

Children of the Black

By Mr_M7

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*Someone destroyed the Earth,
Someone destroyed their lives,
Someone's gonna pay.
Someone had better be watching their Back.*

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1 - It Begins

B-beep...B-beep...B-beep...

Her eyes snapped open to read the glowing red numbers of the digital clock.

“Oh no! I’m late!”

Betty, a.k.a. Atomic Betty, despite having the best intentions usually was late. Most of the time her career as a Galactic Guardian was to blame. This time was no different. She had been called in when another villain of the week had some crackpot scheme to concur the universe. It had taken most of the night to stop his, causing her to oversleep.

It didn’t take her long to get ready, she was use to being late, besides today was very important. In school she and her best friend Noah had been paired up to do a presentation and she had become determined not to flake out this time.

“Hey, Betty!” came a voice from her window.

“Noah!” she called back to her friend, “I’ll be right down!”

She grabbed the poster and her backpack and started downstairs. When she had reached the bottom, as if it was on cue, a small beeping noise caught her attention. Her bracelet was going off again.

“Oh, not now!”

She rushed to the door, trying to cover the sound of her Galactic Guardian Bracelet. Then opened the door just enough to stick her head through.

“Hey Betty.”

“Hey Noah, uh look, I’m not feeling so good to day. You don’t mind doing the presentation on your own, do you?” she really hated asking this, she knew Noah had trouble talking in front of large crowds.

“Uh..well, I guess...uh, sure.”

“Great,” she replied, handing him the poster, “just read off he notes and you’ll do fine.” she quickly gave a fake sneeze.

“Well, hope you feel better, see ya.” Noah left looking somewhat down trodden. Betty just hatted to do this to him, but the fate of the galaxy could be at stake. She ran back up to her room and activated the hologram.

“Atomic Betty, Reporting for duty.” she said with a salute.

“Ah, Betty.” Replied Admiral DeGill. “My apologies for calling you so early, but we have a bit of a crisis on our hands. It seems the Chameleon has stolen an X-HLT prototype called *the Avenger*.” Betty was quite shocked by this news. The X-HLT series of ships were by far the most advanced and well guarded in the galaxy, she was mildly surprised that the Chameleon, of all people could get his hands on one. “I’ve already sent your crew his last known coordinates, Good luck.”

“Thank you, sir.” she replied, just before she was teleported onto her ship.

“Sparky,” she said, addressing the short green alien siting at the front of the ship, “Take us out.”

“Excuse me, Captain,” came a voice from a very old-fashion robot who was clearly labeled as X-5, “I’m picking up a strange reading from the Delta sector, perhaps we should investigate?”

“We can do that later X-5,” Betty decided, “Right now the Chameleon has an X-HLT prototype and who knows what he’s planning to do with it.”

With that the ship and it’s three crew members sped off, unaware that if they had just stopped in the Delta sector they could have prevented, or at least delayed what would happed later that day.

In Tremorton High School a girl walked down the halls normally this wouldn’t mean much, except

that the girl in question was a six foot tall robot. She was the XJ-9 global defense unit but her friends just called her Jenny. This explained the following events. Just as she was trying to have a normal conversation with a cute boy (a very difficult feat for an automaton) when her head exploded with all manner of bells, sirens, and whistles. Half in reflex and half in shock she shot through the roof. Within seconds she was home, trying to discover the source of the urgent warning.

She burst into her 'mother' and inventor, Nora Wakeman.

"Mom? What's going on?"

"Ah, XJ-9, you're here, and in record time, I might add."

"We can talk about my track record later, Mom."

"Huh?" Dr. Wakeman said, a little confused. "Oh, right, we seem to be experiencing a massive alien invasion."

"Oh, is that all?"

"XJ-9, I don't think you understand, this is the largest invasion I've ever seen!"

"That's what you said about the Mole-people last week."

"For moles, they were very large."

"They were two feet tall and afraid of flashlights."

"Oh, just go save the world. And Be careful!"

Jenny eagerly rocketed out of the room and blasted off to encounter the invaders.

"What is mom's problem?" Jenny said to herself once she passed through the clouds, "It's not like I haven't faced an invasion before. I mean that *is* what I was programmed for. I'll bet it's just gonna be a repeat of the mole-man invasion, and I can take care of this with a — Whoa." Jenny trailed off as she approached the invasion force. In front of her was perhaps the biggest ship she had seen in her life. Before she knew it she was staring down the barrel of what was undoubtedly the biggest laser cannon she ever saw. There was no way she could have reacted in time to avoid the blast.

A few minutes earlier, in New York City, a very large and muscular man held a small Glass skull in the air, triumphantly. He was called Huntsmaster by his underling and the Huntsman by his equals, who were few and far between.

"At last, the Aztec Skull is mine!"

Huntsman looked over his students. 88 and 89 were, as usual, arguing about something stupid. Huntsgirl (who would otherwise be referred to as Rose), however, was looking unusually nervous.

"Huntsgirl, are you afraid of something?"

"Uh, no Huntsmaster," she lied. In truth she was worried that her friend, Jake Long (or as the Huntsman would know him, the American Dragon), wouldn't show up in time to stop the Huntsman. Since she obviously couldn't voice her true concerns, she thought up a lie, quickly.

"It's just we haven't seen any sign of the dragon. It all seems too easy." She was about to congratulate herself on this cover story when 88 butted in.

"Awww, little Huntsgirl's afraid of the big bad dragon!" 89 laughed obnoxiously in reply.

'Easy Rose,' she told herself, as she gripped her spear tighter, 'Don't *kill* them, no matter how much you want to.'

89 then took up the mocking role. "Yeah, yeah, yeah! Does Huntsgirl need her mommy to bring her a blanky?" the two erupted with laughter. But they quickly (and wisely) stopped when the Huntsman gave them a sharp command.

"She has a point, it would be best for us to get the skull back to the Huntslair at once."

The Huntsman prepared to teleport the four of them back to the lair. Suddenly a streak of red and yellow spiraled around him.

“Dragon!” he yelled as he felt the skull being ripped from his hand.

“Yo! Hunts-dork!” cried the voice of the aforementioned American Dragon, “Didn’t yo Momma ever teach you not to play with creepy, old Aztec Skulls?”

Before the Huntsman could react, Huntsgirl had leapt up to the building where the dragon had landed.

“You’re late.” she said as she launched an attack.

“Hey, give me a break. There was this Minotaur thing totally trashing Central Park.” Jake Replied as he dodged her.

“Couldn’t anyone else take care of it? Your grandfather? Foo-Dog? Spud?” she aimed a high kick at the dragon’s face.

“Spud? This was one big Minotaur.” he barely dodged the kick.

“Just one?” she shot a punch at his belly.

“It was, like, freaky huge!” he let the punch connect and doubled over.

“Just like we rehearsed?” he asked.

“Just like we rehearsed.” she said just before Jake’s tail wrapped around her ankles and flung her off the edge of the roof. Far enough that she couldn’t grab onto the edge of the building but close enough that she could catch the fire escape.

She waited a while to make sure Jake had time to fly away with the skull before getting back on the roof top. She was instantly able to tell that the Huntsman’s reflexes were a little better than they had planned on. He was up on the roof with Jake. Somehow 88 and 89 had bumbled their way up there, too. She leapt onto the rooftop and took her place in cornering the dragon so as to not arouse the suspicion of the Huntsman, all the while trying to convince herself that Jake had a plan.

The confident smirk that appeared on his face reassured her.

“Hey! Hunts-freaks! You want this?” he held the skull over the edge of the building.

“Whoops!” he said mockingly when he dropped it. The Huntsman lunged a little before Jake caught it with his tail. From Huntsgirl’s perspective she could easily see his plan.

‘This is going to work!’ She thought, not quite sure who she was trying to convince, ‘It has to!’ Before Jake could carry out his plan, however, a bright beam of light Fell down though the New York sky.

Before half a second had passed the Empire State Building was gone. By the end of that second the Huntsman was frantically trying to teleport himself out of there. 88 and 89 were screaming to each other to hold them. Jake, seeing the debris flying towards them, was rushing to protect Rose.

Cement, glass and steel beat on his armored back with Rose safely under his wings. For a moment he dared to look back. The beam was getting wider. Before he could grab Rose and fly away, a large piece of concrete and metal collided with his face, causing him to fall limp. Hazelly he could see the beam coming closer. He couldn’t move, but his mind couldn’t stay still. It seemed like his heartbeat was a countdown to the end, now.

5...

‘Mom, Dad, Halley,’

4...

‘Grampa, Foo-Dog,’

3...

‘Trixy, Spud,’

2...

‘Rose...’

1...

‘I’m sorry.’

2 - The Chamaeleon

"You'll never take me alive! You, uh, JERKS!" Screamed the Chamaeleon over the communication systems.

Atomic Betty had quite a problem on her hands this time. A psychotic super-spy in a stolen experimental Warship that allowed him to not only monitor, but also control every aspect of the ship. Naturally Betty took a little time to think.

"Sparky, X-5, I want you to run every diversionary tactic you can think of, and when you get in range, fire on the *Avenger*, don't hit it, just keep the Chamaeleon's attention."

"What are you gonna do, Chief?" Sparky asked

"I'm going to pay the Chameleon a little visit."

In moments she had boarded her personal hover scooter and launched off. For a moment she drifted in space as she waited for Sparky and X-5 to begin. A warning shot grazed across the hull of the *Avenger*, which clearly got the Chameleon's attention, as the massive warship fired every gun it had at the small cruiser. She wasn't worried though, X-5 knew every tactic used since Admiral Degill was a cadet, and Sparky was one of the best pilots a captain could ask for. As soon as she saw her ship bob and dart, she began to steer towards the *Avenger*.

After studying the X-HTL schematics, Betty had discovered that a series of cameras placed all over the ship's hull allowed the crew to monitor and assess any damage that may be sustained. She had also found the one place on the ship the Chamaeleon wouldn't be able to see. The ship's designers apparently didn't see the practicality of placing a camera near the thickest, strongest part of the hull, right over power cells in the engine room.

Using her bracelet's laser function, Betty cut a hole just big enough for her to squeeze through. The engine room was entirely automated in order to allow the entire crew to be on deck in a battle, which meant she wouldn't have to worry about the Chamaeleon seeing her, at least, not until she got into the hall.

In the engine room, robotic arms reached, pulled, and stretched, struggling to keep up with the strain the Chamaeleon was placing on the ship. To most, seeing all those unforgiving machines moving in a chaotic, mechanized ballet would have brought to mind a sudden and disturbingly messy demise or at least the painful and great loss of limbs. To Atomic Betty, however, it hardly seemed worthy of a cadet.

She slipped through the hole she had cut and stood tight against the wall, analyzing the patterns. It didn't take long for her to figure it out and start on her way. Duck, roll, jump, stop, three second delay, 1...2...3, GO!, one step to the right, grab an arm, ride it until it gets to the spare parts bin, jump off before it gets to the recycling bin, tuck and roll, jump forward, and blast open the door. She looked back and smiled, the engine room of a highly experimental warship had just fallen into the very long list of people and things that had lost to her, after all, she always won.

As easy as it was to go thought the engine room, dodging the intricate surveillance system in the hall was a little less than basic training in Betty's eyes. It was a simple matter of avoiding the camera's (and, therefor, the Chamaeleon's) sight. She was beginning to plan out the suggestions she would give to the builders to make braking in to the ship seem less like child's play when a massive jolt traveled through the entire ship, pitching her across the hall, into the camera's view.

"Cutting it a little close, guys." she muttered as she jumped back into the blind spot she was tossed from, hoping the Chamaeleon hadn't seen her on his monitors.

Apparently he did. Out of the walls popped the automated, self-targeting guns. They started to blast

at her, but fortunately for Betty the builders had never planned on this system being used against a Galactic Guardian. Within moments Betty (who no longer had to worry about being seen) had dismantled the weapons and reached the door to the Bridge. She placed her hand on the panel to open the door. 'LOCKED' the panel flashed in red.

"Galactic Guardian override code: S-K-L-one-zero." she said calmly.

'One moment please...' the screen replied, 'Galactic code not recognized.'

"It's only a prototype so the galactic codes must not have been programmed in yet." she reasoned with her self, making a mental note to add that topic to her discussion with the builders. "Oh well," she sighed. Raising her hand, she fired a laser blast at the panel. The panel seemed to recognize this code as the door slid open. She entered the room carefully, keeping her bracelet at the ready.

"Atomic Betty!" shouted the Chameleon, from the captain's chair, "My arch foe!" he added. It was almost adorable to see someone like the Chameleon call Atomic Betty his arch foe, but, then again it was coming out of the mouth of a psychotic lizard-man.

"Chameleon, I hereby place you under arrest for grand theft warship, come quietly and I'll go easy on you."

"NEVER!" He protested, turning in to a large, more muscular version of himself.

"You asked for it," she smirked and fired from her bracelet a small pink ball, no bigger than a marble. To the Chameleon's shock, the ball flew right past his very large left shoulder. To properly express his disbelief, he returned to his normal form.

"You MISSED! I was as big as a house and you missed! How could you miss?!"

What he had failed to notice, however, was the ball, after passing him, has ricochet off a panel in the back and was now headed towards him. Just before it hit him, the ball exploded in a mess of pink goo that effectively covered the Chameleon. For a moment, he struggled, changing into many hideous different creatures, trying to squirm, cut or rip his way out of the goo, but to no avail.

"Mmmmf! Mmmm!" he said, though it probably would have sounded even more menacing and insulting if he could move his mouth. Calmly and coolly Betty walked over to the captain's chair and hailed her cruiser.

"Sparky, X-5, I've taken control of *The Avenger*. Let's get this thing back to base."

"Aye, Aye, Chief!" Sparky said eagerly.

"Good work guys, but you need to work on your aim, you hit the ship."

"Actually there was this weird shock-wave, it hit us, too."

"X-5, can you calculate where it may have come from?"

"One moment please." Betty was worried, a shockwave powerful enough to feel like a blast from a cannon, even at a close range, would have to have come from an extremely powerful explosion.

"It seemed to originate from coordinates 5-062-98B4."

Her stomach dropped like a lead weight at hearing that. Those were Earth's coordinates.

"Change of plan, you take the Chameleon on board and bring him back to headquarters while I take *The Avenger* an-" her bracelet began to beep frantically and before she could answer it Admiral Degill's face appeared looking very grave. This sort of thing would only happen when all active Galactic Guardians had to be contacted immediately.

"Attention all Galactic Guardians, we have an Omega Level threat, report to Headquarters *immediately* for further briefing."

"You heard him, let's get going, I'll take the Chameleon and *the Avenger* back and let someone deal with them there."

"S-sure thing, Chief." Sparky may not have always seemed like the brightest guardian out there but he could put two and two together. He knew what an Omega level threat meant and he recognized Earth's coordinates, Someone had destroyed Earth.

He looked at Betty just before she disappeared from his screen, as if searching for her confidant smirk, telling him it would be all right. He searched in vain.

3 - Medical Treatment

Betty had never seen any thing like it; hundreds of Galactic cruisers covered the runways of Galactic Guardian Headquarters along with news shuttles and delegates from planets in the sector. There was so little room to land; some had simply abandoned their ships in orbit around the station. Betty radioed her crew and told them to beam aboard the base and have X-5 record the briefing, while she put The Avenger into one of the cargo hangers that had been promised to store the previously stolen warship.

She landed the ship and the Chameleon was taken to a much more secure cell. It took only a few seconds after exiting the hanger for the reporters to swarm. Betty, however, marched forward with such a look on her face that made those who were in her way feel they had a better chance of stopping a rocket train from taking off. Unfortunately, that didn't stop them from trying to keep up with her.

"Atomic Betty! Do you know what the nature of the threat is?" called out one of the reporters.

"No, that's why I need to get to the briefing." She replied sternly.

"Betty! The last two times an Omega-level threat has been issued were involving the Irkin's Impending Dooms one and two, could this be an Impending Doom 3?" Betty had approached the entrance and spun around to face the final question.

"First of all, Impending Doom two is still underway, secondly the Irkin threat has recently been downgraded to a Beta-level threat. Finally, as I said before, we won't know the nature of the treat until after the briefing." With that, she entered the base; witch was off limits to the press.

Inside it was only slightly better than the reporters outside, though no one was asking her questions, she was getting quite a few stares from her fellow guardians. She was used to getting stares from civilians and newer Guardians, but everyone seemed to be looking at her strangely. She was somewhat relieved when Admiral DeGill approached her.

"Betty, I need to see you in my office, privately." With those words she once again felt uncomfortable. Very few circumstances constituted a privet meeting with one's commanding officer. Betty followed DeGill into his office, where it seemed much calmer than in the halls. "Betty, I'm not going to beat around the bush, I think you know what all this is about."

"Yes, admiral, someone or something has attacked and destroyed the planet Earth." It felt so strange to say that like it was just another mission, or some lesson from the academy. "And I would like to see all the data we have on this attack so we can determine possible suspects and stop them from doing this again."

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that, Betty. Galactic code states that, well, you may not be in a proper state to carry out any missions, and, well, I'll have to ask you to turn in your bracelet."

She was trapped, if she refused, that was grounds to arrest her on the spot, and if she handed it over she wouldn't be able to do much to stop who or whatever was responsible. She decided that being unable to help was a little better that being incarcerated. She slipped off her bracelet and placed it on the desk, feeling naked without it. DeGill picked it up and placed it in the vault under his desk.

"Now, Betty, I'm not going to pretend to understand what you're going to be going though, but I do know that if you don't have something to do, you won't be able to handle it, so, while galactic code says you can't go on missions anymore, it doesn't say anything about gathering information."

"Admeral?"

"Yes, you see, we have very little idea what did this, but we were able to pickup two beings who we

believe saw the attack, and I feel it would be best if they told their experiences to someone from their own planet.”

“You mean-”

“Yes, we found survivors. ”

As soon as she was briefed on the basics, she and Degill teleported to the medical wing of the base. By the time they reached the first survivor’s room DeGill was a few feet behind, being that he had fins as opposed to feet. Standing by the door was a tall, dark-haired human, not one of the ones from Earth, of course, Betty had learned how to tell the differences long ago.

“This is Dr. Tam,” Degill said as Betty let him catch up, “he’s the doctor treating one on the survivors. Doctor, if you will,”

“Thank you Admiral,” the Doctor said looking at his notes, “well, while the specimen appears human, it has some rather odd physiology, strange fluctuations in body temperature, oddities in the nerves system, and an amazing resilience to our sedative, it took six times the normal amount just to calm him down, six more doses to get him to sleep. But, then again, I’ve never operated on Earth-humans before, so it could all be normal.”

“Did he sustain any injuries?” Betty asked, wanting to know what she would see one the other side of that door.

Dr. Tam referred to his notes “Uh... let’s see, multiple lacerations, mostly on his back, a minor concussion, and he seems to be missing an eye.”

“Any idea how he survived?”

“A protective energy field,” Tam signaled to one of the orderly who brought over a white hover-trolley, “projected by this.” he pulled out what looked like a spear with a point on either end.

“I didn’t know Earth had energy field generators, especially not portable ones.” DeGill said, looking at Betty for an answer.

“I didn’t know either.” Betty replied, equally baffled. With the spear still in her hand she entered the room. It was, for lack of a better word, a mess. Medical equipment lay all across the floor, most of it was broken. She looked at the ceiling to see many burn marks.

“Like I said, we had some difficulty retaining him.” Tam clarified, “I suggest we put full restraints on him and-”

“That won’t be necessary, Doctor.” she said, looking over at the bed. A short Asian boy lay there, his black hair that looked like it had once been styled with grate care, was now a mess and covered in bandages. “I think I can handle this.”

“It’s your funeral.” Tam muttered as he activated the machine that would remove the sedative from the boy’s system. Betty simply pretended not to hear him.

She entered the operating room and looked at the bed. A young Asian boy was lying there, looking understandably beat up.

4 - Space Ghost

“No, bigger!”

“Not that big”

“And green!”

“It was yellow.”

“Are you sure you even saw it?”

“Are you sure your eyes were screwed in right?”

“Oh, brother.” it had been almost two months since the attack but it felt much longer to Atomic Betty. Mainly because she was getting nowhere in finding the culprit. Jake was getting impatient and Jenny still had some screws to tighten, if you know what I mean. At the moment the three were going through the Galactic weapons archives to try and identify what kind of beam was used. Obviously they were having very little luck

“Why are we even doing this?” Jake asked plainly.

Betty tried to explain it again. “Were trying to find out what *kind* of weapon was used to—”

“No, I mean why aren’t we out there, hunting them down.” Jake stood from his seat in the small room and pointed out the window.

“Trust me, we’re helping out more here.” She wasn’t sure if she was trying to convince Jake or herself of that. “Without us, nobody would know who to look for.”

“Yeah, we’ve made a whole lot of progress!” Jake shouted sarcastically, “Why after only six weeks we found out it was a space ship, maybe if we pull an all nighter we can find out the color by Christmas!”

“I almost destroyed Christmas, once.” Jenny said wistfully.

“Oh, and let’s not forget our most valuable asset, Jenny, the Dysfunctional Robot!”

“Hey! It’s not my fault those intergalactic egg-heads can’t get all the bugs out!” Jenny had now risen to her feet to stare down Jake. Even though she stood almost two feet taller than him, Jake didn’t seem to be phased. Betty saw that fire creeping into his eye again.

“Look, I’ll try and talk to Admiral DeGill about getting us a mission, but you have to understand, there are rules and regulations regarding missions like this. And when you factor in our personal involvement it’s very unlikely that we’d be able to get off this base. I don’t like it either.”

Jake began to calm down, “I’m sorry, it’s just— I feel so helpless.”

“I know.” Betty began gathering up her things, “I think we just need a little brake.”

After putting her things in her quarters Betty went to see DeGill. She had no trouble getting to see him as she already had an appointment to discuss possible suspects.

“Good evening Betty,” DeGill said as she walked in. “How are you holding up?”

“I think I’d do a little better if I had an actual mission to go on.”

“Sorry, Betty, you know as well as I do the rules.” DeGill quickly changed the subject, “Let’s go over our original list of suspects and see if we can narrow it down.” he pulled a very long piece of paper out of his desk.

“Irkins?”

“As far as I can tell, a beam based weapon was used, and the Irkins definitely have that kind of fire-power, but I doubt they would destroy Earth on purpose. I don’t think they have the brain power, I mean, they are *Irkins*.”

“I see your point. What about the Yugopatanians?”

“While Yugopatanians would be likely to destroy a planet, I don’t think they would have let this much time pass without claiming responsibility. But that still doesn’t make them any less suspect.”

“True, uh, do we have any new information on Villgax?”

“Well, according to some recently defected servants he vanished while on Earth well before the incident. No one’s heard from him since.”

“Next you put Dr. Hamsterveil here. Isn’t he in prison?”

“Yes, evidence suggests that Hamsterveil was communicating with someone on the outside. But even if he was he has little knowledge of ray-based technology.”

“He does seem to favor genetic experiments. What about The Cluster? Didn’t they have some new regime change recently?”

“I think so, did we get any delegates to Cluster Prime yet?”

“No, the Grand Councilwoman seems to think it would be best to wait for them to send us an ambassador.”

“Zurg?”

“He has the power, but he’s a conqueror. He would prefer to enslave a planet instead of completely destroying it.”

“Yes his record would support that. Maximus I.Q.?”

“At first I thought that but I don’t think he would make it that simple. Maximus is always looking for a challenge. Even if he did find out that I’m from Earth, he would have devised some elaborate trap just so he could make me watch.”

“I see. What about the Chillites-”

BOOM!!!

When the two heard the blast they instantly sprang into action. DeGill opened a draw in his desk and pulled out two phasers. He tossed one to Betty and ran down the hall as fast as his little fins could carry him (Witch was quite fast when he wanted). They followed a surge of Dinosaur-like soldiers out to the hangers to the source of the blast.

When they got there they saw him. Hovering about ten or twenty feet above the ground was a fourteen-year-old boy with snow-white hair and glowing green eyes. He was clearly the cause of the blast as his hands were surrounded with glowing green smoke.

Betty wasted no time in wonder who this strange apparition was, “In the name of the Galactic Alliance, you are hereby ordered to stand down!”

“Not unless you give me a ship and weapons.” the attacker said in a tone of voice that sent chills down Betty’s spine.

“Stand down,” she commanded, ignoring the shivers running down her back, “or we will be forced to open fire.”

“Open fire?” the specter said mocking ly, “Oh, what ever shall I do?”

He was staring to get on her nerves. “This is your final warning, Put your hands on the ground and surrender.”

“Surrender?” He said, floating back to the ground, “No, I don’t think I will, but I’ll put my hands on the ground if you want.” With a malicious grin, the boy did so. The ground under his hands began to glow. The glow quickly traveled to the ground under the troops before they knew it they had all fallen though the ground into the level below. The glow then moved towards DeGill and Betty. The two leapt out of the way and opened fire. The boy flew back in the air and easily dodged every shot.

“You can’t win.” The Ghost-Boy said.

“I *always* win.” Betty called back, smirking. It had been a while since she had meet anyone this powerful and for the first time in a long time she felt the adrenalin pumping.

—————> CTOB<—————

Meanwhile Jenny and Jake were on the other side of the base in the Mess hall getting something to eat. Rather, Jake was getting something to eat and Jenny was talking to him.

"...and then, they made me their queen."

"Uh-huh, was this before or after your friend became a space pirate?" Jake asked leerily

"Well, it was sort of—" Just then, a huge piece of machinery came crashing through the wall. The path of destruction it left gave Jenny and Jake a clear view of the battle between Betty and the ghost.

"Crikey! We gotta go help!" Jenny shouted.

"Yeah Just let me—"

"No time!" Jenny grabbed Jake around his shoulders and flew through the numerous hole in the numerous walls. Jenny finally came to a stop with Jake in tow, above the battle.

"Betty! Who's this guy?!" Se shouted down to the ground pointing to the ghost.

"I don't know, " Betty called back, "He just—"

"Hang on, I'll check!" Jenny yelled, completely ignoring Betty's warnings. "Hey! You! In the Spandex! What's you're name?"

The ghost boy let out a sigh and mumbled, "Figures, the only way I can get a girl to ask me my name it to blow up something, and even then it has to be a robot." He raised his voice so Jenny could hear, "It's Phantom! Dan—"

"He says his name is Phantom!" Jenny yelled, making Jake flinch

"Yo girl, why don't we stop yellin' and land?" Jake said.

"Oh, Sure! Brace yourself!" Jenny started to land.

"You don't have to yell-oof!" Jenny's engines conked out again about 3 feet before landing.

"What are you doing here?" Betty demanded.

"We nearly got our heads taken off by a screaming metal deathtrap and since it wasn't Jenny this time we just had to come and see."

"I didn't Scream that much and it was just a little fuel valve malfunction."

"Uh, guys? Hello?" Phantom called out "Ghost kid, over here! Kind of destroying everything? *FEAR ME!*"

"Don't worry ladies," Jake said moving Betty and Jenny aside, "The Am drag's got this one." Jake ran full speed towards the Ghost.

"Wait, Jake! You don't—" Betty would have finished that sentence if Jake hadn't suddenly burst into flames. While the girls were still marveling at Jake's spontaneous combustion a huge red Lizard burst out of the fire and flew straight towards the startled Phantom.

"Whoa. Did not see that one coming." Jenny told the thoroughly baffled Guardian. Betty quickly regained her composure and turned to Jenny.

"We've got to help him." the Galactic Guardian and the android hurried towards the ghost and the drag ignoring how strange it might have looked.

"Where's that fish guy?" Jenny asked looking around for DeGill.

"He had to go help the Troopers."

"What Troopers?"

"Exactly."

As soon as she was close enough, Betty launched a kick at Phantom, who was very distracted by Jake trying to rip a hole in his mid section. The kick connected and the ghost staggered back a bit but he did something that very few humans can master, his head continued to turn 360 degrees in the direction that Betty had kicked it. Looking at the shocked faces of his opponents, Phantom swung a fist at Jake and tried to explain.

"I'm a Ghost," Jenny tried to punch him in the stomach but it just turned to mist, "G-H-O-S-T Ghost!" Jake swung a claw and missed but spat a fire ball at Phantom's face, "I don't feel pain," he

said wiping the fire off, "I don't feel remorse." He grabbed Jake's head and slammed it into the ground, knocking him out. Jenny tried again with a kick but Phantom caught it and flung her across the hanger.

"I don't get hungry or tired and I'm not giving up until you give me what I want, so the question is this," Phantom turned to Betty who whipped out her gun, "How long do I have to pound you until you give up?"

"First off, I'll never give up, secondly, what makes you think you can take a blast of hot ionized plasma?" She had to stall while she thought of a plan.

"Well let's see now, that gun you're holding? As far as I can tell it doesn't have the word 'Fenton' on it, on like this," His hand turned a clear blueish color as he literally reached inside his chest and pulled out a baseball bat that, sure enough, had the word 'Fenton' on it.

"Crazy pink girl with plasma gun, meet the Fenton Anti-Creep Stick, Fenton Anti-Creep Stick, Crazy pink girl with plasma gun."

"A bat? You're gonna have to do a little better than that." she said firing her gun. Phantom apparently had a good batting average because he easily hit the plasma ball away with the bat right towards Jenny (Who was just recovering from being tossed) and hit her right in the chest.

"Okay, That was better."

"Wait until I turn it on." the ghost gave the handle a twist. Spikes popped out all over the Anti-Creep Stick and green energy danced all around it's surface.

"Any last words?"

A grin crept onto Betty's face. "Just one; Sparky."

"Huh?"

"Sparky."

"Isn't that a breakfast cereal?"

"No, It's him." Betty pointed behind the ghost. When Phantom turned around he found him self face-to-face with a green-skinned creature wielding a vacuum clearly labeled as the Fenton Weasel. The ghost only had enough time to give a puzzled look before Sparky flipped the switch and sucked Phantom in.

"Can you believe this goombah just left his ship floating out there? I saw the mess he was making and figured some of the junk he had on board would help." Sparky said, grinning smartly.

"It does kind of makes sense, he didn't strike me as all that smart."

"Hello? I'm right here! *FEAR ME!*" Called out the ghost's voice from the Weasel.

"Whadda think we should do with him?" Sparky took the Weasel off his shoulder.

"We should keep him here, I think he's from earth and I'd like to interrogate him. I'd say we use an adaptive energy cell, he seems to be able to manipulate energy."

"Interrogate?! You can't interrogate me! I have my rights you know! *FEAR ME!*"

"Can we talk about this somewhere else? This guy's givin' me the creeps."

While the base's scientists worked on putting together an adaptive cell Phantom, still in the Weasel, was placed in a high security cell. As soon as everyone had left a strange, unearthly laughter began emanating from the Fenton Weasel.

5 - Jail Brake!

After the incident with the Ghost Boy, it took about a week for things to return to semi-normalcy. Jenny's distrust of the bases' mechanics had intensified after she found them trying to re-draw her schematics. Jake, disappointed with his performance during the fight, started to spend more time in the training simulator. While the action had helped improve Betty's mood a little, she was once again becoming edgy and cranky. The main reason being, however, was that Phantom was being considerably less than helpful while she was interrogating him. She decided to try and question him one last time.

The scientists had made an energy cell that was now keyed into Phantom's genetic signature. When they did this for other high-danger prisoners the energy usually came out in a soft, yellow glow. The frequency required to hold Phantom, however, had an eerie green glow to it. That at least made all the easier to find his cell amongst the many energy bubbles that hung from the ceilings in the brig. There was also a noticeable drop in temperature around his cell.

"Finally coming to let me out, huh? The ol' Chameleon's too much for you, huh?"

Betty let out a sigh.

"No Chameleon," she turned towards his bubble, "Nobody's made any demands for your release and, in fact you may have to represent yourself in court."

"What? Why?"

"Chameleon, you impersonated an intergalactic diplomat, punched another in the face, then stole an experimental war ship. And to top it all off, you did it all on universal television. No body really wants to represent you."

"Awww, man."

She left the Chameleon to sulk while she approached the green energy sphere that held the ghost boy. He was lying down in the bottom of it.

"Nice ghost shield," he said as casually as commenting on the weather, "not great, really, but it's not bad."

"I told you, it's an adaptive energy field, that--"

"Yeah, sure, whatever."

"I'm going to ask you one more time, I know you were on Earth when it was destroyed, so just tell me what you saw. We need to find out who did this."

"So, you want me to help you narrow it down, huh? Let's see, then," he put on a very thoughtful face, "I know of only four beings that would be strong enough to destroy the world. One is sleeping forever, the second one is just a filthy, lying piece of cheese, and the last two are me."

'There he goes again,' Betty said to herself, 'every time I ask him something, he goes off to Crazyville'.

"Ya know," he said slyly, "wouldn't it be great if a certain *someone* had a certain *something* that could track those invaders?"

Betty could see what was going on in his head, "Are you saying you have some way to track them?"

"I have a way of *finding* them."

"How?" she demanded.

"On my ship, that you so rudely stole, I have a system that's designed to track items by their dimensional frequency, I was able to recalibrate it to find the specific frequency of a ship that was in the Earth's orbit moments before it was destroyed."

“So all I have to do is get on your ship and find this tracking system.”

“It’s not that easy, I locked up all the systems and you don’t know the password.”

“And you want something in return for the password, right?”

“How did you *ever* guess?”

“Well, sorry, but the Galactic Guardians don’t make deals with terrorists.”

“What makes you think I’m a terrorist?”

“Well, you attacked and threatened an intergalactic governmental base in an attempt to gain high power weapons. What would *you* call that?”

“Uhhhhhhhhhh...”

“I thought so, besides, now that I know about it I should have very little problem cracking the password.”

“Okay, fair enough. But let me ask *you* a question; from what I hear, you’re pretty good, the best, in fact. I understand you put most of these guys in here,” he waved an arm towards his fellow inmates. “So the question is this, what are you doing interrogating me and taking orders from a guppy when there’s some world destroying monster out there?”

“My orders are to find out who or what did that. Not to go out hunting it.”

“Sure, that’s what you say, but how do you *really* feel? I can answer that; you’re terrified. You’re staying here because you can’t stand to be out with that thing that destroyed earth, can you?”

She didn’t respond, and simply left the ghost in his cell. But, as much as she would like to, she couldn’t forget what the ghost had said. Was she too afraid to do any thing other than sit around this base? Why was she so mindlessly following orders? Wasn’t she Atomic Betty, *the* Atomic Betty? The one who defeated over one thousand Blood Monks while blindfolded *and* hand cuffed? The one who literally stopped Tameranian Muck-Beast just by looking at it? Now she was being freaked out by a pasty-faced kid with bad fashion sense.

By lunch time she was completely preoccupied with those questions. So preoccupied, in fact, that she didn’t even notice what Jake was talking about.

“Yo, Betty? You still with us?”

“Huh? Oh, sorry, what were you saying?”

“I was saying that maybe since we laid the smack-down on that ghost freak, DeGill will let us off this station and, ya know, maybe give us a mission, or something to do..”

“I don’t know, he *might*,” suddenly, in that instant, all the hopelessness inside her vanished and the wheels in her head started turning, “you know what? I think he will let us. In fact, I’m sure he will. You guys go pack, I’ll deal with DeGill.”

“You’re serious?” Jenny asked, clearly getting excited.

“Yeah, I’m sure I can convince him to let us go. I’ll meet you in hanger 12.”

She got up and left the two in their excitement. She went in the direction of DeGill’s office but as soon as she was out of sight she made a strategic detour to the holding cells. Ignoring the other inmates she went straight to Phantom. If her plan was going to work, the Phantom would be an invaluable asset. When she got to him she was surprised to find him napping in his cell.

“I thought you said you didn’t need to sleep.” she said loud enough to wake him.

“Sufferin’ spooks, what do you want?” he suddenly looked very shocked, “did I just say ‘suffering spooks’?”

Betty nodded her head.

“DARN IT!”

“Phantom, I’m here to offer you a chance to bring justice to those who destroyed Earth.”

“You’re doing this without Fish-face’s permission, aren’t you?”

Betty remained silent.

“I see, well, You got a ship?”

“Yes, but I’ll need that tracking system you were talking about. I’ll take my ship out a ways and you bring your’s to it, it should be big enough for you to dock in it. I’ll open your cell for you.” Just as she moved over to the control panel Phantom stopped her.

“Don’t worry about that, it a nice ghost shield, but not a great one. Besides, if this ship you’re uh, ‘using’ is as big as you say it is you’re gonna need a distraction, and I’m just the ghost to make one. Five minuets, be ready.”

Betty left the ghost-boy to his distraction and went to the hanger. By now Jake and Jenny would have realized that they didn’t have much of any thing to pack. When she found them there, she informed the guard that they were with her and to let them in. she knew exactly what ship she was taking, it had to be big, fast, and have lots of weapons. *The Avenger*. Cool as a summer breeze she walked up to the behemoth ship. The base’s mechanics had already repaired the damage Betty had done in getting it back and reprogrammed it’s access codes. She punched in the galactic override code and the doors slip open. Quickly, she led her new crew into the ship and towards the bridge. Instinctively she sat herself in the captain’s chair.

“Jake, I’m putting you in charge of weapons. The controls are pretty straight forward, but I want you to familiarize your self with them. Jenny, you’re navigation, you should be able to plug yourself in.”

“What?” Jake complained, “she just has to plug in while I gotta ‘familiarize’? That’s wack, man.”

“Jealous?” Jenny said.

“Of what? The fact that I’m not a giant walking calculator?”

“Or that you need a booster seat just to see over the dash board?”

“I do not!” Jake marched over to his seat and sat down, only to find that Jenny was right.

“It just . . . needs some adjusting, that’s all” he said, searching for the means of doing so.

Meanwhile, in the holding cells, Phantom sat patiently. Suddenly he stood up.

“If their not out there yet, it’s their own fault.” he took in a deep breath and started to scream. He yelled the most unearthly and frightening yell you’ve ever heard. Then it got worse, louder and louder. Everything began shaking from the sound and small cracks were appearing in the glowing walls of the other cells. He yelled even louder and those other walls shattered. The machines making them began to explode and burn, then the cracks appeared in the ghost’s cell. He went even louder, sweat started appearing on his forehead and the other prisoner were covering their ears in pain. Then, finally the machine gave out and his cell disappeared. He finally fell to the ground with green smoke coming off of him.

“Woah, that took more out of me than I thought it would. I’ll have to take it easy getting out of here.” he got up and looked around. The other inmates were all staring at him.

“Ya know, this is about the time you guys should be, oh, I don’t know, maybe, *TRYING TO ESCAPE?!*” with that point, the poisoners decided they would rather take their chances with the guards rather than stay in there with this crazy ghost-boy and charged the door.

Phantom followed the crowd and by using some invisibility and a few selective possessions of particularly dull criminals he was easily able to make it to the hangers. Leaving the latest victim of his overshadowing at the door, he made his way around the ships until he came upon the Specter Speeder.

“Hold it right there,” came a voice from behind, clearly someone who was smart enough to follow a lone escapee as opposed to trying to stop the larger crowd. Phantom turned around the find out that this genius was a shirt fishman holding a gun.

“Oh please, you don’t even come up to my knees, and I thought we already covered the whole ‘your weapons have no effect on me’ thing.”

“I’ll have you know, on me planet I am considered quite tall,” DeGill responded, “and his gun has been specifically calibrated to your genetic signature.”

“You’re bluffing.”

“Do you honestly believe that?” DeGill cocked the gun, “or do you just feel exceptionally lucky today?”

The two stared each other down for a while. A fly buzzed by adding to the tension. Then, Phantom gave a smirk.

“Hey, you ever had frozen fish sticks?”

“What?”

“You’ll see.” as he spoke, a small puff of blue smoke drifted out of his mouth and headed for DeGill.

“What are you-uck!” DeGill was now completely frozen by the blue smoke. Phantom got in the speeder and took off. He phased through the bay doors and navigated towards a huge blip on his radar. Soon he came upon *The Avenger* and a grin crept on his face.

“Nice.”

He flew the speeder towards it and phased the whole thing into what he expected was the cargo hatch. When he got out of the speeder, however, he found something he did not expect. Jenny Jake and Betty.

“You?” Jenny exclaimed, “what are *you* doing here?” She turned to Betty, “What is *He* doing here?”

Without losing an ounce of tact and professionalism, Betty answered. “Phantom happens to have some way to track the invaders.”

“Okay, first of all, my name isn’t just Phantom, it’s Da-”

“Just a thought,” Jake intervened, “but who’s flying the ship?”

“It’s on auto pilot. Jenny, I want you to copy Phantom’s tracking system over to our computers.”

“All right,” Phantom said, reaching his boiling point, “this is the last time I’m going to say this; you can’t get into my programs because I’m the only one who knows the password and it’s not Phantom, it’s-”

“Paulina Fenton?” Jenny piped in.

“Wha-Huh?”

“You’re password, it’s Paulina Fenton, I just cracked it.” Jenny said, poking her head out of the speeder.

“Paulina, huh?” Jake said moving over next to Phantom. “Sounds hot, what is she? Your girlfriend? Common, playah, you can tell me.”

It was about this time Phantom developed a small twitch in his eye.

“Hey, Phantom, did you know you have 2,304,159 different recipes for fudge in here?” Jenny asked as the aforementioned recipes buzzed across the Speeder’s screen.

“That’s it!” Phantom shouted, phasing his hand into the Specter Speeder. “Wake me up if anything important happens.” he pulled out a metal thermos and pointed it at his head. He took off the top and was (to the shock of all those present) sucked inside.

After a moment of uncomfortable silence Jenny spoke up.

“Well, I’d better go to the bridge and set up this tracking program.”

“Oh, uh, yeah! I’ll help you, yo.” Jake agreed.

“I’d better uh, supervise.” Betty added. Anything to get away from the ghost-freak.. The three quickly left the cargo hold and for a good while it was quiet down there. Until Phantom’s voice called out of the thermos.

“Finally, those nut cases are gone, now, how do I get out of here?”

6 - Tragedy at the Speevak homestead

Celestial Academy

1 Hour after Earth's destruction.

Sprig Speevak left the gym feeling both tired and sore. They had been plying a game of Squee ball, a game noticeably like dodge ball. The students had been allowed to pick their own teams which meant it was basically the 'cool kids' against the losers. Needless to say, Sprig was on the losers' team. Also needless to say, they got clobbered, hence his current discontent and pain. But, he was starting to feel better, after all it was lunch time, as his stomach decided to remind him.

"What was *that?*" said a bird in a small flying machine after Sprig's stomach growled.

"That was just my stomach." he looked at the perplexed looks of his friends faces, Chuck and Dif, remembering their lack of knowledge of human biology. "It growls when I'm hungry."

"Really?" Dif the blob asked, "Mine just goes see-through."

"Uh, Dif?" the floating bird, Chuck, asked, "you're always see-through."

The blob seemed shocked by this and bent over to investigate, "I guess that explains why I'm always so hungry. Whadya think's for lunch to day?"

"I don't know, but I could really go for some chicke-" Sprig caught a glance of his turkey-like friend and recognized that psychotic look in his eyes, "uh, salad! Yeah, salad. Mmmm-mmm, I sure could go for a big bowl of salad right about now! Leafy green salad, yum!" To be honest, living on a farm all his life meant that he ate salad with just about every meal and had grown to detest vegetables. But at that moment he spotted something he was quite fond of, girls. Particularly he saw Anni, the girl from the anti matter universe. In the academy she carried two titles, one being the prettiest girl (for obvious reasons) and the second being the girl you don't want to ask on a date (let's just say the last guy who tried was luck his species could regrow limbs.)

"I'm going in." Sprig told his friends as they began to debate who would get his stuff if he didn't make it out alive.

After putting some things in her locker, Anni closed the door, shocked to see Sprig standing there.

"S'up?" he said, or more appropriately, almost said. Before he could get the words out, Anni grabbed his shirt and slammed him painfully against a nearby door.

"Don't talk to me." she said shortly before storming off. Chuck and Dif hurried towards him, somewhat shocked to see him in one piece. Sprig, however tried to look unfazed and leaned coolly against the door.

"Sure she said 'Don't talk to me'," Sprig informed his friends, "but what she really meant was-woah!" the door Sprig had been leaning against suddenly opened, leaving the human at the mercy of the school's artificial gravity. Lying on the ground, it was easy for him to see who exactly had opened the door, none other than Princess Galaxandra, the headmistress of the Celestial Academy.

"Ah, Sprig," she said, only slightly surprised to find him on the ground, "I was just looking for you. May we speak in my office, privately?"

"Uh, yeah, sure." Sprig got to his feet and followed Galaxandra to her office. Once inside, she offered sprig a seat before taking her's behind her desk. It took mere seconds for Sprig to realize two possibly dangerous fact about that room. First, standing to the left of Galaxandra in the corner was Sprig's Gym teacher and personal trainer, Pam Dromeda, second was the look of worry on Galaxandra's face.

"So, uh, what'd you want to see me about?"

"I'm afraid, Sprig, that a . . . situation has arisen. You see, well-" her slender face looked even more worried as she searched for the words. "Perhaps you should see for your self." she pressed a button on her desk. A screen on the wall flickered on to show a woman who Sprig had come to recognize as the Grand Councilwoman of the Galactic Alliance. She was apparently giving a news conference.

"First of all, thank you all for coming here on such short notice," she began, "I truly wish the circumstances were not so dire. I regret to inform both members of the press and the galaxy at large that earlier today a small, primitive planet called Earth was attacked and destroyed by a currently unknown force."

Sprig's heart skipped a beat. Did she just say what he thought she said?

"We ask that you all remain calm. As we speak, the Galactic Guardians are hot on the trail of whatever did this so that we may stop it before it has a chance to attack another innocent planet. We greatly mourn the loss of Earth and it's people, and we regret never *officially* making contact." there was a strange emphasis of the word 'officially', but Sprig couldn't think straight enough to notice. Earth? Destroyed? Couldn't be. Could it? These and a thousand more questions ran through his head as the press conference continued. He had stopped listening by now.

"Sprig?" Galaxandra snapped him out of it, turning off the screen.

"No, no, this-this can't be happening."

"Unfortunately it is." Galaxandra stretched out a comforting hand. Sprig suddenly leapt to his feet.

"No, I don't believe you!" he bolted out the door. Pam Dromeda was about to follow when Galaxandra stopped her.

"But, Ma'am, what if he does something stupid or got hurt or-"

"Why Pam, I didn't know you cared so much." it was true that ever since Pam had been put in charge of training Sprig to use the Nebula battle suit he had grown on her a bit, not that she'd ever admit it though.

"We have to at least know where he's going."

"Where do you think he's going?"

"I don't know, probably his planet to see if it's all true. But he'd need a shuttle or the Nebula- MY SUIT!!!" like him or not, Pam still hated it when Sprig used her Nebula suit. Especially when he did so without her permission.

"We gotta go get him!"

"I agree, but send a team of cadets, his friends. He'll be angry and confused, he may attack. But his friends may be able to talk some sense into him."

Meanwhile, Sprig had already taken the Nebula suit and was on his way. Cursing himself for not paying attention in his alien civilizations class, he was trying to think of who would do something like this. Ever since he had come to the academy, he had only heard of his home as being described it two ways; primitive and harmless. Who would even have a reason for doing something like this?

"It can't be true," he thought, "It just can't be."

About then he entered the solar system. Pluto, Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars- his stomach dropped. Sitting right where Earth should have been was a huge mass of loose debris, still vaguely in the shape of a planet.

"I-it can't be, it has to be an illusion-a hologram. It's happened before, right?"

He strained to remember his Galactic History class. Something like that had happened, wasn't a Green Lantern involved somehow? In any case, he'd have to get a closer look.

He flew into the asteroid field, looking for some sort of proof that this wasn't really Earth. Coming almost straight for him, an asteroid, flat on one side. The flat end was a soft, yellow color that reminded

Sprig that it would be harvest time soon. He would have to get out of school to help his dad with the crops.

Like a brick wall it hit him, the yellow stuff on the asteroid was the crops. He flew over to the rock and landed on the flat end, the rock still had enough gravity to hold him to it. Right at the far end, sticking up like a grave stone was all the proof Sprig needed to know the truth; a mail box bearing the word 'Speevak' printed in simple white letters. With burning austerity he knew, this was no illusion, this was real.

He sat down, trying to make sense of things. So lost in his thoughts he was he didn't even notice the Celestial Academy cruiser approaching.

On board the cruiser was Anni in the pilot's seat, Dif was co-piloting, and Chuck maned the scanners.

"Did you find him yet?" Anni impatiently asked Chuck.

"Keep your shorts on, this ain't as easy as rocket science, ya know. Besides, since when do you care?"

"I just want to get back, okay? I've got a test tomorrow." Truth be told, she did have a test the next day, but it was the least of her worries. She was worried about Sprig, or Crash Nebula, as he insisted people called him.

'He would make a good Space Ranger or Galactic Guardian some day.' she thought, 'He's persistent, hard-working, courageous, brave, nice, kind of funny, hansom, with his boyish good looks and quirky little smile and- NO!' she shook the thoughts out of her head. 'He's matter, you're anti-matter, not exactly the best combination.'

"Hey! I found him!" Chuck suddenly announced, "starboard, about 28.5 parsecs away."

"Al right, let's go get him." Anni said, sounding slightly excited.

"So you can study for that test, right?" Dif asked suspiciously.

"So I can study for that test." she repeated.

Meanwhile, Sprig was still lost in his thoughts.

"This is all my fault," he said to himself, "I'm supposed to be a hero, but all I do is goof off. If I had just, ugh!" he slammed a fist on the ground in frustration. Suddenly he stood up, tall and noble.

"No more goofing off," he vowed, placing one hand on the mailbox, "I swear, I will do whatever it takes to find who ever did this, and I *will* make them regret it."

Just as Sprig was programming a course back to the academy he caught sight of the cruiser approaching. Already havening deduced it's purpose, he flew his way to the airlock. the moment he walked into the control room everyone could tell something was wrong. Everyone, that is, except Dif.

"Sprig! We were so worried!" The blob threw himself on Sprig's knees in what could be called a hug.

"I'm fine." he muttered. "Let's just go home."

"No, you're not fine." Anni said forcefully.

"Of course I am."

"Uh, guys?" Chuck called out, looking up from his monitors.

"Oh, yeah, your entire planet blows up and you're just fine with that?" Anni asked, ignoring Chuck.

"Guys?" Chuck tried again to get their attention.

"What makes you think I'm fine with that? Besides, what do you care?" Sprig was raising his voice and, like Anni, ignoring Chuck.

Anni tried to formulate response "Well, I-I uh-"

"HEY! GUYS! LISTEN UP!!!" this time all eyes focused directly on Chuck, "Thank you." Chuck said once he had everyone's attention, "I'm picking up another life reading out there. It's faint and getting fainter."

"How far?" Sprig asked in a very demanding tone.

"About 14 parsecs ahead."

"Diff, Anni, set a course."

Within moments, they had arrived at their destination. Sprig, Anni, and Chuck were outside searching manually.

"It's probably just an asteroid squatter, you know?" Anni said over the com links as she pushed away a drifting street sign.

"This was a planet only a few hours ago. That's nowhere near enough time for a squatter to settle down." Chuck answered, "Besides, the signal was too faint to be something like that. If you ask me it's either a really big bug or something dying."

"*Chuck!*" Anni hissed, knowing Sprig could hear everything they said.

"Guys," Sprig suddenly announced, "I found her."

"*Her?*" Anni said with a hint of both shock and jealousy in her voice.

"Yeah," Sprig looked at the girl lying unconscious on what must have once been a street. She was Asian, about his age with long black hair that had a red stripe coming from her forehead. The most peculiar thing about her, however, was the fact that she was wearing some sort of armor. Parts of which looked to have been ripped off. Sprig made a quick scan with his suit. Apparently, the rock she was on was giving off some sort of force field that kept her from suffocating, but the air was running out quickly.

"Dif, bring the ship around, we don't have much time."

He reached down to his belt to pull out an oxygen mask and put it to the girl's mouth.

"Just hold on, " he pleaded, "hold on."

7 - Ms. Lee goes to space

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Ohhhhh, my head." Juniper Lee said as she slowly raised her head. Opening her eyes she could tell this wasn't Orchid Bay's Main Street.

"What was I doing there anyway?" she rubbed her head until she remembered, "Oh, right, *trolls*."

She sat up in the bed she was in and took a good look around. Everything seemed so clean and sterile, like a hospital.

"Yup," she told herself, "Trolls'll do that to you."

Feeling stiff, June got out of the bed and began to stretch a bit. As soon as she stood up, however, she noticed something amiss. She felt a small breeze around her knees.

"Where are my pants?" she exclaimed upon noticing that she was wearing a hospital smock. After a quick investigation, she was happy to find that her's was not the kind that was open in the back.

"I gotta get out of here." June told herself as she looked around for her clothes. They were sitting neatly in the corner of the room. They certainly looked like she had been attacked by trolls.

She put on what hadn't been completely ruined and took a quick peek out the door. Outside were creatures of every shape and size, none of them seemed to be more than she could handle, if she took them on one at a time, but all at once would be impossible. If she was going to get out of wherever this was she'd need to do it stealthily.

She took a quick inventory of what she had left over from her battle with the troll. A few magic gems, most though not all of her armor, a magic staff, and her nearly bottomless bag.

All the monsters seemed to be wearing uniforms if she remembered right. If she could make one she may have a chance to get out unnoticed.

"What can I use here to make one of those?" she looked at her supplies spread out on the bed,

"Mmmm-no. Looks like I'll just have to take one." As if in response to her new escape plan, the door began to open. She easily leapt up to the ceiling and grabbed onto a light fixture.

"I just hope they're a size nine."

<-----COTB----->

"Fifteen initial blasts, all at the exact same time. What do you think that means?" Sprig said to Chuck as they looked over the data from Sprig's planetary telescope. Lucky, he usually kept it pointed at Earth. It was designed to pick up things like atmospheric disturbances and seismic activity. Sprig, however, used it to keep an eye on the weather back home. As a farmer his dad had taught him that the weather was incredibly important to their lives. With the telescope they had already discovered that a fleet had approached from the Delta sector at near light speed.

"Computers," Chuck said plainly. "the only other way to perfectly synchronize fifteen ships is if the crews were psychic and, to be honest, I don't know of any psychics that are prone to blowing up planets without warning."

"I was thinking that too, but if the attack was orchestrated by a computer it would choose the most efficient way to do it right?" Sprig pressed a few buttons on the console he was using, "Look at this, the first blasts are at seemingly random spots. It looks like they opened fire on the Earth's geological weak spots only in the second barrage. There's no relation between the first fifteen attack points."

"I dunno, looks like they'd all make good military bases." for a moment, Sprig wondered how Chuck knew this but then it dawned on him that on a planet full of Chucks military savvy would be common

knowledge. Unfortunately, he didn't have time to dwell on a world of edgy chickens before Dif burst into the room.

"We've got a problem, guys!"

"What is it?"

"I'll explain on the way."

Sprig and Chuck hurried after Dif as the blob attempted to explain the problem. Apparently, the survivor had woken up and attacked Anni while she was checking up on her. Anni had now locked herself in the medical room. Unfortunately, Dif was a little vague on the details. Sprig knew he'd have to talk to Anni to figure out what really happened. The moment the three reached the room Sprig knocked on the door.

"Anni! What happened?"

"She ambushed me! Knocked me out and ran off."

"Did you see where she went?"

"Uh, no! She knocked me out, remember?"

"Well, she couldn't have gotten far, she'll be the only one without a uniform."

"Actually, uh, she-she has mine."

"W-what?" Sprig asked, wondering if he heard her right.

"JUST GET ME ANOTHER UNIFORM!"

"Uh, um, okay." Sprig wracked his brain for the proper procedure in this kind of situation. "Okay, Dif, go get Anni a new uniform, Chuck, I need you to tell Princess Galaxandra to put out an alert and put the school in lock-down. I'll see if I can't find her. Move out."

For a brief moment everyone stood, shocked that for once Sprig knew what he was talking about. But, as soon as Sprig left for his task, the others finally caught on and hurried off to their assignments.

"Okay," Anni called out from the room, "I'll just, uh, wait here then."

<-----COTB----->

June figured that this place was some sort of school, as she had made it to what seemed to be a cafeteria, a lot like the one back in Orchid Bay.

'Speaking of which, I must still be in Orchid Bay. It's not like I *could* leave, even if I wanted to.' She thought to herself, resentfully. It was about then she realized that she was very hungry. So, since she was in a cafeteria, and her disguise had gotten her this far, she decided to take advantage of her situation.

After getting a tray full of whatever they were serving and sitting down at a table she was greeted by a group of students. She saw this as a perfect chance to find a way to get out of here. She told them she was new and asked a few expectable questions. Questions like where things were, hoping that the phrase 'near the exits' would pop up. The only thing that came close was a 'shuttle bay' that was down the hall from a physics class.

June saw that was as far as she she could get and quickly made an excuse to leave. Following the directions she had been given she made her way to the shuttle bay. She walked in and saw three or four small ships, each the size of a bus. Before she could do much else sirens everywhere began wailing and the doors behind her slammed shut.

"I've got a bad feeling about this."

<-----COTB----->

Sprig hurried through the halls, both keeping an eye out for the girl and trying to think of where she would be.

"She's human," he told himself, "think like a human." He thought back on his own first time here. Back the the only thing he wanted to do was to go home. She would definitely try to get out of here too. The only way to get off the station was the docking bay.

He made a sharp turn towards the shuttle bay knowing that sooner or later she would wind up there. Sprig slowed to a stop, however, once he realized he was coming up on the gym. Despite her appearance and very pretty eyes, Anni was no pushover. If this girl was able to knock her out, chances are she'd be able to rip through him like tissue paper. Rather than becoming a laughing stock for being beat up by a girl, he decided he would need some muscle.

The moment he finished putting on the Nebula suit the lock-down siren began to wail. He kicked on the rocket boosters and went zooming down the hall. In moments he had arrived at the docking bay. Looking in, he saw the girl fiddling with the controls for the outer doors, she was clearly having trouble with it.

"Come *on!* You stupid, little-"

"You're no going to get far with that attitude." Sprig called out, preparing for a fight.

"Yeah? Well," June turned around to look at Sprig and was suddenly overcome with giggles, "*What are you wearing?*"

Ignoring the comment, Sprig spoke up again, "I don't wanna fight you, I'm here to help."

"Yeah? What's your name Mr. Help?"

"Crash Nebula." Sprig said, wanting at least one person to call him that. Unfortunately that only made her laugh harder.

"O-okay, okay," she said, overcoming her laughter, "I get it now, this is a dream." she turned her head to the roof, "All right *Steven* you can come out now!"

"Are you feeling alright?"

"What are you talking about? I feel great!" June slammed her fist into the panel, smashing it to pieces.

Seeing this wanton destruction, Sprig could tell she wasn't going to go quietly, "Okay, I didn't want to do this, but --" Sprig pointed his fist at the girl and activated his stun ray. Before he could squeeze off a shot, she jumped. As Sprig realized that she was a very good jumper he re-aimed and took a few shots. Three shots, he missed. He tried to get another shot off but she punched him, hard.

His suit was designed to absorb and lessen blows like that but his head was still spinning. If he hadn't been wearing his suit, he'd probably be just another mess for the janitor to clean up. Gathering his senses he stood up and turned to the girl who was now behind him.

"Well," June looked at her still clenched fist, "You don't feel like a dream."

"Nope, just look like one."

"Mmmm, cute," June dropped to the floor and with one extended leg swept Sprig's feet out from under him. His jet pack caught him before he hit the ground. As soon as he was on his feet Sprig swung a fist at her. June caught it and returned with a fist of her own. Sprig grabbed her wrist and the two struggled to overpower each other. Every servo and motor in the Nebula Battle suit was straining to help it's wearer.

"Do you even know who I am?" June cried in Sprig's face.

"Uh, a girl who's way tougher than she looks?" Sprig struggled to say.

"I'm Juniper Lee, the friggin' Tersh Wan Xi! I've taken down monsters bigger than most houses! I went 32 rounds in the ring with Jorden the Destroyer!"

"Are you absolutely sure you're feeling alright?"

"Yeah, I'm feelin' just GREAT!" She let up on her pushing just enough to throw Sprig off-balance then flung him into the shuttle doors.

"Incorrect security signature." came a voice from behind him. He had hit a hand print scanner. Sprig grinned and activated his breathing helmet, he now had the upper hand. After turning on the magna-locks in his boots he slammed his hand on the scanner. The doors slid open to show the icy blackness of space. The air started to be sucked out of the room, along with anything else that wasn't

nailed down. Unluckily enough for June, she happened to be one of those things.

She struggled to hold her ground, but her feet lost their grip and she was flung into the air. The moment she was airborne Sprig closed the doors. The momentum kept June flying towards the doors long enough for Sprig to throw a fist and clothesline her.

"Nice trick, huh?" Sprig said confidently to the apparently unconscious June as he opened his helmet.

"Yeah," the apparently-not-so-unconscious June answered, "but what about this one?" Her feet came up to grab Sprig around the ears and with amazing flexibility, slammed her head into his, knocking him out.

When Sprig came to he felt a rush of air and something touching his hand. He figured that while he was out June must have placed his hand on the scanner to open the doors. He saw one of the cruisers slowly raise up and he determined she must have been inside. If he hurried, the suit might be able to stop the shuttle before she activated the hyper-drive.

As quickly as possible, he powered up his jet-pack to full speed and...nothing. He forgot to turn off his magna-locks! That moment of ignorance proved to be just long enough for June to activate the hyper-drive. With a mighty boom and a flash of light, the ship took off. If Sprig's magna-locks hadn't have still been on he would have been flung into the far wall in a very painful fashion.

As soon as Sprig closed the doors and turned off his magna-locks, the hallway door opened and Chuck hovered in.

"Hey! I heard a-WOAH!" the turkey-like being shouted upon seeing the many ships that had been knocked over and pushed against the walls by the force of the hyper-drive's shock wave. "What happened here?"

"The girl escaped, she took a cruiser and went into hyper-drive."

"So...what now?"

Sprig thought a bit. 'he's asking *me* that? What *am* I supposed to do?' He thought back, if he had followed protocol and left a guard with June, she probably wouldn't have escaped. If he had followed protocol he would have checked his magna-locks *before* trying to take off. What would protocol say about this?

"She's out of our jurisdiction," he heard himself say, "Come on, we should get this cleaned up, we got a test in a little while."

"O-okay." Chuck was really hoping that Sprig would hatch some crazy, half-baked plan to go after the girl. He sighed. His friend was changing, that must be what happens when your entire home world is destroyed.

8 - Mr Phantom's Travel Plans

CHAPTER EIGHT

Betty stared at the map that showed where their ship had been. She leaned back in her chair and gawked at the oddity. So far, Phantom's tracking system had them bouncing around the galaxy seemingly at random. Sighing, she shook her head, she would have to have Phantom take a look at it. Despite his appearance, he was actually rather smart. Tugging at her gloves, she made her way to the door.

"We're running low on supplies." she thought to her self. "I'll have to check with the crew." The door opened in front of her and she began walking towards the bridge. Jenny and Jake were there, keeping an eye on things. She would check with them for any changes in the tracking system, then have them help her find a good place to dock and re-supply. For a moment she considered having Phantom help with that but then she decided that, smart or not, Phantom was crazy.

As she made her way to the front of the ship, she became aware of a dull, almost inaudible clanging. Turning a corner, she saw the cause. Or rather, she saw half the cause. A pair of white boots and black spandex pants sticking out of the wall. Betty sighed.

"Phantom, what are you doing?"

Without bothering to phase out of the wall, Phantom answered, "I'm upgrading the security system."

"Phantom, this is a state-of-the-art spacecraft, why does the security system need an upgrade?"

Phantom pulled himself out of the wall to face Betty. "It won't protect us against ghosts."

"Okay," Betty agreed, hoping he wouldn't mess up the system too much, "I'm going to need you to take a look at that tracking program again."

"There's nothing wrong with the program."

"Still, I'd like to be sure, so-where did you get that?" Betty saw a mesh of wires and circuitry in his hand.

Phantom looked at the wires in his hand for a moment, "Specter Deflector."

"What?"

"I'm using it to make a ghost shield for the ship."

Betty shook her head, "Just don't blow up my ship."

"Your ship?" Phantom asked, "And here I was thinking you stole this ship. And on that note, why haven't you told the others that we're now on the galaxy's most wanted list?"

Betty glared at Phantom. If she could she would have had him court marshaled. "At this time it would be best for them to believe that they are still helping out with an official investigation. Why? Did you suddenly grow a conscience?" she said, remembering that this was the being nearly took out a base full of galactic soldiers without remorse.

"A conscience?" Phantom looked at the circuits in his hand, "No, not any more."

She would have asked him what he meant by 'any more' but he phased his way back into the wall before she could. Seeing no reason for staying she continued her way to the bridge.

Meanwhile, Jenny and Jake were on the bridge watching the trail left by the ship they were following. At that moment the ship was once again moving erratically.

"Wow," Jenny exclaimed.

"Wish nothin', I *can* fly like that." Jake boasted.

"Then why don't you?"

"Well, uh, I would, 'cept, uh, this place is just to small, ya know?"

Jenny almost delivered a scathing rebuttal but just as she opened her mouth the doors swished open. Betty marched in and leaned over the holo-map.

"Has there been any change?"

"By that," the dragon started, "do you mean 'has it stopped acting like a psycho pixie on caffeine'?"

"I suppose, though I wouldn't put it so, uh, poetically."

"Then I guess there hasn't been a change," Jenny chimed in, "but I've never seen a pixie." She added, giving Jake a skeptical look.

"Hey, it ain't my fault you never paid attention." muttered the dragon.

"We're running low on supplies." the former Galactic Guardian interrupted. "We'll need to find a place to dock." She pulled up an image of the surrounding star systems on the holo-map. "Any place look good?"

"How about there?" Jake pointed to a small bone-shaped object on the map, reading the name. "The Satellite of Love."

"It's a great spot," Betty commented, "if you don't mind having your brain slowly turned to jelly by the most unethical and cruel experiments in the galaxy."

"Why did they name it The Satellite of Love?" Jenny dared to asked.

"How else are they going to get people to go there?"

"Good point. This looks like a popular spot," the android pointed out a large orb in the map. "It says 'over seven hundred trillion served'"

Betty thought for a moment, "Foodcourtia? Hmm, I don't know, it's getting awful close to the Foodening."

"The what?"

"The Foodening. Every so often a race called the Irkins have an uncontrollable urge to gorge themselves on empty calories and trans-fats. Foodcourtia is where they go to do that."

"So what? We wait in a few lines. What's the big deal?"

"The 'big deal' is that an entire alien civilization will be converging on the planet. Their ships alone increase the mass of the planet so much that time itself gets wrapped around the it. We could wind up arriving a week before the universe began or leaving fifty years after your last hair cut."

"Oh." Jenny replied sheepishly.

"I hate time travel." Came a chilling voice from above their heads. For a brief moment the three panicked, until they realized that it was only Phantom floating in the air.

"Phantom, please don't do that." Betty commanded.

"Yeah, an' next time, how about using the door?" Jake snarled.

"If you do that then we would stand a *ghost* of a chance in knowing where you *disappeared* of to!" Jenny began to laugh loudly.

"Aww, man." Jake said painfully.

"That was just-" Betty shook her head, at a loss for words.

Phantom stared at the giggling robot for a moment then, "Oh great, Ghost puns! You'd think those would be old by now."

"Nevertheless," Betty said, "we still need to find some place to dock."

Phantom floated down and began pushing buttons on the control panel, bringing up the invader's trail over the map. He pointed to a spot where the path intercepted a planet.

"That's where they stopped last. If we go there we probably could find out where they were planning on going."

For a moment Betty stared in awe. 'I must be slipping,' she told herself. Shaking that thought out of her head, she looked at the planet Phantom had suggested.

"Hannas-Barrbados? It's out of the way, has no official ties with any galactic powers; good, evil, or

otherwise, and" she hated to admit it "the perfect spot for our mission. Jenny set a course, but keep in mind," she looked straight at her crew to make sure she had their attention, "a lot of crazy stuff happens on Hannas-Barrbados, so you'll all have to keep on your guard"

A cocky grin crept on Jake's face, "Hey, chill, there ain't anything that can take on the Am Drag!"
---->COTB<----

Little did Jake know, there was something that could take him on, and as luck would have it that something was on Hannas-Barrbados, was extremely angry, and called itself Juniper Lee.

"Come on!" she shouted at the turtle-like alien standing before her, "Ya wanna get nuts? THEN LET'S GET NUTS!"

The shelled creature cried out and charged at her. She pulled back one of her deceptively powerful fists and slammed it into the monster's stomach. The huge thing skidded backwards. It looked slightly shocked at her strength but started lumbering towards her again. That is, until it became aware off a small cracking noise. The next moment it's thick shell broke to pieces, revealing the monster beneath. It was naked save for a pair of boxers covered in rainbows and colorful monkeys. The beast screamed in embarrassment and ran off.

June turned over to a very small, mustached creature who had been observing the entire thing.

"So Mr. Spacely," June said still not believing some of the names people had around here, "Do I get the job?"

"Yes, of course!" Spacely said in a gruff voice, "with you taking care of all the riff-raff around here I could finally set up a proper business!"

June grinned, 'Maybe this won't Be so bad after all.'

Meanwhile...

Sparky couldn't believe what he was hearing, Betty? Gone rouge?

"That's impossible!" he cried out to DeGill.

"I'm afraid it is, it happened a while after you left the base. She and that Phantom fellow stole a ship and left with the other survivors."

"That long ago? But why haven't we told anyone?"

"Please understand, with all that's been going on we don't need the galaxy knowing that one of our prized Galactic Guardians has stolen a dangerous war ship and is running around the universe with a grudge. The reason I'll telling you this now is because some of our scouts claim to have spotted her ship. I want you to find her and try to bring her back."

"Alright," Sparky got to his feet, "Just give me the coordinates and I'll bring her back." he made his way to the door but was stopped by DeGill.

"Before you go, I have an addition to add yo your team. He's fresh out of the academy but he's good, he has high recommendations. His name is Sprig Speevack, codename: Crash Nebula. He could come in handy."

"Crash Nebula, huh?" Sparky said. "Let's just hope he's a match for Atomic Betty."

9 - This time, with feeling

"I need to get off this ship." Phantom told Betty. That was one of the few reasons she could stand being around him, he said exactly what he meant to say.

"No can do, Phantom," she replied, turning her attention away from the floating teen. Forthcoming or not, that hovering thing he did still gave her the creeps, especially when his legs became that smoky tail.

"You're a wanted criminal, they probably have wanted posters out for you from here to Cluster Prime. If someone recognized you it would blow the entire mission."

"What mission?" Phantom floated into her field of vision, "We're going to a mall!"

"It's not a mall." the only reason she was even in the cargo bay that Phantom had taken over and claimed as 'his room' was to find some sort of weapon to replace her bracelet. "It's a market place filled with potentially dangerous and malevolent creatures."

"And that's different from a mall filled with teenagers because...?"

"Because teenagers don't like humans as an entree." Betty said, digging into another pile of Phantom's junk.

"Okay, okay," Phantom hovered in thought for a while, "What if I wore a disguise?"

Betty couldn't help but imagine Phantom in ridiculous Groucho Marx glasses and a trench coat. "I don't think that will work."

"Really?" suddenly, Phantom vanished from site. Betty looked around her, scanning for any clues to his current whereabouts. It made sense to her that he could cause light to pass through himself, but it was still incredibly unnerving to not know where Phantom was at all times. Suddenly, a flapping noise, she spun around. There was a huge white thing moving slowly towards her, billowing with some unearthly wind.

"A bed sheet Phantom? Honestly?"

"Hey, I've seen some pretty scary stuff under bed sheets. Besides, it's better than being the Box Ghost." he reappeared inside the sheet's folds.

"There's a ghost of a box?" Betty asked, returning to her search.

"No, he's- ugh, never mind. Can I just go?"

"No. I'd prefer to only bring you in in case of a real emergency," Phantom began to protest but Betty held up her hand to stop him, "I'll call if I need you, but," she saw him gearing up for another argument, "I probably won't need to since I'll be taking Jake. Besides, I want you to see if you can get any more bugs out of X-fi-, I mean, Jenny."

"Fine." Phantom conceded, "What are you looking for again?"

"A weapon, something small, concealable, maybe worn on the wrist." she moved to a new pile.

"Something like this?" Phantom was holding up a small metallic band attached to a laser slightly smaller than his hand. "The Fenton Wrist Ray." He said, handing it to her.

"Does it work on anything other than ghosts?" she had grown accustomed to asking this sort of question about all of Phantom's technology, considering just how many of them were apparently completely harmless to everything but ghosts.

"Well, yeah, I've been using it for my gh- uh just a, uh project."

"What project?"

"Project? Oh it-it's nothing, probably won't even work." Phantom floated silently between Betty and the Specter Speeder.

'He's hiding something.' Betty decided. She easily darted past him and moved behind the Speeder where she saw...

"Why is there a hole in my ship?" she shouted at Phantom. The hole led into the engine room and was about six or seven feet tall. Tools were lying all over the floor and circuitry and wires were bolted around the edge on the hole.

"Technically, it's not your ship." Phantom answered sheepishly.

"That's not the point, why is the hole there?"

"Well, it's suppose to be a hole into another universe."

"Another universe?"

"Yeah, the Ghost Zone." Phantom was getting that crazy look in his eye again.

Betty shook her head and began walking out of the room. "If I need you, I'll call." The door closed behind her, leaving Phantom alone.

"Well, that didn't go nearly as bad as I thought it would."

-COTB-

Betty marched into the bridge to see Jake looking perky and ready to go. Jenny, on the other hand, was sulking in the corner clearly upset about having to stay on the ship. 'She'll be alright.' Betty told herself.

"Ready Jake?"

"Pffh, I was born ready, baby!" Feeling she would have preferred a simple 'Yes sir', she began walking to the door.

"Why can't I go?" Jenny called out. Betty stiffened up, the real reason she didn't want Jenny to come was incase she got damaged. Her circuitry was so advanced Betty knew if it was damaged it could take years to fix, let alone figure out. Betty wanted her as close to full power for when they took on the invaders.

"Because Phantom needs help."

"You can say that again." Jake said with a huge grin. Jenny still scowled. Betty's mind began racing; a moody robot could be just as bad as a dysfunctional one.

"The Cluster," she lied, "they invaded this planet a while back. The local were able to fight them off but there are still some pretty strong anti-robot feeling. We can't risk having a mob after us."

"Oh," Jenny's face saddened again, "I understand."

"Don't worry, Phantom's good with machines, maybe he can try and some more of your systems back online."

"Yeah, I guess would be nice to use my blaster cannon again."

"Phantom's in the cargo hold, we'll call if we need you, and-"

"And emergency numbers are on the fridge, I know." Jenny was grinning a little now, Betty smiled in response.

"Let's go Jake." she once again stopped, "Oh, and Jenny? Phantom's working on a project and, well, just make sure he doesn't blow up my ship, okay?"

"You got it Chief." Jenny exclaimed with a thumbs up.

Betty stood stunned, it was almost as if Sparky was standing there. Without another word, she turned and left with Jake following.

Walking at a brisk pace she came out of the ship onto the landing pad. Her only concern was to get to the market and get the supplies.

"Hey, yo! Wait up!" Jake was a few feet behind but Betty didn't seem to notice. She did notice, however, when Jake was towering before her in his dragon form.

"Alright," he said, "What's up?"

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? You keep spacing out, you're always getting confused about weird little things, you don't sleep, you don't eat." Jake let out a sigh and returned to his human form, "You miss 'um, don't you?"

"Miss who?" She didn't really want to be having this conversation.

"Everybody! Betty, the whole world is gone and all that's left is you, me, Phantom, and Jenny. You can't tell me you don't miss your friends."

"Most of my friends were aliens." Betty tried to get around Jake, she really didn't want to be having this conversation.

"Most of them?"

"I really don't want to talk about this."

"Yeah, well, I learned a long time ago that it's a bad idea to keep stuff like this bottled up."

"And I suppose you're the expert on these sort of things?" Betty said sarcastically. Jake looked down, she was right, he wasn't an expert in stuff like this. Betty took the opportunity and walked past Jake. She had a pretty good guess where the market might be and-

"Rose." Jake muttered.

"What?"

"Rose. She's the one I miss the most. I think about her all the time. Every morning I wake up and wonder if it's worth it to live in a world without her."

"Jake, I'm sorry, I didn't-"

"Let me finish. I wonder if it's worth it but then I realize that she wouldn't want me to just give up. I'm not saying that makes me perfect, but at least I can say I miss her out loud. I can admit that she's gone. But you haven't even acknowledge you had a life before the invasion."

Betty sighed, he was right, "Can we talk about this later?"

"Yeah, we could. But it won't get any easier and I'm not moving until we do."

Turning around she saw the way Jake was standing he wouldn't move. She let out a soft sigh.

"I never really had many friends on Earth. The Galactic Guardians contacted me when I was in kindergarten. I wound up spending more time training than I did playing with other kids. I guess I just never really got around to making friends planet side. By the time I got into grade school all the other kids just sort of avoided me. I was just too weird, too different. I tried not to let it bother me. After all, by then I was considered a hero on over a dozen planets. Any time I started to feel lonely I'd just call up my team and go on patrol. Before long I knew more about alien cultures than I did about my own family. I even started to think like most aliens, Earth seemed like one of the worst places to live. A backwards, primitive planet, home to the most ignorant, pathetic beings ever to be called sentient."

"Gee, thanks."

"Sorry. Anyway, by the time I was in middle school no one really wanted to hang out with me. I was too weird, too different. Then I meet Noah. He didn't care how weird I was, he was my only real friend. I mean, I liked my crew and no matter where I went in the galaxy people would welcome me but," tears began running down her face, "I never really had anyone to go skateboarding with or to talk to about comic books or music. I just can't believe he's-he's," she felt Jake's hand on her shoulder, "he's gone." Betty was suddenly overcome with tears. She tried to fight them off but failed. They came steadily for a good few minutes until her eyes were sore and her face drenched. Finally she was able to stop.

"There, feel better?" Jake asked.

"Yeah," she admitted, "a little. But you know, what would make me feel a whole lot better?"

"What's that?"

"Catching up with those invaders and making them pay."

"Awww, yeah, that's what I'm talkin' 'bout!" Jake hooted as they started off towards town.

-COTB-

After Jake and Betty left, Jenny had begun to preoccupy her self. Namely by generating random numbers and seeing how often the same one came up.

"Oh boy, seven again." she said, staring lazily at the slip of paper she just printed out. Finding herself

now thoroughly bored she began to wonder about this 'project' Phantom was working on. Meanwhile, Phantom stood in front of his ghost portal with a set of controls in hand. He flicked a few switches and the machine began whirring to life. Green sparks jumped from wall to wall. The gentle hum of the portal, however, started to give way to a clanking, sputtering noise. The ghost boy fiddled with the controls but the noise just got worse.

"This won't end well." he said calmly as he turned intangible. The ghost portal made a sound like a huge cough and out of it came a huge plume of smoke, sending bits of circuitry and papers flying. As soon as the air settled Phantom became solid again and switched off the machine.

"That wasn't supposed to happen, was it?" Jenny's voice startled Phantom, causing him to lose balance and fall to the floor.

"Sorry!" Jenny shouted as she helped Phantom up. "I didn't mean to spook you. Get it? Spook you?" Jenny began laughing heartily.

"Hilarious." Phantom mumbled, "Betty wanted me to try and fix you up. Might as well do that now." he said, glancing at the portal.

"What is that thing anyway?" Jenny asked.

"Fenton Portal." Phantom said, rummaging through the junk.

"Fenton Portal, Fenton Thermos, Fenton Wipes. These Fenton people must have been inventors."

"Mmmm-hmm." he found what he was looking for. A device that looked somewhat like a mix between a camera and a laser gun. "Stand over there, please." he pointed to a slightly cleaner section of the room.

"So, how is it you have all their stuff? Did you steal it? Or maybe you worked with them in a top secret government lab!" Jenny stood where Phantom had pointed to.

"They were my parents. Say 'cheese'." with that the ghost-boy pointed the device at Jenny and pulled the trigger. A blinding flash of light enveloped the robot for a split second. The device then spat out a piece of paper.

"What's that?" the robot girl said, pointing at the paper.

"Your schematics."

Jenny gasped, blushed furiously and followed up with a forceful slap to Phantom's face powerful enough to his head backwards.

"That was incredibly unnecessary." Phantom said fixing his head.

"Well, maybe you should ask a girl before you take her schematics. How did you do that by the way?"

"With the schematic-o-matic. It was designed to instantly replace lost blue prints for broken machines."

"What happens when the schematic-o-matic breaks?" Jenny asked, calming down some. Phantom's face told her that he had never considered that possibility.

"We'll just avoid that." he gently placed the schematic-o-matic down and started looking at the schematics. "Probably should work on getting you airborne."

"I can still fly."

"Yes, but can you land?"

"Oh, right."

"My guess is that something's wrong with your stabilizers." Phantom grabbed a nearby drill and got to work on one of Jenny's pigtails.

"How did you get to be so smart?" Jenny asked earnestly.

"You'd be surprised how clearly you think without human emotions." he replied without looking up from his work.

"So, are you saying you've tried thinking with human emotions?"

"You ask a lot of questions, you know that?" Phantom was sounding a little irritated.

"Sorry," Jenny shrunk back a bit, "but can you blame me? We hardly know anything about you. I don't think even Betty knows how you survived the invasion."

"Survive? I didn't survive."

Jenny's face reflected her confusion, "But, you had to survive. I mean, you're still here, right?"

Phantom put down his screwdriver with a little more force than necessary. "How many times do I have to tell you people? I. Am. A. Ghost!"

"So, you're...dead? But wait, if that's so, why aren't there more ghosts around. I mean...the whole planet-"

"I had ghost powers before the invasion." Phantom said as he lifted Jenny's pig-tail off her head, sounding a bit more annoyed. "If it wasn't for the first Fenton Portal, I wouldn't have gotten them in the first place."

"So, why are you building another portal? Are you trying to give someone else ghost powers?"

"I DON'T KNOW!" he yelled, "I don't know why I'm building another portal, other than I need to do something just to keep my mind off it." he shook his head and buried his face in his hands.

"Keep your mind off what?" Jenny asked in a caring way.

"It's all my fault, and I don't even feel sorry about it. They're all gone and I don't even miss them! My family, my friends, all dead. It's like I'm some sort of heartless monster."

For a moment Jenny didn't know what to say. After all, she was programmed to fight giant monsters, not offer advice to super-teens.

"W-well, I'm sure it wasn't your fault. If anything, it was mine. I'm a crime-fighting robot for goodness sake!"

"Did you know about it three days in advance?"

"Well, no, but how could anyone?"

"Clockwork. Ghost master of time. He told me that the world was going to end. I thought I could handle it alone. I was wrong, and the whole world paid the price. And you know what the worst part about it is? I don't even regret it! I'm just another filthy, miserable ghost!"

For a minute or two, Jenny thought, "When I first saw you, you were trying to steal weapons and a ship. Why?"

"Why? Because I wanted to get even, just like any other ghost."

"No, I think you were trying to make things right. I may not know much about ghosts, but I don't think they'd be too interested in that."

"Yeah? Well what about my family? I can remember how much I loved them but when I think that they're all gone; nothing." Phantom turned back to the robot's equipment and started working vigorously.

"You should consider yourself lucky to have known your family so well. I had eight sisters and I barely saw them at all, my mom just kept them locked up in the basement." This last statement earned a very confused look from Phantom. "What? They were prototypes, she just turned them off and put them in storage. Did you think the 9 in XJ9 was just for show?"

Phantom's reply came in a deadpan, mechanical way "That's what the 10,000 in the Fenton Dislodger 10,000 is for."

For a few seconds Jenny stared at the ghost boy, then broke out in laughter. She even caught Phantom chuckling a little, which she quickly pointed out. "See? You're not as bad as you think you are. But you know what would really convince me you're not a monster?"

"What's that?"

"If you, maybe, let me, I dunno, have a few upgrades."

"Sure, why not."

This answer made the robot very excited, as she dashed over to give Phantom a shockingly powerful hug, "Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" she quickly let go and turned to her schematics, "Okay, so, first of all, here's what I was thinking, it may sound weird at first but trust me, it's going to look fabulous!" For the next few hours Phantom and Jenny worked on the 'upgrades' and fixed as many bugs as the

could on the way. Then, just as they were working on the finishing touches, an incredibly loud alarm went off in the ship. Betty was in trouble.

10 - Kickin' Butt and Takin' names

Chapter 10

"Where is she?" Mr. Spacely shouted at the top of his tiny lungs. He was mad. A war ship! Landing on his docks! People who rode around in fully equipped war ships usually meant business, and not the kind of business Mr. Spacely liked. Their kind of business was bad for business, which was bad for his profit, and he liked his profit, you could even say he loved it.

"Where is that girl?" he screamed again.

"Cool your jets boss, I'm right here." Juniper Lee had just arrived in the monitoring station. "Who do you need me to beat up?"

"Who ever owns that ship!" he pointed violently at the screen showing the Avenger. "I want them off this planet NOW!"

"Alright, alright. Don't get your underwear in a knot. Who exactly am I looking for?"

Spacely signaled to one of the workers at the monitors who then brought up a picture of Betty and Jake.

"So it's a shrimp with one eye and a girl with no fashion sense. I'll take care of it boss. Don't you worry your little bald head." with that she strode out the door and towards the market place.

Meanwhile, Betty and Jake weren't having the best of luck with supplies. It seemed that all the honest merchants sold poor quality merchandise, while the shady ones had ridiculously high prices. They were just entering another store when someone stopped them. It was a girl. Tall and a little skinny with long silky black hair that only seemed darker thanks to a long shock of white hair coming off her forehead.

"That your warship on the docks?" June said in a tone that seemed to be asking for trouble.

"Maybe," Betty wasn't going to allow herself to be intimidated, "Who wants to know?"

"Looks to me you could've parked it better. I think you should try again, on a different planet."

"You got a problem with us bein' here?" Jake moved towards her as intimidating as possible.

"If you're looking to start something shorty, go ahead. I've got whole can of butt whoop with your name on it."

"We're just looking for supplies," Betty said calmly, "then we'll be on our way."

"Well you know what?" June said, "I don't care. Either you move that hunk of junk, or I move it."

Jake was still refusing to back down. "Who do you think you are anyway?"

"Who am I? I'm what you might call the sheriff 'round these parts. Who are you patchy?"

That was the final straw for Jake. He lunged at her and dragoned up, temporarily confusing June as she dodged with a perfect back flip. She quickly got over it, however, when she saw Jake coming around for another strike. As soon as he was in range June lashed out with a high kick, sending Jake flying.

Jake shook off the dizziness and came back for another round. He tried to bring his claws down on the girl but with surprising strength she caught his arms. Betty took this temporary dead lock to analyze the girl. She obviously had disproportionate strength and judging by the way she moved she had some martial arts training. June kneed Jake in the stomach and let a punch connect with his jaw, knocking Jake away again. Jake tried another charge, this time breathing fire.

Jake could hold his own in this fight and his natural armor could hold up, but too many more of those punches could have killed him. Betty decided that this fight needed to end now, it was drawing too much unwanted attention. She reached to her belt and plucked off a small, silver device. It was time to call in Phantom.

11 - Smack Down in the ol' Town

CHAPTER 11

The vehicle crumpled like a soda can under Jake's back. For a moment his head spun and he couldn't figure out why he and that large piece of metal were colliding so violently. Then, looking as his tail, he saw a pair of hands holding it. Then it all came rushing back to him; he was trying not to die!

He rolled to the left to avoid the girl's powerful fist. Still feeling a little dizzy, he fell off the heap of metal and machinery onto the road. He crawled to his feet and happily saw that the girl had, with that last punch, wedged her fist into the vehicle. He took this opportunity to turn to Betty.

"Yo! I could use some back up over here! Where are those other guys?"

Betty scanned the sky in the direction of the ship. The crowd that had initially gathered had already dispersed when they saw this was a little more than just a street fight, but Betty was getting concerned. She didn't want this fight to go on much longer. Then she saw what she was looking for; a little black speck whizzing towards the through the sky.

"Hang on! I think I see them!" she turned back to Jake, "Jake! Look out!" The girl Jake was fighting had (instead of pulling her hand out of the vehicle) pulled the engine block out and was welding it like a club. She swung the block, smacking Jake aside like a doll. Instinctively, Betty reached for her wrist. She put her finger on the trigger of the Fenton Wrist Ray. Before June had a chance to react, a small green beam shot from Betty's wrist and struck her with surprising power, sending her flying into a nearby building.

"I guess it is good for something other than ghosts." Betty commented. She knew, however that the girl was far too tough to let a brick wall stop her. She ran over to the spot Jake landed. He returned to his human form and was slowly regaining consciousness.

"Jake, are you alright?" She helped him up to his feet. It seemed remarkable he was still able to move.

"Yo girl, I'm fine, I'm cool, I'm icey-chill." Suddenly a strange look came across his face as he asked, "Who lit Jenny on fire?"

For a moment Betty worried that Jake has had one too many hits to the head, until she heard the sound of approaching rockets, meaning that Jenny was landing. Looking towards Jenny she realized that Jenny didn't quite look like Jenny. Many of the dents and scrapes in her armor were gone and, most shockingly, her blue paint (which had been peeling and fading) was replaced by red and orange hot-rod flames.

"Jenny?" Betty asked, not fully believing what she was seeing. "You look . . . different."

"Ye-ah!" Jake groggily shouted, "You lookin' smokin', Girl! Holla!"

Jenny blushed a little, "It was Phantom's idea. He really is good with machines, you know."

"Speaking of Phantom, where is he?" Betty asked.

"He's right behind-" Jenny looked back the way she came and a confused look came on her face,

"Well, he was right behind me. I'm sure he'll show up soon, besides, he got most of the bugs out of me and gave me some upgrades as well. I'm sure I can handle this. So where is the problem?"

"We blasted her into that wall over there and I don't think that will hold her for long." Betty responded.

"Her? It's a girl?"

"Yeah, with super-strength and a bad attitude." Jake added.

"That's never a good combo." Jenny observed.

A sudden noise from the pile of rubble attracted the three hero's attention. Juniper had recovered from the blast and the look on her face effectively conveyed what she said, "Alright, NOW I'M MAD!"

With one powerful leap, June propelled herself into the air, landing with a few yards distance between her and the others. She quickly closed that distance and swung a fist at Betty's face. To everyone's shock, however, the fist stopped. June tried to force her fist forward but it wouldn't budge. Then an eerie voice came out of nowhere.

"This is what you needed backup for?" A white glove appeared around June's fist, quickly followed as the rest of Phantom's body appeared, hovering a little above the ground.

"This is your backup?" June replied proudly and with a strategic twist of her wrist she broke Phantom's grip and grabbed his arm. Phantom had no time to react as June flipped him face first into the ground. He skidded a little before coming to a stop and falling limp.

"Next!" June said calmly. Jenny jumped in as her hands transformed into a giant pair of buzz saws.

"You know," Jenny said, "Phantom's going to be really ticked off when his face grows back."

"Ohhh! The pasty-faced kid's gonna mad! Soo scary!" Jenny brought one of her saws down on June. June caught the saw with both hands, stopping it from spinning. The robot then swung the other saw towards her. June leapt over the saw and, still holding the saw, landed behind Jenny. With expert skill June grabbed both of Jenny's arms at the wrists, holding them so the buzz saws wouldn't hurt her. June then placed her foot on Jenny's back and began to push. Jenny tried not to scream as the joints in her arms strained at the force. Just as it seemed Jenny's arms were about to snap off June was blasted away by another green ray. Phantom stood in the air with his hand extended and giving off green smoke. His face clearly had been damaged. It was covered with green oozing gashes, and one of his eyes had been moved to the wrong place on his face. Quickly the wounds healed and the eye slithered back to its proper place.

"Alright," Phantom said. "Now I'm mad."

"Bring it on, freak show! I've got nine different kinds butt whoop for you!"

Phantom flew for June as she put up her fists. He came at her faster and faster. The moment he was in range June swung a fist. She was more than a little surprised when nothing connected with it. Even more so when she realized Phantom had vanished.

"Where did you go?" she asked as she looked around. Suddenly an odd ripple went all through her body. Then, without wanting to, she doubled over, as if about to vomit. Then she became stiff as a board. It was as if she had no control over her body. Finally she figured out what was happening. She forced herself down to her knees and began slamming her face into the pavement, creating a small crater.

"GET . . . OUT . . . OF . . . MY . . . HEAD!" she shouted between slams. She was forced to quit this when her body levitated and began flying backwards. Suddenly she shot straight up and then after ascending about fifty feet in the air she was flipped head down and bulleted down to the ground like a torpedo. She hit the ground like a bag of rocks and fell limp face down. For a while, she didn't move. Jenny, Betty, and Jake surrounded her, not knowing really what just happened or what to expect. Slowly, June started to get up, but something wasn't right, Betty thought. The way she was moving just seemed off. But when Betty saw her eyes were now green and glowing she was able to figure it out.

"Phantom? You . . . possessed her?" Betty said lowering her wrist ray.

"Technically," Phantom said out of June's mouth, "it's called 'overshadowing' but, yeah, pretty much."

"So, uh," Jake said "what do we do now?"

"That's a good question." Betty replied. "Phantom, how long do you think you can keep her in control?"

"Not much longer. She's really starting to fight back, maybe just a few minutes at the most. But usually after I possess people they're pretty out of it for a while."

"Any way you can get some information out of her? Maybe we can make a deal."

"A deal?!" Jake Shouted, "She just tried to make me a street pancake and you want to make a deal?! What makes you think she'd ever agree?"

"Maybe because she's from Earth, too." Phantom said plainly.

"Say What?" Jake blurted out.

"Yeah," Phantom replied, "She's from a place called Orchid Bay. Her name is Juniper Lee, but her friends call her June. Wait- there's something really important about her." June's face became confused looking as Phantom tried to make sense of the thoughts in her head. "Do the words Te Xuan Ze mean anything to you guys?"

"What?" Jake nearly fell over in shock, "Te Xuan Ze? The Te Xuan Ze? Seriously?"

"What, you know what that means?" Betty asked.

"Well, yeah, but, no . . . Couldn't be, unless--"

"What Jake?" Jenny asked, slightly impatiently.

"The Te Xuan Ze is- or was supposed to be this super powered guardian who protected the barrier between the Magical World and the Human World."

"So she's, like, a good guy or something?" Jenny asked.

"If what I'm getting from her head is right," Phantom answered, "than yeah, she's a good guy- er- girl. But can we just decide what to do with her fast? She's fighting back real hard now."

"Alright then," Betty said, "let her go, Phantom."

"All right." Phantom agreed, "Just keep on your guard."

With that Phantom phased out of her. June, as soon as she was free of Phantom's control she put up her fists, ready for another round. "All right, freaks, who's next?" And then she got light-headed and toppled over. "Whoa, okay everyone just . . . stop spinning."

"Juniper Lee?" Betty asked cautiously.

"How'd you-whoa, real spinney now."

"Juniper, I'm Atomic Betty of the Galactic Guardians, and we are on a mission to find and bring to justice the people who destroyed our home planet, Earth."

"Whoop-dee-doo for you."

"I'm telling you this because we want you to come with us. You definitely have the skills and power to take on the invaders. We can't let what happened to Earth happen somewhere else."

"So pretty much," June said, the dizziness wearing off now, "You want me to do some serious butt-kicking, right?"

"If you want to put it like that."

"Just one question; why do you need me?"

"I told you, you have skills and power to--"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," June said as she started stretching her back. "What I mean is you have a war-ship, a full-on dragon, a human war machine and the Phantom Menace over there," She waved her hand at the others. "Why do you need me?"

"Because, you held the full-on dragon, human war machine and Phantom Menace at bay for nearly three hours single handedly."

"Good reason." June had completely recovered by now. "I guess I can hang out with you guys for a while, on one condition."

"What's that?"

"You keep Casper there from doing that possession thing again." June pointed to Phantom.

"Oh yeah," Phantom said, rolling his eyes, "Like I want to get in more people's heads. If this is all over I'm going back to the ship." Then he faded away until he had disappeared.

"He's kinda-" June said.

"Creepy?" Betty said taking off the Fenton Wrist Ray and hoping Phantom was long gone by now.

12 - Back to the Lab again

Chapter 12

Phantom tapped his finger on the table in his 'room' impatiently waiting for the Fenton Sample Analyzer to give him the read-out. Betty had said she wanted him to help her retrieve the supplies June had acquired from the warehouse Mr. Spacly put them in. He wanted to get this figured out before he went out on a mission.

Shortly after he had finished overshadowing June he noticed something . . . concerning. He had only seen it a few times before, and it never turned out well. As the machine crunched the numbers the doors swished open.

"Oh great," Phantom mumbled, "distractions."

"Hey! Ghosty!" June called out, "I gotta talk with you!"

Phantom sighed, "Its Phantom, Dan-"

"Wow, it's a mess in here." June said, eyeing a pile of circuits and wires.

"What do you want?"

"Part of my deal for coming along with you guys, remember? Betty said I could have some of your anti-ghost-techno-thingies."

Phantom grabbed a small plastic bag out of a box and held it out for June. "Fenton Jerky?"

"Don't change the subject," June pushed the bag away.

"I'm not, Fenton Jerky is filled with anti-ecto enzymes to help boost and strengthen your body's natural spectral-immune system. Now available in Original, Teriyaki, Barbeque, and Fudge flavor." Phantom held the bag out again.

"Did you just do a commercial there?" June grabbed the bag.

"I was just reading off the bag. Of course, you probably won't even need that."

"Oh? Why not?"

"You have an unusually strong spectral-immune system already, that and it gets stronger every time you're overshadowed. It would take an incredibly powerful ghost to hold you for long."

"Well, if you don't mind me saying, I've tangled with a lot of spooks, goblins, monsters, ghouls, and other freaky stuff and I gotta say, you're one of the toughest I've met." She bit off a piece of jerky, "Mmmm, not bad."

"Take all you want," Phantom motioned to the box of Fenton Jerky, "I won't be needing it."

"What do you mean?"

"Uh, oh, uh nothing, just that, uh, I'm already a ghost, and uh, it doesn't do anything for me."

"Oooo-kay." June picked up the box and started walking out. "Oh, one more thing," she turned back to Phantom, "Betty says she wants to pick up the supplies in, like, five minutes."

"Yeah, I'll be up in a minute." Phantom turned back to the machine as June left. Finally a green light lit up with a ding! And the machine began printing out something. Eager to see what it had to say he grabbed the paper and started reading.

"Well that's . . . troubling." Then he heard footsteps approaching. June coming back? No. Those were metal feet. Jenny. Phantom ripped the paper out of the machine and, using a ghost ray, incinerated it.

"Phantom?" Jenny said as the doors swung open, "Can we talk?"

Phantom hadn't really gotten a good look at Jenny since he had made his repairs and upgrades.

Looking at her now with her shiny armor and the hot-rod flame detail he had to admit, she looked good.

"What about?" Phantom asked, wondering if she already knew what the machine had told him.

“Well, um, are you, you know, feeling alright?”

“I thought we already talked about this.”

“No, not- I mean, are you sick or something?”

Phantom’s stomach squirmed, “Why do you ask?”

“Well, you were, I mean, after the fight you were kinda . . . melting.”

Crud. She saw. “It’s nothing, don’t worry about it.”

“Phantom, when your feet become green puddles, it’s usually something to be worried about.”

“It happens to ghosts all the time,” He lied, “It’s nothing.”

“If it’s nothing than why aren’t you telling me what it is?”

Phantom chose to remain silent.

“Phantom,” Jenny raised an accusing finger, “If you don’t tell me what’s going on I’ll- I’ll-”

“You’ll what?”

A grin crept on Jenny’s face, “I’ll just ask your computer.” She pulled a cord out of her head and moved towards the machine Phantom had been using.

“NO!” Phantom reached out to stop her, “No, I’ll tell you. But you’re not going to like it.”

“Hey,” She put the cord back in her head, “We’re friends, and friend want to help each other out, whether they like it or not. Now, what’s wrong?”

Phantom sighed again, “It’s called ecto-degeneration. You see, ghosts are naturally unstable, so they need to attach to something to keep from falling apart, an item, a place, a building-”

“Or a human body.” Jenny said as it all came together. “Well, can’t you just latch onto something? You know, to stabilize yourself? You have plenty of stuff here.”

“It’s not that simple. It needs to be perfectly compatible with my ecto-signiture.”

“What happens if you don’t fix it?”

Phantom looked down, “Then I’ll revert to ectoplasm and, well, cease to exist.”

Jenny stared on in silence. “How long until that happens?”

“If I take it easy and the math I did is right, about two months.”

“What do you mean if you ‘take it easy’?”

“The reason ghosts are so unstable is because ghost energy rips up ectoplasm. The more I use my powers the worse it will get.”

“You need to tell Betty.” Jenny turned to walk out.

“Wait, no!” Phantom reached out and grabbed Jenny’s arm.

“You can’t keep this to yourself!”

“Maybe not, but Betty needs to believe that we can take on the invaders when we find them. She’s got a lot riding on my powers. As soon as we know we can actually trust June to replace me I’ll tell her.”

“But why lie in the first place?” Jenny pulled away from Phantom’s grip.

“She-Betty’s started talking to herself.”

“And?”

“And the only thing that’s keeping her from going off the deep end and getting her up in the morning is the hope that we’ll be strong enough to face the invaders. It’s just until we know we can trust June. It’s for the best.”

Jenny thought it over, “You tell her, tonight.”

“Jenny-” Phantom protested.

“You tell her tonight or I’ll tell her.” Jenny threatened, “I’m doing this because I care about you, Phantom.” Phantom didn’t try to stop her as she walked out.

“After all,” Jenny said over her shoulder, “Friends don’t let friends melt.” Jenny walked out, leaving phantom alone. He sighed and started gathering his things together.

“It’s gonna be one of those nights, isn’t it?”

13 - Hero to Zero

Chapter 13

Jake lazily leaned back in his chair in the control room, staring at the ceiling. He rubbed the patch over his eye socket. It still felt weird to have only one eye, of course that wasn't the only thing that still felt weird. Being in space was a good place to start. Never had Jake even dreamed that he'd be in space. He also had never thought he would actually be surrounded by women. Some how he had thought he'd enjoy it more.

He quickly remembered that it wasn't all women. There was also Phantom, but he usually was brooding in the cargo bay like it was a deep, dark dungeon. That was another thing he was still getting used to, Phantom. The American Dragon had met a few ghosts in his day but they weren't nearly as creepy, or powerful as Phantom. Sometimes Jake had dreams where he was back in New York and some mad wizard was opening a portal to release some great, evil demon and when the portal opened it was Phantom that stepped out, only he looked more powerful and purely evil. Sometimes Jake wondered if Phantom was really on their side. He had talked with Jenny about that dream but she had told him that Phantom was 'just a big softy'. After seeing what Phantom was able to do to June, Jake was really doubting that statement.

He began to wonder, What would they do if Phantom turned on them? Not even the Te Xuan Ze could take him. What if Phantom had been the one to destroy Earth? What if he was just gathering up all the survivors to finish them off?

Jake thought about Betty and Phantom going out for the supplies. He didn't like the idea of Betty, who had no powers and a weapon that Phantom gave her and probably knew inside out, going out alone with Phantom. He had talked with Betty about it and practically begged her to let him come along instead of Phantom. She didn't yield and simply told him she needed stealth and Phantom was the only one who could go invisible and walk through walls.

Apparently nobody else thought Phantom was dangerous. But Jake still had doubts. He may have had only one eye left but he was determined to keep it squarely on Phantom. Just as Jake decided this he heard the control room doors swish open. Turning his chair to face the door, he saw something that startled him; Phantom, with a gun!

"Don't shoot!" Jake shouted, falling out of his chair.

Phantom had a confused look on his face, "Okay," he said, "I won't shoot." Phantom calmly walked in, eyeing Jake with concern. "Where's Betty?"

Realizing that Phantom wasn't going on a crazy shooting rampage Jake began playing it cool. "Oh, yeah, she's still getting ready, you know girls." He chuckled a little and got up off the ground, "You know, that kinda surprised me, you usin' the door and all. Usually you're going around all sneaky, like you got something' to hide."

"Hmm? Oh, yeah well, You know, sneaking gets old after a while." Phantom said. Jenny had made him promise to the Betty about his degeneration, but Jake didn't need to know. At least, not yet.

"Yeah, and you're, uh, packin' heat." Jake pointed at the gun-like device Phantom held under his arm.

"This? It's just the Fenton Crammer."

"So, what's it do?" Jake said feeling he already had a good idea what it did.

"Well, without getting too complicated it fires a high-frequency beam that restructures things on the atomic level altering the item's atomic density removing much of the empty space, therefore 'cramming' the particles together resulting in a decrease in perceivable mass."

“Uhhhh...” Jake felt very confused.

“It makes things small.”

“Like a shrink ray?” That wasn’t what Jake thought it did.

“Well, more of a beam than a ray and not so much shrinking as cramming but basically, yeah. I figure we can use it to get all the supplies here in one trip. The less time we spend off the ship the better.”

“Oh, right.” Jake answered, trying to see if there was a diabolical angle to this. “So, Phantom . . .”

Jake said, thinking how he could find out more about Phantom without tipping him off.

“Yeah . . . ?” Phantom replied.

“Well, I mean, I know Betty’s always been a Galactic Guardian, and Jenny’s built to save the world, but what about you?”

“What about me?”

“I mean, what were you like before the invasion? What did you do?”

“What did I do?” It had been so long since Phantom had actually thought about life before the invasion it was a little difficult to remember. “You know, normal kid stuff, hang out, go to the mall, go to the arcade and, how did we say it again? Rage against the machine?”

Jake wasn’t expecting that. It seemed hard to visualize Phantom just hanging out at the mall.

Destroying the mall, Jake could see, but not just hanging out. “Well, sounds like just a normal kid’s life.”

“Yeah.” Phantom replied wistfully, “Well, as normal as you can get when you’re half ghost and have to save the day all the time.”

“Save the day?” Also not what Jake was expecting.

“Yeah, it’s like, every day some new creep would crawl out of the Ghost Zone and I’d have to force them back, and of course everyone thought I was the bad guy. Even after I saved them all from the Ghost King.”

‘Ghost King?’ Jake thought to himself, ‘where have I heard that before?’ he strained his mind to figure it out. Suddenly it all came back.

“Wait, wait, wait!” Jake said out loud, “The Ghost King? Pariah Dark? My Gramps talked about that guy, he said last time he got out it was bad! Like, a thousand years of darkness bad! You’re telling’ me you beat him?”

“Well, I had some help.” Phantom said.

“Dude, that’s dope! Wait, where’d you say you lived?”

“Um...” Phantom was a little freaked out by Jake’s excitement. “Amity Park.”

“No way.” Jake couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “No. Way. You’re serious?”

“Uh... yeah.”

“You’re the protector of Amity Park?”

“Well, no one’s ever called the ‘the protector’. Usually it was ‘that darn ghost-kid!’ or ‘that good-for-nothing spook!’. But I guess if you wanted to call me a protector you could.”

“Dude! I’ve heard so much about you! You’re, like, a rock star in the magical world! Everyone talks about you! I can’t believe you’re the guy! Man, I never knew you were such a hero!”

Phantom cringed at the word ‘hero’. Something deep inside of him told him he wasn’t a hero anymore, after all he had done and how he had failed. “I’m no hero.” he said, setting down the Fenton Crammer.

“Are you kidding me?” Jake said. “I heard you fought back a full fledged ghost invasion! From what I heard you were definitely a hero back on Earth.”

Phantom let out a heavy sigh, “Okay, I may have been a hero in the past, but it doesn’t matter now. It doesn’t matter how many times I saved my friend, my family, my town, the world. In the end I failed. I failed and all humanity, all the world suffered for it.” Phantom’s mood suddenly grew darker and with an almost unholy tone he added; “All that matters now is finding the person who did this to the earth and

making them pay.”

Jake didn't know what to say. If this was the same guy Foo-dog's friends were always geeking out about, he definitely wasn't a bad guy, but what did he mean when he said he failed? “Look, dude, Don't take this invasion personally. I mean, it's not like they were coming just for you.”

Phantom simply stared at Jake as if he had missed the picture entirely. Before either could say anything the door swished open.

“Ah, Phantom, there you are.” Betty said. “Ready?”

Phantom looked at Jake for a moment, “Yeah, I'm ready.” He grabbed the Fenton Crammer and walked out with Betty.

When Phantom was gone Jake sat back in his chair. Maybe Phantom wasn't pure evil, but Jake decided he should still keep his eye on Phantom.

14 - Ready for Betty?

Chapter 14

Looking up at the stars used to be enjoyable for Betty. She used to look up and think that each of those little specks represented a sun with planets that had billions and billions of creatures on them with their own cultures, lives and dreams. Now the stars just made her jealous. Thinking about all those worlds and civilizations out among the stars reminded her that she no longer had a home. She quickly shook those thoughts out of her head and moved along the dark streets of Hannas-Barrbados. She would talk to Phantom about it right now but she wanted to keep quiet until they got to the storage facility. Better safe than sorry she told herself. But still, she wanted to talk to somebody. It almost felt like more that she could bare some days.

'Just focus on the mission' she told herself. She and Phantom walked through the eerie silence until they reached the warehouse Spacely had directed them to. Betty pulled a bubblegum wrapper out of her pocket. It figured that Spacely would be too cheap to write the warehouse's lock code on a sticky note or anything else. After punching in the code the doors slid open and Betty and Phantom went in.

"Alright Phantom," Betty said, "Start using that shrink-ray and let's get out of here as soon as we can." "It's more of a Cramming-beam, but whatever." Phantom quickly set about to shrinking boxes and crates and Betty began putting the toy-sized supplies in a bag she had brought. After a few piles were packed away Phantom started feeling uncomfortable. He knew there was only one thing to do about that. "Uh, Betty?"

"What? Something wrong?" Betty asked, stooping down to pick up a stack of tiny boxes about a foot tall.

"Well, uh about that fight with June-" Phantom began

"I know Phantom." Betty said, putting more boxes in the bag.

"You-you do?" Phantom said with shock, knowing he himself found out less than an hour ago.

"Yeah, I've seen before." Betty moved on to another stack of shrunken boxes, "You're worried that Because June's so powerful that she'll replace you."

Phantom nearly tripped after hearing how wrong Betty was. "Well, it's not quite-"

"Don't worry Phantom. We need you. We'll always need you. In fact if there's one person in this crew we can't do without," Betty stood up and turned to face Phantom, "it's you."

Phantom looked back at Betty for a moment. Could he really tell her the truth? That he was slowly melting? Then he remembered what Jenny had said. That if he didn't tell Betty, she would. So he mustered up all the courage he had and opened his mouth, "Betty, it's like this-"

"Wait a minute..." Betty suddenly dashed forward, pushing Phantom out of the way. She leapt over a pile of un-shrunken crates and, after a few sounds of movement, walked out from behind the boxes with something small and furry in her hand. The furry thing looked like some odd-white furred mix between a rat, a kitten, and a cockroach. The result was something oddly cute that currently looked traumatized.

"Phantom," Betty glared at him, "You closed the door behind you, didn't you?"

"Uh, yeah, bu-"

"Then how did this get in here?" Betty shook the furry thing out for Phantom to see.

"I dunno."

Betty turned the creature so it faced her and stared at it for a while as her mind worked out the possibilities. Then, with her free hand she slapped her forehead, "Betty, how could you be so dense?" she asked herself out loud, apparently unaware of saying it. "You should have seen through this so

easily, it's cadet stuff."

"Betty, is everything alright?" Phantom asked, not sure if her really wanted a the answer.

"We're surrounded." she said plainly.

"What?"

"They must have gotten to Spacely shortly after we did. He told them where we would be picking up supplies, so they got in first, accidentally let this in with them," Betty held out the furry thing again, "and now they're all over the place and ready to pounce."

"Who?" Phantom's question was answered for him and hundreds of alien soldiers in matching uniforms of all shapes, sizes and colors came out of nowhere and everywhere. Phantom instinctively began powering up his ghost rays, but as the effort made him dizzy he settled with clutching the Fenton Crammer and pointing it menacingly at the intruders.

"The Galactic Guardians." Betty said letting the furry thing drop to the ground.

One of the aliens stepped forward, this one was short, not much taller than Betty, and had a grassy green tint to his skin, a round, boyish face that was accentuated with a large, blue-green nose. Somewhat nervously he spoke.

"Uh, Hey . . . Chief."

Betty coolly acknowledged him, "Sparky."

Phantom clutched the Fenton Crammer even tighter recognizing Sparky as the one who got him a free night in the Fenton Weasel suite, "You again?"

"I figured they'd put you in charge of my capture, Sparky. But I've gotta say, I really didn't expect such a basic cadet move out of you." Betty said, ignoring Phantom.

"Hey, look," Sparky said, raising his hands defensively., "This sooooo wasn't my idea!"

"Good! Because I really was expecting some over-complicated, half-baked, hair-brained trap-scheme that actually ends up working." Betty grinned at the memories of the past for a moment.

Sparky allowed himself a grin as well. The grin quickly faded however, "Betty, Please, just turn yourself in. Trust me, it'll be better if you do."

"I can't do that Sparky. I'm the only one who can stop those invaders from attacking again. We're so close, Sparky."

"Look, Chief, if it was up to me I'd let you go, but..." Sparky looked at the other soldiers as if wondering if he could say the next thing, "It's just...bigger than us. I'm not in control here."

"Wait," Phantom chimed in, "If you're not in control, then who is?"

"That would be me." came a voice from behind. Betty and Phantom carefully turned their heads that way. They saw a boy who appeared very much human with a gangly, almost scarecrow frame that was covered with a uniform a little different than all the others.

"And you are...?" Phantom asked.

The boy opened his mouth and began talking but was quickly interrupted by Betty.

"No, wait...let me guess." She looked him up and down, her eyes carefully combing him for clues. The boy felt a little uncomfortable with how she stared at him. "So, you're obviously a cadet," The boy blushed angrily at this, "But, you have the Nebula battle suit, class 99 weapon, right up there with the Omnitrix. You look like your were from Earth, but you obviously know your way around the galaxy. Got it!" Betty snapped her fingers, "You are, or very recently were, a student at the Celestial Academy, were the Nebula suit was being kept, which means you must be the only human to go there since I was there. Sprig Speevack, right?"

The boy's face showed obvious surprise, "She is good." he said under his breath. Wiping the surprise off his face he reminded himself to do this 'by the book', remembering his encounter with June.

He cleared his throat and spoke up, "Atomic Betty, You are hereby under arrest for the charges of insubordination, harboring a known criminal, and grand theft warship. Phantom, you are under arrest for

attacking a Galactic Guardian space station, suspected possession of unlicensed weaponry, Failure to appear on a scheduled court date, and impersonating a school mascot at Galaxy High.”

Betty turned her head quizzically to Phantom upon hearing the last charge. “Impersonating a mascot? When did that happen?”

Phantom sighed, “Look, I had a life before I met you guys. Okay?”

“Regardless,” Speevack chirped in, “You two are hereby ordered to surrender.”

“Fat chance, get ‘em Phantom.” Betty replied.

Phantom looked very nervous for a second, “Uh, Betty, can we talk?” Phantom grabbed Betty’s arm and turned her around so their backs were facing Sprig and Sparky, and started speaking in subdued tones.

“It’s like this, Betty, I just found out if I use my powers too much I’ll melt like a popsicle, and I’ll melt in two month anyways.” Phantom said.

Betty clenched her teeth, “You mean you mean you can’t beat these guys?”

“Not without turning into a puddle.”

“Would’ve been nice to know this earlier!”

“I just found out an hour ago!”

“Okay, okay, we’ll talk later, let’s just figure a way out of here. Just follow my lead.”

Betty and Phantom turned back around. Betty’s eye immediately darted to the pair of hand cuffs at Speevack’s side. Venusian hand cuffs, perfect.

“Let me get this straight,” Betty said, “If we turn ourselves in, you’ll put those handcuffs you’ve got there,” she pointed at the cuffs, “and then you take us back to Galactic Guardians HQ and we stand trial, have I got all that right?”

“Well, uh, yeah.” Sprig answered, wondering what was going on. Betty leaned over to Phantom and muttered something Sprig and Sparky couldn’t quite hear, Phantom muttered something back.

“Well, after consulting with my partner we’ve decided to turn ourselves in.” Betty said.

“That’s more like it.” Sprig said, smiling. He took the cuffs from his belt and walked towards Betty. The hand cuffs consisted of two metal cylinders to be clamped around the wrist and a metal chord attaching the two. Betty held out her wrists almost like expecting a gift. Sprig either didn’t notice or didn’t care and clapped the handcuffs on her. “Oh, and don’t think you can get out of those. They’re Venusian handcuffs.”

“VENUSIAN?!?!” Sparky yelled, not believing what he was hearing. Before Sprig could figure out what was going on he saw Betty’s hands dart past his face and then the chord of the cuffs was shoved into his mouth. Sprig was forced backwards until he hit the ground, the Venusian chord still in his mouth and Betty doing a hand-stand over him. Betty lowered herself closer to Sprig’s face.

“Good try, but not good enough, Cadet.” She said and then did a hand spring up onto a pile of boxes where a very surprised and awe-struck Galactic Guardian was standing with a gun. Betty wrapped the chord around the gun and yanked it out of the Guardian’s hands. Holding the gun Betty landed a kick in the Guardian’s stomach, causing him to double over. Betty then leapt on the his back and leapt towards a window. She used the gun to blast a hole in the window and shattered through the rest of the window, disappearing into the night.

All the Guardians stared at the window in disbelief.

“Wow!” Phantom said, drawing everyone’s attention back to him. Realizing what they had all come there for in the first place the Guardians pointed their guns at Phantom.

“Uh-oh.” Phantom looked around as Sprig got back up. “Let’s hope I can still do this…” Phantom said to himself. Then, with a look of strain on his face, he vanished. Sprig was left, lying on the ground, slightly dazed and wondering what just happened. Sparky’s face came into view, looking very upset.

Sparky let out an sigh and looked around at the other Guardians. “Well, Don’t just stand there, Go after

them!" The room quickly emptied, leaving only Sparky and Sprig. "Hey, Boss." Sparky nudged Sprig with his foot.

Sprig slowly started coming out of the daze. "Ugh, What happed?"

"Do you know why we don't use Venusian handcuff on Venusians?" Sparky asked.

"Uh, because they have six arms?" Sprig said, pulling himself up to his feet.

"Well, that, and they have a style of martial arts that those cuff were made specifically for."

"She's not a Venusian." Sprig tried to save face.

"No, but she has trained with Venusians."

"That wasn't on her file."

"No, but you could have asked me."

Now up on his feet, Speevack reached for a communicator on his belt. "That's it, I'm issuing the order."

"What? No! you can't!" Sparky grabbed Sprig's arm.

"Look, I'm in charge of all this and I'll move the deadline up if I want to."

"Let's just see if we can't find them first."

"You know, I'm starting to think you might be too close to this case, Sparky." Sprig replied stiffly.

Sparky's face contorted, "Well, apparently you're not close enough. I know Betty well enough that I can tell you what will and won't work against her, if you would just listen to me!"

Sprig stood silently for a moment, staring Sparky down. Then he put the communicator back on his belt.

"In twenty-four hours, if she's still out there, I'm going to give that order."

Sparky looked at Sprig for a moment, "Fine, twenty-four hours." Sparky then turned and left the wear house.

15 - Miss Betty's big break

Chapter 15

Phantom had forgotten how good it felt to do this. Flying through the night sky used to be what he did to clear his head, but since the invasion night seemed a constant and he had been almost exclusively on spaceships, which did the flying for him. The air was cool and inviting, making him slow down a bit to enjoy it, while still going fast enough to feel the wind in his hair. His mind went back to when he would do this almost every night. He remembered seeing the city all lit up beneath him, with a cozy, warm glow. It reminded him of the many times he had to fight a ghost eel or giant squid or robot monster late at night. The trill of the fight came back to him as a dull sensation. He remembered the calmer moments, when he was on patrol on a slow night, or just trying to be alone, or when he would take Sam for a flight... Suddenly and rudely, logic came back into his mind. Remembering he was falling apart, he landed on a rooftop to save energy. Flying really didn't take all that much energy but he still didn't want to take any chances. Phantom took stock of the situation; he needed to regroup with Betty, find a way to get those handcuffs off her (if she hadn't done it herself already), get back to the ship and get off this planet as fast as possible. Looking over the city he started thinking up a way to find Betty and use as little power as possible.

His thoughts were interrupted by a scuffling the next roof over. Instinctively going invisible, he moved closer to the noise. On the next roof he saw Betty, as he expected she had gotten the cuffs off. He floated over to a spot on the roof where there were five metal blocks that looked like air-conditioning units. He would have gone visible if he didn't hear another noise. Looking to the source Phantom saw Sparky in hot pursuit of Betty. Phantom sunk down behind the air-conditioner units and once he was hidden he went visible again to save energy.

"Betty wait!," Sparky called out, "I just want to talk."

She paused for a moment with her back to him, after settling some internal dispute she turned back to face him.

"Wait, How'd you get the Venusian handcuffs off?" Sparky asked in amazement.

"Yeah, about that," Betty said, "You're going to want to tell Admiral DeGill to change protocol. If an agent ever goes rouge you need to change the override codes in all Galactic Guardian equipment."

"Admiral DeGill? You mean, you didn't- Look, Betty you need to turn yourself in, now."

Betty could tell there was something bigger here. "What happened to Admiral DeGill?"

Sparky sighed, "I didn't I'd have to tell you about this, but, he's awaiting a court marshal."

Betty's stomach twisted, "Why?"

"A few weeks ago, DeGill got an order from the Galactic Council, an order about you... to eliminate you. Shoot to kill."

"Then why didn't you shoot to kill tonight?"

"DeGill wasn't going to issue your execution so the moment he got the order, he threw it in the laser shredder. They just found out. They replaced him and re-issued the order, giving me and Speevack the choice on when to activate it, within three days, of course. I tried to slow it down as much as I can but the three days are up tomorrow. If you turn yourself in now you'll be safe, if not then..." Sparky trailed off.

"Then I die, just like everyone else on Earth. Sparky, I have to do this, I have to find out who these invaders are and stop them. The Galactic Council can either help me or get out of my way."

"Is that really the best way to go Betty?"

Betty turned around to look out over the city, "Right now, Sparky, it's the only way to go. Now, if you're not going to stop me, just go back to being Speevack's lap-dog."

Sparky sighed hopelessly and slowly turned to leave. As he put his hand on the controls for his jet-pack he turned back a little, "You know why DeGill shredded that order? Why I tried to protect you, Betty? Because we still believed in you. But the Betty DeGill and me believed in stood for something. You don't stand for anything anymore. Maybe... maybe the Betty we believed in died with Earth." Sparky activated his jetpack and soared off. There was a long moment of silence before Betty broke it.

"Phantom, you're good at being invisible but not quiet."

Awkwardly standing up, Phantom walked over to Betty. "Soooo, execution order, huh? What do we do about that?"

Betty stared quietly for a moment, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Right now I want to worry about getting back to the ship, if they haven't already impounded it."

"Right." Phantom said resolutely, "How do we get back to the ship from here?"

Betty sighed, and pointed down the side of the building "Look down, Phantom, anything look familiar?"

Phantom took a glance at the spot Betty pointed to. It was all a mess of rubble and cracked sidewalks,

"Oh yeah, looks a little different out side of June's head. This is where we fought, so the ship should be," Phantom looked around and, after getting his bearings, pointed into the distance, "that-a-way."

Betty And Phantom moved quickly and silently through the streets, only having to hide from the occasional Galactic Guardian patrol. Finally they reached the docks. It was then that Phantom made an important discovery.

"Hey," he whispered, "our ship is really big."

Betty rolled her eyes, fearing this was another moment that would further prove Phantom's insanity,

"Yes Phantom, it's really, really, big."

"Well, the shouldn't we be able to see it from here?" Betty froze in her tracks, he was really, really, right.

"They might have already taken the ship. Do you think you could pull a disappearing act again and scout it out?"

"Yeah, I'll give it a shot." Phantom slowly fade out of view. Betty sat in in the dark for what felt like eternity. It seemed Phantom took her advise about being quit, though she still would have liked to know where he was. She listened intently to every little sound, so when Phantom reappeared without warning she was a little shocked. "Well?" she demanded.

"Well there's bad news and good news, The bad news is the ship is gone." Phantom whispered.

"And the good news?"

Phantom grabbed Betty's hand, "I think you should see for yourself."

Betty became aware of a slight tingling in her stomach and the realized she could no longer see herself. Phantom had made both of them invisible. It was little strange at first walking when she couldn't see her own feet, but fortunately Betty remembered her stealth training and got along with little trouble. They walked right on past several Guardians and finally made it to where The Avenger should have been. In it's place was, to Betty's surprise, Phantom's ship. When the got up to it Phantom punched a code on the door, causing it to swing silently open. A slightly cautious, but calm Jake sat inside. As soon as Betty and Phantom were inside and the door closed Phantom let go of Betty, making her visible again.

"Jake? Where's the ship?" She demanded.

Jake just smiled, "Hang on, I'll show you what's goin' on." He pulled a large, purple jewel out of his pocket and spoke into it. "Yo! June! Still there?"

June's voice rang out from the gem, "Yep, read you loud and clear, you got them now?"

"Yeah," Jake replied, "Bring us aboard whenever you're ready." Jake turned back to Betty,

"Teleportation crystals." He explained.

“Jake, what’s going on here?” Betty asked. Before she could get an answer she felt herself being pulled in a direction she didn’t even knew existed. The pull turned to a twist, which turned to a scrunch, which turned to a hundred other things before it was all over. Finally Betty found herself back in The Avenger’s cargo hold.

Jake spoke up, “Okay, it’s like this, while you were gone, we were all bored an’ stuff, right? So we turned on the TV, nothin’ was on, so we wanted to play some videogames, this ship ain’t got any, so we looked at Phantom invader-tracky-thing,”

“And?” Betty asked.

“And we saw them start turning back.” Betty’s heart skipped a beat; if the invaders were turning back then it would be easier to catch up with them. “And then when we were figuring out what to do they stopped. We figured we’d have to get at them as soon as we could, but we couldn’t get a hold of you guys, so then June’s all like, ‘yo, I got these teleport rocks, we could jet off an’ jet those two with us when they get back.’”

It was almost too good to be true, Betty decided to clarify, “So, let me get this straight, We’re finally going to catch the invaders?”

Jake smiled again, “That’s what it looks like Chief.”

16 - Holes in the Ship

Chapter 16

June had mixed feelings as The Avenger and it's crew sped off. When she had first discovered what happened to Earth it hit her pretty hard. She remembered crying for a few days and moping around for weeks afterwards until finally she snapped out of it. She told herself to be strong and move on and decided it wouldn't be healthy to go out looking for revenge. Now here she was off to get revenge. The excitement of the crew was rather contagious as she stood on the bridge. Jenny piloted the ship as fast as it could go while Betty sat in the captain's chair, her eyes glued to the tracking system. Jake had gotten impatient and had begun pacing the halls. Even Phantom had joined in the excitement and stood next to the door with his usual creepy aura.

"So, uhh," June broke the tense silence, "How much longer?"

"About 30 minutes." Betty replied, still staring at the tracking system.

June wondered if she could stand even five minutes more of this, let alone half an hour. Phantom was the next to break the silence. "If that's the case I have things to work on, call me when we get there."

"Don't put any more hole in my ship." Betty answered almost robotically.

June watched as Phantom walked away. "I think I'll go help him." She blurted. Anything to get out of this tension.

"Make sure he doesn't put any more holes in my ship." Betty said as June left.

"Aye aye, Captain."

June caught up with Phantom in his room. "So, Phantom, what'cha dooin'?" she said as the door slid open.

Phantom looked up from a tangle of wires and circuit boards. "Working."

"Ooookay." June looked around at all the machines and devices scattered around. She snatched up one that looked somewhat like a microphone. "Mr. Phantom!" She said in her best T.V. announcer voice, "You're moments away from catching the destroyers of Earth, how do you feel now?" She shoved the device in Phantom's face. Phantom simply stared at her for a moment.

"I don't feel." he said, picking up the gizmo he was working on and bringing it over to the Fenton Portal.

"Oh come on, Casper, you've gotta feel something."

Phantom began plugging circuit boards into the Portal. "I feel nothing beyond a desire for revenge and a need to be feared."

"That explains a lot", June thought, "Yeah, but you weren't always like that, were you?"

Phantom's shoulders slumped, "No. Not always. In fact it's kind of ironic, I've always wanted to be an astronaut. Now I am one and I can't even enjoy it."

"Heh. You know what's really ironic? I'm in that same boat." June set down the microphone. "I wanted to be an astronaut too. But with the whole Te Xuan Ze thing I couldn't ever leave Orchid Bay, it was like a prison. Going to the moon was totally out."

"And you're not enjoying this because...?"

"I had to lose everything to get this. And I really don't think it's worth it."

Phantom remained silent and continued working. "So," he said after a while, "are you ready to pay the invaders back?"

June sat on a nearby table, "Maybe, I don't know. Revenge seems kind of, I dunno, pointless, you know?"

"No, I don't know," Phantom said sounding a little annoyed, "explain."

“Well, I mean, even if we beat the invaders, what does that do? It won’t bring back all the people we lost. It won’t undo what’s been done.” Phantom paused in his work. “Phantom? If there was another way to deal with this without revenge, would you go with it?”

Phantom opened his mouth to answer but was cut off.

“June, Phantom, we’re nearing the target. Come up on deck.” Betty’s voice rang out anxiously over the intercom.

“We should get going.” Phantom said and walked quickly towards the door.

“Yeah, alright.” June followed.

17 - Can you hear me now?

Chapter 17

The Avenger landed almost daintily in the small asteroid, positioning itself so the invader's ship would not be able to see it. On board -as soon as June and Phantom were on the bridge- Betty gave the crew a briefing.

"Alright, it looks like we only have one scout ship here. That either means that it got separated from the rest of the fleet or this is all a trap. We need to be ready for either possibility. If it's just lost, we can get valuable information from that ship. If it's a trap, we have the chance to draw the invaders out. We'll need two teams. One to board the scout ship, the other to be ready with The Avenger. Jenny, Phantom, and I will board the ship and see what we can learn, June and Jake, you'll stay here and watch the scanners for any suspicious activity. Any questions?"

"Yeah, I got one," Jake said, not even trying to hide his displeasure, "Why do I gotta stay here?"

"One, I need you and June here to protect the ship in case the invaders try to board and steal it. Two, we don't have any space suits, you can't breath in space, and there's no atmosphere on this asteroid. I have a breather built into my uniform and Jenny and Phantom don't need to breath. Any more questions?" The crew remained silent, "We'll be communicating through Jenny's connection with the ship, incase anyone's snooping in on us. We'll call you in a few minutes to make sure it works. Let's move out." With that, Jenny, Phantom and Betty left and were soon on the asteroid's surface moving towards the ship, leaving Jake and June on the bridge.

It didn't take long for June to sense that Jake was getting antsy again, not that he really tried to hide it. He was pacing back and forth only stopping to fiddle with the ships instruments. June usually was a laid-back kind of person (with the only exceptions being when a giant frog was eating everything or something like that) so this was starting to get on her nerves.

"Hey, lizard lips, you mind settling down? You're kinda freakin' me out."

Jake sighed and took her advice. Being impatient wasn't going to help anything today. "Sorry." He muttered

"Nah, It's cool," June shook a hand in his direction, "I get it, you just wanna go kick some butt."

Jake plopped down in his chair, "Heh, How'd you guess?"

"Aww, c'mon, You know how the magical protector business is; if you don't have to lay the smack-down on a mutant parakeet at least once a week, somethin's horribly wrong."

"Parakeets? It was always mutant cockroaches for me."

"Hey, speakin' of weirdness, I gotta question for you. Before I met you guys I saw a couple of other humans but none of them were from Earth, most didn't even know what Earth was. How's that work out?"

Jake scratched his head, "Betty tried to explain it to us once, I didn't really understand, but she said it was kinda like if you got a million monkeys a million typewriters you'd get Shakespeare, and how if you get a million planets and a million species, humans are bound to pop up more that once."

"So it's just a complete fluke is what you're saying, right?"

"As I understand it."

Just then the ship's communication panel chirped on.

"Hey! Can you hear me now?" came Jenny's voice.

Jake dashed to the communicator in a way as if to make Olympic athletes jealous, "Yeah, hear you loud and clear!"

“Good!”

“Okay, quick physics question, ‘cause I just know it’ll keep me up all night,” June asked, walking to the controls, “If there’s no air out there then there’s no sound, right? So how can you be talking to us?”

“Oh, I have a direct link from my brain to the ship, so this is all happening in my head!”

“Huh, weird. So what’s it like, being hooked up to the ship?” Jake said.

“I think it hates me.”

“Naw,” June said, “ You’re just being a pessimistic robot.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Jenny said cheerfully.

“So, Jen,” Jake said, “are you there yet?”

“Yeah, we can see the ship now,”

“Well, what’s it look like?” June said, leaning over Jake.

“Like a piece of junk, I’m surprised it even made it this far. Betty says it’s an Irkin Voot Cruiser. I don’t know what that means but we’re about to check it out.”

“Keep us posted, okay?” Jake said.

“You got it. Oh, Betty’s trying to get it opened and- WHAT TH-” the feed suddenly turned to static.

Jake started frantically pushing buttons “Jenny? Jenny? What happened? Jenny?”

18 - The Sorrid tale of Zim and Dib

Chapter 18

“What happened?” June asked.

“I don’t know, we just- lost the signal.” said Jake, frantically pushing buttons.

“Hmmm.” June backed away from the panel and took a deep breath. “Alright, we have to assume the worst,” She said, “that this is all a trap and the others walked right into it. Right not this ship is the only way out for us and them.” June slipped into a seat next to Jake and started working the controls. “Let’s see if we can see anything on the scanners.”

Jake stopped and looked at June, “Do you think they’re alright?”

“Phantom’s pretty tough and can handle himself, Jenny’s a walking tank, and Betty... well she’s got Phantom and Jenny. They’ll be fine, but right now we’ve got to protect the ship.”

Jake’s face hardened, “Right.” he agreed as he brought up the ship’s surveillance cameras.

June kept an eye on all the screens before them, showing the landscape around The Avenger in heat-scope, night-vision, x-ray, and a hundred other ways of seeing, some of which she could not understand. Jake on the other hand was hard at work trying to regain contact with the others. Then, suddenly one of the screens showed movement. June enlarged that screen as the communication speakers crackled to life.

“Open the loading doors!” shouted Betty’s voice over the static.

Jake activated the doors and leaned in to the screen for a better look. Whatever was moving towards them was big and fast. “It looks like a tank.” Jake thought aloud.

“A tank with pigtails.” June replied, zooming in to prove her point. In a matter of moments a rumbling filled the ship, confirming that the Jenny-tank had gotten on board. June opened the intercom to the cargo bay. “Everything alright? Should we launch?”

“No.” came Phantom’s eerie voice, “But you’ll want to prepare the medical bay, we have a guest.”

“Gotcha.” June issued a few commands to the ship’s computer, enjoying how easy it was to control nearly every aspect of the ship from the bridge. She turned to Jake, “So, you wanna Go to the med-bay and see how freaky-lookin’ our ‘guest’ is?”

“Naw. I’ll catch up later.” Jake said as he leaned back in his chair.

“Suit yourself, but I’ll bet that suckah is uuuuuug-ly!”

CotB

Standing in the med-bay, June could see she was right. This...thing, whatever it was defiantly did not look pretty. Lying still but breathing on the examination table it looked almost like a cross between a big-headed kid and a giant, squishy bug. Betty was talking into the med-bay’s audio log describing the ‘patient’.

“Subject was taken from a wrecked Irkin Voot Cruiser. He attacked us, apparently unaware of the lack of atmosphere. As such he is currently unconscious due to lack of oxygen to the brain. We were able to quickly bring him back to the ship for examination. Species is...difficult to determine. Subject appears human with Irkin characteristics superimposed. For example; one eye appears human but the other is a solid red like an Irkin’s. Also of note is the presence of an Irkin Pak, which seems to be the source of the Irkin mutations. The Pak appears to have been damaged but has cannibalized some other machine in order to make repairs. It seems, however that the cannibalized portions are severely malfunctioning which may actually explain why the subject is still alive.” At that moment Betty noticed the confused

looks she was getting from Jenny, June, and Phantom. She stopped her recording to explain. "The Pak...it supplies Irkins with nutrients and fluids and even stores their memories. Essentially the Irkin's body is just something to carry the Pak around. If the Pak were to ever attach to something non-Irkin the nutrients often act as poison and kill the host from the inside-out. Since this Pak isn't working right it may not be injecting the all nutrients and therefore not killing him. Did that make any sense at all?" Phantom nodded 'yes' while Jenny and June simple shook their heads.

"How about we just wake him up and see what he knows, okay?"

Betty sighed at the complete lack of procedure, but realized it couldn't be helped. "All right, but let's get those restraints on him first." Phantom pushed a few buttons on a panel by the bed, causing three glowing red bands to wrap around the 'subject'. After pressing a few more buttons a slight electric charge ran through the table, just powerful enough to wake their patient.

"Uuuuhhhmmmmggggg." the thing moaned as it's eyes flickered open. "Where am I?" he looked around for answers. Betty spoke up.

"You're onboard The Avenger. You attacked us, remember?"

"Attacked? No! Wait! That wasn't me it was...him!" the patient seemed to be on the verge of freaking out at this point.

Intrigued, Betty pressed the issue, "Who, then? Who attacked us if it wasn't you?"

"It was...ZIM!"

Phantom spoke up this time, "Who's Zim?"

"PITIFUL MEAT BEAST!" the patient replied, "I AM THE MIGHTY ZIIIIIIIIIIIMMMMMMMM-NNNNNOOOOO! I'm DIIIIIIIIII-ZIIIIIIII-D-D-D-D-ZZIIIIIBBB!" Whoever he was he seemed to be having some sort of augment with himself.

"Ooooookay." June said, "Phantom, I think you're about to lose your 'Craziest Guy on the Ship' plaque."

"I'm not crazy!" Zib screamed, though in his calmer voice.

"Okay. Okay. You're not crazy," Betty said calmly, sending June a look to tell her to keep quiet.

"How did you get here?"

"Very well! Zim will tell you the terrible tale, filthy worm monkey!" Zib cried in his not-so-calm voice. "It began when, I -the mighty ZIM!- was posted on the pathetic filth-ball called Earth, to learn all their weakness for the Mighty Tallest."

CotB

Earth: 30 minutes prior to the invasion

Deep under the ingeniously disguised Irkin base of the invader Zim in the technological wonder of Zim's laboratory, were I, the mighty ZIM, worked diligently trying to find the weak spot in Earth's defenses. At this time I was focusing my amazing brain on it's pathetic solar system. But, with my awesome Irkin mind I discovered an irregularity; something approaching. Something massive, but before even my lightning-fast reflexes could react, a disrupter beam struck, disabling my lab!

I realized that even my advanced technology could not stop this menace, so I was forced to turn to the one pathetic human who has ever dared to match wits with ZIM! The huge-headed human named Dib. When I told the Dib-monkey about what appeared to be an invasion he reacted as I expected. Crying in terror, sniveling in fear, and vomiting in disgusting-ness!

What! That's not what happened at all!

Here's what really happened. I, Dib, was doing my civic duty to prevent an alien invasion by using a-uh-borrowed military satellite to scan the solar system for any approaching spaceships. Suddenly I got a blip on the screen. Not just one, but hundreds! I knew though that even my surveillance equipment and global network wouldn't be able to stop a full-fledged alien invasion, so I was forced to recruit my old nemesis; Zim. Zim, being an alien had advanced technology capable of stopping this, so I went over to

his place. I didn't trust Zim, though, never did, so part of the reason I asked for his help was so I could gather evidence to prove to the world once and for all that aliens live among us.

It was true that the invaders had jammed his systems, but when I got there he really didn't seem to care. In fact him and his robot dog, Gir, were doing...things....unnatural things...to waffles...

It took some time to convince Zim to help, and he only agreed because he wanted to conquer Earth, and of course he couldn't do that if someone else beat him to it. So we got in his spaceship and took off to fight the invading menace!

YEEEEESSSSS! And I, ZIIIIIIIM!!!, piloted!

No ship in the galaxy could match me! I maneuvered beautifully through the planet's disgusting atmosphere. Soaring and tumbling. Yes, I was lord of the skies! All looked upon me in amaze and said...neat-o!

Oh, yeah, and, uh, Big-Head was there too, I guess.

My head is NOT BIG!

When we reached the invasion force I suggested a solid offensive focusing on the mother ship. Zim, however, had other plans and started attacking some of the smaller ships. Because of his bone-headed maneuvering we got hit, taking out one of our guns.

The hit made Gir start acting crazy. Well, crazier than usual. Anyways, while Gir was freaking out, we got hit again, taking out our last gun and doing a lot of damage to the ship. If only Zim had listened to me-

WRONG MEAT-BEAST!

It was not Zim who was stuuuuuuuuuuupid! It was DIB! And because of his stupidity, We were caught off-guard. In the attack I was mortally wounded, but thanks to the wonders of Irkin technology, my PAK, survived with minimal damage (which damage was repaired by using parts from Gir), activated a fail-safe. It backed up all my memories and immediately sought out the closest living organism, which was the un-bathed Dib. By the time the merge was complete the pitiful planet Earth had fallen. Only one option remained: to return to the Irkin Home World and have my PAK removed from this disgusting snot-creature.

CotB

The crew stood, staring at Zib as he slipped into a strange, quite babbling. Jake had come in around the middle of the story and was the first to break the tense silence.

"So, I guess this ain't one of the invaders?"

Jenny looked on in disbelief. "If he didn't have anything to do with the invasion, then..." She trailed off, almost unwilling to say it out loud.

"We've been on a wild goose chase this whole time." Phantom said, with an unusual hint of remorse in his voice.

The crew stood there, not sure what to do or say for a while. Just realizing that they were wrong. For most of them, it was a strange feeling. Sure they all had tough times, but things always seemed to work out in the end. There always was that one thing they overlooked that just popped up at the darkest moment. No such thing happened this time.

June spoke up with a quiet voice. "So, Betty, what do we do now?"

Betty cringed, gazing at her boots. After a minute or two in thought she responded. "I don't know. I don't know." she shook her head and made her way to the door. It all seemed so pointless, so hopeless to her now. No longer a Galactic Guardian, wanted for grand theft warship, with a target on her back to boot. Phantom was melting, the invader's trail had run cold and she had just lost her final lead. She felt like crying, but couldn't find the tears. "Just...land on some planet nearby. We'll figure things out from there."

Then she left for her quarters. Silently and somberly. The crew stayed in the room with the silence,

which was only broken by Zib's cackling.

19 - Flaming Bunnies and Other Such Nuisances

The mood on board The Avenger had gone from an excited electricity to a hopeless fog. Slowly and somberly the massive ship plopped down on a small, forested planet which, if June read the Intergalactic Planetary Registry correctly, was uninhabited. After the crew had discovered that they had been chasing the wrong ship this whole time Betty had locked her self in her quarters, Phantom prowled the halls psychotically, snatching up any electronics left out, June sat in the bridge alone to land the ship, not wanting to deal with anyone. Jenny and Jake had decided to try and help Zib in the sick bay.

"Puny minded simpletons! You're stupidity is massive and... STUPID!" Zib shouted.

"Ooooookay." Jake replied, then turned to Jenny, "So how's this suppose to work, again?"

"Well, from the looks of it, when the PAK repaired itself it used some tech with faulty programming, so I just got to hack in there, fix the bugs, and he should get better or at least less crazy. I might also be able to install a program to help repair the mental damage, but that all depends on if his brain is attached to the PAK."

"Right, I think I've got it now, what do I need to do?"

"Just unplug me if my warning light goes off."

"What warning-" Jake stopped when a large police siren popped out of Jenny's head, "Oh, that warning light."

Jenny pulled a wire out of her head and moved towards Zib.

"H-hey." Zib said in his Dib voice, "This isn't gonna hurt, is it?"

"Uh, well, I don't- no, it probably won't, I mean, I won't feel anything.."

"Probably?" Before Zib could protest anymore Jenny shoved the wire into his PAK and both of them suddenly fell into a trance. Jake watched on worriedly for a moment before his attention was shifted to the sick bay doors as they swished open. Phantom stormed in with an angry sneer. His green eyes darted from Jenny to Zib and finally to Jake.

"Fixing bugs in his PAK?" He said in a tone that suggests he didn't care for an answer.

"Uh, yeah. So, what brings you here?"

"I need some equipment." He responded in a more no-nonsense tone than usual. Then without another word he began rifling through all the drawers and cupboards snatching up any electronics he found. Throwing medical supplies around casually until he found whatever devices he was looking for. Jake watched him, afraid to interrupt. It wasn't until Phantom had an armful of gadgets and was moving

towards the door that Jake mustered enough courage to speak again.

"So, uh, what are you working on?"

Unexpectedly, Phantom let out a heavy sigh, and turned to Jake with a hopeless look in his eyes. "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters." then Phantom left without another word.

Jake looked around at the mess of gauze and bandages Phantom had left sprawled all around. Glancing over at Jenny and Zib -who were both still in a daze-, he began to put things away. Just as he was staking jars of some kind of medicine on the shelves he was startled by wailing noise and flashing lights. The siren on Jenny's head was going off. Jake leapt over to the table and yanked the chord connecting the two. Instantly the siren turned off and retracted back into Jenny's head.

"Hey, you okay?" Jake asked Jenny as she clutched her head.

"Yeah, I'm fine, I just got a little bad –TACO!- uh feedback. My anti-virus program should boot it out in a –doo dee doo dee!- few minutes."

Jake turned to look at Zib and began undoing the straps, "How about you, you okay?"

"Uh, actually, yeah, I do." Zib sat up, "In fact I-whoa. What happened here?" Zib said seeing the mess that Phantom had left.

"Oh, that. Phantom stopped by looking for who-knows-what." He turned to Jenny, "He seemed even weirder than normal."

"Is he all right?" Jenny asked with concern in her voice.

"Is there an 'alright' with Phantom?"

"I think I should go talk to him." Jenny said walking out into the hall. The closer Jenny got to Phantom's room the more concerned she became. She heard all sorts of noises coming from the room, from bangs to thumps to crashes, and she swore she heard a little explosion even. When she opened the door the air in the room was thick with smoke. Somewhere in the mess she could hear Phantom's voice.

"Auuuuggg! Dumb calibrator. Work you stupid thing! WORK!"

Slowly and cautiously Jenny approached. When she was close enough to see Phantom slumped over a table she spoke. "Uh, Phantom?"

His eyes gleamed at her through the smoke. "What?" His voice made it clear he did not want to be disturbed.

"Well, I- It's just- Phantom, are you alright?"

"Alright? ALRIGHT? I'M GREAT!" He shoved the contents of the table onto the floor. "I mean, it's not like I'm dying or anything! I sure didn't just loose the only purpose I had for the last weeks of my life! Oh, no!"

I'm fine! I'm just PEACHY!" Phantom slumped onto a nearby chair, looking defeated.

Jenny quietly walked towards Phantom and, placing a hand on his shoulder said, "It's gonna be okay, Phantom."

"Easy for you to say," Phantom said without even opening his eyes, "You going to be here long enough to catch the invaders."

"Phantom, I-"

"You what?" He said chuckling sarcastically, "What's the robot's wonderful, cure all advice for this, huh?"

Jenny had had enough of this. Grabbing him by the shoulders she lifted him up from the chair. "Hey! Listen! I'm trying to help you here! I'm trying to help you deal with this, but all you want is to be miserable. Why don't you just let yourself enjoy something once in a while? It's not like you've got anything left to lose!"

Phantom kept his eyes closed in silence for a while. Then in almost a whisper he spoke. "I-I'm sorry. It's just- there isn't anything left for me. I'm so useless right now. I told Betty that I'm dying and suddenly I have nothing."

"Don't say that Phantom, you're not useless. You're the one who gave me this awesome paint job!"

Phantom seemed to cheer up a little at this, "Yeah, yeah, I guess. Hey, Jenny?"

"Yeah?"

"Could you, uh, put me down now?" Jenny then realized that she had been holding him a few inches off the ground the whole time.

"Oh! Sorry! You're just so light and, you know, super robot strength and all." as the situation grew more awkward for Jenny she sought to change the subject. Pointing at the still smoking ghost portal she said "So, you said you were having problems? I do happen to know a thing or two about machines myself."

"Yeah, it's this stupid calibrator," Phantom said tapping a gizmo that seemed practically duct-taped to the rest of the portal, "I can't figure out what its problem is."

Jenny leaned in close to examine it and after a moment of consideration told Phantom, "That's because it's a can opener, not a calibrator."

"Ohhhh." Phantom replied sheepishly.

"But," Jenny added, "I think we can re-purpose it. But if I'm gonna help you I want one thing clear."

"What's that?"

"When it's done, we're painting bunnies on it."

"What?" Phantom replied indignantly, "If we're painting anything on this thing it's gonna be hot rod flames."

"Bunnies." Jenny said resolutely.

"Hot rod flames." Phantom corrected.

"Bunnies."

"Hot rod flames!"

"Bunnies!"

The two glares at each other for a moment. Then Phantom broke the silence, "How about flaming bunnies?"

"Mmmmmm," Jenny considered the proposition for a moment, then extracted a wrench from her wrist, "Deal. Let's get to work."

-CotB-

"And so that brings us to the bridge." Jake said. After Jenny left he had started to feel awkward with Zib and was completely freaked out by Zib's one mutant-alien eye. So he made the tactful suggestion to give Zib a tour of the ship. Zib had jumped at the chance and snatched up a notepad Phantom had left out to take notes.

"This is so amazing! I mean, do know how long I've waited to get solid proof of aliens? I have hundreds of pictures of spaceships but I never thought I'd actually be on one!"

"So, you a paranormal investigator?" Jake had caught onto that fact during Zib's rant about how he could find the Loch Ness monster.

"I prefer revealer of truth. I mean there are so many things out there that nobody wants you to know about."

"You mean like...dragons?" Jake wanted to make sure he didn't have another Professor Rotwood on his hands.

"Dragons? No, that's ridiculous. No, I'm talking, like, ghosts and Bigfoot and stuff like that."

"Bigfoot, huh?" Jake opened the bridge's doors and led Zib in, "Nice guy, after he took off that poison ivy diaper and stopped calling himself King Itchy."

"Yeah- wait, what?"

"You guys talking about Bigfoot?" June said, seeing the two come in.

"Yeah, I'm giving Zib here the grand tour." Jake replied.

"So," June said to Jake to avoid looking at Zib's mutant eye, "I guess Jenny fixed his, uh, weirdness?"

"Yeah, she's hanging out with Phantom now."

"Hey," Zib said, "That Phantom guy, is he really a ghost?"

"Oh, yeah totally, and he's a pretty powerful one, too." Jake answered.

"Tell me about it." The memory of June's fight with Phantom on Hannas-Barrbados was still fresh in her mind.

Zib turned to a new page on his note pad. "So, how did you get him here, is he haunting the ship or something?"

"That's a good question," June said, then turning to Jake, "How did Phantom get here?"

Jake scratched his head and started to think back. It seemed almost a lifetime since Phantom had attacked the Galactic Guardian Headquarters. "Well, it's actually kinda funny, Me Jenny and Betty were at Galactic Guardian H.Q. and Phantom showed up and was all like, 'Yo! I'ma need some gear, 'cause I'm after those fools that messed with Earth.' And we were all like, That's cool, but you be messin' with us, so we gonna take you down!' So we sucked him up into a dust buster and locked him up. Then we find out he's got a way to track the invaders so Betty pulled some strings and Bam! We're off. 'Course then we find out we just been followin' you all the time, so, uh, yeah."

Zib suddenly felt guilty, "Oh, I guess that's why Phantom seemed so upset."

"Wait, a dust buster?" June asked for clarification, "You sucked him into a vacuum cleaner? Does that even work?"

Zib spoke up again, "Well, actually most ghost catching equipment is based on the design of vacuums. In fact I saw this web video that told me how to turn any hose vacuum into an atomic suckula-" He was cut off when the bridge door slid open and Betty came in.

"Oh," She said glancing over at the others, as if she was surprised to see them there, "are Jenny and Phantom here? I want to talk to everybody."

-CotB-

In Phantom's lab Jenny had taken over the more technical side of the project while Phantom had been almost forced into doing the paintjob.

"And that," Jenny said, wiping some grease off her forehead, "should just about do it." She and Phantom took a step back to admire their work. "So, this is suppose to open a portal into another dimension, right?"

"Yeah, the Ghost Zone." Phantom replied.

"No offence, but why would anyone want that?"

"Well, you see... it's kinda of a... well... huh, you know, I'm not really sure. But, hey, why would anyone make a crime fighting robot a teenage girl?"

"Good point. Oh well, awesome flaming bunnies, anyway."

"Thanks."

"So what do say we fire this baby up?" Jenny asked moving towards the control panel.

"Uh, wait," Phantom stopped her, "in my experience, turning these things on for the first time usually causes problems."

"Problems like what?"

"Like giving people freaky ghost powers."

Suddenly the intercom crackled to life, and Betty's voice rang through, "Jenny, Phantom, I need you on the bridge immediately. I-I need to talk to everyone."

"Huh," Jenny said, "I guess we'll have to wait on the ghost freakiness. What do think she wants to talk to us about?"

"Beats me." Phantom lied. He had a guess as to what Betty wanted to announce. If he was right, it wasn't going to end well. The two rushed up to bridge. The moment the doors swished open and Phantom caught a glimpse of Betty, he knew something was wrong. She was no longer the confident, observant girl he had met at Galactic Guardian headquarters. Instead, sitting in the commander's chair she had the look of someone who had been defeated.

Somberly she acknowledged Phantom and Jenny. Then, after clearing her throat, she spoke, "I called you all here to make a few announcements. As most of you know, we no longer have any leads to find those responsible for destroying Earth. Our mission to bring them to justice...has failed. So, I guess it's time to come clean about a few things. I...lied to all of you. I lead you to believe that this mission was fully sanctioned by the Galactic Guardians, it was not. In fact, Phantom and I are currently on the Milky Way's Most Wanted List for Grand theft warship. Now I-"

"Whoa, whoa, wait!" June stopped her, "So you've just been lying to us this whole time? Just when were you planning on telling us this? Yeah, guys thanks for helping beat the invaders oh by the way, we're all fugitives."

"June, listen to me, I-"

"Listen to you? Why? We already know we can't trust you."

"But I-"

"Hold on Princess, before you go on does any one else want to do a shocking reveal? Anyone? How about you Jake? You wouldn't happen to secretly be an agent of the Dark Dragon, are you? Jenny? Are you some kinda killbot from the future? Phantom?"

The words spilled out of Phantom's mouth "I'm slowly deteriorating and in about two weeks I'll revert to a puddle of ecto-plasm."

June glared at him a moment, "Like I care." Furious, she began to storm out but stopped when a high pitched beeping emanated from the ship's console. "What now?"

Betty pushed some buttons on her arm rest. "We're getting a call." She answered listlessly. "From a Galactic Guardian Cruiser."