

OPERATION: T.A.M.I.N.G.

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Submitted: November 7, 2004

Updated: October 29, 2007

After an ordeal at the carnival, Laura Limpin becomes attached to Numbuh Two, taking him home with her. This is of course an exercise in diplomacy, given her alterego, the Big Badolescent...but is the inventor boy the one to soothe the savage beast?

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now loading: kids next door mission

operation: t.a.m.i.n.g.

temperamental

adolescent

meets

ingenious

navigator

guy

writing operative: mr. f

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"RRRAH!!!" An earth-shattering wail shook the plywood stalls of the summer carnival, startling the visitors and turning their heads towards the scene. Kids and carnies alike gaped as they watched what was once a crooked Shooting Gallery twist and contort as if undergoing intense, intestinal distress. A pair of oversized hands was squeezing crazily on the booth, putting upon it pressure upon pressure until it could take no more. Soon, the booth shattered into a conflagration of pop-guns and targets, revealing its great destroyer: a gigantic, mutated female with horn-like braids bolting from her skull, pulsating warts speckled on her face, and a great, bellowing voice that even now was hollering the nature of her extreme beef with the world: "ICE CREAM NOW!!!"

Yes, the Big Badolescent was certainly making a scene in the once-peaceful uptown amusement facility. She knocked down snack bars. She overturned stools. Everyone around was running desperately from this whirling menace of arms, boards, and cheaply made stuffed animals as those arms continued to lay waste to the premises. "I WANT PINEAPPLE FROZEN YOGURT CRUNCH!!!" she continued to demand, though none seemed too eager to fulfill the requests of this prepubescent psycho.

Violently jerking from his ice cream cone, Hoagie P. Gilligan Jr. let out a gasp of surprise as he was alerted to the escalating disaster. The rotund boy known as Numbuh Two watched with petrified amazement as the Big Badolescent continued her rampage among the fairgrounds. Swiftly, he turned to

the ice cream man fretting in the stand behind him, another poor soul enveloped with shock and fear. "What's goin' on?" he asked somewhat tactlessly, not entirely heeding the other's horrified expression.

"That loco girl went ballistic, just because we didn't have her favorite ice cream flavor!" the man blurted out in a frenzy, twitching about as if trying to dodge imagined debris. He clenched his head in mental agony, staring off into empty space. "I told the boss that we should restock that pineapple stuff, but did he listen? Nooo!"

"Um yeah, heh heh..." the boy chuckled with a nervous quiver, smiling like a car salesman under fire. "That's too bad..." Leaving the man to his anxieties, Numbuh Two walked away slowly from the ice cream stand, enveloped in flustered thought. Ignoring the dramatics around him, he instead looked down to the frozen yogurt cone he held in his grasp. He observed its swirling shape, the granola embedded within the yogurt, the little bits of pineapple stuck among the granola, and sighed.

"I guess I'm the only one who can take care of this," he resolved reluctantly, staring with regret at his cone. "Man, all I was tryin' to do was cut down." He then started his stride.

Back at the action, the Big Badolescent had lost no steam in her quest for soft-serve vengeance. She had now obtained a large ice cream cart, which she held above her head like a sacred, golden calf. With a terrible rage upon her face, she loomed dangerously down upon who appeared to be the park manager, a balding man in his late thirties. Blubbering pathetically, he stammered out weak apologies and bent down in appeal before the tween titan.

"P-please, Miss Badolescent, control yourself!" the manager pleaded up to the beast and her ice cream cart. "We have many other wonderful flavors, which we are sure will be to your liking!"

But the monster girl was unsympathetic to the man's arguments. "ONLY PINEAPPLE FROZEN YOGURT CRUNCH SATIFIES NEEDS OF SKUNKY SCOUT TROOPS!!!" she declared with gusto, her flapping mouth showing off her glimmering white jaws. Raising the cart above her head, she readied the object for a piledriver upon the manager. Her bulging eyes were swirling with insanity, and her apelike teeth ground together within a mouth entirely devoid of Pineapple Frozen Yogurt Crunch.

"YOU SUFFER FOR DAMAGING SANCTATY OF FRAGILE FEMALE HEART!" she hollered out, beginning to bring the object down.

"No!" the manager squealed, covering his head with his hands.

At that moment, all had seemed to be written by this wacko's whim. But just then, a single young voice cried out: "Stop!"

"HUH?!" the Big Badolescent burbled, stopping her homicidal lunge. Bringing the ice cream cart upright as quickly as she had let it fall, she turned her head frantically for the interference, a familiar smell tingling throughout her nostrils. Sniffing like a boar, the monster girl let her nose rout out the aroma, which eventually lead her to the source of the prior disturbance. And it was a sight that caused her to drop the ice cream cart altogether. "OOOH!"

Among the once paranoid populous, a reverent silence had taken hold of the people, as if the ground

where the Big Badolescent and the manager occupied was holy ground. A large break had formed within the crowd, letting through a round boy of around eleven years old. Like Moses crossing the Red Sea, he steadily made his way towards the beast, carrying an object as if it were a sacrifice to an ancient deity. As well he should, for this object, shining brilliantly in the afternoon sun, was more valuable than any golden calf.

"YAY!" the Big Badolescent cheered, clapping her hands like a schoolgirl. "PINEAPPLE FROZEN YOGURT CRUNCH!" Forgetting about the manager, (who had since then skittered away) she bounded over to the boy in a strange combination between skipping and stomping. With a giant paw, she eagerly reached for the boy's frozen yogurt cone, who relinquished the object with a nervous smile. And with her gigantic tongue, she started loudly slurping away at it, her mouth contorting in a smile that seemed completely alien to the former engine of destruction.

But that wasn't the only thing that seemed completely alien about her. For just a few moments after she had received her treat, a strange transformation began to overcome the Big Badolescent. Her hands began to shrink to a normal size and her body slimmed down to about a third of her former girth. Another two seconds later, and where the beast once stood was now a young African American girl, with eyeglasses, a scout uniform, the same horn-like braids, and an innocence that completely belied her darker nature.

Laura Limpin rose from her spot on the ground, tilting her glasses and licking her cone. "I really like Pineapple Frozen Yogurt Crunch!" she stated cheerfully, as if nothing had happened at all. She turned towards Numbuh Two, and latched onto his side with a ferocious hug. "Thank you, Mister Hoogie, sir!" she squealed, a smile of half-crazed joy affixed to her face.

"Aww!" the crowd cooed, apparently having forgotten their imperilment for the sappy sitcom that was this scene.

"Eh heh-heh-heh...!" Numbuh Two put a hand to the back of his head, looking away from the kid and chucking nervously. Inside though, he had a cold feeling in his chest that things were about to get really messy. And that wasn't just the frozen yogurt that was getting smeared on his jacket.

"We're goin' to a sleep-o-ver! We're goin' to a sleep-o-ver! We're goin' to, we're goin' to, we're goin' to a sleep-o-ver!" Down the neighborhood road, an irritating, bouncy jingle could be heard emanating from a skipping, hyperactive nine-year-old. The little girl took huge, leaping steps outrageous for the size of her legs, turning her gait into a series of jumps and springs. Her face was a mask of oblivious joy, her spectacled lenses seeing nothing but her own enjoyment. So she was completely unaware that her new-found-friend was not synchronous with her happiness, and was in fact, wishing he were somewhere else.

Numbuh Two groaned with distaste as he was dragged against his will by Laura's small, but surprisingly strong hand. His feet drummed away as he tried his best to keep up with his capricious captor. "But why do we gotta go to your house now?" he complained loudly, trying to wrench his fingers away from hers. "I

got things I need to do!"

"Aw, but you gave me my favorite frozen yogurt flavor!" she responded jovially, ignoring his futile efforts to escape. "You're my bestest friend!" The young scout thought over this revelation for a moment, then burst into song again. "Best friend, best friend, best friend times ten!"

The boy only groaned at the irritating tune, and did his best to cringe away from the girl. It had been like this ever since they left the ruined carnival. After receiving her PFYC, Laura had latched onto him like some sort of fungus, all but demanding that he come with her to her house for a slumber party. Before he knew what was happening, he was an unwilling prisoner of both Laura Limpin and the Big Badolescent, a singular pair that he'd only deal with equipped with two SCAMPPS, a SPLANKER, and maybe a big rubber band for flinging her away.

"But I barely even know you!" he tried again, his face filled with desperation. "C'mon, quit tuggin', this is embarrassing!" Numbuh Two furtively looked around, wondering if anybody had seen them. Just as he was glancing towards the sidewalk across from them, a pair of middle aged soccer-mom types locked eyes with him. His ears reddened, and he turned away in humiliation as both of them pointed and giggled at the boy and his girlfriend/adopted sister. (they couldn't decide which)

"We'll be at my house soon, and Mom's gonna have a pot roast waitin' for us!" Laura continued, still not responding to Numbuh Two's pleas. "And then we'll play and play and play, all night long!" The girl went into an excited, dreamlike state, her irises glossing up with a certain romanticism. "We'll play with toys, we'll play with jacks! And then, you can try on all of the skunk hides I skinned to get my merit badges!"

That was it. "Alright, enough!" Numbuh Two cried out, finally wrenching his hand free from the girl's titanium grip. "I'm not gonna deal with this any more! There's gonna be no toys, no jacks, NO SLEEPOVER!" He put his hands on his hips in a manner not unlike an angry matron. "Understand, kid!?"

This shocked the girl right to the bone, causing her to gasp and put her hands to her mouth. Numbuh Two blinked guiltily and took a step back, wondering if he had said what he should have said. Both of them were now stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, looking at each other in silence. And Laura slowly turned away, and clenched her hands into two shaking little fists.

"Mister Hoagie's gonna go to a sleepover with me," she said quietly, an ugly tremor forming in the back of her voice box. "Or Mister Hoagie's gonna be a HOAGIE SANDWICH!" In a burst of blubber, she elevated upward to three times her size, her glasses disappearing, her braids going akimbo. And then, she was the Big Badolescent once again, raising the boy up by the neck and giving him her meanest, most psychopathic glare.

"ACK!" Numbuh Two squealed, his voice cracking like a teenage girl. His eyes were as wide as dinner plates, and his teeth chattered like a bad canasta player. "Y-yes, ma'am!" he stuttered, trying to conjure up something like a smile. "I mean, my dear friend!"

The beast suddenly let out a gigantic smile. "GOOD!" she said with satisfaction, placing the boy roughly back on the sidewalk. After a quick metamorphosis, Laura was again back to her sweet old self, popping

right back to Numbuh Two's side and taking his hand. "Now we gotta hurry, 'fore the pot roast gets coldy cold!"

Once again, Laura took off skipping and singing down the sidewalk, taking Numbuh Two along for the ride. The boy took one last tug on her hand before sighing in defeat. Like it or not, he was stuck with this strange little girl for the moment. He'd just have to find some way to grin and bear it, at least until he could somehow make a getaway.

"Mom!" Laura shrilled, her voice echoing throughout the expanses of the foyer. "I'm home!" Her pupils grew with excitement, almost completely taking over the lenses of her spectacles. "And I brought a boy with me! Come see!"

"Just a minute, honey!" a motherly voice called out from beyond the top of the stairs. "I'm almost done with my curlers!"

"But Mo-oom, I want you to come now!" the girl whined, squirming about as if about to wet her pants. "Come see, come see, come see!" she cried, jumping up and down and rattling the ceramics on top of the ornate cabinet to Numbuh Two's right.

The voice sighed in submission. "Alright, dear!" she responded after a moment, making a few noises with what were probably the hairdressing utilities. "I'm coming down now!"

"Yay!" Laura yelled, raising her hands in victory.

Numbuh Two had stayed hushed up throughout this exchange, opting instead to take a look around the room. From the doorway where he stood, he could see that the two-story Limpin household was quite an upscale residence, with leather furnishings and expensive knickknacks filling every barren place available. He had half-expected to see huge, Badolescent-shaped holes in the wall, or at least the signs of intensive repair. (The stuff she does out there probably doesn't go on in here,) he determined, rubbing his chin in a somewhat thoughtful manner.

The sound of light footfalls shook the boy out of his reverie, and he raised his head to look at a woman in a bathrobe coming down the stairs. Mrs. Limpin was an attractive, thirty-some woman with dark skin and the same fine hair as her daughter. At the moment though, this hair was wound up in an array of pink curlers. But her frazzled state didn't stop him from accepting her little girl into her arms, and giving Numbuh Two her finest smile.

"So you're the new friend!" Mrs. Limpin said, looking over the boy approvingly. "It's so nice to see my Laura meeting people outside of her Skunky Scout group, and a member of the Kids Next Door to boot." Her smile seemed to grow ten shades brighter. "What a nice bunch of youngsters you all are!"

"Y-yeah, that's us!" Numbuh Two babbled, trying to look as sure of himself as possible. He had decided it would be best to humor Laura's mother for the moment. (I guess she doesn't quite know what the

KND really do,) he mused to himself, though outwardly he continued to keep up his false grin.

Thankfully, Mrs. Limpin only glossed over the boy's face for a moment. "Well, I'm glad to have you join us here in our happy home!" she said, starting her turn towards the kitchen area. "We've got dinner all prepared, so you all just mosey on over and we'll get started!"

"Alright!" Laura cheered, running alongside her mother. "Pot roast time!"

The woman stopped in mid step, and turned her head to glance at her daughter. "Pot roast?" she said curiously, tilting her head slightly. Then, she started chuckling. "Oh, you must've misheard me!" she clarified, putting her hand to her mouth to stifle her giggles, "We're having pot pies tonight!"

Laura stopped. "Pot pies?" she whispered, her voice a quiet measure of disappointment. Then, she clutched her head and started making wild, lizard-like convolutions. "B-but I HATE POT PIES!!!" she blurted out, her eyes bulging out of their sockets and practically bursting out of her glasses. Her neck burst with varicose veins, and her forehead exploded with a multitude of pimples. "YOU MAKE POT ROAST RIGHT NOW!" the Big Badolescent roared, in a voice harsh enough to chill the depths of Hades themselves.

But it only served to make Mrs. Limpin mad. "DON'T YOU TAKE THAT TONE WITH ME, YOUNG LADY!!!" she screamed out, her voice equaling the fervor of her challenging charge. In a bolt of mass and muscle, the woman rose nearly ten feet taller, almost breaking the chandelier that dangled from a gold chain on the ceiling. "YOU'LL EAT POT PIES AND LIKE IT!!!" this new terror ordered, flexing her imposing build and giving the Big Badolescent a very evil eye. "OR YOU'RE GETTING THE MOTHER OF ALL SPANKINGS!! FROM YOUR MOTHER!!!"

"YEEP!!!" the younger Limpin croaked, shriveling backwards like a stray dog. "Y-YES, MOM!!!" she warbled pitifully, her voice a combination between the Norwegian barbarians and the little girl she actually was.

The Big Badult nodded her head in satisfaction, and instantly shrunk down to a normal height. "That's more like it!" she said, once again adopting her cookie-cutter persona. With a cheery bounce in her step, Mrs. Limpin strode back towards the kitchen. "Now come over to the sink and wash up," she called out behind her, disappearing behind the doorway. "Those awful pimples will ruin that pretty face of yours."

With a reluctant sigh, the Big Badolescent started shrinking back to Laura Limpin Level again. Once she was finished, she dejectedly followed her mother to the kitchen, towards a good scrub down and untasty pot pies.

Numbuh Two just watched all of this with wide eyes and a slack jaw. (I didn't think anything could scare the Big Badolescent,) he thought, staring curiously at where Laura and Mrs. Limpin had retreated to. But he shrugged off these judgements a second later, opting instead to follow them to the back of the house. He liked pot pies, after all, and he was quite hungry for a good, home-cooked meal.

After dinner was finished and the plates were dry, the Limpin residence was settling down for the night. The setting sun had convinced everyone that it was time to take a break, and get that last burst of energy out of their systems. Mrs. Limpin had retired to the den, wanting to watch her favorite ongoing show "Survivor: Antarctica- Where Nobody Wins But the Reaper." Leaving the two kids to find their own fun around the house.

"Come on, Mister Hoagie, hurry up!" Laura called down from the top of the stairs. "Hurry up, hurry up, hurry UP!" she persisted, letting a bit of her Big Bad self leak through the soprano of her voice.

"All right, all right, I'm comin'!" Numbuh Two grumbled, trying his best to avoid another spaz attack from his pint-sized warden. But to tell the truth, he was actually feeling pretty good right about now. Though he had neglected to make an exit, he had landed a warm meal that he wouldn't have gotten at his own, weight-conscious home. It didn't make the trip worthwhile, but it gave him enough spirit to tough out the remaining time until morning.

(Besides, what could a little girl like her possibly have to scare me?) Numbuh Two thought with a snigger, as he ascended the remaining steps to the upper hallway. (Probably just a bunch of girl magazines and Rainbow Monkey stuff, like Numbuh's Three's room)

As Numbuh Two finished the walk to Laura's bedroom, the girl smiled happily at his arrival. "You're here!" she called out, giving the boy a nice looking smile.

"Guess I am," he said daringly, feeling bolder than he had all day. "Now let's get goin'!"

Laura beamed and nodded. Enthusiastically, she skipped away and entered her room, leaving Numbuh Two to follow her. Fairly unperturbed, the young pilot meandered towards the open door, putting his hands folded behind his back. Brushing aside the wooden bead strings that hung over the doorway, he moved slowly into the room, mentally preparing for whatever girly ridiculousness that was lying in wait. But none of the mental walls he had put up for himself could possibly prepare him for the surprise that overloaded his senses.

Fortunately, it was a pleasant one.

"Wow!" Numbuh Two cried, shaken completely out of any doubt that was remaining within him. "Fliers!"

Laura smiled, nodding her head happily. "Uh huh!"

Laura Limpin's small room was entirely decorated with model airplanes of various sizes. The bookshelf, the desk, and the drawers were dotted with F-14s, Tomkats, two helicopters with working propellers, and one pitch-black Stealth Bomber. Even the walls carried flight memorabilia, with everything from posters of airplanes and blimps, to a wall-scroll of a 1930s zeppelin, to a yellowed reproduction photo of the Wright Brothers first flight. And judging by the excited look she was giving her surroundings, Laura was very, very much into every little bit of it.

Still in awe of the girl's hidden hobby, Numbuh Two wandered over to a Red Baron-type glider, picking it up. "I didn't know you were into fliers, Laura," he said breathlessly, peering absently over the biplane with detached fascination.

"We make them in Skunky Scouts!" she said proudly, putting her hands on her hips. "Building areoplanes gets us the Red Wings merit badge!"

"Geez..." The boy put a hand to his forehead, shaking his head in disbelief. "Almost makes me wish I didn't quit Cub Scouts." He then brought the biplane back to eye level, creasing his brow in contemplation. "This one's no good, though," he said, regarding the object with a critical eye.

"Huh?" Laura murmured, her manner taking on a dangerous lilt. "My areoplane's...no gooOOD...!?"

"'Fraid so," Numbuh Two responded distractedly, completely missing the little miss' twitch of insanity. "'Y'see, you need to adjust the balance on the right wing, or it won't fly straight. It's aerodynamics, you know. Nuthin' you can do to fiddle with the laws of nature..." The aeronautic boy continued with his techno-babble, fiddling with the Red Baron glider and making small changes to its structure. "There, it should work now," he finished up, giving the renovated glider back to the still touchy girl.

With a trace of the Badolescent within her eyes, Laura cautiously took the plane from the boy's outstretched hand. Using the expertise her Skunky Scout training had given her, she mulled over the object. Soon, a bright smile shone in her eyes, and the shadow of her alter ego vanished from her face. "It's better, it's better!" she cheered, raising the glider above her head like a trophy.

"Of course it is," Numbuh Two boasted, folding his arms in an offbeat interpretation of macho bravado. "You're lookin' at Hoagie P. Gilligan, master of the air!"

Laura squealed in joy, dancing about the room as typical of her free-spirited self. "Super Crimson Areoplane, GO!" she shouted out dramatically, thrusting her glider forward and sending it sailing across the room. She laughed happily, her eyes twinkling as she watched the plane crash into the zeppelin wall-scroll and tumble to the carpet. Then, she clapped her hands, and darted forward to retrieve it.

Numbuh Two watched the scout go about her antics silently, content to lean against the wall and observe. And, if anyone besides Laura were to be present, they would've seen that the boy had a small smile growing on his face. (She's kinda cute...)

Temporarily done with her game, Laura ran back toward him, holding in her left hand a yellow biplane glider similar to the Red Baron one. "Now you try!" she chirped, presenting him with a smile and the other plane.

"Ah, do we hafta?" the boy complained, his old reluctance making a comeback. "I'm not really much for playin' with girls."

"C'mon!" she insisted, giving him her best Bambi impression. "Pretty please? Pretty please with pineapple crunch on top?"

Numbuh Two looked at Laura's face, which was practically bursting with hope and eagerness. And surprisingly enough, he discovered there was no need for her to threaten him with the Big Badolescent at all. "Okay," he relented, favoring her with a soft smile.

The girl giggled, and handed him the plane. Numbuh Two took hold of the base of the glider, and propped it between his two fingers. Raising it to eye level, he calculated the flight path that would make for the most impressive glide. And with a small heave, he started his throw, sending it off to the cry of: "Ultra Saffron Eagle, GO!"

They both smiled as the plane shot forward.

The early morning sun shone through the breezy curtains and covered the carpet with a golden sheen of radiance. The furniture and posters reflected the light, showing off an ashen mirror image of the window that they faced, and of the trees and bushes that were beyond that window. All across the floor, a montage of aircraft and games were scattered about, memories of the fun the two children had had the night before. One of those children was just arising to the new day, and stroking his sore muscles from a night of sleeping on the floor.

Numbuh Two stretched loudly, letting the cramped bones in his back snap and rattle with the movement. Rubbing his head with his hand, he adjusted the pilot's gear and goggles that had become misarranged during his slumber. Stepping carefully over the toys and games on the floor, he went over to the chair to receive the jacket he left hanging over it. While slipping the garment on, he took another look at the young girl he had spent so much time with yesterday afternoon and tonight.

Laura Limpin was snoring heavily in her bed, showing off her teeth with every huge breath. Her glasses were resting on the nightstand, and her braids were spread lightly over the pillow she slept on. Her arms were spread out in a very undignified manner, probably the cause of some of the pillows knocked on the floor. And her eyelashes were lying lazily over her upper cheeks, giving her the appearance of a loudmouthed, sweet little angel.

Numbuh Two smiled fondly at his onetime playmate, wagging his head this way and that. There had been a few more scares here and there, but overall the night had been great fun, as he and Laura carried out an epic World War I dogfight up until the wee hours of the morning. Who would've thought he would have so much fun with someone he had once considered only a brainless brute? (I almost can't believe we've spent so much time running away from such a neat girl,) he thought, putting his fist on his cheek in reserved amazement. (Well, almost)

Laura was now tossing in her sheets, her eyes clenching up with some phantom worry. "Buy Skunky Scout cookies, or face consequences..." she murmured sleepily, ending the statement with a very masculine sounding snort. Numbuh Two just chuckled, and made his way over to the slumbering girl. Taking hold of the blanket, he gently draped it over her sleeping form, and she quieted down, a peaceful sort of smile resting across her lips.

Walking back over to the door, Numbuh Two opened it as quietly as he could and stepped out of the room. And with a final smile, he closed the door, being careful not to let it wake the girl up.

Laura flinched slightly with the light sound of the door, rolling over to face where the boy had departed

from. "Come back again, Mister Hoagie," she whispered softly, her lips letting out a small gust of air like a nimbus kiss. She was still asleep.

interrupt transmission []

2 - Part 2

Here's the second part of my Codename: Kids Next Door fanfic, chronicling the adventures of Numbuh Two and Laura Limpin. Things are coming to a head now, and our dear Hoagie is forced to take action. It should be known that I wrote this story before seeing Operation: E.N.D., so things concerning Tommy are not accurate to KND Canon. Just work with me on this: the "error" shouldn't detract too much from the experience.

Here we go!

continuing transmission []

The next day, the local shopping center was bustling with life, evidenced by the array of cars and trucks filling the lot. People all around, kids and adults, wandered next to the shining store names, looking for whatever fulfilled their needs or struck their fancy. The adults tended to keep to a tight, regimented course, going to the shops by which one was closest and how heavy the goods they sold were. But the kids flew about as they pleased, laughing as they dodged the hands of their long-suffering parents and darted in and out of the doors, fiddling with any interesting products that they could find.

Enveloped within the mass of people, Numbuh Two bounced down the crowded complex, carrying in his hands the hottest new video game: "Rainbow Monkeys: Escape from the Enchanted Castle." Though some of his friends would balk at this, he was actually a bit of a closet Rainbow Monkey fan. This particular game featured a special weapon called the Rainbow Monkey Masamune, which cut through the mean ol' Grizzlies like bloody margarine. That's why it was rated "T" for Teen- "Intense Fantasy Violence."

(They just don't make nice games anymore) Numbuh Two stared at his game, smiling vacuously. (Good!) He chuckled evilly, gnashing his teeth in some sort of hideous, demented grimace.

"DDDAAHHH!!!!" A horrific shout broke the explosive ponderings of the jet-obsessed boy, making him look up to the world around him. The strip mall was undergoing some sort of disturbance, and all of the people were flying away from the clothing store as if it were on fire. Numbuh Two strained to look around a group of scared kids, trying to see the source of all this panic. But when he caught a familiar braid pointing out from the center of the crowd, he already knew who was the cause of this problem. "Oh nooooo..."

The Big Badolecent was in rare form today, raging about and sending a ripple of frightened citizens away from the vortex of her violence. "OPEN" signs and parking meters had been thrown all over the parking lot, signs that the beast had seen fit not to only confine her destruction to a small, localized area. In her fist, she gripped a young sales representative by the collar, tightening the fabric until it all but

choked the college bound youth. "NO REFUND?!" she yelled in a blast of flying spittle. "NO MERCCCY!!!!"

He didn't know what he was thinking of, but he found himself suddenly dashing off for the monster girl, startling both her and the representative. He thrust himself in front of her, like a martyr standing in front of a moving tank. "Laura, stop!" the boy called out desperately, looking up the 3+ feet difference between his apple pie face and the Big Badolescent's ugly mug. "This is bad news!"

She was less than impressed by this statement, giving him a look that would wither away an oak tree. With a grunt, she tossed the now whimpering representative over to the side, knocking him against a reinforced glass clothing display. "REPESENER NO GIVE REFUND TO ME!!!" she shouted out, pointing accusingly at the dizzy young man. "REPRESENER DIE!!!"

But then Numbuh Two's face hardened up. "And I said 'no!'" he repeated, looking at the beast straight in the eye.

"HUH?!" The Big Badolescent reared back, looking at him like he had lost his mind, instead of herself.

The boy spread his arms wide, preventing her from going any further. "Look, there are people here just tryin' to have some fun and get cool stuff," he stated, a bead of sweat rolling off his goggles and down his nose. "No matter how ticked off you get, you can't get your way all the time! Stop actin' like a baby and calm down! This ain't doin' any good!"

With every sentence that came from Numbuh Two's mouth, the Big Badolescent's rage wilted a little bit more. Inch by inch, her strength began to atrophy, with muscles and bulk shriveling away into some hidden place within the girl's anatomy. The look on her face was one of growing embarrassment, guilt filling the hateful face to a surprising degree. Soon, that look and guilt belonged to the young scout Laura once again, who was looking up at Hoagie like a child lying by the remains of a shattered cookie jar.

Numbuh Two's face reverted to its normal softness, and he walked over to Laura, who was sitting down cross-legged upon the concrete in front of the clothing store. Placing his arms upon the despondent girl's shoulders, he lifted her back to her feet. "C'mon, I'll buy you some frozen yogurt," he said, smiling generously at her.

"Okay, Hoagie," she responded softly, still holding her gaze to the boy.

Slowly, Laura began walking off in the general direction to the ice cream parlor, moping a little from Numbuh Two's cutting words. Letting her get a head start, he looked around him with a cool, steady scrutiny of the shopping center. The entire crowd was watching slack jawed at this scene, wondering how this small boy could have stopped such an unstoppable force simply by the power of his voice. But that boy just calmly watched her go, his hands proudly on his hips like the slayer of a mighty dragon.

And after Laura had left, Numbuh Two let out the huge breath he had been holding back since he tried his little stunt. His heart felt like it was beating one-hundred-kilometers an hour, thanks to the sheer adrenaline coursing through his veins, and the fact that the school systems were still trying to make everyone learn that stupid metric system. "Whew!" he gasped, whipping a massive amount of

perspiration from off his brow. "That was scaaaaaa-rrry!"

And after he recovered, he ran off down the road to catch up to Laura.

At an abandoned neighborhood road, the chirp of angry sparrows could be heard as they chased down their skittering, multi-eyed lunch. Since it was early afternoon, the streets saw little activity except for the runabout of chipmunks, which were safe momentarily from the cars that were perpetually confusing them. It was too late for people to be wandering around, yet too early for rush hour. But this was fine for the two kids; cars were kinda annoying, and the gray junk they produced could really ruin your appetite for good frozen yogurt.

"I wanna try a new flavor!" Laura was saying excitedly, hanging onto the boy's arm. "Dancing Mango Supreme with sprinkles!"

Numbuh Two nodded slightly, a ghost of a smile threatening to break out. "It's alright if you like," he said, staring straight ahead as if ignoring her. "But my friends would really be mad if they knew you were putting sprinkles on good ice cream."

The girl giggled, taking the dig lightly and giving him a gentle squeeze on his biceps. He rolled his eyes with a smirk, continuing happily down the sidewalk.

His friends! Numbuh Two suddenly thought of what might happen if they caught him spending time with one of their greatest enemies. Laura's warm hand now felt very cold upon his arm, like some sort of skin-colored handcuff that wouldn't let him go. There was no way he would be able to live this one down.

"I just hope I don't run into them right now," he murmured to himself, keeping his voice low enough so that Laura wouldn't hear him.

"Run into who?!" a perky squawk sounded off to his right, startling the living daylight out of him. He whirled around at the sound of this mystery voice, and found he was no longer alone. An oriental girl of similar age had somehow managed to sneak up close enough to thrust her face into his, wearing an oversized green sweatshirt and a funny, Cheshire Cat grin. And judging by the three familiar kids lurking behind her, he knew that this could only be Kuki Samban and the rest of the Kids Next Door, ready to pass judgment on his affairs with the funny little character by his side.

"AHH!!!" Numbuh Two gasped, causing Laura to look up curiously at the stricken lad. "N-Numbuh Three!" he stammered, referring to the girl by her codename.

The girl smiled obliviously, ready to make introductions and happy talk. "Hi, Numbuh Two!!" she burbled out, a cute little slur making itself known in her "o"s and "w"s. "Whatcha' doing with Laura?!"

The other girl only returned the smiles, all too ready for making new friends. "Hoagie's takin' me to the

ice cream place!" Laura said, gripping onto the boy's arm and making him squirm pathetically.

Numbuh Three took a brief moment to process this new information, averting her gaze and putting her hand to her chin as if in thought. As soon as she finished, though, she was all rainbows and sunshine again. "O-Kay!!!" she chimed musically, stretching her mouth into an overkill smile. Humming happily, she walked back over to the rest of her group, who were standing there like mannequins listening to the bizarre exchange, as if it were an everyday thing.

Numbuh Four was the first one of the group to fully take in the situation, and he jumped back three feet. "Bloody heck!" he cried out, his eyes bursting through the blond locks that permanently hovered over his face. "That's Laura Limpin! The Big Badolescent!"

"Well I'll be..." Numbuh Five slowly tilted the bill of her hat, making sure she had seen what she thought she had. "It is Laura!"

"Numbuh Two!" The round operative screeched like a squirrel and whipped around to face the stern countenance of his captain, and his shades that hid his suspicious gaze. "What on earth are you doing with this...this...that?!" Numbuh One demanded with a stutter, referring to Laura as some sort of mutant. Which she kinda was, but that's not the point.

Numbuh Two floundered like...like....Flounder. You know, from The Little Mermaid. "I-I can explain, guys!" he babbled, waving his free hand in the air like a flipper of said wimpy fish.

"Yeah, go on," Numbuh Five said, her gaze solid and calculating. "We can't wait ta hear this!"

At this point during the wonderful exchange, our favorite schizophrenic scout decided to put in her two cents. "Hey, there's no big deal!" Laura said sunnily, regarding her disapproving audience with surprising nonchalance. "We're just good buddies now!" She squeezed Numbuh Two's arm again, beaming with comfort and joy.

"Laura,,s-stop!" he protested weakly, still trying without success to get her off of him.

"We played areoplanes all night long when he slept over yesterday!" she continued on, despite the boy's obvious discomfort. "And he fixed my glider when it was broke!" Her smile increased threefold, and she snuggling up to Numbuh Two's cringing hip. "He's my bestest friend! And soon, I'm gonna ask him to be my bestest boyfriend-friend!"

At this admission, the four KND operatives not involved in this alleged affaire d'amour gaped in shock at the pair, even carefree, cheerful Numbuh Three. Numbuh One's shades hung down over his nose, revealing his dishpan corneas, and Numbuh Four and Numbuh Five also revealed their surprised eyes through their respective covers. They were so surprised that they couldn't even tease Numbuh Two about his "girlfriend." The day was so quiet that the leaves of the trees could be heard blowing in the breeze, as if a high-noon gunfight was just about to go down.

"I don't know what she's talking about!" Numbuh Two desperately shook loose of Laura's hand, pulling away and going over to Numbuh One and the rest, trying to get as far away from the girl as she could. "It's all a lie!"

"Hoagie?" Laura said softly, looking at him with a confused frown.

"She's just some little kid who keeps followin' me around!" he blurted out, flapping his hands about in a frantic fit. "I couldn't get away, so I hadda let her come along! And I don't know anything about playin' airplanes or stuff like that! She's not my girlfriend, my friend, or anything else!" With a final burst of aggression, he poured out the final bit of the insecure tirade. And then he let out a big gasp, tired from emotional exhaustion.

It wasn't but two seconds later that Numbuh Two realized he'd said the worst thing he could've possibly have. Suddenly looking over to Laura Limpin, he found her holding her hands to her face, with eyes twinkling of hurt and betrayal. A cold wind blew her long braids towards the direction of the ice cream parlor, and she bent her head to look at the ground. Her eyelids squeezed shut, beating the tears out onto her chocolate-hued cheeks...and a low rumble was rising within her throat, sounding very much like the familiar roar from a towering, terrorizing tyke.

The four other Numbuhs suddenly fell away from their comrade, knowing immediately what was going to happen. Laura was shaking and convulsing with emotion, almost audibly. Numbuh Two was left to face the wrath of the transforming girl alone, so all he could do was cover his head in fear. He squinted his eyes and braced himself for impact, knowing he wouldn't be able to prevent her wrath a second time.

"Whaaaaaa!!!" A sobbing sound broke him of his frozen state, and Numbuh Two looked up to see that Laura had burst into tears. Pushing by the boy and his friends, she made off for the far end of the neighborhood, the pitter-patter of her feet falling to cover up her extreme sorrows. She was rushing far away from the group, becoming little more than an insignificant speck in the distance. Soon she turned a corner and disappeared, leaving the Kids Next Door on the sidewalk, and disappearing from the life of the one whom betrayed her.

The calm, secret agent girl of the lot made a tsking sound with her teeth. "Numbuh Five don't believe her eyes," she commented, wagging her head with detached awe. "She musta really liked you."

Numbuh Two stared off after the departing Laura, barely hearing his friend's words. He lowered his head to look at the sidewalk, left only with his loss, and his shame.

Evening time in the same county, another neighborhood. A modest house rests on the edge of that neighborhood, a single light shining out through an attic bedroom window. This bedroom is covered in the commodities of a typical preteen boy, with a slight preference towards aerial affairs and piloting. Yet that boy has no interests in playing with his prized objects, already involved in a manner a bit more grave: examining his actions for maybe the first time in his life.

Hoagie Gilligan, better known as Numbuh Two, sat dejectedly on his bed, his hands on his cheeks and his mouth secured into a great frown. The goggles on his face contorted with his expression giving them the illusion of mournful eyes that were without a doubt resting behind the reinforced plastic. Depression

was far from his natural state, yet now he felt like he was about to crumble up into bits, ready to be swept away with the dust bunnies. Not that he really cared: a good sweeping might be good morbid fun in the state he was in.

It had taken him a while to realize it, but he could finally admit to himself that he cared for the MPS-driven girl. He didn't usually gravitate to younger kids, but somehow Laura Limpin had grown upon him anyway. And it was obvious that she felt very much the same way about Numbuh Two. Of course, who could blame her, what with him being the dashing top gun of the elite Kids Next Door, after all.

(Man, I really screwed up) Numbuh Two sighed heavily, putting his face into his gloved mitts. He could boast all he wanted about self-created images of good looks and skill, but the fact was he had let down someone who was actually depending on him. He had all but kicked her out of his life with his wimpy waffling in front of his friends. Some superhero he was.

A creaking noise sounded to his right, and Numbuh Two raised his head out his hands to see the door open to let a younger boy through, looking for the entire world like a fun-size version of himself. "What's goin' on, Hoagie?" he asked cheerfully, a slight annoying twitter to his voice.

Hoagie cringed for a moment at, but settled down "Hey, Tommy," he said dejectedly, giving his brother a sad little smile.

The younger Gilligan bounced a bit, taking the boy's welcoming attitude as a cue to continue. "Whatcha' doin' now?" he said cheerfully, bounding over to the bed. "How 'bout we play superhero, or wrestling underwear?"

"Not now, alright?" Numbuh Two replied, keeping his voice free of annoyance as not to hurt his little brother's feelings. They really were on better terms these days, after all. During the year that had gone by, he had found that hanging out with Tommy wasn't so bad after all, as long as he wasn't trying to butt in on his KND business. Besides, the kid kind of reminded him of Laura, in a strange sort of way.

Tommy looked down at him, and suddenly took in his state of emotion. "Hey, what's th' matter?" he asked, his voice whiny yet empathetic. "You don't look very good at all." He plopped down on the bed beside him, looking innocently up at the elder one. "Come on, I wanna see my hero brother crack his confident grin!" he cheered, throwing a make-believe punch in veneration for his formerly upbeat idol.

The other boy just shook his head in disagreement. "I'm no hero, Tommy," he said depressingly, not even bothering to look at him. "Just a bumbling oaf with no guts." He sighed down at the bed sheets under him, looking like he truly believed every word he said.

The kid looked absolutely shocked at this admission, putting his fists up to bear. "That's not true, Hoagie!" Tommy insisted, clenching those fists with enthusiasm. "You're the most heroic guy I know! Every time there's a big bad adult tryin' to stop our fun, you're right there gettin' them good with super laser blasters and cool catchphrases! Those other guys call you Number Two, but you're definitely Number One to me!" His eyes grew wide with adoration, stretching out his own flight gear goggles. "My brother, the superhero!"

At the end of the youngster's pep talk, Numbuh Two finally raised his head up from their place in his

hands, with eyes wide and clear. Despite mispronouncing the official codenames as "Numbers," Tommy's words struck a familiar chord within his heart. He was a member of the most revered fighting force the fifth grade had ever seen, the only one who could pilot a STANK after an enemy and never let 'em escape. Indeed, it was just as Numbuh One always said: The Kids Next Door never quit!

And there was no way he could quit on Laura.

With a burst of energy, Numbuh Two rose up off of the bed in a rush, turning to face Tommy with a proud stiffness to his chubby fame. "You're right Tommy!" he said with bravado, in a voice actually managing to sound like the superheroes he so admired. "I'm Numbuh Two, chief pilot of the Kids Next Door! Whenever there's a bully picking on some third grader, or an overbearing adult trying to keep the youth from stayin' out past their bedtimes, I'm there! Anytime there's a fellow kid in need, I give it my all!"

Tommy jumped up along with him, his face shining with support for his big brother. "Go get 'im, Super Hoagie!" he urged, throwing his fist into the air. "Super Hoagie, Go! Super Hoagie, GO!"

Numbuh Two chuckled good-naturedly, walking over to him with a fresh, healthy confidence in his step. "Thanks, kid," he said, rubbing his brother on his leather-covered head with his knuckles. Vigorously pumping his arms, he strode to the door, swinging it aside as if it were a castle drawbridge. Then, he started his descent into the unknown, ready to slay his dragons and rescue his cute schizophrenic little princess.

The young wannabe watched Numbuh Two go, craning his neck to look after him. "So does this mean I get ta be part of your club?" he shrilled hopefully, once again the annoying little brother.

The boy stopped halfway out the door, putting his hand on his chin as if to consider it. "Nah," he said nonchalantly, waving off his brother and strolling briskly out of the room, disappearing into the long hallway that lead to the front door.

Tommy stood stagnant in the middle of the room, staring at where the boy had once been. Then, he slammed his fist into his hand, letting out an ineffectual growl. "He always does that!"

All about the neighborhood road, cicadas chirped an ominous song for the benefit of the denizens of the night. The mailboxes and shrubbery gave off long shadows that cut across the concrete like angry, black ravens on the hunt. Helping to create those shadows were long lampposts, putting out bright beacons of light. And illuminated by those beacons of light was one young boy, wandering with a purpose and staying out way, way past his bedtime.

The rejuvenated Numbuh Two calmly walked alongside the street with a steely resolve. His surefooted steps crackled along the cracked walkway, leaving brown footprints over the not-so-pristine path. In his hand was a small Discman, a rotating CD coasting past the laser needle beyond the crystalline casing. And in his ears, the rocking beats of Kenny Loggin's "Danger Zone" blared through big, puffy

headphones, pumping him up for what would be his greatest battle yet.

(Go, man, go!) Numbuh Two told himself, repeating the words like a mantra inside his head. (It's Danger Zone time!)

Just to the right of him, alongside the concrete curve of the cul-de-sac, stood Laura's house. Her first floor bedroom was lit up, showing the shadow of the curtain he had seen earlier. The lawn in front of him was covered with a large amount of dirt and grime, testament to the yard work the Limpin family was having done. So, picking up one of the loose rocks shaken loose by the landscaping, Numbuh Two hurled it against the windowpane.

The stone clattered against the bug-screen and fell silently to the soft earth resting below. But no other sound could be heard throughout the yard, save the nightly neighborhood noise that carried on at this time. "Laura?" he said, looking past to the motionless glass for any indication of person. "Laura, are you there?" he called out again, starting to walk toward the brick walling of her room.

"Go away!" a hurt-sounding voice bit out, sounding as ragged as if it had been crying for three hours straight.

Numbuh Two started a bit at this sound. then raised his eyebrows with hope. "Laura..." he started to say, taking a step closer to the house.

"GO AWAY!" it boomed, nearly knocking the boy off his feet and onto the street behind him.

Numbuh Two shook off the brief wave of fear, and took another step forward. "No!" he shouted out, desperately trying to reach the girl hidden within the house. "No, I will not go away! Not until I get to talk to you!"

"You don't like me!" the voice continued, a tortured, broken sob emanating from the harshness. Numbuh Two craned his ears at the sound of this, and found he could hear faint sounds of crying emanating from the inside of the room. A silhouette of a young girl could be seen from beyond the curtain, peering out from the windowpane. Its shoulders were hunched over, and there was a translucent glimmer on her nose where eyeglasses were probably resting.

"That's not true!" he persisted, hoping against hope that her appearance at the window was a good sign. "It's just my friends were all watching, and I got nervous and scared that..."

"Everybody's s-scared of me!" it wailed with heartbreak, about to go into an emotional breakdown.

And then Numbuh Two turned off the CD player and stopped dead in his tracks, a seriousness in his face that was almost foreign to the lighthearted boy he was. "I'm not scared of you," he said quietly, just loud enough for Laura to hear him from where she was huddled up. "Not anymore." His face softened up, and a soft smile formed slowly onto his lips. "Come on," he coaxed, extending a hand to the forlorn female. "Let's go talk."

This last statement finally seemed to get a reaction out of the girl. The shadowy figure sat still a moment more, then finally straightened up to fiddle with the lock of the window. Numbuh Two watched with wide

eyes as the window began to swing open, held together by its horizontal hinges. Finally, those eyes began to reflect the smile on his face as he beheld the Afro-American girl that was just coming into view.

Laura stood silently, dressed in pajamas dotted with little chocolate chip cookies. Her glasses were off for the moment, allowing the boy to see black eyes, tinted red with the crying she had been doing. The horn-like braids were swaying in the chilly night air, giving them the look of actual hair. And her mouth was quivering with what could be another unhappy frown, or a brand new smile in the making.

"Hoagie," she said quietly, holding out a small hand for him.

Numbuh Two sighed with relief upon seeing his friend once again. Then, he started walking forward to take that hand.

That was when the aircraft landed.

SHOOM!!! a huge tower-like spire jolted downwards in the space between Numbuh Two and Laura, just as their fingers were about to touch. Embedding itself nose-first into the lawn, it sent up a wave of grass and turf exploding from the earth, and the two were propelled away from each other. "WhoooAAAH!" the boy cried out, flying arms-spread backwards. He hit the ground rolling, digging a ten-foot trench with his body before skidding to a halt, unceremoniously sprawled in a position of knockdown.

"Uhgh..." Numbuh Two groaned, struggling to push himself up by his elbows. Rubbing his sore head, he starred with wary frustration at the strange object that had interrupted them. It appeared to be a European castle tower, given a slight fairytale appearance by its pastel coloring and spiraling cone shape. And, like some sort of bizarre candy dispenser, the outer brick of the tower rotated back to reveal its innards...which contained five nasty, little surprises that the young pilot had hoped he wouldn't ever have to face alone.

A quintet of children stepped out in unison onto the lawn, kicking up a single burst of dirt with their pristine shoes. Like little figurines, they all stood rigid with the exact same posture, their arms hanging as if they were the glued on appendages of a paper doll. Each of them was wearing "nice" clothing of the same cut: suits for the boys, sailor uniforms for the girls. Most striking about these cornflower kids, however, were their electric blue eyes, filled with a cold, dignified wrath for anything that they saw as vulgar and unfit.

The Delightful Children from Down the Lane.

"How marvelous," the juveniles spoke out in a monotone, as simultaneous as everything else they did. "To think we would never have a chance to catch one of you pitiful Kids Next Door alone. But look at what we have here." They smirked viciously at the fallen Numbuh Two, who was gaping in shock and fear at the evil twin brother of his KND organization. "It's chubby little Hogarth, out in an unfamiliar neighborhood way past his curfew. That's not following the rules."

"Laura!" Chubby little Hogarth was not as concerned with their speech as he'd normally have been, or his own safety for that manner. He clambered up to his feet and reared back, rushing out in a dash for Laura's room, where the girl had toppled out of sight. He had almost managed to dart past their tower when two robotic arms suddenly sprung of its hidden compartments, ensnaring him with white, cartoony

hands dangling from the ends. It lifted the boy upwards and around, moving him with a very mechanical motion right back to the DCFDTL, still smiling their sinister little smiles.

"You should be more worried about yourself right now," they instructed with glee, staring up at the "handcuffed" Numbuh Two. "For you will be the bait for attracting the rest of your no-good friends right where we want them." Delightfully delighting in the boy's futile attempts of escape, the DCFDTL continued with their hive-mind monologue, their spirits rising with their captive in the rising robotic arms. "I believe we'll chip off your toenails and add them to our collection. We've always wanted large, stubby toes to experiment with, and yours will do quite nicely."

They all started laughing insanely, bending back their heads for full, obnoxious guffaws. And Numbuh Two gritted his teeth with pure frustration, straining his arms against the unbearable might of the giant gloves. "Darn it!" he thought frantically, squinting his eyes loose of a few tears. "If only I had all the guys with me...!"

The hands gave forth a little more pressure on its prey, and Numbuh Two felt his lungs contract with the loss of air. "Now, you putrid little pest, say goodnight!" the DCFDTL said to the heaving captive, their voices spry and cutting with nocturnal adrenaline. "Hope the bedbugs DO bite! Nya-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The little spawns of the nether-realm began their heinous chuckles once again, but this time they made a motion with their fingers for the robotic arms to do their work. Those arms complied very willingly, squeezing on poor Numbuh Two and attempting to send him unconscious on the sheer waves of pain they were releasing...

(BAM!) Suddenly, the jarring slam of a window against its sill echoed throughout the misty summer night, bouncing three times against the neighbor's house, the Limpin garage, and back to the window again. A lone figure had entered the arena, standing in a stocky pose just behind bushes covering the lower half of the window she just shut. With her toes embedded in the dirt and her shoulders wavering with energized tension, this young girl was the very image of petulance and mistrust, even if you were to include her cute looking kisser and cookie-covered clothing. She was Laura, the lover of birthday parties and deliverer of Skunky Scout cookies...

...and she was very, very upset.

The DCFDTL were not shocked at all by this new guest, and turned to greet her accordingly. "If it isn't dear little Laura Limpin," they said with a grin, their voices a mocking mirror of casualness. "We would love to play with you some time, but right now we must attend to our other friend."

Laura completely disregarded their statement, instead repaying them with a withering glare. "You hurt Hoagie..." she said, her lips parted to show a little bit of her clenched teeth.

They sweated a little at this accusation, but quickly regained their malevolence. "So we did," they agreed, as if they had only just discovered that little fact. "But if you insist on getting in our way, I'm afraid we must show you the same treatment, dear little Laura Limpin."

Laura ignored the threat as well. "You hurt him..." she repeated, clenching her fists into two shaking little balls of anger. Now the DCFDTL were starting to get nervous, their smiles getting more and more false

by the moment. They watched as the girl's braids stood on end, an ugly aura of ire enveloping the shrubbery and weeds around her. Her eyes went out of focus, staring at the hidden pocket of darkness she drew from to unleash her furious, darker nature.

"RRRAAAHHH!!!" And with a burst of crazed emotion, she grabbed onto that darkness and made it her own, growing at least five feet in two seconds. Laura's body bulked up like a truckdriver at a pizza stop, her face growing puffy and plump with the added fat. The soothing texture of her PJs melted away, replaced by a red spandex uniform emblazoned with the letter "A" on the chest. And a superhero mask formed over the upper part of her scalp, encasing the Big Badolescent's angry eyes and helping to focus them into two pockets of concentrated malice.

The Alexander of the playgrounds stared down another one of her targets, leaving them frozen in their tracks. Her pupils shifted between the Delightful Children and the trussed up Numbuh Two, who still retained enough consciousness to stare weakly at his unlikely heroine. Mad for all the right reasons, she smashed her foot on the much-abused ground, disturbing both the earthworms and the workers who would be here in the morning to fix the damage. "YOU HURT HOAGIE?!" she started, smashing her fist into her palm. "I HURT YOU!!!"

"Laura..." Numbuh Two whispered, his eyes shutting with the pain he couldn't stomach.

The DCFDTL all looked at each other, a deep knot of fear growing in the back of their throat. "Uh oh..." they chorused, swallowing the knot back down to the pits of their gradually decreasing guts.

With clenched teeth the shape of fangs, the Big Badolescent bulldozed her way to the glacial Delightfuls, her right shoulder bared for combat. Yelling out her best battle cry, she swiped her way through the kids, sending them flying into a Georgian maple a few feet away. As they hit their backs against the strong wood of the tree, the monster girl whirled next to the strange tower-like contraption, which still held the near-unconscious Numbuh Two. Leering chaotically at the sight of her imperiled friend, she bent down at the knees and made a dash for the tower, ready to end this travesty once and for all.

The first thing the Badolescent did upon reaching the tower was make a grab for the robotic arms, taking them in her paws and ripping them from the gears and mechanisms they were connected to. Only programmed to capture the boy, there was nothing the automated appendages could do, and they soon buckled under her immense strength. Like matchsticks, they fell onto the ground as torn shards of metal, sticking into the dirt with a small wobble. And Numbuh Two fell softly into the beast's now gentle hands, letting out a final breath of air as he fell into blissful slumber.

With surprising care, the Big Badolescent restrained her anger just long enough to set him down on the grass, making sure his goggled and leathered noggin got a soft landing before she let go. Then, she returned her gaze unto her enemies, her anger renewed and blazing. The DCFDTL edged away like the laboratory hamsters from Numbuh Two's crazy experiments, their perfect little faces tarnished with lines of fear and anxiety. Soon, they were suspended above the ground, held aloft only by the monster girl's hand on their necks.

The DCFDTL were now taking fishlike breaths, their eyes glassy and fishlike as well. With all of their necks cramped inside the same gigantic fist, their heads were bloated up like a cluster of balloons from the carnival. "B-Big Badolescent, please do not harm our person!" they begged the beast, their faces

turning red with the stress. "Father will be very disgruntled if we arrive at home with our apparel misarranged and soiled!" They took another breath of air, and their cheeks changed from red to plum, as ugly as the Badolescent herself.

This great ugliness saw no reason to answer their request, and only squeezed harder, finally bringing the indigo shades of her faces to a full blue. "YOU HURT HOAGIE!!!" the Big Badolescent cried out, drawing the now-green DCFDTL to the boils on her bulging face. With a feral snarl, she continued to squash their worthless little throats, trying to see how many pretty colors she could get their faces to change to.

Suddenly, a cloud of emotion enveloped the giant, and childlike confusion replaced the furious rage. Her eyes lost sight of the DCFDTL to instead look at something else, deep within the corner of her mind that was still Laura Limpin. They were looking at the disapproving boy from the afternoon, who cared about her enough to risk her own, fearsome wrath. He could see something beyond that of a mindless monstrosity: the part of herself that even she would seldom acknowledge.

The DCFDTL's heads made the transition to a neat purple polka-dot pattern, but the Big Badolescent's eyes were no longer concerned with the color. "You can't get your way all the time," she spoke in a quiet tone, her eyes filled with disappointment and regret.

Their faces remained polka-dotted.

With a frustrated growl, she relinquished her grip on the kids' necks, and the built up pressure from the squeezing was finally allowed out to burst out. (SPEEWWW!!!) The Delightful Children from Down the Lane flew off like balloons with their ties cut off, spiraling off in a haphazard way that shamed their unity and desire for a formation. "AAAH!!!" they wailed, their voices snooty and shrill even as they flew into the next county. Letting off a final spurt of air, they disappeared off behind distant trees, so far off now that the crash of their bodies couldn't be heard by the ears of the Badolescent.

The mountainous creature stood tall amongst the shrubbery, a small smile on her face. "Little dollies fly like areoplane," she said simply, with something like a chuckle emerging from her gravelly voice.

Then, she let herself fall onto the grass around her, letting the demon within return back to the lair of darkness for a long, long sleep.

An early sun shone down on the suburban community, streaking through drops of moisture and adding a sparkly sheen to the flowers and trees. It was summertime, so it was quite light outside despite the presence of the moon. These two light sources, the sun and the moon, gave the dawn an ethereal aura, like you couldn't quite tell if it was day or night. It was the time of day where endings and beginnings were abound, arriving both separately and in pairs, depending on whether you were strong enough to control your own destiny.

Numbuh Two frantically tore about the Limpin's front yard, looking for where the youngest Limpin had

fallen. He brushed through the shrubbery, peered into her room, and even looked inside the broken-down rocket tower for any sign of her, but there was nothing. The place carried the essence of both the girl and the boy's frantic search, with fallen trash cans, landscape ripped to shreds, and a pair of glasses lying on the nightstand inside the bedroom. But there was still nothing.

His memories of last night were faint, but even under the immense pressure of the robotic arms, he couldn't miss the Big Badolescent's charge upon the Delightful Children. Where she had gone to, or even why she had done it, was lost to the boy. (Idiot, why did you do that?) he was thinking, picked up the severed hand that had been crushing him just a few hours earlier. (I never wanted you to...oh!) His eyes fell to something just past the robot's glove, and he stopped examining it to view this new object.

Nearby a medium-sized maple tree, the sound of quiet breathing could be heard, and a single braid was peeking out behind the large trunk. Numbuh Two dashed behind the tree to check it out...and let out a gasp when he discovered that the braid and breathing indeed belonged to whom he thought it was.

Laura Limpin was lying sprawled on the grass, in a state of exhaustion. Her face had relaxed, and her chest rose up and down with her sleepy little breaths. She wore the same PJs that she had the night before, the little cookies dirtied with torn earth from her first righteous battle. There was a strange sort of serenity about her, like a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders, though she still had one more question: would Hoagie Gilligan stay with her?

But though she had no voice with which to speak with, Numbuh Two stayed with her anyway. He lifted her lithe form from the ground, cradling it with a mixture of concern and caring. (She...saved me...) he mused, a sad touch to his usual, easy grin. (Even though I was such a goof) He sighed wistfully, spreading some grass spores hanging within the misty air. (Ah, Laura...)

A series of creases appeared on her face, and her eyes started squinting hard against the light. (She's getting up!) Numbuh Two watched at the girl stirred in his arms, waving her own arms through the air like an infant child. A short smile started to appear on her face, and Laura awakened fully to the cool morning breeze, and her dear one's hopeful face.

"Hoagie...." she said wearily, looking up at Numbuh Two with tired eyes. "Did I do good?"

Letting out a breath of air, the boy expression's softened into a genuine smile. "You did great, Laura," he told her steadily, trying to sound as confident as he could. Seeing the girl brighten immediately upon his praise, Numbuh Two averted his eyes and lowered his head in shame. "About not stickin' up for ya earlier...I've been kinda uncool, so I'm sorry." His eyes and jaw grew firm, in a heroic expression that hours from now he'd wish he'd caught on video. "From now on, I'm gonna be your numbuh one guy, and give you everything that my buds has given me. Sleepovers, parties, all that stuff. If I'm not there when you want me, you can beat me up."

"Then," The girl raised her head to look at him, a certain vulnerability and hopefulness in her eyes. "does that mean you'll be my boyfriend-friend?"

With a gentle smile, Numbuh Two slowly shook his head. "Sorry, but no." he said softly, putting his hands on Laura's shoulders to steady her. "You're still too young for that, and I guess I am too. But don't worry, you'll turn into a beautiful girl in no time, I can see that now." He gave her one of his

trademark shameless grins. "And I'll be there to help ya, every step of the way!" With that, he leaned over and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

Upon the moist touch of Hoagie's lips, Laura's pupils quivered inside her irises, unable to handle this. Her body vibrated in the boy's arms, forcing him to let go and give her some room. Her braids stood on end, sparking with some strange, electric force coursing through her body. And her wobbling mouth was gradually twisting up, transforming itself from its somber innocence to a familiar, crazed brightness that he had to admit he was glad to see.

"YAHOO!!!" she bellowed in her Big Badolescent voice, shooting up at least fifteen feet in the air. At the apex of her jump, the girl clicked her heels and dropped back down to terra firma, landing in front of Numbuh Two with a lazy, cockeyed grin on her face.

The boy's lips curled up into a wry smirk, a look of confidence and fun taking over from his serious side again. After she had recovered from her outburst, Numbuh Two helped Laura up and walked her to the sidewalk, guiding her with a gentle hand upon her shoulder. They strolled away from the Limpin house together, their feet a matching tempo with the splattering of the birdbath to the right.

(Wait, there's no birdbath here!) he suddenly thought, his eyes growing wide with realization. (This sound is...)

"WWWHHHHHAAAAAAA!!!!!" Numbuh Three wailed, an absolute fountain of tears flowing from her slanted eyes. "It's so beautiful! It's so moving!"

Numbuh Five moved up beside the crying Asian, putting a hand on her shoulder to steady her "Easy, girl!" she said calmly, trying to humor her without bending over. "You're as gushy as salt-wataa taffy!"

Numbuh Two swung his gaze towards the street and found his friends standing lined up on the curb. "What are you guys doin' here?" he asked curiously, keeping his arm on Laura.

"What do you think, ya putz?" Numbuh Four responded sarcastically, folding his arms and raising his chin with disdain. "We're always here when the Delightful Dorks make their move! That's the Kids Next Door way!"

"Yes, though it seems our work has been already been done for us," Numbuh One said lightly, looking around Laura's yard with a steady. "Thanks to the Big Badolescent, I guess," He then straightened up into a pseudo-military commander stance, turning to the heftiest member of his team for a statement. "And Numbuh Two, I want to formerly apologize on behalf of the group. We are sorry for the behavior we showed to your new friend." The bald boy tilted his head just a little bit, showing an authoritative, but benevolent smile. "You and Limpin are alright with us!"

Numbuh Four and Five nodded, giving their consent to the pair, whilst Numbuh Three continued to sob over the tear jerking scene.

Upon hearing this good news, the young scout shot upwards and affixed herself to Numbuh Two's side. "I can't wait 'til I get all growed up do I can be with my Hoagie!" the scout cheered, throwing her arms around the boy's chest.

"Yeah," he agreed, ruffling her hair fondly. "Just hope that me and the Kids Next Door don't catch ya! We go after beautiful teenage girls and lock them up!" She giggled loudly to this, shrinking slightly from Numbuh Two's fingers.

With a simple smile, he turned to the rest of the KND, who were waiting with approving smiles on their faces. "Me an' Laura are goin' over to get some frozen yogurt," he said, his hand on the scout's shoulder. "You guys wanna come?"

The group waved their hands in dismissal, politely declining the offer with statements like: "I've got some system bugs to check at the treehouse," "Mr. Higgin's and Ms. Tina (dolls) are having their tea party at noon!" "Wrestlefest comes on at ten-o'clock," and "This is Numbuh Five's candy day!"

Laura was rather undisturbed by their refusal. "More for us!" she called out, grabbing Numbuh Two's hand and taking off down the street. "Come on, Hoagie!"

"Hey!" he chuckled, letting himself be dragged along for the ride. "Not so fast!"

After Numbuh Two and Laura were out of earshot, Numbuh Four turned towards the group with a conspiratorial look on his face. "Hey, I know I said that it's alright for Numbuh 2 to hang out wit' her, and I'm really fine with it and all." He then raised his hands in exclamation. "But maann, that girl's a weirdo!"

Numbuh One lowered his head slowly, his glasses tilted to hide his darkening expression. "I don't want to ever hear another word on how strange Lizzie is again, is that clear?" he said curtly, his mouth twitching into something bordering on a snarl.

"Amen to 'dat!" Numbuh Five agreed, crossing her arms firmly.

Off in the distance, an irritating, bouncy jingle could be heard emanating from a skipping, hyperactive nine-year-old. "We're goin' to the ice cream place! We're goin' to the ice cream place!" But this time, the boy that held her hand just smiled happily and walked with her, content in waiting for both the song to end and a beautiful butterfly to emerge from her cocoon.

end transmission []

Author's Notes: If you're reading this, you obviously have taken the time to go completely through this work, for which I thank you. This work was an experiment I've wanted for some time to play out with our super agents from the treehouse. I wanted to try something a bit different in terms of romance, and also see if I could portray a gag character as a real, feeling human being. I only hope that this story was a success for you all, because I believe it was a success for me.

Some brief explanations on certain little quirks you might have found in this story:

Red Wings merit badge: The name "Red Wings" comes the game Final Fantasy II (IV in Japan), a fleet of airships that attack practically every town you try and go to.

Schizophrenia: In actually, Schizophrenia and Multiple Personalities are two different things. Schizophrenia might include multiple personalities, but they by no means have to go hand in hand. They are sometimes confused with each other. I can't believe I'm perpetrating this misconception... -_-;

Wrestling Underwear: This is actually an inside joke dating back to my early childhood. You really don't want to know what this is about. Trust me.

Hogarth: There's nothing official about this at all, but I thought that Hogarth was a pretty good guess for Hoagie's real name. What kind of parents name their child after a deli sandwich, anyway? ^_^

Kenny Loggins and "Danger Zone": I figured "Top Gun," the movie that this song is a large part of, would be something Numbuh Two is quite fond on. Probably watches it straight through at least once a week.

Numbuh Two: "Goose! NOOOO!"

See, he's watching it right now. (looks over at the screen) Hey, this is Food Network!

Numbuh Two: (sobbing) "I know, and they overcooked that beautiful goose and totally ruined it! NOOOO!"

^_^;

Will Numbuh Two's fondness for the Jekyll and Hyde girl grow into something like that of a boyfriend-friend? Time (and the next fic) will tell...

Until next fanfic, ja ne! ^_^