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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Part I**

**The Revolution**

1. [School is Starting 6](#_Toc329778496)
2. [Things Get Ugly 10](#_Toc329778497)
3. [The Secret Meeting 12](#_Toc329778498)
4. [Spy Work 15](#_Toc329778499)
5. [Raided 21](#_Toc329778500)
6. [Getting Some Troops (and Fancy Posters!) 25](#_Toc329778501)
7. [Rules of War 27](#_Toc329778502)
8. [The First Battle 32](#_Toc329778503)
9. [We Get Some Shiny New Stickers 36](#_Toc329778504)
10. [Revolutionizing the Revolution 43](#_Toc329778505)
11. [Rush to the Factory 47](#_Toc329778506)
12. [Bounty Hunters 52](#_Toc329778507)
13. [Age Disputes 54](#_Toc329778508)
14. [A Chat With Mr. O'Neil 58](#_Toc329778509)
15. [Evicted 60](#_Toc329778510)
16. [Nerds...In Space! 70](#_Toc329778511)
17. [Unconventional Torture 73](#_Toc329778512)
18. [Prison Break 75](#_Toc329778513)
19. [Recruitment FTW 80](#_Toc329778514)
20. [It's a Trap! 84](#_Toc329778515)
21. [I Blame the Economy 88](#_Toc329778516)
22. [Greetings From Castle Vine! 90](#_Toc329778517)

**Part II**

**Everlasting Warfare**

1. [I Need to Increase my Sneak Skill 94](#_Toc329778518)
2. [Prison Break...Take Two 98](#_Toc329778519)
3. [From Bad to Worse 101](#_Toc329778520)
4. [Dramatized for Effect 103](#_Toc329778521)
5. [Let the Games Begin! 113](#_Toc329778522)
6. [Misadventures 116](#_Toc329778523)
7. [Last Stand 124](#_Toc329778524)
8. [Assault on the Library 129](#_Toc329778525)
9. [All Your Base are Belong to Us 134](#_Toc329778526)
10. [Third Floor of Death 141](#_Toc329778527)
11. [Peace at Last 153](#_Toc329778528)
12. [APPENDIX 156](#_Toc329778529)

**Part I**

**The Revolution**

Chapter One

# School is Starting

Monday, August 8th

I*t was the first day of middle school*. August 8th. I had made it to see the legendary (even in its short existence) Castle Vine Boarding School. It’s a pretty new place, only 3 years old. And it is HUGE. I had driven by numerous times and had seen the Middle School briefly, but never had I appreciated how big this place is. About 3000 students could fit comfortably inside, and we were starting the year with about 1800 or so. The campus also had a High School, which I had never seen (this one was a bit further off), but I had heard it was even bigger.

And, for the record, I know nothing about how most boarding schools work. I read a book that took place there once, and watched a show, so from what I could tell (which wasn't much), this school was very different. Unlike many boarding schools, this one had a Middle School AND a High School. The Board had decided to do things the same way as traditional schools, to make the students more comfortable, they said.

People were pouring into the building. I was looking around, trying to find a familiar face amidst the hive of activity. I passed by a few people that I sort of knew, but weren’t great friends with, and quickly said hello.

Castle Vine was two hours away from my town, but surprisingly, a lot of people I knew were attending. Maybe that was because this was the best school for miles. I saw two of my better friends talking to each other, Zach Collins and Arianna Vakman.

“Hey guys,” I said as I approached, “how was your summer?”

"Hey, Luke!" As I joined the group, we began talking a little about what we did over break. Zach went to Arizona for a family reunion, and Arianna went to Washington D.C. I had gone to Seattle to meet up with some old friends.

I checked my watch while Zach recounted the story of how his Uncle fell into the punch bowl after running around in circles and then trying to go in a straight line. The bell would ring any minute now, and the first day would begin.

“Quick, what classes do you guys have?” I asked. We compared schedules. The only class I shared with either of them was Health. Almost as soon as we finished checking, the bell rang.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you guys at,” Arianna checked her schedule, “11:30.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” We all walked away, going to our separate classes, not knowing this would, surprisingly, be one of the most normal days of the year.

It was finally 6:00 PM. Dinner Time. The first day was over, and it was pretty simple. It was like I expected any first day to be; not knowing a lot of people, not knowing where to go, lectures from teachers, spending all day adjusting to our new surroundings. Not much work going on today; just how I liked it.

I was walking through the Cafeteria, but on my way, I saw something slightly... disturbing. Yes, that’s exaggerating a little bit, but that’s all I can really think of to say.

I saw a group of the ‘popular’ kids (it was only the first day, but I could recognize a couple of faces from previous years) sitting at a table. Then I saw some average kid walk over and sit down. One member of the popular group whispered to the others. Everyone stared at him a second, and then all turned towards the other kid. They gave him a look of disgust, scooted over one or two seats, and completely ignored him. Even when he tried to start conversation, they still acted like he wasn’t there, or even snickered at him.

I kept on walking, finally finding some friends that had managed to hold a table against the wave of endless students. Zach and Arianna were there, but also some others such as Rachael Richardson and Daniel Graves.

"Hey! It's Luke! Long time no see! You wouldn't believe what I did this summer..." We talked a bit, discussing what we did over break (Zach, once again, told the story about his Uncle), what classes we had, things like that. I almost told them about the scene that I had just witnessed, but then I thought it probably wasn’t that important. Instead, I told a good Yo’ Momma Joke. But I kept my eyes open.

After we were done eating, we went outside. I’m not sure how it is at other boarding schools (in fact, I like to think that ours is very different from others), but this school is pretty good about student freedoms and privileges.

On the way out, I saw a group of kids huddled in a corner, some constantly joining and leaving. I turned to an eighth grader next to me.

“What are they doing there?” I asked her.

“We call it the Central Trade Market,” she said, “or the CTM. You can trade tons of stuff there, from candy to computer games. Last year, it was just trading, but I heard some people are going to try and start selling stuff this year. But, personally, I always found that a few packs of gum will get you pretty much whatever you want."

As we kept walking, I noticed a lot of cliques. Just then I remembered this school's reputation. It was widely known that this school's clubs and cliques were VERY competitive. Their clubs were their lives, and one club would gladly like to see the end of another. Sometimes they even ‘allied’ with each other to try and convert different clubs. This had happened at the Elementary School too, but not to the same extent. Like I said, very serious. Thankfully, it was mostly in good fun, though like anything, there is always someone who decides to take things too far.

I went outside and enjoyed a long game of Soccer. I had just made a goal, when a kid came up to me. He was tall, about 5 feet 4, and thin. He had slightly tan skin, a few freckles on his face, and sort of long, blonde hair.

“Hey,” he said, “you’re pretty good.”

“Thanks,” I said, panting, “you too.”

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Luke Ericson,” I answered. “Yours?”

“George. George Maxwell.” Just then the bell rang. That meant it was almost 7:30, curfew, and we had to go inside. “Well, I’ll see you around, Luke.”

“I guess so.”

No sooner had I entered the building, I felt myself being shoved up against the wall. I turned to see a kid walking away with short, black, spiky hair. He had broad shoulders, large arms, and was about 5 feet tall. I realized that was the whispering kid at lunch.

“Who’s that guy?” I asked someone next to me.

“Who, him?” the kid said, pointing. He looked around nervously, then took a second to stare at me, as if he were deciding whether I really wanted to know, or if this was in fact a test. He went with the former. "That's Josh Hevowski. I'd steer clear of him if I were you."

"Why?"

"He's terrible," he whispered. "He hasn't done anything serious enough at school to get him busted, though everyone says that he used to get in a lot of fights when he was younger." I looked at Josh, thinking that that was believable. The kid continued, "Nobody can get anything on him, but we all know what he's really like. Bumps in the hall, dirty looks, they tell us what he's really thinking."

“Great,” I whispered to myself, “Only the first day, and I’m already adding people to my ‘Do Not Disturb’ list.”

Chapter 2

# Things Get Ugly

Tuesday, August 30th

T*he first couple of weeks went by fast.* About two and a half had already passed.

After a few more convincing run-ins with Josh, I decided I better do as I was told. I steered clear of him, all right. There was an occasional bump in the hall, but besides that, he wasn’t a problem.

But my friend, Andrew Douglas, was a different story. I don’t know what happened; Andrew wasn’t doing a thing. It happened on the 21st. We were just standing there, talking about a cool video game I had played, when all of a sudden, Josh just came and started messing with him.

He grabbed his lunch bag from the cafeteria. “Hey, Nerd!” yelled Josh. “I got your lunch!” He laughed wickedly while digging his hand into the bag. “Nothing?!?!?” He angrily flung the container a few yards away. “You better bring me something tomorrow!” He walked off, cursing under his breath.

“What was that all about?” I asked.

“How the heck should I know?” Andrew answered. “You've seen Josh, he always acts like he owns the place.” Now I sort of wanted to do something during that whole scene, but Josh is a pretty big guy. Not someone you would really want to mess with, especially someone as thin as me.

Back to the present, it was Tuesday; I had a project due next Friday. I decided to go to the library after dinner. As I said, this school is big. I always kept a map with me, one the school gave us on the first day.

I walked up the stairs, avoiding the stampede of kids running down. Judging by their outfits, I guessed they were going to Soccer Practice.

It took me ten minutes to get to the library from the cafeteria, when it should have only taken five. As I finally entered the room, I saw Josh walk away with a mischievous grin. I ignored it, and turned my attention to the group of kids in the corner. *The CTM?* I thought excitedly. *I have to see this.* But as I approached the crowd, the noise got louder. Then I realized this was about something other than trading gum.

It was a fight! I saw that kid I noticed during lunch, the one in ‘the incident.’ Apparently those other kids were really getting on his nerves. From what I was told later, the kid, whose name was Mac Berochi, had been talking with the other one, Jason Morris, off in the corner. Before they knew what was going on, a fist had gone flying.

Kids were scrambling over there trying to get the two off each other. Mac and Jason’s looks were odd. Terrified yet rage filled. As people began getting in between the fighters, the two loosened up a little, but still made some movement towards the other.

Finally, a voice broke out over the chaos. “What is going on here?!?!” it screamed. Everyone stopped to look at the speaker. I turned and saw Mr. Marten, one of the Eight Grade history teachers.

“All of you, in my office. Now.” The group marched off. I walked away, deciding that my research could wait for tomorrow.

Chapter 3

# The Secret Meeting

Tuesday, September 6th

T*here had been a large number of scenes playing out like the one I just described.* Suspensions were going out left and right.“Man,” I said to myself as I saw Sarah Lindsay go to the nurse’s office after getting into one of the shorter fights (in which she received a bloody nose), “something’s up. Either a lot of kids here need therapists, or something is wrong. Maybe both. But either way, I’m going to get to the bottom of it.”

With all these fights going on, the school had to take action. We were all gathered in the auditorium. The school councilor walked in.

“Good morning everybody,” she said. She didn’t wait for a return greeting. “Now, in light of certain....” she paused, “events...I would like to remind all of you about the rules here.” She then took an hour or so to restate the rules and policies of the school, and told us that we could talk to her about problems instead of using violence. Pretty standard school safety speech, I guess (I suppose I’m not really an expert), except it was stretched to be twice as long.

Unsurprisingly, the fights still continued. Within the first month and a half of school, the fight count had risen to 12; 8 before the speech, and 4 after, and with no signs of letting up. I had seen a few of these first hand, and knew a couple people who saw others.

“Alright,” I said. "It’s about time I get to the bottom of this.” But where to start? This definitely wasn't something I could do all by myself; I was one kid in over a thousand. “I think I might need some help with this one,” I whispered to myself. I walked off to gather my new recruits. “And I thought this year was going to be boring! Hah!”

After talking to a few people, I decided to call a meeting. I invited some of my closest friends; the ones that I knew would be able to help. They were: Zach Collins, Arianna Vakman, Daniel Graves, Rachael Richardson, Christian Smith, and Andrew Douglas. Yes, there were only six people, but I figured that'd get results a lot faster than if I worked on my own.

“So,” I started, “I bet you are all wondering why I called you here.”

“Well, normally I would,” Rachael answered, “but you already told me three times...”

“Spoil sport, Rachael. Spoil sport." I sighed before continuing. “Well, anyway, I’m sure you've all noticed the fights lately. I’ve been looking into them, and noticed that they always seems to involve one of those ‘popular kids,’ and someone else who's excluded from the group."

"Which side's starting the fights?" Andrew asked.

"Both," I answered. "And that's even more of a problem."

“So what you’re saying is,” started Daniel, getting the idea.

“It’s almost like nerds versus populars.” I finished.

“Sounds like a good book,” commented Arianna.

“You know, that doesn't sound too bad,” I replied, “But what would it be about, some big war in the school?” Everybody laughed at the idea of such a crazy event. I stopped, realizing that we weren't too far off.

“Anyway,” I continued, regaining seriousness, “something needs to be done. I want you all to be the eyes and ears of the school. I want you to help me find out what’s going on. I want you guys to be my spies."

"Spies, huh?" Daniel said. "I always pictured myself as a secret agent." He put on his sunglasses.

"Right...So I take it that you guys are in?"

"I'm in."

"Me too."

"Yeah, I'll help." There was a lot of chatter as everyone agreed, and they began looking around as if they were entirely different people and were getting to know their new comrades.

"That's amazing! Now..."

“Wait!” Christian interrupted. “I'm fine with being a spy, but once we get your info, what do we do next?” This was a good question, one that I didn’t have an answer to.

“To war!” joked Zach. We all laughed again.

“I guess we’ll figure that out later,” said Andrew.

“I'm afraid that's what we're going to have to do,” I agreed. “Now I’ll organize another meeting once we get enough information. Just don’t let your guard down! Now let’s go!” We all got up, not knowing that our jokes had had a bit more meaning than any of us thought.

Chapter 4

# Spy Work

September 12th

A *week had passed since the meeting.* Nobody had reported back yet. I wasn’t worried though, there was no rush.

There had been one more fight, but I hadn’t found anything so far. But that was the least of my problems. Josh was even more irritating than usual.

He started picking on Andrew again, and just seemed more menacing, if that was even possible.

“Seriously Josh, leave him alone,” I said bravely, pushing Josh away from Andrew.

“What are ya’ going to do about it, wimp?” He switched to a mocking voice. “Tell yo’ mommy, ya' wittle baby?” He laughed.

“Whatever,” I answered. “Come on Andrew, let’s get out of here.”

“Yeah, keep walkin’ ya chickens! Bawk bawk bawk!”

We left Josh behind, looking like an idiot while he was doing some weird impression of a chicken. Finally I said, "Nobody should have to deal with this..."

"I know!" Andrew agreed. "He's such a jerk! At least we aren't the only ones that Josh is like this to, though."

"What? Oh! I was talking about the chickens. But okay to what you said, too." Andrew laughed and we carried on our way.

A day later, Rachael came up to me while I was finishing up my soup. “Luke, I've got some news for you,” she said.

“What'd you find out?” I asked.

“Well, I found one of the ‘populars’ who has been in a bunch of the fights, along with his friends. He’s apparently been picking on some of the other kids here, along with his posse.”

“What’s his name?” I asked.

“Devon Darahbin.”

“Tell the others to keep an eye open for them. And if a fight breaks out, try and stop it,” I ordered. Rachael gave me a look that said ‘No way am I getting in there’ but all he said was yes before walking away. That was understandable. We both knew we probably wouldn't step foot into a fight, let alone stop one, but that's really all I could say. “I guess I better find this kid,” I mumbled to myself.

It was 4:30 PM. I had already finished all my work, so I decided to see this Devon. I saw him and his friends hanging out in the hall outside the library (a common hang out for many of the students). I couldn’t hear what they were talking about, so I moved a little closer, sat down, and pretended to read.

I decided to take a closer look at Devon. I recognized the guy from one of the fights I witnessed, and I believe he had just come back from suspension. He had combed back, black hair, pale skin, and was maybe 5 foot 3, sort of hard to tell because he was sitting down. He didn’t look too good though, after all those fights. Lots of bruises were all over his body. He had a couple cuts and a lip that’s bottom left corner was covered in dried up blood. I looked back at my book.

A little while later, I looked up again, and saw Christian sit down about two yards away from Devon’s group. *Looks like he got the news* I thought. I glanced at Christian, giving him a look that said ‘stay cool.’ Christian nodded, his eyes darted around the posse, as mine were only a moment before.

I looked back at Devon. He was just talking to his friends about normal stuff. Then one of them looked at me. I quickly buried my nose in my books. Maybe to quickly...

It got quiet. Devon walked over to me. “What are you doing?” he asked.

“Just reading,” I said, slightly nervous. *What if Devon is the cause of the fights? What is he going to do to me if he figures out what I’m doing?*

Devon looked at my book. It was The Hobbit. “Oh, *that* book,” he said.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s so *boring.* I stopped reading on, like, the third page or something. Besides, it’s a nerd book,” Devon answered.

“Nerd book....right....” Devon and his friends walked away. *Well that wasn’t too bad* I thought. Just then Josh passed through. He briefly looked at Devon. He and his friends exchanged nervous glances. Then they walked over to Christian.

I couldn’t hear what they started saying to him, but he looked irritated. That was only the beginning though. Then came the slapping. And punching. Square in the face, too!

“Hey, leave him alone!” I shouted, pulling them off Christian.

“Standing up for the Nerd, eh?” said one of Devon’s friends.

“Yeah, I am. Back off.” Now, I’m not really a muscley guy. I’m not really that intimidating. But my involvement seemed to frighten Devon a bit, maybe because heads were starting to turn. So instead, he pulled out a spit wad shooter. He quickly started pelting us in the face.

“Argh!” I yelled. “Let’s get out of here! Come on.” Christian and I quickly ran down the stairs; the attackers didn't even bother to chase us. “Man, what the heck happened?”

“I really don’t know,” answered Christian. “He just came over, started going calling me a Nerd, then punched me!” I could already see some bruises starting to form.

“Ouch,” I said, “you ok?”

“Yeah.”

“We better get you cleaned up.” I continued. “And then maybe you should take a break from this investigating.”

“Alright,” answered Christian. We went to the bathroom and washed up. Needless to say, the Headmaster had some visitors that evening.

We finished up in the bathroom. “Alright, I think I’m okay. And I just remembered I have some homework I need to do. I’ll see you later.” Christian walked off.

I started walking to my dorm, checking my watch on the way. 5:17 PM. I still had a little less than an hour before dinner. But as my eyes were distracted by the time, I bumped into Josh. He gave me a menacing look. *Oh no* I thought.

“You lookin’ for a fight?” he asked me.

“Uh...no...sorry...I was just....” Josh cut me off.

“Listen, runt, consider yourself lucky. You found me in a good mood. But you should be more careful. We wouldn't want an...accident...would we?” Josh’s eyes darted over the banister of the *third floor railing.*

“No...I...I...”

“Good. ” He walked off.

“Hey Luke, I...”

“DON’T HURT ME!” I screamed, putting my arms in front of my face.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, it’s just me!” It was Daniel.

“God, man, you scared me,” I said, relieved. “Whatever it is, make it quick. Guild Meeting tonight."

"What?"

"World of Warcraft."

“Oh. Right." Daniel continued. "Well I have some...information for you...."

"Is the ominous voice really necessary?" I asked.

"Just usin' my talents." Daniel shrugged.

“Ok, well do you think it can wait a bit? The meeting starts soon. What about tomorrow? Or the next meeting? It'll will probably be next week.”

"Alright, alright," Daniel answered. "I'll just tell to look out for a girl by the name of Beverly Marks."

“Beverly Marks?” I nodded. “Ok, thanks.” Daniel walked off, leaving me alone again. “Great, what’s this one going to be like?”

It was Friday, which was leading into avery deserved weekend. After I was done eating (and after I was done reminding Zach that I had heard the story about his Uncle a million times) I picked up George. Earlier I had enlisted him to the cause.

We eventually found Beverly. She was probably about 5 foot 4. She had light skin, and very long, blonde hair.

I told George what I told Christian yesterday. “Just play it cool.”

“Sure," he agreed. "Hey guys, what’s up?” George approached Beverly and her friends.

“I didn’t mean like that!” I whispered, running up behind George. “You’re breaking the first rule of espionage!”

“What do you know about espionage?” he asked, turning around.

“You’d be surprised,” I said, then whispered, “and so would I, if I actually knew something about it.”

George started talking to them, so I decided to just sit down at a nearby table (which maybe wasn’t the best choice because Josh happened to be there. Man, was this guy stalking me or something?). Andrew went up behind George. I had introduced them and they became fast friends.

Just then I saw Josh give Beverly a quick glance. She looked away, said something inaudible, and laughed at Andrew. She started slapping him in the face.

“Oh no,” I said while getting up, “more Devon’s.” I saw George yell, then motion to me for help. I got in between Beverly and Andrew. “Oh, thank goodness you found him! I was just starting to think he *wasn’t* going to get me that slice of pizza.” I gave Andrew a fake glare. “Come on.” George followed us. As soon as we were out of earshot I whispered to Andrew. “What was going on in there, man?”

“I don’t know! She just started slapping me, literary, out of nowhere! What did you say to her, George?”

“We were just talking about our favorite bands! She seemed nice enough, and then she went all evil on you!” I still wasn’t sure exactly what was going on here, but it was clear that there may have been a somewhat credible reason to raise fists at these people. Something else was going on here though, and somehow, I was going to put a stop to it.

Chapter 5

# Raided

Wednesday, September 21st

T*he meeting began as soon as everybody had arrived.* The meeting was held at 5:00 PM. Along with the people who attended last time, there a few others, such as George.

“I bet...” I started.

“No, we aren’t wondering why you called us here,” stated Rachael. I sighed.

“Um...actually...I was just about to.....” We all looked around, our eyes falling on Michael, his name was. “Yeah...” He looked away.

“Anyway, we are all going to tell everybody our evidence,” I continued. “And,” I turned towards Michael, “for those of us who don’t know, we are talking about the recent fights, and the reasons behind them. I’ll go first.” I told them about what happened with Devon, with Christian occasionally correcting me and adding a few things I missed.

Daniel re-accounted a story about Beverley nearly getting into a fight, before George and Andrew told us their experience. A few other people said some things, but Rachael was the only one to say something important.

“It seems like Josh has a lot to do with this,” she said.

“What a surprise,” Daniel whispered to me. I chuckled.

“I’m not exactly sure what his part is,” Rachael continued, “but he definitely seems to be involved. He has hung out with most of the fighters at one time or another."

"So what?" Andrew called out. "So he hangs out with people like himself. No surprise there."

“Yeah, and seriously, is it really worth fighting about?” Arianna asked.

“You should have seen it,” I said. “They literally were beating up Christian and Andrew. Look, Christian still has bruises.” Everyone turned to observe the injures. “Though they didn’t seem to want extra attention, unlike some of the other fighters had done. Once I stepped in, they backed off.”

“And we all know what it was that *didn’t* help...,” Daniel added, referring to my less-than-legendary strength. Everyone laughed.

“Thanks, Dan.” He shrugged.

“Luke is right,” Andrew piped up, getting us back on track. “Though maybe we shouldn’t go throwing punches, something needs to be done.”

“Exactly,” I continued, “so the next step is to...” I was cut off by some sort of battle cry. Spit wads flew through the air.

“AMBUSH!” Michael yelled. We took cover behind a table. I looked up and saw that Devon was leading the attack. They had obviously taken advantage of the fact that there was no Librarian.

“Take these!” Ryan Roberts yelled. He tossed us all some rubber bands and hornets. It wasn’t much, but it was better than getting pelted with spit. Some of us were pretty good shots, unlike me, who could never figure out how to work the darn things. I just couldn’t fit the rubber band properly on my fingers. While trying to figure out the weapon, I heard Daniel let out a hacking cough behind me.

“What’s wrong?” I asked. Daniel kept coughing. Then something flew out of his mouth.

“Ugh, spit wad,” he said.

“Disgusting!” yelled George, shooting out a hornet. It stung one of the raiders hands, and they quickly dropped their ‘weapon.’

“Ah, I’m hit!” Michael screamed, collapsing into an over-dramatic ‘death.’

“Always a joker,” I said, sighing. “Ah, my eye!”

“See?” Michael whispered with his ‘last dying breath.’

We all pulled out of the library. We decided not to call another meeting just yet, but to still keep our eyes open.

The next few weeks, there were three more spit-wad attacks. Everybody at the meeting started carrying hornets, and sometimes practiced in their rooms at night so they could knock any straws out of an enemy’s hand. I had finally managed to shoot a decent shot, though it definitely wasn’t as good as some of the others.

More got in on this. I decided to call another meeting.

About 40 kids were present. We all had plenty of hornets.

“All right guys,” I started, “things are getting tough out there. It’s all out war! We need to do something!”

“What, like raise an army?” a kid shouted.

“Exactly!” I answered. Everybody groaned. “What? I mean unless you *like* getting pelted with spit wads.”

“He’s got a point there,” George said.

“A school army? Man, sounds just like something you would put in one of your stories,” stated Arianna.

“Maybe,” I agreed, remembering her first comment like this, and thinking of how my joke was starting to become the truth. “Though as much as I would like to write a good story sometime soon, now is the time of action!” That got their attention. The crowd started whispering among themselves.

“Ok, so let’s say this *does* happen, and we make an army?” shouted Abby Franklins, being the logical one. “There’s just one problem.”

“Which is…?” I questioned.

"What do we do afterwards?" Unfortunately I had to answer the question this time.

"This time it really is to war. This time we'll be doing something besides talking. This time everyone will be preoccupied worrying about us to fight."

"That works for me," Abby said. "But one more thing..."

"Yes?" I said, slightly annoyed.

“Team name!”

“What?”

“Every team has *got* to have a name.”

“She’s right,” George added. “The A-Team, the Justice League, the Rebel Alliance, the Horde, the…”

“I think we get it,” Abby interrupted.

“Alright then,” I yelled, "Anybody got an idea?" We all quieted down to think.

"How 'bout, 'Dead Meat?'" someone called out. Everyone laughed.

"Very funny," I replied. I thought some more. "Wait, I've got it! We can be....The Nerds!"

“The Nerds?” Rachael groaned. “Really?”

“Hey, why not?” asked Zach.

“Yeah,” Daniel added. “I mean we *are* going to war with the Populars. And what’s more different to a Popular, than a Nerd?” Murmurs of approval came from the crowd. Rachael looked down, as if to think.

“Alright, alright,” Rachael agreed. “But we better not have costumes!”

“Deal.” I answered. “So how does this sound, everyone? We're moving from spies to a fully functional military."

"I think we should wait before we call it 'fully functional...'" Andrew whispered.

"Fine, fine. Fully functional or not, though, it's time we bring the fight to them. Who's in?" There were no more arguments this time. "Very good." I said. "Very, very good. It's finally settled; we are…the Nerds.”

Chapter 6

# Getting Some Troops (and Fancy Posters!)

Friday, September 23nd

N*aturally, we had to start recruiting.* Right after the meeting, we got people working on some posters. Here's what we came up with:



We put a bunch of these all over the school. Now, we had expected some people to turn up, but we weren't at all prepared for how many.

On Friday, there were 120 kids crowded inside the library. Much, much, much more than anyone expected.

"Wow," exclaimed Zach. "Lots of people."

"Yeah," I said in little more than a whisper. I was astonished that this many people wanted to help. I was even more surprised that I, of all people, was the first to act.

"Alright, alright," I yelled, "let's get down to business." Everyone quieted down. "Now, we have had a lot of problems lately. Fights, abuse, harassment, and just plain jerks. Things are looking bleak. But that's where we come in. We are here to change all that. We are here to stand up for what is right! We gather here today to make a difference, even if, I admit, the way is a bit...silly. But arm yourselves! Be armed with your rubber bands, your hornets, your paper-ninja-stars, and the knowledge that we are united and stand together!" I admit that during the last part, I sort of started to get lost in the moment...

"Today, we unite to defeat the oppressive forces which appose us! Together, we shall end this senseless violence, and this school shall be a better place. If you sign your name on that recruitment paper, then today, brothers and sisters, we will stand together! Today, we will be NERDS!"

Silence. I could see it in the crowd's faces. They weren't sure whether to cheer or to laugh. They finally did both, but it was a good sort of laugh; a deserved one after a long period of gloom. I could tell that I had won them over. The troops had been rallied, their leader had made his intentions clear, and we were ready to move. The preparations were ready; the war had begun.

Chapter 7

# Rules of War

Sunday, September 25th

N*ow of course, we were also going to need some rules.* Even real wars have them, so our fake one, being held in a school, and having no real casualties besides maybe a bruised leg from tripping, needed them as well. We came up with this:

**WAR CONTRACT:**

**Rules:**

Stickers (Badges) showing your Faction's Insignia must be worn at all times, no exceptions.

No physical contact:

No punching

No kicking

No slapping

No serious pain:

Any pain cannot be anything more than a sting.

No face hits.

No blood!

No weapon is allowed to be sharp, pointy, or anything that could actually be used as against somebody in a real life situation.

Please refrain from fighting near Bathrooms or Dorms.

All badges must be worn near the top of your outside shirt, in the front.

Once a troop is dead, they CANNOT be involved in the war AT ALL until Rescue Day [See 'Procedures.']

When the battle starts the next day, all soldiers must go to the outpost they were last located, save for if you are getting your sticker on Rescue Day. If a particular fight spans over multiple days, you must begin the battle in the general area of said skirmish. If you were not located at an outpost and were not participating in a fight at the end of the day, then you must go to the nearest base.

Monday is the only exception of the above rule, unless the leaders come to an agreement. On Monday, a soldier is allowed to go to any outpost controlled by his or her faction.

**Procedures:**

Each troop has 7 lives. Once hit 7 times by any approved weapon [See 'Rules'] a troop cannot be involved until Rescue Day [See Below].

Faction Badges are thrown away after death, and handed out each Rescue Day [See Below]. Any shots fired by a soldier without their Sticker are to be ignored. Alert a Judge [See Below] immediately.

Rescue Day is every other Wednesday. On Rescue Day, every 'dead' troop is revived. All revived troops must be revived at the same location. This is the only day new members can join.

Once 'dead,' soldiers must assist in cleaning up the leftovers of the battle (stickers that didn't get thrown away, hornets, or spit wads (however gross)).

Lives/hits/health points return to 7 after each surviving day.

The Battle Begins 1 Hour after school ends (4:00 PM), and goes until 5:00 PM, on Weekdays. On Saturday, it goes from 1:30 PM to 2:30 PM. Sunday will be the 'day off.'

Any change in rules, procedures, or any special events must be brought to the attention of the Faction Leaders (those signing this document), and have signed evidence of said changes.

Both Nerds and Populars must have 5 judges (alternating each week) which will oversee all battles to make sure all rules are followed accordingly. Any troop found breaking said rules will be temporarily banned, or even completely disqualified, depending on the seriousness of the 'crime.' Multiple bans will also result in permanent disqualification.

Ending the War

The war is over once there are no more troops on one side, or the leaders decide to surrender. If the war somehow lasts until the end of the year, it will be decided then who wins. The winner will most likely be whoever has the most surviving soldiers, though an agreement will be reached if that time ever comes.

**Leader Signatures:**

**Nerds:**

**Luke Ericson**

Daniel Graves

**Populars:**

Conroy Becker

**Jordan Wilson**

Alright, now we are ready," I said as Conroy finished signing. I was actually pretty surprised that they did. I guessed they were both thinking about the fact we were still in school. One false move could end each and every soldier in the headmaster's office.

Then I began to wonder how these two came to be the leaders. What did they have to do? Who did they have to know? Were they the cause of most of the fights? Those ended up being questions I would never find out.

I rolled up the contract. "Well, everyone, I look forward to seeing you all in battle." I tipped my imaginary hat. The others simply grunted. We all walked off, ready for the action to begin.

Chapter 8

# The First Battle

Monday, September 26th

"C*ome on!"* I yelled, dodging a couple spit wads. The first battle had begun, and, even after the meeting, I was astounded by how many people decided to participate. I had initially led 50 troops out, and now we had about 25. Every move we made was countered by the Populars, every weakness was exploited. Everything was going according to plan.

The Populars had a massive strike force; it seemed almost as if they had brought out their entire army out to destroy us. I wasn't expecting this, though we were doing surprisingly well. It was obvious that years of video games were paying off for the Nerds.

The Popular Badge, half of it being bright pink, the other being a dark blue, was very noticeable amidst the chaos. Someone had created a large banner with the Nerd Symbol on it, and had propped it up over on the side of the action

Since the school had so few students compared to its capacity, there were plenty of empty spaces such as this one that we could use. We had been fighting for about half an hour now. I ducked behind a dusty desk after shooting several hornets. "I'm getting good at this," I whispered to myself. I popped up to shoot some more of the paper-death-wads; this time I had managed to deplete an enemy soldier's Life Points.

Several Popular soldiers jumped out at me, hurriedly trying to shoot me with their spit wads. In their haste, only one met their mark. I quickly shot off a few hornets (since they were close, I could easily fire at them), taking down a couple. George came up from behind, helping me take out the rest.

I turned to George. He was turning out to be a very good leader. I knew from the start he would prove to be great, which is why he was immediately ranked Lieutenant. He had a squad of 20. "How's it going?" I asked him.

"Not bad," he answered, narrowly dodging a spit wad. "You?"

"Tired." I took that time to notice our dwindling numbers. This battle had been going on for a while, and we hadn't sent too many soldiers.

It seemed like there was an endless supply of Populars. For every one that ripped off their sticker, two more replaced them. Apparently they had done a lot of recruiting of their own. Probably a lot easier on their part. Most people would rather be labeled 'Popular' instead of 'Nerd.'

Before I knew it, it was just me and 12 others. I ran behind a cover and pulled out my walkie-talkie. "Alright! Now!" I yelled. Within seconds, fifty Nerds came up from all directions. Daniel led the attack.

"CHAAAARGE!!!" A barrage of hornets met with a flying army of spit wads. Some troops came up behind me, helping the survivors.

"So, you made it?" I asked Zach, who ran over and gave me a handful of hornets. "I thought I would have all the fun to myself."

"What a shame," he replied, then laughed. We surrounded the Populars. Shot after shot was let loose, and pretty soon we had completely eliminated their force. But we weren't the only ones with a plan.

All of a sudden, fifty more Populars surrounded *us.*

"How did you not see them?" I yelled behind me to Zach, as I got hit by three spit wads. I quickly brushed them off, before I narrowly dodged a fourth.

I turned around, only to find my Admiral ripping off his sticker. Even after he took it off, he was still getting nailed with spit wads. "I'm hit, I'm hit!" He walked towards the Library, sighing. "Sorry, Luke." I looked around, knowing that this was going to be close. I decided not to risk it.

"Alright, let's get out of here!" I yelled. " Lieutenant Maxwell!!" George came running up.

"Yeah?" he shouted through shots.

"Take your troops and make sure the path is clear, so the rest of us can make it back to the HQ," I ordered.

"I'm on it!" George pulled out his Walkie-Talkie. Bravo Squadron, we're pulling out towards the HQ, meet up with me as quickly as possible." He ran off and disappeared in the crowd.

"Daniel!" I called out to my Co-Commander. "We're losing too many, too soon! Get everyone out of here! The remainder of my troops will pull out behind you!"

The Commander nodded. "Retreat!" he yelled. "We're getting out of here! Go, go, go!" We ran off, still firing hornets behind us, and moved slowly towards the Library. Even more Popular Soldiers came out. A couple small squadrons tried to intercept us.

Ammunition was flying everywhere. This was turning out to be a very chaotic battle. With the short range of the weapons, we could be using swords and it would be more organized. I stopped, thinking about that. It could end up being a useful idea later.

"Where's George?" I asked no one in particular. That was answered quickly. His troops sprang out from all around, quickly and efficiently shooting countless hornets, sending out wave after wave to destroy the interceptors. I went over to the Lieutenant. "Alright, we're just going to sprint over to the library. I'm quite done with all these surprises."

"Sure thing," George answered. He ran ahead of us, before I issued the order.

"Keep moving!" I waved my hand towards the Library, and started to run. The rest of the Nerds followed after me. Pretty soon we had reached the Headquarters, and we met no extra obstacles. Finally, we entered the Library's double doors, many people reached for water or snacks, others just sat down and rested.

"Arianna, Andrew..." I puffed, not bothering with titles, "Populars...behind us...cover HQ...hurry..." That was enough. The two motioned for some soldiers to follow them, and they set up by the doors to shoot the oncoming Populars.

After I sat down for a moment, I went behind the newly erected barricades, and took aim at the Populars.

"Good first day, huh?" I asked Arianna.

"Yeah. Let's see how long you can keep this going."

I took another shot, meaning I only had one life left. I took that as a signal to stay behind cover. But, to make sure I wasn't completely useless, I handed hornets to nearby soldiers. Finally, cheers broke out. I looked up to see a lot of Populars, but none were fighting. They were cleaning.

"Haha!" My voice range out through the Library. "We did it! It's our first battle, and we've won! Pat yourself on the back, as they say." I poured some delicious, cold water into my hoarse throat. "We'll rest for the remainder of the day, figure something else out tomorrow." I checked my watch; there were still 10 minutes until this battle was officially over. I went over and sat down at a table.

"Luke," a voice came up from behind me. I spun around in my wheely chair. Noah Dylans and Ryan Roberts stood in front of me, both good friends that I had known for quite some time now.

"Well look who decided to join the fun." I laughed, still drinking my water. "What can I help you with, Generals?"

"It's not Generals," Noah stated.

"Eh?" I took another sip from my water-bottle.

"We're not joining the Nerds. We've got something better planned."

"Oh really? What's this, 'plan?’" I asked.

"Say hello to the school's newest Bounty Hunters," Ryan answered.

"Hah! Bounty Hunters! That would actually be pretty cool, if this wasn't a war between 'Nerds and Populars,'" I laughed. "So, is it just you, or are there others?"

"Of course there are others," Noah said. "We had to get help, we're not joking around. And neither are you, apparently." He paused. "We better get going. We and the other Hunters have things to talk about. Important business, you know."

"Call us if you need anything," Ryan said.

"Yeah, right," I said sarcastically. Noah looked around at our already slowly, but surely dwindling numbers.

"I think we'll get work, soon enough," he laughed.

"Mmm hmmm....Sure." The two Hunters walked off. "We can fight our own battles," I whispered to myself, "we just need a bit more help."

Chapter 9

# We Get Some Shiny New Stickers

Wednesday, October 5th

A*fter our victory on Monday, it was clear to the school that we were serious about what we were doing.*  The following Rescue Day, we had 100 more cadets to hand their Badges to, for a grand total of 250 Nerds.

But these were no ordinary recruits. Different clubs and activities were beginning to be represented, on the Nerd Military, the Popular Forces, and even as Neutral Groups who wanted to take part in the fun.

Rachael Richardson, already a General, had been promoted to Admiral, as she was chosen to represent the Band and Orchestra. They were named the Instrumentals, and their sticker had a violin and bow, a trumpet, and a snare drum on it, as appose to the regular Nerd Badge which had the Nerd Emblem**\*** and was accompanied by a calculator and some large glasses.

Andrew Douglas, now Admiral, was chosen to represent the computer wizards of the school, which would thereafter be known as The Geeks. Their sticker had a Computer and a laser gun that looked like it was from a movie from the 60's.

"We're really spreading out," I thought, as I handed out the Badges. All the stickers still had the blue backgrounds, so they were easily recognizable to all.

That day we decided to do some easy stuff, just to show the recruits some simple things. We went on patrol in groups of three. I went with Daniel and Arianna.

"Pretty quiet," I said to them, as we walked down the halls. They both looked at each other and spoke.

"Too quiet...."

"Very suspicious," I said, chuckling. Just then a soldier came running up to us. She saluted. I noticed the Instrumental Sticker.

"High Commanders, Admiral," she said, nodding to each of us.

***\*You can see the Nerd Emblem as well as other badges in the Appendix.***

"At ease." She was very clearly out of breath, and had been running a bit. "What are you doing away from your squadron?"

"They were taken out, sir!"

"What, where?" Now Daniel and Arianna were interested.

"First East Wing.**\***Blake Thompson is leading a huge strike force! I had barely made it out. But I think they're going for the HQ!"

"Why didn't you use your Walkie-Talkie?" Arianna asked.

"I accidently dropped it this morning," she laughed, slightly embarrassed. "Don't worry, though, I'm getting it fixed."

"What's your name?" I questioned.

"Jen," the Girl answered.

"Hey, guys, I think she was followed." Daniel reached into his pocket for some hornets and stretched back the rubber band. There were five Populars coming down the hallway.

"There she is!" one called out. "And she found friends." They all prepared to shoot.

"C'mon, guys," I said to them, holding out my arms. "There's just five of you. Do you really think you're a match for four highly-trained Nerds?"

They looked at each other. I guess the answer was yes, because they opened fire with their spit wads. I dodged one, but two more hit me. I pulled out a handful of Hornets, and simply threw them in the attacker's direction. Arianna shot off a few, taking out one of them. Daniel shot down another. Jen finished off one more.

"Two on Four," I said. "You've caught us in a good mood. I'd suggest you don't tell anyone about this." We started to leave. The Populars didn't argue.

"Arianna," Daniel turned, "see if you can reach the HQ on your Walkie."

"Alright." She pulled it out. "Zach? You there, Zach?" We had left him in charge of the Library while we were gone. "Zach?"

"C'mon, we better hurry," I said, starting to run. "We have to get over there." We jogged across the building, hurrying towards the Library.

***\*This was how we explained locations throughout the school. First East Wing meant that it was the east wing on the first floor.***

As we entered the Head Quarters, we could easily tell that the Populars had gained the upper hand in this battle. I looked at the enemy soldiers, and quickly recognized their new stickers. They also had the same background color, pink and blue, but had a football and helmet. It was labeled 'Jock.' "Hey! Hey!" I yelled, pointing. "They took our idea!"

"Is that seriously what you are complaining about?" Arianna asked. "Our main base is being attacked, and you are mad they copied our idea for stickers?"

"That's Luke for you," Daniel said, pulling back the rubber band. I looked around, appreciating that, even vastly outnumbered, the Nerd troops fought well and fought hard. To my right, I saw Zach rip off his sticker. I quickly ran up to the Admiral.

"Zach! What happened?" I asked, crouching next to him.

"There were tons of 'em, just coming in through all the doors. There wasn't anything I could do."

"Except maybe call for backup," I added. "Whatever. It’s fine, we'll take them down either way." I turned around, only to find Daniel and Arianna had been shot down. I couldn't see what happened to Jen. "Everybody, over here!" I said in as loud a voice I dared to use in the Library. Even though the Librarian was nowhere in sight**\***, it still for some reason didn't feel 'right' to yell.

There were about 30 of us gathered in the middle. I assumed and hoped that most of the troops were still on patrol, or helping secure new outposts (we had just recently decided to start expanding outside the Library), because there was no way that we could last with that many men, whether we won this battle or not.

The Populars, in slightly greater numbers than ours, surrounded us. A scene from *Star Wars* came to mind. "Stop!" a voice called. It was Blake Thompson. "Well, well, well? If it isn't Luke Ericson? What do you have them calling you now? High Commander?" He laughed.

"Of course! This is the perfect opportunity to get a cool title! Why wouldn't I become High Commander?" Blake and I were actually pretty good friends. This helped remind me that, however serious the cause was, this 'war,' in the long run, was mostly going to just be fun.

"So, how's it going on your side, eh?" he asked me.

"Good. And I'd just like to take this time to remind you that we're at war."

**\**See the Appendix for the full explanation.***

"Of course, of course."

"So then you'll have no problem with me doing this. NOW!" Up from the second floor, hornets rained onto the Populars. This took them by surprise. It was impossible to dodge the projectiles. The enemy soldiers looked around frantically, trying to find out where the shots were coming from. By the time they found out, it was already too late. They began firing, but the Judges came and said many of them were already dead. Arguments broke out, but the Judges quickly settled the disputes.

Blake ripped off his sticker, looking around. "Well, Luke, you got us this time. But I don't think you'll be as lucky in the future."

I walked up to him. "I guess we'll see about that."

Blake left the room with his dead soldiers. I hurried to assist getting rid of the remaining enemies before they could retreat. It only took a few minutes to take care of them. George came down the stairs from the vantage point that won us this battle.

"George, George, George," I said, putting my hands on his shoulders. "You, sir, are getting promoted! This is twice now you've saved us! Now c'mon, let’s help clean up." We joined the others in helping out get rid of the mess, knowing that we had claimed another victory, but, once again, only just.

Chapter 10

# Revolutionizing the Revolution

Thursday, October 13th

I *was doing a Solo Patrol this Thursday afternoon, when Andrew approached me.*

"Afternoon, Admiral," I said. "You need something?"

"I think you'll like this," he replied excitedly. "The Geeks have created a new weapon. It isn't perfect, but it is definitely going to help." Andrew handed me what looked like a crumpled up piece of paper.

"Andrew," I said, "this looks like a crumpled up piece of paper." The Admiral smiled.

"Squeeze it, then throw." I did what I was told. I watched excitedly as the paper ball rolled down the hall. At first nothing happened.

"Um...Andrew...I..." *BOOM!* Ok, it wasn't really a boom, so much as a pop. Tiny balls of paper flew out in all directions, raining down through the air. I was astonished. "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Is that what I think it is?"

"Yes," Andrew smiled. "A grenade."

"How...how did you do that? That's awesome!"

"Here, I'll explain..." We quickly delved into a technical conversation about how the grenade worked, all of which is too advanced and boring to recount here.

But at that moment I knew that surely we had gotten the upper hand, and the Populars were in for a surprise.

That was the beginning of the schools own Industrial Age. Weapon after weapon was being developed, device after device being designed. **\***

The Geeks HQ, the Tech Room (workshop/computer lab), was turning into some sort of combination between a Science Laboratory and a War Factory. It had two Squads guarding it at all times. And it definitely helped that they were backed up by a room full of experimental weapons.

***\*A complete list of weapons on both sides, as well as a few pictures, diagrams, and explanations, can be found in the Appendix.***

So far a few things had been created, or close to being finished. The Grenade being one, and special hornet shooters being another. Yes, it was still just a rubber band that you wrapped around your fingers, but now it had special guiding marks that were supposed to help improve accuracy. The Geeks liked to think of ways to better things, even if it wasn't by using the most technology-oriented solution.

Another great thing that came out from the Factory was a walkie-talkie system, which created one major communications channel which would be secured by, basically, Operators. You could only get in if you knew the current access code. Although it was doubtful that the Populars were going to get on Walkie-Talkies and listen in, we figured better safe than sorry.

We also had what we called the Battle Channel. This was another channel for our Walkie-Talkies that we would use for quick access in fights, as it would be sort of hard to stop and say a code in the middle of a fight.

Anyway, at this point the Populars only had their Spit Wads and Hornets (although I was outraged to learn they were using *our* weapon until I realized that this would beat getting hit with spit).

A week after Andrew showed me the Grenade, I was at the Third North Wing Outpost The 3rd floor was pretty empty, so it was a great place for battle.

"The Pop's have been pretty quiet," a kid mumbled. He was right. The last attack, aside from a few small skirmishes, had been the one on the HQ last week.

"Yeah," I answered, looking around. "A bit unnerving if you ask me." I decided to use this opportunity to call a meeting. I returned to the HQ. Most of the Officers were present; those who weren't had more important things to do.

"Commander," I said, turning towards Daniel. "Give me a quick rundown on the soldier situation."

"All 350 of them are ready for combat, and more ask about joining every day," he announced.

"Christian, how are the Outposts looking?" I asked.

"We have almost all of the 2nd floor. The First North and South wings are owned by the Nerds. The Populars control the First East Wing. The West is contested territory."

"What about the Third Floor?" I asked.

"As you know, we have the Third West Wing. We don't really know anything about the rest, but obviously the Populars must be in there."

"Alright," I continued, "Andrew? Any new projects being worked on?"

"Unfortunately, we have to stop construction on the defense mines, they are a too difficult to make and they wouldn't be too useful. You could spot them from a mile away."

"That's too bad." I said. "Keep me informed on your projects" The Admiral nodded. Everyone looked as if they were about to leave, but I put my hand up. "Now hold on, we have some important business. The Populars have been awfully quiet lately, and I think..." I was cut off by my Walkie-Talkie. "Hold on, let me take this. Hello?"

"Luke?" the voice came out loud. We could hear a lot of noise in the background.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"It's Zach!" the voice answered.

"What is it, now? You always seem to stir up a lot of trouble, Zach..."

"No time for jokes! I'm at the factory! We're under attack!"

"Aha! The Populars finally decided to strike! I knew they were too quiet..."

"No, not Populars!" Everyone leaned forward in their chairs after they heard this.

"What?"

"It's a Neutral group! And..." Zach stopped there. I got out of my seat. "I swear, if he's dead *again...*C'mon everybody! Let's move! Lieutenants and Captains, take your troops and make sure all outposts are secure, just in case this somehow ends up being a diversion. Turn your walkie-talkies to the secure channel. Alert me if anything happens.

"Right!"

"Now, Generals and Admirals, you're with me. We'll all be on the Battle Channel. Number 6, remember? Now let's go! Everyone meet back here tomorrow!"

Chapter 11

# Rush to the Factory

Thursday, October 20th

W*e had completely forgotten about the neutral groups who joined in, and we never expected an attack, especially one this big and on a place this important.* Our strike force numbered at about 80 soldiers or so, theirs was probably about the same.

The Nerds charged into battle, waves of hornets pouring out towards The Opposition (the name given to the Neutral Groups when referred to as a whole). Those grenades were finally getting a good use, since things had been quiet since their invention.

Though this presented a problem, with all the ammo flying, much of it matching (many of The Opposition used the same, or similar, weapons as us), it was, at times, difficult to tell who was getting hit by who. I knew that even with the judges, this battle would probably be pretty 'unfair.'

The battle was intense, the mess was huge. We were pretty close to the factory; the entrance was just 10 Yards behind me. I figured the only way for the Opposition to retreat was back the way they came.

Dodging a hornet, I remembered that I had just scattered the Lieutenants and Captains. I got out my walkie-talkie and prepared to send the order, but before the words left my mouth, a very well-aimed, and very powerful, shot sent the radio spinning away through the chaos.

I ran towards it, trying not to get trampled. Someone caught site of me, and, taking advantage of my weakened state, began shooting. *One, two, three.* I quickly rolled away, grabbed the walkie-talkie, and threw a grenade out towards the shooter. It at least distracted them long enough for me to take cover.

I jumped behind a corner and switched my walkie-talkie onto the secured channel.

"Code, please," the Operator said lazily.

"Bumbles bounce!" I answered, peeking around my cover, noticing The Opposition slowly making their way towards the Factory.

"Alright, here you go."

"Captains Maxwell, Salos, Sanders, and Martin, do you read?"

"Yep."

"Yuh-huh."

"Gotcha."

"Hey there!"

"Alright," I explained, 'you four take your troops and help us at the Factory. But make sure you take the long way here, and go near the entrance to the Second East Wing! Once you arrive, wait for me, I'll meet you there." I didn't have time to wait for an answer. Turning, I noticed Abby a short distance from where I was standing. "General Franklins!" I called out. "Hurry, get over here!" She ran fired one last shot before running over to me.

"Yes?"

"How many soldiers do you have out here?" I asked her. She looked out over the battlefield, trying to pick out faces.

"Maybe...15?" she answered. "Why?"

"Gather them all, then follow me. We're gonna’ pummel these guys." The General nodded and ran off to gather her troops. I took this time to survey the carnage. 'Dead' Nerds and Members of the Opposition lingered on the edges of the battlefield, waiting for it to end so they could begin cleaning.

Stickers and ammunition littered the floor. I could hardly tell the difference between spots that got hit by grenades and those that didn't.

Abby returned with a troop of Nerds behind her. Once we met up with the others, we'd have a pretty decent sized force. "We're ready," she said.

"Alright, let's move!" I ordered. We quickly ran away from the fight, went down the stairs and walked around the battle. We kept the battleground within sight, but were careful to make sure we weren't noticed by the Opposition.

We could see it from pretty far away, though luckily the school normally had quite well behaved students, so a large, noisy group of kids was nothing that drew too much attention. And (though others may have laughed) I was quite convinced that some of the teachers knew what was going on, and actually enjoyed watching us battle it out. Maybe they were just glad the fights had stopped and were replaced by something much more entertaining.

We shortly arrived behind the warzone, just as the other troops came running up to the rendezvous point. "Okay everyone." I pointed towards the chaos. "They are right outside the factory. Now we should be able to take them out pretty easily, but George, once we meet them in battle, you and your men will rush straight inside the Factory. I want you to stay there and guard that place with your lives. I'll follow shortly. Got it?" The Captain nodded.

"Alright. We CANNOT afford to let them take this place. We're going to surround the Opposition and take them all down. Any questions?" Silence. "Good! Now let's do this!" We all got up, grabbed hornets and grenades, and charged.

We swiftly took out the Opposition Forces, nailing one soldier after another. Just in time, too! Twenty Populars, taking advantage of the chaos just as we were, were sneaking behind the battle and breaking through through the defenses of the Factory.

I noticed Zach, somehow still alive. I called out to him, tossed a grenade, and he threw it towards the Populars, wiping out a good chunk of them.

I quickly ran inside the Factory. George was already there, clearing up the small amount of Populars that the guards hadn't defeated yet. Throwing out a couple more grenades, I quickly took out the rest.

"Captain, do you think you can take it from here?"

"Of course!" George answered confidently.

"Good. Very good." I left the room and found myself back in the middle of the action. Even with our efforts, the Opposition was still strong, and even more Populars were arriving, from all sides.

I threw several grenades out into the madness, hoping that they met their mark. And then I saw him. None other than the Emperor himself, Conroy Baker (Emperor was not an official title, we Nerds just thought it was really cool to say).

He swiftly took out several soldiers, some Nerds and some Opposers. I aimed at him, but he dodged my hornets. I even tried throwing another grenade, but he quickly removed his jacket and blocked the projectile. *Crafty!* I thought.

Running back into the Factory, I approached Andrew who was about to run out with a box.

"Admiral Douglas!" I yelled.

"High Commander!" Andrew put the box on his knee and raised his hand in salute. Although I had the reputation of using titles the most, many found that it really helped set the mood.

"What's in the box?" I asked the Admiral.

"Equipment. I don't want anyone getting their hands on this."

"Anything useful?"

"We've got plenty of spare rubber bands, hornets, gre..." I cut Andrew off.

"Yes, yes, but anything...experimental?" Andrew took a good look at me, smiled, and turned around, and started digging through the box.

"It's not quite ready yet," he explained. "But we've got down the basic principles. Here it is!" The Admiral pulled out what appeared to be a plastic rifle.

"This...This is a gun?" I questioned, astounded.

"We modified parts of several Nerf and Air-Soft guns, to get...The PC-MG!" Andrew beamed.

"What's with the paint job?" I asked, observing the bright colors.

"Well we can’t go around waving this thing in people’s faces if it looks like a real gun...”

"Good point. What about ammunition, what does it fire?" I grasped the weapon. It was surprisingly light.

"This one: hornets," he answered. "We might be able to get other ammo types, though."

"Wow, you people are geniuses!" I complimented. "So...has this thing been tested yet?"

The PC-MG was fully loaded. One hundred and fifty hornets a clip, five clips a belt. I ran out of the door, raising the weapon.

"Behold! Doom has come!" I yelled cheesily. I pulled the trigger. Waves of hornets bombarded the Popular and Opposition forces, taking out countless soldiers.

I took out the empty clip, reached for another one, and reloaded. More and more and more hornets were littering the floor, and a lot of stickers were accompanying them.

People who I didn't shoot right away were frozen in awe at this new weapon, before I nailed them with its ammo, giving them a firsthand look at its power. Just then I saw Conroy again. I aimed and unleashed the weapon on the Popular Leader.

A sticker fluttered to the ground. Conroy's sticker. The Emperor grumpily started to walk off before realizing that he was one of the last ones standing. I gazed around, noticing that my new toy had done a lot more damage than I first thought. The cleanup had already begun.

I lowered the PC-MG, and let out a sigh of relief. Finally the full power of the Geeks had been demonstrated. And once again, victory had been awarded to the Nerds, but at a price. Thinking back, that seemed to happen a lot…

Chapter 12

# Bounty Hunters

Friday, October 21st

O*ur numbers had taken a huge blow after that battle.* Even though many of our troops were scattered throughout the school, many had been taken out, either by the Factory Raid or one of the many smaller ones launched by the Populars.

The Nerd soldier count was diminished to a total of 100, only about a third of our full army at the time. The only high-ranking members (Admiral and above) were Andrew, Daniel, and myself, and Rescue Day was the week after next.

At the next meeting, I grudgingly announced my plan. "Everyone, we have taken a massive blow. As much as I hate to say it, we need help. We need...." I paused, not sure if I should finish the sentence. "We need Bounty Hunters."

Five Mercenaries arrived to help us. They were each being paid two pieces of gum a day. Noah was one of them. "You won't be disappointed," he said smugly.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," I grumbled. "You can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?"

"What?"

I sighed. "Can you do as amazing as you say you can?"

"All that, and more," Noah assured me.

"Well then get to it!" I snapped. The Hunter looked as if he was about to say something, but decided against it and walked off.

Ten minutes later, I found myself in the Factory. Everyone looked up from their work.

"High Commander Miller!" someone approached me and saluted.

"At ease, General."

"Is there something you need?" he asked me.

"I have an announcement for you. Everyone, listen up!" All the Geeks stopped what they were doing and turned towards my direction. "I'd like to personally thank each and every one of you for your brilliant work! As you probably know I tested your PC-MG out recently, and it was absolutely amazing," I commended. "I'm hoping that the future holds even more wonderful surprises from this amazing factory! That is all." There was a little clapping and congratulations between friends, but work quickly resumed.

"Thank you, sir," the General said, turning back to me.

"No, thank you! You have all done a great job with those rifles. I'm guessing you're working on more, yes?"

"Of course, but it will take time to finish them. The one you used was an early prototype."

"That's expected, take all the time you need. Just keep up the good work!" I slowly walked back to the HQ, taking my time to think about what our next plan of action should be.

Things were pretty quiet after that. *Of course the one time I spend perfectly good gum, nothing happens* I thought. There was one raid, but pretty small. Though the crazy thing was, two bounty hunters, Ryan Roberts and Benjamin Lockwood, had fended it off all by themselves.

"Well, how about that?" Noah asked me with a smirk after word spread to the HQ.

"Yes, very impressive," I said nonchalantly. But other than that little skirmish, nothing happened until Rescue Day, though I was on my toes the whole time. I guess we did more damage to our enemies than I thought. We all knew that any large attack would probably be the end for the Nerds.

Chapter 13

# Age Disputes

Wednesday, November 2nd

R*escue day had never felt so far away.* As I handed out stickers to everybody, I realized we would need a lot more help. More than a few bounty hunters, anyway. I called a meeting with all of the high ranks, along with anybody who wanted to come.

We kicked it off right away. "Now, you are all completely aware of what happened last week," I stated. "Yeah, we won, but only just. Half us were dead, the other half disorientated after the chaos that came afterwards, trying to pick up the pieces. And if we win this, we are going to need a LOT more soldiers."

"Who else is there?" Rachael asked.

"I was thinking it is time to enlist more 8th graders," I answered. There were very few 8th graders in the Nerds at the time, Generals Abby Franklins and Lakira McDowell being some of the only ones that had decided to enlist.

I'm guessing it was because, for one, most people kept to their own age groups, so the "80's" as they were sometimes called, had little incentive to join up. Plus, the two grades just don't always get along for some reason.

Anyway, everyone in the room knew this, so there was a good deal of disapproval.

"Luke," Arianna turned, "you know why we can't do that. We just aren't meant to go together. It's like Oil and Water." This got a few shouts of agreement from the crowd.

"Oh please, you're all overreacting," I scoffed. "Don't you think you're all taking the whole 'we don't get along' approach a bit too seriously?"

"Luke," now Daniel was talking, "we're kids fighting a pretend war in school, and you're the High Commander. You say we're overreacting?"

"Touché," I grumbled. "But honestly, it's not that hard! Just have to play your cards right, be smooth. Smooth as a babies behind." Everyone let out a groan at that last remark.

"Anyway," I continued, "we have Abby and Lakira. We have connections. People that *they* know and trust. People that will get *them* on *our* side. C'mon guys. It's not like we have anything to lose, right? And when have I led you guys down the wrong path?"

"Well there was that time last year when you nearly..."

"Rhetorical question, Rachael."

"Oh c'mon, that's one of the coolest stories!" She turned to Christian and George to retell the event.

"So, Generals, are you two up for the job?" Abby and Lakira both nodded, ready for the mission.

I was accompanying the two Generals, though I planned to mostly sit back and let them try to handle things, at least for now. We didn't know quite where to start, but Lakira suggested we try the Chess Club, figuring we should start small and work our way up.

We entered their HQ after convincing the guards to let us in, and were followed by Captain Maxwell (scheduled to be appointed General) and his escort. Some kid, one I didn't recognize, came up to me. He could tell by our badges who we were.

"Listen, I already told you," the kid started, "we don't want to join your cause or whatever the heck you want."

"Listen, talk to these guys," I said, motioning to Lakira and Abby. "They'll better understand the situation, and I'm sure we can all agree on something we're happy with."

"I've got an option, that *I'm* happy with," the kid answered, raising his weapon towards me, pointing it at my head.

"Whoa, whoa. Ease up there. That would've been an awesome move, if we were in a film. But I'll let you guys talk it up. Because," I said looking behind the kid, "it doesn't look like you have much backup."

He smiled and lowered his weapon. "This game just keeps getting more and more fun."

"Ah, see, that's where you're wrong," I replied, sitting down. "This isn't a game. This is war." I let that sink in before letting the two Generals get to work.

"Alright, let's get this over with. The name's Mark. You two?"

"Abby."

"Lakira."

"Alright, and how do you plan on getting me to join you? What do I gain?"

"Frankly, not much," Abby answered. I flinched at that remark. That's not really something you want to hear from your own diplomat when you’re trying to make an alliance. "Despite what Luke said, this is a game. A game that, with us, you can win."

"Yeah," Lakira continued, "it doesn't look like you're going to be doing much holed up in here with a fighting force that small."

"You'd be surprised. We have ton of other clubs willing to back us up." I silently took note of this.

"Even more reason for you to join," Lakira said, thinking quickly. "With your Allies and our Forces, we could easily win over the Populars."

"Exactly," Abby finished. "If we get people the size of the Factory Assaulters, we could easily double our Army, and how could the Populars stand up against that? And Mark, I've seen you get picked on. Not like some of the others, but it’s happened. Don't you want a chance to get back, even if it's mostly in the name of Fun?" For a moment, silence. Then Mark started moving.

"Alright, alright, I'll talk to the others. Come back here at the Beginning of Battle the day after tomorrow." Then he walked off.

Our party got up to leave and head back to the HQ, it was almost six o'clock.

"He sounded genuinely interested," Lakira said, turning to me.

"Yeah, I think you might be looking at a pretty big army come Rescue Day," Abby added.

"This is going to be awesome!" George cheered.

"Yes, yes!" I yelled. "Today Chess Club, tomorrow the World! Mwa ha ha ha!" We all laughed as we returned to the HQ, sure that tomorrow held a much brighter future for the Nerds, and doom for all those who opposed.

The time came for us to return to the Chess Club's Base. Although we left in high spirits the other day, we were unsure what to expect this time around.

"Alrighty," I said as we entered the room. I noticed Mark standing in front of several other students.

"I've made my decision, as have the rest of the leaders," he announced, motioning towards the group behind him. "We pledge our support to the Nerds."

"Amazing!" I exclaimed, shaking his hand. "That's great news. But we'll need some things from you before this begins. We're going to need stickers, and all the leaders need to be assigned as Admirals..."

We delved into conversation, talking about all the things we would need, and how things would be working out from now on. One matter was left though; a name.

"So, you guys will be: The Chessies!" I yelled. Everyone burst out laughing.

"The *Chessies?*" Mark screamed, unable to contain his laughter.

"Oh come on, it's not THAT bad. And it's not like we don't have weirder names. Instrumentals, for one."

"Yes, but *Chessies!"* the newly appointed Admiral pounded his fist on the table. After the laughing subsided, we finally continued. Despite the outbreak, we all agreed on the name Chessies. Everything was in order. The Nerds, once Rescue Day came, would have a massive army on their hands. One that would certainly destroy the Populars.

As we wrapped things up, I decided to use the same phrase I used all those days ago when the war began. "Well everyone, I look forward to seeing on the battlefield." We left the room once more, even happier than the last time we had made this walk.

"Well, Admirals," I said turning to, formerly, ten percent of the 8th graders in the Army, "It looks like I'm a little short on hands. How would you two like to be commanders of the 80's?"

"Us? Well I guess..." Abby replied sarcastically.

"Yeah, it's not like we're doing anything else," Lakira added. We all laughed and hurried to the Library to tell everyone the good news.

Chapter 14

# A Chat With Mr. O'Neil

Wednesday, November 9th

I *was in the Library this Wednesday telling some people about the changes that would be happening in preparation for next week.* Although we came to an agreement last Wednesday, there were still a lot of things we had to set up. Guard rotations had to be changed, soldiers had to be reassigned to different outposts, ammunition and weapons had to be redistributed so that everybody had enough. There were tons of things that had to be done and we didn’t plan to finish them all by Rescue Day.

I was in the middle of an argument with somebody about why they wouldn’t be getting as many grenades for the next couple of weeks when Mr. O’Neil walked in. He looked around and muttered something under his breath that I couldn’t hear.

As he approached me, I told the other person that I wouldn’t keep arguing about this and walked away.

“Luke, could I talk to you for a moment?” Mr. O’Neil asked.

“Sure thing,” I answered. We both walked towards a quiet corner before he began talking.

“Nice…operation you have going here,” he said. “Mind telling me what this is all about?”

“Of course, it’s…well…" I didn't know what to say. "Hmm...it’s sort of a…err…”

“Did you honestly think we wouldn’t notice?” asked Mr. O'Neil. I chuckled nervously. “Don’t worry, you’re not in trouble. I just wanted to say that some of the other teachers and I *have* in fact noticed what’s going on here. Frankly it’s kind of amusing. Just watch what you’re doing, okay?”

“Wait…are you saying…are you saying that it’s alright to do all this stuff?”

“Are *you* saying you had the intention of breaking the rules when you set all this up?” Mr. O’Neil asked me.

“Well, no but…”

“Now, under normal circumstances we wouldn’t allow something like this to happen and we’d stop it from the start, but from what we’ve seen you’ve done a pretty good job of keeping it under control, and since this has started we haven’t seen any fights. So we'll let you keep this up, as long as your careful!”

“Well, that’s…That’s great! Thanks!” Mr. O'Neil smiled and left the Library, after taking one last look at my handy work.

And there you have it. I was right all along. Sounds a bit ridiculous, huh? Almost like some desperate plot turn in a book or movie. Well, that’s what happened, and I can tell you, I felt a bit calmer for the rest of the war.

Chapter 15

# Evicted

Wednesday, November 16th

T*he group that arrived in the Library next Rescue Day was way bigger than we thought it would be.* Even though we had met with all the leaders, we had never imagined that the combined forces would be anywhere near this numerous. It was a miracle they didn't attack us during the aftermath of the Factory Raid, or we surely would have been doomed.

Though I'm guessing the numbers were so big, not just because of the large neutral network of friends, but for another reason. Our recent victories, and this new alliance which promised many more, hand encouraged many remaining Sevees as they were sometimes called, to join up with already represented clubs and join their peers in battle. Also, many uninvolved 80's decided to join up as well, in classes that contained both grades.

So not only did many of our clubs double their strength, twice as many groups were added to the roster. Here are just a few of the groups who decided to join**\***:

Eighth Grade Computer Class Students (adding onto the Geeks)

Eighth Grade Lacrosse Team

Seventh Grade Soccer Team

Eighth Grade Band and Orchestra Members (adding to the Instrumentals)

Eighth Grade Robot Club

Seventh and Eighth Track and Field Members

\****A complete list of represented groups can be found in the Appendix.***

We had a total of 600 troops, nearly double what we had before. I was guessing that the Populars had about 400 or so. That meant there were still 1000 people out there, either as Opposers or not in the war at all (200 students had come later in the year). But the Populars had done some recruiting of their own.

I was just in the middle of a meeting. "Time is of the essence," I explained. "The Populars will be swooping on the rest of the students like a hawk on a lone mouse. I think it's time we..."

My Walkie-Talkie cut me off. "High Commander!" a girl's voice said, "We have a situation out in Field A! One of our outposts is under attack by a huge army!"

"That's pretty far out, what could they want with that?" I asked. " I mean we only put people there so we could have an outpost outside!"

"Wait," Daniel yelled, "Andrew told me that he would be at Field A with Zach and Abby to test out a weapon!"

"Well if Zach's over there, there's bound to be trouble," I said getting up. "He somehow always manages to get himself killed. How many are there, would you say?" I asked the girl.

"At least 200, maybe more. Hurry, we can't hold on much longer!"

"200? Alright guys." Everyone was out of their chairs now. "We better get over there. With multiple high ranks, and a secret experimental weapon, we need to defend that base. This is almost too good to be true!" I paused at the door, motioning towards some of the captains. "All those Populars in one place. Our massive army will surely decimate theirs!"

We marched down the stairs with a force of 400, ready for battle, confident that our victory was assured. What could go wrong? But as we approached the outpost, I knew something *was* wrong. There wasn't a battle here. There wasn't a single Popular in sight. I approached my friends who seemed to have just finished testing the weapon.

"Where are they? Where are the Populars?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"What?"

"Someone radioed us, said there was a huge strike force attacking this very place."

"Nope," Zach said. "We were just testing out this awesome thing; have you seen it? It's a..." The General was cut off by all our Walkie-Talkie's going off.

"This is General Christian Smith! The Library is under attack! Heeelp!"

"It was a diversion," I whispered, shivering as a sudden breeze blew by. "Everybody, back to the HQ! Andrew, take the guards here and get this weapon to a safe place, got it? The rest of you, let's go!" We raced towards the Library, completely abandoning the outpost. In my overconfidence, I had only left 50 Nerds to guard the Headquarters, the other 150 were scattered around the school.

I knew, with hundreds in the Library battling it out, we were in for one heck of a fight.

It was chaos in there. Hornets, spit wads, even some paper ninja stars, littered the floor. I looked up to see George and his men fighting out the Populars on the second level. They seemed to be the only major group of survivors.

"CHAAARGE!" I screamed. Nerds poured into the Library from all directions, swooping in on the unsuspecting Populars, though their numbers somehow surpassed our own. I'm guessing there were at least 500 pouring in from all the doors. It was a big library.

The battle was epic. Grenades flew. Hornets hit. A few PC-MG's whirred. Troop after troop ripped of their stickers, but only to be replaced by more and more.

Spit wads rained down on us, taking out many soldiers. Our numbers were great, but this was a choke point. We couldn't all fit through the doors at once, so a lot of their power was lost. We couldn't hold out long.

I narrowly dodged a hornet, shooting two of my own. "Zach, we have to get up there and help George!"

"Got it!" The two of us fought our way through the massive army, trying to help one of our top Generals. I rolled behind a bookshelf, noticing the novel in front of me was one I wanted to read for months, but was always checked out. "Hey, look! I've been waiting for this!"

"Hey, Luke, I could sort of use your help over here!" Zach called from the aisle across from me.

"Sorry!" I got out from behind my cover, rolling a couple grenades behind the Populars, taking a few of them out.

The Judges had a very hard job that day. They could barely keep up with things going on, let alone interfere with them. It was nearly impossible to manage everything, and chaos ensued.

I snuck up around some Populars, quickly firing off a series of Hornets taking some more out. Zach came up from behind and finished the rest of them off. We ran up to George and his men, and quickly took out all the Populars on the second floor. But it was too late. Looking down, we could see our 'invincible' force was surrounded, outnumbered, and surely dead.

"Alright, we're gonna do this like I did in the other raid," George whispered. "We'll surprise 'em and take them all out."

"Not so fast." We turned around, and a squad of Jocks was behind us. I guess that these guys had learned from last time. There was no way we could get out of this one.

We were brought downstairs and put with the rest of the Nerds. Just then, an unexpected figure emerged from the mass of Populars.

The Empress, Jordan Wilson stepped into the open. The Populars lowered their weapons. A few others were with her. Blake, Conroy, and Sakina. The Sakina related to our very own Commander, Lakira. I thought about how terrible this war was, splitting up friends and family alike.

"Hey, Blake," I said. "I guess you were right?"

"I guess so. It's time we end this."

"Right!" Conroy agreed. "Fire!"

"Wait!" Jordan commanded. Nobody moved. "We can't kill *all* of them. Who knows how many Nerds are left? We need to take prisoners. We need some leverage. A way to get what we want. They give us something, we release some prisoners. Right?"

"And we can get information out of them," Sakina added. "It will make it a lot easier to defeat these guys if we can find out where their bases are, where we can find weapons."

"How about this," Conroy said. "We shoot half of them, the other half we send off to jail?"

"I like the sound of that," Blake agreed, smiling. I knew I was done for. A kid tried to escape and began running for the door, but he didn't get far. The Populars immediately shot at him.

But just before they could fully defeat him, Nerds poured in from all sides. Not many, but enough to give us the distraction we needed. "Now!" I yelled. The chaos broke out once more.

This time, though, instead of breaking out the weapons, we made a break for the exit. The rescue force covered our escape. "Blake, Sakina, after them, after them!" I heard Jordan yell behind us.

"Everybody, get to the factory!" I whispered. "And don't let them follow us! We can't let them know where we are going!" We rushed through the halls, not letting anything stop us. We managed to defeat the force that followed us, although they took out a fair amount of soldiers, as if the survivor count wasn't low enough already. I saw Christian, and found out he was the one who had led the rescue.

"I thought you were dead!" I yelled.

"Not today," he answered, smiling. “I got out of there as soon as I could to get help. So a couple outposts might be completely undefended…”

“Trust me, it was worth it.” As we entered the Factory, Andrew came running up to us. "Someone filled me in! How many made it out?"

"Not enough," I answered. "Even with General Smith's brave rescue, few of us escaped. Not like there were many survivors to begin with. Regardless...this is terrible...This morning we had 600 soldiers. I'd consider us lucky if we still have a third of that many!"

"What happened?" Andrew asked me.

"This was my fault," I explained. "I got cocky. I made a stupid mistake, and now we're left with practically nothing. I thought 'well, might as well take our ENTIRE ARMY with us! What the heck!' And now look where that got us."

"Hey, you got excited. We all would've done the same thing. I mean hundreds of people under your control, fighting for you in a fake war? C'mon, anybody could've done it."

"Thanks, Andrew. But we have to act fast. They won't expect us to do anything for now, so we have a little bit of time, maybe a day, before they start hunting us down."

We had decided to go into stealth mode for a while. Under the radar. No major attacks, and less gigantic outposts. We figured if we were spread this thin, any victory for the Populars would be very minor.

Although many of our troops were dead and Rescue Day was next week, a great deal of our soldiers had been captured, which meant they wouldn't be able to do anything until we broke them out. Which meant we would have to bide our time until the moment was right.

We had about 200 Nerds left. This was a crushing defeat. We all met up in the Factory, our newly designated HQ. "Now," I began, everyone picking up the urgency in my voice, "it is essential that we get the Drama Club's support. They are the largest standing Neutral force, and our best chance of busting our people out of prison." It looked as though some where going to argue, although I didn't give them a chance. I knew they would have good reason.

You see, the Drama Club, naturally, had a ton of good actors. So what better chance to practice acting and improv, than a fake, long lasting war? And they happened to be portraying the gruff, loner, warrior type. They had staged several successful raids on mildly important outposts, none of which I had been a witness to. They were fierce, smart, and large in numbers. I remember asking myself why I hadn't tried to enlist them earlier.

Rachael, Arianna, George, myself, and 12 of the best trained Nerds rushed towards the Drama Room. This mission was of the upmost importance, its success or failure could turn the tide of the war.

We approached the door to our destination, and I looked around. "I've got a bad feeling about this…" I announced quietly.

"What makes you say that?" George asked me.

"Well probably the fact that most of the lights are turned off and…" George put his hand on the doorknob and prepared to push when several hooded figures surrounded us.

"And the fact that we were surrounded by creepy hooded warriors," I finished. "You guys beat me to it."

"Notice how that came *second* in the list," Rachael commented.

"You're out of your territory, Nerd," a voice whispered. "All of you, inside. Now!" George cast me a sideways glance. I nodded, and motioned for him to step inside. We entered a large dark room, filled with more hooded figures and even a couple fake campfires. *Sheesh* I thought. *Talk about Role-play. Lucky ducks.*

"How long did you know they were there?" Arianna asked me.

"Oh, nearly since the beginning. They're good, I'll give them that, but it's a bit easier to notice people when they are the only ones wearing cool, dark, flowing cloaks."

"And you didn't think this would matter to us?" George continued angrily.

"Why would it? They didn't kill us, even though they had more than enough people, especially considering they would've taken us by surprise. So I thought I might as well let them have an awesome looking ambush."

"They could've been waiting for more people," Arianna replied.

"I guess," I answered. "But there was really no need. And hey, it all worked out in the end, right?" I smiled. Nobody else did.

"Stop," the person commanded. "Hand over your weapons." We did as we were told, but I had to intervene.

"See, you got the part wrong," I told the guard. "*Real* shadowy-warriors would take our weapons *before* entering." He grunted. "Hey, just tellin' you how it is. What can I say? I'm a fantasy nerd."

"Enough!" a voice cried out. The guard stepped aside, and in front of us stood a tall girl with long black hair.

"Your voice…" I commented, "it seems so familiar…" The girl ignored me.

"So, what are you doing in our land?" she questioned. I glanced over and saw a pile of prop swords, obviously being used as their weapons. The girl caught my eye. "Don't get any ideas," she told me.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute! I know who you are now. Yes, yes, I remember." The girl smiled, as if she was anticipating this. "You were the one who told us about the Library Raid. And the one who lied about the Outpost Raid! And I bet your name isn't even Jen!"

"Yes, and I must say, I never thought it would work out so perfectly," she laughed. "You taking your whole army? Hah!"

"Yeah, yeah.”

“Seriously, that was ridiculous. It couldn’t have gone better.”

"I know!"

"And then they even took a hundred people prisoners!"

“Alright! I get it!”

"Anyway," the girl continued, "everything you said is true, except for that last part. My name *is* in fact Jen. Jennifer Alison. So I'm guessing, now that you know the truth, you don't want to ally."

"Hah! Are you kidding?" I yelled. "This makes me want to ally even more! Now I know you're even smarter, stronger, and quite frankly, cooler than we first thought. Right, guys?" I looked around for approval. I didn't get much. "Right?"

"Luke," Rachael said, turning to me. "These guys are the reason most of the army is *dead.*"

"Yeah," Arianna added. "I don't think this is a great idea."

"Correction. *I'm* the reason most of the army is dead. These guys over here," I motioned towards Jen and those behind her, "are simply playing the game. Playing it smart, I might add. I made a stupid mistake. And I'm definitely not going to that keep me from allying with the best Role-players in school." I turned back around towards the Drama Kids. "So, are you guys in?"

"What do we get out of it?" Jen asked.

"Well," I began, quick to do this before anyone stopped me, "George here has saved me, and our army, more times than I can count. Arianna has been great at leading the troops; organizing them and making sure each base is properly defended. Rachael has contributed a lot of ideas that we use today, and keeps the army's morale up. And, as for me, well…” I paused. “All those years of Starcraft are finally paying off. What you see in front of you are some of the best tacticians, fighters, and organizers in all of Castle Vine Campus.”

"Is that it?" Jen asked me, unimpressed (or pretending to be).

"Well I could go into details, but we'd be here hours. Although, there is one other thing…" I paused. "The cause…You see, even if not everyone knows, or even agrees, we fight for a reason. Remember those fights? They stopped when the war started. I guess you could say we fight for freedom, justice. Luke's Freedom Fighters, I like the sound of that." Jen laughed again.

"Well, I suppose that settles it. We're in."

We casually walked back to the Factory, knowing that Dramatic Soldiers hiding in the shadows would alert us to any danger. I turned to my friends.

"You guys barely said anything," I said. "Something wrong?"

"First of all, that place gives me the creeps," George answered, shivering. "Did they really have to dim the lights?"

"Oh come on, you know you thought it was cool."

"Yeah, maybe, but still creepy…Plus the fact that…"

"What, that they had spies that managed to infiltrate the army and the radio channels? And they already know about the prisoners? Yeah, I was a bit worried about that, too. But at least I know they're on our side now."

"Are they?" Rachael piped up. "Who knows, this might just make it easier for them to get us."

"You guys worry too much! Jeez. It'll be fine! Because believe it or not," I lowered my voice to a whisper, "I have spies of my own. I'll know if anything's up." Everyone looked a bit surprised, but realized they could be being watched. “I’m as observant as a hawk. Nothing gets pass these eyes unnoticed,” I continued, walking straight into a pole. Everyone laughed. “Okay, okay, something got by once. Sue me. So, what about you, Arianna? What do you think?"

"I don't know, something's not right. But what it is, I'm just not sure."

"Trust me guys, everything will be…Perfect."

Chapter 16

# Nerds...In Space!

Saturday, December 3rd

W*ith the addition of the Dramatics, things were going exceedingly well.* They added 150 soldiers, all fully armed and deadly. This meant our total army (including those imprisoned) was at 800, and the Populars had this many as well. There were still 400 neutral students, some ready to fight, others not. But the Populars had the upper hand; they had about 250 of our soldiers behind bars.

A couple did escape; it's hard managing a couple hundred kids in a 'prison.' Unfortunately, this only lasted a few days. Within a week, the steady, if weak, pour of escapees stopped. We weren't quite sure what happened.

The really bad part though, was that the Populars seemed to like taking more prisoners now. Deaths went down, hostage counts went up. Despite the prospect of trading prisoners for supplies working, it seemed that the Populars thought it would be more useful simply to keep a ton of prisoners and run down our reinforcements.

Although our information seemed to be leaking out quickly...three of our remaining outposts were attacked within two days after the loss of the library. Luckily any major secrets we had (besides the codes for the comm-channels, which we could simply change), were kept between me and a few trusted friends.

Back to the topic of the Dramatics, the warriors supplied us with tons of prop swords (they had went out and bought crates full of them, and promised to donate them to the school at the end of the war). In turn, we gave them 20 PC-MG's, which were primarily being constructed in the homes of those who went home during the weekends.

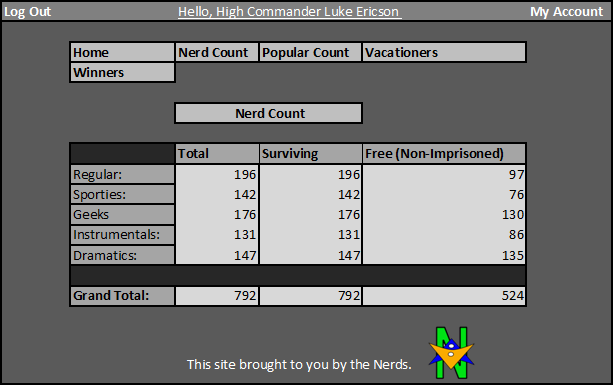
One Saturday, I got to go visit Andrew while him and his team were working on one of the weapons. As time went on, the guns got better, faster, more efficient. Not only did they perfect their building techniques, they were getting better materials. They used less paint-ball-gun parts and started building more on their own, now that they knew more about them.

You see, since the Dramatics were portraying gruff warriors, they tended to be a bit more stubborn, and openly 'defied me' a bit. It could get annoying sometimes, but not only was it cool, it normally led to a better success. Jen and her Generals were smart (not that my own weren't), and they were very good at what they did, both in playing their shadowy-roles and on the battlefield.

I was just observing the website one day, making sure the Dramatics had all signed up. I had teamed up with the Geeks to create a site where each person was given a Username and Password, and if they died, they would mark something online that labeled them as 'Dead.' Luckily, most people in the war were honest ones.

The site would reset every Rescue Day, and everyone would be at 'Survivor.' Both teams' total soldier counts were displayed, so we would know if one team had beaten the other.

If ever you planned to be gone for an extended period of time, you would alert a leader so that you would be termed as 'Dead' until you returned. Here is a picture:



Although I had only designed the site and the Geeks had taken care of the programming, I was very satisfied with myself. Maybe not that pretty, but it got the job done.

Yet I knew we needed more.

The Nerds needed an occupation force in Cyber Space. This site was great, and met its purpose, but I needed something to help me keep in better contact with my fellow Nerds.

I got online and began making my own site. "What?" I screamed, startling my turtles. "nerd.com is taken? Come on…" I started thinking of other names. I tried all these: thenerds.com, nerdcentral.com, nerdparadise.com, nerdo.com, nerdcommand.com, and nerdgathering.com.

I was down to my last idea. Under 'Url' I typed "thenerdarmy.com" and clicked 'Check Availability.' Not taken. I hurriedly pressed OK, as if someone would take it right then.

I called Andrew up to help me, and we worked on the site through the night, quickly trying to finish so it was done by tomorrow. Finally, we finished. Each Nerd would be assigned a password. Everyone would get a profile page which contained their name, rank, picture, and survival status.

There was also a Tactics Page. It had all the strategies anybody would need to know. After that came the Outpost Page. It listed all the bases as well as who controlled them. Next was the News Page. All of the important announcements were listed here.

Last but not least was the Meeting Page. It included live Forums and Chat Rooms, for easy communication between the army.

Seems like a lot, doesn't it? Not something you would want to fall into the wrong hands. Luckily we managed to make it so that only those who were one of the Nerds and logged in could access the site. Also the Tactics Page could only be viewed if you had the special code, which changes every week or so. Just a small step to keep spies at bay, but about all we could do.

*This site* I thought *may end up playing a huge part in this war.*

Chapter 17

# Unconventional Torture

Monday, December 5th

T*his chapter is from Lieutenant Benjamin Lockwood’s perspective.* Although I wrote it, he has approved and says it is all correct.

The sudden flood of light blinded me. The Populars had put a bag over my head so that I couldn’t see where we were. I agreed to it since I didn’t want to be the one that ruins the mood. This looked like some kind of conference room that wasn’t being used by any teachers.

“So,” a girl started, “what can you tell us about your little Nerd friends?”

“Why would I tell you anything?” I asked defiantly. There was another kid in the room. He sighed.

“We didn’t want to have to do this,” the boy said. “I thought there would be rumors around the prison by now. Sarah, get out the pen.” The girl reached into her backpack and pulled out a black ink pen. She handed it to the other kid.

“What are you going to do with that?” I laughed. “Draw a mustache on me?”

“Not quite,” the boy answered. He clicked the pen. Once, twice, tree times. I laughed. But then he kept clicking it faster and faster. The girl pulled out her own pen. She started clicking as well. They went on like this for who knows how long, I lost track of time. Faster and faster, louder and louder.

As my smile disappeared, theirs grew. This was insane. *Click, click, click, click, click, click!* I think I yelled, I’m not quite sure. I didn’t know how such a simple noise could drive me so nuts!

Both pens moved closer to my ears. I thought I would go mad. Just then the girl let out a crazy laugh. Yeah, I’m pretty sure she was insane.

“What’s wrong with you people?” I cried. It felt like my ears were about to shrivel up and fall off my head, right after my brain exploded. The mixture of clicking and laughing was enough to drive anybody off the edge.

“Okay, okay!” I yelled. “You got me, just quit the clicking!”

“There, was that so hard?” The duo smiled and prepared to say something when three figures walked past the window. They went past me before doing a double take, then burst into the room.

“Freeze!” one of them shouted, ninja star poised. They were wearing a Nerd sticker. “Hey, that’s Lieutenant Lockwood! Come with us, sir.”

“Don’t mind if I do,” I commented. I stuck my tongue out at my torturers before they got shot. They grumpily removed their stickers. “Thanks for that. I was just about to go mad,” I said to my saviors as we left the room.

“Don’t mention it,” one replied. “You’re lucky tiny-bladder over here,” he motioned towards another member of the group, “had to use the Little Nerd’s Room.”

“I still have to go,” he commented.

“Yeah, yeah. After that we’ll head back to HQ.”

“How long did it take to get the Library back?” I asked.

“Oh, no, we’ve moved to the Factory,” the soldier answered. “So we better hurry. It’s a long way back, what with that pit stop, and the battle is almost over.”

After the kid had finished his…business…one of the soldiers asked me a question.

"Wait a minute, how come you don't know about the library? Weren't you being held in there?" Just as I opened my mouth to speak, the bell rang. "Well, battle's over. Never mind. See ya!" The group walked off, leaving me behind.

I figured my important info that I was about to reveal could wait until tomorrow. Unfortunately, I didn’t get a chance to tell anybody until it was too late…

Chapter 18

# Prison Break

Tuesday, December 6th

T*he raid began right after 4:00.* I had posted the plan on the website the night before, and I didn’t want to give the enemy a chance to react if they were in fact ‘listening’ in.Although we went through a few security measures on the cyber outpost, it still made me feel vulnerable, especially when I remembered Jen infiltrating the radio channels.

I had decided it was time to strike. We were going to get those Nerds out of prison. Everything was set. Our scouts were placed, the troops were ready, and the few who hadn’t read the plan last night had been filled in.

Even if we failed, we would still have enough troops to last. We were sending only 150 soldiers, as we had scouted the base ahead of time and saw little defenses. We figured that most of them were probably in the Safe Room**\***, but if we struck fast then we could probably take the library back, and the prisoners.

Learning from the last time we battled here, most of these soldiers would not enter the library. Many would remain outside, and we were hoping a majority of the fighting would happen there as well.

I pulled out my walkie-talkie. “George, come in George. You read me General?”

“I read you loud and clear,” he answered.

“Alright, how are things looking?”

“Populars have been moving in and out of the Library, but there are fewer soldiers each time. They should be done in about five, ten minutes.”

“Alright, I’ll start sending some small squads over to you. I think you can handle putting them into position, yes?”

“Sure can. I’ll be waiting.”

***\*There were multiple Safe Rooms in the school. Places like the Library and Computer Lab obviously, had to be used for more than the war effort. So therefore we had smaller parts of these facilities that everyone agreed that they would not go into for regular purposes, unless their team had control of it or were attacking. This way people could still use these areas without seeing all our secrets and defenses.***

“Luke, out.” I put the walkie-talkie away. “All right, 17th Division, you’re taking the lead! Remember, you’re just meeting up with the scouts, so be stealthy! 16th Division, you’re up next, follow behind. Meet up with General Maxwell at the camp. We’ll be following soon.” The troops quickly left towards the rendezvous point, ready for battle. Some time passed before George told us it was safe to proceed. I didn’t waste any time before heading out.

“Alright everyone, let’s move!” All those who were left picked up their gear and headed out. A flood of students, maybe 80 or so, started pouring out the doors. I took that time to silently thank whoever decided to have such a large tech room, and one that had both computers and a workshop.

I grabbed my PC-MG and headed out the door behind Daniel.

The ‘camp’ was already buzzing with activity by the time we got there. Some were doing last minute target practice and tried shooting things like cans and cardboard targets. Others simply talked as if everything was normal. Daniel and I approached George. Abby and Zach were already there.

“Status report,” I said. George was the first to speak.

“I’ve scattered several squads of about 20 or so around the library. The scouts have told me that the back entrance to the library is less heavily guarded, so I say we put a heavy strike force in the front to let a smaller team sneak through the back and take them by surprise.”

I nodded. “Sounds like a good plan. Anybody have something to add?” This time Abby spoke.

“I suggest we try to take the fighting outside as soon as possible.”

“Agreed, I almost forgot about that. Here’s what we’ll do. We have the large strike force attack in the front and then quickly retreat outside, luring them into an even larger platoon. After the Library is cleared out, me and Daniel will take some men and go through the back like George said.” Nobody argued. We quickly assembled the troops and moved out.

Daniel and I were hiding around a corner along with twenty other men. We could see twelve Populars guarding the rear entrance to our former HQ. I pulled out my walkie-talkie.

“Zach, you guys in position?” I asked.

“Yep, I’m about to go in. George and Abby are ready. I’ll bring everyone out as soon as I know I’ve got the Popular’s attention.”

“Gotcha,” I replied. “Whenever you’re ready, go ahead. Just have George or Abby radio me once you’ve lured everyone outside.” I lowered the walkie-talkie.

“Hopefully this battle goes a bit better than last time,” Daniel whispered.

“Yeah, just a bit.” A slight pause, then, “You think we just jinxed ourselves?”

“Definitely.”

“Wait,” I pointed, “something’s happening.” Someone rushed out of the library and shouted at the guards. Most of them left, leaving only four for us to defeat. This was shortly followed by a voice over the radio.

“Alright, it’s working. You’re good to go!”

“Let’s move! I’ll lead the way. Daniel, you cover the rear.” We rushed towards the entrance, quickly taking out the guards before they even knew what was happening.

We stopped to grab a few hornets, then quickly snuck inside the Library. From where we were, we could catch some glimpses of the battle raging outside. Although the troop outside had taken the Populars by surprise, it was obvious this would be a tough fight, which made our job all the more important.

I quickly crouched behind a bookshelf and waited for all the others. “Alright, Daniel you stay here. Watch me. Austin, you come with me and we’ll check out the safe room.” Daniel nodded in agreement. I looked around, saw no one, and then I quickly ran towards the door. I waited for David to show up before I peeked inside.

“Wait a minute…” I looked around. Yes, this was definitely the safe room. But something wasn’t right. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. “Austin, look inside the window. Do you see any prisoners?” The soldier looked inside.

“Is this a joke? I don’t’ see anyone.”

“Exactly….empty…” I continued to look around inside, as if the prisoners were simply hiding. “C’mon, let’s go.” We scurried back behind the bookshelf.

“They’re gone,” I stated.

“What?”

“The prisoners, they’re gone!”

“What do you mean, ‘gone?’” Daniel questioned.

“I mean gone! They’ve obviously been moved somewhere.” I looked around the corner. I still wasn’t sure who would win, but it appeared the Pouplars had gotten some backup and gained the upper hand, if only slightly. I wasn’t going to risk another defeat like this.

“Well, shouldn’t we jump in and help?” Daniel asked, about to get up.

“No. This is a risk I’m not willing to take, especially after last time,” I answered, bringing the walkie-talkie to my mouth. “Everyone, pull out.” George was first to reply.

“What? Luke, are you sure?”

“You heard me. Pull out. This mission was a failure.”

Chapter 19

# Recruitment FTW

Friday, December 9th

I *had never counted on recruiting all the Opposition.* I didn't think we would need this many soldiers. Of course, I had never counted on losing the HQ. I had never counted on losing so many troops. I had never counted on having a bunch of awesome shadowy role-players join my army. In fact, I had never counted the war lasting more than a month or two. Yet here I was.

This week was boring. I was at an outpost with the 21st Division**\***, doing normal old guard duty. This was my personal squad, which had some of the greatest fighters in the entire army. George Maxwell, Benjamin Lockwood, Ryan Roberts, these were some of the best soldiers we had to offer.

Both Ben and Ryan were former bounty hunters, but after a while decided to join us. They were both exceptional fighters, amazing on the battlefield.

Then both of them got locked inside a Popular prison camp. Of course, Ben was lucky. He got rescued early.

I knew we had to free Ryan somehow, and all the other countless Nerds stuck in jail, but we were still recuperating from our defeat, both the loss of the HQ and last week’s. It wouldn't be easy, but at least we had time. The Standard Learning Reviews, or SLR's were coming up, and many people liked to do a bit of extra studying for them. Although 'Standard' was in the name, some of it was actually quite challenging. Due to some complications, the test had to be pushed back right behind our vacation.

I had an idea. With the SLR's going on, we could use this time to sneakily move through the school. Parts of the Opposition still stood, maybe another 150 soldiers. We could use that. Badly. Like I said, the prisoner count was getting crazy.

I called for a meeting.

"Alright guys," I began. "As you know, things aren't looking too good. The Populars have about 300 of our men behind bars, and we thought they might be in the Library Safe Room. Obviously, that isn’t the case. Lieutenant Lockwood and approached me and said that all the prisoners have been relocated to the Gym. Although we’re going to have to break them out soon, I think we should use this time to recruit the rest of the Opposition.” Everyone agreed, so we didn't waste any time in setting off.

***\*For a full explanation of the 21st division and its counterparts, see the Appendix.***

Daniel, Lakira, Christian and I strode through the hall with 30 soldiers. The rest of the Opposition were much closer to Popular Territory, so this was a potentially dangerous mission. This also gave us an excuse to go scout out the enemy defenses.

We snuck past the library, meeting no trouble.

“Something’s not right,” Lakira announced. “It’s too quite.”

“Relax,” I replied. “The Dramatics probably took out any guards posted here.”

“I hope you’re right..."

We crept along, slowly moving our way towards the abandoned class rooms that the Opposers dwelled in.

“There they are,” Daniel pointed out. “The last of the Opposers.” We marched up to the door, the Dramatics waiting for us. They had already talked to the guards, so we went straight in. Someone approached, seemingly a leader. Daniel began to talk but quickly got cut off.

“We already know why you are here. Come back tomorrow and we’ll talk.”

“Any particular reason?” I asked. “I mean we did go through a lot of trouble to get here.”

“We’re a bit busy at the moment. This decision is final. *Come back tomorrow.*” The person turned and left.

“Well wasn't he friendly…” Daniel mumbled.

“I guess we’re coming back tomorrow,” I said. We left the room, Dramatics covering the rear this time.

“Doesn’t this seem a tad bit suspicious to you?” Lakira asked me.

“Yeah, just a bit,” Christian added.

“I’d say so. Tomorrow, we’re bringin’ a bit of extra fire power,” I announced, careful not to let any of the Opposers hear me.

The next day we marched off for the Opposition again, this time with 50 fully armed nerds, equipped with the latest PC-MG’s and prop swords. Not only would we be prepared for any attack, this would help show our power to the Opposers and hopefully make them more willing to ally themselves with us. If it didn't scare them.

This time we took the long way to avoid the library, knowing it would be a bit harder to sneak by with a group this large. We came across a few Populars, but the battle was short and we only lost two or three guys.

“Here we are,” I called out. “Let’s hope things go a bit better today.” Daniel covered the rear. “Stay here,” I told him, “just in case we have to make a speedy getaway.” The Commander nodded and motioned for a few soldiers to come and stay with him.

“Keep your eyes open,” Lakira whispered. “Something’s….off....”

“Trust me, Lakira! Everything will be fine.”

“I hope you’re right.”

"Déjà vu..." I heard Christian whispered as we approached the Opposition Leader.

“We have thought over your proposal for an alliance. Come this way and we will discuss the terms for us to join you.”

“Ha-ha! See, what’d I tell you?” I patted my officers on the backs and followed the Opposer. "You guys," I continued, pointing, "stay out here. The rest of you come on in." We entered a small room with a table and four chairs; most likely this was an unused conference room that the teachers let these students use.

We sat there for 15 or 20 minutes discussing an alliance, when finally the leader said, “There is one final term I’d like you to agree to.”

“Which is?” The next response came from another kid, who had yet to speak a single word.

“You’re death.”

I burst out laughing. “Ha! This guy’s hilarious.” I was the only one laughing. Christian leaned over towards me.

“Er…Luke, I don’t think he’s joking.”

“No, I’m not,” said the kid, “and neither are they.”

Chapter 20

# It's a Trap!

Friday, December 9th

L*ucky for me, this* *was a good day, so my reflexes were spot on.* I managed to dodge the hornets coming from the 20 Populars that burst into the room.

The guards weren’t as lucky. Out of the ten that accompanied us into the conference room, eight got shot down. Christian and Lakira took a couple hits, but they were unharmed for the most part.

The five of us ducked behind the table and took turns firing at the Populars with regular hornets. A few went down, but they were simply replaced.

I heard Daniel’s voice from the other room and before I knew it the Populars were gone. I searched for the Opposer that had tricked us, but he was nowhere to be seen.

“Where’d he go?” I yelled. “He’s gone!”

“Forget about it!” Daniel shouted. “We’ve got more Pop’s incoming!” We all hurried outside to see a whole armada of Populars marching towards us.

“We’ve got 20 coming in from the left,” I shouted.

“20 more from this side,” Christian yelled.

“We’ve got Jocks over here,” Lakira called out.

“Wait a minute!” Daniel yelled.

“Wait? What do you mean ‘wait?’ We’re about to get killed!”

“But the Dramatics are gone!” I looked around the room, and he was right. No sign of them.

“But…” I wasn’t sure what to think. Tricked? Betrayed? Abandoned? This was definitely something I’d have to talk to Jen about, if we got out of here alive. “Well that makes things a bit difficult,” I announced.

With only 30 or so soldiers, we were greatly outnumbered and surrounded, and the only outposts close enough to send backup in time couldn’t afford to, being so close to the Library.

“Good thing I brought this baby,” I muttered, pulling the PC-MG out of the harness on my back. “Like it’ll do a lot of good. Nice knowing you guys.”

“You too,” everyone said together.

The battle commenced. The shots from my brightly colored rifle rang through my ears, as did the whizzing of hornets and spit-wads.

My instincts took over; I simply aimed and shot my enemies, briefly pausing to reload. I put the ammo in the weapon and unleashed another wave upon the oncoming soldiers. Shot after shot met its mark. I was getting good at this, which, to be honest, was a bit scary.

Getting good with any weapon, especially in a fake war, is something that might be a bit worrying to some. But I didn’t think about it then, I simply thought about surviving. I’m guessing that this has probably happened in many situations throughout the ages: You let your body take over and it’ll do whatever it needs to do to survive, no matter the cost. Spooky.

I stopped to reload again, but this time, I didn’t shoot. I looked around, weapon poised, quickly pointing it to and fro. There weren't any Populars left. We had won. Well...survived is probably a better word.

“Looks like technology reigns supreme,” I whispered. “You guys okay? Daniel?”

“I’m fine.”

“Lakira?”

“Still alive.”

“Christian?”

“I’m good.” We all dropped our stuff and collapsed on the ground.

Lakira turned towards me. “Did you *really* think he was joking?” she asked.

“What? Oh, yeah. It crossed my mind after I remembered enlisting the Chessies. I didn't really take the time consider how ridiculous that would be." I turned towards the others.

“Alright, so the four of us are still alive. Who else is left?” Five soldiers raised their hands.

“You put up a good fight,” I said to the dead ones. “I’m proud to have Nerds such as yourselves defending our lands. I saluted them as they walked off. We sat there in silence for another couple minutes before I got up.

“Well, it’s not over for the rest of us. Not yet, anyway. C’mon, we have a war to win.” I walked off with my officers and the remaining soldiers, heading back towards the Factory.

I entered the room, immediately looking for Jen.

“Hello, High Commander,” she greeted.

“Is that a hint of worry in your voice? Perhaps you didn’t expect to see me still wearing this,” I touched my sticker. “Yeah, that’s right, I’m still alive.”

“I say this a lot, but I have no idea what you’re talking about,” she replied.

“That sounds rehearsed,” I said. “Does that sound rehearsed to you guys?” I whispered behind me.

“She’s a Dramatic,” Lakira answered. “Not really the best way to interrogate her.”

“Good point.”

“Please, explain,” Jen continued.

“Today 15 Dramatic soldiers deserted us, and we nearly died. Daniel here was one shot away from the big comic con in the sky.” Everybody groaned at that last remark. “C’mon, that’s all I could think of on such short notice.” I turned my attention back to the Admiral. “Now this may come as a bit of a shock, but some others around here don’t quite trust you guys. This isn’t helping that image.”

“Believe me when I say I had no idea that this was going to happen. I’ll look into it right away.”

“I hope you’re telling the truth. I may keep things quite for now, but I need some results. If I fail to see any evidence of an investigation, I’ll make sure more than a few heads are turned your way, got it?” Jen actually looked a bit nervous. Any act she was putting on was a good one. Maybe that’s why she was the Dramatic leader. “Remember, I’ve got my eye on you.”

I walked off, not giving anybody a chance to say anything. It was already getting awkward, and I thought that I maybe took things a bit too seriously that time. Hopefully it would be for the best.

Chapter 21

# I Blame the Economy

Wednesday, December 14th

T*hings had been going downhill since we lost the HQ.* You might say we were even with the Populars, since before our defeat we just kept on winning. Well that certainly didn’t make us feel any better.

We were all a bit grumpy. The stress of having to fight a war while still doing school work was starting to wear us down, especially with the SLR’s ending today. Being crammed into a smaller HQ with this many people didn’t help either, so the last week or so I had tried to spread people out a bit more, sending them to other outposts.

Unfortunately the Factory had never had such a high amount of guards from the beginning, so we were a bit nervous. Though lucky for us, this area didn’t get a lot of traffic. Since there were a lot of expensive computers and some dangerous saws, a large part of the Factory was off-limits for fighting.

The rule was you could use this no-fly zone for war purposes, but if your team didn’t have anybody in the area outside the safe zone and there is a battle going on, you would have to get out. Officially, the only fighting within the Factory itself could happen in the side-workshop, which didn’t have big dangerous blades and whatnot, although occasionally there would be some fighting elsewhere. But it was normally calmer fighting and not next to any power-tools, so we didn't enforce that too much unless people were getting too close to the computers.

Anyway, we were all still a bit on edge after what happened with the Dramatics. In fact, it seemed like the whole school just had an all-around bad mood.

To make matters worse, we were running out of supplies. Extra paper and rubber bands were running dangerously low, and we didn’t have much gum or money to get any mercenaries should the need arise.

And lately we had been trading more and more on the CTM to get the supplies we needed, and occasionally got some extra treats for the soldiers in these stressful times.

I called for a meeting with all the Nerds, although with a smaller HQ and other outposts that needed defending, we had to have several smaller groups go in one at a time.

“Alright everyone,” I began. “Please take extra care to *not* break your rubber bands. We’re running low and won’t be able to hand out many more. Also, we have had several soldiers ask to have their walkie-talkie’s repaired because they’ve broken theirs. The Geeks are doing their best to fix them, but they are probably going to have to buy new ones. And now for the bad news.” Everyone groaned.

“Due to a lack of supplies, anybody who isn’t doing so already will have to make their own ammunition. Otherwise you have to pay in gum or cash.” I handed out a pricing sheet for all the things we would be offering.

“This is crazy!” someone cried. “We have to pay for this stuff?”

“Listen, we’re trying to get some more supplies, but until then this is just going to be how it is. I’m sorry but there is nothing we can do. You’re lucky that the CTM revolves so much around gum, otherwise paying in it wouldn’t be an option.” Complaints rang out again. I put my hand over my face and sighed. *What have I gotten myself into?*

Chapter 22

# Greetings From Castle Vine!

Saturday, December 17th

“L*ook out! There’s one!” I yelled.*

“I’ve got him,” someone else answered.

“Hurry, he’s getting me! Ah!” Another yelled.

“C’mon, heal, heal!” One more added.

“Aaaand…I’m dead!”

“Me, too.”

“As am I.”

“Well that went smoothly,” I finished. “That's enough for me. I’m going to head out, I’ll see you all tomorrow.” I waited for the others to say goodbye, then I pressed the ‘Log Out’ button before I pushed my chair away from the computer. I hung up my headset and began to reflect on both my arena team’s performance and the events that had transpired lately.

We had finally decided to take a break*.* With the SLRS finished and school going out for the holiday season, this was the perfect time to give the war a rest. Things were getting very heated, and we all needed some time to cool off.

We were also using this time to resupply the army. Despite the precautions we used involving the gum, things did not go well. We desperately needed this time, both for supplies and for rest. That’s right. The Nerds were taking a vacation.

I was reading in my dorm the next morning; my parents would be picking me up on Wednesday. Although I had already finished a chapter, I wasn’t really reading it. My mind was wandering back towards the frontlines.

I mean, I had started a *war!*  Pretty crazy stuff. And it was still going. And going. And it was actually causing things to happen in people’s lives. Unfortunately, not good things. About all I had seen come out of it was stress, heated discussions, and wasted time.

*Wait* I told myself. *What am I saying? Sure there are some rough patches, that’s expected. But I intend to have a happy ending!*

“Now, where was I?” I said out loud, turning back to my book. I flipped through the pages looking for wherever I stopped paying attention before finally giving up in exasperation. I put the book aside and lay down on my bed. *Yes, a happy ending. That’ll be nice. Well we’ll see about that.*

It was evening now, dinner time. I sat down next to some friends. “It feels…weird, doesn’t it?” I asked them. “Things are just so…so…so calm now.”

“I know what you mean,” Daniel answered. “The school’s too quiet.” Everyone nodded in silent agreement. We were all trying to avoid war conversation since it was our vacation, but we were, well…out of practice. Although we had regularly brought up normal things in conversation throughout the war, now something was different.

“So, you guys ready for camping?” I asked, finally finding something to talk about.

“Yeah! You should see some of the camping gear I have,” George said. “I’m definitely ready for this.”

We had been planning this trip for a while. It would be George, Zach, Christian, Andrew, Daniel, and myself. Our dads knew each other (excluding George’s, since he was newer to our circle of friends) and were going on a winter camping trip. We were tagging along, and even got to sleep on the opposite side of the campsite so it was as if we were on our own little adventure.

*Hmm* I thought as the others excitedly chattered away. *Adventure. It seems like everyone’s had enough of it for a while.*

On the way back to my dorm I bumped into Josh; I had only seen him a few times since the war started. The reunion didn’t seem to be quite as touching to him.

“Hey, punk,” he started. “I heard you and your friends are going on a little trip. Better watch out. I heard the wolves prefer *little girls* to men,” he told me before hitting my shoulder.

“Wow, real original Josh. Kudos to you! How about you do me a favor and go be an idiot somewhere else?”

He got up real close to me and said, “You have a fat mouth. I don’t like that. And neither do they.” Josh raised his fists.

“Oh yeah? Well I’ve heard something, too. Santa only brings presents to good little boys and girls, and, um….” I awkwardly raised my own firsts. “Hmph!” Josh laughed.

“Too bad, you’ll need *an ambulance* after I’m done with ya’.” He walked off and I felt the urge to stick out my tongue. My mouth happily obliged.

**Part II**

**Everlasting Warfare**

Chapter 23

# I Need to Increase my Sneak Skill

Monday, January 16th

I *was deep behind enemy lines.* With the intel that Lieutenant Lockwood had given us, we thought it would be a better idea to scout out the Gym ahead of time. He had told us about the new prison camp after his escape, but we didn’t want to make any plans until we knew what we were up against.

I was very surprised nobody had leaked the location earlier. Although the official rule was to not reveal things like that after hours, I didn’t expect people to follow this as well as they did.

Ah, yes, a recap might be appropriate before continuing. We didn’t want to start the war off right when school started, which was a week prior to this. We thought, despite the recent vacation, we shouldn’t jump into things too fast. It also gave us time to readjust to school life, and catch up with friends we hadn’t seen over the holidays. This also gave us time to get our strategies ready, one thing that *was* allowed after hours. And on an unimportant and obvious side-note, none of us got eaten by bears while camping.

Anyway, I had volunteered to go to the gym, but this was risky. Chances were if I got captured they would imprison me and I’d be out of the game (both literally and figuratively) with no estimate of how long I’d be in there.

George had taken a small troop to escort me part of the way. We parted as we neared the Gym, but I had them stay put in case there was trouble.

I snuck inside, unsure where to start looking. This was the perfect time for a stealth mission. There was a blackout and we had decided to continue the battle, so the only light was coming through the windows.

The Populars had propped up gymnastic mats to act as walls, so I couldn’t see most of the Gym. As I slowly tip-toed through the bleachers, a noise came from above. I stopped dead in my tracks and saw someone. Was that a football helmet? Yep, it was a Jock! I held my breath.

The Sporties were all very powerful. Their strength meant that they would normally be used as ‘tanks.’ Once, a couple of them tried using soccer balls as weapons, but after a heated argument we had them stop and banned the weapon. Most used hacky-sacks nowadays, both Nerds and Populars.

But how come this guy wasn’t chasing me? We joked that the Sporties could almost sense the presence of a Nerd, especially Jocks.

I heard the noise again. I looked back up at the Jock. Still no movement. Wait, was that snoring? Yes, the Jock was definitely asleep!

“Boy, am I lucky or what?” I whispered to myself as I got out from under the bleachers. But my two left feet had to ruin it. I stumbled over a soccer ball and fell to the cold floor. Immediately, I looked behind me and saw that *Squeak* did nothing to wake the jock. "Very lucky, apparently..." Unfortunately my luck quickly ran out.

“Look, over there!” someone shouted. I turned my head, and in front of me was a small squadron of assorted Sporties. They could easily overpower me, even though I had become a skilled fighter. This was their turf. The gym had sport’s gear galore.

And you know what they saw first? *Dodge balls. A cart-load full of them.* Our eyes met, and I immediately jumped in the air. The door seemed a lot further away than it did when I came in.

To add to the troubles, a figure blocked my path. The Jock had woken.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “We’re just playing a little game!” A grin crept onto his face.

A barrage of dodge balls flew towards me. Before I knew it I had been hit 5 times. I quickly took out our newly implemented **MED-KITS\***. All you had to do was rip one in half and your health would be completely restored.

I dodged a couple projectiles as they whizzed past my head, then quickly bolted for the door. I outmaneuvered the jock and heard him yell, “Get him, get him!” Some Populars had already come out from behind the mats a little earlier, but now they began pouring into the hall behind me. Before I knew it I was being tailed by 40 or 50 Populars. Luckily they were a good distance away so only a few shots met their mark.

I took out my walkie-talkie, turned it onto the main channel, and said, “The Flag must be waved. I repeat, the Flag must be waved.” There was a brief moment of silence as whoever was on the other side checked to make sure the code was valid, since there were ten.

“Your code checks out,” the voice said as it returned.

“Great,” I said. “Patch me through to Commander Graves.”

“Right away,” they replied. Another moment of silence accompanied by two more hits. I couldn't take too many more...

“Yes?” I heard Daniel’s voice come out.

***\*Each team would get 50 MED-KITS every Rescue Day.***

“Daniel, it’s me, Luke,” I said into the device. “I’ve got a ton of Populars behind me. This is the distraction you need, the Gym is wide open.”

“Really? Right now? Weeeell..."

"Daniel!"

"I'm kidding! I'll get to it."

“Good, but you have to go *now!* As in *right now!* I can’t keep this up much lo…” Just then a good throw of a hacky-sack knocked the walkie-talkie right out of my hand.

“Hello? Hello?” Daniel’s voice kept repeating. I wanted to go and grab the walkie talkie, but that would mean giving up my lead on the Populars. I had a split second to make this choice, but luckily, I didn’t have to decide.

Chapter 24

# Prison Break...Take Two

Monday, January 16th

“G*et down!”*  I ducked right as George and his soldiers let out a wave of hornets, nailing the oncoming Populars. Five of them ripped of their stickers, but more kept on coming. “Come on, let’s get to the HQ,” George told me.

“No,” I replied as I picked up my walkie-talkie. “I’ve ordered an attack on the Gym. We’ve got to keep these guys distracted. C’mon!” We ran off, trying to keep the Populars busy for as long as we could. Hopefully it would give time for Daniel and the others to get to the gym.

We ran through the halls for five minutes, losing four of our own soldiers, but defeating twelve. We came prepared with **MED-KITS** as we knew this would be a dangerous mission. Finally we got radio confirmation from Daniel that the raid had begun.

We headed down the hallway and saw about 80 Nerds taking on the Gym Defenses. Hornets flew all around, and the Popular’s numbers were decreasing. As we entered the prison, I saw Daniel taking cover behind the bleachers.

“Commander, we’ve got about 30 Populars about to come through those doors,” I pointed to our entry point. “Get ready!”

“74th!" he yelled. “They’re coming through the doors!” The first Popular walked around the corner. “Aim! FIRE!” Waves of hornets flew towards the Populars, and I turned my attention elsewhere. It seemed that more Populars had come in on both sides. This promised to be yet another close battle.

“George,” I said, handing a soldier a **MED-KIT**, “we have to get the prisoners out. Take your men and come with me.”

"Alright. Alpha Squadron! Let's move!" George's troops lowered their weapons and followed us as we wandered into the Gymnastic-Maze. It seemed most of the fighting was outside, so we met minimal resistance. Those Populars we did meet we took out quickly. Then we came to a fork-in-the-maze.

“Alright, we’ll split up. George, Lisa, Finn, you three go left. Lucas, Morgan, you two are with me.” George nodded and we rushed off in the opposite direction. I got out my walkie-talkie as I snuck through the ‘halls.’ “Daniel, how are things going out there?”

“More keep coming through the doors!! Not sure if we can take them or not."

“Well if things calm down, then send any troops you can spare into the maze so we can bust the prisoners out. As soon as we have them we can get out of here.” There was no reply, so I simply hoped that Daniel was still alive would do what I said.

Finally, we emerged from the maze and found them. The prisoners. We got there just in time, too. It seems that, in the confusion, some prisoners managed to steal some weapons and were revolting. While some shot at the remaining guards, the rest made a run for the door.

“Everyone, this way!” I waved them towards me and they rushed over. “C’mon! Go, go, go!” Out of the corner of my eye I saw a Sportie start to throw a hacky-sack. Things seemed to go in slow motion as it came towards me, narrowly missed, and nailed the mat, knocking it over.

The mats were close enough together to act like dominoes. One fell after the other, and pretty soon most of the walls were down. A lot of people were inside by now, so this distraction gave the Populars enough time to recuperate. They quickly ran over and pulled up the mats and shot down a lot of Nerds, while I was helplessly trying to save a few soldiers.

To make matters worse, I looked across the Gym to see Zach, Daniel, and their men getting their hands tied together by several Jocks.

But nobody could have possibly expected what was going to happen next. The lamps that were set up around the gym switched off, and thirty cloaked figures rushed in and began shooting and slicing both Nerds and Populars. Not only did they catch everyone by surprise, they were extremely efficient fighters and took down many soldiers on both sides.

I cupped my hands around my mouth and simply yelled, “RETREAT! RETREAT! Everyone, get out of here!” Nerds rushed out of the library through the door I went through, while the Populars slowly retreated towards the opposite exit, not bothering with the remainder of the Nerds under the mats.

I dodged a few swordsmen on the way out. Many other Nerds were not that lucky. It was complete chaos, and it felt like everything was going in slow motion. Everyone ripping off their sticker, some brave soldiers who thought they could handle the mysterious figures only to be cut down. Most, like myself, just ran. We didn’t know what was going on or where we were headed, we just ran.

I came across Daniel as I snuck through the halls, as if all the shadows hid an enemy. “What just happened?” he asked.

“I don't know! I…I mean…That was crazy!” I answered. Just then Zach came up to us. “Glad to see you made it,” I said. “You seem to die a lot, Zach.”

“Have you guys seen George?” the Admiral asked.

“No,” Daniel answered, turning around as if the Captain would be right behind us.

“I haven’t seen a lot of people; that was complete madness. But I’m sure he made it out,” I reassured. “It’ll probably be a little while before we find him, with all the chaos.”

“Well shouldn’t we try to contact him?” Zach asked.

“No! We don’t know what he’s going through. We don’t want to distract him, or worse, give away his position if he’s sneaking out.” On the way back to the HQ, we passed up a small outpost.

“Let’s stop here,” Daniel said. “Maybe we can find some survivors.” We had only come across 12 soldiers, out of the estimated 150 prisoners in the main prison camp, and the 90 (including George’s men) that had led the attack.

We approached the conference room-gone-outpost. “He-hey! Ryan!” I yelled. “Good to see you out of prison!”

“Have you seen this place?” the Lieutenant ignored my greeting. We entered the base and found it deserted.

“What happened?” Zach asked.

“Not sure,” Ryan answered. “But he does.” He pointed to a figure standing in the corner.

“Who are you?” I questioned, noticing the Instrumental sticker.

“Private David Harrison. Dramatics ambushed us.”

“Dramatics? Are you sure?” Daniel asked.

“Definitely. They had the outfit and the stickers.” Everyone looked towards me.

“Well, it seems to me like we have a bit of a problem. And things were going so well.”

Chapter 25

# From Bad to Worse

Thursday, January 19th

W*e didn’t get to talk to Jen for a few days.* She was very sick, and had to stay in her dorm until she could at least get out of bed. By the time we saw her she didn’t look perfect, but at least she wasn’t throwing up all over the place.

In the meantime, we got several more scattered reports of Dramatic attacks, and scouts said they saw them attacking the Pouplars as well. Things were getting bad. And, to make matters worse, George had in fact been killed last week, and Rescue Day wasn’t until next.

I was waiting in the Factory for Jen to show up, when Ryan walked by.

“Hey, Ryan,” I called out, motioning him over, “Come here.”

“Hey,” he greeted. “What do you need?”

“Now, I’m not saying you should have done this as it would have been a bit unsportsmanlike, but why didn’t you guys break out of prison earlier? I mean if you just walked off, the only thing they could really do would be to shoot, and then you could come back in on Rescue Day.”

“That’s what some people said we should do. But others said the same thing as you, it wouldn’t be very fair. Of course, Josh was also waiting outside…”

“Josh? He’s involved?”

“Yep. Nobody wanted to leave if it meant having to deal with him. I don’t know if he really follows the same rules as all of us.”

“Understandable. Well, now I know a bit more about what we’re up against…And what about simply not showing up to prison the next day?”

"They had a roll-call. They checked every day."

"Impressive." As we talked about other things, both war involved and not, Jen walked in.

“You wanted to see me, High Commander?” she asked.

“I’ll just…go over there…” Ryan walked off. I ignored him.

“Yes, yes in fact, I did. Are you aware that there is a group of Dramatics running rampant around the school, destroying absolutely everything in their path? Phew, that was a mouthful…”

“What…what are you talking about?” Jen questioned. Either she honestly didn’t know what was going on, or acting played a huge role in her ascension to Dramatic power. Both were realistic options. I plopped some papers onto the desk to my side. “What are these?” she asked.

“These are the reports. Pictures. This is happening. Either this is some elaborate setup to make me not trust you, or these are Dramatics. And I don’t know why anybody would go out of their way, buying cool cloaks, and then recreate or even steal our stickers, and *then* attack both sides just to make me distrust one Admiral.”

“I…I don’t know what to say….honestly...but…Hey, wait, what’s this?" Jen picked up one of the photos. "Look, that’s James! James Abbot! And look at these! He seems to be in a lot of these pictures…”

“Hold on a second, I recognize him…I saw him when we tried to get the rest of the Opposition! He’s the one who was at the meeting, the one who ordered our death! And look here, these pictures! Those were my spies!"

"Spies? You have spies?"

"Of course I do! Or...did...A couple people in the drama club..."

"*You had people spying on me?*"

"Face it Jen, the whole Dramatic thing was a bit sketchy, and not to mention...Oh, forget the spies, okay? This is what they want. To mess with our heads. We should be focusing on the fact that there is a rebellion going on, and they're kicking our behinds!"

“This is bad. Very bad,” Jen whispered.

“Great, that’s not a phrase I’ve been hearing all afternoon. Hey, anybody else have some bad news for me?”

“Actually sir,” someone called out, “we just lost another outpost to Dramatics.”

“Thank you,” I said sarcastically, putting my head in my hands. “Thank you.” I could tell that the vacation did not solve all the stress related problems.

Chapter 26

# Dramatized for Effect

Thursday, January 26th

D*ays passed before we could find any evidence of Dramatic outposts, let alone a Head Quarters.* And by the time we did that, we figured we might as well wait until Rescue Day before attacking.

I was sitting in my ‘office’ (AKA: My Dorm) this day, when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" I called as I drew my attention away from my book. George opened the door as I paused my music.

“You wanted to see me, sir?” He asked, coming closer. I took my headphones out of my ears.

“Yes. I need you to keep an eye on Jennifer. We need to know if she has anything to do with this plot, and if any of the ‘loyal’ Dramatics are actually lying in wait to ambush us.”

“Spy work? This might be a bit harder than last time.”

“Yes, hopefully this won’t result in more slapping…Anyway, I’m trusting you to do this properly. Think you can manage?”

“I’ll give it a shot.”

“Good. That gives me a little more confidence,” I stated, not sounding very confident at all.

“What? You? Nervous?” George asked sarcastically.

“Yes, I know, I know. The great Luke is worried.”

“Well..." the General motioned for me to explain.

“Alright.” I sighed. “Well, first of all, we don’t know what we’re dealing with. We already know the Dramatics aren’t someone you want to fight if you can help it. But now they’ve been recruiting, and we don’t know how heavy.”

“There are so many kids in the school,” George replied.

“Yes, but that means it’s even more painful if our own soldiers betray us. We can’t turn anywhere for more troops.”

“It sounds like that’s not the only thing on your mind…”

“No, it isn’t.” I paused for a moment, unsure whether or not to continue. Finally I spoke. “It’s just this war in general. When I made it, it was supposed to be fun. I’m not sure if it is anymore. Yeah, it was supposed to represent something, standing up for what’s right, stopping the bullying and all that, but it’s almost like this is real, now. We’re all just getting stressed, and I’m a bit worried that the strife between Nerds and Pouplars will be carried off the battlefield.”

“I’m sure everything will work out fine. We’ll finish what we started, and it’ll all work out.”

“I hope so. I really hope so.”

“Alright, move, move, move!” Nerds poured into the Gym. This had been in Dramatic control**\*** since the prison break, and we wanted to take this before moving onto the other few bases we had found.

The Dramatics had rearranged the mats into barricades and taken cover behind them and the bleachers. They were obviously prepared for invasion. But there was a weak spot in their defenses.

“Hello, Arianna?” I said onto my walkie-talkie. “It’s just as I thought. Their defenses are lower in the back. Attack like we planned.”

“Got it.” Twenty PC-MG armed warriors charged in from the rear entrance, destroying all the Dramatics nearby. But I should have known it wouldn’t be easy. This was no ordinary opponent.

There was a side room where we kept a lot of PE equipment. The door slid open as Arianna’s troop passed. Thirty sword-wielding Dramatics snuck up behind my Admiral's Nerd troops and quickly took them out.

I pulled out my newly issued PC-SN. It was a one of a kind Paper Sniper. Yes, the scope was originally half of a cheap pair of binoculars, but it was better than nothing. And the range for the gun was increased by about 50%.

As an added bonus, the hornets were specially designed, so they would split apart near its target, almost like a miniature grenade.

***\*In this context, the term ‘Dramatics’ also includes the other Opposers. The Dramatics were the leading force at this time, and were also the most active.***

So in two shots, I could do at least 5 points of damage, which would probably eliminate whoever my unfortunate target was.

I took aim and fired. The shot met its mark, and after a couple more, I had taken out enough of the Dramatics to give Arianna’s soldiers a fighting chance.

I turned my attention to the frontlines. Although the Dramatics had been well prepared, we were slowly pushing them back. If Arianna survived, there would be no place for them to retreat.

I rolled behind a barricade and tossed a grenade over, then sent some shots out with my PC-SN. Zach crept up beside me, taking cover from the wave of hornets that suddenly erupted from the Dramatics.

“What’s going on out there?” I asked him.

“You've got to see for yourself.” I peeked around the barricade, and saw one of the most brilliant strategies in the entire war. Six lines of Dramatics were in a square formation. The first two lines would shoot then duck. While they reloaded, the next two lines would shoot, and then the next two lines, then the next two lines, and so on. Then, two smaller lines of swordsman guarded the front and rear.

Each line had 5 Dramatics, so there were tons of hornets flying through the air. Quickly, and deadly. This had to be the most efficient way of fighting. I tried throwing a grenade, but it was simply batted away by a sword.

“It looks like we have to do things the old fashioned way,” I told Zach, loading my gun. “You with me?”

“I’m with you. Hey, over here!” Zach motioned towards his soldiers, and they crawled towards us.

“On my mark. One. Two. Three…” Someone rushed over the barricade. “No!” I shouted after them. “You were supposed to wait for Go!” With the noise from other parts of the gym, all anybody seemed to have heard was ‘Go.’ Everyone ran forward, swords drawn, and rushed towards the blockade.

I sighed and ran after them, weapon poised. *Bang, bang, bang.* I sniped out the soldiers in the middle of the blockade, while the other soldiers took out the swordsman. The chaos was enough to let a grenade inside, taking out a few Dramatics.

Unfortunately, another surprise awaited us. Thirty more Opposers rushed in through the main doors. Although there were already some ‘normal’ Opposers within the gym, the Dramatics were obviously pulling the reigns here.

The Opposers hassled our soldiers enough so that the Dramatics could get back in formation. But I looked up, and saw something. Something that I was very surprised nobody took advantage of already.

“Zach!” The Admiral rushed over. “Give me your gun.”

“What? Why?”

“Just do it!”

“You better not break this thing.” We switched weapons, and I ran off. I hopped up on stack of mats.

“Here we go. Just grab and…JUMP!” I jumped onto a hanging rope, bombarding the enemy with hornets. The expression on their astonished faces was absolutely priceless. I bet the expression on my face was too. But I didn’t think about that then, I just fired. I took out a lot of enemies before running out of ammo. I saw Zach below me. “Catch!” I yelled out. He nodded and I threw the rifle down. I used my now free hand to throw out a couple grenades, taking out any who hadn’t yet noticed me.

I landed hard, and got tossed a sword. I swung it a few times, taking out another Dramatic. Arianna and her troop rushed towards us and quickly destroyed the remaining forces.

Looking around, I saw that the cleanup had begun. I walked over to Zach and grabbed my sniper. "Thanks," I said. After that I clambered up on top of the bleachers. Breathing heavily, I yelled, “Congratulations, everyone! We are one step closer to destroying the Dramatics.”

We took out almost all the known Opposing Outposts, two of them being completely comprised of our former allies, the Dramatics. They had obviously done some recruiting, as only half of the role-players had left our ranks. At least, only half had left our ranks *yet.*

Only one place remained, and that was the Dramatics headquarters itself. The Drama Room. We did not know that the Dramatics stationed there were among the traitors, which was why it took so long for us to find out about the enemy HQ.

“So,” I was talking to Jen right before the assault. “Your own faction’s headquarters is in the hand of traitors, and you honestly had no idea?”

“Hey, I don’t go there much anymore. Honestly, it sort of creeps me out,” the Admiral replied.

“And it never occurred to you to have someone check it out?” I asked her.

“I could say the same thing to you," she replied.

“Touché...I suppose there isn’t much point in arguing about it. At least, not yet... Let’s attack and get this over with. The Populars are probably getting ready to attack any moment now."

We ran into the Drama Room, guns at the ready. As usual, it was dark in here, so we had flashlights taped onto our weapons.

“It’s all clear over here.”

“Here, too.”

“No Dramatics over here, either."

“How could that be?” I asked. “We have people positioned around the only two exits. We would have known if the Dramatics had gone. Rachael, Jen,” I said, turning to the two others in charge here. “You two stay here. And Rachael…” I lowered my voice to a whisper. “Keep an eye on Jen.”

Rachael simply nodded and I walked out the back door. I approached the twenty Nerds put there to guard the rear.

“High Commander,” one said and saluted.

“Hello there. Are you sure nobody has come out through those doors?” I asked.

“We’ve been watching that entrance constantly. Nobody’s gone in, and nobody’s come out.”

“And you are absolutely sure of this?”

“Sure as the sun is yellow. Well, sort of an orange…I suppose a yellowish orange…”

“Yeah, you just….keep doing what you’re doing.” I walked back inside. All was quiet. “Hello?” I called out.

“Hello.” I whipped around to see James himself.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

“Don’t worry. I’ve already…taken care of your friends. Mua ha ha ha!”

“Wow. Talk about cliché.”

“Oh, that’s just practice for a play I’m in. Don’t mind that. *Anyway,* I say we have a little duel. One on one. No tricks, no surprises. We each get a sword, and that’s it.”

“Alright,” I said. “And I suppose after it’s over, the battle will continue as normal?”

“Yes.”

“So this whole thing really serves no purpose.”

“Exactly.”

“Ok!” I yelled, opening my arms. “Let’s do this.” We both emptied our pockets of any extra weapons. I threw my PC3**\*** to the side along with a bunch of grenades and **MED-KITS.**

“You really come prepared, don’t you?” James asked me.

“I could say the same to you,” I answered as the traitor pulled out a massive prop sword. He chuckled. James dropped his cloak and threw me a smaller weapon, but I was satisfied.

“Bow, and…BEGIN!”

We circled around each other for a moment, unsure if we should make a move or wait to see if our opponent would strike first. James eventually gave in and lunged at me, narrowly missing. As he lost his balance trying to regain his posture, I swung at his arm. *One hit down, six more to go* I thought.

The Dramatic leader simply laughed it off and attacked again, this time hitting me twice before I even knew what was happening. Just then Rachael walked in.

“Where have you been?” I cried, deflecting another blow.

“I really had to use the bathroom! Where’d everyone go?”

“There are probably some Dramatics that took everyone out that are hiding in here. Watch it!” I dodged a third blow. Rachael rushed help me. “Stop! We’re doing this movie style: one on one.” Even in the dim light I could see Rachael roll her eyes.

***\*This was the newly developed pistol. They were expected to be more common than the PC-MG’s, as they are much cheaper, and easier, to make.***

“Well you better hurry, Populars are outside.”

“Just keep ‘em off me.” Rachael nodded and went outside to get the rear-guarding Nerds, and then rushed out to meet the Populars. James and I both got another hit on each other.

“You should give up now,” he told me. “Save us both the trouble.”

“Oh please. That doesn’t even work in the books. It definitely won’t work on me.”

“It was worth a shot,” James said, hitting my elbow. All of a sudden I let out a fury of hits, all of them meeting their mark. *One, two, three, four.* On the fifth blow I hit James’ sword and it went skidding across the room.

“Before you kill me,” James explained, backing up, “I’d like to let you know, I rarely following the rules. NOW!” As I had assumed, there were plenty of Dramatics hiding in the shadows. The sprung out, swords poised, and charged.

I dashed for my stuff and ripped a **MED-KIT** in half. I pulled up my pistol and shot at the nearest Dramatic.

“Rachael!” I called out. “Help!” I rolled a grenade, taking out the two enemies I had shot at. I deflected a blow with my sword but took another from behind. And another. And another. Before I knew it I was using another **MED-KIT**. And James just stood there, watching. Another figure approached him. Who was that? Not Rachael, or any of the kids that were left to guard the back.

“Shows over,” she said. The figure stabbed at James before he even turned around. He ripped off his sticker and raised his finger, as if to say something, but simply growled and walked off. The mysterious person followed behind as Rachael and her troops came in and unleashed a volley of hornets onto the Dramatic attackers.

“Pretty cool, huh?” I said to Andrew. “’*The Showdown With Abbot.’* I like the sound of that. Too bad we had to blow two thirds of our Dramatic support, though…”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m sure your children’s children will retell the story. Now can we get a bite to eat? I’m starved.”

“Ugh, fine.”

That evening I re-accounted the story to the people at our table.

“So you have no idea who the figure was?” the Daniel asked me.

“All I know is that they were a she, and they had long hair. About all I can tell you.”

“It was Jen!” George yelled, sitting down next to me.

“What, are you sure?”

“I was coming in through the back with my squad,” the Captain explained. “I her and James leave the room. It was Jen, without a doubt.” Silence for a moment.

“Well, I guess this means we won’t have to keep an eye on her,” I finally said.

“That’s too bad,” George replied. “I didn’t get to practice my spy skills.” We all took some bites of our food before Daniel asked:

“So what are we going to do tomorrow?” More silence. I swallowed my food and spoke.

“The same thing we do every day, Commander. *Try to take over the school!*”

Chapter 27

# Let the Games Begin!

Sunday, January 29th

W*e had completely obliterated the Opposers.* Their life counter had gone to 0, which means only the Populars stood in our way to School Domination. This meant that the Library would be our next major goal. We knew that any battle for our former Headquarters would just be too epic to do in one afternoon. It would probably be so epic, in fact, that the school probably wouldn’t be able to handle it.

Which is why we decided to do things like this: Saturday, we had the ultimate game of capture the flag. It was across the entire school. We were allowed hornets and swords, and one shot would kill you until the next round (you would not have to wait until Rescue Day to re-join the war, though). Each round won out of 10 would gain your faction 20 extra **MED-KITS.** There were five rounds in the morning, and five in the afternoon, and they were spread out so we only had a few back-to-back games at a time.

But today was Sunday, which meant an even better battle. Paintball. A few of our peers were somewhat wealthy, so they managed to cover a bit of the already cheap (we got a very good deal) paintball. These were the same people supplying us with the materials for our weapons.

This was the battle of battles, in the war of wars, in the conflict of conflicts. This day would later be called 'The Battle of Paintball Woods,' of The Castle Wars. There were five rounds, and whoever won one got 7 PC-MG's along with 30 extra **MED-KITS.** They also would gain control of one of the five contested outposts surrounding the Library.

These key battles, although being held in very different ways than normal, would play a huge part in the war. This would be a fun day indeed.

I stopped running for a moment, looked up, and started staring at the dark clouds in the sky that were blotting out the sun. Paintball-guns rang out from the distance. It seemed almost like a movie, or even a real war. At least, a lot different from our day-to-day battles.

This was the last round of the day. The score was tied; each team had won two rounds. The Populars had gained the upper hand during the Capture-The-Flag games, so we had to win this.

I ran over to one of my officers at the outpost just ahead. Rhonda, her name was. “Lieutenant, the enemy is trying to flank us from the West. It looks like they’re going towards the river and are heading towards our headquarters. We can out maneuver them if we go through there.” I pointed towards a clearing in the trees.

The lieutenant nodded. “I’ve got 12 soldiers left, I think,” she said.

“Good,” I said. “I’ll get my own troops and meet you at the river. We’ll come up through the South.”

"Sounds good." We both ran away to gather our soldiers. I went towards a nearby outpost set up in some high rocks, and one kid got shot as I approached.

“George!” I called, taking cover behind a tree. “How are things looking up there?”

“We’ve got a few Populars down below,” George yelled behind him. “We should be done with them in a minute.”

“Good. I need to take a few of the soldiers posted here, we’re intercepting some Populars heading down towards the river.”

“Hold on…” George let out a shot from his paintball-gun. The seemed to have met its mark. “Alright. You guys, go with Luke. The rest of us will stay here and defend this outpost.” The soldiers George pointed to got up and ran down toward me. His Nerds combined with mine totaled to about 25 or so.

“Ok, we’re meeting up with Lieutenant Bennet at the river,” I explained, lifting a branch away from my face, “where we’ll intercept about twenty or thirty Populars. They’re moving from the West, and Rhonda is going up through the South Path.”

We rushed through the forest, weapons poised, ready for anything. I could see the river ahead. I held up my hand, signaling the troop to stop. *Quite* I mouthed. We slowly crept through the trees, hiding behind the thicker bushes on the ground.

We arrived just in time. The Populars were marching through the clearing, making their way towards the river and, inevitably, our HQ.

But where was Rhonda? She should be here by now, with the shortcut she took. We would need their help; the Popular squadron was larger than I had thought. At least 50 strong, and most were equipped with automatic weapons.

We heard some guns go off nearby, close enough to be Rhonda and her soldiers. Now I was getting worried. The Populars had a decent chance of taking our base, and my unit wouldn’t be able to do much on their own.

But then I saw some rustling in the bushes. I turned to look, and saw a face. No, not Rhonda. Daniel. He nodded at me and I returned the gesture. Turning around I said, “Alright. Snipers will start the attack. You’ll stay back and take out who you can. The rest of you are with me, we’ll charge in.” Nobody argued and we got right to it. “Alright, masks down...On my mark...GO!”

Six snipers took out some of the Populars in the front. We charged towards them. We caught the Populars by surprise, but after a few of them were shot down they reacted. Paintballs flew through the air, pelting Nerds and Populars alike. Daniel’s soldiers came in from the back, continuing to throw of the Populars. They were surrounded.

Unfortunately we weren’t the only ones hiding in the bushes. Another troop of Popular Soldiers, just enough to turn the tide of battle, jumped out at us. They came from where we heard the shots, and where Rhonda was supposed to be. They must have intercepted the Lieutenant.

“Daniel!” I called out. “If we can get to the HQ, we have a chance of defeating them! Because we definitely don’t have any here!”

The Commander nodded. “Retreat! Retreat!” We waved towards the HQ and the Nerds started fleeting across the river.

The Populars were not far behind. They were quickly shooting down our soldiers. I let out a few shots into the air as a signal to anyone nearby that we needed help. A paintball whizzed past me and I started running a bit faster. I realized that a lot of Nerds had been nailed so I was now at the back of the troop.

But all too late I noticed the root in front of me. I tripped over it and slammed on the leafy ground. Shots rang out. I was dead.

Chapter 28

# Misadventures

Sunday, January 29th

N*o, I wasn't ACTUALLY dead.* It was more of a, "Oh God, I'm dead." I quickly rolled over, narrowly dodging a few paintballs. I started gaining speed as I went down a hill.

"Aaaahhhhh!!!!" I was very scared of hitting a tree. I turned myself sideways so my feet would dig in the ground, and dug my fingers into the cold dirt.

I slowly came to a halt, and not a moment too soon. A tree lay a few feet in front of me; I would've rammed into it if I hadn't stopped. Just then I heard shouts from behind, and the loud crunch of leaves, there was no time to lose. I got up and bolted through the woods, unsure where I was going.

If we hadn't been doing paintball, I would have brought my walkie-talkie; I didn't want to risk it getting ruined here.

As I ran from the Populars, I was careful not to trip over any roots this time. I started to change my path and curved back towards the HQ. It was easy, I just followed the sounds of battle.

"There he is! Shoot him!" I slowed down a little, just enough to turn around. I saw five Populars, fully armed, poised to shoot. A paintball whizzed past my head. I shot a few behind me, one met its mark and the other missed completely.

I started to slow down again. I could see a large group ahead, and I didn't know who it was. I wasn't going to take any chances. I started to curve away from them, as well, until I got a glimpse of a face. Was that...was that Lakira? I took another look. Yep, it was definitely her.

"Hey! Over here!" I yelled. "Help!" I took another shot behind me, but I couldn't tell if it missed or not. Then I looked back at Lakira and saw her yell something. Then the Nerds moved out. Fifteen of them poured out from their hiding spot and quickly eliminated the pursuers.

"Phew," I puffed, walking back towards my Commander. "That...was a close one...Thanks."

"Don't mention it." I looked around at the other Nerds. George was also here.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him. "Shouldn't you be guarding the outpost?"

"Populars took it. It looks like they're ditching their defenses and moving towards the HQ. I was also saving her." George motioned towards someone else. I looked to see Rhonda standing where he was pointing.

"Rhonda! What happened to you?"

"Some Populars took out most of my squad. Only me and three others are left."

"Things are not looking good," I said. "We better keep moving. Both Daniel's squad and mine are running towards the HQ, away from the Populars we were supposed to intercept. That is, if they're still alive..."

Lakira nodded and issued a command. "You heard him, let's go!" We ran through the woods, towards the now faint sounds of paintball guns.

We were getting close. "Shields up," I said, lowering my mask.

"What?"

"Just a...Star Trek thi-never mind."

When we came out of the trees, we could see that things were worse than we thought. The Nerd HQ was one of a few bunkers in the arena. The front was a concrete wall with a large opening in the middle to act as a window, and had rocks around the sides. The back was simply a small hill, giving people inside enough cover to stand. It was surrounded on almost all sides, and more Populars were incoming.

"C'mon!" Our troop rushed in, taking aim at the Populars. I pulled the trigger of my rifle and got a couple of them before I ran into the bunker. "Andrew!" I called out. "What's the situation?" A paintball whizzed past me, only missing because I bent over to grab something I dropped.

"We've got a ton of Populars attacking from all directions, and more are coming every minute. We're running low on reinforcements," the Admiral answered between shots.

"Well I can see that...Did you get the radio fixed?"

"Yep. It's up and running." I walked over to the radio, taking another shot between the window before kneeling down.

"Hello? Is anybody there? This is High Commander Ericson. We need to pull everyone back to the HQ."

Some static came through. I adjusted the knob and heard, "...attack right now. Not too many Populars, so we should be able to help. We'll start mo..." more static. Just then another voice.

"Help the HQ? We can't even get out of here. You're on your own!" I waited a moment and adjusted the knob again and heard one more voice.

"Somebody, help! We've only got a few soldiers, and Populars are closing in! We've got tons of ammo here and the Populars are getting close to getting it!"

"Where are you?" I asked this last person.

"We're at the hill outpost, south from the HQ. We really need help, it looks like even more Populars are coming!"

"Hey, Andrew," I yelled. He ducked, almost getting hit by a paintball.

"Yeah?"

"How bad is it out there? Can we spare any troops?"

"Maybe a few," Andrew answered. "But even that would be pushing it."

"We've got to do it. The Hill Outpost is under attack. If they fall, we'll be completely surrounded. They've also got a stash of ammo that will really help whatever side keeps it." Andrew sighed and called a few people over.

"Take them," he said. "I'll stay here and defend this base."

"Thanks, Andrew. I'll try to get back as soon as possible." I went back to the radio.

"Re-direct. If you can make it to the Hill Outpost, go there first! We need to strengthen that outpost, and then we can move to the HQ!" I didn't wait for a response. I turned towards the six soldiers. "Let's go."

It was getting late. The sun was just starting to go down, and with the already overcast day, it was getting dark. I pulled out a pair of binoculars and looked out towards the Hill Outpost.

“What do you see?” someone asked.

“Hmm. Populars coming in from all sides. Southern side looks the worst. Lots of Pops…and a squad of Nerds retreating up towards the rocks. The side closest to us only has a few Populars, we should be able to get them by surprise and reinforce the base.

“Wait…Populars moving in from the East…no, West…Both! More are pouring in! C’mon, we have to move!”

We ran towards the hill, going as quietly as we could while still hurrying. “Alright. Lower your masks." I put the protection over my face as did the others. "Alright. Ready? GO!”

We snuck up on the Populars, taking out several of them. One noticed us before we could shoot him, and fired a paintball at one of my soldiers.

Two more Populars turned around, one we shot before he could react, while the other shot at another Nerd.

Between the confusion of fighting soldiers up on the hill, and being ambushed by us, the Populars were dealt with quickly. We rushed up to the rocks and took cover behind their relative safety.

“High Commander,” one person said, raising his protective mask. “Good to see you.”

“Christian, haven’t seen you in a while. How’ve you been?”

“Not great. Sort of got some Populars taking over my outpost.”

“Yeah, that can get you down.”

“This is just like on Endor, huh?” Christian asked me.

“Yeah, when a bunch of teddy-bear creatures jump out and save us, then we’ll talk. Now where’s that ammo I heard about? I’m running low.”

“Over there,” the Admiral pointed. “But there’s a problem.”

“There’s always a problem,” I replied. “But what’s this one?”

“The ammo’s a bit past the cover. We put it there earlier, and when the Populars came, we couldn’t go out to grab it. They’ve shot anyone who goes near.”

“Well, that is a problem. I better take a look.” I crept over towards the rocks behind the ammo and took out my binoculars. Christian came in behind. “Snipers hiding in the trees. It looks like some Populars are moving up towards the ammo.” I took out my rifle and fired towards the oncoming squadron. “Never mind. Just the snipers.”

“Can you shoot them from this distance?”

“Maybe, but…” *Wap, wap!* The snipers were shooting at us! “Get down!” We dropped down onto the dirt, clasping our weapons. “Okay, I guess not. This is a problem.”

I took out another Co2 Canister and reloaded my paintball gun. “Ok, well now what?”

Christian let out a deep breath. “Backup.”

“No, really? Backup would help? Thanks for that.”

“No, not real backup! We’ll get a few people and rustle some trees, make it look like there’s a ton of Nerds coming! Maybe we can scare ‘em long enough to get the ammo!”

“You really think some moving plants will help?” I asked.

“It’s the only plan we’ve got,” Christian answered. “And…” *Wap.* Another sniper shot hit the rock. “Well that was a bit close…” the Admiral said as he saw the paint splatter. “So,” he continued, “what do you want to do?”

I sighed. “Alright. That looks like the best shot we have. Let’s get down there.”

We snuck down the hill the way that I came up; the Populars hadn’t moved back into that position yet. Christian led the way. Three soldiers followed him, and I covered the rear.

“Hurry it up,” I called out. “All it’ll take is for one of those Populars to turn their heads and we’re done for.” We all started jogging towards the tree-line. We stopped as soon as we were out of eyesight.

“So, what, we just start shaking trees?” one of the soldiers asked.

“Pretty much,” Christian answered. We all grabbed onto the nearest tree and started shaking it.

“Not too hard,” I announced. “We want to make it look like we’re just pushing braches out of our face.” No more than 30 seconds passed until one soldier spoke up.

“Uh, guys, I think we’ve got a…” SPLAT. She looked down on her arm. There was a huge green mark on her uniform. “Crap.” We all walked over to where she was and looked out from between the trees. A sniper was aimed right…SPLAT. Another soldier looked down and saw that he had been shot as well.

“There, in the trees!” A Popular called out. “Over there! C’mon!” At least 20 Populars started running towards us, randomly shooting at the trees. The last soldier got hit by the wave.

“I did *not* think of this!”

“Yeah, that was sort of silly of us..." More paintballs started flying past us. "C’mon Christian! It's just you and me. Run!” The two of us bolted through the trees, not knowing or caring where we were going. “Actually, this is perfect! That’s 20 Populars that won’t be harassing the out…” I stopped dead in my tracks. Christian rammed into me and we both fell to the ground.

I looked up, hoping that what I saw earlier was just some crazy trick on my eyes. I already knew that it wasn’t. Just 10 yards ahead was a troop of Populars about 30 strong.

“Get up! Get up, get up!” I stood up and Christian quickly rolled to the side, and not a moment too soon. The Populars nailed the spot where we were just lying with tons of paintballs.

“Run!” Christian yelled. We started running through the woods again.

“Make that 50 Populars…” I whispered to myself.

“Up there!” someone ahead called. “Fire!”

“Look out!” I pushed Christian out of the way and we slammed onto the ground once more. Another wave of paintballs whizzed through the air. “Go!” We got up and prepared to run, but there were more Populars ahead. We turned around, only to find some more on that side. We were surrounded.

I drew my pistol. “C’mon. We’re not going out without a fight.” I let out a few shots and took out a Popular.

“Agreed.” Christian did the same.

Populars were closing in. Then, almost in slow motion, a Popular aimed right at me. I had fallen down to dodge a paintball, and this guy had a clear shot. No way I could dodge this. He put his hand near the trigger and…WAP, WAP, WAP!

“For the Thespians!” someone cried out. Paintballs came out of the trees, shooting all the Popular enemies. They were cleared out and packing up before I even knew what was going on.

Someone walked out from behind the trees and offered a hand. I grabbed it and they helped me up. “I heard you on the radio; I got here as soon as I could.”

“Jen! Am I glad to see you! I thought we were done for.”

“Heard the battle cry? Thespians. It’s the proper term for someone like us. I think a name change is in order?”

“Maybe…But probably not. So, Christian, that was pretty close, huh? Christian?” I turned around. Christian was sitting up against a tree and was holding his leg. “Whoa, Christian, you okay?”

“I think so. I fell, skimmed my leg is all.”

“Let me see.”

“Really, I’m fine.”

“That’s what they always say when we find out they’ve been infected by the aliens. Now let me see!”

“Fine, go ahead.” I pulled up Christian’s pant leg up a bit. I looked away almost immediately. “Oooh, jeez. There’s blood. There’s blood.”

“What?” Christian screamed. Jen walked over.

“Oh come on, that’s it? I’ve seen waaay worse! It's just a little cut; all we need to do is wash it and wrap something around it.”

Christian looked back at me. “I think he’s doing worse than I am.”

“I’m just a bit…squeamish…is all.”

“Squeamish?” Jen laughed. “You look like you’ve just seen someone get killed.” I shot her a look and stood up. “Hey, anybody have a cloth or something? We need to wipe this up."

“I’ve got a spare shirt,” a girl said.

“Ah, thanks, Delaney.” Jen wiped the blood of Christian’s leg. Then she took out a water bottle. “This might sting, okay?”

“Okay.” Jen poured the water over the wound. Christian let out a small ‘ah’ but besides that seemed alright. “Now let’s wrap this around…” Now Jen carefully wrapped the shirt (un-bloody side) around Christian’s leg and made it into a makeshift bandage. “There we go. Can you walk?”

“Yeah, I think so.” Christian got up slowly, but surely. “Ah!” He stumbled a bit and Jen and I caught him.

“Whoa there!” I yelled. “Careful.” We slowly let go of Christian and he tried walking again; this time he managed.

“Alright!” he said. “Let’s go!”

“Eh, Christian, I don’t know if you should really be fighting. That’s a nasty injury.”

“Nah, I’m fine. Once I get to the base I don’t have to move around too much.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah!”

“Well then let’s get going! C’mon, we have to hurry. The outpost wasn’t in great shape when we left.” Our troop, now about 30 strong headed quickly towards the Hill Outpost, or at least as fast as we could with Christian’s leg. It wasn’t bad, he just couldn’t run very much without it feeling sore. He agreed to get it checked out by the nurse at school.

Finally we emerged out of the trees.

“Go, go, go!” Nerds were rushing down the hill. Two were holding the giant crate of ammo.

“What’s going on?” I asked Benjamin as he passed.

“There’s only a few of us left. A ton of Populars jumped out of the trees. No way we could fight them all off.”

“How many would you say there are?"

"Fifty at least. Look, they’re getting past the hill!” I turned around to see a horde of Populars running down the hill and taking aim. I quickly looked back at Christian.

“Leave me behind,” he said. “Go!”

“No. We’re not leaving anyone behind. We’re in this together, no matter what.”

Chapter 29

# Last Stand

Sunday, January 29th

W*e ran through the woods; the Populars were close behind.* “I bet you didn’t picture this when you woke up this morning, huh?” I yelled. I was piggy-backing Christian and was running as fast as I could. "Switch!" We slowed down and Christian wrapped his arms around Jen's neck and climbed onto her back. "Alright, let's go!" A few paintballs were being shot towards us, but the Populars were far enough away that nobody could hit us, if they were even shooting at all.

"How much further to the HQ?" Christian asked.

"Just past these rocks I think." We ran past the rocks I mentioned and came out into a clearing. "Welcome to Headquarters." Populars were fleeing through the trees, Nerds pouring in from all directions. It was obvious that this was a close battle.

We walked over to the bunker. Jen brought Christian to a safe place and let him down. She checked on his leg before coming back towards me.

"He's going to be alright?" I asked.

"Yep. We just need to make sure that his leg gets washed out again. It'll be sore for a few days but he'll be fine." I started walking towards the bunker.

"Everyone, fall in!" The remaining Nerds, numbering at no more than 80, circled around me. "Alright, George and Lakira, secure the perimeter. There are a ton of Populars that are coming from that direction," I pointed to where we just came from. "They'll be here any moment." The two didn't wait a moment longer. They ran behind cover and were followed by their remaining soldiers.

"Now, we just brought in ammo from the Hill Outpost. Restock now while we have the chance. It's obvious that the Populars are simply regrouping and preparing for another attack." As I said this paintball shots rang out from behind me; the Populars had entered the clearing. I ignored this and walked over to the radio. "Hello, are *any* outposts still standing?" All were quiet as we waited for a response. Nothing. I was just about to get up when some noise came through.

"Hello? Hello? Who is this? This is Commander Franklins! I'm here with Rachael Richardson, and we've managed to defeat the Populars around here! Do you need help?"

"This is High Commander Miller. We're at the Head Quarters and we need every last soldier. Just abandon the outpost and get over here, and fast!"

"Alright!" Now another voice came through.

"This is Zach. My soldiers and Arianna's are on our way right now! Keep some Populars for us, will ya?"

"Will do. Just hurry, because they'll be attacking any minute now!"

"Let's pick up the pace!" Zach called out before the signal went out.

"Ok, so here's what we have to..." *Sploosh!* A huge blast of paint splashed a bunch of soldiers. "GET DOWN!" We all took cover behind the bunker. "My God, what on Azeroth was that?" I asked.

"Paintball grenade," Andrew answered. "A lot more effective than our paper ones."

"I didn't know that was even a thing!"

"Oh it is, and they have them!" Another grenade flew and hit three more Nerds.

"ON MY MARK!" I yelled. "THREE! TWO! ONE! FIRE!" Every Nerd popped above their cover and shot their weapons. A wave of paintballs met the oncoming Populars, taking about twenty of them down. "This is going to be a tough one," I told Andrew.

"When *isn't* it a tough one?" The Populars continued their onslaught. Despite our system of shoot and duck, those grenades just kept coming.

"Daniel!" I called out.

"Yeah?"

"Can you see anyone specific that's throwing out a lot of grenades?"

"Hold on, let me check!" Daniel poked his head out for a daring 10 seconds. Then he turned back towards me. "In the back! Guy with a big backpack. And a belt of grenades around his waist."

I poked my head out and immediately saw who the Commander was talking about. "How did I miss that guy? Sniper," I said tapping on the person behind me. "Him." I pointed to the grenadier.

"No problem." The sniper took aim and shot the Popular right in the stomach. Then he shot each individual grenade. "Just an extra show," he smiled.

"Wait, wait, he's handing someone the grenades! Shoot her!" *Bang!* "Now he's walking towards someone else! Shot him! And someone else! Keep covering those grenades, make sure nobody can get them!"

"That might be a bit difficult."

"Why's that?"

"Look!" I turned my head to see ten other people throwing grenades over the bunker.

"Oh jeez. How the heck..." Just then the trees started shaking in a frenzy, out popped Zach and Arianna.

"Fire!" they shouted in union. About 30 Nerds charged out of the trees and shot at the Populars. Four of the grenadiers went down, one fled, and the rest turned their attention to these new attackers.

"Shoot the grenadiers! Shoot the grenadiers!" Out from our bunker came another wave of paintballs. One grenadier, two, three...*Sploosh!* Four...five...*Bang!* The last onetried to hand their ammo to another Popular but all they ended up doing was getting their comrades killed.

*Wap, wap, wap, wap, wap!* A ton of shots came from the side. I looked to my right and saw some gunners in the trees. From the opposite direction a small squad of Populars emerged. "They've really got us pinned down..."

Luckily we had a few more reinforcements. I looked to see the gunners stop shooting and instead climbing down from their vantage point. Rachael came out of the trees with 20 soldiers behind her, and they quickly ran over to help George cover the rear.

Abby had another 20 soldiers and joined Zach and Arianna right on the frontlines. But then the biggest surprise of all. About fifty Nerds came rushing into the clearing, followed by even more Populars. The battle was utter chaos. Both Nerds and Populars springing out of the trees in all directions.

Just then I saw a blur move through the crowd. They dashed past the few grenadiers still trying to hand off their 'explosives.' Not anymore. Whoever that was running grabbed the grenades. I saw a few splashes of paint and some disappointed Populars lower their weapons.

I waited a moment before firing again. Just then someone tossed me something. I barely caught it; it was a grenade. "Christian! Was that you?"

"A little rest and my leg's good as new. But it's going to be killing me tomorrow..."

"Well thank you soldier, your contribution to the cause will not go unnoticed," I said in my most serious voice. "Now, how many grenades did you grab?"

"Four."

"Four paintball grenades." Just then someone came over, grabbed a couple grenades and launched them over. "Really? REALLY?" I yelled. The person either didn't hear or ignored me. "Alright...two paintball grenades. You keep that one, and I'll keep this one."

I looked back over the barricade and saw that the Populars had still managed to get the upper hand. I let out a couple more shots from my rifle, before turning back to Christian.

"You trust me?"

"Well..."

"Close enough. Retreat! Regroup! Pull back to the bunker!" It took a moment, but slowly the Nerds started making their way to safety, or at least the nearest thing to it. It was a bit of a tight fit, but we all got situated. Although we were very vulnerable to a grenade right then.

"Commanders," I said. Take your troops and guard the perimeter while I address everyone else. About thirty soldiers got up and replaced those at the edges and began firing.

"Alright, everyone. This is it. The final paintball battle of the day. We get this and we get a pretty good advantage to get back the Library! The Populars nabbed an extra victory in Capture the Flag, so we have to get them here. This is it. Because whoever wins the Library will have a better chance of winning the war. We have to do this. Which is why we're just going to run out there, and fight 'em. No cover, no tricks, just close combat."

"Let's do this!" one person shouted.

"Yeah, c'mon!" cried another one.

"Well then alright, let's go!" A wave of Nerds poured out from between the rocks and some clambered up the hill. The first few got shot down quickly, but that gave the opportunity for the rest of us to rush out. I grabbed two pistols and started shooting ahead. *Wap, wap!* Two Nerds next to me went down. *Bang, bang, bang, bang!* Three Populars got shot, a fourth narrowly dodged my last paintball.

I saw a grenade fly into the crowd, taking out a ton of Populars. *Bang, bang!* That time I nearly got hit, but someone ran right in front of me at that moment and took the shot instead. I saw another few grenades fly out; obviously a few grenadiers handed off the weapons to someone. One completely missed, but two more were direct hits and took out a lot of Nerds.

*Wap, wap, wap, wap, wap, wap!* A rain of paintballs came out from a few gunners standing on the edge of the battle. I aimed one of my pistols right at the eye on their mask and fired. The shot blinded them and they threw their gun on the ground. I looked back at the Popular in front of me, then again at the gun. We both scrambled for the weapon. I let out a shot from my pistol. It completely missed. They pulled out a grenade and tossed it, splashing those behind me with paint. I rolled, grabbed the gun, turned over and shot the Popular right in the stomach.

I quickly jumped up, dodging a few shots. A volley of paintballs emerged from my rifle and nailed at least 20 Populars. But, just my luck, the thing was out of ammo. No time to reload. I pulled out my own rifle, not nearly as quick, off my back. I turned to see another grenade fly, and a Nerd jumped up, caught it, and threw it back at the Populars.

"Yeah!" I yelled.

The fighting continued. I dodged shot after shot, and eventually had to retreat to the bunker to reload. It took me a minute to get all my weapons in order, but I did it. Just then Jen came up to me.

"Almost over. We outnumber them; we've got it in the bag."

"Ha, ha! Yes! Let's go out there and finish this!"

We got up and came out from the bunker, but we didn't like what we saw. The last Nerds began walking away, and based off the stains they were taken out by a couple well thrown grenades.

About 15 Populars stood in between us and victory.

"Take this," I handed Jen my rifle. "One last fight. Good luck."

I drew my duel-pistols as quickly as I could and took out four Populars. Jen let out tons of paintballs from the rifle, taking out six more. But just then, while sliding to avoid a projectile, she slipped and fell in a patch of mud. The Populars used this to their advantage, and almost immediately shot her.

Me against five Populars, with no time to grab any other weapon. I was done for. I let out two shots, both of them hitting my enemies. But to make sure things weren't too easy for me, I ran out of ammo. This was definitely it.

"No, wait, the grenade!" I dropped one of my pistols, grabbed the 'explosive', and threw it. It managed to take out three of the Populars. The only remaining three Populars.

That was it. It was over. Victory was ours.

Chapter 30

# Assault on the Library

Monday, January 30th

U*pon checking at the lounge, we found out that we did in fact win the last round of paintball.* We held a small party the next day, celebrating our victory.

"This is it, everyone! Tomorrow, the Library will be ours and we'll be one giant step closer to ending the war!" Everyone cheered and clunked their water bottles together. I hopped onto the computer and logged onto the website. "800 Nerds ready to follow me into battle," I whispered. "Amazing."

It felt like an eternity before the battle began the next day. We were all gathering in the Factory a few minutes ahead of time so that we could leave for the outposts as soon as the battle started.

"Gear up!" I called once a significant amount of people inside. "We're taking back what's ours!" Hornets were being created, grenades were being handed out, machine guns were being loaded. Everyone was nearly ready, I just wanted to say a few things.

"Attention everyone," I announced. "I have a few words to say. I've been listening to you guys. I know there are some doubts among you. Some of you are beginning to wonder what all this is about, why we're fighting. We'll I'll tell you.

"We're here because we want to change something. You might be saying, 'Why aren't we brave enough to get into some real action?' Well we are brave enough to do something more. If we win, when we win, we'll know that we beat them, without getting or giving, any bloody noses," I said, pointing out the door. "Plus, we're learning some pretty helpful stuff. Trust, stamina, strategy, long-term thinking, problem solving, and team work.

"Don't think of this war as a way to divide us! Think of it as a way to bring us together. And we can rise above these challenges, and say that we won. Pride and glory will be ours! And...on top of that...you have to admit...this is all pretty fun." I smiled.

The troops cheered and clamped and whistled. Cries of 'let's do this' and 'for the Nerds!' rang out from the crowd.

"Wow," I thought, "if there's one thing I've learned this year, it's how to make a speech." Everyone started moving out the door. "General Maxwell!" I called out. "You take your soldiers and go to Outpost 1. Admiral Smith, you go with him. And how's your leg feeling?"

"Good as new!"

"Great! Now, Admiral Alison, Lieutenant Lockwood! You two are going to Outpost 2! General Maxwell, you are going as well. Got it?" They all nodded. "George. Don't let me down. Wear your new title proudly. Make it count for something."

"Don't worry. I'll be great." George laughed and went off to join the others.

"Admirals Vaksman and Douglas. You two, with me. Outpost 3. Hey, Ryan! Get over here!" I waved the lieutenant over. "You go with Commanders Franklins and Graves, and prepare to assault Outpost 4, alright?"

"No problem! Let's go!" Ryan motioned for his troops to follow.

"Alright, Zach. You're going to take Admiral Robinson and Commander McDowell to attack Outpost 5."

"Outpost 5. Got it!"

"Alright everyone! Secure those outposts, we'll attack the Library once all of them are controlled!"

One last cheer went out before our troop went its separate ways. We arrived at the outpost just in time. All our watches were synchronized so that we would know when the battle began. All of our watches beeped, signaling that the battle for the Library had begun.

Almost immediately after my walkie-talkie went off. "Lakira here. Taking Outpost 5 may take a little while."

"Why, what's wrong?" I asked.

"Well remember how the winners of each paintball round got some machine guns?"

"Yeah, of course."

"Well...It seems like almost every single one is being used at Outpost 5."

"Do you need backup?"

"No, we can do it. It'll just take a while. But I'd say this is a pretty good opportunity to attack the Library."

"Good idea. I'll just wait for confirmation from Outpost 4 to know that they've taken it." We waited anxiously for a few minutes. My outpost at least, met no resistance. It was very quiet, which was worrying me. Who was making their way to the other outposts? Who was waiting for us at the Library?

After about five minutes of waiting, we finally got radio contact from Outpost 4. They had taken the base and were ready for the assault. I got on my walkie-talkie and addressed everyone.

"Alright, Outposts 1-4 are controlled and ready to move. Please say something if there are any problems keeping you from setting out right now."

"No problems here."

"We're good!"

"Ok, Outposts 1 and 2 will go through the front, while 3 and 4 will go through the back. Let the assault begin. Good luck." I put the radio down. "Alright, let's move!"

Everyone grabbed their gear and we started jogging through the hallway.

"Look out, there's some!" Andrew called out. We quickly shot at the small squadron of Populars, only letting them get two shots out.

"Gotta be careful," I said quietly. "This place is probably infested with Populars. Probably just small squadrons, though, otherwise they would've attacked." I couldn't have been more wrong. We went around the corner and found about twenty Populars waiting for us.

"Attack!" Three Populars had PC-MG's, while the rest had hornets. A wave came out. Two Nerds went down, and I tossed a grenade in. Just enough hornets hit one of the gunners to remove a sticker, and two Hornetiers went down.

I saw Arianna throw two grenades while Andrew let out shots from his PC-MG, distracting everyone enough to ignore Arianna's projectiles.

For this brief moment, I was a bit worried. Basically, I was creating soldiers. But I quickly dismissed the thought.

The Popular Squadron was quickly disposed of, although they managed to take out 30 Nerds out of the 80 we started with. The assault was being launched in 2 waves, so there were another 80 Nerds back at the Outpost that would be leaving any minute now.

"C'mon, we have to keep moving." By the time we arrived, the other squads were cleaning up the squadrons around the entrance. Very soon after that, the second wave of squadrons arrived. Over 600 kids surrounded the library. Some in the front, others in the back. Now was the time.

At this point, there was no strategy. No tactics, no tricks, no distractions. Just surround the Library and have one epic charge. I rushed to the front of the army.

"This is it! This is what we've been waiting for! Whether this ends the war or not, this will truly be a battle to remember! For the Nerds!"

"For the Nerds!" everyone cheered.

"CHARGE!" I screamed. We all rushed down towards the Library, which was seemingly miles away. The doors burst open and forty jocks stood between us and our goal. All were armed to the teeth with hacky-sacks. We were pelted by these sort-of grenades and hornets, some falling to the barrage.

Fortunately we had the better grenades, and we threw some in and immediately destroying the blockade. We didn't even have to stop; we just kept running.

Now it was time for the real challenge. I wasn't sure how many Populars were in there, but apparently a lot of bases had been deserted to defend this place.

"George, Arianna! You two take out those spit-wad shooters up on the second floor!" There was no delay.

"Ryan, Benjamin, you two take the 21st division and focus on as many Popular leaders as you can!" These two also ran off immediately.

I rolled a few grenades in front of me and let out some shots from my PC-MG. A Nerd in front of me took a few hits so I told him to take cover behind a table and gave him a **MED-KIT.** I sat there for a little while, shooting Populars and taking cover behind the table.

Just then a rain of grenades came from the second floor. I looked up to see Arianna and George, as well as a few other soldiers, letting out tons of ammo of all weapons onto the crowd. It was impossible for the Judges to tell who was out, I knew that we would unfortunately have to rely on people's honesty.

All of a sudden another rain came, this time tons of hacky-sacks emerged from the back door. Eighty Jocks had burst into the Library and were using their own swords. A few of their projectiles hit me, almost brining my health to 0. I quickly used a **MED-KIT** and stuffed it in my pocket.

The sword-wielding Dramatics charged the Jocks to combat their strength, but they quickly fell to despite their training.

A burst of noise came from the opposite side. The soldiers from Outpost 5 had finally arrived, and they were armed with PC-MG's. These were the few that we added sound-effects to, just for kicks.

The paper-wads went flying across the Library, pelting the Jocks that had taken us by surprise. Some charged at the Nerds and managed to take out a few gunners before inevitably falling.

I ran behind a bookshelf and shot through a break between the books. It took a second for the Populars to spot me before a bunch of Jocks ran over to nail me with their swords.

One grabbed a hacky-sack off the floor and threw it at me. I dodged it, but another one hit me. I unleashed a ton of paper-wads out of my weapon, taking out a few Jocks in the front. Two more hit me before ripping off their stickers. *One life left.* One last Jock raised his sword and...

Lowered it. He ripped off his sticker and behind him I saw Zach lower his pistol.

"Thanks for that," I said, taking out a **MED-KIT**. "Nearly got me."

"Heh, and then we'd be left without someone to boss us around. That would've been a shame." We both laughed before continuing the battle.

The fighting continued for a while. Not more than 15 minutes, but significantly longer than most battles, considering how long we were already fighting.

A sword flew through the air, coming right at me. I rolled behind a shelf as hit the ground. As I got up, another noise slowly replaced that of the battle. Cheering. The Library, at long last, war ours once more.

Chapter 31

# All Your Base are Belong to Us

Monday, May 14th

F*our and a half months had passed.* Despite our victory at the Library, the war continued. Although the tables had turned. We had conquered nearly every single Outpost in the name of the Nerds, and we were very close to victory. Yet the fighting went on.

At this point there were only a few students that weren't involved in the war, and most of them were former soldiers.

We had activated the **DESPERATE MEASURES INITIVE**. This meant once you're dead, you're dead. No Rescue Day. Things were getting serious, now. We were really trying to end the war, because if it didn't end by the time school did, well, that'd be ridiculous.

I was on the way to the Factory. This area was deep within our territory, so any Populars that managed to sneak in I would be able to handle.

I entered the lab. Rows of troops lined up the saluting position.

"At ease!" I yelled. Everyone knew I liked that sort of thing and occasionally humored me. "Admiral Duncan," I approached the scientist. He was wearing the engineer cap that was now standard issue among the Geeks.

"Commander," Andrew acknowledged.

"Andrew, we have to end this war. Please tell me you have something that can help us."

"Well, there was one thing that I wanted to test today. We're going to have to go down to the basement to get it, though."

"Alright, let's go."

We left the room and slowly walked down the hall before we reached some stairs.

"Alright, now we've got John working on this thing, down here."

"John? John Withell? Why's he in the basement?"

"You know him. He's a bit odd. Likes to be by himself. We asked him if he wanted to help, and he said he wanted a place to work in the basement."

"And the school let him?"

"Yeah, he's built some cool stuff." We walked down the stairs. I was very excited to know what was John was building down here.

Two Nerds blocked our way.

"Halt. This area has restricted access. Please present your ID and access co..."

"Marcus, you do this every time. Just let us in."

"Fine, fine. Sorry for having a little fun." The guards moved out of the way.

"Jeez," I whispered to Andrew. "You have guards down here?"

"Yeah, they were just sitting bored at an outpost anyway. Ah, here it is." I was impressed. The sign on the front door even said "Withell's Workshop."

"Why...why don't we have one of those?" I asked, pointing.

"Just let it go."

We entered the workshop. There was a kid sitting by a desk on the opposite side of the room, tinkering with something.

"John," Andrew said. "We're here to check out that thing we've been working on."

"What?" John turned around and was wearing a pair of goggles.

"Doing some welding, are we?"

"I'm not doing any welding. It doesn't look like you're doing welding, either. I just where these for fun."

"I like this guy," I said pointing.

"John," Andrew continued. "We're here for that special thing!"

"Which thing?"

"The best one."

"What's the best one?"

"The...oh..." Andrew hurried over and whispered in John's ear.

"OH! The cannon! Why didn't you say so! Why'd you whisper?"

"Well it was supposed to be a secret..."

"A cannon? That's amazing! Get it out, I want to see."

"Sure thing. Where'd you put it, John?"

"In the closet..." John got up and opened up a storage room. Andrew followed him, mumbling something to himself.

I turned around and looked at the walls. There were some amazing blueprints of plenty of inventions; some we could use in the war while some where probably pushing the limits of our best technologies.

I bumped into a desk and something clattered to the ground. I bent over to pick it up, and immediately recognized it. It was a very early model of the PC-MG. The patchwork was obvious, and there was a long red stripe going through the middle. I looked over to see a bunch of assorted Nerf, Airsoft, and Paintball guns lined up against the wall.

"Careful," I heard Andrew call from the closet. I turned around and saw the pair carrying a large box into the main room.

"Wow," I said. "How long were you working on that?"

"Once we finished the first gun-like weapons," John explained, "I knew we could do more. Ever since then I've been constructing a special cannon. I've only just shown Andrew two weeks ago."

"Well, let's test it!" Andrew said.

"Hey! It's my invention, I'll decide what to do with it. Let's test it!" Andrew sighed and lifted the box up. I went over and helped the two lift up the box. We carefully brought it out into the long hallway.

John pulled the box down around the package, and inside was a marvelous cannon.

"Wow! This is amazing!" I said.

"I know," Andrew and John said in union.

"Alright. Now how does this thing work?"

"Insert the grenades in here," John explained. He put them into a hole in the top of the cannon. "Then press this!" Several grenades flew through the air and exploded about eight yards in front of us.

One of the guards came over. "Jeez, is that what you've been working on? We've been right by that for a week and you never showed us?"

"You never asked to see it!" John went back into his workshop.

I laughed. "What are you laughing at?" the guard asked.

"Oh, it's just that they say we need to raise test scores when we have students building cannons and paper-machine guns, and making military strategies worthy of the history books."

"Can't satisfy everyone," Andrew said.

"Well one thing's for sure, this cannon has satisfied me. C'mon, let's put it back."

Unfortunately, this cannon was very expensive. The Geeks only planned to make a couple more, if any. Though it was still a very valuable asset.

Another week passed. The few outposts we could find we took without hassle. I had no idea where so many Populars could be hiding, but they were doing a good job.

Even with all this, the war continued. The problem with the **DESPERATE MEASURES INITATIVE** is it got everyone one edge. Any unnecessary fighting was avoided, which mean battles slowed down and small skirmishes came to a complete halt.

I was in my dorm one day, playing some Mass Effect when I heard someone knock. I paused the game, rolled my chair over to the door, and opened it.

"Hey, what's up?" I asked. The person turned around, raised a pistol, and shot.

*Wap, wap, wap, wap!* Four papers nailed me before the Popular drew their sword. I quickly turned my chair around and rolled backwards, reaching desperately for my PC-MG propped up against my dresser. My fingers scraped up against its side before the weapon fell over.

I looked back at the Popular, who aimed to stab. I quickly dodged the sword, then hit their pistol and sent it skidding across the floor.

Next I tried to grab the sword, but they had a firm grasp on it. We wrestled over the weapon for a moment before the Popular kicked my chair sending me slamming into my desk. They ran over, grabbed the pistol, prepared to shoot, and...

A sword swung through the air and hit the pistol out of the assailant's hand. Shots came from behind them, and they were quickly down. The Popular grabbed their gun and left the room.

"WHAT...JUST...HAPPENED?!?!" I yelled in shock.

"We saved you, that's what happened." I looked up to see Zach. "C'mon, we gotta go. Delaney, how's it looking out there?"

A Dramatic outside lowered her pistol and turned back towards us. "All clear." She said.

"Dramatic with a pistol. That seems a bit out of character."

"You think about leading an army. I'll think about my character."

"Alright, alright. Yeesh." I grumbled, hopping out of my chair. "Now what's going on? How'd you guys know to come help me?" I started re-arranging the things that got messed up in the fight.

"We were going to tell you that Populars attacked some people in their dorms. But I guess you found that out, huh?"

"Ever heard of walkie-talkies?" Zach held up a radio. "Oh. Heh, heh. Yeah, I left that in the library. I was going to pick that up soon."

Zach looked at my computer screen. "Yeah. Sure."

"Well we better get to the HQ, I need to call a meeting. This war has gone on long enough." I grabbed my PC-MG and followed Zach outside. "Forgot to save my game..." I said as I walked back in. "Alright, NOW we'll end the war!"

The three of us ran down the hall towards the library. I had contacted all the high ranks to get them to meet us at the HQ. Everyone was there shortly.

"Alright guys. We need to wrap the war up. This has gone on way too long! We can't keep doing this! We need to start searching the school, top to bottom. We need to find out where they're hiding. Who's sent out a scouting mission recently?"

Nearly everyone rose their hand.

"Where have they been?"

"Third floor."

"I sent them to the third floor."

"We split up, I went to the second floor and they went to the third."

"Ok. And they didn't find anything."

"They never came back," everyone said together. They quickly looked at each other.

"And nobody said anything?" I asked, bewildered.

"Obviously we figured it was just a little mishap..." Lakira said. "Looks like that's where we're going to find our Populars."

"We better send someone to check," Arianna said.

"Jen, I want you to lead a scouting party with your stealthiest operatives."

"I know where the lights switches are. I can get that place dark in an instant."

"Good. Just make sure there aren't any teachers in there..."

"It's the 3rd floor, it'll probably be empty."

"Alright, well get moving. We don't have a whole lot of time left." Jen quickly got up and motioned to for two of her Dramatic Guards to follow.

"Well we better get ready for a fight," I continued. "If all the Populars are there, this is going to be one heck of a battle. Andrew, what's the cannon situation look like?"

"We've got two ready to use. And we just finished up another batch of guns."

"Hopefully that'll be the last. Think about it guys, this week we could be ending the war! Everything will be back to normal." Everyone quieted down. "What's the matter?" I asked them. "You guys don't enter the war?" There was a moment before Rachael responded.

"We've been doing this for so long, it'll be weird to go back to normal." Everyone nodded in agreement.

"C'mon guys. All the stress. All the time away from doing other things you like. I thought you'd want to get that time back."

"Luke," Daniel said to me. "You've made something awesome! And we like it."

"Well sorry to burst your bubble, guys, but this had to end eventually. Nothing lasts forever, and this of all things definitely wasn't meant to." I stood up quickly, startling some people. "Now let's go plan this assault."

Chapter 32

# Third Floor of Death

Tuesday, May 15th

W*e were on the stairs by the third floor, waiting for a few people to arrive with the cannons.* Jen had found the Populars alright, and we figured out how they were hiding. Checking their maps, they found out that there was an unused, outdoors courtyard that had an entrance on the Third Floor.

I didn't know how we could let this slip by for so long. But it didn't matter, because we were here today. We were ending the war.

This was the perfect place for a raid. Most of this floor was unused, and this area was completely deserted. At least, by the school. We were using it for our own purposes, and that would prove useful. This was what we planned on being the final battle, so we didn't bother leaving any guards. All 700 Nerds surrounded the area, and were ready for battle. No judges today. Yes, this may mean there would be that much less order in the already chaotic battle, but we just couldn't leave anyone out like that.

"Admirals Smith and Vaksman. You two are going to be leading the attack on the outpost up here. After you clear that out we can begin the assault on the courtyard itself." Someone called my name. I turned around to see a few Nerds carefully lifting the cannons up the stairs. "Aha! Here are the wonder machines. Just put them over here." I cleared a path through the soldiers to make way for the heavy cannons.

"Alright! This is it everyone! The final assault! If there are any Populars that aren't in this base, they'll have no choice but to surrender! We're going to set up the cannons and begin the bombardment. Then Admirals Smith and Vaksman will lead their squadrons into this guarding outpost. After than Admiral Alison and General Maxwell will lead their troops and follow behind. The rest of you will await further orders. We'll be starting shortly."

I approached Andrew who was getting the cannons ready.

"Admiral," I said.

"High Commander."

"Andrew, I thought of something. We're not going to get much use for these cannons, not in this battle. Too many stairs."

"And an elevator."

"What?"

"Yep. There's an elevator."

"That's great, but this thing is too heavy to just be carrying around."

"Not too worry." Andrew took out some sort of controller and flipped a switch. The cannon began moving around.

"You've got to be kidding me. This thing *moves around with a remote control?* That's awesome!"

"Finished it a few days ago. Unfortunately, the other's immobile as a car on the autobahn."

"Um, aren't cars on the autobahn pretty mobile?"

"Exactly! We got wheels on both of them!"

"Ha! Amazing. We'll clear out an area by the elevator and then I'll radio you to send the cannons down."

"Gotcha." I left the Admiral to his preparations. I walked over to Daniel, who was handing out weapons to the less-equipped Nerds.

"Commander," I said as I approached, "you are going to take thirty Nerds locate a second entrance to the courtyard.

"Why couldn't you check the map?" he asked.

"Jen seems to have the only map left in the school. There's a little blot of ink on her map, and she can't tell if it's another entrance that got smeared or if it's just some crud. We haven't checked it out yet because she only just noticed."

"Well, this sounds boring."

"I know it does. Which is why I'm going to have your squadron controlling one of the cannons."

"Well this sounds less boring."

"Good. We're counting on you! Finding a secret entrance can cut off the Populars escape route, and any reinforcements. On second thought, you better take more soldiers. Commander McDowell! Over here!" I waved Lakira over and filled her in.

"Alright, sounds good," she said. "I'm going to need one of these though..." Lakira reached over and grabbed two pistols from the box of weapons Daniel had. "Alright. Ready."

"That's the spirit! Now let me show you the area you'll be checking out..." I pointed to the ink blot on their map and directed them to where they were going. "Alright, you guys good?"

"Yep! We're ready!"

"Alright! Now get that cannon and get going! We'll be starting the attack any minute now."

"Gotcha. Let's go!"

The two commanders gathered their troops and went down to the first floor, and began the search for the 'secret entrance.'

"Commander Franklins, Admiral Alison, as soon as the outpost is secure, you will lead your troops down the stairs, got it?"

"Got it."

"Alright."

Now everything was complete. The preparations were ready. The troops were gathered. The Populars were surrounded. The war was about to end. I went up to the top of the stairs and went to my full height, and began addressing the army.

"Andrew! Is that cannon ready?"

"Ready and rarin' to go!"

"Good! Arianna! Christian! You two ready?"

"Are you guys ready?" the two repeated.

"Yeah!" their squadrons cheered.

"We're ready!" the Admirals answered back to me.

"Nerds, are you ready?"

"Yeah!"

"Geeks, Dramatics, are you ready?"

"Woo!"

"Instrumentals, Sporties, are you ready?"

"YEAH!"

"Nerds of Castle Vine, I am Luke Ericson and I am your High Commander! Today we gather to end the war that’s troubled this school all year, in the hope that this is a better place than it was when we arrived. Today we end this thing! Today we do this!" Just then my mind flashed back to the beginning of the year. "Today we defeat the oppressive forces that oppose us! Today, WE ARE NERDS!"

This time there was no pause. Cheers broke out immediately. Everyone drew their weapons and raised them up into the air, swinging them wildly.

"Now! Christian! Arianna! On my mark! One! Two! Three! CHARGE!"

The two squadrons charged towards the HQ, right after Andrew fired several grenades straight through the door.

More cheers rang out as they exploded, quickly taking out a couple Populars.

"The assaults begun," I whispered to myself. "Let's hope this is the beginning of the end."

Everyone sat around anxiously while we heard the fighting just ahead. Andrew was prepared to move the cannons, and Abby was getting ready to move the troops in at a moment's notice.

"What's the hold up?" I called out.

"They keep coming up the stairs!" someone yelled back. "This could be a while."

"George!" I yelled. "General Maxwell!" George came running up through the crowd.

"Yes?"

"Take your troops and get in there! They need backup! Lieutenant Roberts! You'll follow him, got it?"

"Got it!" The two signaled their troops and rushed into the room. This got us even more excited. Everyone watched excitedly as the battle raged on in that tiny room, not knowing when it would stop. Finally, at long last, Christian signaled us over.

"All clear!" he shouted.

"Alright, Commander Franklins! Move in! We'll follow shortly behind! Send someone up once you've secured the area around the elevator!" Abby didn't delay. She ran towards the outpost, her soldiers following behind her.

The rest of us followed behind. Abby and her troops rushed down the stairs, while I sent the first strike force down with her.

"Careful everyone! Don't step on that cannon. It's *very* expensive..." Andrew slowly navigated the devices through the crowd.

"Ok, I'm going to start moving soon, you okay here?" I asked.

"Yep, ready to go." Just then someone came running up the stairs. They shoved their way through the crowd before speaking.

"Elevator is clear. Ready for the cannons."

"Well looks like we're both moving. Take a few people with you in the elevator. Good luck down there, Andrew."

"Thanks. You too." I turned around and started making my way towards the stairs.

"Alright everyone! Let's move! For the Nerds!"

"For the Nerds!" We all charged down the stairs, and the sounds of battle got louder with each step. Finally we emerged into the courtyard, and I blinked in the light as I gazed around at the battlefield.

Dramatics were at the frontlines, holding the Populars at bay with their swords. Gunners were behind them, using what little room there was to shoot at the Populars.

I could see a separate entrance on the opposite side. There were Populars fighting outside; my commanders obviously made it.

I knew this fight would be quite intense. This place was could not hold a few hundred kids, and soldiers of both sides would simply keep filling in the ranks for a while.

*Ding!* The elevator opened up and Andrew rolled out the cannon. They wasted no time. Tons of grenades flew out of the elevator and out into the Popular crowd, taking out several.

I unleashed a wave of hornets from my PC-MG before throwing out a couple grenades. This was truly chaotic. I wasn't sure how many people were going to play honestly, but I just went with it. Eventually the battle would have to end, either way.

"Ready? GO!" A shout came from the Populars and a rain of hacky-sacks fell down on us.

"LOOK OUT!" I jumped out of the way, only getting hit by one hacky-sack. Unfortunately a lot of people by the stairs got nailed, and a good bit of them had their lives exhausted. This meant there was a huge block by the stairs. One we couldn't afford.

But there was no time to worry about this, because a charge of sword-wielding Populars sprang out and broke through the Dramatic barricade. They charged right at me. I let out another barrage of hornets from my rifle before I ran out of ammo. I lowered my weapon and grabbed my pistol, and shot a few more hornets at the on comers. Not before one could hit me though. Three times. Three hits left.

I walked over to a safer location to reload my weapon. Another rain of hacky-sacks fell on the spot where I was standing just moments ago. That one would have surely got me.

*Whoosh!* Another set of grenades flew onto the battlefield, erupting from the Geeks marvelous invention. That took out another large chunk of Populars, but once again they were simply replaced by reinforcements outside.

I couldn’t tell how Daniel and Lakira were faring, but there squadrons must have still been standing, because the Populars still seemed to be occupied with them.

The fighting continued for some time. Finally, I looked out onto the battlefield, taking in everything. The fun, the horror, the good, the bad. Regardless of what anyone's opinion might have been about the war, I looked out that day knowing I had started something. I had started a war. And that was pretty amazing, that one person could start something this big and keep it going, and maybe even make a difference.

But then another thought crossed my mind. The meaning of this war. Had it been lost through the battles? Had we all forgotten what this was really supposed to signify?

*Stop it, Luke* I thought. *There's a time and a place, and this is neither.* I continued fighting, now only stopping to reload. Shot after shot, clip after clip.

It seemed that the constant flow of reinforcements had started to slow down. The Dramatic barricade was weakening. More and more Populars were getting through.

"Andrew!" I called out. "There!" I pointed to the area where the most enemies were leaking through. "Fire! Fire!"

The Admiral quickly did as he was told and turned the cannon. *Swish!* Tons of grenades bombarded the oncoming Populars, many of them ripped off their stickers. The few who survived were quickly dealt with by a few riflemen.

Another group of Dramatics came rushing down the stairs to fill in the gaps. They were met by another barrage of hacky-sacks, followed by a charge from some sword wielding jocks. I ran over and rolled a couple grenades, taking out a few jocks, and distracting a couple more just long enough for others to defeat them.

Just then someone bolted through the defenses, much too fast for us to react, let alone stop them. They dashed around, collecting all the hacky-sacks that were strewn across the courtyard. They picked them all up and disappeared back into the mass of Populars, almost as quickly as they had left.

Almost immediately after, another rain of hacky-sacks fell upon the Nerds. It was met by a barrage of grenades from both cannons. Lakira and Daniel had finally broke through. The Populars were surrounded. We couldn't lose. We just couldn't.

This barrage, on both sides, lasted longer. Hacky-sacks and grenades, both from cannons and arms, rained down on the entire battlefield for a good minute before it finally quieted down. That took out a huge amount of soldiers, both Nerds and Populars.

That's when I remembered one of the **MED-KITS** I had in my pocket. I took one out and ripped it in half, before once again reloading my weapons.

Despite this, there were still plenty of soldiers on both sides, and it seemed like another batch of Popular reinforcements was trying to fight its way inside the courtyard. It was as if the school wanted us to continue fighting; no matter what we did there were always a million more soldiers to replace the ones we defeated.

"Out of grenades!" I heard Andrew call. "Hurry! Someone run up and get more!" I saw a Dramatic run into the elevator and head upstairs. I turned my attention back to the battle, but realized that I was out of ammo.

"Looks like I'm not the only one that needs to restock..." I made my way towards the stairs and pushed my way through the endless crowd of Nerds.

Finally I made it to the outpost. There were plenty of other soldiers there too, resting and restocking on supplies.

"It's pretty crazy down there," one said.

"Yeah," replied another. "Absolutely insane. I'm pretty glad it's over."

"Really?" chimed in a third. "I'm pretty disappointed. This was a lot of fun."

"Speak for yourself..." I casually grabbed some more clips, in no rush to return to the chaos downstairs, when all of a sudden a screech broke the quiet chatter.

"ATTACK!" I could see Populars running up the stairs, coming straight for the HQ. By this point, most of our soldiers were in the courtyard or getting ready on the stairs. There were few of us left to defend our little outpost.

"Everyone! We're under attack!" I grabbed the nearest grenade and threw it towards the incoming squadron. It did nothing to halt them. The relaxing Nerds got up and aimed towards the Populars.

"Fire!" I ordered. Tons of hornets met the attackers, but a fair amount managed to make it past, and defeated the gunners with swords.

"We need help over here!" I called towards the stairs. I drew my sword, not waiting for backup. I aimed a couple stabs at a nearby Popular. Another attacked, this time we had a small duel.

I used my own sword to block his as it came rushing towards me. I pushed it away and he took a few steps back. He swung again, I blocked it once more. I drew my pistol but he quickly knocked it away. The two of us sparred, getting a few hits in. He nailed me twice, whereas I only got him once.

Finally reinforcements arrived. After they helped the remaining Nerds clear up the invaders, the opposing swordsman looked around, then frantically bolted away, down the stairs and back to the rest of the Populars.

Some soldiers started to chase him, but I said, "Let him go! He's earned it." A few more Nerds came up the stairs to restock on supplies. "You guys, guard this outpost!" I ordered. "Once another large group comes up, switch places with them. Got it?"

"Sir, yes sir!"

The group of eight or so sat down and began reloading their weapons, ready to guard us from anyone who thought they could surround us. At least, anyone who thought they could do it with a small group.

The group and I went back down the stairs, returning from the battle. The fighting was just as intense as I had left, even more so because now victory was insight, with the number of soldiers dwindling.

"Let's end this guys," I whispered, half to them and half to myself.

*Swish!* We came out just in time to see another wave of grenades fly through the air, although this time there were a couple duds. The non-exploders landed right at the feet of, guess who, Josh Hevowski.

I looked up at his reaction and immediately knew that something bad was about to happen. He rushed towards the cannon, taking several hits, and smashed the device with his foot.

"Hey, Hey! What the heck!" cried out Andrew. A ton of Geeks went up behind him and began yelling.

"Oops," Josh laughed. "Looks like I slipped." An argument broke out, and nearby soldiers of both sides gathered around. Very soon I realized that they were arguing about more than just the destroyed equipment.

"What? Jeffrey! You traitor, you were part of the Nerds just yesterday!"

"Hey, is that my sword? You stole my sword!" Soon everyone was arguing, enemies and comrades alike.

Josh kept denying everything with a smirk on his face even though we all knew what had happened. All of a sudden, memories flashed across my mind...

**...**

*One member of the popular group whispered to the others. Everyone stared at him a second, and then all turned towards the other kid. They gave him a look of disgust, scooted over one or two seats, and completely ignored him. Even when he tried to start conversation, they still acted like he wasn’t there, or even snickered at him.*

**...**

*It was a fight! I saw that kid I mentioned during lunch, the one in ‘the incident.’ Apparently those other kids were really getting on his nerves. From what I was told later, the kid, whose name was Mac Berochi, had been talking with the other one, Jason Morris, off in the corner. Before they knew what was going on, a fist had gone flying.*

**...**

*“It seems like Josh has a lot to do with this,” Rachael said.*

*“What a surprise,” Daniel whispered to me. I chuckled.*

*“I’m not exactly sure what his part is,” Rachael continued, “but he definitely seems to be involved. He has hung out with most of the fighters at one time or another."*

**...**

I could not believe it. All this, for nothing. The problem had stared my right in the face. Josh. He actually *did* stare at me in the face one time, if you remember. And I didn't see it. *Stupid!*  I was yelling at myself. *Stupid, stupid, stupid!*

Just then I snapped back to reality, where the arguments were escalating.

"ENOUGH!" Everyone quieted down and looked behind them to see where this most recent outburst had come from. "Everyone. I was stupid. Someone, tell me why we're were fighting."

"You said it yourself, Luke," someone called out. "To do something about the fights without being violent!"

"Yes. But, I ignored one key factor. One really important thing that we all missed, somehow. Missed, or didn't reveal..." Now everyone was interested. "Uh, uh, Devon!" I picked someone out of the crowd. "Tell me, why did you fight Mac that one day in the Library?"

"What? Why..."

"Answer the question!" everyone yelled in union.

"Okay, okay! I fought Mac because...because...because...why did I fight him? I honestly cannot remember!"

"Exactly! Beverley! You there! What about you? Do you remember?"

"I...I can't! I don't remember why I fought those people!"

"What about you, Joseph? Riley? Damon? Do any of you remember?" They all responded with the same vague answers as the others.

"See? None of you remember. And under normal circumstances I might think you forgot, or even not believe you completely. But not today! Today, I have...things...to...things to say! Yes! These people were manipulated, and the fights were caused by none other than Joshua S. Hevowski!" I turned around and pointed to Josh as he tried to sneakily escape out the back while everyone was focused on me.

"How'd you know his middle name?" someone called out.

"I didn't! It's called dramatic effect! Now, do you have anything to say, Josh?"

"It depends? Do you have the dream of getting punched?"

"Hey, not on our watch!" Andrew stepped forward with a bunch of Geeks behind him.

"Yeah!" Daniel stepped out of the crowd as well. Lakira followed behind. Soon all the Nerds were lined up behind me.

"C'mon!" Josh yelled. Let's get them!" He started walking towards us. He turned around, to see that none of the Populars were following him. "C'mon! Let's do this!"

"No, Josh!" Conroy called out.

"This war is over!" Jordan continued. "Over!" she threw her rubber-band into the air. Conroy did the same, and pretty soon all the Populars were following suit.

"This pointless conflict is over," I called out. "The Nerds also resign from this war!" I prepared to throw my rifle on the ground, when Andrew stopped me.

"Careful! Careful. Those things don't like being thrown around."

"Oh, sorry." I laid it on the ground, my pistol joining it shortly after. The remaining soldiers dropped their weapons as well. By this point a lot of the defeated soldiers had gathered around to see what was going on.

"Now Josh. You sure there isn't anything you'd like to say?"

"You sure you want to do this, nerd?" Josh asked me. I took a step forward.

"This is the most sure I've been about anything this entire year. Enough is enough. I'm not standing for this."

"Well if that's what you think," Josh started, "you won't be standing at all!" The bully took a step forward. I saw a fist swing through the air, aimed right at me. Before I could react, I felt myself being enveloped by darkness...

Chapter 33

# Peace at Last

Tuesday, May 15th

I *woke up in an unfamiliar room.* I could only make out a silhouette standing in front of me as my eyes adjusted.

"Hello there!" a voice said. "Good to see you waking up. You can come in now!" I turned towards where the person was facing, and saw a bunch of people come in.

"Luke! Luke!"

"Careful," the person, who I now realized to be a nurse, said. "He's only just woken up, don't overload him."

"Huh?" I said, confused. "What happened?" I tried to sit up, but quickly layed back down.

"Take it easy," the nurse warned. "You'll be a bit sore for a few days."

"What, what happened?" I asked everyone. "Did, did Josh attack me?"

"He blew a gasket," Arianna explained. "Knocked you out."

"He's getting expelled!" Blake yelled. "No way the school could keep him after this. I even heard he'll have to show up in court."

"Court? Wow." I had mixed feelings about that last part. Despite how much I disliked Josh, I did feel a tinge of guilt knowing that I had gotten him sent to court. I didn't linger on this, though. Because it was finally over.

I returned to school the next day with my arm in a sling; I had fallen right on my arm, breaking it. Naturally it was my main arm. I'd have to survive without my right-hand man (no pun intended) for a while. This would be a real downer for raid nights...

That day after school we had a special party. There was one special one for the Nerds, the Populars, and the Opposers. Just one last thing to do as members of our factions. On my way to the party I was greeted by smiles and hellos by people of all teams.

Everyone just seemed so much happier. Maybe it was because of the end of the war, or because Josh was being expelled, maybe even because school was just starting to come to a close. Probably a combination of all the events that had happened recently. Whatever it was the entire school had a much lighter mood to it.

I entered the Library for the award ceremony. I presented a medal to all the Commanders and Admirals, and many other of the best soldiers. I saved the best for last.

"For saving many of your fellow Nerds, including myself, on multiple occasions, leading your men valiantly into battle multiple times, and being one of the best Nerds we had to offer, I, High Commander Luke Ericson, present to you, newly appointed Commander George Maxwell, the Award of Heroes. Wear it proudly!"

Cheers and clapping erupted from all over the library. I shook hands with George, and someone snapped a couple pictures.

That Saturday, we held a larger ceremony for all members of the school. Naturally I had to give one last speech to the entire school.

"Everyone, everyone! The people gathered around me are the brightest, nicest, smartest, and most amazing kids on the planet. I'd like to thank you all for putting up with me and this war all year. I'm glad that you were all a part of it, and I'm very glad that you all played a part in ending it. Thank you. You're all heroes. I am very thankful to have been given the privileged to know you, and lead a lot of you into battle. And I'm very proud of what you've all done, especially regarding ending the war.

"And," I added," I'm sure the custodians are also very grateful." Everyone laughed. Even though we were supposed to clean up, there were occasional announcements about substantial messes.

"My fellow leaders, soldiers, warriors, students, friends. You may do the honors." I passed around the bucket of stickers, slowly letting every single person out of the hundreds of students grab one.

Once they all had a sticker, we walked over to the dumpster. Finally, one by one, we dropped the badges into the garbage. We clapped the entire time, and everyone was smiling. Finally the last sticker was dropped.

"It's over!" someone in the crowd called out. "It's really over! Lucky thing for you guys, we almost won!"

"Excuse me?" somebody else cried. "We were going to destroy you!" Shouts started coming out of the crowd.

"Oh no..." I whispered. "Here we go again."

# APPENDIX

**Emblems and Badges**

**The Librarian Situation**

At Castle Vine we didn't have a Librarian. We had students who volunteered to take their place, and some teachers who would occasionally stop by and help. This worked great in years passed, I'm told, so the school decided to use the system again.

As you can imagine, this made using the Library as our headquarters, much, much, easier.

**Clubs**

Here is a complete list of clubs that took part in the war. Not all clubs had special names, and not all clubs with names had special badges.

**Nerds:**

Teams with badges: Geeks, Sporties, Instrumentals, Dramatics

* Computer Classes **(Geeks)**
* Lacrosse Teams **(Sporties)**
* Soccer Teams **(Sporties)**
* Mason's Comic Club
* Tennis Club **(Sporties)**
* Chess Club **(Chessies)**
* Wood and Metal Work Classes **(Geeks)**
* Band and Orchestra **(Instrumentals)**
* Drama Classes **(Dramatics)**
* Book Clubs Potter, Tolkien, Snicket, and Sella
* Astronomy Club **(Astronomers)**
* Student Librarians
* 8th Grade Baseball Team **(Sporties)**
* Golf Club **(Sporties)**
* 7th Grade Basketball Team **(Sporties)**
* Track and Field Club **(Sporties)**
* Mr. Harold's Sunday Biking Club **(Sporties)**
* 7th Grade Art Class
* Robot Club **(Geeks)**

**Opposition:**

All teams had their own badges. James's Dramatics where the regular Dramatic stickers with a whole punched in the middle.

* Dramatics (temporarily)
* James's Dramatics
* Official Swimming Club
* The Raiders (This was not made of any specific class or club. The Raiders were simply a group of random people who wanted in on the fun).
* Book Clubs Collins and Percy
* Green Team
* Choir
* Unofficial Guitar Club
* Art Club

**Populars:**

Clubs with badges include Jocks and Sporties. The Populars approached us and we let them use the same general design for our badge, but they had to use their own background color to avoid confusion.

Although the Populars had less groups being represented, they had a lot more 'regular' units.

* Football Team **(Jocks)**
* Hockey Team **(Sporties)**
* 7th Grade Baseball Team **(Sporties)**
* 8th Grade Band Members **(Instrumentals)**
* 8th Grade Metal Work Classes
* Book Clubs Bella and Percy 2
* Unofficial Swimming Club
* Official Guitar Club
* 8th Grade Basketball Team **(Sporties)**
* 8th Grade art class

**Weapons of the War**

Here are all the weapons that were being used by the end of the war. In the Opposition's case, they'll be the weapons used before they were defeated. They mostly used the same weapons, but there were some exceptions.

**Nerd Weapons:**

* Hornets **(with accuracy-lines on the rubber bands)**
* Prop-Swords
* PC-MG's **(Assault Rifles)**
* PC3's **(Pistol)**
* PC-SN's **(Sniper; only one was made)**
* Grenades
* GC-HC **(Grenade Canon)**
* Hacky-sacks **(used on rare occasions)**

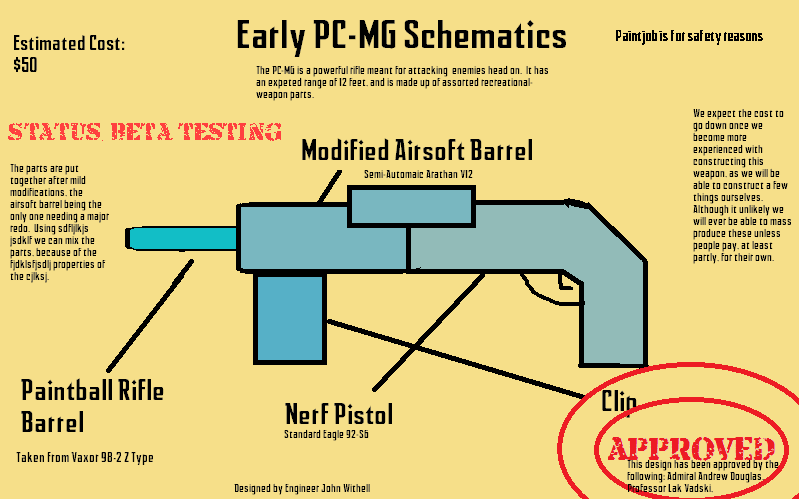
**Opposition:**

* Prop Swords **(only used by Dramatics/James's Dramatics)**
* Hornets
* Spit wads **(few occasions)**
* Hacky-sacks

**Populars:**

* Spit wads **(usage decreased throughout the duration of the war)**
* Hornets
* Prop-Swords **(began using after they realized it was hard to fight the Dramatics)**
* Hacky-sacks
* PC-MG's and PC3's **(were won or stolen in a few successful factory raids)**
* Dodge balls **(only used in the Gym)**

**Guns, Their History, and Their Construction**

Here is a very early diagram of the PC-MG. 

The PC-MG was originally comprised of several recreational-weapon parts from different places. The paint job was made this way as to not alarm anyone.

In this diagram the main part of the gun is a Nerf pistol, although this was later scrapped and we went with other, more expensive spring-loaded weapons.

The clip was made of a thin plate of cheap iron that we got from a local hardware store and cut at one of our engineer's homes. This, at first, was the only part (other than the hornets of course) that the Geeks constructed themselves.

As time went on, however, a few more parts were hand-made. The barrel was fairly easy to make, we just fix up a small, metal pole.

The reason we could not simply use one weapon type was because they all had elements we needed. The paintball guns had the small, narrow barrels which were necessary to have the hornets be anywhere near accurate. The airsoft guns, not only have a slightly more reliable spring-system, they also have the option of getting cheaper, plastic system if we needed to.

Plus, it was just that much cooler to say we got this thing working when it was made out of that many different things.

Although PC3's were much cheaper and easier to make (they were slightly modified airsoft guns), a few of the wealthier students insisted on creating more PC-MG's, and they were both fairly common to anyone who was willing to pay a bit of money to get their hands on one of these.

My sniper was made by John Withell one night when he was bored and had nothing to do. He didn't make more as there wasn't really much of a need for having snipers in our army.

**Various Forces of the Nerds**

There were many divisions and squadrons that were part of the Nerds. Here are just a few.

**21st Division:** The 21st division was my own troop. These were the most elite squadrons of the entire Nerd military. Throughout his rise, Commander George Maxwell led Bravo Squadron. Later in the war, it was renamed Alpha Squadron, as most members of the former Alpha Squadron bailed out on us, either simply giving up on the war or betraying us along with James's Dramatics. You might ask why it's not called the 1st Division. We simply thought this sounded cooler.

**Leaders:**  High Commander Luke Ericson, Admiral Jennifer Alison, Admiral Zach Collins, General George Maxwell (since George was appointed Commander at the end of the war, he never got to wear this title while leading Alpha Squadron), Captain Ryan Roberts, Captain Juan Salos, Lieutenant Benjamin Lockwood

**Squadrons:** Alpha Squad, Bravo Squad, Gold Squad, Red Squad, Rod-Squad, Squid Squad

**42nd Division:** The 42nd was Daniel's troop. As far as skills go, the members of this division were pretty much on par with the rest of the Commander's squads. However, this division was responsible for the famous 'Airfield Raids.'

Now there was certainly no airfield within the school, but there was a long hall that someone painted to look like a runway, so was dubbed 'The Airfield.' Daniel and his troops were at the Airfield when a larger party of Populars set up an outpost nearby, cutting them off from the rest of the Nerds for three days. Although the 42nd Division was unsuccessful in breaking through the blockade, they would have if the last batch Popular reinforcements had not beat our own.

Given that Commander Graves was vastly outnumbered, this was a moral victory, and the battle became famous.

**Leaders:** Commander Daniel Graves, Admiral Andrew Douglas, Admiral Arianna Vaksman, General Lan Royce, General Bo Verne, Captain Steve Sanders, Lieutenant Li Voss, Lieutenant Rhonda Bennet

**Squadrons:** Delta Squad, Gamma Squad, Silver Squad, Blue Squad, Eagle Squad, Robo-Squad

**Shadow Division:** Despite being a part of the 21st Division, Admiral Jennifer Alison also led the Shadow Division. This was made up of most of the Dramatics, as well as a few others who decided they preferred stealth and sneakiness. Naturally, Jen wanted to send some of her operatives to scout out the base instead of me, but I refused.

The Shadow Division harassed several convoys going to and from the library and took several small outposts as the guards there began packing up near the end of the battle. They also played a huge part in securing the dorms. The Shadow Division put a few agents patrolling the area, catching the few who decided to break the courtesy that we had expected.

Also, during many battles, the Dramatics had snuck around and attacked from behind, similar to what I did at the Factory Raid. This brought us many victories.

**Leaders:** Admiral Jennifer Alison, General Casey Marks, General Pete Lannyre, General Jeb Patterson, Captain Delaney Shadows, Captain Jake Savel, Captain Derek Johannes, Captain Harold Carmichael, Lieutenant Sven Marksfield, Lietenant Whitney Jones

**Squadrons:** Beta Squad, Zeta Squad, Black Squad, Azure Squad, Raptor Squad, Tiger Squad