

Where the Stars Glisten

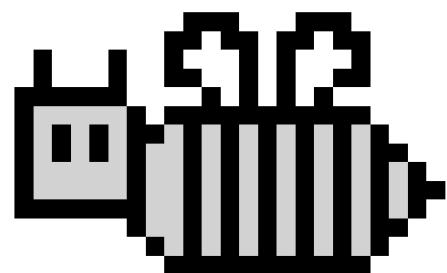
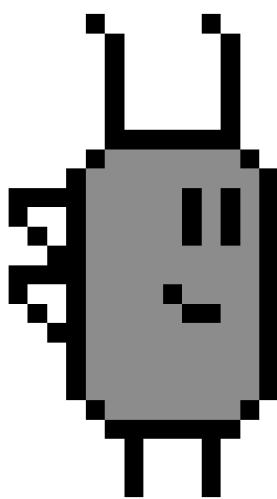
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Directory

Part 1: Dome of the Stars	3
Part 2: Equinox	48

Part 1

Dome of the Stars



Prologue

Wake up. Go outside. Explore that biodiverse rock you live on; there's so much to do, yet, you spend most of your time in one location? Well, I won't blame you for your choices. I respect your lifestyle. After all, you only get so long to live life, so you should be making the best effort to live it the way you want to.

Your planet isn't the only one. There are other rocks floating in space, waiting to be explored. Big ones, small ones, some where the rain boils, others where the incredibly low temperatures will freeze a man in an instant.

Earth has a variety of areas, all with their different backstories, ethnic groups, and cultures. This planet is your home. As far as one can see, there is no other celestial object hurling through outer space that supports life. But what if I told you that you were mistaken?

Far, far, away, there exists a system of various other planets. For one, there's Planet Kelvin; a planet of heat so intense, nobody would want to live there! But, although that one shows no signs of life, there are some that do.

Planet Electro; this is a desert planet. However, its capital, Electro City, is still able to thrive. It is still a mystery to foreigners, which makes it a great tourist attraction.

Planet Vernal; this planet has mostly mild temperatures, containing various ecosystems similar to those of Earth.

Then there's Brop. Now, nobody knows exactly why it's named that way. However, this is a highly developed planet and is always a fantastic choice if you're looking to migrate.

There's still one more planet that I haven't mentioned yet: Planet Arbor. This planet is large, though not to the extent of Planet Vernal or Brop. Unlike those 2, however, there are no known inhabitants; it's not really a planet which would cope well with society. Despite its size, there's only one notable feature besides the grass that encircles the full planet: a tree. A single tree. That's why they call it Planet Arbor, because of this one single tree.

Now that that's all cleared up, let's get to our main story. This great adventure involves a fly. Now, flies here do not look like what you are used to. Think of tiny, bipedal egg-shaped creatures with antennae. Except somewhat larger. Still small, but about the size of a figurine. Now, imagine these, but lime green and with wings on their backs. These are the flies.

This fly lived on Brop with his sister, Cecilia. Cecilia was a blue fly; she had a rare mutation. However, this could be exploited to provide raw power to anyone cruel enough. In this case, there was. This evil genius's name was Cwork, and he, along with his sidekick, Goose, soared through space, all the way to Brop, nabbed Cecilia, and went on their way. Having seen this all take place, her brother quickly went to the rescue. He flew after them, flapping his tiny wings as fast as he could. However, he crashed into a tree, injuring them in the process. When he finally got up, he soon realized that the crooks had made an escape.

Chapter 1

Fleaflea

My wings felt as though they had just gone under a steamroller. “Ack! Move!” They wouldn’t budge. Once again, I attempted to flutter a bit.

I tried to turn as best I could to see my right wing. It looked almost as if it had a crack or two.

This day was already going bad enough with those guys randomly showing up, and now I was in extreme pain. As much as they constantly pinged with injury, however, my wings would have to wait; they could be fixed later.

Suddenly, I felt flushed with rage. My sister was the only family I had left, so for this to happen made me feel as though my whole world had been destroyed.

“CECILIA!” I called out, awaiting a response. “CECELIA!” I tried again to no avail. She was gone, out there somewhere. I could only imagine how scared she must have been feeling.

Even the grass below me seemed to be crying now. Flying back to my tree, I discovered that I could glide in short bursts, though not for very long.

After some time to take in what had just happened, I walked outside. The wind was rather strong this afternoon. Too strong, in fact.

My ears began to ring. In the corner of my eye, I noticed a rocket launching into the sky, quickly accelerating for some time until it was barely visible anymore.

Something in my mind snapped that instant, and I immediately began to hop towards the area of liftoff. By jumping and gliding, and repeating the process right after I hit the ground, I could build up a bit of momentum. It wasn’t anywhere near as effective as flying, but it would have to do for now.

It took around 5 minutes of doing this until I finally approached my destination. It was in a cleared-out field, and one could clearly notice the vibrant circle of burnt grass. It still smelled vaguely reminiscent of burning fuel.

My sister was actually gone, for real. They swooped down here, picked her up, and were gone in a flash, all in the span of less than half an hour.

Dropping my head in defeat, I slowly walked back the way I had come. As I trotted through the woods, I began to wonder where they could have possibly taken

her. For one, they could have taken her to Planet Electro; its metropolitan area in Electro City was always bustling and had a skyscraping population. Perhaps the biggest settlement in our local planetary system, that could definitely be a possibility.

Electro City was built in a desert. A desert so dangerous, in fact, that the wildlife alone could kill you. Adventurers were advised to bring a gun, in case there was a snake slithering around, waiting to bite at the perfect moment. However, this planet was extremely distant and could take up to a week in total to travel to from Brop!

Another idea would be Planet Vernal. This was the planet closest to Brop, and it was also as highly developed in some areas as well. I had always wanted to go there on vacation; the first time I had seen a picture of Shallow Shores, I instantly fell in love. Its beaches, small antique shops, and nearby mountains would make anyone shed a tear just looking at its sheer beauty. Oh, there were also apparently a lot of pears.

However, there was more to this planet. I had heard legends of there being a possible civilization beyond the mountains. A civilization with temples and unique culture. A civilization, where, if you were to stand where they were, the views would look possibly even more breathtaking than looking at the mountains from afar in Shallow Shores. A civilization with ancient armor and weapons. Now, I had only heard mere stories about this civilization, so I could not confirm whether or not they actually existed.

While thinking about all of this, I completely overshot my tree. In fact, I had mindlessly walked so far that I couldn't recognize any of my surroundings. The trees here formed a canopy; any light that dared try entering was denied.

An echo rang through the forest.

"Traveler. Step inside." Out of nowhere, a rocket ship silently appeared to the right of me. Observing it, I noticed some things. It was relatively small for a modern rocket ship, but still big enough to look functional. It had a white coat of paint, and its bolts appeared to be newly tightened. The window was a tad bit foggy, but nothing too hindering. However, though this was a nice ship, I was still extremely confused.

“Who are you?” I cried back, trembling. I had no idea how far I had walked past my tree; it could have been miles.

“Fleaflea, I saw what happened,” the voice boomed. “Be not afraid.”

My fear partly subsided when I noticed that the source of the audio was from a speaker hidden behind a tree.

“How should I know to trust you?” I called back. At this moment, I also realized that there was a microphone on the ship, detecting all of my confused yells.

“You want to see your sister, do you not? Step inside the rocket.” I hesitated a moment, and then came to the realization that this could be possibly my only chance of rescuing Cecilia. However, it could be risky. What if I messed up along the way? Or, what if this ship just ending up sending me hurtling straight into Planet Kelvin? After pondering the situation for a moment, I decided to do what was right.

“Okay,” I responded, confidently. The silver steel door on the front of the rocket ship slowly slid up with an ominous *clang* and a few squeaks along the way. This felt odd, considering that the rest of this vehicle seemed in good shape.

I slowly approached the rungs directly below the door and climbed them one at a time. These, too, felt rather coarse.

Directly after I boarded the ship, the door quickly fell shut again.

“Where are you taking me?” I asked with a hint of nervousness. I wanted to be as polite as possible; after all, the man controlling this ship could easily end my life in mere seconds.

A feeling entered my gut at that moment, but I cast it aside. The voice then responded.

“Planet Arbor.”

“What!?” I had only heard of this planet a few times. However, not much was known about it, and it was said to be possibly dangerous. “Why!?”

“Fleaflea, if you travel on my ship, you must abide by my rules. I promise you will get to see your sister eventually. However, you must go here first.”

And with that, the ship started shaking violently, and a few seconds later it blasted off towards the stars.

Chapter 2

And so they were off. There were no controls on this ship; everything was automatic. As Fleaflea walked around the main area, he noticed another speaker.

Planet Arbor. Fleaflea had only merely heard quick snippets about it; after all, it was still mostly a mystery, even to scientists!

“Who are you?” Fleaflea asked, once again. “How do you know my name?”

“My name is Quintorre,” the voice replied. “As stated before, I saw everything that happened. You may feel threatened, and I understand that. However, you should not feel afraid.”

“But then,” began Fleaflea, “I assume you know where those guys are? If you’re willing to take me to them, why do we have to stop at Planet Arbor?”

“‘Those guys’,” Quintorre responded, “are named Cwork and Goose. Cwork looks like a skeleton, basically. While I don’t advocate for judging anyone based on their appearance, he really does.” Both of them let out a light chuckle. “Goose, on the other hand. He’s a big fella. But don’t worry, Fleaflea, we’ll be able to stop them.”

“Then why are we going to this planet?”

“You’ll understand later, I promise.” Quintorre must have had good social skills, for this reassuring comment quieted Fleaflea for a bit.

During the flight, Fleaflea got to know Quintorre better. He apparently had a big, white, bushy beard going down his face, and bright blue eyes. However, with age comes wisdom, for Quintorre was able to help answer a few of Fleaflea’s life questions. In addition to this, he lived in an apartment in one of the busiest parts of Electro City. Finally, he exceptionally had a fondness for pears.

“Wait,” asked Fleaflea, excitedly. “Are you from Shallow Shores?”

“Indeed I am, my boy,” said Quintorre. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, I’ve just always wanted to go there...” said the fly, falling into a daydream. “Quintorre, do... do you think we could go there as well?”

“We’ll see, Fleaflea. But, remember. Your sister is the priority. The reason I’m taking you to Planet Arbor first is... is...”

“Okay, fine,” said a disappointed Fleaflea. Suddenly, an idea popped into his head. “Quintorre, have you ever heard of the civilization past the mountains in Shallow Shores?”

“What… oh, them. Yes, Fleaflea, not only have I heard of them, but I’ve actually visited them, as well.”

“Really? What are they like?”

“Well, I didn’t necessarily come for a good reason. You see, there was actually a disease spreading there. When I got word, my crew and I came with aid. Although we were able to save the people there, it… came with a cost. That was 20 years ago.” Quintorre became silent for a moment, but then spoke again. “They’re a very interesting people, though. Caring, sweet, gentle. Their structures, as well, are amazing! I do remember now, yes, I went on a trip there about 10 years before that. Hiking through those mountains was incredibly peaceful. There is not a single memory of mine more tranquil. However, many of them are defenseless. They’re a passive group, that’s no secret, but they’re not very good at defending themselves…”

“What? Then what happens if someone tries to invade?”

“Well, don’t worry. They’ve got trained officers. They call them… the… uh… oh, yes, I remember now. They call themselves the s-“

Before Quintorre could finish his sentence, an alarm began to sound.

“What’s going on?” Fleaflea panicked. “What’s happening?”

“Oh, dear….” said Quintorre. “Alright, Fleaflea. Basically, Planet Arbor has… a rather unusual pull. Which means it could easily grab our ship and send it flying through the atmosphere. Which might be precisely what’s happening right now.”

“But… Quintorre… what will happen to the ship?”

“Worst case scenario, it gets bruised a bit. In that case, we could send the ship nearby to Planet Vernal, and see if they could take a look at it. Or, I could fly out to you with some tools… although, Electro City is far away, so it might take awhile. But let’s hope that it doesn’t get that badly damaged.”

It seemed to Fleaflea as though the alarm was blaring louder than before at this point. He looked outside of the window for the first time in the past half hour, and saw an amazing sight.

“Quintorre wasn’t kidding when he said that this was a large planet!” he thought. Fleaflea had to turn his angle completely to even be able to see outer space outside of the window.

And then he saw something that he’d never forget seeing for the first time.

“Quintorre... is that a giant *TREE!*? ”

“Yes, Fleaflea. They call it Planet Arbor for a reason.”

Suddenly, a light flashed on. Taken aback, Fleaflea stumbled.

“**Brace for impact!**” A voice rang out. It repeated this message a few times. Fleaflea felt as though he was going to faint due to the intense stress.

But, that didn’t matter now, because a moment later, the ship crashed into the surface of the planet.

Chapter 3

Fleaflea

Smoke. When I first came to my senses, there was a strong smell of smoke. I heard what sounded like a crackle and a flicker, and... the heat. It was unbearable.

Groggily, I opened my eyes and stood up, then realized where I was. The ship had crashed, and was now on fire as well.

“Quintorre!” I exclaimed. “The ship is destroyed!”

“I could detect that... I can try to fly out there with my own ship and pick you up. Just hang in there.”

“How long will it take?”

“At optimal speeds, it will be... about 2 days.” The flight to this planet had taken several hours already, and I didn’t feel like waiting any more. “But, there may be a solution,” said Quintorre. “This planet, well, I’ll explain it in greater detail, but there is probably an abundance of resources which you could use to repair the ship. It won’t be perfect, and we will have to fly it to another planet to get it fixed completely, but it’ll do. There is plenty of food on the ship which should hold you over for that amount of time. Go explore the planet. There are 4 doorways as you walk around the tree, each of which leads to a different area. Then, there’s... I’ll tell you about that part later. Just do what you can, I’ll try my best to get out to you.”

Great. I was stranded on this unknown, likely dangerous land, and now my sister would be in even more danger. The piercing pain in my wings wasn’t helping, either.

The ship had crashed in a grassy area. In fact, looking to my left, then to my right, there was only grass for miles.

Until I turned around.

The giant tree had been waiting, looming above me this whole time. There appeared to be a wooden pathway spiraling up around it.

As I took one step onto this path, I was instantly moved up multiple miles. Looking off the edge now, I could still see the grass, though barely. Looking up, the clouds seemed to only be a few meters above me. The path had flattened out

here; observing either side, it began sloping down and inclining again, respectively. The path was right against the side of the tree, and at this point there was a large doorway proportional to the size of this monstrosity:

It seemed almost as if the door was emitting a quiet hum, beckoning for me to enter. After hesitating for a moment, I walked inside.

Light was absent from this room; I walked in a straight path, though I perhaps could've gone any direction; I did not know. It felt as though I was stepping on something squishy. After a bit of time, something occurred to me and I began to sprint. Then, the low light level slowly began to brighten.

There was grass below me, and the walls were blue; they almost looked like the sky, and it seemed like it was projected on them. There were bushes, trees, all the like here. In every direction, there was seemingly endless grass. Turning around, I noticed that the doorway I had entered from was absent, and there was instead grass as far as I could see. Albeit, there were a few occasional trees. However, these were dispersed sparsely.

A few meters in front of me, I noticed something gray in the grass. Upon further examination, it seemed to be in the shape of a boot. Engraved on the bottom of either side were the letters "SS". In addition to this, there were 3 lights going down from the top on either side, being blue, yellow, and red, respectively. It was as if they were 2 stoplights.

Strangely, this boot looked like it could fit me nearly perfectly. After locating its twin nearby in the grass, I decided to equip them.

Mere seconds after I put them on, I felt... different, in an indescribable way. Well, it was indescribable until I moved forward. I had super speed with these things on.

Though, they were heavy on me, and I wouldn't be able to fly while wearing them. However, that was irrelevant at the moment due to the state of my wings.

This next part sounds weird, but I swear its true. When I ran with the booths on, it almost felt as though a bar was going up in the back of my mind from red, to yellow, to blue. Then I remembered the lights on the sides of the boot. It seemed crazy at the time, but it really did feel like I could sense the lights turning on one by one the more I ran.

Maybe “SS” really did stand for something. At this point, at least, I could not tell. So, I decided to call these boots the “Super Shoes”.

With the Super Shoes on my feet, I felt nearly unstoppable. I was having so much fun taking advantage of my new speed boost that I was completely oblivious to a tree up ahead until I was only a few feet away from it. I closed my eyes, bracing for impact, when...

Nothing happened to me. I turned around, confused, and saw that I had made a hole in the tree, which fell to the ground with a *thud* a few seconds later.

I had ran straight through the tree. Quickly taking off my right boot and looking at it just before the lights began to turn off in order again, I observed that all 3 were shining brightly.

Up ahead, I noticed a patch of a few more trees. It was at this moment when I had realized I had no way of communicating with Quintorre this far out.

“What am I supposed to do?” I said to myself, quietly. However, I must’ve had a microphone attached somewhere, because I heard the familiar voice speak again.

“I designed the ship so it would launch a microscopic communication device onto your left antenna. Pretty cool, I know. You likely didn’t even feel anything when it was attached. In this area, you’ll need to get some wood for fuel. I know fuel doesn’t seem like the most useful thing at the moment, but it definitely will be later.”

“Okay,” I replied. Going further into the trees, I found that by running through them, I could get them to fall to the ground easily.

After I had felled many of the trees in the area and picked up their wood, on my way to look for more, I randomly decided to look to my right side.

Then I saw something strange. In the grass, behind a few bushes, I could make out what/appeared to be a red blob. With further approach, I began to see black dots on this blob. Finally, I decided to sneak all the way in. Yet, I was not fast enough, as the blob seemed to rotate before I could find a hiding spot.

At this point, I could see her more clearly. She was a ladybug, about my height though possibly a bit shorter. She seemed to look mildly bored with a neutral expression on her face.

And, finally, her eyes were directed straight at me.

Chapter 4

“Why... why are you here?” asked Fleaflea, showing a mixture of panic and confusion on his face.

“I’m an explorer,” the ladybug responded. “However, my ship ended up crashing. I was planning on calling my boss back in Electro City to send out a rescue ship for me; however, the cost of that would be insane, and would put me in incredible debt. So, I’ve been scavenging for resources.” She turned to a puzzled expression. “And... why are you here?”

Fleaflea thought for a moment, then came up with his answer. “I... uh, well, I was planning to fly out to Planet Vernal from Brop. However, my ship got pulled into the gravity of this planet, and sent me crashing down. So, yeah, I’m also trying to find stuff.

“Oh, I’m sorry about that. Maybe we can work together? The name’s Marta, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Fleaflea. And, sure, we can work together.”

As they began to pick up sticks, Marta opened up to Fleaflea a bit.

“Y’know, Electro City is a cool place and all, but sometimes it’s a real pain to live in. It’s so expensive; however, I’ve lived there my whole life, and I’ve never been able to afford space travel that wasn’t supplied by my job. So, unless I want to live in some tiny desert village, the city is the only other real option I have.”

Fleaflea then remembered his Super Shoes.

“Hey Marta, watch this.” In an instant, Fleaflea felled another nearby tree by simply running through it.

“Where did you even get those?”

“I found them on the ground, over there,” Fleaflea pointed in the direction he had come from. “I call them my Super Shoes.”

“Wait... you found them HERE? Those are only sold in Shallow Shores. They’re a huge hit, and one of the things that the region’s known for.”

“That’s what ‘SS’ must have meant”, thought Fleaflea to himself, still deciding to call the boots Super Shoes nevertheless.

“Marta,” began Fleaflea. “Have you ever been there before?”

“Once, as a child, my family took a trip there. It was beautiful; the beaches were fantastic. The views, especially. Though, I swear I saw something on the trip...”

“What would that be?” asked Fleaflea, before realizing what it possibly was.

“I was looking at the mountains one evening, and I swear I saw something that looked like a temple. But, like, it wasn’t like anything else in Shallow Shores... it was... different. It’s always stuck with me.”

“Oh, interesting.” Fleaflea assumed that Marta must have had to be talking about the civilization beyond the mountains.

When they finally felt satisfied with the amount of sticks they were carrying, Fleaflea began to wonder how they would even leave this area. However, this wasn’t for long, because Marta was one step ahead of him.

“Just... *wake up*. It’s hard to describe what I mean by this, but... just... try.”

After a few seconds of taking in what she had said, Fleaflea tried all the possible ways he could think of “waking up”. Scrunching his face, closing and then reopening his eyes, pinching himself, everything!

Then he relaxed, and dozed off.

When he came to, he was back in front of the doorway. Marta was there, looking off of the edge.

“Look who’s *finally* woken up,” said Marta. “How’d you sleep? Anyway, I put all of the sticks back at the bottom. I saw a giant, charred, metal heap, so I assumed that was your ship. They’re safe there. The next doorway leads into a jungle; let’s check that place out next.”

“Okay,” replied Fleaflea, still half-asleep,

After stepping on the incline of the path and being instantly moved in front of the next door, they stepped inside.

Once again, the room was extremely dark. Fleaflea reached his arms out, feeling something in the process.

“Ow! You just punched me in the arm, you doofus!”

“Sorry!”

Fleaflea began to look for any way to “activate” the room.

“Last time I checked this room, there was a hole somewhere,” Marta explained. “I fell through, and, bam, I was on top of a tree.”

The two of them began scanning the room, walking every possible inch they could.

A scream suddenly rang out. Marta had found the hole.

Running in the direction of her yell, Fleaflea braced himself for anything that could possibly happen. The lights on his Super Shoes lit all the way up to blue, and he accelerated tremendously.

Fwoop.

Fleaflea had found the hole as well, and closed his eyes immediately after he began falling. After a moment or two, he opened them back up again, and was greeted by a clear blue sky. Everything was peaceful; besides the sound of the wind rushing past him, it was nice and quiet.

Until he looked down.

Giant trees with rich, green leaves. The leaves, too, were large. Fleaflea could not see the bottom; the leaves were like a canopy over the ground.

In a panic, he tried all he could to slow his descent. Yet, there was nothing. He tried flapping his wings.

No progress. He tried once again, with all his strength, and...

It hurt him so much; after all, his wings were likely fractured. However, he was able to lighten his fall, and peacefully landed on a jungle leaf.

A voice could be heard on another nearby leaf; it was Marta. After the two reunited, they started to plan what to do next.

“We should probably get to ground level,” she stated. “That way, we could see what resource to harvest here.”

“Alright,” agreed Fleaflea, and so they dropped down to the floor of the jungle, which didn’t happen to be too far down.

As they were walking, Marta asked Fleaflea a question.

“Have you ever heard of Hugh the Gatherer?”

“He was one of the only things I even knew about this planet before crashing here! Of course I know who Hugh is! He’s said to be the only person who’s gone through all the doorways!”

“Yes, and he was able to build a rocket from scratch. He was a fly, just like you!”

“One of my idols...” Fleaflea began to doze.

They ended on that thought, and prepared to enter the dense tropics that lay ahead.

Chapter 5

Marta

I've lived in Electro City for my whole entire life. Growing up in one of the more decent areas, I had a decent childhood. Besides for my job, however, I've only traveled through outer space one time, and that was for a trip to Shallow Shores on Planet Vernal.

It was a nice vacation. The temperatures were rather nice, though not boiling. But, that's what the whole planet is apparently like.

The planet's capital, Pinecone, is on the opposite side from Shallow Shores. They're two very different areas, let me tell you. I've been there in recent years, and it's been having a few issues. The peace hasn't been stable, for one. Ever since those technological boots started being produced in Shallow Shores, there's been less of a need for public transportation. That's fine on its own, of course, except for the fact that some citizens don't know how to run properly and crash into the sides of buildings or other pedestrians. Not fun.

In Electro City, on the other hand, they've got things figured out. By banning these shoes, as well as other things, such as flying in public and controlling spaceships below a certain altitude, things are a bit less chaotic. For good reason, too; Electro City has a huge population. If things were that bad in Pinecone, just IMAGINE how much worse they could be in Electro City!

And, it's not like these things started being produced recently or anything. Some say that even Hugh the Gatherer, the great explorer who built a spaceship from scratch to leave Planet Arbor, had a pair of his own!

Ever since I met that fly, things felt... odd. Don't get me wrong, Fleaflea was a really interesting creature. But... there was something about him.

As we continued our trek through the jungle, we thought about what resource would need to be harvested here.

"Alright," I said to him. "Obviously, your ship's body has taken a huge blow. That means we need some materials to fix it. Since we're in a jungle, do you think there's some valuable metal here?"

"Perhaps. Maybe there's some sort of cave here?"

“We wouldn’t even need that. We’d just have to find some deposits. Since you say you’re going to Planet Vernal, even some relatively weak material would work. Once we arrived, we could send it in to be repaired. Was there anyone else with you on the ship?”

“Well...” began Fleaflea. “A man named Quintorre has been remotely controlling the ship for me. He’s going to try to travel here, but we should still look for stuff. It’s a long story.”

To cut the long story short, he told me about his sister, and how she had a mutation. He told me about two guys named Cwork and Goose. He told me about this man, how he’s from Shallow Shores. Finally, he confirmed the reason why I saw that temple in the mountains on my trip there.

Suddenly, the sky began to dim even greater than before. Looking up, I noticed that the leaves were still becoming larger and more opaque, likely denser as well.

“So, what kind of metal should be exactly be looking for?” asked Fleaflea, with a hint of nervousness. “I don’t really want to be in this area much longer...”

“Wait”, I said, suddenly obtaining an idea. There were some plants on the group nearby. “Perhaps we could use some of these as a sort of bandage for your wings.”

“Sure, why not”.

I took some leaves and began to spiral them around his wings.

“Wait,” he said. “Won’t this just fall off?”

“No,” I answered. There was another type of plant nearby. Being an explorer, I could identify it as one that could stick. “Hold still.”

I took the leaf from that plant, and lodged it between the upper and lower layers of the natural bandage I had wrapped him with. “This should stay.”

While venturing further on, I spotted something against the side of a tree out of the corner of my eye.

“Hm, looks like an old bracelet.” This bracelet had wooden beads of various shades on a string. It wasn’t that much, but it seemed cool enough.

“Can I wear it?” asked Fleaflea, somewhat excitedly.

“Sure, buddy.” I tossed it to him, and he slid it onto his left arm.

It fit perfectly.

“Hey!” he called from a fair distance away. “I think I found something!” I quickly spread my wings, took flight, and landed over there as fast as possible.

There were large fragments of iron laying on the dirt.

“But, how...?”

Suddenly, the once-blue sky turned a shade of red. After a deep echo ensued, I noticed a large tree soaring high into the air, but not before a meteorite pounded into the ground right next to it.

Then another.

And another.

Finally, after what seemed like 10 minutes had gone by without one of these space rocks disturbing the peace, I went to inspect the area with the uprooted tree.

It was nowhere to be found, as it had likely been flung halfway across the jungle. The meteorite, or rather, what remained of it, was still there, however. Once again, this one contained iron.

After scavenging the areas of every crash I noticed, I eventually made my way back to Fleaflea.

“Now, I know your ship isn’t doing that great, but surely we can salvage some of the body. There’s a lot of iron out here, but due to our small size, I’ve only been able to pick up a small sample.” I laid out the pieces on the ground in front of him. He analyzed them closely.

“Yes... this should work.”

“Good.”

“It’ll probably take multiple trips; those crashes were pretty big!”

Then, we closed our eyes in unison, and woke up back in front of the doorway. We made our way down together this time, placing the iron pieces next to the sticks.

After a few repetitions of this, we were finally satisfied with the amount. After all, this was a human-sized ship, so it would need a lot of materials!

Suddenly, Fleaflea looked concerned about something.

“What is it?” I asked, curious.

“Hold on.”

After a moment of him listening, occasionally speaking, Fleaflea broke the news to me.

“He’s able to get here in three days. Initially, he told me two, but he was underestimating. Don’t worry, though, there’s enough food and water still on the ship to last us a full week.”

With that, he laid down next to the ship, curled up, and dozed off.

Chapter 6

While this adventure was occurring, things were relatively normal down at Brop. This planet was separated into various states, each with their own different regional laws and regulations.

One of these states was named “Gateway”. This region was named this way due to its proximity to the edge of the atmosphere; the largest space center was here, and this was where most ships would land if they flew here to visit or for commercial purposes.

One of the citizens of Gateway was a bee named Joshua. Joshua’s specific species didn’t have legs, but rather always hovered low above the ground, horizontally. Due to evolution, this species gained an adaptation that would have them constantly hover without using much energy; similar to how a heart constantly beats.

In addition to this, Joshua’s species didn’t have arms either. They learned to use their antennae for various actions, or to use their mouths to pick stuff up. Due to them using their wings most of the time, they could travel quickly, and wouldn’t need to build up much momentum.

One day, as Joshua woke up, he remembered that he had to leave for his trip. He resided in a hive which hung off a tree. This tree, however, was not hollow like Fleaflea’s. Rather, it was stronger and physically capable of suspending the hive in the air.

After flying out of his bed (for he could not leave it otherwise), Joshua grabbed his two bags, one with each antenna. He did a final check, then exited the hive, pushing his side against the circular door to close it shut.

Joshua was to go visit his grandmother and brother in Shallow Shores. As he speedily flew down the path to the space center, he could barely keep his curiosity in check. He had heard amazing things about this place, and to be there with one of his favorite people! As he was deep in this thought, Joshua saw the large space center coming into view.

As he approached it, he could see a spaceship fly out of the atmosphere, into the great beyond. He, too, would be in that situation, soon enough.

After eventually passing through security, Joshua slowly landed down on a nearby seat. He checked to see that his bags were still there; he did not want to go without them.

“Pinecone Airlines, flight 754 en route to Carañajo, Shallow Shores, boarding in 5 minutes.

Upon hearing this news, Joshua lifted himself into the air, flapped his wings, and sped off briskly into the distance.

Once he finally boarded the ship, Joshua looked around in awe. There were various-sized seats for each type of passengers; humans, bugs, robots, and others. They had them all.

As the ship warmed up and eventually launched off into the air, the bee looked out of the nearby window and saw everything he knew shrinking as his altitude increased. It was amazing.

Many hours later, Joshua saw a different sight than the dark abyss that was outer space. It was a planet. Planet Vernal, to be exact.

“All passengers, we are going to be descending into Planet Vernal, please-wait.”

The speaker broke out, and Joshua began to feel a little nervous.

“Passengers, this might be a bumpy landing. Be aware of this, and stay safe. Thank you.”

However, this would be more than a “bumpy landing”. For, just like how Quintorre’s ship had crashed on Planet Arbor, the gravity was too strong for these pilots. They were both relatively inexperienced, and had forgotten to change the settings before the flight.

They were not to land on Shallow Shores anymore. Rather, they missed that spot entirely, and Joshua saw an island come into view as the ship accelerated.

Thunk.

Time passed, and a few more hours passed until Joshua woke up. Just as Fleaflea had done earlier, Joshua began to panic.

Nobody else on the flight had survived.

“Hey! Sir, I have come across a peasant trespassing on the castle grounds!” a voice rang out.

“Take him to the dungeon!” another, deeper voice called.

“Yes, sir!”

Joshua felt a chain secure around his head, and that was when he finally opened his eyes.

A man in shining armor was hauling him off. Joshua struggled to escape, flapping his wings as fast as possible, but to no avail.

He had been captured.

Chapter 7

Fleaflea

I woke up from my nap, still next to the ship as I had been previously.

“Marta?”

“Oh, hey, Fleaflea. You’re awake.” She sounded close by. As I looked around, I could hear various banging noises.

“I’m just fixing up the ship,” she reassured. With that, I sprung up, and went over to check. Indeed, she was; half of the body was already completed!

“However...” she began, “I need us to find a way to cool it. If we let this thing overheat, it’ll either cook us alive or explode. Neither of those options seem desirable. Check out the next room, I’ll keep working on this.”

“Okay,” I responded, and with that, I was off. As I ran on the grass, I could feel that my wings didn’t hurt as much anymore. “Wait, Marta. Do you think my wings are better yet?”

“I’d give them a bit more time.”

After moving up 3 stories high, I was finally outside of the third doorway. This time, when I looked over the edge, I could only see the fog below.

Upon my entrance, the room was dark, just like the others. What could it be this time?

After a few moments of feeling out this area, a low, grinding noise began to emit from... somewhere, and the hard, wooden ground below me began to shake.

I was in an elevator, and it was now slowly descending. After a minute or so of just the elevator, the darkness, and I, the walls around me finally stopped reaching down. As I got down on the floor to peer, I noticed a night sky, and a white, crystal-like substance on the ground. At least, it looked like that.

“What even is this stuff?” I asked myself, quietly.

“It’s called snow,” Quintorre’s voice responded.

“Wait, how did you know what I was talking about?”

He didn’t reply to that message.

Snow. This was the stuff I had heard about years ago. I still partially remembered being a child, when my father would tell Cecelia and I stories about

snow. How you could play in it, make snowballs, even make a person out of the stuff!

My father always had amazing stories to tell. He travelled around a lot. However, one night many years ago, he was attacked by space pirates. They knocked him out, looted his belongings, then set his ship ablaze.

I crouched down and took a handful of snow. It was rather cold, but a refreshing type of cold.

However, I quickly dropped it. There would be time for it later. For now, I had to report this back to Marta.

“So,” she said after I finally arrived, “I’ve been hard at work. What did you find in the third room?”

“There’s, well, it’s this crystal-like, white, cold...”

“Fleaflea, are you talking about snow?”

“Yes.” I would have thought that she, too, would’ve needed a better description.

“Look, the snow won’t do any good for the cooling system; it’ll melt immediately. However, if you could find some really cold, like, REALLY cold ice, and a lot of it, we could have a chance at this.

“Alright,” I said. “I’ll see what I can find.”

Once I eventually made it back to the snow land, I started to observe the area. It was nighttime there; the sky was especially starry this time around. In the distance I could see a dense forest, eventually leading up a mountain. To my left and right, I saw only snow. Behind me was the elevator; now just merely a wooden plate laying on the ground, collecting flakes of the stuff. Looking up, I could still see the elevator shaft poking down through the ceiling. Past the elevator, there was only more snow. This place really had a lot of it!

“Fleaflea,” came Quintorre’s voice. “Are you in the snow room?”

“Yes,” I responded. “My friend told me that I might need to find ice for a cooling system, if we want to get this ship repaired.”

“Yeah, you guys might want to try that. We could get it repaired after I fly in. Does she happen to be talking about gelid ice?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s an ice that’s incredibly cold. It could even take weeks to melt in even the hottest of deserts! Perhaps even a full day on Planet Kelvin... Anyway, even

though these rooms have only been lightly explored in the past by dedicated researchers and scientists, the reports from Hugh the Gatherer say that this type of ice can be found here. Now, obviously, we don't know if this is true or not, but you should probably take his word for it."

"Is there any specific place I should look?" I asked.

"Let me find it..." I could hear the flipping of pages for a moment. "Oh, yes! Here we are! Okay... you have to look at the bottom of the deepest oceans... yikes. Well, if Hugh could get down there all these years ago, alone, I'm sure you'll be able to as well! Try finding an ocean."

I had a feeling that the forest would be no help, so I began walking left. However, this land was flat, with only snow as far as the eye could see. So I began running, and soon I could feel the Super Shoes' meter increasing. I was now zooming forward across the snow, likely leaving a whirlwind of snow behind me.

Then I discovered a body of water. This was by accident, due to me not slowing down in time and instead being flung into it by my sheer speed.

It was freezing.

I swam over to the edge and climbed out. Now shivering, I knew I would have to get back to Marta.

Thankfully, I was able to wake up.

"Marta," I said. "I know where we can find some ice. However, it might be hard."

"I'm up for it," she responded, confidently. "Don't worry, Fleaflea, we can do this together."

After this, we both fell asleep next to the ship.

Chapter 8

A seagull flew low, parallel to the ocean. A wave crashed. Then another. This continued on for awhile.

The star was setting now; it was always a beautiful sight for everyone, tourists and citizens alike, to watch the sky turn orange as the ball of fire went on its way to greet the other side of the planet.

A pear fell off of a tree, and hit the ground with impact.

Nearby, a spaceship was flying.

“Alright, Goose,” said the evil Cwork. “There’s a blue bee here. Perfect to add to our collection.”

They landed at Shallow Shores, and exited the ship. It was quiet now, with a majority of the citizens already having gone to sleep.

“Ey, where do you think this one is?” asked Goose. Goose was human; he had gray hair and his pale skin was a bit wrinkly. He was on the larger side, but made up for that with his strength.

“Let’s look in some of the windows,” Cwork responded. He was human as well; however, his makeup was almost opposite that of Goose. He was thin and frail; almost bone-like. He did not personally possess any might, but was still powerful.

“Alright.”

“See anything yet?” asked Cwork, while they were both peering in. “All I’m seeing is an ant.”

“I just see a mantis.”

A few houses later, Goose spotted something.

“Ay, Big-bones, you might want to come over here.”

“Goose, you know I don’t like you calling me that! What is it?”

“Maybe this is just the awkward lighting, but I think I see something blue,”
Goose responded,

“Wait... let me get a closer look.” Goose moved aside to allow Cwork to stare in. “Yep, that’s a bee alright. And it is indeed blue. Let’s get to it.”

The building was rather rectangular, with the coarse walls extending a couple of stories into the air. Using a chimney wouldn't work, as it was on the roof. The door was always an option, but could be noisy. Cwork thought of other methods.

"Hmm... I got it! Let's just use a window!"

There were a fair amount of windows lining the walls outside. Cwork saw that the one closest to him was a bit taller than him; however, with teamwork, anything would be possible.

"Alright, Goose, hoist me up here." A few grunts, an "Ow!" and one "I've seen narcissists that could support me far better than you are right now," later, they finally aligned themselves, and Cwork slipped inside.

"Now, bee, where are you?" He searched the narrow halls, hoping to find something. After all, the houses were somewhat cramped; the standard "human" house was like something you might live in on Earth; it fit all. On the other hand, the "bug" houses were a tad bit more complicated. Obviously, a normal house would be too big for these guys; they'd need somewhere a bit cozier. Doors and appliances were usually closer together for this reason. They were awkward in some ways, which led many bugs to live in trees, hives, or other places.

But, some bugs actually liked this setup. The victims of Cwork's attack fell under that category.

Cwork felt something graze his angle. He looked down and made out a tiny doorknob in the dark.

"How can I even open this?" he wondered. That thought didn't last very long, due to the order being yelled close by.

"HEY YOU! TRESPASSER! YOU'RE COMING WITH US!" At this point, Cwork knew that it couldn't do any worse. He smashed through the wall, only to find that a very old bee had just woken up.

"Where's the blue one?" demanded Cwork, ready to crush this bee at any moment. She began to shake a bit. "I'll repeat my question: Where's the blue one?"

The knocking began to grow louder.

"OPEN UP!"

"Tell me where it is, or you get the foot."

"STOP!" an unfamiliar voice rang out. "I'm the blue one. Just don't hurt her. Please."

Cwork looked down to his left to notice the blue bee he had been looking for.

“Alright. You’re coming with me.” He grabbed the bee and quickly broke through another wall. Now outside, he began running the paved paths, buildings on either side of him.

“STOP RIGHT THERE!” the voice continued. However, Cwork had no reason to be afraid. Even if he didn’t have much strength, there was one physical activity he was good at: distance running.

“I’ll tire them out, then we’ll make our escape!” he thought to himself, the bee in his hand petrified with fear.

Suddenly, Cwork heard what sounded like an engine revving up. In a matter of seconds, the officers had caught up to him.

“But... how?” he asked, confused. The officer then pointed at the boot on his feet.

“Now, stop running, or your punishment will only worsen.”

“Alright... calm down...” said Cwork. “Relax. You got me.” Even the bee calmed a bit, though it was still shaking.

“Sir, drop the arthropod,” said the officer. Looking closer, Cwork realized that this was no human, but some sort of machine. A robot. Cwork quickly brushed this thought off, though it was still interesting.

“Alright... hold on...” Cwork prepared to loosen his grip. He could feel his pulse running throughout his hand.

Then he squeezed.

“What the-“

A cloud of bright energy illuminated the night sky, and after what felt like minutes, a blast shook the nearby buildings, blew a pear tree over, and launched the robot into a nearby wall.

However, this was not the worst part. You see, Cwork had some other unique abilities. One of these abilities was being resistant to unhealthy levels of radiation.

The town had gone quiet, just as it had been before Cwork first landed. Looking at the robot, he noticed that its eyes were shut, it wasn’t moving, and that there had been some sort of explosion; possibly that of its battery.

Then the dust began to fall.

Chapter 9

Fleaflea

I felt the rubber flippers sticking to me.

“Marta, are you sure this is going to work?” I asked. She had gone all out and made these flippers and a wetsuit with some rubber she found back in the jungle. In addition to this, she had also created a helmet for me, and oxygen tanks, I felt like a true diver. “Will this be enough insulation?” After all, I would have to plunge into the ocean, swim down for an unknown amount of time, and then...

“Listen, buckaroo, I’ve got you covered. If some disaster happens, then I can try to jump in or something. Plus, we have the life preserver!” By finding elastic-type leaves, once again in the jungle, she was able to make AND inflate this ring, all for my survival,

“Alright, I’ll trust this. I’m going in.” I charged into the ocean, and switched into a swim before I lost all momentum. At that moment, my feet felt odd. The slippery flippers were much different than the heavy Super Shoes.

“Fleaflea, swim out a bit. Once instructed, dive down until you find a white, steaming brick of ice,” came the voice of Quintorre, who was also in on the plan. “After you do this, just dislodge it or something. It should float to the surface naturally.”

Swimming in the ocean was hard, but not nearly as cold as when I fell in the first time. As I swam further out, I began to notice various stalagmites from the ocean floor. However, these were really tall, as I could not even see the floor yet myself.

The water had a blue tint, as did everything in it. The rock formations were a grayish-blue themselves.

“Alright, Fleaflea, you’re out far enough. Now dive down,” commanded Quintorre.

I switched my position and began to swim downward.

To be honest, I didn’t know why I had been so nervous. Sure, I was a bit cold. But diving down felt soothing. As I descended deeper and deeper, I found myself enter a trench. It was in this trench where the peace seemed to fade away.

A dark, somber mood emanated from the atmosphere of this pit in the ocean. There was nothing in here. Sure, I had been alone earlier, but at least I had the stars to comfort me. Plus, Marta had been able to see me from up there.

“Quintorre,” I trembled. “Where is the ice?”

“Keep swimming down. There’s literally no native life here, don’t be afraid.”

And so I swam farther. In the 5 or so minutes it took to reach the sea floor, I thought about home. The state of “Plain Plains” was where I lived. No, the plains were not that plain. They had trees and other things. But this one was flatter and less biodiverse than other regions on the planet.

Plain Plains was a “level 3” state. Basically, Gateway, being the highest up, most populated, and having the largest space stations and air traffic, was “level 1”. Anything after it slowly descended. Nearby cities or districts were larger than anywhere else on the planet. Of course, these were minuscule compared to Electro City.

Smaller cities made up most of the level 2 states. In level 3 states, like my own, one would usually find suburban towns. They’re cozy and away from all of the chaos, so I prefer living in Plain Plains.

Level 4 states, being almost polar opposites to Gateway, didn’t gather much attention. They were mainly made up of smaller towns or villages. However, they had some amazing landscapes. It was always fun to go on a hike up one of the mountains there and see the amazing views at the peak.

The level 5 states were almost entirely nature. Sure, people lived there, but not many. However, the foliage there was gorgeous.

“Fleaflea, have you seen anything yet?”

I snapped back into reality, about to report nothing, until I noticed a dim glow from under me.

“Wait, hold on, Quintorre.”

There it was. The gelid ice.

“Quintorre, I got it.”

“Alright, Fleaflea,” he responded. “What’s it’s situation?”

I lunged down to the ice and looped around it a few times, observing its state. The cold was unbearable; however, it seemed to have no effect on me. The ice was tangled in a few vines, but nothing else. I reported this to Quintorre.

“Okay,” he said. “Can you try to get it out?” I then struggled to pull it out of them. Going at a smaller level to try to untangle the vines, it was actually quite simple.

“Yep, I’ve got it floating here.” It was bobbing up and down, slowly, ominously.

“Give it a bit of a nudge to see if it’ll float up.” I pushed it to the side, and indeed, it began to rise up through the water.

“Quintorre, it’s going up.”

“Alright, once you break the surface, try bringing it in with you.” After speedily ascending up the trench, I wrapped my arms around the gigantic cube, and proceeded to swim back to where I started this quest.

“Great job!” Marta cheered, and she threw the ring around me and pulled me in. “Okay, this will be fine as long as it isn’t exposed to too much light or heat. I’m going to hide this in the ship while I work, and once it’s set in place, it should be good. It’s so cold, that this minuscule amount should honestly be enough to cool the whole ship. I know, it’s crazy! Though, I believe that both of our species’ evolved a resistance to this level of cold, in a previous ice age... and for Quintorre, well, he’s gigantic, so it shouldn’t freeze him to death, either. Good work back there, Fleaflea.”

“Thank you, Marta.” So, that explained why the ice didn’t have any large impact on me.

Boredom was a bit of an issue here. I didn’t want to go into the next door until I was prepared; I had to feel ready internally. Because of this, I noticed the smallest details.

“Hey Marta,” I said to her one day. “Why does it seem like the leaves on the tree never move?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, even the giant branches sway a bit in the wind. But the leaves on the other hand, they just seem to lightly move like a flap, rather than go wild like would be expected. You’d think you’d hear some rustling, but, nope, nothing.”

“Hm, strange,” she responded. “I’ll try to notice that next time it’s windy.”

Soon, I realized that I would have to hit up the last door. It would be a place to scavenge for the last resource I would need.

“Hey Marta, I think I’m going to check out the fourth doorway.”

“Alright, be safe, and make sure to report back.”

I went up to the fourth and final doorway, preparing to enter. Interestingly enough, it appeared that the path continued onward.

Chapter 10

“Excuse me, sire, but shouldn’t we have a trial first? It seems only fair.”

“A trial? No, you numbskull! He was trespassing, clearly.”

“I understand, sir. To the dungeon it is, then!”

As Joshua was being transferred to the dungeon, his mind began racing, and his heart began to pump faster than normal.

For the first time, he spoke.

“My flight just so happened to crash here, gentlemen, so if you could kindly-”

“DO NOT SPEAK, PEASANT!” And, so, Joshua didn’t try to reason with them again.

The men were giant; but, that was what all humans were like, Joshua supposed.

He was dragged down a long, spiraling staircase, with walls of stone. Being able to occasionally glance outside of the tiny windows, Joshua saw miles upon miles of rolling hills, various stone towers, and a bright blue sky.

Eventually, the staircase flattened out, and Joshua was carried through this dismal, stone corridor. Now, the only light was from the dim candles that lined the walls.

“Here. You’ll be let go in 10 years at minimum, if we think you should be. You deserve this, you piece of rubbish!”

They led him in, undid him, and quickly closed the door. From what Joshua could observe, the dungeon was filthy. The walls had a strange, green goo, and there was a single torch directly outside of the bars for light. These bars, along with the single door in the corner of them, were the only things between he and that hallway. Joshua’s wings dropped, and he plopped down to the ground.

Back in Shallow Shores, things weren’t going much smoother.

“Cwork!” yelled Goose, “What in the name of Planet Kelvin was that?”

“Radiation,” he whispered.

The whole area was now radioactive. Only minor damage had been done physically, but now, with this, it didn’t matter anymore.

This wasn’t a safe place to live.

“And... I assume the bee...”

“I don’t think it’s dead. However, it isn’t blue anymore. It’s a shame, for it could’ve been a wonderful addition to my collection.”

“Cwork, you know that we’d need hundreds of these to equal the power of even one single nuclear explosion.”

“No we don’t, we just need to be efficient with how we obtain their energy. Follow me.”

They quickly boarded their ship again, as to not be spotted, and Cwork led Goose into a back room.

“See this fly?”

“She has a name, bonehead.”

“SHUT UP! WHAT DID I JUST TELL YOU?”

Cecelia began to tremble after seeing Cwork’s outrage.

“W...what do you want with me?” she stammered.

“Oh, you’ll see, fly, you’ll see! Once we harvest that... blue... from you, you can stay here for free! It’ll be great! Unfortunately, we can’t send you back home...” Cwork’s eyes narrowed for a second, then brightened again. “But, we’ll make you feel at home here! We don’t want to kill you, we just need the blue powers.”

“Uh, buddy, what do you mean you ‘don’t want to kill her’?” asked Goose. “She’ll be useless to us.”

“I don’t want an innocent life to die! And, no, that robot officer had it coming to him!”

“Whatever, Cwork. Just talk to me once you’ve grown a bit of backbone.”

“I hope you burn in the core of Planet Kelvin,” Cwork retorted.

“You know what? Since this all seems like a ‘game’ to you, and you clearly aren’t harvesting that energy yet, I’ll just go find that brother of hers! The data showed that he’s the only living relative, so if we can get him, then nobody can stop you from waiting even LONGER. Because, clearly, if you keep up your ways, he’ll try to rescue her before we’ve even done anything! Goodbye, Cwork. I hope your bones are rattling right now.”

Cwork’s bones were indeed rattled.

“Goose, you can’t just do that! If he actually gets here than that’s different, but, once again, he’s an innocent. We only start destroying civilization and stuff AFTER we extract enough power! Remember?”

“Cwork, you can’t just keep your morals like this! You’re acting like a piece of fluff right now! Listen, I’ll find out more information about the brother, and I’ll be able to track his location. Trust me, I promise this is for the better.”

Cwork’s bony jaw dropped as Goose started the ship up.

Chapter 11

Fleaflea

“Hello, anybody home?” I knew I was going to get no response from this dark room; I never had, and I would never plan on it actually happening.

But, then, a mysterious blue aura filled the room. A low echo could be heard. And, in front of me, stood the white spirit of a fly.

“Who... are you?” I asked it. However, I did not worry, nor panic. I somehow... remained calm.

“My name is Hugh,” he began to say. “I see, traveller, that you have picked up my items. Fear not, I come in peace. I, too, once roamed this planet.”

“Hugh? HUGH THE GATHERER?” My legs began to tremble.

“Yes, that is me. We will meet another day, I promise.” The aura vanished, and I began to worry if I had gone insane. Not much longer after this, however, the room slowly lit up.

This time, the backdrop appeared to be that of a mountain; various others could be seen in the distance. However, I could not see them very well, due to the fog that appeared around them.

A metallic whir then ensued, with multiple clanging sounds. Trying to find the source of the noise, I looked right, then left, then finally up. Above me, a small, gray platform was slowly lowering. A man was standing on it.

This human’s hair was gray, and he was balding. He was a bit chubby, though, at the same time, his arms appeared to support great muscles. As his platform slowly descended, he made eye contact with me and grinned. Something looked... familiar about him.

As my stomach suddenly dropped, I tried to find the door out of this room. However, there was none. Despite the portrayal of the mountains on the walls around me, this spherical chamber wasn’t too large.

“So, Fleaflea, we finally meet,” said the man, in a deep voice. “Y’know, I’m surprised you’re here, out of all places. But that’s okay. Of course, my very great *superior* didn’t feel like bothering you. Once again, that’s fine, because I’ll deal with you instead.” At this point, his eyes seemed to light up with flames.

As I recognized him, I felt fury once again. This was one of the guys who took my sister away!

“Where is she? How did you find me?”

“That doesn’t matter now. I, Goose, will end you!”

The floor began to elevate rapidly from below me, shooting up almost like a rocket. In an instant, Goose jumped out of the ship and tried landing onto me. I quickly rolled out of the way and noticed it impact with the ground.

“What do you want from me?” I yelled, dodging his attempts at kicks and dives. At one point, he even tried to step on me.

“You need to be exterminated, you pest!” At this moment, I formed an idea. I wouldn’t have much space to work with, but it could be possible.

Running around the room multiple times, I could sense the meter going up.

Red.

“Hey, what are you doing? Get back here?” But Goose didn’t try to interfere; he knew that he would just be run into.

Yellow.

He watched in horror as his inevitable fate was sealed.

Blue.

I quickly diverted into the center of the room, running towards his left leg. I braced for impact, and, looking upwards, noticed his eyes fill with dread and fear. I had won this battle.

The hit did not kill him; however, he did go flying into the wall. It did not crack, although I thought I heard a few of his bones fracture.

“W...what are you? Stay away from me!”

With that, he jumped back into his spaceship and quickly launched up, back into the unknowns from above. It was also at this moment when the floor suddenly stopped in place; I, too, was shot up, but used my wings to float back down.

Silence was all that I could hear in this room.

I relaxed, closed my eyes, and woke up.

“Hey, Fleaflea!” called Marta, after I went back down the ramp. “The ship’s almost done! What was in that room!”

“Marta,” I responded. “It’s not safe here. One of those guys... Goose... he found me. I was able to beat him, but what if they become more prepared for next time?”

“Shoot, okay. Quintorre should be here tomorrow, and the ship should be done by then as well. Is there anything else left here?”

“Well, I did notice the path incline a bit higher.”

“Alright. Check that out before he gets here. I’m exhausted, and I’m assuming you are as well. Let’s hit the hay, my friend.”

Little did either of us know that this would be our last peaceful sleep for awhile.

Chapter 12

Marta

“Fleaflea,” I said, yawning. “Can you check in with Quintorre and see when he’s going to arrive?”

“Sure can do,” he responded, and talked quietly to his friend. “He says that he... oh! He’s actually about to enter the atmosphere now! Look at the sky!”

We looked at the blue gradient that was above, and then I saw it: a little white dot.

Now, this white dot didn’t stay little forever. Over the course of the next few minutes, it increased in size. In fact, I was soon able to notice various details, such as the tinted windows on the front, and a man waving out of them.

“Why isn’t it slowing down?” cried Fleaflea. A moment later, his question became valid; for this ship had not landed safely, but rather impacted with the ground.

“Quintorre!”

I quickly flew over to the ship. He was still there; struggling to escape the rubble. However, he eventually managed it, and stumbled over to us, almost stepping on Fleaflea in the process.

“Not again! I can never get a landing right here!” He quickly looked at both of us, then a look of shock came over his face. “It appears as though we are stranded.” Then he turned to me. “You must be Marta, right? How’s the ship coming along?”

“Almost done, sir. Can you take a look at it?”

“Almost done? Impressive for a creature of your size. Sure, I can finish the job. If all goes well from this point, we’ll be able to fly to Planet Vernal. And that one doesn’t have nearly as strong of a pull...” He then turned to Fleaflea, crouched down, and said something in a low voice. The fly then nodded as if to accept a request, and looked at me.

“Marta, we have to go higher up.”

“Alright”, I responded. I then looked up to the giant that was Quintorre. “You sure you got this?”

“Yes. Now run along, you two.”

After we reached the top, there was no more to the path. It flattened out, yet did not finish increasing. It had ended.

The clouds were far below us, now. There was no trunk next to us, either. Only the giant leaves.

“Huh, let me just try walking into this door,” Fleaflea joked, then stuck his arm into the leaves.

He was frozen.

“Marta... it... feels metallic.”

I brushed the leaves aside, which revealed what had been behind them; a gigantic metal door, and a smaller, bug-sized door on the bottom of it.

It opened quite easily, and swung closed behind us. It was a heavy door.

“What... is this place?” asked Fleaflea, clearly in awe. Outer space was projected onto the walls of this dome; I even recognized a few constellations. The floor did not feel wooden like in the other doorways; instead, it also felt metallic.

There were various wooden bug-sized tables scattered around this large, circular room. They were all in rows, in a neat formation. One common theme, however, was that many contained some sort of container with blue liquid. As I went over to investigate one of them, I noticed a dusty piece of paper. After brushing it off, I began to read the contents.

Record 1:

A bee born earlier today has been reported to be blue. This has never been seen before in any species, ever. Sure, mutations existed, but never to this extent. This happened on Planet Vernal, in the city of Pinecone. I'll see if I can fly out there from Brop tonight.

A flask of liquid laid next to this first paper. This liquid was blue, and appeared to have gone flat; as if it had been there for years on end without being touched. After examining this for long enough, I decided to pick up and read the note that was on the other side of it.

Record 2:

I made my way to Pinecone yesterday. When I approached the house, I looked in through the window and saw what appeared to be a blue, jelly-like substance on the furniture. Not wanting to take any chances, I snuck into the house, bagged some of it up, and ran back to my hotel room. Sure, it may have been immoral, and not very legal. But sometimes, you have to go to outlandish extents for science.

“Fleaflea, have you seen these?”

“No, what?” he asked, turning to face me. He still looked a bit perplexed.

“Come over here, read them with me.” He walked over to the table and picked up both of the notes. After placing them down again, he had an odd expression on his face.

“W...why did he take the jelly?”

“I have no idea, my friend.”

Another table was merely a few feet away from this one, so I walked over to it.

Record 3

I told my assistant about this, and he looked at me in disgust, saying that I shouldn't have brought the goo back to Planet Electro. I tried to explain that it was okay, and would be in containment. It's been a few hours, and he's still ranting about it,

It was at this time that I noticed a little, black radio next to the note. On the top there was an even smaller button, which I pressed. Then I heard the recording.

“*This isn't a good idea, buddy.*”

“*Whaddya mean? Look, I promise it won't spread.*”

“*You KNOW that this might not be safe. We have no idea what the effects of this mutation even are!*”

“*I've got it, don't worry! I'll just bring it to a lab and run some tests! I promise, it'll be easy!*”

“*Are you out of your mind!? You can't do it here in Electro City! Millions, maybe even BILLIONS of creatures live here! Imagine what would happen if just one of them got infected!*”

“Alright, alright, hear me out! I’ll bring these to another planet! There’s this big one that caught my eye last time I flew here from Brop, and I haven’t heard anyone else talking about it! I’ll see what’s up over there, okay!”

“Fine, but you better know what you’re doing!”

“Of course, I’ve got it all under control! Don’t worry about it!”

I looked over to Fleaflea, who was on the other side of the table, ready to tell him about my discovery. However, he was standing still, jittering a bit, holding the note.

“Marta”, he said. “Read this.” I took it from him and gave it a look.

Record 4

Everything was settled, or so I thought. When I flew out to this planet, it had turned out that I had missed a lot of things. Most importantly, however, this planet had a great gravitational force. My ship ended up crashing here. When I eventually came to, I saw the biggest tree I had ever laid eyes upon. I think I will name this planet myself: “Planet Arbor”.

Chapter 13

Fleaflea

“Alright,” I said to Marta. “Clearly, there was a scientist here that we never learned about. How many tables are even here?”

“Uh, buddy,” she responded, hesitantly. “There’s tables as far as the eye can see. However, I don’t think that all of them have notes on them.”

We walked over to the third table in that row.

Record 5

Right from the start, this planet came off as odd. For one, the giant tree was the only thing remarkable. However, it appeared as though there was a path spiraling up around it, and the occasional doorway. After 4 stops, this path went all the way up to the tree’s leaves! This came off as odd to me; it was just a dead end. That was, until, I realized that there was a door in the leaves.

This led to an empty dome, with outer space projected on the ceiling. I have decided that this will be my lab. Now, I’ll just need to make myself some tables...

“Fleaflea”, Marta said from the other side of the table. “The sixth entry describes how the blue liquid was multiplying... and, he may have accidentally ingested some of it.”

I felt a sense of dizziness. “He... he ingested the... the... the... l... liquid?”

“Hey buddy, stay there. I’ll read seven to you myself.” In her best speaking voice, Marta read off the entry.

Record 7

I frantically tried to find more information on this stuff. Using some of the testing kits that I had in the ship, I began to run numerous experiments on the stuff.

Thankfully, despite it being absolutely disgusting, this stuff will NOT kill me. However, it does appear to be highly unstable; even EXPLOSIVE! I’ll try to collect even more data... ”

“Fleaflea,” said Marta, somewhat worryingly. “That’s the last entry.”

“What do you mean ‘the last entry’?” I asked, confused. “There has to be more, right?”

“Nope, that was the last note. Let’s go.”

Disappointed, we left the dome and travelled all the way back to the bottom of the tree. Quintorre had worked at a much greater pace than Marta; after all, he was much larger than she was.

“Alright, you two,” he said, looking excited. “I’ve finished up fixing everything. Marta, thanks for all the help with this.” She looked at me with pride, then back at him. “We’re getting out of here! Next stop, Planet Vernal.”

Just like it had previously, the metallic door creaked open, and all 3 of us walked up the ramp into the ship. It only dawned on me now how gigantic and vast this place was; after all, it had been originally built for human use.

“Let’s count it down,” said Quintorre. “On the count of 3.”

“3,” we all shouted. I could hear the ship warming up, and felt a vibration below me.

“2,” the noise was becoming louder now, and the vibrating only increased in intensity.

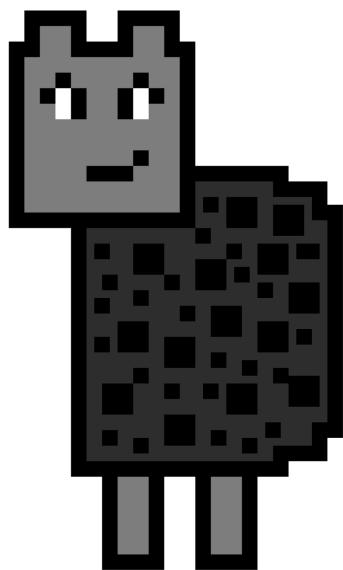
“1!” The ship’s floor felt lighter, and I could feel it carrying the three of us up, into the dark, open, wasteland of space.

“This trip, like the one to Arbor, should take less than 24 hours,” said Quintorre, confidently. “I brought a lot of things on my ship there, such as food resources. That shouldn’t be a problem. Now, we just have to wait it out.”

I looked out of the window, and saw the tree gradually begin to shrink smaller and smaller...

Part 2

Equinox



Chapter 14

A gust of wind swept some sand off of a rocky cliff. A snake rattled its tail some distance away. A nearby cactus was looking extra pointy during this fine day.

The planetary system's only star, *Aurora*, was beginning to set. This flood of light made the desert redder than usual.

During all of this action, a ship touched down.

“Charles, this is stupid. Why are you landing in the desert?”

“You know I don't like using my real name, *Gus*. What's the point of cool code names if we aren't even going to use them?”

“Suit yourself then, *Cwork*. We made those up back in the fifth grade. Anyway, why are we even in the more remote part of Planet Electro?”

“Goose, trust me. You never know, there could always be a blue snake or something!”

“*Cwork*, you haven't even done much research on this. It's not like this mutation is common or anything; it's critically rare.”

“Okay, fine, let's go.”

The ship lifted off before either of them exited the ship.

“Listen, Goose, I'm going to be honest with you. This plan IS kind of stupid... I'm going to let this fly go, and make it up to her somehow!”

“Charlie, you can't just let her go! You started this, you end it!”

“No, Goose! You know what, I'm done! I don't know if I even want to try rulin the galaxy anymore. It's way too ambitious, and it doesn't feel right!”

“YOU KNOW WHAT, CHARLIE?” Goose was practically fuming steam at this point. “I'M DONE, TOO! DONE WITH YOU AND YOUR INNOCENT, STUPID MORALS! OFF TO THE DUNGEON WITH YOU!

And so, Goose grabbed *Cwork* by the neck and slammed him into a conveniently close jail cell, locking it afterwards.

“You're in timeout.” At this, Goose walked away, smugly.

Having seen this all go down nearby, Cecelia briskly flew over to the jail bars.

“Would you like to talk about it?” she asked *Cwork*.

“Look, Cecelia, I’m so sorry I, uh, kidnapped you back there. I... I had a hard upbringing...” Cwork slumped back.

“It’s okay, I forgive you. I promise, I’ll get us both out of here. I’m sure you’ll be able to make things right, you return me, and everyone’s happy. Well, except for your friend over there...” she beckoned over to the direction that Goose had walked. “What’s his problem, anyway?”

“His childhood was like mine, but with even more bullying. We’ve only had each other for the longest time, but... now... I don’t know if I really like him that much anymore.”

“You don’t have to. He seems like a complete jerk.”

“Yeah.”

An awkward silence ensued.

“Y’know,” began Cwork. “I haven’t talked much about my feelings this openly in a long time. Thank you, Cecelia.”

“You don’t seem like that bad of a guy. Just misguided.”

They ended on that note.

Back in Quintorre’s ship, things were going as smooth as always.

“I’m surprised that that tiny ice cube is holding up so well!” said Fleaflea, surprised. “I mean, yeah, it’s definitely cold, but it’s keeping the ship from melting in space!”

“It’s so cold, even I’m feeling a bit chilly!” responded Quintorre. The old man was crossing his arms and legs. “Marta, how the heck do you two manage to survive in this temperature?”

“Again,” the ladybug said. “It’s an evolutionary trait. However, because of this, it appears that we’re especially prone to hot climates.”

“But Marta... I thought that you lived on Planet Electro?”

“Yep, lived there my whole life, but have never entered the desert. Where are you from, Quintorre?”

“Carañajo, Shallow Shores. You know, the town with the mountains and the pears-“

“Wait,” Fleaflea intervened. “I thought that all of Shallow Shores was like that?”

“Nope,” Marta stated, confidently. “Shallow Shores is a province on Planet Vernal. A majority of it is tropical and it is known for its amazing coasts (giving it its name), but Carañajo is the only town with that type of culture. I’ve actually been there before, Quintorre.”

“Oh, really? What did you think?”

“Mostly peaceful. It was very calming. The temperatures weren’t that hot. Again, though, that’s not saying much, due to most of Planet Vernal being like that. However,” she narrowed her eyes, “areas like Bizfona get pretty melting a lot of the time.”

“Well, Marta,” said Quintorre. “Bizfona is on the southern end of Shallow Shores. Of course it’s going to be hotter there.”

“Wait,” Fleaflea interrupted again. “What is that?”

A small ship was rushing towards them.

“Space pirates!” Marta panicked. “Quintorre, we’re close enough, get the ship into the atmosphere!”

“But-“

“JUST DO IT!”

Quintorre veered the ship towards Planet Vernal. The blue and green celestial body was gargantuan up this close. Fleaflea could even make out a few continents!

“Why is it getting hot in here?”

“THE ICE CUBE’S MELTING!”

“I told you that this tiny of an amount wouldn’t work!”

“Well, it’s Fleaflea’s fault!”

“What?! You guys were the ones who told me I only needed a single cube!”

“GUYS! WE”RE GOING TO CRA-“

And, just like what happened before, the ship impacted with the ground. Hard.

Chapter 15

Fleaflea

“Ugh...” I groaned. “Where am I?” Then I remembered what had happened.
“Marta? Quintorre?”

They both came rushing to me.

“Is everyone alright?” asked Quintorre.

“Yeah,” said Marta. “But... where are we, exactly?”

Looking around, I noticed vast, rolling hills, with the occasional tree. Nearby, I noticed what appeared to be another crashed spaceship.

“This looks like... a commercial ship? With multiple passengers?”

A moment later, I could hear footsteps patting the grass.

“HALT! Who goes there?”

“My name is Fleaflea, this is Ma-“

“Surprisingly, I do not actually care who you are, for I never asked! You have been caught trespassing, come with me!”

Noticing this man, I saw that he was wearing shining armor, and welded a sword. Knowing that these could likely be used on me, I decided to go with his orders, and to not correct him. It appeared that the other two had the same thought.

“Alright,” said Quintorre. “We’ll follow you.”

He led the three of us down a dirt path, his armor cranking in the process. In the far distance, I thought I could see a couple of small houses. We were led into a large, stone castle.

After navigating a couple of the dark corridors, we began to go down a staircase. There were a few windows, although I just saw what I had already seen before.

At the bottom of this spiral, there were a couple of more hallways, dimly lit by torches mounted on the wall.

Finally, we reached the dismal dungeon.

“IN HERE! AND STAY THERE!”

He slammed the door shut.

Looking around, I noticed some red slime on the walls. There was one window in the corner of the room.

“Is that... a skull?” asked Marta, in horror.

“Y...y...y...yes...” a shy voice barely croaked out.

I looked in the corner, and made eye contact with the source.

He was a bee, clearly looking ragged. His wings were slowly flapping to keep him afloat. His eyes looked like they had seen some things.

“They... haven’t fed me since yesterday... and, even then, I only get pieces of bread. They do give me a small cup of water every few hours, though. I get one hour in the courtyard, heavily monitored. But I just lay on the ground, motionless. It’s so boring here.”

“That’s awful!”

“It really is! I just wanted to go to Carañaj to see my grandma and my brother. But then, after the ship crashed, now these *lunatics* accused to of trespassing!”

“What is your name?” asked Quintorre.

“Joshua,” the bee responded. “We need to find a way out, now. They aren’t going to free us themselves.”

“There’s a keyhole in this door,” Quintorre remarked, causing me to eye the metal, steel barrier between us and the outside world. “Maybe we could steal a guard’s key or something?”

“No way,” said Joshua. “They come in pairs. There’s no way a single one would come in by himself. We’d never get the chance to do that.

“Maybe,” Marta began, “we can bribe them?”

“No. Once again, those “knights” (as they call themselves) are loyal to their king. Any attempt of bribery will fail.”

Even a half hour later, we were stumped.

“YOU SCUM!” came a voice in the distance. “GOODNIGHT! GO TO SLEEP!
I’M TRYING TO LISTEN TO MY BEDTIME STORY, AND YOU ARE ALL
INTERRUPING ME!”

“Sorry, William!” Joshua called back. “That’s William. He’s usually nice if you get on his good side. He’s not like many of the others. Anyway, we should probably get some rest and think about this more tomorrow.”

“Agreed,” I responded. “Night, everyone.”

That night was a hard one. It was dark and gloomy, with the only luminescent being Vernal's moon reflecting light through the single window. Aurora had set hours before, and was now saying hello to those in Pinecone.

This dusty, dismal dungeon gave no comfort, either. The cold concrete floor below me was vastly different from any other place I had slept in the past. The human-sized skulls pointing in my direction didn't help, either.

Everyone else was asleep by this point. Marta was on her back, Quintorre was propped up against a wall, Joshua was lightly planted on the ground. I then looked up again at the gigantic door. It appeared that they key they used was smaller than the size of me, meaning that any attempt to fly through the keyhole would fail immediately.

My bracelet suddenly glowed white. The previously-brown beads were now brightly shining. Then it began to rumble again.

Everything around me went dark, and, once again, the blue aura filled the room. It was Hugh.

His white, spectral ghost approached me, slowly.

"Hello, once again, traveler," he said. "I see you are now on Planet Vernal. This dungeon... I remember hearing myths about it. In fact, I remember legends about this whole place!"

"Where am I?" I asked, curious.

"You're on the island of Hoggeth," he responded. "Yes, I know, it's a strange name. But that's because their king is named King Hog VI. Yes, they let the "Hog" bloodline run on for 6 generations. You guys have to get out of here, it isn't safe. Take this."

He tossed me an item about half my size, which had an appearance similar to that of a paper clip.

"Good luck, traveler. We will meet again soon."

With that, he, along with the aura, vanished. Everything from before came back into view.

This time, I rolled onto my side and dozed off.

Chapter 16

Marta

“Fleaflea,” I restated once again. “How did you get that lock pick?”

“I just saw a vision... and it was given to me.”

“Wait... wait...” said Quintorre. He crouched down and whispered something to Fleaflea, who then nodded. Quintorre stood back up

“Alright. Who cares how he got it? We actually have a way to get out of here!”

Joshua looked like he was about the faint. The poor guy had been trapped here for longer than the rest of us.

“Guys, we’ve gotta think fast,” said Quintorre. “Joshua, how many exits are there in this castle?”

“Conviniently enough, actually, I thought I saw a door right at the top of the staircase. It’s just a bit down the hall.”

“Whoa,” Fleaflea remarked. “This should be easy! Or at least, kind of easy?”

“Remember that they can still catch us,” I said. “Just be careful, smart, and silly, alright?”

Everyone agreed to that.

After fiddling around with the keyhole for a bit, Quintorre was able to unlock the door.

“Follow me.”

So we did. I was directly behind him, then Fleaflea, then Joshua, barely functioning, was still able to manage to flap his little wings in the back of the line.

The corridors were dark; however, they were straightforward. It appeared that this dungeon was the only thing remarkable in the cellar of the castle.

We finally reached the spiral staircase and quickly ran up. The windows were too high for me to see out of at this point. After the long climb, another bright hallway greeted us.

“Alright!” commanded Quintorre! “Turn left!” A bit rather down the hallway was a door on the left side. Once we exited the stone castle, I could feel grass below me again, and began to take flight.

“Marta,” said Quintorre. “Do you see anything? Any houses, perhaps?” I tried to seek out anything of the sort from my high altitude, and eventually noticed some lights.

“Yeah, I think so... I... I think that’s a village, Quintorre!”

“Great! C’mon, we need to go there. And we need to help Joshua.

“N...no... it’s... okay...” Joshua could barely speak.

“Nope,” replies Fleaflea. “You’re coming with us, and you’re going to get the help you need, whether you want it or not.

Quintorre held out his hand in front of Joshua, who, after a few seconds, lightly plopped himself down on it.

“B...be careful not to touch my stinger. Sure, my species evolved so I won’t die after a single sting, but... s...still. I don’t want you to get h...hurt.

“Don’t worry, Joshua. I’ve got it all under control.”

With me guiding them up in the sky, we eventually reached the lights, which were, indeed, from a village.

“Quintorre! He doesn’t look like he’s going to last much longer!” yelled Fleaflea, now in the back of the line. “I’ll speed up ahead! I can see if anyone is willing to help!”

And so, with the help of his boots, Fleaflea quickly accelerated and ran towards the village.

I could hear him shouting from up ahead, then eventually run back with another human.

“Quintorre! Show Joshua to him!”

Quintorre opened his hand completely and brought it up to the other man’s level.

“Oh, wow. He looks severely injured. What happened?”

“He was in the dungeo-“

A wave of shock instantly covered the man’s face, and he made eye contact with Quintorre.

“W...what exactly could a bee do to get thrown in prison. Did he stab a knight or something?”

“Well, you see, we’re not from around here. Both of the ships we were on crashed outside of the castle, and both times, we got accused of trespassing.”

“Ah, mate, the government here is severely corrupt. I can help your friend out. Would all of you like to stay with us for a bit?”

“Thank you for your generous offer,” responded Quintorre, surprised. “We’d be happy to accept.”

“My name is Patrick, I’ll lead you to my house,” said the man. What are yours?”

“I’m Quintorre. This is Fleaflea,” Quintorre said, motioning to the speedy green blur on the ground. “This is Joshua,” raising his hand once more. Joshua did a light flutter, then quickly fell down again. “And this,” he said, pointing upwards at me, “is Marta.” I gave a nod and waved my arm a bit.

“Pleasant to meet you all,” said Patrick.

As we walked along, we gave him a greater explanation.

“My ship crashed,” began Quintorre. “I need to get it to Pinecone. These two are with me,” he said, beckoning to Fleaflea and I. “Joshua was on track to go to Carañajo, but his ship crashed as well. If you don’t mind me asking, where are we, exactly?”

“This is the kingdom of Hoggeth,” explained Patrick. “It’s an island. The king and his small group of advisors make up the whole government. There are also the knights, so I guess they count too. None of them acknowledge anything outside of here. In fact,” his eyes squinted a bit, “King Hog VI has set a law in place where any mention of a place outside of here gets the offender executed.”

“Wait,” I said. “King... Hog?” I could feel tears begin to roll as I held in my laughter. “They let that name go on for so long?”

“Be careful!” warmed Patrick. “Yes, I find it comical as well, but any criticism of the king could put you under the worst of torture!”

“Oh... yikes.”

“Alright. We’re finally here. Follow me.”

Patrick led us down the dirt road, to his house. It was small, like all the others nearby. The house was made of wood and had a thatched roof. There were a couple of windows on the front side.

Upon entrance, it seemed just as cozy. There was a small fireplace in the center, and above it was a set of armor; just like what the knights were wearing, though a bit less shiny. On one side of the room was a singular wooden table with a few

chairs. Near this, against the wall, was a stove and a cabinet. On the other there was a rug, a bookcase, and two more comfortable chairs.

“Where do you sleep?” Fleaflea asked him.

“Come with me.”

A ladder was propped up against the wall, which we all climbed. Upstairs, there were two beds with a nightstand between them. A candle sat upon this nightstand.

“King Hog doesn’t believe in using technology; we can only use candles. Is it true? Are there really lamps out there? And electricity? And refrigerators?”

“Yes,” I said. “All true.”

“Wow...” said Patrick, in a daze for a moment. “Well, it’s late, and we should all probably get some shut-eye. Quintorre, you can sleep up here with me. You other 3, sleep on the chairs. You’re small enough.”

I occupied one chair, while Fleaflea and Joshua were on the other one.

“Goodnight, everyone.”

“Goodnight, Marta,” Fleaflea responded.

“G...goodnight...” Joshua could barely squeeze it out. In minutes, we were all fast asleep.

Chapter 17

The next morning, when Patrick woke up, everyone was mostly asleep. That is, mostly everyone.

“Ow...” he heard from downstairs.

He rushed down, expecting to see Joshua in pain; however, after a good rest, the bee was feeling better.

“Who’s making that sound?” he thought out loud,

“Me..” said Fleaflea. Patrick rushed over to him, his long, brown hair swaying in the wind. His beard was roughly shaved, and he wore a dirty, yellow shirt, and gray pants.

“My wings... they... ache...”

“Wait, Fleaflea,” said Marta, who had just woken up. “Take the bandage off.”

Fleaflea only now removed the leaves that Marta had wrapped around his wings long ago.

“Wait... they don’t hurt anymore!” Fleaflea spread his wings and flew into the air, then descended back down. “My wings! They work again!” He proceeded to then fly around the room.

“Heh... seems like everyone’s better,” said Patrick, delighted.

“Wh...what’s going on down there?” asked Quintorre from upstairs.

“Quintorre! My wings work again!”

“Oh... that’s great to hear, Fleaflea!”

**However, what’s not great to hear is that this chapter is currently incomplete!
Stay tuned for more!**

Edit as of 6/25/20: So, you can probably see that the last change on this document was a few months ago. I’ve discontinued writing this. However, I may do more in the future with these characters and/or the universe. Thanks for joining me on this journey!