The Princess

And The

Abyss Diver

**By**

**Trevy Burgess**

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0. Middle School

School was created to make suitable   
workers for the workforce,   
but does the world still need flesh robots?

Thursday, September 2

Luke and his best friend Ripper stepped out of the tour bus and onto the school grounds of the Albert Einstein Academy for Gifted Children.

At a glance you wouldn’t think the two would be friends. One was a tall, muscular jock who was both handsome and popular. The other was a short, socially awkward, chubby kid with acne and thick glasses.

Luke stepped to the edge of the growing crowd of students and took in the scenery. All about them rose the magnificent mountains of Switzerland.

“I can’t believe we are both going to this crazy school,” Ripper said. “You maybe, but I’m just a dumb jock.”

“Nonsense,” Luke said. “You are smart. You’re problem is motivation. Besides, you’re here on a sports scholarship.”

“Maybe so,” Ripper said. “However, without your tutoring I couldn’t have obtained the minimum grades. Why did you sign up as a tutor?”

“My mum insisted I make friends. She was the one who suggested I tutor,” Luke said. “Although very soon all tutoring will be done by AI agents.”

“I’m glad my career is safe,” Ripper said. “Robot sports never took off. People want to see real people battling and bleeding for their entertainment.”

“My aunt had a live band for her June wedding, even though it was more expensive,” Luke said. “And the rich never use robots, preferring humans to serve them.”

The last of the teens exited the busses and a woman called out, “Attention kids.” She paused until everyone quieted down. “My name is Mrs. Bertrand. Welcome to the Albert Einstein Academy for Gifted Children.

“Please follow me to the auditorium for your orientation ceremony.”

Over a thousand kids followed the woman to a large building. Luke and Ripper chatted as they walked.

“Hey look, they have human gardeners,” a girl next to Luke said.

“I wonder why,” another girl said.

Stepping in, Luke found himself inside an auditorium seating thousands. However, only half the space was used.

After a long wait, everyone was seated.

A man in a business suit walked on stage and said, “Greetings everyone. My name is Dr. Everson Thornville and I am your principle.

“Welcome to the Albert Einstein Academy for Gifted Children.

“You are all here because we believe you are the shining future of our tiny blue star. Over the next few years you will learn the skills needed to handle the terrifying changes that will befall Blue Star.”

That ominous statement caused some murmurs from the students.

“That’s diabolical,” Ripper said.

“In this school, you will not learn to become a worker at an office, factory or what not. AI can do that easily,” the principle said. “Our goal is to teach each of you to become masters of your own destinies. Only then may you overcome the monsters surrounding us and gain true strength.”

“Monsters?” Ripper asked.

“Either it’s a metaphor or the principle is crazy,” Luke said.

The principle smiled at the confused students and said, “Annie Winfield, please enter.”

From offstage a teenage girl entered, wearing the school uniform.

The auditorium broke out in murmuring. That wasn’t surprising.

“Damn, she looks like an elfin princess,” Luke said as he almost drooled. He had the urge jump on stage and…

Luke wouldn’t do that in real life. He wasn’t that stupid. However, nothing prevented him from ravaging her in his mind.

All about, the other teens had the same desire, even many of the ladies.

“Annie Winfield is the youngest daughter of Edward Winfield, chair and founder of this school,” Principle Bertrand said. “And yes, I’m talking about Winfield Energy.

“Although not the first company to commercialize fusion energy, their product is by far the most compact, safe and dependable. And yes, we do have a Winfield reactor.”

The Winfield reactor was said to capture fast neutrons from the fusion process and convert the energy directly into electricity. The process was propriety but the results were undeniable.

It wasn’t surprising that Edward Winfield, Annie’s father became a trillionaire. AI and unlimited energy made for a powerful combination.

“However, that is not why she is here,” the principle said. “Yes, many of you here exceed her in terms of physical fitness and problem solving, to name a few. However, her combined scores exceed everyone here, and that’s saying something.

“Ms. Winfield, please speak to your cohort.”

Annie stepped up to the mike and took a breath.

“Thank you Principle Thornville,” Annie said. “6 years ago my father founded this academy using his considerable wealth. The purpose is to gather all the best and brightest kids of the world in order to forge a better world for everyone.

“Sad to say the world is full of monsters. They live just below the surface, hungry to come out and slaughter. The environmental contamination, desecration of sacred lands, polarization of the world, despair and hate are making things worse.

“Our goal here is simple. Become strong and never place our fate on so-called saviors.

“I look forward to growing ever stronger with all of you.”

With that Annie stepped off from the podium.

“Thank you Ms. Winfield,” the principle said.

“School starts on Monday. Including today that will give you 4 days to get over any jet lag.

“Your luggage will be in your dormitory rooms. Also, you will find your school issued cell phones, uniforms, and everything else you will need to attend classes.

“Go to your dormitories and settle in.

“After that, I encourage you to spend time getting to know your fellow students and exploring the local town. Also, the hiking trails are amazing, with rivers, waterfalls and canyons to explore.”

The principle paused and then said, “I do need to warn you. Please avoid leaving school grounds after dusk. This is especially true of the surrounding forests.

“And if you are stuck in the town, go to the city hall. They will find you a bed for the night, and then return at sunrise. We don’t want you to miss school. More importantly, we want you to be safe.”

By now half the students were more than a little uneasy.

“Principle Thornville, please don’t scare the kids,” a woman said.

“This is vice-principle Eliot Drew,” the principle said, pointing at the woman. He turned to the vice-principle and said, “Fear is essential if one is to stay safe. You know what is out there.”

The principle turned back to the audience and said, “The boundary of the school grounds is well marked.

“You are required to be either on campus grounds or in the town between dusk and dawn. Those rules are there for a reason. We don’t want tragedies. Dismissed.”

The auditorium burst into a cacophony as everyone tried to understand the dire warning.

“Damn, that was weird,” Ripper said. “Why not just say we will get into trouble?”

“Maybe there are wild animals,” Luke said. “No, that doesn’t make sense. The principle said we should explore during the day.”

Ten minutes later they were at their dormitory room.

The studio apartment had a kitchenette to the left and a washroom to the right. Beyond were two elevated beds. Under each bed was a study area with desk, chair, and chest of draws.

On the floor to the right was Luke’s luggage. Stacks of books sat on the desk with a phone next to it.

“That’s weird,” Luke said.

“What’s weird?” Ripper asked.

“This cell phone isn’t IOS or Android,” Luke said. “Also, it’s rather bare-boned, with only 6 apps.

“There is a Map App, Party Chat, Character Info, Identification, Library, and settings. There is no app store or anything.”

“That’s weird,” Ripper said. “What’s the WIFI password?”

“Challenger 423,” Luke said, pointing at a sign on the wall.

“Thanks,” Ripper said as he opened his laptop.

Luke unpacked, placing his clothes and items in his closet and chest of drawers. Last item was his laptop.

It was time to call his parents.

“Hi Mum, Dad, Goat Father,” Luke said.

Ripper glanced at Luke but didn’t say anything.

“Hi Luke,” Luke’s mum said. “Was the trip okay? Was there any problems?”

“No mum,” Luke said. “The trip was just tedious, since all I could see were clouds. Here is my room.”

Luke panned the phone around and said, “I even have a kitchenette, so I can practice my cooking.

“Ripper, say ‘Hi’.”

Ripper waved and Luke stepped out onto the balcony.

Luke pointed his phone at the surrounding mountains.

“Those mountains are beautiful,” Luke’s mother said.

“I hear there are plenty of those nut jobs in Switzerland,” Luke’s dad said.

“There were some protesters at the gates when we arrived,” Luke said.

“So Goat Son, did you eat any good books lately?” Luke’s uncle and godfather asked.

Luke stepped back into the room and pointed the phone at his new school books. “I have plenty of food,” He said.

Luke stepped back out onto the balcony and closed the door. He and his uncle started bleating at each other.

“Stop that you two,” Luke’s mother said angrily. “What if you said that in public?”

“Well he is Billy the Goat,” Luke’s uncle said. “He can’t help it.”

Technically Luke’s name was Luke Billhardson, or as his uncle liked saying, Billy.

“And my uncle is the Goat Father,” Luke said.

“Okay dear, you better go,” Luke’s mother said. “You have plenty of work ahead of you.”

“Work hard, Luke,” Luke’s dad said. “Remember I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks mum, dad,” Luke said.

“Remember to eat plenty of tin cans,” the uncle said. “You need plenty of iron for your growing bones.”

“Okay Goat Father,” Luke said. “Bye mum, dad, Goat Father.”

Luke hung up the call and entered the room.

Ripper looked at Luke curiously.

“My uncle and I are both Capricorns,” Luke explained. “And goats are funny creatures. It’s something we’ve been doing all my life. Do you have a favorite animal?”

Ripper paused a moment and then said, “I suppose it would be a gorilla. The ultimate line backer would be a gorilla. They are the ultimate symbol of speed, strength, and endurance.

“I finished unpacking.”

“Let’s go get something to eat,” Luke said and they headed out.