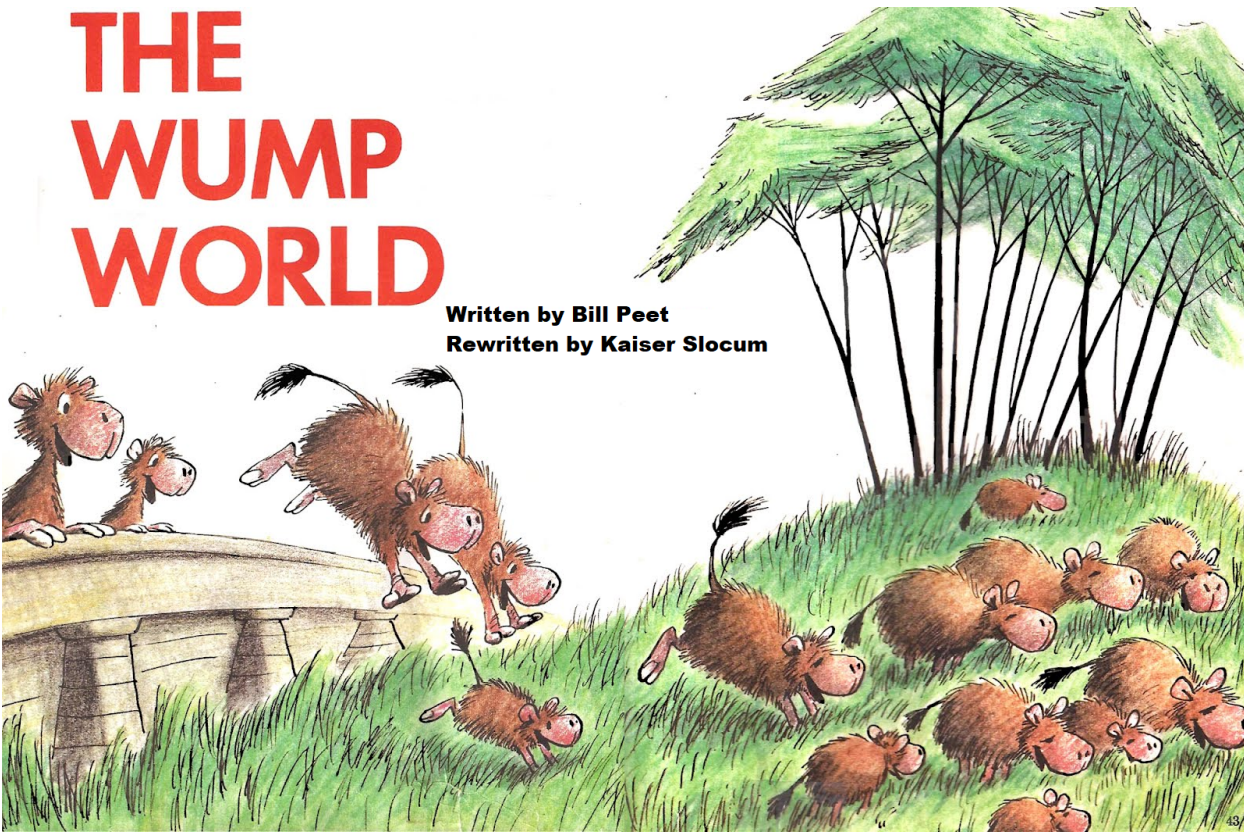


THE WUMP WORLD

Written by Bill Peet
Rewritten by Kaiser Slocum



*This book is dedicated to
Kent Slocum
Who inspired my creativity*

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Or visit: <http://citstudent.lanec.edu/~slocumk473/Kaiser'sWebsite>

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Opener

"Beep, beep," the persistent background noise of various computers and tech software echoed across the steel-walled room as I pressed my hot face up against the glass and tried to see what was going on in the next room. It had been days since any of our pilots had found anything worthwhile, and the rumor was that my sister was onto something big.

"Fssshhh, Singe - this is Smog," the Capcom said, "Do you read me?"

"FSSSSSSSHHHHH, click," the old speakers buzzed with static. Suddenly, the static quieted down and my sister started to speak, "Smog, this is Singe, I read you. The object on my radar is a planet - it's quite large actually."

At this, Rob Marcy, our Supreme Leader, rose from his overdone, plush chair and jumped closer to Capcom.

"Ask her WHAT it is!" He whispered fiercely.

"Singe, what do you see," Capcom replied coolly.

"It's....hard to tell..." my sister began - "fshhhhhssssshhhhh."

Rob moved his head closer to the ancient speakers near the Capcom.

"It's, it's.... Gre-", her conversation was suddenly cut off.

"Singe, I missed that last part," Capcom replied quickly, "It's what?"

There was a loud burst of static that blasted into the ample ears of His Supreme Leader; followed by an enormous pause.

"Singe, this is Smog, do you read me? I did not hear what you said," Capcom replied, a little more anxiously this time.

"Fshhhhhsssss - just a minute," my sister finally replied over the intercom. This was interrupted by a loud buzzing noise from a scout monitor at a desk a few meters away.

"Singe is running considerably low on fuel," the man barked at Capcom and Rob.

"Well, darn it all!" Rob roared, "What *is* it she found?!"

"Ugh!" my sister began again to my relief, "There's some large green cloud covering the planet. I can't tell!"

"Well FIND OUT!" Rob yelled into Capcom's microphone.

"If she doesn't turn around soon, she won't be able to make it home," the scout monitor yelled over to us.

"Tell her to hurry up and find out what it is!" Rob yelled at the poor Capcom.

"Try moving in," Capcom quickly replied into the microphone, "Can you tell if the green cloud is toxic?"

"I would," my sister replied, "But my fuel indicator says I need to return. At this, his Supreme Leader leapt from his chair, swiped the microphone from Capcom's hands and roared, "Just dive beneath the clouds."

I stood back in shock. *What was he thinking?!* She could get *killed* out there!

"The green cloud is getting thick," my sister replied a little later, "I can't see anything else around me now."

"Just a little longer now," Rob breathed into the microphone.

"Oh, my -," my sister began, but she was cut off by a loud bang that emitted from the speakers.

“Drat,” she replied, “I just saw the tip of a spire or something poking out from the clouds, but a rock hit my left gas tank, and I’m leaking fuel. Can I still make it back?”

“Yes!” Rob roared, as I, on the other side of the glass, leapt at the window.

“NO!” I screamed back.

Rob turned around and pointed a long, blue finger at me. Quickly, two com station guards converged on me.

“It’s time to go now,” the older one said as he firmly grabbed me by the wrist.

“But sis needs to come back home!” I yelled at him, “She’s almost out of fuel!”

“You shouldn’t even be here, and you don’t know what you’re talking about,” the other replied as they hustled me down the aisle. At the last minute, I picked up on my sister’s voice, “Just a little longer now... BABOOOM!!!”

The explosion of sound from the speakers scared my captors so bad that they dropped my hands and plugged a finger into their ears. I ran back to the glass and squished my face up against it. Inside, the com employees stared at each other in stunned silence.

“We’ve lost contact with her,” Capcom replied.

I screamed in anger as the guards quickly caught up with me and pulled me out of the building and to my waiting parents outside.

Chapter 1

“Hurry up Jeffrey!” Mom shouted at me from the living room of our small apartment, “You don’t need to bring *everything!*”

“I’m not!” I shouted back, “But there’s SO much to go through!”

I pulled my attention away from a little flashlight-like gadget and started throwing stuff into the three, huge, cardboard boxes in the middle of my tiny room. I didn’t have a lot, and what I didn’t want I could just leave, but most of my stuff was either sentimental or useful. I swiped two objects out of a plastic drawer, decided in favor of my electromagnet, and tossed my mini power generator onto the floor. I was a tech engineer major and an intern for a large power company in my civilization. It wasn’t the most boring job, but there just didn’t seem like there was a lot of chance to grow or get my ideas put into action. I finally managed to tape down the flaps on my three boxes; then I dragged them, one at a time, to the living room where two movers were pulling the boxes out of the house on dollies.

The third box had all my electronic gizmos in it, and it took me especially long to heave it out of my room. By the time I finally got it there, I slumped against it and caught my breath.

“Jeff, check the attic for anything we may have forgotten,” Dad told me as he ran by with a recycled-plastic lamp.

I sighed and pulled myself to my feet. This was the first time in about ten years that we had to move, and it was especially exhausting to me as I was involved in the internship and just getting off college for the summer. I stumbled back down the hall and entered a room that had been my sister’s many years ago. Now, it was just a small office for my parents. Over in the corner, near the ugly, metal walls was a wooden stool that I moved to the middle of the room and stood on. I stretched my hands to the ceiling and grasped a small, plastic knob connected to the ceiling. With a short jerk, the attic’s entrance opened and the collapsible ladder extended – barely missing my head. I slowly climbed the clumsy ladder and squished myself into the tiny attic compartment above. Now in the attic, I could hear our upstairs neighbors banging around as they too packed their stuff for the big move.

To my left, I saw a box labeled “pictures” and one labeled “trophy.” Neither of those was important, we Pollutions didn’t see much attraction to memories or winnings of the past - it’s all about the present anyway! The only other boxes were one labeled “Christmas” and “sister.” I pretended to not see the Christmas box, as my dad always got obsessed with lights, and I knew he’d get new ones anyway this winter. However, my sister’s box intrigued me. The government had done away with most of her stuff

when she was killed in the unfortunate accident, but evidently my parents had saved a few things. After blowing dust off the top of the box, I carefully opened the box and peered inside. It basically consisted of a few of her articles – like her hair brush, a jewelry box, a small alarm clock, a space poster, her favorite teddy bear, and a... wand? I plucked the wand out of the box and held it up to the dim light filtering in through the small attic window. It was cylindrical, black and peculiarly thick.

“Jeff, have you found anything?” Dad shouted at me from below.

“Nah, just some old pictures and Christmas decorations,” I yelled back to him.

“Well, we’re just about to head to ‘TieNight,’ so come on down,” he replied as he left the office.

With the wand in hand, I quickly swung down the ladder and ran into the living room.

“Sorry, kid,” the older mover told me, handing me my electromagnet, “No electromagnets. We had a bad incident with one a few years ago – they’re too easily set off.”

I didn’t bother asking him what the incident was about – accidents happened all the time around here anyway. As the movers toted out the last box, I switched on the electromagnet and looked around for a metal object to levitate on it. To my surprise, my sister’s wand suddenly vibrated and a side of the wand popped off and shot across the room, embedded in the wall across the room. Luckily mom and dad were still in the kitchen. As if on cue, the wand started talking!

“July 15, 2020,” my sister said, “When I was on my latest scouting mission, I noticed a strange blip on my radar. Upon further inspection it turned out to be a planet. I’m too close to where I believe the Planet of Four Cones is – I can’t risk the government getting this info. I’ll probably go explore it in a later mission. “

“Huh?” I thought, “a planet that my sister was trying to hide?” I couldn’t understand that. Our elite Pollution scouts spent years just finding one planet. It was the discovery of a lifetime for a scout to find an inhabitable one – how could my sister just give that up?!

“September 1, 2021,” my sister continued a moment later, “I know the planet. I temporarily disabled my communication equipment and flew in for a better view. The atmosphere is really thick, but the planet looks very habitable. It’s covered in rivers, grass, and trees. I landed there and scouted around it for a while too. I was surprised to find a strange, animal-like species inhabiting the area. They appear especially friendly and nice. I know it’s too beautiful and innocent to have my civilization destroy it – I’m protecting it. If you’re hearing this – it’s your job to protect it too. I’m calling it Wump World. It’s located at 34-67-109-31663.” I waited a minute longer as my parents banged around in the kitchen, then pulled up my phone.

“Okay,” I told myself, plugging in the coordinates to my universe app, “Has anything been discovered at 34-67-109-31663?”

“Bleep!” my phone chimed, “Your destination is planet – 8T54.”

“Did someone say 8T54?” Dad announced, waltzing into the living room, “I’m so excited to start a new life on a new planet – this is only my third!”

“Wait, we’re moving to 8T54?” I asked him.

“Yep!” Dad announced, “Isn’t that what you just said?”

I stood there for a minute, thinking. What was so special about a planet that my sister would want to protect it? Was it just the crazy thoughts of an anti-mover? I didn’t know, but I DID know that I’d know soon enough.

“Honey! I’m keeping the blue set,” Mom yelled to Dad from the kitchen, “Let’s leave the stainless steel collection.”

“Sounds good!” Dad yelled back as he assisted the movers, who had just come back in, with a particularly large coffee table. I quickly shoved my electromagnet and my sister’s wand into my pocket and ran into the kitchen to help mom with her last minute boxing.

“I never seem to have enough time for these moves!” Mom told me as she shoved a box labeled “fragile” toward me.

“You’ve only moved like three times!” I reminded Mom as I carefully placed the box onto a nearby dollie.

“Yeah, but that’s excluding all the inter-planet moves,” Mom puffed as she wrapped plates and bowls up in bubble wrap with lightning speed.

“Sure,” I answered, “And it’s going to be a massive amount of households all trying to make it to our spaceship.

“Tell me about it,” Mom answered, “And the air outside is SO bad!”

“Thank goodness for a new planet!” Dad announced as he came into the kitchen as well, “I think we’re all done here, how are things coming along here?”

“This is the last one,” Mom replied, stacking one more pan into her box, “Let’s get onto the road as early as we can!”

“Can’t agree with you more, honey,” Dad replied. Dad and I wheeled the dollie outside and into the smoky air. I relapsed into a wild series of coughs as we quickly shoved the kitchen supplies box into the back of our oversized van. With eyes fully watering, we quickly boarded our vehicle and turned on the air purifier.

“It’s a good thing our atmosphere is so poor here or we’d be even more hurt!” Dad announced as we sped down the street and away from our apartment forever. Unfortunately, we quickly ran into heavy traffic as everyone was racing towards the boarding spaceships.

“Briinnnnngggg!” my smartphone buzzed wildly for my attention, so, with a sigh, I pulled it out of my pocket and answered.

“Hello, Jeff here,” I answered.

“Jeff,” my boss said, “It’s going to be at least a week before our office building is going to be set up, so why don’t you just work on cleaning up those air purification systems on your Comp-CAD?”

“Sure,” I replied, “Should I forward them to Brighten when I’m done?”

“Good,” my boss replied again, “And I’ll have Gerry contact you when you’re done so he can get you introduced to our water-cleansing idea. We’ll talk later.”

“Wait!” I cut in quickly, “I had this great idea for a planet shield generator. I was thinking that if I was given some time and maybe with some help from Yerina I could come up with a prototype!”

“Jeff. We’ve gone over this before. Your ideas aren’t bad, but they aren’t useful for getting government contracts. Plus, the *last* thing we need is a planet shield. We need a giant fan for blowing our air OUT of the planet – not keeping it in!”

“But I’m sure it could have huge benefits!” I argued.

“Look kid, you’re just our intern – so get used to it. You’re the lowest guy in our corporation. We’ll talk later. Bye”

I clicked off the call rather disappointed and slumped back into my car seat. We’d moved a total of a half mile over the entire phone call and had at least another thirty before we’d be close to our spaceship.

Mom turned on our van’s television.

“And we’re just a day away from our grand departure towards 8T54!” the news announcer exclaimed excitedly, “Our own reporters have managed to get a private interview with our head exploration general with what our new planet is like!”

The television switched to show an overweight Pollution with a slouched hat and way too many medals on his freshly-pressed uniform talking to a younger, slim lady with a microphone.

“So, General Gayer,” the news reporter asked, “What is the environment of our new planet?”

“Well,” he answered, “It’s not very exciting actually. According to our ace pilot, it consists mainly of grass, a few trees, and some rivers – that’s it!”

“Well, that’s a let-down,” the news reporter lady replied honestly, “What do you think of the planet as being hospitable to us?”

“The air content and soil richness is actually perfect,” Gayer answered, “We’ll be able to construct our buildings in no time!”

“Is there any wild life?” the news lady asked.

“Not that we know of,” Gayer chuckled, “Not like the wild monkeys of R#9Q!”

I sighed with relief at that, which must mean that we were not moving to my sister’s planet after all – she had said there were animals there.

“Well, that’s all, folks!” The news lady spoke to us, “Let’s move to Charles as he talks about the mysterious disappearance of a couple in zone 72W!”

I rolled my eyes and let my gaze drift to the windows to stare at the rest of people anxiously beating their horns and trying to go as fast as possible, but not going at all very fast because cars were jammed everywhere. Mom puzzled over her massive book

of crossword puzzles, and Dad set up his smart phone on the dashboard to check out the latest happenings of his favorite football team. Meanwhile, I decided to pull out my laptop and check on my CAD drawings.

I worked as an intern for II (Ideas Incorporated), and since I was exceptionally good with electronic hardware, I was put in charge of reviewing the schematics of the new water-cleansing system that the government wanted in all of our water-treatment plants. My next project sounded equally boring – they were all machines that were trying to treat the problem of our water and air becoming dirty without trying to solve the problem of where all that dirt was coming from – the construction companies.

When I was little, my sister had told me many stories of our old ancestors working in harmony with nature and not ever destroying the earth or the atmosphere. Whether that was true or not, I didn't know since our government cared precious little about history, but I figured that a planet with a protective shield around it would be able to keep out harmful star rays and space debris and allow the ecosystem of a planet to function harmoniously. The problem with my model, though, is that it would require that all inhabitants output no or very little smog and toxic waste – which seemed impossible at our current state.

I pulled up my drawings and studied them carefully again. In order to produce enough energy to put out a full shield around a planet would require insane amounts of energy and would also require a very thick atmosphere – which is something that our government's leaders avoided at all costs. As I studied my long-range electric transformation, I realized that, perhaps, if I removed some of my mini mirrors and replaced them with crystal prisms, I could greatly reduce the power needed to overcome atmospheric refraction. By the time I had drawn up the new beam emitter, our van had arrived at our spaceship (TieNight). TieNight was one of the biggest spaceships, and we had already studied where we should park our car inside of its massive parking network and find our mini living quarters. Even with my dad's meticulous map skills, it took us another hour to find the correct parking space. After slipping my laptop into its case, I jumped out with my parents and walked to the nearest transport tube and slipped inside.

"Dibs on the power button!" Dad exclaimed – pressing it before mom had even barely entered. With a powerful "Whoosh!", we shot up the tube in our capsule and took a series of hair-raising curves.

"Fizzzzzzzz," our capsule finally came to a stop, and we stepped out to find ourselves in a large lobby where a long line of fellow Pollutions were waiting to get their room's key card. Dad, who was still trying to watch the retakes of some of his football team's plays, just skipped the line and collapsed into an easy-chair nearby. Mom, on the other hand, went to visit the gift shop. I was trying to decide what to do myself, when I heard a familiar voice from behind me.

“Jeff!” It was Yerina. Yerina was a fellow intern at II and an extremely smart biologist. She also was branded as a nerd, so she typically only hung out with a few people – me being the foremost person. Next to her was my other friend, Wilfred. Wilfred was a gaming nerd, and he was always on his hover laptop – blasting away zombies or some other odd creature.

“I can’t believe we’re on the same spaceship together!” Yerina told me.

“Well, considering that we only have a dozen spaceships and this is our largest one, the chance still is about 30%,” I reminded her.

“Still not very good odds,” Wilfred mumbled as his finger pressed rapidly up and down on the “f” key of his keyboard.

Yerina rolled her eyes, “Where are your parents?”

“Dad’s over there in that chair,” I told her, “and Mom is visiting the gift shop.”

“Ok,” Yerina told her, “My step mom is in that line over there. How is your planet shield simulation coming?”

“Not too bad,” I replied, “The simulation still needs some work, but right now I’m working on the beam emitter. I think that refractive crystals would work better than mirrors, but I still think a different medium besides crystal would work.”

“Let me see that,” Yerina told me, taking my laptop and moving over to a nearby table in the lobby’s cafeteria. I pulled up a chair myself and watched her review my schematics as Wilfred stumbled about and tried to pull up his chair while simultaneously mowing down a robotic army with his bazooka.

“What’s the math equation here?” Yerina asked me, clicking on the CAD crystals.

“It’s up on the top under the ‘Insert’ menu.”

“Ok....Let’s see. Refractive index of the crystal is 0.6 – but you want an angle of 32.729.... If we used the arcsine of that, then we’ll need an index of 0.72.”

“Is there a material with that refractive index?” I asked anxiously.

“Of course there is!” Yerina laughed, “There’s a material for every refractive index.”

While Yerina looked up different materials’ refractive indices in her chemical database, I checked on Wilfred. He was playing RoboZombie Annihilation 13.

“Your enemies are awful!” I told Wilfred.

“Yeah,” Wilfred mumbled as he blasted two apart with his machine gun – bazooka thingy.”

“You need better MMO opponents,” I told him.

“I know, but I can’t find anyone,” he replied.

“BZZZZZ!” Wilfred’s screen buzzed with congratulations and showed his high score. It was a good deal higher than everyone else’s.

“One more game,” Wilfred told me, “Then I’ll go find my parents.” I knew that meant he’d be playing at least a dozen more...

“HOLY COW!” Wilfred practically shouted – attracting undue attention from several nearby customers, “Check out that opponent!”

Sure enough, Wilfred’s next opponent had ultra-metal armor on and was demolishing Wilfred’s fortifications indiscriminately.

“Get Anirey!” I instructed him, noticing the username of his opponent. Wilfred smirked, hunted around in his inventory, and pulled at a destructo-matic.

“Take that!” he whispered, unleashing a massive fireball at Anirey.

To our surprise and horror, Anirey pulled up a Kliptic shield and reflected the fireball right back at Wilfred. Wilfred was so surprised that he didn’t jump out of the way in time and was incinerated instantly.

“Oh come on!” Wilfred groaned, “Where did that user come from?!”

“Check this out!” Yerina suddenly said from across the table. She turned my laptop around and showed us a screenshot of RoboZombie Annihilation 13. On it, in big bold letters read these words, “Congratulations! You killed DarthWilfred! You earn 5,293 credits!”

“Oh,” I replied, “Anirey is Yerina spelled backward.”

Wilfred groaned loudly.

“Oh, and Jeff? I found your compound, but it’s a doozy of a formula. It’s going to be hard to get the materials needed,” Yirena told me.

“You’re full of good news today aren’t you?” I groaned.

“Welcome to TieNight!” the ever-present spacecraft’s narrator boomed, “Our departure will be in nine hours. Please feel free to get your room card at our reception desks and relax in our many recreational rooms. Thanks for flying TieNight!”

“Yeah, like we had a choice,” Wilfred grumbled, “I heard that SkyStar has a two story pool!”

“Yeah, but TieNight has a gaming zone with state-of-the-arc ethernet and wifi!” Yirena informed him.

“What?! Really?”

“Yeah! Haven’t you read the ship’s guide?!” Yirena scolded him.

“Uh, no.... I’ve been kind of busy...”

“So how hard is it to make that type of compound?” I asked Yirena.

“It’s not impossible, it just requires a special type of organic mixture. Otherwise, you have to make a synthetic version that requires a whole lot of heat and energy.”

“Alright, well, I’m not building the thing, so I’ll just put it in the plans. The worst case is that I just use crystal instead.”

“Oh! Check this out guys!” Wilfred interrupted spinning his laptop around to us, “There’s an entire satellite and deep space communication deck!”

“Yeah, but why would we be interested in it?” I asked Wilfred.

“I don’t know, but it’d be cool to see if there was extraterrestrial life out there!”

"It's off limits, Wilfred," Yirena replied flatly.

"Oh, is that what that red sign means there?"

"Ya think?!" I chuckled.

"Are you ever even going to get a job?" Yirena questioned Wilfred.

"Well, as you know, my parents are part of the Emperor's advisory committee, so I don't really need to, but I applied for a position at an internet provider here because some of their Wi-Fi signals keep getting scrambled, and they can't figure out the problem. With my internet protocol knowledge, I think I could be a big help," Wilfred informed us, "Also my parents said I had to, so there's that..."

"The idiots in the world," I lamented, "Who'd be so low as to scramble Wi-Fi signals?!"

"Maybe it's an accident or something," Yirena mentioned.

"Unlikely," Wilfred spoke up, "When the company tried to trace back the signal it always led all over the place. Typically an accidental signal will be easily traced to a constant source."

"Well, I need to get these water filtration specs and diagrams done, so I'll see you all later, okay?" I told them.

"Sure, see ya," Yirena told me, heading down the hallway to the left. Wilfred stayed to finish his game (or three), and I headed back to my dad who was still in the lobby.

"Did you get our room card?" I asked him, when I reached him.

"No," he said, quickly standing up and shoving his phone in his pocket, "Let's get in line."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

An hour later, we were on our way to our room with our key card.

"I don't remember there being this many stories in TieNight," Mom commented.

"Neither do I, but it's been quite a while," Dad reminded Mom.

Our room turned out to be a bit cramped, but Dad said it was alright (mostly because there was a big, leather chair near the window).

"Ugh! The internet for my phone has been so bad today!" Dad complained, "I don't know what's the matter with it!"

"Wilfred said there is someone scrambling signals," I told him, "The internet company will probably get it fixed soon."

"They better!" Dad groaned, "I'm paying for better coverage than *this*!"

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Twenty-four hours later, we were all in the same position as the night before.

"My internet is *still* bad!" Dad declared grumpily.

"Well mine is working fine, and we're on the same Wi-Fi," I reminded Dad, "Perhaps it's your phone?"

"It couldn't be!" Dad declared decisively, "I just got it last year!"

"Electronics go out fast," I mumbled out loud.

Dad angrily got up from his chair and walked around the room, pointing his phone towards the ceiling and trying to get better coverage. That was when we saw a flash of light blast by our window.

"What was *that*?" I asked, getting up from my bed. I looked out our room's small window and saw a large fleet of ships outside shooting lasers at *our* ships.

"Oh," I replied, "It's the Minutions."

"Bother!" Dad replied, "This day couldn't get any worse!"

"Attention all passengers," the overhead voice cut in, "We are currently being attacked by the Minutions. This does not pose a threat to us. I repeat; this does NOT pose a threat to us, but it will delay our journey. Under the unlikely event that a stray laser pulse does harm part of the outside of the ship, please call security immediately. For now, please stay in your rooms until further notice."

"Cool!" I replied, racing for the door.

"They said to 'stay put,'" Dad reminded me.

"I know, but maybe I can get a better view of the battle from the main lobby!" I yelled back, throwing open the door. The problem was that I couldn't get out because there was suddenly a lot of the ship's staff running from the communications room and down the hallway. I presumed that they were going to board their mini spaceships to fight back.

"Ow!" I heard a familiar voice whine from down the hall, "Watch where you're going!" "You're supposed to stay in your room!" one of the staff yelled out as they flashed by. When the last of the group had disappeared down the hall, I noticed a very trampled figure of Wilfred.

"What *are* you doing on this floor?" I asked Wilfred.

"Trying to go there!" Wilfred said, pointing to the door of the Communications center.

"Huh? Why?"

"Because," Wilfred answered, annoyed. He breezed past me and, snatching a key card from his pocket, waved it in front of the door's card reader.

"Bleep!" The door unlocked and Wilfred hustled in. Not wanting to be left out, I raced for the door and slunk in behind him. The entire room was empty.

"Just as I thought!" Wilfred declared, knowing full well that I had followed him, "Now I can figure out this weird Wi-Fi stuff."

"Are we allowed to be in here?" I asked, looking over my shoulder.

"Probably not," Wilfred answered, "But it's the only way to get better signal tracing."

Wilfred plugged his laptop into one of the monitor banks on the far side of the room and began typing away on his laptop.

"I don't think I should be here," I noted.

"Sure you should," Wilfred said, "Check this out."

He pulled up on some of the monitors' high definition view of the mini space battle going on outside.

"Where did you get *that*?!" I asked, surprised.

"It's on the bridge's security cameras," Wilfred answered, not missing a beat on his laptop.

"But I thought the common public were not allowed to see that footage."

"They aren't, but it turns out that it's easy to hack into the system from here," Wilfred noted, "Now be quiet. I need to set up this internet packet protocol system quickly."

I shut up and started watching the space battle. It consisted of the Minutions taking pot shots at our larger space ships while our mini space pods shot back. Neither were creating much damage, and our main spaceships were starting to fly away.

"Ok," Wilfred mumbled, "Run that program; then we need to check out that other status." On the video feed, there was a small skirmish of spaceships fighting that was starting to get violent.

"I do hope no one gets hurt," I whispered to Wilfred.

"They'll be fine," Wilfred said back, "Alright I've got it."

"Got what?" I asked.

"The source of the jamming signal," Wilfred answered, "Actually the seven possible places."

"Where are they?" I asked, intrigued.

"They are all from servers based out of a few places. One appears to be from a random government server. Another from the Space Cadet's program server. A third and fourth from two different highschool districts servers. A fifth and sixth from a pair of restaurants. and a seventh used by Co-Yup."

"How are you going to find out which is the truly disruptive server?"

"I'm going to have to manually go to each one," Wilfred replied, clearly annoyed at this prospect.

"Do you have security for that?"

"No."

"Can you get some since you're trying to solve the problem."

"No, that'd allow me access to too much classified documentation."

"Perhaps I could check out the servers for Co-Yup," I replied, "Mom and Dad are members of Co-Yup."

"Well, it'll still be hard to find the other servers, but I'll see what I can do," Wilfred acknowledged.

Suddenly, from down the hall, Wilfred and I heard footsteps.

"You didn't steal that card off your parents?" I asked Wilfred, quickly getting up.

"Maybe," Wilfred said – averting my gaze and quickly unplugging his equipment.

"Bleep!" the card reader outside buzzed, unlocking the main door.

“Where to go?” Wilfred asked frantically.

Without a second thought, I dived underneath a nearby table; then, the door opened.

Chapter 2

The person who entered was *not* a government employee like the rest of the people that I had run into just a few minutes ago when I left my room. No, this guy was dressed completely in black and was obsessively looking over his shoulder every few seconds.

“What’s he doing?” Wilfred breathed silently next to me.

I slowly shrugged my shoulders and tried to see what the guy was doing. He was furiously tapping away on a keyboard and his face was pretty much an inch from the screen (when he wasn’t looking behind himself, anyway).

“Should we bust him?” Wilfred whispered.

“But we shouldn’t be here either!” I replied, “Plus who’s to say he *shouldn’t* be here?”

Wilfred shrugged his shoulders. The man eventually stopped typing and started to read the contents of the screen. Just at that moment, there was the sound of small bleeps at the communication center’s main door again. The masked man jumped, and glanced quickly at the door. There was then an audible click as the door unlocked. The man yanked his USB drive out of the computer he was at and dove across the room toward a hiding place – which just so happened to be the table that Wilfred and I were under.

No sooner had this happened, than the door was swung open and several of the employees returned to their stations. They quickly set to work on their equipment and started talking in a jumble of voices. Meanwhile, the man quickly noticed us as he shrank in beside us. As quick as a flash, he produced a handgun and leveled it at Wilfred and us. I jumped ever so slightly and Wilfred’s face turned white. We raised our hands as best (and as quietly) as we could. I couldn’t decide whether I preferred to be stuck under the table or being threatened. With a slight motion with his left hand, the masked man indicated he wanted Wilfred’s computer. Wilfred hesitated, but the gun appeared to make the final decision – Wilfred handed his laptop over. The man leaned up against one of the table’s legs and started typing on Wilfred’s laptop – after plugging in his USB drive. Wilfred looked extremely nervous, and I couldn’t help but think I looked similar. Suddenly, one of the employees came over to the table and, standing up at it, started to do something on top. His legs were literally inches from my face. The masked man, while keeping a wary eye on us and the employees, continued to work on his stolen laptop. Luckily (or maybe not so luckily) the keyboard wasn’t noisy. The next ten minutes were probably the most miserable moments of my life, as I worried about *my* life and the lives of our space cadets and our ship during the ensuing battle outside. I caught snippets from conversations among the employees, but whoever they were talking to on the other end of their headsets made understanding the current status of the battle almost impossible.

After about ten minutes, the man popped his drive out of the laptop, jammed it into his pocket, handed the computer back to Wilfred; then pulled a small ball out of his other pocket. He then proceeded to roll it across the floor of the room. Before I had time to wonder what it did, it exploded in a dense cloud of green fog.

The masked man shot out from under the table with lightning speed, and Wilfred, who suddenly showed amazing agility, followed suit. There were several cries of surprise and yells of pain as employees (and probably the masked man) ran into each other and nearby furniture. The fog was so dense, I couldn't even see my hand in front of my face, but I followed my mental map of the room – still painfully colliding with several objects in the process. I was barely halfway out of the room (or so I thought) when the fire alarm went off – someone had pulled it (or accidentally bumped it). If the pandemonium before had not been bad (which it had been), it was now! Suddenly, everyone started yelling and screaming and pushing and shoving. I stumbled and crawled along the floor to where I thought the door was. Before I knew it, the fog around me suddenly dissipated a little, and I saw the doorway nearby. I surged towards it and bolted out of it – with several employees behind me. I didn't stop running then; I just kept on going down the hallway, past my room, and around the corner. Behind me, I could hear some of the department's staff coughing.

I didn't stop running until I was several floors below in the main lounge. Interestingly enough, the fire alarms were not ringing down here. Then, I collapsed into a particularly comfortable-looking chair. On the Large Ultra HD TV's everywhere were the last moments of the battle in which the Minutions retreated. I had suspected this anyway. All of us knew that the Minutions were a hit-and-run group anyway. The announcer then appeared and spouted off a bunch of stats – luckily no one had been killed (on either side). This, then, was interrupted by another announcer.

"We have a smoke bomb explosion in the Communication Service room on Floor 8," he said, "We are asking everyone to stay where they are until police can sort the situation out. Police are currently searching security camera footage for the perpetrator(s)."

At this, I stiffened. I hadn't thought about that. I was toast.

My phone then decided to ring which caused me to jump in surprise.

With a reluctant hand, I pulled my phone out and looked at the caller – it was Wilfred.

"Hello?"

"Hey, this is Wilfred. How are you doing?"

"Uh, ok?"

"Hey, I have something to show you. Where are you?"

"I'm on the third floor's lounge."

"Cool, see you in a min."

Literally within a minute, Wilfred walked up to me and sank into a chair nearby.

“Check this out!” Wilfred said, opening his laptop up and pointing the monitor at me. The screen was filled with all sorts of plain text. I didn’t have much time to read it before Wilfred pulled his laptop back.

“I stole all the information off the guy’s drive,” Wilfred explained.

“How?!” I exclaimed, maybe too loudly.

“Simple, I just started a program I coded a while back before handing my computer over,” Wilfred answered, “When he pulled his drive in, it deleted all the data off it and stored it in a secure place on the SSD.”

“What I want to know is why he gave it back,” I pondered.

“Easy, he put an internet tracker on it to relay anything I do to his server,” Wilfred answered again, “But I took care of that easily. He’s not getting anything he hacked.”

“So what did he hack?”

“Surgium,” Wilfred breathed.

“Surgium?”

“A terribly rare type of rock,” Wilfred said, “It says here that the government believes that some of it is on our new planet!”

“What?!” I said, hardly believing the news.

“I don’t know,” Wilfred admitted, “There actually isn’t a lot on here. Either the man didn’t copy off all he wanted to, or this is all there is.”

“Could you check the place where the guy got this?” I asked Wilfred.

“Unfortunately, no,” Wilfred sighed, “It’s on the locked digital storage server. No one can take stuff off it – not even the emperor. Only high-level government officials can put stuff *on* it.”

“But how in the world did that guy know that info existed?”

“Maybe he got some of their passcodes?” Wilfred shook his head, “Right now I’m working on tracking his server’s signal, but in the meantime, we should probably start to check on the servers for that mysterious Wi-Fi signal interruption.

“You don’t think it could be that mysterious man?”

“Stop calling him ‘mysterious man,’” Wilfred told me.

“Fine, ‘Luigi,’” I replied sarcastically.

Wilfred chuckled as he leaned back in his bean bag, “Want a tutorial in server hacking?”

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It was only after a week of intense gravity aboard our ships due to our acceleration, that our horde of spacecraft finally arrived at our brand new planet. Every screen on our ship was tuned into the first views of the green planet sprinkled with blue lines of rivers.

“This is fantastic!” Rob was saying in his interview on the news network, “There is so much room for improvement here!”

I shook my head in disgust, knowing that when Rob was through with our planet, it’d be nothing but sprawling metropolis after sprawling metropolis.

"I don't like our president's bow-tie!" Dad was saying to Mom as we sat in our apartment awaiting further orders, "You'd think someone as rich as him would be able to afford something nicer!"

"It's the fad though," Mom replied, "All the rich men are wearing those."

Dad's face showed obvious signs of disgust, "That is a crime against fashion wear!"

Mom chuckled, "In modern day's fashion, almost *anything* goes!"

"Sayyyy," I said, interrupting their conversation, "Mom, are Co-Yup's servers hosted locally or using virtual ones?"

Mom shrugged her shoulders, "I have no idea; things like that don't concern me."

"Well, now that you mention it," Dad added, "I think they may be local, because I remember that there was a large server room in our building that we weren't allowed into."

"Interesting," I said aloud, making a mental note to talk to Wilfred about it later.

"But now," Dad continued, "I'll bet we'll have a nicer facility! Hopefully I can get a window cubicle!"

"A window cubicle?!" I laughed, "So you can look out into all the smoke?"

"I'm sure our government has that well under control," Mom said, "We won't have the same problem as our last planet!"

"Are you sure?" I said, "Because I have a feeling nothing is going to change."

Dad shrugged, "Well, the worst case is we just found another planet. No harm, no foul!" As if on cue, there was a large beeping noise followed by the announcement speakers crackling on.

"ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS, WE WILL BE LANDING SHORTLY! PLEASE BE SEATED FIRMLY!"

I grinned excitedly, "I can't wait to get outside and plant my feet in the fresh dirt!"

Mom glared at me, "But it's dirty and wild down there!"

I rolled my eyes, "You need to live a little, parents!"

"Exploration is for young people," Dad said matter-of-factly, as we strapped ourselves into our space seats for the atmosphere entry.

"I don't feel all that young," I stated, "They treat me way too much like an adult at work."

"Well, that's because you-," Mom replied before being cut off by flames licking the outside of our portal window.

"Already?" I gasped, "This must be a thick atmosphere!"

Dad stared at the flames as they grew brighter and bigger and eventually covered the window completely, "This will be interesting..."

After another intense few minutes, the ships finally settled softly on the ground below and the flames immediately dissipated.

"WE HAVE LANDED!!!" the spacecraft's speakers announced.

After quickly unbuckling myself, I raced out of my chair and headed for the apartment door.

"Be careful out there!" Mom yelled after me.

I wasn't going to be stuck in the spaceship any longer, I had decided, so I raced down the largely abandoned halls of the spacecraft and made for the elevator that would take me down to the offloading floor. As was normally the case, the elevator wasn't on my floor, so I pounded the "down" button, and pulled out my phone to keep an eye on the current news. As I watched, several important council members exited the spacecraft without helmets and started marching for a hill nearby. Anxious to follow, I pounded the "down" button some more times until the elevator finally reached my floor. When the doors opened, I hurried inside.

"I see you couldn't wait either!" Yirena laughed as I jerked my head back in surprise.

"I should have thought you'd be coming!" I replied, "Although, I am a bit surprised to see you, Wilfred!"

"I thought it might be cool to see the natural landscape," Wilfred said sheepishly,

"Assuming we don't get attacked by anything!"

Instantly, my thoughts traveled back to my sister's recording where she mentioned wildlife on the planet. I shuttered slightly, hoping that they really were peaceful.

"You okay?" Yirena asked me as the elevator continued downward, "You're staring at your phone rather strangely."

"Oh, oh!" I said quickly, "I'm...I'm fine, just thinking..."

Yirena gave me a strange look, but didn't press it since we just then reached the bottom floor and exited to find a small crowd of other Pollutians hurrying down the corridor. We followed them through a series of passageways and to the massive lobby where, at the far other end were a series of open doors leading the great outside.

"C'mon!" I said excitedly, dragging poor Wilfred behind me, "Let's goooo!"

Reluctantly, Wilfred followed behind as I pushed through the crowds to reach the doors and ramp outside that rested on the solid dirt beneath.

The first thing I noticed when I stepped outside was the air, a fresh, cool air that was almost magical. Around me, other Pollutions also just stepping outside noticed this as well and gladly breathed in the clean air.

While Wilfred and I got ourselves drunk on clean air, Yirena pushed us to get down to the ground where she could sample the earth. When I finally caught up with her, she was already a good three hundred meters to the West of the line of Pollutions stretching up a Northern hill. She was on her hands and knees sampling the dirt and water nearby into test tubes.

"Look at that river!" I commented, "It's so clear!"

Wilfred grabbed my arm as I attempted to put my hand into it.

"Don't touch it!" he said, "It could be poisonous!"

“Actually,” Yirena commented as she placed her test tube of water into a strange, portable machine, “The makeup of this water is a very pure form of just H₂O!”
“That’s water, right?” I confirmed, trying to pull myself away from Wilfred to touch the water.

“Yep! And-,” suddenly, Wilfred yelped and let go of me, sending me head first into the river.

I wildly thrashed about, trying to gain a footing and thrust my head above the water finally to get a breath.

“Grab my hand!” Yirena shouted to me, as she extended her arm out to me while laying flat on the grassy river bank. I was not a very good swimmer, but I could swim, so I paddled closer to the bank of the river and grabbed Yirena’s arm, finally feeling the riverbank beneath my feet. In a matter of seconds, I made it back to the shore – very wet and very annoyed.

“WILFRED!” I screamed at him once I had caught my breath, “What was that for!” However, Wilfred was not even looking at me; he was hopping around on one foot and smacking at his shoe.

“It’s on my foot!” he cried for the third time.

“What’s on your foot?” Yirena said dryly, going over to inspect Wilfred’s shoe.

“This...this horribly smelling, sticky brown stuff!” he cried out.

“Hmmm,” Yirena said thoughtfully, pulling off Wilfred’s shoe and sampling some of the compound into another one of her vials, “This looks like animal excrement!”

Wilfred, still trying to balance on his other foot groaned even louder now, “How?! Why me?!”

“Pffft,” I groaned, “Stepping in poo doesn’t mean you need to freak out!”

“Don’t you know all the germs in stuff like that?!” Wilfred moaned again, “And this is a new planet. I could be infected!”

“Drama king,” Yirena laughed, “This organic compound is mostly just composed of chewed up grass like that we’re walking in.”

“Well, that’s good,” I said aloud, “At least we know the Wumps aren’t carnivores.

“Wumps?” Yirena said, “Huh?”

“Oh, ummm, uh, the animals,” I said.

“You named them?” Yirena asked.

“Uh, sure?” I said, instantly regretting having said that.

“Annnnyway,” I continued before Yirena could press the matter, “I think it’d be best if we go back to everyone else now.”

“Oh, assuredly no!” Yirena insisted, “We need to find these animals!”

“But they could be dangerous!” Wilfred whined, finally toppling over into the grass.

“We just established they’re herbivores,” Yirena continued, packing up her small chemical analysis kit, “So we’ll be just fine.”

"Doesn't mean they won't hurt us though," I mumbled loudly, falling in behind her, "You come Wilfred?"

"No, absolutely not," Wilfred said, "Who knows what scary things lurk here. Also, Yirena, gimme my shoe back!"

Yirena tossed Wilfred's shoe to him, then continued forward. Regretting my life's decisions, I reluctantly followed after her, as Wilfred attempted to wipe the poop off his foot. As he did so, however, I noticed that he stepped his clean shoe into the exact same pile. A few seconds later as we crested another hill, I heard his cry of exasperation as he found out what had just happened.

"Uh, so where are we going?" I asked Yirena.

"To the forest there," Yirena responded promptly, "It's likely the Wumps as you call them were scared and retreated into the cover of the trees."

"Well, huh huh, I don't *know* that they're called Wumps, I just said that maybe-," I began. Yirena turned around to face me, "You don't just name things, Jeff. What do you know about these creatures?"

"Moving onnnn!" I ignored her, hurrying towards the trees.

Yirena sighed, but, thankfully, didn't press the subject so we continued into the forest and soon enough found a small cave.

"Let's go inside!" Yirena said excitedly, poking her head into the entrance.

"I don't know...", I replied, "Are we sure that's a good idea?"

Yirena scowled at me, "Don't be like Wilfred, c'mon!"

Turning on my phone's flashlight, I entered the small cave and scrambled down the steep sides to a damp, barely lit cavern with a small stream running down the middle and a few mushrooms dotting the jutting rocks.

"It's actually quite cool in here," I said, "Nothing scary!"

As if on cue a large "WUMP!" noise bellowed from behind me, causing me to jump a foot and spin around. Not more than a few feet behind me were a whole group of medium sized animals of some sort with big eyes and even bigger snouts.

"The wumps!" Yirena gasped, noticing them as well.

"We should go now," I insisted, grabbing her arm and attempting to go back towards the cave entrance.

"Oh, this is great!" Yirena said excitedly, "I should take some pictures and study them! This would make a great scientific paper!"

Yirena pulled up her phone's camera app, but I quickly smacked her hand.

"Don't take a photo!" I said, "Do you realize what would happen to them if people knew about them?!"

"Ouch!" Yirena said, pulling away from me and massaging her arm."

"They'd all be caged up, probably killed!" I continued, "We can't let *anyone* know they're here!"

“But they may starve here regardless!” Yirena argued.

“But...but,” I said, not sure how to reply.

“I’m sure they’re really nice,” Yirena insisted, walking slowly towards the largest Wump at the front of the group, “Here, little wumpy, here here little wump!”

The wump stared back, not sure what to make of Yirena, but as she got closer, his eyes narrowed.

“Uhhh, Yirena, I don’t think he likes you,” I told her, “Maybe you should just give him some space!”

“Nonsense,” Yirena replied as she reached to pet his furry back, “They’re all so cute!”

“WUMP WUMP!” The wump suddenly rammed her with his snout, sending Yirena flying across the room. She smacked into the cave’s rock wall about two yards away from me and sank to the ground unconscious.

After stifling a scream, my first reaction was to run, but I knew that someone had to help Yirena. While keeping an eye on the angry group of wumps, I edged over to Yirena and gently touched her face.

“Yirena!” I whispered loudly to her, “Can you hear me?”

Yirena’s limp body did not respond; then, a small trickle of blood started oozing from the side of her head.

Chapter 3

Grumpy lady builds a house on top of the cave entrance (being in her basement). Yirena has to do all this crazy stuff to be allowed to go into the basement. Meanwhile, Jeff is busy with his internship and trying to design giant fans. Wilfred works on tracking down the mysterious man.

Chapter 4

While working on his fan project, Jeff works with yirena from a chemical company and discovers the atmosphere is very thick (very big fireballs on ships on entry). He realizes fans won't do much good. Bosses say they were paid to make fans, and that's what they will do!

Wilfred infiltrates Space Cadet's program to access the server and has to join the program!

Chapter 5

Jeff continues to work on his planet shield idea and goes with mom to product night at Co-Yup so he can check out the servers. Yirena is going back a lot to the old lady's house to study and feed the wumps. She's writing a thesis about them.

Chapter 6

Wilfred infiltrates government headquarters to get at a server and almost gets arrested while Jeff checks out II servers. They find that the signal was routed through the random government server via another signal.

Chapter 7

Cadets are sent off to find a new world

Chapter 8

Air and water quality are terrible

Chapter 9

Wilfred is put in prison and Jeff is fired because he takes the fall for the fans not working as the community gets upset over the air quality. A cadet comes back with new world

Chapter 10

Jeff hunts down Yirena who wants to stay with wumps, but the old lady locks them in and everyone leaves without jeff and yirena. Jeff is mad and a big wump breaks through the end of the tunnel onto the street. Jeff calls in the radio and gets an answer but is then ignored because the government doesn't want to go back to them. Jeff finds Wilfred left in prison and lets them out. A weird spaceship arrives with enemies aliens (experts in spaceships and technology), a few pollutions including jeff's long-lost sister (who are good workers), and a few other aliens who have always used the same planet for years and know how to be environmental. Wilfred leaks about the wumps and Jeff's sister loves the wumps and they start work to help the planet.