

Terrestrial Drive FIRES TORM

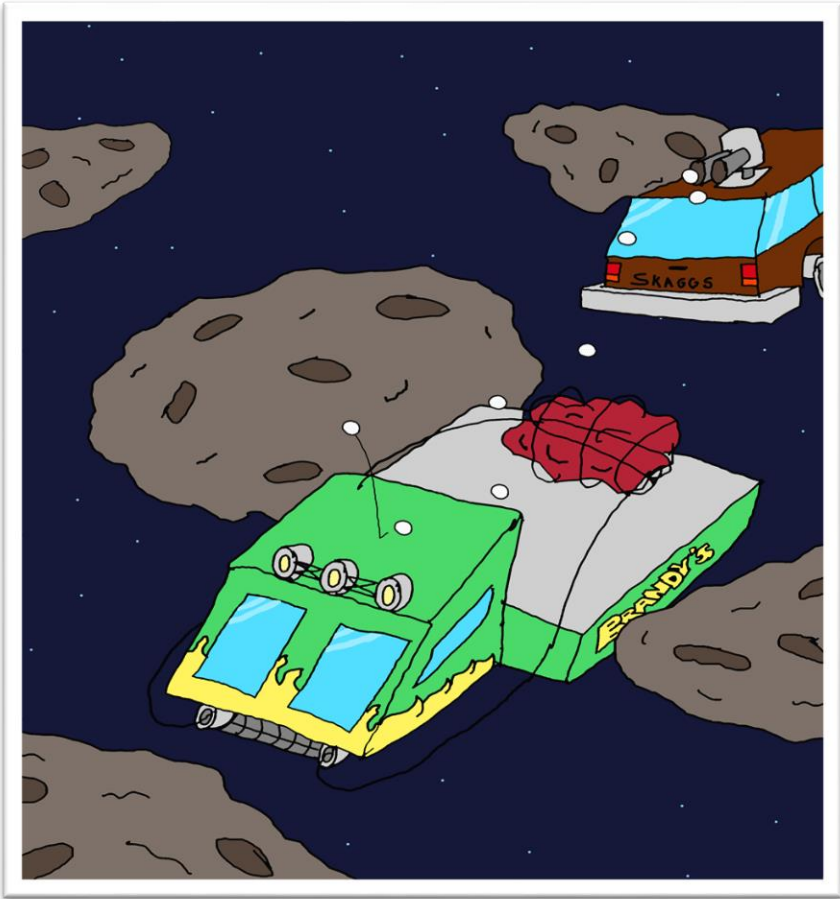


Ethan Clark

Terrestrial Drive
Firestorm

Ethan A. Clark

Chapter 1... A Head Start



In the black ocean of space, a race is always happening...

In an asteroid field just a few light years beyond the rings of the planet Taured, Brandy, a red-haired raccoon girl dressed in a red flannel shirt, jean shorts, and a denim apron pilots her bulky boxed-shaped cargo spaceship, paint scratched and weathered, through the Great Asteroid Fields of Caelus speckled in rare rocks & precious minerals. She has her sight firmly set on one of them... a blocky, jagged asteroid glistening with a vermillion red shine. Looking through her homemade optical headdress, the raccoon girl pans back and forth as a poorly constructed, backwards facing station wagon piloted

by a pair of rambunctious bird boys races closer and closer into view. “Not them again!” she complains. As she maneuvers closer to her prize, she’s startled by a sudden, loud banging on the roof. She looks up to see a flurry of magnetic golf balls raining down onto the cab of her ship.

She senses what’s happening and instinctively presses a button on the overhead control panel, unleashing a thick cloud of smoke trails from behind. She circles around the rival ship straightaway, confusing and disorienting the pesky bird duo, and then races back towards the low gravity of the asteroid. She fires her braking thrusters, toggling carefully between left and right, and stops right in front of the asteroid. A dull pulse emanates from the back of the craft revealing two tow cables with their harpoon hooks embedding and clamping meters deep into the vermilion prize. A stabilizing beam made of high strength titanium spreads between the cables and she proceeds to fly back home with her treasure trailing behind. “What a day!” says Brandy as she settles into her captain’s chair, satisfied at a hard day’s work. However, just minutes after logging in her return coordinates, the ship begins to struggle a bit. Brandy compensates with additional rear thrusters thinking she’s caught in some kind of invisible gravity well from the asteroid field.

There’s a little improvement, but it’s not smooth sailing. Sensing something else is wrong, she looks back and see that the Bird Boys have returned and have sunk their own tow cables into her prized asteroid. “*Really? Here we go again...*” she says. Not to be outdone, Brandy slams both control levers forward and flips another switch to blow out the pressurized cargo hold for an added boost. The ship lurches ahead in a sudden burst of speed, pulling the asteroid and the Bird Boys swiftly ahead. But, the Bird Boys double down and pull back with a new secret weapon. Brandy looks on her a view screen and sees a that makeshift rocket booster on the underbelly of the duo’s craft has been deployed, giving them added thrust.

It’s now a tug-of-war in the center of Caelus.

Brandy still has a few tricks up her sleeve and proceeds to deploy Little Bruh to cut the harpoon cables on the backwards station wagon. Little Bruh begins to saw on cable one when, out of nowhere, comes a rogue asteroid directly at them both. Brandy makes quick work of the situation and barrel rolls her craft, her prize, and the Bird Boys three hundred and sixty degrees portside to escape the crushing impact of the falling asteroid. Luckily, they avoid a catastrophe.

“Y’all can thank me later bird brains,” cries Brandy. “Why don’t y’all give up now and find your own rock?” The Bird Boys increase thrust. Loud creaks and cracks resonate all throughout their craft as the rivets groan under the stress. They think their plan is working, and they high five each other, until...

CRACK!

The ginormous asteroid breaks in two. Brandy’s ship lurches forwards, and she’s sent sprawling on the hard metal floor with a thud.

"Brandy, what happened?!" asks Pj from the intercom.

Brandy pulls herself back to the control panel and answers the call.

“Preston, there were these two boys drivin’ a space wagon shootin’ golf balls at me and tryin’ to take my asteroid!” She explains while frantically lurching the ship about, dodging asteroids and golf balls.

Suddenly from above, out of nowhere, a gigantic, silver, bulletlike spaceship darts over to the fractured asteroid. As a red, pulsating tractor beam jets out from the bottom of the ship, Brandy slams the control levers back. “Oh no you don’t...you can’t have mine...I’ve worked too hard for this one...,” says Brandy. However, the sheer strength of the tractor beam begins to pull Brandy’s ship forward and she falls to the metal deck again. She slams the control levers back once more only to hear the ship creak and crack under the stress. “What is going on? I didn’t make my ship just to get destroyed. I better let go or I’ll end up like those bird brains spinning off into space.”

SNAP!

The tow cables break, Brandy falls on the floor, and the split asteroid is loaded into the sleek ship, and races off into the stars beyond. The Bird Boys spiral out of control towards the jade nebula, squawking and losing their feathers in sheer frustration. Their tow cables completely ripped from the rear of their vehicle, they're venting oxygen and other space debris as their ship bobs up and down like a storm buoy in a restless ocean. The broken, snake-like cables float away silently.

"YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!" Brandy shouts in frustration.

"What happened?" Pj asks.

"Th-this silver spaceship just stole my asteroid with some high-power tractor beam!" Brandy explains while picking herself back up.

"Heh, at least rare metal asteroids aren't one of a kind...Don't worry, you'll find another one." Pj ensures.

"But I've been searching for a while! Star Summit starts in a couple of days. I ain't got any time!"

"Alright, come back to the salvage yard."

Back on the planet of Taured, the spiky-haired human Pj and his all-purple friend from the feline-like Tauredian race, Marie are in a spacious garage with walls of smooth, pristine cinderblocks painted with a fresh coat of gray. He's looking under the hood of his recently upgraded blue, big-finned muscle car. Pj then pulls out the dipstick and analyzes it carefully.

"Hey Marie, can ya' pass me some oil, please? The Steel Bruiser is gonna need some!"

"Steel Bruiser? That's a new nickname..." Marie says in observation.

“Well, Brandy’s sister told me that ‘The Beast’ wasn’t so original. So, we discussed possible names until settling on Steel Bruiser”. Pj explains.

Marie reaches out her arm, and a bottle of motor oil flies into her hand. She then hands it to Pj, and he pours some into the oil filler and shuts the hood.

“Hey Marie, gimme some wax please!” Pj requests

“Uhhhh...ok?” Replies Marie in confusion.

Marie then reaches out her arm once more and a bottle of wax flies into her hand and a towel gets hooked onto the tip of her tail. Pj happily grabs them and begins waxing his car. He rubs and shines the car from the vicious teeth on the grille, exhausts jutting from the side and the sweeping fins on the rear until the whole car shines vividly.

Pj fires up the engine and slowly drives out of the garage. As he exits, Brandy's cargo ship emerges from a bright white cloud bank and descends to the ground, kicking up a big cloud of dust as the engines woosh, and dirtying up Pj's car.

"Aw come on, I just waxed this!" He complains.

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Jackson. It's going to get dirty anyways when Brandy adds the body kit.”

You’re right. I better take this puppy for a little walk around the block before the next project begins. Do y’all want anything from the corner store? My treat!” says PJ.

PJ grabs hold of the steering wheel with both hands and fishtails out of the parking lot onto the winding road, the back bobbing up and down as the tires screech across the blacktop. “Two double pineapple smoothies and some Grecian scones coming right up!” Says PJ.

"So, what's the plan now?" Marie asks.

"Hmmm...we're just gonna have to make the body kit out of Shapemetal...I've got a lot of it and it's easy to make cool shapes with!" Brandy proposes.

"Hmm...isn't Shapemetal a weaker metal?" Pj inquires with concern.

"You're right! I'll put some reinforcements onto the body kit..." Brandy says as she quickly scribbles away on the body kit's blueprints.

"That solves the durability problem...but it's gonna make my car heavier...which means it's gonna be slower..."

"Well Preston, ya' car could use some weight reduction...how 'bout I give it an Aero-Fiber hood and trunk? That'll shave off a load of weight. Ooh, and maybe change those seats to something lighter." Brandy suggests.

"Sounds like a good plan to me!" Pj says in agreement.

Brandy then rushes out the door, hustles a cart loaded with Shapemetal and Aero-Fiber to the garage and she begins to work diligently on the body kit.

Beyond the rings of Taured, a bulletlike cargo ship silently sweeps through the stars, then coming to a stop instantly, scooping up another shiny asteroid with its pulsating tractor beam, before continuing to dash through the stars.

The ship approaches a lime green planet. As it comes closer to the surface, the seemingly flat landscape becomes an ocean of lime green sand dunes, broken up by rivers and streams of a gold fluid. The ship swoops into a large, gaping cave opening embedded in the ground and weaves between the cave walls that surround a winding trail of emerald-green dirt.

The ship then lands in front of a rock wall tall and wide with a pair of metal doors in it. A short and stocky raccoon man dressed in luxury athletic shorts, a ritzy t-shirt and a regal cape exits with two metallic asteroids on hovering platforms trailing behind him. The doors open wide, and the raccoon walks down a long corridor with walls lit by a

jagged wave of lights that cut into the walls and floors of glazed sandstone.

He then shoves open a set of doors, steps into a round room and sits down on a plush, pillowy chair in front of a large circular desk.

“I bring you two more rare asteroids. How satisfied are you now?”
The raccoon man says with a slow, smug voice.

The chair at the desk turns around, revealing a short man with neatly trimmed hair dressed in a plaid shirt and shorts.

“Y-yeah, I’m satisfied...” The man mutters.

“Come on pal, hand the track over to me now!”

“Alright, Alright, I will!” The short man fusses as he frantically shuffles through his desk.

The raccoon man then pulls a packet of papers from the hands of the short man, and scribbles on the bottom of each of them with narrowed brows and gritted teeth.

“Thanks...” The raccoon then storms over to the chair and shoves the man off it.

“Now get out!” He demands as he points to the door. The man in plaid then scurries out of the building.

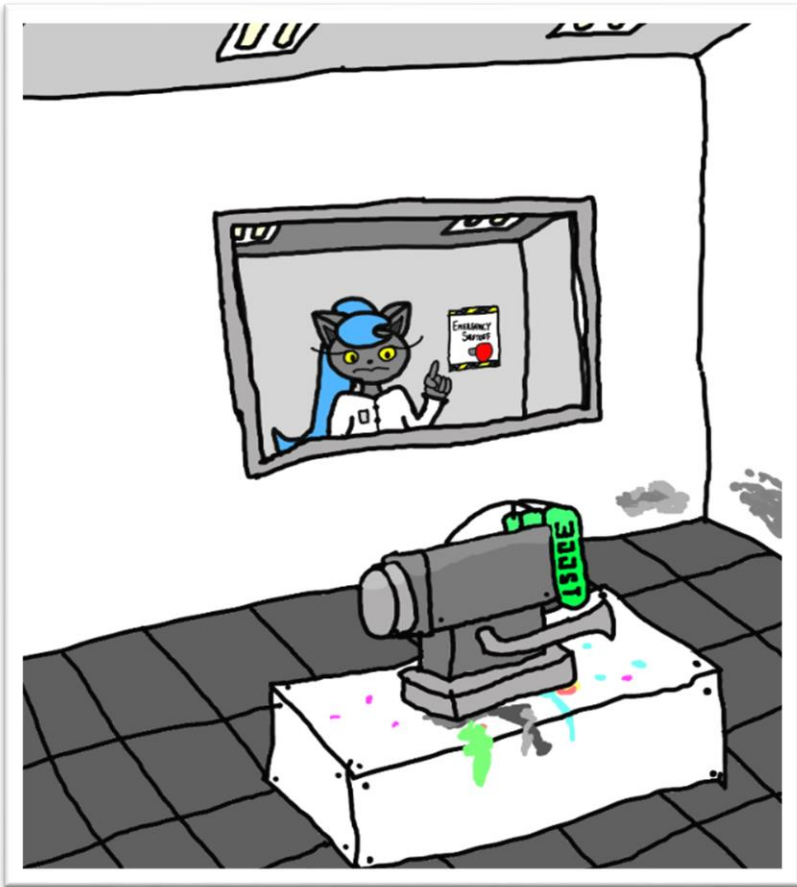
Back under the rings of Taured, in the colorful streets of Zephyr City, there lies a laboratory.

Behind the graphene walls of the lab, there’s a raccoon lady with a black sleeve covering her left arm, blue hair slicked back in the front and tied off into a long ponytail in the back, dressed in a lab coat.

Through a window, she gazes at a room with tile floor cracked and fractured, walls stained by soot, and an inline-3 engine with metallic green bottles mounted to it on a table stained by chemicals.

“Alright, let’s see how this little engine handles the revised formula...” The raccoon lady nervously says with her hands trembling.

She looks down to see the control panel in front of her lined with buttons, switches, dials, and gauges. The engine sputters to life with the flick of a switch and it begins to sputter faster as Francine moves the throttle lever forward.



Francine braces herself as she lowers her finger onto a button labeled “BOOST”.

The engine begins to clatter and rattle much more rapidly as an intense green plume of energy shoots out of the exhaust pipes.

The raccoon scientist then weaves her pen around, quickly putting data down onto her clipboard.

Francine braces herself once more as she pushes the throttle further, fires another bottle of boost, then another, and then one more. The engine shakes and rattles even faster with bigger plumes of energy shooting from the exhaust pipes. Her eyes open wide at the sight of the engine remaining stable. She then pulls the throttle back and switches it off.

“I finally did it! I’ve created a stable formula!” Francine cries out with glee as she dances around. She skips and twirls on out of the control room and to a communicator booth in the hall. The communicator is a tall, rectangular device with smooth edges, a keypad, and a big screen that’s mounted to the wall.

Francine then dials a number on the keypad.

“CALLING: BRANDY FERNSBY” The screen reads.

“Heya sis! Watcha doin?” A familiar voice answers.

“Hello, Brandy! My latest boost formula was a success!”

“So, no mo’ explosions?” Brandy asks enthusiastically.

“No more explosions...” Francine replies with relief.

“Then get yo fluffy tail over to the race headquarters! The boost is gonna help us win Star Summit!”

“Ok. I’ll be seeing you at your emporium soon. Goodbye!”

Francine then runs out of the booth, grabs a cart, rolls into the storeroom, grabs some tanks of ingredients and rolls them to a minivan...

...A minivan sporting an egg-shaped front featuring round headlights, a boxy rear topped with an elegant wedge-shaped spoiler, sleek bumpers, side skirts, and cool wheels. The appearance is topped off with obsidian black paint lined with blue hazard stripes.

After she loads the tanks into her vehicle, she turns it on, and it quickly glides out of the parking garage with a quiet hum.

Francine gracefully drifts and slides her minivan through the alleyways and side streets of Zephyr City. Her maneuvers catch the eyes of many drivers and pedestrians.

Back in the garage at Brandy's Super Emporium for Old Metal Things, Brandy is busy working on The Steel Bruiser. She keeps the torch steady as she binds the new, wider fenders to the body of The Steel Bruiser.

Pj peeks his head around the doorframe to get a peek at his car. The Steel Bruiser now sports a shark fin sweeping down the middle of the rear and widened fenders. The car now sports a bold two-tone blue and yellow paint job. Pj smiles boldly at the sight of his upgraded vehicle.

Brandy then welds the last of the fender, puts down her torch, and lifts her welding mask.

"You like it, Mr. Preston Jackson?" She asks with a cheery smile.

"Like it? I love it! My car has never looked so cool!" Pj replies with great enthusiasm and gratitude as he gazes at his car in awe.

"Since I got your body kit fitted so quickly, I'm gonna tune up my car!"

"What kind of car do ya race? 1944 Skaggs Hauler? 5007 Advancer Utility Machine? 21999 XMC HP2?"

"I used to have a Taured Year 5039 Advancer tow truck, until I sold it." Replies Brandy.

"So...that guy who owned the weird museum full of stolen cars was the one who bought it..." Replies Pj.

“But, that Advancer tow truck ain’t my race car. Mine’s in the secret garage!”

“You have a secret garage?”

Pj turns his head about the room, in search of a potential place it could be accessed. He analyzes each wall but ends up stumped. Pj then notices that Brandy is nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, an empty section of the floor turns transparent, and a striking supercar painted a rich metallic red with a pink sheen, a front end sculpted like a manta ray, a smooth long rear that flows through the light and wind, and sleek disc wheels, shiny and reflective like chrome is lifted up from the underground and into the garage.

“Woah! You got a really nice car there!” Pj exclaims.

“It suuuuure is a nice car! I’ve got many more rare and unique cars in the secret garage.”

Brandy then pops the engine cover open, gets out, and grabs her tools.

“What’s really nice about this here Zibmont Eternax Class, is that I rebuilt it all by myself! Boy, that sodium-fusion engine was hard to work on! I had to rebuild the fusion chamber from scratch! You can’t imagine how hard it was to get my hands on a maintenance manual for one of these things...boy, it took me months to get it back up and running! This thing ain’t like my big ol’ Bullard tow truck which got every company in the galaxy makin’ spare parts fo’ it...” She rambles while tuning up her car.

“Hey Mr. Preston Jackson, can ya hand me the sodium powder?”

Pj pulls the jug of sodium powder from off the shelf and walks over to the back of Brandy’s car.

“Here you go...” Pj says as Brandy takes the sodium jug.

While Brandy pours in the powder, Pj gazes at the many components of the engine, like the circular fusion chamber in the center, exhaust pipes, cooling system, and the powder hopper just behind the fusion

chamber. Brandy then shuts the engine cover, hops into her car, and the fusion engine wakes up with an echoing click, followed by a metallic whirr.

“You ready to head to the race headquarters?” Brandy asks.

The engine of Pj’s car ignites with a fierce roar, followed by the vicious burble of the engine idling.

“You bet! I gotta get the Steel Bruiser painted!” Pj replies.

With a flash of light, Marie teleports into the passenger seat of Pj’s car.

“I’m ready, Pj. Let’s get going to the Dragoon Storm headquarters.”

The three then set off to the racing headquarters.

Back on the planet of lime-green sand, a female Tauredian towering in stature with tall ears, light-gray skin, slate-colored hair fashioned into a big beehive style, a medallion with her family crest mounted to her hair with a blue sash, and a bulbous royal blue gown decked out with wavy gold accents heads down the hallway to the office. She then sends the doors flying open with a fierce gust of wind.

“You’ve acquired a race track! Thank you, Wetzel...this is going to help me so much...” Eleanor says as she steps into the room.

“Yes...Stone Valley Trail belongs to Team Crown now, Eleanor. With the track being in our possession, we’ll be able to give ourselves some advantages...” Replies Wetzel

With the press of a button, an explosion goes off in the distance, triggering a rockfall to tumble across the track.

“...like being able to manipulate the track during a race.” Wetzel declares.

Eleanor reaches into her handbag and pulls out a miniature sports sedan with boxy, yet elegant and luxurious styling, saucer-like disc wheels an otherworldly chrome, flat and slim boost thrusters coming from the side skirts, a pair of large boost thrusters protruding from

the trunk, and a tall triangular wing mounted to the rear of the car. The car is embellished with a beautiful metallic rose paint job that She steps over to the window overlooking the race track.

“So, it begins...my rise to greatness. I’ve got a racetrack that’ll work in my favor, and a team that’ll do anything it takes to win...The Bonneville Clan will have superiority over the Fernsby Clan on Star Summit!” Eleanor declares with raised arms.

Back under the rings of Taured, Pj, Marie, and Brandy arrive at a large, yellow, warehouse-like building with an attached tower. They pull into the main building and are met with a sleek garage with multiple levels, rooms, and high-tech equipment.

The two then exit the vehicles. Pj and Marie look back to see Brandy lifting a couple of suitcases from the passenger seat of her car.

“What’s in those suitcases, Brandy?” Marie inquires.

“I’ll show ya, Follow me!” Brandy gleefully replies.

Marie and Pj follow Brandy over to a pad with a circular device in the center and a pole with a metallic prism tip hanging from the ceiling. Brandy opens up one of the suitcases, revealing a fleet of miniaturized cars neatly encased in foam. She pulls out her Sakura Paramount 4aR, now decked out with a loud, psychedelic, purple and magenta racing livery topped off with a bold, yellow 471 on the sides.

“Say...that’s your 4aR!” Exclaims Pj.

“Surprise, Pj! That’s my race car! After Oregano Jones was arrested, I went and finished my interplanetary racing certificate.” Replies Marie.

“What inspired you to do that?” Pj inquires.

“Why, you know of my family’s racing heritage, right, Pj?” Marie inquires back.

“We talk about it all the time...” Pj replies with a grin on his face.

“Well, someone has to carry it on.” Marie quietly states with closed eyes.

“Alright y’all, time to show you a cool gadget!” Brandy announces while holding Marie’s miniaturized machine.

Brandy places it atop the center of the pad, and she presses a button. Bolts of energy emerge from the prisms and cover the car. The car jitters and shakes as it slowly grows larger and larger. The bolts calm down as the car’s growth and jitter slow down.

“Ain’t it great we joined this here team? We have access to all this awesome technology! Now that we can shrink our cars, we’ll have more room on the hauler!” Brandy says excitedly.

“I’m just glad we’re on the same team as Alfonso Accardi. He’s such a skilled driver! Also, why didn’t you fix your car here? They probably have all sorts of advanced repair technology!” Pj suggests.

“Well, I joined this team well after I fixed that Eternax Class.” Brandy explains.

The sounds of Francine’s high heels stepping and cart wheels squeaking then echo in from the left. She’s now dressed in a light gray skirt and a blue shirt pushing a cart loaded up with boost bottles on both the top and bottom.

“Sis! How ‘bout I load up Marie’s wheels right here with some of that new boost you made?” Brandy enthusiastically asks while unlatching and opening the hood of Marie’s car.

Francine stops in front of the three and smiles with a little wave.

“I would love for you to! But we have an assembly to attend first. It’s starting in a few minutes.” She informs to Brandy, Marie, and Pj.

“Dontcha worry sis, I’m real fast when it comes to switching out boost bottles!” Brandy eagerly claims.

“Hmm...are you going to be bringing the whole cart into the presentation?” Marie asks.

“Oh, I am not. I just finished making all this boost using my new formula and I’m moving it into the storage room”. Francine explains as she grabs a bottle of boost from the cart.

“Mind if I take that cart off yo hands?” Asks Brandy.

Francine wheels the cart to Brandy and Pj, Marie, and Francine board the elevator.

Pj, Francine and Marie are seated in a small auditorium. They’ve got their attention focused on a Tauredian, tall and strong with bold yellow skin, lined with energetic lightning bolt patterns standing atop the stage, briefing everyone inside about recent developments regarding Star Summit.

“As of today, Stone Valley Trail has changed owners. I am not aware of who the new owner is yet. Do not be surprised if you notice any changes to the course.” He announces.

A slick cockatoo man stands up from the chair behind Pj’s and he begins to speak.

“Hmph...whoever bought the speedway, did it by force! They bought it so they can manipulate it to their advantage!” The cockatoo man says.

“Me and Marie will look into who the new owner is and what their motives are, Roland. Don’t you worry.” Replies Alfonso.

Marie then whips out a saucer-like laptop and begins to type away at the keys and a young woman with short blonde hair then stands up.

“If that new owner is nothin’ but a cheater, I’m gonna ram his car off course!” The blonde-haired woman declares with pumped fists.

“I understand where you are coming from, Miranda. But we don’t know if this new owner is even a racer. Remember too that we strive to drive clean on our team here.” Replies Alfonso.

The doors then fly open with a quiet squeak.

“Hey y’all, did I miss anythin’? I was busy loading boost into everyone’s cars...well the ones that got combustion engines anyways...” Brandy asks.

“Stone Valley Trail was bought last minute.” Explains Pj.

“Is that all?” Brandy Inquires.

“From what I know, that’s all.” Pj replies.

Francine then gets up from her seat and steps onstage with a bottle of boost in hand. She begins to explain the creation of the boost formula...

On a faraway planet similar to Taured, a young Francine lives in a small town.

While she works a delivery job, she remembers the tales of great scientists that fascinated her as a child.

A vision of a more powerful boost comes into her mind. She then tirelessly studies chemistry at the local library, sacrificing whatever free time she has.

She spends hours and hours in her garage, trying to perfect the boost formula using the knowledge she gained from her studies.

As Francine’s vision nears completion, a valve in one of the boost bottles breaks from the pressure, and the bottle explodes with a ball of flame. The event nearly takes her life and leaves her severely injured.

After Francine recovered from her injuries, she puts her boost project to the side and begins to study chemistry at a university. During her studies, she invents a fuel that’s highly efficient.

But an impetuous desire for speed led her into great trouble during a study abroad. She secretly raced on the highways under the moonlight. She rose in the ranks and made many enemies whilst defeating various street racing organizations.

After the study abroad ended, a few of her enemies followed her back home, seeking revenge. She tried to fight them off but was left with no other option than to run.

Lost In a metropolis on another planet, she assumes her current identity, and shares the fuel she formulated with the populous, which in return establishes her empire of chemistry. With her empire now in full swing, she returns to the boost project in which she left shelved.

“The completed boost formula along with our skillful driving will be our key to victory!” Francine declares while holding the bottle of boost out in front of her with both hands.



Chapter 2: Hit the Track

The members of Dragoon Storm all hustle into their sleek, smooth, whalelike transport shuttle. Its engines quietly ignite, and it soars off into the skies of Taured. As Pj looks out the windows, watching the rings of Taured glide past his sight, he's filled with a feeling of excitement, anticipating the many thrilling races ahead of him.

"It's been a while, Preston." Miranda remarks to Pj.

"Yeah, the last time we were together...we were in middle school." Pj reminisces while looking at Miranda.

"I'm ready to tear up the sand on Stone Valley in my trusty new Herder P200. How's life on Taured been for ya?" Says Miranda

"It's just like living on Earth. Only difference is that there are much less humans."

"I heard yer Skaggs Miami got stolen recently. But you got it back, didn't ya?"

"Yep. I got it back pretty quick." Pj replies. He then looks over to his right to talk to Marie.

"Did you find out who the new owner of Stone Valley Trail is?" He asks

“The new owner is someone named Wetzel D’Creste. He’s a rare metal trader of unknown origin. He also leads a racing team called...Team Crown.” Marie informs.

Brandy then scurries over to Marie

“Is that the meanie who took my asteroid?” She asks emphatically.

“It’s a possibility. But let’s focus on Star Summit for now. You still built the body kit for Pj’s car even with not enough rare asteroid metals.” Replies Marie.

The carrier then pulls onto an intergalactic freeway populated with a flurry of many other spaceships all a stream of light and energy rushing at high speeds.

The carrier then pulls off of the intergalactic freeway and it approaches a planet surrounded by moons, teeming with city lights atop its surface. As it descends down to the ground, a city of round platforms and buildings with white foliage on the ground comes into view. The ship lands in a shipyard lined with a plethora of transport ships of many different shapes and sizes.

The team exits the ship with suitcases in hand and they step towards a gigantic, domed stadium the size of a small town.

The team steps through the back entrance arches of Cykrey Stadium. As they walk to the garages on the floor, they hear the muffled cheers and screams of all the audience members eagerly awaiting for the race to start.

They follow behind many other racers, until stepping through a door with their team’s insignia on it, down a set of stairs and into a black, glossy garage module. It’s got ambient white lighting lining the edges of the room, sleek & seamless tool cabinets along the wall, a trio of atom compressor beams hanging from the ceiling, and a door to the sleeping quarters and command center on the back wall.

“Welcome, DRAGOON STORM” a voice greets from the speakers.

“I see they’re treating us well here...” Roland comments

Brandy goes off and rummages through the cabinets. She pulls out a tool with a big grip and a long neck, and then she runs over to Roland, presenting the tool to him with both hands.

“Y’see this here doodad, Mr. Roland? I used one of these to fix my Infinity Class!” Brandy says eagerly.

Roland turns his head slightly and looks at the tool.

“It appears that Gremor-Wrench hasn’t been used very much. I wouldn’t be too rough with it if I were you. It could be an antique one day!” He comments.

“It’s a tool, Mr. Roland. It’s gonna get all beat up when you’re down in the depths of yer cars!” Brandy says in rebuttal.

“You do have a point.” Replies Roland.

Pj opens up his suitcase and pulls out his car. He places it under the atom compressor beam; Brandy fires up the beam and Pj’s car shakes and rattles back to full size.

He jumps into his car, the engine ignites with a booming roar, his car comes rumbling down a corridor, and towards the starting grid. Brandy and Marie then follow suit, resizing their cars back to full size and driving out to the starting grid.

On the brightly lit starting grid, an artificial winter forest scene populated by plasticky cone-shaped trees begins to fill up with an array of cars, new and old, big and small, and the many rumbles, roars, pops, hums, and screams from the engines of the cars.

“Now entering the grid: car #19 driven by Wetzel D’Creste, the leader of Team Crown!” The announcer calls out over the stadium’s loudspeaker while a smooth, imposing supercar painted black with crown emblems on the hood and sides quietly prowls onto the course, closely scaping by and nudging the cars it passes.

The bellowing and rumbling of the Steel Bruiser’s engine resonate in the cabin of the vehicle.

Pj looks up at the rearview mirror and sees Wetzel's car rolling into view with the crown emblem gleaming under the light. Wetzel grins back in the mirror menacingly.

The hiss and whirr of a pneumatic engine sounds as a yellow open-wheeled race car decked out with lighting, a sturdy wing and four small wheels in the front, a pair of air intakes on the side, a glass dome over the driver's seat, two big wheels and a big wing on the rear quickly weaves to the only remaining spot on the grid with great precision and discipline.

“...aaaaaaand here comes the one and only Alfonso ‘Lightning Cat’ Accarrrrrrrrrdi! With the last driver on the grid, we can start the raaaaaaaace!” The announcer flamboyantly calls out

The countdown lights ignite and begin to count down. The drivers rev the engines of their cars as the lights continue to descend.

“Don't go too hard on yourselves, it's only the first race.” Lightning Cat affirms to his teammates over their communication system.

The lights hit the bottom, and the racers rush out of the starting grid, with tires screeching, and smoke billowing. The racers rush through a short tunnel, and onto an elevated section of track that rushes over an indoor town with round, cylindrical buildings, teeming with life and activity. The racers then head into a downward helix, with some gliding across with a drift and others slowing down and weaving through the curve along the racing line.

As the many racers exit the first curve and run down another straightaway, a boxy, jet-black armored SUV with a sloping rear, big tires that are bulky and brutish, rugged suspension, and windows tinted a vicious neon green activates a bottle of boost, and barrels down the straight. Drivers swerve out of the way as the 4-wheel bruiser lunges at them, before slamming into the back of a bright yellow jeep with orange wheels driven by a duck-man. The back of the vehicle crumples on impact, and the SUV rumbles away.

The racers and audience gasp at the sights and sound of the wreck.

“This is ridicucklous!” The duck-man exclaims.

“Ooooooh! Drake Duckworth of the Spequackulars has gotten in a naaaaaasty crash!”

The armored SUV continues to accelerate. It lunges towards Brandy, she slams the brakes, the SUV hits the wall and grinds along it, Brandy hammers the gas pedal and comes lunging forwards.

“What’s up with that feller?” Brandy asks over the communication system.

“I don’t know. But that is someone I wouldn’t want to encounter in a dark alley.” Francine comments.

“That vehicle is associated with Team Crown. It has the same emblem as Wetzel’s car...not to mention, it’s driving so recklessly.” Roland informs.

The racers then speed along some curves, with Pj slipping into a power slide, Brandy jerking her supercar into a twitchy drift, Lightning cat slowly battling his way to the front, and Marie keeping watch on Wetzel and the SUV all while driving through a backdrop of ancient space civilization replicas.

As they cut through another straight that passes back through the indoor town, Pj keeps his sights locked onto the cars weaving and shifting past each other. He spots an opening, puts his hand on the boost lever, and pulls it back, sending his car rocketing forward, blurring by the other racers with a plume of green flames shooting out from the sides. The residents below and audience members watching remotely on the screens watch in surprise and amazement.

“Woooooooah! Car Number 13 has some aaaaaaaamaziining boost crafted by one of his veery own teammates, Francine Fernsby!”

Francine smiles upon hearing the commentary. She continues to observe her teammates through a computer screen in the command center alongside Roland and Miranda.

“Now you all be careful, the curve up ahead is very tight. I advise you take it as carefully; you don’t want to ruin such a good-” Roland warns.

“-y’all don’t worry about what Roland’s sayin. I know y’all can taaake that bend with no problem...” Miranda interrupts.

As Brandy cranks her car into the curve, a rose-gold sports sedan glides and weaves up behind Brandy with great precision and pulses of green flames shooting from the sides. A fierce blast of wind shoots out from the front, destabilizing Brandy’s supercar. Brandy’s car fishtails and sways around as she works to stabilize the vehicle.

“Wooooould you look at that, an automotive brawl is breaking out on the course with Brandy Fernsby and Eleanor Bonneville!” The announcer exclaims.

Brandy slams the brake, jerks the steering wheel, and her car comes sliding at a 90-degree angle.

“What are you doing, you Fernsby?!” Eleanor shouts in frustration. Eleanor then charges towards the red Eterna Class and Brandy cranks her car back into position, Eleanor comes veering towards another car, Brandy races away, Eleanor avoids a collision by a hair, and skids about, fighting to regain control of her high-horsepower machine.

Eleanor fires a boost, and her car speeds up slightly with a big flame spitting from the smokestack, inching closer and closer to Brandy.

Eleanor fires another boost, bumping into Brandy’s car.

“Brandy, Brandy you’re gonna want to make an eva-” Roland warns.

Brandy then lunges her vehicle to the left in evasion, with the tail of her car swaying from side to side.

“I know, Mr. Roland. Gotta make an evasive maneuver!” Brandy says in cutoff.

Eleanor unleashes another gust of wind, sending Brandy skidding.

Brandy once again fights for control over her car as she skids around the other racers, making sure to avoid hitting them. She then regains control and continues to race down the course.

Lap after lap, Pj and the team battle for position as they drift, dodge, and maneuver through the sights and straightaways of Cykrey Motor park.

Out the corner of his eye, Lightning Cat spots a rickety beige sedan. It's got the front end replaced by a blunt metal wedge hastily welded on, a roll cage in place of a roof, and rear wheel covers that have been clumsily bolted on. Behind the wheel is a short, scraggly, monkeylike alien.

“Skrimbooooo is on a rooooool!” Skrimbo says as he clumsily charges at Lightning Cat with his finger on the boost button.

Lightning Cat quickly veers to the right, Skrimbo blasts forward, and Lightning Cat slipstreams from behind Skrimbo, and he retakes his leading position.

He continues to cruise along in the lead, with his hands relaxed on the wheel, and his sights set on the starting line to begin the final few laps, checking his mirrors periodically. He then spots a classic muscle car painted a blue and yellow two-tone with teeth on the grille in his left mirror.

“Heh heh, I'm right behind ya, Alfonso!” Pj gleefully announces over the team communication system.

Pj then inches closer and closer to Lightning Cat. His palms sweat and heart begins to race as he verges on passing Lightning Cat.

“Take it easy, Preston. Our team is leading the race. Just maintain and defend your position.” Lightning Cat advises over the communication system.

“Alright...” Pj replies in compliance.

He takes a deep breath, his hands relax, and his heart settles down. He refocuses on the road ahead and not the racers in front.

“Pj! Look out behind you!” Marie alerts over the communication system.

Pj takes a look in the rearview mirror to see Wetzel charging directly towards him. He swings his beast machine to the side, Wetzel scrapes and grinds against Pj’s car with great showers of sparks scattering in their path. Pj hits the brakes, Wetzel shoots forwards, Pj then pulls the boost lever, and he comes racing ahead of Wetzel.

Wetzel lunges and re-aligns himself with Pj. From the corner of her eye, Marie spots Wetzel ready to pounce, and she fires a bottle of boost, shoots ahead of Wetzel, she slams on the brakes, stopping within inches of the front bumper of Wetzel’s car. Wetzel seethes back at Marie with rage in the rearview mirror. He raises his hand up to the ceiling and slams it down on a button.

The engines begin to whirr loudly as energy begins to build up. Marie flinches out of the way, and Wetzel comes screaming past, scraping past and spinning out Marie in the process. Maire wrestles with the steering wheel, her car sways from side to side, kicking up big clouds of smoke. Mare straightens up her car, she fires another boost, rolling past Wetzel.

The final laps of the race conclude, and Dragoon Storm crosses the finish line victorious. They all gather in the winner’s circle as many spectators all come to congratulate the team.

In the garage of Team Crown, Eleanor, now dressed in plain clothing and an apron, works on her car diligently. She pulls back some engine components to access the boost system.

As she tunes and adjusts the boost system, Wetzel steps in from behind.

“Well, my dearest Eleanor, *you* could have done better on the track...” Wetzel says whilst walking up beside Eleanor.

“What do you think I am doing, Wetzel? I’m tuning my car.” Eleanor sternly replies.

”Yesss...your engineering skills will indeed be essential for my team’s victory.” Wetzel snickers.

Wetzel then takes a closer look at Eleanor’s hands as she continues to alter and adjust the boost system of her car.

“Eleanor, how about you just get a better boost for your car instead of wasting time tuning the boost system?” Wetzel proposes.

Eleanor then turns her head to look over her shoulder.

“Wetzel, this is high grade boost. The boost system I have set up is inefficient.” She firmly states with a bottle of boost in hand.

“You know the Fernsby clan is your enemy, right?”

“Yes...*they* have brought dishonor to my clan.”

“One of those Fernsby ladies on Dragoon Storm has devised a pretty powerful boost. It might just be the boost you need...”

“Haven’t I made it clear that a stronger boost would be useless to me? This boost system burns through boost bottles in an instant and it doesn’t even give me much of an increase in speed!”

“Think about the innovation you can reap if you steal it from her! The Bonneville clan will rise above the Fernsby clan and assert their dominance throughout the universe!” Wetzel proposes.

“Wetzel, I’m not a chemist, I am an ENGINEER! I would not understand a thing about the boost’s formula. Besides, would it really be worth going to the trouble to steal it? I can’t take that dishonor.” Replies Eleanor.

“Did you just forget what I told you? The Fernsby Clan has brought so much misfortune to your people. It’s time to fight back. Take back your honor.” Wetzel reminds.

Eleanor stands up, casting a shadow over Wetzel. She then turns around, staring Wetzel down in the eyes.

“Leave me be. I will deal with *them* on the racetrack.” She demands.

Eleanor then sits back down to continue working on her car. From the corner of her eye, she spots Wetzel leaping into his car and speeding away.

Back in the garage of Dragoon Storm, Brandy and Roland are mending the mechanical damage dealt to the cars, while Francine is restoring the paintwork.

“Didn’t the announcer say the driver of that rose-gold car was a...Bonneville?” Francine asks.

“Yes...I believe that woman was a Bonneville.” Roland adds.

Francine lets out an anxious sigh and hunches forward slightly.

“Could she be trying to start another...clan war?” Francine nervously suggests.

“Aw chill out, sis! I don’t think that Eleanor lady was tryin’ to start a clan war. The Fernsbys and the Bonneville’s haven’t had a clan war in ages! She was probably just jealous of my nice car! The Eterna Class is quite sought after, y’know.” Brandy affirms

“I’m not so sure about that, Brandy. She was being quite aggressive towards you...I don’t think she was trying to put your car into a salvage auction, she was trying to take you out of the race.” Roland argues.

“Hey LC, why don’t you let us ram ‘em off the road now? That Wetzel and the rest of Team Crown are up to nothin’ good!” Miranda requests.

“I understand, Miranda. But we at Dragoon Storm drive contactless because if we were to make another driver crash, their wrecked vehicle would prove to be a great road hazard to the other drivers. However, if there is an aggressor and you have exhausted all other defensive options, you may fight back.” Lightning cat explains.

“Alfonso, why not we go out and see the local sights when we’re done with repairs?” Marie proposes.

“Hmm...good idea.” Replies Lightning Cat with crossed arms and two fingers on his chin.

“I’m raring to visit some of the art exhibitions in the area.” Says Roland.

“I’m just hopin’ there’s some good places ta’ eat at...” Comments Brandy.

“I’ll go get our cars ready...” Francine announces as she opens up a cabinet and pulls out a suitcase.

Under the rings of Taured, a sleek, silver spaceship lands in the outskirts of Zephyr City. Wetzel emerges from the bottom of the ship, with a communicator in hand.

“Hello? Yes, I’d like you to take me to the Industrial District...” He orders sternly while talking on the communicator.

Moments later, a rickety Sky Taxi lands beside Wetzel. The rusty doors spring and rattle open with a shrill squeal. Wetzel steps inside and slams the door shut. The Sky Taxi then abruptly thrusts into the sky, and lunges towards the Industrial District. As the Sky Taxi descends and parks on a landing pad, Wetzel keeps his sights set on a black, boxy building surrounded by a chain-link fence with vans and pickup trucks all parked on the pavement.

Wetzel exits the Sky Taxi and pulls out a dislike device from his pocket. He places on his forehead and presses the center, causing him to dematerialize and vanish from sight. He hastily makes his way over to the fenced black box. From across the street, he analyzes the perimeter, taking a close look at the doors, ladders, and entryways. A van pulls out from the lot, and onto the street. Wetzel then stalks the van as it navigates the streets. It then pulls into an alleyway where it drives alone. Wetzel then reaches into his pocket and pulls out a strange blue orb the size of a ping-pong ball. He takes aim and sends it smashing through the driver’s side window. It bursts into a cloud of smoke, and the driver of the van falls unconscious.

Wetzel then takes the ID badge of the driver and busts through the back gate with a punch, and scans into the back door. He then sneaks through the halls of the laboratory, peeking around corners, and swiftly navigating the corridors without making a sound. He then comes upon a door with a tag reading “Ch. Francine Fernsby”.

Wetzel then rummages through Francine’s cabinets, hastily pulling out papers and skimming them over.

“Where’s that blasted boost recipe?” Wetzel says in complaint.

He continues to frustratedly open drawers and scramble through papers and folders until finding a folder labeled “SUPER BOOST”.

“Yes...” He says to himself while flipping through the contents of the folder.

Back on the planet Sprellbot, Dragoon Storm rides in comfort in Francine’s minivan and Marie’s 4-door supercar.

They navigate the roundabouts that wrap and weave around the cylindrical skyscrapers in the city of Palindom. They then park at a broad, circular parking lot that surrounds a plaza with a

grand sculpture of a spiral frantically struggling its way upwards until making a vertical loop through the center of a metallic, pearly wheel.

Roland gazes at the sculpture with wide eyes and a wide gape in his beak, Francine meticulously analyses it with a cheery smile, and the rest take a walk around the sculpture, taking in the details.

“Hey sis, whaddya think this here sculpture is all about?” Brandy asks to Francine.

“Brandy, this sculpture is meant to represent the struggle and thrill of racing. It’s meant to remind us all of why we race. We may struggle at times, but the thrill of it all pays off well.”

“Heh, I’d like to have a race on that sculpture if it were life-sized” Pj remarks.

The team continues to take in and converse about the sculpture. They then enter their vehicles and hit the road.

“Say Brandy, what kinda foot ya like ta’ eat?” Miranda asks to Brandy.

“Well, I suuure like myself some bar-b-cue!” Brandy says eagerly.

“Too bad they ain’t got any of that in these parts...at least not American-style barbecue...” Miranda yearns.

“There may not be any of your earthly cuisine in this particular nation on this planet, but we can explore the local culture by partaking in their cuisine.” Lightning cat proposes from over his communicator.

Back in the garage of Team Crown, Eleanor is polishing her car with an ornate scrubber carved from wood. She carefully combs over every single little detail, making sure that her car looks its finest. She then places the scrubber down on her tool bench, pulls out her handheld vacuum cleaner. She begins to vacuum the floors and seats when she hears some footsteps clumsily come up from behind.

“Skr...Skrimbo do not understand why you cleaning your car! Skrimbo say that your car always gets dirty when racing, so why bother cleaning your car when racing make it dirty?”

“The appearance of your car is most important, dearest Skrimbo. If you want to be respected, your car should look its best.” Eleanor explains.

“Skrimbo think that advice is very foolish! Skrimbo is gonna give you a piece of his mind!” Skrimbo declares while stepping close to the back door of Eleanor’s lavish car. He whips out a pocketknife and slashes and scrapes up the driver’s side rear door.

Eleanor’s vacuum drops with a thud as she furiously walks over to Skrimbo, who’s got his pocketknife raised high in the air. She knocks him over with a gust of wind, sending him rolling on the ground, sprawling to a stop.

“Skrimbo is sorry for s-scratching your car. Skrimbo won’t ever scratch your car again!” Skrimbo pleads as Eleanor walks on over to him. She grabs him by the hand and picks him up off the ground.

“May you please respect other people’s motorcars, Skrimbo?” Eleanor sternly advises.

“Skrimbo says that you do not respect other people’s cars also, Skrimbo saw you trying to wreck Brandy Fernsby!”

“Brandy’s car doesn’t deserve respect. She descends from my adversaries.” Eleanor justifies.

Wetzel’s car then rolls back into the garage, screaming into a halt, bumping into Skrimbo’s car in the process.

“Well, my team, I have found a very special tool that will make my team the reigning champions over all the other teams!” Wetzel proclaims.

“What is it?” Eleanor inquires.

“It’s only something you failed to actually think of getting...” Replies Wetzel while holding up the Super Boost folder that he stole from Francine.

“Have I not reminded you enough, Wetzel? Chemistry is a skill in which I do not possess.” Eleanor refutes.

“Well, that is why I have Lazeena on my team.” Replies Wetzel while pointing to a scrawny, lanky female Tauredian with pale gray skin and disheveled gray hair.

Eleanor then puts her vacuum onto her tool bench and grabs her scratch remover and begins to buff out the scratches made by Skrimbo.

At the beginning of the next day, Francine rises from bed early, gets into her minivan, and speeds it around the stunt zone in Cykrey Motor park. Her van weaves about the halfpipes, leaps from ramp to

ramp, does donuts around big spiraling pillars, and powers through loops and corkscrews.

An hour later, an audience begins to build up in the seats that surround the stunt park. Moments later, a massive crowd surrounds the stunt zone, all buzzing and chanting with excitement. The overhead lights then dim, and a spotlight shines on a tunnel portal on the wall.

A silver hover sports car, Francine's minivan, and an orange sports sedan with black decals and a funky body kit all emerge from the tunnel opening and onto the floor of the stunt park. The three cars all split up, with the hover car pulling out to the left, the orange sedan to the right, and Francine's van going straight.

Francine's van powers through a vertical loop, as the silver hover car and orange sports sedan jump through the center of it. The three cars then gracefully drift around the loop, with Francine flamboyantly spinning about.

The three cars then split ways, with the hover car going into a corkscrew, Francine drifting along a halfpipe, and the sports sedan circling around the pillars one by one.

The three cars then re-unite, and drive through the vertical loop once more.

High in the great crowd of onlookers, Eleanor observes the performance with her hands together, and a great fascination in her eyes.

"To think that those of my culture are opposed to driving motor vehicles fast..." She thinks to herself.

The performance continues to dazzle, with the drivers gracefully drifting in tandem, soaring over jumps, and gliding through the loops and corkscrews.

It all culminates in a finale of Francine rolling through the loop backwards, and spinning her car 180 degrees around, while the other cars perform a flat spin between the loop from opposite sides, barley scraping by each other.

The three cars then park side by side to each other in front of the center loop. The drivers all step out of their cars, happily waving to the applauding audience.

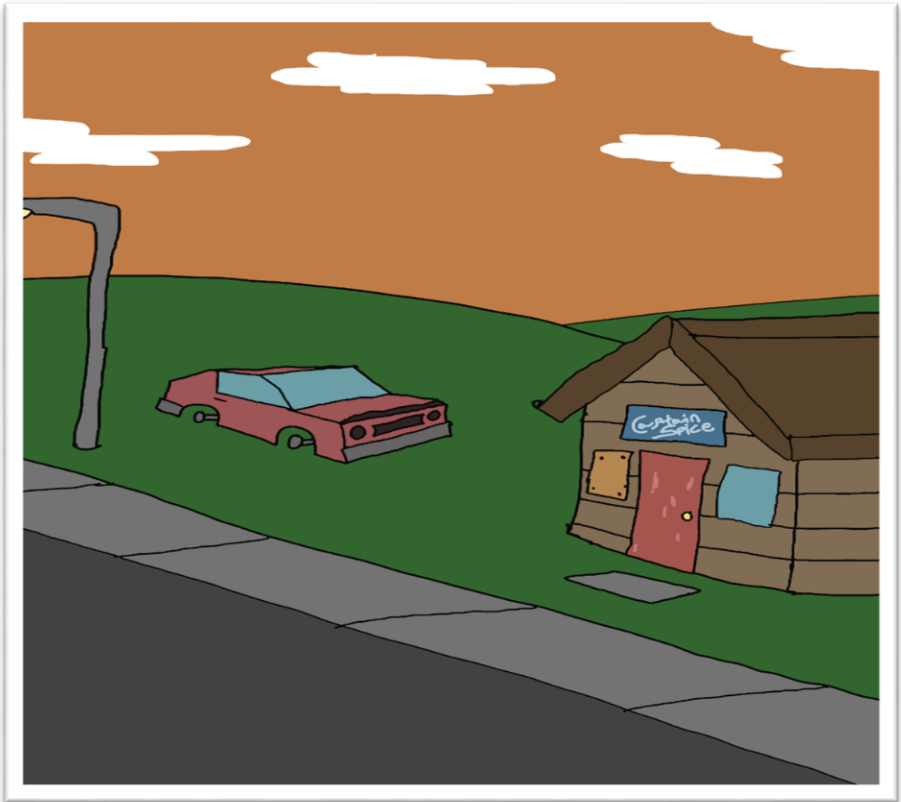
From the top of the grandstands, Eleanor notices a certain blue-haired raccoon lady down on the stadium floor.

“I forgot...the driver of the black minivan is a Fernsby!” Eleanor exclaims with eyes wide open. She angrily gets up and storms out of the Stunt Zone.

“I’ll prove to my people we should never have abandoned motorcar racing...we must show once more who are the superior racers!” She monologues as she’s walking out.

In the youth of a young, yellow Tauredian, he imagines heroic adventures of racing as he plays with his toy cars. Through adolescence, he begins his racing journey with racing in local tournaments. After being sideswiped, pitted, and rammed into last place, he tries to up his aggression, leading to his then-beloved race car being broken beyond repair in a desperate attempt to get back at the aggressor. Now an adult, he fights back against the aggression with defensive maneuvers. His new style catches the eyes of many, including a university student on the run and a brash demolition derby driver from a far-off planet.

Chapter 3: Hometown



Another day rises, and the Dragoon Storm carrier ship is cruising along the Intergalactic Freeway.

“Hey Marie, you know where we headed next?” Miranda asks to Marie with pumped fists.

“For the next leg of Star Summit, we will be racing at Criswell Speedway...” Replies Marie.

“Criswell Speedway? I remember practicin’ for mah...I mean, I remember practicing for my racing license at Criswell Speedway...” Francine embarrassedly corrects.

“Come on sis, you don’t gotta be embarrassed ta embrace ya roots!” Brandy says in comfort to Francine while patting Francine’s back.

“Brandy, you know how those science people are...” Francine refutes.

“Sis, you ain’t on earth no mores! Them Taured people don’t know much ‘bout earth stereotypes! Besides, they’d be pretty stupid to not know who Francine Fernsby; one of ‘da most brilliant chemists of the 21st century is!” Brandy refutes back.

“Ok...you’s got a point, Brandeh. But I like how I sound now. It makes me feel so immersed in my city life.” Replies Francine.

“Heh heh...once you’s a southerner, you’s always a southerner!” Brandy comments jokingly.

The ship continues on route until pulling off at an exit. Close in the distance is a big cone-shaped structure with a swirl of energy in the center. As the carrier slowly goes through the vortex of energy, static electricity fills the air, the temperature rises slightly, and time seems to come to a stop.

Through the windows of the carrier, nothing but a swarm of yellow and gold energy can be seen. It creates a chaotic light show that excites the senses. But after short last, the energy begins to calm down and dissipate, the static neutralizes, and time speeds back up to normal.

The carrier then cruises into the atmosphere of the planet Earth. As it comes closer and closer to the surface, a small town overlooked by a forested hill comes into view. The ship lands in a gravel lot, and the team steps out. Led by Brandy, they step out into a small town dotted with rustic buildings and a few new ones.

“Alright y’all, this right here is Mccoy, Georgia. This place is me n’ my sis Francine’s stompin’ grounds.” Explains Brandy while guiding the team out into the town.

“So, this is where you spent your youth, Brandy...” Comments Roland.

“Yeeeeeep, sure is!” Replies Brandy.

“Mccoy, Georgia? This ain’t where Criswell Speedway is...” Miranda comments.

“We are taking a detour in our travels, as per suggestion of Brandy. The race at Criswell Speedway won’t be for a few more days. Brandy, why don’t you give a tour like you said you would.” Lightning Cat explains.

“Alright! This right here is Butter’s, the old grocery store. Me n’ my sis used ‘ta git some pork rinds and Captain Spice during the summertime. Too bad it closed down after the owner moved outta town after he won da lottery...” Brandy explains and reminisces whilst pointing to a small, rundown wooden building with a pointed roof and a faded “Captain Spice” sign hanging on it.

“Then, Jhonny Squatch’s came in and boy, they’s was reaaaal nice when they first moved into little old Mccoy’s, Georgia. They had all these fancy snacks me and Francine had never heard of! Not to mention, only other place where I done see so much fresh produce is at the farmer’s market 30 minutes away from here...” Brandy rambles.

“Hey Brandy, y’know what else is over here in Mccoy?” Miranda enthusiastically asks.

“What else is in Mccoy? That’s a loaded question there, bud. Y’got Chuck’s Smokehouse, it’s a good place to eat...” Brandy says whilst pointing towards a Victorian-style mansion with smokers beside it, emanating smoke and the savory scent of barbecued meats.

“...then, there’s the town square, clock tower, the demolition derby museum, shootin’ range-lots of ‘em...” Brandy continues to ramble.

“Naaaawww...I was referring to The Scrap Heap! I thought ya knew what I was talkin’ about when I said y’know what else we got in Mccoy.” Miranda adds.

“Ahhh, The Scrap Heap, drag strip and demo-derby arena. It’s the place for racin’ enthusiasts to be when they’s in Mccoy’s Georgia!” Replies Brandy.

The deep booming growl of an engine echoes in from the distance. It gets louder and louder as it approaches the drivers of Dragoon Storm. Close in the distance, a classic muscle car with fading blue paint speckled with scratches and patches of rust and the driver’s side door replaced with a door painted a shiny forest green rumbles up and stops beside the drivers of Dragoon Storm, with the tires screeching and big plumes of smoke pouring out from the tires.

“Smoker!” Francine calls out.

Many of the Dragoon Storm members stop and look around in confusion.

“Smoker?” Pj inquires.

The driver’s side window rolls down, revealing a slick, black-haired raccoon man behind the wheel dressed in a messy t-shirt and khakis.

“Hey Brandy, Francey, them peoples with you your racin’ buddies?” The raccoon man asks.

“Yeah Tommy, they sure is my friends!” Brandy replies gleefully.

“Mind if I challenge on of ‘em to a drag race?” Tommy asks.

“Now?” Pj inquires.

“Naaaaw man, whenever ya got time!” Replies Tommy.

“Yo Tommy, why did Francine yell smoker when she saw you?” Pj asks.

“Couldn’t ya tell man? I made big show of smoke when I stopped! When I do drag racin’, I do a big burnout and leave my opponents in

the smoke. One time I was in a drag racing tournament and dun I smoked ‘em all!” Tommy boasts.

“So man, when ya wanna drag race me?” Tommy asks.

“Well, our race at Criswell speedway is in a few days so...how about...tomorrow?” Replies Pj.

“Heh heh, let’s see if ya get smoked!” Tommy Taunts. He then speeds away with the tires squealing and smoke billowing.

“HEY! I’ve won some drag races too!” Pj shouts as Tommy vanishes into the distance.

Marie puts her hand on PJ’s shoulder.

“Easy, Mr. Jackson. He just wants some friendly competition.” Marie affirms to Pj.

“Hey y’all, how ‘bout we go to the shootin’ range?” Brandy enthusiastically proposes.

“Shooting Range?” Roland asks.

“Yeah, shooting range! We shoot some targets with some BB guns!” Brandy explains.

“We’re going to go shoot at targets...for fun?” Roland asks with confusion.

“Yeah! Never seen skeet shootin’ competitions on TV?” Replies Brandy.

Roland keeps a straight face with raised eyebrows.

“Oh right, it’s just another one them things Earth people from the United Sates of the America get...” Brandy says in realization.

“So, we all do not agree on what activity we should partake in yet? How about we continue the tour of Mccoy, Brandy appears to be quite the enthusiastic tour guide!” Lightning Cat proposes.

Brandy then continues to tour the town in which she and Francine grew up in...

In an abandoned warehouse on earth, Wetzel's chemist, Lazeena is hastily analyzing and brewing the stolen boost formula. Her tools and ingredients sit atop a protective blanket placed atop a rickety picnic table. Behind her stands a large, rusty, metal tank.

BANG!

A huge spire of flames bursts out from the beaker, melting it in the process.

Lazeena lets out a slow, raspy chuckle. She then grabs another beaker from under the table and mixes more ingredients together. She then lets the ingredients set, puts a lid on the beaker, and throws it across the room. It hits the wall and slowly rolls around on the floor.

Lazeena picks up the beaker from the ground and hastily places it back on top of the table. She then removes the lid and pours in some fuel. The formula bubbles and boils violently, then the beaker vibrates, and the table begins to burn. Lazeena grabs a fire extinguisher from under the table, and clumsily points the nozzle around, covering the table and floors with fire foam.

She then blends some chemicals together, now paying an extra bit of attention to how much of each she's putting in. Lazeena then tapes and glues the beaker to the table and pours some fuel into the mixture. The mixture bubbles, the beaker vibrates, and a green plume of energy booms from the beaker. The beaker continues to shake and rattle, becoming more aggressive as the boost burns.

BANG!

The beaker breaks apart in a small explosion.

Lazeena then tirelessly brews a big quantity of boost in the tank behind her. She hastily fills up a bunch of bottles with boost, and wheels them out to her truck, which she recklessly drives through the city streets. She then arrives at a luxurious hotel, where she wheels in

the boost through a backdoor, up an elevator, and into Wetzel's hotel room.

"I brought you the boost you wanted...boss. They're a little unstable but they should be just good enough to be used in a car." Lazeena says whilst rolling in the cart of boost bottles.

"Good." Wetzel comments with crossed arms. He then grabs a bottle from the cart and hands it to Eleanor.

"What must I do with this bottle of...boost?" Asks Eleanor.

"Are you stupid? Did you even listen? You're going to put it in your car!" Wetzel frustratedly explains.

"But the boost...it is unstable! I cannot put it in my car! I still haven't gotten the boost system fully functional!" Eleanor refutes.

"I don't care! It's a more powerful version of that Fernsby boost! You want to destroy them, right?" Wetzel argues.

"Destroy? I...I only want to dishonor them after they dishonored my people for lifetimes! What better to do it with than beat them in a major racing tournament?" Eleanor frustratedly explains.

BANG!

Everyone's attention turns to the window overlooking the outside where Skrimbo's scrappy sedan can be seen with the rear ablaze.

Eleanor rushes down to the street with a fire extinguisher to put out the flames on Skrimbo's car.

"Skrimbo says he hit the boost too hard! Skrimbo is gonna get his car fixed and hit the boost too hard in front of someone during the next race! They're going to get their car totally smashed!" Skrimbo says whilst Eleanor puts out the last of the flames.

Eleanor then heads back into the hotel room one more time and grabs her toolbox. She then stacks a briefcase and some bottles of boost on top of her toolbox.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Wetzel sternly asks.

Eleanor scowls with her fists clenched.

“I’m going to run some tests!” Eleanor shouts whilst storming out of the room. She slams the door behind her, loads her things into the back of a silver-plated van with a beautiful design on the side studded from diamonds and crystals and she rumbles away.

In the opulent Tauredian Nation known as the Bonneville Kingdom, a young Tauredian wastes her days away, trying to reinvent and innovate up long-standing technologies, to little success.

Growing up, her peers didn’t lend her much respect. She was always out to prove herself. She read into the history of her land, seeing stories of conflicts waged out with racing. The Great Fernsby Clan War put an end to the Bonneville racing legacy, as they wanted to distance themselves from the way of the Fernsbies.

But the engineer thought otherwise. If she wants to elevate her clan back to glory, she should fight back. Through her many failed attempts, she was casted out from her nation for violating their strict policies of “no racing”.

Now alone and with nowhere to go, she seeks out help from absolutely anyone. That help then comes in the form of a stocky, ring-tailed man...

Eleanor drives into the sunset when passing a rustic, hand-carved sign reading “The folks in Mccoy welcome you!”

She navigates the rustic downtown, taking in the old brick buildings with fading signage from bygone eras. Eleanor then pulls into a dragstrip and parks her van in the grass beside one of the racing lanes.

She opens the back doors of her van and pulls out a resizing beam mounted to a telescoping pole with a wire running back into the van. The pole is extended up and the rod the beam is mounted to is extended outwards. Eleanor opens up the briefcase and pulls out a

car that's just a bare metal frame with boost thrusters on the sides and rear.

She places it under the atom compressor beam and activates it, causing the vehicle to rattle and rumble back to normal size. Eleanor then gets her toolbox and the boost bottles, tunes up her test car, installs the boost, and picks up a remote controller.

The vehicle is staged on the dragstrip. The engine is revved steadily, and it speeds down the strip. Eleanor quickly fires off a shot of boost, and a big plume of energy flares out from the rear boost thruster. She fires off a longer shot of boost, and an even larger plume of energy surges from the boost thruster. She then gently activates the right horizontal thruster, the energy plume crackles and flares out, the rear energy plume crackles up, and the engine, then the thrusters explode in a ball of flames.

Eleanor then panics over to her van, grabs a fire extinguisher, and rushes over to the wreckage. She covers the burning test vehicle with fire foam until it's devoid of embers.

Taking a look at the exploded engine and boost system, Eleanor groans with frustration.

"I knew not to have trusted Wetzel's dubious boost...It would have only brought me harm. I shall break reality to him when we reunite." She says whilst shrinking her test car back down.

As Eleanor is packing her things back into her van, Tommy's muscle car rolls up beside Eleanor and he steps out.

"Hey man, you blow in from the renaissance faire or somethin'?" Tommy comments whilst taking a look at Eleanor's rather extravagant fashion. Tommy then takes a closer look at her and notices the crest on her head.

"Wait a minute...you's a Bonneville!"

"Well of course I hail from the great Bonneville clan! I'll be winning back the honor in which your people took from mine."

“Heh heh, if you wanna get some honor, you better race beside some more honorable folk! Them Team Crown people seem like a buncha lowlifes if I’ve seen any.”

Eleanor stands silently as she watches Tommy get back into his car and burn rubber. She then climbs into the driver’s seat of her van and makes her way back to the garage.

Chapter 4: Rising Heat

The Dragoon Storm crew are busy at work in their garage at Criswell Speedway, quickly installing drag racing tires, a parachute pack, and a bit of extra power into the engine.

They then load Pj's car onto a trailer, and head back to McCoy. They then arrive at the Scrap Heap, unload his car, and Pj drives it towards the starting line. The grandstands are lightly populated with human spectators.

Tommy then rolls up in his muscle car, which is now fitted with modifications similar to Pj's.

The two stage their cars on the starting line. The engines rev, lights count down, and the two cars peel out of the starting line with clouds of smoke pouring from the rear tires.

Pj wrestles with the steering wheel to keep his car straight. Once straightened out, he fires off a bottle of boost, pushing him ahead of Tommy. But then, Tommy also fires off a bottle of boost, sending him ahead of Pj. Pj continues to focus his sights on the finish line, and he roars into the end zone with the parachute flying, only to find out he has lost the race.

"Curses!" Pj exclaims as his car slows to a halt.

Marie then comes on over to open up the driver's door for Pj.

“Don’t fret Mr. Jackson, this race was only for fun.” She acknowledges to Pj as he helps him out of his car.

Pj then meets up with Tommy and the two shake hands.

“Heh heh, y’see why they call me smoker?” Tommy asks proudly.

“Yeah...you really...smoked me.” Replies Pj.

“Hey man, you still got skills. It ain’t easy controllin’ a Skaggs Miami with 1000 horses all trottin’ in the rear wheels.” Tommy says in admiration.

“Ey, my bud Mr. Preston Jackson woulda been able to beat ya if I were able to tinker with the transmission of his car, then he woulda been flying through those gears and hit top speed within the blink of an eye!” Brandy says to Tommy.

“Brandy, don’t you get all in a fuss. You know I’m gonna be cheerin’ ya on when you’s racing at Crisswell Speedway tomorrow!”

Lightning Cat then steps into the scene, catching the attention of Tommy.

“Well, if it ain’t Lightin’ Cat! Thanks for lettin’ me race one your own. It was fun!” Tommy says with gratitude whilst shaking hands with Lightning Cat.

“Please, call me Alfonso. It’s my real name after all.” Replies Lightning Cat.

“Whatever man, I call ya Lightning Cat because y’earned that name! You’s is fast...like lightning!” Tommy explains.

“Alright, pal.” Replies Lightning Cat.

The next day rises, and Dragoon Storm is fast at work, tuning up their vehicles in their garage at Crisswell Speedway. On the floor lies a classic compact forest green SUV and a black sports coupe with blue rims and blue hazard stripes on the doors.

“Alright, we’re headed into race number two!” Pj announces.

“Oh, it’ll be a thrilling affair! I’ll show my skills on the raceway to all!” Roland proudly adds.

“Well bless my heart Roland, you’re pretty jolly today!” Brandy comments.

“Oh, but I am, Brandy! I’m going to finally participate in the art of automobile racing after months of being strictly the team’s mechanic.” Roland states.

Suddenly, a modern sports pickup truck lowered to the ground some, painted a bold, screaming orange with aggressive flames roars into the garage with a screaming halt.

“Howdy everyone...I just took mah truck for a test drive! I can tell y’all that it’s reaaaaaaal fast! I’m hopin that I git into some inescapable battles with Team Crown and other aggressive drivers, so I can show ‘em who’s one the meanest drivers on the west coast is!” Miranda says enthusiastically.

“Just remember Miranda, don’t go looking for fights. Only fight because you have to.” Reminds Lightning Cat.

“Yeah, yeah I know, LC!”

“Miranda...why didn’t you just stay in the demolition derby scene? There’s plenty of support for that all through the galaxy.” Pj inquires.

“When Lightnin’ Cat came my way, I was floored that a guy as cool as him wanted me to join his team!” Miranda explains.

“When I saw some of Miranda’s defensive driving maneuvers, I saw great potential in her.” Lightning Cat adds.

In Team Crown’s garage, Eleanor continues to tune and adjust the boost system of her car. She focuses on all the pipes and other internal components, carefully weaving her tools through it all. Just then, Wetzl comes into the room.

“How do you do, *friend?*” Wetzl greets while juggling a bottle of boost in his hand.

“I’m fine.” Eleanor directly states.

“I hope you are about ready to put the new boost inside of your car since you’ve run your tests...” Wetzel tells Eleanor while shoving the boost bottle right in her face.

“Did you even listen to what I told you what happened when I ran my tests? The boost blew up my test car!” Eleanor frustratedly explains.

“Oh...but that is just a pity...” Wetzel comments. He then paces around as a crooked grin comes onto his face. Eleanor crosses her arms with a raised eyebrow as he does so.

“What are you thinking about?” Eleanor inquires.

“Oh...just that we could sneak this boost into our adversaries’ cars...especially the Fernsbies...” Wetzel explains.

“Your plan is flawed. First of all, they’re going to quickly trace the...unstable boost back to us. Next of all, what do you mean by our adversaries when you say Fernsbies? You’re not a Bonneville. You don’t quite understand the long history of conflict between the Fernsby and Bonneville clans...” Replies Eleanor.

Wetzel then grabs Eleanor by the shoulders and bends her down to his level.

“Listen mechanic, I’ve faced a few Fernsbies myself in street racing. They’re nothing but trouble, and I’m out for revenge on them after what they did to me!” Wetzel angrily explains. He then lets go of Eleanor. She stares down at him with anger and frustration before sitting back down on her stool.

Eleanor’s attention quickly darts from one component to the next on her boost system. She tries to get started on one part but backs out and tries to work on another. She then looks at the clock on the wall and back at the boost system. Eleanor lets out a sigh of defeat, shrinks her car back down with her resizing beam, and puts it away. She then pulls out a tough and elegant electric muscle car, painted a

beautiful obsidian black and gold two-tone, a Bonneville crest on the roof, and white wall tires. The car rolls out of the garage with a sharp, electric rumble.

Lazeena, now sloppily dressed in one of Eleanor's dresses and a face covered with messy makeup pushes an enclosed cart followed by Skrimbo, now wearing a trench coat dragging along the ground head out the door.

The two stumble and trip around, as they head into unoccupied garages, installing the dubious boost into the cars of unsuspecting racers. They then come across the front door of Dragoon Storm's garage. Lazeena clumsily knocks on the door by swinging her fists at it.

"No, No!" Skrimbo shouts as he tackles Lazeena away from the door.

"Skrimbo says you have to wait for garage to be not occupied before you can go inside!" He scolds.

"Heeh...heeh...I like to punch entryways..." Lazeena wheezes.

Suddenly, the door opens, light spills out, and Francine pokes her head out, looking around for the perpetrator.

"W-who's there?!" Francine nervously calls out.

"Daniella! We ain't got time to worry about who was playin' knock-knock zoom! We's gotta race that's startin' within a couple hours!" Brandy calls back.

"D-don't call me Daniella!" Francine mutters as she heads back inside. The light then fades away as the door closes.

"Whooooo's Daniellaaaa?" asks Lazeena.

"Skrimbo says that maybe Daniella is Francine's old name! Skrimbo will ask big boss Wetzel about this and see what he thinks!" Replies Skrimbo as he's dialing Wetzel in on communicator.

"What is it, Skrimbo? I'm a very busy man so make it quick!" Wetzel sternly greets on the communicator.

“Skrimbo asks, what do you think about my theory of Francine previously being called Daniella? Skrimbo saw her not liking being called that name...” Replies Skrimbo.

“Daniella Fernsby? Oh...I know that name very well...it’s time for *my* revenge! Rig her car with that boost!” Wetzal orders. Skrimbo then ends the call. Skrimbo and Lazeena sit and wait for Dragoon Storm to move on out of their garage.

“Heeeey Skrimboo...why not we preteeeend to be a cleaaaaaning crew?” Lazeena suggests.

“Skrimbo says...why did I not think of such an idea?” Replies Skrimbo.

Skrimbo then walks over to the door and punches it repeatedly.

The door opens, revealing Lighting Cat.

“May I help you two?” He asks.

“Me...me...Broskrim is here to clean your garage!” Skrimbo announces.

“Cleaning? I haven’t heard much of there being a cleaning service here.” Lightning Cat inquires.

“Heeeh...It’s...hospitable of the lower regions!” Lazeena explains. Skrimbo then knocks Lazeena over with a broom and gets all up in her face.

“No, Skri...Broskrim will tell you what it’s actually called! You must call it southern hospital!” Skrimbo corrects.

“No, it’s called southern hospitality. But you two wouldn’t know that because you’s not southerners.” Brandy corrects.

“Sorry, but we are not interested in your cleaning services.” Lightning Cat says as he slowly closes the door.

“Drat! Skrimbo doesn’t know how to get into the garage now. Skrimbo is just going to wait until Dragoon Storm bozos leave.”

The two sit and wait beside the front door. Suddenly, the sounds of one of the garage doors opening catches their attention, and Francine's van along with Marie's Sakura Paramount roll out of the garage.

"Skrimbo says, this our chance!" Skrimbo says as he scurries into the closing garage door.

Lazeena trails close behind, but her dress gets stuck under the garage door as she's heading inside. Skrimbo runs around the garage, staring at each side of the cars parked inside.

"Grr! I, Skrimbo don't know which car is Daniella's!" He grunts frustratedly.

"Skrimbooo...don't you remember that everyone has a racing...number...Francine is number...uhh...I doooooon't remember." Lazeena comments.

"But what number is Francine? Skrimbo can't blow her up if Skrimbo can't find her car." Skrimbo complains.

"Oh wait...I remember! Fraaaaancine's a chemist...so...her logo is probably on her car...she's my inspiration to become a chemissssst!" Lazeena explains.

"Wait...if Francine is your idol ...then Skrimbo doesn't know why you're involved with this!" Skrimbo acknowledges to Lazeena.

"Just following...the orders of the big boss..." Lazeena explains.

Skrimbo then spots a certain black sports coupe with big blue hazard stripes on the doors. He takes a look at the back bumper and sees a logo with a big F and L and below the logo is text reading "Fernsby Labs". He pops the hood of Francine's car and plugs in the boost bottle.

"Alright! Skrimbo is done with his job!" Skrimbo announces as he exits the garage.

"Heeeeeeey...aren't you forgetting something?" Lazeena calls out just before Skrimbo opens the front door.

“Skrimbo says, you find your own way out.” Skrimbo talks back as he exits the garage.

Lazeena then rips the part of her dress stuck under the garage door and heads out the front door.

Moments later, the garage door rises, and the Dragoon Storm crew pulls back into their garage. Francine quickly steps out of her van and rushes over to her car to take a quick look under the hood.

“What are you doing, Francine? You have already tuned up your Ghareka Quabato. Is there something you forgot?” Lightning Cat inquires.

Francine stands silently, staring at the bottle of boost in her hands.

“This isn’t...my boost...” She mutters softly. Lightning Cat comes in to take a closer look at the dubious boost.

“Hmm...not sure how that got there.” Lightning Cat comments.

“D-do you think my boost was stolen?!” Francine anxiously proposes.

“I say it was sabotage! That dubious boost is going to destroy your engine!” Roland adds.

“We will look into the possibility of our garage being broken into. But, we do not have time for that right now for the race is soon to begin.”

“Alfonso, I say we talk to Wetzel D’Creste after all this. He is the one who bought Stone Valley Trail. If he’s loading up cars with dubious boost, who’s to say he will not be using the track he recently purchased to his advantage?” Marie suggests as Lightning Cat looks at her from over his shoulder.

SLAM!

“Aight sis, I got yer car all loaded up with the good boost...formulated by you! I checked everyone else’s cars ta’ see if

they's got that bad boost in 'em but it was only yours that's got the no-good, suspicious boost." Brandy cheerfully announces after slamming shut the hood of Francine's car.

"Thank you..." Francine says as she enters her car and fires up the engine. She then drives off to the starting grid of Criswell Speedway. Roland, Miranda, and Brandy then follow suit as they speed out of the garage.

At the wooded starting line of Criswell Speedway, excitement and celebration is high, with festival tents and a stage set up in the fields and open landscapes along the track.

"Ok everyone, just keep calm and focus on your driving. Don't get blinded by the drivers ahead of you." Lightning Cat advises on the communication system.

"Heh, sure

thing, LC..." Miranda comments.

"You ready for this sis?" Brandy motivates to Francine over the communication system.

Francine sits and stares at the road ahead of her. Thoughts of the strange boost that was sneaked into her car race through her mind. She ponders exactly what the boost could have done if she were to have not removed it from her car.

"Sis, the race is about to start!" Brandy alerts to Francine.

Francine then darts her attention to the starting lights which are in the middle of counting down. She clumsily revs the engine, and the race begins with her wheels sluggishly slipping out of the gate.

The many racers speed and weave through the gentle staring curves of Criswell Speedway. Brandy, slowly powering her way through the pack, Miranda, closely squeezing between and brushing by opponents, Roland, carefully and delicately weaving around other racers, and Francine, drifting and whirling about as she puts on a

spectacle for the onlookers and other drivers as the race rages on in the woods of Criswell Speedway.

From the corner of her rearview mirror, Francine notices a luxury SUV painted a pearly white barreling towards her. She spins and swerves out of its path, and the SUV goes skidding into the grass. Francine quickly fires off some boost, and she jets forward and slams on the brakes as she nearly crashes into the back of another racer.

“Woah Francine, what’s gotten into you?” Marie asks.

“Well...there was this driver who was gonna wreck me!” She explains in a flustered manner.

BANG!

The SUV bumps into the back of Francine’s car. She panics, grips the steering wheel firmly, and fires off another bottle of boost, speeding away from the SUV.

Towards the front of the pack, Brandy attempts to overtake a racer driving an orange supercar. The driver fires off a bottle of boost, it briefly sends them forward before a crackling, sputtering backfire rattles their exhaust before a flaming explosion blows out the engine. The driver quickly veers off to the side to safety while the other racers brake and veer to dodge the flaming car.

The crowd gasps at the explosion. Following the gasp comes silence, then quiet commotion.

“That...that was not normal.” Lightning Cat comments.

“Heh heh...his engine sure got blown up...” Miranda adds.

The race continues to rage on with opponents overtaking, blocking, and even bumping into one another. Eleanor rolls up behind on Francine. The moment Francine attempts and overtake, Eleanor sends out a gust of wind, destabilizing her. Francine spins and weaves around, restabilizing herself. Suddenly, Miranda lunges towards Eleanor. Eleanor slams onto her brakes as Miranda’s bright orange

truck bumps into another driver, causing them to spin out and crash into another driver.

“Miranda, what did I tell you?” Lightning Cat calls out.

“Ey, that Eleanor was tryin’ ta wreck Francine just like how she was tryin’ to wreck Brandy at Cykrey.” Miranda explains.

“Remember what I told you, stay out of trouble. Don’t get on the offensive unless you have no other choice.”

Eleanor then spots Brandy’s car further ahead in the pack. She charges up some e-boost, and glides on over to her. She fires a gust of wind at Brandy’s car, sending it fishtailing. Brandy quickly lets go of the gas, stabilizes her car, and puts her foot back on the gas, speeding towards first place.

Meanwhile, Roland is carefully cruising along the track in his classic SUV. He carefully watches the other racers, calculating what maneuver to make next.

KABOOM!

Flames and shrapnel erupt from the hood of another car, creating another wave of surprise and shock amongst almost everyone on the track. Everyone quickly swerves out of the path of the wreckage, some banging and bumping into each other while trying to avoid the road hazard.

“It’s sabotage I tell you, sabotage!” Roland calls out to Lightning Cat.

“That is noted. Just remember to be focused on racing first.” Replies Lightning Cat.

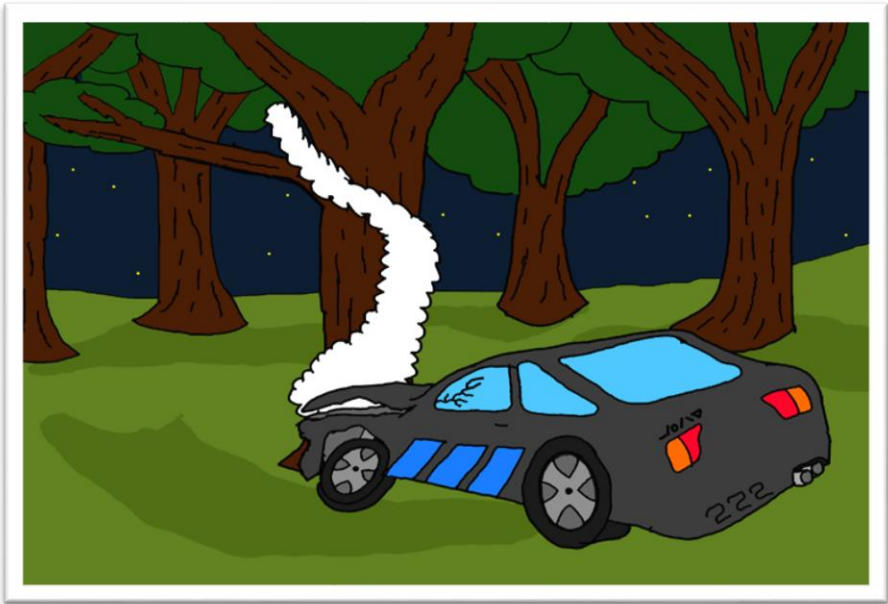
“Alfonso, you don’t always have to remind people of being focused on racing. They know that. They just have things they want to get across.” Marie tells Lightning Cat.

“Yo, Roland! Check ya rearview!” Pj warns.

In the lens of the rearview mirror, comes Lazeena’s heavy-duty, green-windowed SUV. It effortlessly knocks and bashes a path

through its opponents. Roland steers clear, before getting knocked on the corner, and spinning out off the track. His classic SUV sustains a big dent as it bumps right into a tree.

“You’ll pay for that! You’re lucky these old things are almost indestructible!” Roland shouts as his vehicle pulls out of the grass and back onto the track.



In the driver’s seat of Francine, she continues to drift and spin in-between and around her opponents. Then, In the corner of her sideview mirrors approaches a certain luxury SUV, scraping and bumping its way up to her. Francine frantically fires off some boost, sending her clumsily skidding about at high speeds. Her boost fizzles off, and Wetzel comes boosting forwards. He slams into the back of Francine’s car, and yanks his steering wheel to the right, sending Francine spinning out off the track. She floors it, her wheels slip and spin, slowly pushing her car forward as they go flat out, while Wetzel charges towards her once more. Ramming into the back corner, Francine uncontrollably spins out, before the front of her car crumples upon hitting a tree.

With stress and anxiety surging through her mind and body, Francine spaces out as she stares off into the woods in front of her. She grits her teeth, holding back a great pain in her leg.

“Francine, are you alright?” Lightning Cat calls out over the communication system.

“I...I’m fine...” Francine mutters.

“What was that all about? What could Wetzel have against Francine? They’ve barley even met!” Pj exclaims.

“Oh...I know me and him have met before...just under different identities.” Francine explains.

“Ok. Elaborate after the race is done.” Says Lightning Cat.

Meanwhile with Miranda, she rumbles down the track in her pickup truck. She frequently looks around, checking for Wetzel’s luxury SUV.

“Come out, come out wherever ya are, ya big no-good bully!” Miranda taunts.

A grinding sound catches the ears of Miranda as she looks to her left, seeing that Wetzel is scraping by, with a look of determination in his face.

Miranda jerks the steering wheel of her truck to the left, pushing Wetzel away. Wetzel drifts away slightly, and then slams right back into Miranda, causing her to bump right into a white sedan, causing it to slip and swerve, before crashing into a purple hatchback with a very large rear wing.

“Boost away Miranda, boost away!” Marie orders.

Miranda frustratedly hammers down the boost lever, sending her away from the clutches of Wetzel.

Meanwhile with Roland, he continues to sputter down the track in his damaged vehicle. Skrimbo slowly clatters up to Roland in his scrap of a car.

“Skrimbo says, it’s time for destruction! Skrimbo will ram right into you!” He says whilst his finger hovers over the boost button. His exhaust briefly shoots out a plume of energy before crackling out. The engine blows out in a fiery explosion, but Skrimbo keeps his hands on the wheel.

“Engine exploding won’t stop Skrimbo!” Skrimbo taunts as his car rapidly loses momentum. He veers towards Roland in a last-ditch effort, before getting sideswiped by Wetzel boosting ahead. The impact sends him rolling off to the side.

“Hey! Skrimbo is your friend! Why are you attacking Skrimbo?” Skrimbo complains as Wetzel vanishes off into the distance.

The race rages on, with Brandy inching towards the lead and Roland and Miranda battling to protect their positions in the middle of the pack. They battle over the hills and through the woods, coming into close contact with other rivals.

Lazeena rumbles up onto the offensive once again, aiming for the rear left corner of Brandy’s sleek supercar. Brandy jolts her car to the right, evading the attack. Lazeena shifts over right in front of Brandy, and slams on the brakes. Brandy, lets off the gas and taps the brakes, stopping just before the rear tires of Lazeena’s armored SUV.

CRASH!

Miranda’s pickup truck slams right into the side of Lazeena’s car, it swerves and squeals about, before bashing into a silver open-wheeled race car. A red race car then collides with the careening open wheeler, sending the race car rolling off of the hill.

“Miranda! What did I tell you?” Lightning Cat scolds.

“Come on! She was trying to smash up Brandy!” Miranda replies in protest.

“You have to remember to be careful when performing offensive maneuvers. This isn’t a demolition derby.” Explains Lightning Cat.

A sudden gust of wind hits Brandy as she attempts to navigate a curve. Eleanor comes charging past with e-boost, but to only be knocked off the road by Wetzel barreling past her. He rumbles across the finish in first place, to an unamused and frustrated audience, booing and scolding him as the confetti rains down.

In the garage of Dragoon Storm, Roland tirelessly works to fix up everyone's cars, and Francine is seated on a chair, bent over, propping her head up with her fist and a healing cast on her right leg. Pj and Marie are gathered around her, listening to a tale of her past.

"You? A street racer?" Pj says in disbelief.

"Yes. During my study abroad in Japan, I participated in the underground highway racing scene. My instincts for speed came out. My driving skills allowed me to quickly rise in the ranks..."

"What could you have done to anger Wetzel so much?" Marie inquires.

"Oh, you know, dismantling his street racing reign by defeating his subordinates one by one. I learned of his criminal motives while doing so. He's not just in it for the thrill of racing illegally under the moonlight. He likes to bet high and force his opponents to forfeit their cars, so he can sell on the black market...or worse, being taken to a chop shop so they can be sold for scrap!" Francine explains.

"Hmm...that kind of sounds like a couple of the criminal leaders I...well, me and Pj have dealt with." Replies Marie.

"Oh, but Wetzel...or Rebber as I knew him during that time was no laughing matter. He held grudges and kept promises. He vowed to hunt me down. I thought that he would never find me in my humble hometown of McCoy...but to my shock and dread, he found me! I was left with no other choice than to leave behind my friends and family, just so I could live to see another day, and begin my career in chemistry. But it seems that Wetzel has found me once again. What I learned from this experience was that street racing is never worth the

risks it includes. Being caught by the authorities is already enough of a risk. But having a dangerous criminal on your tail? Worse.”

“Francine, how is your leg doing?” Lightning Cat asks while stepping into the room.

“Uhh...it could be worse...” Francine nonchalantly comments whilst removing the sleeve from her right arm, revealing a prosthetic arm underneath.

“Say, where’s Miranda and Brandy?” Pj asks.

“Brandy is out on a drive. As for Miranda...I am not so sure about that.” Replies Lightning Cat.

On the streets in McCoy, Brandy drives a green cabover tow truck decked out with yellow flames on the front over to a gas station. She parks the truck over by the diesel pump, and heads inside to request getting her truck filled up. Upon returning to the pump, she spots a certain gray-skinned, opulent-clad Tauredian also at the pumps.

“Well, if it isn’t my archenemy.” Eleanor sneers as Brandy passes by.

Brandy turns on a dime and takes a gander at Eleanor with her head askew.

“Uhh...hey? Whatcha doin here?” Says Brandy.

“This is a refueling shop. What do you expect me to be doing? I’m refueling my car for the next race.” Eleanor says with a diminutive tone.

“Well...this place is a bit far from McCoy speedway and there’s a gas station not too fars from it.” Brandy elaborates.

“Well why are *you* here?” Eleanor inquires.

“Me? I’m lookin’ for my sis’ old car. She abandoned it here years ago after gettin’ chased outta town by that criminal Rebber. Boy, Rebber was one nasty ‘coon!

“Nasty racoon you say? I’m dealing with a nasty racoon of my own right now. My boss seems to just hate me. Despite my warnings about how sabotaging everyone’s cars could get us banned; he just didn’t listen. Not to mention, he seemed to blindly ram right into me, sending me careening of the road.”

“Well...you haven’t gotten banned yet...but don’t count on that...”
Brandy comments

“That is what I fear...” Replies Eleanor...

Brandy stands still with her finger on her chin and an eyebrow raised.

“Have you ever thought about changing teams?” Brandy suggests.

Eleanor silently glares at Brandy with wide eyes. Her body is still as a statue as the sounds of cicadas and crickets chirping break the silence.

“Y’know...there’s room on my team. You’re welcome to join...just make sure you leave a good impression on Roland and my sis, Daniella...uh...I mean Francine! They might think you’s up to no good.”

Eleanor remains silent, giving a slight glance to Brandy.

“That is the problem. Is my new team going to respect me? I already have great reservations on working alongside my enemies. I want to restore the honor to my clan by besting your kind in racing...after the last Fernsby war, they declared that car racing is the way of our enemies and must be made taboo. I say, we fight back! Assert our superiority! Make them fear and respect us!” Eleanor explains.

“You might get the respect of the whole galaxy if you join our team! Y’saw everyone booin’ Wetzal after he crossed the finish line. Y’don’t want any that, right?” Brandy acknowledges.

Eleanor puts her hands together in front of her and lets out a relaxed exhale. Her tension melts away as she comes to terms with possibly siding with her enemies.

“I will think about it. Meet me in...what’s the name of the capital city in this province?” Eleanor asks calmly.

“That’d be Atlanter’s...sorry...I mean, Atlanta.” Brandy informs.

“Ok. We shall meet in...Atlanta in the afternoon tomorrow.” Replies Eleanor.

“How ‘bout we do some break-fast at the Breakfast Barn? It’s mighty tasty!” Brandy proposes.

“Ok, but do not expect anything. You’re still an enemy to me, just one who is rather cordial.” Replies Eleanor.

Brandy and Eleanor exchange their communicator contact information to keep in touch with each other. Eleanor then detaches her car from the fuel pump and drives away.

Brandy detaches her truck from the fuel pump, and heads back into the convenience store to grab a quick snack. She stashes it in her tow truck’s glove box and heads off.

Brandy skims high and low, glancing into alleyways, abandoned garages, and the surrounding woods. As she turns past a ditch in front of a 3-way intersection, the beams of light emitted from the headlights of her truck hit an object veiled by kudzu vines that gives off a faint orange sheen.

She parks her tow truck beside the ditch, and steps in to take a closer look. She pulls back the vines to reveal a small and spunky classic muscle car with a hopper protruding from the hood, orange metal flake paint, decked out with yellow flames is pale faded, and speckled with scratches and rust.

Brandy pulls out a set of pliers from her toolbox and cuts the vines covering the car. More and more is revealed as the vines are trimmed away. A tree stump stands right in front of the car, the car has sustained front end damage, and the driver’s side door is missing. Brandy moves her tow truck, backing the rear end towards the rear

end of the little muscle car. She mounts the car to the hooks and pulls it out of the ditch.

The vehicle is then transported over to the Dragoon Storm garage at Criswell Speedway. Brandy parks her truck out back and knocks on the front door of the garage and puts a tarp over Francine's old car.

“So, you're back...How was your drive?” Lightning Cat asks.

“It was great! I found my sis' old car! Hey...y'mind if I have a chat with ya in private? There's been a...development regardin' one the members of Team Crown.”

Complying to her request, Lightning Cat takes Brandy into her room, and sits down on the bed, and Brandy sits down on a chair.

“I was fuelin' up my big tow truck at the pumps when I encountered that Eleanor Bonneville lady. She was kinda contemptuous to me at first since I'm a Fernsby...I don't quite get why she don't like kind...anyways, she went on about how she don't like her boss, how he ignorin' her concerns about getting banned for sabotage...so I offered for her to join the team...she kinda seemed interested and we could be meetin' in Atlanta tomorrow at the Breakfast Bran!”

“Allow me to accompany you when you're meeting up with her tomorrow, Brandy. She could still spell trouble.” Lightning Cat advises.

The next day rises, and Brandy begins her day with bringing in Francine's old car into the garage and doing some restoration work to it. She mends the front end and chassis along with installing a new driver's side door.

Francine steps in with her crutches. Shock and surprise burst onto her face upon seeing her long-lost ride resting on the garage floor, with the hood popped open.

“My car...you found it?”

“Sure did! It was still sittin’ in that ditch after all them years! It ain’t up to that racin’ spec but it should be good to go grab some groceries from Jhonny Squatch’s!” Brandy says whilst pouring some Chew-Mints into the hopper and some Captain Spice into the fuel tank.

“Brandy, are you prepared to leave?” Lighting Cat asks as he enters the room.

“Where are you going?” Francine asks.

“Me and your sister will be headed to the capital city to meet with Eleanor of Team Crown. She’s been quite frustrated with her experiences on the team and considering joining us.” Lighting Cat explains.

Francine stands still with bewilderment.

“What?!” Francine exclaims.

“Hey sis, why dontcha come along with me n’ Alfonso? I think yer presence will help things go all fine and dandy!” Brandy says in encouragement.

“I-if you say so...” Mutters Francine.

Brandy fires up Francine’s old car. It awakens with a rattle, bloop, and fizz. Lighting Cat enlarges a sports coupe, and the three head off into the capital city.

Chapter 5: Car Crashes and Coffee

In the bustling streets of Atlanta, Eleanor and the representatives of Dragoon Storm wait within the parking lot of Breakfast Barn. Brandy eagerly looks around, Francine anxiously stares down at a book, and Lightning Cat stands beside his car, facing Brandy.

Eleanor's rocket sedan arrives in the parking lot, with the paint gleaming, and the engine humming. She steps out of the car and waits beside the front door. Lightning Cat then approaches her.

"My name is Alfonso Accardi, but people like to call me Lightning Cat. I lead the Dragoon Storm racing team. You must be Eleanor." Says Lightning Cat in introduction.

"Yes, I am indeed Eleanor. I am considering...joining...your team." Eleanor nervously replies. Brandy prances on over to the front door of the restaurant, with Francine lagging behind on her crutches.

The four step inside Breakfast Bran and are met with a lively atmosphere lit by the rows of windows on the sides, and metal chandeliers overhead. The walls are a glossy hardwood, the carpet is green, and the seats have red cushions. The four are then seated and begin negotiations.

"So, you are considering joining our team? What led you to make that decision?" Lightning Cat inquires.

"Ever since I joined Team Crown, I've been in constant friction with its leader, Wetzal. He's a rather selfish figure who doesn't seem to

really care about me. Take the previous race for example, I warned against him rigging up everyone's cars with a dubious boost, stating that we could get banned for sabotage for doing so. But he just ignored my warnings and yelled at me. Not to mention, he rammed me off the road just so he could be the one on the 1st place podium." Eleanor explains.

"Well, you seem to be rather sincere with your frustrations and musings. But what is stopping you from being a part of the team? You might prove to be quite useful with your engineering skills. I bet Brandy would like to take a look under the hood of that rocket sedan of yours." Replies Lightning Cat.

"My apprehension is teaming up with the...guests you brought. They hail from the Fernsby clan. I'm in this to prove once and for all, which clan reigns supreme in motorsport."

"Then why are you considering joining our team?" Asks Lightning Cat.

"Your red-haired Fernsby...she's got a rather kind demeanor...certainly feels ironic that my own enemies are being kinder to me than my...current boss. But, If I so choose to side with the enemies of my clan, I'll never be accepted by them again." Eleanor explains.

"You will always be welcome amongst us if you join." Lightning Cat assures to Eleanor while putting his hand on her shoulder.

Eleanor lets out a long, relaxed exhale. She delicately relaxes her head on her fingers, contemplating a decision.

"...I will join Dragoon Storm." Eleanor softly says in acceptance.

Eleanor signs her name onto the team roster and shakes hands with Lightning Cat.

"Now that I am a part of your team Alfonso, I can give intel on Stone Valley Trail. Wetzel is going to rig the track with all kinds of traps. So, stay vigilant during the next race. You don't want to be swept away by a rockslide." Eleanor informs.

“Thanks for your info, Eleanor.” Replies Lightning Cat.

“Oh boy, wait until Roland n’ Marie find out about this!” Brandy Comments.

Francine anxiously spaces out, staring down at the table.

“Ey sis, what’s wrong? Ya lookin like you saw a ghost or somethin’...”

“Wetzel...he...he’s after me.” States Francine.

“Francine, you can forgo the race at Stone Valley Trail. Eleanor can take your place.”

Francine lets out a nervous sigh of relief.

“...that’s one less place to worry about old Rebber...” She says to herself.

The four continue to converse and partake of their meals.

Once the meeting is finished, the four head back out to the parking lot. Eleanor walks around Francine’s car, looking at the patched-up body work, faded paint, and the peculiar hopper sticking out from the hood. The rattle and fizz of the engine’s ignition echoes lightly through the air.

“What powers this car?” Eleanor inquires.

“This here beauty runs on Captain Spice and Chew Mints!” Brandy happily explains.

“A car powered by...soda and breath mints? I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Well...it’s some for-gotten Fernsby tech...woulda done mo’ repairs but we’s running a little low on materials at our Criswell Speedway garage.” Brandy explains.

“Hmm...I will take a closer look back at your garage. Your bizarre engine...intrigues me.”

The hum of an electric engine whizzes in from the distance. A crown-emblemmed black supercar slides right in front of Francine's little muscle car, with the headlights shining right into the eyes of Brandy and Francine.

Brandy hits the gas, and sputters away, narrowly squeezing past Wetzel's car. Eleanor pulls out slightly and fires a gust of wind at Wetzel's car. Wetzel fishtails around, then Lighting Cat blocks Wetzel, giving Elenor time to speed away.

Francine keeps her vision locked onto the rearview and sideview mirrors as Brandy navigates the streets of Atlanta. She spots Lighting Cat pursuing Wetzel down an intersection, only for Wetzel to whip around, and charge at her car. Francine yanks the handbrake, and spins the steering wheel around, veering into the other lane, and Wetzel blows past, with Lighting Cat in pursuit distantly.

Wetzel slams on his brakes, whips his car around into the opposing lane, charging towards Francine. Brandy floors it, making the little muscle car sputter forwards ever so slightly faster. Francine veers to the side, only to have Wetzel grind against the passenger side door. He wrestles with Brandy as she attempts to steer Francine's soda-powered machine away from the walls of the skyscrapers beside the street, only for Wetzel's car to be struck on the rear by an incoming car at an intersection, causing it to very cleanly break in two, and screech to a halt.

Lightning Cat stops in the middle of the intersection, exits his vehicle, and orders everyone to clear the area. He steps on over to the driver's side door of the front half. But as he bends down to get to eye level with Wetzel, a set of caster wheels deploy from the end of the front half, and Wetzel speeds away, with the sounds of police sirens wailing in the distance.

A buzzing rumbles out from Lighting Cat's pocket. He pulls out his communicator and answers the call.

“Hey Alfonso, what was all ‘dat ruckucs back thar?”

“Wetzel’s car broke into two, and he made a getaway using the front half...I’m going to bring the other half back to base for further investigation.”

Lightning Cat hitches up the rear end of Wetzel’s electric supercar to his and drives on back to the garage.

Chapter 6: The Missing Link

Brandy is fast dismantling the rear half of Wetzel's electric supercar. Eleanor stands tall beside her, watching and analyzing her every move.

Brandy pulls off the left-side quarter panel, to reveal a strange envelope stuck to the inside of it.

She opens the envelope and a handful of purple hexagonal coins, all scratched and worn-down spill out onto the floor.

“Well, I be blessed; I dun haven't seen Ferns-Cres coins since I saw mee-maw!” Brandy says while she holds a couple of Ferns-Cres coins in her hand.

“Ferns-Cres, the currency of the old Fernsby royalty...What is Wetzel planning with those?” Eleanor comments as she kneels down to take a look at the coins.

“Your guess is as good as mine.” Francine comments.

Marie then comes in, carefully picks up all the Ferns-Cres coins, puts them in an “evidence” bag, and stores it away in safe keeping.

Brandy continues to remove body panels, until the inner frame is revealed. She then disconnects the frame from the chassis, mount the telescoping lift arms, and lifts the frame off from the chassis, revealing the motors, the e-boost system, and a little black box.

“Why, what would this be? Is this an explosive to destroy us all?” Roland sternly inquires as he holds up the mysterious black box to Eleanor’s face.

“Your guess would be as good as mine. Wetzel didn’t let me in on everything. There could be much more about him that we don’t know.” Eleanor replies with a quiet tone.

Lighting Cat then gently takes the black box off of Roland’s hands.

“This isn’t quite heavy enough to be an explosive...but whatever is in this box, Wetzel didn’t want us to find out.” Lighting Cat acknowledges whilst opening up the box and pulling out a rolled-up piece of paper.

Everyone gathers behind Lighting Cat as he unrolls the paper, revealing a hand-drawn map of a land called Procyonia. It’s a medium-sized country with a coastline on the west, and a mountain range splitting the north and south. Towards the northeast, there’s a circled area labeled “Angelica”.

Far beyond the reaches of Earth and the Milky Way, Wetzel flies towards Procyonia. He lands his ship right lands in the courtyard of a castle, surrounded by a moat and a long driveway with potted plants on the sides out in front. As he steps out with a heavy sack in his right hand, a black classic race car with chrome stripes going down the left-side and covered rear wheels speeds out of the garage, spinning and weaving around the potted plants. The car then turns sideways as it goes across the bridge, slowing down until it stops just before Wetzel. The driver’s side door opens and a cute, black-haired raccoon lady wearing a frilly black dress, high heels, and a shiny tiara steps out of the car.

“Well, if it isn’t-”

“Yes, the name’s Angelica. You wanna talk?” Angelica sasses with a vibrant, bouncy tone whilst stepping towards Wetzel.

“Of course, esteemed Fernsby. You’re quite the skilled driver and could prove to be a valuable asset to my team...I’ve just lost one of my drivers. Let’s just say, she couldn’t comply to my ways.”

“Sure, I’d love to strike fear into the hearts of those who oppose me on the track! There’s just one tiny little detail you forgot...what’s in it for ME?” Angelica demands whilst pointing her finger right in Wetzel’s face.

“How does a fine payment of Fenrs-Cres sound?” Wetzel proposes whilst handing Angelica the bag he was holding.

“Hmm...generous offer, but I need a bit more than just money. Give me a real mission, someone who I can really crush the spirits of.” Angelica requests

“There’s a team called Dragoon Storm, and they’ve got some fellow Fernsbies working alongside a Bonneville.”

Angelica’s pupils shrink with rage as she clenches her fists and grits her teeth.

“No Fernsby ever allies themselves with a Bonneville...THE TRAITORS WILL SUFFER!” Angelica shouts into the skies above.

“Yes, that’s the spirit. Now go resize your car so it can fit inside my ship. Space is limited!” Wetzel instructs.

“I don’t need your measly ship” Angelica disregards with a hand on her hip and a foot stood up on its toes. She presses a button, the ground rumbles, and a piece of the castle lifts off, and moves in right above the two, casting a shadow that’s only broken up by the glow of the thrusters. A gigantic hatch opens up from beneath, Angelica takes a seat on the nose of Wetzel’s sleek ship, and it slowly rises towards the opening, along with her race car.

“You coming boss, or am I just gonna have to leave you behind?” Angelica taunts with a crossed leg.

Wetzel scowls at Angelica, before running right into the tractor beam, and he rises up towards the cargo hold of her ship. The ship is then

engulfed with bolts of energy, before vanishing with a crackle of thunder.

Back in the garage of Dragoon Storm, Eleanor oversees Brandy as she tinkers with the boost system on her rocket sedan.

“Marie me pal, you find anythin’ on Angelica yet?” Asks Brandy.

“Just like a lot of the suspects I try to search for, I always come up empty handed. Only traces of her out on the web are family trees of the Fernsby royalty...it says she’s like a princess...or queen maybe?”

Replies Marie.

“Say Eleanor, do you know anything about Angelica? You look quite regal to me; you probably know of someone associated with her...she is from your rival clan, and I am certain they’d be keeping tabs on...relationships.” Marie enquires.

Eleanor gets up from her stool and faces Marie

“Oh, me? I’m not of any nobility...my culture just loves opulent things! People make that mistake a lot.” She explains.

“So, you’re just a commoner back in your homeland...” Marie adds.

“Precisely...” Eleanor replies with a little bow. She then sits back down on the stool and continues to work on the boost system.

“...I’m not just a commoner in my homeland; I am an outcast. Ever since the last Fernsby-Bonneville conflict, my people have distanced themselves from car racing. They found it to be nothing but a hive for dishonor and evil. I say racing can be beautiful. There’s something special about being able to pilot a car at top speed, weaving around your opponents and around the curves of the track...” Adds Eleanor.

“Uh...If you’re all about honor...then why did you try to run me and my s-sister off the road?” Francine mutters.

“Forgive me, please. I was misguided by Wetzel.” Replies Eleanor.

Brandy and Eleanor work more on the rocket sedan, making sure the boost lines and cooling system are up to spec.

“Hey Eleanor, why not’s we go take this here car for a test drive?” Brandy proposes.

“I don’t see any harm in doing that...” Replies Eleanor.

As Brandy climbs into the passenger seat, she’s stopped by Lightning Cat.

“Brandy, I think it would be better if Francine went to go test the car with Eleanor. There’s still repair work to be done.”

Francine looks at Lightning Cat with wide, nervous eyes.

“Can...like PJ go instead? My leg is...umm...still healing!” Francine babbles.

“Francine, you should be good to walk on your right leg now. I say testing the car alongside Eleanor will help you get more comfortable with her. Just remember to put it back on when you head to sleep.” Says Lightning Cat.

Francine slowly unlatches the clamps of her cast, and shuffles on over to the passenger side of Eleanor’s rocket sedan. Eleanor then climbs into the driver’s seat and the two head out of the garage.

Down a road in the wooded hills, the darkness is broken up by the headlights of Eleanor’s car and the moonlight above.

“Where are we going?” Asks Francine.

“McCoy. I just want to get away from Wetzel.” Explains Eleanor.

As they head further down the road, Francine notices Tommy’s muscle car heading up the opposite lane. He slams on the brakes, and he follows Eleanor’s car, running along the opposite lane.

“S-stop the car, Eleanor!” Francine calls out, just before a big surge of energy bolts in the form of a cube materializing above the road. Thunder crackles, and Angelica’s spaceship is revealed, hovering above the road. Eleanor slams on the brakes, and the occupants exit the vehicle.

“What in tarnation? What’s a piece of our kin’s castle doin’ floatin’ right above the road?” Tommy exclaims as he runs closer to the ship. He looks to his left and sees Francine and Eleanor standing beside each other.

“Well, well, well, looks like you took my advice man...though I’d never expect you’s, a Bonneville lady to team up with my folk.” Tommy comments.

“Irony has struck me...my blood rivals show more kindness to me than my previous overlord. It wasn’t an easy decision to make...betray my clan...or be on the losing team.” Eleanor explains.

The stained-glass window on top opens up, and Angelica comes soaring out with a jet pack.

“Well, if it isn’t the traitors.” Angelica mocks as she’s landing.

“You must be Angelica...” says Eleanor.

Angelica grabs Eleanor by the shoulder and throws her down onto the pavement.

“Oh! What is your...problem?” Eleanor scolds with a groaning voice.

“Want to join Team Crown? This is your only chance! If you don’t, I’ll take you three out as well!”

Eleanor struggles and shakes as she picks herself up from the road. She storms right behind Angelica and knocks her down with a fierce gust of wind. She lies on the ground, struggling to get back up.

“People like you are why I left Team Crown.”

“Wait just a darn minute, that Bonneville lady is racing for Dragoon Storm now?” Tommy comments.

“Switching teams was a hard decision.” Eleanor explains with a heavy voice.

“Heh heh, I guess you took my advice. Lightning Cat is one respectable driver.” Replies Tommy.

Francine anxiously watches Angelica continue to squirm, fighting her way onto her own two feet.

“L-let’s get out of here! Angelica could get up at any moment now!” Cries Francine.

Eleanor takes a quick look at the still-squirming Angelica and turns her attention back to Francine, Brandy, and Tommy.

“Ok everyone, get in my car.” Eleanor orders.

“Me? I’m gettin’ in my own car!” Tommy proclaims before running towards his car.

Eleanor, Francine and Brandy head into Eleanor’s sedan and the engine fires up.

Angelica springs up onto her two feet, and leaps onto the hood of Eleanor’s car using her jet pack.

“You’re not getting away THAT easily!” Angelica manically taunts. Eleanor scowls at her, strafes the car to the right, sending Angelica stumbling off. Eleanor cranks the thruster control stick forwards, sending her car rocketing down the road.

In the lens of the rearview mirror, Angelica flies back through the stained-glass windows with her jetpack. Her spaceship fires up and begins to drift towards Eleanor and company. The bottom hatch opens up and the tractor beam activates. Francine bails from the car, running into the forests along the road.

“Come back, Francine! Yer gonna get caught!” Brandy exclaims.

Angelica’s ship veers off the road and over the woods. Francine becomes enveloped by the blue glow of the tractor beam and becomes weightless, rising towards the cargo hold of the ship.

“HELP ME!” Francine screams as she continues to rise further and further from the ground.

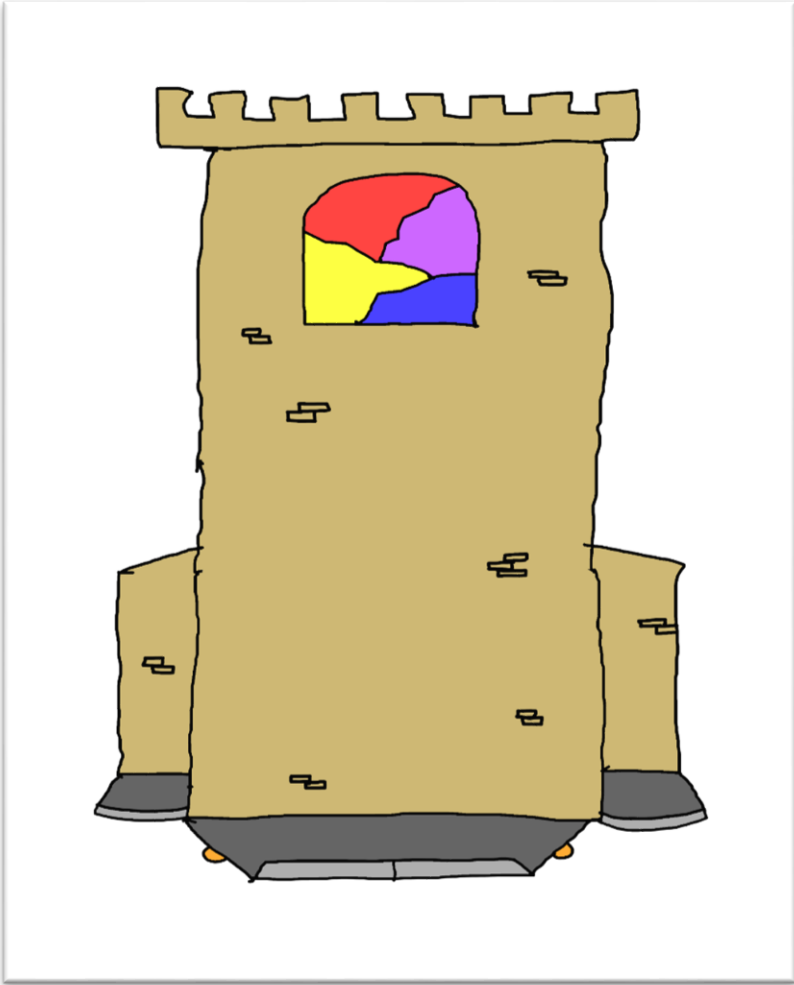
“Do something!” Eleanor demands.

“I...I can't! I wasn't prepared for my sis to be abducted!” Brandy replies with a panicked voice.

Francine enters the cargo hold and Angelica's ship vanishes with lighting and thunder.

Eleanor and Brandy silently stare at the starlit sky with bewilderment. They hurry back to the garage down the road...

Chapter 7: Drive to Survive



Above planet with a surface lit by the hazy glow of industrial lights and flares, Angelica's castle ship re-materializes.

Francine opens her eyes to find herself encased inside a transparent prison cube suspended above the cargo hold. Beneath her, she sees countless cars of all shapes and sizes, crates stacked up in the top left corner, and the hatches directly beneath her.

With a sudden shift to the wall on the right, Francine is startled. She shudders with fear as she's lowered to the ground and is greeted by Wetzel and Angelica.

"Well, if it isn't Daniella..." Angelica greets with a bubbly voice.

"Francine, I will let go of you under one condition: you compete in a challenge against me and Angelica. If you win, you are free to go." Wetzel explains with a charismatic tone.

"...But if you lose, WE'LL THROW YOU OUT INTO SPACE!" Angelica snaps.

Wetzel unlocks Francine's n box and shoves her towards a line of identical cars placed right on the hatch doors. They're limousines, with posh, somewhat boxy styling, and diamond-blue paint.

"Get in." Wetzel demands as he points to the car in the middle. Francine slowly climbs into the driver's seat of the car. Wetzel and Angelica get into their cars, the bottom hatch opens up, and the cars are dropped down into a dingy industrial facility by the tractor beam. Angelica pulls up right beside Francine and rolls down her window.

"Your challenge is to break of the 5 traffic cones we've laid out. But you have to do it within 20 minutes! When you break 5 honk the horn, OK? YOU GOT THAT CLEAR?" Angelica explains.

The area is dirty, rusty, dilapidated with facilities abandoned and still operating. Smokestacks billow out smoke and fire, ambient lights create a haze amongst a sunset backdrop, and the droning rumbles of the facilities create tension within the air.

Wetzel shakes up a bottle of Lazeena's volatile boost and hurls it high into the air.

BANG!

Angelica and Wetzel roll out of the starting area, both veering off in different ways. Francine floors it, peeling out and lurching around. She sways over to an abandoned warehouse, and her vision is hit by

the piercing glow from the reflective stripes on the traffic cone shining back. She recklessly crashes through it, scoring her first point.

Exiting the warehouse, she hits the brakes, and cranks the steering wheel to the left, uncontrollably veering towards a wall. The car feels heavy, cumbersome, almost lethargic to steer. She hits the rear corner of the car on a wall, sending creaking shockwaves through the suspension, shaking the car up.

Head-on through the windshield, Francine spots another traffic cone, but Wetzel suddenly pulls out from an intersection, then throwing another volatile boost at a long-dormant smokestack. The explosion from the boost sends the smokestack crumbling down to the road directly in front of Francine. She comes to a stop and slowly turns her car right around, fighting against the sheer size and weight of the vehicle.

“I’m not going to make it; I’m not going to make it!” Francine says to herself in a flustered, fearful voice.

She rumbles and swerves around the industrial labyrinth, searching for another traffic cone. In the rearview mirror, she spots another one. She kicks into reverse, and barrels towards it. Angelica boosts out from a corner, taking aim towards Francine.

SMASH!

Angelica collides with Francine, and she wrestles with the steering wheel, trying to direct her out-of-control car towards the traffic cone. It comes to a stop inches before the cone. Francine then bolts out of her seat screaming and kicks over the traffic cone.

She heads back into her car and picks back up the pace, going flat-out. Her car creaks and lurches, as the damage dealt by Angelica takes a toll on the performance.

Francine becomes vigilant in her hunt for more traffic cones as she darts her attention around, keeping a lookout for any incoming attacks. She sputters down an alleyway, smashing into another traffic cone. Pushing onwards, Francine becomes even more vigilant. The

air feels hotter and more tense as the clock ticks down. Her mind is in a frenzy, trying to think about anything but what'll happen to her if she fails.

Angelica rolls up on Francine, initiating in a pursuit. Francine throws her car around 180 degrees, in an attempt to shake Angelica off her tail. But Angelica follows suit, and she fires a boost, charging directly towards Francine. Francine nudges her car to the left, and Angelica scrapes by, kicking up sparks and shearing off paint.

From the corner of her eye, Francine spots another traffic cone. Angelica veers to the right, shoving Francine out of the direction of the traffic cone. Angelica whips out a bottle of volatile boost and takes aim at a tall structure. Francine falls back, and crashes into the back corner of Angelica's car, causing her to flinch and drop the boost.

Francine speeds past Angelica, and smashes into the distant traffic cone, but slams on the brakes, as she's approaching a wall fast. With the car still slowing down and the wall approaching fast, Francine bails out from her car, and it smashes into the wall.

The roar from the engine of Angelica's limousine comes rumbling towards Francine. She takes off one of her shoes, hurls it at the windshield of the car, and it bounces right off. She dives out of the way, scraping and scuffing herself up as she rolls on the ground all while Angelica comes to a halt. She exits the car with a fist in the air, as she charges at Francine.

Francine takes off her other shoe, throws it at Angelica, and limps on over to Angelica's car. Angelica tries to yank open the door, but Francine fires off a bottle of boost, breaking her grip.

Francine tirelessly prowls the area, searching for a traffic cone. Another explosion from volatile boost sends a wall crashing down, and Francine's frustration and anxiety up.

Just ahead of her, another traffic cone stands. Francine hammers down the last bottle of boost Angelica had in stock, and smashes into

the traffic cone. She blares on the horn, and Angelica's ship comes veering over to Francine.

Back on the planet Earth, the members of Dragoon Storm are discussing on how to handle the rescue operation

"Do any of you have suggestions on how we can track down Francine?" Lightning Cat asks.

"If only that Angelica's ship stuck around longer...then I could have gotten its tracking code." Says Marie.

"Well...we could file a report to the Intergalactic Search and Rescue. They'll send out a search party." Eleanor proposes.

"No, they're a bit too slow for Francine's situation. We need to get the Nebula Force for her." Says Roland.

"Yeah but...the Nebula Force usually only comes out for the really serious stuff...like if someone super important is kidnapped!" Pj comments.

"Francine IS important! She's responsible for some of the breakthrough in combustion engine fuels!" Roland argues.

"Who cares about how we find 'er? I just wanna get into Brandy's truck and smash up them Angelica and Wetzel in a demolition derby!" Miranda snarks.

"Hey! You can't smash up my tow truck! I need it for work!" Brandy says in protest.

"So, we can't agree upon a method of search? I would advise we wait a little." Lightning Cat suggests.

"Mr. Accardi, we can't wait! Francine could be gone forever if we're too slow!" Marie comments with concern.

"Marie, Wetzel is a man who likes to bid and scheme. He could come forward with a ransom notice. That can be our time to strike and rescue her." Lightning Cat explains.

A rapid knock at the door catches the attention of everyone.

“Does anyone want to answer the door?” Lightning Cat inquires.

“I’ll get it!” Brandy offers.

Upon opening the door, Brandy’s met with a trembling Francine. She steps on toward Brandy with open arms and gives her a big hug.

“It’s you!” Francine says softly.

Lightning Cat and Roland enter the scene of the reunion, with eyes wide open.

“Francine...you’re back?” Lightning Cat says with surprise.

“Are we really sure this is Francine? I mean...it probably is her. But this could also be a robot, or a hologram...” Roland warns

“Calm down Roland, this here is my sis! Only my sis would immediately hug me upon seein’ me again after goin’ away fo’ a while!”

“Where were you?” Asks Lightning Cat.

“Wetzel and Angelica captured me...and forced me to do this...challenge where I had to break 5 traffic cones within a time limit or else I’d be thrown out into space.” Francine explains.

“Hmm...noted.” Comments Lightning Cat.

The three head onto the garage floor, much to the surprise of everyone, all while Eleanor and Miranda shuffle suitcases and supplies in and out of the back door.

“Francine? You back already?” Pj exclaims.

“She’s back just in time...the race at Stone Valley Trail is soon.” Marie comments.

“Indeed. We’ll need to discuss who will be on the starting grid next.” Lightning Cat informs.

“Heh heh, we already know Francine ain’t gonna on the starting grid.” Pj teases.

Francine lets out a discomfited laugh with a crooked, uneased smile on her face.

“Whatever Francine went through...it really stressed her out.” Marie infers.

“I’m just happy to be alive...” Francine says with a heavy, relived tone.

“You look like you need some rest, Francine. Why don’t you get some rest...in fact, why don’t we all get some rest? We’ll get an early start tomorrow morning, so our minds can be prepared for the upcoming race.”

One by one, everyone begins to prepare for bed, with some getting to bed sooner than others.

Chapter 8: Rumble In The Valley



Through the windows of the Dragoon Storm carrier ship, Earth becomes nothing but a distant gleam.

“Man, maybe next time we’re visiting Earth, how ‘bout I show you guys my neck of the woods.” Says Pj.

“Y’mean ME and you’s neck of the wooods, old pal.” Comments Miranda.

“HEY! You know what I mean, Miranda.” Replies Pj.

“Where did you grow up, Mr. Jackson?” Marie asks with a gentle smile.

“Over in the Golden State of California...watching Nitro City Speedorz and the local racing events on TV was such a blast!” Replies Pj.

“You’re from California too, Miranda? Your accent doesn’t seem to indicate that...” States Marie.

“My maw and paw were from Texas...” Miranda explains.

“Hey Pj...’member our favorite character from Nitro City Speedorz?” Miranda asks whilst bumping Pj on the shoulder.

“Oh...how could we forget, it was Octavian Octane. He drove the coolest car ever, the Sharkinator! Too bad he never won any races.” Pj reminisces.

Pj and Miranda continue to converse happily with one another. Meanwhile, Francine walks down the aisle with a clipboard in hand and stops in front of Marie.

“Marie...Alfonso wanted me to take inquiry on who will participate in the next race...” Francine asks whilst fidgeting with the pen.

“I will ask Pj first...” Informs Marie.

“Hey Pj!” Marie calls out. But Pj ignores Marie, as he continues to talk with Miranda. She briefly observes them conversing, until she taps Pj on the shoulder.

“Ey, what is it?” Says Pj.

“Would you like to be on the starting grid of the next race?” Marie offers.

“Hmm...I don’t know man, I’ll have to drive slowly to avoid all those traps I keep hearing about. I don’t like to drive slowly, y’know.” Pj says in declination.

“Miranda, do you want to be on the starting grid today?” Marie inquires.

“I’m ready for another round! I can show those traps who’s boss!”
Miranda says eagerly.

“Marie, what about you? Do you want to participate in the Stone Valley Trail race?”

Marie closes her eyes takes a long, gentle breath in and exhales.

“I will participate. I’ve had to face danger in the past, and I should continue to.” Says Marie with her eyes still closed.

Francine goes around the ship, getting inquiry on many other drivers, only to be met with uncertainty and declination. Francine then heads into the cockpit of the ship, where Lightning Cat and Brandy are at the helm.

“So far, only Miranda and Marie want to participate in the Stone Valley Trail race.” Francine informs.

“Alright. I will join her on the starting grid then. Make sure she doesn’t do anything too brash.” Replies Lightning Cat.

“But that leaves one empty spot! Who...who’s going to take that spot, I-it’s not going to be me! We-We’ve went over that a...a lot!” Francine mutters.

“How about Pj takes that last spot?” Lightning Cat proposes.

“But he declined the offer.” Francine insists

Francine steps over to Brandy and calls out her name.

“Brandy, Brandy!”

“What is it, sis? Little busy right now so you gotta make it a jiffy, ok?”
Says Brandy.

“Can...you...”

“Can I what?”

“Can you join the lineup for the race today?” Requests Francine.

“Sorry sis...but I wanna take a break. Gotta fix some cars, maybe give some pointers while y’all are on the track...why dontcha tell good old Preston Jackson to get his behind into his car? He sure likes to do things with his pal Marie, y’know.” Brandy suggests.

“But he...” Francine refutes

“Just talk to him!” Demands Brandy.

Francine shuffles on out of the cockpit and over to Pj.

“What’s shakin?” Says Pj.

“Can you...please be on the...starting grid today? There’s one last spot to fill...” Francine anxiously requests.

“Haven’t I told you that I don’t want to?” Reminds Pj.

“But you’ll be with Marie! You like her, don’t you?” Debates Francine.

“I can chat with her over the communication system!” PJ argues.

Marie turns her attention to Pj and grabs his hand.

“Remember the night we first met? I know you didn’t exactly want to do all that stuff to get your car back, but you did and succeeded. Is this really any different?” Says Marie.

Pj takes a deep breath in and sighs.

“Alright, I’ll do it.” He says in agreement. Francine then signs Pj’s name onto the starting grid lineup. The ship flies for a little longer before landing on the planet of lime green sand dunes.

Everyone steps out and gets into a rhythm of resizing cars and tuning them up.

Brandy quickly installs the off-road tires, suspension, and light bar onto Miranda’s muscle truck and Eleanor is swiftly yet delicately changing the oil and other fluids in Lightning Cat’s dune buggy.

Pj jumps into the driver's seat of his classic taxi, fitted with a rugged suspension and big, knobby tires. The paint is a bit scratched and rusted, but still very bright and bold.

"You ready for this?" Marie says while turning her head to Pj.

"What's the worst that could happen?" Comments Pj.

"Don't think about it too much, OK?" Replies Marie.

Pj, Marie, Lightning Cat, and Miranda travel over to the starting grid of Stone Valley Trail.

The sun is shining brightly over the road and coarse oceans of green sand, broken up by canyons and rock formations of the same color. A haze of green dust blows across the road all while the crowd is surging with energy, anticipating an exciting race soon to come.

"Alright everyone, give it your all! Wetzel's victory last race gave Team Crown a big boost in score. If we are not careful, Team Crown could surpass us." Advises Lightning Cat via the communication system.

The starting lights begin to count down. Engines rev and whirr, sending vibrations through the air. Pj's heart begins to beat faster and harder, as anticipation fills his body. The starting lights hit the bottom, bursting into a green beacon, sending everyone rumbling away from the starting grid, and the crowd into a frenzy of cheers.

The road transitions from a paved straightway, to a winding, unpaved trail. As the trail narrows, the racers bump, scrape, and nudge each other, trying to make their way to the front. In the driver's seat of Wetzel's luxury SUV, he whips out a device with an antenna and buttons on it. Upon pressing the topmost button, an explosion from a cliff above shakes the ground lightly.

The many racers swerve and lunge to avoid the rockfall. A dune buggy further ahead of the pack gets struck on the engine by a falling rock, causing the driver to lose control, and everyone else swerving and dodging the vehicle along with the falling rocks.

Pj frustratedly brakes and accelerates on and off, jostling the steering wheel, all while being shaken around by the rough road with gritted teeth.

“Pj, look out behind you!” Eleanor warns from the command center.

Through a split-second peek at the rearview mirror, Pj spots a black, white, and chrome classic muscle car comes barreling towards Pj with boost. With a reflex like lightning, Pj twitches the steering wheel to the right, barley avoiding Angelica’s attack.

“I’m not going to be trading paint this time!” Pj shouts out.

Angelica rolls forward, and right next to Miranda’s big orange sports truck. Angelica veers left, slamming right into Miranda’s vehicle.

“Ey! What you tryin’ ta do to me, yaaah feisty little whippersnapper?” Miranda calls out. She holds tight to the steering wheel, leans it to the left slightly, and then jerks it hard to the right, bashing into the side of Angelica’s muscle car, sending it swerving, and other cars veering out of its way.

Pj continues to navigate his way further up the rough terrain and into a pitch-black cave only lit by the headlights and roof lights of all the cars. There, he notices the gleam of Marie’s rally car close in the distance.

“Careful everyone, we’re in the pitch-black now. Stay extra vigilant, you don’t know what could be coming.” Says Lighting Cat.

“Alright...” says Pj as he gently lets off the gas a little.

POP!

A roadster fitted onto a 6x6 chassis hits a hidden spike strip, and chunks of tire fly across the track, landing on the road and other vehicles. A big chunk of tire lands right on Marie’s windshield. She takes one hand off the steering wheel, moves it to the right, and the tire chunk moves along with it and off the windshield.

Soon after, the light at the end of the cave approaches. The lights on top switch off as the surroundings shift from pitch black to green. To the right of the path, there is a canyon overlooking a golden river. To the left is a short canyon wall and off in the distance lie spires reaching off into the skies above.

Bumping and scratching its way through the pack, comes a scrapped-together mini semi-truck driven by the one and only Skrimbo. He rides right up beside Marie.

“Skrimbo says you will lose this race! Skrimbo is going to blow this place sky high!” He taunts whilst holding a remote detonator.

Marie looks to the side, seeing Skrimbo waving the detonator in the air. She sets her sights straight and holds out her hand to the right once more, pulling it back, slowly jostling the detonator from Skrimbo’s grasp. It flies out of his hand and onto the road, in which it’s crushed under the weight of a passing vehicle.

“Skrimbo...Skrimbo!” Wetzal shouts out from Team Crown’s communication system.

“Skrimbo answering! Skrimbo say, what do you want from me?” Babbles Skrimbo.

“It’s time for you to set off the REAL detonator.” Wetzal demands.

“Skrimbo don’t remember where the real detonator went.”

“Gruugh...you fool! The detonator button is on your center console!” Wetzal says with a scolding tone.

“Me Skrimbo still not know where button for detonation is! Skrimbo will just continue racing and smash into whoever he doesn’t like.” Skrimbo sasses back.

“GAAAAH! IT’S THE BIG RED BUTTON!” Screams Wetzal.

“Oh, I see big red detonator button now!” Skrimbo says whilst pressing down the button slowly.

BANG!

An explosion from the cliff top sends rocks rumbling onto the road, blocking the path. A boulder bumps Wetzel on the side, knocking off a wheel, and sending him spinning out, stopping just before the edge.

“GRRRAH!” He screams out while sitting idle, looking at the empty road in front of him. Wetzel fires a recovery winch; it sticks to the canyon wall in front and pulls his luxury SUV away from the cliff’s edge. On the other side of the rockfall, Marie is hard at work, trying to move all the boulders from off the road using her telekinetic powers. She struggles as she tries to focus deeply, moving the heavy rocks off of the road and on top of the canyon wall.

She breathes heavily and restlessly. Her legs tremble and her arm tires out. Pj sees the exhausted Marie from up ahead. He shuffles through the storage compartment of his car and pulls out the first aid kit. He rushes through the pack of idle cars and up to Marie.

Pj then opens up the first aid kit and pulls out a metal can with a wide cone on the top and a keylike seal on the side. Marie takes it off his hands, cracks off the seal, and slowly inhales the revitalizing medicine within. Her body feels relaxed and cooled. Her mind becomes clear and at ease.

Marie grabs Pj by the shoulder to pick herself up.

“Love ya, pal.” Marie says while hugging Pj warmly.

Marie turns back to the pile of boulders. She takes a deep breath in, braces herself, and raises up her arms with her palms pointed to the sky. Marie breathes hard, yet steady as she lifts the remaining boulders off the road, all at once. As the boulders are placed atop the canyon wall, Pj sprints back to his car, and the racers continue the race, one by one.

“Good work, Marie.” Lightning Cat praises from over the communication system as Marie picks up speed.

“Don’t forget about good old Preston Jackson! He dun saved Marie!” Adds Brandy.

Side by side, Wetzel and Lightning Cat race down the track. With every lunge and charge from Wetzel, Lightning Cat dodges with great reflexes and precision. A brake check to the front causes Lightning Cat to make a strategic fallback, where he maintains a distant position in second.

Back with Miranda, she's busy battling it out with Lazeena who's in her armored SUV as usual. She frustratedly avoids Lazeena's clumsy attacks, getting her truck scraped and dented in the process, all while being guided by Brandy and Roland.

“Keep yer foot steady, hands steadier, and keep them eyeballs focused more on the road ahead so ye don't crash intah anyone's rear ends!” Brandy instructs.

“Grugh! Drivin...drivin clean is haaard! I just wanna smash Lazeena's car!” Pleads Miranda.

“Easy now. Focus on an opening, and then is the time to fire off some boost.” Roland advises.

Miranda's mind is flustered. Her palms are tense and sweaty as sparks fly and metal screeches. She clumsily dodges and bumps into an opponent vehicle that gets its tires blown out by spike strips. She hits the boost, and scrapes between two racers, putting her closer to the lead.

“You...well you found an opening. But you should have waited for the opening to widen so you don't scrape up your vehicle!” Comments Roland.

“Aw come on man, my truck's still rollin! I good!” Replies Miranda.

Meanwhile, Pj and Marie ride in tandem with one another, watching each other's backs. In the lens of his rearview mirror, Pj spots Skrimbo's mini semi charging towards Marie.

“Heads up, Marie! Skrimbo's comin' at ya!” Pj warns.

Skrimbo fires off some boost, Marie veers to the side, Skrimbo slams on the brakes, only for his vehicle to flip over.

“Grrrr! Skrimbo won’t let stupid Dragoon Storm win so easily!” Skrimbo screeches out while pressing the big red button on his center console. A box in the bed of his truck opens up, and a drone flies out. It’s got a couple of sharp, pointed forks on the front. Team Crown’s drone follows behind Marie and Pj, as they cruise down the track, weaving around other racers and braking before falling rocks. As Pj navigates his vehicle over a rock pile, the drone comes closer and closer with the forks pointed towards the rear tires for Pj’s truck.

“You better get off those rocks Pj, a drone is coming to pop your tires!” Marie warns.

Pj takes a look back and sees that the drone is right on his tail. He lurches off the pile of rocks, getting jostled and shaken as he makes his quick escape. Pj fires his last bottle of boost and evades the drone’s pursuit.

Meanwhile with Angelica, she stalks Lightning Cat, watching his every move as he trails behind Wetzel. The three roll through a volley of dunes, fighting for first place. Angelica charges at Lightning Cat, crashing into him, and spinning him out. But during the spin cycle, Lightning Cat spins and twists the steering wheel, straightening up his car, and pulling himself back into the race.

Angelica blares the horn of her car with rage as Lightning Cat skids back onto the road with clouds of dust being kicked up. She charges at him once more, but Lightning Cat quickly activates a bottle of boost, leaving Angelica in the dust and overtaking Wetzel.

Wetzel picks up his controller and presses the button. A colossal cloud of dust and smoke erupts from a sand dune, making the track ahead nothing but an almost opaque swamp-green cloud. Lightning Cat keeps a very close eye on what little road he can see ahead of him and his rearview mirror.

“Be warned, Wetzel has deployed a smokescreen up ahead.” Says Lightning Cat in a very direct voice.

“Ah man, how could I not know about the smokescreen? Francine’s getting really anxious about it.” Pj mentions.

“B-but you could crash! Our team could lose the race!” Muttered Francine.

“Don’t worry about me. Focus on directing your teammates.” Lightning Cat says to Francine.

Wetzel rolls up on Lightning Cat and shunts him on the side, pushing him towards the edge of the road. Lightning Cat falls back once more and shoots ahead with his last bottle of boost. The front grille on Angelica’s car opens up, and a pair of rods emerge from the front, surging with energy.

The rods expel a ball of energy, hitting the rear of Lightning Cat’s buggy, crumpling the engine, and sending it tumbling across the sand. Once his buggy thuds back onto four wheels, he gets out of it and takes a look around, assessing the damage.

“This vehicle won’t be running with the engine in that condition...” Lightning Cat says as he observes the mangled engine block of his dune buggy.

“You will all have to go on without me. My car has been incapacitated by Angelica’s attack.” Lightning Cat announces over the communication system.

“No....” Says Pj.

“How did Angelica attack you?” Marie inquires.

“She seemed to have used some sort of weapon...offense seems to be one of the only options in fighting her now. Just don’t hit her too hard, you don’t want to take your own car out in the process, ok?” Lightning Cat explains.

“I’m coming for you, Angelica!” Miranda says with glee.

As the finish line dawns in the far distance Pj, Marie, and Miranda all fast approach Wetzel and Angelica. They all race in the bottom of a wide canyon, with the sunlight gleaming off the walls.

Miranda cruises alongside Angelica. She toots out a little jingle on the horn to taunt Angelica. With a twist of the steering wheel, Miranda smashes into the side of Angelica, only for her to bounce back and retaliate, making Miranda's truck skid and swing around briefly.

“W-whatever you do, don't get in front of Angelica! S-she'll shoot you!” Francine frantically warns.

Miranda taps the brakes, falls back, swings over behind Angelica, and slams right into the back of her car and veers to the right. Angelica goes spinning out, and off the road, only being stopped by hitting the canyon wall.

Wetzel then triggers another rockfall, blocking the road ahead. Miranda begins to climb over the rocks with her truck, with Wetzel riding right up to her. Miranda and Wetzel nudge and bump each other, all while Marie quickly moves rocks off the road, one by one, making sure to take a short breath in periodically. As part of the road is cleared, Pj inches further and further ahead.

He looks in the sideview mirror and sees a black, chrome-stripped muscle car barreling towards him with a pair of energy-laced rods protruding from the grille.

Marie senses the approaching danger, turns around on a dime, and holds out her hand, nudging the steering wheel of Angelica's car to the right as it fires off some bolts of energy, breaking some boulders and the sideview mirrors of Pj's truck.

The crazed royal charges up the rods once again as she comes closer and closer to Marie. She gets back into her rally car and spins her car around with a U-turn. Angelica follows suit, whipping her car around, keeping the energy rods aimed at Marie. Ms. Moon then does another U-turn and speeds away, carefully climbing her car over the fallen boulders that she wasn't able to clear from her path. Meanwhile,

Angelica clumsily readjusts her car, swaying and spinning out towards the boulders, only to stop inches away from them.

Meanwhile, Miranda makes her way towards the finish line, with Wetzel following close behind. He fires the winch at Miranda's rear tires, ensnaring them and slowing down the vehicle. In the sight of the rearview mirror, Angelica comes towards Miranda, ready to attack.

Our fellow driver of an orange pickup truck sways to the right, causing Wetzel's SUV to move along with it, as Angelica fires off a shot of energy. It hits Wetzel's car, snapping it from the cables and sending it out of control.

Miranda barrels towards the finish line, with a look of grit and determination in her eyes. But then, an impact to the rear corner of her truck jars her, sending the vehicle screeching to a halt just before the finish line. Miranda puts the pedal to the metal, the front wheels of her truck spin and struggle as they very slowly drag the dead weight closer and closer to the finish.

Angelica races across the finish, claiming a 1st place victory. As Miranda's wheels continue to spin, she spots Wetzel sputtering back into the heat. She nudges her truck to the right, in an attempt to block Wetzel. He bumps Miranda, making her slide across the finish line in second place.

Chapter 9: Reprieve From The Heat

In Dragoon Storm's garage at Stone Valley Trail, Lightning Cat stands tall with his shoulders up and hands behind his back.

"Our previous race was quite challenging, wasn't it?" He addresses.

"It took a strain on my telekinesis..." Marie says with a heavy, exhausted tone and a hand on her forehead.

"I thought Marie was going to pass out back there!" Pj comments.

"I just glad I got second place! Thaaaat Wetzel thought he was hot stuff, but I done bloocked him!" Miranda brags.

"You used offensive maneuvers effectively and only when needed. Good job." Lightning Cat compliments with his head turned to Miranda.

"We are almost neck and neck with Team Crown now with our scores. If we want to win Star Summit, we have to win the final race. But we need to be in the state of mind for winning..." says Lightning Cat with a firm tone.

"And what do you propose we do?" Roland argues.

"I say we head to Aquarius early so that we can do some sightseeing, give ourselves a vacation. Let our minds think about something other than racing." Replies Lightning Cat.

Once again, Dragoon Storm's carrier ship is loaded up, and they head off to the planet Aquarius.

As the flight progresses, Eleanor folds out a personal table and places her shrunken rocket sedan on it along with a small toolbox. She gently opens the hood of her car, picks some tools from her toolbox, and carefully works at her car, making every movement slow and delicate.

Brandy looks over from Eleanor's shoulder and watches her work on her miniaturized car.

"Hey Ms. Eleanor Bonneville, whatcha doin to yer car right there?"
Asks Brandy

"I am doing the usual things to my car, Brandy. That being tuning it up in preparation for the final race." Replies Eleanor.

"Have you ever tried tinkerin' with the engine of yer car? That might help make the boost system more efficient."

"Oh...I haven't thought of that. However, it would be more ideal to work on the engine if my car were at full-size and not shrunken for transport." Says Eleanor.

Eleanor is then slightly startled by a tapping sensation on her shoulder.

"Ey Ms. Bonneville, what are you in the mood for doing on Aquarius?" Asks Pj.

"Oh, I am most uncertain about what activities I'll partake of. Is Aquarius an aquatic planet by any chance?" Eleanor inquires.

"Why yes it is, Eleanor. We'll talk about activities once we arrive there." Says Marie.

"If they offer fishing there, I'd be glad to participate in that!" Eleanor says with a soft, joyous tone.

“Fishin? You wanna go fishin’, girl? I never thought you’d ever want to go fishing. Ya kinda strike me as some fella who’s wanna go to the swimmin’ pool or somethin...” says Brandy.

“More specifically, she’d be sitting out by her private swimming hole, given that she’s a bit highfalutin...” Francine adds.

“Woah sis, you’s being a bit catty-wompus right thare!”

“I-I’m sorry Brandy!” Francine apologizes.

“Don’t get yer britches all in a knot, sis! I was just teasin’ yeh!” Replies Brandy.

“You two don’t quite seem to fully recognize that I’m just a commoner. Everything in my homeland may be gilded, but there’s still rich and poor. I didn’t have the privilege of a personal swimming pool while on vacation. It was quite the miracle that I could afford the thrusters for my car...” says Eleanor

“...shall I change into something that’s a bit more...relatable to you two? I do love this dress, but it seems to not be reflective of my true self amongst other cultures.” Eleanor suggests.

She heads over to the carrier’s storage room, grabs an outfit from her suitcase, and heads into the restroom to change. She emerges from the restroom dressed up in a smooth, stylish black skirt and white top.

“How do you like this?” Eleanor says whilst crossing her legs.

“Welp, that outfit is pretty much what Francine wears!” Says Brandy.

A relived sigh with a soft smile comes out of Eleanor upon hearing Brandy’s comment.

The carrier continues to fly through space. Through another portal it goes, electrifying the air around, and seemingly slowing down time. Emerging through the other end, it approaches a planet with great oceans, and islands dotted throughout.

As it lands, a city comes into sight. It's got geodesic spheres, large plant life that sprawls all throughout the land, pillared buildings carved from a glossy stone, and many docks for passengers and cargo. Coming closer to the ground, stylish watercraft ride around the streams and waterways like traffic on the road. The ship then lands on a large landing dock, overseeing a race track built over the endless ocean, infinitely stretching and twisting into the horizon.

Down an elevator with their things in hand, the drivers of Dragoon Storm quickly put their luggage and shrunken vehicles into their garage. Brandy pulls out Francine's van from her suitcase and enlarges it.

"Hey sis, mind if I borrow yer van righty quick? I'm gonna go down yonder to see if they got any them hardware stores so I can get some parts and materials to finish fixin' up yer hot rod, ya hear?" Says Brandy.

Eleanor steps over to the driver's side window of Francine's van.

"Brandy...you can borrow my van If you want..." Proposes Eleanor.

"Naaaw, I good! Besides, this van can really pull some heavy loads with them electric motors makin' all dat torque!" Brandy kindly declines. With the whirr of the electric motors, Brandy glides out of the garage and into the Aquarian city of Pescadopilis.

"Francine!" Eleanor calls out. Francine then comes scurrying to Eleanor soon after.

"W-what do you want Eleanor?"

"Would you like to go...fishing with me?" Asks Eleanor.

"I. I. I-mean sure?" Francine replies nervously.

"Well, then let's go!" Eleanor says whilst putting her muscle car down on the ground, just before enlarging it back to full size.

As Eleanor and Francine walk the streets of Pescadopilis, they pass by the large vinelike foliage jutting from out of the sea. Highly

customized watercraft racing each other on the streams below and between the buildings add to the majesty of the glistening sunlight across the sea.

While awaiting the go at an intersection, Francine spots Pj and Marie sitting together at a table on atop a restaurant patio. She rolls down her window and leans out of the car.

“What are you doing, Pj?” Francine shouts out.

“Me? I’m just having some quality time with Marie.” Pj hastily explains.

The traffic signal then gives the go, Eleanor rolls out, and Francine climbs back in.

“How long have Pj and Marie known each other?” Eleanor inquires to Francine.

“Oh, a few months now...I thought it’d be a little longer ‘til they would start dating.” Replies Francine.

The two then park at a big building with arches big and long, protruding outwards diagonally. The building is colored a nice ocean blue with asymmetrical windows shaped like puddles of water. Inside, there’s a big round front desk, and a chandelier made to look like bubbles.

Manning the desk, is a goldfish-like man. His orange skin is all shiny and scaly, he’s got fins on his head, back, and limbs, and his head is pointed, with the eyes on the sides.

“Greetings, do you know where we can participate in some...fishing?”

The goldfish man stares at Eleanor and Brandy with not a word coming out of his mouth.

“Sorry, maybe you didn’t hear me well but...do you know of any place where we can participate in fishing activities?”

The goldfish man simply babbles about in an indiscernible language that has a very bouncy rhythm to it.

“Oh dear, how could I forget! They speak a different language here!” Says Eleanor.

“I’m just as lost as you...the only other languages I know other than English and Zephurian is Japanese...and only a little.” Comments Francine.

A sea otter lady then comes rushing into the desk, stopping right in front of Francine and Eleanor.

“Sorry about that, I-I got a little carried away during my meal break...Anyways, how can I help you?” The sea otter lady says in apology.

“Do you know where we can participate in some fishing activities?” Eleanor inquires.

“Well, fishing for fish is something you won’t really find in this area...but you can fish for metal! You never know what you might find.” Replies the sea otter lady.

“That sounds like...something Brandy would be really interested in.” Comments Francine.

Eleanor pauses for a moment, taking a look around.

“Where can said metal fishing places be found?” She asks.

“Oh, just rent a magnetic fishing rod and cast it into an open body of water! Just make sure you’re on public property!” The sea otter lady explains.

After renting a pair of magnet fishing rods, Eleanor and Brandy drive out to a nearby dock and cast their lines. As the two move their lines around, searching for any loose objects stuck on the ocean floor, the sounds of water splashing on the supports of the dock create soothing ripples through the air.

Francine's line jerks downwards, and she reels the line up with all her struggling might. A circular object about the size of a dinner plate, all tarnished and rusted rises up from out of the water. Eleanor lends a hand, aiding Francine in moving the heavy object from over the water, to the dock.

"What is it?" Francine inquires whilst Eleanor carefully examines the circular object, seeing traces of a sword, crown, and flower on one side.

"This is a Bonneville crest!" Says Eleanor in realization.

"Is that what you wear...on your head?" Francine asks with a discomforted, puzzled tone and expression.

"No...This crest would have been placed on the front of a car. Looking at the condition of this crest, it has likely been sitting on the ocean floor for many years." Eleanor elaborates.

"How would it have gotten there?" Francine inquires

"Well, that may have been the actions of an overzealous member of the Fernsby clan...they tore it off, vandalized it, and threw it into the water. I don't know who else would just...remove a Bonneville crest...the only other thing it could have been was a wreck." Replies Eleanor.

Eleanor picks her magnetic fishing rod back up and sifts it through the water. The rod bends downwards, and Eleanor reels the line in, pulling a small scrap of metal with a tube on top out of the water. The two continue to fish for objects, scooping up all kinds of doodads and oddities, from scraps of metal to old relics.

Francine puts her fishing rod down and lets out an exhausted sigh.

"We found a lot of things today!" She exclaims while looking at the pile of finds. They then load up the front and rear storage compartments of Eleanor's electric muscle car, and they head on back to the garage.

Upon arrival to the garage, they see Brandy working on Francine's long-lost car.

"Brandy, we went magnet fishing and got some scrap metal that may prove to be useful to you." Says Eleanor while Francine unloads the metal from her vehicle, placing it beside the pile of fresh materials and car parts for repairs.

Brandy sifts through the pile and pulls out a rusty valve.

"This is just what I needed!" She exclaims with the valve raised high in the air. Brandy puts the valve into a jar filled with a silver, sandy substance and shakes the jar vigorously. The valve comes out of the jar with the rust gone and bare metal exposed. Brandy then installs it in Francine's rusty old hot rod.

"Well sis, I think yer old car is back in workin' order! Wanna...take it for a test spin?" Says Brandy.

"Let's hope that we don't get accosted by anyone for once..." says Francine.

As the garage door rises, Wetzel and Angelica are revealed, standing front and center. He grabs Francine by the wrist, and she screams.

"I'm not done with you." Says Wetzel.

"Please, I'll stop racing! I'll do anything to get you to stop!" Francine pleads.

"What is going on in here?" Lightning Cat says with a direct tone whilst walking in. He quickly spots Wetzel and Angelica restraining Francine.

"Unhand her this instant." Lightning Cat orders with a stern, firm tone.

Angelica leaps at Lightning Cat, firing a dropkick, only for him to dodge and Angelica to come crashing and sprawling onto the garage floor. She picks herself back up, running towards Lightning Cat again.

"STOP! We're just here to bargain!" Wetzel orders.

“B-but that evil man deserved it!” Angelica pleads.

“What is your bidding?” Lightning Cat asks Wetzel.

“I’d like to play a...little game with you. You bet all of your cars, and I bet one of my own. Whoever wins takes all...”

“...and what happens if I decline your twisted game?” Lightning Cat inquires.

“THEN WE’LL BURN DOWN THAT FRANCINE’S LAB AND TAKE ALL YOUR CARS ANYWAYS!” Angelica snaps.

“What do you say to our offer, sir?” Wetzel says smugly.

Lightning Cat pauses, staring down at Wetzel with his brow narrowed.

“You leave me with no other choice...I’ll accept.” He says in reply.

Wetzel lets go of Francine, and he scurries out with Angelica. Skrimbo follows behind, skidding and spinning out in a golf cart, he bails and runs away just before it goes over a barrier and falls into the ocean.

“What are we going to do now?” Francine sputters.

Lightning Cat puts his hand on Francine’s shoulder, gets on one knee, and faces Francine.

“No matter if we win or lose, we will catch Wetzel by surprise.” Lightning Cat says in assurance.

“I-I don’t understand!” Francine says with confusion.

“We will devise a way to arrest him when he has his guard down...” Lightning Cat clarifies gently.

“...say, where’s Marie? I’d like to discuss the plan to catch Wetzel and Angelica with her.” Lightning Cat asks to everyone in the room.

“She’s on...a date with Pj.” Eleanor explains.

“Ha! I knew them’s had feelins’ for each other! They’s seemed like a perfect match fo’ one another since the day they first crossed paths!” Says Brandy.

“Hey sis, how about we take that old hot rod of yers for a test drive around the track and git yerself accustomed to the layout tomorrer’s? It’ll help ya win!” Brandy suggests.

“It’s easy to race on a track with no opponents...w-when the race rolls around, I’ll just be sent careening off the road by Wetzl and fail our entire team...I can’t do this!” Francine says with her head down and a very defeated tone.

“Francine!” Eleanor calls out.

“W-what?” Francine mutters in response.

“If Wetzl or Angelica attack, I will defend. You just focus on drifting gracefully across the track.” Says Eleanor.

“Oh...ok” Francine replies softly.

Chapter 10: Calm Before the Storm

The next day arises on the planet of Aquarius.

Beneath the ocean's surface lies a long tunnel, twisting and snaking through the water. Through the asymmetrical windows of the tunnel, a natural wonder of brightly colored coral twisting towards the surface, lush plant life, and sea creatures swimming and crawling high and low.

Francine cruises down it in her hot rod, with the array of colors from the outside bouncing off the windshield.

"There's a very sharp turn coming up. Make sure to hit the brakes!" Eleanor alerts.

Francine hammers down on the brakes, sending her car screaming to a complete standstill.

"You're quite anxious still...just hit the gas and carry on. This is only practice." Comments Eleanor.

Rolling out of the coral reef and slightly above the ocean's surface, the water shines like diamonds studded onto a fine fold of fabric. Waves crash against the walls of the track, spraying water across the road, making it slick. Francine accidentally nudges her steering wheel, causing her to hydroplane and spin out across the soaked section of track. Slipping back into the flow of the course, Francine carries on with her foot light on the gas.

“What are you doing?” Eleanor inquires.

“Taking...it easy.” Francine explains.

“You’re not going to be able to win a race going slow. Pick up the pace, please.” Eleanor requests.

“I-I just want to drive around the course without screwing up! L-let me drive at my own leisure for now!” Replies Francine.

“...whatever calms you down” says Eleanor.

Francine cruises around the course, carefully gliding through the wet and dry. Heading into an underwater tunnel, she takes a look out the windows, gazing at an underwater temple on the other side. It’s carved out of a gray, polished stone with beautiful, wavy details. Moss covers the stone in various areas. Francine watches the aquatic life swim around the temple, charming her, and soothing her worrisome heart.

Francine then lays her foot down on the gas, picking up momentum, and whooshing out of the underwater tunnel. She finishes her lap around the course, hitting the curves with more precision and confidence than before.

“Do you now feel ready for the race happening tomorrow?” Eleanor asks.

“Can...you let me do some more laps?” Francine requests.

“Just two more. You do not want to wear yourself out.” Replies Eleanor.

Francine continues to zip around the course, navigating the twists and turns, with a little spinout due to an unforeseen slick road. Anxiously picking herself back up, she continues to finish up her laps going a little slower than before. Afterwards, she heads back into the garage for a meeting.

In the garage of Dragoon Storm, everyone gathers around Lightning Cat and Marie.

“I will not be available to guide you during this final race. Marie and I will be waiting in the vicinity of the winner’s circle for when Wetzel and Angelica step foot in it. When that moment comes, we will jump in and arrest them for their crimes.” Lightning Cat explains with his hand on Marie’s shoulder.

“But what about Lazeena? She isn’t innocent, she brewed the volatile boost.” Eleanor Inquires.

“Yes, yes she did. But Wetzel and Angelica are the biggest and most persistent offenders. I’m certain you’d want to see your former boss and his cohort be brought to justice, don’t you?” Replies Lighting Cat.

“Well, I would like to see them brought to justice knowing what he did to me...and Francine especially.” Says Eleanor.

Brandy’s eyes perk up and her sights turn to Eleanor upon hearing her statement.

“Say, you’s a real friend to us now, showin’ some respect to my dear old sis!” Says Brandy.

“I’ll say it again, my enemies...well former enemies are more respectful to me than my old boss or the people of my homeland.” Replies Eleanor.

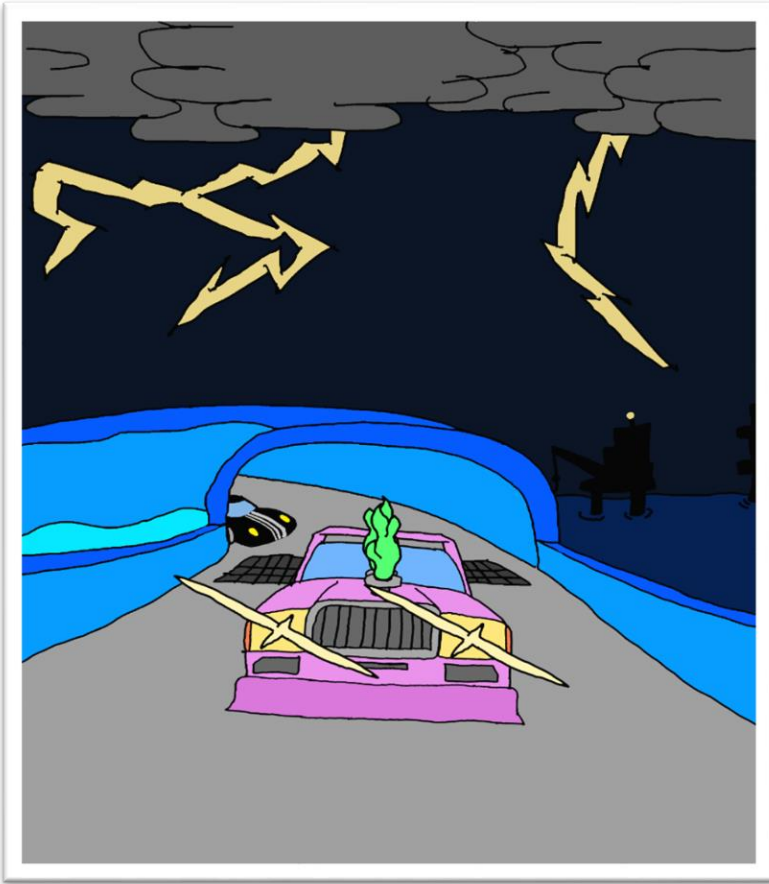
“But...what happens if the arrest fails?” Francine says with concern.

“Then we’ll just call the Nebula Force to deal with them!” Roland says with a prideful tone and posture.

The team then proceeds to discuss the race course, talking about how to tackle things like overtakes and how to make defensive maneuvers for whenever Team Crown is on the attack. After not too long, the discussion ends and everyone heads out into the city of Pescadopilis.

“Don’t stay out too late! You’ll all want to rest up for the big race tomorrow!” Lighting Cat advises as everyone prepares to leave.

Chapter 11: Firestorm



Dark skies loom over the course, thunder rumbles, and a light drizzle begins to trickle down. The audience is loud and vibrant with anticipation, raring to see the final showdown of all the racers in Star Summit.

Within the walls of Dragoon Storm’s garage, Pj gives a quick wax job to his faithful vehicle, the Steel Bruiser. Marie and Lighting Cat emerge from their rooms and onto the garage floor, dressed up in sleek outfits of black, blue, and silver.

Marie approaches Pj and gives him a nice tap on the shoulder.

“Pj...Mr. Jackson!” She calls out to grab his attention. Pj turns around to see Marie standing in front of him with arms crossed, and a cool, confident look on her face. She holds onto Pj’s hand and looks into his eyes with a soft smile.

“Good luck out there!” She wishes to him whilst delivering a gentle hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Pj then climbs into the cockpit of the Steel Bruiser

“I don’t need luck; I just need you.” he says before firing up the engine.

It rolls out of the garage, followed by Eleanor in her rocket sedan, Roland in a classic sports car, and Francine in her Ghareka Quabato, fully repaired, and sporting a new paint job. One that starts with the flames on an orange backdrop of old, before seamlessly fading into the signature blue hazard stripes on black. In a line, they drive off to the starting grid, with the drizzle becoming a downpour. Lightning flashes and thunder rumbles through the air, amplifying the revs of the engines and the noise of the crowd. The rain soaks the track and shrouds the course in a veil of mist.

All feels silent when the countdown lights burst aglow. Time feels slower and slower with every tick towards the bottom. The lights hit the bottom, and everyone screeches out of the starting line, some fishtailing about, kicking up water. Eleanor strafes and jets through the pack with the boost thrusters of her car lighting up the area around her. Angelica follows close behind, scraping and bumping all who stand in her way. As the race heads into the first underwater tunnel, Angelica fires off some boost, Eleanor strafes to the right some, and Angelica comes roaring past Eleanor and right into the back of another racer. As the many racers roll past Angelica, she reverses away from the wreckage with her vehicle unscathed.

Meanwhile with Francine, she cruises through the underwater tunnel, with Pj slipstreaming close behind.

“Mind if I slingshot?” He says over the communication system whilst speeding past Francine.

Francine fires off some boost and comes skidding and drifting around her opponents as she shoots ahead. From out of nowhere comes Lazeena’s armored SUV, sending an opponent spinning out, and the others swerving to avoid sustaining damage. The SUV bumps into the back of Francine, sending her slipping out of control.

“Alright sis, you know what to do! Grip that there steering wheel real tight, and don’t get too squirrely!” Brandy instructs.

Francine quickly heeds her sibling’s direction, carefully straightening up her car, as other races whizz close by.

BUMP!

Francine shudders and panics from the sudden impact from behind her car. A glance in the sideview mirror reveals a black classic sports car with silver stripes wedged underneath, showing her down the track and out of the underwater tunnel. Angelica veers left, scraping Francine’s car against the wall. Eleanor falls back and gets right beside Angelica. The Crazy Princess shakes Francine off and lunges at Eleanor, the former member of Team Crown shifts her rocket sedan to the right, narrowly avoiding Angelica. Eleanor then eases off the gas pedal slightly, distancing herself from Angelica. With a shift to the left, the pedal to the metal, and the brunt of the rear thruster, Eleanor comes blazing past the pack.

The rapid sweeping of windshield wipers, the glow of the headlights, and rapid lightning flashes be the only things breaking through the wall of heavy rain and fog, keeping visibility of the road ahead up to a safe level. The road ahead may be clear for Eleanor, but her eyes are more focused on the crowded road behind, filled with many other drivers raring to take the lead away from her.

“Aight Eleanor, you’s doin’ mighty fine right now. Just don’t let yer guard down!” Says Brandy.

“I am well aware to be staying on my toes.” States Eleanor.

In that pack of racers behind, Roland finds himself locked in a battle with Wetzel. The scheming rare metal trader charges up e-boost, all while Roland hangs behind. The stylish cockatoo man keeps cover behind other racers. With every falling drop of rain, he awaits for Wetzel to lunge at an opponent. From the corner of his rearview mirror, a black electric supercar comes barreling towards Roland. It hits Roland’s car on the back, Roland firmly grasps the boost lever, and slams it down, sending his car slightly ahead of Wetzel’s. With a heavy rhythm in his heart, Roland threads the needle between two cars closing in on each other, scraping off a bit of paint from his car in the process.

“Alright Roland, whatcha wanna do’s now is y’wanna get where that Pj’s is, so you can slipstream right off ‘em, and slingshot ahead of ‘em with some boost!” Brandy instructs.

Roland slowly and strategically weaves his way through the racers, through the curves, rises, and descents of the track. Just ahead in an underwater tunnel that peers into an ocean ruin, are the shining blue fins of Pj’s Skaggs Miami.

“Ey, Roland! Ya ready to do a slingshot?” Pj enthusiastically says over the communication system.

“As per what Brandy instructed.” Replies Roland.

Roland stays behind Pj, gaining speed from the slipstream. He inches on to the left, and boosts away, leaving Pj in the dust.

“Well Mr. Preston Jackson, all I need you to do is not mess up. Well, y’could go down yonder ta where Eleanor is!” Brandy suggests.

“Let’s see if I can catch up to Roland first!” Says Pj.

From out of the underwater tunnel, Francine drifts through a long and broad helix. Water kicks up like an ocean wave as Francine and other drivers drift through the curved section of track. Heading out

of the helix and into a straightaway, Wetzel approaches. He stays in pace with Francine, as he flashes his headlights on and off.

“So...you...you want to duel, Rebber?” Francine says to herself with a heavy voice. Wetzel and Francine slow down some, staging themselves.

Flashes of lighting in a quick succession feel like a countdown as Francine mentally prepares to battle against her old adversary once more.

Out of the gate, Francine dodges an incoming shunt from Wetzel. She slips along the course, stabilizing her car. Gaining speed and avoiding the drivers going faster than her, it's as if she's racing on the highways at night once more. With boost blazing out of the tailpipe, Francine rises in the ranks.

CRASH!

Francine comes spinning out of control. The world becoming a blur of light and color sends Francine's mind into a frenzy. Her car, her livelihood, all about to slip away from her. A fire begins to build inside her.

“I can't lose!” She cries out.

She straightens up her car and moseys on down the track. Francine clenches the steering wheel tight; she grits her teeth anxiously and sweat trickles down her body.

With another flash of lighting, a rounded silhouette of a black supercar with a big rear wing is distant.

“I'm not going to crash out of this race! Not this time!” Francine declares whilst her finger is within a hair of the boost button. Francine comes speeding ahead with the boost plumes shooting out of the exhaust. The shadow of Wetzel's supercar approaches closer and closer as Francine speeds down the track, through the underwater tunnels surrounded by natural wonder, across the oceanic bridges,

with the imposing shadows and droning lights of industrial platforms off into the horizon.

A couple of laps pass, and Francine is within scratching distance of Wetzel. He brake checks Francine, and she falls back, regains speed, and comes drifting around Wetzel.

“Ahh, that’s my sis alright. That’s my sis.”

“Can ya...never mind. LC n’ Marie gonna get ‘em after the race.”

Back with Pj, he cruises along the track, throwing in a little drift here and there. His smile is confident, and his shoulders are relaxed. Skrimbo comes sputtering up beside him, and veers into him, only to oversteer and come sliding towards the sidewall.

“Try all ya want, monkey man!” Pj smugly taunts.

Whizzing past the grandstands packed with onlookers, they all cheer and applaud as he overtakes another opponent, with the V8 roaring like a tiger and droplets of water flying off the tires and rear fins gracefully.

“Alrighty Mr. Preston Jackson, you’s getting much closer to Eleanor! By now, we’re gonna finish with a good score!” Brandy says eagerly.

“Say, where’s Roland? Did I miss ‘em?” Pj inquires.

A long, refined sigh grumbles from the airwaves. In the rearview mirror, Pj spots none other than a classic sports car painted a forest green.

“I’m right behind you...” Roland says with annoyance.

Metal banging and tires screeching echoes out from behind. Angelica’s classic supercar comes growling close by, like it’s taunting him belligerently. Pj carefully veers away, with a pounding heart and tensed veins. As Pj drifts away from Angelica, the Crazy Princess simply continues to power forward. Confusion and bewilderment surge through the bodies of Roland and Pj.

“Why didn’t she hit me?” Exclaims Pj.

“Are you sure that’s Angelica? There is another Skaggs Trackmaster on the course.” Roland inquires?

“She’s the only one driving a black Trackmaster!” Clarifies Pj.

“Prepare yourself Eleanor, Angelica is approaching you fast...Eleanor? ELEANOR! Answer me!” Roland shouts over the communication system.

Further ahead of the pack, the rocket sedan continues to lead the charge. Eleanor is no longer looking back. What’s behind has caught up, and now she’s focused on what’s ahead. The scrubs of the windshield wipers are like a metronome helping solidify that focus. As she heads into a turn, she can almost feel every minute bump in the road when she lets off the gas and weaves the steering wheel around.

CRASH!

An impact to the side crushes Eleanor’s focus. Her grip on the wheel loosens up as she spins and twirls it around, along with shuffling the boost joystick about, getting the front end of her car to point towards the road ahead.

Pj slams the boost lever, racing towards Angelica, only for him to have to have his brakes glowing red hot, stopping before Angelica who swiftly blocked the way. Eleanor comes rumbling back up to Angelica. The black Trackmaster lunges at the rocket sedan and begins to scrape against the wall.

Pj sees the sparks fly and paint chunk of as Angelica relentlessly holds Eleanor back. He nervously honks the horn of his car. The Crazy Princess veers off from Eleanor some, getting within spitting distance of Pj.

With an uneased instinct, Pj falls back, cranks the boost lever down, and comes flying right back at Angelica, making impact on the back corner of her car, sending her spinning out of control.

“Thank you, Pj,” Eleanor says with gratitude.

Falling behind the pack, Angelica slips past Francine. An enraged spark of determination lights inside her, as she aggressively gets her car back into gear, and keeps her crosshairs firmly locked on her adversary.

The unmistakable sheen of the silver stripes on Angelica's car triggers Francine to whip her car around 360 degrees, with Angelica following suit, nicking another racer in the process. A hatch opens up from atop the rear engine cover, and a small cannon is revealed. Francine quickly shifts over beside a car, blocking an incoming blast. Chips of metal, carbon-fiber, plastic, and mechanical fluid scatter all around the track as everyone swerves around the wreckage.

“Brandy! Brandy!” Francine calls out on the communication system.

“I know sis...I just warned yer buds righty up ahead.” Brandy says in assurance.

Angelica readies another shot, Francine elegantly weaves and zigzags around, throwing off the Crazy Princess' aim. Another shot fires, flying across the ocean beyond. Down the course, Angelica maintains her pursuit of Francine with an iron will. Through a straightaway, Angelica readies another shot. Francine begins another swerve but is knocked back into the line of fire by a black electric supercar. Francine mashes the boost button, and speeds off into the distance, the laser fires off, Francine dodges, and the laser clips her on the front bumper, chunking it off.

Wetzel winds up some E-Boost as they head through an underwater tunnel. He lets out a wild charge at Francine, and scrapes on past her, sending sparks flying. Angelica fires off some boost, nicking Francine on the side, and whittling away control from her car. She lurches and slips around, all while Angelica primes up another shot from her cannon. She focuses her sight, making sure the crosshairs are centered directly onto the rear of Francine's car. Francine jerks her car around 180 degrees, sending the Crazy Princess into the same direction. With the laser about ready to fire, Francine does a 180-degree heel turn with her car, the laser fires, narrowly flying above the trunk, and making impact on the approaching Lazeena, sending her

spinning out of control and crashing right into Angelica, crumpling the front end of her car. Firing off her final bottle of boost, Francine rockets out of the underwater tunnel.

Francine takes a glance into her rearview mirror, seeing that Wetzel is still chasing after her. The two continue to battle it out down the track, with Francine weaving in and out of other drivers, and Wetzel forcing his way through, sustaining further damage to his vehicle in the process.

An air of frustration fills the cabin of Wetzel's car. How can his nemesis be so persistent? How can the woman who was cowering in fear at the mere sight of him gain so much confidence so quickly? He must stop at no cost to bring her down.

He slams his fist down on the E-Boost button. The charger winds and winds, sounding more strained and stressed. His car stutters and jerks about, the headlights and dashboard flicker, struggling to stay illuminated. Francine begins to ease off the gas, and veer away from Wetzel. Soon, Francine and Wetzel are riding side by side. Francine lays her foot right down on the gas, does a 360-degree spin around Wetzel, and he comes recklessly charging ahead, then immediately slamming on his brakes. The brakes burn so hot from trying to immediately stop the car, they could almost melt and deform. He then comes slipping into the sidewall, and the collision absorbs all of his remaining speed.

Francine lets out a comforted sigh of relief as she passes by Wetzel, who is slowly pulling himself out from the wall, and sputtering back up to speed, with the headlights of his car flickering chaotically.

Lap after lap, Francine draws closer to Roland. Speeding through a straight, she drafts on driver upon driver, fighting her way up to her teammate.

BUMP!

“WHAT WAS THAT?” Francine sputters.

BANG!
THUMP!

“You’ve got a hitchhiker!” Exclaims Roland and Brandy.

Sounds of rocket thrusters plume from above. Angelica then comes right down and lands on the windshield, with her jetpack mounted to her back. She frantically pounds the windshield whilst screaming uncontrollably. With every pound of Angelica’s fists, the windshield vibrates more and more intensely. Francine jiggles the steering wheel and Angelica is shaken around, with her hair and dress fluttering with the jerky movements of the car. Roland rolls down his window, grabs the coffee cup resting in his cup holder, and hurls it at Angelica. The coffee splatters all over her clothing, and she lunges off of Francine’s car, and gives chase to Roland on jetpack.

Roland simply presses the boost button and shoots off towards the finish line. Francine anxiously watches as Angelica continues to give chase down the track. Through the helix, down the tunnels, and across the finish line, where Pj and Eleanor await. At the finish line stands a winner’s circle, with a podium on the center. Atop the podium, is Pj’s Skaggs Miami.

Angelica fiercely dives towards Eleanor, with arms outstretched and hands open, ready to strangle her. With a flash of light, Marie warps onto the winner’s circle, and holds out her hands, with a pulsating wave of energy comes out. Angelica briefly struggles, only to narrowly evade colliding with Marie.

“How are we going to stop her?!” Exclaims Francine.

“Hmm...noticing what model of jetpack she’s using, have her chase someone until the fuel runs dry.” Suggests Eleanor.

From the corner of her eye, Eleanor sees Angelica making a wild dive towards her with arms reaching out, coming in for a second attempt of attack. With the wave of her arm, Eleanor sends out a gust of wind to throw Angelica off-course.

“Eleanor!” Marie calls out.

“Yes?” Replies Eleanor.

“We’ll get Angelica to chase us through Pescadopilis. Once the fuel runs dry, we’ll get the Nebula Force to escort her.” Explains Marie.

“Sounds...reasonable.” Eleanor hesitantly replies. As she heads to her vehicle, she signals Francine to come along with her.

“W-why? Why do you want me to come?” Francine inquires.

“Your vigilance will prove to be most valuable to us.” States Eleanor.

Marie teleports into the driver’s seat of her car. Her Sakura Paramount screams into the persisting storm just as Angelica spots them and gives chase.

Suddenly, Wetzel’s electric supercar comes sputtering into the winner’s circle, with the even headlights spitting out a few sparks. The driver’s side door swings open, and Wetzel comes stomping out.

“So, you’ve won the race, DRAGOON STORM...” He hisses.

“Wetzel D’Creste, you are under arrest for multiple charges.” Lightning Cat announces as he climbs out of a hatch form under the platform at the winner’s circle.

“You may have won the race, but the fight isn’t over!” Wetzel declares in a fighting stance.

“Wetzel, stop! Or I will press more charges against you!” Lightning Cat warns with a loud, stern voice all whilst stepping closer to Wetzel.

Wetzel fires a punch, and Lightning Cat evades impact with a blindingly fast twitch reflex. Wetzel throws out another punch, another, and yet another, all of which Lightning Cat evades. He grows more and more frustrated, lunging and jumping towards Lightning Cat, all while he simply steps backward with composure. Lightning Cat then whips around behind Wetzel, carefully pins him down on the ground, and handcuffs him.

“ALRIGHT! Alright! You win for real. The car I am awarding you is under...the trophy podium.” Wetzel says in surrender.

“Show us.” Requests Lightning Cat with crossed arms.

“What? You want ME to show you fools where it is? I-I just told you!” Wetzel sneers in protest.

“Oh, but would you want to have a little more time in the spotlight, before you’re escorted to prison?” Says Roland.

Wetzel simply scowls at the Dragoon Storm drivers surrounding him.

“What are you imbeciles doing? GET ME OFF THE GROUND SO I CAN SHOW YOU!” Wetzel demands.

PJ and Lightning Cat lift Wetzel from off the ground, and he escorts them to the winner’s circle podium, opens up a hidden compartment on the backside, and points to a suitcase. Lightning Cat extracts the suitcase and opens it up. Inside the suitcase, there lies a limousine.

“Heh heh, figure Daniella would like *that one...*” Wetzel smugly remarks.

Meanwhile Eleanor, Francine, and Marie are locked in a hot pursuit across the streets of Pescadopolis. The Crazy Princess flies around with a clenched fist. A merging traffic car cuts off Eleanor from Maire, singling her out. Then, Eleanor shifts onto a highway on ramp, and activates the rear thrusters, turning her vehicle into a blur as it powers down the highway with a whirring growl.

Angelica hovers above Pescadopolis, with her head fuming, darting her sight about, searching for her adversaries. A familiar mechanical grinding scream shakes out from the streets below, triggering her to descend, prowling for her target, occasionally turning off her jetpack, and continuing her search on foot.

She peers around a street corner and spots a sparkle of metallic rose metal. She fires up her jetpack and leaps over to get a closer look. Upon seeing the thrusters and tall wing protruding from the rear, a grin filled with malice creeps across her face. Eleanor then gently pushes the thruster control stick forwards, triggering a plume of

green energy to fizzle out, searing a bit of Angelica's dress, triggering her to break down into a flailing, stomping tantrum.

Once her temper cools, she finds that Eleanor's rocket sedan is nowhere to be seen. The sounds of frustrated drivers blaring their horns quickly grabs Angelica's attention.

"WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?" Angelica snaps. She then fires up her jetpack and continues the search. That same high-pitched grinding scream echoes out again.

"I know what your car sounds like...just show your face already, Marie!" Angelica sneers.

She scans the streets below, only to find nothing. As she scans, scans, and scans, the plumes from the thrusters on her jetpack begin to sputter and snuff out. She presses a button on the strap, the wings widen, and she glides downward. The Purple Speedster then slips down the road, opposite to her direction.

Angelica does a sharp lunge between the skyscrapers surrounding her, turning herself around to give chase to Marie. She keeps her focus locked onto the shining purple roof of Marie's car. Upon making contact with the roof's surface, Marie slams on the brakes, destabilizing Angelica's balance.

Once the momentum wears off, Marie climbs out of the vehicle.

"Angelica Fernsby, you are under arrest." Marie announces.

Angelica leaps off the roof of Marie's car, the purple Taurelian vanishes with a flash of light, and The Crazy Princess crashes onto the ground. Marie teleports beside Angelica, and spreads her hands out wide above Angelica, casting a telekinetic wave, sending Angelica into an unconscious state.

After putting handcuffs onto her wrists and placing her in the backseat, Marie drives off to escort Angelica to the city's Nebula Force center. Angelica is then placed into a prison transport ship and is taken off-planet.

Later...

The night sky over Pescadopilis is clear, with the stars shining on the oceans like a cosmic kaleidoscope. Everyone in Dragoon Storm stands tall and proud atop the winner's circle podium, surrounded by their winning vehicles and fans applauding their skillful driving. A great feeling of achievement overcomes them all.

"We make a good team, don't we?" Pj remarks.

"I knew that ever since the night we first met..." Adds Marie.

"Hey Eleanor, whaddya think now that the whole wide galaxy respects ya?" Brandy inquires.

Eleanor looks at Brandy smiles warmly.

"Respect? What about genuine kinship from my enemies...well, former enemies." Replies Eleanor.

"I'm just glad I don't have to worry about Wetzal anymore." Francine sighs in relief.

"You wanna go by Daniella again?" Brandy eagerly asks.

"No. I'm better known as Francine. It's who I am now. 'but I ain't ever gonna forget's who I was before's." Francine teases.

The race official, a gray alien dressed in a posh white jumpsuit hands Lightning Cat a big trophy of gleaming silver.

"Alright everyone, time for your picture." says a photographer.

The team then faces the camera, with prideful smiles on their faces, and the photo is taken.

Chapter 12: New Beginnings



A month has passed since Dragoon Storm's Star Summit victory. Stories of their valiant driving spread across the galaxy rapidly, reaching many planets and nations.

Meanwhile in Zephyr City, Francine cruises down the streets in her new limousine, now painted orange with yellow flames on it. She's sporting a set of shining sunglasses, and she's got a lick of bright orange in her hair now.

She pulls into the Dragoon Storm headquarters. The Moon Auto logo accompanies the Dragoon Storm emblem in addition to purple being added to the color scheme on the outside. Inside, Miranda, Brandy, Roland are fast at work refurbishing a work van on the garage floor, Francine and Eleanor are painting up a supercar in the paint booth. Up on the second floor Marie, Pj, and Lightning Cat sit

together in an office, with Lightning Cat accompanying the front desk.

“It’s going to be some time until the next major racing event begins. But our racing expertise is needed in this galaxy.” States lightning cat

“I know some of us could make good agents...but vehicle theft has stayed down in Zephyr City.” Says Marie.

“Hey, there’s always other cities we could help out in!” Adds Pj.

“If we’re going to be doing investigations and recovery long-term, we’re going to need a base of operations.” Says Marie.

“Ooh! Why not we go...find the lost city?” Pj enthusiastically suggests.

“Which one? There’s many of them, and a lot of them are thought to be mere myths.” Replies Lightning Cat.

“Oh...uh...I was thinking of the subterranean one in the Squebbelflop system.” Explains Pj.

“Oh, that one...it’s certainly a place of intrigue. So many books and films have been made about that one. It’s a place...of interest. But no matter what our next venture will end up being, we are going to make it worthwhile. But until then, let us focus on the new Moon Auto!” Declares Lightning Cat.

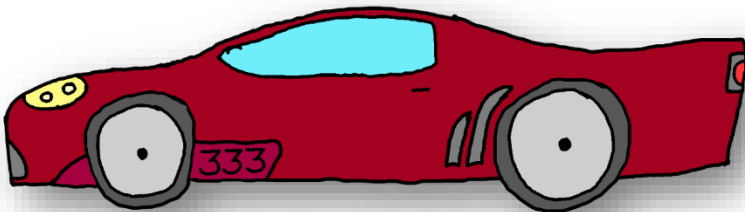
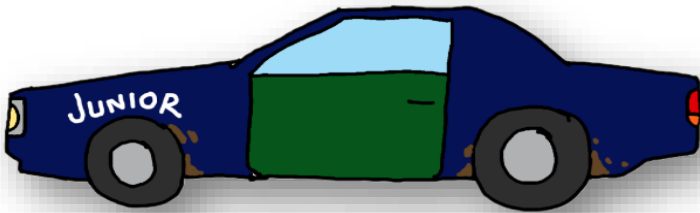
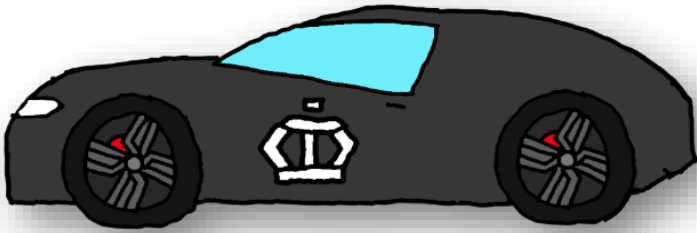
Marie and Pj look into each other’s eyes.

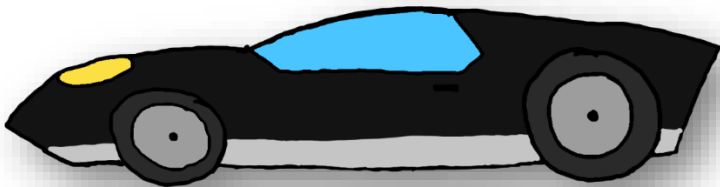
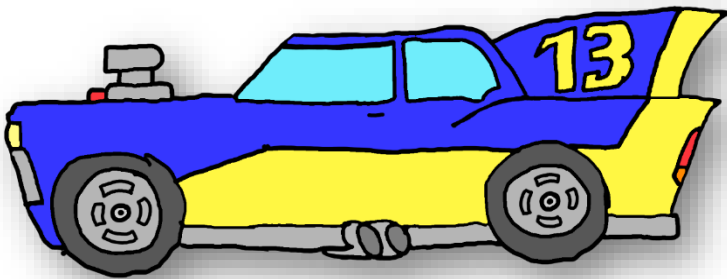
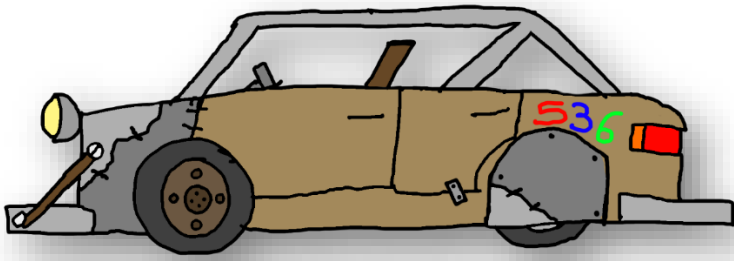
“Heh, we can focus on...” Pj starts.

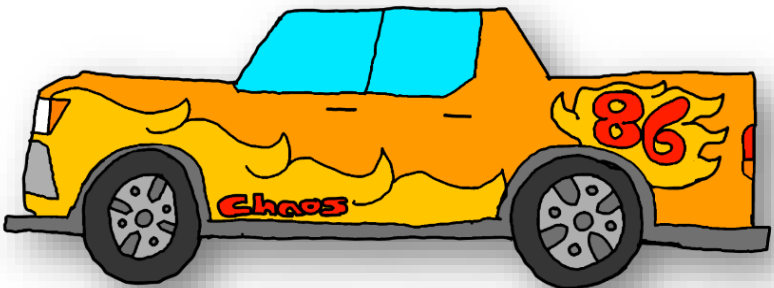
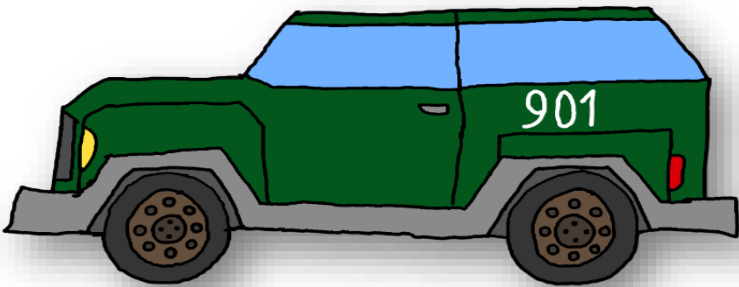
“...each other for now?” Maire continues with a knowing gaze.

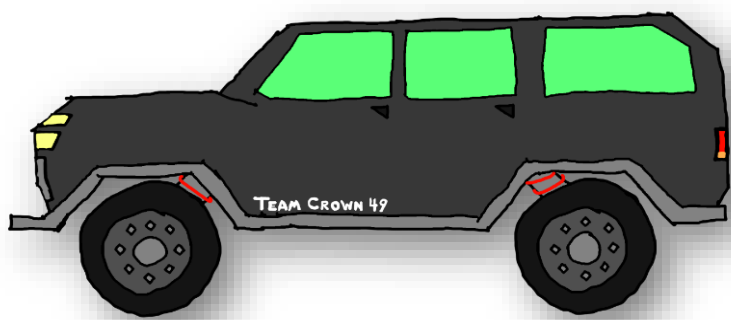
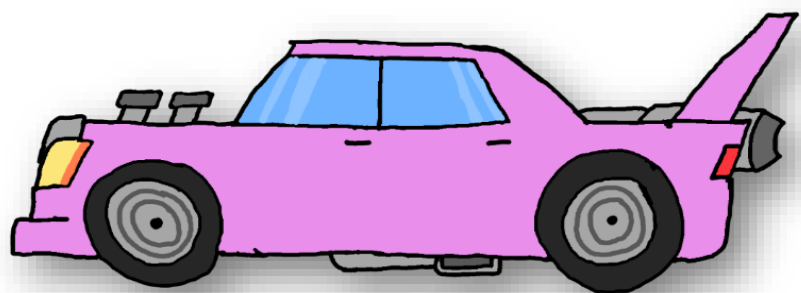
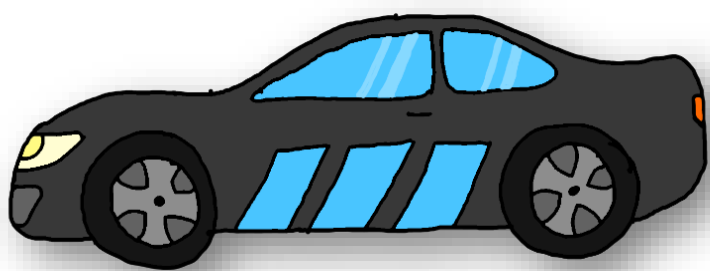
The two then get up from their chairs, and share a tender, loving hug.

The End.









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