

# Terrestrial Drive



Ethan Clark

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## Chapter I

### The Traveler

*Picture* a clean, glossy white interior with round ergonomic seats and wavy blue accent lights. The soft sounds of train wheels running along a winding track and the sounds of people conversing can be heard. A young man with dark spiky hair and strong arms is looking out the bubblelike windows, taking in the city skyline approaching quickly. The skyline gets even closer, more colorful, shinier, as if an entire little world is coming into view. A chime sounds, and a calm electronic voice comes on through the loudspeakers.

*“We will be arriving at Zephyr City Railport soon. Please remain seated until the train comes to a full stop. As you are waiting, we would like to give information about places in the Great City of Motion that you might have overlooked. Take in a stunning purple backdrop with the rare isosceles trees at the violet woods located just northeast of Zephyr City. Grab a bite to eat at the Cyberspace Diner. If you’re in the mood for a good museum, check out the*



*Revolution Auto Museum! It features an ever-changing collection of cars. No two visits will be the same! We will be arriving at the*

*station in a few minutes."*

The young man continues to gaze through the window and sees the skyscrapers standing high in the clouds; the local business district, standing short and modest, is bordered by trees on the ground and greenery, making the block revived, clean, and lively. The arched roof of Zephyr City Railport inches closer and closer into view. As the station gets closer, the train moves slower and slower. The chime sounds again. "*We have arrived at Zephyr City. Please wait for the train to come to a full stop and the doors to open. When you exit, please take your belongings, and follow the walkway out of the train. Thanks for riding with us and welcome to The Great City of Motion!*"

The young man waits for the train to come to a full stop. He gets up hastily and shuffles his way down the spiral staircase onto the blue, green, and purple tiled floors of the Zephyr City Railport. He takes in the grand appearance of the railport. Large, flower-like columns support the sloping hills of the roof. The roof gazes upon the expansive sky where the fluffy clouds, skyscrapers and planetary rings can be seen. Above, a large second floor balcony overlooks the trains coming and going. He peeks at the shops and facilities and looks back at the black and blue wavy striped train to watch the luggage get unloaded. The lower half fades from a glossy black to a translucent blue to reveal cubes and rectangles with handles, all carefully and methodically stacked on top of each other. A deep metallic blue car materializes into view. It has sharp sweeping fins on the rear and a wide gaping grille with sharp teeth and angry eyes on

the front. An excited smirk rides up the face of the young man at the sight of the car.

*"Ahh...my fine, fine beast machine!"* PJ says to himself.

He makes his way across and out of the train platform and walks down the main hall. PJ finds himself on the balcony he was looking up towards just a few minutes earlier. He turns around and walks on over to a facility labeled "LUGGAGE AND PERSONAL CARGO SERVICES". The interior of the facility has smooth glossy white floors and walls painted sky blue with images of suitcases, cars, and other goods. The muffled sounds of the railport grounds and the hum of the air conditioning make a soft ambience. The young man walks up to the round, asymmetrical front desk. A green-skinned receptionist with big pointy cat ears, curly hair, and eyeglasses is working at a computer. PJ speaks to the receptionist.

*"Good day! I'm here for my car!"* The receptionist pauses work and turns to look at the young man.

*"Ok. Give me your name, please,"* she asks.

*"Preston Jackson!"* He replies.

The attendant turns back to the computer and hastily clacks the keys on the keyboard. She turns back to face PJ.

*“Ok. Your vehicle is item #33. Please proceed to the automobile collection garage.”* She hands PJ a small slip of paper with the number 33 on it. He quietly slips it into his pocket.

PJ makes a spritely walk down the stairs, through the halls, and into the automobile collection garage. PJ is greeted by a long, gray hallway with dark, glossy gray walls with smooth, round edges. Along the right side, there’s a blue accent light going along the side, and silhouettes of cars riding atop the accent lights. On the left, there’s a row of square entrances with rounded corners. PJ enters the first one. He’s greeted by cylindrical device with a screen at eye level. Below the screen are four buttons placed in a row. Below the buttons are two slots, one narrow and one wide. The back wall is smooth and crystal clear, appearing almost as if there’s no barrier between him and the car on the other side.

*“You are entering the MotorStack Automobile Collection Garage. Please insert your voucher to claim your vehicle.”* PJ reaches into his pocket, shuffles his hand around, pulls out the voucher and inserts it into the narrow slot. A door closes behind him, and the whole room slides up and sideways, revealing the familiar ferocious face of PJ’s car tucked away nicely in an oblong-ish cubby hole with shiny white walls. A part of the back window slides away to form a doorway. PJ runs to his car and swings the door open to sit down on the plush seats. He pulls the door shut, fastens his seatbelt, and thrusts the key into the ignition.

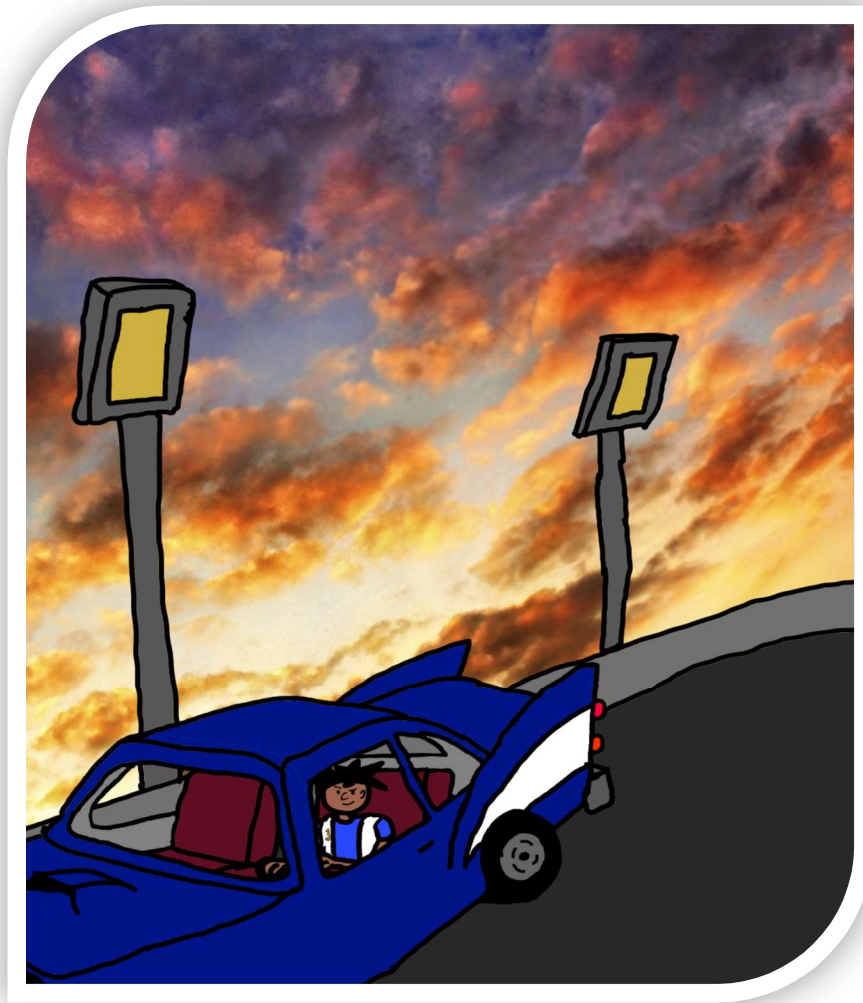
*“Please wait while your vehicle is brought to the ground floor.”*

PJ’s eyebrows lower and his smile morphs into a frown. He thumps his foot on the accelerator, up and down, impatiently. A muffled click sounds from beneath the car as it slides out of the cubby hole. It’s shuffled down the wall on a verti-track and thrust across the floor sideways onto an exit portal. Another muffled click sounds from beneath the car. He turns his head and looks for anything that might prevent him from going through the portal into The Great City of Motion. He switches the ignition “on” with red lights dancing in a rhythmic pattern from slow to fast. The engine awakens from a long sleep with a yawn that turns to an impressive growl. PJ puts his foot on the pedal and speeds away towards Zephyr City, The Great City of Motion.

He glides down the exit ramp, makes a few turns, and leaves tread on the street, carefully weaving in and out of traffic. He glides on over to an on-ramp with a pure white oblong sign in silver trim overhead reading “HYPERWAY. ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.”

PJ slams the gas pedal down as he rides up the on-ramp. The engine’s roar rises in pitch as he increases speed, racing under the translucent blue leaflike canopies covering the Hyperway. What a thrilling blur from high speed! He grows more comfortable the farther and faster he drives. He takes a quick look at the rearview mirror of his car as a little reminder of what’s behind...the silhouettes of reflection and scenery fading into a metallic distance. He notices a stylish silver luxury sedan and tilts the steering wheel to lean his beastly machine over into

the left lane to let the vehicle pass. He races on and takes another look into the rearview mirror to see a silver car is behind him,



following even closer. He jerks the steering wheel to the side to move his monster car to the right lane and backs off the gas pedal slightly to slow down. He looks in the rearview mirror, but the black car has seemingly disappeared. Just as PJ's sights are reset to the road, he notices a metallic object out from the left corner of his eyes. He ignores it and puts his foot down again on the gas. *Vrroom!* The hum of the engine echoes and fills the cabin. He cruises straightaway down the Hyperway until spotting a sign distance, an oblong silver-trimmed white sign hanging high reading "EXIT 13. DECREASE SPEED."

The car screams beneath the sign and heads down the gentle slope of the exit ramp, the engine calming to a grumble. He's made it to Zephyr City! To his right through the protection of the driver's window, he sees a pair of brick buildings with clean facades and sides stained from many years since they've stood. Roads disappearing into vague vanishing points separate them. On the left sits a park with gentle rolling hills and pristinely cut grass that contours with the short rows of trees with stubby branches. The setting sun on the horizon paints a light shade of orange over the whole scene. PJ watches the different vehicles pass through the intersection. He looks to his left side again and sees a silver 4-door car. He beholds the faint silhouette of a mysterious driver behind the wheel. The traffic light above switches to green and PJ accelerates away quickly, only to make an abrupt left turn. He glances back into the all-seeing rearview mirror to see the black car has vanished without a trace.

As PJ continues to his destination, the colors of the buildings lining the roads mute and soften. The sun sets like static on an ancient radio until the alien sky turns dark. The massive windows on a few of the tall buildings emit a soft, clear glow, giving a view of the workspaces and places inside. The accent



lighting bordering the stretches of street and sidewalk adds vibrant highlights to a city slowing down for the night. PJ chills his pace, makes a couple of left turns and pulls into a parking lot full of life and activity. Exotic plant life and asphalt combined with the normal painted striped lines indicate a mechanical microcosm of diverse sorts. Sports cars, muscle cars, and customized cars ranging from standard commuter cars to the finest supercars are abundant and displayed from one end to the other. The air is filled with thumping music and enthusiasts carrying on with one another about their "rides". The rumble, pop, and roar from the engines of the many machines is like a mechanical symphony of offbeat rhythms. Among the slew of vehicles present, one of them is a major standout to PJ. Behold! A purple 4-door supercar with a front end that narrows slightly and a stumpy rear with a spoiler, large and wide anchoring the back of the car.

*"Woah! I can't believe my eyes! It's a Sakura Paramount 4aR!"* PJ excitedly says out loud. He speedily cranks down his window to talk to the owner who's sitting on the hood. He isn't disappointed, although she's not what he expected. She has tall purple cat ears and long purple hair.

*"Hey! Nice car! How'd you get it?"* he asks excitedly. The feline young woman turns to look at PJ and tilts up her sunglasses. She has purple eyes and purple skin. Even her teeth and tongue are different shades of purple. Maybe you've seen her before in one of your dreams.

*“Oh...Hi. I got this car from my grandfather. He was an interplanetary race car driver many moons ago when fusion power was on the rise. Your car looks...a little familiar...why don't you park it, and we have a talk?”* She tells PJ.” PJ pilots his car to the far corner of the lot and parks. *“So, what kinds of places you like to go to?”* She asks.

*“Racetracks are my home away from home...Gotta keep them drivin' skills sharp!”* PJ replies.

*“Hmm...you must race for a living, right? I know I've seen you and your car on TV before...you're Preston...Johnson, right?”*

*“Actually, my name is Preston Jackson.”* PJ says. *“I'm best known for my winning title and setting the longest drift at the Andromeda Invitationals.”*

*“Oh yeah, I heard about the drift. No one here has ever done that! Maybe you can show how you did it.”*

Just then, a shrill squeal crackles out from the far corner of the parking lot.

*“What the heck was that? What's going on?”* Marie says out loud. PJ looks to the other side of the lot and sees his car being towed away by a black shadow and vanishes almost instantly into the dark of the dimly lit streets.

*“AAAUGH, MY CAR! Who's taking my car?!”* PJ sprints towards the scene, but he suddenly freezes in place. His mind grows more

tense and furious with each passing second. *"I can't believe what just happened! Do you believe that? Where do they come off stealing my car?"* He doesn't know what to do. He then says, *"why can't I move my body? I feel like a statue."* Suddenly, he feels a tap on his shoulder. *"Hey, Mr. Jackson!"* PJ turns to see the familiar purple owner of the rare purple car standing beside him. PJ's body frees up unexpectedly, and he begins to sprint off once more. But he's stopped again, unable to advance farther.

*"What...is...HAPPENING?!"* PJ exclaims. The monochrome feline woman stands before PJ.

*"Your body freezing in place...that's one of my special abilities...I apologize, but I have not properly introduced myself. I didn't want you to get injured trying to get your car back. You'll see some strange things here. I'm special agent Marie Moon, an envoy of Rarity Recovery Services. I work to recover stolen vehicles and help keep thieves off the streets."*

Marie reaches into her pocket and pulls out a black egg-shaped device. She unlatches the lid with her thumb to reveal a screen and a keyboard.

*"So, Mr. Jackson...tell me the make, model, year, and color of your car."* Marie asks.

*"It's a Skaggs Miami, 1960- "*

*"1960?"*

*"Earth Year 1960."*

*"Oh, ok...I don't do Earth car recoveries often. 1960 is...well less than half a century ago on Earth. I'm used to hearing about vehicles from our planet which would be like the 4980s or the 5050s."*

Marie shares these unique details as she enters the details of PJ's car to her little device which seems to have a mind of its own with all the sounds emanating from it.

*"So, it was cobalt blue with silver speck, right?"* Marie asks. PJ nods his head in the affirmative quite profusely. Marie continues to tap away at the keyboard of her pocket-sized computer. It sparkles bioluminescent with each entry input. After a few taps, she whips the screen back in place and flips it back into her pocket.

*"So, where are you headed now, Mr. Jackson?"*

*"I don't know what I'm gonna do since I don't have a car. I came here to compete in the Zephyr City Grand Prix and Star Summit...two of the toughest races anyone could ever do. I want to live out my dream! But it won't happen now!"*

He sighs and drops his head and asks, *"will you give me a ride back to my apartment?"* *"Sure! get in."* Marie reaches into her other pocket, and a soft click is heard. A little chime chirps from her purple speed machine.

PJ marches over to the passenger door and swings it open. The seat contours to his body like some kind of symbiotic being from another planet. He sinks in and softly shuts the door to click his seatbelt. He takes in the fine details of the interior which boasts finely stitched seat upholstery, headliner, and floor. The sleek, wavy, and glossy dashboard and center console are finished off with a steering yoke molded to the shape of an eye with ergonomic grips on the sides. Marie flicks the ignition on, and an aggressive screech shoots out from the exhaust. The interior comes to life with ambient lighting and multiple digits displaying in a foreign language PJ can't understand. Marie inches and wiggles her way out from the packed parking lot and onto the quiet streets. Her ride purrs like a kitten. The hum of the filtration system softly fills the cabin of the illusive speedster as darkening skyscrapers create a faint metallic black wave that shines onto the hood. The streetlights create a wave of spotlights that glow a soft orange flow across the empty roads. A passing tram glides by with a high, soft rumble. A calm feeling comes over PJ, but not completely.

*"Hey Marie, you're taking me back to my apartment, right?"*

*"Oh...I am taking you home. I'm just...taking a detour."*

PJ begins to feel more tense in his core. The calm feeling he briefly had was beginning to melt away.

*"Oh...ok..."*

The surfaces of the skyscrapers have become mostly dark, with the roads being the only thing of the silent streets being lit. As Marie navigates, she periodically swivels and tilts her head about, keeping a lookout on her surroundings. The car stops at a red intersection.

*“Ey Marie, did ya’ actually get this car from your grandpa or did your agency give it to ya?”*

*“No, I’m being honest about this being my grandfather’s car. I drive it because it is practical.”*

A low, aggressive growl of exhaust booms from the right side of the intersection.

It gets louder...

And louder...

*GGRRRRWWOORRRRMM!*

An elegant and boxy 2-door luxury car, lifted, with a sturdy suspension blows by. It appears to be chasing a bright green sports car. Crack! CRASH! “What was that?” Marie and PJ see the long luxury car slam into the right side of the green car, making it swerve out of control. With all four tires screaming, it leaves behind a thick cloud of white and ominous smoke...like a dense fog full of grease and oil. The traffic light above turns from red to green. Marie lays her foot down on the gas and drives away. PJ looks to the left, and through the smoke he sees that the

lifted luxury creation is intact. The driver's side door is open. There, standing amid the chaos is a tall, slender figure with one long ear jetting out the side. Her big ponytail hangs close to the ground as she walks towards the wreckage of the green car.

*"Heh...that was really unexpected...The way the big fancy car just SMAAASHED the other car..." Back on Earth, I'd report that to the police, but it seems things here are little different. On the train ride over I saw two trucks collide on a side street and they just kept going. "* says PJ.

*"Hmm...whoever was behind the wheel of that car certainly isn't a fellow agent..."* exclaims Marie.

Marie turns the steering yoke to the left, eases her foot off the gas, and pulls up to her destination.

PJ and Marie are greeted by a neon sign with an angular, minimalist logo that reads "MOON AUTO". Close ahead in the lot is a small square building with a white cinderblock base and a purple top. It has windows all around the center and its inside is dimly lit. A single sign hangs precariously in the window which says "sales office". Behind and to the left of the sales office is a long, round-roofed garage made from corrugated steel with a row of bays for vehicles of all varieties. On the right, is a wide warehouse with a pointed roof and a yellow sliding door.



Marie feathers her foot onto the gas and slowly maneuvers towards the warehouse. She stops and shoves the door open. The floor of the warehouse is half occupied with boxes, crates, and odds and ends from offworld. The other half is full of cars, veiled by covers of varying degrees.

*“Hey Marie, you work here? There something you gotta get? This part of the detour?”*

Marie walks towards a rectangular module with windows in the back corner of the warehouse. She enters a password on the door’s keypad, and she creaks it open. The room inside has a

kitchenette, a wardrobe, a bed, an ornate lamp with an old cloth shade sitting atop a nightstand, and a door on both ends.

*“Wait...you LIVE here?”*

*“Yes. And I’m afraid you’ll be living here for some time.”*

*“W-What?! You’re going to make me live in a warehouse?! What about my apartment? I’m not going to be your prisoner!”*

*“Come inside my home and have a seat. I will explain the situation at hand.”*

The two of them walk in through the doorway. Marie switches on the lamp, and pulls out the chair sitting by the wardrobe, and places it beside her bed.

PJ takes a seat on the bed, and Marie sits on the chair.

*“So, you’re wondering why you’re staying over at my place? Well, it’s because you’re safer here. That apartment complex you stay at is a base of operations for the vehicle thieves who stole your car...and they’re not so nice. I rarely go there.”*

*“What? You’re saying was sleeping on top of those perps?”*

*“Pretty much.”*

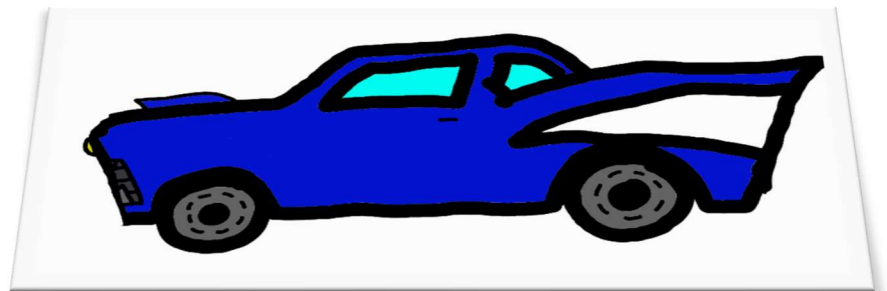
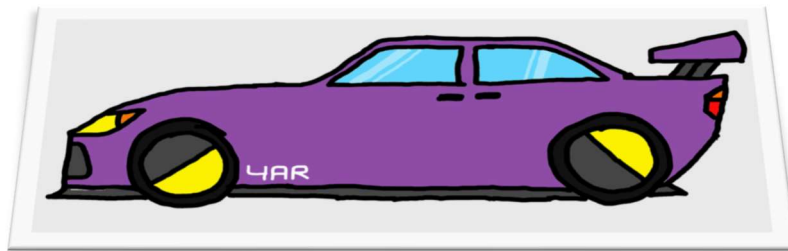
*“What else? What am I gonna do while you go hunt down those thieves?”*

*“...I’ll tell you in the morning.”*

Marie points her finger to the far end of the room...

*"It's time to go to sleep now. There's a bed for you to rest on in that room over there."*

PJ walks to the far side of the room, and he opens the door. He sees a single bed and climbs in to lay down. Staring upon the dark gray vista of the ceiling, he still feels restless. Footsteps from the other room trickle in like the gentle thump of his heart beating, but he dozes off in short order.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The Investigation**

*Knock knock knock! Knock knock knock!*

PJ turns his head to the side, a bit startled by the sounds. He makes his way out of bed and onto the floor towards the door. He sees the silver doorknob, turns it, and swings the door open, only to see Marie standing before him, holding papers in her hand.

*“You look very tired this morning, Mr. Jackson.”*

*“You can say that again. I hardly got any rest last night. The room kept creaking and there were weird sounds outside that kept me up. What are those loud, screeching animals called outside in the trees?”*

*“Oh, don’t mind them. They’re called Seenesters. They’re kind of like Earth squirrels, but they forage on metal nuts and bolts from the abandoned airship factories. Sometimes they get one stuck in their throat. That loud noise is just them clearing their throats.*

*PJ, I have found something for you to do while I “track down those thieves” ...you’ll help me by being my driver. I just finished getting you registered. The skillset from your racing background covers all the requirements needed.”*

*“So...I work...for you now?”*



*"No, you'll work with me."*

*"Oh...ok...I gotcha..."*

*"Yeah...I'll let you rest up a little more. You're going to need it...Mr. Jackson."*

Later...

The sun is sitting high in the great blue sea of the sky. Below is Marie's Sakura cruising along the road like a reflection from the sky above. An echoey rock song plays on the radio and immerses the driver and passenger in surround sound through grainy, but hi-fidelity speakers. Outside is a subdivision patterned with rows of aging identical homes. Their lawns shimmer in vibrant, natural green, all well cared-for and cut.

*"So, this the place? 2121 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street?"*

*"Yes. It's reported that the suspect living here is in possession of an orange 5051 Bullard Brute. I know he has it because I did surveillance on him earlier. Hold tight while I go in and arrest him. When I come out and put him into the backseat, drive normally to the police station. If you see anything suspicious, notify me on the communicator."*

Marie closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. In a bright purple flash, PJ sees her standing outside of the suspect's house. She knocks on the door. A scruffy bald-headed man opens the door and asks, *"what do you want?"*

Marie says, *"Sir, you're going to have to go with me downtown for questioning. I have evidence that you've stolen and are in possession of a 5051 Bullard Brute. Do you deny this?"*

*"I don't got to take no lip from you, officer!"* the bald-headed, angular, slinky-like man slams the door shut.

PJ's heart begins to thump as Marie proceeds to knock on the door once again. The garage door raises up, and an orange muscle car with smooth, hard lines swings out from the garage and speeds out to the road with a sharp squeal of the tires and a growl of the exhaust. PJ grasps the steering yoke tightly, a purple flash bursts beside him, and Marie is back in the passenger seat.

*"GO! GO! GO!! Foot on the gas!"* she commands.

PJ stomps his foot on the gas, sending the car forward and pushing him down on the seat. The orange Brute gets closer into view, and it spins around, kicking up a large cloud of smoke. PJ slams his foot onto the brakes, sending Marie and PJ lunging forwards from their seats. The tire squeals stop, and the engine roars off to the side.

PJ grabs the steering yoke again, and he yanks it to the side. Through the clearing smoke, an orange sheen is seen speeding in the distance. PJ lays his foot down harder, with his sight set on the orange block rolling in the distance. As he gets closer, it stops and attempts to turn around. It wiggles and nudges around, bumping and scraping into curbs and a mailbox, until finally rumbling away in the opposite direction.

As it rushes towards the two, Marie holds out her hand with her fingers outstretched. She focuses on the bald, bushy eyebrowed perpetrator behind the wheel. The driver becomes unconscious, and the car leans to the right. Marie frantically clenches her fingers, and she shifts it around robotically. The car comes to a screeching halt with a great sharp scream of the tires. Marie then jolts her hand to the right and pushes her hand forwards. The orange machine comes to a complete stop.

As she is exiting the car, she notices residents rushing out of their front doors to see cause of the commotion.

*"Don't worry folks. Stay calm, Stay calm.... We have the situation under control."* Marie announces.

She opens the door and handcuffs him with one single sweeping motion. He can't react and is escorted to the back of her car where he's promptly restrained and contained.

A resident in sloppy, stained pajamas holding a coffee tumbler walks up to Marie and PJ.

*"Man... what...what...was...that?"* he asks.

*"That was us, doing our job...Ridding the streets of these criminals,"* Marie explains.

*"Are you two movie stunt people? That was some AWESOME driving! I've never seen anything like that before!"* a resident exclaims.

*“No, we return stolen vehicles to their rightful owners!” Marie shouts back.*

*“Return them to their rightful owners? How about you two work harder on that! My daughter still has not got her car back!” a nearby resident comments.*

*“Hey, it’s my first day! I’m trying to get used to this job. What do you expect?!” replies PJ*

Marie and PJ spend a few more moments answering all the questions and comments of the residents battling for their attention. A resident originally from the outer bands of the Moon Creaxis exclaimed, *“boh-di-bahp, dey fur cha-leng zay”* which translates roughly into *“it’s about time, that dude was bad news”*.

Soon, the tow truck arrives, and it carries the orange machine away. PJ and Marie walk back to the purple speedster.

PJ fires the ignition, and he drives off to the police station. On his way, the skies roll from blue to gray, a rumble of thunder booms, and rain trickles down.

Moments later, PJ pulls into the parking lot of the police station. He backs into a parking space and steps out of the car to gaze at the façade of the police station. It’s clean and tough with thick cylindrical pillars, tall walls built from strong, thick bricks, and a grand staircase to the front doors, all in a modest white. He

watches Marie scale the stairs as she escorts the bald suspect to the front doors. She turns slightly and signals PJ to come along.

Inside the empty, plain, and pristine lobby, Marie stands in the middle gazing around for PJ. PJ pushes the doors wide open, and he steps on over to Marie.

*“So, we puttin’ this dude behind bars?”* PJ asks.

*“Not yet. I still must...speak to him to get information about the gang of thieves who stole your car...I’ve heard rumors about him having connections to one of the most notorious gangs in Zephyr City. Though, I do not have any information on which one it could be.”*

Marie turns to the side and walks down the hallway. She turns right, opens the door, and locks it behind her. She reaches to the side and flicks a switch. An overhead light buzzes on, revealing two chairs separated by a table. Marie seats the suspect on one chair, and she sits down on the other, and looks at the suspect in the eyes.

*“Hello- you interrogating me you s-s-s-stupid grape? Well, you ain’t! I don’t have to tell you nothing!”* The suspect mutters in a deep, slow voice.

*“Well, I am interrogating you today. My first question is...who else is in your crew...what kind of places you hang around?”*

*"That's a s-s-s-stupid question! Why do I need to tell you what kind of places I loaf around?"*

*"Just tell me where you like to hang out. Is there a park or restaurant you frequent?"*

*"I don't got to tell you that. I can keep all my dang secrets!"*

*"Ok...my next question is what kind of cars do you like?"*

*"Don't care what dang car I got, just as long I can get away from you idiot agents!"*

A jolt of tension fills Marie's body.

*"Well...what is your favorite...snack food?"*

*"Oh, you don't know what my favorite snack is you hairy grape? Them Moon Munchies is good! Too bad you don't got any. Huh huh ho!"*

*"Ok...and where do you like to purchase these 'Moon Munchies' from?"*

*"What do you mean ya' don't know where to get Moon Munchies from? They everywhere!"*

*"I...mean...like...do you have a preferred place to buy them from?"*

*"You got cotton in those huge ears on yo s-s-s-stupid head? I don't got to tell you anything on who I get my Moon Munchies from!"*

Sweat begins to drip from Marie's forehead. Her heart thumps quicker.

*"You get...your Moon Munchies from a...criminal or...something. Don't you?"*

*"Hey how'd you figure that out?"*

Marie's eyebrows dart upwards. She stares closer into the eyes of the suspect.

*"You not telling me anything on who you get them from. You have a connection to a key player in one of the vehicle theft gangs. Tell me what you see when you receive your Moon Munchies."*

*"I ain't never gonna let you arrest Oregano Jones! He sure won't let you arrest him! He gonna put you in the hospital!"*

*"Have you-"*

*"Shut that stupid mouth of yours! I said I don't got to share any of my dang secrets!!"*

Marie lets out a long sigh...

*"Alright, I am done interrogating you."*

Marie escorts the suspect down the halls and to a back lot. She puts him into the back of a prison van, and it drives off into the distance. Marie walks back into the lobby to see PJ standing there, looking around, and tapping his foot.

*“Hey, Mr. Jackson. Let’s go...”*

*“Did ya get any hot new information on those no-good thieves?”*

*“Sigh...I am not good with interrogation, but there was nobody else open to do it today. I was only able to find out a potential person who our suspect is working for. He works for this man who he calls ‘Oregano Jones’...”*

*“What?! That’s it? How in the world are we supposed to find this Oregano Jones? I’ve never heard of him! How are we ever going to find him with only knowing his name? Where does he live? I know, he hangs around at Fisker Plaza like you said!”*

*“Umm...how about we go home now? We’ve finished all the work we needed to do for the day.”* Marie tells PJ.

Marie and PJ exit the police station, walk down the grand front staircase, and into the purple speedster. Marie drives it through the streets, and back to Moon Auto. She parks in the back warehouse and runs to the sales office with PJ following.

PJ walks through the front door and is greeted by stale air. The muffled thumps of music coming from the radio and car memorabilia from all centuries lining the wall subdue the evening.

*“Hey Marie, whatcha doin now?”*

*“Mr. Jackson, I must help with my family business right now. Why don’t you go do some stuff in town and come back after closing?”*

*"But I still don't have a car..."*

*"You don't have a daily driver? The Skaggs Miami is your only car?"*

*"Well I used to have one, it got lost in transit on its way from Earth to Taured."*

*"Alright..."* Marie reaches down and places a key onto the desk.

*"You can have this Linguine Metro. It's in the warehouse."*

PJ swiftly grabs the keys and utters *"thanks!"* as he walks out to drive away.

## **Chapter 3**

### **A Strange Visitor**

The stale aroma from the air conditioning chills the quiet, brightly lit floors of the sales office. The radio emanates out slow relaxing melodies from atop the desk.

PJ and Marie are sitting at the desk, looking at information spread out across a curved computer screen.

*“So, you still don’t know anything about Oregano Jones?!”*

*“He’s very illusive from what I’ve researched on the agency’s database. He’s only been spotted driving around in a silver Luxor sedan or appearing at the Fisker Plaza apartments to check up on his cohorts. I don’t want to go there, but we might have to sneak into the depths of Fisker Plaza to get a chance at disbanding this gang and releasing all the stolen vehicles...including yours,”* Marie says. She looks down at the desk with a frown and a heavy sigh.

The growl of an engine rumbles from just outside the front door. It grabs the attention of PJ and Marie. They look to the windows as they watch a boxy, lifted, 2-door luxury car pull into the parking lot. The driver exits the vehicle and walks up to the front door.

The unfamiliar beastly face stands tall in a black dress with an orange scruffy ponytail, a long ear, and a crystal-topped scepter in hand.

*"Who...is she?"*

*"I know who she is! She smashed that black car the other night!"* exclaims PJ. *"She's definitely not an agent..."* says Marie.

*"Let her in! Maybe she knows something!"* says P.J.

*"Ok, but I'll be keeping my eye on her."*

Marie stands up from her chair reluctantly, walks over to the front door, grabs the handle, and swings it open. The unfamiliar face steps inside. Marie sits back down on her chair.

*"Good evening to you two...allow me introduce to myself...I'm Irene,"* the unfamiliar face announces.

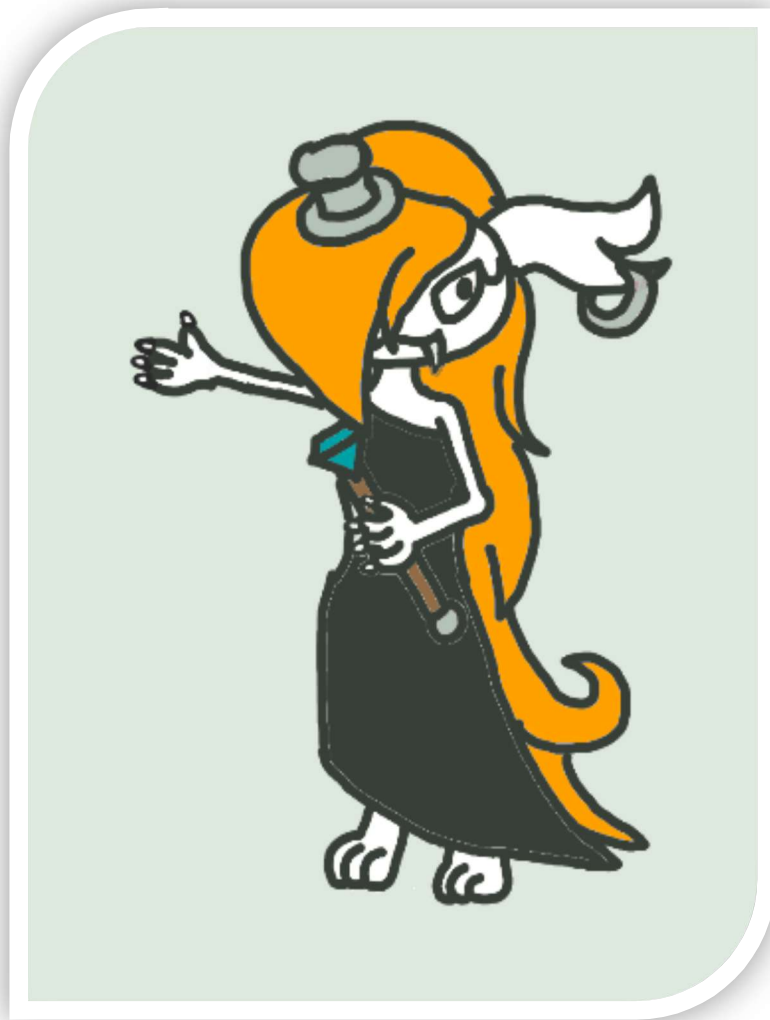
Marie tilts her head to look at Irene with a raised eyebrow.

*"Uhh...can we help you?"* Marie inquires.

*"I am here to offer my services. Do you need a third hand in your pursuits? You know...I hold quite a database on some of the more "unsavory" characters in this town,"* says Irene.

PJ's eyes open wide with a rush of excitement.

*"Really? What can you tell us about the guy called Oregano Jones?!"*



*"Oregano Jones, you say? Well, Mr. Jones is a very illusive man...many have tried to catch him, but they've all failed...even*

*the authorities have yet to capture him.”*

Irene turns slightly and brushes her chin with her scepter.

*“...However, I know a few of his secrets...”*

*“What are they? Tell me!”* PJ demands.

Irene’s arm reaches out, pointing her scepter directly to PJ’s face.

*“If you want my aid, you must prove yourself worthy...”*

Marie rubs her index finger on the desk’s surface as a concerned look invades her face.

*“Preston, if you want my aid, come to the Smith’s Drag Strip tomorrow night. There’s someone there who’d like to challenge a man of your skills to a race.”*

PJ responds, *“who’s this someone and why should I race them?”*

*“Oh...you’ll find out if you’re up to the task and not afraid. I know something of every agent in this city, and my instincts tell me you won’t refuse.”* Irene looks down at a holograph of images and text projecting from her watch.

*“Ms...Irene, what can you tell us about the other criminal leaders in our fair city? You must be one of them if you know so much about them. Do you have any connections with them?”* Marie inquiries.

*“Marie, I don’t have any connections with the likes of Oregano Jones. I do, however, know one Skinny Pete and the man who lives on the outskirts of Cat City called Mr. Meo. You may know him as Stubbs. Stubbs sells evaporator coils and disc brakes when he’s not heisting small electronics,”* replies Irene.

*“It doesn’t seem like you know too much. This all smells fishy if you know what I mean. I’ll be keeping my eye on you.”* Marie says sternly.

*“Don’t be concerned about me. Haven’t I told you that I mean no harm, Marie,”* insists Irene.

*“Well, we can’t know everything Marie, can we? Irene...I’ll see you tomorrow! Let’s see what secrets you can spill,”* PJ says enthusiastically.

Irene looks at the two, smiles, and turns to the door. Looking over her left shoulder with suspicious eyes she says,

*“It was a pleasure meeting you two. I look forward to seeing how tomorrow’s events will unfold.”* Irene turns around and exits. The roar of Irene’s car follows but fades out into the streets.

*“You don’t know what you’re doing, Mr. Jackson. She’s not an agent. We don’t know who she serves,”* insists Marie.

*“But she’s the key to Oregano Jones! She could be a big help,”* PJ emphatically replies.

Marie places her hands flat on the desk, and gazes into the distance. She takes a deep breath, and lets out a soft, long sigh, and tips her head down. PJ stands up from his chair and walks out of the building. As he exits, the soft melodies from the radio echo into the night as he walks his way back to his living quarters. He enters his bedroom, lies down on the bed, and goes to sleep with a single thought floating in his mind: *“Who is this mystery person and why do they want to race me?”*

Knock knock knock! The morning comes all too quickly.

PJ opens his eyes, walks over to the door, grabs the handle, and he pulls the door open.

*“Hi, Marie.”*

*“Good morning, Mr. Jackson.”*

*“Who are we investigating today?”*

*“Nobody. I’m off duty today.”*

*“What? Why? We’re getting closer to catching the guy who stole my car!”*

*“You do know that being an agent isn’t my only job. I’d like to go out somewhere today. Any suggestions?”*

*“The Revolution Auto Museum? I heard about it on the train I took to Zephyr City.”*

*“Hmm...OK. That sounds like a good idea!”*

The two get into PJ's "new" Linguine Metro and drive off to the Museum. They park in an adjacent parking garage and walk to the front entrance.

The front façade of the building white, plain, and bloblike. It has "REVOLUTION" etched onto it. The two walk through the front doors and buy tickets from the rectangular ticket machines. They then step onto the floor of the main hall. In the center is a row of small industrial trucks. PJ takes a closer look at the tow truck on the end...

*"I don't see what's the big deal with a 5039 Advancer tow truck. It doesn't look it could haul anything," jokes P.J.*

Marie looks at the logo on the door with narrowed eyes and her hand on her chin. She reads out loud, "Brandy's".

*"Who's Brandy and how did this truck end up here?" PJ asks.*

*"Oh...she's a business partner of mine. She must've sold or donated her truck to the museum."*

The two walk away from the display of work trucks and across the scratched and slightly stained floors. They step into another exhibit, featuring modified sports cars, and a large white curtain that goes the width of the room behind the showcase. They walk up to a small, round one with a thin, short spoiler bolted onto the back, the number 2 spray-painted onto the doors. There is a dent in one of the doors and a pair of bug-eyed pop-up headlights.

*"Do you know who raced that car?" Marie asks P.J.*

*"I don't know. Let me check..." He gazes at the information placard placed beside the vehicle. "Dumpy Brown!"*

*"Who's Dumpy Brown? I've never ever heard of the 2-time champion Dumpy Brown."*

*"Dumpy Brown? That name is a little gross. What kind of parent would name their kid Dumpy Brown?" Marie comments.*

The two walk over to another vehicle. It's a sedan with boxy lines, deep rims, a spoiler on top, a roll cage, and a suspension that lowers it almost straight to the ground. Marie peers into the driver's seat and notices a cup resting in the cup holder on the center console.

*"Why is there a cup in this car? That seems odd. Maybe a worker left it there when they were moving it. Wait a minute...did they steal this car?"*

*"Maybe the person who donated it just forgot. Some of the people who drive Benzins have a reputation for not being the brightest."*

Marie sneaks over to the big white curtain. A note taped on rests in the center.

*"Sorry this exhibit is unavailable, we will be auctioning the vehicles so we can create a greater, better exhibit." It reads.*

Marie scowls at the note, stomps over to the end of the room, and thrusts her head through the curtain.

*"PJ, you really need to see this."*

The sounds of PJ's footsteps quickly approach Marie.

*"What, what is it?"*

*"Look behind the curtain."*

PJ slides his head through the curtain and sees a row of highly modified cars and a shiny blue car with sharp sweeping fins on the rear. The front end with monstrous teeth and angry eyes stares back at him. A great feeling of anger and frustration boils inside of PJ's mind. His heart speeds up, and his muscles feel tense.

*"HEY!!! THAT'S MY CAR!"* He screams.

*"Shhh!"* Marie whispers.

*"Those jerks took my car and they're gonna sell it?!"* he furiously whispers.

A distant voice mutters from far behind. The sounds of footsteps begin to approach from behind. Marie turns her head back to see a tall figure in a gray trench coat and a hat approaching.

*"Hide!"* Marie whispers into PJ's ear.

PJ darts behind the curtain. Marie takes one more look back. The figure in the trench coat is getting closer. Marie takes a deep breath, and she blips out with a flash of purple light. The footsteps grow louder, breaking through the curtain, approaching the two. The footsteps slow down to a stop. PJ and Marie's eyes gape open as they keep their breath held tight. The footsteps inch even closer, and they pause. The stomping hovers over to the right, growing faint. The stomps and clacks melt back to the other side of the curtain, shuffling out of the exhibit, until they fall silent. The two sit, leaning up against the resting beast machine. The only thing in their sight is a blank white wall with a garage door, all scuffed, rusted, dented, and banged-up.

*"Well, we located the car. Now, we need an escape plan."* Marie whispers to PJ.

*"Escape...plan...I have an idea..."* PJ says to himself.

Marie's eyes slide to focus on PJ.

*"You're not going to steal the car right now, are you?"*

*"What do you mean steal the car? IT'S MY CAR! I'm going to take it back before some rich dude from the other side of the galaxy buys it. I've spent countless hours and money getting to what it is today. I must get it back NOW!"*

Marie sits silently. The sounds of the visitor's footsteps begin to fill the air. She closes her eyes, and exhales. Her eyes open and makes eye contact with PJ.

*"You have your keys, right?"*

*"Of course, I never forget them!"*

Marie walks over to the passenger side door, pulls the door open, and sits down in the car. PJ leaps into the car and thrusts the key into the ignition. A roaring growl booms out from the exhaust pipe as PJ revs the engine. He's home! It feels so good to be behind the wheel of "the beast" again.

He shifts his monster machine into reverse, slams his foot onto the gas, and crashes through the door with a great loud crash and bang. He slams onto the brakes as he barrels towards the fence. He shifts back into first gear, lays his foot on the gas, swings his car to the right with a great lurch of the steering wheel, and races out of the backlot onto the streets.

The city rushes past like a movie in quick fast forward. Marie glances back into the canvas of the rearview mirror. She notices a bulky black car emerging from the museum. It edges on closer to the two.

*"PJ, where are you going?"*

*"I'm goin' back to Moon Auto to drop off my car!"*

*"Don't."*

*"Why?"*

*"We're being chased! We're going to Brandy's instead!"*

*“Where’s that?”*

*“I will help you. It is my duty to help others.”*

PJ rushes through the city, only to notice a red flare of light up above, close in the distance. He slams his foot onto the brake pedal. His car comes lurching forwards with the tires screaming loud as ever, rapidly losing speed. PJ taps the steering wheels as his attention switches back and forth from the rearview mirror and the traffic signal. PJ darts his focus to the rearview mirror.

The bulky car inches closer...

PJ darts his focus to the traffic signal...

It’s red.

He darts his focus back to the rearview mirror...

The bulky car is even closer...

He darts his focus back to the traffic light...

It’s still red.

He darts his focus back to the rearview mirror...

The bulky black car is inching closer, slowing down, aiming for the bumper of his beast machine.

PJ darts his focus back to the traffic signal...

It’s green.

PJ lays his foot on the gas.

The sounds of blaring horns, and shouting drivers roll past PJ as he wiggles and weaves through the maze of cars slowly rolling forward, being trailed by the bulky black car. He speeds through the intersection, and through the street, weaving in and out of traffic, gazing back in the mirror, watching the moves of the shadow pursuing.

*"Get to the Hyperway! Get to the Hyperway NOW!!"* Marie commands.

PJ speeds past signs and shops. Close in the distance, rows of cars sit at an intersection. PJ grabs the wheel and lurches his car to the right. The "beast" rumbles and swings around as he cuts through a patch of grass, and back onto the road. He looks back into the rearview mirror to see the black car stopped at the red light. As PJ races down the road, an identical bulky black vehicle turns out from the corner behind. PJ leans the monster machine left, inching to an on-ramp. He puts his foot down on the pedal, and his car roars up the on-ramp.

*"Keep your eyes peeled for exit 21. It's coming up quick..."*

A sign fast approaches in the distance, becoming more legible as it gets closer.

*"Exit 19"* It reads.

PJ rolls on through the blue rush of the Hyperway. The roar of his monster machine's engine and the rush of the air pound on his eardrums while his heart beats quickly and sweat down the sides of his head. An oblong sign hanging above the road materializes in the distance.

It's getting closer and closer.

*"Exit 20" it reads.*

*"Ok, be sure to exit at 21! 21!"* PJ says to himself.

THUMP!

The tail of the car drifts to the right. PJ grips the steering wheel tight and yanks it to the left. Sparks fly as he struggles to get back into the lane. A shadowy metal blob rolls right up to the driver's side window.

*"Auugh, I forgot about that guy! How are we gonna shake him?!"*

Marie lunges over and reaches her arm out, with her hand outstretched. She reaches her trembling arm around, sporadically grabbing the air.

*"I can't find a steering wheel or any pedals! It must be remote driven! I can't believe it!!"*



PJ presses his foot down onto the brake. The black blob rushes past, slows down, and swings all the way around with a cloud of smoke. It emerges from the cloud of smoke, charging directly towards Marie and PJ.

PJ grinds through the gears to put the car in reverse, and slams onto the gas. The blue beast rockets away as the black blob gives chase. It gets closer and closer to bumper's reach. PJ braces his arms, gently raises his foot of the gas, swings the steering wheel sideways with great might, and his car whips around 180 degrees, and the black blob slides out of control, and crashes into the wall. Marie grabs the shifter and shuffles it back into forward gear.

*"Go! Go! GO!!! We have no time to waste!"*

PJ puts his foot on the gas and speeds through the Hyperway. The oblong shaped sign comes rolling in again from the distance:

*"EXIT 21! THERE IT IS!!"*

He leans the car over to the right, merges onto the off-ramp, and slowly eases his foot off from the gas, the adrenaline still pumping in his veins. Marie guides him through some back roads, leaving the stinch of tall buildings and resting in the calm of some countryside trees. PJ drives down a road. To the right, he spots a hand-painted sign riveted onto a pair of rusty old pipes placed onto a dirt road. The road meanders under the canopy with "the beast" rumbling and shaking down the road. The light at the end of the canopy of trees approaches, and PJ is met with a grand field filled with all sorts of well-worn machinery, some of it all in one piece. A little white house with

a brilliant red roof, shutters, and front door. PJ parks the car in front of the home.

The two walk up the dry old creaky floorboards, and Marie knocks on the front door. A bug-eyed, red-haired raccoon girl adorning overalls and boots with a wrench in hand greets the two.

*"Why-a hello Marie! Welcome back to Brandy's Super Emporium for Old Metal Things! Watcha here for?"* Brandy asks.

*"Before we talk, you see that Skaggs Miami out there?"* Marie asks with her arm pointed behind her.

*"That blue one with the monster teeth that's all scraped up on the side?"*

*"Yes, that one. I need you to go and hide it somewhere safe.*

*I will explain when you get back inside."*

*"Ugh yeah...my car's all messed up now..."*

*"The most important thing is that is in your hands now, PJ."*



## **Chapter 4**

### **RaceHeart**

#### \*\*\*BREAKING NEWS\*\*\*

A car thief has broken into the Revolution Auto Museum and stole a blue Earth Year 1960 Skaggs Miami“

A light clattering of a spoon on a pot rattles from behind Marie and PJ. The musty fumes of natural gas and sizzling meats haze through the air. Marie and PJ gaze at their reflections on the black canvas of the TV resting atop a handmade shelf. The scruffy carpet floors, a dried-up pale beige. The wallpaper, a murky off-white dotted with pink bubbles scales from floor to ceiling. Footsteps rustle and crunch from behind the two.

*“Hey! I made ya’ll some grub!”* Brandy gleefully announces. She puts the plates in the laps of the two. Marie and PJ eat their freshly cooked meals. After they finish, PJ steps outside. He bends over the porch railing, slowly turning his head around. A

great panorama featuring a row of worn vehicles, scrap piles and trees stands before him.

A soft high-pitched whirring drills into PJ's eardrums. He steps off the front porch and walks along the side of the house. The whirring grows sharper and louder with each step. He steps past the back corner of Brandy's little home and is met with a large tow truck with 6 mighty wheels of steel, a flat nose cab with a bulky square grille, a pair of burly smokestacks seated behind the cab, and a big strong towing boom resting on the rear of the vehicle. The vehicle is painted yellow with green flames on the cab, and "BRANDY'S" stencil-painted in green on the rear.

The whirring stops, and Brandy pokes out from behind the truck's cab.

*"Hi there, Mr. Preston Jackson! You like my new tow truck I imported from Earth?"*

*"I do! It's pretty darn cool."*

PJ walks up closer to Brandy.

*"Hey, I got a thing for you to do."* he whispers to her.

*"Oooh, watcha need me to do for you?"* Brandy whispers back.

*"I need you to tow my car over to the Smith's Drag Strip. Oh, and do you have any masks or helmets?"*

*“Sure! I’d love to take my new truck for a spin! But...why do ya need a mask? You goin’ to a costume party afterwards?”*

*“You know what happened earlier today? Me and Marie are on the run from a gang. I can’t have my face show up in the thick of Zephyr City. I might get recognized by the wrong people. Oh, and make sure you keep that tarp over my car.”*

*“Ok! It’s time for you to burn some rubber!”*

The sun is setting fast on the streets of Zephyr City. The streets are becoming quiet once more as the countless citizens return to their homes. The growl and hiss of the tow truck’s diesel engine and the creak and squeal of the suspension shake into the eardrums of PJ and Brandy.

*“So, who ya’ racing? A friend, rival, or a buncha strangers?”*

*“A stranger. A lady visited me and Marie at Moon Auto the other night and offered some information on the head honcho if I beat a specific person...that she didn’t describe in a drag race.”*

*“Well, I know you’re gonna win because Marie told me all about your racing background!”*

*“Yeah, it just depends on what my opponent’s driving. It could be something much faster.”*

A silver luxury sedan with rounded edges and headlights rolls by the driver’s side. It stays in pace with the tow truck. PJ turns

his head and squints at the vehicle. He sees a silhouette of a driver inside the car.

*"Yeah...that's Oregano Jones."* PJ whispers to himself.

*"Oregano? I sure love putting oregano on my pizza!"* says Brandy.

*"I'm talking about Oregano Jones, a gang leader. He's the one who stole my car."*

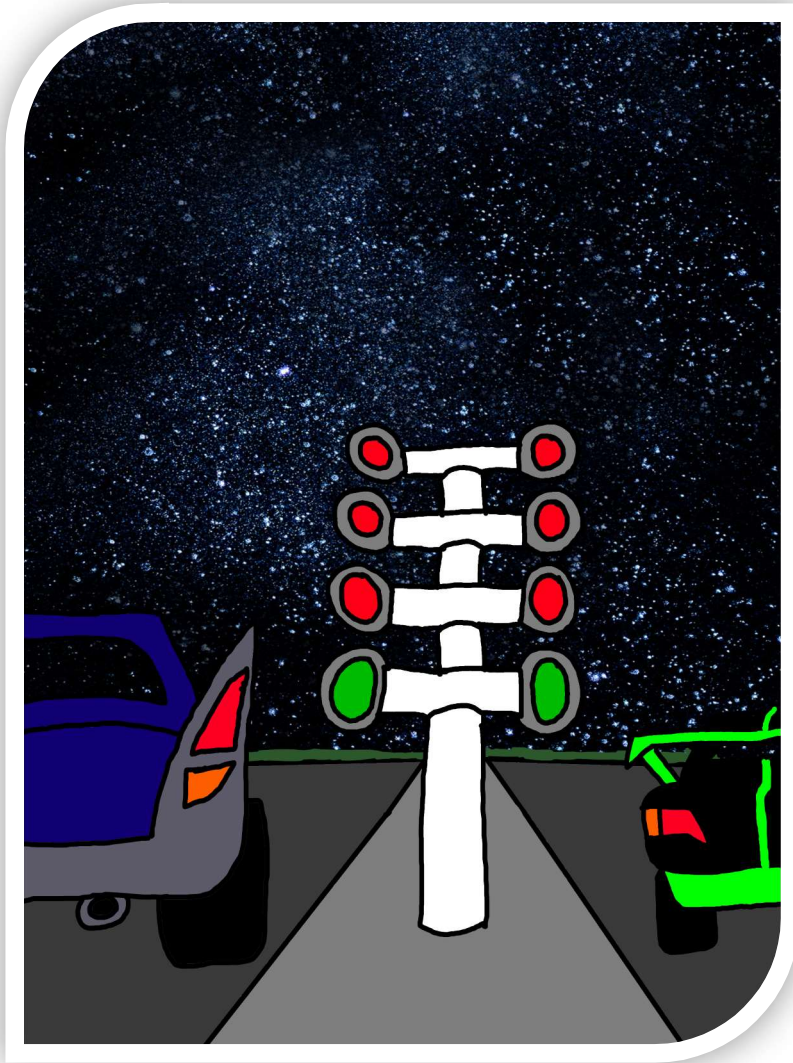
*"Oh...ok!"*

A pair of grandstands on a flat expanse of land with a small brick building in between and an iron gate rolls into view. Brandy turns off the engine, and the two exit the truck. PJ walks up to the gate and sees a person about his height wearing a glossy green helmet and a dark green racing suit. The figure is standing in front of a small black and neon green sports roadster with a smug grin of a grille standing behind the gate.

*"Who are you supposed to be?"* The masked one inquires in a slightly raspy tone.

PJ lifts his mask, revealing his face. The masked one chuckles smugly.

*"Oh...well, you're going to LOSE today, punk! You're going to FEEL the BITE of pneumatic power!"* The masked individual boasts.



*"Yeah, whatever man. You act like it's still the 5020s. It's the 5050s now for crying out loud! Pneumatic performance cars are everywhere!"*

*"Hey, Preston! Your car is ready to race! It's time to start!"*

The two enter the drag strip, and ready their cars on the starting line. PJ sits and gazes at the long black strip of asphalt before him, only being illuminated by the floodlights standing above. His heart pounds, his palms & forehead sweat, and his legs tremble.

*"You're gonna be embarrassed after this so-called tournament champion!"* the masked one shouts.

The lights between the two racing lanes begin to count down. PJ puts his foot down on the brake and revs the engine steadily. PJ locks his sights onto the path of asphalt ahead. The starting lights between the two racing lanes begin to tick down. He grapples onto the top of the steering wheel with his left hand, and clenches onto the shifter with his right hand. Two green orbs of light burst to life in the center of the two lanes. PJ throws his foot off from the brake and slams his foot down on the gas. A huge cloud of smoke erupts as the car fires forwards. PJ yanks the shifter into second gear and then into third gear. The engine roars louder and higher as the beast machine and the pneumatic hotshot duel down the asphalt. The neon green shadow creeps past, PJ gasps with furrowed eyebrows and yanks the shifter into fourth gear. The neon green shadow creeps closer towards

PJ's sight. The blue beast machine edges on closer, as the two racers approach the finish line at a blistering pace. PJ snaps the shifter into 5<sup>th</sup> gear, and the smug speedster rolls right up beside PJ. The two bolt beneath the finish gate, and slam onto the brakes. A booming squeal of the tires echoes around the plane, and a massive white cloud of smoke plumes out. PJ climbs out of his car and turns back. He gazes through the clearing smoke as his heart races and his core warms up.

LANE 1: 8.562 LANE 2: 8.583

"YES!" He gleefully shouts with both arms raised high into the air.

A tall figure steps out from the darkness, and onto the pavement. As it gets closer, more is revealed. It's dressed in a black dress, and it sports a big long ponytail.

*"Hello again, Preston. You have proven yourself worthy...more than worthy."*

The tall figure steps into the light . It's revealed to be none other than Irene.

*"What do ya mean I am more than worthy instead of just regular worthy?"*

*"I heard the news. You have found and retrieved your vehicle from Oregano Jones' gallery."*

*"I just got lucky there. I wasn't looking for anything. Marie just happened to have poked her purple head into the right place."*

*"No worry. You escaped the forces of Oregano Jones' drone cars. What would you like to know about Oregano Jones?"*

*"Where should I start? Well-"*

The clatter and chug of a diesel engine rumbles in from behind, followed by the soft pitter-patter of footsteps running on the grass coming from beside.

*"Hooray for Mr. Preston Jackson! He's the best racer in this place! He's on the path to be a world champion!"* Brandy cheers as she dances, with arms raised high up.

*"Hmm...who is your raccoon friend?"* Irene asks.

*"She's a friend of my friend Marie."* PJ explains.

*"Hey Brandy, can ya take my car back to your place? I might have won but I still can't be seen, especially not in my car!"*

*"Sure can...winner!"*

The clink of chains and cables rattles from behind, followed by the soft rippling of thick fabric, and Brandy chugs away in her truck.

Honk! Honk! Honk!

A big green block rolls past with a tarped silhouette of a car in tow. It chugs and grumbles into the night with the tarped vehicle wobbling about.

Irene stands still for a few seconds. She smiles and walks off towards the distance.

*"Follow me."* Irene says as she turns her head back, waving towards herself. She turns forward and proceeds to walk to the far side of the bleacher. She turns back once more to see PJ still standing in the same place.

*"Are you coming? You do want my help, right? You certainly have earned it."* She inquires.

PJ slowly raises his left leg and moves it forward. He then raises his right leg and moves it forwards. He slowly walks over to Irene, swiveling his head from bleacher to bleacher. In the distance, Irene spins her scepter around in her left hand. She then throws it high into the air, reaches her arm out a little, and catches it with her right hand.

As PJ gets closer, Irene walks behind the bleacher, with PJ following not too far behind. After Irene disappears behind the bleacher, a sputtering roar of the exhaust echoes from behind the bleacher, and the roll-caged, raised-a-little, land yacht pulls out from the shadows. PJ climbs into the mahogany and marble lined interior of Irene's car and he fastens his seatbelt. She puts her foot onto the gas, and the land yacht leans and swerves out, down the racing lanes, and to the streets.

*"I will ask you once more...what is it that you want to know about Mr. Jones, Preston?"*

*"Irene...who are you?"*

Irene silently takes a deep breath and smiles.

*"I am not who you fear I am. Oregano Jones is no friend of mine. I am an ally to the kind of you and your purple friend. Now, about Oregano Jones: he hosts car auctions for the vehicles his gang stole from Fisker Plaza."*

*"Why hasn't anyone caught 'em yet if you know where he is?"*

*"He makes an escape before anyone has a chance to catch him! I've came close to catching him a few times, however..."*

*"Oooh."*

*"Preston, where would you like to go now?"*

PJ sits with his back pressed to the soft, exotic, red fabric of the seat with his head turned to the window, watching the brick-and-mortar buildings, and lone smokestack outside roll by. The land yacht stops at an intersection. A familiar compact black & green sports car pulls up to the passenger side and rolls down its window. The masked individual from many minutes ago leans out from his car.

*"Hey YOU!"* he shouts.

PJ rolls down his window. *"Whaaaat?"* He mutters with shrugged shoulders.

*"You may have won this time, but you not gonna win the next race! Not after I go to the car auction and win myself something far better than your wreck! I heard they got a Paramount 4aR at this auction!"*

PJ's eyebrows fly up as his heart begins to pound.

*"Where is this?"* he inquires. *"Oh, you think you gonna score the Paramount? Well, if you wanna try, go to Fisker Plaza."*

The light switches to green, and the pneumatic hotshot sputters off. Irene feathers her foot onto the gas, and the land yacht glides down the street. Irene turns her eyes to the right to see PJ sitting up straight with wide open eyes.

*"PJ, is there anything of concern?"* *"They've got Marie's car! We gotta get to the auction!"*

PJ pulls out a rectangular device, flips up the screen, and begins typing and scrolling away on it. He clicks, swipes, and double clicks. He then taps away at the number pad...

*"Hey-low! This is Brandy's Emporium for Old Metal Things! Watcha need?"*

*"This is PJ. You at your place yet? This is urgent."*

*"Did that tall lady in the dress wreck her car?"*

*"No. I have been told that Marie's car has been stolen and will be put into a car auction."*

*"Hey Marie! The phone's for you!"* Brandy calls out.

*"..."*

*"Who is this?"*

*"It's PJ. Your car was stolen and-"*

*"W-w-what?! Who did this?! And how did you find out?!"*

*"Just...find a way to get to Fisker Plaza."*

*"..."*

*"Hello? Marie? You still here?"*

*"..."*

PJ shuts the lid to his device and slips it into his pocket.

*"So, to Fisker Plaza it is?"* Irene inquires.

*"Yes! We don't got time to waste!"*

The land yacht leans back as it pulls out from the intersection, and down the streets. The car lurches and sways through the turns, a calm & elegant orchestral tune fills the cabin of the car. A mixture of aged brick buildings, and modern stone buildings rush past the canopy of the windshield. Irene eases her foot off from the gas, and her car gently leans forward as it slows down.

Through the low-lying skyline, a blue 4-floor building with a sloped roof shows its face. Irene navigates the land yacht into a dimly lit alleyway. She then cranks the engine off.

*"We have arrived at Fisker Plaza, Preston."*

*"Yeah, we sure have..."*

The two climb out of the car, and PJ pokes his head around the corner. In the blue building's parking lot. Among the great assortment of vehicles stands the same familiar black and green sports car, with the masked individual leaning on the rear end. PJ darts back behind the corner and faces Irene.

*"I'm gonna need a new disguise. This helmet not gonna cut it."*

*"You need a disguise?"* Irene steps over to the trunk of her car, and it lifts open.

*"I have you covered."* She says with a baggy slate gray suitcoat in one hand and a chrome silver bullet-shaped helmet in the other. Footsteps shuffle in from the left corner of the alley. They get closer and closer to the opening...

*"PJ should be around here somewhere..."* A distant voice chatters.

*"Yeah, he sure is here somewhere..."* a higher voice chatters out.

A cat-eared silhouette with a purple tint to it, and a short, bushy-tailed silhouette walk into the alleyway opening and stands in the center of it and stops to gaze at Irene and PJ.

*"Hey, who's the guy in the funny suit and helmet?"*

*"Hmm..."* the purple silhouette mutters with its hands put together.

*"Marie, it's me, PJ!"*

*"So, what you gonna do while me and Irene get yo' car back?"*

*"I'm sorry but, I don't know yet."*

*"Well, you gotta do something like...keep a lookout...or-"*

*"Preston, I recall you saying we don't have any time to waste. Isn't it time we come into the auction?"*

*"Oh, right!"*

Irene gently struts out from the alleyway, and to the building. PJ runs after her.

*"Bye y'all! See you after I get your car back!"* He calls out with a smirk on his face to Brandy and Marie.

PJ follows Irene through the parking lot in front, across the side and back of the apartment complex, and to a large concrete wall with a dirty white metal door in the back corner. Irene taps her claw on the window.

*"Who izzit?"* a gruff voice grumbles out from the other side.

*"Madame Irene."* She says smoothly.

The door slowly creaks open, revealing a short raccoon man wearing jeans and an eyepatch. Irene and PJ step through the door.

*“Eyyy, who’z bullet man? Whatz he doin here?”* The raccoon man grunts.

*“Oh, him? He’s my...delivery driver. He delivers my cars home for me. You do know I’m a very busy woman.”*

*“I’ve nevah seen ‘em, and he lookz like a lottah trouble!”* the raccoon man grumbles as he closes the door behind the two.

PJ follows Irene down a concrete staircase surrounded by concrete walls, dimly lit by the lukewarm buzz of a fluorescent light. As the two step down, a chatter becomes louder and louder. It becomes its loudest when they step into a room with oak wood-paneled walls, red carpet floors, a stage with red curtains and a dune buggy atop it with a whole variety of peculiar figures filling the floors. The lights dim, the chattering softens, a spotlight shines onto the right side of the stage, and a tall figure in a neon orange suitcoat, and a jet-black skull mask steps out from the curtains.

*“Greetings Visitors from near and far! Get ready and be dazzled by our awesome cars! Welcome to tonight’s auction!”* The skull-masked figure calls out with his arms wide open.

*“But before we begin, we must inform all of you of someone who we don’t wanna see ‘round here...”*

PJ's face is placed front and center to the curtains by a projection. He swivels his head about with his hands behind his back.

*"If you see this man, show him that he's not welcome in these parts. OK, let's begin our auction starting with this 4993 Baguette Buggy! This auction will start at 1,000 Zephs!"*

The crowd hollers out a chaotic cheer with their arms pumping up to the skies.

*"1,000!" a gruff voice booms out.*

*"2,000!" a slow, low voice mumbles out.*

*"3,000!" a pompous voice shouts out.*

*"10,000! 10,000! 10,000!" an aggressive voice screams out.*

*"10,000? It sounds like someone wants to do a buyout!"* The skull-masked figure announces with his hand by his ear.

*"THAT'S RIGHT! NOBODY ELSE CAN HAVE BAGUETTE BUGGIES BUT ME!"* the aggressive voice hollers out. A burly bald man runs onstage, fires up the engine, and reverses the vehicle behind the curtains. The sputter of the engine winds and winds from behind the curtains, getting quieter and quieter.

*"Allriiight! Our next vehicle is a very special one...It's an ultra-rare Sakura Paramount...AaR!!!!"* The skull-masked man pridefully announces.

A purple supercar with a slightly pointed front, and a wide spoiler on the rear emerges from the curtains. The metallic purple paint shimmers and reflects from the bright glow of the spotlight as it inches out.

*"Bids on this beauty are gonna start at 200,000 Zephs! Ssstart bidding!"*

*"I'd like to do a buyout please."* Irene offers with her arm raised.

*"So, you think you wanna do a buyout on this?! That'll be...2,500,000 Zephs!"*

"Oh, no worries. I'll accept that offer."

"Well then...the ultra-rare Sakura Paramount 4aR has been sold!"

PJ steps forwards, and shuffles through the crowd, bumping, brushing, and stumbling by everyone he passes. He climbs the steps to the stage, and he climbs into the purple speedster. Through the driver's side window, PJ sees the skull-masked man run up towards him with his arms swinging side to side.

"Hey bullet head, what are you doin?"

*"Oh, I-I'm the delivery driver. I'm bringing it home for my client."*

*"You sure you a delivery driver, little man? I haven't seen many car delivery drivers around these parts..."*

*“Well...my client is just a busy person...”* PJ mumbles as his forehead begins to lightly sweat.

“Busy person? I believe I noticed her in the crowd somewhere...in fact, I am the surest of all that I heard her voice...”

PJ pans his sights through the crowd of scowling, eyebrow-raised, suspicion-sharing crowd. He looks up and down, left to right, corner to corner, and not a single trace of Irene’s beastly, beautiful face can be seen.

*“So little man, who are you really? What’s the face under that helmet?”*

PJ stares at the skull-masked man with eyes wide open and sweat trickling down his face. His tightly grasped hands slide down slightly from the steering wheel.

WHACK!

A crystal topped scepter flies from the shadows, hitting the skull-masked man in the head. The crowd gasps, the skull-masked man lets out a brief scream of pain as Irene picks up the scepter, and she leaps into the passenger side of the purple speed machine. PJ switches the engine on, and the car comes alive with a great scream from the exhaust. As he hastily reverses the car, the wide spoiler catches on the curtains, and they get ripped down as the vehicle rushes into the back warehouse. PJ wiggles and weaves around the vehicles, rolling

his way towards the light in the back corner. He rolls up the ramp, and into the streets. Irene helps PJ navigate the purple speedster to the alleyway. Brandy then rolls her tow truck in front, blocking the view. PJ, Marie, Irene, and Brandy all stand in the center of the darkly lit alleyway.

*“Well, we got your car back, Marie! But...now Oregano Jones is going to be hunting me down even harder! I know, I’ll just move to a new city, never come back to Zephyr City, maybe even change my name...and perhaps grow a mustache while I’m at it.”* PJ sputters out as he paces back and forth.

Marie puts her hand onto the side of PJ’s head and turns it to her face.

*“PJ, Oregano Jones is going to be out in the open. It’s the perfect opportunity to arrest him! Don’t give up your dreams just because you’re scared of him now.”* She says to PJ in a somewhat stern tone.

*“Aren’t you scared of him too?”* PJ inquires.

*“Sigh...I was. But tonight, I realized that I must face my fear.”*

*“Hey, what’s this silver Luxor Emperor doin’ just sitting out in the road?”* Brandy calls out.

PJ, Marie, and Irene all look into each other’s eyes, and crouch down to the ground.

*“We need to think of a plan now!”* Mare whispers to PJ and Irene.

*"We just start chasing him, right?" PJ inquires.*

*"I say we ram Mr. Jones car with either my cruiser or your...raccoon friend's tow truck."*

*"I'm sorry Irene but, we agents can't perform those kinds of maneuvers."*

*"Hmm...so you want it to be a clean pursuit?" Asked Irene.*

CRACK!

A glass bottle hurls over the cab of Big Jonas, and it shatters onto the hood of Irene's land yacht.

*"Marie, you'll be riding with me. PJ, you'll be driving the Paramount."*



*"Since there's more than one of us driving...maybe we can corner him."* PJ suggests.

*"Whattabout me, Irene? I'm Brandy!"*

CRASH!

Another glass bottle flies over Brandy's truck, and shatters on the wall.

*"I think Brandy can keep watch in case we lose Oregano Jones."* Marie proposes.

*"PJ, Marie, Brandy, are all of you ready?"* Asks Irene.

Another bottle hurls into the alleyway, and it halts in place midair. It remains motionless for a few moments until Marie thrusts her hand forward, and the bottle flies over the cab of Brandy's truck.

Crack!

*"I'M GONNA GET YOU NO-GOOD GOOD GUYS!!"* a distant voice shouts.

The four leap into their vehicles. A cacophony of mechanical grumbles, chugs, and screams bolt out, and the three vehicles race out with a thick cloud of smoke. The purple speedster and the land yacht swing, skid, and power slide out from the alley, and onto the main road. The silver sedan charges towards the purple speedster. With a flick of the yoke, the purple speed

machine flinches over, and the silver bruiser flies past, swerves in front, and keeps pace. With a booming hiss, the trunk shoots open, and a cannon with a big clear cylinder filled with metal balls resting on top is revealed. PJ slams his foot onto the brakes, and he pulls into the left lane. A deep mechanical growl blows past PJ, and the land yacht snaps into a slide, rapidly losing momentum, throwing up a cloud of smoke. When the smoke clears, the cannon stands high above, pointing down with the barrel gazing directly into the eyes of PJ. He kicks the car into reverse, whips it all the way around, and a metallic sphere blows past. He kicks the car back into forward gear, and zips away. He steers the car over into an alleyway and puts the purple speed machine to a complete stop. PJ looks in the rearview mirror, and the big yellow shadow of Brandy's truck trundles past. He looks into each side mirror. An empty street with buildings on the left, and an empty street with a streetlight at the end in the right one. PJ peers through the windscreen. A corridor of brick with litter dotting the grounds stands before him. The growl of engines roars from the periphery, and the silver bruiser & the land yacht speed past the opening. PJ puts his foot on the gas, and the car screams out from the alleyway.

Buzz buzz buzz!

PJ reaches into his pocket and pulls out his communication device.

*"Yo! Who is it?"*

*“Mr. Jackson, we will be chasing Oregano Jones to the abandoned port. You got that?”*

*“Yeah Marie, I got that.”*

PJ puts his communicator in the cup holder and puts his focus right to the road in front. He rolls past Irene’s car, and paces along with Oregano Jones’ car. The driver’s side window rolls down, and a bottle flies out, smashing into the passenger side window with a crackling crash. In the right corner of the distance, a broad & flat expanse of slightly overgrown concrete with a large, rusted warehouse resting atop. The three rush towards an intersection, and the silver bruiser power slides to the left at the intersection and rushes out of view. The purple speed machine and the land yacht lean left at the intersection, and slow down to a stop in the straight. In the horizon ahead, a box truck slowly approaches, a mechanical roar softly vibrates through the air. The mechanical roar booms and charges closer and closer from the left side of PJ’s periphery. The purple speedster and the land yacht pull forwards as the silver bruiser charges out from the alleyway with a thick trail of smoke behind as it screams to a halt, thumping into the wall.

The silver sedan reverses back from the wall, and it trundles away, racing towards the empty concrete expanse. The two cars chase after it, pacing it side by side.

Buzz buzz buzz!

*“Hello?”*

*“Hey Mr. Preston Jackson, I think I just saw that Oregano Jones guy!”*

*“Yeah, and I’m chasing him now!”*

The rumbles and screeches from the engines now echo as they speed behind the walls of the rusted steel structure atop the abandoned plane of concrete. PJ lets his foot off from the gas pedal as the land yacht & the silver bruiser drift towards a corner, and the land yacht blocks Oregano Jones in. The trunk of the silver sedan shoots open once more, and the cannon takes aim at PJ. A silver sphere flies beside PJ. Another silver sphere blows past with a grinding screech and a shower of sparks. A small, metallic purple blob flies into the distance, thudding onto the ground with a crack. PJ rushes to the entrance, glancing back and forth between the pavement, and the cannon behind him. He shifts over to the side, and a metallic ball crashes and slides on the ground beside him. PJ races around the perimeter of the building and parks the car on the corner. He walks over to the entrance and creeps his head in from the side. The steel structure is mostly empty, except for Irene’s land yacht in the corner. He begins to step inside. The squeak of a door opening resonates through the air. PJ tilts his head around, searching for the origin of the sound.

*THUMP!*

The Skull-Masked Man charges towards PJ with his fist raised. Marie chases after, with a purple haze coming from her

outstretched arm. As the Skull-Masked Man approaches closer, he becomes slower, his arm droops down, and he droops down to the ground. PJ stands still and gazes at the now unconscious Oregano Jones.

*"We've caught him...."* PJ says in disbelief.

*"Oregano Jones won't be causing any more trouble anytime soon,"* Marie says in reflection.

*"PJ, where's my car?"*

*"I parked it outside..."*

*"Ok. I'll see you at Brandy's."* Marie lifts Oregano Jones, and she carries him out. The aggressive, powerful scream of the exhaust vibrates through the air as the purple exterior of Marie's car shines away into the night.

*"Preston, how may I be of your service now?"*

*"Irene, how 'bout you take me to Brandy's?"*

*"Brandy's?"*

*"You know, Brandy's Super Emporium for Old Metal Things?"*

*"I'm sorry but, I do not quite know where that is. Your raccoon friend can help you with that. She seems to be the owner of that place."*

*“Alright, I’ll go call Brandy...”* Just as PJ reaches into his pocket, Irene grabs his attention...

*“Remember Preston, if there’s business you need aid with, call me. I am at your service.”*

Irene walks to her car, and she drives away.

PJ stands in the rusted steel structure, alone. He steps out and looks at the brick buildings along the silent street, all aged and weathered. He gazes at the night sky split by the planetary ring, seeing the stars shine, watching aircraft and spacecraft flying by.

Honk honk honk!

A yellow box cab tow truck with green flames and big smokestacks rolls up and stops in front of PJ.

*“Hey, Mr. Preston Jackson! You need a lift?”* Brandy asks with her head hanging out of the window.

*“Yeah, I do! Take me to your place.”*

PJ climbs into Brandy’s truck, and she makes her way back to Brandy’s Super Emporium for Old Metal Things.

## Epilogue

PJ and Marie sit on the couch in Brandy's living room, looking out the front window into the fading light. The chirps of the nighttime bugs buzz in from the outside, and the hum and slosh of the dishwasher sounds in from the kitchen behind.

*"Thanks for working with me, Mr. Jackson."*

*"Eh, I didn't have a choice. At least it's all over now."*

*"I could have easily found another agent if it wanted to. But you stuck with me."*

The smell of baked pastries permeates the air, and Brandy walks up to Marie and PJ wearing oven mitts on her hands.

*"I know it's real late but, I'm making y'all some cookies to celebrate you two stoppin' Oregano Jones!"*

*"I'll have some in the morning. I need to get some sleep."* Marie tells Brandy.

*"Marie, what do you wanna do tomorrow?"* PJ asks.

*"I don't think we have to do anything tomorrow. We've done a lot in the past couple of days."*

*"We sure have..."*

*The End.*