

Popcorn

A red and white popcorn bucket is shown with a stream of yellow popcorn popping out of the top. The word 'Popcorn' is written in a large, bubbly, red-outlined font, with a single popcorn kernel integrated into the letter 'o'.

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“GHOST STORY”

BY LONE FANG

PORCELAIN

POPTROPICANS

BY LONELY COYOTE

ARTWORK

BY SPOTTED DRAGON

& MORE INSIDE



STORIES

Ghost Story

by Lone Fang

Darkness, then suddenly, I was in a bright room, a huge yellow blimp was positioned above me. My name was chosen, Lone Fang, or Fang, as most called me. I leapt into the yellow blimp and my eyes wandered over my new map. The islands were so different, and so BIG! And there were so many! I decided to start on Ghost Island. The poor magistrate! He was so fed up with the ghost hunters, he looked dead on his feet. Pun intended. I quickly realized he would need to be avoided if I wanted to search for any ghosts. I didn't feel very welcome in Hemlock Harbor, but I made do and played nice. I walked along the misty street and stopped dead. Hemlock Harbor was gloomy and small, but this shop, a shop made of gingerbread and candy, litterally exploded in your sight. It looked too cheerful for this place, and it made me the teensiest bit suspicious. The name was The Gingerbread House. A guy around my age paced in front of it, shaking salt over his shoulder, mumbling under his breath. "Hi there, I was wondering if you know where I can get a roo-?"

"Take this. A pinch of salt a day keeps the spirits away. You never know when you'll need it in a creepy town like this." He interrupted as if he didn't hear me, and handed me an extra salt shaker. "Um, thanks?" I said, and edged around him. "I'll get a room later I suppose. I want to take a look at the cemetery." I thought. I came within sight of the cemetery gates, and heard a crack. It was enough to send a chill down my spine. Shivering, I turned to my pet Blue, the sobbing dragon. "What was that sound?" I asked him. As usual, he just shed more tears. Which wasn't very encouraging. The noise came again, but I couldn't see anything through the thick fog. The gates opened as I sat there in absolute fear, shivering in a cold sweat. A boy with blonde hair, stiff with gel, a blue winter outfit and the doofiest smile on his face, came out of them, looking very sly. Spotting me, he hustled over and without a decent intro, began speaking to me as though he'd known I was there. "The sun is setting, and soon it will be the witching hour. Why not let me be your guide to some of our town's most haunted sights?"

I was rather taken aback by his bold manner, so, without answering, I asked snippily: "Are there really ghosts in Hemlock Har-

bor?" I didn't have to ask him twice. "There are indeed!" Suddenly, his face became clearer. "Hmm... The fog seems to be diminishing." Suddenly, he jumped in fear and I knew why. Footsteps were headed our way. A man in a bowler hat with a cane and a tired and stern face appeared behind me, which caused me to jump in fright. "Yikes! I need to be on my way before I get in trouble!" The boy said, and sped off in the opposite direction, a pamphlette floated towards me, the one I'd noticed him carrying before. I snatched it out of the air curiously, and stuffed it in my backpack. Then, I turned and faced the man that sent the strange ghost guide running. I knew from his important appearance (and wardrobe) that this could only be the magistrate of Hemlock Harbor. He sighed in a very tired way. "There was a time when Hemlock Harbor was a peaceful village, before this flock of ghost-hunting imbeciles turned it into a cheap tourist destination." Then he stopped and stared at me, realizing, that I was an apparent newcomer. "If you have no business in these woods, then I suggest you find a lodging for the night." he said in a fatherly stern way. I heeded him and left the cemetery gate, examining the dropped flyer. It showed five destinations, and the local ghost names. The first mentioned was the tireless thief, one ghost that would be digging for eternity under the locally placed bank vault. The second was called the "Cemetery Specter". A cloaked figure that seemed to come every night to drop a single, sorrowful rose upon one weather-beaten grave, then vanish into thin air. One particular one was known simply as "The Woman In The Window". A spirit of a lonely old woman that stared out the top window of the abandoned house near the inn. Music, apparently, soothed her. "Neat, at least I know a note or two of 'Hillary Duff', that'll cheer her up." I thought ruefully, flipping to the last two pages. As if this town needed an even bigger creep vibe, it had a haunted lighthouse. "The Restless Lighthouse Keeper."

"Aren't the dead SUPPOSED to REST in peace. R.I.P. And all that? He must've missed orientation or something." I muttered. This lost soul was very stubborn, and let the light of the lighthouse rove around continuously. Never wavering.

The last article was sad to read. A warden from the offshore prison had finished his rounds, and with no meal service, sat to eat a warm pastry, when the first successful jail break occurred. His wandering spirit still roamed the cells. Never escaping his shame.

Shoving the depressing flyer in my bag once again, I made my slow way to the inn. Before I could reach the inn, I passed a large fountain that was out of order, with an aggressive mamma seagull standing atop it, protecting her nest. I decided not to bother her, and moved on to the vendor in front of the Times Herald news place. I stopped to look at what he sold, wondering how much of it was ghost themed. Impressively, nothing was. I must have caught his eye, because he gave me a sly wink and nudged the cart. The displays spun around and, bam! Insta-ghosted t-shirts, pens, and even little cakes. "Make it quick! I can't let the magistrate see this stuff!" He murmured. I was instantly turned away. "Um.... Yeah, no thanks." I told him. The displays spun again and settled into place, as if they'd been there forever. "Let me know if you change your mind." He said sincerely. "Are there really ghosts around here?" I asked, mainly due to the fact that all he might know, was town gossip. What he told me, however, was something I was excited to hear. "The editor of The Herald is paying big bucks for hard evidence of ghostly sightings." With a word of thanks, I slipped into the Hemlock Herald. I was met with the sight of old lamps, a working typewriter (Which I've ALWAYS wanted), and a very loud printing press. A woman with small-framed glasses and a professional wannabe reporter's outfit, stood in front of it. She greeted me with a warm smile, which was a relief. I'd seen too many people that looked scared or depressed. It was unnerving. I shook her hand, which was warm and solid. Also a relief. I kept expecting people to turn into wisps of vapor or bursts of ectoplasm. I asked her about the local haunts and if I could help with her newest story.

"My readers want to know if these hauntings are real. As do I, for that matter. I'm willing to pay fifty dollars for each piece of hard evidence you can find. Since you aren't my employee, I can't really give you more than that. I'm sorry." I told her it was fine, I wanted to do it, and not

for the money, but she insisted she pay me anyway. I bid her goodnight and walked outside, turning excitedly to Blue. "This is gonna be fun, eh, Blue?" I asked, nudging him. He gazed at me with his heavy frown and nodded slightly. That was as cheerful as he got. I patted him, and raced back to the cemetery. Pausing at The Gingerbread House, I decided to go in and ask about the ghosts from a local's point of view. I walked in and a pretty, young girl stood in front of the counter, wiping it down. I opened my mouth to introduce myself and ask my questions, but she beat me to it. "I don't know or care what you've heard, but all we sell here are baked goods!" She said angrily. I paused, taken aback by the sudden rudeness, but then reasoned she must've been asked alot about ghosts already, pushed past the typical patience level. Keeping my voice calm, I simply replied: "My apologies, miss, I just wanted to see what you had, is all. And I was wondering if you knew about any open lodgings for the night?" I asked. She sighed and threw the rag on the bar. "Feel free to browse, and no, I don't know about rooms, I live above the shop. Sorry for snapping at you." She stuck her hand out and introduced herself. "m'name's Jane." I took her hand and shook it with an introduction of my own. "Fang. Well, that's what my friends call me."

"You got a real name, kid?" Glinda asked, raising her eyebrow. "No, I never did. Didn't ever know my parents. So I named myself." Jane looked ashamed and started to apologize, but I explained that it was fine, and it didn't matter what she called me, I'd answer anyway.

"Can I get you anything?" Jane asked as I opened the door halfway. "No, you look tired, but I may be back later. Those hot cross buns look awesome." I smiled. She smiled too, but it was rather sad. "Those were the warden's favorite too." I nodded, and left.

"So, if she knew the warden, then she must know why his spirit still lingers." I mused as I walked towards

the cemetery gates. My little stubby-legged Blue just sighed miserably. I seriously had no idea why he was so unhappy. I'd fed him and pampered him and he was more miserable than any lost soul. As I came into view of the gates, I spotted a man with a pale, scared face, and huge bags under his eyes. I intercepted him as he nervously stood inside the gate. "Is something wrong?" I asked him kindly. He paused and looked at me desperately. "I've been searching the cemetery for days, trying to find where my uncle, Silas Moon, is buried." He explained in a quick, nervous voice. "Can I help?" I asked. "Maybe the location is recorded in the town archives at the Hemlock Herald." He responded. "Well, since I have clearance, I'll be glad to check for you." I offered. "If you do, I'll give you a place to stay for the night." He promised, looking a tad relieved. "No need. I'll check the town's inn." I said, and turned before he could protest, walking back to the vendors cart and The H. H.

"Back so soon? Have you found evidence already?" The editor asked in surprise. "No ma'am, I'd just like to examine the town archives." I said quietly. "Oh, of course, be my guest." she said, giving me the key to unlock the basement. I descended the rickety stairs and found an old book with names and gravesights. I found Silas Moon, and memorized the sight. I climbed back up, thanking her. "No trouble, leave it unlocked in case you need it again." The editor replied kindly. I left the H.H. and hurried back to Silas's nephew. "Lot c, plot 48." I told the nervous nephew. "Thanks, I just want to pay my respects and get out of this scary town! Here's my inn room key. I took the liberty of finding out if any rooms were available. Only mine was if I gave the key back."

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Ghost Story

by Lone Fang
(continued)

He explained, handing me a key with a small ghost shaped tag, labled “room b”. “Thank you again, for finding my uncle.” He said, starting off into the cemetary maze. I looked after him, torn between the desire to investigate, and the other to sleep. Blue sighed and curled up on my shoulder, and began to snore. Little smoke rings curled around his snout. “Sleep it is, then.” I sighed, and headed for the inn.

The innkeeper’s wife met me at the door. “Oh, good. Well I’m glad a room became available to you, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to meet my husband.” And with that farewell, she left. I silently made my way to my room, so as not to disturb anyone. My room was simple. A wooden chair sat under the window, two wardrobes made up the decor other than an ugly portrait of an old woman. I laid Blue (still snoring smoke rings) on one pillow, and lay my head on the other. “It’s been a long day.” I sighed, and slipped into darkness.

I woke up to a soft scraping sound, and glanced aound. Nothing seemed out of place, but then, the wooden chair moved towards the closest wardrobe by itself, the wardrobe doors flapped, and the ugly painting shook violently. Like some crazy spirit had tried to rip it off the wall. “Yikes! I’d better investigate, or I’ll never sleep again!” I muttered. I shoved the door of the first wardrobe open, and the innkeeper and his wife popped out of hiding.

Now, I’m a light sleeper, but I don’t like being interrupted, or spied on. “What’s going on here!?” I demanded angrily. The wife looked ashamed. “We’re sorry for trying to fool you.” She said. “We’re kust trying to give people what they want; a good scare!”

“I should report you to the Magistrate!” I blurled angrily. They went pale. “No, please don’t give away our secret!” The innkeeper begged. “Fine! But I’m leaving! Blue! Come on, Stubbs, we’re going!” I snapped at the sleepy flier. He curled in my hoodie and kept sleeping. “We’re really sorry, and to prove it, we’ll tell you something worth it. If you play her favorite dong on the violin, the Woman In The Window will appear for you.” The wife said, acting all mystic. “And I suppose you’ve tried

before.” I said icily. “Neither of us are very good at the violin, you can keep ours.” The inkeeper said. I nodded stiffly, and marched out, grabbing the violin and the sheet music. “Help me out here, Blue, where do my fingers go?” I muttered as I positioned myself under the old house. The man that was camping out on the shore was pretending rather poorly not to notice. Blue sighed sleepily and arranged my fingers on the strings. “Thanks, Blue. You can go back to sleep now.” I said, and drew the bow across the strings, reading the notes on the sheet. It certainly was a beautiful song.”She won’t be long now.” The camper said excitedly. Then, he blanched. “Uh oh.”

It was the Magistrate. He looked angry. “Young man, you’ve been warned three times about ghost hunting here. Come with me, now!” “I’m in for it now.” The camper muttered. He followed the Magistrate out of sight. Taking my chance, I swiped the binoculars and peeked through them up at the top window. A woman beckoned me urgently from the top floor window. “Do I dare answer that beckon though?” I asked myself. Then, I shivered. I must. I climbed the cliff face and unlocked the attic doors.

Halfway down the attic stairs, a ghost-like shape loomed over the stairs. Gathering my nerve, I reached out and yanked on... a sheet? I uncovered a sewing dummy that must’ve been there for like fifty years. “Oh thank goodness.” I muttered, tossing the cloth aside and continuing. I made it halfway up to the main floor, when, suddenly, the stairs fell out from under me. “Aaaagh!” I shrieked. Hey, call me chicken, but it freaked me out, and I thought I was gonna impale myself on something. But I landed on my feet like a cat, and realized I had only been a few feet up. My first impression of where I’d landed: dusty. I couldn’t jump up there, but there was a giant box I could use to boost me up. I leapt and clung to the lip of the crate, hoping the lid wouldn’t just pop off, and struggled to the top of it. From there, I climbed the rest of the stairway. “Glad I took all those physical education classes. Jeez!” I muttered. I emerged from the basement/attic, and found myself in a run down, once-beautiful living room. A golden framed picture depicted a stunning young woman and a man, obviously lovers, gazed lovingly at eachother over entwined hands, frozen forever. Once glorious chandeliers had fallen apart, and shards of glass lay everywhere. A

battered grand piano sat under the staircase, never to be tuned and played again. I made my way up the second flight of stairs, and was relieved to find them rather sturdy. I entered the large bedroom. To the right of it, a telescope was positioned to look out the huge window.

I looked through it curiously, clearing the vision so I could see all of Hemlock Harbor. After a moment, I raised my head away from it. “Are you looking for someone?” Came a soft voice directly behind me, which scared the literal hell out of me. “ACK!” I yelped, jumping back, while twisting around to defend myself. It was the old lady from the window! “I hope I didn’t frighten you, dear.” she said, sounding sincerely concerned. “Are- are you a ghost?” was all I could stammer. I felt rude, but she laughed. “Aren’t you silly! I’m merely in town to take care of some unfinished business.” I laughed nervously.

“If you’re really looking for spirits,” She continued. “I can help you get started.” I was interested imediately. “Go on.” I said slowly. “Go see Jane, the baker, and tell her Fiona sent you.” She instructed. “Fiona?” I asked. “Yes, dear. Who else could I be? The boogyman?” She laughed. I laughed too, more at ease now. Man, this place got to you real quick. “Thank you very much, miss.” I said, leaving the room.

“Not at all, dear. Let me know if you find anything!” She replied, waving.

I stood outside the Gingerbread House, contemplating whether or not to go in and bother Jane any farther. “I just got on good terms with her. I don’t want to ruin that. But, if I want to stop the hauntings, and allow the dead their peace, I have no choice.” I sighed and pushed the chocolate bar-themed door open. Jane was still up. “Changed your mind about sweets?” she teased quietly. I smiled weakly. She had to know why I was here. “Actually, um, someone sent me.” I muttered. Jane raised her eyebrow. “Oh? And who did? The Magistrate?” Did I detect bitterness in her voice? “No, not the Magistrate. Fiona. Fiona sent me.” Jane’s skeptical look vanished. “Fiona? Oh.” I nodded. “Well, isn’t that something? You must be pretty serious about tracking our town’s spirits. One minute.” Jane glanced out the windows, checking for the Magistrate no doubt, then leaned over tha counter and flipped a switch. The counter shook and sank slowly into the store floor, and was replaced by a series of ghost tracking tech that I’m certain the Magistrate knew nothing about.

STORIES

A camera that could capture any apparitions, a thermal scanner (and it doesn’t take a genius to know what that one did), an emf detector that alerted you to any spirits nearby, and a thermometer to tell you if a spirit had passed. “Since you’re a friend of Fiona’s, these are yours to keep. Some will work better than the others, depending on the spirits. And here,” she turned and handed me a life-changing, incredibly important.... plate of hot cross buns. “Take these. Good luck on your search. Don’t let the Magistrate catch you! I know he means well, but it’s time these spirits got the peace they deserve.” I smiled and accepted the ghost tech, and the buns, and placed them in my pack. “Wanna come along?” I asked playfully. A dark look passed over her face. “No thanks, I’d probably ruin the fun.” She tried to make her voice sound light and even, but I saw through it. I teetered on the edge of the decision to ask about her past, but I decided against it and thanked her again for the gifts. “I’ll come back when the dead sleep again.” I promised, and headed out into the foggy town once again.

I looked left and right, wondering where to begin. “If I want to start, the best place is probably the cemetary.” I thought aloud. Blue nudged my shoulder in agreement. “Can you handle the scary cemetary, Stubbs? Or would you rather wait here for me?” I asked teasingly, tickling his wing and walking towards the cemetary gates. He shuddered at the sight of them, but otherwise stayed resolutely by my shoulder. “Thanks, Blue.” I murmured, relieved I wouldn’t have to do this alone. I entered the gate and tried to memorize my path. Right, left, left, straight.... Eventually, I ended up at Lot B. The gates exactly like the front ones, only with a B on the adorned iron. I gathered my nerve and swung the gate open. Crypts and unburied coffins lay everywhere. Gravestones, some so old, I’d never know who lay beneath them, and others quite new, which was depressing. A boy wearing

a tin foil hat and glasses, stood atop a coffin, his eyes closed. He stood next to a bunch of superior looking tech, which made me think it was just Hollywood-level baloney. I climbed to the top of the coffin and waited for him to say something. He didn’t even acknowledge me. Finally, I cleared my throat. He opened his eyes and hissed; “Shh... I can hear the spirits whispering to me. It’s rude to interrupt. Sometimes, I can even hear them climbing from their graves.”

This was a bold statement I didn’t know what to do with, so I just started asking questions. “Climb from their graves?” I asked, hoping he actually answered. “Yes! At night, I can hear them clawing through the earth. Not that you could hear that.” He added nastily. Too rushed to glare at him, I ran my fingers along the length of one of the contraptions next to him. “This sure is some fancy equipment.” I said sarcastically. I figured it was just a prop, but the guy acted like I slapped his dead Grandpa. “BE CAREFUL WITH THAT! It’s extremely sensitive equipment, and you can’t possibly understand how it works!” He snapped closing his eyes again, trying to ignore me. I studied him for a moment, then smiled slyly. “What’s with the tinfoil hat?” I asked. That did it. “You aren’t worried about radio-frequency electromagnetic radiation? Are you crazy?!” Blue growled. I held him back. “Watch who you call crazy, bud.” I said angrily. “Who else is here? And are they as annoying as you, or do they happen to be decent?” The guy threw me a withering look. “The engraver’s here. I offered to teach him about ghosts, but he wouldn’t listen!” He said indignantly. I rolled my eyes. “Just go back to ghost-hearing.” I told him, and stomped off. “Hmph!” He snorted. And he went back to his ghost-hearing. Blue was grumbling under his breath, snorting steam in my ear. “Oh, quit that! He’s not worth that. And watch your language!” I scolded.

continued...



STORIES

Ghost Story by Lone Fang (continued)

The engraver's hut was directly behind the actual graveyard, a small wooden hut with the sign "Engraver, wood, metal, and stone!" and it was all engraved, ironically, in a gravestone. Haha. I pushed the small wood door open and saw a man at work, carving wood. He was an older guy, with glasses and strong looking hands. "Excuse me." I said. He stopped and looked up. "Oh! Sorry, mis, didn't hear ya come in! Did you want something engraved?" "Oh, no sir, just having a look around." I said evasively. "If there's any work I can do for you, just come back and let me know. I engrave all sorts of things, not just headstones."

"Your sign did mention that. What else is it you engrave?" I asked. "Oh, just about anything! Even jewelry, such as rings." I nodded. "I wear one myself, but I don't need it engraved right now." I said conversationally. "How long HAVE you been engraving headstones?" I asked curiously. "Mmm.. let's see here.... I really don't remember..." he trailed off, looking discouraged. Hastily, more to change the subject, I asked: "Have YOU seen any ghosts around here?"

"I am usually pretty busy in my shop, but that tinfoiled fellow out there insists he can hear them. Hmph! Typical of ghost hunters and huge fakers!" He mumbled the last part. I laughed and agreed. "Well, thanks for letting me stop you. I'll come back if I need you." I said with a friendly wave. "Thanks for breaking the monotone!" he said, going back to his work. Outside, I marched past the tinfoiled guy, and said nothing to him, and, like before, he didn't acknowledge my existence. I rolled my eyes again and ventured into the maze once more. This time, I had to backtrack a lot, but I managed to stumble across Lot A. I pushed through the gates, wondering what news I'd find here. I went right, all the way to the base of a tall hill. A long-buried coffin stuck out of the hill face. As queasy as it made me, that coffin was the only way up the hill. So I climbed up it and found an eccentric lady with a wild look in her eyes. "Quick! the cloaked figure will be here any second! Get behind here!" I did as she told me, and ducked behind an overlarge headstone. Soon enough, she hissed out; "SHH... I hear footsteps! Oh, I wish I brought my camera! Camera? Oh! Quickly, I dug through my pack and brought out the huge camera Jane had

given me. The girl's eyes widened as a black-robed and hooded figure made its way past our hiding spot, towards an old, weatherbeaten headstone, carrying a single rose. It placed the rose on the ground, and raised its hands, as if in praise. "Quick! Take the picture!" The girl hissed. I raised the camera lens and snapped it. The click was a little too loud, and the figure heard it. It turned in our direction, then sprinted the opposite way. I almost gave a chase, but I lost him. "Shoot! I lost him in the fog!" I told the girl. "Did you get the picture though?" She asked, getting up from her hiding spot. "Yep! I gotta get this to the reporter!" I said excitedly. "Be careful. The Magistrate is furious about the ghost hunters!" She warned me. "Don't worry, he won't see this picture until it's in the newspaper. Maybe then he'll let someone try and solve this." I said, tucking the picture in my pack.

Past the unused fountain, and the vendor cart, I burst into the H.H. The editor was sitting at the press again. When she looked up, she said; "I'm working on my next edition to the paper, so unless you have evidence, please be on your way."

Too breathless to explain (I ran the whole way) I shoved the picture under her nose. She blinked in surprise, staring at the picture, as if she couldn't quite believe it. "Why that's.... That's Sensational! This is front page stuff!" She snatched the picture and began to scribble on a blank sheet of paper. After she was done with that she put the picture on the press. I began to sneak out the door, but Blue accidentally sneezed, loudly. The editor turned, then started in surprise. "Oh my! I'm sorry, I got so excited I almost forgot! Here's the fifty dollars I promised! I'd find somewhere safe to put this!" She shoved a fifty in my hand despite my weak protests. "Thank you for your help! Now I have to get this printed and out there!" I watched her work, offering to help here and there, and soon, we had fifteen stacks of newspapers. "Put these outside will you?" She asked. "I gotta make more, but this should be enough to satisfy the guys outside for now." I picked up a stack and placed it outside the door. The vendor eyed it, then rushed off to fetch others. I went back in to get more, and when I came back, half the first stack was gone. I made my way to the Bank to make my deposit, (I didn't want to lose the fifty) and entered. Allowing the guys to read the article thoroughly before they could grill me with questions. Inside, a young woman sat behind the counter.

"Sorry, but it's time I closed up shop and get home before it gets too dark. I don't know what's scarier in this town, the ghosts, or the kooks running around trying to find them." And with this little speech and an apologetic glance, she let the curtain slide shut. I stood there, feeling very foolish, and looked around, hoping for a sign. And there one was, right above a flight of stairs ascending into the "Bank Vault". This was where I could make a safe deposit. I quickly ascended the steps. The first thing I saw was a huge dog at the foot of the stairs. I was a little nervous, but then I saw the guard. "It's alright, he won't hurt you." He said. I walked boldly past the dog and found he only stared balefully. "It's so nice to see a human face. It gets so lonely down here for me. Rusty here isn't much company. Were you here to make a deposit?" He asked. "Oh, yes, I have fifty." I said. "Right this way." He said, opening the huge bank vault door. As soon as he did, Rusty burst in behind him and began to claw, growl, and bark at a certain part of the vault floor. "I don't know what gets into him when we come in here, but he does that every time."

On a hunch, I took out the thermal scanner, explaining what it was to the guard, and pushed the little button on the side. The screen lit up and showed red glows around me, the guard, and Rusty, but showed a blue glow around a figure in the floor under my feet. "Why that's strange, I wonder who that is." I mused aloud. Rusty payed us no attention, and continued to claw and bark at the figure underneath him. The guard cleared his throat awkwardly. "Well, if that's your only deposit, I guess you'd better be on your way." I nodded and crossed the vault, and climbed back up the stairs. "That must've been the Tireless thief ghost. But why is he stuck there? And why hasn't he been able to break through?" I mulled over this, nursing several ideas as I walked. I wasn't paying too much attention to where I was going when I ran into the crowd of guys outside the H. Herald. All of them held copies of the newspaper

I had put out earlier. The boy with the camera around his neck started the conversation. "Have you seen the paper? This is big news!" He said excitedly. "Of course! That's my evidence. And I helped print the paper." I muttered. Tinfoil was standing next to him, and chipped in excitedly; "I knew ghosts were real! And people thought I was crazy!" I snorted. "You'd have to be crazy to wear that hat in public, Tinman." Salt dude snickered. Tinfoil scowled but said nothing. They all looked at me expectantly. "What?" I asked. The vendor cleared his throat and glared at the newspile pointedly. "Oh, alright then!" I said irritably, and picked up the newspaper. I read the front page just to pacify the idiots. They didn't believe I'd read the article. When I finished, who should show up, but the Magistrate himself. "This isn't any proof at all! I'm sure it's just another hoax! Now each and every one of you get back to your place of residence before I lose my patience!" They scattered. Maybe because he looked really scary when he was angry. I made to go away, but he stopped me. "I'm keeping a very close eye on you. I hope you're not the one behind this nonsense." I avoided his gaze, and he sighed, then left. "He's right. Maybe that wasn't a ghost at all, but just someone just dressed in a cloak. I should do some more investigating." I made to go back to Fiona, but got sidetracked. A sailor had docked near the abandoned camp underneath Fiona's house. I decided to meet him, since he looked exhausted, I hoped I could help him in some way. "Hi, traveler! Can I help you somehow?" I asked kindly. "I'm exhausted after a long trip. Do you know of any available rooms in town?" He asked in a friendly way. "Yes, you can have my room in the town inn. Room 2b. I won't be needing it." I said, handing him the room key. "Hey, thanks, friend! I can't wait to get some rest. In exchange, feel free to use my boat any time." He offered. I thanked him, saying I'd pay for anything else he needed, because the boat was just the thing I needed. I wanted to investigate the lighthouse, and the

old prison. "Goodnight, if you need anything, take the fifty I've got under deposit here. Tell the guard Lone Fang sent you." I told him, climbing into the boat, Blue sighed and followed. "Much obliged, little miss." He said, tipping his hat to me and heading for the inn. I hesitated, then called at his back: "Lock your door! Or you'll have unwanted visitors!" He turned and gave me the thumbs up to let me know he heard me, and kept walking. "Alright, to the prison!" I said spiritedly, starting the motor.

The prison was run down and spooky. A wooden sign amongst the wreckage read DO NOT ENTER. I shuddered at the sight of the entrance way. A huge, iron-wrought arch outlined the hole where a door used to be, a small design of some devilish creature, and the word REPENT was carved into the iron. I wondered about how a prisoner, years ago, could stand here, looking at this sign, and the sea, and sometimes thinking that the sign was the last thing they'd ever see of the outside world. I worked up my courage, and strode inside. Blue hesitated, then sighed miserably, and flapped quietly after me, landing on my shoulder.

Inside, I knew this was gonna be difficult. The place was huge, and there were too many floors. Luckily, there was an old elevator, but this was gonna turn into a game of Marco Pollo real quick if I didn't reason it out quick. I equipped my EMF scanner, and saw that I was far away from a nearby spirit. "The warden's office would be in the center. It makes sense. It wouldn't be on the last floor, or the top floor, it would be where he could get to any incident evenly. Don't you think?" I asked Blue, before realizing he was asleep in my hoodie again. "How could ANYONE sleep at a time or place like this?" I muttered. "Phsyco dragon."

I pushed the button labeled "Floor H" since H was the middle of the alphabet. When I got to the floor, the EMF scanner showed I was really close.

continued...

Ghost Story

by Lone Fang
(continued)

I wandered down the spooky, cell-lined hallway. Most of the cells were trashed, but a few were okay to look in. Some had tally marks on the walls, lots of them, one had a graffitied question that once again, made me shudder. It read: "Have you returned?" I entered the door with a sign that said "Warden's office". Once in, Blue woke up, acting nervous. He sensed a spirit. So did the EMF scanner, whose needle pointed at the red end and lit up crazily. Broken light bulbs were still in the ceiling, though broken shards littered the floor. A moose head sat above the lit fireplace. On a table/stand, a lamp was lit. I took off my pack and began to dig through it. While doing this, I took out the plate of hot cross buns and laid them on the table. Suddenly, Blue hissed and hid in my hoodie again, hissing and snorting smoke rings. The chair at the other end of the room I had noticed, had stopped rocking. Footprints became visible in the dust, and the curtain over the ruined window fluttered violently. One by one, the hot cakes were gone, invisible teeth tearing chunks out of them. "You are not prisoner 24601?" A voice asked. The Warden appeared in front of us. Of course! I thought. The Warden loved Jane's hot cross buns! "I'm not. Who's that?" I asked politely. "See for yourself." He said. A picture appeared in his hands and he handed it to me. It was a mugshot of a man with his cell number and block. "He was the only man to escape from this prison. When I saw the hole he'd dug in his cell, I covered it up, fearing my error would bring shame to this institution." The Warden sounded very bitter and I hoped he wouldn't start throwing stuff. "So what happened?" I asked hesitantly. "The truth became known and the prison was shut down. Now I haunt these walls forever unable to be free until his whereabouts are discovered." He replied bitterly. I felt terrible for the Warden, and I wanted to help him, and the only way to do that was to find 24601. "I'll find him." I promised. "Do not expect anything from me, I cannot help." He warned. I nodded and left. "Cell block D, cell 8." I memorized. "Okay. Let's go, Stubs!" I said, getting in the elevator again. I pushed the button with a little "D" next

to it. Blue snuggled deeper in my hoodie. "Chicken." I teased lightly.

I found cell 8 rather quickly. It wasn't in bad shape like the others. This one had a huge book laying on the ground, and a bed covered the hole. I opened the thick book, and found the cutout of a pickaxe in the thick pages. Suddenly, the cell bars slid shut and locked. "Oh no! The Warden wants someone locked in this cell, even if that someone is me!" I mumbled. "Great idea. Tempting, but no thank you." I pushed the wrecked bed aside and crawled into the hole 24601 had made before me. In the tunnel, I pulled out the thermal scanner and found... the Tireless Thief, chipping away. I climbed up halfway and found his abandoned pickaxe (And a can of tuna). I raced up and saw the ghost of 24601, a man in a jail suit, looking bitter and weary.

Right in front of him, on the ground, a folded letter to him lay in the dust. I picked it up to examine later. "Um, hello?" I said tentatively. "At last, someone has found me! After being misled by Flatbottom, that scoundrel, I became trapped in this miserable tunnel where I have been since trying to escape." I mulled this over, then asked: "Why would he, Flatbottom or whoever, lead you to the bank vault?"

"I can only imagine he was afraid I'd confess our crime. It serves me right for tricking Valiant, that poor young man." I paused, troubled. Who was Valiant, and who was Flatbottom, and what did they have to do with each other. How were they tied into this? I took out the letter and unfolded it carefully.

"You did very fine work for me. Valiant appeared deceived by your note and in his sorrow boarded a ship for England immediately after reading it. As your promised reward, I will help free you from your prison. Using the pickaxe I'm smuggling to you, create a hole in your cell's flooring. Then dig west for exactly one mile. There, you will find an easy exit onto Main Street." I read this letter two times to make sure I didn't miss anything, then a third time so my brain would believe it. "He tricked you after you deceived another. I'd say karma, but this man allowed you to die. This isn't karma, it's murder." I told the escapee. "Poor Valiant...." the spirit said miserably. "You deceived him to get out.... Did Valiant... die?" I asked in disbelief. The prisoner's dead stare was

answer enough. I shuddered. "He died on the ship to England." I concluded. "That's sad. Why would you do it?" I asked. "The living have their reasons, then the dead pay for it after the time of the living." He answered. I left him there, knowing no amount of coaxing or pleading would make him leave that accursed tunnel. I arrived back in the cell, and used the pickaxe to dig outside the cell. I hit the elevator and pressed the button for the floor with the only exit. The outside air smelled of sea and salt. It was a relief to be outside. I set off in the boat once more and headed for the light house.

Once at the lighthouse, I saw a torch outside I could use. I had to shield it up the stairs, because the seaside wind was blowing strong through the openings in the walls. Once up there, I realized how warm it was. I put the thermometer on an outlet on the wall. "If it gets any colder than five degrees, the thing'll tell me. It should be able to detect a spirit." I explained to a sleepy Blue, who just sighed smoke rings. "Seriously, I need to get you some toys or something." I told him. I climbed to the outside, where the light was, and maneuvered it to see the surrounding city and the prison. "All I see is the city and the prison. I guess the spirit that haunts here isn't here right now." I jumped down and started the boat again, heading for the shore. As soon as I pulled in, the thermometer scanner went crazy. It showed the temperature at the lighthouse had gone down twenty degrees. "Ugh, at least I'm still in the boat." I muttered. I started the engine and sailed for the lighthouse once again. I made my way inside and stopped dead. A torch floated up the stairs by itself. Blue hissed and gripped my shoulder with his strong claws, fighting the urge to flee. I was too, but those claws hurt. "Blue, let go, get in my hood. You'll be safer there." I said gently. He blew a smoke ring, and loosened his grip lightly, but made no move for my hood. "Okay, but be careful with those claws." I teased nervously. I calmed my nerves and climbed the stairs once again. A spirit of the old man in the light house awaited me. He was broken down and sobbing. "Oh, mortal, it is cruel indeed that a short nap while living would cause my soul to have no rest in the afterlife!" He sobbed. Moved, I asked him gently what happened. "When the doomed ship departed for England, instead of shining my light on the dangerous harbor,

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I slept on this cot!" He wept. He caused poor Blue to sniff miserably. "The ship crashed upon jagged rocks. Travel north past the rocks and see for yourself." He sobbed quietly. I almost cried myself. "It was a mistake! Why can you not have peace?" I asked desperately. "Because I caused unrest in the souls of every person aboard that ship. Most have passed, but, one still remains, and until he makes peace with this harbor, I will be here, remembering my mistakes and wallowing in them, for there is nothing I can do to change the past." His eyes were heavy with sadness. "I'll help you." I promised. "You'll have peace soon." He seemed cheered for only a moment. "Do this, and you'll be highly rewarded in the afterlife." He promised. I shuddered. "I hope it isn't too soon." I muttered, going back up to the light. I could see the wreckage, but I had to get closer. The lightkeeper promised to shine the light for me, and I left, sailing for the wreckage. At first, I saw nothing of too much importance, then, something caught on the prow of the wrecked ship sparkled in the beam of light. "There's something there." I murmured. Blue stretched his wings and flapped over, picking up something, and flew back over to me, dropping the object into my palms. The necklace glinted in the beam of the lighthouse. It was a pretty little thing, and upon further investigation, I found that it opened. A note fell out. It read: "Dear Valiant,

Though I have promised to be your wife, I must tell you that I have fallen in love with someone else, and no longer wish to see you. If you truly love me, it would be best for you to leave this town and allow me to live my life in peace.

- Fiona."

I stared in stunned disbelief. Fiona was in love with the same man 24601 had tricked! This must have been the letter he had forged in Fiona's name. Valiant had fallen for it and died, and whoever paid 24601 to forge it had covered his tracks. With 24601 dead and out of the way, he had a clear shot at Fiona. This was a fight for a fair maiden. And one side played dirty. I

didn't really know what else to do, so I went back to shore and made my way into Fiona's house, and found her in the bedroom above the telescope room. "Fiona, I believe these belong to you." I said quietly, handing her the locket and the two notes. She read and reread everything, her face became paler and paler with each line. Finally, she put them down on the bed, staring out the window behind me, confused and angry. "Oh my dear Valiant, tricked by a forged letter and so hurt by this lie that you threw my locket out to sea! Henry, if you were responsible for this, I have no remorse for discarding your ring! Let it sit at the bottom of the fountain forever!" She sobbed and fled past me and out of the room. I was stunned by the reaction, and didn't move for a moment. Finally, I unfroze and left the room, when I got close to the door, I found a small scrapbook and picked it up, and then left the house. I wandered to the H. Herald, then spotted the fountain. Didn't Fiona say the ring was in the fountain? I wondered. "If the ring really is there, I need to get rid of mamma seagull for a couple seconds." I said. Blue stomped and made to smoke her, but I pulled his tail. "I have the peaceful solution." I said. He sighed and sat in my hoodie. I took the can of sardines, opened it and threw it. That caught the gull's attention, and she shot after it. I quickly climbed up to the top of the fountain and dug around. There it was! A gold band with a small diamond atop it. I jumped down and examined it. It had been engraved. The inscription said: "Let my love bring you joy."

"Classy." I muttered, shoving the ring in my pack. I knew who to talk to about the ring. "The engraver might have done this himself." I said. I raced to the cemetery and pushed through the maze to Lot B. I rushed past Tinfoil, who shouted: "Hey! Trying to listen to the dead here!" "Keep talking and you'll join them!" I snapped. That shut him up. I pushed the door open to the Engraver's shop. "Hello again." He greeted. "Can I help you?"

continued...



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Ghost Story by Lone Fang (continued)

"Yes, I need you to tell me if you did this?" I asked, handing him the ring. "Ah, yes, I remember the piece. It wasn't enough to sway Fiona's heart. At least Mr. Flatbottom has his job to occupy him." He explained. "What is his job?" I asked. "If you want the whole story, go to the newspaper archives and look up August 18, 1929." I thanked him and exited the shop and the cemetery, headed for the H.Herald. "Hey! Got more evidence for me?" The editor asked excitedly. "No ma'am. I'm here to search the archives. Is that okay?" I asked politely. "Of course! Go right ahead." She said. I thanked her and headed to the lower level. I found the archives and turned the handles until I found August 18, 1929. The story read: "FLATBOTTOM BECOMES YOUNGEST MAGISTRATE IN TOWN HISTORY!" It also said that Mr. Flatbottom had erected a memorial for the wrecked ship his best friend Valiant Lovejoy was on. I closed down the archives and took a better look at that scrapbook. It showed a picture of Valiant as a young man, him and Fiona dancing, Henry Flatbottom and Valiant together as friends, and one proclaiming Henry as the Magistrate. "So Henry is the Magistrate! I've got a pretty good idea of who the cloaked figure is now!" I said determinedly. Blue snorted smoke rings and flew through them in excitement. "Let's go." I said, letting him land on my shoulder before I took off running. I raced through town, probably scaring the heck out of all the townspeople, but I couldn't stop now. I raced into the cemetery maze and found the Lot A gates quicker than any other time, and rushed to the right. The crypt wasn't sealed. "Why wouldn't the crypt be sealed?" I asked. Blue snorted nervously. I pushed the heavy lid out of the way and a ladder ascended into darkness. "It's a secret entrance, where does it go?" I wondered. Then I answered my own question. "If I wanna find out, I gotta follow it." I turned to Blue. "You coming?" I asked gently. He clawed the air nervously, but squeezed my shoulder to reassure me he wasn't going anywhere. I sighed in relief and climbed down.

The crypt hid a maze of tunnels, but I followed a draft that told me fresh air was nearby, and found myself outside the cemetery gates, on the old stump. "I knew this

thing looked fishy!" I muttered, climbing out. Suddenly I heard footsteps. "Someone's coming! I better not let them see me!" I whispered, climbing out and hiding behind a hillock in the ground. It was the cloaked figure! Holding a rose. Suddenly, he stopped and sneezed loudly. I jumped up and confronted the "specter". "Ghosts don't sneeze! Who are you?" I demanded. The figure jumped into the stump and ran. "Nice conversation." I muttered, following. I ended up back in Lot A, on top of the crypt once more. I chased the figure all the way to the worn grave I'd snapped a picture of him at. Desperate and backed into a corner, he demanded: "Begone, Mortal!"

For some reason, this ticked me off. "We'll see who's mortal!" I said angrily, taking the first thing I could reach out of my pack, the salt shaker, and threw it at his face. His reflexes threw his hood back and who should be there but the Magistrate. "AAAA! That stings!" He exclaimed. "The Magistrate!" I said, unsurprised. I'd already guessed it was him. "Yes, I am! And with my authority, I command you to leave this place!" He said angrily. "You don't COMMAND me anywhere, Mr. High and Mighty!" I huffed. "You must answer for your crimes! You're responsible for a forged note that sent Valiant Lovejoy to his death!" I spat. Blue hissed angrily, tears fell from his snout. (He's real emotional). "It's true, I confess! Only with my best friend gone could I woo my dear Fiona! But her heart belonged to Valiant alone. She rejected me and died shortly after, waiting for her love to return." He said in a bitter-suffering voice. A sudden realization hit me hard in the gut. "Did you just say.... Fiona is.... dead?" I choked out. "Yes, for nearly fifty years I've visited her grave, leaving a rose as a token of penitence for my terrible deed!" He broke down and a small sob escaped him. Blue whipped around and let his wings blow away residue and webs from the name upon the grave. The name "Fiona" was carved in the stone, clear as day. It didn't feel real, but then Blue whimpered and scrambled to get into my jacket. I spun around. The spirits, led by Fionas, marched towards us. They halted, and for a terrible moment, I thought they might take his life right there, or instead, ask me to. But then, Fiona's face broke into the warm smile she'd given me the night she met me. "Henry, your crime deprived so many souls of rest. We thank you for your confession and forgive you. Perhaps we can all find peace now." She turned to me. "This was your wish all along,

You never wanted money or fame, just peace for others. Thank you." She said sincerely. I blushed and nodded. I didn't trust myself to speak. "Fiona!" A voice called behind me. I turned and saw the man in the scrapbook, Valiant, young and whole, and extremely happy. "Fiona, I have returned!" He announced jubilantly. Fiona's spirit floated gracefully to his side, but even if she had run and stumbled, no sight would have been as perfect as the sight of those two together. "Valiant! I never lost hope!" She cried. "Now let us rest." She said, her face fifty years younger. The spirits vanished. I turned to the Magistrate. He wiped a tear from his eye and cleared his throat. "Thank you for helping us find peace." He said. "The dead deserve their rest. I was only doing what was right." I said modestly. "Nevertheless, thank you. You are a hero here in Hemlock Harbor." He said importantly. I nodded and turned to leave. "I'll come back if you have any more ghost sightings, or if Jane is till baking." I said, smiling. He smiled sadly as well. "Yes, but until then, good luck." I nodded and left the cemetery, and walked into the Gingerbread House. Jane was wide awake, and by her sad yet happy smile, I guessed she'd heard about Fiona. "I'm sorry." I said. "No, thank you for helping Fiona, you've brought peace to the town. That's more than anyone else here has ever done." I nodded. I didn't want to contradict her. "Will you stay?" Jane asked. "No, I'll check in every once in a while, but I can't stay anywhere permanently." I said. Jane smiled sadly. "I guessed as much, but it was worth a try. Have fun and good luck on your journies." She said. I thanked her and left. As I climbed into my blimp, I saw her wave. I launched my blimp, and soon, Hemlock Harbor was as distant as a memory.

Thanks for reading!

The Adventures of Super Grape (Part 2: In the Encounter of the Master Mind) by Super Grape

continued from issue #21 of *The POP-CORN* (November 2014)...

From where we left off super was going to check out a cry for help and Incredible Wing had gone missing what happened to him you ask? Don't worry you will find out soon.

Super goes to check out the cry for help it came from the bank. Meanwhile at the bank the cashier was relaxing but then a guy who she had never seen before walked in. The guy was wearing a black outfit along with a black cape and mask across their face and they were wearing a black helmet and a black belt with the letter m on it. "Hello I've never seen you before" the bank cashier said. "I just moved here" the mysterious guy said. "Yes well can I help you?" the bank cashier said. "Yes I want you to give me your computer this is a robbery" the mysterious guy said.

"Oh help!" the bank cashier said. The mysterious guy laughs evilly. "Fool you think a hero will come and save the day?" the mysterious guy said. Just then Super Grape burst through the door. "Hold it right there wait are you new? Who are you?" Super said. "Who am I you ask? I'm a new villain you may call me The Mastermind" Mastermind said. "Well then Mr. Mastermind prepare to be put to justice!" Super said. The Mastermind laughs evilly. "Bring it on you fool!" Mastermind said. That voice sounds familiar where have I heard it before? Super thought.

Super puts her fist up and starts to fight. Super was about to win when she pauses for a minute. "Where did you get that helmet?" Super said. "I got it from the store" Mastermind said. Mastermind punches super.

Super falls to the ground. "Now if you excuse me pardon me but what's your name?" Mastermind said. "It's Super Grape" Super said. "Well then Super Grape if you excuse me I have to go" Mastermind said. Mastermind gets the computer. "Until we meet again Super muhahaha!" Mastermind said. Mastermind leaves. "Who was that guy?" the bank cashier said.

"I don't know but I'm gonna find out" Super said. So Super goes to find a cop to see if there was a file on this new villain. "Hey Sally do you have any files on a villain named the mastermind?" Super said. "Hold on let me see..... nope sorry super I don't have any files on a Mastermind" Sally said. "Oh well he's a new villain" Super said. "A new villain? That is intrusting here take this you can make a file for this new villain" Sally said. "Okay thanks" Super said. So super opened the blank file and fills in: Villain name: The Mastermind. Clothing: wears a black cape along with a mask along with a black outfit and belt and a helmet. What's the Villains real identity? Unknown. Super closes the file.

I need to find out who this villain is super thought. Meanwhile the mastermind had just reached his new hideout it was a dark cave on Nobotiti Island. That hero thinks she can defeat me? I think not still though she's pretty clever if I'm gonna take her out I'm gonna need some help Mastermind thought. Luckily he knows some Villains on super power Island that would help him succeed so the mastermind went to super power and went to the prison. The mastermind had a bomb he throws it and the wall exploded.

"Were free!" Copy cat said. "Who are you?" Sir rebel said. "I am The Mastermind just do what I tell you to do and you will be rewarded" Mastermind said. "Okay what are your orders?" Betty Jetty said. "I want to destroy a girl named Super Grape" Mastermind said.

Dun! Dun! Dun!

(the end, for now)

Meet the Creators

by HermioneGranger112
(Crazy Lightning)

“What is it?”

Aiden was staring at the sand, where Elizabeth had drawn a picture of.. well, he couldn't tell what it was. He hadn't seen the world at all (it sounds weird, since he spent most of his life on a boat as the captain) but he could only watch the passengers depart into the great beyond, longing to be with them himself. But, no, after his shifts he always had to return to his tiny apartment in a poor part of a city.

“It's a blimp.” Elizabeth grinned – it was the first time Aiden had seen her smile.. She had always been cold, refined, and the picture of sophistication – until her father was a victim in a shipwreck accident – Elizabeth and Aiden were the only two to escape.

Elizabeth must have read the puzzled look on Aiden's face, because she quickly continued, “It's something to help us get out of here. No one's reading our signals for help, and if we don't get out of here soon, we're going to die.. one way or another. And.. I miss home, even though it won't be the same without.. Dad.”

Aiden was angry for a split second, because he saw the look Elizabeth was giving him. It wasn't his fault that her father hadn't escaped in time – he did everything he could to save the passengers, but it was a hopeless situation.

“I'm not blaming you.” Elizabeth muttered quietly, and Aiden felt horrible. He had ruined another person's life by taking away the thing she loved most – of course she had the right to blame him. He put a hand on her shoulder and she jumped in surprise.

“So.. what's the color of this “blimp?” Aiden asked, making air quotes with his hands. Elizabeth grinned.

“There's that grin I love so much.”

“What will it be, Elizabeth? Pink? I hear girls like pink –“ Aiden teased, before Elizabeth burst out, “Yellow!”

Aiden looked at her, surprised, and asked slowly, “Yellow?”

Elizabeth nodded, blushing, “It's always been my favorite color – it's just so cheerful, I guess, and bright – it instantly puts a smile to my face.. And it helps people see the “silver lining” or the good part of any situation, no matter how bad.”

“And..” Elizabeth continued, her grin growing larger, “I think it's the color of adventure.”

Aiden grinned back, and said, “I couldn't agree more, Miss Elizabeth,” and mock bowed.

“So.. let's get to work, shall we?” Elizabeth asked. And so they did..

But everything did not go to plan...

“It wasn't my fault!” Aiden argued, while Elizabeth threw a seething glare at him. “How was it my fault that we got kidnapped by a purple giant? For all we know, he might not be a kidnapper, he could be a savior!”

Elizabeth hissed, “What kind of “savior” would carry a club half as big as he is and would almost suffocate us? I'd rather be stranded on the desert island we were just on, dehydrated and ready to die in peace!”

Aiden tried to get a word in unsuccessfully, as Elizabeth kept rambling, “What if we're used in a science experiment? What if we're electrocuted? Killed in brutal ways? What if we're –“

“I'd thank you to not put one more disturbing image in my mind!” Aiden screamed, but Elizabeth wasn't going to be cut off. “You're asking why this is your fault? You're the one that drove the ship into those rocks. You're the one who told everyone, but me, to stay on the passenger deck so they could be “safe”, and YOU'RE THE ONE WHO CAUSED THE DEATH OF MY FATHER!” Elizabeth screamed, and

there was total and complete silence.

Both of them opened their mouth to speak again, but they couldn't – both of them were weak and tired from not sleeping for days, and this argument just drained their energy and their voice more.

Tears silently ran down both of their faces as they recalled the shipwreck that had ruined their lives - My life can't get any worse than this, they both thought, and were silent the whole journey to – wherever they were going.

Suddenly, there was a loud clunk and both Elizabeth and Aiden jumped in shock, before the giant (if it was a giant) started lowering them toward the ground. They landed hard, and took a few precious moments to absorb their surroundings. Then they were carried high in the air again, swung casually a few times to their dismay, and landed on another solid surface, before being turned upside down altogether and dumped ungraciously down to the surface.

Aiden and Elizabeth started breathing hard, having being slowly suffocated in the bag, and pressed their cold cheek against the metal, blinding white table they were lowered on. They were startled to hear people.. talking.

“Yes, Zeus, I know they're mortal beings, but what are they? Are they some sort of animal?” a cruel voice came from high above. Elizabeth and Aiden could only see feet moving around the table, and could not get a glimpse of the “humans” faces at all.

“Well, my dear Medusa, it seems they are not animals, but indeed.. actually, I don't know what they are myself.”

“Oh, Zeus, such a clever god like you would surely know what they are.. Perhaps we should ask them?”

“Medusa, I am sure that they are too unintelligent a species to comprehend what we are saying, and I think they'll be perfect to experiment on, to test our game, “Poptropica”, and I'm sure that since they have no brain –“

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“You really shouldn't make conclusions in that manner.” Elizabeth cut in, and she whispered to Aiden, “I told you they were experimenting on us, didn't I?”

“Oh look. They talk.” Zeus said dryly, and the “table” they were on, started rising, until they were face-to-face with the people who had formerly called them dim-witted animals.

“I think an introduction is due, don't you?” Zeus said, and all the Giants, seated around the “table”, nodded.

“Dr. Hare, pink, fluffy, and evil bunny genius – I'm also a scientist with a lab, if you'd like to visit I've written down the address of this card -.”

“Binary Bard, and I'm undoubtedly a villain with a metal heart – I'm actually part cyborg and excellent at binary code.”

“Shark Boy, pleased to meet you, and I've heard that Professor Hammerhead is from your species? Is that true?”

“Captain Crawfish, and if you've heard that pirates aren't real, then here's living proof of a bonafide one – and I really don't appreciate the puns, thank you.”

“Medusa,” the woman who had just had a conversation with Zeus nodded coldly at them. She was the strangest of the lot – because she had snakes for hair – but Elizabeth was sure she could be beautiful, with her porcelain, pale skin, her emerald green eyes and her flowing purple toga with matching sandals.

Zeus finally thundered, “Few mortals get to bask their eyes on the great and powerful Zeus! But I have more news for you – not as exciting as being in my presence, of course, but you will be testers in my new game!

Poptropica!”

“What exactly is Poptropica?” Elizabeth asked, glaring at Zeus. “Poptropica is a virtual world where humans can try to beat the greatest villains of all time – through a computer or digital device, of course. But you two get the chance of a lifetime – to defeat us in person, instead of through a device! You'll have adventures, shiny medallions, and –“

Aiden bluntly said, “What do we get?”

Medusa laughed, and said, “Well, besides from being electrocuted and killed right this second, beating all the game's islands might be your way home.”

Elizabeth and Aiden stared at each other, and they could see hope flickering in each other's eyes. They turned back to the giants, who were watching them intently, and together said, “We're in.”

“Wonderful! You'll be using Miss Elizabeth's blimp to travel between islands, which are individual quests and challenges, almost impossible, in which you will attempt to beat us – it'll be the experience of a lifetime! If you don't fail, that is. If you do, you'll die, and furthermore, you'll NEVER get home! Are you ready?”

“And please, call us the Creators.”

“We're ready.” Elizabeth said without a moment's hesitation, and Aiden nodded.

“Let's go get our life back,” Aiden whispered in Elizabeth's ear, and Elizabeth nodded confidently.

“Excellent! We'll start right away.”

stay tuned for more...



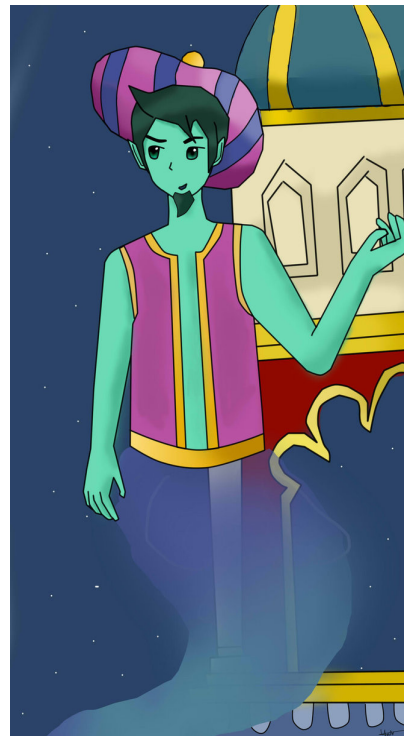
ARTWORK

I AM AN ALL POWERFUL
♦ GENIE! ♦
YOU CAN NOT MOCK MY
♦ POWER! ♦
GOOD THINGS COME IN
SMALL PACKAGES,
♦ TOOTS! ♦



Small Packages
by Spotted Dragon (SydVC)

***Poptropica:
Genie**
by yadira-star



Poptropica
High

***Poptropica High**
by BlazingAngel123

Popsona (Patterned)
by SlantedFish



Poptropica
High

***The
Whole
Group**
by MissEligon

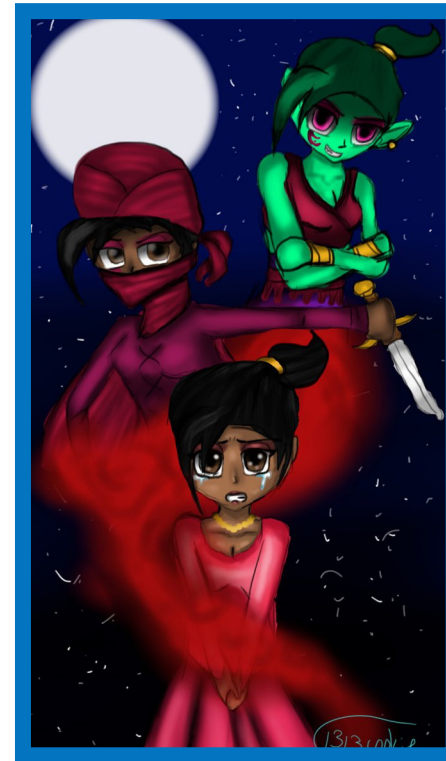


entries marked with an asterisk () are handpicked by PHN staff

ARTWORK



**Porcelain
Poptropicans**
by Lonely Coyote



I Just Want You Back
by Brave Tomato (1313cookie)



Night Bot Island
by MasterPinpey

ARTWORK



***Become your true selves and serve me...**
by Brave Tomato (1313cookie)



Poptropica Login
by \$CupcakeLuv\$



Circus of the Bizarre
by MuZzKI

Arabian Nights Haiku
by Slippery Raptor

Arabian Nights,
Princesses, genies, and thieves
It's a whole new world

PoptropiCon Haiku
by Slippery Raptor

Wearing my disguise
Playing cards and some spoilers
Battle Omegon

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