

CHAPTER 1

Band practice wasn't going well — again. Two weeks after we totally stunk at the All-Ages Open Mic Night, Julie Kobayashi was still trying to convince our friend Greg Troutman that he couldn't sing, and that he *definitely* shouldn't be the front man, or front boy, for our band the Ghosts of War. She was right, of course. Once your voice starts to crack — which was exactly what happened to Greg right in the middle of our first-ever public performance — you need to step away from the microphone already and let somebody else have a turn.

The only problem — besides Greg's cracking voice — was that Julie also kept trying to convince us we should let

her be the one on the mic. Unfortunately, Julie can't sing, either. Even more unfortunately, she has what my mom calls a tin ear and can't hear herself when she's singing off-key. What's even *more* unfortunate is she actually thinks she's a great singer. Probably since she's a musical genius in every other way, her parents never had the heart to tell her the truth — that her singing is awful times ten.

Halfway through our third song that day, with Greg still on vocals, Julie suddenly stopped playing, turned off her keyboard, and threw her hands up.

“That sounded like squeaking, not singing,” she said, before turning to me and adding, “You tell him, Anderson. He won't listen to me.”

I set my guitar down and retreated to the back of our practice room in the basement of my uncle Dex's junk shop, the Kitchen Sink. No way did I want to get in the middle of those two.

Greg bent his guitar pick in half and then tried to bend it straight again. It wouldn't go. “That's just how I sing,” he snapped at Julie. “It's my *style*.”

“No, it's not,” she snapped back. “It's your hormones.”

I retreated even farther as they argued back and forth about Greg's “style,” until I bumped into something. It was

a footlocker. I looked down at it, confused. Just the week before I had moved it to a storage room next door to where we practiced, to get it out of the way and so I wouldn't have to see it all the time and be reminded of what was in there. I had no idea how it got back here. Maybe Uncle Dex had moved it . . .

A few weeks earlier, I'd found a World War II navy pea-coat in the locker, along with a mysterious letter, setting in motion a pretty crazy adventure involving a guy named William Foxwell — or rather the ghost of William Foxwell. Greg, Julie, and I had to solve the mystery of how he went missing in action at the Battle of Midway, which was the most important navy battle of World War II.

I wrote all about it in a notebook that I keep hidden under my mattress at home. I even gave it a title — “The Secret of Midway” — though I doubt I'll ever let anybody read it besides Julie and Greg.

Anyway, I knew there was a lot of other stuff in the locker that looked like it was from other wars, but so far I'd only glanced inside. Greg kept asking me if we could check out what was in there, but I didn't want to go messing around with anything else that might have a ghost attached to it. I was still recovering from the Secret of Midway, and missing

William Foxwell, who sort of became our friend but disappeared once we solved the mystery.

It was funny about that locker, though: The more I stayed away from it, the more I couldn't stop thinking about it, like it had some kind of gravitational pull on my brain — even after I shoved it in that storage room next door. And now here it was, somehow back in the practice room.

Not only that, but as I stood there staring at it, the footlocker started to sort of glow. Then the latch fell open all on its own. Then, the next thing I knew, I was bending down without even thinking about it, opening the lid, and looking inside.

Greg and Julie were still arguing about who squeaked and who squawked when they sang, and so that's what was happening when I found the hand grenade.

I didn't know what it was at first because it was round and smooth, not like the pineapple-looking hand grenades you see in movies. More like a big olive-green lemon. Then I noticed the plunger and safety clip.

There was something written on it, too, scratched into the metal, and I had to take it closer to the front of the practice room to read what it said.

That put a quick end to Julie and Greg squabbling.

“Whoa!” Greg said. “Where did you get that?”

“You shouldn’t have that,” Julie said before I could answer. “It could be dangerous.”

I held the hand grenade up toward the light so Greg and I could read what was on there.

The writing on the grenade said *Z & Fish* and underneath somebody had also written, or scratched, *DMZ 68*.

Greg took off his beanie, which he wore all the time because he said they made us look cool. Or at least less uncool. “What is that supposed to mean?” he asked.

“Beats me,” I said. “Maybe we should take it upstairs and ask Uncle Dex.”

Julie stomped her foot. “Maybe we should take ourselves upstairs and get away from that bomb before something happens,” she said. She was already heading for the stairs.

“It’s not a bomb, Julie,” Greg said. “It’s a hand grenade.”

She stopped. “And what is a hand grenade, exactly?”

“Well,” said Greg, pulling his beanie back on over his wild red hair, “it’s, um, well, I guess it’s a bomb. But you throw it. You don’t shoot it out of a cannon or whatever.”

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s all go upstairs.”

“Leave it down here,” Julie said again. “It could blow up and kill us. We have to get out of here.”

I couldn't leave the grenade, though. It felt like my fingers were glued to it or something.

And then, as if somebody was standing right behind me, reading over my shoulder, I heard a whispery voice.

"That looks like my lucky grenade."

I whirled around and collided with Greg. Nobody else was there.

"Did you hear that just now?" I asked him.

"Heck, yeah!" he said.

We both looked around for a second, then bolted up the stairs behind Julie.

I still had the grenade.