

MONSTER CLUB

HUNTERS
FOR HIRE

BY

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SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

FOR GALEN, WHO FOUGHT GREMLINS
AND TROLLS WITH ME EVEN WHEN
HE WOULD RATHER HAVE BEEN
PLAYING AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-31851-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

19 20 21 22 23

Printed in the U.S.A. 37

First edition, August 2019

Book design by Christopher Stengel

TOMMY



Everyone in Ms. Jander’s third-period science class jumped when the alarm buzzed and red-and-white lights started flashing above the door.

Tommy Wainwright tensed in his seat. Was this it—a real emergency? An opportunity to escape a deadly fire? Or an infestation of acidic toads they would need to battle their way through? Had Karim been right about the basilisk footprints he said he found? Tommy was ready for anything.

Principal Jackson’s voice crackled over the intercom. “This is not a drill. Everyone please remain where you are. We will update you soon.”

Tommy grinned at his friends Karim and Spike, who were sitting next to him at the back of the class. Karim looked scared, as usual, and Spike was just watching with a knowing smirk. They didn’t get it. This could be their big chance to have something crazy awesome happen!

Suddenly, the flashing lights went dark. The classroom erupted with chatter, but Ms. Jander rapped her knuckles on her desk and the students fell mostly silent.

“I know you’re all distracted, but we’re not finished with class,” she said. “We need to get through this week’s unit on substances with mystical properties. The supernatural biology group presentations are just around the corner.”

2

The class groaned in unison.

“Yesterday,” Ms. Jander continued, “we covered mystical substances like sour ooze, which can expand from a small mass to a hundred times its original size. Last night’s reading was on a different substance with mystical properties.”

Tommy perked up when she mentioned “supernatural biology” and “sour ooze.” Finally, they were talking about something *useful* in science class! Enough of this stuff about the water cycle and electricity; studying monsters was the only thing that could make school interesting.

“Tommy, did you do the reading last night?” Ms. Jander asked.

Perking up had clearly been a mistake. “Uh, yeah,” Tommy said. It wasn’t a total lie; he’d glanced at it when she handed it out. That counted for something, right?

Tommy didn’t know why Ms. Jander called on him so much. Maybe it was how often he got distracted during class. Or it might be because Tommy was a head taller than most of the other seventh graders. He normally enjoyed looking like a giant among mere mortals, but it did seem to draw an unusual amount of attention from teachers—even if they

often assumed he was a big idiot. Just because he was a big hunk of beefcake didn't mean he was a moron.

"Tommy, do you remember the difference between a meteoroid, a meteor, a meteorite, and meteorium?"

Tommy stared back blankly. Those words were all really similar. Why should there even *be* a difference?

"Well? It was in last night's reading." Ms. Jander didn't seem disappointed; she didn't expect Tommy to know the answer. But that didn't mean she was going to let him off the hook.

A lesser person would have stayed silent, or admitted to not knowing the answer. But that wasn't Tommy. No, Tommy never backed down from a challenge, no matter where it came from, no matter how ill-prepared he was. So what if he didn't have the answer in his head? Tommy might not be book smart, but at least he had guts. Maybe he was gut smart.

"Meteors are shooting stars." He knew that much was true. "And, um, meteoroids are people who are big fans of them. And meteorites are, like, people who shoot them down." Tommy nodded. He'd probably nailed it, just by listening to his gut.

"And meteorium?" Ms. Jander asked.

"Uh . . . that's when you grind up meteors and use it to season burgers." Tommy was pretty sure he'd seen that on *Now You're Cooking with Gas*, his favorite cooking show. Gaston Lefevre was both a great chef and totally ripped. "Mussels to build muscles" was an inspirational segment.

Ms. Jander stared at him for a moment. “Well, that’s very . . . creative, Tommy,” she said. “But sadly not the least bit correct. Does anyone want to help him out?”

Tommy sagged in his chair. Of course he’d gotten it wrong. Maybe he was just the big dumb lug everyone thought he was. Just because he started every morning with a Brotein (“The power to bro down and crush it”) shake, that didn’t make him dumb.

And now the whole class was staring at him. He could feel them judging him. He looked around, hoping that someone would bail him out, but no one else said a thing.

Ms. Jander focused her attention on someone else. “Karim, what about you?”

Karim shrunk back. “Um . . . meteorium is what you can make magical weapons out of.” He sped up as he got started. “You have to forge it properly, usually with volcanic heat. Like my dad did in the episode when he needed a magical ballista bolt to defeat the—”

“Thank you,” Ms. Jander interrupted him. “That’s correct. Which is why meteorium is one of the most valuable substances on earth. It’s the only thing that can harm most monsters.”

That was actually pretty cool, Tommy had to admit. He resolved to do more than just glance at the reading next time.

“What about meteors, meteorites, and meteoroids?” Ms. Jander asked.

More silence. Tommy stared at his desk. Maybe he should

give his gut smarts another crack at it. Maybe they just needed to warm up first.

But then Spike sighed and spoke up. “Meteoroids are rocky bodies in space. A meteor is the streak of light we see in the sky when the meteoroid burns up in our atmosphere. And meteorites are just meteoroids after they land on Earth.”

Ms. Jander nodded sharply. “There! That wasn’t so hard, was it?”

“How did you know that?” Tommy whispered. It really wasn’t like Spike to study any time there wasn’t a test the next day.

Spike shrugged and pointed at the front of the room. It was all Tommy could do to keep from smacking himself on the forehead. The answer was already written on the board, probably from the last class. All he’d needed to do was look.

I wasn’t made for this school stuff, he thought. I was made for big adventures.

That’s when the alarm went off a second time.