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**ARCADE
OR BUST!**

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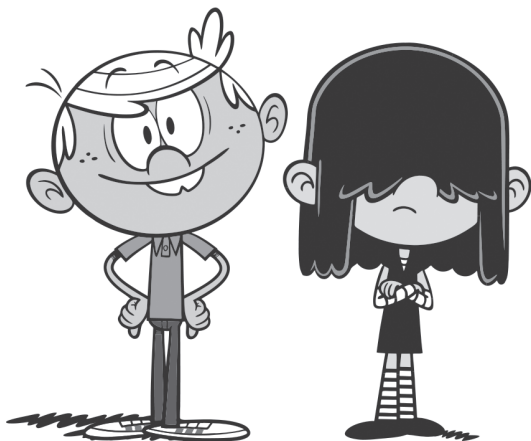
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THE **LOUD** HOUSE



ARCADE OR BUST!

BY AMARIS GLASS

SCHOLASTIC INC.



“Lincoln, can you hold Hops while I clean out his cage?”

“Lincoln, I need you to teach me how to Hula-Hoop.”

“Lincoln, will you help me polish my coffins?”

Sisters. They all want a piece of you.

Picture this: I’m Lincoln Loud, minding



my own business in my linen-closet-turned-bedroom, doing a little dance in my undies because it's Saturday.

But not just any old regular no-big-deal-nothing-to-do Saturday. Today was the most exciting Saturday in the history of weekends! I had freedom (my parents were away all day at a seminar on singing to your houseplants to help them grow). I had quarters (Captain Coinbottom, my piggybank, was practically too heavy to carry). And I had a quest: be the first in line with Clyde at the arcade to play *Marshmallow Martian Blasters*.

What's *Marshmallow Martian Blasters*, you ask? It's only the most legendary, full-size, never-been-played-before video game known to kid-kind. It was one of the first games to



appear in arcades when our parents were in grade school. *No kid living* has ever seen it in real life. Like Bigfoot.

Only, we've managed to find it!

And it's coming to Gus's Games and Grub.

"Lincoln!" Luna pounded on my door, interrupting my undies dance. "Project Day meeting in five minutes!"

No.

NO.

Nooooooooo.

Not Project Day. Not today!

I flopped down on my bed and groaned into my pillow. This ruined *everything*. Why did Lori have to invent this miserable tradition, anyway?

Project Day is just what it sounds like: a day



full of projects. In a house with eleven kids, two parents, four pets, and one Vanzilla, someone is always trying to get something done. Usually several someones, and they all need help.

I admit, Project Day can be pretty handy when you want to build a bike ramp in the backyard but can't do it by yourself. In a family this size, there's always someone with the skills you need to get your project done. Everyone helps everyone, knowing that the next time Project Day rolls around, the favor will be returned.

Like I said, it's not a bad deal—unless you already have plans. *Big* plans. Important plans. Intergalactically pivotal plans! Why todaaaayyyyyy? *Whyyyyyyyyyy?*

“Lincoln—er, Firesticks! Are you there?”



Come in, Firesticks!” Clyde’s voice crackled from my walkie-talkie. “Are you ready for Operation Be First in Line to Play *Marshmallow Martian Blasters* and Get the High Score? Over.”

I stretched my leg out and grabbed the walkie with my toes—a skill I spent one very bored week last summer perfecting while all my sisters were sick—and pressed the button to talk to Clyde.

“I’m here, but I have bad news, buddy.” I took a deep breath. “Lori’s decided—”

“That she’s done with old Too-Tall McSkinnyPants and is in the market for someone new?” I could practically hear Clyde smoothing his hair.

“*Clyde!* Focus! It’s bad.” I slid down to the



floor. “She’s instituting Project Day. Today.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Lincoln, this ruins *everything!*”

“I know! What am I going to do?”

More pounding on my door, this time from Lola. “You better be getting dressed, Lincoln. No one wants to see you in your underwear!”

“Clyde, they’re coming for me. How do I get out of this?” I jumped up and began stuffing my backpack with clothes, comics, and my secret stash of fruit leather. The situation was dire. I might have to run away.

“Lincoln, this is bad. Over.”

“I know.”



“Like, *really* bad. Over. Project Days can last forever! Over.”

“I *know!* Clyde, you’re not helping. Over.”

“Sorry. Okay, let’s just take a minute to breathe. . . .” I could hear Clyde inhaling and exhaling so deep *I* was getting dizzy. “Of course! We need an Operation.”

Right. “A *new* Operation,” I said.

“A Get Out of Project Day Operation.”

“A Get Out of Project Day Without Making Everyone Mad Operation.”

“A Divert and Distract Escape Operation?” asked Clyde.

I considered it. That had worked well for me in the past, but . . . “No, I think more of a Fool My Sisters and Then Walk Merrily Away Operation.”



“Ah, a Help with Project Day Without Actually Helping Operation. Classic.”

“A Be Really Eager but Absolutely Useless So No One Will Want My Help and I Can Sneak Away Without Anyone Knowing What I’m Really Up To Operation.”

“Lincoln, that’s genius!”

It really was. “And I haven’t even gotten to the best part. Every Project Day has a Floater, and if I can convince everyone to pick me, I won’t be tied to one certain project. I’ll float around, and no one will know where I’m supposed to be. When I disappear, no one will even know I’m gone. Poof!”

“Whoa . . . you’re an inspiration. I’m proud to call you my best friend.”

“Thanks, Clyde. Me too.” Part of me knew



that didn't even make sense, but I was so impressed with myself I let it slide and did a somersault off the bed, landing in a gloriously awkward heap that did nothing to dampen my enthusiasm. "This is totally going to work. *Marshmallow Martian Blasters*, here we come!"

