

CHAPTER 1

“Yuck!”

I pushed the soggy cereal around in the bottom of my bowl with my spoon. There was no way I could eat one more bite.

“Come on, Mason.” My big brother, Joel, set the Mega-Flakes cereal box in front of me with a thud. “Eat up!”

I stared at the words on the back of the cereal box. The kitchen light made the silver letters sparkle.

Win! Win! Win!

A Mega-naut Adventures video game!

Collect five box tops and enter NOW!

I scanned the list of video game options. Hang gliding, mountain climbing, cliff diving. “I wish I could play this Mega-naut Adventures video game right now.”

Joel rolled his eyes. “Yeah, but you’ve got one more box top to go. And you know Mom won’t let you rip it off until you’re done this last bowl.”

“But, the fiber gunk keeps getting stuck between my teeth,” I said.

Double Yuck.

“No box top. No game,” Joel said.

Mom watched me from the rec room as she folded laundry. She had already caught me trying to dump the cereal in the garbage can. There was no escape.

“Don’t remind me.” I took another gritty, gaggy bite. “Gross.”

“Just swallow it, already,” Joel said.

I made a face and swallowed my mouthful of cereal. “Why couldn’t they put this prize on the back of a Chocobits box? Or Alphapuffs?”

“Don’t be a wimp, bro. Mega-Flakes aren’t *that* bad,” Joel said.

“So *you* eat them,” I said.

“No way! I already ate my share.”

It was true. Joel finished his five boxes weeks ago. He would probably get his video game any day now. And I might too. If only I could finish these last few bites.

“I can’t do it.” I put my spoon down. It clattered onto the kitchen table.

“Block your nose,” Joel suggested.

“Tried that,” I said.

“Close your eyes,” he said.

“Tried that, too,” I said.

“How about some more milk?” Joel ran to the refrigerator.

“You’re forgetting one thing,” I said.

“What?” Joel asked.

“I hate Mega-Flakes!” I yelled.

“Aw, man!” Joel flopped down on his chair.

“It’s useless,” I said. “You’ll just have to play Mega-naut Adventures without me.”

“But it’s no fun bragging about my high score if I play by myself,” Joel said.

“Who says you would get the high score, anyway?” My voice rose.

“I guess we’ll never know, will we?” Joel crossed his arms and stared at me.

“But Mega-Flakes?” My stomach gurgled. It felt like it was going to explode. “This much fiber can’t be healthy for a kid.”

“You just need to trick yourself into thinking you like them. Mind over matter.” Joel squinted his eyes and stared me down.

“Mind over matter?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Just keep your eyes on the prize.” Joel pointed two fingers to my eyes and then to the picture of the video game on the box.

I took a deep breath and glanced at Joel.

“You sure this is going to work?” I asked.

“Eyes on the prize,” he repeated, like some kind of mind-controlled zombie.

I brought the spoon to my mouth. I stared at the picture of the Mega-nauts Adventures video game. The buttons gleamed. Zigzag sparks shot out from the screen.

I imagined playing.

Beating Joel!

Before I knew it, the Mega-Flakes were gone. The only thing left was a puddle of milk.

“I did it! I ate the last bowl!”

“Finally!” Joel said.

I ripped off the box top and popped it in the envelope with the others.

“Hey, wait a second!” I cried. “There are already five box tops in here.”

“Oops!” Joel laughed and called over his shoulder as he raced out the kitchen door. “I forgot to tell you. Dad finished another box yesterday!”

“You won’t be laughing when I blow past you with my high score!” I chased Joel to the mailbox down the street, grasping the envelope.

“Mega-naut Adventures—here we come!”

CHAPTER 2

Joel pounded on the bathroom door. “Mason! Are you done yet?”

I flushed and washed my hands. Mega-Flakes. High in fiber. Get the picture?

“What?” I poked my head out the door.

“Look! I just got it!” Joel held up the Mega-naut Adventures handheld video game. It looked just like the one on the box.

“Where’s mine?” I asked.

“There was only one. It was addressed to me.” He dropped his hand to his side. “Sorry, Mason.”

“My box tops must have got there too late.” I sighed and slumped against the door frame. “Did you try it out yet?”

“I will,” Joel pinched his nose and turned to go, “as soon as I can *breathe* again!”

I ran after him, down the stairs, through the kitchen where Mom was baking cupcakes, and out the front door. We sat on the front steps. Our dog, Sparky, snored on the porch swing. Joel played with the video game’s buttons.

“It looks like there are five levels in all. And look! There are all sorts of sports to choose from. Mountain biking, sky diving...Oh! There is even

super-luge!” Joel’s player raced down the course at top speed, gathering points along the way.

“Hey, you’re really good at this,” I said.

“Thanks!” But Joel was good at everything he tried. He was so, well...fearless.

“Can I try?” I asked.

I was pretty good too. I rappelled down a cliff. Then I snowboarded down a mountain in time to beat a giant avalanche. I got to level four on that one.

“Level four?” Joel asked.

“And high score.” I grinned and handed the video game back to him.

“Not for long!” Joel started up a new game.

“Can you imagine being a real Mega-naut?” I rested my chin in my hands and stared out into the empty street.

“It sure would beat living in old Borington Heights.” Joel jabbed at the buttons. The video game beeped and flashed as his score got higher and higher.

“How did you get to level three so fast?” I looked over Joel’s shoulder.

“Looks like you won’t have that high score for long.” Joel smirked.

All of a sudden, his game started to buzz.

“Hey, what’s wrong with this thing?” Joel tapped the screen.

“Isn’t it working?” I asked.

“No. The screen just went blank,” he said. “Great! I can’t believe I ate five boxes of Mega-Flakes for this. This game is nothing but junk.”

Joel was just about to fling the video game aside when the screen flashed. A message appeared.

Top Secret

You ate five boxes of Mega-Flakes. This proves your worth.

We have chosen you as a Secret Mega-naut Agent.

Do you accept?

YES/NO

“What is this, some kind of joke?” Joel asked.

I checked his screen. The YES/NO sign kept flashing.

“What should we do?” I asked.

Joel pressed YES.

Welcome, Agent Joel

Mega-naut Agents to date:

2 out of 25

“Hey, what are you doing? And how did the game know your name?”

I asked.

“I dunno, but it sounds like fun,” Joel said.

“You can’t just join up to be a secret agent. You’re just a kid!” I said.

“Come on, Mason. It’s not like it’s real or anything.”

“It looks real to me.” I glanced down at the screen.

Mega-naut Agents to date:

12 out of 25

“They just do that to make it *look* real.” Joel shifted on the stairs, and then looked at me. “Don’t they?”

“How should I know?”

But there was one thing I *did* know. There was no way *I* would just go ahead and join some secret agency.

No.

Way.

CHAPTER 3

“Mason, look!” Joel nudged my arm.

A delivery truck screeched to a halt in front of our house. The delivery man rushed up the walkway. He handed me a package.

“Mr. Mason Munro?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Sign here, please.”

I scribbled my name and took the package. It could only be one thing.
My Mega-naut Adventures video game!

The delivery man turned to walk away.

“Wait!” I yelled.

He stopped and glanced over his shoulder.

“Is this...I mean...this Mega-naut thing is just a game, right? It’s not real, is it?” I asked.

The delivery man tipped his hat.

“I assure you, Mr. Munro, Mega-naut is as real as it gets. Good day.”

With that, he jumped back into his truck and sped away.

My package started to buzz. Joel and I looked at each other and gulped.

“Open it!” Joel yelled.

My hands shook as I ripped open the package. I lifted the game from the bubble wrap. It sprang to life in my hands.

The same message as Joel's popped up. I read it slowly, taking in every word. Especially the last sentence.

We have chosen you as a Secret Mega-naut Agent.

At the end was the very same question.

Do you accept?

YES/NO

“Cool!” Joel said.

“What do you mean—cool? You heard the delivery guy. This isn't a joke!”

“I know. Isn't it great?” Joel said with a grin.

“Joel! You saw what was on that video game. What if they actually make us do that stuff for real?”

“Don't worry! We're just a couple of kids,” Joel said. “I'm sure Mega-naut will give us the easy stuff to do.”

“I don't know. This is all happening so fast.” Rappelling over cliffs and snow boarding in an avalanche had been fun. But that was a video game.

The YES/NO sign kept flashing.

“Do it, Mason. I can’t join a secret agency all by myself. Besides, it looks like you’re the last one left to sign up.” Joel pointed to my screen.

Agents to date:

24 out of 25

“Okay, okay, don’t rush me.” I swatted his hand away.

I looked at Joel. He looked fearless. I wanted to feel like that too, but I was shaking like a leaf. My heart pounded in my chest. But, for once in my life, I took a chance. I moved my finger toward the screen and pressed YES.

Welcome, Agent Mason

Mega-naut Agents to date:

25 out of 25

Field Agent Team Complete

“Wow.” I stared at the screen like I was in some kind of a daze. “Can you believe we just became secret agents?”

“Maybe we’ll get special badges,” Joel said.

“Or uniforms,” I added. “Oh! Then again, junior agents might not get uniforms.”

Just then, our video games began to vibrate in our hands. Mine sent a tremor up my arm. Two side panels flipped out. About a zillion extra buttons and flashing lights appeared.

“Mason! Check out your screen!”



CHAPTER 4

Agent Mason

*You went ABOVE & BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY by eating
SIX boxes of Mega-Flakes instead of five.*

*For this great act of courage, we have promoted you to ‘Chief Field
Agent’.*

“Chief Field Agent?” My mouth hung open.

“Wow!” Joel gasped.

“Look, there’s more!” I said.

Please choose your second-in-command.

The screen showed a map of the world. Twenty-five little dots flashed across the map.

“Hey, there’s me and you.” I pointed to two dots near Borington Heights. Above the dots were the names Agent Mason and Agent Joel.

I knew who I wanted. I made my choice.

You have chosen Agent Joel.

Please stand by.

“Cool! You chose me? Even though I made you eat that extra box of cereal?”

“Don’t remind me.” I held my stomach. “I never want to see another Mega-Flake in my life!”

The rumble of a truck sounded from up the street. It stopped with a screech in front of our driveway. Another delivery man rushed up to the front step.

“Agent Mason?”

I nodded slowly.

“Um, yes.”

“As Chief Field Agent, you are also our grand prize winner! You have won a *lifetime* supply of Mega-Flakes! Here is your first box!”

He handed me the box and sped away.

“Ugh. Not more Mega-Flakes!” I cried.

“Hey look,” Joel said.

The box top had a message on it.

“*Flip the top for your secret Mega-naut mission code.*” I ripped off the box top. Inside was a series of letters.

P-N-G-W-N-D-R-P

“Maybe you type the mission code into the Mega-naut datacom!” Joel held up his video game.

“Datacom? Is that what we’re calling them now?” I smiled at Joel. He was really getting into this. I was too. It was kind of fun. I grabbed my video game, I mean, datacom, and typed in the code.

Nothing happened.

“Maybe you didn’t punch the letters in right. Here, let me try.” Joel grabbed my datacom and jabbed at the buttons.

“Hey!”

“What?” He tossed my datacom back to me. “I was only trying to help.”

Still nothing.

“Maybe this is just a big joke,” I said.

“The joke is, now you have a life-time supply of Mega-Flakes.” Joel laughed and shook the box. Something thunked inside.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Maybe there’s a prize in here.” Joel rifled through the cereal. He pulled out a small toy wrapped in plastic.

“What is it?” I asked.

The plastic crinkled as he turned it over.

“It looks like one of those toy paratrooper guys. You know; the ones you toss up in the air and they float back to the ground with their parachutes?”

“Hey, another message!” My screen flashed.

Code approved

Unwrap your prize to begin your mission.

“Awesome. You ready?” Joel was about to tear open the plastic package when I stopped him.

“Wait!” I yelled. All of a sudden it all became so real. I wasn’t sure I was cut out to be a Mega-naut Agent. Especially not a Chief Field Agent.

“What’s the hold up?” Joel asked.

“This all sounds kind of scary,” I said.

Joel looked at me. His eyes were fierce.

“Mason, look around you! There’s a reason they call this town Borington Heights. This is the most exciting thing that’s ever happened to us!”

He was right. Still, I wasn't sure.

"Shouldn't we ask Mom or something?" I asked.

"I guess." Joel tapped his foot.

"Hey Mom," I yelled through the kitchen screen door. "We just got our video games from the Mega-Flakes box. Is it okay if Joel and me become secret Mega-naut Agents and go on a top secret mission?"

"Sure, dear," Mom replied from the kitchen over the sound of the hand mixer. "Just don't forget to take out the recycling once you boys are done."

I looked at Joel and shrugged.

"You ready now?" Joel asked.

"Ready as I'll ever be, I guess," I said.

With that, Joel ripped the plastic from the prize and flung the toy paratrooper in the air. Its parachute opened.

Right away, I got a feeling we weren't in Borington Heights anymore.

CHAPTER 5

“Arghhhhh!”

A rush of air blasted against my face. My shirt rippled and flapped against my body. My stomach belly-bopped and flip-flopped.

I looked down and gasped. All I could see was a mass of white.

I was falling.

Fast!

“Joel!”

“Mason!”

I turned and saw him. His arms and legs were stretched out in a spread eagle. He was falling, like me.

“Isn’t this *great?*” Joel had the biggest smile I had ever seen.

“Great?!” I yelled over the howling wind. “Are you crazy? We’re about to become splattered like road pizza!”

Just then, my datacom beeped. I fumbled around and found it in my pocket.

LEVEL 1

You are plunging toward earth at 115 miles per hour.

I didn’t need to know that.

Impact will occur in 52.4 seconds.

I REALLY didn't need to know that!

You are equipped with a parachute.

To avoid impact, pull the green rip cord.

They could have skipped to that part! I stuck the datacom back in my pocket and felt around for the rip cord. Finally, I found it.

“Joel!” I called over to him.

He was still smiling.

I pointed to my rip cord. He understood. He found his too and gave me a thumbs up.

“1, 2, 3...Pull!” I yanked the rip cord. Joel did the same.

<<RRRRIIPPPP>>

Nothing!

Nothing?! Five minutes on the job and I was already plunging to my death.

“What are we supposed to do now?” I yelled.

The earth zoomed toward me.

Closer.

Sharper.

Bigger.

Joel's smile started to fade.

“Call headquarters!” he yelled.

I grabbed my datacom and typed in a message. We didn’t have much time. My message had to be short and sweet.

HELP!

I waited for an answer. The seconds felt like eons. My eyes watered from the rush of air blasting against my face, making it hard to see the screen.

“They’re not answering!” I yelled.

Joel’s smile disappeared. He looked worried. Joel never looked worried.

Finally, the datacom beeped.

Secondary rip cord ready

Of course! A backup parachute! I sighed in relief and actually felt a little silly. Of *course* parachutes have a backup. I don’t know why I had been so worried.

A yellow cord popped out. I grabbed it.

“The yellow one!” Joel understood and found it, too.

I didn't wait to count. I just yanked the yellow cord as if my life depended on it.

Wait!

My life DID depend on it.

<<RRRRIIPPPP>>

Still nothing!!!

“Is it too late to quit this job?!!” I yelled.

My datacom beeped again.

Tertiary rip cord ready

I had no idea what ‘tertiary’ meant, but I was desperate.

“I think there is another cord!!”

Joel had already found it. He pointed over his right shoulder. A bright red rip cord. I searched around and found mine.

“I got it!” I yelled.

But Joel wasn't there. I looked up. His parachute had opened. He was soaring gracefully to earth.

I looked down. The earth came closer and closer. It was now or never. I grasped the red rip cord and gave it a humungous tug.

<<RRRRIIPPPP>>

My head snapped back. A sharp jab dug into my shoulders from the straps of my pack.

The parachute opened!

The rat-a-tat-tat of my heart settled down to a thumpety-thump. The harsh wind in my face changed to a gentle breeze. The piercing ring in my ears turned to a soft whistle.

Ahh....

This was nice. Floating along. I remembered thinking that I could get used to this...

Until I spotted the huge mountain of ice!

Joel headed for a clearing beyond the mountain.

“How do you steer this thing?!” I yelled.

But he couldn't hear me. It looked like he was pulling on two ropes to go left and right.

I looked up. Only the left rope dangled down. The other one was tangled up and out of reach. If only I could steer my parachute enough to clear the mountain.

I gave the rope a tug.

“Whoaaa!” My parachute swerved to the left, narrowly missing the mountain of ice. The clearing came into view. I looked up for Joel. He was on his way to a safe landing too.

I breathed a huge sigh of relief. This wasn't so bad. Maybe I *could* do this Mega-naut Agent thing after all. The wide, open field stretched out below me.

Almost there...

A few more feet and I would be back on solid ground.

<<<THUNK>>>

<<<BANG>>>

<<<CRUNCH>>>

Really.

Solid.

Ground.

ouch

CHAPTER 6

“That was awesome!” Joel yelled as he shrugged off his parachute pack.

“That was painful.” I moaned and rubbed my backside.

“Rough landing?” Joel asked.

“Crash landing. How did you figure out how to steer this thing, anyway?” I untangled myself from the parachute ropes.

“You’re not the only one with one of these, you know.” Joel held up his datacom. “I called Mega-naut headquarters.”

“Look.” I pointed to his screen.

Level 1 complete

“Cool! It’s just like the Mega-naut Adventures video game,” Joel said.

“Level 1 is a bit chilly.” I shivered.

“Where are we, anyway?” Joel looked around.

“Good question.”

We stood in a clearing covered in frozen snow. Mounds of ice and rock rose around us. Plus—it was bone-chilling cold!

“It looks like they dropped us in the middle of the Arctic.” My teeth chattered.

“Antarctica to be exact, sonny.” A sweet, granny voice spoke.

I jumped and turned to the voice. It was an old lady with granny glasses, a beret and a whistle.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Agent Blue Hair at your service, sweet pea.” She pinched my cheeks and slipped a parka over my shoulders. She handed another parka to Joel.

“Just great.” Joel leaned over to whisper in my ear. “First they pick a couple of kids to lead a secret mission. Now they’ve sent *Granny* in for back-up.”

“Joel!” I punched his arm.

“What’s that, sonny?” Agent Blue Hair turned up her hearing aid.

“Uh, nothing,” I said. “Do you have any idea what our mission is?”

“Well, dearie, I just joined Mega-naut, too.” Agent Blue Hair said.

“But, I think we are supposed to rescue a few penguins. They should be around here somewhere.” She peered over her glasses.

“Penguins? That’s so lame!” Joel cried. “What about polar bears? Or ferocious snow leopards?”

“No, penguins are good.” I nodded. I could feel my whole body relax.

“That doesn’t sound too dangerous.”

“How are we supposed to rescue anything?” Joel stuffed his hands in his parka’s pockets and kicked at the frozen snow. “We have no gear. Plus, there are only three of us.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that!” Agent Blue Hair blew the whistle hanging from her neck. Dozens of little girls popped out from behind the mounds of ice. They were dressed in parkas, berets and sashes.

“You can’t be serious!” Joel shook his head in disbelief. “Girl Rangers?”

“Girl-bots, actually,” Agent Blue Hair said.

“You mean they’re not real?” I walked up to one of them and poked it with my finger.

“*Would you like to buy some cookies?*” The Girl-bot pulled out a box from under her parka.

I jumped back. Totally weird!

“It’s my deep cover.” Agent Blue Hair giggled. “Nobody will suspect an old lady with a Girl Rangers troupe.”

“Smart,” Joel said.

“Don’t they slow you down?” I asked.

“Oh, goodness no! Watch this.” Agent Blue Hair blew her whistle.

“Girl-bots! At-ten-TION!”

The girls formed three perfect lines. They stood as still as statues.

“Girl-bots—pyramid mode!” Agent Blue Hair ordered.

The Girl-bots spun around like Olympic gymnasts. Legs and arms whizzed by me. They zipped and zapped on top of each other. Soon, they formed a humungous, thirty foot, Girl-bot pyramid.

“Wow!” My mouth hung open. Joel stared.

“Fire proof, water proof and Evil Nemesis proof.” Agent Blue Hair nodded her head and smiled.

“Evil Nemesis proof?” I shouted.

Just then, a giant roar filled the air. Dozens of silver snowmobiles exploded onto the icy field. A shiny, gold snowmobile led the way and raced toward us.

I grabbed Joel’s arm and yelled over the noise.

“No one said anything about an Evil Nemesis!”

CHAPTER 7

Agent Blue Hair blew her whistle. “Girl-bots—transport mode!”

The Girl-bots scattered to the ground and lay flat on their stomachs. The sides of their parkas flipped open. Snow skis popped out. Handle bars burst out of their sleeves. Steam shot out of their boots.

“Hop on!” Agent Blue Hair yelled. She grabbed her Girl-bot’s handlebars. It took off like a shot. Joel and I did the same and sped off. We ducked around the icy mounds and rocks.

“These things are awesome!” Joel yelled. The hood of his parka flew off his head as he picked up speed.

I gripped my Girl-bots handle bars and held on with all my might. We bumped along the frozen ground at lightning speed. The wind blasted in my face. “How do I work this thing?!”

But my Girl-bot knew what to do. It zipped ahead to catch up to Joel.

I looked over my shoulder. The extra Girl-bots zoomed behind us. They shot snowballs through their handlebars. The silver and gold snowmobiles swerved to avoid them. But still, they were gaining on us.

My Mega-naut datacom beeped. I pulled it from my pocket with one hand and tried to hang on!

Level 2

You are being chased by Mega-naut's Enemy #1:

Helgor Horribull and his Evil Silver Knights

I looked over to Joel. "Are you getting this?" I yelled. He had his datacom out too. He nodded.

Helgor has kidnapped a waddle of penguins.

He plans to use them in his evil plan to take over the earth.

You must rescue the penguins from his evil lair.

This is your mission.

Do you accept?

YES/NO

Did I have a choice?! I pressed the 'YES' button with my nose and glanced over my shoulder. Helgor was right behind us.

A picture flashed up on my screen. The evil horde behind us showed up as a batch of blinking red dots. We showed up on the screen as a bunch of happy faces. Ahead, was a cave full of dancing penguins.

The penguins! We were close!

I looked up.

There was something else up ahead. The gigantic mountain of ice!
And we were heading straight for it at breakneck Girl-bot speed!

“We’re gonna crash!!” I yelled.

“This way!” Joel veered to the left. Where was he taking us? What if we got trapped?

Helgor’s golden snowmobile roared behind us. His army of silver sped along by his side. Finally, I saw what Joel saw. A gap appeared in the wall of ice.

“Follow me!” Joel yelled. He zipped through the opening. Agent Blue Hair followed him. The extra Girl-bots trailed behind me, keeping Helgor and his crew at bay.

I slipped through the gap in the ice. But who knew how far into the mountain we could go before being turned into popsicles? One thing was for sure. Helgor had to be stopped. But how? Then I remembered. I glanced over my shoulder and yelled.

“Girl-bots! Pyramid mode!”

One by one, the Girl-bots flung themselves on top of each other. They made a solid pyramid wall across the gap. Helgor and his crew screeched to a stop behind it.

SAFE!

CHAPTER 8

My Girl-bot finally slowed down. We stopped between the icy walls of what looked like a cave. I could hear Helgor's snowmobiles rev up and speed away beyond the Girl-bot pyramid.

"You okay?" Joel ran toward me.

"I am now. Thanks for the heads up, Agent Joel." I grinned.

Joel flashed a smile.

"And good moves out there, Agent Blue Hair!" I called out.

"Thanks, sonny!" She shuffled over and saluted. "There's still a whole lot of chick-a-boom left in these old bones, you know."

"Um, Agent Blue Hair, how did you become a Mega-naut Agent, anyway?" Joel asked.

"The same way you did, I suppose. I've been eating Mega-Flakes for years!" Agent Blue Hair leaned over and whispered. "At my age, a little extra fiber never hurts."

Joel and I looked at each other and laughed.

The sun shone through the ice, lighting the cave in glinty sparkles. A gigantic H was carved in the ice of one of the walls.

"This must be Helgor's secret lair," I said. "We have to find those penguins and get them out of here!"

“Yeah, before Helgor comes back and turns us into ice kabobs,” Joel said.

My datacom beeped. It still showed the penguins on the screen.

ALERT!

The penguins' body heat is dropping.

Code Blue!

“We need to hurry!” I said. “Let’s hunt around for a way in.”

“Over here, sonny,” Agent Blue Hair called over from a gap in the ice. “I think this leads somewhere.” She slipped between the icy walls. Joel and I followed, leaving the Girl-bots on guard.

We traveled deeper and deeper into the ice. As we went down, the sun didn’t shine through anymore. Soon, everything went dark. The glow from our Mega-naut datacom screens lit the way.

“My datacom shows the penguins just a few feet away,” I said.

“But this is a dead end,” Joel whispered beside me.

I ran my hand along the icy wall, looking for a way through.

“There must be a door here somewhere,” I said.

“We better find it soon,” Joel said.

A drilling noise rang from above.

“Oh, dear,” Agent Blue Hair said. “That Helgor fellow must be drilling his way in.”

All of a sudden my feet gave way from underneath me. The blue light from our datacom screens bounced off the walls as we all fell. Down, down, down we slid through a tunnel of ice. Finally we stopped in a heap at the end of the passage.

“Where are we?” I stood and helped Agent Blue Hair to her feet. The icy cave sent a chill through me. My breath formed clouds of vapour. I blinked and tried to focus on the room around me.

“Do you see what I see?” Joel asked.

I did.

All around us, large glass cylinders rose from the floor to the ceiling. Computer screens flickered in the background, lighting the room in an eerie glow. Black and white shapes stood in each glass cylinder.

Penguins!

I glanced at my datacom.

Level 3

Penguins must huddle together to keep warm.

That is how they conserve heat.

You must release them before they freeze.

“Helgor has trapped them!” I ran up to one the cylinders and tried to open it. “They’ll die if they can’t be together.”

“We have to find a way to get them out of here.” Joel did the same.

“Oh, dear.” Agent Blue Hair held her tummy and winced. “Bad timing.”

“What’s the matter?” I turned to her.

“I need to duck to the ladies room,” Agent Blue Hair whispered. “Those Mega-Flakes really did a number on me this morning. Back in a jiffy.”

Joel and I yanked at the handles of the glass cylinder doors. They didn’t budge. My penguin flapped its wings and shuffled its feet.

“It looks like its trying to fly away,” I said.

“Mason! Penguins can’t fly.” Joel looked at me like I had the I.Q. of silly putty.

“I know that! But still...” I looked at my new little friend through the glass. “I’m going to call him Flappy.”

“Instead of *naming* the penguins we should be thinking of *saving* the penguins,” Joel said.

“If only we could open these doors.” I pulled at the handle with all my might.

“Keep trying! The drilling sound is getting closer,” Joel yelled over the noise.

Then I saw something across the room. It was a huge lever with the words “Penguin Pod Release” written over it.

“Look!” I pointed to the lever.

“Let’s get it!” Joel yelled.

Just then, ice chips exploded around us. Dozens of silver caped people burst through a hole in the wall. A man dressed in gold stepped out, holding a gigantic drill. His beady eyes shifted from side to side.

It was Helgor!

“So!” Helgor’s voice cackled. He strode across the room. His golden cape flapped behind him. He snatched the datacoms from our hands.

“Two bratty, little kids with video games? *This* is the best Mega-naut can do?”

He sneered.

“Let’s get out of here!” I grabbed Joel’s arm.

“Not without the penguins!” Joel wriggled out of my grasp. He ran across the room and launched himself toward the lever. A silver guy blocked his way.

“Nice try!” A golden tooth flashed as Helgor spoke. He snapped his bony fingers. “Evil Silver Knights! Lock them in a penguin pod! That will teach Mega-naut not to mess with Helgor Horribull!”

“Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha!!!”



CHAPTER 9

“What the heck were you thinking?” My face was mashed up against Joel’s shoulder. We were crammed inside a glass penguin pod. There was no escape.

“What?” Joel tried to wriggle his arm free from behind his back.

“Did you actually think you could take on a bunch of Evil Knights? You’re just a kid!”

“Well, it’s better than standing around naming penguins,” Joel whispered.

“Yeah, well now we’re trapped.”

“Well maybe you should have picked someone *else* to be your second in command!” Joel’s voice rose.

“Maybe you’re right!” I said.

“Besides, I should be Chief Field Agent, anyway. I’m older,” Joel said.

“Only by a year.” I squirmed and tried to make myself look tall.

“Fourteen months and three days.” Joel glared down at me.

“Oh, yeah?” I said.

“Yeah!” Joel shouted.

“Silence!” Helgor held up his hand. He sat in front of a computer. Our Mega-naut datacoms were beside him on his desk. His Evil Silver Knights stood guard at each of the penguin pods.

“Now back to the task at hand.” Helgor rubbed his bony hands together. “I must figure out how penguins stay warm in the icy Antarctic. Once I harness that power, I will have enough energy to run my evil lair. First I will command the South Pole and soon...my evil plan will come together and I will RULE THE EARTH. Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

The penguins’ eyes drooped. Flappy flapped his wings.

“We need to free them,” Joel said.

“Didn’t you notice we’re packed in a penguin pod like a couple of sardines?” I glared up at him.

“That reminds me,” Joel said.

“What?” I asked.

“Get your knee out from my stomach.” Joel winced.

“As soon as you get your elbow out of my eye!”

Helgor waved his hands in the air.

“Argh! Why aren’t these experiments working??!” Helgor stood from his chair and marched across the room. He punched in some numbers on one of his computers.

“The penguins have not touched the tasty peanut butter sandwiches I have made for them. They refuse to drink the delicious Jiffy Juice. Now their body temperatures keep dropping. How will I ever solve this mystery and rule the earth if the penguins do not cooperate?”

“Joel, look.” I pointed across the room.

It was Agent Blue Hair!

“Excuse me, dear.” Agent Blue Hair poked her head in through the doorway. She spoke in her sweetest granny voice. The Girl-bots followed behind, dressed in their berets and sashes.

“What are *you* doing here?!” Helgor boomed. The Silver Knights stood guard, ready to pounce.

“Oh, forgive me. My Girl Rangers troupe is working on their Winter Skills badge. I’m so sorry to disturb your work, dear. You must be a very important man!” Agent Blue Hair gushed.

“Why, yes.” Helgor adjusted his golden cape. “I am *quite* important. As a matter of fact, one day I will rule the earth.” He stood proudly. Then he narrowed his eyes. “What do you want, lady?”

“*Would you like to buy some cookies?*” The Girl-bots spoke all at once. They pulled out their cookie boxes.

“Cookies?!” Helgor’s Silver Knights looked up from their posts.

The Girl-bots burst open the cookie boxes and launched them through the air. The Knights scrambled from their posts and dove for the cookies.

“Please, Evil Silver Knights! Control yourselves!” Helgor swatted the Knights as they wrestled each other to the ground.

“My cookie!”

“No! My cookie!”

I spotted Agent Blue Hair amid the chaos.

“Over there!” I yelled through the glass. Joel banged on the penguin pod’s glass. Agent Blue Hair looked our way, but couldn’t hear me. I pointed to the lever. She scooted around the Silver Knights as they stuffed their faces.

“Got it!” She pulled the lever.

The doors of all the penguin pods clunked open. The penguins hopped out and waddled around the floor. Our pod door popped open too. Joel and I sprung into action. I grabbed our datacoms. Joel and Agent Blue Hair rounded up the penguins.

My datacom flashed a message.

Level 4

You must airlift the penguins to safety.

The screen flashed up a map of the evil lair. An airplane icon blinked at the end of a long hallway.

“This way!” I grabbed a penguin in each arm. “Mega-naut has an airplane waiting!”

Joel and Agent Blue Hair gathered up more penguins. The Girl-bots did the same. I was halfway out the door when Joel yelled to me.

“Mason! Over there!”

I spotted Flappy waddling across the room. My heart pounded like a jackhammer. All I wanted to do was escape to the airplane. But I couldn't just leave Flappy there. I turned and ducked around the scrambling Knights to get to him.

“Come here, Flappy!”

“Hurry!” Joel yelled.

I tucked Flappy in my parka and held the other penguins in my arms.

“Come on!” I raced for the door.

A few Girl-bots stayed behind, tossing cookies at the Knights. They crawled around the floor, like puppies looking for a treat.

“After them!” Helgor commanded.

The Silver Knights stumbled to their feet.

“This way!” I ran down the hallway with Joel, Agent Blue Hair and the Girl-bots at my heels. Flappy squirmed inside my coat.

Finally, we reached the door and ran outside. The Silver Knights were right behind us. All of a sudden, they clutched their stomachs.

“Owww, my belly!”

“Ohhh!!!”

Groan

They fell in a heap at the loading dock door, moaning.

“Get up, you idiots! They’re getting away!” Helgor tried to get by the Evil Knights but they thrashed on the ground, blocking his way.

We raced to the airplane and jumped in, penguins in tow. I leaned out of the airplane door and yelled. “Pretty good for a couple of bratty kids with video games, hey, Helgor?”

Helgor tried to untangle himself from the moaning, groaning Silver Knights but it was no use. He shook his finger at us.

“We’ll meet again Mega-naut Agents! This isn’t the last you hear of Helgor Horribull!!!” He swatted at his Silver Knights. “Useless! I should have ordered the Ninjas instead.”

The Knights moaned and groaned at his feet.

“My belly, ohhhh...”

Helgor's face scrunched up.

“Ewww!” He pinched his nose. “Okay. Who tooted?!?”



CHAPTER 10

Agent Blue Hair climbed into the pilot's seat of the airplane. She turned dials, moved levers and switched on about a zillion lights.

“Do you know how to fly this thing?” I could feel the airplane picking up speed as it sped down the runway.

“No problem, sonny. Nothing a little chick-a-boom can't handle.”

<<Whop-whop-whop-whop>>

The propellers whirred. The airplane shook as it took off.

I looked back outside the airplane door. The mountain rattled. Giant cracks formed in the ice.

“Run!”

Helgor and the Evil Silver Knights ran for cover. The giant cracks in the ice gave way.

<<Crack>>

<<Crackle>>

<<Boom>>

The evil lair exploded into a rain of ice crystals. They bounced off the outside of the airplane as we rose into the sky.

“We shouldn't hear from those guys anytime soon!” I yelled over the noise of the engine.

“What was in those cookies, anyway?” Joel asked.

Agent Blue Hair winked. “Oh, just a super-duper blend of my favourite high fiber cereal, sweetie.”

“Mega-Flakes?” I asked.

“The one and only!”

Joel and I looked at each other and laughed.

We flew over miles and miles of ice, far away from Helgor’s lair. The Girl-bots tossed fresh fish to the penguins. I held Flappy in my arms and tried to keep him warm.

“Don’t worry little guy, you’re safe now.”

I got my datacom from my pocket when I heard it beep. It flashed a message.

Level 5

You have reached the final level.

Return the penguins to their home.

This will complete your Mega-naut mission.

Over the horizon, I saw them. Hundreds of penguins huddled together to stay warm.

“I won’t be able to land down there!” Agent Blue Hair called over her shoulder from the pilot’s seat. “There are too many penguins. It’s time to say goodbye to our little waddly friends.”

“Yeah, but how do we get the penguins from the airplane to the ground? Last time I checked, penguins couldn’t fly.” I looked at Joel.

“I think the Girl-bots have that covered,” Joel said with a crooked grin.

I looked to the back of the airplane. The Girl-bots had strapped the penguins onto their tandem parachutes. One by one, they jumped out of the airplane door and soared to the ice floe below. Soon, all the Girl-bots were gone. I looked down in my arms. A warm little bundle looked back.

“What about Flappy?” I asked.

“And Bruiser!” Joel said.

“Bruiser?” I turned to Joel. He had a penguin cuddled in his arms, too.

Joel shrugged his shoulders and smiled. “He kinda looks like a Bruiser, don’t you think?”

“You’re going to have to take them down,” Agent Blue Hair said over her shoulder.

“Down? As in parachute down?” My throat went dry. My hands began to sweat.

“There should be more parachutes in the back,” Agent Blue Hair said.

Joel had already found them and was putting his on.

“Come on, Mason. Make the jump. I know you can do it!” Joel handed me a parachute pack. I put Flappy down on the deck and took the pack in my hands.

“It’s not the jumping part I’m worried about.” I rubbed my backside. “It’s the landing part.”

“You just need to focus, Mason. Mind over matter.”

Sounded familiar.

“Mind over matter?” I asked, smiling.

“Just keep your eyes on the prize.” Joel pointed two fingers to my eyes and then to Flappy.

I looked down into Flappy’s eyes. He flapped his little wings at me.

This wasn’t about eating a bowl of yucky cereal. This was real life.

Could I do it? Is this what it meant to be a real Mega-naut Agent?

I made my choice.

“Whaddya say Flappy? You wanna know what flying really feels like?”

Flappy waddled his little feet.

“Okay then. I’ll do it!” I pulled on my parachute and strapped Flappy in.

“Take some cookies before you go, dear.” Agent Blue Hair held out a box of Girl-bot cookies.

“Uh, thanks but no thanks.”

Joel stood at the open door of the airplane. He gave me a thumbs up.

“Wheee!!!” I could hear him scream as he jumped.

I stood at the door, ready to take my turn.

“Agent Blue Hair?”

“Yes, sonny?” she asked.

“Will we ever see you again?” I asked.

“I hope so.” Her eyes twinkled. “A girl my age can stand a bit more adventure now and then. Plus, this is so much better than shuffle board!”

I smiled. I turned back to the open airplane door and took a deep breath.

And jumped.

My heart went rat-a-tat-tat. My stomach belly-bopped and flip-flopped. But there was another feeling, too. I wasn’t sure what the feeling was, but it felt great.

I pulled the rip cord. My parachute opened. Flappy flapped his little wings.

“Isn’t this GREAT?” I said to Flappy.

He flapped his wings faster.

As soon as we touched down, I released Flappy from my parachute.

He waddled off to join his other penguin friends.

“You did it, Mason!” Joel yelled.

“*We* did it.” I slapped his hand in a high five.

Our datacoms beeped.

Agent Mason, Agent Joel

Congratulations on a successful mission.

The penguins are safe. The Girl-bots will guard the area.

*They will return to Mega-naut Headquarters once we know Helgor
will not come back.*

“Good to know, but how exactly do *we* get back?” I asked.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew our parachutes over our faces.

“Joel?”

“Mason?”

Then everything went white.

CHAPTER 11

“Whoa!”

I felt the parachute slip away from my face and opened my eyes.

“Where are we?” Joel asked.

I looked around and blinked. The parachute was gone.

The trees waved in the breeze up and down the street. I could hear Mom clanging pots in the kitchen. Sparky snored on the porch swing.

Borington Heights.

We were back at our house, sitting on our front steps.

“Can you believe what just happened?” I asked.

“So, you were there too, right? I didn’t just imagine it?” Joel asked.

“Not unless we were having the same dream,” I said.

Joel grabbed my arm and shook it.

“Do you know what this means?” His smile was even bigger than when he was plummeting to the earth at warp speed.

“It means we’re real-life Mega-naut Agents,” I said.

“Wow!” Joel and I said together.

The penguins. The parachutes. Agent Blue Hair. Helgor Horribull and his Evil Silver Knights. It had all been real!

“Boys!” Mom stepped out of the kitchen door. She put a hand on her hip. “That recycling is not going to walk to the curb by itself, you know.”

“Mom!” I jumped up. “You’ll never believe what just happened.”

“What’s that, dear?”

“Well for starters, we just parachuted into the frozen Antarctic. Then we saved a bunch of penguins from Helgor Horribull.”

“What does that have to do with putting out the recycling?” Mom asked.

“If you don’t believe me, just look.” I searched my pockets and found my datacom.

Mom took it in her hands. She stared at it, punching the buttons.

“Wow!” Her eyes grew wide.

“See what I mean?” I asked.

“Yes indeed! *Very* life-like. My goodness, these video games have come a long way since I was a girl.” She handed back my datacom and headed for the kitchen.

Only it wasn’t a datacom any more. The buttons had returned to normal. It was a Mega-naut Adventures video game—just like before.

“Oh, and boys...” Mom paused at door.

“Yeah?” I looked up.

“...don’t forget the compost!” She winked and disappeared into the house.

I tossed the video game onto the porch and followed Joel to the garage.

“Joel?” We lugged the compost bin and recycling boxes to the end of the driveway. “Do you think anyone would believe what just happened?”

“Not a chance. But does it really make a difference?” Joel asked.

“I’m not sure.” I set the recycling boxes at the curb and wiped my hands on my jeans.

“There is definitely a difference, though.” Joel looked at me kind of weird. “In you, I mean. It’s like you’re a different Mason now.”

“You think?” I stuffed my hands in my pockets. “Like how?”

“Like when you jumped out of the airplane to save Flappy. That was so... well...brave,” Joel said.

Brave...so that’s what that feeling was.

“Cool.” I smiled. “Except, I was shaking like a leaf inside.”

“Kind of like how *I* felt when the Evil Silver Knights exploded into the evil lair.”

“You were scared too?” My eyes popped open.

“Shaking like the whole tree in a windstorm!” Joel laughed.

We headed up the driveway and sat back down on the front step.

“You know what, Joel? I’m really glad I picked you as my second-in-command.”

Joel glanced at me and narrowed his eyes.

“Even though I got us trapped in a penguin pod?” he asked.

“Yup.”

“Well, for a little brother, I guess you’re an okay boss. Besides, I’m kind of glad Mega-naut chose you as Chief Field Agent and not me.” Joel snickered.

“Why?” I asked.

He reached behind me and pulled out a familiar box.

“Because there is no way *I’m* eating a lifetime supply of Mega-Flakes!”
