

The Exquisite Corpus



The Exquisite Corpus

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1

The Misbegotten Rendezvous

By Carolyn Stevens

A teenage boy walked down A Street in downtown of the booming metropolis of Manhick. He had dark brown skin and spiky blue hair that was a wig, but I wasn't supposed to tell you that. In his pocket he carried a student ID identifying him as Billy Crocker, along with a library card for Ryan Slickbottom. Squished between these was a bus pass that clearly stated he was Francis Stablemouth, next to a cell phone that belonged to Cole Durbinghambone. His real name was Agent 139, super-special spy. He is the best of the best; the most sought after special agent in the world, in other words, a talented, gifted, amazing, clever, and all together quite intimidating personage. If he knew I had just told you all this, he would probably have to assassinate me.

As I was saying, he was walking down A Street and feeling rather cross. He was being forced to take on a trainee to bring along in his missions. He tried to console himself that her name was Lunalanka, and anyone with such a nice name couldn't be too bad. He was going to meet her at the McDonalds near the secret CIA headquarters, then take her along to be briefed on the latest mission, which, he had been told, was going to be the most important one of his life.

Now, if they proceed with this mission they will encounter along the way: a blind accordion player, two cans of bean soup, four talking Australian mice with bad intentions, a rocking chair with a temper, one fake cucumber, a super-mega deluxe king-size biggest ever and yet box of Twinkies, an abdominal snowman, a fleet of rubber duckies, a cat that can run through sliding glass doors, several bad versions of the song "Elmo's World", a colony of brain-sucking cockroaches, two

left shoes, a bouquet of Venus Fly Traps, a Martian limerick, and an enormous number of red herrings.

But first he has to meet Lunalanka or, to use her official name, Agent 337. 139 strolled into the McDonalds and looked around for his new companion. There was only one person in the establishment. She was wearing a pink sparkly shirt, black stiletto heels and a mini skirt so short he felt uncomfortable just looking at her. She opened her mouth.

“Like are you like Agent 138 or whatever it is? Like gag me with a spoon, you’re young! Like why couldn’t they give me someone like older and more better? Like if they had given me to some like old dude with a load of experience on the job and was like the best that would have been totally rad. That’d be like *wow* and you’re like *ick*. Can I like sue them, ’cause that’d be like totally rad, like, I’ll like text my like boyfriend and he’ll be like-”

There 139 cut her off. “Look, I don’t know if you’re Lunalanka or what, but we need to get going. Our briefing starts in seven minutes and forty-two point eighty nine seconds.”

“Yaaaaaaaah, ’cause you’re like taking so long.” And with that she swept out of the restaurant, leaving in her wake a befuddled Agent139 and a bemused looking cashier.

They finally got to the location of the secret headquarters (this took a while since 139 had to drag his subordinate out of every shop they passed) and he was explaining to her how to find it when she said, point-blank, “There’s like nothing there.”

He began to explain to her again the secret method when he happened to look up himself and saw that she was right! Where the building should be there was nothing. Absolutely *nothing!* There was just a great open cavity in the row of stores that lined A Street.

Just in that moment he felt his cell phone buzz in his pocket.

2

M.I.A. at the C.I.A. By Abby Waters

“Like, totally no way!!!!” 337 gasped, “Is that like the newest version of the...” 139 was paying no attention to her. He snatched up his phone, and clicked talk. All Lunalanka heard was some ums, ahs, and an occasional growl. Of course, you can’t really hear much when you are gabbing to your boyfriend at 100 miles per hour. She seemed to be constantly on the phone, always with her boyfriend. What 139 heard was:

“139?” 139 recognized the voice immediately.

“Yup”

“This is-” 139 cut him off.

“CIA, yes I know,”

“Well, the Headquarters is-” 139 cut him off again.

“Gone,” 139 was impatient.

“How do you do that!?!?” The man exclaimed.

“Huh?”

“Read people’s minds!!!”

“It’s not that hard to figure out when there’s a huge gap on the sidewalk!!”

Now 139 was getting irritated.

“Oh,” The man was sheepish.

“Well, get to the point, what is it?”

“Okay, okay, (that’s when 139 growled) Well, we couldn’t find Headquarters on the radar, but the exotholiquiphibiletal imaging x-ray ultraviolet scan told us that its exterior had been knocked down, but the inside was all taken.”

“What?!?!?”

That’s when the signal died. After 24 more tries, it was apparent that the phone signal had been tampered with. 139 cursed, stomped the ground and cursed again. His cheeks turned a frightening shade of purple, (A humiliating tendency of his). If all of the insides of Headquarters had been taken, then the Exquisite Corpus had been taken too. This thought alone made his face turn from frightening purple to white as a marshmallow.

“Like, what the heck your problem?” Lunalanka had hung up with her boyfriend. Finally.

“The Exquisite Corpus is gone,” 139 said, flatly.

“Yaaaaaaah.....Okay. But 'ya know, I don't think that an extra quick cat pus is really a, like, issue right now, I think that we should like seriously figure out what happened to this building.” 139 sighed. He would have to explain this to her.

“The Exquisite Corpus is a book of sorts. It holds just about every piece of valuable information to the CIA, FBI, Witness protection plan, secret services, and other organizations that I would get killed if I told you about, and, if someone outside these secret societies got a hold on them, our whole economy would collapse. We depend on secret services more than you think. The Headquarters is the most heavily guarded building in all of Manhick, because of that book. ”

“Like, no way!!! Can I read it?”

“That's the point. It's gone” 139 could not believe this girl's stupidity.

“Oh.....So, like this is retarded. What are we going to do?”

“I'm going to send out a signal to see if we can pick up the bugs we implanted in the neuro....” 139 trailed off until Lunalanka was totally lost. He then pulled out a small device that looked like a cross between a cigarette lighter and a power tool. Lunalanka pulled out her cell phone, went to contacts, hit the top contact, (boyfriend) and pressed text. She then typed one word:

“Yes”

All of this time, 139 was muttering to himself on while waving around the power tool/cigarette lighter like a street sign holder with Thriller in his iPod, and one too many Red bulls. Passing people hurried to the other side of the street, and several beeps came from people locking their car doors while passing.

He couldn't get any signal.

These people were smarter than he thought. They took the bugs out. Or, they were over 100,000 miles away, which was not likely. How could somebody just take the book like that?!? It was so secure, so guarded. If the mafia got a hold on that.....139 shuddered. Lunalanka glided over to him.

“What is it 337,” Lunalanka started to say something, then something else crossed her mind, as he said ‘337’.

“Do you have a like real name?”

“Yes, 139”

“No, like a real name, as in, my name is Lunalanka, but you would call me-”

“Shut it, 337, I'm trying to think,”

“Exactly,”

“Fine, I'll tell you,” he said, realizing that she would not shut up until he told her, “My name is...is, Elmo.”

337 shrieked with laughter. Shrieked and shrieked and *shrieked*. Finally, she broke out into the song “Elmo’s World”. Badly. She sung it about 5 times, each horrible in its own way. Finally, she stopped.

They both turned just in time to see them coming.

3

The Abdominal Snowman

By Shane Ekstrum

139 was instantly on the offensive, a gadget in hand that looked like a combination of a water pistol and a light stick. Then he recognized the two approaching men.

“Like, that is totally-” started Lunalanka.

139 cut her off.

“Mr. President” he stammered out “what are you doing here?”

The President smiled and said “I’m here to give you your mission. We have traced the headquarters to Alaska. You are going to set off immediately. A plane should be here-” He was cut off by the roar of an engine. 139 and 337 looked at the beautiful spaceship-like plane that had landed on the road.

“That is like seriously the most awesome thing I have ever laid my eyes on!” Shouted Lunalanka, too loud apparently, for the President, the secret service agent accompanying him, and 139 covered their ears. She ran over to it and banged on the cockpit. “But like, how do we totally get inside? This stupid thing is shut tight.”

139 strode over and pulled on the door handle on the side of the plane. The door that opened looked remarkably like a car door. He slid into the front seat and waited until Lunalanka figured out how to fasten her seat belt. Then they shot into the sky, entirely oblivious of the President’s last words.

“Your rendezvous with our agent will be at noon tomorrow!”

The plane shot over Canada towards Alaska. 139 had long since turned the Indiana Jones music on the radio up full blast to drown out 337’s screaming. Just as they were over Alaska, the plane just stopped. In midair. Over miles of snow. In the middle of nowhere. You get the idea. Lunalanka stopped screaming.

“Like, why did you stop? We are over like, seriously nothing!”

“I didn’t stop the plane!” 139 yelled as his hands frantically flew over the controls. Suddenly, the plane just dropped. Lunalanka screamed so loud that 139 thought he felt his eardrums bleed. Then the plane slammed into the ground, and the last thing 139 saw before he blacked out was a white, hairy figure opening the cockpit.

139 opened his eyes groggily. He saw that he was in a snow cave. A fire was lit in the cave, and hunched over it was a hairy figure. Lunalanka was nowhere in sight. 139 eased himself to his feet and grabbed the nearest thing he could use as a weapon, in this case, an icicle. He sneaked up behind the creature. In a second he had the icicle jabbed into its neck.

“Don’t move!”

The beast jumped and yowled. Then surprisingly, it spoke. The first three words it said I will not write down.

“Yipes, what did you have to do that for? Now my belly is all irritated again!” The beast slumped over with a groan, 139’s arm still clenched around its neck. 139 let go of its neck and pointed the icicle in front of him like a spear. The beast turned and looked at him. What he saw shocked 139. It had an ape-like body covered in white, shaggy hair. But its head was that of a children’s snowman, with a mouth and eyes made of coal and nose made out of a cucumber that bounced like it was made of rubber. “And what are you doing with that icicle, it’s plastic you know!” 139 realized that this was true.

“Who are you?” asked 139, thoroughly befuddled.

“Why, I am the abdominal snowman!” the abdominal snowman said, quite indignantly. “Well, not really.” With that, the beast tore off its skin and shook off its head to reveal a dark-haired teenage boy, who extended his hand. “Agent 235, at your service, but you can call me Sean.” He said with a grin. 139 shook his head to clear his mind. Then he firmly squeezed the boy’s hand.

Just then, they heard Lunalanka scream.

4

A Secret Cave and a Clue

By Emma Cluff

139 jumped up and turned to run to 337's aid. Rounding the corner of the cave, he skidded to a halt. There was Agent 337, being licked with as much ferocity as possible by a polar bear cub. He then realized what peril 337 was in, for, as you know, if there is a bear cub, the mother bear is soon to follow. "337, get out of there, I repeat get ou...." Just then he noticed the hot pink collar and matching leash with bells hanging on the cub's neck.

"Ewwwwwww! Like, someone get this thing off of me. It's like totally ruining my makeup job, and my name is Lunalanka."

"On the job your name is 33-"

"Yaaaaah whatever."

Just then Sean, or Agent 235 came dashing around the corner, skidded to a halt in front of Lunalanka, and proceeded to scoop up the polar bear and stroke it. "How did you get out, my little sweetie?" He crooned. Turning to 337 and 139 he said, "This is Annabelle. She's not supposed to be here. It looks like she chewed through the leash I tied her up with at home."

"Um, like, speaking of your home, do you think you could like get us there, because I am like seriously getting that hypothermal thingy. You know the one where you turn all black like instantly and your fingers fall off. And like don't tell me that pitiful excuse for an 'ice glue' or, like, whatever you call it is your home."

"Hm, oh, yeah, home. Sure! No this is, 'like', only temporary. Right this way." He led them out of the cave and towards a grove of trees. All of a sudden 235 stopped, bent over and tugged on a short stick protruding from the ground. With an explosion of snow, a panel of wood lifted to reveal a dark hole. Sean snatched up Annabelle and hopped right in. 337 and 139 heard a dull thud and some mild cursing. Then a light switched on, and 235 called, "Come on down, there's a ladder against the wall." 337 went first, and then came 139. When they were safely on the ground, they peered around in the dim light. They were in a room that was shabbily furnished. In the corner there was a space heater, and in the middle of the room there was a table. The only other thing in the room was a

vase of Venus Flytraps. As 139 watched, a lone fly buzzed into the mouth of one of the plants, and the jaws closed on the captive.

“Like why do you have a big cup of Saturn Flytraps on your table, and I think I would like rather be in that snow cave. Cause this is like totally *primitive*.”

“Primitive!” Sean said indignantly, “Wait ’til you see this.” He stepped up to the decidedly solid granite wall and rested his hand on a thin groove near the right side. The moment he did so, a crack appeared in the middle of the wall and widened until there was a two foot gap in it. Sean turned around and gave 337 a very smug look.

“Okay that was like totally creepy, and I am like totally hungry, do you have some like coffee and some of those like little pastry thingies?”

“Ummmmm...well... let me go see what I've got.” He then walked through the gap in the wall. 337 walked right behind him with 139 following reluctantly behind them. They entered into a lavishly furnished room with velvet couches, a wide screen plasma TV, three computers, a kitchen, and a Keeps Your Footprint When You Step On It Squishy Delicious Green with Black Polka Dots Rug. Sean, over at the fridge, gave a little moan. “I'm sorry guys; I forgot that the plane that brings me supplies isn't coming till tomorrow. All I've got is a couple cans of bean soup.”

As they ate the soup Sean said, “Oh yeah, I drove your plane into a secrete garage behind this place. It has a few dents, but other than that it's just fi-” Just then 139's phone rang cutting 235 off. He stood to get it out of his pocket.

Answering it, he said, “Hello, this is 139. How can I help you? Oh, yes sir, of course. Yes, yes, good. Any deadlines? Alright, we'll leave right away.” Flipping his phone shut, he looked up and said, “We know where the Exquisite Corpus is.”

5

Like, No Way

By Morgan Lesan

The two agents' faces widened in surprise.

“Like, no way!” Lunalanka screamed. “You mean like that missing book thingy!”

“Yes, 337, they found the missing book thingy.” 139 said, starting to get quite frustrated with this girl.

“Like, where?” Lunalanka said, as she sprung off the velvet couch she had been sitting on.

“In Manhick, and we have to get there immediately,” 139 announced, as he led 235 and 337 through the gap in the wall. Lunalanka clung to his shirt as they passed the Venus Flytraps. She had some serious phobia problems.

When they arrived at the plane, they jumped in. 139 started the engine. Putt-putt-putt putt-putt-POW.

“Like, what just happened?” Lunalanka screamed.

139 took a deep breath and slowly explained. “337, the engine just died.”

“Like what are we like going to do? Are we like going to die? Cause I like don't want to die, that would be, like, totally NOT rad.” She pulled out her phone and started madly texting her boyfriend. 139 hastily got out of the cockpit, as 235 went to go get supplies, since he was the only “mechanic” around for a gazillion miles.

When he came back, Lunalanka had stopped texting her boyfriend. Now she was on the phone talking to him. From outside the plane 139 could overhear some

of it. “I am going to like die of hypothermo- whatever, and we’re like trapped in like the middle of nowhere, with this like lame guy that calls himself 139, but his real name is... guess...no...no...not even close...okay, okay! I’ll tell you.

It’s...
Eyn...

Yeah, is that lame or what! Well see yah later, love you lots, I hope I live through this so I can, like, get to see you again.” She burst into violent drama-queen tears, sobbed out, “Bye,” and hung up.

Finally, thought 139.

By now, 235 had unscrewed a million screws, and had finally broken through to the engine. What the dark haired boy saw made him scream. He quickly scurried out from under the plane.

“What is wrong with you?” 139 asked, afraid he had another Lunalanka on his hands.

“There is a whole colony of cockroaches inside the plane engine!” Gulped out 235.

Lunalanka stepped out of the plane door, and said, “Like, what is like all the commotion about? Oh my gosh!” She screamed. Thousands of cockroaches were crawling out of the engine. After they all had crawled out, the head cockroach, also known as Wemouskee spoke.

“Who are you?” The cockroach demanded.

“I am Agent 139, and this is 235 and 337.” 139 said still in shock, not fully grasping the situation that a cockroach was actually talking to him.

“Wait; are you like the famous brain sucking cockroaches that I read about in that story?” Lunalanka shrieked in worry. No one answered her.

“Is it 11:59 yet?” One cockroach demanded. 139 looked at his spy watch and said,

“No, it’s only 9:00 a.m.” There was a disconcerting mumble as all the cockroaches started toward the engine again. 139, realizing it was the cockroaches that had caused his plane’s engine to fail, spoke. “Wait, I think I have a better place for you to stay, let me just turn this plane around so I can show it to you. The cockroaches (139 thought ruefully that they must be just as disconcerted about the

situation as he was) agreed. The agents quickly got in the plane and flew away. It had been a diabolical trick to play on the insects, but it had worked.

Suddenly Lunalanka burst out, “They could have like sucked my brains out, or like totally drained my intellect and that would have been so *totally retarded!* And I haven’t had a good shower in *hours*. I feel disgusting, and do you know what will happen if I don’t take these earrings out soon? I think we should...” 139 rolled his eyes at Sean.

“That girl is crazier than I thought,” he whispered, not knowing she was actually right (about the cockroaches at least).

Once they got back to Manhick, they were greeted by the President. He met 235, and asked if they had found the Exquisite Corpus, and the missing headquarters.

“Actually,” 139 explained. “We got a phone call there that said it was in Manhick.”

“Really?” Said the President, looking confused.

“Yeah, here in Manhick.” 235 reassured.

“Um, okay. Great!” The President said hesitantly, and then left.

Once he was out of sight, 139, and 235 got out their spy gear. 337 got out her phone. As usual. They both waved their detectors, trying to get a signal until the clock on Lunalanka’s phone had gone from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Exhausted, discouraged, and out of luck, they stopped for dinner.

“We are never going to find it at this rate, and the President’s response suggests that the Exquisite Corpus may not be in Manhick at all.” 139 exclaimed, as he sat down to a burger and fries.

“Like no way!” Lunakanka burst out. “We went like all this way for like nothing?”

“We don’t know for sure, but we are all secret agents. Well... maybe not all of us.” 139 looked at Lunalanka. She was putting on another layer of make-up, filing

her nails and texting her boyfriend all at the same time. 235 chuckled slightly, seeing exactly what his colleague did.

That night, 139 lay in bed thinking of the Exquisite Corpus, Agent 235, Lunalanka and the journey thus far. Finally he dozed off. That night he had a curious dream.

6

The Dream

By Hannah Williamson

He tossed and turned; panted and sweated; and even drooled a little. His subconscious was telling him to fight for his life. This is what 139 dreamed:

He was standing on a shore by a lake, all was quiet. Then, what should he see across the lake? A tall person running away with the Exquisite Corpus! Quickly he looked around for a boat, nothing. SPLASH! Into the water he dove. He didn't care how far he had to swim; he had to get that book!

A soft slimy hand snatched him from under the water. 139 gasped for air then felt the icy water consume him. The water was dark and he couldn't see what had a hold on him, never-the-less, he struggled to get to the surface. He held his head above the water and sucked in as much air as possible. He saw something yellow coming towards him, then was yanked beneath the surface once more. Another hand grabbed his shoulder, but this one wasn't slimy and it pulled him towards the surface. 139 felt with his foot for the slippery hand. WHAP! Just before he ran out of air, he kicked it away, and let the other one pull him to safety. After a few gasps he looked at his rescuer.

“Sean!” He couldn't believe what the boy was riding on, “Why are you - ”

“Riding on a rubber ducky? I'll explain later, Lunalanka's waiting for us on the other side.” As he climbed up behind Sean, 139 realized that there was a whole fleet of rubber duckies, and they were quacking in code. Weird. Without any instructions, the duckies dropped them off at the shore. 139 thought he even saw one wave 'goodbye'. Before the swam off across the lake

“Like, where have you been? Oh, and why are you like, all wet? Don’t you dare drip on me!” There it was, that annoying voice, once again. This wasn’t a dream, it was a nightmare.

“Where are we?”

“Like, Australia, duh.”

“Australia?!”

It was at that moment 139 woke up. He looked at the clock next to his bed.

“Ten-thirty! Oh no, I’d better get going!” He changed out of his pajamas, and into a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. After a very nutritious breakfast of two double chocolate cookies, 139 hurried to the McDonalds where Lunalanka and Sean were just finishing their Mc-whatever it is.

“Like, what took you so long? Whoa, you totally smell, like, gross!”

“I overslept and didn’t have time to take a shower. Anyway-”

“That’s what deodorant’s for, weirdo.” 139 ignored her. He quickly told them about his wacky dream.

“OMG! *Australia!!!!* That’s where my boyfriend lives!!!!!!!!!!!!” In a flash, she had pulled out her phone and started texting.

“So me and my rubber ducky saved you from the slimy hand of watery death? Cool!” Sean was grinning from ear to ear thinking about how truly heroic he was.

“Sean, it was a dream. Lunalanka, I really don’t care.”

“But, like, you should care. OMG! I have a brilliant idea! It’s totally radd! I’m a genius!” Then she was silent, staring dreamily into space.

“So are you going to tell us?”

“Oh! Yeah! What if your dream thingy, like, wasn’t really a dream? What if it was, like, a vision?” They stared at her for moment, and then burst out laughing.

“Rubber ducky to the rescue!” Sean snickered.

“Like, not funny. Come on, can’t we at least, like, check out Australia?”

“I don’t want to go on another wild goose chase 337. Going to Australia would be a huge waste of time.” His cell phone buzzed.

“Hello... Yeah... **WHAT?!?!...** Okay, okay, I got ’ya. We’ll leave right away.” He hung up the phone.

“Like, what was that all about?” Sean’s two companions were staring at him open-mouthed.

“That was the president... they just discovered The Exquisite Corpus... really IS in Australia.”

“Like, I told you so!” Lunalanka giggled.

“Well, let’s go!” said Sean. 139’s mouth was still open.

“Dude, can we buy Elmo here some, like, deodorant on the way.”

The trio hurried to the hanger where they had parked the plane. They climbed in, buckled their seatbelts, and shot into the sky. Lunalanka screamed for a while, then settled down and started texting her boyfriend, telling him the whole story of why they were coming to Australia.

“When we get there we should totally go visit my boyfriend, his name’s Michael, and like he knows everyone, and that’d be like, totally radd...” 139 ignored her as he lowered the plane to the ground.

“We’re here!” One by one they emerged from the plane. Sean and 139 pulled out their detectors

“Can we, like, please, please, *please* go to my boyfriend’s house?”

“*No.*”

She continued to beg until the very frustrated 139 said yes.

“Awesome! I’ll like, text him and tell him we’re coming!” They were close by so they walked to their destination. Lunalanka pulled out her little pocket

makeup kit and began putting it on everywhere she decided she needed it. Then she ran up to the door and rang the bell. The door swung inward.

“Michael!” Lunalanka screamed. She immediately threw her arms around him and squeezed tightly. After she let go of him 139 had a better view of the young man. Once again his jaw dropped. Michael was the person in his dream! The one who had The Exquisite Corpus!

Death by Accordions

By Ashlynn Walker

139 tried not to look suspicious, but his forced smile couldn't even fool his "blonder than pancakes" partner. It couldn't and, unfortunately, it didn't.

"Like, what is your problem? We know where that stupid book thing is!" She sniffed at 139. "AND we bought you some deodorant, so you like don't smell like Sean's stupid polar bear anymore."

Sean wasn't paying attention until he heard Lunalanka say his name. He broke into the conversation with an intelligent, "Huh? Who said what?"

Lunalanka rolled her eyes at him and groaned. "Like do you ever stop talking?" She asked him. Sean looked like he wasn't sure whether to be offended or confused. "Now," 337 turned to 139. "Like quit being like a total freak and say hi to my boyfriend!" She skipped over to Michael. (Something that looked dangerously painful to do in stilettos.)

139 slowly walked to her boyfriend, hoping that he didn't look as green as he felt. His mind was racing with questions. Did Michael really have the Exquisite Corpus? Had Lunalanka been in on it too? 139 glanced at her. She was squeezing her boyfriend's hand as if it were a foam stress ball.

Michael smiled at 139. It seemed genuine, but still...

"Yo, I'm Mike." He said holding out his hand. "And you, little man, must be Elmo." 139 felt his face heat up. Sensing that he'd embarrassed the agent, Michael

covered up with, “Hey, it’s all cool, man! Little ‘Luney’ keeps me posted,” he smiled at Lunalanka, who didn’t seem to mind the nickname.

139 went to shake Michael’s hand, but snapped it back as soon as it came in contact with his skin. The man held up a slimy green hand. “Whoa dude, sorry to freak you out like that. Don’t worry, it’s just dish soap. I didn’t finish doin’ the dishes from this morning.”

139 wanted to believe him, but the vision from the night before convinced him otherwise. Luna Lanka grabbed the slimy hand, and in a sickeningly sweet voice asked, “Like, do you still have that like GINORMOUS mirror in your house? ’Cause like, gag me with a spoon that would be like totally retarded if you got rid of it!”

Michael stared at her for a moment, then burst out, “Oh! Yeah...the...mirror. Hey, don’t freak, Luney! It’s all cool!”

Michael invited the three agents inside, promising them a tour of his house with a “big finale”. 139 wasn’t stupid. He knew that this was a trap. But if he could *possibly* outsmart the enemy, then *maybe* they could find the Exquisite Corpus *and* get out of the place alive...maybe.

“Okay dude, this seriously awesome room is called, ‘my kitchen’,” Michael showed the agents every single room in the entire house, but none seemed out of the ordinary. Not until they reached the room with the accordion player.

Michael was walking all three agents through a hallway that contained about thirty doors in all. But that wasn’t the weird part. Sitting on a red rocking chair beside one of the doors was the oldest man 139 had ever seen. He had a few strands of hair left, combed completely over to the other side of his head and his wrinkled face seemed vaguely familiar to 139. Apparently, he was asleep, but in his hands sat an accordion. It was as if the man had fallen asleep while he was playing. Strangely, Michael passed right through the hallway, not even glancing at the sleeping figure.

139 held back, hoping that the others wouldn't notice. He did *not* need Lunalanka blowing it again. When they had all left the hallway and their voices died down to a faint echo, 139 walked up to the accordion player. He was two feet away from him when the man's eyes suddenly opened. Though they vacantly stared off into space, 139 had a terrible feeling that the man wasn't asleep anymore.

"Big mistake," the man uttered in a gravelly voice that did *not* match his combover.

And with that, he smashed the accordion over 139's head, laughing as the unconscious agent crumpled to the ground.

8

The Red Herring

By Breanna Burden

“Ugh...” 139 felt as if his head had been split in two. He slowly sat up, and, remembering how he ended up on the floor, immediately became defensive. Then he realized he was lying down on a soft feather bed with velvet lined pillows. He had no idea where he was and felt like his head was heavier than before. He reached up and felt his bandaged head. *Who did this?* He thought. At that exact moment, a group of people banged into the room, talking and laughing much too loudly for 139’s head. He lay back down and stared at them. In the very front was, of course, Lunalanka... a headache on legs. Following her were Michael and Sean. Finally remembering where he was and what had happened 139 looked wildly around for the crazy accordion player. Not seeing him, he relaxed and followed the group with his eyes until they finally got to his bed (it was a very big room).

“Dude,” Michael exclaimed, “Do you have a death wish?” 139 didn’t understand. “You NEVER stop and look at crazy old grandpa... last person who did that was never seen again,” he told 139 as if this was obvious.

“Grandpa?”

“Yeah, Dude! I’m his only grandson, so I took him on as a responsibility... I regret that now.” Michael looked despondent.

“I like totally told you that before!” Lunalanka said, noisely chewing a piece of bubblegum.

“When did you tell me that?” 139 rolled his eyes, she was always imagining things.

“Like I told you on that plane flyer thingy!” She said, sounding almost indignant. 139 realized it must have been part of her useless babble he had ignored

during the plane trip. BLAM! The door suddenly slammed open revealing a very old bent figure holding an accordion. Crazy old grandpa! 139 panicked and squealed like a girl! “EEEEKKKKK!”(another embarrassing habit of his). Michael, apparently not noticing the squeal, ran over to the doorway, grabbing a long coil of rope from the nearest chair. He angle-tackled the cross eyed old man, which seemed dangerously painful to do to a bony old guy, and quickly tied him up so that he could do no harm.

Lunalanka looked shocked, “Like, why would you like totally tackle your grandpa like that!” Sean, meanwhile, was staring bug-eyed at the crazy old man, obviously not comprehending that the he was dangerous.

“Sorry you had to see that Luney,” Michael cooed in a sickeningly sweet voice, “But he’s not just any grandpa, he almost killed little Elmo over here.” Lunalanka, finally understanding, looked not at all sorry that Accordion Grandpa had almost done away with 139.

“I still don’t get it.” Sean blurted out. Realizing that no one heard him, he stopped talking.

Michael walked over and picked up the battered accordion, then started shaking it. Strangely, it sounded like something heavy was thumping around in the instrument. Taking an extremely sharp pocketknife from his belt, he quickly sliced open the instrument, all the while the crazy old grandpa was making strange burbling sounds. Michael shook the instrument yet again and the object fell to the ground with a loud bang. The reaction was instantaneous. 139 and Sean jumped up with yells of astonishment, Michael stared wide-eyed, mouth hanging open, and Lunalanka wrinkled her nose in disgust.

It was the Exquisite Corpus.

Immediately, 139 jumped out of bed, ignoring the aches in his head, and skidded to a halt next to the book. With shaking hands, he picked it up and yelled in excitement. Lunalanka, finally understanding, came up to him and whispered, “So that’s like the missing book thingy?”

“Yes 337, it is.” 139 breathed out.

After his astonishment wore down Michael started to be skeptical, “So how did my crazy old gramps get a hold on your book thingy? He’s not a thief, just crazy.”

139 had been wondering the same thing. “I thought at first, YOU took it, Michael... I had this weird dream...” 139 stopped abruptly seeing Michael’s livid face.

“You calling me a THIEF!?!” He yelled. 139 felt suddenly puny next to this man.

“It was just a theory!!” He said quickly, fearing that Michael would use that mean looking tackle on him.

Lunalanka seemed deep in thought for a few seconds and then piped up, “Well, like what if someone like planted it on him to shift the blame.” Michael, 139, and Sean looked at her in shock.

“You know, that’s not a totally ridiculous idea.” 139 said, amazed that she actually had actually come up with something plausible.

“Well then, we have to figure out who planted it on him.” Sean said, trying to outshine Lunalanka.

“Of course!” She said, rolling her eyes. She was about to speak again when everything went black and the room became so cold that everyone’s teeth began to chatter. The lights slowly came on to reveal a dreadful sight, Sean was missing and a there was a big black message scrawled on the wall. *You have been warned.*

Worst of all, the Exquisite Corpus was gone once again. In its place was a super-mega deluxe king-size biggest ever and yet box of Twinkies.

139 was still shivering, but this time in fear. There was no sign that anybody had been in the room, yet both Sean and the Exquisite Corpus were missing.

“I think I know what’s going on...” Michael finally said after a few moments of shocked silence, “We are working against a dangerous enemy, an enemy that cannot be defeated.”

The Very Villainous Winnie

By Cole Murphy

139 looked up at Michael and saw that he was soaked in sweat.

“Like what’s wrong. You’re like totally sweating like a fat pig. That is like so not cool,” exclaimed Lunalanka.

139 was still in shock. Could Michael really be the true villain here? Or was it that unconquerable enemy that Michael seemed to know about? 139 walked over to the words on the wall and the immense box of Twinkies. He felt a hand cling to his shoulder.

“Dude I’m really sorry about this whole book thing and all, but there’s something you should know,” said Michael. “Sit down.”

139 obeyed and began the seemingly long walk over to the feather bed, passing Crazy Old Grandpa lying quite unconscious on the cold cement floor. He nervously took a seat next to Lunalanka, the makeup artist.

“Have you, in all your C.I.A. business, ever heard of the Australian Express?”

139 shook his head.

“They’re basically the rulers of Australia, France, Germany Belgium, and Soon the U.S. It’s a gang that gets all the inside information of a country, and then takes control of the country’s economy. Man, this is hard to explain. They’re EVERYWHERE, but mostly in big cities like New York and Rome. They outnumber the population of Australia 3 to 1. They are all, um, well...” Michael hesitated.

“Wh-, what? Who’s everywhere?” said 139, nearly leaping off the bed in excitement.

Michael continued hesitantly, “They are all... mi-.”

Instead of finishing his sentence he let out a strange sound that seemed to be a mix between a grunt and a scream. Lunalanka, startled, dropped her portable makeup mirror and hurried to her boyfriend’s side.

“My ankle,” said Michael as he lied on the floor, “I can’t move.”

139 quickly rushed over to him and Lunalanka to assess the situation. He saw a string of pink tail hanging out of Michael’s pant leg. 139 kneeled down and carefully lifted the part of Michael’s jeans that was covering his left ankle to reveal a scruffy white mouse.

Lunalanka screamed and practically flew to the top of the bed and flattened against the wall.

“Eww! Eww! I like hate mice, they like poop everywhere!”

The mouse looked up at him with those creepy red eyes that white haired rodents have. 139 slowly noticed that the mouse was wearing a golden cloak, and that its mouth was stained with blood that was slowly oozing out of the outside of Michael’s ankle.

Then the unthinkable happened.

The mouse spoke.

“ ’Ello mate. Ye wouldn’t mind steppin’ a bit to your right. Ye blockin’ the light, an’ I’ve got some emportant business to attind to,” said the mouse in a strangely normal, sarcastic sounding Australian accent.

Just then 139 saw three other white mice walk up to Michael and stand around his head. The one on the right had a Crocodile Dundee hat and was dressed in a purple silk robe with a miniature martini glass filled with what looked like orange juice in its hand (or whatever talking mice use to hold things). The one in the middle was wearing a turquoise leotard with a black baseball cap that said “Mickey Mouse Rules” on it, or so it seemed (it was so small that 139 had trouble

reading it) while he ate a greasy miniature Hot Pocket. The one on the left had a brown French mustache and wore a tuxedo with a black bow tie and a white dress shirt.

The mouse with the tuxedo hopped onto Michael's chest.

“Ah, so you want to betray us, eh?” Said the mouse in a bad French accent. “You think you can stop us, well we will stop *you*, Michael. What do you have to say for yourself?!” The mouse pulled out a green plastic sword, like the ones used to hold sandwiches or fruit together, and with one motion pointing it straight into the tip of Michael's nose, causing a small scratch.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! Hey, come on Vinnie, I was just filling them in, we can't stop you anyway, so why do you care? What's with the French accent?” protested Michael. He talked to the mouse so casually, like he had known it for a very long time.

“Vat, you don't like ze new sound? It makes me feel... powerful! MWAHAHAHAHAHAH!!!!” laughed the mouse. The occupants in the room were staring at the rodent as if they didn't know whether to be revolted, curious, or break out in hysterics. “And now you and your friends are going to die.” By now his voice was back to his natural Australian accent.

“What!?!” exclaimed Michael, “this was never part of the deal!”

Lunalanka let out a huge drama-queen gasp, still on top of the bed and flattened against the wall. “Like what are you talking about, Michael!?!? It better not be true, or I'm going to like totally telling your Grandpa.”

“You knew about this thing the whole time?! I knew you were no good,” said 139 with so much frustration that it was a surprise that steam did not bellow out of his ears. “That dream I had, I knew I should have listened to it.”

“Yes you should have,” said a voice coming from the center of the room. Everyone was startled to hear this sudden comment, but even more startled to see whom it came from. Michael's Grandpa stood with a huge bump visible on the left side of his forehead.

“I implanted a chip into your brain the other night in Manhick,” Said Grandpa to 139.

Everyone in the room, even the mice, uttered a confused “What!?!?”

Grandpa stared of into the distance. “You see it all started two months ago...”

At Last... a Motive!

By Brett Bergthold

Grandpa stared of into the distance. "You see, it all started two months ago when you might say I got *flattened by an Australian Express*. Up to this point, I thought I was living the American dream - rocking my cares away on my shady, mortgage-paid-off, front porch. Little did I know that my little rocking chair world was about to be rocked by this evil gang of mice you now see before you! Content, was I, to spend my days rapidly rocking in my rocker (even though some days that *bad boy* threw me off my horse, uh... rocker) but I digress. One can easily imagine my blissful days with my Wii *Rockingchair-Mania* workout program and plenty of delectable energy snacks - Hostess Twinkies and Red Bulls. Oddly, it was due to my little Twinkie snacks that my perfectly revolving, balanced world, was about to be thrown off its rotational axis! For, I now know that it was my Hostess morsels that this little fellow Vinnie and his gang took issue with! Their "mission" had brought them thousands of miles from Sydney to my front porch. On that fateful day, I was to meet the ranting *Tuxedo Tornado* with a bad French accent."

Vinnie vented, "An evil entrepreneur American named Lunalanka, pretending to be an airhead - and doing a much too natural job of it - visited our homeland with the sole, wicked purpose of poisoning my people with her cream-filled fat bombs."

Grandpa grimaced, "Vinnie kept adding emphasis to his points by jabbing me in the nose with a miniature *Hors d'œuvre-looking* plastic sword."

Vinnie rambled on, "Our land, once pure, pristine, and 100% certified organic, is now afflicted, infected, and tainted with various forms of Americans and their **junk food!** We, the first inhabitants of this vast island paradise, have come to refer to this American invasion as the *Aboriginal Abdominal Abomination!*"

Grandpa moaned, "Then he started up with his *second* beef against Lunalanka and her fellow Americans. Is *beef* the right expression concerning a mouse?"

Vinnie had launched into his final diatribe. "We stole the internationally famous *Exquisite Corpus* book - or "*The Big Book of Everything Important*" as your current CIA director, Dr. Natale, refers to it - because you have ruthlessly and utterly twisted the truth about where the power lies in this world. Yes, it lies! We animals are tired of you *human* animals continuing to proclaim that *you* rule the world. Such lunacy, or perhaps, Lunalankacy! You see, even the smallest ranks of our armies can easily outsmart *any* human. For example, a single mosquito in a human's bedroom at night will drive the poor chap to utter madness. And nothing is tougher than a cockroach for surviving nuclear war. Yet, what *chaps our hides* the most is that "*Exquisite*" *Corpus* of yours so conspicuously omits **the facts!** Where, for example, is *any* credit given concerning the dominate power of my mates - the Australian animals!? For one, we are quite proud of the fact that our Stonefish is the deadliest fish in the world! They immediately take deadly revenge, on any airhead humans that cluelessly steps on them, as they invade and pollute our Great Barrier

Reef. In addition, you Americans are completely ignorant of the world's most deadly snake - as you write book after book about your relatively harmless rattlesnake - while the Inland Taipan, ruler of the Australian heartland, receives no mention in the *Corpus* at all!"

"I finally had to interrupt this long-winded mouse," Grandpa said in exasperation, "He droned on and on - reminding me of my old Jr. High English teachers - and I had to force a few facts *of my own* on him. Had he never watched Animal Planet!? Produced in the good old US of A? Did he not recognize the rich cinematic contributions of the American media through shows such as Crocodile Hunter and Crocodile Dundee? Yet, Vinnie would not be moved (literally, for the nose jabs continued!) Mysteriously, this mouse leader had discovered that I was once the director of the CIA and that years ago I made the decision to locate our CIA headquarters close to a McDonalds. All animals, Australian or not, **hate** McDonalds! And there is a *primary* beef on theirs!"

"Gramps," said the mouse rudely, "Do you realize the millions of Australian cows that have been sacrificed under the 'Golden Arches' for the sake of human obesity!? To be honest, I really don't care about the 'nuggets issue' given all the squawking each year from the chicken unions, but I do feel passionately that Australian animals deserve some world respect!"

"You have unfairly judged me," Grandpa argued. "Yes, I have been loyal to the mission of the CIA, but I have also been loyal to animals! In fact, since my wife died, my closest friend for many years was my ten-year-old tabby, Abby! Sadly, Abby died recently due to her cataract issues. She ran right through my sliding glass door!"

"You only think that!" said Vinnie smugly. "If *you*, old man, were *my* owner, I'd run through the door myself and put an end to the misery!"

Suddenly, 139, having heard enough of this endless stream of maximum verbosity (Grandpa's history lesson) summarized the old man's ramblings. "So, in a nutshell, this complex *rodent's nest* you describe, Grandpa, was all masterminded by the notorious *Australian Express*. They stole the *Exquisite Corpus* in an attempt to right a wrong. They are demanding that changes be made toward a new *Corpus*!"

Meanwhile, Lunalanka could be heard humming to herself the theme song from the Indiana Jones movies. Actually, she had checked out of *this* scene long ago. She was humming and mumbling to herself because a favorite escape of hers - to enter "the zone" - was to write poetry. Well, actually, not *true* poetry, but rather... bad limericks. She was now attempting to piece together *somewhat* rhyming lines...

The Totally Tragic Cosmic Crisis
An Earthling, like, came from afar
Bearing *junk food* from yonder star
These Twinkies caused quite a *quark*
For at sunset they glowed in the dark
So *pickled*, they crashed their Mars' cars!

Hearing this last line, Michael was now *especially* embarrassed to be Lunalanka's boyfriend... like *really*! In desperation, he turned to 139 to try and explain his side of the

story. "That double-crossing Vinnie (nothing like Cousin Minnie) turned into an *in-your-face*, cheeky little mouse!"

139 muttered, "Is there anything else that could possibly go more wrong? First, we have Lunalanka here, **always** a *headache on legs*, now adding insult to injury with her off-key humming and attempts at poetry. All to accentuate the pain in my already throbbin' noggin, that's still reeling from colliding with an accordion. Then, to top things off, I now learn of a chip implanted in my *temple*...of apparent doom!"

Grandpa jumped into this cacophony again, "You must understand 139 that Vinnie and his ruffians gave me no choice regarding implanting that chip in your cranium. Their little mitts can't do surgery by themselves. My life was threatened! I complied, at first, and simply have been biding my time. As a loyal *lifer* to the CIA, I have been looking for just the right moment to foil these double-crossing, wretched, rodents. And... the moment is... NOW!"

Vermin's End

By Tracy Kline

Reaching down with his right hand, Grandpa whipped off his left shoe and, squinting, prepared to hurl it with deadly force at Vinnie, who stood frozen in shock. Right before the leather missile left his hand; however, Grandpa caught something out of the corner of his eye that made him falter. To him it appeared as a small, pumpkinseed-shaped blur, but it was clear enough: It was the cockroach Weemouskee, clinging to the corner of the ginormous mirror, antennae quivering...

The shoe clunked harmlessly to the floor, while the group endured Lunalanka's piercing shrieks of "Kill it, Mikey! Like, smooosh its little brain!"

But neither Vinnie and his henchman nor Weemouskee seemed to hear a thing. Instead, their eyes were locked in a deadly stare.

Lunalanka's ear-splitting screams were suddenly drowned out by an even louder sound. The ginormous mirror exploded into a million shining shards, shattered from within by none other than Sean, triumphantly riding on the back of a now formidably huge Annabelle the polar bear, wearing her hot pink collar and holding in her furry jaws...*the Exquisite Corpus!*

Vinnie was the first to break the stunned silence. "Run for it, mates!" he squeaked, the French accent forgotten in his panic. Before anyone could move, the four villainous vermin had disappeared through the gaping hole left by Sean and Annabelle. But before Weemouskee could do the same, Mike quickly reached over and scooped him up in an empty Twinkie wrapper. The furious insect could be seen wildly waving all six legs (or were they arms?) but his screams were muffled by the crinkle of the greasy plastic.

"What's that, little dude? I can't heeaaaar you!" Mike taunted. "Bet'cher little buddies'll be lost without their fearless leader!"

Lunalanka peered over his shoulder with mingled horror and relief.

As Annabelle shook the final tinkling shards from her fur and began shuffling curiously toward the box of Twinkies, Sean slid to the floor, clearly basking in the moment. (And really, could you blame him?)

139 took a deep breath, deciding it was time for some answers. Holding his aching head, he said quietly but with a note of hysteria, "Can someone PLEASE tell me what's going on?"

Mike casually tossed the wrapper and its outraged occupant to Grandpa, who, having had enough excitement, had settled back into his rocker next to the accordion on the floor.

Lunalanka chose this moment to add her own half-cent's worth. "Like, yeah--Mike. My high powers of perceptuality are telling me something's going on here. Like, did I

hear you say you had a DEAL with those totally disgusting little rats?"

"Mice, babe. They're mice. And yes, I did have kind of a deal, but it was on my terms, *capiche?* Now, are you going to let me explain or not?"

She gave him a sulky pout, but went to stand as far away as she could from Grandpa, who was starting to look like his old snoozy self, and Annabelle, who had dropped the slobbery Corpus and was contentedly noshing her way through the box of Twinkies.

"Now, where was I?" Mike continued. "Oh yeah, the mice. So, their little Australian Express thing was, for a while, a bit of a problem. But they were never as much of a problem for the CIA as their little six-legged enemies, Weemouskee and his, uh...followers, were."

139 broke in. "Wait, so you're saying *you're* with the CIA?"

"Well duh, Elmo," (139 winced at this) "how else do you think I got a girlfriend as hot as Luney, here?" Mike replied with a grin. She responded with a giggle and little wave from across the room.

"Anyhow, it seems that mice and cockroaches are like, natural enemies or something, being as they compete for the same rejectamenta..."

The Twinkie wrapper in Grandpa's lap began to vibrate with ferocity.

"So I thought, 'Hey, what if we use them against each other?' So we made a deal with the mice, offering them access to the Exquisite Corpus in exchange for information about Weemouskee and his gang."

139 spoke up again. "You gave them access to the CORPUS?"

"Elmo, don't get your fur in a bunch. It was a *fake* one, okay? Now can I finish *uninterrupted?* 'Cause you're an important part of this, coming up..."

139 nodded sullenly, raking a hand through his blue hair with an exhausted sigh.

"When I heard the mice had gotten to Grandpa and were planning to force him to implant a chip in your brain to use you for who-knows-what evil purpose, we acted quickly to substitute a chip of our own. To save Grandpa from the danger of such a mission, we employed a new agent, 337, to do the work for us. She was highly recommended--by me, naturally."

Lunalanka had perked up at the sound of her code name. "Oooh, Mikey," she gushed. "You said nice things about me!"

Mike smiled at her. "Of course, Babe! With your skill at texting, I knew you were the right agent for the job. Elmo never knew what hit him!"

"Wait...what? When?" stammered 139.

"Remember when we were, like, at that McDonald's? Back in Manhick?" She didn't wait for him to answer. "Well, anyways, when you thought I was texting, well, like some of the time I really WAS, but for part of that time, I was doing the implant thingy."

"You mean you knew everything the whole time?" 139 stared in disbelief.

"Of course not, you silly. Nobody knows everything. That would be like, way too dangerous!"

Mike cut in, "But don't worry, little dude. The chip was harmless, and it's actually dissolving inside your head right now--since it's already done its job."

139 looked rather uncomfortable at the thought of a microchip dissolving in his grey matter, but he managed to ask, “What job?”

“You know that nightmare-slash-vision thing you had about me and Australia?”

139 nodded.

“That was caused by the chip. It was the best way we could think of to get you here, to lead the Australian Express off the trail. You gotta admit, it worked!”

Completely overwhelmed, 139 plopped onto the floor, head in his hands. Sean sat down next to him, with a comforting hand on his shoulder. By this time, Annabelle had finished the Twinkies and ambled over, hoping for perhaps another snack. 139’s hand went to the top of her shaggy head, patting her absently. When she saw he wasn’t going to feed her, she walked over to the hole where the mirror had been. Only now, 139 realized, there was no longer a hole. The spot had changed to a panel of solid brick. Annabelle sat on her enormous rump in front of the panel and scratched her neck with a hind paw the size of a catcher’s mitt, then curled into a ball--giving her the appearance of a small sofa.

139’s eyes suddenly widened. “Wait a sec,” he said. “When we left Alaska, she was just...”

“A baby. Yeah, I know,” Sean interrupted. “It’s the bean soup, I think. Plus, she’s a special experimental breed of polar bear, made to grow really fast, but she broke into my pantry and ate the rest of the bean soup while I was gone, and I think that may have had something to do with her getting *so big so fast*...”

“But where did you...and how did you...?” 139’s eyes flicked from the panel where the mirror had been to the spot on the wall where the words--*You have been warned*--were still barely visible, though quickly fading.

“Oh, that,” said Sean. “Are you sure you’re ready for all this, 139? You’re looking a little...sickish.”

“I’m fine!”

“OK, suit yourself. It happened like this. After Grandpa clocked you with the accordion and we got the decoy Exquisite Corpus out of it, and while the room was all dark, Mike grabbed me and shoved me toward the rocking chair. When I fell into it, I felt everything get all cold all of a sudden,”

“Like, we felt that, too! It was that hypotherma-thingy!” Lunalanka chimed in.

“Because it wasn’t just a chair,” Sean continued. “It’s a PORTAL...to *Alaska*, activated by a code only Mike knows! When the lights came back on, I was standing on my squishy delicious green-with-black-polka-dots rug at home!”

He paused to make sure it was all sinking in before he went on. “Then my cell phone was ringing, and it was none other than the President himself, telling me to hop on my fastest supersonic jet and high-tail it to Manhick. I did just that, with Annabelle, of course, and when we arrived, sure enough--the Prez was waiting with about six jillion Secret Service Agents, right outside of Headquarters...or the empty lot where it used to be.”

Sean stopped and took a deep breath. He was clearly enjoying his moment in the spotlight, even if he himself hadn’t understood everything that happened.

“Wow! Was he wearing that same tie? The one with the teeny little red stripes?” Lunalanka interjected.

Sean rolled his eyes. “I don’t know! I was too busy trying to keep Annabelle from slobbering all over him and getting herself death-rayed by one of the Secret-Service suits! I had to climb onto her back to get her to hold still. But anyway, this is where it gets weird...”

139 couldn’t stifle his groan. *How could it possibly get any more weird?* Mike heard and gave him the thumbs-up from across the room. “You’re doin’ great, Elmo, just stick with us...” he said encouragingly.

Sean continued. “So out of his briefcase, the President pulls *the Exquisite Corpus!* I was just about to congratulate him and ask how he’d gotten it, when he gives me this weird look, whistles to Annabelle, then hauls off and *chucks* it toward the empty lot!! Now I’ve seen her fetch stuff before, like her favorite baby stuffed seal toy, but never something from the air. So it’s all I can do to stay on her back as she launches after the thing, and wouldn’t you know--she catches it!” He paused a moment to give the now-snoozing bear a scratch behind the ears. “But before we hit the ground, I started to feel even weirder than ever...in fact, it was like the air was shimmering around us, like it was...glass or something. Next thing I knew, we were standing right here in a pile of shattered mirror fragments, and, well, you know as much as I do, from that point on.”

Mike had stepped closer to 139, who was trying his best not to look completely stunned.

“I’ll take it from here,” Mike said in a calm voice. “From the beginning, the plan was to prevent the Australian Express from accessing the real Corpus. But to do so, we had to let them think they had the real McCoy. We staged the disappearance of Headquarters by putting up an invisibility field around it. We used this as an excuse to give the mice time with the *fake* Corpus, without alerting the authorities--or so they thought. The *real* Corpus was there at HQ all along; still is, in fact.”

Sean looked crestfallen. “You mean this is...”

“A fake? Yeah, 235...it’s not the genuine article. But that’s OK, the President needed your help, and Annabelle’s,” he smiled at the sleeping bear, “to smash the invisibility field and close the portal between here and Manhick once and for all. It took the force of a full-grown flying polar bear to do it!”

Sean looked somewhat consoled by this idea.

“But wait a minute,” 139 cried, looking suddenly alarmed, “the mice...they got away!!”

“Not hardly,” said Sean. “If that mirror-portal took them to Manhick while it was still open, I can assure you they’re caught by now. That place was *crawling* with CIA and Secret Service agents!” Mike nodded in agreement.

The word “crawling” seemed to snap Lunalanka out of the stupor into which she had recently slipped, lulled into a reverie by the melodious sounds of Grandpa and Annabelle’s snores blending together. “Like, what about those gnarly little bugs and their plot to take over the world?!”

“Not *that* again,” grumped 139.

“Actually, she’s right,” Mike interjected. “Recent intelligence uncovered a plot by... get this... a band of hyper-evolved cockroaches escaped from a testing facility, who were actually planning to take over the world *today* at 12:00! Pretty crazy, huh?”

Sean snorted with laughter, and the rest of them looked at him curiously. “Oh yeah... I forgot to mention that when I took off in my plane just now back in Alaska, there was this huge cloud of smoke on startup, and let’s just say it smelled like a barbecue gone really bad!” he explained, still snickering. “When I checked the engine compartment, it looked like a scene from *Night of the Roach Hotel Zombies!*”

At that moment, a tiny but audible gasp turned every head toward Grandpa, who had not stirred. The noise had come from Weemouskee, who had taken advantage of Grandpa’s slumber to wriggle out of the wrapper. Shocked by the news of his followers’ terrible toasted demise, he stood poised on the arm of the rocking chair, antennae sticking straight up like a pair of toothpicks.

This time, it was Lunalanka’s turn to act fast. Wrenching the stiletto heel off of her left foot (she, too, was right-handed), she sent it rocketing at Weemouskee with blinding speed. The unfortunate vermin didn’t have a chance; he was knocked through the air and smacked completely unconscious before coming to rest on the F# key of the accordion.

Mike scooped him neatly up once more, this time to be sealed safely in a Mason jar with holes in the lid until such time as he would go on trial for crimes against humankind.

But that’s a story for another day.

For now, 139, Sean, and Lunalanka were headed back to their homes, this time by completely ordinary modes of transportation. Having endured the long goodbye cooings of Mike and Lunalanka, 139 settled into his seat aboard Wallaby Airlines flight 007 and closed his eyes to enjoy a long nap, free from nightmares or vermin of any kind.

Epilogue:

Far away, on the snow-covered slopes of the Alaskan wilderness, came the barely-audible strains of a song, sung in a high, thin, insectile voice: “La la la la la la la la Elmo’s world... la la la la la la la la Elmo’s world...”

At precisely 11:59 AM, 139 was jarred from his slumber by the ringing of his cell phone.