

The kitchen door of the Hate Pit hurtled open with such force and such noise that it almost made The Living Lump drop the milkshake he had just mixed up. The Plant Lady woke with a jolt at the noise, she had dozed off reading the latest issue of Better Gardens Than Your Magazine.

The Blinding Skull strode proudly into the room, he had goggles over his eyes, a soldering gun in his hand and, even though his skull was brilliantly lit up, a huge smile could clearly be seen, plastered across his face.

"I have done it!" he proclaimed loudly.

"Done what? Scared the bejeebus out of me and Lump? Because that you did for sure." The Plant Lady said as she adjusted her glasses. They had become crooked either when The Blinding Skull had entered the room or during her nap.

"No!" The Blinding Skull continued on, ignoring her. "I have finished my latest invention."

"Oh," The Plant Lady said, turning back to her magazine. "Is that all?"

"Yes." The Blinding Skull said proudly, knuckles resting on his hips. There was a moment of silence as Lump slipped a straw into his milkshake and took a sip. The Blinding Skull sighed, "Isn't anyone going to save me what it is and what it does?"

There was another moment of silence. The Plant Lady turned

a page in her magazine.

The Living Lump smacked his lips in contentment at his latest peanut butter milkshake making skills. Only now that he had had his first sip of milkshake, he could engage in conversation, "What is it? What does it do?"

The Blinding Skull smiled and crossed the kitchen to him in two, leaping steps. "The Laser Ray Gun."

The Living Lump looked at him and blinked. "But didn't you already invent the laser ray gun?"

The Blinding Skull shook his head, "I did, I did, but I have now modified it. Before the modifications, the ray from my laser ray could only be accurate at a range of ten miles or less."

The Living Lump nodded as took another big sip of of his peanut butter milkshake. He had made it extra thick. This one was going to take awhile to get through.

"After the modifications I made today," The Blinding Skull continued proudly, drumming his fingers on the soldering gun, "The laser ray is accurate to a distance of 238, 400 miles."

The Plant Lady looked up from her magazine, "I know my hearing isn't what it used to be but did you just say that your laser ray gun can now shoot 238, 400 miles?"

The Blinding Skull turned to her with a smile, "It can."

"Why do you need it to shoot 238, 400 miles?" The Plant Lady said incredulously, "The League of Good's headquarters is only nine miles away which is why, correct me if I'm wrong, you built the thing to be accurate up to ten miles away in the first place."

"That's true." Said The Blinding Skull. "But I don't want to blow up The League of Good's headquarters."

"You don't?" said The Living Lump quickly, "I thought that has always been a goal."

"I has been." The Blinding Skull retorted. "It still is. I just started thinking that perhaps the best use of the laser ray would be a much larger target."

"But 238, 400 miles?" The Plant Lady reasoned, "You can't shoot that far on earth. The earth curves you know."

"Pffft!" The Blinding Skull chided, "Of course I know! I'm The Blinding Skull. The smartest man on the planet."

"Well, you can't be very smart if yo have built a death ray to shoot that far at something on earth."

"I didn't build it to shoot at something on earth." The Blinding Skull said calmly, drawing his speech out for dramatic effect. "I built it to shoot at...the moon."

The Blinding Skull threw up his hands and let out a maniacal laugh and pressed the button on the key fob that he

always carried with him. Suddenly, hidden speakers in the walls of The Hate Pit blared a dramatic music sting:

DUN! DUN! DUNNNNNN!

When The Blinding Skull opened his eyes, both The Living Lump and The Plant Lady were staring at him, both with a look of bemusement on their faces.

"Why do you want to blow up the moon?" The Living Lump asked. "I think it's pretty."

The Blinding Skull sighed, "It is pretty. But--"

"You know we need the moon, don't you?" The Plant Lady said. "I've studied all about it."

"Yes, I--" The Blinding Skull attempted, but was cut off.

"The moon makes the tides what they are." She chided.

"Yes, I know that. The sun will create the tides for us, they just won't be as pronounced as before."

"And you know it's the tidal friction of the moon that gives us our twenty four hour days." She continued.

"I do," The Blinding Skull said, hands on his hips. "Our days would be only six to eight hours after awhile."

"And the nights would be darker."

"Darker?!" The Living Lump chimed in, suddenly nervous. "I don't need them any darker, thank you very much."

The Blinding Skull raised a hand. "Lump--"

"Oh, and the other issue is that, eventually, the earth would, you know, TILT OFF ITS AXIS!"

The Blinding Skull lowered his head and raised two hands in surrender. He held them there until he was sure he had everyone's attention.

"Listen." He said softly. "I know all this. But all of these things would happen over time. Not right away. These things are not life threatening to US."

There was a bigger silence now. Even The Living Lump understood the ramifications of blowing up the moon. Finally, The Plant Lady cleared her throat.

"Why?" she asked softly. "Why do you want to blow up the moon? Are you just saying you're going to blow it up so that the governments of the world will pay a ransom?"

"No." Said The Blinding Skull quietly.

"You're really just going to blow it up?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Why? What's the percentage in it? What do you personally stand to gain out of it? Is it just a show of power?"

"No."

"Look, Skull," said The Plant Lady, slowly rising from her seat. "We are all 'bad guys' here. We do bad things, but before now there was purpose behind them. Money. Power.

Revenge."

"Milkshakes," The Living Lump said between sips.

The Plant Lady nodded and continued , "But if blowing up the moon isn't because of those things, if it's just because you can, then we have entered a whole new realm of 'bad guy' here. I mean we're talking entering the Psychic Psycho territory. Doing bad things just to cause chaos."

"There is a reason I want to blow it up." The Blinding Skull said through grit teeth.

"Why." The Plant Lady asked.

"Love." The Blinding Skull said quietly.

"Love?" The Plant Lady repeated, confused. "What do you mean love?"

"Because of love." The Blinding Skull said quickly.

"What's with the sudden third degree. I have told you I have a reason. You are my teammates, you should be going along with me on this."

"I'm not just going to blindly along with you on this one especially since it will have a massive impact on the Earth!" The Plant Lady said with some force. "I don't know if Lump is ever going to have any kids and I assume you aren't. But you can't just put the Earth in peril by destroying the moon. I care about this because my plants are going to long

outlive me and I don't want to put them in danger! So, I'm going to need an explanation. Why do you want to blow up the moon because of love?"

The Blinding Skull was quiet for a beat. He then inhaled, "It happened years ago at summer camp."

Suddenly the room filled with flashing lights and a computerized voice started squawking, "Cinematic Flashback Sequence Initiated. Cinematic Flashback Sequence Initiated. Prepare for Cinematic Flashback."

Suddenly, the walls of the kitchen seemed to disappear and the trio found themselves standing the middle of a forest on the edge of a lake. None of them were shocked by this. They were well used to The Blinding Skull's Cinematic Flashback Simulator. A computer that, when someone wanted to tell a story from their past, tapped into the storyteller's brain and projected the images around them on the walls of the Hate Pit. The effect was unnerving at first, but the trio had become quite used to it.

The three stood in the clearing, when a rustling was heard from the bushes behind them. The three spun and a girl, about twelve, here red hair in pigtails, clothed in blue overalls came bounding through the bushes. She was barefoot and giggling. "Come on, silly, get a move on." She hollered back into the bushes.

There was some rustling and suddenly a flicker of light. The light grew stronger and a young boy, dressed completely inappropriately for camping, in a suit and tie, came tumbling out of the bushes. Even if the young boy's head wasn't glowing, just looking at his mannerisms was a dead giveaway to The Living Lump and The Plant Lady, that this was The Blinding Skull.

"Look at you as a child Skull." The Plant Lady whispered. As awkward and ungainly as ever."

"Quiet." The Blinding Skull hissed, and then he continued his story, which played out in front of them.

The boy caught up with the girl. "Awfully wooded around here isn't it Mary?" the young Blinding Skull asked, looking around.

The girl giggled. "Of course it is. This wouldn't be magic if it wasn't."

"Yes, but aren't you afraid of ticks? They carry Lyme Disease you know." Little Blinding Skull said, itching his arm.

Mary grabbed the youngster by the hand and pulled him towards some bushes on the far end of the clearing. "Come on. I don't want to miss it."

Little Blinding Skull followed behind as did the older version of himself and The Plant Lady and The Living Lump. They broke through the bushes and came out in a large field. It was



nighttime but the field was lit by a huge full moon that hung low in the sky above the trees on the far side of the field.

The Living Lump gasped, "It's beautiful."

"It's beautiful." Little Blinding Skull said at almost the exact same time.

Mary turned to him and pushed the red hair back from her face. "That's not even the best part." She crunched down and searched the ground around where they stood. She found a rock about half the size of her hand and stood up. Cocking her arm back she threw the rock deep into the middle of the field. It landed with a thud.

Suddenly, from where the rock had landed, little specks of light began floating up into the air. The specks began growing outward in a circular pattern, just as if she had thrown a pebble into a stream. More and more specks began to flit into the air. Little Blinding Skull stood, eyes wide. He had never seen anything like this before. The incredible beauty of the little specks of flickering light had taken his breath away.

"Photuris lucicrescens." He whispered quietly.

"Fireflies." Mary whispered back and she slowly reached out and took his hand.

The moment their hands touched, the young Blinding Skull's skull flickered out and the two young kids, and the three super

villains were surrounded by thousands of flickering specks of light.

"She was the only person who could get me to quiet my head." The Blinding Skull said. "That evening that night was the most memorable I've ever had."

Suddenly the field disappeared around them and the three supervillains found themselves in the middle of the kitchen.

There was a moment of silence and The Plant Lady said, "That still doesn't explain why you want to blow up the moon."

"Yeah," The Living Lump chimed in between slurps of Milkshakes, "Especially since it was so pretty."

"It was very pretty." The Blinding Skull agreed, chin on hand, lost in the thought. "From that night on the moon became something very special between me and Mary. Even though we lived far apart, the moon was something we could both look up at at the same time and feel a connection to each other and that night."

"Then why blow it up?" The Plant Lady reiterated.

The Blinding Skull sighed. "Throughout the years, Mary and I have never been able to make any sort of relationship work out. There were always things standing in the way. Distance. Other relationships. Foolish decisions on both of our parts. But then, last fall, the straw that broke the camel's back. We

were in one of our periods of not talking to each other when suddenly out of the blue she called me. It seems she had been given the chance at a big opportunity to advance her career and she needed help putting together the presentation for it. Help, she knew, only I could give her."

The kitchen once again filled with a warning lights and a robotic voice again spoke, "Cinematic Flashback Sequence Initiated. Cinematic Flashback Sequence Initiated. Prepare for Cinematic Flash Back."

The room once again seemed to whirl around them and the three found themselves standing in more familiar territory. The Blinding Skulls lab. Not the lab here at the Hate Pit, that lab is much bigger, but a modest Lab. In the center of the room, behind a table, stood them now several years older, Blinding Skull and Mary. Mary, they noticed was crying.

"I don't know." She said between sniffles. "Maybe I should just forget it."

"No." The younger Blinding Skull said, "We can come up with something. We'll just make it simple. We'll make it you, and it'll be great."

"But I don't have any experiment I could show them." She said, looking down at the kleenex in her hand.

"Look," the younger Skull said to her, "You brought your

stuff right?"

Mary nodded.

"Let's just look through what you bought and we'll see what we can put together." He said. "You have nothing to worry about. You're going to be great."

Mary looked up at The Blinding Skull and smiled. She reached out her hand and took his. Instantly, the light of his skull flickered out as his mind came to rest. He smiled, his eyes closed. After a moment, he opened them, looked down at her and said, "Let's begin."

As the two in the flashback started to work, The present day Blinding Skull leaned over to The Plant Lady and The Living Lump. "We worked throughout the afternoon to get the basics of her project together. Now, I didn't do the work for her, mind you, she did it all herself. I just helped her with wordings or ways to rephrase things in the report, only to polish it up. After she left it needed a little editing and I offered to do that."

"Why?" said The Living Lump.

The Blinding Skull looked at him, "Why? Well because I thought this time was going to be it. The time I was really going to connect with Mary. The time when we would finally be together as we were seemingly meant to be. You see, the weeks

leading up to this afternoon of work were filled with emails of heavily loaded innuendos and nicknames. Promises of hugs, kisses and more."

"But..." said The Plant Lady, anticipating where the story was headed.

"But..." repeated The Blinding Skull and as he did, the room swirled around them and they found themselves back in the kitchen. "But two days after emailing her with her final project, she emailed me saying that she was seeing someone else. That they were an item and she was telling me goodbye."

There was another silence. The blinding Skull cleared his throat, "Thinking back it was clear to see that she had started 'seeing this guy' way before the day I helped her. The innuendos and nicknames and promises of hugs and kisses and more were just a ruse to get me to help her as she knew I was the only one who could."

"She used you." The Living Lump said.

The Blinding Skull nodded. "She used me. And to top it all off, her project was accepted. So she got everything she wanted."

"Have you talked to her since?" The Plant Lady asked.

"Yes." The Blinding Skull sighed. "A few times. She told me she was no longer seeing that guy. She hinted that we should

finally be together, but in those discussions there was no apology offered nor was there never even any hint of any remorse for what she had done. As I said, In our history, I had done a lot of things that weren't right, but I always manned up and apologized for them. Either in person or via written letter. Never in a text or online post. That, apparently, doesn't go both ways. So, I just let communication dwindle. And....that's that."

"And that's why you want to blow up the moon?" The Plant Lady asked.

"Yes." The Blinding Skull said determinedly. "Every time I see it, it is like a knife cutting me deep to the bone. My heart literally aches. I will be going about life, forgotten completely about Mary and then, catch a glimpse of the moon over the horizon and the pain floods in stronger than before."

The Plant Lady reached out her hand and touched The Blazing Skull on his shoulder. "What she did wasn't right. I understand that it hurt you, but are you really willing to destroy the moon over one person? The moon belongs to all of us."

"Yes." The Blinding Skull said, tensing up his body. "Yes. I am. And I'm going to do it tonight."

Again, silence in the kitchen. It was broken by The Living

Lump slurping up the last of his milkshake.

"Well," The Plant Lady said with a sigh, "There's nothing we can do to stop you. Do what you must."

The Blinding Skull smiled. He reached out his hands and placed one on each of their shoulders. "Thank you friends." He began to exit back to his lab. "And after I destroy the moon, maybe we can use the Laser Ray to destroy the League of Good."

He was out the door. The Plant Lady began walking back to her magazine.

"You really gonna let him destroy the moon?" The Living Lump asked her.

"I don't think we can stop him." The Plant Lady said.

The Plant Lady slowly got up, closed her magazine and shuffled off in the direction of her greenhouse. The Living Lump looked down into his milkshake glass and sighed loudly.

Later that night, The Blinding Skull's head glowed brighter than normal. In his lab he busied himself with buttons and switches and read outs on screens.

"Thirty seconds until optimum target position." A computerized voice said.

The Blinding Skull entered a sequence onto a keyboard. A loud hissing began behind him as two coolant nozzles disconnected themselves from the large laser ray. The loud

whining hydraulics filled the room as the laser barrel positioned itself. On a large screen on the main wall, The Blinding Skull could see the moon creeping into the crosshairs.

"Fifteen seconds until optimum target position."

The Blinding Skull sat in a chair and wheeled himself over to the main controls. He slipped on a pair of sound blocking headphones. Reaching forward he lifted the plastic cover protecting the firing button.

"Ten seconds until optimum target position."

He looked at the screen, watching the fractions of seconds click by. The lights on the edges of the screen caught his eye in a weird way. For the briefest of moments, with the moon super sized on the screen, he swore the lights were the tiny specs floating above the field back at the camp.

"Five seconds until optimum target position."

"Fireflies." He whispered softly to himself. He reach towards the button but his hand hesitated. A stabbing pain in his chest feeling as if someone had grabbed his heart.

"Optimal target position achieved."

The Blinding Skull swallowed. He pushed the button.

There was a large flash of light and a loud bang as the laser fired. Seconds later, everyone everywhere throughout the city, heard a large explosion.



The next morning there was a press conference in downtown Daily City. Fifty or so reporters crammed the front steps of City Hall. A podium was set up, loaded down with numerous microphones bearing the insignias of news organizations from all over the world. Cameramen sipped coffee and chatted quietly with each other as their partnered news anchors fixed their hair and checked their attire in mirrors. The busses, cars and trucks of the city hummed their usual drone in the morning sun.

Suddenly there was the sound of a sonic boom and everyone instantly turned their gaze skyward. A streak of light, like flames in the sky rocketed around above city hall and then, before anyone could track it, a being landed behind the podium with a flash.

There, cape billowing around her, stood Suprema. Champion of Daily City and the leader of The League of Good. She stood, striking a dramatic pose for the cameras that whirred around her, then she took the last step up to the podium.

"Citizens of Daily City. As you may know, last night, many people reported seeing a strange laser shoot skyward. I can now confirm to you that an attempt was made to blow up the moon with a powerful laser ray."

A murmur went the crowd. The news outlets had reported on the laser, but details were scarce. Suprema held for a moment

as the news of this revelation went through the crowd.

"Moments before the laser was fired, a tip was called into the League of Good that such an attempt was going to be made. Acting quickly on the tip, I, personally, was able to stop the laser, absorbing it with my body and completely destroying the weapon that was used. I also destroyed the laboratory it was built in and ensured that such an attempt would never be made again."

"Who was behind the attack?" a reporter shouted.

Suprema raised an eyebrow. She hated being interrupted, but she had anticipated this question. "It was a villain of no consequence. To mention his name here would only give him the undeserved attention he desires. Again, I repeat, he will not make the attempt again or, after the damage I did to his lab, it will be a very long time before he will have the resources to even begin constructing a similar device. If he does, he will fail, just as he did this time."

"Who did the tip come in from?" another reporter shouted.

"It was an anonymous tip but the League of Good's computer were able to determine who the caller was. I will not reveal the caller's name though as that would defeat the point of the anonymous tip." Suprema cracked a slight smile. "I will say we are in debt to that person's quick thinking and will be

rewarding them for their duty to protecting the world from the acts of evil masterminds. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must return to the Tower and engage in other pressing matters. Good day citizens."

Before the throng of reporters could even begin to pepper Suprema with more questions, she was rocketing back to the sky and gone from sight.

Later that afternoon, back at the Hate Pit, The Blinding Skull was sifting through the wreckage that, the night before, had been his lab. The Plant Lady was in her greenhouse tending to her plants and in the kitchen, The Living Lump was preparing another Peanut Butter shake.

A buzzer broke the silence.

Neither of the three members of the Cauldron of Hate acknowledged it.

The buzzer sounded again.

The Blinding Skull sighed and waded through the piles of wreckage to the wall intercom, one of the small things in the room that still worked after Suprema's rampage.

"Lump! Someone's at the loading dock. Go answer it." The Blinding Skull barked into the microphone.

In the kitchen, The Living Lump sighed and crossed out of the kitchen and up the cement stairs to the loading dock. He

pushed the button to roll up the door.

As the loading dock door slowly chugged along its tracks, The Living Lump took a deep sip out of his milkshake. The brown shoes and pants of a Universal Package Service delivery man came into view, followed shortly by his brown shirt, brown clipboard and brown hat.

"Good morning." The delivery man said. "I have a delivery here for a Mr. Living Lump."

The Living Lump stopped drinking and opened his eyes wide in surprise. He swallowed the mouthful of peanut butter shake and cleared his throat, "That's, uh, me."

"Great." The delivery man said and held out his clipboard and a pen. "Just need you to sign right here and they are all yours."

For the first time, The Living Lump noticed the stack of six, twelve by twelve by twelve, cardboard boxes, the delivery man had on a hand truck behind him. Lump narrowed his eyes as he looked at the boxes. He didn't recall ordering anything that would have been delivered by the Universal Package Service.

"Uh, what's in them?" he said, handing the clipboard back to the delivery guy after placing a big X on the signature line on the paperwork.

"It's about a three month supply of peanut butter milkshake

fixings." The Delivery guy said as he walked around behind the hand truck and, tilting it back, began wheeling it around The Living Lump and into the loading dock area. He paused as he passed Lump and looked up at him with a smile, "Although, by the size of you, it looks like it might last you about a week."

"But I didn't order any milkshake fixings." The Living Lump said, puzzled.

"Not an order." The delivery guy said with a groan as he pushed the boxes forward to slide the hand truck out from underneath. "This is a gift."

The Living Lump smiled, "A gift?!" The delivery guy nodded. The Living Lump instantly frowned and narrowed his eyes again. "From who?"

The Delivery guy stopped and rested an arm on the top of the hand truck. He grinned broadly and leaned in towards The Living Lump. "I'm not supposed to tell you." He whispered.

"But these are a gift from The League of Good."

The Living Lump was silent.

The Delivery guy continued whispering, "You must have done something really good. They don't send gifts to just anyone." There was a moment of quiet as The Living Lump took all this in. "Well," The Delivery guy said, "I gotta get going. More stuff to deliver. Have a good one buddy!"

The Living Lump watched as the Delivery Guy walked back down the loading dock ramp to his big brown truck that was parked amongst the piles of garbage at the dump. He walked over to the wall where the button for the door was and was about to push it when something caught his eye in the sky. There, big and white, surrounded is a sea of blue was a big, half full, daytime moon. He looked at it a second and then smiled.

He then pushed the button to lower the door of the loading dock.

The end.

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