

# *SUPER GALAXY KNIGHTS* **STARSTUFF STORIES**



**Stuck In His Shadow**

“Good morning, Zoramo City! Today, we're coming to you live from Mantor Beach, where setup continues for the annual Zoramo City Fashion Show. Feludi, are you excited for tomorrow's show?”

“Oh, absolutely, Muko. 7078 has been a great year for fashion trends so far, so I can't wait to see what the designers have to offer up tomorrow. But we'll talk more about that later. For now, here's Pylo Fu with the weather. Pylo?”

“It's bright and sunny outside, Feludi- and it's looking like it's going to stay that way for a while. Our five day forecast says that there won't be a cloud in sight until Monday. Good news for the fashion show, especially given how much rain we've had in the past few weeks. Back to you, Feludi.”

A row of televisions in a store window continued to play the local morning news, as two tall ten-year-old children- a boy and a girl- walked past. The boy had a stern face, light skin, and neck-length orange hair, with blonde highlights in the front. The girl had a longer face than the boy she was walking with, as if she had carried just a few more of life's sorrows than the boy did. Her skin was slightly paler than the boy's, and her hair was smooth, shoulder length, and black, with two blond protrusions hanging close to her eyes. Both wore tattered school uniforms- grey slacks, black shoes, collared grey shirts, and blue clip-on neckties- all of which seemed a size too small. The two continued their journey around a corner, then across the street, through the open gates of Mantor Beach Elementary School. They walked through the front door of the main building, passing by the dwindling carpool lane. The siblings arrived at room 115 just as the bell rang. The two rushed to their seats in the middle of the classroom, alongside 9 other children. A petite woman in her late thirties with dark brown skin and black hair got up from her desk in the corner, and stood in front of the chalkboard.

“Good morning, children!” said the woman sweetly.

“Good morning, Mrs. Cuderafi!” replied the children.

The woman picked up a clipboard from her desk, and checked the names off as she called them.

“Mamu Ce?” called Mrs. Cuderafi.

“Here,” said one of the children.

“Cefy Huhysiso?”

“Here.”

“Kody Kulenu?”

“Present.”

“Qunaga Lixe?”

“She's sick today,” said Cefy.

“Gynu Ludi?”

“Here,” said the boy with orange hair.

“Suzigu Ludi?”

“Present,” said his twin sister.

“Heca Nujubolo?”

“In attendance.”

“Hualu Ry?”

“Present.”

“Tebe Syna?”

“Here.”

“Xatosy Tepo”

“Here.”

“Qykuze Vule?”

“Present.”

“Cobequ Xado?”

“Here.”

Mrs. Cuderafi tossed her clipboard back onto her desk, then took out a piece of chalk from underneath the chalkboard. She began writing on the board.

“First,” said the teacher, “I’ll need you all to open your math workbooks to page 13. Finish practice problems 1-15 by-”

Suddenly, the bell rang. All the kids sprung up out of their seats and walked towards the door in the back of the classroom.

“I need to figure out a more efficient way to take attendance...” muttered Mrs. Cuderafi, before following the children out to recess.

The kids scattered once they reached the playground. Some played on the swing-set, while a group gathered around a bench to watch a trading card game. Gynu took a volleyball out of a crate, and began to play catch with Suzigu. Gynu looked over at the bench, where Heca was playing a game against Kody. Heca was drinking from a box of apple juice, while Kody had a water bottle open near the edge of the table. Heca Nujubolo was of average height for his age, with lightly-tanned skin. He had flowing dirty-blond hair, and his school uniform was incredibly clean- as if he had a different set for each day of the month.

“You know,” said Heca to his opponent, “my dad’s a Galaxy Knight. If you beat me, I could have him put you in jail.”

Gynu caught the ball and threw it back to his sister. “Ugh,” he said. “I really hate Heca. He’s such a jerk.”

“‘Hate’ is a mean word,” said Suzigu as she tossed the ball back. “Anyway, he’s not doing anything to you. Just don’t think about him.”

Kody placed another card from his hand onto the table.

“If beating you was illegal,” retorted Kody, “Your dad would have to put everyone in jail.”

“HA!” shouted Tebe. “It is funny because Heca is terrible at this game!”

The children all started laughing as Heca’s face turned red. Suddenly, Heca stared at the water bottle in front of Kody. The water slowly rose out of the bottle, looking like gelatin being squeezed out of a tube. Once all the water was out of the bottle, it rushed forward until it was hovering over Kody's lap. Then, the water fell, hitting Kody's pants with a loud splash. Kody let out a high-pitched yelp and stood up sharply, looking down at his wet pants.

“HA!” shouted Tebe. “It is funny because it now looks like Kody peed in his pants!”

The crowd began to laugh again as Kody ran off crying. Once the group stopped laughing, they turned towards Heca.

“Did you do that, Heca?” asked Mamu.

“Yep!” said Heca. “It's called magic. I can make water move wherever I want it to. I learned how to do that yesterday!”

The children oohed and aahed at Heca.

“If I *really* wanted to,” said Heca, “I could pull your blood out through your eyeballs.”

The group went silent.

“R... really? You can do that?” asked Mamu nervously.

“As far as you know, yeah. But don't worry. I won't do that unless I'm super duper mad at you.”

The kids all looked at each other in fear.

“Please don't get mad at me,” said Qykuze.

“No promises. But I guess if you all gave me your lunch money, I wouldn't be mad at any of you for the rest of the day...”

Heca laughed as the surrounding children rummaged through their pockets.

“Ok, now I *really* hate Heca,” said Gynu, the volleyball flying past him. “Someone needs to teach him a lesson...”

“Please, don't do anything dumb!” begged Suzigu. “If you hurt Heca, his dad will put you in jail, remember? Just... tell the teacher or something!”

“Mrs. C was right there reading her book, and she didn't do anything,” said Gynu as the bell to end recess rang. “It has to be me. After school, I'm gonna beat him up.”

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Five hours later, the final bell rang.

“Ok, but tomorrow we'll definitely start on problems 1-15, I'm sure of it!” shouted Mrs. Cuderafi as her students left the room.

Hundreds of children poured out of their classrooms, then out of the building.

“Hey, Heca, do you need a ride home today?” asked Mamu.

“Nah, my dad's just gonna be a few minutes late. I'll see you at soccer practice tonight!”

The remainder of the kids left, leaving Hecu alone in the hallway, sitting next to a drinking fountain. He had just started humming a tune to himself when Gynu finally came out of the classroom.

“Hello, Heca. How are you today?” said Gynu as he approached Heca.

“Pretty good, I guess. Why?” responded Heca as he slowly stood up.

“No reason. Y'know, you took a bunch of money from our friends today. Are you gonna pay that back tomorrow?”

“Nah, I think I'll keep it. I could use the pocket change.”

“In that case,” said Gynu angrily, clenching his fist, “I'll *make* you pay them back.”

“Was that a threat? You know, my dad is in the Galaxy Knights. If you hurt me, he'll put you-”

The remainder of Heca's sentence was interrupted by the sound of Gynu punching him in the face. Heca stumbled backwards, hitting his head against the wall. Heca grabbed the drinking fountain, dazed. Gynu stepped back into the center of the hallway and towards the classroom, surprised by his own actions.

“You... hit pretty hard,” said Heca, slowly walking into the center of the hallway, across from Gynu. “But... I bet you don't have any magic.”

Heca held his right arm out towards the drinking fountain. Water came out of the spout, as if it had turned on by its own accord. Instead of arcing into the drain, however, the stream of water floated towards Heca's outstretched hand, and around his back. Heca pointed his left hand at Gynu as a large, floating bubble of water formed behind him. A coin-sized disk of water came out of the bubble, and shot towards Gynu. Gynu shut his eyes as the disk hit his left cheek and flew past, into the distance. Gynu suddenly felt a powerful stinging sensation, feeling like he just got the world's worst paper cut. He screamed in pain.

“Yup, no magic. Looks like you're gonna be the one paying up! Well, at least you would, if you had any money to pay.”

Heca shot another disk, which Gynu dodged- however, a third disk was close behind, and cut Gynu on the hand. Gynu screamed again.

“Ooh, poor Gynu!” taunted Heca as he continued to shoot out disks. “What, are you going to call for your mommy? Oh, wait... you don't have one anymore, do you?”

“Shut up!” shouted Gynu, as his ear was scratched.

“I overheard my grandma talking about it on the phone a few months ago. She wondered what your mom was even doing driving around in the middle of the night...”

“SHUT UP!” shouted Gynu, now running towards Heca. Heca shot a larger water disk than normal aimed at Gynu's neck when Suzigu came out of the classroom.

“Gynu, what's going on? Are we going to start walking home soon?”

Gynu turned to look at his sister, dodging the disk entirely in the process. The disk continued on its

journey until it hit Suzigu's shirt, carving a deep gash in the left side of her chest before splashing on the floor behind her. Suzigu stood stunned for a moment before she began bawling her eyes out.

“S... sorry! It... it was an accident!” said Heca nervously. Gynu's eyes filled with pure rage.

“I'm fine with you being an annoying jerk,” said Gynu, turning back towards Heca. “I'm fine with you bullying our friends. I'm fine with you scratching me up. But nobody- NOBODY hurts my sister!”

Gynu's hands began to glow a bright scarlet, increasing in intensity to a blinding level. Gynu pointed his hands at Heca. Two jets of red-hot flame shot out of Gynu's palms, hitting Heca in the cheeks. Heca was blasted back and into a wall, as his cheeks continued to burn intensely. An alarm went off, and sprinklers throughout the hallway activated. The door to the teacher's lounge opened, and a dozen faculty members rushed out to survey the situation. Five took Heca out through the back door of the building. Another took a cell phone out of his pocket and began to dial as he followed the first five outside. One pulled the fire extinguisher off the wall, and ran outside. One more ran down the hallway that led to the nurse's office, and the remaining four led Gynu into Mrs. Cuderafi's classroom.

Suzigu was alone in the hallway- crying, bleeding, and soaking wet. After a few minutes, she collected herself and walked out the front door of the building, to begin her long march home alone.

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Gynu sat waiting in his desk in Mrs. Cuderafi's classroom, covered in bandages and fear. A first aid kit lay open on the desk next to him, with only bandage wrappers and an empty bottle of disinfectant as evidence to the kit's recent use. Mrs. Cuderafi sat at her desk, another teacher stood at the back of the room, and a third teacher stood by the door. Each of the adults had a fire extinguisher within arms' reach.

There was a knock at the door, and the nearest teacher opened it. A tall man with a chiseled jaw walked in. He had fair skin, and short, spiky, blonde hair. He wore round spectacles and a three piece brown tweed suit- but the sleeves were slightly too short, revealing traces of what looked to be tattoos on his arms. On his right arm was a green curve that was clearly the start of some circle. On his left, there were two black lines, as if someone tried to perforate his wrist, but gave up halfway through. He wore a band that looked similar to a wristwatch around his right bicep, but instead of a clock face, the band had a representation of a thermometer, shaped in plastic in a crude, cartoony style.



“Gynu?” said the man. Gynu looked up at him. “I’m Mr. Nujubolo. Heca’s father?”

With fear in his eyes, Gynu began to clamber out of his chair. The faculty all reached for their extinguishers.

“Woah! Easy! I’m not here to hurt you. I just want to talk. I know you didn’t mean to hurt Heca.” said Mr. Nujubolo in a calming voice.

Gynu slowly sat back down in his chair as Mr. Nujubolo approached him.

“Is Heca... dead?”

“No! Goodness me, no. He’ll have some cool scars, but otherwise he’ll be fine. Don’t worry about him. I’m glad you’re okay too, Gynu. Your teachers made a good call with that disinfectant - I don’t trust that public school water supply...”

“Are you gonna put me in jail?”

Mr. Nujubolo laughed as he turned around the seat in front of Gynu, before sitting down.

“Is that what Heca’s been telling you? Galaxy Knights don’t put people in jail. Well, ok, we do, but never anyone your age. Got it?”

Gynu nodded. Mr. Nujubolo rolled up his sleeves to his elbows, revealing the remainder of his tattoos. On his right arm were a series of four gauges, none of which had their functionalities labeled, but all of which had a thin line pointing towards the “zero” position. On his left arm were eight zeroes, all stylized to look like digital clock numbers. Mr. Nujubolo extended his arms, pointing his hands at Gynu.

“Now, I need you to do the same thing you did to Heca to my hands, if you can,” said Mr. Nujubolo. “Shoot fire at me as hard as you’re able to. I want to see how strong your magic is.”

“Won’t that hurt you?”

“Don’t worry,” said Mr. Nujubolo with a wink. “My son isn’t the only one in the family with magic powers. I won’t get hurt.”

Gynu slowly raised his hands to point at Mr. Nujubolo's. He took a deep breath as his hands started to glow a bright scarlet. Just like before, jets of fire blasted out of Gynu's hands, this time white-hot instead of red. As the fire hit Mr. Nujubolo's hands, the area of skin affected emitted a purple glow, and the artwork depicted in the tattoos began to change. The numbers rose quickly, and two of the dials started pointing to the right.

*“Hmm... so he's outputting about  $1.2 \times 10^{12}$  Joules per second at his maximum,”* thought Mr. Nujubolo. *“Sweet Lumpy. That's about one fiftieth the energy output of an atomic bomb, every second! If he used even an ounce of his full power on my son, I would no longer have one. If this is the kind of strength his magic has at ten years old... what will he be able to do as an adult?!”*

Mr. Nujubolo looked at his left arm, which was now a series of nines.

“Thank you, Gynu. You can stop now.”

Gynu stopped shooting fire, and the glow faded from around his hands. The numbers began their slow descent back to zero.

“What's your life like at home, Gynu? What does your dad do for a living?”

“He worked in a gift shop for a while, but he quit a couple months ago after mom died...”

“Ah yes, I did hear. I'm sorry for your loss. Gynu, do you like superheroes?”

Gynu nodded.

“Have you ever wanted to be one?”

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The sun was setting as Suzigu walked up the stairs arrived at the door to her apartment building. Her clothes were mostly dry, although her cheeks were not. She punched her code in the entrance door, shambled to the end of the hallway, and slowly climbed up the stairs to the third floor. Suzigu turned a corner and arrived at apartment 309. She took a key out of her pocket and unlocked the door. Finally, Suzigu climbed over a pile of notices and stepped into the living room.

The room was dark, save for the soft light flickering off of the nearby television set. Across from the television was a large, cushioned chair, with a small table next to it. The table had one brown bottle that was partially filled, alongside two empty ones and a tv remote. A hairy man with a protruding gut was seated in the chair. He stared at the television, eyes vacant, not even reacting to the sound of the door.

“I’m home, dad!” shouted Suzigu.

“Hm,” said Mr. Ludi. “Dinner?”

Suzigu sighed. “In just a second!”

Suzigu walked into the kitchen area, opened the fridge, and pushed aside an army of bottles to take out two of the three microwavable personal pizzas she had left in there to thaw that morning. She placed the pizzas on the stovetop, then opened the closet. She took out a sticker-covered stepladder, opened it in front of the stove, and climbed up. Suzigu opened one of the pizza boxes and unwrapped it, then pressed the button to open the microwave oven door. She put the pizza in the microwave and closed the door. She reached over to the buttons with her left hand to punch in the cook time, wincing in pain from the cut she had gotten earlier. Suzigu clutched her heart with her cold hand as she turned to her father.

“Dad, after dinner, can you help me with my homework?”

“That’s your brother’s job, Suzigu. Remember?” said Mr. Ludi, his eyes affixed to the television screen.

Tears welled up in Suzigu’s eyes.

“Gynu... didn’t come home today,” said Suzigu between sniffles. “He got in a fight, and... and... I think he might be in big trouble!”

“Huh. That’s a shame.” said Mr. Ludi in a disinterested tone of voice. “Dinner ready yet?”

“No,” said Suzigu, as she looked back at the time remaining on the microwave. The cordless phone next to the stovetop began to ring. Suzigu looked at the phone. An unknown number. Suzigu picked up the phone and pushed the talk button.

“Ludi residence, Suzigu speaking,” said Suzigu in as cheerful a voice as she could manage.

An intimidating, yet friendly voice came out of the receiver. “Hello. May I speak with your father, please?”

Suzigu stepped down the stepladder and walked into the living room area, where she handed her father the phone.

“It's for you,” she said.

Mr. Ludi took the phone as Suzigu walked back to the kitchen area.

“Speaking,” said Mr. Ludi.

“Hmm.”

“Well, the fewer midgets running around this place, the better. Fine.”

“Ugh.... the building's fax machine is downstairs...”

“Yeah, yeah, I'll sign it. Just... give me a minute to get down there.”

Mr. Ludi hung up the phone and tossed it aimlessly to the side, spilling his drink in the process. He slowly slid out of his chair until his feet landed on the ground. He then pushed up on his armrests until he was standing up. Mr. Ludi stretched his arms above his head, walking out of the door to the apartment. Suzigu was left alone once more, with only the hum of the microwave oven to keep her company.

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The sun shined over Mantor Beach Elementary School the next day. Suzigu walked into Mrs. Cuderafi's classroom alone, completely downtrodden. She sat down in the middle of the classroom, next to the empty desk that would normally house Gynu. The bell rang indicating the start of class. Mrs. Cuderafi got up from her desk and stood in front of the class.

“Good morning, children!”

“Good morning, Mrs. Cuderafi.”

“Today, we have a very special guest. As you can see, Heca is out sick today, but his dad has decided to talk to the class about his job at the Galaxy Knights. Everyone give a warm welcome to Mr. Nujubolo!”

The door opened, and Mr. Nujubolo walked in, with Gynu in tow. Gynu's uniform looked brand new, tailored specifically for him. Gynu rushed to his desk. Mr. Nujubolo pulled his son's empty desk away from the front row and awkwardly squeezed into the child-sized chair, backwards.

“Hey kids. I'm Mr. Nujubolo, and I'm cool- just like you. I'm the president of the local chapter of an organization called the Galaxy Knights. The Galaxy Knights are an elite crime-fighting group. Imagine a security company or a spy agency, but with more superpowers. Our job is to keep you all safe from the most dangerous things out there- supervillains, legions of evil, really big meteors, etcetera. Nobody in this room is bad enough for us to go after. Even if you all started beating up your teacher, I wouldn't come down here to arrest you. Got it?”

The children nodded.

“Also, what my son did to you is bullying, plain and simple. Now, Heca's learned his lesson, and he won't try and push you around anymore- but if anyone extorts you like that again, or does anything mean to a fellow classmate, you need to tell your teacher. Understand?”

The children nodded once more.

“Good. I have one more announcement to make. Some of you may have heard rumors of what one of your classmates did yesterday afternoon. Well, I'm here to tell you that all those rumors are true.”

“Wow, Gynu!” shouted Tebe. “I can't believe you really turned your toes into snakes! That certainly was the most unbelievable thing I heard about your fight yesterday!”

“Ok, *some* of the rumors may have been false,” chuckled Mr. Nujubolo. “But the point remains that yes, your friend Gynu does have magic powers. Because of this, I have offered him a position in the Galaxy Knights. By this time next week, Gynu will be training with the best and brightest magic users out there in our state of the art facilities- so be sure to say your goodbyes before we head off.

Well, catch you on the flip side.”

Mr. Nujubolo struggled his way out of the chair, then walked out of the classroom door. The recess bell rang, and all the children got up to head out the classroom's back door. Gynu led the pack, with a group of his classmates fawning over him. Suzigu was the last one out. She grabbed the volleyball out of the crate, before noticing that Gynu was already at the benches, surrounded by his new posse. Suzigu walked over to the corner of the playground and sat in the bushes, volleyball in her lap, and moped alone. Meanwhile, the kids all began to pester Gynu.

“So after next week, you won't ever have to go to school again?” said Hualu. “Cool!”

“Nah, it's not all that great,” replied Gynu. “Mr. Nujubolo said that boring ol' school stuff is part of my training too. I just won't have to go to school *here*.”

“You're so lucky you got those cool fire powers! Man, I wish I thought of standing up to Heca...” said Mamu.

“Mr. Nujubolo says that being lucky isn't really a part of it. It's all 'bout how 'in-tuned' you are with your emotions, and how creative you are. If someone else got in that fight, they would have got a completely different power, or none at all. Also, he said I probably would have gotten the powers anyway when I got older- maybe if I got in some different fight in high school or whatever.”

“Where is the Galaxy Knights base? Is it that really big building next to the beach?” asked Cobequ.

“That's just the local base. I'm gonna be living in the *big* base. Mr. Nujubolo said it's a secret where that one is, but it's somewhere *really* far away.”

“Aww man... I wanted to visit you over summer break!”

“Yeah, you're not going to get to see me again for a long time- unless you can run *super* fast!”

The children all laughed at this- all except for Suzigu, who was listening in to the entire conversation. She began to cry once more- silently, as she neither wanted nor thought she could get anyone's attention. A vast sorrow overcame Suzigu, unlike any she had ever felt before. Her heart felt as though it had been infected by pure loneliness.

Suddenly, a black dot appeared on her clothes, just above where her heart lay. The texture of the clothes beneath was completely lost to the intensity of this darkness. The dot began to spread to the rest of her body- slowly at first, and accelerating as it grew. Soon the shadow had covered the grass around Suzigu, and not long afterward it had covered the entire playground.

The children screamed as the sky itself turned black, leaving only a bright white spot to indicate where the sun used to be. Mrs. Cuderafi opened the door she was standing next to, and shouted for everyone to get inside. The children stumbled over each other as they made their way to the door, which was only perceptible by the two white rectangles on the ceiling of the classroom. Mrs. Cuderafi closed the door once all the children were inside- all except for Suzigu, who was still crying in her corner of the playground.

Nine children and a small woman in her thirties stood in a darkened room in silence. They could see that the lights were still on, but they weren't shining on anything. Mrs. Cuderafi slowly worked her way across the classroom, opened the door, and shouted into a black hallway.

“MR. NUJUBOLO! ARE YOU STILL HERE?”

“What's going on?” asked another teacher, who had also peeked into the hallway. Did a fuse blow? Do we need to call maintenance?”

“I think this is beyond maintenance,” said Mrs. Cuderafi.

“Your assessment is correct,” bellowed the unmistakable voice of Mr. Nujubolo. “This isn't your average everyday darkness. This is... some sort of magic attack, I'd imagine.”

“What do we do?” asked one of the other faculty members.

“First, we need to get everyone safe. What's the most fortified room in the school?”

“We go to the cafeteria for our tornado and lockdown drills,” suggested Mrs. Cuderafi.

“Hopefully that'll do. Take your students there, in a careful and orderly fashion. I need to make a phone call.”

The teachers hurried back to their classrooms. Nujubolo reached into his back pocket and pulled

out a touch-screen cell phone. He pressed a button at the bottom, and the screen lit up.

*“So my screen and the lightbulbs are still visible,”* thought Mr. Nujubolo. *“This ability must be forcing particles to absorb any light they would normally reflect or scatter, but it doesn't do anything to particles that emit light.”*

Nujubolo dialed one of his favorited contacts, and held the phone to his ear while walking towards the cafeteria.

“Peba? It's Lexono. I'm in a bit of a situation here. My son's school is under a magical attack. I need you to send some people over to figure out this ability, and help keep these kids safe from whoever the attacker is.”

“Well,” said the woman on the other end, “I have some good news and bad news. The good news is that your son's school isn't under attack.”

“What's the bad news?”

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“Welcome back to our live coverage of the Zoramo City Fashion Show, right here on sunny, sunny Mantor Beach. We have with us world-famous designer Mofote Qejoliju, here to talk about his upcoming spring collection. Mofote, will you tell us more about the outfits we'll be seeing here momentarily?”

“Well, Feludi, my theme this year is visibility. When you wear these clothes, you're not trying to hide from anyone. You're telling the world 'I am here. This is who I am. Pay attention to me.’”

“Sounds great. Well, sounds like they're about to start the walk- so let's take a look at that.”

Photographers aimed their cameras at the catwalk, the volume of the music increasing. Just as one foot came out from behind the curtain, an inky-black shadow enveloped the stage, the crowd, the news desk, and eventually the entire beach.

“...I need to stop drinking rubbing alcohol when I'm on the air...” said Muko.



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Mr. Nujubolo entered the cafeteria alongside the final group of students.

“So you're saying the entire kingdom is covered in this shadow?”

“Yes sir,” said Peba. “I got a call earlier from our friends in Fort Sikode, and I checked with the Knights on Doveca Island. Nothing but darkness.”

“That's not good at all...”

“We're also getting reports of the shadow extending into the sea. This may be a planet-wide attack. In addition, the crew and I tried putting up a magic barrier in our office, but the shadows still got in. Whoever this user is, they're more powerful than the twenty of us combined.”

“Yikes! Well, try to triangulate the source of this, in any way you can. I have no idea what this attacker could be planning, but it definitely isn't a surprise party.”

“Understood, sir.”

Nujubolo closed the door behind him as he entered the cafeteria. In an instant, the lighting in the cafeteria returned to its normal fluorescent hum. The children cheered- all except for Gynu, who seemed very worried about something. Mr. Nujubolo looked around the room, then brought the cell phone back to his ear.

“Peba? I have some new information. The shadow can only reach places where light could reach normally. I'm in a room with no windows, and the lights are normal in here. Maybe you can use that to help locate our assailant.”

“That's very helpful, sir. Now, I'll make sure to only check outdoors, plus any buildings with outside windows. Really narrows it down, sir.”

Suddenly, there was a hand pulling at Nujubolo's jacket. He looked down and saw Gynu, with a fearful look on his face.

“Mr. Nujubolo? There's a big problem...” said Gynu.

“Look, I know you want to help, Gynu, but you haven't even gone through training yet. Don't worry, we can handle things.”

“Sir,” said Peba, “the Knights in the castle are reporting that Queen Mitika is getting restless. She's saying that we should call in backup from up top...”

“Let's avoid calling HQ until it's absolutely necessary. We don't want to make more of a scene than there already is.”

The sound of a news broadcast emanated from a radio one of the teachers brought.

“...and we are getting reports of multiple-car pileups around the city. It's impossible to tell how many vehicles are involved in these collisions, but the accidents are getting worse by the second. Emergency workers are trying their best to pull survivors from the wreckage, but it's uncertain how many are being rescued and how many are being skipped over. For more, we go to senior traffic analyst Bageni Zecona with the eye-in-the-sky traffic copter. Bageni?”

Three seconds of static played.

“...Well, we all hope that Bageni is all right.”

“Sir, some good news,” said Peba. “Many of the naval units are reporting that light is working properly for them. It seems the shadow is only covering half the globe.”

“That *is* good news. Well, now you just need to find the center of the circle. Keep working at it-”

“There's something else... the shadow isn't a perfect circle. It ebbs and flows seemingly at random. It's almost as if the user has control over which surfaces are covered, but they just don't have the-”

“...Training,” said Mr. Nujubolo as he held a hand to his forehead. “The ability was so strong, we assumed it was the result of years of practice and planning. When in reality, it's an insanely powerful new magic user. So, we're looking for someone who just felt strong emotions of some kind- either sorrow or loss, given the nature of the ability. That may help us once you figure out the location.”

“Please, Mr. Nujubolo!” said Gynu, tears now welling up. “It's urgent!”

“In a minute, Gynu.”

“Sir, our calculations are finished.”

“Go.”

“By averaging the coordinates of the borders, we figured out a rough midpoint. The magic user should be somewhere near... uhh, sir?”

“What is it?”

“The computer's giving us *your* position.”

“I can't find Suzigu!” sobbed Gynu. “When the darkness started, we all came inside, but she... might be hurt or... or...”

Mr. Nujubolo dropped his phone, then turned to Gynu and put his hands on his shoulders.

“Right. We need to find your sister, pronto. Where did you see her last, the playground?”

Gynu nodded, tears still flowing down his cheeks.

“Let's go then. Take my hand, and try not to trip.”

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Sirens and screams wailed in the distance as Suzigu continued to cry, alone on the playground. A door opened, and two pairs of footsteps stepped out onto the soft grass.

“SUZIGU!!” shouted Gynu through his tears.

“Suzigu, are you out here?” said Mr. Nujubolo. “Say something so we can find you!”

Suzigu wiped away her tears and opened her eyes.

“Wh... what's going on? Where are you guys? I can't see anything!”

“That's sort of the issue,” said Mr. Nujubolo, walking towards the sound of Suzigu's voice as Gynu

followed. “There's magic covering everything with shadow. Your magic, Suzigu.”

“Me? But... I don't have magic!”

“Nobody has magic until they do. You created this shadow, Suzigu. You can turn it off!”

“I... I can't...”

“You can! We believe in you!”

“NO I CAN'T!” sobbed Suzigu. “I'm too... alone. Every time I try to turn it off, I think about watching Gynu get taken away and it's... it's like the shadow is the only thing keeping me safe from seeing that!”

A pair of dim red flames suddenly appeared in the air. The flames grew and shaped, until they took the form of Gynu. The flame-Gynu walked forward and extended its arm.

“Hold my hand, Suzigu,” said Gynu. “We can fix this the way we always fix things – together!”

“Gynu, are you sure-”

“Don't worry, Mr. Nujubolo. I won't hurt her. Got it, Suzigu? I won't hurt you! Not now, not ever!”

Suzigu's sniffles faded as she slowly reached for Gynu's hand. She grabbed it. It felt like grabbing a warm blanket. Immediately, a comforting heat enveloped Suzigu's body. Her heart felt like it was melting, and she closed her eyes, smiling for the first time in days. Slowly but surely, the shadow encompassing the world faded away. Suzigu opened her eyes, now full of light, and she stood up while taking in her surroundings. Gynu pulled her into an embrace as the fire around his body faded.

“I love you, Suzigu,” said Gynu, beginning to cry once more.

“I love you too, Gynu,” replied Suzigu. “But... won't you still be leaving next week? You're still going to leave me all alone!”

“What?! We were never going to abandon you!” said Mr. Nujubolo, as the familial hug ended. “Gynu refused to go anywhere without you accompanying him. I did instruct your father to tell you that- although, in retrospect, it was naive of me to think he'd follow through. Well, it's a moot point

anyway.”

“What do you mean?” asked Suzigu.

Mr. Nujubolo extended his arm for a handshake.

“Suzigu,” said Mr. Nujubolo. “Do you want to be a Galaxy Knight?”

THE END