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BLITZERS
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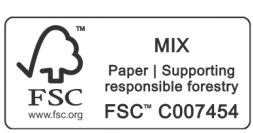
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To Maudie, most excellent Cat.

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BLITZERS

THE FIGHT IS ON!

This year's must-have game!

TRAIN THEM! ARM THEM! FIGHT THEM!

»» Advanced AI system! ««

»» Virtual training world! ««

»» Custom death blows! ««

SMASH YOUR ENEMIES! CRUSH YOUR FOES!

DESTROY!!!!!

Blitzers Inc. is a subsidiary of McTurk Systems. By using a Blitzer device, you agree to all terms and conditions, now and forever

1
Chew Lip

The first thing to say is: Jay started it.

I know he's my big brother, and he was trying to help. But, no joke, everything that happened is down to him – the battle with Mel, the sneaking around, the giant robot fight, all that stuff on the news … *Everything* is because of him.

Yeah.



"So … is it a real Blitzer then?" asks Tan.

"Of course it is!" I say. Then I frown. "I mean, I think so."

I examine my new device. It *is* real, isn't it?

It *looks* real. It looks like every other Blitzer – square, plastic, about the size of a Post-it pad, with a screen and some buttons. Blitzers don't look very exciting, but they're the latest thing. They're *everything*.

Blitzers are virtual fighting creatures. Ages ago, there were these things called Tamagotchis – cute virtual animals you had to feed and look after. Blitzers are like those, but *not* cute. You don't feed them; you train them to *fight*. And each Blitzer is different – how they look, how they fight, their special moves.

They're all anyone talks about at school, and if you don't have one, you're right out of it. When new Blitzers arrive in shops, parents actually fight over them. Every kid has one!

Every kid but me anyway.

"Maybe for your birthday, Danny," Mum said when I begged her to get me one. "That's only a month away."

"A *month*!" I wailed. "That's *for ever*. Can't it be like an early present? *Please*?"

But we're skint. And Mum's already working two shifts – she doesn't have *time* to fight all the other parents. It's rubbish being the only kid in school without one. Even Tan has one, and she's even less cool than me.

But then this morning, before school, my brother Jay handed me an old shopping bag and said, "Hey, I got you one of them Blitzer things."

I was like: *YASSS! Finally*.

But now I'm not sure.

"You get fakes," says Tan. "Real Blitzers have a hologram, see?" She shows me the hologram on the back of her Blitzer.

I check mine. It has a hologram, but it's a bit worn.

"No, it's real," I say. I switch the Blitzer on, and it plays a little tinny tune. "See?"

"Hmm," says Tan.



It's a bit battered compared to Tan's. But Tan's Blitzer is rare – it's a Silver Edition, with stripes on the case and bonus skins. She didn't even pay extra for it. It was just one of the specials they sometimes mix in with normal ones.

"So what's its name?" Tan says.

"I dunno. Where does it tell you?"

Tan shows me her screen. It looks like the deck of an old shipwreck, with worn ropes and rotted wood. Something is standing on the deck, staring out at us – some kind of human … robot … crab? That sounds weird. But it's human shaped, only it has a wide, square head, a big body, huge pincer arms and armour plating. And shark teeth, for some reason.

Tan clicks the corner of the screen, and a name appears: *HOOK JAW*.

"Oh," I say. "Yeah. Mine is …" I click the screen and peer at it. "Um. 'Chew Lip'."

Tan screws up her face and peers at me from behind her thick glasses. "*Tulip*? Like the flower?"

"No, Chew Lip!" I say. "Chew … Lip?"

"Oh," says Tan. "Well, that's … cool, I guess. Show me?"

I show her the screen.

Chew Lip's world is a forest. Not a scary, dark, spooky forest. Just a nice one, with pretty trees and friendly squirrels. Chew Lip is sitting on a log. Chew Lip is light blue and looks a bit like a tubby robot bear made from cubes. Its mouth is curved into a weird smile.

"What is that?" asks Tan.

"Um. A bear?" I guess.

Tan shakes her head. "Mate, that's a *teddy bear*."

"It's a wild bear!" I snap. "Or something. I don't know yet. I just got it."

"Well ... what level is it?" says Tan. "Hook Jaw is Level 15. When it reaches 20, I get bonus attacks."

"I haven't fought anyone yet," I say.

"Yeah, you gotta train it first," Tan says, and clicks on her screen. The shipwreck turns into a gym, with training dummies for Hook Jaw to fight. "Like this." She drags her finger across the screen, and Hook Jaw stomps over to a dummy and attacks it. "If your Blitzer doesn't do the right thing, you zap them, see?"

Tan presses a button, and a hand appears on the screen and points at Hook Jaw, firing a tiny lightning bolt. Hook Jaw roars in fury and attacks the dummy harder, smashing it to pieces. "And if it does well, you stroke it." She presses another button, and the hand comes down and strokes Hook Jaw. It seems to calm down. "Easy."

I nod. "OK ..."

"What's its special move?" Tan asks. "Mine can flood the arena!"

"Um ..." I don't know. Chew Lip hasn't done anything like that yet. "When I turned it on this morning, I think it was painting ..."

Tan gives me a look. "Painting," she replies.

"Um ... yeah."

"Hmm," says Tan again. She shrugs. "Want to do a practice battle?"

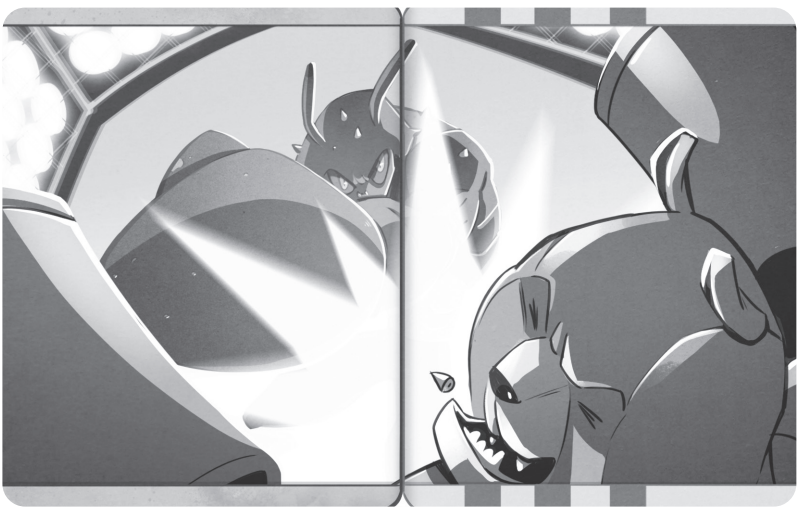
She holds up her device, and I do the same, and we click them together. They've got magnets, and they join to make one display.

The display shows the arena.

The arenas are picked at random. It might be a warehouse, or a forest, or the side of a volcano ... This one is like an old Roman

gladiator circus – there's sand on the ground, a blistering sun and rows of people cheering. Chew Lip is on one side of the arena and Hook Jaw on the other.

Hook Jaw roars and raises its pincer arms. Chew Lip stands and watches. Hook Jaw stomps forward and *whacks* Chew Lip across the face.



"Yes!" shouts Tan. On screen, the crowd roars. Chew Lip staggers back. Hook Jaw moves forward again and stabs at Chew Lip with its claw.

"Come on – fight back!" I shout. But there's nothing I can do. That's the thing about Blitzers – you can train them, but once the fight starts, it's up to them. All you can do is teach them the right things and hope they remember.

It's a short fight. Hook Jaw finishes with its special move, calling up a giant wave that washes Chew Lip away. The crowd cheers.

WINNER: HOOK JAW says the screen.

We unclick our devices, and they switch back to their home screens. Tan's screen shows Hook Jaw striding around on its deck, lifting its arms in a victory pose. On my screen, Chew Lip is sitting in the forest, looking surprised and a bit wet.

Tan frowns.

"Yeah," she says. "Yours is rubbish."