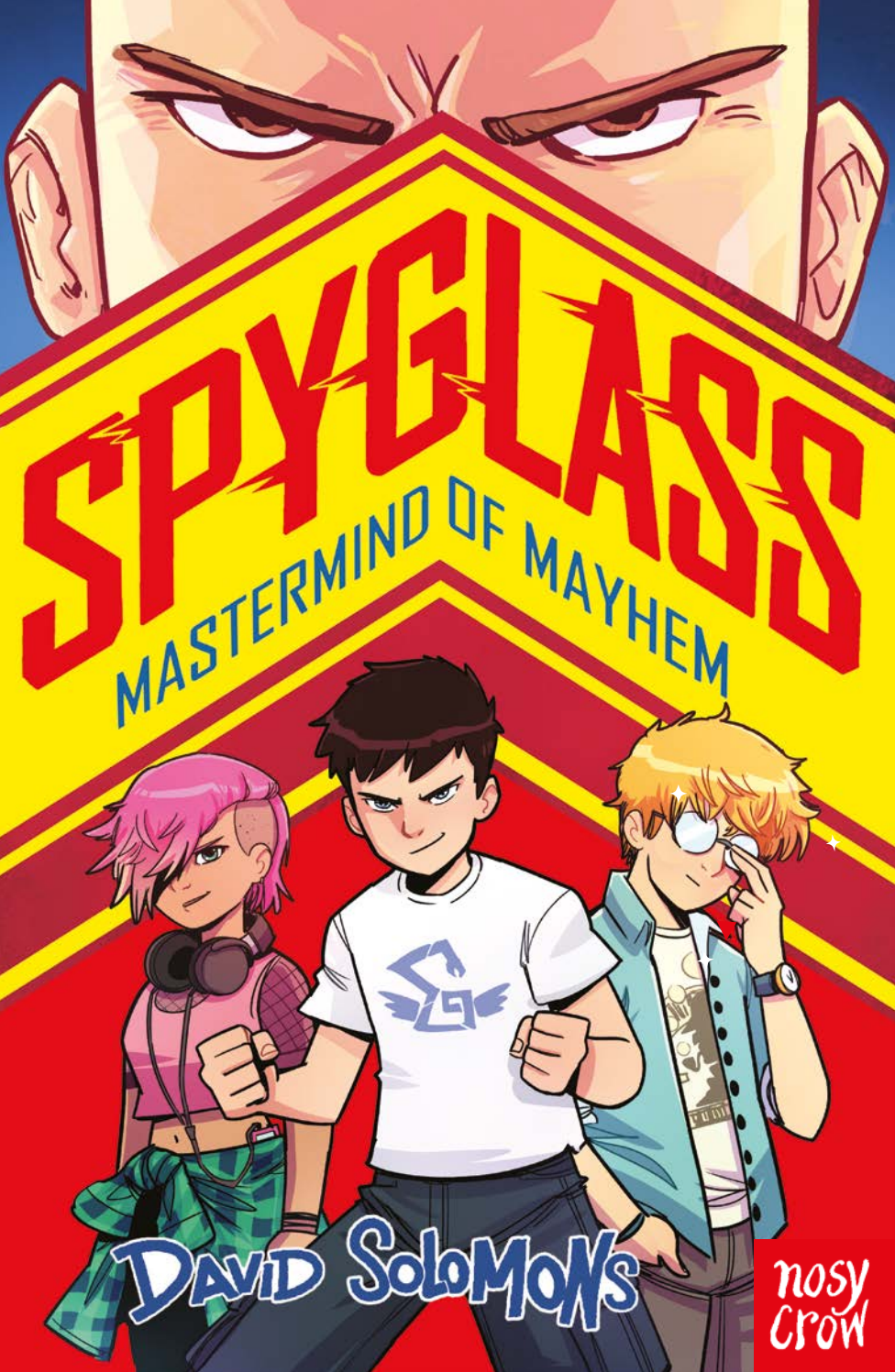

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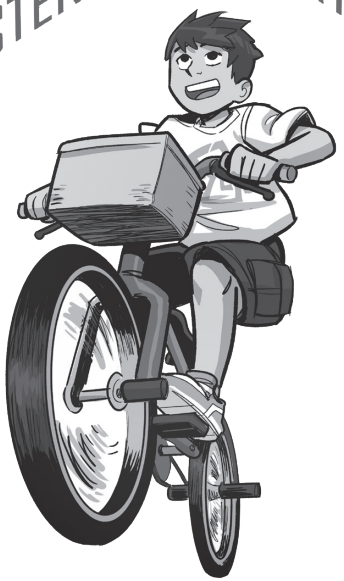
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A Beginner's Guide to Ruling the Galaxy



SPYGLASS

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DAVID SOLOMONS

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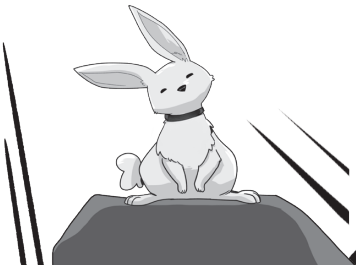
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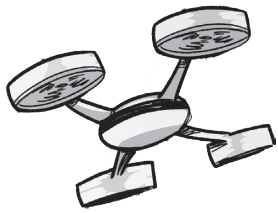




For Luke and Lara.
I've been expecting you.

D.S.





1
WELCOME TO GOLDENCLIFF (SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED)



Nobody knew it yet, but the fate of the world would be decided on a sizzling Tuesday afternoon. It didn't look like the kind of day anything important might happen. The sun beat down on GoldenCliff Holiday Park with the kind of intensity that could fry an egg on a beach towel. Rows of glinting caravans sat baking in the heat, like giant toasters ready to pop out sunburned holidaymakers. Mums and dads orchestrated the chaos of their families with the precision of air traffic controllers on their sixth coffee. Kids swarmed the ice-cream van. Teens lay about like forgotten laundry, barely moving except to scroll their phones. Seagulls circled overhead,

calculating their next snack with terrifying accuracy.

It was the first week of the school summer holidays, and Adam Stickland was stuck behind the counter of the so-called GoldenCliff Corner Shop – a name that bugged him every time, since the shop wasn't anywhere near a corner. It was slap bang in the middle of the park. He had been cooped up in there for hours, envying the guests who popped in to stock up on snacks and beach gear before heading out to enjoy their day. He, on the other hand, had responsibilities.

His mum and dad had bought the caravan park five years ago and poured all of their energy – and savings – into making it a success. They were constantly coming up with money-making wheezes. So far, these included a minigolf course, an outdoor cinema, a small petting zoo (home to a deeply serious, fluffy white rabbit named Hoppenheimer), a kids' adventure playground, swan pedalos and the shop, which sold everything from organic jam to organic sunscreen to organic steak puddings (provided by local artisanal butcher For Your Pies Only). As well as manning the till, Adam's chores also included oiling the swings in the playground, maintaining the seaworthiness of the pedalos, feeding Hoppenheimer and fixing anything that broke. Which was everything. All the time.

Adam was the park's secret fix-it genius. If something whirred, beeped or made a weird clicking sound, he could sort it. His skills didn't come from books or school – they came from sheer survival. His dad meant well, but his DIY attempts usually ended in disaster. One time, he "fixed" a tap and turned it into a water fountain. Another time, he jammed the printer so badly it coughed up paper like it had the flu. That's when Adam stepped in. Thanks to a YouTube channel called *Licence to Drill*, he taught himself everything from unblocking toilets to rewiring fairy lights. While his dad made things worse with the wrong screws and bolts done up too tight, Adam quietly became the real hero of GoldenCliff – one clever fix at a time.

Today's challenge was a contraption that had seen better days – the park's prized popcorn machine, which had chosen this moment to churn out charred kernels instead of fluffy white clouds of snackable gold.

Standing behind the counter, Adam fiddled inside the popcorn machine with a screwdriver, a paperclip, and the kind of concentration usually reserved for bomb disposal. A stubborn wire finally clicked into place, and the machine let out a hopeful whirr.

A second later – *pop!*

He grinned as the first fluffy kernel burst into the tray.



Victory. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, smudging a streak of grease across his eyebrow.

No one noticed, of course. No one ever did. But if GoldenCliff Holiday Park had a secret tech wizard keeping things running, his name was Adam Stickland.

"Hey, Rocket," Adam said, peering under the counter.

His dog opened one eye, gave a lazy thump of his tail,

and went back to pretending he was on duty. With his glossy coat and noble expression, Rocket looked like he belonged on a poster for police dogs. In reality, he was mainly focused on one thing: snacks.

To Adam, that tail wag meant *loyal companion, reporting for service*. To Rocket, it meant *was that roast chicken I smelled, and will some of it be mine?*

"How long until they get here?" Adam wondered aloud.

Adam's friends Zada and Tyler were due to arrive this afternoon, and he had been waiting a whole year to see them again. The dog seemed to consider the question, then let out a soft bark before resting his head back down. Adam sighed and scratched him behind the ears. His friends' arrival couldn't come quickly enough.

Adam had learned the hard way that living on a holiday park wasn't all fun and games. In fact, most of the year was the opposite of fun. The off-season dragged on for months, with barely a tourist in sight and his parents glued to their laptops, trying to figure out how to bring people back.

That left Adam and Rocket to roam the empty beaches and cliff paths like two lonely explorers. Sometimes they'd wander into the nearby village of Flintlock for a change of scene, but Flintlock – perched on a hillside

above a horseshoe bay – was as pretty as it was boring.

It was the kind of village where it felt like aliens had abducted all the young people, leaving behind only friendly old folks who wanted to stop and chat. Adam knew more about arthritis than any thirteen-year-old reasonably should.

During term time, he caught the bus to school in the nearest town. It was far enough away that no one ever came to visit. So, he lived for summer. When the park filled up. When his friends came back.

Adam had met them – Zada and Tyler – five years ago, during the inaugural GoldenCliff Minigolf Challenge. The fifth hole had featured a volcano that, instead of a mild eruption as planned, exploded in a dramatic shower of confetti. Adam, Tyler and Zada had ducked for cover beneath the giant fairy toadstool on the sixth hole, shielding themselves from the colourful barrage like extras in a really low-budget disaster movie. Tyler still claimed theirs was the only friendship in history that began with paper lava and an oversized mushroom.

Adam called for Rocket, flipped the sign to CLOSED, and locked up the shop. Zada and Tyler would be here any minute. He and Rocket dodged through the busy caravan park, excitement buzzing in his chest. He scanned the crowd, searching for Zada's bright-red hair.

"Adam!"

A car pulled into the car park – and there she was, hanging out of the passenger window. But wait – her hair wasn't red any more. It was bright pink. Neon pink. And shaved on one side.

She shouted his name again, and he grinned, waving like mad. The car stopped. Zada jumped out and wrapped him in a bear hug that nearly knocked him over.

Zada loved neon. Today she wore a tropical-pink crop top and matching shorts, with electric-blue high-tops. For a second, Adam wondered if her head would glow in the dark. It looked like someone had dipped a lightning bolt in raspberry sherbet. Awesome. And slightly terrifying.

Right on cue, Tyler's taxi pulled up. While his mum, dad, and little sister wrestled bags from the boot, Tyler hopped out, looking slightly crumpled but grinning all the same. His sandy-blond hair stuck out in every direction, and his green eyes were hidden behind a pair of oversized sunglasses. He wore a T-shirt with *Werelock Holmes* on it – a comic-book hero who was a quiet librarian by day and a stylish, crime-fighting werewolf by full moon. Tyler also had on khaki cargo shorts with more pockets than a pool table, and black Converse that had clearly seen some action.

Adam didn't care much about fashion. He liked his faded T-shirt and scuffed shorts just fine. Which was lucky, because "new clothes" weren't exactly in the family budget. Every spare penny his parents saved went straight into the holiday park.

Tyler approached with the slow, deliberate strides of a man who had already lived a full, tiresome life and now just happened to be trapped in the body of a thirteen-year-old.

"I have finally arrived at GoldenCliff Holiday Park, where the fun is supposed to be endless and the journey here definitely was." He yawned and offered a weary but sincere fist bump to each of his friends. "Now, where were we?"

He said it as if their conversation had briefly been interrupted and not, as it was, that a year had passed since the three of them were last together. Since their last visit, they'd all finished Year Eight at different schools, stretched out a bit taller, and picked up a few extra worries. Which was exactly why this summer needed to be different – care-free, fun-packed, and absolutely unforgettable.

Zada returned the fist bump. "We were at the part where we start having fun!"

"Fun's been kind of on hold around here without you



guys," Adam admitted.

"Then I declare the summer of freedom officially open!" Zada said, raising both arms like she was launching a rocket.

"Whoa, can we tone down the excitement, please?" Tyler said. "This afternoon, I'm planning a full schedule of doing absolutely nothing. Sun lounger. Gentle breeze. Faint sound of waves. If it takes more effort than lifting an ice-cream cone, I'm out."

With that settled, the three of them started chatting about what they wanted to do that week. Adam could already feel something lifting, like summer had finally—

"Adam!"

His mum was waving from outside Reception, eyebrows doing that *urgent mum wiggle*. "Back to work, kiddo! Need you to make a delivery!"