



SPYGLASS

COLD FINGER



DAVID Solomons

nosy
crow

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Also by
DAVID SOLOMONS

Spyglass: Mastermind of Mayhem



My Brother is a Superhero

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My Evil Twin is a Supervillain

My Arch-Enemy is a Brain in a Jar

My Cousin is a Time Traveller

A Beginner's Guide to Ruling the Galaxy



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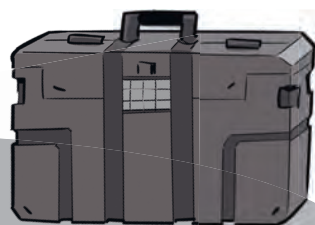
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For Luke and Lara.
Officially, this never happened.

D.S.



1

THIS WAS NOT IN THE BROCHURE



There was something deeply wrong with the Christmas tree.

For one thing, it was sweating. Long streaks of fake snow slid down its branches like it had just run a marathon in a fur coat. A small child was poking it with a candy cane and another was asking loudly why Santa had gone “melty”.

GoldenCliff Holiday Park had been hit by a Christmas warehouse explosion, courtesy of Adam Stickland’s relentlessly optimistic parents. In theory, Frostival (Ice and Easy Does It!) would save the family business. In practice, it was thirty degrees and rising. Adam’s dad

had insisted the festival would “put GoldenCliff back on the map”. He was correct, technically. The map now showed a large puddle where the ice rink used to be.

Adam, dressed as an elf and currently losing a slow battle with a pair of tights, dabbed his forehead with a mince-pie-stained napkin.

He was stationed in the Elf Hut – a plywood cabin painted like a gingerbread house, complete with foam liquorice and sticky curtains. His badge read *Joy Liaison*.

“Remind me again why I’m the one in tights and you get to nap?” he asked Rocket.

The dog lay under a collapsing inflatable snowman, tongue lolling. His expression said clearly: *I signed up for sausages, not this*.

Across the park, a speaker crackled to life and began playing “Jingle Bell Rock” at a volume that could strip paint. Somewhere behind the hot-chocolate stand, there was a *fzzzt-crack-thump*, followed by a puff of glittery steam.

The snow machine had just burst into flames.

Adam sprinted out, grabbed the nearest extinguisher and smothered the blaze. Foam hissed, steam rolled and the wreck wheezed its last festive gasp.

His mum appeared through the haze with the calm face of someone running a yoga class inside a volcano.

Floaty white kaftan, jangly bracelets, expression halfway between peace and panic.

“The snow-machine rental is non-refundable, Adam,” she said, misting a pensioner with lavender spray. “Can you fix it?”

He eyed the control panel. He could fix *almost* anything. Once, he’d repaired the dolphin ride with a whisk and paperclips, and the fairy lights with bits of karaoke mic. He’d even got the hot tap working again by jamming it with a jellybean. But this?

“Let’s just say it’s moved on to a higher form of decoration.”

His mum sighed and glided back towards the Elf Hut. Adam followed, brushing extinguisher foam from his sleeves.

Inside, she was already scrolling on her iPad and frowning at the line marked *Projected Frostival Revenue*.

“That’s six hundred pounds of slush down the drain,” she said. “If this flops it might put a slight wobble in the budget forecast.”

Adam knew she was downplaying it. If Frostival failed, they were finished. The family business was hanging on by a very thin and sparkly thread. He twisted his elf hat between his hands and kept quiet.

That was when his dad burst in – Hawaiian shirt with

Santa flamingos, red swim shorts, and the optimism of a man who'd never met a problem a marker pen couldn't solve. He carried a whiteboard scrawled in red capitals:

NEW PLAN: SUN-SLEIGH RACES!

"Good news, everyone!" he beamed. "Reindeer jousting is off – Gerald got concussed by a deckchair – but picture this! Santa Claus on a jet ski! Sunglasses, board shorts, joy from the surf! We reverse the snow machine. Ice slide! But, like, horizontal."

Adam glanced at the smoking wreck outside. "Tricky, seeing as it just exploded."

"Even better!" said Dad. "Sculpture garden. We rope it off, add a QR code, call it The Spirit of Winter Past!"

"Good luck finding anyone still willing to dress up," said Zada, stepping from behind a cardboard igloo like a glitter-coated commando. Her hair shone pink and silver; her shorts sparkled with stray baubles. "We lost the elf in zone B to heat rash, and two carol singers ran into the sea."

She waved a clipboard. "Also, the bubble machine's foaming again. It's either broken or achieved full robot consciousness."

Rocket thumped his tail in agreement.

"What are you wearing?" Adam asked, blinking at her T-shirt, which featured a cartoon yeti in sunglasses

captioned *Flake It Till You Make It*.

"Seasonally appropriate pain," she said. "Tinsel shorts. Do not recommend. Where's Tyler?"

Tyler shuffled in, Santa hat slumped over one ear, clutching a folding chair and half a mince pie. "The snack tent collapsed. I may never recover."

"From the shock?" Zada asked.

"From the custard."

He unfolded the chair, sat and groaned. "If I stop moving, tell my mum I gave my life for Christmas."

Mrs Stickland's headset crackled. She winced. "The pudding raffle just became a food fight."

At the same moment, Mr Stickland's walkie-talkie buzzed. "The candy-cane arch fell on the stilt walkers. One's upside down in the reindeer pen."

They exchanged a brisk nod and charged out in opposite directions like festive emergency responders.

"Mum's still trying to find the zen in the chaos," Adam said. "Dad's selling sun-powered sleigh races." He managed a weak smile. "So it's fine. Everything's fine."

He looked at his friends. "You two are meant to be managing the grotto queue."

Zada and Tyler had arrived three days ago for a holiday. Instead, they were now fully drafted into



Operation Keep GoldenCliff Afloat, paid in ice lollies and guilt.

"The grotto melted," said Tyler. "We've reclassified it as a sauna."

"Perfect," said Adam. "We can go into competition with that new spa. Call it the GoldenCliff Relax-and-Regret Package. Free flip-flops and heatstroke."

Zada snorted. "My mum went there for a Glow Alignment. Said the woman running it never blinks and calls everyone 'Radiant Being'."

"Anyone who says 'Namaste' at you during a fire drill is hiding something," said Tyler.

Adam thought of the spa up on the cliffs. His mum had already muscled in, supplying them with fruit boxes from the park shop and "emergency ice deliveries". When it came to new ventures, she was less businesswoman, more guided missile. He'd already cycled up there in the heat three times. Another run and he'd qualify as a spa treatment.

He was about to speak when his phone buzzed. He glanced down to see a single message. No emoji, just a name.

PROFESSOR GOODSPEED:

Come. Bring the others. It's waking up.

"That's not ominous at all," murmured Tyler.

Adam flipped the sign on the Elf Hut to *Back in 5*, gave the mince-pie soup a respectful nod and ran. Zada and Tyler were right behind him. He led the way, weaving past a toppled snowman, three tangled candy canes and a toddler earnestly licking what might once have been a chocolate reindeer but now looked more like a crime scene in foil.

The message sat heavy in his pocket.

It's waking up.

He didn't know what "it" was, not exactly, but the last time the professor had used that tone, Adam had ended up airborne, oil-smudged and mildly famous.

Behind them, "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" juddered to a halt mid-key-change, and someone shouted, "The trifle's escaping!"

Adam didn't look back. Whatever was waking up, it wasn't the jelly.

2 SIGNALS AND SILENCES



Spyglass Manor looked even grumpier than usual. Its turrets poked at the sky like accusing fingers, and its salt-streaked windows glared down at the path as Adam and the others arrived, their bikes wobbling from the heat. The place still seemed annoyed about losing Best Coastal Property to a yurt. Rocket trotted ahead, tail up, nose twitching, like he expected something to explode.

Zada hopped off her bike and winced. "I think the seat branded me."

"Better than what mine did," said Tyler. "I'm not sure the bike was *squeaking*. I think it was *pleading*."

Adam didn't answer. He was looking up at the house: