

Bad Guy to the Rescue

By Steve Groll

Two youths brought to alien world in an effort to save an dying people

Carter and Kat were sitting under their favorite shade tree talking about their new school year. They both agreed that they did not care much for their math teacher, Miss Homer. "She gives way too much homework," Kat complained as she rolled her green eyes.

"That's true, and she acts like she's mad all the time," the blond haired boy said.

"Maybe she's dealing with some personal problems."

Carter was just about to say something else when suddenly, the two best friends were covered in darkness so complete that they thought they had just gone blind. They shouted in fear and jumped up. As soon as they were on their feet, the darkness lifted. They found themselves on a dirt path winding through a thick strange jungle surrounded by plants of many colors and strange shapes. Standing in front of them was a very odd-looking man.

The children screeched, "Who are you?" at the same time.

The man had pale skin, and eyes that were almost black peering out of an angular face. He wore a long black trench coat, black, pointed leather boots, and a black, wide brimmed hat. "I take it you are Carter and Kat, also known as the partners?" (The two twelve-year-olds described their relationship as a partnership in the business of adventure.) The man asked in a breathy voice, "Do you mind if we sit?" Carter looked at Kat, shrugged, and then he sat back down. Reluctantly, Kat joined them.

"Do you know Guard?" Carter asked. (The Guardian is a powerful being who aided the children in their adventures beyond the dead forest.)

"Maybe he knows the Adversary," Kat said coldly. (The Adversary is an evil being who seeks to destroy the partners.)

"I know both," The man said. "The Guardian suggested that I meet with you. I agreed, so he brought you here. By the way, my name is Tolltooth. The Guardian seems to think that you may be able to help me with a problem I have. Frankly, I do not see how a couple of children from another world can help with the problems I and my people are facing. Nevertheless, I trust The Guardian and so here we are."

"What is it that you need help with?" asked Kat.

"My village is just around that bend." He pointed behind him up the path. My people are called the Graylongs and we are starving. Our crops have failed for the second year in a row, and there are no animals left in our forest that we can hunt. The predators that remain alive in the jungle are hungry too, and they are very dangerous. They have started attacking and eating our people whenever they can catch one alone. The predators have started coming into our town and taking our children. Eventually they will become so desperate that they will attack our village and kill us all; we will be too weak from hunger to defend ourselves. We do not know what to do. The Guardian seems to think that you would have a solution for us."

"Maybe we can take up a collection and buy you some food," Kat suggested.

Tolltooth snorted. "This is a waste of time. I do not know what The Guardian was thinking bringing you here."

"I think that's a great idea," Carter said. "What's wrong with that idea?"

"Look at me," Tolltooth snarled. "Look around you. Does it look like you are still in your world? The Guardian brought you to my dimension because we need food from our land. We need help from those that understand our unique situation. I do not see how you can tell me anything. You are ignorant of our ways." Tolltooth stood up with disappointment on his face. "I am sorry you were bothered."

"No, wait." Kat jumped up. "The Guardian must have had a good reason for bringing us here. We have experience dealing with desperate situations. Please, sit down and tell us more."

Tolltooth's expression changed from frustration to weary sorrow. The look on the man's face made Kat feel sorry for him. She could see the deep pain and desperation he felt for his people.

"Tell me Mr. Tolltooth, are there other villages near yours that could help you?"

The man shook his head, no.

"How far is the nearest community?" asked Carter.

Tolltooth sighed. "The nearest village is a half-day's walk straight down that path through very dangerous jungle. But dangerous or not, the people who live there are terrible people. They are wealthy, but they would never help us. They are an evil bunch. Other than that, we do not know any other villages. We stay in our own area, and we do not trust anyone else. This is a dangerous land."

Kat said, "I'm curious about the people who live in that other village. Have you ever seen any of them?"

"Yes I have. Sometimes when we are out hunting, we see some of the Guynice. The men wear earrings. They have light blue eyes and red hair."

"What makes them so terrible? What sorts of things do they do?"

Tolltooth looked at Kat and spoke to her like she was either very stupid or a very young child. "Did you not hear what I said? I told you, they wear earrings, they have light blue eyes, and red hair."

"I have red hair and Carter has blue eyes. That doesn't mean that we are terrible people," Kat said.

"Yes, that is troubling, but you don't wear earrings. Look, I don't know how to explain it, but they are the Guynice. Everyone knows that the Guynice are bad. They are different! They are powerful, and they have more than we do. They are dangerous!"

"Mr. Tolltooth, I think we can help you. Would you excuse Kat and me for a moment? I need to talk to her privately. You can stay here; we will be right back."

Tolltooth just shrugged and shook his head skeptically.

When they were alone Carter said, "These people are prejudiced. They are so prejudiced that they would rather starve to death or be eaten by wild animals than ask the Guynice for help."

"You could be right, Carter, but what if the Guynice really are bad people. What if they decide to take Tolltooth's people into slavery or something worse?"

"That's possible, but at this point what choice do they have? Do you have any other ideas?"

Kat thought for a moment. "No. I wish we could talk to someone from the Guynice people."

Carter broke into a big smile. "That's it. We need to visit the Guynice village and try to get an objective opinion about them. Come on, Kat, let's see if we can get Tolltooth to take us to the Guynice and see for ourselves what they're like."

Tolltooth was already standing when the partners returned to him. "I think it would be best if you returned to your dimension. I really do not see how you can help."

"We have an idea," Carter announced. "Would you take us to the Guynice village? You do not have to enter the village. Just get us there safely if you can."

"Are you insane? I told you it is a half-day's walk. The jungle is filled with predators, and the Guynice are probably worse than anything we will meet in the jungle!"

"If you will not take us, then we will go alone. With or without your help we are going to try to save your village," Carter said.

"But how... I don't... This is madness!" Tolltooth stammered.

Kat smiled at the confused man and asked, "Mr. Tolltooth, do you trust The Guardian?"

The man shook his head as if he were coming out of a trance and said, "Yes, of course I do."

"Then you should trust us. What do you have to lose? According to you, you are all doomed anyway, so what choice do you have?"

The man sighed in resignation, and said, "Let's go."

"What sort of predators might we meet on the road?" Kat asked nervously.

"Most of the predators that hunt around the village will not attack us unless we get separated, so we need to stay together. But as we move farther away, there are creatures that will attack anything, no

matter how large the group. They act on instinct only. Those are the ones we must fear the most.” The jungle was a scary place filled with strange sounds and smells. It was dark, and the air was hot and humid. The partners were sweating profusely. Kat was just about to ask Tolltooth how he could stand to wear that long, black trench coat in the heat, when suddenly, a strange humming sound started to grow louder and louder as if something large and terrible was moving toward them.

Tolltooth shouted, “Stop! It is a swarm of spats! Oh, this is terrible! It is the worst! Quick, get off the road and hide!”

But it was too late. The sky was filled with strange creatures the size of beach balls. They had wings like giant flies that allowed the ugly, black creatures to hover and change direction quickly. They had heads like bats with red, glowing eyes and sharp teeth. They had round bodies with long legs hanging down like huge spiders. There were hundreds of them. There was no way to escape them, but rather than attack, they dropped long streams of sticky goop like black toothpaste on the travelers. As soon as the goop touched them, it dried like hard plastic. The partners struggled but were unable to break free of the substance. Eventually they fell over, unable to move.

Then, as suddenly as they came, they were gone. Carter and Kat continued to struggle; however, there was no escaping their bonds. To their surprise, Tolltooth came walking up to them. “I am sorry, but I tried to warn you. I will not be able to help you escape. My coat is made of a special type of leather that does not allow the spats binding substance to stick. The flyers have gone to get the rest of the swarm. Most of the spats cannot fly. What you saw were the hunters. They find prey, capture it, return to the swarm, and show them where the prey is. They will be here soon. I am sorry, but I will not be able to get you to safety in time. I must hurry back to my village. I did not want this to happen, please believe me, Goodbye.”

Tolltooth ran back up the path, while Carter and Kat yelled after him, “Please do not leave us here! Help us!”

It was no use. The partners were alone now. “How long do you think it will take for the rest of the hive to get here?” Kat asked.

“I don’t know. What difference does it make? We’re stuck. I can’t move anything except my mouth. How about you? Can you move your legs or hands?” Carter had to ask because he was facing away from Kat.

“No, I’m completely covered. I can’t see you, Carter. My face is in the dirt, and I can’t move my head.”

“Oh dear me, I see you have gotten yourselves into a bit of a mess,” said a tall man who looked like he came from Tolltooth’s people. “I heard the sounds of the hunters and I hid just in time. I was lucky because I traded my soken skin coat for some food. Well, I must be going before the swarm gets here. Sorry I cannot be of assistance.” The man ran up the road the same direction as Tolltooth.

Again, Carter and Kat yelled for help, but it was no use. Soon after the second man disappeared the children heard a buzzing and rustling from the jungle moving toward them.

“They’re coming!” yelled Carter as he and Kat struggled with all their might to free themselves from their bindings. They were held so tightly that it felt like steel bands were holding them down.

“Carter, what are we going to do?”

Together the children did the only thing they could do; they yelled and screamed for help. And someone heard their cries. “Ho there,” a man yelled from down the road. “Hold fast, I am on my way.” The sounds of the swarm were getting closer and the partners yelled with even more urgency. “Hurry! The swarm is almost here!”

Directly, a red haired man with pale blue eyes wearing large hoop earrings and a loincloth ran up to the partners. He flipped Kat over on her back and did the same thing to Carter. Then he grabbed hold of Kat by the ankle with one hand and Carter's ankle with the other and dragged them as fast as he could back the way he had come. It was obvious to the partners why he turned them over. The hard substance covering their backs protected them from injury when the two were being dragged on the dirt.

As he ran, the redheaded man said, "Now you must keep silent. We do not want the swarm to hear us. They will search the area where the hunters found you. Once they realize that you are no longer there, the hunters will begin searching for you. If we are lucky, we will be far enough away that they will not find us."

The partners could tell that the Guynice was struggling with all his might to run with his heavy load. Once they were about a mile farther up the road the man stopped running. It took him a while to catch his breath. "I... think... we will be... okay now. I cannot run any farther... with you. When I catch my breath, I will get you out of your bindings."

The partners were profuse in their expressions of gratitude to the Guynice for saving them. "You are welcome. My name is Lep. I was hunting when I heard your cries for help. How is it that you happened to be in such a dangerous place, and who are you? I have never seen your race before."

The partners introduced themselves to Lep as he used water from a nearby stream to melt the substance that held them.

"We were on our way to your village to ask if you would be willing to help the Graylong people. They are starving and are almost too weak and sick to fight off the predators threatening to overwhelm them."

"Hmm, the Graylongs keep to themselves, and they do not like us, that is clear."

"Well they do not seem very nice either. Tolltooth was taking us to visit you when the swarm hunters attacked. He had a special coat that protected him from this glue stuff and left us to die. Then another Graylong, who was hiding nearby, came out and just left us to die, too."

"That is troubling, but if they are as sick from starvation as you say, maybe they were too weak to help you."

"Maybe," said Carter. "But they could have at least made an effort."

"There must be women and children at risk in their village as well. I have an idea. I will have my people gather up some supplies, take them to the edge of their village, and leave them. That way, the innocent will not have to suffer along with the bad. We do not even have to show ourselves, so they will not have to feel like they owe us anything. Besides, if they know it is from us, they might rather starve than take it."

"But Lep, they should know it is from you. Tolltooth told us that you are bad people. He did not even want to ask for your help."

"They will know it is from us. After all, who else would leave the supplies for them? There is not another village around here for many miles. Yes, they will know it is from us, and if they accept our gift as a gift of friendship, they may seek us out and respond in friendship. If not... well, we can't force people to like us, now can we?"

Suddenly, darkness fell around the partners just as before. When they could see again, they found themselves sitting under their favorite shade tree.