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#2

105
PAGES

The Oh Force: Begins

THE FORTRESS OF CUBICLES:
A LITERAL HOSTILE TAKEOVER

FORTRESS
OF
CUBICLES

Scabs Don't
Do Stairs!

Another
One?
-Your Man



A less than Graphic Novella

By Antony and Ezra King

Previously on The Oh Force!
-By The Captain

My Dearest Digital Diary,

I made new friends! I thought I was too old for that stuff. They say you can't teach an old dog to make new friends, how wrong *they* are. The first one I met was one of those silly quiet French clowns! Although, he doesn't wear as much make-up as you'd think. His name is like, James I wanna say? He's not much of a talker but he sure is a moper.

Andy is cool though! They say it's not a party until someone's taller than you. Boy does Andy bring the parties! He does kinda stiffen up when he gets frightened, but when he's all squishy he's a pretty goofy guy, and I like that!

I don't know about that Kirby fella though. She kinda sucks. Hehehe. But for reals, I just don't quite get her yet. Sometimes she's funny and other times she's mean. She says she has this interdimensional blackish holeish thingy in her chest, but she won't let me see it! And I'm pretty sure she stole one of my hotdogs. Andy wouldn't do that. He can be taught!

And finally, there's Libby. I really don't know her. Apparently, she's related to Kirby somehow? I think they're like twin cousins or something.

So, what happened was I don't live in my not a secret lair anymore, I have a superhero team named after me, we stopped Lord Fancy Pants from stealing Mr. Rich Guy's stuff, and we'll all live happily ever after. The End!

#1**9****PAGES****The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover****THE LAST STRAW:
I'M JUST WAITING FOR
SOMEONE TO SAY...**

The Fortress of Cubicles is oddly silent, with the exception of keyboards rattling off their percussive beats. The painfully generic office building is eight stories of wall-to-wall cubicles. Each massive floor has little creativity in design, favoring function over form. The formulaic grid-like pattern of bland workspaces repeats over and over across the expansive layout. The industrial chic ceilings stretch up six meters from the carpet, giving the perception that this was intended as a warehouse rather than office space.

Florence Enza sits in one of these cookie-cutter cubicles typing manically on her mechanical keyboard. Her outward demeanor suggests that she is underpaid and underappreciated, despite the body of her work. She wears a wrinkled, pastel purple blouse and a flared-leg pair of loose-fitting pants, her dark hair put up in a messy bun. Her well-manicured nails are tipped in a subdued shade of pink and gracefully flow across the keyboard, with little need for the backspace key.

Her typing slows, tilting her head to the side as she notices a swishing sound coming from the walkway behind her. A bit flustered, Florence stops her work and stands, the sound intensifies as it grows near. She steps over to the far edge of her undersized cubicle, standing on her tippy toes to peek over the meter and a half tall wall. She scours the aisle, trying to locate the source of this mysterious sound.

A blurred shape flies in from the entryway of the cubicle, sending her off balance. She catches herself against the wall as she watches the phantom figure make a speedy retreat. Her chair slowly spins in place as her desk drawer slides shut with a soft click. Florence takes an uneasy step forward, grasps the drawer, and begins to pull it out. She reels back when her fingers find something sticky, moist, and malleable underneath.

Dropping to her knees, she inspects the underside of her desk to find a rectangular piece of white, putty-like material. “Ew, is this gum?”

A tall, broad man seems to pop into existence, filling the opening of her workspace. His alabaster skin gives the impression that he’s never felt the touch of the sun. He is large, with a well-crafted physique like a gym rat, but hides it beneath an outfit befitting someone in IT. His tie shines bright red with thin, white diagonal stripes cascading down. It obscures the buttons on the well-tailored, short-sleeved white shirt that hugs his bulking form. Upon his hips, blending in with his pleated slacks, rests a matte black fanny pack that is flanked on either side with utility pouches. His perfectly sculpted blond hair is cut high and tight, matching his rigid personality. Underneath his single breast pocket, naturally sporting a pocket protector, a tag reads, ‘Cubicles’. To ensure that his name invokes similarities to a Greek demigod, and not an office fixture, it is quickly followed by a phonetic pronunciation ‘(kew-bih-KLEEZ) He/Him.’ The next line of text announces he is the office’s ‘Efficiency Consultant.’

In a mechanical motion he raises his arm, flicking up his index finger and preparing to mansplain the sticky substance.

“No Florence, that is handy tack!” His face remains passive despite his jubilant tone.

From her knees, she stares at him with a question in her eyes and a hefty bit of indignation. “Ok, but why on the underside of my desk?”

Cubicles gently smirks as he quickly explains his actions. “Convenience, Florence, convenience.”

He disappears from the entryway to her cubicle, whooshing down the aisle in a nearly imperceptible motion. Although one might assume that Cubicles possesses super speed, it is actually his super strength that allows him to move so quickly. Unfortunately, this immense strength comes with reduced flexibility, causing his movements to be rather rigid.

Florence pulls herself out into the aisle as she meekly turns to head in the opposite direction.

Worried that the new Efficiency Consultant might be omnipotent, she mumbles quietly to herself. “Uh, Ok... Weirdo. And I told you before, I prefer Flo.”

She makes her way towards an alcove that is slightly smaller in size than a couple of cubicles put together. A placard mounted to the side of the entryway simply states, ‘Copy Room.’ In one corner, two people stand on either side of a watercooler having a quiet conversation.

On the far right of the tiny nook is a shelf stuffed full of reams of paper wrapped in non-descript tan packaging. Beside that shelf are cubbies, separated into slots, with stacks of paper.

Each cubby is labeled with the number of pages in each slot. Every increment increases the page count by five, with one large slot reserved for singles. Oddly, there does not seem to be any copy machine present in the room that bears its namesake. Instead, there is just a podium with a data pad that is about the size of an A4 sheet of paper.

Flo enters the duplication station to find Stuart Placaté, a man in his mid-twenties sloppily dressed in the minimum clothing suitable for an office environment. Standing next to him is Robert Poroso, a balding jaundiced man. He might look familiar to anyone who has watched *A Brief Backstory in Forced Evolution*. His claim to fame consists of him bearing his porous caboose while displaying what happens when he is subjected to copious amounts of water.

Stuart spots Flo and tosses a question in her direction. “Hey Flo, Bob and I were talking. Do you think Cubicles is running out of things to do around here? I mean, he organized the files chrono-alpha-numerically. I don’t even know what that is. And he took my chair!”

Flo tugs one of the little brown paper cups from the tube attached to the side of the watercooler, quietly contemplating if this is the right place to air her grievances.

Bob pipes up with thoughts of his own as he dips his finger into his half-filled cup. “Yeah, Stu’s right. It’s only been a week since he was hired to organize things and all he’s brought is chaos.” Bob swings his head back over to Stu. “Wait, he took your chair?!”

Flo chimes in with her own gossip before Stu can respond. “Did you two catch his latest accomplishment?”

Bob and Stu both turn their heads to look at Flo as their responses overlap.

“No.”

“What did he do now?”

Flo listens carefully for the sound of Cubicles whooshing about in their general area before continuing. “He stuck poster putty under all the desks. For *convenience*.”

Flo air quotes the word convenience to really emphasize her disdain, as the other two let out a weary laugh. Bob bends down and refills his cup.

As if sensing some modicum of joy that needs to be snuffed out, Cubicles appears amongst them. “Stuart, your fifteen-minute break is over.”

A tense silence fills the air with Cubicles’s sudden appearance. Cubicles, completely unfazed by their startle, whips out a stapler from a holster on his belt and staples Stu’s cup shut. Stu drops his now unusable cup into a recycling bin before begrudgingly making his way to the other side of the room. Stu breathes a heavy sigh, feeling rather silly that this Efficiency Consultant requires him to stand behind the stupid podium at all times. Bob sticks his finger back into his nearly full cup of water.

Cubicles turns his attention to Bob. “And so is yours, Robert!”

Cubicles staples Bob's cup around his finger. Bob waggles his finger with the cup dangling side to side. He imbibes the water using his absorbent skin, causing his finger to expand and burst the cup. The dilapidated demitasse drops into the bin.

Paul E. Mortimer, Mort, raises his hand to give Bob a wave as he enters the alcove. He retracts the greeting when he notices the expression on his co-worker's face. Bob sulks out of the room as he rolls his eyes at Mort. Intentionally avoiding eye contact with Cubicles, Mort heads over to Stu's station. Flo takes a slurping sip of her water that echoes in the pregnant pause.

Mort presents Stu with a form that looks like a standard office document that serves little purpose other than recording every little interaction. “Hey Stu, can you copy this for me please?”

Stu grabs up the piece of paper. “Sure, Mort, how many copies?”

Mort's demeanor comes off even more timid than usual with Cubicles looming just behind him, but he attempts to give a friendly reply. “Ten please.”

Stu grabs a stack off the top slot in the cubby labeled ‘Ten’ and closes his eyes, helping him better concentrate on the task at hand. His eyes shift from left to right beneath his lids as the form and its contents replicate to the blank bundle. He

places the first sheet onto his newly minted copies, and hands the slightly warm documents back to Mort.

Like a coiled snake, Cubicles expertly strikes out. “Here, let me staple that for you, Paul!” He clips the papers with precision in the top-left corner as they transit between the two men.

He then briskly points his stapler back over at Flo before twirling it around one finger and sliding it into its holster. “Florence, since you wasted a bit of your break earlier to use the lavatory, you should leave in 2.5 minutes to make it back to your station on time.”

A bit disturbed that their Efficiency Consultant seems to know how much time she spent in the restroom, Flo accompanies Mort out of the copy area. The sheer amount of micromanaging that it would take for him to have those numbers causes her to shudder as goose pimples form on her skin. Mort stares at the well-placed staple on his stack of single page forms that were never intended to be affixed together.

He fiddles with the metal fastener, trying to loosen its grip as he sighs out, “Cubicles’s really stressing me out. I’ve been shifting like crazy lately.”

Flo bobs her head in agreement, as she whispers in an effort to make sure Cubicles will not overhear. “Yeah, I’m just waiting for someone to say strike.”

A person in the cubicle next to them stands up excitedly with a questioning, but clearly happy, expression. “Strike?”

A couple of the people around the worker then stand, look at each other, and in a statement, as if they are seeing who else is up for the idea. “Strike.”

Everyone in the office stands up and begins moving out of their meager workspaces. Picket signs suddenly appear in the sea of exasperated employees as if people have very much been anticipating this. They begin marching towards the exit doors chanting, “Strike! Strike! Strike!”

Stu walks towards the exit of the copy room. Cubicles jumps in front of him and pushes him back in. “Call in the scabs, Stuart!”

Stu looks back at Cubicles with a hint of terror and a fair amount of confusion. “But... strike?”

Cubicles focuses his glare on the only person immediately in front of him. “There is no time for that Stuart! We must replenish the workforce!”

Stu glances past Cubicles with a longing look at his other coworkers who gleefully make their way to the exits. The palpable fear of the large, angry consultant outweighs Stu’s instinct to make a break for the door. He sadly slinks back to his podium, putting on the kind of headset you’d find in a cheap call center.



#2**7****PAGES****The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover****BREAK-FAST:
THERES NO TIME FOR
TOAST?**

Captain Ohblivious flops an ordinary piece of white bread limply onto a cheap looking paper plate. He shoves the meager meal, plate and all, unceremoniously onto a rack in a questionably clean toaster oven. The Captain forcefully slams the door to the oven closed with a loud clank.

The crackling of breakfast in progress catches the attention of the easily distracted geezer. Jason wields his invisible skillet with professional precision as he intentionally punctures the imitation yolk. He expertly flips his morning meal without the need of a spatula. Andy pours a box of Generic General O's cereal into a flimsy plastic bowl. The circular puffs of grain softly plop out of a box adorned with what looks like Wilmer Valderama cosplaying as Captain Oh.

Ohblivious eyes the egg that begins to crisp around the edges. "Are you making an egg?"

Andy glances up from the subject of his stomach's desire before making a sarcastic quip, since Jason cannot. "No, he's making a chicken."

Captain Ohblivious closes one eye, staring intently at the egg with the other one. "That's a chicken?!"

Kirby walks into the room just in time to respond, beating out Andy. “It could’ve been. If he wasn’t incubating it so quickly.”

Kirby looks over at Andy with a smug grin, knowing that she has stolen his line. Andy seems deep in thought as he tries to come up with a rebuttal, slowly chewing his mouthful of cereal to provide him time.

Kirby continues toward the fridge, opening the bottom half to pull out a pizza flavored chimichanga from the freezer as she shouts over her shoulder, “Yo Mime, get the door for a lady?”

Jason pretends to ignore her, pursing his lips hard and trying to make certain that he does not lose his breakfast.

Captain Ohblivious’s eyes bounce from Jason to the egg to the microwave, ultimately landing on Kirby. “I think you need glasses. That’s James!” he shouts as he opens the door to the microwave.

Kirby expertly slings her not breakfast burrito into the microwave from across the room, mouthing to no one in particular ‘*James?*’

Andy grins as he finally crafts a clever comeback to the chicken vs egg scenario. His smile lowers with his finger as he realizes that both eggs and chicken, along with practically every other foodstuff that they can afford, are made of PProColli. PProColli is a new miracle substance that contains all essential nutrients and can be printed into a myriad of different textures and shapes. And no, it’s not people. So, the not-egg

could have conceivably become not-chicken. He sighs and goes back to noshing on his Generic brand cereal.

The Captain can't remove his eyes from the sizzling faux-vum. Kirby kicks the freezer closed, struts to the microwave, and then presses the rapid cook button. While Ohblivious is distracted, Jason takes the opportunity to try to sneakily extract the paper plate from what would be certain fiery death. An old school cordless phone rings from a table next to the entry.

Andy stands up and moves to answer the newly added business line in their now even more overcrowded apartment. "I got it!"

Andy's exclamation breaks Captain Ohblivious out of his trance. Seeing that Andy is closing in on the phone he puts a finger up in the air and shouts, "Not before me you're not! Spurts of Justice!"

The frail looking old man transforms into the hero of yesteryear. Captain Oh swoops out of the kitchen to a long table near the door that holds the receiver with a data pad next to it. He snatches the handset, tossing it into the air, before looking back at Andy with a smirk as he shrinks back into his primary persona. Andy just shrugs and heads back to his cereal.

Captain Ohblivious's triumphant expression turns perplexed when the phone fails to land in his hand. He looks up at the ceiling trying to figure out why the phone never came back down. "I didn't think I threw it *that* hard. Stupid other me."

He looks back to see Libby, who must have grabbed it out of the air, already taking notes with the caller.

“What was his name... How do you spell that?” Libby asks.

Ohblivious grumbles rather loudly, upset that he was bested even in his throwback form.

Libby boxes him out of her vision by turning her back ever so slightly to him. “Like cubicles? But it’s pronounced Cue-bih-clees? Okay.”

Captain Ohblivious scrambles towards the kitchen when he hears the ding of the toaster oven. He sees the empty plate sitting on the counter, staring at it for a long moment. The Captain picks up the sheer paperware, and begins searching for the bread that was on there just moments earlier. He looks around suspiciously at the others in the room, attempting to find out which of these greedy pirates pilfered his toast.

Libby hangs up the phone and addresses the room. “Looks like we’ve got a job. There’s been a hostile takeover.”

The curious crew concentrate on Libby, except for Ohblivious, who searches dangerously close to the stove-top for his missing munchable. He stares down the silent chef as he lifts Jason’s plate quickly off the counter, peering underneath. Not finding what he’s looking for, he turns his suspicions to Andy and stalks over to the table.

“Doesn’t that happen every day?” Kirby retorts.

Libby shakes her head. “Not quite like this one.”

As Jason tries to abide by Libby’s call to action, he gazes at the countertop, not finding the plate he left there. He pivots, finding that The Captain now has two plates and is staring down Andy. Jason spots the misplaced toast lingering in the toaster oven. Giving it only a moment’s thought, he makes sure Ohblivious can’t see him and stealthily extracts the browned bread. He tilts the not-pan, sliding the not-egg onto not-his-plate, and then tosses the ethereal cooking vessel into the sink with a clatter.

Libby looks a little perturbed that nobody has made any attempt to stop doing what they are currently doing. “We don’t have time for breakfast. You want to get paid, don’t ya?”

Jason folds his toast like a taco. “Fine with me.”

Just then the microwave finishes with a satisfying ding as Kirby gleefully yanks it open to retrieve her pizzarito with a little giggle.

She takes a large greedy bite, immediately letting out a cry of pain. “Ah, augh, lava!”

The food falls, dribbling from her mouth and onto the linoleum. Jason, just about to shove his own food into his mouth, thinks better of it after seeing Kirby’s reaction.

Jason blows on his food while locking eyes with Kirby. “What’d you expect?” He takes a greedy bite of his own.

Kirby looks at him with sad puppy-dog eyes. “Foood?”

Jason decides to be a good friend and grabs a Bunker's Breakfast Bar off the counter, handing it to Kirby.

Libby, already looking a little impatient, claps her hands together rapidly. "C'mon people, we gotta go!"

That seems to light a fire under the others in the room. Captain Ohblivious, however, actively ignores Libby. He goes to grab a replacement for his missing bread. Realizing that both hands are preoccupied with plates, he combines the two together and places a new slice on top of the more rigid platter. He slides the stack onto the metal rack of the toaster.

Libby only notices Ohblivious when he turns up the dial with a loud click. "You too, Oh. There's no time for toast!"

The Captain starts to make his exit, running in a direction that is not the way to the front door. "No time for toast?! You sound imperious!" He then proceeds to smash through the kitchen window, shattering the glass. "Let's goo-Oh Force!"

His cries echo in the alley as he plummets toward the Ferrock below. Jason stops chewing on the remainder of his breakfast taco, staring at the demolished window.

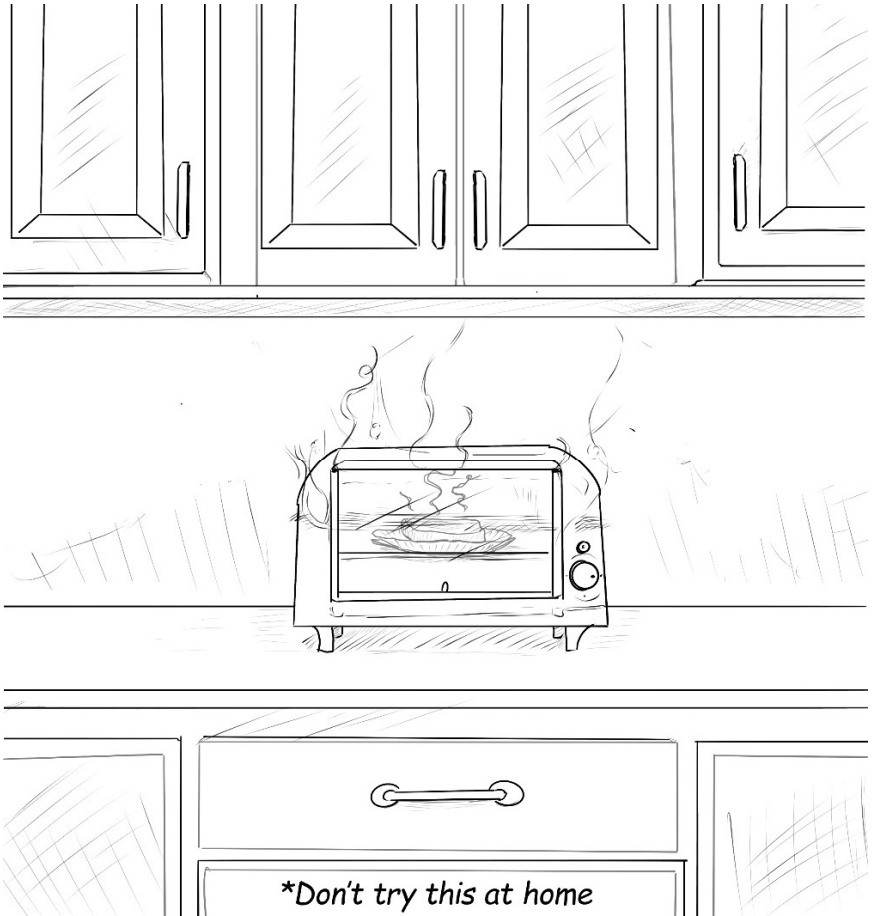
Kirby, deciding that the door is a far better option for an exit, rushes forward and flings it open. "Not it!"

Libby sighs. "Well, now we really need this job."

Andy follows Kirby, bringing his bowl with him. “You could have been more clear.” He says through a mouthful of cereal.

Libby puts her arm around Jason’s shoulders and ushers him towards the door. “We’ll figure it out later.”

Jason stays silent, still not finding the power to chew. He turns off the thermostat, flicks off the light, and closes the door on their way out. The only light left in the room is the ominous red glow of the toaster oven.



#3**2****PAGES**

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

**DUMPSTER DIVING
FOR JUSTICE!**

The Oh Mobile, formerly known as Andy's van, pulls up next to a dumpster in the alley. Captain Ohblivious sits on a mound of trash with just his head poking out above the lip of the garbage bin. The oblivious Captain wields a circular pizza box as a steering wheel, attempting to drive away in the refuse receptacle.

Ohblivious does a double take on The Oh Mobile, slamming his foot down in a 'pedal to the metal' attempt. "Try to catch me now!" A noticeable boot shaped dent forms in the side of the bin.

Kirby and Andy begrudgingly exit the Oh Mobile, meander over, and try to pull The Captain out. After a few moments of struggling, Kirby grabs the dumpster and begins rocking it back and forth. Without having to voice her intent, Andy picks up on her plan and begins helping with the endeavor. Kirby gives Andy a swift nod as the bin picks up momentum. They give it a final yank, toppling it over onto its side. The trash and Ohblivious spill out onto the Ferrock in the alleyway.

They drag Captain Ohblivious out of the rubbish and into the van through the sliding door. Andy and Kirby sit back in their seats, leaving The Captain laying on the crusty carpet. Jason wields an invisible steering wheel so that their ride better

resembles the kind of self-driving vehicle that is legally required in the city. He gives them a dirty look over his shoulder. Kirby rolls her eyes as she and Andy pry Ohblivious from his prone position and prop him up in the rear facing seat. All the while, Captain Ohblivious grasps his pizza box, trying as hard as he can to drive away.

As Jason starts to pull out onto the street, The Captain begins excitedly bouncing up and down. This does not do any favors for Andy, who's been trying incredibly hard to strap him in. Andy finally gives up, realizing how unnecessary a seat belt would be for a man who is nearly invulnerable. Instead, he takes a seat next to Ohblivious and buckles himself in.

Captain Ohblivious intensifies his focus on driving. "Now we're really moving!"

Ohblivious looks down and to his side with a puzzled look on his face. "Wait, I think I have it in reverse!"



#4**10
PAGES**

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

SEND IN THE SCABS

Outside The Fortress of Cubicles, a swarm of picketing employees has formed. They shout in front of the drab concrete structure featuring windows more like what you'd expect on a prison than on an office building. A handful of people stand at the periphery of the crowd, looking quite out of place. As soon as the picketers notice the newcomers they stand aside, making no attempt to bar the crossing of their picket line. The jeers of the crowd playfully taunt the scabs as they move towards the glass and metal security doors.

Bob Porosa can be heard above the crowd, "Have fun in there."

To which Mort, adds, "Good luck! Cubicles'll take *real* good care of you!"

A very slight and diminutive kid, Íre Tator, smiles and waves at the mob. He has the appeal of a teenage Rick Moranis and the soft features of an even younger Macaulay Culkin. His wave and smile seem to be genuine, like the world has not yet touched his innocence.

Íre leans towards his less than enthusiastic compatriots. In a cheery tone with a speech impediment that sounds like a combination of a lisp and a slur, "I'm sad we don't get to work with these guys. They seem really nice!"

Bob smiles an almost devious grin back at him as he passes. “Oh, you’ll be out here with us soon enough!”

Along with Íre there are four others, a girthy man, an aging secretary, and two more that seem to have no place in an office environment outside of janitorial work. This curious collection of individuals makes their way inside to find a large lifeless entryway. This foyer serves little purpose other than to corral people into its lonely elevator. A small, square bit of yellow paper hangs limply on the metal frame just above the elevator buttons.

Íre removes the Post-It note from its perch and reads aloud, “Scabs report to floor four. The elevator shall not be used at this time. Please take the stairs.”

The very large gentleman, Barney Flaherty, could easily be mistaken for the comic store guy from the Simpsons. His gut hangs out at the bottom of his septuple XL t-shirt. A ponytail protrudes off the circlet of hair that he calls his manly mane. He wears a hiker’s backpack that is stuffed to the brim with odds and ends. Strapped to the side of his pack is a camping chair built for two.

Barney about-faces in a twirl with more grace than his size would suggest possible. “I’m out.” He begins shuffling slowly back towards the front doors.

The rest, who need money more than they hate stairs, head to the nearby stairwell. As they ascend the first flight, a variation of the same muzak that is ever-present in elevators and AutoCabs throughout the city, plays softly in the background before it is rudely interrupted by a commercial.

The voice of Automaton cheerfully, and in a far louder volume than would ever be necessary, echoes through the reverberating concrete chamber. “Feeling a little run down?! Do you need a little pick me up at the beginning of the day?! Splooshie has got you covered! Try our new frozen energy drink made with our milky goodness! We have co-branded with ProEnergy to bring you a buzz that will keep you buzzing away like a well-focused data analyst on Adderall! Pick up your pick me up today at any location where Splooshies are sold! Just hit the ProEnergy button prior to pouring a cup of your favorite frozen milky treat!”

The group soars up the steps, trying to escape the onslaught of unwanted advertisements. As the first one to reach the fourth floor, Íre frantically grabs the door. He greedily pushes on the door, intent on fleeing the stairwell and ridding himself of the unsolicited solicitation.

Automaton continues, rambling off the small print, so to speak. “Splooshie is lactose free and does not contain any animal by-products! Please press the ProEnergy button only once a day as it adds a proprietary blend of stimulants that includes 800 milligrams of extended-release caffeine! If you are pregnant or think that you may be pregnant, please refrain from pressing the ProEnergy button altogether! This product should not be consumed by children, people under 55 kilograms, or small animals!”

Íre pushes on the door to the fourth floor with all his might. “I think it’s locked!” Íre yells out as the soothing muzak begins from where it left off.

Another man, the human equivalent of a slide puzzle that has been put together by a 3-year-old who gave up halfway through, stands by, much more reserved in his demeanor. He has no arms where you would expect them but does boast a well-toned, yet wiry appendage attached just above his forehead. The out of breath Íre releases his pressure ever so gradually as his frail body fails him.

Íre backs up from the door to give it a good once over as if trying to solve a riddle. Just below the sound of the muzak, an annoying nose whistle fills the air. Apparently, it is happening not only when Íre is breathing in, but when he is breathing out as well.

The man with one hand squeezes by Íre and bows slightly. Íre bows in kind, assuming this must be a greeting of some sort. He straightens back up as he realizes that the other man was just leaning over to get an easier grip on the handle. With a soft tug, the one-handed man pulls the door open towards him. Íre stands dumbstruck as the others file through the threshold. He comes out of his stupor, catching the door before it swings shut in front of him.

As he rushes forward, he collides with the backs of the others, who have stopped in awe. Their necks crane back, looking up at the triple-stacked cubicle walls that create a barrier across the enormous floor. The padded panels rise four and a half meters into the air, leaving a small gap between them and the high ceilings. At the ground floor, one of the partitions has been removed, creating a small entry into the office beyond.

Standing next to the child-size opening in the foreboding fortification is an equally imposing figure, Cubicles. He impatiently taps on a data pad, popping his head up as the door closes behind Íre. Íre walks up to him, a bit hesitant but proud to display the sticky note he grabbed from downstairs. Cubicles stares at the Post-It note on offer from Íre.

Íre tries to put on his best smile. “Íre Tator at your service!” He emphasizes the pronunciation of his first name, which sounds more like the name of one of the great lakes than the expression of contempt suggested by the standard spelling.

Íre looks a little self-conscious as Cubicles continues to gaze down at his outstretched hand, “...sir?”

Cubicles lets out an involuntarily shutter at the shrillness of Íre’s voice, “Oh, you are annoying.”

Íre nods, “Yes sir, I know.”

Cubicles glares at Íre with contempt in his eyes. “Since you so unnecessarily took my sticky note, *you* get to take up that job.”

Íre studies the yellow piece of paper in his fingers. “Can’t I just put it back on the door?”

Cubicles yanks the paper out of Íre’s hand, shaking it vigorously. “You know these things never stick twice!” He deftly slaps the Post-It note onto Íre’s forehead, spins him around, and gives him a light push towards the stairs.

Íre drops his hand in defeat. “OK,”

Cubicles raises his voice, enunciating his words slowly and firmly to make sure they are understood. “Remember to keep the strikers out, only let scabs in, and whatever you do, do not let anyone in the elevator!”

Íre turns back with evident confusion fixed on his face. “Isn’t the elevator down?”

Cubicles thrusts a hand out, pointing a single stiff digit towards the stairwell. “To. Your. Post!”

Íre takes the hint and scurries away.

Taking a deep breath as the door closes behind Íre, Cubicles turns his attention to the other three, his face settling back into his normal passive expression. “The rest of you, I am now the manager of this establishment, Cubicles. Kew-bih-KLEEZ.” He deftly taps each syllable on his name tag as he emphasizes the pronunciation. “Let me show you to your workstations.”

Cubicles crouches down and shuffles through the hole, stopping just inside. Feeling like adults trying to get into a child’s blanket fort, each member of the group employs their own tactic to find a way through the gap, which is only about a meter and a half tall. On the other side, they are greeted by a corridor made from cubicle partitions. After the last of the group makes it through, Cubicles picks up a wall that was set aside. He places it over the one gap in the otherwise formidable barrier. It makes a soft clicking noise as it pops into place.

Cubicles slightly turns his head in the direction of his scabs. “Follow me. Stay close so you do not get lost.”

Cubicles takes off down the corridor. The others, quickly realizing that he is not going to wait for them, break into a sprint to keep up with his brisk pace.

“Remember the following sequence. Left, right, right, right, left, left, right.” Cubicles bellows, keeping his eyes forward as he effortlessly rushes through the maze.

The trio of temps trip over each other as they struggle to keep up with him. They nearly run into their large office manager when he abruptly stops in front of an opening. He surveys the three of them and ushers a small, dim looking boy, possibly even younger than Íre, through the entryway labeled ‘Files.’

The boy wears a simple shirt that contains several stains in various stages of setting in. His jeans are definitely a few sizes too big and worn as if they have been handed down a few times too many. Instead of a belt, the battered old denim is being held up by a zip tie. It weaves through two of the front belt loops, with the fabric in between bunching in a hasty mess. Although his skin has a youthful tautness indicative of his age, his hair is a patchy mess. He either lost a battle with a set of hair clippers, or he has early onset Alopecia Areata.

“This maze is designed to keep you safe from the strikers. Do not reveal your sequence for security reasons.” Cubicles points at the only one of the bunch that appears to have any familiarity with an office setting. “Name?”

The woman straightens up, trying not to give the impression that she is surprised by the sudden call out, “Susan Pernova, but everyone calls me Sue.”

Sue wears a pant suit with an ageing pair of what-used-to-be-black slacks that have lost a lot of their luster and could easily be mistaken for dark grey. Her faded, floral-pattern jacket hangs loosely over a drab off-white blouse. She looks rather nervous, like she could explode in a fiery ball of discomfort at any moment.

Cubicles nods, grabbing one of her hands that dangle limply at her side. He gives it a forceful shake before returning it back under her control. “Susan, we work on a first name basis here. Full first names, mind you. It is still a professional environment.” He jets down another passageway. “To the S section.”

The two remaining scabs are a little better prepared this time. The man with one hand rushes as Cubicles begins providing additional instruction, with Sue trailing in the rear.

“Right, left, left, right, right, left, left, left, right.”

They stop in front of a cubicle. Stu is on the floor curled into a fetal position crying under his desk.

“Susan, meet Stuart. You will be working across from him. If you have any questions, feel free to ask Stuart.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Stuart. I’m Sue-” Sue nervously glances at Cubicles. “I mean Susan.”

Cubicles gives Sue an approving bob of his head while looking down at his watch. “Stuart, you have 15 minutes remaining for your lunch break. I suggest you get this all out of your system so that it will not affect your work.”

Stu whimpers out a sobbing statement that seems to be more to himself than anyone in particular. “I want to go on strike.”

Cubicles chooses to ignore Stu’s pleas and motions to the one-handed man. “I have a special assignment for you.” With just a few steps, he makes it to the end of the hall and starts to turn the corner. “Right, left, right, right.”

After a long straight path of partitions Cubicles darts through a gap in the walls. The man with one hand finally makes his way to the opening as Cubicles comes out with a 4-pack of LED tube lights.

“Take these up to the 5th floor. There are a few lights out.” Cubicles shoves the box of bulbs into the face of the man with one hand. “Change them and then come back. I have another assignment for you, in the restroom, with a plunger.”

The one-handed man slowly rotates in place and stares at the daunting maze with a healthy helping of apprehension. He gets up the courage to move as he senses Cubicles’s eyes boring into the back of his head. He makes it to the first intersection, looking left then right. He starts towards the corridor on his right.

Cubicles shouts, “No, left!”

The one-handed man turns, glancing back at Cubicles. Lifting one finger off the box of bulbs, he points to the left. Cubicles gives him a nod and shoos him away as he slides a cubicle wall marked ‘Manager’ aside like a pocket door, covering the entrance to his office.

He mutters under his breath, “Of course the reverse is backwards. Scabs.”



#5**5
PAGES****The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover****THE FORTRESS OF CUBICLES
OR
THE FORTRESS OF CUBICLES?**

The Oh Mobile deftly dodges two AutoCabs, pulling up alongside a red marked curb. It parks near a Fire Zone sign in front of The Fortress of Cubicles. Captain Ohblivious bolts from the vehicle and joins the crowd.

Jason climbs out. “Are you sure we can park here?”

Andy waves off his worries. “Of course! They said it was an emergency.”

As The Oh Force nears the barrier of bodies, they are pleasantly surprised to find that the people move aside, allowing them through.

Captain Ohblivious mumbles along with the chant as he wades his way through the sea of strikers. “We won’t work, fire that jerk.”

Kirby and Andy attempt to pull Captain Ohblivious from the masses while Jason and Libby continue toward the building. The realization dawns on the strikers as they gawk at the members of the Oh Force in their midst.

“Isn’t that The Oh Force?” exclaims a voice from the mob.

Flo looks quite excited by the prospect of their help. “Yeah, they helped Dr. Van Schpagg.”

Jason and Libby make their way to the doors just as two people walk out of the foyer. On the right is Wain G. Petelin. She is an average size woman with a majestic pair of white wings that fold elegantly over her back. She wears an expensive Bertino suit in a subtle shade of heather gray. She exudes a commanding presence, though it could just be the wings.

Wain walks up to them with her finger pressing on a wireless earpiece. She gives a slight tilt of her head to indicate she is speaking with the person in her ear, “Hold on one moment.”

Wain turns to Jason and Libby, making eye contact with them. She plucks the headset from her ear and tosses it to the man at her side, Anthony Turney. He is a squat, well-dressed gentleman in a pinstripe suit. He has an air about him that makes it clear he is not just an executive assistant. His vibe gives off big lawyer energy.

Wain proceeds to introduce herself. “Hi, I’m Wain G. Petelin from Bunker’s Business Solutions.”

Libby cringes as she watches Anthony Turney shove the earpiece into his earhole and begin quietly mumbling into the microphone. Wain shakes Jason’s hand.

Wain walks away from the building with the clear expectation for them to follow. “I’ve called you here today because our efficiency consultant has taken over the building. Our employees won’t go back to work until he’s out.”

Wain stops just past the picketing protesters and stares stoically at Jason. Libby nudges Jason lightly with her elbow to try to get him to respond.

After waiting a few awkward seconds, Libby jumps in to salvage the conversation, “Yes. You gave me a brief overview when we spoke earlier.”

Wain switches her focus to Libby. “Oh, good I won’t have to repeat myself. I need you to go in there and get him out. I really don’t care how. Just try not to cause too much damage.”

“Understood,” Libby gives a singular bob of her head as she pulls her slate from her pocket. “Can you tell us what floor he’s on?”

Wain massages the bridge of her nose. “His *security guard* won’t tell me a thing.” She holds up one hand to reassure Libby that the frustration is not directed at them. “And yes, I’ve already called Cubicles to let him know that he’s been terminated. But he insisted that *I* am a striker and *he* could not be fooled.”

Libby jots a few notes down on her slate. “Alright. We’ll have a word with this security guard and go from there,” She looks up as she slides the slate into her pocket. “Thank you.”

Kirby and Andy drag Captain Ohblivious out of the crowd to join the rest of their team. Libby extends her hand in a parting gesture.

Wain peers down at Libby's hand and reaches into her jacket, pulling out a check. "Here's your advance. You'll get the other half when the job is complete, as negotiated."

Libby rolls with it and takes the check. "Thanks again. We'll let you know when we're done."

The Captain takes off running for the door, ripping himself away from Andy and Kirby. He yells as he zooms by, "You can cook all you want, but I'm going to get this job finished."

"I like the enthusiasm," Wain gives an approving nod, "I'm glad we hired The Oh Force. Check floors four through six, they're the occupied floors. You're bound to find something."

Wain turns away and gets into the back of a limo, whose door is being held open by Anthony Turney's leg. He furiously wipes down the earpiece with a disinfecting wipe before handing it back to Wain.

Jason breathes a sigh of relief as the limo pulls away. The thought of Captain Ohblivious fielding the call earlier fills him with a sense of unease.

The Captain moves too quickly for the crowd to make way, forcing him to awkwardly zig-zag through the mob. "Scuse me! Pardon me! Coming through!"

Andy takes Kirby by the wrist, following after Ohblivious. "C'mon, let's go get him... again."

Kirby yanks her arm back, but begrudgingly follows anyway as she whines, “Why are we always on Oh duty?”

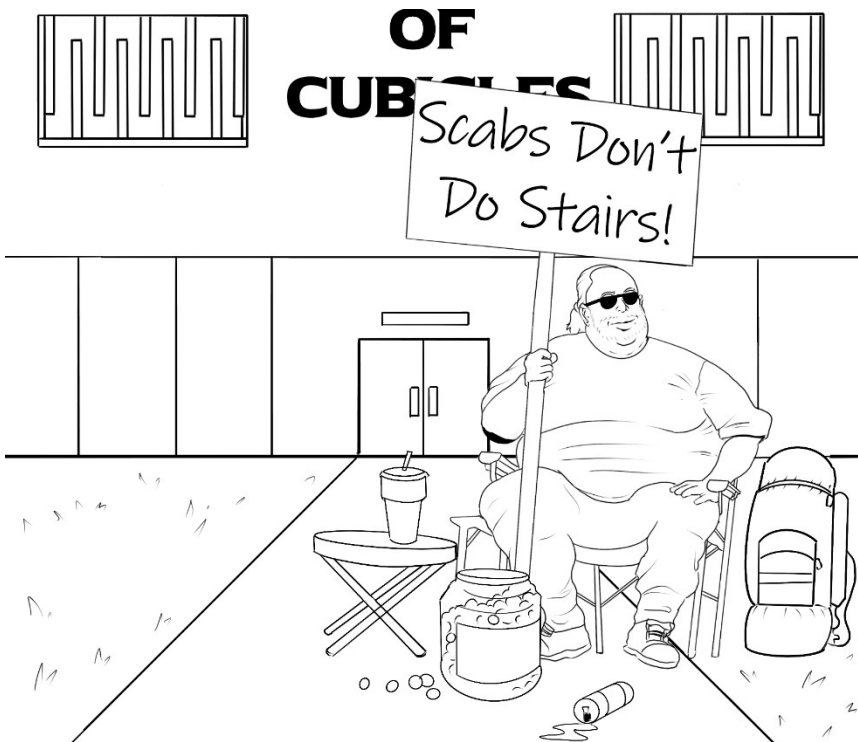
“Because,” Andy giggles, “Doody.”

Kirby’s face squinches up in disgust. “Ew. Grow up.”

“You first,” Andy quips back over his shoulder.

Kirby gives a slight tilt of her head, recognizing a fair point when one is made. “Touché.”

They walk past Barney, who sits in his oversized camping chair under the shade of the building. He sips from a cup that reads ‘Stilled Lemonade’. He holds a hastily made sign that states 'Scabs don't do stairs'.



#6**12
PAGES****The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover****ÍRE TATOR AND
THE ELEVATOR OF
DOOM!**

The Oh Force enters the building to find Captain Oblivious mashing the buttons for the elevator with Íre hanging from his outstretched arm. Íre holds one hand firmly over the sticky note on his forehead, hiding the floor number from the intruders.

Íre desperately pleads with The Captain. “The elevator is down, and I can’t tell you what floor they’re on unless you’re a scab!”

Captain Oblivious peers down at his arm and sluffs off the scrawny boy with one quick fling, as if only now realizing he was there. “I’ll show you scabs.”

Íre scrambles to his feet and begins dusting himself off. He points at his forehead, trying to emphasize the words written on the sticky note that his hand is clearly covering. “I keep telling you! It’s DOWN!”

“Then why aren’t the doors open yet!?” Captain Oblivious slaps a hand on the elevator doors, demonstrating his growing agitation.

“What aren’t you understanding?!” Íre Tator says, attempting to break through The Captain’s tough layer of ignorance. “The elevator. Is. Down!”

Captain Ohblivious rolls his eyes and throws both hands out dangerously close to Íre’s face. The Captain further escalates his tone, “Yeah, I heard you the first-time, nerdling! If it’s *down here*, why isn’t it open?”

Íre freezes as he mulls over the question. He flutters his eyelids as he processes the information. Regaining his composure, he states more calmly. “Ok. I guess I could have said that better. The elevator is out of order.”

“You’re out of order!” Ohblivious screams in response as he starts to press the call button once again.

Kirby, Jason, and Andy seem perfectly entertained watching the spectacle laid out before them.

Libby shakes her head and moves forward to intervene. “As entertaining as this is, we’re paid by the job not by the hour. Let’s act like adults.”

“Yeah, you two!” Ohblivious whips around and snaps at Andy and Kirby. “Don’t make me turn this car around!” He then goes back to incessantly mashing the button.

Having enough, Libby steps forward and rolls up her sleeves. Although this is usually a sign that someone is about to get their hands dirty, for Libby it is how she shows off her extra-human ability. Normally, she uses a combination of clothing and concealer to keep her power from causing any undue influence. Libby strives to make certain that people know her fame and fortune do not come from the allure of her spellbinding skin, but rather, the content of her character. Íre’s

captivated gaze is a clear indication that her careful measures are a vital component to achieving this goal.

“Hey cutie. You’re going to let us past, aren’t you?”
Libby purrs.

Íre stares slack-jawed, fixated on the flashy flesh of her forearms, “Uh-Huh.” His arm relaxes, but his hand remains fixed to his noggin.

Libby tries to hide her irritation with his short unhelpful reply. “And what floor did you say Cubicles is on?”

“Fourth floor” Íre replies in an almost hypnotized voice as his hand drops to his side, revealing the message underneath. “You’ll have to take the stairs. The elevator is down. I mean out of order.”

Libby winks and rolls down her sleeves. Íre comes out of his trance. He slaps his hand over the note once again, wincing in pain at his self-inflicted injury.

“Ow!” Íre quickly realizes he’s been manipulated. “Hey, y-you tricked me!”

The Oh Force begins heading to the stairwell, just as the elevator lets out a soft ding. Captain Ohblivious about-faces and rushes past Íre, who gapes at the open lift.

Andy looks over at Kirby. “Should we risk it?”

Kirby shrugs and heads into the elevator. “Beats climbing four flights of stairs.”

Jason glances at Libby for direction.

Libby is already moving towards the lift. “We shouldn’t split the party. That’s never a good idea.”

Jason apprehensively joins the others. Íre waves his arms frantically as Captain Ohblivious pounds the door close button.

Íre pleads with a sense of urgency in his voice. “I’m not supposed to let anyone in the elevator! It’s out of order!”

As the elevator doors begin to close between them, Captain Ohblivious gets in the last words, “I told you, *you’re* out of order.”

The doors silence any attempt Íre would have at a comeback. The Oh Force are left listening to the elevator muzak - the same tune as always.

Jason nervously picks at his nails. “Are you sure we should risk it? I mean, a little exercise never hurt anyone.”

“Exercise has hurt *plenty* of people,” Kirby leans back, lounging against the wall.

As they begin to slowly go up, Jason cannot help but feel a mite worried. “Not more than plummeting to our deaths. Afterall, he did say the elevator was down.”

Captain Ohblivious slaps Jason on the back. “Don’t worry my pasty-faced magic clown, things can only go up from here.”

Before Jason can respond, the elevator chimes as they reach the second level. The group looks around at an empty floor. Then they notice that all the buttons have been pressed. Captain Ohblivious puts his hands on his hips in pride, smiling at them with a smug expression of accomplishment.

After another pointless stop on another empty floor, the doors open on the fourth floor, revealing a boarded-up entryway that appears to be a bunch of cubicle walls fixed in place. Andy cocks his head to the side while staring at the unusual sight. He pushes on the wall to see if it has any give.

After discovering that it is surprisingly solid for being made of cubicle partitions, he gives up and takes a small step back. “Fifth floor?”

“Is there any other option?” Kirby gestures at the controls.

Captain Ohblivious represses all the buttons with an exaggerated swipe of his hand. “Gotta keep giving it orders so it doesn’t run out.”

Andy glances over at the lit-up buttons on the elevator panel. “Yeah, all of ‘em... eventually.”

Jason takes in sharp, short breaths in an effort to calm his nerves. Libby puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“Oh, come on,” Kirby rolls her eyes. “This is why it’s out of order.” She gestures to the blockage in front of them as the doors begin to close.

Kirby proceeds to jump up and down, attempting to make her point. This does very little to alleviate Jason's anxiety, whose breathing rapidly increases. Libby shoots an admonishing glare at her sister as they stand in silence. A tense, yet short while later the doors open to the fifth floor and Jason dashes out into a large empty room. The only thing in the room is a ladder and an empty box of Bunker's Bright Bulbs.

The awkward silence follows the hesitant team as they meander out into the barren office space, adding to the eeriness of the unlit floor. They naturally gravitate to the nearby stairwell, but stop when they hear a soft dinging warning. The sound is akin to what you hear when you forget to shut off the lights in your car. As they search for the source of the noise, they find Libby standing frozen in place, blocking the elevator doors from closing. She slowly scrutinizes the vast nothingness of their surroundings.

Jason's concern for the safety of the elevator has been replaced by concern for his friend. "You OK, Libby?"

Libby snaps out of it and makes her way to the rest of the group, while suspiciously surveying the floor. "Wain said that this was one of the occupied floors, so..." she trails off as she meets up with them near the stairwell, giving a wave of her hand across the empty expanse.

"Oh yeah," Andy takes a second look, as realization registers on his face. "Isn't this supposed to be the Fortress of Cubicles? Like, wall to wall cubicles or something. You've seen the commercials, right?"

Jason ushers Libby into the stairwell as she takes in the room one last time.

“It is not what I was expecting either.” Libby says as the doors swing closed behind them.

Just then the calming muzak cuts out as Automaton seems to realize there are people in the stairwell who can be subjected to unwanted advertisements. “Clean air! Blue skies! Majestic mountains! The United State of Alaska has it all! We’re here whenever you’re ready! Just come on over!”

“Maybe it isn’t rented out?” Jason yells over the commercial.

“Tourism packages starting at low affordable rates! Be it hunting, fishing, hiking, – if you’re lucky – whale watching, or even all the above! We promise you will enjoy yourself!” The ad continues.

Kirby anxiously skips down the stairs, tossing caution to the wind in an attempt to escape the obnoxious barrage of propaganda word salad. She barks up at them from the lower landing as she frantically opens the door to the fourth floor. “The hen outside said four to six.”

The recording continues in a quieter, rushed tone, “Hotel and airfare are not provided! We are not responsible for any injuries or dismemberment on your trip! The United State of Alaska no longer has resources for search and rescue, please be careful! Paid for by the United State of Alaska Tourism Board!”

Kirby pauses in the entryway, momentarily stunned at the sight of the triple stacked wall of privacy panels. She stands there staring at the collection of cubicles.

Andy comes up behind her with quite the opposite reaction, brushing her aside. “Wow! This is truly a Fortress of Cubicles. Or should I call it the Fortress of kew-bih-KLEEZ?” His ADHD train jumps tracks as he bolts forward like a dog chasing after a squirrel. “I’m gonna climb it.”

Andy begins trying to scramble up the side, pressing his face against the wall as he searches for a grip.

The Captain giggles, frolicking forward. “You can climb it all you want. I’m gonna pet it.”

Libby and Jason join Kirby in the doorway.

“I guess we found the missing cubicles,” Jason says.

Kirby bares her teeth at Jason with a mischievous grin, “It’s like cubicle mating season!”

Libby scoffs at her sister. “Grow up.”

“You first,” Kirby quips.

Libby shakes her head and starts walking towards the fortress within the fortress. “Unlike some people, I did.”

“Touché” Kirby shrugs her approval.

Libby stops a few meters from the wall, trying to ignore Andy and Ohblivious. “Are they trying to keep us out, or keep everyone else in?”

“Probably both.” Jason walks past Libby and towards Andy, who has yet to find a handhold on the barrier. He begins rummaging in the satchel that he carries with him everywhere.

Captain Ohblivious slowly pets the fuzzy surface, watching Andy with amazed curiosity. “Don’t worry, he’ll run out of energy soon.”

Andy takes a step back, feeling the judgement from Jason. “What? You think you can do better?”

Jason nods silently and proceeds to pull out a long tubular object that is, of course, invisible. He props it on the wall, rolling out the tube and maneuvering it like a ladder against the rampart. He is momentarily jostled as Ohblivious slams up against the fortification like a battering ram.

“Of course I can do it better, side-kick!” The Captain proceeds to rub his face against the fuzz, making a soft hum of pleasure with every stroke of his face. “Mmmm. I told you he’d give up soon.”

Andy starts to take offense, but the sight of Captain Ohblivious smearing his whole body against the cubicle barrier makes him self-conscious and a little disgusted. He wonders if this is what he had looked like the entire time. Andy doesn’t dwell on it for long, though. Taking a deep breath, he lunges forward determined to beat Jason to the top.

Jason tears his eyes away from The Captain and goes back to steadying his ladder before climbing up the incorporeal rungs. Andy slips backwards, flopping to the floor. His clumsiness wobbles Jason on the ladder. Thinking that Ohblivious was the one who caused him to fumble his footing, Jason shoots a glare at him. Andy springs to his feet, pretending nothing happened, and searches with his foot to steady the ladder for Jason. Jason gives him a nod of appreciation before finishing his ascent. He pulls an invisible telescoping spyglass out of his vest pocket, extends it, and gazes out across the maze. Wisps of smoke rise in the distance.

“I want to see! Can I go next?” Andy whines, “C'mon, please!?”

Jason slides down the ladder and onto the floor next to the others, who have congregated next to the barricade. Andy releases the ladder and turns to him expectantly. Jason gives a single jerk of his head in the direction of the ladder and Andy excitedly starts climbing.

“Sure, go for it.” Jason says with a smile.

Andy’s face falls to a frown as his feet flop to the floor. “That was such a bush move. I would expect that from Kirby, but not from you.”

Jason is surprised by how deep Andy’s rebuke really hit home. He contemplates pulling the ladder back out but decides that they probably don’t have enough time.

Jason chooses instead to address those that were amused by his antics. “Well, it’s a maze.” He raises an eyebrow in

confusion. “And I think somebody’s smoking?” He confidently gestures along the wall in front of him. “I can see a pretty clear path to the smoke from the wall here. Maybe whoever it is can give us directions.”

Kirby stares at Jason expectantly. Jason just stares right back, like he knows that he must have missed something based upon her expression but cannot put his finger on what.

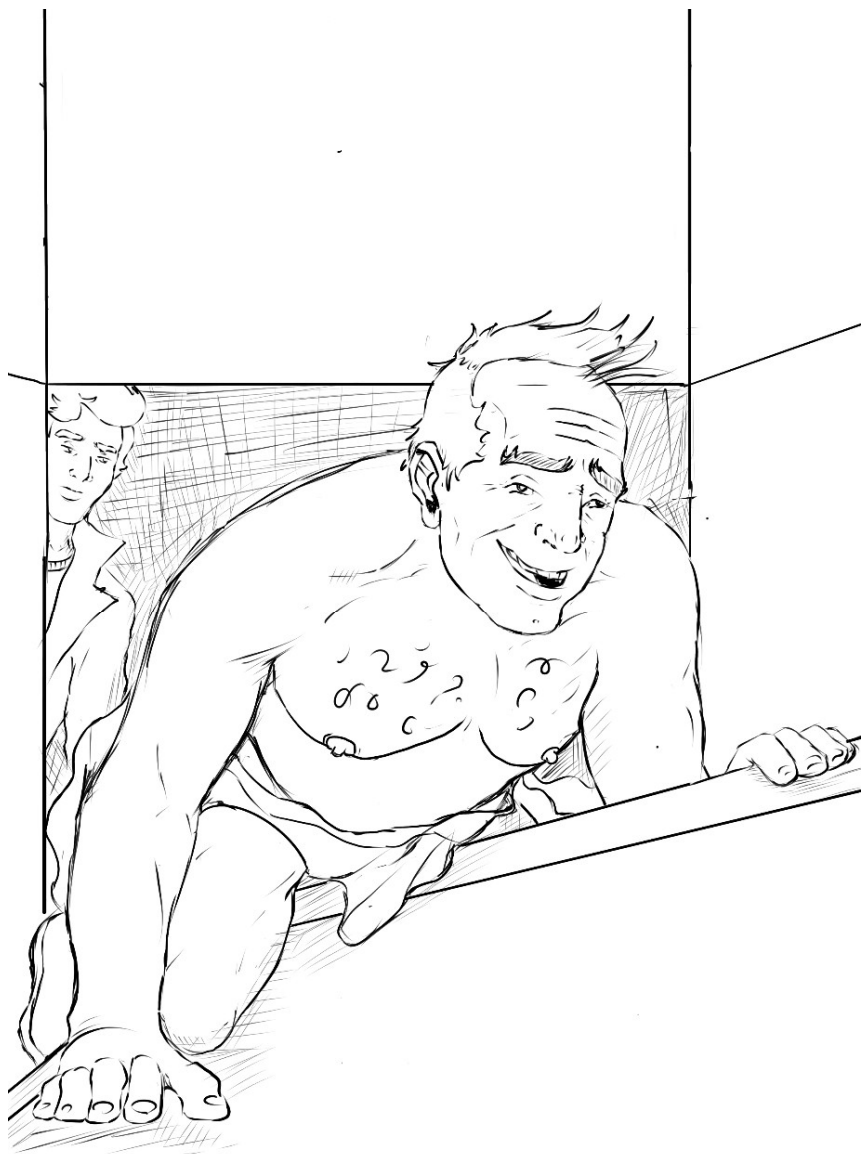
Kirby knocks on the wall. “How do we get in?”

Jason spins around to find a now half-naked Captain Ohblivious sliding his body back and forth across the fuzzy sound proofing. He recognizes his oversight just as The Captain goes to embrace another section. This panel falls in, revealing a path beyond. This does not deter Ohblivious from fondling the fallen partition on the ground.

Jason points, “Right there, obviously.”

Kirby rolls her eyes at him, smirking as she walks past. “You didn’t know that was there.”

“I might have, you’ll never know,” Jason hurries to take the lead, holding his hands up in front of him like trying to mentally picture what he had seen from above.



#7**9
PAGES****The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover****A PICTURE IS
WORTH A
THOUSAND TURNS**

Captain Ohblivious shuffles his feet at the back of the pack as the team wanders down a long corridor in the labyrinth. He hums softly as he trails his right hand along the fuzzy wall, never breaking contact. Kirby and Andy mill along in the middle of the group, growing less certain with every change of direction that they make. Jason and Libby take up the lead. Jason's initial confidence in being able to navigate them to the source of the smoke wanes with every step. They round a bend to find a wall blocking any further progress. Jason shakes his head slightly and starts doubling back the way they came.

Libby lets out a long, drawn out, sigh. "Are you sure you know where we're going?"

Ohblivious follows the wall all the way around the U-turn, keeping his hand on the partitions. Pulling a permanent marker out of his fanny pack, he makes a larger 'X' over a smaller one on the dead end. This is likely not their first encounter with this particular location.

The Captain turns the corner. "I know exactly where I'm going. My furry friend shows me the way!"

Andy has been keeping an eye on Ohblivious, as captain wrangling has become one of his duties. He sees the writing on

the wall. “I’m pretty sure we’ve been going in circles. This looks familiar.”

“Of course it looks familiar, we just turned around,” Kirby raises an eyebrow in judgement.

Jason stops, swiveling around. “C’mon you guys. Let me concentrate. This isn’t as easy as it looks.”

“Oh, don’t worry. You’ve made it look *far* from easy,” Kirby snarks.

The Captain lashes out, getting frustrated that everyone keeps ignoring him. “It *is* easy! *James* just don’t know that what *I’m* doing is how you do it!”

The insistent criticism, and being called James, has taken its toll on Jason. His heated hand gestures make it obvious to the rest of the team. “Okay, fine! I’m doing my best. And my name is JASON! What do you want from me?”

“A picture when you were up on the ladder earlier would’ve been helpful,” Andy murmurs loud enough to make sure the others can hear.

Libby focuses inwardly as if truly letting the comment sink in. “That would’ve been a good idea.”

Jason eases back on his aggression, understanding that this point would be hard to refute. “I didn’t think of it at the time.” He thinks of a way to shift the blame and glares at The Captain. “I was a little distracted by *someone* rubbing their body all over the wall.”

Ohblivious sends a similar scowl over to Andy, shifting the blame even further. “Yeah sidekick, get your act together. Stop distracting... Jason?”

Andy decides not to acknowledge the comment clearly directed at him. “Why don’t you just go up there again and get a picture now?”

“There’s no frame of reference like there was at the beginning of the maze,” Jason wags his head, this thought having already occurred to him.

Andy gives him a deadpan stare. “Soo... why don’t we just go back.”

“Do you know where back is?” Jason thrusts his hands out as if to say ‘by all means, lead the way.’

Ohblivious raises his hand ready to answer the question.

It sinks in for Andy that they are truly lost. “Man, you really should’ve taken a picture at the beginning.”

Jason flips around and storms off to the nearest intersection. “Shut up.”

Andy does just the opposite. “I would’ve taken a picture if you’d just let me use your ladder.”

Dejected by not being selected, Ohblivious puts his hand back down, and caresses the wall forlornly, “I keep trying to tell them, but they won’t listen to you like I do.”

Kirby, the only one who's been paying attention to The Captain, starts to get curious. "Who are you talking to?"

"Nobody from the looks of it," Ohblivious hangs his head, "Just using the advice of the wall to find the way through."

They meet up with Jason at the intersection. Feeling the expectations upon his shoulders, and not wanting to field any more questions, Jason chooses a path at random. Captain Ohblivious's gaze bounces around in consternation. He watches Jason walk down a hallway that is clearly marked with multiple L's, then looks at the unmarked passageway to his right.

Captain Ohblivious has had enough of them ignoring him. "I keep telling you, if you're stuck in a maze, the walls will show you the way." He takes a right, marking the support beam on his way around the corner.

"Oh gods. I can't believe I understood that," Kirby says, voice mixed with awe and concern at having followed Ohblivious's train of thought for possibly the first time. She starts after The Captain. "I'm following Oh."

Libby tosses a dirty look at her sister, but it is short lived as she finds Kirby redirecting her attention to the mark on the support the way Jason is headed.

As much as Libby wants to install Jason as the de facto leader, she also doesn't want to be misled. "Fine, we can try it another way."

Jason scurries back to the crossroads not really having words to convey his confusion. He looks over to Andy for support.

“Sorry,” Andy rests a large hand on Jason’s shoulder, “Libby said not to split the party. The majority has spoken. I might’ve taken your side if you’d let me climb your ladder.”

Andy lingers for a moment before hustling after the other three. Jason gapes, still in shock as he watches the others amble down the corridor. He finds his feet and chases after them as they turn a corner. “Hey guys, wait up!”

The team twists their way through the maze until they reach another unmarked intersection. Ohblivious plants his feet, sniffing about in the air. His body bends with his neck as he makes little snuffling noises like a dog who’s been roused from a deep nap by the scent of sustenance. Captain Ohblivious falls on his lead foot in the last direction his head was pointed, as if his nose has taken up the reins. It’s not long before The Oh Force comes upon an area that resembles something more akin to your standard office spaces.

Jason notices the smoke rising at the end of the corridor, mumbling to himself. “I could’ve just climbed the ladder again and looked for the smoke. C’mon Jason, you’re smarter than that.”

The Captain starts to reel off a series of military hand signals. He holds his hand out for them to stop and look up. After the rest of the team notices the smoke rising in the air, they return their attention to Ohblivious. He then indicates the point of entry and instructs them to move forward. While they

didn't understand the sign for 'point of entry', Libby and Andy still get the gist of it. They creep towards the opening, leaving an uninterested Kirby and a mopey Jason in their rearview.

Libby and Andy peer into the workspace. Stu Placaté crouches in a corner, bobbing his head. His face has warrior stripes painted under his eyes in ash. He spins a pencil quickly against a cubicle partition that is lying on the floor. Tendrils of smoke steadily rise from the fabric surface as he attempts to start a fire. This doesn't appear to be his first attempt as there are several partially burned patches on the flame-retardant surface.

Stu rocks back and forth on his heels. "Must... stay... warm. Must survive."

Captain Ohblivious frantically motions for the other two to move forward and back up their companions. Jason and Kirby begrudgingly join their teammates, if only to make sure they don't get hit in the face by The Captain's flailing limbs.

Libby knocks gently on the metal frame of the entry, trying not to spook Stu. "Uh, excuse me?"

Libby's attempt not to startle Stu fails miserably as his unhinged eyes gawk at them, like a raccoon caught eating trash. He leaps onto a cubicle wall, scrambles up, and disappears over the other side.

"*He* didn't need a ladder," Jason gives Andy a playful grin.

Outraged, Andy points in the direction of Stu's escape. "He's half my size!"

"And who's fault is that?" Kirby pats Andy's belly with the back of her hand.

Andy covers his belly with his own hand, getting a tad self-conscious. "Genetics."

Captain Ohblivious, having gone back to his usual distracted self, inspects a golden glob of earwax hanging on the cap of his permanent marker. He gives it a little sniff, finds it unpalatable, and wipes it on the wall. Ohblivious whirls around, panicked that someone may have witnessed his unsanitary activity when a voice butts in from behind.

"Don't mind Stuart. He's been like that since I got here." Sue gives them an apprehensive wave. "I'm Sue. I mean *Susan*."

Libby recovers quicker than the rest. She raises her hand, returning the greeting. "Uh, hi. Do you happen to know your way through this place? We're looking for the Efficiency Consultant."

Sue gives them a knowing nod of her head. "You must be talking about Cubicles. He's probably in the C section."

The Oh Force vacantly gazes back as an awkward silence fills the space between them.

Not getting the reaction she expected, Sue elaborates. “You know this is the S section, so there’s probably a C section... like... babies”

They continue to stare at her passively.

“I don’t have a clue where he is, it’s a maze after all,” Sue shrugs with her hands. “He only showed me how to get *here* from the entrance. And I’m so scared of getting lost that I’m pretty sure this is where I live now.”

Libby shakes her head, looking perturbed, “All that to say ‘I don’t know.’ Thanks.” Libby turns her back on Sue, addressing the group, but mostly Jason. “So, what do we do now oh fearless leader?”

Captain Ohblivious raises his hand in reply, as if Libby’s question was directed at him. He holds his ear to the wall, listening intently. Feeling ignored, Sue sits back down at her desk muttering an offensive rant rife with expletives too quietly to be heard. As she settles in at her desk, her personal space is invaded when Ohblivious barges in. He clambers onto her desk, shoving the side of his head against the partition. His eyes track back and forth as he seeks the wisdom the wall may provide.

Sue picks up her keyboard to fend off The Captain. “You’d think with all the money you guys had, you could afford some manners!”

Captain Ohblivious pats the wall reverently before bolting out of the cubicle and down the hallway. “It’s this way!”

After noticing the marks on the wall, Ohblivious flips around. Having realized this was the way they came from, he runs in the opposite direction. “And by this way I mean this way!”

Andy shrugs and trails after Captain Ohblivious. “Eh. Why not? He’s got us this far.”



#8**6****PAGES**

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

**LOST IN THE LABYRINTH:
SO SUE ME**

The team meticulously makes their way through the maze. They search methodically about, trying to discern their next best move. Captain Ohblivious's approach is like that of a dog. He's compelled to examine every nook and cranny of the convoluted collection of cubicles, marking the walls as he goes along.

Ohblivious stops at an intersection and glances over his shoulder to find Andy, who is trying to keep his distance, quickly averting his gaze. Andy pretends to be as nonchalant as possible, knowing that The Captain might act unpredictably if he suspects that he's being watched. Captain Ohblivious rushes to his right, breaking Andy's line of sight. He flattens his body up against the wall, waiting to see what Andy's reaction will be. His suspicions are confirmed when he spots Andy peering around the bend.

"Why are you following me?" Ohblivious eyes him angrily as he strikes a defensive pose.

"I'm not following you," Andy gives The Captain a placating smile as he closes the distance. "I'm just trying to make sure we don't get separated."

Captain Ohblivious narrows his eyes. “That’s just a fancy way of saying you’re following me. Well, follow this!” He then speeds off. “If you *can* follow.”

Andy runs after him shouting over his shoulder to the others, “He bolted, try to keep up!”

Captain Ohblivious’s voice grows fainter with every additional meter he puts between them. “You try to keep up!”

Andy uses his long legs to the best of his ability, but he is no match for even the elder Ohblivious’s superhuman speed. It is almost like The Captain is playing with him. Just when Andy thinks he has lost him, Captain Ohblivious takes off from a workspace, doubling back the way they came. He leads Andy in circles, reminiscent of a chase sequence from Scooby Doo.

Kirby, Libby, and Jason do well enough to keep Andy in their sight, or at least in ear shot. They find that the padded partitions provide significant sound suppression. This muting effect is exponential with every turn, making even the loudest noises difficult to discern unless they have a direct line of sight.

Out of the corner of his vision, Andy spots movement entering one of the office spaces. He creeps up to look inside, discovering Stu ripping off his shirt and tying the arms over the neck hole to create a makeshift bag. Stu hastily stuffs supplies from the desk into the sad, sweat-stained sack. Andy backs away as softly as he can, attempting to go unnoticed by the deranged office worker. He backs into someone that is squishy, yet immovable. Andy slowly turns his head to see a giddy Captain Ohblivious.

“Tag, you’re it!” Captain Ohblivious flies past, slapping Andy, hard, right on the rear.

Kirby laughs but realizes it was the wrong reaction as it emboldens Andy to continue his pursuit. Kirby tries to follow, calling out in annoyance, “Andy!”

Eventually Libby, Jason, and Kirby find Andy lying on his back. He is splayed out on the floor, breathing heavily.

Libby puts her hands on her hips and taps her foot expectantly as she looks disappointedly down at Andy. “Are you proud of yourself?”

“No, sorry.” Andy rolls himself over, propping himself up in a sitting position before lumbering to his feet with a sheepish grin. “I got caught up in the chase.”

Libby shakes her head. “Well, now we’ve lost our bearings. Do you know where we are, or where we came from?”

Kirby slaps her thigh rhythmically. “Where do we go? Where did we come from cotton-eye-”

Libby gives Kirby one of her signature glares. Kirby immediately stops singing mid-beat.

Jason shrugs and begins walking towards an intersection. “This labyrinth probably won’t be solved with logic unless we want to spend all day on it. Maybe he did us a favor.”

Andy nods emphatically, deciding to take the out that has been offered to him rather than dwelling on how silly it was to think he could catch The Captain. The remainder of the team turn to follow Jason, who has stopped in his tracks staring into a cubicle with a blank look of defeat on his face. The others meander over to see what has him so deflated.

“Well, we’re back to square one,” Jason says.

Inside the cubicle is a smirking Sue with her arms smugly crossed in front of her. “Looks like somebody got turned around.”

Andy’s mood sinks as his body follows suit, plopping his bottom to the floor just inside the cubby. “Hello Sue, can’t say I’m happy to see you again.”

Libby takes Jason gently by the arm over to Stu’s desk and begins rummaging around the mess, searching for paper and pens.

Sue gives Andy a mocking frown. “What am I, chopped *Sue-y*?”

Kirby enters Sue’s cubicle and decides to spur the conversation, knowing that Andy enjoys a good pun. “Wow that was corny, a play on chopped liver. What else you got?”

“I have an a-pun-dance of material.” Sue smiles at Kirby.

Kirby gives her a little nod of respect. “OK, let’s do this. Andy, you’re up.”

“I’m not feeling quite up to a battle of puns. I’d rather sit here and pout.” Andy waves off Kirby’s suggestion, choosing to ruminate on his role in their recent failures.

Kirby sits down next to Andy and shifts far too close to him. “Are you saying you just want to pun-ish yourself?”

Andy begins losing focus on his misery but tries to hold on. “No, Kirby, I just need a moment.”

“Give yourself a break,” Sue rolls her chair slightly forward. “Sometimes we just need to take a minute to get our fraughts in order.”

“True,” Andy bobs his head as he watches Sue slide out of her chair and join them on the floor. “Thanks for not letting me kick myself and joining me while I’m down.”

Sue smiles. “No problemo, I was just distracting you while your friends wandered off.”

Andy raises a single eyebrow at Sue, questioning where the pun was before locking eyes with Kirby in fear. They hop to their feet, searching around for Libby and Jason. Sue has pulled herself from the ground and grins mischievously as they frantically skitter about.

Kirby gives Sue a disdainful look. “I would ask you where they went but you would likely lie to us.”

Sue puts her hands out and motions them as if attempting to compare the weights of two objects. “You know what they say, hope in one hand and in the other *shift-y*.”

Kirby and Andy shake their heads at the ill-conceived pun and start off down the path without another word to Sue.

“But they went this way or was *this* that way. Oh, I don’t know. It’s so easy to get turned around in here it’s a-maze-ing.” Sue calls after them.

Andy and Kirby disappear into the maze, leaving a gleeful Sue behind. Sue spots Libby and Jason coming up the corridor from the opposite direction of where the other two went, distracted by a piece of paper in front of them. Sue hurries back to her workstation, trying to look busy. The pair comes into her cubicle looking around on the floor for Andy and Kirby.

“Where’d they go?” Jason asks.

Sue swivels around, giving them a convincing expression of bewilderment. “Why, they went after you when they realized you had left.” Sue’s grinch-like grin grows three sizes as Libby and Jason take off back the way they came. “I have to say, this has been a pretty fun temp job.”



#9**9
PAGES****The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover****ROUND AND ROUND WE GO
WHERE WE STOP?
CAPTAIN OH KNOWS!**

Libby races through the catacomb of cubicles, tugging Jason around by the front of his shirt. She calls out her sister's name at the top of her lungs, barely taking breaks to breathe. They aimlessly search from corridor to corridor, hoping to stumble across their lost companions. Although they are covering a significant amount of ground in their haste, no rhyme or reason guides their blind pursuit.

Jason clammers forward, trying not to lose his shirt. "You really think this is the best way?"

"Yes!" Libby takes a break from screaming to respond. "I have to hold on to you so we don't get separated!"

"No," Jason softens his tone in an attempt to calm Libby. "I meant the yelling part. You're more likely to lose your voice than find them. That's kinda what these walls are for."

Libby stops cold. Her eyes dart back and forth as she is lost in thought.

Jason side-steps to avoid running into her. "Are you okay Libby?"

Libby comes out of her trance. “Yeah, I’m just thinking this is likely what Kirby would be doing too. But, you’re right about the walls.” She glances up at the top of the maze, then swivels back to face Jason. “Jason, you’re a genius!”

Even though his first reaction is to respond with ‘I know’, Jason waits passively as he’s not quite sure what she’s giving him credit for.

Libby releases her grip on Jason’s shirt, shoving him back slightly in the process. “The walls may block the sound down here, but it can still travel above them. You mind doing your thing?”

“You going to go up there?” Jason raises an eyebrow at her, “I can’t call out to them without hurting myself.”

“I’m not getting on that thing,” Libby scoffs. “Just go up there and listen. If she’s calling out like I think she is, we’ll at least have an idea of where they are.”

Jason gives her a mock salute, eliciting a well-deserved eye roll from Libby. He proceeds to pull out his invisible ladder once more and climbs up. Upon reaching the top, he leans his body over, stretches his head out, and cups his ear, as if a few more inches will give him some advantage.

“You hear anything yet Jason?”

Jason nods.

“Which way?”

Jason, a little upset that he is trying to listen only to have Libby filling the air with her voice, points down at her. He then raises his hand to his face, silently zipping his lips. Libby pouts, clearly offended, but she chooses not to voice it, having understood his point.

Jason listens closely once more, trying to hear anything over the noise of the industrial AC units. He reaches into his vest pocket as he thinks he hears the faint sound of Kirby calling *his* name, a fact that he will never tell Libby. He looks down at her as he pulls out the imperceptible spyglass. Libby looks like she wants to speak, but Jason silences her with just a wag of his head.

Jason scans over the maze and finds Andy's metal body bobbing along above the cubicles. The frozen figure holds his hand just over his eyebrows like he is trying to protect them from the bright LEDs as he searches. Andy swivels about like a periscope, showing that Kirby is actively trying to increase his field of vision. When Andy is facing his direction, Jason waves. Even though he doesn't move, Jason knows that Andy mentally waves back. The act of physically waving would completely destroy Kirby upon the rapid descent of his fleshy body. Jason stays quiet, since shouting would send *him* plummeting to the solid floor below. So, they both watch each other as silently as two ships passing in the night. Jason, hoping that Andy can see him, points to a large opening in the center of the maze.

Jason uses very exaggerated ASL, praying that it will translate across the distance. "Meet me in the large center."

After figuring out a decent enough path to where he indicated they should go, Jason starts climbing down his ladder.

He stops halfway down and scurries back to the top, taking out his slate and snapping a picture. He slides down the ladder to where Libby waits impatiently. She throws her hands out as if to say, what did you see?

Jason gives Libby a thumbs up. “I think I got ‘em. Follow me.”

Jason walks off confidently in the direction that he had plotted, sneaking a peek at the image on his slate.

MEANWHILE

Kirby walks along the corridors with her hand raised above her head, holding up Andy. She turns him from side to side every so often as she hollers out Jason’s name.

Kirby puts down Andy after keeping him in the air far too long. She takes extra care to make certain that she puts him in an awkward position. She places him precariously on an empty desk to ensure that he falls when he unfreezes.

When Andy realizes that she is just going to leave him there, he flops to the floor. Kirby giggles like she will never stop finding that funny. Andy seriously considers that he may just unfreeze in the air next time to teach her a lesson. He quickly disregards this intrusive thought. He understands the laws of physics well enough to know that a two-meter fall would not be pleasant for a man of his size, let alone the person beneath him.

“Every time,” Andy pulls himself up from the carpet and sets off, weaving his way through the web of workspaces. “Every single time. I’m *so* happy you find it *so* funny!”

Kirby chases after him, stumbling on her laughs. “Did you see anything?”

Andy nods but responds in a sarcastic tone, “Yeah, I saw Jason up there. We had a little talk. We’re gonna go meet up with him right now.”

Kirby takes it at face value knowing the idea was a long shot.

Andy adds, this time seriously, “But for real, I did see him a while ago, and he said we should head to this large area.”

Kirby alternates between Andy and the top of the wall. “What do you mean *he* said?”

Andy signs to Kirby. “Remember, we know sign language.”

Kirby stares back at him blankly before realization sets in. “You know I never learned those magic hand spells.”

Andy replies with a simple familiar gesture.

Kirby follows him, furiously exclaiming “Rude! That’s not even sign language!”

ELSEWHERE

Captain Ohblivious has found that he can move the walls around, rearranging them any way he sees fit. He has pulled in office furnishings from all over to make a large, relatively comfortable, lounge area. He lays out on some couch cushions stacked upon several partitions, making up a platform bed-like structure.

He perks up, giving his full attention to the opening of his makeshift man-cave as he hears footsteps approaching. He watches as Jason and Libby hurry past his hidey hole. Captain Ohblivious leaps up to follow them.

Libby watches over Jason's shoulder as they stop. "I think we're lost again, there was a junction back there that wasn't on your picture."

"How?" Jason traces his finger along a hand-drawn line on the picture of the maze that he took earlier. "We walked to here, we took that turn, then we've been walking along here and this is all different."

They inspect the corridor, questioning the many random gaps where walls should be. It would appear that a lab rat has decided it's easier to burrow through the maze rather than solve it.

"You say tomato I say potato," Ohblivious startles them as he puts his finger forward and starts drawing on Jason's slate. "It's not different, it's better!"

Captain Ohblivious traces a new line, that is far more direct, to the circled area in the center of the maze. “C’mon. I’ll show you.”

Libby follows The Captain through one of the holes in the maze, much to Jason’s dismay. “Surprisingly he hasn’t led us wrong yet.”

Jason bends down, peering through to see another hole off to the right a bit. Captain Ohblivious grabs him by the jacket and pulls him through.

Ohblivious points down the hallway to the water coolers in the center of the large area. “Ta-Da!”

Jason stands dumbfounded, staring down the hall. “I would have gotten us here too.”

“Eventually,” Libby pats him on the shoulder, trying not to seem too condescending.

Jason solemnly looks down at his slate. “But I had a picture this time.”

“I didn’t need a picture,” Ohblivious knocks on his noggin. “I had it in my flesh drive.”

Libby shudders at the ill-conceived combination of words. “Kirby and Andy should be here by now, right?”

Ohblivious snaps his head around, only just now realizing the other two aren’t present. “Oh yeah, where is my sidekick?”

“They were over that way somewhere,” Jason says, halfheartedly waving his arm in the direction he thinks he had seen them.

“That doesn’t help,” The Captain pokes at the picture on Jason’s slate. “Where were they from where you were when you saw where they were?”

Jason bobs his head, as if going from word to word, trying to piece together the nonsense that just came out of Captain Ohblivious’s mouth. After solving the riddle, he circles his finger around an area on the maze. “Right about here-ish?”

Ohblivious slaps Jason on the back, far harder than necessary. “See! That’s better Jame-son. I’ll go get ‘em and be back faster than you can say two shakes of a lamb’s jiffy.”

Once Captain Ohblivious disappears through another one of his mole holes, Libby and Jason make a beeline to the watercooler. They start slugging back paper cone after paper cone. Soon after their thirst has been satiated, Ohblivious pops back out with Andy and Kirby in tow.

Libby sees Kirby and puts her arms out, looking to embrace her sister. Kirby hurries in her direction with excitement in her eyes.

At the last second, Kirby veers off in the direction of the watercoolers, staring down Jason. “Now *he* made that look easy.”

Libby is a bit disappointed, but not surprised, when Kirby passes her up in favor of the water. Andy fills the void with a genuine hug. Libby shrugs and decides just to go with it, nuzzling into Andy's chest.



#10

5

PAGES

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

**GETTING A HAND
WITH THE LAY OF THE
LAND**

Andy, with a water cup in each hand, quickly empties them both into his mouth. The contents overflow, dripping down his chin and cascading onto his shirt. Jason sips from a cup calmly, while Kirby drinks directly from one of the spigots.

Jason defers to Captain Ohblivious. “Fine. You obviously know your way around better than I do, Oh. Did you find anything while you were rearranging the maze?”

The Captain throws his arms up in the air before spreading his hands out wide. “I found many somethings!”

Jason shakes his head knowing that he shouldn’t have expected anything more from Ohblivious.

Andy’s eyes go wide as he wipes the remaining droplets off his face with the sleeve of his oversized overcoat. He voices the brilliant time saving idea he just came up with. “Why don’t you just transform into Oh? Then you can easily find Cubicles!”

“What are you talking about, I am Oh!” Ohblivious anxiously pats himself down to make sure he’s real. “You had me scared there for a moment. And if you’re talking about the spurty thing, I already did that today!”

Water spills out of Kirby's nose as she laughs at the poor choice in words.

Andy just shudders. "Wait, you can only do it once a day?"

"Yup," Captain Ohblivious doesn't skip a beat as he heads towards the water coolers. "Or twice if I have a very long nap or a very splendidiferous poo."

Andy decides this is where the conversation should end as The Captain grabs one of the water jugs and begins chugging it.

Ohblivious gets about halfway through the half-filled 20-liter bottle before he drops the jug and grabs his crotch. "I have to do my other spurty thing now!"

Libby's face contorts in disgust from this statement as Captain Ohblivious runs past her. He heads down the longest corridor they have seen thus far with a sign marked 'Lavatories'.

Andy looks down at the empty paper cone cups in his hands, then towards where The Captain had fled. "Yeah, I think I'll have to do the same."

Libby and Jason hurriedly refill their cups.

"Spurt stop!" Kirby nods her approval.

Libby glares at her sister as she reluctantly follows after the others. "*Please* don't make that a thing."

Jason swings back to fill the cup to the brim, like he may never see water again. His calm and cool composure disappears, now that Libby is no longer watching. He brings his lips to the cup, rather than the other way around, and heads towards the potty passageway.

The group parts ways, entering their respective restrooms. Andy and Jason are greeted with a disgusting wet sloshing sound. Jason looks around the large bathroom inquisitively, trying to find the source of the sound in the echoey chamber. Andy immediately locates the origin of the nausea-inducing noise, heading to the stalls to investigate. He walks up to peek through the crack in the door of stall number two and recoils in surprise. Jason looks under the stall, sees no feet, and decides to open the door. Inside, the one-handed man is standing on the toilet seat, vigorously plunging away. Surprised, the man with one hand swings his head around to look at them. In doing so, he sloshes water onto the stall wall as the plunger remains in the hand that is firmly anchored to his dome. Luckily, the two intruders avoid being sprayed with the tainted toilet water.

Jason, a little embarrassed, instinctively uses sign language as he speaks aloud. “Umm... Directions?”

As Andy and Jason leave the lavatories, the moist echoing of the plunger resumes. Jason stares at a couple strips of toilet paper with drawings on them. The toilet tissue map has their current location at the restrooms and a list of turns that need to be made in order to get to Cubicles. Libby exits the ladies’ room absolutely livid, her face turned up in an expression of revulsion. Kirby stumbles after her, nearly falling over from laughter.

“We got an odd surprise,” Jason reaches out, holding the map towards Libby without looking up from it. “I’m so glad he wrote this out for us. It was impressive.”

“Especially since he only has one hand! He didn’t even drop the plunger,” Andy adds, disgust and awe tinging his voice.

“We would’ve never remembered all those lefts and rights. He also gave us directions back to the stairs.” Jason finishes his sentence.

Libby carefully takes the paper from Jason, looking it over. “Far better than the surprise we got.”

“Speak for yourself!” Kirby huffs, trying to catch her breath between uncontrolled laughs.

Ever curious, Andy peeks into the restroom to find Captain Ohblivious with his suit around his ankles in a stall with the door wide open. A horrible splooshing sound bounces around the tile room. He ducks back out with a shudder, nodding in understanding to Libby. Libby shoots him a look of appreciation. As soon as Libby returns her attention to the map, Andy’s jaw drops in a wide, open mouthed grin that he directs towards Kirby. A loud groan emanates from the open women’s room door.

“C’mon, I wanna get out of this maze. We’ll come back for him,” Libby says, having finally had enough. Under her breath, she adds, “maybe.”

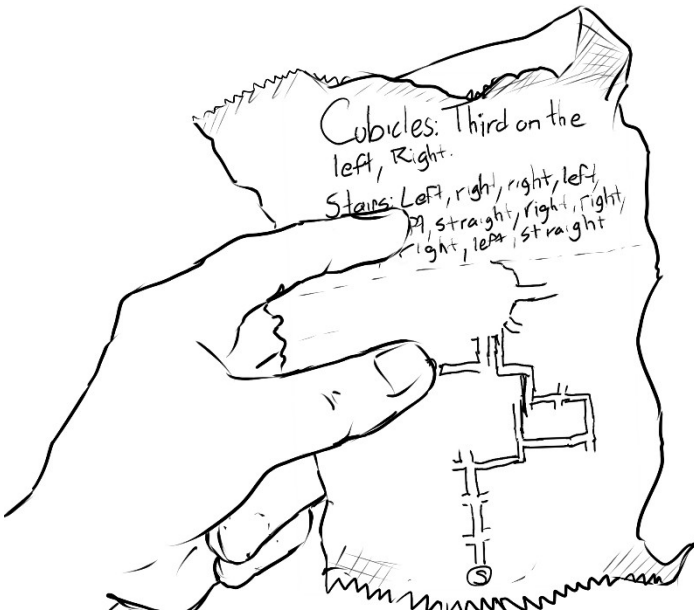
Libby scans the faces of the group for any objections. Kirby tries to cease her laughter and stick up for The Captain, but Libby is quick to end the conversation before it starts.

“Alrighty then.” She points to an exit that is just right of a large central corridor and hands the map back to Jason. “Lead the way oh fearless leader.”

Andy scoffs, as he takes offense to her statement. “Hey, this was all my idea, technically that would make *me* the leader. Right, Kirby?”

The rest of the group ignore him and start walking off in the direction that Libby indicated.

Andy yells after them, “Right, Kirby? Kirby?! KIRBY?!” He hurries after them, so he doesn’t get left behind. “Fine, I’ll lead from the rear.”



A CALAMITOUS CLASH WITH CUBICLES

After a relatively short walk from the water coolers, the group is confronted with a long hallway. The imposing efficiency consultant stands at the end, reading over a document.

Cubicles looks up from his papers, gives them a quick once over, and goes back to reading. “Hello. Are you the new scabs I ordered? It is great that you are showing such initiative.”

Andy takes a step forward to take the lead. “No way!”

Kirby giggles a bit, “Maybe you *do* look like you’re meant to work here.”

Andy scrunches his face while Cubicles looks on waiting for him to finish. Andy obliges after regaining some of his composure, “Wain G. Petelin sent us.”

“You are with the strikers!” Cubicles immediately shifts his posture, snapping into a combat ready pose. He grabs the wall next to him, ripping it away as easily as if it was made of paper. “Excuse me, I need to borrow this!”

Through the newly created gap in the wall, Sue stares in shock. Cubicles tosses the document he was reading onto her desk. “I will be back for this important report.”

Cubicles menacingly advances towards The Oh Force, minus their namesake. Sue reaches out to nonchalantly pick up the report. Cubicles quickly turns back to Sue, jabbing a finger in her direction. “Do not touch it!”

He then, in one swift motion, steps out of view. Sue looks at the document and cranes her head, attempting to read it without touching it. Only the title page is visible, which plainly states, ‘Long Term Plan’.

Cubicles methodically inches forward, holding the heavy partition wall with just his left hand as the other reaches down to pull the stapler from its holster. The team nervously shifts as Cubicles stops and plants the barrier at his feet. He peeks over the improvised bulwark, striking the stapler against the top in rapid succession. The tiny metal projectiles fly with a surprising amount of speed towards the group. Andy does what he always does in times of peril, transforming into his shiny metal form. The staples ricochet off The Human Shield in several directions, one of which sinks itself into the meaty leg of Kirby.

Bewildered, she stares down, stunned by the little paper fastener embedded in her thigh. “Who shoots a stapler?”

Kirby checks on Libby and Jason. Jason has his hands up in a protective motion as if he were holding up an invisible wall in front of them. Kirby glares at them as staples bounce off their barrier, clearly upset about not being included in the protective box. She returns her attention to Cubicles, who is now focusing his fury on the only one the staples may work against, her. Behind him, Sue leans over her desk to get a glimpse of the action. Her head just barely sticks out as

Cubicles sends a fresh volley of staples in the direction of Kirby. Kirby sucks them into her metal filter. Several papers and Andy come along for the ride. She grabs Andy, and, without thinking, chucks him at Cubicles.

With just a flick of his arm, Cubicles easily deflects the metal man missile and begins closing the distance between them. Andy bounces off the corridor walls, narrowly missing Sue's head as she quickly retreats into her cubicle. Andy's light weight frozen frame pings off the barricades, skidding down the hallway. Kirby retreats as Cubicles continues his assault with another onslaught of staples.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" Kirby yells out as she receives several puncture wounds in her fleshy bits. She ducks around Jason, seeking shelter behind the invisible shield.

Cubicles braces both arms on the partition and charges forward, intent on barreling over the intrepid intruders. Jason's jaw drops in shock as his eyes grow huge inside the invisible fortification. Libby wraps a hand over Jason's mouth, preventing him from yelping and dissolving their defensive dome. Libby checks over her shoulder to find that Kirby is already gone. She breathes a sigh of relief at her sister's choice to hightail it out of there. Libby swivels her head back to the elephant in the room, the man expertly wielding office equipment in an exceedingly violent manner.

Jason's eyes somehow manage to go even wider as Cubicles slams the shield into his invisible box. Libby winces as she slaps her other hand over Jason's mouth, reinforcing the one that's already there. Although she knows that one peep from Jason will surely be their end, she also knows that the

same restrictions do not apply to her. From the confines of their clear casket, Libby begins inaudibly shouting enough for the both of them.

The box jostles backward, sliding alarmingly fast along the industrial carpeting as Cubicles presses forward. Cubicles pounds the pair into the wall behind them before shifting his captives to the left. He spots Kirby ducking into one of Ohblivious's short-cuts to his right. He pauses for a moment, upset that his maze has been tampered with. Cubicles whisks down the hall, unable to fit through the gap with his unwilling passengers in front of him. Kirby starts to realize that using The Captain's network of holes is not enough to compete with Cubicles's knowledge of the maze. His efficient navigation enables Cubicles to cut Kirby off at every turn, forcing her to dive from Oh Hole to Oh Hole.

Andy, finally unfreezing, tries to navigate the maze using the sounds of Kirby's cursing as his guide. He is relieved to find Kirby, and his other friends, in the central hub. He leans against the wall, taking some deep breaths as he watches Kirby frustrate Cubicles. Kirby exploits one of Cubicles's few flaws by running in circles around the water coolers. The stiff supervisor's super strength impedes his ability to move in a parabolic path and he's unable to close the distance between them.

Andy bursts out into laughter at the ridiculous sight. "If you keep it up, Kirby, this square will have to change his name from Cube-icles to Circules!"

Off in the distance Sue let's out a single resounding "HA!"

Cubicles stops cold and slowly turns his head in Andy's direction. The rest of Cubicles's body shifts with military precision, lining up with his menacing glare. Unfortunately for Libby and Jason, they come along for the ride. Andy's expression turns grim, as it dawns on him that he has given away his relative safety in exchange for a cheap chuckle. Kirby, who never stopped running, slams into the backside of Cubicles. She bounces off him as though he was a stone pillar holding up the building.

Andy moves to the opposite side of the watering hole, keeping the coolers between him and Cubicles. Rather than arcing around the water coolers, Cubicles shifts sideways allowing for a straight shot directly at Andy. Cubicles bullrushes forward, but Andy dives out of the way at the last second like an inexperienced matador. Andy decides to take a page from Kirby's playbook and just stick to running around the central hub.

Andy rushes past Captain Ohblivious, who has wandered in from the direction of the restrooms.

Ohblivious steps out into what has now become the colosseum of cubicles with our less than glad-iators. "Are we still playing tag?"

Andy doesn't seem to have the time nor the breath to respond. Captain Ohblivious cocks his head to the side watching Andy. Ohblivious unknowingly steps out in front of Cubicles and the transparent tank of prisoners who rush up from behind. Libby and Jason are slammed up against the opposite side of the box when the previously unstoppable Cubicles meets the immovable Captain.

Libby lets go of her death grip on Jason's face as she is sandwiched between him and the box. Jason lets out a grunt as he falls on top of Libby. Cubicles stumbles as the impenetrable prison dissipates. Libby grabs Jason and rolls out of the way as Cubicles lurches forward. Confused, Captain Ohblivious turns around in time to see the cubicle-wall shield bump him in the chest and face. Ohblivious takes a step back, a little perplexed as he did not remember seeing a wall there just a moment ago. The wall jiggles a little bit and starts moving forward tentatively.

The Captain's eyelids disappear as an expression of fearful understanding washes over his face. "The walls are moving! I have angered them with my moving them without them asking to be moved!"

Captain Ohblivious shoves back with both hands against the makeshift shield, knocking Cubicles to his butt. Ohblivious turns and runs away, knocking down the nearest partition before mowing his way through the maze. Cubicles flops his shield to the ground beside him. He struggles to stand as he watches Captain Ohblivious run amok through his orderly design. The meticulous maze tumbles down with each subsequent wall The Captain destroys. The fuzzy boards clamor to the floor in a domino effect, exacerbated by all the missing supports that were pulled out to make Ohblivious's man cave.

Cubicles has only managed to make it as far as his knees, unable to bring himself fully to his feet. He throws his head back and lets out a guttural cry. "Noooo! Diisooorder!"

Andy continues his sprint as the primary threat has changed to the wave of cascading walls. He finally freezes, going into his metal form as the bedlam of barricades bury him.

Kirby finds herself in the same boat, except she doesn't have the ability to freeze and evade the danger. Instead, she scrambles to avoid the chaos. She breathes a sigh of relief as she spots the stairwell door through the hole Captain Ohblivious made in the ramparts. She trips on a broken panel, surprisingly turning it into a dive and executing a perfect battle roll.

Kirby springs to her feet before turning around to check on her compatriots, and to see if anybody witnessed her unbelievable stunt. "Tell me you just saw tha- Ah!"

Her friends become much less of a concern as she watches the barrier bow with the weight of the collapsing cubicles. Kirby pushes open the door and dives inside just as the dam bursts, releasing a flood of broken partitions. She catches her breath, gets up, and opens the door, only to be greeted by an impassable heap.

"Bush!" Kirby says as she resigns herself to the stairs. As she takes the first step, Automaton joyfully spews out his sponsored content, much to her chagrin.

Having stayed at the central hub while the walls collapsed around them, Libby and Jason stand over Cubicles, gawking at the aftermath. All around them the decimated dividers spread outward like ground zero of a massive impact crater. Jason bends down and attaches invisible shackles to the Cubicles's wrists and ankles. He uses an invisible chain to pull

Cubicles to his feet and towards the elevator, that is now clear of the cubicles that blocked its entrance. The Captain scurries over to meet them as they walk past a very large pile of debris with a metal hand sticking out from under it. The hand turns to flesh, which is immediately followed a blood curdling scream before it quickly turns back to metal.

Captain Ohblivious stops, looks down as heroically as he can, and reaches out. "I'll get you young lady!"

Ohblivious grabs the metal hand and yanks Andy out, sending cubicle parts flying.

"Eh?!" The Captain looks at the mangled expression on Andy's frozen metal face and back at the pile.

He tosses Andy over his shoulder and starts rummaging through the debris, looking for the non-existent lady. While Captain Ohblivious rips cubicle walls apart trying to locate the source of the scream, Cubicles sees the utter disregard for office equipment and begins bawling. The Oh Force, minus Kirby and The Captain, make their way to the elevator to see Sue, the one-handed man, and the dim-looking youth standing there waiting for them. Libby lets out a piercing whistle as the doors begin to open. Captain Ohblivious takes the hint and quickly makes his way to the elevator. They pile in, a little uncomfortably given the number of them, to then become far less comfortable as Captain Ohblivious forces his way in with too much haste.

Shortly after the elevator begins its descent, a hand pops out of a nearby pile. Stu, bloodied and only half clothed, emerges from the aftermath. He looks side to side and sits back

down, trying once more to spark a fire by rubbing a pencil in a spinning motion against one of the downed walls.



#12

5

PAGES

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

Back in the elevator, the muzak is drowned out by Cubicles's blubbling. "No one is ever going to hire me again! Look at this disaster! Would you hire me?!"

He traces his eyes from one person to the next, indicating this is not a rhetorical question. They all steadfastly avoid meeting his gaze, with the exception of Captain Ohblivious, who looks him straight in the eyes while vigorously digging in his nose. He stops to look at his reward up close, notices Libby's disgust, and thinks better of eating his prize. Instead, he slowly draws his hand down to his side and sneakily wipes his finger on the elevator wall. The Captain looks down in thought, noticing the fanny pack on Cubicles's waist.

"Yeah, you can come work for us! You recognize a good utility belt when you see one, and that's good enough for me." Captain Ohblivious nods as he pats his own fanny pack.

Jason rolls his eyes, but a glimmer of hope shines in those of Cubicles. The elevator dings open as the doors slowly part on the ground floor. Íre is now armored up in an array of office supplies, his small frame wrapped in clip boards held on by packing tape, amongst other accoutrements. The sticky note on his forehead now looks to have grown in length. Íre has

placed a blank sticky note on top of the original one covering up the portion that reads ‘Scabs are to report to floor four’.

He wags a finger at Kirby who has already made it down to the ground floor. “See! I told you that the elevator was down. *You* had to take the stairs. You shoulda listened to me.”

“You’re right about that, nerdling!” Captain Ohblivious says as he gestures out the following words. “Elevator, ground, equals down.”

Íre rolls his eyes, choosing not to get into another debate he would probably lose as Kirby pats him condescendingly on the head.

She shoots a look at Andy and the rest of the group, but mostly Andy. “Took you long enough. I’ve been stuck here listening to this one babble on. I think he’s lonely.”

Íre begins to take offense and then shrugs, knowing that Kirby is probably not far off the mark. He makes eye contact with his now shackled boss, straightening up his posture.

Seeing Cubicles’s hands ethereally bound in front of him, the gravity of the situation finally dawns on Íre. “Hey!”

“It is over for me annoying one.” Cubicles says dejectedly, seeming to have better composed himself during their short elevator ride.

Íre attempts to take in the statement as the gaggle of people filter out of the elevator and towards the building’s exit.

Íre looks back up with a sense of concern. “Does this mean I'm fired?”

The Oh Force pauses only for a half second before continuing towards their pay day outside without a word back to Íre.

Íre looks even more baffled, and more than a little hurt. “Hello?!” Íre considers his options for a moment before posting himself back in front of the elevator doors.

As they exit the building, the crowd outside seems a little apprehensive at first. However, at the sight of the defeated look on Cubicles's face and the yank of the invisible chain that pulls him forward, they let out a loud cheer. Wain is shaken out of her heated conversation on the phone by the joyous crowd. She makes a beeline to The Oh Force, staring wide-eyed at Cubicles's tear-ridden face.

Wain seamlessly pulls out their second check from her pocket as she yanks the earpiece out, shoving it into the waiting hands of Anthony Turney. “Good! I can get everyone back to work now.”

“Uh, I think you're going to want to clean up first.” Jason apprehensively glances back at the building before returning his attention to Wain.

Jason puts his hand over his mouth as the chains dissolve from around Cubicles's hands and feet. Cubicles turns his hands over, staring down at his unshackled limbs before catching the frantic reaction from Jason.

As Cubicles realizes all eyes are on him, he puts his hands over his face and runs off. “Don't look at me!”

People shift out of his way, choosing to slam into those around them rather than be trampled by the large man. Wain turns to watch him with a hint of concern.

Captain Ohblivious points off in the direction Cubicles ran. “Yeah, he made a lot of mess!” Then Ohblivious gives an overly exaggerated wink to Jason. “Wink! And I didn't knock down any walls or move them without their consent!”

Jason quickly changes the subject to avoid her reading too deep into The Captain's statement. “As promised, Cubicles has been removed from the building.” He plucks the check from Wain's hand and stuffs it into his pocket. “Nice doing business with you!”

Jason starts to walk off with the others quickly following his example. Wain turns back with the intention of admonishing them only to discover that they are gone. She chooses to ignore any perceived slight from their quick exit, reaching out to Anthony Turney for the earpiece.

“We should celebrate. Maison De Lou?” Kirby drapes her arm around Jason.

Libby snatches the check from Jason and then looks incredulously at her sister. “Not on this payday. How 'bout Master Monchies?”

“Works for me. You...” Andy trails off as he stares at the fire lane where his van used to be. “Wait, where's my van?!”

Jason shrugs. “I guess the city didn’t think it was much of an emergency.”

Kirby moans out her discomfort “Aww, we’re gonna have to walk to Master Monchies? Can’t we just take an AutoCab?”

Jason, Andy, and Libby all respond simultaneously. “No!”

Captain Ohblivious grabs his groin, looking a little concerned, “We better start steppin’. I gotta pee!”



#13**4
PAGES**

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

**MASTER MONCHIES
HOUSE OF CRUNCHY
MONCHIES**

The team gathers at a long counter with copious amounts of random food laid out in front of them on mismatched crockery. The place looks like a dive bar had a one-night stand with a Chinese food restaurant, and this was the resulting bastard child.

An older gentleman stands behind the bar with a smug look upon his face as he takes requests for outlandish orders. Master Monchie's House of Crunchy Monchies is known for one thing, there is no menu. The jovial Asian man has an open policy, allowing patrons to ask for whatever they want. If for some reason he cannot accommodate, it means you are the only person in any dimension who has ever wanted that particular meal.

The success of the Oh Force's first real mission together demands celebration. The fanfare seems like it is louder than it needs to be, as if trying to drown out the unpleasant amalgamation of moans and splooshing emanating from the restroom.

Andy decides to soldier forward for the sake of fun. "Let's see what else Master Monchie can pull off today. How about... calamari covered in nacho cheese? I'll call them, Calamachos!"

Master Monchie smiles and he pulls his apron forward. To the discerning eye it is more of a slit in his apron, exposing a fleshy pocket in his midsection. He reaches down, rummaging around in the extradimensional space he lovingly refers to as his Monchie Marsupium. He pulls out a plate of fried calamari smothered completely with a heaping amount of steaming nacho cheese. He plops it on the counter with gusto.

Andy claps his hands in utter amazement, “He's good.”

The toilet flushes and Captain Ohblivious leaves the bathroom far too quickly, making the others believe that the exit has been much less hygienic than anybody would like.

The Captain wipes his hands on his tattered onesie announcing to no one in particular, “Tuna!”

“Ah, tuna sandwich,” Master Monchie responds in a far more understanding way than you’d expect from such a flippant request.

Ohblivious sits on one of the stools, spinning around joyously. “Yeah! And make it a big one!”

Master Monchie reaches back into his interdimensional munchie pouch and pulls out a meter-long tuna sandwich. He presents it to Captain Ohblivious with a flourish, setting it down softly in front of him.

The Captain’s eyes grow wide with the challenge laid out before him. “It must be Boxing Day!”

The restaurant goes silent as Ohblivious consumes the sandwich in a fashion that can only be described as incredible and incredibly disturbing.

Libby closes her eyes to avoid seeing the spectacle of Captain Ohblivious attempting to shove the sandwich down his throat. Though this provides little reprieve, as the sounds take her imagination somewhere far worse than reality.

Although finding it abhorrent, enthralling, and slightly hilarious, Kirby endeavors to take Libby's mind off the disgusting chaos. "Aren't we supposed to be celebrating? How about a couple bottles of champagne? I mean cham-pag-nee." She takes a large bite of a lasagna-filled burrito.

Andy gives her a thumbs up while grasping a handful of Calamachos, acknowledging the acceptable pronunciation of *champagne* and his approval of the idea.

Libby opens her eyes, putting her hands up in protest. "Sparkling wine, and I'll go no further."

"OK!" Kirby waves down the chef. She stumbles over her words through a mouth full of food, "You heard the lady, a bottle a piece." Kirby waits to see if her sister will object.

Libby shakes her head as she pushes away her much more sensible meal, seafood gnocchi with alfredo sauce. "You think that's a good idea?" She gestures her head at The Captain without turning her eyes in his direction.

Kirby sees Captain Ohblivious shoving the last half of his absurdly long sandwich down his throat, much like a goose trying to eat a fish that is far too large.

Kirby looks back at Master Monchie and quietly says, “Aaaand carbonated grape juice in a bottle with no label for The Captain.”

Master Monchie nods his head, as if that was already a given, but also a nice challenge.



**WE SHOULD HAVE MADE
TIME FOR TOAST.**

The Oh Force stumbles down the well-lit street. Andy and Kirby have their arms draped over each other's shoulders, singing in a less than unified manner, but loud enough to make up for any inadequacies.

"Dance then whoever you may be. He is the lord of dance says he. We dance..."

The song trails off as they begin to diverge on what the next lyrics should be, the words becoming quite incomprehensible as they loudly sing over one another.

Andy smiles a rather satisfied grin, "Wasn't he a funny guy? He was a funny guy."

Kirby and Andy giggle to one another, swaying back and forth as they trip over their own feet. Libby and Jason take up the rear with Captain Ohblivious strung between them. Ohblivious mumbles to himself, slurring his words as if he is also drunk. Libby nurses a nearly full bottle of sparkling wine as she labors under the dead weight of The Captain.

"His was non-alcoholic!" She whispers to Jason.

Jason, who is obviously trying to take more of Ohblivious's weight to save Libby the trouble, smirks back

with mischievous intent. “I wonder what would happen if we let him drink.”

“Don't even think about it!” Libby hisses, overwhelmed with just the thought of what that would entail. She passes the bottle to Jason who takes a quick drink.

The Captain stirs between them in a restless and belligerent manner. “What you talkin’ bout bossy lady?! I'm drunk! You need to stop looking at your own skin.”

Libby immediately sluffs off the arm of Captain Ohblivious, yanking the bottle back from Jason. Jason does not hesitate to do the same, not just because he seconds Libby’s reaction to Ohblivious’s inappropriate outburst, but out of self-preservation. He watches as The Captain topples over onto the ground, knowing that, had he not acted fast enough, he would have shared the same fate.

Libby shakes her head indignantly. “Rude!”

Jason looks back incredulously at Captain Ohblivious, who is sprawled out on the ground with his face planted against the pavement, his rear end skyward. If it was a yoga pose, it would be called the stink bug.

“Why would you say something like that?” Jason asks.

Captain Ohblivious flops onto his side and rolls onto his back. “That’s what Kirby tells me when they don’t agree on stuff ‘n things.”

Libby looks back at Captain Ohblivious only briefly, then to Jason for confirmation. Jason sheepishly shrugs, half-heartedly trying to stay out of trouble. Libby turns up the bottle and takes a long drink before pursing her lips in frustration.

“Mmm. What’s that glorious smell?” Captain Ohblivious sits straight up like Dracula rising from a coffin as he sniffs the air. He bolts to his feet and takes off running as realization strikes. “My toast!”

Captain Ohblivious shoots past both Jason and Libby, practically flying down the street. Only practically though, as *actually* flying has never been in his repertoire. Leap buildings in a single bound, maybe, but not fly. Libby and Jason exchange a weary glance.

Captain Ohblivious runs up on Kirby and Andy who stand stunned, looking dumbstruck at the smoldering remnants of their headquarters and home. The Captain joins them in gawking at the fire that somehow decided to destroy only their apartment, leaving the rest of the building intact.

Andy rolls his alcohol laden noggin over to Kirby “I guess we can think of this as a positive”.

“How is any of this a positive? We don’t have insurance,” Kirby scoffs.

Andy shrugs “At least we don’t have to fix the window.”

Captain Ohblivious dramatically collapses to his knees and starts bawling. “To-oo-aa-ast!”



See, we told you not to do it at home.

**WAIT.
ANOTHER ONE?**

Íre stands steadfast in front of the elevator as if Geppetto had returned him to his original wooden form. He remains clad in the pilfered protective provisions, which he scrounged from his surroundings. Surprisingly, he's still able to maintain a decent level of attentiveness, despite the numerous hours stuck in one place. The Post-It notes flap on his head as the air kicks on. Íre crosses his eyes as he attempts to stare at the yellow pieces of paper on his forehead. With every tap above his eyes, his resolve dwindles. Íre angrily rips the notes from his face, peels them apart, and slaps the original note over the call buttons for the elevator. He removes his hands like he is waiting for it to drop, but after a few seconds of it showing no movement, he puts his hands on his hips in triumph.

He shakes his head and says mockingly, "You know these never stick twice."

Íre turns about and begins walking towards the exit, quite proud of himself. He glances behind to take one last look at his handiwork, just in time to watch the note flutter to the floor. Íre rushes back and inspects the piece of paper laying limply on the linoleum. He picks it up with a fair amount of difficulty, as his makeshift office armor is not very malleable. He slams the note back in place, taking additional time to rub his finger over the front side of the adhesive area. Íre hesitantly pulls his hands back, hovering them over the flimsy piece of

paper as if willing it to stay in place. Right as he starts feeling confident again, the glue loses its grip on its metal perch. Íre manages to catch the paper, avoiding another awkward attempt at collecting it from the ground.

A few more tries and several apt curse words later, Íre resigns himself to placing it back on his forehead, where it falls off near immediately. He tries again to snatch it out of the air, haphazardly wrangling it onto his chest. When he pulls his hands away, the note stays affixed to his shirt. Íre stares down at it for a few minutes, baffled that it could possibly stick to a fabric surface after refusing to adhere to a smooth one. His face slowly turns to an expression of moue as he realizes he is right back where he started. Íre's attention on the frustrating memo falters as he notices a scent in the air. His nose whistle lets out a resounding whine as he sniffs heavily, trying to identify the odor.

Íre crinkles his nose as he deduces the likely cause of the scent. "This is a non-smoking building!"

Íre's taken aback when three firefighters in full gear burst through the entry doors. They quickly make their way across the room to a stunned Íre. The firefighters fan out to see if everything is alright on this level.

Íre, knowing something is now very wrong, tries to make sure the record is straight, "It wasn't me!"

"See if there's anyone else in the building." One of the firefighters directs the other two towards the stairwell.

“Hey, thanks for believing me.” Íre looks relieved as the firefighter comes his way with a sense of purpose and determination.

The firefighter shivers at the sound of Íre’s voice and, without a word, picks up Íre and roughly tosses him over his shoulder. He runs through the lobby and out of the building. As they emerge outside, Íre can see that several floors above him are engulfed in flames.

Íre gazes in amazement at the flames above, and not knowing what to say, just lets out a quick swear, “Oooh <bleep>!”

The firefighter walks past Wain, who looks like she just got there, feverishly pounding on her slate with a tense finger. The automated fire truck, which is simply an oversized water tank on wheels with a cannon on top, begins flooding the topmost floor with water.

“I hope there's time to cancel that check,” Wain mutters to herself.

Feeling safely far enough away from the blaze, Íre taps the firefighter on his helmet. “Can you put me down now?”

“Oh! With pleasure.” The firefighter shudders as he sluffs Íre off his shoulder, dropping him to the ground with a loud wet thud.

“Thank you,” Íre softly moans with the last bit of breath that is still left in his chest.

Stu bursts through the front doors of the building, being chased closely by a firefighter in full gear. Stu is nearly unrecognizable. He waves a flag that has been fashioned from his cut-off shorts – which, once upon a time, were his pants. To cover his unmentionables, he has crafted a loin cloth using tape and a tattered piece of carpeting. He swings his shirt-sack at the firefighter, who has now decided that it’s just not worth it and ceases his pursuit.

Stu lets out a battle cry, screaming at the top of his lungs. “STRIIIIKE!”



#16**3
PAGES**

The Fortress of Cubicles: A Literal Hostile Takeover

**POSTLOGUE:
THEY'LL BE OPEN IN
THE MORNING**

Captain Ohblivious stands in a drab motel alcove lined with various glowing vending machines. He stares at one in particular, not quite sure what he's looking at.

“What's a Charcuterie?” he shrugs his shoulders and reaches into the neck of his suit, pulling out a piece of paper. “Eh, no time like presents!”

He tries to shove the paper, that is obviously not a bill, into a slot on the machine. Not only is it not a bill, but the slot he is attempting to put the paper into is meant for a credit card. He presses his hands against the bottom of the paper and tries forcing it into the card reader. He slowly pulls his hands back, only for the paper to come shooting out of the machine. As he snatches it back out of the air, it becomes clear that this is not a normal piece of paper, but rather the check they received from Wain G. Petelin.

He looks at the machine and back at the check. “Man, this must be really expensive. And with a fancy name like charcuterie I bet it's tiny too.”

He frowns, lowers the check to his side, and walks out of the alcove. He perks up, noticing what looks like a food truck without the truck part. The small boxy structure is almost completely made out of glass and stationed on the periphery of

the motel parking lot. A sign with bright yellow insignia reads, 'Stilled Lemonade'. The Moonshiner runs on a treadmill inside the windowed container. Hanging from the ceiling is a human sized hamster bottle partially filled with a yellow liquid.

The spectacle would be out of place in most instances, but the fact that the man is scantily dressed in only a pair of speedos gives an extra level on the oddity scale. The treadmill is suspended over a kiddie pool, and the treads are full of little holes to allow for his manly moisture to drip into the vessel below. Captain Ohblivious runs up to the stand and whips out the check holding it over the counter as far as he can.

Ohblivious waves the check at The Moonshiner. "Do you take checks? The Food ATM machine doesn't want to eat it."

The Moonshiner breathes heavily, but tries to help out the best he can. He points his glistening arm, that is dripping in sweat, down the street. "Just Kosh Kash and the good ol' Canadian Dollar. The Bank is just down the street. They can take care of you down there."

The Captain rushes off before hurrying back. "Thank you!"

Full of gusto, Captain Ohblivious briskly skips down the street in the direction of the bank. He makes his way to the doors, but just as he reaches forward, he realizes this single door is the only thing left standing. On the ground a heavily scorched sign reads, 'The Bank of New Edmonton'. The check that was once upright and ready in his hand, droops to follow suit with his head.

“Aw.” His disappointment is short lived as he turns away from the rubble. “Meh, the door says they’ll be open in the morning.”





Captain Ohblivious turns around in circles, like a dog trying to catch its own tail. But instead of a tail, he is grabbing his left arm around the elbow with his tongue sticking out to its full length.

He finally flops onto a nearby bench still holding his arm.

“If there is one thing I have learned today, elbow grease doesn't taste very good, and breakfast is the most important meal of the day. So, you should always make time for toast!”



“End!”