

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

**THE DAY
MY BUM WENT
PSYCHO**
ANDY GRIFFITHS

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GLOSSARY

This is my story.

It really happened.

It's all true.

Not even the names have been changed.

I agreed to tell my story in the hope that others can learn from it, and I would like to thank Andy Griffiths for helping me to get it down on paper.

Like most people I took my bum for granted for too long. If this book can save even just one person from making the same mistake, then I will be happy.

Who knows?

The next bum it saves might be yours.

May your bum be with you always,

Zack Freeman
September 2000

Andy Griffiths is the popular and award-winning author of the *Just* series. He lives with his partner and two daughters in Melbourne where he divides his time between story-writing and bum-fighting. *The Day My Bum Went Psycho* is his first novel and is based on a true story.

Also by Andy Griffiths
and illustrated by Terry Denton

Just Tricking!
Just Annoying!
Just Stupid!
Just Crazy!
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Also by Andy Griffiths
(with Jim Thomson and Sophie Blackmore)

Fast Food and No Play Make
Jack a Fat Boy: Creating a healthier lifestyle
for you and your children

THE DAY
MY BUM WENT
PSYCHO
ANDY GRIFFITHS



First published 2001 in Pan by Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited
1 Market Street, Sydney

Reprinted 2001 (five times), 2002 (four times), 2003 (four times), 2004 (twice), 2005 (twice), 2006 (twice)

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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Griffiths, Andy.
The day my bum went psycho.

ISBN 0 330 36292 5 (Aust. edn.).
ISBN 0 330 36320 4 (NZ edn.).

I. Title.
A 823.3

Designed by Liz Seymour
Typeset in 11.5/14 pt Life Roman by Post Pre-Press Group
Printed in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group

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The Day My Bum Went Psycho

Andy Griffiths

Adobe eReader format: 978-1-74197-004-3

Online format: 978-1-74197-607-6

EPUB format: 978-0-23055-036-0

Macmillan Digital Australia
www.macmillandigital.com.au

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Ian Smith for technical advice on the inner workings of volcanoes and Christian Doonan for technical advice on the chemical composition of flatulence.

I would also like to thank Jill Groves and Anna McFarlane for their tireless, painstaking and—must be said—at times downright pedantic editing.

Above all I would like to thank Zack Freeman without whose courage this book would not have been possible, and without whose efforts we would probably all be walking around with bums for heads and heads for bums.

This book is not dedicated to my parents, by request—A.G.

This book is dedicated to my bums—Z.F.

MIDNIGHT BUM RALLY

Zack Freeman woke out of a deep sleep to see his bum perched on the ledge of his bedroom window. It was standing on two pudgy little legs, silhouetted against the moon, its little stick-like arms outstretched in front of it, as if it was about to dive.

Zack sat up in bed.

‘No!’ he yelled. ‘Come back!’

But it was too late. His bum jumped out of the window and landed with a soft thud in the garden bed below.

Zack stared at the window and sighed.

‘Oh no,’ he said. ‘Not again.’

This was not the first time Zack’s bum had run away.

Since his twelfth birthday, two months ago, Zack’s bum had made a habit of jumping off his bed and running around the streets making a nuisance of itself. Zack was sick of it. So was the local bumcatcher who had already caught and impounded it three times.

Until recently Zack’s bum had confined itself to a variety of harmless pranks, such as attaching itself to the faces of statues and passersby. But on its last outing it had joined a pack of five hundred feral bums who had lined the emergency stopping lane of the South Eastern Freeway and mooned all the people driving to work. This stunt had caused many accidents, which the bums had thought was a great laugh. The sentencing judge, however, was not amused and placed them all on twelve month good behaviour bonds.

Zack knew he had to catch his bum himself this time. If the bumcatcher got involved, he would have to report it and Zack’s bum would end up in jail for sure. And there was no way Zack wanted to spend every second weekend visiting his bum in jail.

Zack threw back the blankets and was about to get out of bed when he heard his grandmother call out from the next room.

‘Zack?’ she said. ‘Is that you?’

‘Yes, Gran,’ said Zack. ‘It’s all right, go back to sleep.’

‘What was that noise?’ said his gran. ‘Have they resumed firing?’

Zack rolled his eyes.

‘There’s no war, Gran,’ he said. ‘Go back to sleep.’

Zack was living with his grandmother while his parents were away. They both played in the wind section of the National Symphony Orchestra and went on tour three or four times a year, during which Zack would have to stay with his grandmother—sometimes for up to a month at a time. He loved his grandmother, but sometimes he wondered who was looking after who.

‘No war?’ said his grandmother. ‘You mean the war’s over?’

‘Yes,’ said Zack.

He was used to this conversation. She was always talking about the war. Zack wasn’t sure which war she was talking about, or how long ago it had happened, or whether it had even happened at all—all he knew was that it seemed real to her.

‘Did we win?’

‘Yes, Gran,’ said Zack. He figured that she would go back to sleep quicker if he just agreed with everything she said. ‘We creamed them.’

‘That’s good,’ said his grandmother. ‘I’ll take over the watch. You get some rest. You’ve earned a soldier.’

‘Yes, Gran,’ said Zack.

He couldn’t tell her the truth. It would be bad enough talking to his parents about his bum, let alone his grandmother.

He waited a minute until he could hear her snoring and then he got out of bed. With difficulty. It wasn’t that easy moving without a bum. Zack walked across the room to the window, leaned out and peered into the night.

He saw his bum standing on the tips of its toes at the end of the driveway, as if sniffing the air. It was looking up and down the street.

There was still time to catch it. But he’d have to be quick.

Zack climbed out of the window and tiptoed down the driveway.

As he got closer, Zack realised that he wasn’t the only one trying to catch his bum.

Mittens, his grandmother’s cat, was crouched on top of the front fence, ready to pounce.

‘Uh-oh,’ said Zack. He wasn’t sure who was in more danger—Mittens or his bum. Mittens was always catching birds and mice and leaving them half-chewed on the front doorstep. But she had never caught a bum before. Well, not as far as Zack knew, anyway. And a half-chewed bum on the doorstep wouldn’t be something you’d be likely not to notice. Still, he didn’t want to take any chances.

Before Zack had time to do anything, however, Mittens leapt.

But Zack’s bum was faster.

It bent over, aimed itself directly at Mittens, and fired a loud, deadly stream of gas. Mittens fell to the ground. Zack’s bum took off up the street, its little arms and legs pumping away like pistons.

Zack was shocked. He knew that his bum had gone feral, but he’d never seen it kill anything before. He had to get it back. He knew that once a bum gets a taste for killing, it is very difficult for them to stop.

But first he had to try to help Mittens.

Zack hobbled over to her body and knelt down. Poor Mittens was in a bad way. Zack pulled her head back, pinched her nostrils and was preparing to give her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when Mittens coughed.

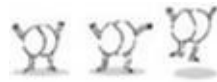
She wasn’t dead after all. She had just been stunned.

Zack breathed a sigh of relief.

‘So my bum isn’t a killer,’ he thought. ‘Not yet, anyway.’

In the distance he could see the dark shape of his bum disappearing over the top of the hill.

He got up, pulled the cord of his pyjama pants as tight as possible, and ran after it.



As he ran, Zack cursed his luck. All he wanted was a bum that would settle down and just be a bum. A bum that wouldn't embarrass him in public at every possible opportunity. A bum that wouldn't make rude comments whenever he tried to talk to girls. At the very least he'd settle for a bum that didn't jump off his body and gas cats in the middle of the night.

By the time Zack got to the top of the hill his bum was already halfway down the other side heading towards the local football oval.

And it wasn't the only one either.

Zack couldn't believe what he was seeing.

There were bums everywhere. Pouring onto the oval from all directions.

It was an amazing sight.

Bums.

Hundreds of them.

Thousands.

Big bums.

Small bums.

Fat bums.

Scrawny bums.

Pimplly bums.

Hairy bums.

Big wobbly bums tottering along on tiny white legs.

Tiny babies' bums crawling across the ground.

Every sort of bum you could imagine was heading towards the oval.

Zack was amazed. He'd never seen so many bums without their owners attached. But why? He wondered. What was going on?

Zack crept quietly down the hill in the darkness and crossed the road to the wooden fence surrounding the oval. A large group of bums was approaching him from the left. Big bums. And they looked mean. Zack looked around for somewhere to hide. On the other side of the oval was a large grandstand, but it was too far away. To his right, however, there was a small wooden hotdog stand. Zack hesitated. The bums were getting close. He dived over the counter.

The group of bums passed by him, muttering excitedly. Zack couldn't understand what they were saying, but he could smell it all right.

He didn't dare to poke his head up for at least five minutes after they had passed. When he finally did look out he was shocked.

In front of him was a sea of bums. Bums filled every available bit of space on the oval, as well as the grandstand on the far side.

Zack looked for his bum but couldn't pick it out from the crowd.

It didn't really have any distinguishing features apart from the fact that it was small and pink.

But as he looked, the crowd began to part. And gasp.

'Look! There he is!' said one bum.

'It's him!' said another.

'Our leader,' said a third.

For a moment Zack thought they were talking about him, but then he realised they were looking past the hotdog stand. He turned around and strained to catch a glimpse of whoever or whatever it was they were looking at, but there were too many bums in the way.

And then he saw it.

It was a bum.

But not just any bum.

It was small and pink and strangely familiar.

It was *his* bum.

Zack couldn't believe it.

He watched as his bum made its way through the crowd. It passed directly in front of the hotdog stand. As it passed, the other bums would reach out and try to touch it like it was some kind of celebrity. Occasionally Zack's bum would touch one of the hands extended towards it, but mostly it was protected by a group of four bumguards. Two walked in front of it, pushing aside any bum that tried to get too close. The other two followed a few paces behind, protecting it from the rear.

Zack's bum reached the scoreboard, climbed up a small ladder and then walked across a narrow platform that ran along the bottom.

When it reached the middle of the platform it stopped.

The bumguards remained on the ground and formed a line to keep the crowd from surging forwards.

One of the guards was shining a torch on Zack's bum. The light shining on it from below made it look quite sinister.

Zack wiped his brow.

'This can't be happening,' he said to himself. 'It can't be happening. It can't be happening.'

But it *was* happening.

Zack's bum raised a bum-trumpet to its mouth and blew a long loud note.

The whole crowd became silent.

Then Zack's bum began to speak.

'Brothers and sisters,' it said quietly. 'You know why I have called you here, so let me get straight to the point. For too long we have been forced to do the dirty work for the human race. For too long we have been laughed at, smacked, pinched, kicked, sat on and generally regarded as figures of fun! For too long we have been denied our rightful place on top of the neck where we belong!'

There was an enormous cheer from the crowd.

Zack blocked his nose and wiped his eyes. When one bum talks it's bad enough, but when

thousands talk at the same time, well, it's not pleasant to say the least.

After a few minutes the cheering died down.

'But what can we do?' said a bony bum in the front row. 'We're just bums.'

Zack's bum stepped to the edge of the platform, the torchlight making it look more sinister than ever.

'No, my friend,' it said. 'Divided we are just bums, but united we have the potential to be the most powerful force on the planet. Right now, on an island in the Sea of Bums, bums from all over the world are working around the clock to fill an extinct volcano. When it is full, it will become the greatest bumcano in the history of the world. And when it erupts it will be devastating enough to knock out every human being on Earth.'

Zack's bum paused, enjoying the dramatic effect its words had on the assembled bummery.

'That, my brothers and sisters,' it said, 'will be when we strike. We will swap places with the heads and assume our rightful position on top of the neck. By the time the humans come to, the Age of Bums will have begun and there will be nothing anybody can do to stop us!'

The bums began cheering again.

Zack lowered himself behind the counter and grimaced, trying to make sense of his bum's crazy plan. Bums taking the place of heads? Heads taking the place of bums?

The idea made Zack's stomach turn.

His bum had to be stopped. He had to tell the local bumcatcher what was going on. Even if it meant that his bum would end up in jail.

But how could he get to the bumcatcher? wondered Zack. He was stuck in a hotdog stand surrounded by thousands of deranged bums. He wasn't going anywhere.

He peeked over the top of the counter.

Just then a bum ran screaming through the gates.

Followed by the bumcatcher.

'Help!' called the bum. 'He's got a bum-magnet!'

The bumcatcher was holding what looked like a mini satellite dish in his outstretched hand. But as he entered the oval he stopped dead in his tracks, obviously stunned by the huge number of bums in front of him. He dropped the bum-magnet and started to back away. But it was too late. The bums closed in all around him.

'Please, no!' he begged. 'Let me go!'

'Bring him to me,' commanded Zack's bum.

Two of the bumguards shoved their way through the crowd and Zack watched in horror as the bumguards grabbed the bumcatcher and dragged him, kicking and struggling, back towards the scoreboard.

'Help!' yelled the bumcatcher as the bumguards dragged him up the ladder and onto the platform where Zack's bum was standing.

The sight of the bumcatcher seemed to enrage the bums. They were booing and hissing. The air stank with their poisonous fumes. Brown blobs were flying through the air and splattering onto the back of the scoreboard.

The bumguards dropped the bumcatcher on the platform in front of Zack's bum and moved away.

Zack wondered whether he should try to help him, but he was too scared. There must have been more than ten thousand bums out there. Even supposing that he could convince his own bum to give up its plans for world domination—and that was a big 'if'—he didn't like his chances of trying to convince the other bums. They were in an ugly mood. And judging by the smell in the air, getting uglier by the minute.

'Stand up, bumcatcher,' said Zack's bum.

The bumcatcher slowly stood up. His legs were trembling.

'Let me go,' he gasped. 'Please.'

'Why would I do that?' said Zack's bum. 'So you can catch us all?'

'I was only trying to help you,' said the bumcatcher.

'Help us?' said Zack's bum. 'And how exactly were you trying to help us? By sucking us up with your bum-magnet? By shooting us with your bum-guns? By holding us in your cages like common criminals?'

'All I'm interested in is trying to get bums back to their owners,' said the bumcatcher. 'It's my job.'

Zack's bum turned to the crowd.

'Owners,' it spat. 'Owners! Did you hear that? That is exactly what this rally is all about. Bums are not slaves. We are not owned by anybody!'

'But a bum without an owner is just a . . . a . . . a bum,' said the bumcatcher.

At that the bums resumed their boos and hisses and launched a fresh round of missiles at the bumcatcher.

Zack's bum turned to the crowd and put its hands up.

'Enough,' it said.

Then it turned back to the bumcatcher and touched his shoulder.

'I'm sorry you feel that way,' it said. 'But that's understandable. After all, it's your head talking—not your bum. But we can fix that.'

The bumcatcher's eyes widened.

'Surely you don't mean . . . no . . . you can't be serious!'

Zack's bum nodded.

'That's exactly what I mean. But don't be scared. Think of it as an honour. You will be the first of the new order. The first to be "rearranged". What do you say?'

Without waiting for an answer, Zack's bum motioned to the bumguards.

They swung into action.

One of them produced a pair of scissors, cut a hole in the back of the bumcatcher's trousers and removed his bum.

It came out coughing. It was very white and, judging by the way it was shivering, very frightened.

'It's okay, little fella,' said Zack's bum, patting it. 'You'll be all right.'

Meanwhile the other bumguard grabbed a handful of the bumcatcher's hair and began to pull it.

The bumcatcher yelled.

‘I can’t do it,’ said the bum. ‘I need help!’

One of the other bumguards put its arms around the first bum and they both started pulling. All of a sudden the bumcatcher’s head came free. The bumguards stumbled backwards and fell over.

‘Well don’t just lie there,’ said Zack’s bum, taking the head of the bumcatcher from the bumguard. ‘Stand him up!’

The bumguards picked the bumcatcher up off the platform and helped him to his feet. He stood there, swaying groggily back and forth while Zack’s bum attached the bumcatcher’s head to where his bum had been.

The crowd cheered.

But that cheer was nothing compared to the cheer when Zack’s bum, lifted up by two of the bumguards, crowned the bumcatcher’s neck with his bum.

‘All hail the new order!’ yelled Zack’s bum.

‘ALL HAIL THE NEW ORDER!’ chanted the crowd.

It was a truly grotesque sight. The bumcatcher swayed from side to side, as if his bum wasn’t sure how to control its new body.

‘Help!’ yelled the bumcatcher’s head. ‘I can’t breathe!’

‘Now you know how we feel,’ said Zack’s bum. ‘Guards—put his underpants back on!’

The bums pulled the bumcatcher’s underpants up over his face, muffling any further protests.

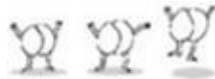
After this, Zack’s bum turned back to the crowd.

‘This is just the beginning,’ it yelled. ‘Follow me now! To the bumcano! To our glorious future!’

Zack’s bum leapt off the platform and crowd-surfed its way to the main exit.

‘To the bumcano!’ it cried as it passed through the gate.

‘To the bumcano!’ echoed the vast crowd of bums as they followed it into the night.



Zack waited until all the bums had left the oval. He was terrified. He didn’t want what had happened to the bumcatcher to happen to him. He probably would have waited longer except that the bumcatcher’s body, still swaying on the platform, took a few uncertain steps forward and fell.

Zack heard the bumcatcher groan. He jumped out of the hotdog stand and ran to him.

The bumcatcher’s bum was scared.

‘I didn’t want this,’ it whimpered.

‘I know,’ said Zack. ‘I saw the whole thing.’

Zack pulled the bumcatcher’s underpants down so that he could see the bumcatcher’s face.

He looked terrible. His face was bright red, his eyes popping out of their sockets . . . and his breathing was shocking. To make things worse he was poking his tongue out and making a loud slobber raspberry noise.

He was clearly delirious. Whether it was from the rearrangement or the fall was hard to say, b

Zack knew he had to try to bring him to his senses.

Zack took a can of pine-scented air-freshener that was hanging off the bumcatcher's belt and sprayed it near his face to try to neutralise the effects of the rearrangement. As the smell of pine trees filled the air, the bumcatcher's eyeballs stopped rolling and he focused.

'Zack?' he said, with fresh terror in his eyes. 'What are you doing here? You're not on their side, are you?'

'No way,' said Zack. 'I was following my bum. It sneaked out of my bedroom.'

The bumcatcher groaned.

'That was your bum up there, wasn't it?' he said.

'Yes,' said Zack, feeling ashamed.

'I thought I recognised it,' said the bumcatcher. 'I never forget a bum.'

'You look bad,' said Zack, quickly changing the subject. 'Do you think you'll be able to catch them?'

The bumcatcher shook his head.

'I'm going to be out of action for a while,' he said. 'At least until I get myself sorted out. I can't stop those bums now.'

'But if you can't, then who will?' said Zack.

The bumcatcher winced as he spoke.

'Listen to me, Zack,' he said. 'Your bum has gone psycho. There's only one person who can stop . . . Silas Sterne.'

'Silas Sterne?' said Zack.

The bumcatcher nodded.

Zack knew about Silas Sterne. Everybody did. Like all his friends at school, Zack collected bum-fighter trading cards, and the card featuring Silas Sterne was the rarest and the most prized of them all. He was one of the world's greatest bum hunters. He'd hunted—and captured—some of the biggest and meanest bums on the planet. His photograph on the card showed a fierce-looking man dressed in a shiny black Ninja suit. Unlike a Ninja, however, he was wearing a white hard hat with a miner's lamp on the front of it. Also, unlike a Ninja, he had a couple of massive bum-guns slung across his shoulders. Zack had had to trade ten of his best bum-fighter cards for it, including the cards featuring the Smacker, the Kicker and the Kisser, but he was so happy to get the Silas Sterne card he didn't even mind.

The bumcatcher groaned. His eyes were closed.

He was obviously in pain.

Zack sprayed a little more air-freshener above his head.

The bumcatcher opened his eyes and focused on him with difficulty.

'Zack, you have to go to the Bum Hunter. Tell him everything that's happened here tonight. He'll know what to do.'

'But I can't go out there,' said Zack. 'It's too dangerous. The whole town will be crawling with bums.'

'Zack,' said the bumcatcher, 'it's *your* bum. It's *your* responsibility. You can't stick your head in

the sand, or it will end up grafted to your backside—just like mine.’

He was right. Zack knew that. But he was still scared. Despite his enthusiasm for collecting bum-fighter trading cards he had no desire to be a bum-fighter himself. Well, perhaps it wasn't so much a lack of desire as a lack of aptitude. Zack had failed the Junior Bum-fighters' League entry exam three times. Each time he'd been gassed by a particularly clumsy and slow-moving bum, much to the amusement of the other junior bum-fighters and the embarrassment of his parents and himself. After the third gassing he'd given up all thoughts of fighting bums and devoted himself to his trading card collection instead.

The bumcatcher, sensing Zack's fear, spoke to him gently.

‘Look, Zack,’ he said, ‘I'm not asking you to fight them. All you have to do is to contact the Bum Hunter. Here, I've got everything you need. My utility belt. Take it.’

The bumcatcher undid the belt from around his waist and handed it to Zack.

Zack took the belt. It was made of thick brown leather and had a large gold buckle with the words ‘BE BOLD, BE BRAVE, BE FREE’ inscribed on the front. The belt had a variety of little holsters and hooks to which all the basic tools of bum-catching were attached. There were three wooden clothespegs, a roll of toilet paper, a fluffy pink toilet seat cover, a small rolled up net, a row of cork, a set of sewing needles, a box of matches, a tennis racquet and a cake of soap.

Zack understood what most of the items were for, except the soap.

‘What's the soap for?’ he asked.

‘For washing your hands,’ said the bumcatcher. ‘It's the first rule of bum-fighting. Always wash your hands afterwards. Got that?’

Zack nodded.

The bumcatcher lay back down, grimacing with pain.

‘And one more thing, Zack,’ he murmured weakly.

‘What's that?’ said Zack, his mind reeling.

‘Put these socks on.’

The bumcatcher handed him a pair of thick brown bumcatcher socks.

‘Socks?’ said Zack, wondering if the bumcatcher had gone mad.

‘Yes,’ said the bumcatcher. ‘Put them on now, and don't take them off until you need them.’

‘How will I know when I need them?’ said Zack, still confused.

‘You'll know,’ he said. ‘You'll just know.’

‘Where will I find the Bum Hunter?’ asked Zack.

The bumcatcher didn't respond. He'd lost consciousness.

Zack slapped his cheek. ‘Wake up!’ he said. ‘You haven't told me where I can find the Bum Hunter.’

For a moment there was no response.

Then the bumcatcher half-opened his eyes.

He tried to form words. ‘... I ... need ... more ... spray ...’ he whispered.

Zack sprayed.

The bumcatcher started talking although still with difficulty.

‘You’ll . . . find . . . him . . . at . . . the . . . the . . .’

His voice trailed off.

Zack pressed the nozzle on the spray can, but nothing happened. He pressed it again. Still nothing.

Zack threw the can on the ground.

‘Where!?’ he pleaded. ‘Just tell me where!!!’

But it was no use. The bumcatcher was completely out of it.

Zack looked at the belt in his hand and read the inscription on the buckle again.

BE BOLD. BE BRAVE. BE FREE.

Zack didn’t feel bold.

He didn’t feel brave.

And he certainly didn’t feel free.

He wasn’t free to live his life.

His bum was always wrecking everything.

Whatever he tried to do his bum would always find some way to sabotage it.

Zack knew that the bumcatcher was right.

His bum was his responsibility. He had to find the Bum Hunter before it got any more out of control.

Zack put the belt on. It hung loosely around his waist. He pulled it tight but it still felt weird. It reminded him of the feeling he’d had when he’d put on the cowboy suit his parents had given him for his sixth birthday. It was too big and the seams had itched against his skin. To make things worse he’d pricked himself with the shiny silver Sheriff’s badge and cried. He’d begged to be able to take it off, much to his father’s frustration. ‘But you only just put it on!’ he’d said. ‘Give him time,’ said his mother. ‘He probably just needs to grow into it.’ But Zack had never worn it again. He just didn’t like it. And he didn’t like the belt. As far as Zack was concerned, the only difference between his cowboy suit and the bumcatcher’s belt was that instead of guns he had a roll of toilet paper on one hip and a tennis racquet on the other.

Just as Zack was about to leave, he remembered the socks.

‘Oh great,’ he mumbled as he rolled them onto his feet. ‘Not only do I have to find the Bum Hunter, get my crazy bum back and save the world, I have to wear bumcatcher socks that will make my feet all hot and stinky. This day just keeps getting better and better.’

He pulled his shoes back on and headed towards the gate.

THE BUM HUNTER'S DAUGHTER

Zack couldn't see a single bum anywhere as he left the oval.

But he could see where they'd been.

There were skidmarks everywhere. Splintered, broken, smoking trees. Smashed house windows. The roads pockmarked with more craters and blast holes than the surface of the moon. Cars lying on their sides or completely overturned, obviously shaken by some powerful blasts.

And everywhere, permeating everything, the air was warm and thick with the stench of rotten-egg gas. Breathing was almost impossible.

Zack reached down to the belt, took out one of the clothespins and put it on his nose. It provided instant relief. He was glad that the bumcatcher had insisted he take the belt.

As he crossed a large intersection on the outskirts of town he noticed a droning noise.

Zack couldn't identify it, but it was getting louder. It seemed to be coming from overhead.

He looked up. The sky was streaked with light. Dawn was not far away.

And then he saw them.

Flying bums.

A whole squadron.

Heading straight towards him.

The noise was deafening and the smell was so intense that Zack almost passed out.

He ran down a hill to hide under some trees beside a small creek, but it was too late.

They'd seen him.

As Zack ran, he looked over his shoulder. A bum broke away from the pack and began to zoom towards him.

It was not a pretty sight.

It was huge, and coming in fast.

Zack fell to the ground and put his hands over his head—just in time. The bum swooped down over the top of him, brushing the back of his hands. Zack lifted his head to see the bum shoot up into the sky, turn and start hurtling towards him, even faster this time.

Zack gulped.

This was just like the exam he'd failed the last time he'd tried out for the Junior Bum-fighter League. Except worse. The bum that had gassed him there was slow-moving and clumsy. This bum was bigger and meaner and meant business. Real business.

Zack became aware of a sharp pain in his side. It was the tennis racquet handle. He pushed himself up onto one elbow, reached down and pulled the racquet out of the belt. If he was going to die, he least wanted to die in comfort.

Then Zack noticed a strange thing.

As he produced the tennis racquet from underneath him the colour drained from the bum, leaving it a deathly white.

Instinctively, Zack realised that the bum was scared.

It was scared of the racquet!

Zack gripped the handle tightly and a daring idea formed in his mind.

He could hit it.

It was worth a try. After all, what did he have to lose? He figured he was about to die anyway.

Zack rolled over, sat up and hid the racquet behind his back. He waited until the bum was almost on top of him, and then he let fly.

THWACK!

The bum went hurtling off his racquet and into the back of a parked car.

BOOM!

The explosion was deafening and the force of it knocked Zack over onto his back.

Zack couldn't believe what he'd just done.

He stood up to run, but two more bums, even larger than the first, broke away from the main group and sped towards him. Zack raised his tennis racquet, ready to hit them. As they drew closer, however, one veered around to attack him from behind while the other continued its assault from the front.

Zack gulped. And gulped again.

One gulp for each bum.

Those bums were smart, he thought. They knew he could hit only one at a time.

But then Zack had another daring idea.

He focused his eyes on the bum coming towards him.

He could hear the evil drone of the other bum coming in from behind.

At the last possible moment he ducked.

The bums collided with a thunderous sonic boom.

Zack was thrown face first onto the ground.

But that wasn't the end of his problems because now the rest of the squadron was heading towards him.

And they weren't happy.

Zack knew his tennis racquet would be no use against that many bums. There must have been at least fifty of them spread out across the sky and heading in at him from every direction.

He didn't know a lot about bum-fighting, but he knew enough to know what this meant.

It was a cluster bum.

Zack started running.

He had to find cover or he was going to be obliterated.

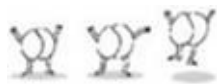
And then Zack saw it . . . an open storm drain.

He ran towards it.

He'd made it to the mouth of the enormous pipe when the bums collided.

WHAM!

He felt the heat on his back as the blast propelled him into the darkness of the drain.



Zack rocketed through the pipe and shot out into a large open area into which a number of other drains emptied.

He crashed onto a small card table surrounded by bums. The table collapsed underneath him and the bums went flying. But before Zack could get up, the bums were all around him, poking him with their soft, frog-like fingers.

'Well, well, well,' said a well-scrubbed bum who was wearing a cardboard party hat in the shape of a crown. 'If it isn't a bumcatcher! How nice of him to drop in, isn't it, Maurice?'

Maurice, a larger bum standing beside him, nodded.

'Very nice, Prince,' he said in a deep voice. 'Very, very nice indeed.'

The rest of the bums elbowed one another and sniggered.

The bum called Prince jumped up onto Zack's chest.

'Well?' he said. 'To what do we owe this unexpected pleasure, bumcatcher?'

The smell of the Prince's breath almost knocked Zack out, despite the clothespeg on his nose.

'I'm not a bumcatcher,' said Zack.

'Do you take me for a fool?' said the Prince.

'No,' said Zack.

'Then why do you insult me?' said the Prince.

'Insult you?' said Zack. 'What do you mean?'

'Well, you're wearing a bumcatcher's utility belt,' said the Prince reaching forward, unclipping the belt and dangling it in front of Zack's face. 'I assume you're not delivering pizzas.'

The other bums slapped their thighs and winked at one another in appreciation of their leader's joke.

'That's not my belt,' said Zack.

'Look,' said the Prince, 'I'd like to believe you. I really would, wouldn't I, Maurice?'

'That's right,' said Maurice. 'He would. He really would. He really and truly . . .'

'That will do, Maurice,' said the Prince.

'Sorry, sir,' said Maurice.

'As I was saying,' said the Prince, 'I would like to believe you, but it's more than my job's worth. As you see. As leader of Bum Intelligence it's my job to capture and interrogate any humans engaged in anti-bum activities. Now put yourself in my shoes. A human wearing a bumcatcher's utility belt enters the room and tells us that he's not a bumcatcher. What would you do?'

'Let him go?' suggested Zack.

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