

**KYAN
GREEN**
BATTLES THE MULTIVERSE

COLM FIELD

Illustrated by **DAVID WILKERSON**

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*For Mum and Dad, aka Eyelash and
Dangerous Dave, aka Blammo and Granjab*

*(That's what predictive text suggested for Mamo and
Grandad and I'm sticking with it)*

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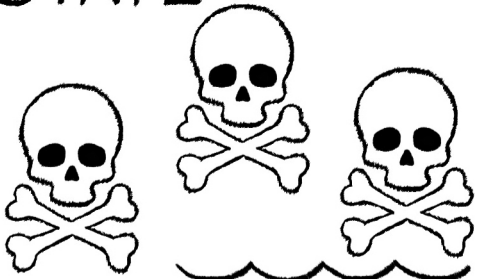
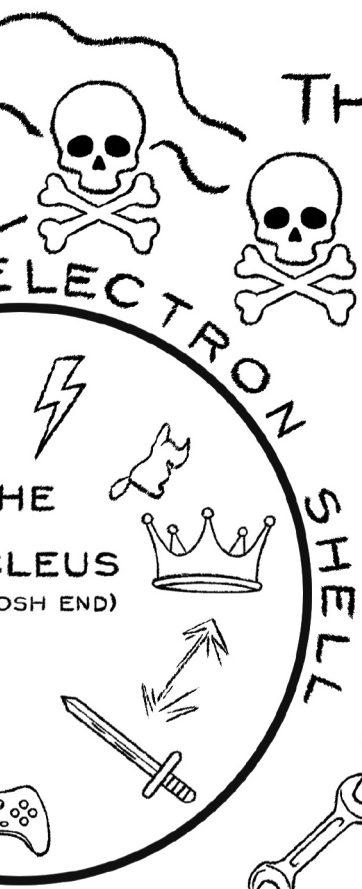


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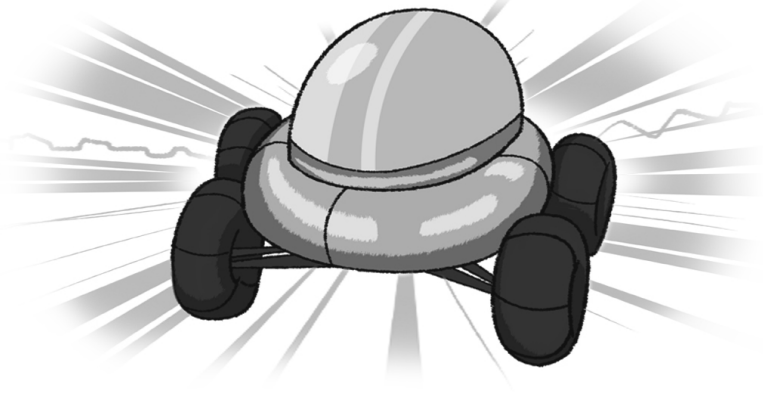
THE PURE STATE



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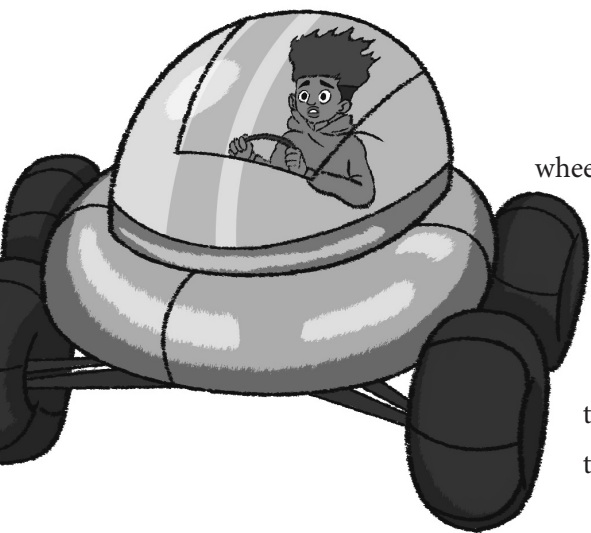
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The Grinster's Kitchen

My car rolled quietly across shiny blue and white squares. The sun shone above like no sun I've ever seen; flat, long and pale. Strange, white buildings zipped past; curved, shiny and smooth, without any windows or doors. Even after the many weird and wonderful worlds I had already seen, this was an alien place.

That thought made me shiver.

Without thinking I pushed my foot down, and felt the quiet pull of an electric engine *whoosh* me forwards. I hadn't thought these buggy-looking cars would be quick: they looked more like bumper cars. But they were perfect for this smooth terrain, and soon I saw more bizarre sights. A milky-white pond. Huge brown scabbly



wheels with holes in the middle, clustered together like a herd of cows. I sped up between two giant glass towers, and –

‘Watch out for the sludge trap, ya great galoob!’ a familiar voice hissed through the speakers, just as a slimy orange blob hurtled towards me. ‘We lost three bubble-butts last week to them!’

I took my foot off the pedal, and with a gentle whistle my car came to a quick halt. I pushed a yellow button marked RADIO, and spoke.

‘Uh, thanks, uh . . . Grandma?’

The voice hadn’t belonged to my real grandma. Instead it was this universe’s version of Kyan Green’s grandma. Trouble was, I’d already found that, in a lot of universes, my Almost-Grandma wasn’t actually *called* Grandma. When the voice at the end of the radio didn’t answer, I worried that I had made a mistake. But then the radio crackled, and my friend Stefania replied instead.

‘I don’t think she can hear you,’ she said, coming to a

halt alongside me, her brother Dimi just behind. ‘The range on these radios isn’t very strong.’

‘They drive wicked though, innit,’ Dimi said enthusiastically, giving his wheel a spin and rotating on the spot. ‘*Nuff* safe. They should have these bumpers on all cars.’

‘Where’s Luke?’ I asked. Dimi winced, and he nodded past me. There, juddering forwards one metre at a time, came Luke. He swerved a little right, then a *lot* left, so much that I had to move forwards to avoid hitting him. Then, with a relieved smile, he paused . . .

And jerked again into the glass tower.

‘Whoops, sorry!’ Luke said with a laugh. ‘How does it even do that?!’

‘Gamma Team,’ Almost-Grandma hissed angrily through my radio. ‘Why aren’t I seeing you already? Do you want to get eaten?’

‘Did she just say eaten?’ Dimi asked, his voice rising. He jabbed frantically at his radio, causing *TSS-TSS* hisses of static that set my teeth on edge. ‘What did you – *TSS-TSS* – say? *What* – *TSS* – did you say?!’

‘Dim,’ I said soothingly. ‘Dimi – *TSS* – Argh, DIMI! Remember what we said after Jet Ski Snooker? We play it cool, until we know what’s happening.’

‘Shut up, you lot,’ Stef said (that’s Stefania for ‘Listen to me please’). ‘I know what this place is.’

She drove around the shivering orange sludge, up to a shiny metal sculpture. It was long, flat and thin; except for the end, which was curved into a big bowl. In the bowl was more orange sludge.

‘That’s a giant spoon,’ Stefania said, ‘That’s a spoon and this . . . this is marmalade.’

Suddenly the air felt very still.

‘Nah,’ Luke said eventually. ‘No way that’s marmalade. Who puts marmalade on a spoon?’

‘People that *eat* people,’ Dimi moaned.

‘Ky, would *you* do it? Would *you* put marmalade on a spoon?’

‘I do *not* eat marmalade,’ I said.

‘What?! Marmalade’s bash!’ (Side Note: Luke’s recently started making up his own slang. I don’t know if he knows it’s made up, or if he’s just misheard real slang.)

‘Don’t trust it,’ I said. ‘All those bits.’

‘That’s peel! That’s bits of orange peel, how can you—’

‘*Who cares, you lot?!*’ Stefania exploded. ‘If that’s the size of the spoon, how big is the mouth it goes in? This is a kitchen table. This is a giant’s breakfast.’ She twisted in her chair, pointing around at all the weird things we’d passed.

‘Those smooth, windowless houses? They aren’t houses, they’re jugs. That milky pond over there? It’s actual milk. And that big flat sun above us? That’s the kitchen light.’

‘And those huge brown wheels aren’t wheels,’ I realised with a gasp. ‘They’re . . . they’re *Clumped Wheat-Os!*’

‘Eh?’ Luke said. ‘Wait – you mean Cheerios?’

‘Eesh, Ky.’ Dimi sighed. ‘We don’t get the brands neither, but the cereals your dad buys always sound so *grim*—’

WHOOOMP! A gigantic meaty hand SLAMMED down from above and picked up the metal marmalade spoon like it weighed *nothing*. Boulder-sized crumbs of toast tumbled from its fingertips as it did, crashing down – BOOM-BOOM-BOOM! – around us.

‘RUN!’ I screamed, and sped for the shelter of a dinner plate, Stef and Dimi close behind. I reached the shaded area beneath the plate’s rim, spun around . . . and my heart sank.

‘Luke!’ I shouted. ‘Over here!’

But it wouldn’t be that simple. Luke really hadn’t got to grips with his car. Somehow he’d driven right into the middle of the Cheerios herd, bashing into one then another as he tried to escape.

‘Stupid – *oof!* – cars!’ he hissed. ‘I – *urfff!* – can’t get the – *oof!* – steering right!’

‘You’re turning too much,’ Stefania said. ‘Turning too much and – slow down!’

‘Yeah I *get* that,’ Luke hissed back. ‘It isn’t—’

‘Still too far,’ said Stef, not noticing my and Dimi’s glares to stop. She doesn’t mean to be, but she’s kinda harsh when we make mistakes. ‘You can speed up though, hurry up! More than that! Nope, too – too far!’

‘Just pretend you’re on the dodgems, Luke,’ Dimi said encouragingly. ‘Except instead of a buzzer going off when the ride’s over, there’s a mad giant who’ll rip off all our heads.’

As if that were all he needed to hear, Luke finally sped out between the Cheerios. But he still wasn’t in control. He veered right around in a circle, and *just* as that gigantic hand THUDDDED the marmalade spoon back down on the table, Luke’s back wheels drifted into the sweet orange sludge clinging to the back of it . . . and was stuck fast.

‘Wheelspin it!’ Dimi shouted. ‘You’ve got to break free!’

But Luke was frozen. His eyes wide, his mouth open, he stared up in terror as a titanic shadow loomed across the table like a total eclipse. I edged forwards, and saw it too; the biggest, grumpiest, *butters-est* face I have ever seen.

‘It’s Mr Stringer,’ I said faintly. ‘The Giant Grinster is Mr Stringer.’

Back in my universe, Mr Stringer was our landlord, the greedy grasper who'd pulled every trick in the book in order to kick us out of our home – until the Infinite Race helped me to uncover his illegal lies. He'd been my enemy in *every* universe, in fact: the Sparks Raider who'd almost destroyed an entire ecosystem; the out-of-control copper who'd tried to run us off the road; even the arrogant, spoilt Racer desperate to cheat me out of first place in the most brutal Demolition Derby in the Multiverse. So far I'd won every battle we'd had. However, there was one *teensy* difference between those worlds and this one.

Never, in all the worlds I'd travelled to, had Mr Stringer ever been *this* big, and never had I been *this* small.

'What's he doing?' Dimi asked. 'Why's he in slo-mo?'

Dimi was right. The Grinster was taking ages, craning his neck to peer at my terrified, marmalade-stuck friend. I felt a soft current of air being sucked up through those hairy blocked *clackalacka-clackalacka* nostrils, and as the Grinster's mouth began to open, his lips pulled slowly apart like some spit-glued ziplock bag.

'He's gigantic,' Stef said in wonder. 'Everything takes longer to reach his brain. Or everything is taking less time to reach our brain. This must be how ants see us.'

The Grinster's mouth gaped open wider, revealing tea-



stained, cereal-bunged teeth, His hairy nose sniffed and snorted, and a whole *orchestra* of pigs echoed around us.

‘Speak for yourself,’ I said. But when the Grinster spoke, he sounded more disgusted than I did.

‘UUUURRRRRRRRRRRRRRGHHHHHHHHHH!’ he roared, and picked up the teaspoon with Luke still attached. As I cried out with dismay, the Grinster flailed the spoon about, until Luke’s car broke free of the marmalade, and was flung high across the table, falling out of sight.

‘NO!’ I shouted, and looked desperately around at Stefania and Dimi. ‘No! He can’t . . . Please say he’s survived that.’

‘We’ve got to find out,’ Stef said determinedly, though through her windscreen her face looked pale. ‘Let’s go and find hi—’

As if things couldn’t get any worse, General Grandma’s voice crackled through the radio.

‘You’ve done it, Race Team One – the Grinster is fetching the bug spray. Now *get outta there!*’

‘Er . . . what’s bug spray?’ I asked. And before anyone could answer, the Grinster loomed over the table again. He held a spray canister in his hand, and as it grew closer I saw writing on it which scared me more than anything I’d seen already.

**BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE HAPPY
CORPORATION!**

PURGE-AWAY!!!

**ERADICATE THOSE PESKY TINIES, SAFELY
AND HUMANELY!**

‘The Happy Corporation,’ I said faintly. ‘This is going to be *evil*.’

It was. With a deafening SSSSSSSS, the Giant Grinster’s finger pressed the trigger, and a jet-black plume cannoned out like silly string. It floated there for a moment, before separating into five blobs. These blobs drifted apart, and as they did they grew, expanding like odd-shaped water balloons, until each one was the size of a tent. Then, suddenly, they began to shake. Quietly at first, then *violently* jerking and stretching.

‘There’s something inside them,’ Dimi whispered. ‘Something that’s trying to escape.’

And something did.

An evil-looking blade the colour of shiny obsidian punctured one of the sacs. The blade began to bulge as it sliced down, pulsing, growing, until by the time it had reached the bottom it looked less like a blade and more like a . . .

‘Stinger,’ Dimi breathed. ‘La naiba, that’s a stinger!’

The sac began to crinkle, sagging like a bag of thick dead skin. A long, thin, mandible-like mouth poked out from the opening the stinger had made, twitching like it was sniffing for food. It suckered at the sagging sac skin, paused . . . and in one, brutal motion, hoovered it all up to reveal a curled-up giant insect, as big as my car back home. The insect’s wings opened, and with a long, angry buzzing sound, they began to beat.

‘Oh. My. Days,’ Dimi murmured faintly. ‘Hornet drones.’

‘How do you know they’re called that?’ I said.

‘What else could they be called?’

Like an old-fashioned aerial, two long metallic antennas extended from each of the five hornet drones’ heads. Slowly they rotated in mid-air, like searching satellites. One of them came to a sudden halt, facing away from us towards the city of cereal boxes. Then, as it shot away at a *startling* speed, the other four kept revolving, until they came to a stop in front of us.

‘I’m detecting bug signals, Team One,’ my Almost-Grandma warned through the radio. ‘Now. *Get. Out.*’

‘Listen,’ Stefania said, her voice tight with fear. ‘Luke’s got to be where that other hornet went, past the big cereal

‘NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!’ the Giant Grinster bellowed somewhere far above. Flooring it back around the dish the same way I’d come, I wondered what he was moaning about. Then, with a loud, splintering CRACK, long, thin veins began to spread across the plate, shaking deeper and wider with every vicious *PLING!* from Hornet Two above. This shelter wouldn’t be safe for long; this whole dish was fracturing into pieces!

‘KYA . . . I . . . YO . . .’ Dimi shouted, his words crowded out by static. Cursing these rubbish radios, and suddenly panicked that I’d strayed away from my friends, I sped up. But these bubble-butts weren’t fast enough to win in a sprint against these drones, and I knew it. When I heard that *zzzz!* creeping closer behind me, I *knew* that Hornet One had freed itself and was gaining on me. Somehow I had to escape both these drones.

‘Dimi!’ I shouted. ‘Stefania! Still being chased, can you hear me?’

For a moment there was nothing but static. I heard an explosion in the distance and plunged into despair. Was this the mission too far? Were we really going to let our cosmic twins down today? Then, as I kept speeding around the curve, feedback crackled through my radio and Dimi’s excited voice broke through.

‘REPEAT: THEY DON’T LIKE WET! THEY DON’T LIKE WET!’

They don’t like wet! Daring to veer to the outside of my shelter for a brief moment, I looked ahead and saw egg yolk dripping in a waterfall – a yolkfall? – from the plate’s edge. A plan formed in my mind. A crazy idea.

Taking a deep breath, I took my foot off the accelerator, and came to a stop just before the yolkfall. Within moments, the buzzing of Hornet One slashed through the air towards me, and the frenetic Hornet Two – *PLING! PLING! PLING!* – smashed into the plate directly above me. A huge chunk of porcelain began to shake free from the rest, big enough to crush me if it dropped. Still I waited. I’d only get one shot at this.

‘Three, two, one . . .’

zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

‘Now!’

And three things happened at once. Hornet Two’s stinger punctured the plate above; Hornet One whipped around the plate towards me, stinger-first; and I *slammed* my foot down, my hands whirling the steering wheel left then right to zip forwards *around* the stream of egg yolk, not daring to look back till I’d reached the teacup.

‘Yes!’ I exhaled shakily. My plan had worked. Hornet

One had plunged through the yolksfall – only to be impaled by the Hornet Two’s deadly stinger. Now, as Hornet Two buzzed frantically to break free, the thick, oozing egg yolk was short-circuiting blue sparks across Hornet One’s entire metal frame, and it was starting to shake violently. I looked up at that demented Hornet Two, saw something like fear in its frantic movements, and grinned my *toughest* grin.

‘Smell ya later, punk,’ I said . . . and that’s when the porcelain plate shattered into pieces, setting the murderous drone free. My voice died in my throat. Hornet Two turned to me with a deadly, emotionless triumph . . .

And Hornet One exploded with a *KABOOM*, engulfing them both in a ball of fire!

‘YES!’ I whooped with relief. ‘Dim, you legend, you were right! Where are you guys?’

‘Follow the destruction to the cereal boxes,’ Stefania replied. She wasn’t lying either. The shiny road was littered with crumbs and spatters, and huge, wasp-shaped holes punched through every piece of toast in the rack. The sauce bottles were toppled like ancient glass ruins, and two husks of twisted metal sat smoking in the milk pond. As I heard a gigantic roar of rage far above me, I couldn’t help but smirk with satisfaction.

‘AWWWWWWWWW, NOOOOOOOO!!!!’

‘Ha! I bet the Grinster didn’t expect his bug spray to smash up his kitchen,’ I chuckled. But there was no time to celebrate.

‘Kyan, Stef, come look at this!’ said Dimi, his voice quiet and urgent. ‘I’m at the corner of Bran Flakes and Porridge. I’ve found Luke.’

I raced forwards, around the grid-like city of humongous cereal boxes, until I saw Dimi. The two boxes opened up into a clearing, and as I pulled up alongside Dimi, he pointed and I saw him.

‘Luke!’

Our friend was trapped beneath an upside-down glass with a thin, curved handle. The glass was *right* on the corner of the table, and Luke was shouting and waving at us frantically, driving repeatedly into the glass walls. But his voice didn’t come through the radio, and the glass didn’t budge. Stood on the base of the glass above him, watching us silently, was the final hornet drone.

‘What’s he pointing at?’ I asked. ‘And why is that drone just sitting there?’ Then a horrible thought dawned on me. ‘Where’s the Grinster?’

It came out of nowhere, a rolled-up magazine the size of ten trees, swooping down so fast that the draught of air

it created sent me spinning, smashing the cereal boxes over like dominoes. Me and Stef raced beneath the boxes as they fell, our headlights lighting up a shrinking tunnel. But Dimi was fearless in these bubble-butts, and I broke through to the other side of the cereal box just in time to see him WALLOP into Luke's glass at full speed before bouncing off and . . . the glass barely moved.

But the hornet drone did. With the Grinster's crazed laughter booming around us, it suddenly darted for Dimi's car, its stinger stabbing through the metal roof and through the passenger seat just *inches* from Dimi.

'AAAARGH!' Dimi screamed, slammed on the accelerator and whirled the steering wheel around, doughnutting wildly across the tabletop. Breaking free, the hornet soared back up into the air, turned with a deadly grace, and plunged *straight* back down, this time aiming right for Dimi's skull.

'Dimi, NO!' I screamed – just as the Grinster's rolled-up magazine swooped across the table and smashed the hornet into the Porridge Oats box.

'AWWWWWW NOOOOOOOOO!!!'

'Oh my gosh, did you see that?!' I laughed. 'He took out his own bug!'

For a moment, Stef's face was deathly pale. Then,

instead of saying something kind about her brother's narrow escape, she looked tersely across to the upside-down glass still holding Luke.

'What do we do about Luke though?' she said.

Just then, a net was fired out across the clearing. It wrapped around the hornet drone lying prone by the Porridge Oats, and as I looked to see who'd fired it . . . I felt a *huge relief*. A mean, blue-and-white-chequered tank was rolling towards us. Poking out from the top of the turret was my Almost-Grandma's head, half hidden behind the telescopic sight of her harpoon gun. She looked like a military officer in this universe, and sure enough, as she chewed the cigar sticking out of her mouth, she nodded with unsmiling satisfaction, and ducked back down.

'General Loretta Price, come to save the greenhorns,' she bellowed. 'Yer up, Gunnery Officer Celestine!'

'Gunnery Officer *who* was that?' I asked.

'GET OUT THE WAY OF THE HEAVY MOB, BUBBLE-BUTTS!' another familiar voice shouted through my radio. It was my kid sister – not my *almost*-sister, but my actual sister, Celestine. She was there when we found the Infinite Racetrack, and although we argue a lot, I recently learned that she is way smarter and tougher than I've ever given her credit for.

But even so, I wouldn't *ever* give her a tank gun.

'Tines,' I said. 'Tines, is that a good idea? 'Tines? Tines, NO!'

BLASTTT!!! Celestine fired, and a flaming shell burst out of the tank's turret. At first the shot looked wide, and my heart sank – but I wasn't giving my sister enough credit. The shell smashed into the ornate handle, tearing it off and sending both flying off the table. The glass itself was sent spinning around violently, circling wider and wider along its thin, delicate rim . . . before at last it toppled over, leaving Luke free to escape!

'Woohoo!' Luke whooped, swerving left and bouncing off a sugar pot. We all raced forwards to join him (and I'm not gonna lie: to make sure he didn't somehow drive into another disaster). Then, before we could speak, the Grinster let out a groan of *pure* agony.

'NOOO, NOOOOOOOOOO!!!'

'He must've liked that glass,' Dimi quipped.

'Great job, team!' Almost-Grandma shouted. 'We've captured ourselves a hornet drone, and if I have to tell you to drive down that table leg one more time, *I'll squish you like the Grinster couldn't!*'

Well, that threat was enough; we had to get off this table. Following my Almost-Grandma's directions, we

raced towards the corner of the table, the Grinster still wailing about his precious glass above us. But as the table's edge came closer, I looked at the floor miles below and began to worry.

'Wait, Stef!' I asked. 'Won't we just fall?'

'I don't think so,' Stef said. 'So long as we keep moving, we'll have more force sticking us to the leg than the gravity trying to pull us off it.'

'OK,' I said, took a breath . . . and raced for the corner like everyone else. Everyone except for Luke, that is.

'I just can't – urgh! – get the hang of this!' he shouted, careening the wrong way past me, even as the shadow of the Grinster's titanic magazine loomed over us again.

Well, no *way* was I leaving him. I spun the wheel, screeching into a spin that smashed into his bubble-butt car and drove us *both* over the table's edge. As the magazine smashed down behind us, as our spinning wheels flew off the table and somehow *clung* to the table leg *still driving*, Luke screamed – then laughed with glee.

'You did it, Kyan!' he shouted through the radio. 'You're the best!'

That's Luke. That's my best friend.

The trouble was, I wasn't sure if he should be on this team.