

Sam Adler and the Mar Ball

by Dwayne Carr

“Got it!” I shouted.

My best friend Toby jumped up and clenched his fists, but he was too nice to hit me and I had won his favorite marble fair and square. I held it up to the light and grinned at the way the red color looked like fire in the sunlight. I made sure that Cody Gibbons could see it. Cody always watched Toby and me play marbles, but we never let her play. We were experts and she wasn’t a good enough player.

“It’s the first time he ever played his purie,” I called to Cody. “I got it!”

Cody shook her head and Toby stomped back toward the school building. I held the marble up one more time, then I made a big mistake. I dropped it in my right pocket.

My name is Sam Adler, and there's something you need to know about me: I travel a lot to a planet called Thrae. My teacher says I daydream too much, but Thrae is a real place and I’m a very important person there. The other thing you need to know is that anything that’s in my right pocket travels with me between Earth and Thrae.

Normally I only keep Shacs and Noics in my right pocket. They look a lot like white marbles, but they’re actually money on Thrae. The Shacs are worth four Noics, and I have a lot of Shacs at my house on Thrae.

I stopped by the drinking fountain when I got back inside the school and that’s where Ambassador Prill found me.

“The king would like your wise counsel, Mr. Adler,” said Prill. He was a very formal man, and he was dressed in a suit and tie, so I figured Thrae was in one of its modern periods. Thrae changes time periods as often as we change clothes on Earth.

I was starving when I got to Thrae, so I stopped by the Otis Candy Shop for some lunch. I pulled out my Shacs and Noics, and that was when I realized I had dropped the red marble in my right pocket.

Otis's eyes got huge when he saw the purie.

"What is it, sir?" he asked.

"It's just a marble," I said. I tried to hand him three Noics to pay for my candy, but he couldn't take his eyes off the purie.

"The Mar Ball?" he said, and he sounded all choked up.

"No, not *the* marble. *A* marble," I said.

Otis's eyes lit up even brighter. "There are others like this on Thrae?" he asked.

I scratched my head. "Well...no. I guess not. It's the only one like it on Thrae."

"Then it is priceless, sir," said Otis. He reached out to touch it and his hand trembled.

I was getting angry. The king was waiting to see me and I was hungry. I just wanted to pay and get out of the store. "Look," I said, "just take it. It's not worth anything."

Otis looked at me as if I had just offered him a million dollars. "You want to give it to me?!"

I held it out to him. "Take it. And let me pay you for the candy."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Otis. He picked up an entire box of candy bars and shoved them at me. "Take them all, sir!"

I left the store with eight boxes of candy.

I ate a candy bar and then another and, I didn't really think about the king again until I had finished off more than half of the boxes. When I finally got to the castle I found it in an uproar.

"Did you hear?" said the king as soon as I entered the room. "Otis has found a great jewel. The Mar Ball! The rarest and most precious gem in the kingdom!"

“It’s not a gem,” I said. “It’s a marble. It’s worth about a penny.”

But the king didn’t know what a penny was, and he was certain the marble was an expensive gem.

“Otis is coming now to show it to me,” said King Bern. “I must have this jewel.”

Nothing I said could convince King Bern that the marble was not a jewel, and when Otis arrived with the red purie the king’s eyes bulged.

“I must have this gem for my crown,” said the king. “You will sell it to me.”

“Your highness,” said Otis, “I have promised this jewel to my daughter as her wedding present. I cannot sell it to you.”

“You must!” cried the king. “Now that I have seen it I must have it for my own!”

The king stood up from his throne and stepped toward Otis, and I could see that the situation was getting out of hand.

Otis held the marble tighter. “No. I cannot sell the Mar Ball to you.”

“Traitor!” shouted King Bern.

“Wait a minute,” I said, but they both ignored me.

“You are a traitor to your king!” screamed Bern. “You will die for this!”

Otis turned white and fell to his knees. “Please, my lord!” he said. He clasped his trembling hands together, and the next moment the marble dropped to the castle’s polished floor.

I pounced on it before anyone could move.

“There,” I said. I stood up and shoved the marble into my right pocket. “Now no one can have it. I’m taking it back to Earth.

The king turned on me and raised his hand. “You...you traitor!” he yelled.

I stared at him until he stopped shaking, then I said, “You’ll have to choose between me and the Mar Ball. If I leave it here I’m never coming back.”

The king stared at me for a long time, then he sank down onto his throne and buried his head in his hand.

“You have been my best friend and wisest counselor. I cannot bear the thought that you might not return. Take the Mar Ball and return it to Earth. Never bring it back here.”

A moment later I was standing by the water fountain at school again and Ambassador Prill had bowed and then disappeared. I looked up in time to see Toby slam his locker and start down the hallway toward me. I ran toward him and reached him before he even saw me.

“Here,” I said. I put the marble in his hand and closed his fingers over it. “Take it.”

Toby stopped and stared at me.

“You’re my friend,” I said. “That’s more important than any old marble.”

Toby looked at the marble and then back at me, and this time his face split into a big grin.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said. “Maybe I should give this marble to Cody. She’ll never learn to play if we don’t give her a chance.”

I laughed. “I’ll give her half my marbles.”

Toby’s eyes got big. “Half of them?!” he said.

“Yeah,” I said. “I need to have something to win back.”

THE END