

Sam Adler and the Purple Problem

by Dwayne Carr

My best friend Toby slumped down beside me on the bleachers in the school gym. He slammed his fist down on the seat. I could tell he was mad.

“I can’t believe they put Regina on our team,” he said. “We’ll never win now!”

“We never win at kickball anyway,” I said. “Our pitching stinks.” I could say that because I was the pitcher. I could never roll the ball fast enough or make it curve at the last minute. There were three kickball teams in the fifth grade and ours was the worst.

My name is Sam Adler. Except for my red hair, which is always a mess, I’m a pretty normal kid. I have an older brother and sister, and a dog name Mutt. My life is like everybody else’s, except that I travel to a planet called Thrae and help King Bern whenever he gets into trouble—which is a lot.

Toby wasn’t convinced by my argument. “But she’s in a wheelchair!” he grumbled. “How can you play kickball in a wheelchair?!”

I couldn’t think of a good answer, so I was relieved to see Ambassador Prill waving to me from underneath the bleachers. He looked all shiny for some reason. I jumped down and crawled under the bleachers to talk to him.

“Good morning, sir,” said the ambassador. He bowed (I’m very important on Thrae), and when he straightened up he hit his head on the underside of the bleachers. Prill didn’t even blink. He’s too serious for that.

“What’s with the tin foil, Prill?” I asked. He was wearing a suit that looked just like the aluminum foil my mom uses in the oven. Even in the dim light under the bleachers it was sparkly.

“We are exploring space, sir,” said Prill.

The time periods on Thrae change in the blink of an eye. Once, I was galloping on a horse down the main street of a Wild West town when suddenly I was in a rocket ship blasting past a row of planets. It takes some time to get used to.

“King Bern has asked whether you could spare the time to see the purple men we have discovered, sir,” said Prill.

“Purple men?” I said. “Sounds like fun. Let’s go.”

An instant later we were standing on a hill near King Bern’s castle. The hill was crowded with people and it took a few minutes for us to push our way through to where the king was standing right at the top.

“Oh, Sam!” said the king. “I’m so glad you’ve come! Look what we’ve found!” He pointed down the hill.

Right at the bottom of the grassy hill was a silver metal machine that looked like a big plate.

“Is it a flying saucer?!” I asked.

“Ask them,” said the king. He pointed toward his feet and that’s when I finally noticed the two people standing next to him. I guess they were people. They were less than three feet tall and had bright purple skin and lime green hair. They were ugly.

“Aliens,” said King Bern matter-of-factly.

I took a step backward. They might be dangerous.

“Don’t be afraid,” said King Bern. He pointed to one of the purple men. “This is Grib,” he said. He pointed to the other one. “And this is Grob. Or the other way around. They look so much alike it’s hard to tell.

“What are they doing on Thrae?” I asked.

“We were exploring space,” said the king, “and they followed us home. But, they crashed their ship, so now they’re stuck here. We’re trying to think of what they can do on Thrae. There must be something that little purple people can do here.”

A large man pushed his way out of the crowd and stood in front of King Bern. He cleared his throat loudly. "If it please your majesty," he said. (Anyone who speaks to King Bern always starts by saying "if it please your majesty," unless they're *very* important.) "If it please your majesty," said the large man, "why can't they sit in your majesty's garden and be purple. Why do they have to *do* anything. I should think that being purple all day would be quite enough."

Grib (or maybe it was Grob) folded his arms and glared at the man. "We don't want to sit around all day and watch you work and play." His voice was squeaky, but then it got even squeakier. "We want to *do* something!"

The large man mumbled an apology then disappeared into the crowd.

An elderly woman shuffled up to the king and bowed low. "If it please your majesty," she said, "perhaps the men could pick flowers in your majesty's garden. The work would be easy enough for such little people."

This time Grob (or maybe it was Grib) folded *his* arms and stamped his foot. "We don't want to pick flowers!" he squealed. "We're strong and we want to do *important* work!"

King Bern looked very worried.

I looked around the crowd and suddenly noticed a nice looking tall woman who looked a lot like my mom. The woman was the Head Librarian of Thrae, and that gave me an idea. I went over to her and whispered what I was thinking.

"Excellent idea!" Mr. Adler she exclaimed, then she went to stand in front of the king. "Your majesty," she said (and she didn't say, "if it please your majesty," because the Head Librarian of Thrae is *very* important), "I would be honored if these men would work with me in the library. I find it very difficult to reach the books on the bottom shelves and these men would be perfect for that job."

Grib (or Grob) folded his arms again. "Is it difficult enough work for strong fellows like us?"

“Oh yes,” said the Head Librarian. “Some of the books are very heavy.”

Grob (or Grib) folded his arms too. “Is it important enough work for us?”

“Of course,” said the Head Librarian. “What could be more important than getting a book for someone who wants to read it?”

“We’ll do it!” said the two purple men together.

Everyone cheered and King Bern looked relieved. “Hurrah! It’s settled!”

The gym reappeared around me and I crawled back out from under the bleachers. I stood and watched Regina for a few minutes. She was in her wheelchair over by the door and no one was paying any attention to her. Suddenly I snapped my fingers. Toby looked up.

“What are you thinking?” he asked.

“Maybe.... Just maybe,....” I said. I ran over and talked to Regina, then she rolled along beside me back to where Toby was sitting.

“Toby,” I said, “meet our new pitcher. You don’t have to be able to stand up to roll the ball! Regina says she has a wicked curve ball and there isn’t a kicker anywhere who can beat it!”

Toby shouted and gave Regina a high five. “Welcome to the team!” Then he grinned at me before he added, “And you’ve got to be *a lot* better pitcher than the guy we have now!”

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