

## Sam Adler and the Shootout at Sundown

by Dwayne Carr

I was mad at Toby.

Even though we're best friends, we get mad at each other sometimes. Today was one of those days. I slammed a book down on my desk so hard that even Miss Winkler looked up.

"Sam Adler," she said. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said. I glared at Toby. His desk was right beside mine, but he pretended not to see me. He ignored me the rest of the morning, but at recess I saw a chance for revenge.

We were playing whiffle ball and Zack Barton and I were the team captains. Zack is the biggest bully in our fifth grade class, and he hates Toby and me, so I knew he wouldn't pick Toby for *his* team.

"Good," I muttered under my breath. "I won't pick him for *my* team either. That'll show him."

We took turns picking players and as we called out names I could see Toby getting more and more nervous. When I picked Brenda Wright his eyes bulged. She was an awful player. I just stared at him and could tell that he had figured out what I was doing.

"Pssst. Pssst."

It sounded like there was tire leaking air somewhere close by. I looked around.

"*Pssst!*"

The noise was coming from behind the bushes and I just caught a glimpse of Ambassador Prill motioning to me. Zack was having a hard time deciding between Chelsey Winters and Derek Rider, so I stepped over to the bushes.

Prill was wearing a cowboy hat that was too big and a holster, complete with six-shooters.

I should probably stop and explain that I'm a normal kid (except that my red hair *never* stays in place). I travel a lot to a planet called Thrae. Prill is the man who comes for me whenever King Bern needs me. The other thing you need to know is that the time periods on Thrae shift like the wind. I guessed from Prill's outfit that Thrae was in a Wild West period.

I tried to sound like a cowboy. "Howdy, partner!" I said.

Prill's cheeks turned bright red. The ambassador is very serious and I'm sure he hated being seen in a cowboy outfit.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Prill, "but King Bern—I mean, *Sheriff* Bern—requires your assistance."

A few seconds later we rode into town on two white horses and followed the dusty main street past the saloon to the jail. The king was inside wearing a silver star on his shirt. He had on a cowboy hat instead of his crown.

"Sam!" he said when I walked in. He looked relieved. "Zor is going to ride into town at sundown and shoot up the place!"

Zor is the chief bad guy on Thrae. He's always giving King Bern—I mean, Sheriff Bern—a lot of trouble.

"Where are all the people?" I asked. I looked out the grimy window at the empty street. I hadn't seen anyone since we arrived. "Zor only has a few followers. If you get all the people together they can stop him before he gets into town."

"That's just it," said Bern. "All the parents are mad at me because I made a law that you can't make anyone under the age of eighteen eat Brussel sprouts. A big crowd is over at Otis's ranch trying to decide if they'll support me against Zor."

I rode over to the ranch and found a hundred men standing around arguing. As I got off my horse Peter Wimple, the mailman, was calling the king a tyrant.

“Let him fight Zor alone!” Wimple yelled.

Everyone murmured in agreement.

"He'll see that he can't make laws that we don't like!" cried Wimple.

The crowd hooted in agreement.

"He can't tell us what to feed our kids!" shouted a woman in the middle of the crowd. All the kids in the crowd booed her.

I pushed my way through the throng and climbed up on a box, then I motioned for them all to quiet down. They got quiet right away. (I'm *very* important on Thrae.)

“Listen here,” I said. “Just because King Bern—I mean, Sheriff Bern—made a law you don’t like is no reason to turn your backs on him. He’s done a lot of good things for you.”

I pointed to Otis. “Otis, when your candy store burned down last year, the king helped you build a new one. Remember?”

Otis nodded and looked at his cowboy boots.

“And Peter,” I said, pointing to the mailman. “When your goalie got sick and you thought your soccer team would have to forfeit the championship this year, who stepped in and played goalie?”

“King Bern,” mumbled Wimple.

“Exactly,” I said. I looked around the crowd.

All the men started putting their hands in their pockets and shuffling their feet.

“You all ought to be ashamed,” I said. “You can’t turn against someone just because he does something you don’t like once in a while. What about all the times he does things you *do* like? Where’s your loyalty?!”

“Sam’s right,” said Otis. “Let’s go, boys. It’s almost sundown and we’ve got to go help the Sheriff!”

A moment later I was standing behind the bush again. Prill tipped his ten-gallon hat to me and disappeared.

“Come on, Adler!” yelled Zack. “It’s your turn to pick!”

I stepped back to where everyone was waiting and breathed a sigh of relief. There were still four kids left and Toby was one of them.

“Toby!” I said. “I want him on my team.”

Toby’s eyes lit up and he smiled.

“Thanks,” he said, as we walked over to where the team was standing.

“No problem, partner,” I said. And if I had been wearing a cowboy hat I’d have tipped it to him.

THE END