

Cade Kickstarter Sample

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CHAPTER 1

The Ark shook.

Hopefully they would be through the asteroid belt, or whatever it was, soon. Cade had better things to do than try to guess when another collision would knock him off his feet.

He unclenched his jaw and shook out his hands. It was fine. The ship was fine. He was fine. Of course he was. He refocused on his task.

The air duct cover was stubborn. He slid his prystrip around the grate again, wincing every time it scratched. Security was picking up their patrols of the uninhabited areas of the Ark. They wanted the Grem. Wanted him bad.

They knew someone was out here where he shouldn't be. They knew someone was writing about the Grem's adventures out here and they were popular. They had to stop him before other people joined him.

Cade grinned. They weren't going to catch him. He was just too good at being sneaky.

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At least, that's what he told himself.

Another jiggle with the prystrip.

There.

He nodded as the grate shifted just enough. The pry-strip went back into his cloak pocket, and out came the microdrill. Now that the sealant was broken, those six screws were all that held the grate in place.

A smile twitched at the corners of his lips. The drill buzzed as he worked the first screw loose and then the second. They fell into his palm easily. The third screw squealed. Cade froze. The dark, dusty corridor stretched away from him. The dim orange emergency lighting revealed an endless line of abandoned berths.

No. No boots tromping. No one muttering into their phones. Just the faint buzzing of the lights and his own breathing. That was all.

Slowly, carefully, he pulled the third screw fully loose. The fourth and fifth came easily. Still no stomping. The sixth screw. The last one. Just that one, and he could pull the grate free. He lifted the microdrill. It buzzed. The sixth screw fell into his palm.

He sighed in relief.

The grate fell loose. It clattered to the ground. Metal clanged. The crash echoed down the corridor.

Cade jumped to his feet. His head whipped around. He tried to look both directions at once. He gulped for air. He couldn't get caught. What would his dad say if security brought him home? If Dad found out he was the Grem? Or maybe it would be worse. Maybe security would just

lock him up or something.

He shook his head. No. It was fine. Security was looking for him, sure, but it wasn't that bad, was it? He was just removing an old grate. Breaking something, sure, but something that was unused anyway. He was just looking around. By himself. In a forbidden area of the starship.

Right.

No tramping feet. No boots striking the floor. No security heading his way.

The smile started blooming again as his gaze fell on the open hole in the wall. A hole big enough for him to wriggle into.

And no one knew he was here. No one could stop him.

With a full grin, he stuffed the microdrill into a pocket in his black cloak. He crouched, staring into the dark space between the walls. Where would this lead? What adventures lay at the end of it? What would he see that no one had seen in generations?

His hand shook as he reached out. He touched the inside of the passage. Dust coated the smooth, shiny metal.

He was touching what no one else had touched, maybe since the time the Ark left the earth all those generations ago. Imagine that. Him, Cade, doing something no one else had ever done. He huffed a little laugh.

Well. It was time to go explore, then. He crawled into the narrow space. It was a good thing he was still small. He hated being small when he was with other people. They could push him around. He couldn't fight back. But here? His size let him go where no one else could. He

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reached back and pulled the grate into place behind him.

The Grem was between the walls now.

In the safety of this unknown space, Cade chuckled.

He crawled. The cloak dragged behind him, tugging at his shoulders. He had to keep it, though. It was necessary for what he did. For example, it held his headlamp. He reached into one of its pockets and took out a disc attached to a headband. He slipped it over his thick brown hair and tapped the disc. It lit a dim white, allowing him to see.

And then he sighed. A long plain shaft of metal stretched out ahead of him. No fancy flashing buttons. No secret panels. No hidden rooms as far as he could tell.

Just more of the same.

Exploring was supposed to be exciting, not finding more and more and more long hallways, empty rooms, and grates leading to air ducts.

He'd push on anyway. Maybe this air duct would be different. You never knew.

He crawled for a while, resisting the urge to cough. The air was always so dusty in the uninhabited areas. Maybe that was why no one went here. Damien would be wheezing in the first few minutes out here.

Finally, the duct came to an intersection. Straight ahead looked like more of the same. The left looked like more of the same.

But the right . . . That was different.

He turned right and crawled forward about three meters before finding himself in a small room. He couldn't

stand, but the walls broadened. Dark monitors and panels filled with buttons and levers covered the space.

“No power . . .” Cade muttered as he took in the room. He reached out and rested a hand on one of the levers. It felt cold and smooth.

He could pull the lever.

What would happen? Would the room power on? Maybe air would start pumping through the ducts again. Dust would go everywhere.

The room was probably for something simple like monitoring air quality. Control for the conduits here. Maybe it controlled other things, too, like water reclamation.

Or maybe it was something else. Maybe the room was so well hidden because it used to be a secret security room. Maybe this controlled bulkheads that would isolate different areas of the Ark. Or maybe there were cameras all over the ship, and they all fed here. Or it could be a self-contained escape pod, in case the rest of the Ark failed! Was there food here? They’d need food if someone was going to survive here for a while.

And if he pulled the lever, maybe he’d find out.

His fingers rested there. Of course, maybe it didn’t do anything.

His studied the keyboards and the various panels.

Not enough light. He gave the disc on his head three quick taps. It brightened.

His fingers roamed the buttons and levers. He held his breath and clacked a button down. It snapped under his finger like it was brand new, never used.

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Nothing happened. No screens lit. No alarms sounded. The Ark didn't suddenly turn green. As far as he knew, it wasn't venting oxygen out into space. The button did nothing.

But it felt new. Whatever this room was, they didn't need to send someone here often. What did that make it? Maybe it really was a secret room!

Could this be the Grem's nest? Anna would love that. A secret hideout. He took out a beat-up phone and turned it on. He couldn't do this long or security would be able to track him, but he should be able to get an image for her. Maybe later he and Damien would be able to figure out how to activate the room.

He tapped the phone a few times. It sent out a pulse of light and chimed once, twice, three times.

He shut the thing down. Hopefully he'd been fast enough that no one out there noticed.

He chuckled to himself. If the room was secret, maybe no signals could get in or out. It would make sense.

Unless, of course, it really was just for maintaining air quality or something.

All right. He should probably get home. Damien couldn't cover for him forever. He turned back the way he'd come, down the dusty air duct, turning left. A tap, and his disc dimmed. Another, and it turned off. He peered out from behind the metal grate. It looked just like he'd left it. Good.

Cade stuck his fingers through the grate and pushed. He was able to slide it down and gently set it on the

ground. A quick scurry later, and he replaced the grate.

Now the hard part. He had to lay down a false trail so no one knew he'd stopped here. Paranoid? Maybe. But security was after the Grem. He couldn't be too careful. His cloak flowed behind him to hide his footsteps. They could still follow his path in the dust pretty easily, though. He had to throw off any possible pursuers.

Down the hall, away from the inhabited spaces. Out beyond where he'd been before.

More exploration.

He turned right, left, left again. More hallways.

Sometimes a day of exploring just meant hallways. Those were the boring days. But today he'd found a secret room of some kind. It was a good day.

Just a few more turns, and then he could start heading back. He turned right.

And stumbled into a garden.

Well, it would have been a garden, if it wasn't dead. The dim emergency lighting showed troughs of dirt in neat rows. A few skeletal plants stuck up here and there. The ceiling was lined with old tubing to water whatever had grown here.

He'd never found a garden before. Two discoveries in a single day! He could risk taking another image. He retrieved the phone and turned it on.

Harsh electric lights in the garden flickered on with a whine.

In the distance, he heard the tromp of feet. Security was on its way.

CHAPTER 2

Cade froze.

The lights must have had some sort of motion sensor. That was all. And just because he could hear security near didn't mean they were coming for him. They had no clue he was here. They couldn't.

Unless it was a trap.

They wouldn't do that, would they? Sure, in Anna's stories he embarrassed security all the time, but he hadn't really done anything wrong in real life. He was just walking around outside the inhabited areas. He was just looking around where he wasn't supposed to go.

All right. Maybe some people might think that was wrong. But it wasn't like he was trying to destroy the Ark or anything. He was just exploring! He just wanted to see what was out here!

Well, whether it was a trap or not, there was someone marching close enough for him to hear, and if they were that close, they'd probably spot the bright light. There wasn't time to wonder. He had to move.

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He looked around the large room. It was at least fifty meters long and twenty meters wide, with rows of the raised troughs throughout. There were two closed doors on other walls. They could lead to other hallways or offices. Either way, with these bright white lights, security would definitely be able to see his trail in the dust on the floor even more easily.

He had to think faster. His brain was starting to jam up. There wasn't time for that.

Should he go back the way he came? No. Security was coming from that way. He could run into them, and he wasn't a fighter. He snuck and slunk, but he never struck. At least that's what Anna said. He thought that was pretty lame, but he couldn't tell her that. She was so proud of that line.

Focus. Find a way out.

So that left the two doors. Maybe with the lights on, there'd be power to them. He ran to the closer of the two. He slapped the entry pad.

The door slid open to reveal a closet. It stunk in there. Probably some sort of abandoned gardening material. He didn't know anything about that stuff.

He stepped in and out of the closet so the trail looked like he went in. Then he sprinted to the other door.

The security footsteps were definitely louder.

This door slid open to reveal a long hallway. Emergency lighting lit it in that eerie orange.

Cade stepped through. The door shut behind him. The electric whine of the bright lights fell silent, leaving only

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the hum of the emergency lights.

Of course, if the door had opened for him, it would open for security, too. There was only one thing he could do.

He turned to the panel next to the door. He drew the prystrip from his cloak and slipped it around the panel, loosening it. A quick tug, and the whole thing came off. These were not exactly the sturdiest of devices. He cracked his knuckles and rammed his fingers into the wiring. He yanked on a fistful of wires.

The opened panel sparked a few times. He snatched his hand back from the sudden heat.

There. Hopefully that would be enough, maybe buy him some time. Now he just had to figure out how to get home from here. Wherever here was. Should be easy, right?

His phone toned.

He jumped. His heart was loud enough, security would probably hear it from the other side of the door. Maybe from the other side of the ship. He'd completely forgotten he had his phone on. He fumbled to get it out. He had to turn it off before it connected to anything and alerted the network he was way out here!

It was a message from Dad.

No time now. He shut the phone off. Hopefully it wasn't anything important. Probably just letting him know what supper plans were. Something he could complain about later, if security didn't kill him first or drag him away or whatever it was they planned to do to the Grem.

All right. It wouldn't do any good to get lost now, and he would get lost if he didn't calm himself down. Security

wouldn't be able to get through that door for at least a couple minutes, and that was if they even wanted to chase him. Maybe they were just making their normal rounds. Maybe it wasn't a trap at all.

He should be safe here. Should. If security was following him, or if anyone was coming into that abandoned garden, he might be able to hear them if he stuck around.

It just meant he had to calm down. Cade closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He unclenched his jaw and cracked his knuckles. His heart slowed.

All right.

He put his ear against the door.

Two voices, both men, talked to each other. He couldn't understand their words.

Well, that was useless. Time to head out down this hallway, then. He shook out the cloak to make sure it still scattered the dust behind him. The last thing he needed was for them to figure out that the Grem was really just Cade.

He kept an eye open for any other grates that might lead to air ducts. That might also serve as a good way to slip away. He had plenty of holes he could hide in, but they were all closer to home.

He should've checked the time while the phone was still on. How long until he was supposed to be home? He had been cutting it close before he found that garden. Now Dad would probably be mad at him. Late for supper. As long as he didn't try calling Damien, though, or as long as Damien could make excuses for him, it should be fine.

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He hoped.

If Dad went to Damien's berth and found out he wasn't there—

Nope. Cade forced his thoughts to slow down. He couldn't jam up again. That wouldn't help anything. First, he had to get home without getting caught by security. Then he could deal with Dad.

This hallway was like all the others he'd explored. Endless doors. Intersections with other corridors. Numbered rooms. He didn't have time to peek into those rooms or search for artifacts he could bring back for Damien. Not this time. And now if he went back to look at the garden, he'd be in a dead end, since he disabled the door.

He groaned. He didn't get a scan of the room. Both his friends would be angry. Two new rooms, and he only got a scan of one of them. Well, hopefully the one room would be good enough. After all, it had all sorts of levers and buttons. They had plenty of gardens back home already. This one was just dead.

So. Should he just attempt to circle back? Two lefts or two rights, and he should be heading back toward home. But where was security?

He started jogging. Time to really get moving. He came to an intersection. Left or right? Did it matter? He turned right.

And that's when he heard the footsteps behind him.

He turned. Was something moving down the corridor? It was so hard to make anything out in the dim light. It could be his imagination. More than once, he'd imagined

he was being chased out here, especially when he'd first started exploring.

He wrapped his cloak around himself and tried to stay in the shadows. In this orange light, it would be hard to see his trail in the dust unless someone was looking for it. With any luck, if someone was here, they hadn't noticed him yet.

There was definitely the sound of footsteps, though. He thought they came from behind, but it was hard to tell. The corridors echoed so badly out here.

Oh, he wanted to pop his knuckles.

Run? Or hope they hadn't noticed him and go back? He still couldn't tell whether there was someone walking behind him. It was too dark, too echoey.

All right. This wasn't doing any good. He might as well move. The next intersection wasn't far away. He could turn and get out of sight if that was someone behind him. Once more, he flared the cloak so it would disturb the dust more thoroughly.

He made it to the intersection. He flung himself to the right.

And right in front of two security guards.

CHAPTER 3

Cade yelped in surprise.

The guards jumped back. One scrambled to draw his kenner. The other flailed.

They were scared? They weren't expecting to see him! He had to take advantage of this! Cade grabbed his cloak and flared it out to either side of him.

"The Grem!" one screeched. The other finally drew his kenner.

That would be bad. One shot from it, and Cade wouldn't be able to walk. He needed to scare them enough he didn't fire. He should shout something clever!

"Aaaa!"

It was just a wordless howl. Very clever.

The kenner fired, a violet spark that blinded him for a moment. All three yelped again.

He was hit! Wait, no. He was still standing. The guard missed! Cade cheered.

Both guards trembled. The one who had fired dropped his kenner and covered his ears. The other stood frozen.

All right. This was his chance to do something cool. They weren't going to hurt him. They couldn't since they were so scared. Cade took a deep breath to slow his brain. No jamming. Not now. Not allowed.

He looked at the two guards. They wore the simple gray overalls that most people on the Ark wore. The emergency lights made them appear a deep red. He didn't recognize either of them, but that wasn't too much of a surprise. The Ark held something like forty thousand people. There was no way he could know everyone.

Something cool. He should do something cool.

His eyes fell on the dropped kenner. Should he? Only security was allowed to have them. Damien would love to get his hands on one. Maybe he could figure out how it worked.

But what if there was a tracker on it? Security would know where it ended up. And then what? They'd think Damien was the Grem.

Still, it would be amazing to have a kenner.

Nope. Jamming up. Stop thinking. Just do.

Cade stooped and picked the device up. "Naughty, naughty," he growled as deep as he could.

What did that even mean? The first time the Grem says anything to a guard, and he says that? He wished he could think things up like Anna. She was good with words. That was her entire thing.

He waved the kenner toward one of the guards. The man cowered.

"I'll keep this," Cade rumbled. At least he'd remem-

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bered to change his voice so they'd have a harder time figuring out who he was.

"Hey," the guard who hadn't fired said. "Hey! You're the Grem!"

"Yeah?"

"You're short."

"Big enough to handle you!" All right, that was better. And then he noticed the guard reaching for his kenner. Cade pointed his new firearm at him. "Don't."

The guard's hand shot up. "Please don't shoot me!"

Cade laughed. He couldn't help it. This was awesome. He was so scared of security, and here they were, cowering before him like, well, like something that cowered. Anna would know.

But now what? Should he just walk away? Tell them to walk away? This was so stupid. He should have figured out what to do if security caught him long ago. It wasn't like he didn't have nightmares that something like this would happen.

But why did it have to happen at all? All he wanted to do was explore! Go where no one had lived for generations and see what there was!

Maybe even find a window so he could finally see the stars with his own eyes.

A phone buzzed.

One of the guards reached toward his pocket.

"Don't!" Cade's voice came out a lot higher than he intended.

The guard's hand shot up. The phone buzzed again.

Cade thought of his own phone. His dad had tried to call. Every minute he spent here with security was a minute longer it would take him to get home. Dad would be so upset. He really had to get home. There wasn't time for this. But if he walked away, the guard could shoot him with the other kenner. And if he sent them away, they could just call more security. He couldn't let them do that.

Cade blinked. He really was an idiot, wasn't he?

"Take out your phones. Put them on the floor." He made sure to keep his voice low. "Don't activate them!"

The guards obeyed.

"You! Put your kenner on the floor. Careful!"

He did.

"Step back! Again!"

They trembled as they backed away.

He stooped to snatch up the phones and the other kenner. He dumped them into the pockets of his cloak. "Good. Now stay here." This was it. If he could get away, he'd have defeated security for the first time in real life, not just in some story Anna thought up.

He ran past them. His cloak flowed behind him.

Or it should have. The extra weight from the kenner and the phones meant it didn't fly like it usually did. A corner wrapped around his leg. He tumbled to the floor.

"Hey!" The spell was broken. The guards chased after him.

Cade scrambled to his feet and sprinted. They weren't far behind him. He still clutched a kenner. Could he fire? Should he? It wasn't supposed to harm anyone. Not for

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long. Just make their muscles relax so they couldn't do anything. He'd never even seen one fired before today, though. Well, besides on a stream, but that wasn't real.

It felt heavy in his hand.

He couldn't keep running for long, though. He wasn't a runner. And security was supposed to stay in good shape.

Then again, they were supposed to be brave, too, and look what had happened. He showed up, and they yelped as loud as he did.

Cade came to an intersection and dashed left. He could turn here, like the heroes did sometimes on the streams, and shoot them as they came around the corner.

Nope. Too late. He sped past it. The guards' feet pounded closer. How far until the next intersection? Was he heading toward home? Did he want to lead them toward home? At least they couldn't call for help since he had their phones. At least he'd done that right.

Faster. He had to push faster. His hands shook. Even if he fired, he probably wouldn't hit anything.

Wait. Ahead. He saw one of the safety bulkheads. It was up, since there wasn't an emergency, but maybe he could time it. If he fired and hit it, it should drop, right? He'd be able to get through and keep the guards on this side. Simple!

He ran through. He fired.

The kenner shoved back against his hand. He yelped. Was it supposed to do that? The entire thing had almost jumped out of his grip. His wrist hurt! No wonder the guard had dropped it!

Wait. Did that mean the guard hadn't expected that either?

He shook his head. He had to concentrate. He was being chased by guards, wasn't he?

Or was he? The bulkhead should have dropped! He hadn't heard it, but he was so caught up in his head, he was concentrating on running, maybe it dropped and he didn't notice. He risked a glance over his shoulder.

Nope. It hadn't dropped. The guards still pounded after him.

Cade gulped for breath. He couldn't keep this up.

Ahead. Another intersection. He dashed around the corner. All he had to do was spin.

Nope. Still too late. He was made for sneaking not running!

Wait. He recognized the markings on the wall here. He knew where he was! All he had to do was—yeah. He was close to one of his bases. They'd run farther than he thought! Unless he was wrong. That would be bad. No. He wasn't wrong. Couldn't be wrong. He just had to hang on and stay ahead of them a little longer. Just a little longer.

Were legs supposed to hurt like this? He was probably running wrong or something. The objects in his cloak clattered against his side. That wasn't helping.

The guards shouted behind him. They sounded so close. He didn't dare turn to check.

If they caught him, that would be the end. He'd stolen from them. He couldn't remember anyone ever stealing from security before. Who knew what the punishment for

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that would be?

He turned another corner. There it was. He screeched to a halt and slapped the entry pad. A door slid open.

The guards tackled him. They fell to the ground in a tangle.

No! If he got in the room, he'd be able to keep them out. He'd be safe.

An elbow landed in his face. Something tugged at the cloak around his neck. Everything was hands and legs and grunting. He flailed. A violet spark shot out. All three of them yelped again. The grip on him loosened.

Cade scrambled through the open door. He spun and slammed down on the entry pad. As soon as the door closed, he shot the panel with the kenner.

He took a shaking breath.

He'd made it.

CHAPTER 4

Cade flinched as the guards punched the entry pad on their side. They pounded on the door. They shouted. The door didn't open, though. The circuits were fried. No one would be coming through there for a long while.

His breathing finally started to slow. Oh, his jaw hurt. He finally cracked his knuckles as he exhaled. He gave a sharp nod. "Take that! Yeah! Don't fight against the Grem! He'll win every time!" He kicked the door. As he exalted in his triumph, he turned to take in the room.

It was just a simple berth, like most others. A small room to relax in, with a standard panel to watch whatever a person might want to stream. A small kitchen, a bedroom, a bathroom. Plain beige carpeting. Off-white walls. An in-wall desk on one side of the relaxing room. No one had lived here for a long time, so there wasn't any other furniture. It'd all been reused by people back in the inhabited areas.

The shouting from the hallway paused for a moment. Then it picked up again.

One of the phones in his cloak buzzed. He plucked it

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out and regarded it. Should he answer? He tried to think about how Anna would write a story like this. The Grem was supposed to be tricky. He'd probably answer and say something mysterious. He'd keep it on vocal only so no one could see his face.

Cade didn't feel very mysterious right now. Then again, he could answer and just say the guard was busy right now. That could be fun.

No. Stop. Think.

If he answered, the Grem's voice would be recorded by the network. And if it recorded his voice, they'd be a step closer to figuring out who he was. So, no. It'd be fun, sure, but he shouldn't answer the phone, even if it was just vocal.

He sighed. Sometimes this Grem thing was fun, and sometimes it was disappointing. Today, apparently it would be both.

He should probably dump the phones fairly quickly. He turned both off so tracking would be disabled. He could ditch them easily. But what to do about the kenners? He wanted to keep those, but he had no clue if they could be tracked. Maybe just dump them in another of his bases? That way they couldn't be tracked back to him, but he could still get to them if it was safe. Should he turn on his phone and do a quick scan of them?

No. Too risky. At least right now.

The shouting on the other side of the door finally stopped. One last pound, and then quiet. If this were a stream, one of the guards would be going back to get help

while the other stayed behind to watch and make sure the Grem didn't get out.

Would they make it into the room? Maybe if they got the Engineers involved. Security probably didn't have the know-how to fix something he'd broken. Most people didn't.

Too bad he didn't know how to fix it, either. That door was out of commission.

Well, no problem there. Cade grinned to himself as he crouched and pried a grate off some ductwork. He'd mapped a network of the ducts closer to home before he'd gotten more adventurous and started exploring farther out. From here, he could get close to home without ever being out in the open. He'd never seen any evidence anyone else knew about the vents, and Anna kept them out of her stories. Better to be safe and mysterious.

He ducked into the vent and pulled the grate back on after himself. Now, even if security made it into the room, they wouldn't find him. Hopefully they didn't even think to check the vent.

He crawled down the ductwork as quickly as he could. He should have checked the time before turning off those phones. How long had Dad been waiting?

After crawling a distance, he opened another grate and hid the kenners and the phones in another berth. He just slid open a desk drawer and stuffed them in there. If security was able to track the kenners, hiding them more wouldn't matter much. But from here, they wouldn't be able to link the Grem to Cade.

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Back to the air ducts. More crawling. He finally reached the end of what he could do in secret. He reached up to unclasp the cloak. It would only draw attention here, and now he really wanted to make sure no one noticed him. All his tools, his cloak, everything stayed behind except his phone.

He peered out from behind the grate. No one else here at the moment. Good. Carefully, he slid the grate out and crawled into the brightly lit garden. Tomato plants sprouted from the troughs. It smelled so green here. He replaced the grate and took a deep breath. He reached out to touch some of the fuzzy leaves as he strode out of the garden.

And just like that, the Grem was left behind, and he was just Cade again, an average kid huddling in the belly of the mostly empty Ark.

He snatched his phone from his pocket and keyed it back on. The screen lit up to show him only one message from his dad.

That was either a really good sign or a really bad sign.
The message read,

Working late. Eat supper with Damien's family.

Cade sagged against the wall. He hadn't realized how stressed he was. But it was fine. His dad didn't realize how late he was. He wouldn't be mad. He wouldn't be disappointed.

He flicked over and sent a message to Damien.

You home?

As he waited for an answer, he started heading that direction. He passed a woman heading the other direction, and soon a man. He was coming into the inhabited areas again.

His phone buzzed.

Yeah. Waiting.

Cade replied that he was on his way.

The corridors were still that obnoxious off-white, but at least they were lit here. He reached one of the wider concourses that saw more use. He passed a market that sold everything from produce to proprietary links for different games or streaming shows. His stomach growled as he passed a stall selling churros. He really needed to start bringing snacks to stuff into his cloak.

He turned into a residential area. The hallways were lined with doors leading to berth after berth. The walls beside some doors held pictures. A few potted plants sat on the floor. He paused in front of a door that had a gear spray-painted onto it. Cade tapped the entry pad.

Damien sat on a couch inside. "About time you showed up. Jerk."

"Sorry. I got caught by security."

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“What?” Damien jumped to his feet. “You okay?”

Cade laughed. It was easier to laugh than to tell his friend how scared he had been. “I’m awesome! I got two kenners hiding for you.”

“What? Seriously? You didn’t bring them here for me?”

“Sorry. Didn’t know if they were trackable. What’s for supper?”

“You’re hungry?”

“Yeah!” Cade stepped into the kitchen. “So what’s for supper?”

“Parmesan orange chicken.”

“Really?”

“Hey, not everyone’s parents make food like your dad. If you want to heat up the tray, go for it. So, security?”

As Cade took the tray out of the cold box and popped it into thevection, he told Damien everything.

“I’ll see if they can track the kenners. I don’t think so, but it’s not like I’ve ever messed with them. I hope they can’t. I want to look at those!” Damien slid the tray out of thevection. “You got a scan of the hidden room, though. Can I see?”

Cade thumbed through the options on his phone.

A second later, Damien’s phone buzzed. “Got it.” He linked the phone to the panel in the relaxing room and displayed the image. “All right. Hm.” He plunked down on the couch.

Cade dished himself a plate of parmesan orange chicken. Again. Just about every night he ate here, it was this. Damien’s parents worked second shift, so they weren’t

around often. Not that Cade's dad needed to know that.

"Yeah. I think it's just an air maintenance room. See those? They test air purity. But maybe not." Damien didn't stop to get himself supper.

Cade wolfed down the stringy chicken pieces. "You just sat here?"

"Someone's got to cover for you."

"Think we can power on that room?"

"I don't know yet." Damien turned the image this way and that, trying to figure out the patterns of the buttons. His knee bounced as he worked. "Give me a little bit!"

"You're supposed to be the smart one."

"Hey, maybe I'm smart, but you're the Grem!"

Cade smiled. "I am, aren't I?" And a warm feeling glowed inside him. He'd discovered two new rooms, escaped security, got two kenners, and his dad didn't even notice he'd been gone longer than normal.

It really was a good day.