

LoveReading4kids.co.uk
is a book website
created for parents and
children to make
choosing books easy
and fun

Opening extract from
**My Gym Teacher
is an Alien Overlord**

Written by
David Solomons

Illustrated by
Laura Ellen Anderson

Published by
Nosy Crow Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

First published in the UK in 2016 by Nosy Crow Ltd
The Crow's Nest, 10a Lant Street
London, SE1 1QR, UK

www.nosycrow.com

ISBN: 978 0 85763 733 8

Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered
trademarks of Nosy Crow Ltd

Text copyright © David Solomons, 2016
Cover and inside illustrations copyright: Laura Ellen Anderson, 2016

The right of David Solomons to be identified as the author of this work has
been asserted.

All rights reserved

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or
otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding
or cover other than that in which it is published. No part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or
by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of Nosy Crow Ltd.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, St. Ives Plc
Typeset by Tiger Media

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in
sustainable forests

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



1 POWER-UP



“Luke, use your force field,” Serge shouted from the other side of the splintering ten-storey shark tank that ran the height of Commander Octolux’s vast undersea lair. There was a crack like a pistol shot as the tank sprang a leak and a stream of water arced on to the deck, splashing my foot.

We were about to be up to our necks in hammerheads.

I focused my force-field superpower on the widening hole. Glowing blue energy shot from my fingers and plugged the gap. That would keep the sharks at bay. Now it was Octolux’s turn. I checked my watch – we had less than five minutes before he launched an intercontinental

ballistic missile containing a unique and deadly payload. If we failed to stop him then the virus stored in the warhead would infect the whole world, turning every man, woman and child into a quivering jellyfish.

“I’m going for the command bridge,” I said, sweeping past Serge. I touched a finger to the side of my mask and with a swift tap blasted a fizzing ball of mental energy at the high-security door. It flew off its hinges and hit the floor with a clang. Quickly I stepped over it, my cape fanning out behind me as I raced inside.

The walls of the command bridge were one smooth curve of plexiglass, offering a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the deep ocean. Monstrous shadows cast by dimly glimpsed sea-creatures glided over the surface. The ping of a sonar detector and the gurgle of Octolux’s breathing apparatus were the only sounds. After battling our way past attack squids, lethal lionfish sentries and electric eel assassins, we had reached our final goal.

Commander Octolux stood over the launch-control panel, preparing to fire his fishy missile. At one time he had been wholly human, but where his head used to be was now a surgically attached octopus plugged directly into his brain stem, and although his hands sported four human fingers, instead of thumbs he had a pair of opposable piranha fish. With his octo-brain he could

think of eight different things at once, which made him a master strategist, and his piranha thumbs meant he was a formidable opponent in close-quarter combat. His one weakness was a reliance upon special breathing equipment. He needed to be connected to an air tank or he'd go as floppy as a stunned haddock. All we had to do was cut off his supply. The next few minutes would witness an epic battle between the forces of good (me and Serge) and the evil commander.

The fate of the world was in my hands.

Commander Octolux looked up from the control panel, threw back his bulbous head and opened his vicious beak to let out a great gurgling laugh. Somehow he knew we were coming – we had walked into a trap. His watery gaze fell upon me, that horrifying beak opened once more and he said:

“Luke, I’m not telling you again – your dinner’s on the table.”

Commander Octolux sounded a lot like my mum.

I glanced over my shoulder. Mum stood in my bedroom doorway. Even without an octo-brain and piranha hands she was a fearsome presence.

“Luke, Luke – he is launching *le* missile!” Serge yelled over the headset. “Ah, *mon brave*, we are too late.”

I turned back to the TV screen just in time to witness

an animation of Octolux's missile rising from its undersea silo and shooting out of the ocean depths to wreak jellyfish doom upon the world. I threw down my game controller and sighed.

There were no save points on the final level, which meant we'd have to start again from the beginning, and those platypus mines at the first airlock had been a total pain to get past. Especially since Serge found the word "platypus" so funny that he kept forgetting not to step on the mines.

"I think that's enough *Star Lad* for one day," said Mum, switching off the console.

My parents had been so amazed and stunned and happy at avoiding the recent asteroid apocalypse that when I asked them shortly afterwards for a new games console they'd not only agreed, but also let me keep it in my bedroom. I'm not proud of taking advantage of them in their moment of weakness. On the other hand – brand-new Xbox!

"It's not *Star Lad*," I said. "It's *Star Lad 2: Danger from the Deep*." There were two videogames featuring the world's first real superhero, Star Lad. The first one was rushed out after he'd stopped Earth from being flattened by Nemesis. It was OK, but the sequel was better. However, both suffered from the same problem:

they didn't feel real. For a start, neither was set in Bromley. Even worse was how they portrayed Star Lad. For example, in *Danger from the Deep*, Star Lad's secret identity is millionaire schoolboy Lance Launceston, who is bestowed with superpowers after an accident with a plasma generator at his father's fusion laboratory; he has a kinetic blast power, and a Star-Jet that can do Mach 6.

All of which is complete nonsense.

And how do I know this? Because Star Lad is Zack Parker, who was given his powers by Zorbon the Decider. He gets five pounds fifty a week pocket money, has just regular telekinesis and owns a Carrera Vengeance mountain bike. And he's my big brother.

I slipped off my chair and followed Mum downstairs. I had played a small but, I like to think, key role in Zack's epic world-saving triumph, but no one was making videogames about me. Perhaps because, apart from my best friend Serge and my neighbour (but definitely *not* my girlfriend) Lara Lee, no one knew how I'd helped rescue Star Lad from the clutches of wannabe superhero and comic-book-store owner Christopher Talbot. But even if they had known, who wants to play a videogame from the point of view of an eleven-year-old boy with flat feet and no superpowers? It wouldn't be very popular. In fact, I don't think I'd play a videogame as me.

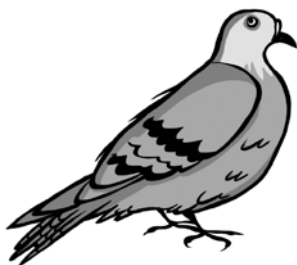
As I trudged downstairs for dinner I heard a *tuk-tuk* noise from the hallway and then a small shape slid from the shadows beneath the hall table. A red squirrel waited for me at the foot of the stairs. I knew it was for me, since this wasn't the first time. The squirrel sat up on its hind legs and held out a note. It hadn't written the note – that would be silly – but I knew who had. As soon as I took the folded paper it scurried off, its bushy tail bobbing back into the shadows.

“Assemble tonight,” read the message, which was scrawled in the familiar purple ink of a Uni-ball Gelstick Pen with a 0.4mm tip.

Just two little words, but they signified something big. Finally! Things had been quiet since the whole Star-Lad-Christopher-Talbot-volcano-comic-store-giant-asteroid business in the summer. Since then my life had returned to its dull routine. I scrunched the paper in my fist. All that was about to change. Something was in the air. I sniffed. Some kind of fishy thing in a gloopy sauce. But that didn't matter because something else was out there, waiting for me. Something thrilling. Something dangerous. Adventure was in the air, and its name was ... S.C.A.R.F.

2

DON'T GO OUT WITHOUT YOUR S.C.A.R.F.



After dinner I sneaked out to the tree house in our back garden. When Dad and Grandpa put it up they had no idea that the exact spot they'd chosen was a doorway between our world and a parallel world, or that it was destined to become the international headquarters for a secret superhero crimefighting organisation known as S.C.A.R.F. – or possibly S.P.A.T.U.L.A. We hadn't yet decided, which was partly why we were meeting up tonight. There was a lot to discuss.

As I huffed and puffed to the top of the rope ladder I reflected on recent events. Thanks to a catastrophically timed wee, I had missed out on being granted my

greatest wish – to become a superhero. As if that wasn't bad enough, it had happened twice.

Twice.

The second time the powers were given to my neighbour, schoolfriend and cub reporter, Lara Lee. Now, instead of splashing the story of Star Lad across the front of the school newspaper, she had *become* the story. Right away, she and Zack teamed up to fight crime and have thrilling adventures. Which was very nice for them, but left Serge and me twiddling our game controllers. That's what this evening was about.

For weeks I'd been trying to get both superheroes in a room with us to discuss forming a team. We hoped to convince them that dynamic duos were old-fashioned, and that modern superheroes have a whole bunch of people helping them out in the background. Of course, usually they're ex-Special Forces commandos or genius-level scientists, not eleven-year-old boys with no practical skills and whose only expertise lies in knowing that the Hulk comic-book character was meant to be grey and that Superman was originally bald. But we weren't going to mention that part.

Serge was already in the tree house, the first to arrive. He looked up as I entered and I saw that his cheeks were covered in a bright-red rash. "I am allergic to squirrel

fur,” he explained miserably. “I wish she would stop sending messages by small woodland creature.”

“She’s just exploring her new power,” I said, sitting down next to him to wait for the others.

“I should warn you that I have taken the anti-histamine,” he added, “but I am unsure if it was drowsy or non-drowsy.”

Serge and I had been through a lot together, most of it accompanied by a chocolate bar and an asthma inhaler. We were alike in many ways, but most of all we shared a passion for superheroes. I was as close to Serge as I used to be to my brother. It’s not that I don’t get on with Zack, but we’re in different places in our lives. I’m saving for the new Batman videogame, and he’s saving the world.

“Did you bring the designs?” I asked.

Serge unzipped an A3 portfolio case. We’d spent ages coming up with the name of our crimefighting team, and even longer on designs for the logo. I held up the first one, all sleek silver and black lettering with a drop-shadow that made it pop off the page. “Nice,” I cooed.

“Nice?” He seemed offended. “It is a highly effective design, at once simple and resonant with our target audience. Regard the swoosh, which adds dynamism, and the bold use of chiaroscuro—”

“The what?”

He sighed. “Light and shade, Luke. Light. And. Shade.”

I held up the second design side by side with the first. “I’m still not sure about these. S.C.A.R.F. and S.P.A.T.U.L.A. aren’t exactly fearsome, awe-inspiring acronyms.”

When the initial letters of a phrase spell out a word it’s called an acronym. We’d tried to create one as cool as S.H.I.E.L.D. or T.H.U.N.D.E.R. but it’s much harder than it looks.

There was a rustle of leaves from outside the tree house and a moment later Star Lad blew through the doorway to land before us with a controlled thud. He struck a pose, head down, one knee on the floor, one arm trailing behind him, cape settling across his back. Slowly he lifted his masked face. These days Zack rarely just arrived anywhere – he made *an entrance*.

Beside me I could tell without looking that Serge was impressed. Even though he had played a vital role in the Nemesis adventure, Serge hadn’t yet outgrown the fanboy phase. On a daily basis, I was rather less in awe of Zack. It was hard to be impressed when you got the blame for a messy room and can’t say it’s because your brother threw a telekinetic fit looking for his spare cape.

Ah yes, the cape.

For ages Zack wouldn't wear a proper costume, saying that a mask and cape looked stupid, but in the end he came round. Zack is a bit skinny and the billowing cape gives him more presence. The mask guards his identity, but it also protects the delicate skin around his eyes. He was getting some serious windburn from all that flying.

There was a flutter and a hoot from the doorway as Lara glided into the tree house. She didn't have the same flying superpower as Star Lad, relying instead upon a unique propulsion system.

Birds.

They clung to her sleeves and trouser legs: geese for altitude, pigeons for guidance, and frantically flapping, manoeuvring sparrows. She touched down gently, extending one poised foot to the floor and then the other. Landing accomplished, she chirped at the birds. Releasing their grip on her they streamed from the tree house back out into the night.

The superpower that Zorbon the Decider had given Lara was the ability to command animals.

Not all animals. Tigers, elephants, polar bears – basically anything big and fearsome – *didn't* respond to her. We'd been to the zoo and checked. It was only creatures like squirrels and rabbits and small birds that she could control, which I couldn't help thinking was,

well, a bit rubbish.

And then there was her costume. It was unlike any other, which is to say that it covered her body in a sensible fashion. Whenever I look at girl superheroes in comics my first thought is that if they went out wearing as few clothes as that, they would catch a chill. And one day I'd like someone to explain to me the point of an armoured bikini. I'd helped Lara decide on her costume. So in addition to a mask and cape, she wore a tough leather jacket, dark trousers with useful zip pockets, gloves for protection from claws, and big black boots.

She'd also needed my help choosing her superhero name. Obviously it had to be animal-based, so she suggested names like Talon, Claw and Birdgirl.

"All taken," I informed her.

"What about something with *wing*?"

"There's already a Nightwing," I said.

"Then I could be Daywing!" said Lara.

I frowned. "That sounds like part of a hospital."

In the end she decided to call herself Flutter, which, after checking through my comic collection, turned out was available. However, it was also terrible. But she wouldn't budge. After a great deal of persuasion, she agreed to *Dark* Flutter, which added a hint of fear to the featheriness. Although Serge thought it sounded like a

chocolate spread. Then he'd had to go and make himself a sandwich.

In the tree house Lara and Zack began to catch up on their week's heroics, talking about events Serge and I knew nothing about, or had only seen reported on the news. It was as if we weren't even in the room.

Lara snapped her fingers. "Oh, I forgot to mention the—"

"Genetically modified greengrocer?" finished Zack. "Taken care of." He brushed off a piece of glowing broccoli that had stuck to his sleeve.

"Oh good."

"And those trapped miners?" he asked in return.

"Yes, the moles were a great idea. Thanks," said Lara, making a feverish burrowing motion with her hands.

Zack lifted his mask. It settled on his forehead with a twang of elastic. "No problem."

"By the way," said Lara, "great job on that evil Artificial Intelligence in John Lewis."

Zack shrugged. "Couldn't have done it without you. *Partner.*"

She gave him a friendly punch in the arm. "Stop it. You're embarrassing me."

They grinned at each other, distinctly pleased with their week's work.

“So,” I said. “Evil Artificial Intelligence, eh? Sounds like the kind of mission, say, where you could have done with some back-up?”

“Nah, we had it covered. Isn’t that right, Dark Flutter?” Zack held up a palm and Lara smacked a high-five. He turned to me. “So why have you brought us here? I have maths homework, and it’s polynomials.”

I got straight to the point. “We’re here to discuss the formation of a super-secret organisation dedicated to fighting crime.” I held up the logo designs. “S.C.A.R.F. is the Superhero Covert Alliance Reaction Force, and S.P.A.T.U.L.A. stands for Superhero PATrol United—”

“Is this for one of your role-playing game thingies?” Zack interrupted with a frown.

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s real.” I could see from his expression that he wasn’t getting it.

Lara studied Serge’s expertly shaded logo. “Bold use of Enrico Caruso,” she said with a pitying smile. She was always muddling her words. Muddled or not, unlike my annoying big brother, she could tell I was miffed.

“Wait,” said Zack, realisation dawning. “*You* want to help us fight crime?”

Now we were getting somewhere. “Exactly.”

He folded his arms. “Not a chance.”

“But you need us!”

“Do we?”

He was forgetting an important point. “Who rescued you when you were abducted by Christopher Talbot a.k.a. The Quintessence?”

“You just won’t let it go, will you?” The muscle in his jaw clenched. “I get nabbed by a supervillain *one time*. It won’t happen again.”

“It’s not fair!” I burst out. “You get superpowers. She gets superpowers. And what do I get? A pair of slip-on loafers!” I was breathing heavily. “Just hear us out, Zack, please.”

My brother relented. “OK, OK, if it means so much to you.”

I turned to Serge. “Ready?”

He was sitting cross-legged on the floor, head slumped on his chest, snoring lightly.

I sighed. “He took the drowsy.” No matter. I could do this without him. It’d be just like my presentation to the class on wasps. Except hopefully without the mass breakout and the screaming. I jumped to my feet, clasped my hands behind my back and began to pace. “Superheroes are in constant danger of making easily avoidable mistakes. If only Superman had had someone to tell him, ‘Kal-El, step away from the glowing green rock.’ That’s why you need someone like me.” I glanced

down at the snuffling Serge. “And him.”

Zack and Lara stood in silence. I could tell they weren’t buying it. But I wasn’t finished yet. “While I admit that you have gained *some* experience of how to be superheroes, you’re still new to the job. On the other hand, I have *years* of experience. I’ve been reading comics since I was knee-high to Ant-Man.”

Zack tutted. “Comics are useless – they don’t tell you how to be a superhero.”

Was he mad?! That’s precisely what comics did. But just as I was about to say so, he cut me off. “Oh sure, they’re full of fantastic adventures, but they don’t tell you about the *reality*. They don’t tell you that you need to wear a vest to keep warm when flying at altitude. Or that under certain atmospheric conditions your telepathic power picks up Radio 4. Or that it’s all very well stopping criminals, but you have to be very careful not to breach their civil rights or you open yourself up to accusations of unlawful restraint and wrongful arrest.”

He was right – none of that stuff was in any comic I’d read. Probably because it sounded really boring. I turned to Dark Flutter. “Lara, come on, who was it stopped you from choosing a dry-clean-only costume?”

“That’s true,” she nodded, “but there’s quite a difference between reading washing instructions and

fighting crime.”

This was too much. “Well, you’re a terrible superhero,” I fumed. “Your power is *rubbish*.”

“Rubbish?!” Lara placed her hands on her hips, raised her chin and declared, “I have dominion over the animal kingdom.”

“You have dominion over a petting zoo! In fact, you’re not a superhero at all. You’re a *Disney Princess*.”

She bristled with indignation and I was glad she didn’t have a spare hedgehog to hand.

“Maybe if you were ex-Special Forces or genius-level scientists we could team up,” mused Zack.

“But, Zack—”

“Forget it. It’s too dangerous. We’ve got superpowers; all you’ve got is a swooshy logo.” I was about to protest when he clutched a hand to his forehead. “I’m picking up a disturbance on my Star-Screen.”

“I came up with that name,” I muttered, but he ignored me.

“Someone’s in trouble,” he said.

“Dark Flutter?” said Zack.

“Right behind you, Star Lad.” She cupped a hand to her mouth and squawked. In seconds the tree house filled with birds. “See you at school,” she said to me as the birds picked her up.

I could only stand by and watch as she and Zack flew off on their next adventure.

There was a snort as Serge stirred and sat up. He looked round the tree house through bleary eyes. “Ah, *zut*, I missed them. So,” he asked, turning to me, “is it S.P.A.T.U.L.A? Oh, I hope it is S.P.A.T.U.L.A.”