

Fearsome Four

The Toad of the Grimy Underworld

Joseph Jethro



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Chapter One

‘I’m gonna win!’ Ray shouted, his voice full of excitement as he pedalled faster. The wind howled through his hair as he glanced swiftly over his shoulder. Abner and Sani were closing in fast, their identical bikes gleaming as they raced after him. The three of them were riding sleek blue bikes with bright red tyres. Paw prints, painted bright red, marked the handlebars and pedals, making the bikes look wild and unstoppable.

At the back of the group, their youngest brother, Umari, was determined not to be left behind. He crouched low over his smaller dirt bike, gripping the handlebars tightly. The black and electric orange frame shone in the sunlight. *STRIKE 16* was printed in bold letters, daring anyone to doubt its speed. His stabilisers bounced slightly as he hit a bump, but Umari’s fierce grin said it all: he was set on overtaking his brothers, no matter the cost.

‘This is so not happening!’ Abner groaned, pumping his legs harder as he tried to catch up to Ray.

With incredible speed, Ray hurtled down the winding road, his bike taking tight turns as he raced towards the finish.

Being the eldest brother, Abner *had* to win – it was practically his job. At least, that’s what he believed.

The problem was that Ray always managed to win every race, and it was going to happen again.

The finish line was marked by a tall lamppost at the end of the road. Ray’s eyes narrowed, his heart pounding furiously. He couldn’t lose.

The lamppost came into view, and with a burst of energy, Ray pushed his legs faster, pedalling like his life depended on it. The wind whipped against his face as he zoomed towards victory.

‘Yahoo!’ Ray cheered, skidding to a stop and leaping off his bike. ‘I win!’ he shouted, throwing his arms in the air like a champion.

‘As usual,’ Abner grumbled, screeching to a halt and hopping off his bike.

‘Here, take this, loser!’ Ray teased, turning around to wiggle his backside at Abner.

Sani skidded to a stop beside them, his eyes sparkling with excitement. ‘That was awesome!’ he laughed, glancing back at Umari, who was pedalling furiously to catch up. ‘Let’s have another race!’

‘Sure,’ Ray said with a wink, puffing out his chest. ‘But just for ya info, I’ll win again. I *always* win bike races.’

Finally, Umari caught up, his cheeks red and his little bike wobbling slightly as he came to a stop. ‘You guys *always* win!’ he huffed, frowning. ‘I don’t get it! When I race with Dad, I always win.’ He raised an eyebrow, clearly suspicious.

Ray burst out laughing. ‘That’s ‘cause Dad lets you win, so you think you’re the fastest kid in the world!’

‘Ray!’ Abner elbowed him sharply in the ribs, glaring at him. ‘That’s Dad’s secret, you idiot!’

‘Hey! Dad doesn’t *let* me win. I *am* faster than him!’ Umari roared, his voice filled with frustration.

‘Sure, you are faster than him,’ Ray muttered, rolling his eyes dramatically.

‘You two are such dopes,’ Abner sighed, shaking his head.

‘We are NOT!’ Ray and Umari shouted in unison, glaring at him.

Before the argument could go any further, Sani stepped in, grinning. ‘Forget it, guys. Let’s hit the ice cream shop and grab a munch!’

‘Yeah!’ cheered the other three, instantly forgetting who won or lost.

Sani, the second eldest, frequently took on the big brother role, always stepping in before things spiralled out of control. But even then, there were times when chaos still erupted. And when it did, Sani had no choice but to report it to Dad, the boss.

And when Dad found out the brothers were fighting, it didn’t matter who started it or who was innocent – he’d make all four of them stand in timeout. No exceptions. The rule was simple: if you were caught in the middle of a fight, you faced the wall. That’s right – the wall.

And none of the brothers liked it, mainly because Dad’s timeout was more like a staring contest with the wall. It didn’t stop the fighting, though. Nope. The brothers were still as mischievous as ever, ready for the next round.

They mounted their bikes and raced towards the Pink Ice Cream Shop, the thrill of the ride intensifying with every push of the pedals. But as they neared the shop, Ray let out an exaggerated groan. ‘Ugh, so annoying!’ he grumbled, his voice dripping with frustration. ‘The road’s blocked off!’ He slammed on the brakes, coming to a sudden halt.

In front of them, the road was completely cordoned off, and a bunch of utility workers were drilling into the ground, their tools making a horrible, screeching noise that sent shivers down their spines.

With an eyebrow arched, Umari squinted at the scene. ‘Are those utility workers?’ he inquired, studying the figures dressed in neon orange outfits and white helmets.

‘Yeah, they definitely are,’ Ray confirmed, rolling his eyes like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Sani grinned mischievously. ‘Well, I call them carrots,’ he said, gesturing towards them. ‘Just look at the weird colour they picked for their uniforms. I mean, who wears neon orange like that? It’s hideous.’

Ray snorted so loudly he almost fell off his bike. ‘That’s amazing! They really do look like a bunch of carrots digging up the road!’

The other three burst into laughter, picturing the workers as a squad of oversized veggies on a mission.

‘What are they talking about anyway?’ Abner asked, tilting his head and scrunching up his face in confusion.

‘This is a huge problem,’ one of the workers said, his voice shaking slightly with concern as he coughed.

‘The tricky part is, we don’t know what caused it,’ another worker muttered in a gruff voice, shaking his head.

The first worker continued, ‘The entire city’s in a state of emergency – the drains are on the brink of overflowing, and leaks in the underground pipes are draining our clean water supply. In fact, most of the drains and pipes are already spilling over! But how did this happen?’ He threw his hands up in exasperation. ‘It just doesn’t add up.’

The boys exchanged anxious glances. Finally, after a long pause, Sani spoke up, his expression serious. 'Are you guys thinking what I'm thinking?' he asked.

Abner nodded quickly, his eyes wide. 'I'm definitely thinking what you're thinking,'

'D-d-don't tell me this has anything to do with that eyeball we saw bulging out of the manhole last week,' Umari stammered, his voice shaky as he swallowed hard.

'There's only one way to find out,' Sani said, his voice steady and full of determination.

'How?' Ray asked.

'We go under,' Sani whispered, his eyes narrowing as he clenched his fists, ready for action.

'W-what? You're not telling me...you're not saying we're going UNDERGROUND!' Umari yelled, his voice trembling with disbelief. His shout startled a flock of pigeons, sending them flapping into the sky in a whirlwind of wings and feathers.