

A Simple Search Goes Quite Wrong

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Part One: Malex

Malex had just arrived home from a long day at the office. He felt weary to his bones.

In truth, his job wasn't any worse than usual. But it *was* grating on him more lately. He wondered why.

Suddenly, Snufflefungus, Linus, and Mara burst in.

(Sounds of the door opening and footsteps.)

Malex: Hey guys, what's up?

Linus: There's no time to explain!

Snufflefungus: We're borrowing your camera drone!

Malex: The nice one? Wait! Why?

Mara: Snufflefungus promised Mike we would find his dog, and we think it jumped into the sinkhole.

Malex: Mike the pest guy?

Linus: Malex, that's not a nice thing to call someone, but yes. Mike the pest.

Malex: What? I didn't say- Wait, how does my drone fit into this?

Snufflefungus: Easy! We'll just fly it down into the sinkhole, use the camera to find the dog, and solve our first case!

Linus: Easy!

Mara: Probably not *easy*, but yeah. Straightforward.

Malex: This hardly sounds straightforward.

Mara: Want to come with us? You could help!

Snufflefungus: It's an adventure!

Malex: You're not selling this very well.

Linus: You guys need to leave Malex alone, he just wants some peace and quiet!

Malex: (Surprised.) Thanks Linus, that's unusually empathetic of you.

Linus: After all, he's past his prime! It's only proper that he give up his adventuring ways and succumb to retirement.

Malex: There it is. I should have expected that.

Snufflefungus: I got the drone! Let's go!

Mara: Are you sure you're not coming?

Malex: Yeah, I'm sure.

(Sounds of footsteps leaving.)

Malex: Just, please be careful with my drone! It's kind of-

Linus: (Interrupting.) Bye.

(Sounds of door slamming.)

Malex: -expensive.

Part Two: Mara

Mara, Linus, and Snufflefungus raced back to the edge of the sinkhole and peered down into its enormous maw.

Mara: Well, Snuffy, we got the drone and we're here. What now?

Mike: Yeah, what now?!

Linus: (Screams.) Mike! What are you doing here?!

Mike: (Sheepish.) I live here!

Linus: Well don't sneak up on me like that. You're scary enough as it is!

Snufflefungus: We just need to send the drone down into the sinkhole and find Mike's doggy!

Mara: Okay, who's going to do that?

Linus: You are, obviously!

Mara: Me?!

Snufflefungus: That controller is going to be hard to manage without hands.

Mara: That has *never* stopped you before!

Linus: Quit whining and get on with it!

Mara: (Growls.)

(Sounds of the drone taking off and flying into the sinkhole.)

Mara flew the drone up and out over the edge of the giant hole, then straight down. As the drone flew down and out of sight, she turned her attention to the camera feed on the controller.

As the drone flew lower and lower, the sunlight began to fade and grow dark. The camera adjusted to the lower light conditions, causing the video to turn slightly grainy.

Mike: (Hushed.) What do you see?

Mara: Not much, just lots of dirt.

Linus: How far down does this thing go?

Snufflefungus: According to the TV, nobody knows!

(Sound of Mike's doggy yipping.)

Mara: (Hushing.) Guys, did you hear that?

They all fell silent.

(Sound of Mike's doggy yipping.)

Mike: That's doggy! I hear him!

Mara: (Straining.) It's hard to tell where it's coming from. I think we might be getting close to the bottom.

Linus: What is that stuff at the bottom?

Snufflefungus: It looks kinda greyish.

Mara: It's really dark. Everything looks grey.

The group strained to make sense of what they saw on the screen. Almost like an alien world, the terrain at the bottom of the sinkhole was grey and wet, lumpy and marked all along with curious circular protrusions arranged in a spiral pattern.

And in the center of the spiral: a hideous one-legged dog.

Dog: (Yips.) Oh no, they're coming to get me! Octo, save me!

Mike: It's my doggy!

Linus: Did he say *Octo*?

Snufflefungus: Who's Octo?

On the camera feed, the ground slowly rippled. Then, without warning, it heaved.

(Sound of giant tentacles moving.)

The camera feed cut out and the ground below them lurched.

Mara: (Screams.) Run!

Snufflefungus: I'm running, I'm running!

Linus: What **are** those things?!

Glancing over her shoulder, Mara saw them: Giant grey tentacles, lined with enormous suckers, snaking up from the sinkhole and shooting into the sky.

Several of the tentacles gripped the edges of the sinkhole and wrapped around adjacent buildings or trees. Others waved angrily in the sky. And two of them were racing *directly for the group*.

Mike: Oh no, they're coming for us! Hide!

Mara: Where? *Where?*

Snufflefungus: Here!

Panicked and desperate, Mara, Linus, Snufflefungus and Mike dove behind a car that had been parked in the street. And not a moment too soon.

(Sound of tentacles slamming on the ground.)

One of the angry tentacles slammed onto the ground and smashed the car, barely missing Linus.

Linus: Yipe!

(Sound of tentacles retracting, dragging debris with them.)

Snufflefungus: We made it! Hooray!

As quickly as it had started, the assault ended. The tentacles retracted back into the hole, leaving trails of wreckage in their wake.

Mike: My house!

Indeed, Mike's house — which had been precariously close to the edge of the sinkhole to begin with — had been sheared into pieces and tumbled into the void.

Snufflefungus: (Sympathetic.) Is this the first time you've had your house destroyed, Mike?

Mike: Yeah.

Linus: Well this is Ohioville, bucko. Get used to it!

Part Three: Linus

As the group reached Malex's house, Linus decided that being a private detective was exhausting.

(Sounds of the door opening and footsteps.)

They tumbled into the house, tired, grimy, but satisfied from a hard day's work.

Malex: How did it go?

Snufflefungus tossed Malex's drone controller, that is, what was left of Malex's drone controller, into his lap.

Snufflefungus: (Cheerfully.) Here's your controller back. Sorry it broke.

Malex: Uh, and the drone-?

Linus: (Flippant.) Yeah we destroyed it.

Mara: (Excited.) We found a *humongous* monster at the bottom of the sinkhole! It was **massive**, and it had tentacles, and it almost *killed* us!

Malex: Uh-

Mike: And we found my dog!

Linus: (Screams.) Mike! Did you follow us all the way here?!

Mike: No, I walked *next* to you all the way here!

Linus: Well you gotta stop sneaking around like that, jeez!

Malex: Hey look, the SD card is intact. I bet I can recover the footage.

Mara: Yeah, let's see it.

Linus: Mike, since you're here, let's discuss payment options for services rendered. After all, we did find your dog.

Snufflefungus: (Contemplative.) That *is* true.

(*Sounds of footage being played back.*)

Mike: But he's still stuck underground! You said you'd bring him back!

Snufflefungus: (Contemplative.) That is definitely *not* true.

Linus: (Dismissive.) There's a lot of hair splitting going on here. Let's not get sidetracked. You asked us to find your dog. We found your dog. (Triumphant.) Case closed!

Malex had pulled up the footage from the drone camera and was scrubbing through it.

Malex: What is that thing?

Mara: (Excited.) I know, right? We discovered some kind of giant monster living at the bottom of the Ohioville sinkhole!

Mike: (Dismayed.) But how am I going to get my dog back?!

Snufflefungus: (Hopeful.) Maybe we can climb down?

Linus: Impossible!

Mara: Why don't you float down?

Linus: (Snorts.) I can't float that high. I need mass underneath me otherwise I fall. Besides, we already tried that with Malex's drone.

Mike: There's got to be a way!

Malex: I think I know how to get down there.

Mara: Oh?

Malex had paused the footage at a specific frame. It was just before the tentacles had knocked the drone out of the sky, but just *after* they had moved, revealing more of the bottom of the hole. He pointed at the screen.

Malex: Snufflefungus, do you recognize that pavement?

Snufflefungus: (Astonished, drawn out.) Oh!

Mara: Is that the network of tunnels around Snuffy's lab?!

Linus: It sure is.

Mike: Great! Let's just go down there and get Doggy!

Snufflefungus: (Nervous.) If those are *my* tunnels, that might be a **bad** idea...

To Be Continued