

Chapter One

We only had three minutes left on the clock when things started to get serious. And they'd been pretty stinkin' serious already, thanks to the Thunder's left defenseman, who was grinding our guys into the boards every chance he got. I had no idea what his parents were thinking, but they'd named the kid *Adrian*. They should have been able to see what was coming and call him Tank.

Anyway, this monster had been knocking me around for the whole period, and I was getting pretty tired of the refs not calling it. Coach O'Neal was shouting from the bench, along with the rest of the team and our fans (well, families) in the stands.

I'd been personally introduced to the kid's elbow at least six times, but I didn't let that stop me. I was playing to win.

So I was pretty disappointed when Coach called me out.

I skated off the ice, passing our own hulking mass of muscle (and my Math tutor), Eddie Bosko, who high-fived me as he took over the right wing position.

"Nice job, Nugget," he said, with a growl like a grizzly.

“Thanks,” I said, as I climbed onto the bench.

“That defenseman’s a beast,” Patrick Chen said, shaking his head from farther down.

“No doubt,” I groaned. “Every time I had the puck, he had me.”

“You played hard, son,” Coach O’Neal said, patting me on the back. “That kid’s at least twice your size and you gave him a run for the money.”

I couldn’t help thinking that if my stupid growth spurt would hurry up and happen, I wouldn’t even be having the conversation.

Or any conversation about size.

“Man, I hope we can win this one,” Patrick said as he pulled on his gloves, just in case Coach put him in.

I glanced past Patrick, where David “Bedhead” McCafferty was resting against the wall. He looked half-asleep, as usual.

It was too bad he never looked half-awake.

Seriously, who could relax during a hockey game? Especially when they were on the team!

I watched the game, wishing I was still in there. I’d had to accept the fact that Bosko and I were sharing right wing, but that didn’t mean I liked it.

If I had my way, I’d play hockey every second of every day. It was my favourite thing to do, and I happened to be pretty awesome at it. If I wasn’t playing, I was practising, and if I wasn’t practising, I was either watching it on TV or reading about it.

Which reminded me that my copy of *Shoot! Volume 4* would be arriving at Chapters any day.

Yes!

Was hockey my life?

Definitely.

I leaned forward on the bench and watched the action on the ice.

We'd beaten Victoria before, but this time the game was too close to call.

They were a strong team, stuck with a weak uniform. While we looked dangerous in our black and red, the Thunder were drowning in purple and yellow. And it didn't matter that the L.A. Kings wore those colours a million years ago. There was nothing cool about purple and yellow.

I mean, come on.

But worse than Victoria's uniforms was their attitude. Just because they were from the biggest city on the island, they thought they were better than everyone else. They played rougher than they should.

Rougher than anyone should.

Hockey had rules for a reason. Seriously, it was a game, not a war.

I jumped to my feet as Eddie stole the puck from the Thunder's right defenseman. He hauled past the centre line, his skates scraping against the ice.

"Come on, Bosko!" I shouted, as I watched that nasty Tank move toward him.

That kid was fast, too.

Eddie kept the puck close as he skated toward the Thunder's goal, but within seconds Tank was right on his tail.

Our hometown crowd cheered as Eddie got closer to the net and I glanced up to see my parents and sister on their feet in the stands.

It was getting loud out there.

I wished the crowd was cheering for me. I wanted to be

the one getting ready for the best shot of the game, not my “partner.”

“Take your time!” Coach O’Neal shouted. “Play smart, Bosko!”

We had less than two minutes left on the clock and we were still down a goal, so everybody was super tense.

I was hoping like crazy that Bosko could tie it up and send us into overtime. Then maybe I’d have a chance to get back out there.

I lived for overtime.

Eddie was eyeballing his target, preparing to take the shot. I knew he had perfect aim, and that Coach didn’t need to tell him to take it slow. Bosko had patience, for sure.

“Shoot!” Kenny shouted. (His patience wasn’t quite as developed.)

“Hard!” Patrick added, even louder.

I held my breath as Eddie pulled back his stick to whale on the puck. He had a killer slapshot (almost as good as mine), and I knew the Thunder’s goalie didn’t stand a chance. Bosko knew right where to put the puck, and I could already imagine it flying into the top of the net.

“Right in the cookie jar, Eddie!” my dad shouted from the stands.

I held my breath.

The crowd was going nuts.

The clock ticked behind its steel cage.

My heart bounced around in my chest like popcorn.

Bedhead McCafferty was . . . sleeping?

Never mind.

“Shoot, Bosko!” Patrick shouted, as we all watched the play.

It was going in, for sure. There was no doubt about it.