

# COMIC SHIFT

**TED STAUNTON**

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# CHAPTER ONE



“Des,” Jolie said to me, “a comic about a super Holstein and a bionic egg isn’t going to cut it when we get to middle school. Cowman and Bob are done. We gotta up our game.”

*Cowman and Bob* was the comic we did together, Jolie writing and me drawing, and this was bad news — really bad.

It was a summer afternoon, and we were sitting at the kitchen island in my house. I had paper, a pencil and a big eraser. Jolie had the latest edition of an *Aurora Nefling* comic.

Aurora is a character in the Nitron Empire Galaxy of Heroes. She’s a Star Command officer from the planet Galaxeenon who fights crime in the metaverse. Nitron was going to make a movie about her soon.

Behind us, my mom, who was home from work early, was chopping stuff for dinner. She had the little countertop TV on. Mom is a news addict.

I had just drawn Cowman and Bob. They were not cool like Aurora Nefling.

They looked like this:



“But I like C and B,” I said. “They’re funny.”

I didn’t say I also liked them because they were my idea, and especially because they’re super easy to draw. In drawing, my best skill is erasing.

“Action, Des. We need more action.” Jolie flipped her *Aurora Nefling* comic open to a big fight panel, all bulgy muscles, swoopy angles and sound effects like CRANNG and BZZZZZZLT!!!! “See? Way cool.”

“Way cool?”

I looked at Jolie. Sometimes she said stuff that sounded prehistoric — or at least old enough that my dad might say it. It weirded out a bunch of the kids in our grade six class, but Jolie never seemed to notice.

“Whatever,” Jolie said. “We gotta morph our comic big time for a middle-school audience. Look at this action.”

I looked again. “Morph” meant change. If that meant me drawing like Nitron comics, it wasn’t going to happen. I could never draw like that.

Jolie and I had been doing *Cowman and Bob* since last January, when her family moved in next door and she started in my grade six class. She saw me doodling on a math worksheet and said, “Awesome sauce! Who are they? Want to do a comic together?” almost in one breath.

That’s how *Cowman and Bob* started. Like I said, I’m not a good drawer. And Jolie isn’t the world’s greatest writer, although her script about the killer math test where the numbers jumped out and attacked everything was pretty cool. I had trouble giving the numbers arms and legs, though. Jolie really got on me about that.

We charged ten cents an issue and got to use the school copier. People liked *Cowman and Bob*. We did pretty good for grade six. That was a big deal for me, because our comic was the first thing that’s ever made me stand out — except for one useless thing I can do that I never tell people about.

Before C&B, I was the kid version of a grey hoodie someone had forgotten on a coat hook at the back of class. Doing our comic, I was more like a tuna sandwich in your lunch: not a highlight like a pudding cup, but worth noticing.

If we didn’t do C&B anymore, I’d go back to being unnoticed just as we started grade seven in a new school. I didn’t want that; *new school, new me* had been my secret plan. I’d thought C&B was the way to do it.

Now I said, “Well, you’re the writer. If we’re not doing *C and B*, what am I supposed to draw?”

“I dunno yet, but a coolio villain is vital. Maybe if you start drawing one, that’ll help get me started.” Jolie nodded at my pencil and paper.

My stomach fluttered. She didn’t quite seem to get how bad a drawer I was. I didn’t feel like showing her now. I stalled. “I need to sharpen my pencil first.”

In the nick of time, Mom said, “I bet you two will get ideas at the show tomorrow. Look, the opening parade is on the news.”

On the TV, an announcer wearing a cheesy mask was blathering on about the start of Cosmicon Fan Fest. Jolie and I were going tomorrow. Behind the announcer was a long line of costumed people: wizards, superheroes, video-game characters and more.

“Hey,” I said to Mom, without thinking. “There’s—”

“Who?” Jolie said.

I clammed up. “Nobody.”

I’d gotten a beep. That’s what I call it when I recognize someone other people probably wouldn’t. One of the people on screen was dressed as Wolfgang — a half-wolf/half-cyborg hero in JC Comics. He’d helped shingle our roof two summers ago.

Recognizing people is my useless talent. I never forget faces. I *can’t* forget them; it’s the way my brain is wired. Mom and Dad know, but usually I don’t tell

other people because they just think it's weird or boring. I hadn't told Jolie.

Her phone dinged.

"It's my Mom," she said. "I gotta go." She slid off her stool. "See you tomorrow. You wearing a costume? I am."

I shrugged.

"C'mon! Ya gotta wear one. Okay, see ya." Jolie buzzed out the back door at warp speed.

I looked at the TV. Someone had a great hobbit costume. It looked pretty special, and I wondered if they'd made it themselves.

If Jolie wanted a comic with muscles and action, I was going to have to get special too. That meant I'd have to learn to draw better. Way better. Which could take a while. Like forever. There had to be an easier way.

And then I found one.