

Axle Galench and The Gate of No Return

Chapter One

I'd March During the Ides of March But My Shoe's Untied

The time? Right now. The place? A planet called Mizmoe, located on the opposite side of space far from Earth. The human-like creatures living on Mizmoe are Manarkins. The most important event of the year is about to take place.... That would be the Manarkin Marching Band Competitions. Are the Manarkins serious about this? Yes! The students of Kamoo School are scheduled to perform in ten secomoos.

"All right, students. This is what we've been working toward all year long." The band director, Mr. Beflat, sighed. "And as much as I don't want to tell you this, I'm forced to put Axle out front with his diggery-dulcimer."

"What!?" shrieked the entire band. "Where's Keynoat? Why isn't he here?"

"I just received word that he's in the hospital getting a tonsil transplant."

"Oh, no! Why now?" asked Drumager. "Axle's not ready to be placed out front. Speaking of Axle, where is he?"

"I don't? Axle, where are you? Axle!" called Mr. Beflat.

"Coming," came a meager reply amidst a large crowd of Manarkins that were shuffling into the stadium.

"Hurry! It's time to start. Get your instrument ready," ordered Mr. Beflat.

"Sorry I'm late. My mother couldn't get off work and?"

"You knew the contest was today. Why didn't you have your father bring you here?" demanded Mr. Beflat.

"I don't have a father. He's gone, remember?"

"Oh....well. We don't have time to listen to your excuses. You're taking Keynoat's place out front. Places, everyone! Take your places!" Mr. Beflat called out.

"Out front? But I've never marched out front," said Axle.

"Keynoat's in the hospital. The entire district of Kamoo is depending on you to help us win this final competition. I don't need to tell you how important this is. Now get up there. It's time to march," said Mr. Beflat.

Axle grabbed his diggery-dulcimer and took Keynoat's place up front. The hardhearted looks from the other band members pierced every nerve in Axle's system. I can't mess this up. I've got to be perfect. Axle glanced down at his feet and gasped. I didn't have time to put on my band shoes! Oh no! One of my shoes is untied!

"Attention! Prepare to march!" ordered Mr. Beflat.

"The Music Arts Department proudly presents the Kamoo School Marching Band!" A loudspeaker echoed throughout the stadium.

"Ready....march!" ordered Mr. Beflat.

Axle couldn't see his feet when he held his diggery-dulcimer up to play. I hope the judges don't notice my dumb shoes. I hope I don't trip on my shoestring, Axle thought. The band made various maneuvers and turns, then they split into several single files and formed the perfect letter K for Kamoo. After that, the band returned into formation and was marching in perfect unison for their grand finale. Then, disaster struck.

Axle had worried all this time about tripping on his shoestring, but that didn't happen. Quirk Flutter, a boy marching behind Axle, stepped on it, catching Axle completely off-balance. Down he went with a thud. Those that didn't fall down on Axle fell over his diggery-dulcimer.

**THUD! THUMP! CRASH! BANG! THUMP!
THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!**

There, in front of two thousand Manarkins, stumbled the once proud and top-ranking marching band of Kamoo School. Everything they had worked so hard for that whole entire year was gone. Mr. Beflat ran out to help the students back to their feet.

"What happened?" he asked as he picked Quirk Flutter up. Then he looked down and saw Axle's shoes. At closer glance, he saw that one of them was untied. "Where are your band shoes, Axle?" Mr. Beflat groaned. "Oh...why me?"

Everyone in the band shushed instantly and glared down at Axle, who was still unable to get up. Beneath a pile of instruments, Axle looked up at the faces of his disgusted classmates. "Sorry....I'm sorry."

"All right! Let's clear the area for another band," the announcer called out. "Let's give a round of applause to Kamoo School, because your applause is all they'll receive. Thank you, youngsters, for trying."

The band turned their backs on Axle and left him all alone on the field. He got up, not bothering to follow his schoolmates to their section. Instead, he lowered his head to avoid the stares from the crowd and began the long embarrassing walk to the place where his mother would pick him up after she got off work.

It was difficult to hide in the crowd while carrying a diggery-dulcimer. Axle felt all eyes were on him and his clumsiness. Manarkins were human in appearance and only three feet tall when fully grown, but at the moment, Axle felt as if he were a giant red sore toe that everyone was gawking at. He made his way to the designated spot where his mother, Clea, said she would pick him up, and sat down by himself to wait.

Look for Chapter 2: "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" Wednesday, June 20th

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