

The Misadventures of Dale and Luke

Chapter 1

Dale and Luke stood on opposite sides of a crossroads. Luke glared at Dale and pointed down the main road. "We're supposed to go that way."

Dale jerked a thumb at a large sign behind him, emblazoned with the words WELCOME TO FLOOGANTOWN—ADVENTURERS WANTED!

" 'Adventurers wanted,' " he said, "That's us! Let's have a little fun."

"The king didn't hire us to 'have fun.' " Luke twisted his mouth. "Whoever heard of 'Floogantown,' anyway?"

"Not me." Dale beamed at Luke. "Isn't that exciting? C'mon, just a quick trip."

"We're on a critical mission—"

"Pffft, can't be too critical if they sent us."

Luke stabbed the dirt with the pointed end of his wizard staff. "I know you're some washed-up merc-for-hire at the end of, what I assume, was a solidly mediocre career—"

Dale's eyebrows rose.

"—but this is my first royal commission and I've got my reputation to think about." Luke took a deep breath. "I don't want to be known as the Savior of Floogantown."

"Fair enough. Real talk. You ever done anything like this before?"

Luke fiddled with the shaft of his staff and looked down at the ground. "No."

"Well, I have. I'm telling you—we're just somebody's useful idiots." Dale narrowed his eyes. "Haven't figured out who or why, yet."

"I was valedictorian of my graduating class at the Clay Tower," Luke said. "I'm not anyone's idiot, useful or otherwise."

Dale snorted. "You're a recent grad with no real work experience. Trust me, you're an idiot."

"At least graduates of the Clay Tower can, you know, blow things up with magic." Luke looked pointedly at Dale's potbelly and disheveled clothing. "Honestly, I'm not sure what you bring to this partnership."

"Exactly." Dale grinned. "It's been a long time since anybody asked me to save the world. I think we could use a trial run"—he nodded down the hill at the village below—"before we get down to the king's business."

"That is surprisingly reasonable," Luke said begrudgingly.

"Maybe we'll get lucky—maybe I'll get killed."

Luke frowned. "How is that lucky?"

"You can have all the glory for yourself and I don't have to listen to you hide your insecurities behind meaningless academic accomplishments. That's a win-win, you ask me."

Luke's mouth fell open.

Dale clapped him on the shoulder and laughed. "Come on, let's go save some poor villagers."

They descended a dirt road into the valley where a cluster of dome-shaped huts lay nestled between the hills and a winding river. A pungent odor permeated the air as they drew closer. Luke coughed. "Gah, what is that stench?"

"Reminds me of a dairy farm." Dale shrugged. "Just take a few deep breaths, you'll get used to it."

Luke sucked air in through his nose and doubled over, gagging.

Dale smirked. "City kid, huh?"

"Travellers, ho!" A fat, frog-like creature waddled towards them. "Are you here because of the sign?"

Luke stepped in front of Dale and bowed. He opened his mouth to speak but the frogman cut him off, speaking in a heavy lisp.

"—because we don't need you anymore." The frogman put his webbed hands on Luke's arms and turned Luke around. "We're fine, honestly. Thanks for thinking of us."

"Agh, gross, could you please"—Luke brushed at the frogman's slimy hands—"please stop touching me." He held up his blue robe, now covered in splotchy handprints, and groaned. "I just had this professionally cleaned."

"You had your traveling clothes cleaned?" Dale arched an eyebrow. "Right before beginning on a long and dirty journey?"

"Appearances are important."

"Weren't you head nerd at your little magic school?"

"Valedictorian."

"Right. Head nerd. So why don't you, I don't know"—Dale twirled his fingers—"magic up the illusion of cleaner clothes?"

Luke sniffed. "Magic should not be used for such mundanities."

"Seems to me that you could've saved your coin."

"Seems to me that only one of us is a certified wizard." Luke sneered. "When I want the advice of a barely employed drunk, I'll ask for it."

"I prefer the term 'voluntarily underemployed' drunk," muttered Dale.

The frogman blinked. "A drunk? A wizard? We definitely don't need you." It smacked its lips in irritation and herded the two men back up the road.

"Wait! Don't leave!"

Dale and Luke turned to see another frogman waddling towards them, waving one hand frantically. He stopped in front of them, breathing heavily. "Ignore Arglebarg here," he said, speaking with the same heavy lisp. "We floogan are in desperate need."

He looked at Luke, then Dale, and frowned. "Are you... adventurers?"

"They're drunks," Arglebarg said, "and, even worse, they're wizards."

"Oh," said the new frogman. His face fell. "Not adventurers."

Luke bowed. "We are royal—"

"Yes," Dale said, pulling Luke up straight. "Absolutely, we're adventurers. Just normal adventurers." He shook the new frogman's hand then wrung his hand afterward, grimacing as bits of slime dripped off his fingers. "What can we do for you?"

"My name is Smergl. I'm the mayor of the floogan."

Arglebarge snorted and rolled his eyes.

"Ignore him," Smergl said, waving Arglebarge away with his hand. "He's still upset about the election."

"You ran on a platform of xenophobic isolationism," Arglebarge said, "in a town dependent on exports and tourism."

"The town disagreed with you, Argle."

The mayor and Arglebarge glared at each other in silence. Luke began to extend his hand towards Smergl, then waved instead. "Mayor, we are at your service."

"Excellent," Smergl said. "I will show you the problem."

"We've already smelled it," Luke said. "I'm sure we can eliminate the odor."

The frogmen exchanged a confused look.

"You know," Luke said, "the smell?"

"Ah." Smergl shook his head. "No, that is the blorchblorch. Our most precious resource. Very fragrant."

"Your whole village smells like it," Luke said, wrinkling his forehead. "That's not a problem?"

"No no, the problem is this way." Smergl beckoned. The group tramped across the lawn of the nearest hut. As they rounded the rear of the hut, Luke and Dale exchanged a surprised look.

Luke pointed. "Is that..."

"—an outhouse?" Dale finished. He walked up to a wood building jutting out from the wall of the hut. He examined the joinery and whistled. "Pretty good carpentry. Where'd you folks learn to do this?"

"We didn't." Smergl grimaced. "They just started appearing."

"There are more?" Luke looked around, frowning.

"They started over at my inn," Arglebarge said. "Attached to the guest rooms. Which has been great for attracting human tourists, let me tell you."

"Great for you, maybe," Smergl said, "but floogans have no need for barbaric human poophuts." He turned to Dale and Luke. "No offense. We're just more efficient, biologically speaking."

Luke furrowed his eyebrows. "'More efficient'?"

"Floogans waste nothing."

Luke glanced at Dale, who shrugged. "These outhouses, the whole town has them?"

Arglebarge nodded his head. "It's very mysterious. Not much you can do, I'm sure, so you'll want to be on your way—"

"Wait," Luke said, pushing past the innkeeper and putting one hand on the outhouse. "These things are invasive?"

"I prefer to think of them as automated gentrification," Arglebarge said.

"Gentrification!" Smergl smacked the innkeeper on the shoulder. "As if we wanted outsiders here."

"But..." Luke wrinkled his nose. "Who would want to move here?"

"Well that's the whole point, isn't it?" Arglebarge spread his hands. "If we add some, ahem, amenities..."

"Human amenities, you mean," Smergl said, rolling his eyes.

Arglebarge shrugged. "More humans, more business."

"Oh, yes, more business," Smergl wagged a finger in front of Arglebarge's nose. "This is how these things always start when the humans come. First, it's invasive human poophuts—"

"Those aren't a thing," Luke said.

"—and then its 'oh we should have a human mayor' and 'oh don't you think all this blorchblorch is a bit smelly' and then its 'oh let's just kill all the floogans.'"

"Hey!" Luke frowned. "Humans don't just go around killing other species."

Smergl, Arglebarge, and Dale exchanged incredulous looks and burst into laughter.

"Don't mind him," Dale said, wiping tears from his eyes, "he just graduated."

"Floogans won't have their culture appropriated or eradicated," Smergl said. "Not so long as I'm mayor!" He kicked the nearest outhouse. "Get rid of these."

"That"—Luke rolled up his sleeves and stepped back—"is easily done."

"Oooo," Dale said, wiggling his eyebrows. "Magic time!"

The two floogan and Dale backed away. Luke closed his eyes and raised his staff, murmuring to himself. The tip of his staff glowed red.

"Oh, by the way," Smergl said, leaning forward, "make sure you don't—"

"Yes, yes, I've got this," Luke said, thrusting his staff forward. A streak of flame roared across the grass and slammed into the outhouse, sending pieces of wood in all directions.

"—blow it up," Smergl said, his shoulders slumping.

Dale cheered. Luke turned, his smile fading as he saw the glowering faces of the frogmen.

"What?" he asked.

"We already tried blowing them up." Smergl shook his head. "We're not stupid, you know."

"I just thought—"

"It's not like they appeared and we just threw up our little hands and said, 'Oh no! Whatever will we do!'" Smergl wrung his hands in faux frustration. " 'We frog people are too stupid to do anything. We must wait for the wise and powerful humans to save us.' "

"I-I get it," Luke said, holding up his hands. "I should have asked—"

"Arrogant. Prick." Smergl poked Luke in the chest. "Not everything can be solved by a fireball to the face."

"That's right," Dale said. "Sometimes you need to stab the face, instead."

"What? No!" Smergl whirled to face Dale. "You can't just stab a mysteriously appearing, magically-reproducing building."

"You sure?" Dale scratched his chin. "Stabbing the face works, like, eighty percent of the time."

"Poophuts don't have faces!"

"Obviously," Dale said. "That'd be weird. Who could do their business in an outhouse with a face?"

"Dale, I don't think that's his point," Luke said.

"No, but think about it." Dale shuddered. "It's hard enough to go when someone's in the stall next to you. How awkward would a sentient outhouse be?"

Smergl closed his eyes and pinched his brow. "Oh gods, you're an idiot."

"He is," Luke said, "but help me understand. What's wrong with simply blowing them up?"

Arglebargle chuckled. "We'll show you in the morning. Why don't you head over to my inn and get settled in?"

"Yes," Smergl said. "I can't stand any more idiocy today." He stomped off, muttering under his breath as he picked his way across the debris-strewn yard.

"The inn is down the hill." Arglebargle pointed. "My daughter will see to your rooms."

Luke and Dale ambled through the village in the direction of the river. The inn was larger than the rest of the floogans' buildings and made from the same green-black muck. Flanking the inn in a semicircle sat several small, one-room huts connected via gravel pathways. Each of the huts had a fresh-looking outhouse attached in seemingly random ways, including one hut with its outhouse jutting out from the top. They entered the main building to find an empty common room except for a female floogan washing mugs behind the bar. Dale sidled up and perched on a stool.

"Hey goodlookin'," he said. "Two mugs of your house specialty, please—whatever that is."

"Blorchblorch ale." The waitress plopped two mugs on the bar and poured a thick brown sludge from a pitcher into both. She smiled as she pushed the mugs across the wood. "Been a long time since I've laid eyes on humans."

"Especially fine specimens like us, I'm sure." Dale grabbed his mug and sniffed, closing his eyes. "Mmm, smells a bit like everything else in this town."

Luke sniffed his mug gagged. "Yes—like filth."

"Don't be rude." Dale took a small sip and coughed. "Although, you aren't wrong."

"It's the blorchblorch," the waitress said. "We use it for many things. Ale, fuel, building materials."

"Why does it smell... the way it smells?" Luke asked.

She shrugged. "Blorchblorch is like human waste product, only reusable and much more versatile."

"How quaint," Dale said. He drained his mug and pushed it across the bar with a wink.

"You can handle your blorchblorch," said the waitress. "You are a fine specimen indeed."

"I can handle a lot of things." Dale grinned. "Arglebarge's daughter, right?"

She nodded and extended a dry hand. "Plarglebarge. Humans call me 'Penny'."

"Lovely to meet you, Penny."

"Why don't you have a lisp like the others?" Luke asked.

Penny grinned. "I studied tourism and hospitality services at a human university and had to master the common tongue to fit in. We floogan have extremely long tongues, by your standards." She gave Dale a meaningful look. "I've become very good at controlling mine."

Dale popped the collars of his coat and leaned in with a sly smile. "What a coincidence, I have extensively studied foreign tongues." He winked at Luke. "Some might say that I am a valedictorian of such things."

"That's not what 'valedictorian' means"—Luke stopped—"oh. I get it."

"You two are here to get rid of the poophuts, aren't you?" Penny said. "That's why my father said to give you our worst rooms."

Luke raised his eyebrows. "Why would he do that?"

"Business," she said with a shrug. "Dad wants the town to grow."

"And Smergl wants it to stay the same," Luke said.

"You got it."

Dale chuckled and turned to Luke. "I told you. We're always somebody's useful idiots."

"Now that I think about it," Penny said, tapping her cheek with one finger, "this all started when Dad planted those magic seeds around town."

"Seeds? What seeds?" Luke asked, alarmed.

"Dad bought them off some low-life wizard"—she smiled apologetically at Luke—"no offense. Told Dad the seeds would modernize the village or some such. Big magic, cost Dad a small fortune. Which he didn't have to spend."

"Not a fan of his plan, eh?" Dale said.

"I'm not a fan of a lot of my dad's decisions." Penny gave Dale a level look. "I voted for Smergl, if that tells you anything."

Dale grinned. "I like a girl with daddy issues."

Luke snorted and collected his staff and travel pack. "Can I get the key to my room, please? I have some research to do."

Penny handed him a brass key. "Third hut from the right." She handed another key to Dale. "You're the second from the right."

"Hmm," Dale said, looking down at the key in his palm. "I'm simply terrible at counting. Did you say the second from the right? That's this many fingers, right?" He held up four fingers.

Penny stepped from behind the bar and took Dale by the hand. "I'd better show you."

Don't wait up, Dale mouthed to Luke as the floogan pulled him out the door.

Luke sighed and adjusted his wizard hat. He walked around the inn just in time to see Dale and Penny disappear into a guest hut. Luke's face tightened as he tried the other huts. All were locked except the one immediately adjacent to Dale's. "Oh perfect," he muttered.

He pushed his way into the room and collapsed on the small bed inside. After skimming a thin guide about magical plants, he removed a thick tome from his pack titled *Social Skills: A Guide for the Gifted Wizard* and read until he fell asleep.

The pungent smell of blorchblorch hit Luke as he stepped into the early morning light. Trying not to gag, he trudged down the path to the main building.

Dale sat at a table in the otherwise empty room, Penny on his knee. They were giggling as Luke entered.

"You sleep well?" Dale asked.

"Well the bed was—"

"Because I barely slept a wink with this one"—Dale gave Penny squeeze—"keeping me up all night."

"Yes, I heard the, uh," Luke said, swallowing, "the mattress."

Dale looked confused. "The mattress?"

"All those wet squishy sounds?"

"Oh honey," said Penny. "That wasn't the mattress."

"Gross," Luke said, blushing.

Dale chuckled and shooed the floogan woman off his lap. "We better take a look at your handiwork from yesterday."

Luke nodded.

"Did you really blow up a poophut?" Penny asked.

"Outhouse, and yes."

"That was dumb," she said with a smile. "But you'll see." She gave Dale a long kiss. "Have fun and good luck."

Dale watched Penny disappear into the inn's kitchen. He smiled wistfully then caught Luke's glare and clapped his hands. "Right! To work!"

They made their way to the scene of the explosion from the day before. Luke gasped. Where debris had landed, outhouses rose from the ground in various stages of completion.

Luke peered inside one half-finished building. "It's like they are growing themselves."

"Like weeds," Dale said. "And look here, this one's got a pipe coming off it." He pulled out a small folding shovel and started to dig.

"What are you doing?"

"You'll see." Dale methodically continued scooping out dirt, excavating a straight line away from the debris. Finally, he stopped and pointed. "These things have plumbing."

Luke peered into the trench and used his staff to push dirt clumps out of the way. Running down the center of the trench was a shiny metal pipe. "How strange," he said.

"Not really," Dale said. "Fancier models come with plumbing sometimes. I've seen it at rich person parties."

"I don't know which is more unbelievable: that this village is facing an infestation of invasive outhouses or that you were ever invited to rich people parties."

"Har har." Dale wiped his brow. "Shut up and help me, head nerd." He put his hands on his hips and stretched his back.

Luke squinted, his gaze following the line of the pipe down the hill. He grabbed the shovel and paced off into the undisturbed grass. Luke shoved the blade into the grass. It clanked. He nodded and paced off again, then repeated the process. Another clank. Luke continued to douse the ground throughout the village, making innumerable small cuts in the earth, until he started missing more than he hit. Satisfied, he walked back to the trench.

"Uh, that's not how shoveling works," Dale said. "You have to actually remove the dirt. Can't just poke at it."

"Just watch." Luke folded back his sleeves, then began to rub his hands against each other and murmur. A bright white light ignited around his fingertips. Bending quickly, Luke thrust his fingers into the earth at the end of Dale's trench. Luke pulled upwards, straining with his legs.

"Dude, you got a weird way of digging—" Dale closed his mouth, his eyes wide, as the soil pulled up along the lines that Luke had cut into the dirt. Across the grass fields of the town, thick layers of soil folded over like so many heavy blankets, revealing a twisting network of pipes.

Luke grinned and stuck his tongue out at Dale.

"Very nice." Dale slow-clapped and nodded. "That's a lot of pipe."

"That's what she said," Luke said.

Dale stopped clapping. "Uh, what?"

"You know, like that old joke."

"No, dude, just... no." Dale shook his head. "You don't have the wit for it."

"Pfft, this from a *half-wit* philanderer."

Dale laughed and slapped Luke on the back. "'Half-wit!' Ha! That's more like it."

Luke's cheek reddened but he smiled and crouched by a section of the pipe system. "You think every outhouse is connected?"

"Probably." Dale scratched his head. "But where are they leading?"

"Hmm, that's actually a good question."

Dale chuckled. "You know what they say—even a blind squirrel gets laid once in a while."

"Is that... is that what they say?"

"I dunno, I might be paraphrasing."

They spent the rest of the afternoon examining the unearthed pipes, with Luke making a small sketch of the subterranean network in his notebook. The sun burnt low in the horizon as they made their way back to the inn.

Luke sat at the bar, suspiciously eyeing a bowl of thick liquid in front of him. "So no fireballs," he said, "obviously."

"Right. What about freezing them?"

"What, like forever?" Luke shook his head. "Pretty sure the floogans don't want permanent frozen 'poophuts' cluttering their village."

Luke lifted a small bit of soup to his nose.

"It's not blorchblorch soup, if that's what you're wondering." Penny stood behind the bar. "It's black bean."

Dale took a sip then flashed a thumbs-up and began slurping down the soup. Luke relaxed and spooned some into his mouth.

"Agh," he said, spraying soup onto the bar, "this is horrible!"

"There's always blorchblorch pudding."

"No, I-I'll be fine." Luke choked down another spoonful.

"So, anyway," Dale said between bites, "no fire, no ice. What else you got?"

Luke shook his head. "Not really sure. Make them invisible, maybe, but people would walk into them."

"I thought you were the best in your class."

Luke wiped his mouth with a napkin. "Yeah but they didn't offer any classes on invasive building removal, ok? I could cloak them in permanent darkness, or make them smell like fresh flowers, or blow them up, or toss them into a planar warp, but what good would any of that do?"

"So no magic..."

"No magic."

They sat in silence as Luke forced down the rest of the soup.

"Listen," Dale said, turning to Luke. "You had indoor plumbing at your fancy wizard school, right?"

"Yes, the Clay Tower had certain amenities, including plumbing."

"Was it good plumbing?"

Luke shrugged. "The school's administration didn't exactly care about student housing, so water pressure was dodgy. If someone flushed a toilet, the showers dropped to a trickle. That sort of thing. "

"Great, so get this." Dale bobbed his head, excited. "I heard this story about an ancient city where some well-intentioned wizards created a citywide sewage system. Apparently, during a big sporting event, everyone waited until the intermission to relieve themselves. When the

time came, the entire city retreated into their bathrooms, did their business, and when they were done? They all flushed at the same time." Dale nodded soberly. "It was a catastrophe."

Luke frowned. "So, what happened?"

"It exploded."

"What, the sewer?"

"The entire city."

"That's... not how plumbing works. When pipes burst they don't blow things up."

"The sewer was the work of wizards." Dale shrugged. "Who knows what dark magic was involved?"

Luke massaged his temples. "Dale, I really don't think that happened. There isn't a wizard school for evil plumbing magic or anything."

"That you know of."

Luke clenched his jaw. "I was the valedictorian. I would have known."

"Well, I think we should give it a shot anyway."

"What, install a magic sewer under the village?"

"No! No." Dale grinned. "I want to try The Floogantown Flush."

Luke closed his eyes, grimacing. "The Floogantown Flush."

Dale nodded. "That's what I'm calling it. We get everyone in the village to stand by one of the toilets, and then we send up a signal and everyone flushes at once."

"And..."

"And we see what happens!"

The morning sun warmed the green-brown huts behind Luke as he faced the crowd of villagers. He swallowed.

"Ok so, we've got a plan to remove the outhouses—"

"We're calling it the Wizard Luke Flush," Dale said.

"Wait, what?" Luke hissed.

"I changed the name," Dale whispered. "Gotta build your reputation, right?"

Luke scowled as Dale clapped him on the back and shouted to the crowd. "Yes, the Wizard Luke Flush. It's foolproof. We need every able-bodied floogan to stand by a toilet and, on our mark, flush."

"Excuse me," Smergl said from the front of the crowd. "Your plan is to flush a bunch of toilets?"

"Yes," Dale said, very seriously.

"We're not paying you for this."

"This should overload the system," Luke said. "It will break the pipes feeding the outhouses, causing them to die simultaneously. Hopefully the whole thing just shrivels up."

Dale nodded. "Yes. Afterwards, we'll dig up the remains and dump 'em in the river."

"The river?" Smergl said. "Our neighbors downstream won't appreciate that."

"They already complain about all the blorchblorch we dump in it," Arglebarge said. The crowd of floogans murmured in assent.

"Fair enough." Dale scratched his chin. "We can pile up the scrap and burn everything. That'll do it."

"Right," Luke said. "Let's get this over with."

Several minutes later, every floogan stood dutifully outside an outhouse. Luke raised his staff. "On my mark, floogans! Ready! Set! Flush!" A red flare launched from the tip of Luke's staff and soared into the sky. All across the village, toilets flushed. The sound of swirling water grew, followed by a gurgling and then—silence.

"What now?" Luke whispered to Dale.

"Just wait."

As the last of the water drained into the pipes, the ground began to rumble. Dale grinned. The outhouse next to Luke began to shudder, sending bits of paint and dust to the ground. Luke stepped away, wide-eyed.

"Adventurers!" Smergl called. "What's happening?"

"It's working," Dale shouted, dancing a little jig.

The pipes rose out of the ground, twisting in worm-like fashion. The outhouses, still attached to the pipes, ripped free from their huts.

"Oh no, my beautiful poophuts," cried Arglebarge.

The outhouses continued to pull away as the pipes curled together and pulled the small buildings towards a growing mass of metal and wood.

Dale stopped dancing. "That doesn't seem right."

Luke stood next to him. "Is that... alive?"

They watched wide-eyed as the outhouses and pipes reared up in a vaguely humanoid mass that towered over the squat floogan village. Arms and legs formed with limbs of pipe and outhouses at the extremities. A terrible maw opened in the chest, flashing rows of porcelain toilets as teeth, and roared.

"Oh." Dale said. "A monster."

"A golem, actually," Luke said, stepping back and gripping his staff with two hands. "An outhouse golem."

"Gotta be honest, dude." Dale shrugged. "I got nothing."

"Good thing for us"—Luke gritted his teeth and tossed his staff to Dale—"I got perfect marks in golem class."

Smergl clutched at Luke's robe. "What are we gonna do?" He pointed at the outhouse golem, which smashed a nearby hut into a pile of blorchblorch timbers. "Save my town!"

"I'll need some of your buildings," Luke said. The floogan gibbered in fear, his eyes starting to roll back in his head. Luck slapped Smergl. "Quick, man! Have you any buildings that no one is using?"

Smergl stared blankly at Luke.

"Use my guest rooms," shouted Arglebarge, coming up behind them. "If we don't stop this thing, my business is ruined anyway."

Luke strode directly at the patchwork monster, his face grim. His hands glowed a deep green. Behind him, Arglebarge's guest rooms erupted in a blaze of green flame. Luke lifted his hands, clutching at the empty air. The blazing huts broke free of the ground then soared overhead and tumbled together in front of the monster.

"Yay?" Dale said. "I think?"

Luke glared at him and continued to wave his hands in intricate patterns. Dale and the villagers watched as the guest huts molded together, forming a huge blorchblorch figure. The outhouse golem slammed one fist into the ground. In response, the blorchblorch golem pounded its chest. Luke snarled and thrust both hands forward. The villagers cheered as his golem charged.

The golems met with a resounding crash. The blorchblorch golem, denser and smaller, slammed into the lower torso of the outhouse golem, sending it backwards. Luke swung his arms, mimicking punches and throws, as the two golems tumbled and rolled in the dirt.

"You got this, dude!" Dale pumped his fist. "Nice!"

"Sh-shut up, Dale," Luke said. He moved closer to the battle, his face tight with exertion. Luke's golem dealt a flurry of blows as Luke furiously punched the air. He bared his teeth and grunted with each strike as his golem drove its opponent farther away from the village.

"Uh, dude," Dale said, "wait, hold on—"

"Not now, Dale."

"But the river, it's—"

"NOT NOW." Luke brought both fists behind his head and slammed the ground. His golem leapt into the air and crashed down on the outhouse golem's head, crumpling it into a heap just as the massive figures reached the edge of the water. Luke's golem grabbed the tangle of writhing pipes and waded into the river's current. Together, the two golems sank under the water, resurfacing several yards downriver.

Dale, Luke, and the floogans watched in silence as the river carried away the golems. Luke's shoulders sagged. He turned slowly and grabbed his staff from Dale, then collapsed onto the ground.

"Well," Dale said, "I guess that's that."

"But... but what about the city downstream?" Smergle asked, his eyes wide. "You've just washed that monstrous thing right to them."

"You're welcome," Luke said, laying on his back.

Dale offered a hand to Luke and pulled him up. Leaning in, he whispered, "We better get outta here before the rest of them realize that you probably just started a war with their neighbors downriver."

Luke nodded and brushed off his robes. "Floogans of Floogantown," he said, raising his voice, "we have saved your village from the outhouse infestation—"

"But really you just pushed our problem off on our neighbors," shouted someone in the crowd.

"That was fast," Dale muttered.

"Well, I mean," Luke said to the crowd, "the water will probably destroy all the wood parts." He scanned the crowd. "It will probably stop them from regrowing..."

"I think we should kill them," shouted a different voice.

"Dude," Dale said, backing away from the increasingly rowdy crowd.

"Yeah..." Luke nodded. "Let's go."

The crowd of angry floogans rushed towards them, wielding broken blorchblorch timbers. "Cut them up into ten million pieces!"

"Toss 'em in the river!"

Dale and Luke turned and ran, ducking their heads as bits of blorchborch hurtled past.