

WANTED:
A SUPERHERO
TO SAVE THE
WORLD
WANTED: SUPERHEROES



WANTED:
A SUPERHERO
TO SAVE THE
WORLD
WANTED: SUPERHEROES

BRYAN DAVIS

BOOKS BY BRYAN DAVIS

Wanted: Superheroes

Wanted: A Superhero to Save the World

Hertz to Be a Hero

#3 - Title to be Determined

The Reapers Trilogy

Reapers

Beyond the Gateway

Reaper Reborn

Time Echoes Trilogy

Time Echoes

Interfinity

Fatal Convergence

Dragons in our Midst

Raising Dragons

The Candlestone

Circles of Seven

Tears of a Dragon



Oracles of Fire
Eye of the Oracle
Enoch's Ghost
Last of the Nephilim
The Bones of Makaidos

Children of the Bard
Song of the Ovulum
From the Mouth of Elijah
The Seventh Door
Omega Dragon

Dragons of Starlight
Starlighter
Warrior
Diviner
Liberator

Tales of Starlight
Masters & Slayers
Third Starlighter
Exodus Rising

To learn more about Bryan's books, go to
www.daviscrossing.com

Facebook - facebook.com/BryanDavis.Fans





Wanted: A Superhero to Save the World
Illustrated Edition

Copyright © 2019 by Bryan Davis

Published by Scrub Jay Journeys
P. O. Box 512
Middleton, TN 38052
www.scrubjayjourneys.com
email: info@scrubjayjourneys.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

ISBN Print: 978-1-946253-24-8
ISBN Epub: 978-1-946253-36-1
ISBN Mobi: 978-1-946253-35-4

First Printing – February 2019
Interior Illustrations by James Art Ville

Printed in the U.S.A.
Library of Congress Control Number: 2017910659

CHAPTER I

How Can You Have a Secret Identity When You Share a Bedroom with Your Sister?

I sat at my desk chair and aimed the grocery-store checkout scanner at my forehead, hoping the trigger's noise wouldn't wake my sister.

I glanced at her, asleep in bed. When it's time for school, she can sleep through an atomic blast, but let me try to sneak ice cream at midnight, and she shows up in her padded Tigger slippers with a big spoon in her hand. I swear those slippers turn her into a Ninja.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled the trigger. A bright light flashed for a split second, and a soft beep sounded twice.

I turned the scanner around and read its tiny screen. *Edward (Eddie) Hertz. Male. 12 years old. Caucasian. Brown Hair. Brown Eyes. Last reported height – 4 feet, 7 inches. Last reported weight – 75 pounds.*

I frowned. Still a shrimp, no matter how much I exercised. That would change ... if only I could get the courage to try out the super-secret invention in my closet.

At least the scanner worked perfectly. I touched my forehead. Obviously the data liquid had penetrated the cells and left an invisible marker under my skin. It

might last only a few months, but, for now, it looked like another success.

The trickier step came next.

I sat gently on my sister's bed. My head bumped her toy dragon suspended by a string from the ceiling. Covered with feathers she had plucked from a bluebird that splatted against our window, the dragon carried a tiny female humanoid made out of marshmallows, toothpicks, and yarn — a fairy princess, but I could never remember the ugly thing's super-long name.

I aimed the scanner at my sister's forehead. It had taken all day to figure out how to get the data into her skin. Offering to paint her face with sparkle makeup worked like a charm.

I pulled the trigger. The scanner flashed and beeped twice. Again I read the screen. *Samantha (Sam) Hertz. Female. 8 years old. Caucasian. Brown Hair. Hazel Eyes. Last reported height – 4 feet, 2 inches. Last reported weight – 55 pounds.*

Perfect. Now if Sam were ever kidnapped, I could track the marker and identify her no matter how much a villain changed her appearance.

Smiling, I touched the *A* emblem on the front of my shirt. Archimedes, the boy superhero, had succeeded once again.

I breathed the name in a whisper. "Archimedes." I had chosen that name for several reasons. For one, he was among the greatest scientists of all time, but the main reason is simply that it was a cool Greek name, just like the name of the most amazing guy on the planet — Damocles.

I looked at the framed photo on my desk, an

autographed picture of Damocles I won in an art contest. I drew a comic strip of him rescuing my mother from our burning apartment building and sent it in to join probably ten thousand drawings scrawled by other young hero worshipers.

And I won. Of course he probably didn't judge the drawings himself, and the autograph might have been stamped on the photo by an assistant. But maybe, just maybe, the assistant told Damocles the winner's name. If *Eddie Hertz* passed into his ears at some point, that was enough for me.

I looked at my wristwatch — a mega-cool one I built from a pocket watch and a digital timer. The combination gave it an old-fashioned face and a multi-mode LED numeric readout at the center.

The hands pointed to 12:10 a.m., and the digital readout agreed. Danger always lurked in the city of Nirvana, and I was late for midnight patrol. Of course, the city already had Damocles to watch over the citizens, but he couldn't be everywhere at once. They needed a backup, and I was just the kid for the job.

A cool breeze stirred the curtains of our second-floor apartment's window. Easy access to our room was a safety hazard, so I always closed the window when I went to bed or out on patrol. Street lamps outside could take the place of a night-light, though Sam insisted that we leave a glowing blue fairy princess light plugged into an outlet. She claimed that the fairy watched over us at night, a dumb idea, of course, but I didn't tell her so, at least not more than a couple of times.

A rattling hum drifted in from outside. Strange. It

sounded like a motor of some kind but not like a car or truck engine. It slowly increased in volume as if a machine were warming up.

I laid the scanner on my desk and fastened my gadgets belt around my waist along with the attachments — two spool lines with grappling claws, a portable hologram projector, a paintball pistol, a knife in a sheath, a glass cutter, two suction cups, two coils of wire, adhesive tape, a pair of gloves, a razor-disk gun, and a laser pen.

Everything was ready, except that my solar-powered laser pen needed a charge. But how could I turn on a light without waking Sam?

I spotted the night-light next to the desk. It wouldn't provide much juice, but it should be enough for one patrol.

Crouching, I set the pen's butt end against the bulb. As the night-light dimmed, the red LED power meter on the pen's side slowly increased — 5%, 8%, 10%.

The bulb popped, shattering the glass. I staggered back and landed with a *whump* on Sam's bed. My head smacked the dragon and sent it swaying back and forth inches in front of my face.

"What are you doing, Eddie?" Sam squinted at me from her pillow. Remnants of sparkle paint glittered on her face.

I hid the laser pen behind my back. "Just checking on you."

"To make sure I'm asleep so you can raid the fridge?" She sat up and halted the fairy's arcing dragon ride. "We're out of ice cream and cookies. Mom says we can't afford them till next paycheck."

I brushed a sparkle from her cheek. "Can't a brother be concerned for his sister's welfare?"

"You can't fool me." One eye closed halfway. "I see a strawberry Poptart crumb on your lip. If you really cared about me, you wouldn't be sneaking those into our room."

I swiped the crumb away with my sleeve. "You're not *that* allergic to strawberries."

"Am so." She laid a hand against her forehead and put on her I'm-so-dramatic expression. "If I even breathe the vapors, I am likely to swoon."

I rolled my eyes. Mimicking Princess Queenie, her favorite cartoon superhero, was making Sam way too theatrical. Sometimes she had no clue what she was saying. "Give me a break. When Mom made strawberry shortcake last week you licked the spoon ... and the bowl ... and the baking tin."

"She added the strawberries later, genius. And you should talk about eating too much. You snuck food in here three nights in a row."

"Mom never said I couldn't." I shrugged. "I've been working out a lot. I get hungry at night."

"And now you're wearing that weird costume." She resumed her suspicious stare. "Are you going out again?"

"Going out? What are you talking about?"

"I've seen you. Night before last and the night before that."

"What are you? Some kind of spy camera?" I got up from the bed and walked to my closet, stealthily sliding my laser pen back to my belt. Now I had to get my

mask without Sam noticing. "And it's not a costume. I just modified an Alabama football jersey."

"Take me with you, at least this once, or I'm telling Mom."

I spun back and wiggled my fingers in a creepy way. "Mephisto's gang would skin you alive and eat your kidneys. He's a mass murderer."

"He's a mass murderer," she said in a mocking tone. "You made him up just to scare me."

The hum outside grew louder. I had to get out there to see what was going on. "Mephisto's real. Get your head out of your comic books and you'll hear about him. Everyone in town talks about Mephisto."

She crossed her arms in front. "I still don't believe in him."

"Right." I touched the dragon and made it sway again. "But you believe in fairy princesses."

"Because they're real. I see them in the mirror when there's a full moon, and when you try to touch them, they burst into a zillion sparkles."

"And when you try to catch them, the sparkles go right through your hand. I know. You've told me a thousand times." I pushed her down to the pillow and pulled the cover up to her chin. "Full moon's not till tomorrow night, fairy princess, so go back to sleep."

"If you don't take me with you ..." Sam slid out of bed and marched past me toward my closet. "I'll show Mom what you're working on in there."

"No!" I leaped ahead of her and blocked the door. "My closet is off-limits. You keep quiet, and I'll get you another Princess Quirky book."

She stomped her foot. "Princess *Queenie*."

“Whatever.” I reached into the closet and grabbed my mask from a shelf. At this point it didn’t really matter what she saw. “I tell you what. If you prove you can keep my patrols a secret, then I’ll tell you an even bigger secret when I get back.”

“At least a hint now, or I won’t believe you.” She set a fist on her hip. I knew that stance. Stubborn. I had to throw her a bone, something harmless. But what would work?

A gunshot pierced the silence, then another, not unusual for our neighborhood, but Mom still might check on us. I had to hurry. “Listen. When I get back, I’ll tell you what I’m working on in the closet. If Mom comes in, pretend to be asleep. Got it?”

Sporting a victory smile, she nodded.

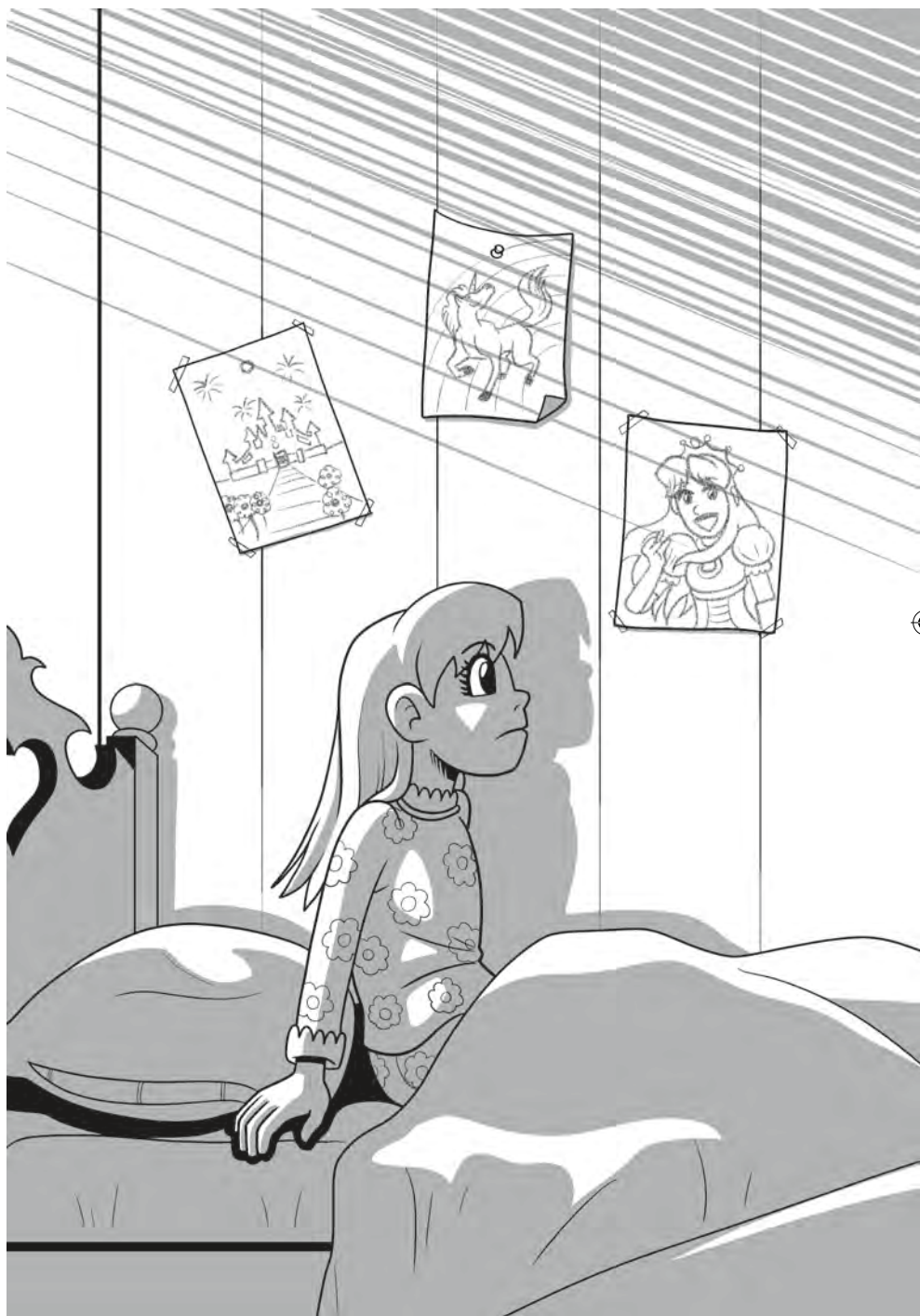
“Don’t get smug.” I tousled her hair. Partly because I liked her. Mostly because it annoyed her. “Now give me a Princess Power Pledge.”

She raised her hand. I slapped my palm against hers, and we burped at the same time. “Remember,” I said, shaking a finger, “if you break the promise, your stomach will explode and all your guts will spill out. Now go to sleep.”

“You got it.” She dashed to her bed and slid under the covers.

Finally. As I pulled my flexible cowl mask over my head, I imagined Mom peering out her window to look for the source of the gunshots. She would come to check on us at any moment.

I flipped a switch on my closet’s inner wall. At my bed, a holographic image appeared — myself under the covers. The projector was my greatest feat to date,





though the new invention in my closet would surpass it if I could get it to work.

A shudder ran down my arms. That was one contraption I hadn't dared try on myself. Sure, I wanted to be a real superhero like Damocles, but I hadn't tested my cell-manipulation ray on a human yet. It was just too dangerous.

Leaning into my closet, I looked at the switch on the rear wall — disguised as a black widow spider. All I had to do was flip it, and the ray would bathe me in energizing ion emissions ... or maybe fatally scramble my brain.

I shuddered. Not yet. Maybe tomorrow.

Footsteps creaked beyond our bedroom door. I rushed to the window, climbed out, and dropped to the fire-escape landing. After closing the sash, I crouched and peeked inside.

Mom opened the door. Light poured in from the hall. Still wearing her waitress smock, she walked close to each bed, then approached the window, looking worried, as usual. Ever since Dad died, she never seemed to be as ...

I shook the thought away. I had to concentrate.

Pressing my back against the brick wall, I watched her out of the corner of my eye. She gazed through the glass for a moment before locking the window. No problem. With all the gadgets on my belt, getting back inside would be a breeze.

The moment she left and closed the bedroom door, I pulled the laser pen from my belt, flicked it on, and aimed the beam at the street lamp near the alley entrance about thirty feet away. The beam locked on

the lamp's electronic eye. Two seconds later, the light blinked off and cast our alley in dim, angular shadows.

Now under the cover of darkness, I threw a line from one of the belt's spools. The claw on the end looped around the street lamp's protruding metal arm again and again until it stopped with a clink.

I pulled on the line. Good and tight. Of course I could use the fire-escape ladder, but I never missed a chance to practice.

I leaped from the landing and swung down. When I neared the street, I pushed the detach button on the spool. The line released, and I hit the ground running.

Without slowing, I made a right turn at the alley entrance toward the sound of the mechanical hum. The street lamp, now behind me, flashed on. I ducked into a shadow at the side of the closest building — the bank where Mom kept her money.

I craned my neck to listen. The hum seemed to be coming from inside the building. A bank robbery? If so, why all that noise? Mephisto wouldn't be so careless, and he already robbed a bank last week. Being repetitive didn't fit his pattern. Maybe this new robbery was a diversion — a stunt designed to attract the police to keep them busy while Mephisto pulled off a bigger crime — a reasonable theory, but so far the street remained deserted.

A scrap of paper drifted on a breeze and settled at my feet. I snatched it up and scanned it — a bank deposit slip. I walked to the bottom of three steps that led to the bank's entry and eyed the wide-open front door. Suspicious. Very suspicious. Real burglars would have hidden their tracks. But why would they disable

the alarm and then be so careless about the obvious break-in? The pieces weren't coming together.

I jogged to the top of the steps and sneaked inside. At the lobby's far wall, a thick metal door stood open, probably the safe. The hum emanated from there, maybe a drill bit grinding through the metal of an interior door.

I hurried back to the stairs and looked up at the underside of the entryway's overhanging awning. Yes, this would be perfect. Working quickly, I withdrew a pair of wire coils from my belt, reeled them out a few feet, added adhesive tape to the two ends, and threw them upward. They stuck to the awning. Now two wires dangled, one at each side of the stairs. With the push of a button at the wires' bottom ends, I activated a stun field between the two lines.

The field gave off a slight buzz. Not good. The robbers might hear it.

I withdrew the hologram projector from my belt, spun the dial, and browsed the images in the memory. A cop with a rifle? No, they would back off from him. A woman juggling bananas? No, that would be stupid. A bag of money? Perfect. Just the bait I needed to make them ignore the noise and face plant right into unconsciousness.

I jumped to the side of the stairs, backed into a shadow, and pointed the hologram projector at the bottom step. When I pushed the button, a fabric bag appeared, the size of a big pumpkin. Hundred dollar bills stuck out through a drawstring at the top. Now I just had to wait.

Across the street, a human form prowled along the

rooftop of a three-story building. Mephisto? I shook my head. Not his style. Tunneling with a magna-gopher? Yes. Bulldozing with an octopus tank? Definitely. But sneaking across a roof? Alone? No way.

The form dashed briefly through a light, revealing an unmistakable cowl mask — black and gray, covering his face except for his eyes, nose, and mouth — just like mine.

I swallowed through a tight throat. *Damocles?*