

“It’s not just the cops,” Kyle told the artificial intelligence. He had programmed Erasmus based on his own thoughts, so why did he have to keep explaining things? “It’s the Army and the FBI, too. I’m not playing — I’m studying their patterns.”

“They have idiotic patterns,” Erasmus said. “They can’t get to you from the ground.” He paused. “Oh. I just intercepted a signal. They have fighter jets scrambling from an Air Force base fifty miles from here. They’ll be here in —”

“ATTENTION, BLUE FREAK!” Now it was an FBI agent in shades and a boring gray suit with the bullhorn. The cop who’d had it was kicking at the ground as he stalked off. Kyle felt momentarily bad for him. “WE HAVE SUMMONED MIGHTY MIKE!”

Kyle stiffened at the mention of his nemesis. “Of course you have . . .” He seethed under his face mask.

“Cowards,” Erasmus spat. (A neat trick, considering Erasmus didn’t have any spit. Or a mouth, for that matter.)

“SURRENDER NOW AND HE WON’T HURT YOU!”

“TELL YOU WHAT,” Kyle blared, “YOU TELL *HIM* TO SURRENDER!”

“T-minus three minutes to the jets,” Erasmus warned.

“Wait for it,” Kyle said, executing some more aerial

acrobatics in order to dodge the latest pathetic volley of bullets, nets, and grenades from below.

“*Kyle . . .*”

Kyle hated the way Erasmus could seem to talk down to him just by saying his name. He figured maybe it was time to reprogram the AI to call him “Master” or something a little more respectful.

“I want *him* to see,” Kyle said.

And just then — as if summoned by Kyle’s desire — a dark pinprick on the horizon moved and became clear.

Mighty Mike.

The do-goodingest do-gooder on the face of the planet. Resplendent in his green-and-gold costume, the cape fluttering in the wind as he soared toward Kyle, his fists ahead of him, his blond hair blown back. He looked like some kind of movie hero, but Kyle knew better. Mighty Mike was up to something here on Earth. He could just tell. He knew it deep down in his gut.

Kyle chuckled to himself. “Wait for it,” he told Erasmus again. “Almost.”

Down below, Kyle watched as the cops and the others scattered. No doubt they didn’t want to get caught in the crossfire when Kyle and Mike pounded each other, with Air Force jets firing air-to-air missiles at the same time. There would be a lot of shrapnel dropping out of the sky.