

## The Eleutherian Chronicle

### Chapter Four

The annual Brightwood Falls Fair, or 'The BFF' as the local radio talk-show hosts had irksomely started calling it in recent years, was located in the northwest side of town in the parking lot next to the Riley Pier on the lake. While not really notable for anything other than its overabundance of miniature donut vendors, the week-long springtime themed festival always drew in large crowds based perhaps solely upon the common opinion that in Brightwood Falls there was simply little else to do. To its credit, in addition to the mainstays of a typical small time fair, the festival also featured five rides (the most popular of which being a fiendish mini-coaster appropriately named 'The Rat Race'), a stage for local bands and artists to perform, a sizeable corn maze, and an open-air community market. This year, the festival theme was "Gold Rush", in homage to the gold prospectors that helped to found Brightwood Falls in the 1860's. To help support the theme, all attendees were encouraged to show off their best western garb, or at the very least purchase some from the vendors to fit in.

The sun hung low in the sky and the crowds along the midway had all but dispersed, with only the vigilant few remaining in an attempt to win a few more games. Even as they counted the wads of cash collected over the day, stall workers called to those passing by, inviting them to try their luck one more time.

Every win awarded players with a few tickets that could be spent in exchange for novelty prizes and bags of candy, though the true attraction was the grand prize raffle: in exchange for 50 tickets, players were entered into a draw for a brand new jet ski, a prize so popular that the midway workers already had to replace the raffle box twice since the fair had opened its doors the Friday previous.

Above the dwindling crowds a chilling breeze swept past, rustling a droopy-eyed attendant who clearly desired nothing more than for his bed to swoop in on downy wings and carry him home. With a yawn, he glanced at his watch and sighed. Pulling himself up from his yellowed and cracked plastic lawn chair, he slowly lifted an old-timey megaphone to his lips and announced to those below, "Step right up and pit your grit against legends of the Old West. Billy Miner, Boone Helm, the Cassidy Gang and, uhm, more! Don't miss your chance to prove you have what it takes at the Brightwood Bonanza - two games for the low, low price of five dollars, starting now until closing. Remember, beat the high score, win the same amount in tickets! Hurry on down!"

"Wanna play?" Lucas asked, gesturing towards the giant wooden Bonanza facade as a group of kids in matching oversized pink foam cowboy hats rushed past them.

"Sure, sounds - whoa, hey, easy there partner - uh, fun." Sara said while carefully maneuvering through the miniature

stampede, the last of whom narrowly avoided a head-on collision with her. A child-like glee swept over Lucas' face, though he quickly composed himself and straightened up his back like the comic butlers Sara saw in old British sitcoms.

Following a remarkably cheesy accented "M'lady", he offered his arm in standard Old-West fashion, and somehow managed to tip his cowboy hat with his other hand without upsetting the matted purple knot of cotton-candy held therein. Like a choreographed dance, Sara returned the favour with a sweeping curtsy, though she immediately regretted it on account of her one-size-too-small cowboy boots and nearly fell into Lucas as she linked her arm with his.

"You alright?" Lucas asked, holding her steady and noting the sudden unnatural positions that her legs had decided to take.

"Awesome," Sara quickly answered, blowing aside a rogue curl of hair that swooped over her face and then finding her footing, "never better."

Before Lucas could add any more than squinty-eyed suspicion, she quickly added, "We going to shoot stuff, or what? Come on!" and forcefully pulled him down the hay-lined causeway that lead to the Bonanza, briefly catching the attention of the disinterested attendant who had since become very much engaged with whatever was happening on his phone...