

Chapter 1

Who would ever forget the night the amusement park burned down? Its grand opening had been one week away. Reggie Daniels and his girlfriend, Joanna Peck, had been high school students then.

Now it was more than two years later. They were both working and taking courses at City College.

Like everybody else, Reggie and Joanna had heard the sirens. They had seen the wild flames dancing hundreds of feet into the air. The smoke poured into the sky. It blotted out the moon and the stars. For a while neighbors feared that half the city would burn. But the fire department did a good job. They even saved many of the buildings

within the park. But the park had never had its opening.

It was a Saturday night. Reggie and Joanna were on a date. The two stared at the ruins behind the ugly plywood walls. Big signs were plastered all over them. They read “No Admittance.”

“Why don’t they just tear the whole mess down? Then they can build something else here,” Joanna said. The burned amusement park was now an awful eyesore in the neighborhood.

“Dad says they want to raze the place. Build a shopping center,” Reggie said. “So far, though, nobody has enough cash. Everybody’s offering pennies on the dollar for the land.”

Five years ago, everything had been different. Eddie Scott, a kid from the neighborhood, had made it big in baseball. He was a star. An American League team had drafted him. The team had signed him

to a multimillion-dollar contract. Eddie was one of the few from these mean streets to ever have such luck. He was so grateful.

He decided to help his neighborhood by building a state-of-the-art amusement park. He called it Planet Doom because it had an outer space theme. But then the fire had broken out. All his dreams had gone up in flames. Eddie's career soon flamed out too. After two years he was cut from the team. Then he vanished. Nobody knew what had happened to him. Worse, nobody cared.



Joanna peered through a narrow crack between two pieces of plywood. "It looks so weird in the moonlight. I can still see the Ferris wheel and the roller coaster. What fun we would have had if they'd gotten it up and running."

"My buddy Erik says there's a curse on the place," Reggie said. "That's why nothing worked out." Reggie laughed. Then he made

spooky sounds, mimicking the ghost who maybe roamed through the deserted park.

Joanna poked him playfully in the ribs. “Oh, stop it! There’s no curse. Some fool probably just tossed a cigarette into a pile of trash on a hot windy night. That’s why it all went up in flames.”

“I don’t know,” Reggie said. “I heard that some weird old dude owned this land a long time ago. They say his wife finally had enough of him and left. When she ran off, they say the old man put a curse on the house and the land. Then his house burned down. When they built the amusement park here, maybe the curse stuck.”

“Oh, Reggie! Stop with the curse nonsense,” she said.

“Eddie Scott must have been cursed too,” Reggie said. “Say, what’s with that dude these days? He gets millions of bucks to play in the majors. And he has one good season. Then he busts his ankle so

bad. Nobody can fix it. He never did play great again. The poor dude must have been cursed. Or maybe the guy was just a jerk. Who knows?”

“Just some bad luck,” Joanna said. “Happens to a lot of guys. The injury healed. But he lost his momentum or his confidence or something. Look at the stats. Plenty of guys who were Rookie of the Year ended up in the minors. They scrambled for less money than you get flipping burgers.”

Joanna pushed at the plywood to widen the crack so she could see better. “I remember really looking forward to Planet Doom opening. It was going to be such a huge blast. At last we’d have something really fun to do in this crappy neighborhood. It seemed too good to be true. I guess it was.”

Suddenly the plywood gave way. A two-foot-wide opening appeared in the fence. The space was plenty wide for somebody to slip through.

Joanna turned and grinned at Reggie. “It’s only eight o’clock. I told Mom I’d be home by eleven. Want to take a look around?”

“Sure,” Reggie said. “I always wanted to take a date to a haunted amusement park.”

“Oh, Reggie, will you stop it!” Joanna laughed. “These are just some old deserted buildings.”

When they had squeezed through the opening, Reggie carefully moved the plywood board back into place. He didn’t want a passerby to notice the big opening and discover that someone had trespassed.

“Welcome to Planet Doom,” Reggie said in a deep ominous voice. “Here you can travel to the farthest reaches of outer space. Are you ready to encounter terrors beyond your wildest nightmares? Abandon all hope, you who enter here!”