

*The*  
***INCREDIBLE***  
***ILLUSTRATED***  
**IRIS**

A Comic Book Comedy by

**TYLER J. RINNE**

# Cast of Characters

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*The Amazing Alexander*

*Narration Man (voice)*

*Layla Larson, Girl Reporter*

*Adequate Arnie*

*B. Billy Bunkum*

*Bernicia Grovel*

*Cat Snap*

*Iris Meriwether*

*Cici Meriwether*

*Inkwellington*

*Death Face Mask*

*Tyrannosaurus Tex*

*Count Mafioso*

*Rat Master*

*Mega Corn*

*HouseStrife*

*The Robot Queen*

*Rita Mortis*

*Rebecca Spectra*

*Jacquelyn Jigsaw*

# SCENE ONE

*(The stage is split in two. The larger half, Stage Left, is the comic book universe of THE AMAZING ALEXANDER. On Stage Right, on a higher plane than SL, is the bedroom of IRIS MERIWETHER, our heroine. The comic book side will represent a variety of scenes throughout. A big, blank comic book page is in back of the SL side. Various panels will be slid into this grid structure to show location, plot points, and narration. The SR side, the bedroom, belongs to a young girl.)*

*At rise, lights are down on the SR side, although we can barely make out a girl, IRIS, lying on her bed, reading.*

*On the SL side, we are in a run-down old comic book store. There are longboxes, cardboard cutouts and cobwebs over everything. The place has been deserted for a long time. But what's this? A red light shining in...it is ALEXANDER himself slinking cautiously into the room. He lights his way with a small red flashlight attached to his wrist.*

*Lights come up on the comic book behind: we see a panel of ALEXANDER doing just what he is onstage. There is a text box that reads just what we hear...)*

NARRATION MAN: *(off)* An intrepid red light shines through the dangerous dark of a deserted comic book store! What peril peers behind these pages? Only the greatest hero of Anyopolis or, indeed, the world, can fathom it! Yes, it's another adventure of *(A beam of light shoots down onto ALEXANDER, who poses heroically.)* The Amazing Alexander!

*(ALEXANDER relaxes and swings his light onto something wriggling in the corner—it is LAYLA LARSON, Girl Reporter, gagged and bound! He rushes to her.)*

ALEXANDER: Layla! *(He stops short of pulling the gag from her mouth.)* Layla Larson, Girl Reporter, in mortal danger even on my birthday. Why am I not—

*(He pulls off the gag. Just as he does that, the lights blast on and out pop a dozen or more people.)*

ALL: SURPRISE!

*(ALEXANDER clutches his chest as B. BILLY BUNKUM, newspaper editor, rushes to him with his hand extended. Close behind him is BERNICIA GROVEL, copiously taking notes, and CATHERINE “CAT SNAP” SNAPOLOPOLIS, snapping pictures with her flash-bulb camera.)*

BUNKUM: Happy birthday, boy, happy birthday indeed!

ALEXANDER: B. Billy Bunkum—I should have known you were behind this! I haven’t had this big of shock since I faced the revolting Dr. Volting and his Defibulator of Doom!

BUNKUM: And that was a front page story, just like this will be! Get a picture of this, Snap Cat. *(She does.)* Very good, very good! And now, what’s a birthday without a cake, eh?

*(Everyone cheers. LAYLA struggles in her bonds.)*

LAYLA: Excuse me? Still tied up here.

BUNKUM: And who better to deliver it than The Amazing Alexander’s effervescent sidekick, Adequate Arnie! Bring it on down, Arnie, bring it on down!

LAYLA: A little help, maybe?

ARNIE: *(Rushing down, holding a big cake aloft.)* I baked your favorite kind, Alexander, its pineapple—*(ARNIE stumbles, tossing the cake in the air. Everyone gasps! ALEXANDER deftly catches it. A sigh, then a cheer. ARNIE looks over the cake at ALEXANDER and smiles.)*—Right-side up cake!

*(Everyone laughs, clustering around ALEXANDER, wishing him a happy birthday, etc. It is broken up by...)*

LAYLA: WILL SOMEONE UNTIE ME ALREADY?!?! *(ALEXANDER smiles at her. He holds up a finger to her then makes a big show of blowing out his candles.)* What are you waiting for, your next birthday?

ALEXANDER: There went that birthday wish...she’s still talking!

LAYLA: *(Over the laughs.)* Very funny.

ALEXANDER: *(Waving off the laughs, untying LAYLA.)* Come on, Arnie—help me out over here, would you? *(He hands the cake off to BERNICIA.)* Bernicia, if you wouldn’t mind cutting the cake?

BERNICIA: Oh! Anything for you, Alexander!

*(She scuttles off to cut the cake while SNAP CAT takes pictures of ALEXANDER and ARNIE untying LAYLA.)*

BUNKUM: Well, Alexander, by now I'm sure you've put two and two together and realized that Miss Larson's kidnapping was only a ploy to get you here for this surprise party.

ARNIE: That's weird, because whenever I put two and two together, I always come out with five.

BUNKUM: But I do have to admit—I had an ulterior motive.

ALEXANDER: Not you, Bunkum...

BUNKUM: Flatterer! You know as well as I do that all of your enemies always plan an even bigger and more spectacular surprise to commemorate your birthday!

ALEXANDER: I keep hoping that one of these years they'll just pick me up something at Hallmark.

BUNKUM: Well, whatever they have cooked up this year, I plan to have my photographer—

LAYLA: And your best reporter!

BUNKUM: And my best reporter close at hand! Now, *(He waves at BERNICIA, who has brought down a piece of cake for ALEXANDER. She flicks on a recorder.)* You wouldn't happen to know what those vile villains of E.V.I.L. are up to this year, would you?

LAYLA: For the record, on the record, of course.

ALEXANDER: Of course. And no, I haven't heard a peep from the Evil Villains In League (with one another), or E.V.I.L. as they're better known. Maybe they've decided to skip this year. Or they forgot!

BUNKUM: *(Waving off BERNICIA'S recorder.)* Oh. Oh, that's disappointing. Very disappointing, indeed. No one else has heard anything, have they? *(The crowd mumbles that none of them have either.)* No blueberry boom-berry muffins, like last year?

BERNICIA: *(Reading from her notes.)* “Dangerous Dessert Deflated by Daring Do-Gooder!”

BUNKUM: No giant birthday cake monster let loose in downtown like the year before that?

BERNICIA: *(Reading.)* “Carnivorous Cake’s Copious Carnage Curtailed by Courageous Champion!”

BUNKUM: Or, in the highest-selling edition of all time, no alien ducks with laser-beams from the planet Quax-UI?

BERNICIA: *(Reading.)* “Foul Fowl Foiled in Flamboyant Fashion by Fabulous Forerunner of Freedom!”

BUNKUM: No...no nothing?

LAYLA: Thank goodness, I was running out of alliterations...

BERNICIA: Actually...I didn’t want to bring this up and-and-and ruin the party, but—

BUNKUM: What is it, Bernicia?

BERNICIA: Well... *(Out of her purse she pulls an odd-shaped package wrapped in newspaper.)* This was delivered to our offices this morning, with The Amazing Alexander’s name in the c/o line.

LAYLA: Hey, I’m supposed to go through all of Alexander’s mail before he gets it! *(ALEXANDER raises an eyebrow at her.)* I mean...I hold onto all of it! Without snooping. *(Another look from ALEXANDER.)* What? I can’t repress my investigative instincts.

BUNKUM: Bernicia, give it to the boy! And for deadline’s sake, turn that recorder back on!

*(She gives it to ALEXANDER. He takes it gingerly, handing off his cake to LAYLA.)*

ALEXANDER: Well, it’s not ticking. And it’s not breathing. *(ALEXANDER violently shakes it. A collective gasp. He sighs, disappointed.)* And it’s not a comic book. So let’s see what it is.

LAYLA: *(Just as he is about to tear into it.)* Wait! *(Everyone turns to her as she pulls a slim package from behind her back.)* Open mine first!

ALEXANDER: Layla, You do realize that whatever is in this package could kill us all?

LAYLA: That’s exactly why you should open mine first.

ALEXANDER: She has a point. *(Everyone grumbles in agreement. As he goes to grab LAYLA’S package, a note flutters off of the other package. He grabs it.)* A note! *(He reads.)* “Today you were born, today you die! By opening this card, you have activated three separate bombs

placed in three separate places in the city of Anyopolis! Only you can stop this destruction, and only with the three clues in this package! You have three hours! Wishing you a happy birthday from the bottom of our black, black hearts, E.V.I.L!” *(He flips the card over.)* Ha! Look, a dog with sunglasses!

BUNKUM: Open the package, son, open the package! *(To CAT SNAP)* And get a picture of it!

LAYLA: *(Shoving her own package under his nose.)* Yes, open it!

ALEXANDER: Um, Layla, I think he meant...

LAYLA: Oh, I know what he meant.

ALEXANDER: *(As LAYLA waggles the package.)* I do have three hours, right guys?

ALL: Ehhhhhhhhh.

*(LAYLA gives them a look and they all shut up. ALEXANDER opens LAYLA'S package. He pulls out a comic book, a copy of "It's a Trap" #24. Just what he wanted!)*

ALEXANDER: Layla, how did you—this is—I don't believe—this is the most exciting thing to happen to me all day!

ALL: Really?

ALEXANDER: This is—

LAYLA: “It's a Trap” issue number 24!

ALEXANDER: The rarest comic book ever printed!

LAYLA: And the only one missing from your collection. Do you like it?

ALEXANDER: Layla, I love it!

*(ALEXANDER lunges in for a hug, catches himself, and settles for an awkward high five. LAYLA is disappointed. Awkward silence.)*

BUNKUM: Um. Our city is going to blow up in three hours, so...

ARNIE: *(Very hurt)* And apparently I baked this cake for nothing!

ALEXANDER: Right, the clues. I only have until midnight... *(Then, to LAYLA.)* I really can't wait to read this, Layla.

LAYLA: Oh, go ahead! I want to watch you enjoy it.

ALEXANDER: But—

LAYLA: ENJOY IT.

ALEXANDER: I guess a quick read-through isn't going to kill anybody...

*(The crowd grumbles that "Yeah, it probably could." He smiles nervously and pulls the comic book out of its wrapper. He opens it and there is an enormous bang and a flash of light before the lights go out completely. The lights fade back up and LAYLA and ARNIE both rush into a cloud of smoke that lingers over ALEXANDER.)*

LAYLA: Alexander! Are you okay?!

ARNIE: Alexander! Do you want some cake?!

*(They pass through the smoke. ALEXANDER is gone! Everyone is dumbstruck. The package of clues and his new comic book lay on the floor.)*

LAYLA: He's gone.

BUNKUM: We're doomed!

ARNIE: *(Shoving cake in his mouth, sarcastic and hurt.)* More for me, then, I guess!

CAPTAIN EXPOSITION: *(Off)* Where has the Amazing Alexander vanished to? Are these the last hours of Anyopolis? Would anyone like some cake? Find out in issue #384 of THE AMAZING ALEXANDER!

*(The lights crossfade from this scene as we move into...)*



# SCENE TWO

*(The SR “Real World” of Iris’s bedroom. It is not decorated like a typical girl’s room at all—it is covered in comic book and super hero paraphernalia! On the SR wall, a window looks outside. We can tell that she is on the second floor. Next to that window, in the corner, is a small single bed with superhero covers. Along the back wall, between her bed and a door that leads to the hallway, is a large desk cluttered with drawing materials, candy bar wrappers, action figures, etc.)*

*IRIS lays on her bed in jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. She wears mismatched socks on her feet and headphones around her neck. She flips closed the comic book that she has been reading—and that we’ve been seeing—and reaches into a box at the foot of her bed for another one. This box is labeled TO: IRIS, FROM: UNCLE TODD. She rummages around, not finding what she is looking for.)*

IRIS: Issue three hundred and eighty-four, where are you? Three-eighty-four. Oh, come on, Uncle Todd—you had the last thirty-two issues of “The Amazing Alexander” in this box—you don’t have the next one? Ugh! These should be organized alphabetically by title, and then in descending numerical order—and I won’t even mention the gross oversight of not having them polybagged! *(IRIS reaches under her bed, looking for bags to put the comics in. She comes up with a stuffed animal, which wasn’t what she was looking for. Then, she spots a box of bags sitting on her desk. She grabs two pillows and throws them on the floor. She hops across them, careful not to touch the hardwood floor.)* No lava! No lava! *(She reaches the end of her pillow-bridge, but can’t quite reach her desk. She hops back to her bed, grabs the stuffed animal that she recently unearthed.)* Sorry, Mr. Wiffles, but it is imperative that I reach that box of polybags! The lives of my comic books depend on it! *(She throws Mr. Wiffles into the lava!)* Your sacrifice shall not be made in vain, Mr. Wiffles! *(She bounds across Mr. Wiffles’ stomach and onto her desk. She opens up the box of bags and finds something she didn’t expect on top—a gift!)* “Happy birthday, Iris. I’m sorry I couldn’t make it this year...Uncle Todd.” *(This saddens IRIS. She defiantly sets the package aside. Then, she notices Mr. Wiffles on the floor, and bounds to him.)* I’m sorry, Mr. Wiffles! I’m not going to leave you! You’d never

miss my birthday, would you, Mr. Wiffles? You wouldn't move to Seattle just because you got a new job, would you? Hmph. Then again, you wouldn't get me a present that is obviously a rare old comic book either, would you? *(She sets Mr. Wiffles on the desk, but he falls off again. She doesn't notice as she goes to and unwraps her present. She squeaks with delight!)* Uncle Todd, how did you—this is—I don't believe—this is the most exciting thing to happen to me all year! My very own copy of "It's a Trap" #24!

*(IRIS'S happy moment is interrupted by the howl of her little sister, CICI MERIWETHER, from outside her bedroom door.)*

CICI: I-ris! Time for din-ner! Mom says she is not bringing it up to you again and if you're going to blow off your entire birthday party, you can at least come down and eat with your family! Or you're not getting anything at all!

*(Iris's mood suddenly changes: her smile turns into a frown.)*

IRIS: Fine. I'm not hungry anyway.

CICI: Mom made that dis-gust-ing guacamole chicken, which is apparently your favorite, but, if you ask me, is practically snot on a stick that I personally do not intend to eat.

IRIS: Fine.

CICI: And, if you ask me—which no one bothered to, as usual—it is completely ridiculous that you get your favorite meal just for being a pouty-pouty mopey face all week long. And it's your birthday, but whatever.

IRIS: Shut up, Cici! *(IRIS throws the long-suffering Mr. Wiffles at the door. He bounces off of it and, again, falls into the hot lava floor.)* I said I'm not hungry!

CICI: Fine! I'll just tell Mom that you're still being a big whiny baby about Uncle Todd leaving! *(A long beat.)* Mom really means it that you're not gonna get any food if you don't come out. *(Another beat.)* I'm not gonna eat mine either. You know, 'cuz it's practically snot on a stick. *(Beat.)* She'll probably just put it in the fridge though, so...

IRIS: Just leave me alone, Cici!

CICI: Fine! I hope you never come out! I hope I never see you again!

IRIS: Maybe I'll just leave then! How would you like that, Cici? Huh? *(She listens for CICI, who must have left.)* If I left like Uncle Todd? Nobody would probably care, anyway... *(Suddenly, it hits her!)* Mr. Wiffles!

*(She springs out of bed, hops across her pillows, snatches up her stuffed animal, makes to dash back across the pillows, but stops midway. She clutches Mr. Wiffles to her chest, looks down at the "hot lava." She sticks a toe into it, flinches at the heat, but then something in her face changes. She puts her foot down on the hardwood floor—it is no longer lava. She walks back to her bed across the floor. The game is over and so is her smile. She crawls into bed, turns out her lamp, pulls her covers over her and sighs. After a moment, she tosses and turns. This goes on for a while. Finally, she sits back up, opens her nearest desk drawer, takes out a flashlight and a candy bar. She grabs her copy of "It's a Trap!" #24, takes it out of the bag, holds the candy bar in her mouth, and ducks under the covers to read the comic by flashlight. Lights out.)*

# SCENE THREE

*(After a beat, the lights come back up on the SR side of the stage. Time has passed, but not much. There is now a snoring lump in the bed. A quiet knock comes at IRIS'S door.)*

CICI: *(Talking low, through the door.)* IIIIII-ris! Iris! Iris, are you there? Are you asleep? Gosh, it's not even midnight yet, lazybones! *(Beat.)* Anyway, I just want to remind you that you promised me last week that you would watch the new episode of Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time with me, and I'm starting it in t-minus five minutes with or without you. I recorded it. *(Beat.)* Well, it's this week now, so you have to watch it. *(Beat.)* And I brought you some of that snot on a stick, if you want it. *(She pounds on the door, this time.)* Do not make me do this the hard way, young lady. *(Another beat, a heavy sigh, then footsteps walking away down the hall. The lump in the bed turns over. In no short time, CICI'S head pokes in, upside down, from the top of the window. She smiles a wicked but endearing grin, swings into the room and plops onto the bed, on top of the lump.)* Wakey-wakey, fishbone shakey! *(She pulls off the covers and up sits THE AMAZING ALEXANDER?)* You're not my sister.

ALEXANDER: *(Groggy with sleep.)* You're not my sister.

CICI: Glad that's settled. Do you like Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time?

ALEXANDER: I'm not sure

CICI: You have t-minus four minutes to figure it out. I'll be in my room. Should I pour you a bowl of Super Milk Marshmallow Breakfast Time Cereal?

ALEXANDER: How is that different from what you asked me about before?

CICI: I'm done here.

ALEXANDER: Wait, wait! What's going on?

CICI: *(Sigh.)* I am about to—

ALEXANDER: And don't say anything about marshmallows. Super, pink, or otherwise.

CICI: Sorry, pal, we're not speaking the same language.

ALEXANDER: Give it a shot? The last thing I remember is...pineapple right-side-up cake...an E.V.I.L. present wrapped in newspaper...and a rare comic book.

CICI: Mm. I think something was lost in translation.

ALEXANDER: Holy moley, I just remembered—the entire city is going to blow up!

CICI: But you had no trouble recalling the cake and the comic book?

ALEXANDER: Of course. Comic books are awesome.

CICI: Says the comic book character.

ALEXANDER: What am I doing here? What am I doing sleeping? I have to save—what did you say?

CICI: I said you're a comic book character. Do you even listen?

*(CICI passes ALEXANDER the comic book that IRIS was reading last night. He takes it, looks at the cover.)*

ALEXANDER: This is...I don't even...

CICI: I don't understand their appeal either.

ALEXANDER: This is so AWESOME!

CICI: This room is destined to be occupied by nerds. That's all there is to it.

ALEXANDER: *(Flipping through the issue.)* This is cool, this is cool, this is cool! And this story—it's what just happened to me! ...Before I woke up here, anyway. There's Layla, and B. Billy Bunkum and the cake...

CICI: Again with the cake!

ALEXANDER: And—that comic book that Layla got me for my birthday—did it—did it send me here? Did it transport me, The Amazing Alexander, through time and space, between 3-D and 2-D, plunging both my world and yours into horrible, inescapable doom?

CICI: So...does that make you a comic-kazee pilot? *(She laughs, slaps her knee. ALEXANDER stares at her.)* Oh, I crack myself up.

ALEXANDER: Okay, that was a pretty good one.

CICI: I know. *(She shakes ALEXANDER'S hand.)* Cecilia Elvira Meriwether. You can call me Cici.

ALEXANDER: The Amazing Alexander. You can call me the Amazing Alexander.

CICI: Can I call you Al?

ALEXANDER: You can't call me Al.

CICI: Fine. You can't call me Betty.

ALEXANDER: What?

CICI: Different language. Well, I'm off. T-minus one minute until—

ALEXANDER: Raspberry Princess Marshmallow Lollipop, I know.

CICI: I'm going to chalk that one up to ignorance, Al.

ALEXANDER: Alexander.

CICI: Betty.

ALEXANDER: Would you stop that?! Cici. I need to get back home—back into this comic book. Do you have any idea how I might be able to do that?

CICI: Sorry, I don't do the whole comic book thing. That's my sister.

ALEXANDER: Okay, can I talk to her?

CICI: Be my guest.

ALEXANDER: Alright, where is she?

CICI: *(A beat.)* I was hoping you could tell me that.

ALEXANDER: What do you mean?

CICI: I mean...she was here last night—presumably—but then she wasn't here this morning. Instead—

ALEXANDER: I was in her place.

CICI: And if that's an improvement, it's a marginal one at best.

ALEXANDER: You don't think that...I came here and your sister...

CICI: Iris.

ALEXANDER: Iris... *(He points at the comic book.)* Went there?

*(CICI and ALEXANDER share a wide-eyed look as we crossfade into...)*

# SCENE FOUR

*(The E.V.I.L. conference room! Two long tables are arranged into a V, with the point US. There are chairs at the tables, looking in. In the center of the V is a lone chair and, seated in it, is IRIS! She is surrounded by the members of E.V.I.L.)*

NARRATION MAN: Deep underground, swaddled in the murky waters of Deathbed Swamp, is the lair of the most sinister villains of all time, bestowed with the most unwieldy acronym of all time...Evil Villains in League (with one another)! They are: *(Each member poses as NARRATION MAN names them.)* Tyrannosaurus Tex, wealthy oil baron from the dawn of time!

TYRANNOSAURUS TEX: Okay, girlie, we'll give you one more chance to get your story straight...just what were you doing in that comic book store, and where in tarnation is The Amazing Alexander?!

IRIS: I told you...I was just reading a comic book!

COUNT MAFIOSO: That does seem plausible...given where she was.

NARRATION MAN: Count Mafioso, vampire mob boss of the Anyopolis underworld!

COUNT MAFIOSO: ...A comic book store.

INKWELLINGTON: Plausible, yes. But is it the truth?

NARRATION MAN: Inkwellington, able to fake, fudge, and falsify any written document. De facto secretary of E.V.I.L.

INKWELLINGTON: I have written here that this young girl, who claims to be called "Iris," was found by one Count Mafioso at the abandoned Cozmic Comic Book Store. Correct?

COUNT MAFIOSO: Indubitably. I heard tell, through the channels of the night, that there was to be a surprise party for the Amazing Alexander at said comic book store...but when I arrived, I saw not a fun-fun party, but this girl, asleep on the floor! I also found this comic book.

*(COUNT MAFIOSO throws "It's a Trap" #24 on the table.)*

TEX: You found a comic book in a comic book store? Boy, nothin' gets past you, does it?

INKWELLINGTON: Is that accurate, “Iris”? The minutes will reflect the truth!

DEATH FACE MASK: If the minutes are so important...

NARRATION MAN: Death Face Mask, who, with the help of his fancy mask, is able to communicate with the dead and bend them to his will!

DEATH FACE MASK: Why did we skip my treasurer’s report just so we could interrogate this girl?

INKWELLINGTON: Because this is important, Death Face Mask!

DEATH FACE MASK: And my report isn’t. I see.

HOUSESTRIFE: Death Face Mask has a point—

NARRATION MAN: HouseStrife, heinous homemaker garrisoned with gruesome gadgets!

HOUSESTRIFE: I’m supposed to discuss my new Lettuce Leaf Lobotomy Launcher!

RAT MASTER: Ooh! I saw those in the catalogue!

NARRATION MAN: Rat Master—he has rats!

RAT MASTER: Does it really “launch a barrage of extra-crisp greenery, able to incapacitate even the hungriest of foes”?

HOUSESTRIFE: You tell me!

*(She opens her Launcher, throws lettuce at RAT MASTER.)*

RAT MASTER: Ooh! Delicious and deadly! Plus, my rats are gonna love this for a snack!

COUNT MAFIOSO: You are not going to let out those disgusting little bags of pestilence, are you, Rat Master?

RAT MASTER: Actually, rats are extremely hygienic, and friendly, and cool! In fact, here’s some other neat things about rats...

MEGA CORN: Let’s hear ‘em, Rat Master!

NARRATION MAN: Mega Corn! He’s corn!

MEGA CORN: I’m all ears!

*(Everyone busts out laughing, including IRIS.)*

COUNT MAFIOSO: Oh, Mega Corn, you are just delightful! But seriously, Rat Master, your rats are revolting.



INKWELLINGTON: The record shows that Rat Master's rats are revolting, and that we are getting off track... *(Nodding at IRIS.)* Frankly, I don't think we're making a good first impression on this young lady.

IRIS: Oh, this isn't my first impression of you guys.

INKWELLINGTON: Please elucidate?

IRIS: I mean I've been reading about you guys for years.

TEX: Readin' about us?

HOUSESTRIFE: In that rubbish-riddled paper put out by the slanderous B. Billy Bunkum?

COUNT MAFIOSO: Is that true, little girl? Do you read that garbage?

IRIS: I read the comics.

HOUSESTRIFE: The comics page is the only part of that paper that doesn't slander and spit upon The Evil Villains in League (with one another)!

IRIS: Look, I don't think you understand...I read about you in comics. Comic books. I'm from an entirely different world than you guys.

INKWELLINGTON: Another world, is it? An alien being, are you?

IRIS: No—

DEATH FACE MASK: I strongly caution us from working with any aliens at this point, friends. We still owe the Quaxulons of planet Quax-Ul *(types it out on a calculator)* a whole stinkin' lot of money for that anti-matter death ray that we rented and Alexander promptly destroyed. But you wouldn't know that, because we skipped the treasurer's report.

IRIS: I'm not an alien! I'm just dreaming. A cool dream, yes, but I'm dreaming.

RAT MASTER: *(After a beat of silence.)* I've got this.

*(He pinches IRIS.)*

IRIS: Ow! What was that for?

RAT MASTER: I'm evil.

IRIS: No you're not. You're just misunderstood. I read your origin story in issue #271.

RAT MASTER: I'm evil. And I'm going to wake you up from your dream.

IRIS: No you're not! (*MEGA CORN pinches her.*) Ow, cut it out!

MEGA CORN: I'm evil, too!

IRIS: No one is debating that, Mega Corn. OW! (*Everyone starts pinching her, stating that they too are evil.*) Alright, back off! (*Everyone jumps back!*) Okay, you wanna know what happened to The Amazing Alexander? You wanna know who I am? (*General nods and "yeahs."*)

MEGA CORN: I'm all ears!

*(Everyone laughs again.)*

RAT MASTER: He already said that!

IRIS: Okay. Okay...my name...is...The Incredible Illustrated Iris, and I come from another world...the world of thta comic book! (*She points at "It's a Trap!" #24*) And I... am the one who...has finally defeated The Amazing Alexander once and for all!

*(There is a stunned silence, then, slowly, a round of applause. General chatter: "Way to go!" "Finally!" "Liking that!" etc.)*

RAT MASTER: "Rats!" You beat me to it!

TEX: Cool it, Rat Master.

HOUSESTRIFE: This is not the time for jokes.

MEGA CORN: Yeah, can it, Rat Master

*(Everyone laughs again.)*

DEATH FACE MASK: How did you do it? We've been trying for years!

IRIS: How did I do it?

ALL: Yeah!

IRIS: How did I do it?

ALL: YEAH!

IRIS: You honestly think I'm going to tell you?

COUNT MAFIOSO: Can we have a hint?

MEGA CORN: Just a tiny kernel of information?

*(Laughs.)*

TEX: That's what I'm talkin' about!

IRIS: Well...you all know how much The Amazing Alexander likes comic books, right? (*General agreement.*) Then isn't it fittingly ironic that he is now trapped inside of this one?! (*Another great cheer! COUNT MAFIOSO and TEX lift IRIS up onto their shoulders! As they parade her around the room, she tries to grab "It's a Trap" #24, to no avail.*) That's right! The Amazing Alexander has been trapped inside of a comic book! So you guys totally don't have to blow up the city anymore!

HOUSESTRIFE: Blow up the city?

TEX: Whatchu talkin' 'bout, Iris?

INKWELLINGTON: That was not on the agenda.

IRIS: Oh, come on, you guys! You know what I'm talking about! It was actually a good plan for once...you put three bombs around the city with three clues leading to those spots? Three hours 'til they go off? At midnight?

TEX: Midnight?

INKWELLINGTON: Well, it's eleven o'clock right now!

IRIS: It's what time?! Well, you guys might as well go disarm the bombs, right?...Since The Amazing Alexander isn't around to defeat anymore, right?

DEATH FACE MASK: Lady, we didn't plant any bombs.

MEGA CORN: Yeah! I'm the only plant here!

COUNT MAFIOSO: There is a line, Mega Corn.

TEX: We'll let you know when you cross it!

*(Everyone laughs again.)*

IRIS: You...you didn't do the thing with the bombs?

RAT MASTER: We were waiting until tomorrow to really surprise him!

TEX: We were gonna make a great big ol' birthday cake...

RAT MASTER: And tie him to one of the big candles...

TEX: Except—get this—the candles were gonna be a big ol' sticks o' dino-mite!

HOUSESTRIFE: It's from my Party of Peril collection!

IRIS: You were going to blow him up.

DEATH FACE MASK: That's right!

IRIS: And nothing else?

TEX: Maybe the cake, but we was hopin' not to! HouseStrife made chocolate! My favorite!

IRIS: And you were going to do it...

ALL: Tomorrow.

IRIS: So who's...who's blowing up the city? The city that I'm...that I'm stuck in? And not in a dream, either...somehow...

COUNT MAFIOSO: Oh, fudgetaboutit! Let's party!

INKWELLINGTON: And don't worry about the bombs, my girl! We're far enough out in the swamp that, if anything were to happen to the city, we wouldn't be touched!

*(They dance around with IRIS on their shoulders until...)*

TEX: Hold yer horses...ya'll hear that?

*(There is a soft sound of footsteps.)*

DEATH FACE MASK: Oh, yes, it's the respect for budget constraints and the fiscal year fluttering away down the hall...

TEX: Naw...sounds like footsteps.

DEATH FACE MASK: I made spreadsheets, you guys. And pie charts.

TEX: Metal footsteps.

COUNT MAFIOSO: It couldn't possibly be...

INKWELLINGTON: My minutes show that she hasn't been to a monthly meeting since...since that thing...

RAT MASTER: What thing? I'm lost.

HOUSESTRIFE: Amazing Alexander...

RAT MASTER: Oh. That thing.

MEGA CORN: Oh, we are so shucked.

IRIS: What are you guys worried about? I defeated The Amazing Alexander!

ROBOT QUEEN: *(Hidden in darkness)* Did you now?

*(The villains part to reveal THE ROBOT QUEEN striding into the room.)*

DEATH FACE MASK: My Mechanical Majesty—

ROBOT QUEEN: Quiet. *(To the two holding up IRIS.)* Put her down. *(They look for a place to set her.)* Anywhere. *(They put her in the chair.)* So. You have defeated The Amazing Alexander, have you?

IRIS: That—that's right.

ROBOT QUEEN: Mm. And you know who I am?

IRIS: Yes.

ROBOT QUEEN: Who am I?

NARRATION MAN: Her Mechanical Majesty, The Cog-Filled Conqueror, The—

ROBOT QUEEN: Not you! *(She points to IRIS.)* You.

IRIS: You're—you're The Robot Queen.

*(THE ROBOT QUEEN puts her hand on the back of the chair, squeezing it. As she does so, she heats it up. The room starts to turn red. IRIS shifts in her seat.)*

ROBOT QUEEN: The Queen. And as the Queen, it goes without saying that I have certain rules—certain edicts, yes? Edicts that must not be broken. Do you know what is my most important edict of all, girl?

IRIS: Someone has to oil your hinges at least once a day?

TEX: Lookit that—

COUNT MAFIOSO: She's using her powers to heat up the chair!

ROBOT QUEEN: *(Just as IRIS is about to boil, she lets go. She walks around IRIS.)* My most important edict is that no one—NO ONE—but me, The Robot Queen, is to eliminate The Amazing Alexander! Were you aware of this rule?

IRIS: *(After a beat.)* Are you aware...that I used this comic book to defeat The Amazing Alexander—something you have never been able to do—and that I could use it to do the same to you?

ROBOT QUEEN: I doubt it.

IRIS: Sure about that? *(They stare at each other. IRIS starts to slowly back away. The villains part to let her through.)* I'm out of here...and don't try to follow me.

ROBOT QUEEN: Or?

IRIS: Or you'll find out what the Incredible Illustrated Iris can really do.

*(IRIS backs away until she is out of range of the villains, then sprints off! Everyone stands in a stunned silence.)*

ROBOT QUEEN: Don't just stand there, you fools! SEIZE HER!

ALL: SEIZE HER!

*(No one moves.)*

RAT MASTER: Man, we need some henchmen on this team.

ROBOT QUEEN: Bring that girl...and her wretched little comic book...TO ME!!!

*(The villains run off in separate directions. Crossfade to...)*

***DUN DUN DUNNN!!!***

***To be continued...when you [CONTACT THE AUTHOR](#)***

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## SCENE FIVE

*(IRIS'S bedroom. ALEXANDER sits in the middle of the floor, staring into the last issue of his comic book. CICI spins on the desk chair behind him.)*

ALEXANDER: Come on, comic book! Give me some hint of how to get back! Why won't you help me?!

CICI: Because it's a dumb comic book?

ALEXANDER: I'm gonna chalk that one up to ignorance, Cecilia.

CICI: Cici.

ALEXANDER: Whatever. Look in the last page here. I go "Poof" as soon as I open the comic, right?

CICI: *(She looks.)* No!

ALEXANDER: *(Excited.)* What? What do you mean?

CICI: It doesn't say "Poof." See? It says "Woomph!" *(CICI laughs, but ALEXANDER is not amused.)* Maybe you're looking at it wrong. *(ALEXANDER tries holding the comic upside down. Nothing.)* Not literally! You're thinking of the comic as a doorway, right? That you can use to travel back and forth? Maybe it's a trap.

ALEXEANDER: Yes, I know it's "It's a Trap." Issue #24.

CICI: No, "It's a Trap" is a trap.

ALEXANDER: "It's a Trap" is a trap? *(CICI nods.)* Wait, if it's a trap, "It's a Trap" means that "It's a Trap" is a trap?

CICI: Yeah, but who's on first?

ALEXANDER: What?

CICI: *(Sighs)* I keep forgetting you're a fictional character...

ALEXANDER: Will you please tell me what you're talking about?

CICI: The comic book that you got from your girlfriend—

ALEXANDER: She is not my girlfriend!

CICI: Mm-hm. I'm telling you that issue #24 of "It's a Trap" is a literal trap...one that you fall into and don't get out of!

ALEXANDER: You mean like a big trap door? Don't those usually lead into a torture ch—*(CICI smiles big at ALEXANDER.)* Never mind. ...But why would Layla's present do that to me?

CICI: Maybe she's breaking up with you?

ALEXANDER: She is not—we are not—it doesn't make any sense!

CICI: Yeah. I don't know what she sees in you either.

ALEXANDER: You are a precocious little girl, aren't you?

CICI: Yes, but I'm cute, so I get away with it.

ALEXANDER: You would make an excellent super villain.

CICI: Thanks!

ALEXANDER: Speaking of...E.V.I.L. must have done something to that comic book...rigged it so it would send me here.

CICI: And why would they do that?

ALEXANDER: Oh, I don't know...because they're evil!

CICI: I know they're E.V.I.L., but are they really that evil?

ALEXANDER: Of course E.V.I.L. is evil! Why would they be called E.V.I.L. if E.V.I.L. wasn't ev—we are not doing this again.

CICI: *(She laughs.)* But weren't they already planning on blowing up the city?

ALEXANDER: Yes...

CICI: And didn't they send you a whole boatload of clues so you could try to stop them from blowing up the city?

ALEXANDER: Three isn't exactly a boatload...



CICI: Depends on how big the boat is. But how in the world are you supposed to stop Anyopolis from blowing up if you're in a whole 'nother world?

ALEXANDER: I can't!

CICI: See? It obviously wasn't E.V.I.L. that sent you here.

ALEXANDER: But with me gone, their evil plan will succeed for sure! How is that not what they want?

CICI: Have you ever even read a comic book?

ALEXANDER: You dare!

CICI: No bad guy ever really wants to hurt anybody. Look, I mess with my sister all of the time—but I never actually want to hurt her.

ALEXANDER: ...I suppose not. But then why do it at all?

CICI: Because she's my sister...I'm supposed to mess with her! And it's fun.

ALEXANDER: So, you're saying...

CICI: That your villains only mess with you because that's what villains do.

ALEXANDER: But then—

CICI: You stop them because it's what you do. And—

ALEXANDER: Because it's fun? (*CICI raises an eyebrow at him.*) Well, it is kinda' fun.

CICI: See? All we do is do what we do!

ALEXANDER: Just do what you do...that's an awful nice way of looking at things...even for an awful little girl.

CICI: Thanks! Hey... (*CICI and ALEXANDER throw Mr. Wiffles back and forth at each other until they tire.*) Want to watch Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time?

ALEXANDER: Isn't it over by now?

CICI: I have DVDs.

ALEXANDER: What are those? Robots? Evil robots?!

CICI: Different worlds, man. We come from whole different worlds...

(*CICI leaves to get her DVDs. Crossfade to...*)

## *SCENE SIX*

*(Deathbed Swamp! IRIS slogs through gunk, ducks under vines and trees, and pinches herself repeatedly.)*

IRIS: I can't save Anyopolis! But I have to save Anyoplolis! No. This is a dream. Just a weird dream that was cool for a while until everyone started chasing me.

NARRATION MAN: These thoughts race through young Iris Meriwether's head as she trudges through the mucky-muck of Deathbed Swamp, the perilous pit of petulance and poopy-poop in which the headquarters of E.V.I.L. rests!

IRIS: *(She throws herself down on a log.)* Okay. This isn't a dream. I'm really here. I'm really inside of a comic book, a whole bunch of villains are really chasing me, Anyopolis is really going to blow up and—*(Something growls.)* I really hope that isn't an alligator-saurus. Oh, what am I going to do? What would...what would Uncle Todd do? He would...he would...move away. At least that would get him out of here. At least then...I wouldn't be alone.

*(IRIS puts on her headphones and curls up in front of the log, closing her eyes.)*

NARRATION: But little did young Iris know that she wasn't alone at all! Meanwhile, in a separate part of Deathbed Swamp...

*(LAYLA and ARNIE, filthy with muck, trudge through the swamp. ARNIE carries the newspaper-wrapped package.)*

LAYLA: I can't save Anyopolis! But I have to save Anyoplolis! Oh, this is a nightmare. A nightmare that I thought I could handle until we stepped into this swamp.

ARNIE: Want me to pinch you and see if you wake up?

LAYLA: *(She gives ARNIE a look that answers his question.)* “Amazing” Alexander my eye...he just had to go missing on the day that the city decides to blow up. How are we on time, Arnie?

ARNIE: Oh, we’re not on time at all...we don’t even have two hours before those bombs go ‘blooey!

LAYLA: “Absent” Alexander is more like it...

ARNIE: We could save the day!

LAYLA: That’s the kind of attitude that got us out here in the first place, isn’t it? What was your bright idea? Come out here and try to reason with the Evil Villains in League (with one another)? Tell them that Alexander has evaporated and hope they disarm the bombs?

ARNIE: Oh, and to return their package!

LAYLA: Right. For...?

ARNIE: Re-gifting.

LAYLA: Re-gifting. Right. *(LAYLA and ARNIE sit down on the log that IRIS is laying in front of. IRIS, with her music playing and her eyes closed, doesn’t notice.)* Arnie, I could just scream.

*(IRIS turns over, sees LAYLA and screams! The other two scream and flip over the log. ARNIE tosses the package up in the air and it lands in IRIS’S lap. IRIS regards the package, then tears it open. ARNIE sits back up.)*

ARNIE: Hey! It’s not your birthday!

IRIS: Actually...it is.

ARNIE: Oh. Carry on, then.

LAYLA: *(Jumping to her feet.)* And just who are you?!

IRIS: I’m Iris. And this is just what I needed to save the city!

LAYLA: Hey, it is not your birthday!

IRIS: Yes it is.

LAYLA: Well...that’s beside the point!

*(IRIS pulls the first clue from the package...a black flower.)*

IRIS: *(Gasp!)* A Black Widow Iris! We might save the day yet! *(She jumps to her feet.)* Come on, you guys, let's go!

LAYLA: HOLD ON JUST A MINUTE!!!

IRIS: *(After a beat.)* Yes?

LAYLA: I think it's time I put my investigative instincts to work and find out exactly who you are, what you're doing here, and if it really is your birthday! For the record, on the record, of course.

IRIS: That is such a lame catchphrase...

LAYLA: Excuse me?!

ARNIE: Break time! Who wants hot chocolate?

IRIS: I'll take some, please!

ARNIE: *(Pulling out a thermos and marshmallows.)* Comin' right up!

LAYLA: NO HOT CHOCOLATE! *(IRIS and ARNIE cross their arms.)* Okay, fine—hot chocolate. But you have some explaining to do.

IRIS: My name is Iris and, with your help, I'm going to save Anyopolis.

LAYLA: Sure you are.

IRIS: Look, I don't have time to explain, but I know that The Amazing Alexander is gone, I know that there are bombs planted—

LAYLA: Aha! Because you had something to do with it!

IRIS: *(Sighs.)* No, because I read all about you.

LAYLA: *(Sweet.)* You read my column! Always nice to meet a fan.

IRIS: Not your column—I read your comic book! We really don't have time to get into this, but you're a fictional character.

LAYLA: How dare you!

ARNIE: *(Passing out cocoa.)* I like my marshmallows and cocoa at a 50/50 ratio, so I kinda ran out marshmallows before I got to yours, Layla. Hope you don't mind. *(LAYLA crosses her arms.)* Or I can have mine without, no biggie.

*(IRIS takes an "Amazing Alexander" comic book out of her hoodie, gives it to LAYLA, who flips through it.)*

LAYLA: What is this? *(Something on the page catches her eye.)* Great Cesar's Ghost, is that really what my nose looks like?!

IRIS: This issue had a fill-in artist. You usually look better than that.

LAYLA: (*Sweetly again.*) Oh, thank you! That's sweet!

IRIS: Although I think this guy draws you a little more true to life.

LAYLA: Why, you—just give me one good reason why I shouldn't feed you to an alligator-saurus...

IRIS: Because The Robot Queen is back!

ARNIE: (*He spits out the hot chocolate he just sipped.*) Sorry. This is still really hot. What did you just say?

IRIS: I said The Robot Queen is back.

ARNIE: (*He spits it out again.*) Ugh, this tastes horrible without marshmallows! Sorry—you were saying?

IRIS: The Robot Queen is back!

ARNIE: (*He does a final spit-take.*) The Robot Queen is back?! Why didn't you say so?!

LAYLA: Impossible. She's been deactivated. Or destroyed. Or taken back to IKEA.

IRIS: No, I saw her. With my own eyes.

LAYLA: Ridiculous! How are we supposed to believe—?

IRIS: What is it you always say, Layla? "The eyes don't lie?"

LAYLA: ...I do say that...

IRIS: And that is a good catchphrase.

LAYLA: (*Sweetly.*) Aw, thanks! Hey, wait a minute—just where did you see her with your own eyes?!

IRIS: At the E.V.I.L. headquarters.

LAYLA: And just what were you doing there?

IRIS: I was...I infiltrated it, on a secret mission.

LAYLA: A secret what now?

IRIS: A secret mission. Since The Amazing Alexander was missing, I knew that I had to do something to stop the destruction of Anyopolis. So I assumed the secret identity of...The Incredible Illustrated Iris!

LAYLA: (*Beat.*) Is that right? And I suppose that is your hero outfit?

ARNIE: It lacks a fanny pack, but otherwise: nice!

IRIS: I said I was undercover, didn't I?

LAYLA: No, honey, I think you left that part out.

IRIS: Well...I am a hero! And I'll prove it! (*LAYLA motions for her to go on. IRIS shows her the flower.*) This flower is a Black Widow Iris. What can you tell me about it?

LAYLA: It has the most personality of any Iris I've ever met.

IRIS: Black Widow Irises are native to this swamp and, more specifically, The Deathbed Swamp Cemetery.

ARNIE: The Swamp-etary!

LAYLA: I remember those—wasn't there a thing with Amazing Alexander and Death Face Mask and—

IRIS: Issue #154—"Swindling the Swamp Specter." See, the thing about Black Widow Irises is—

ARNIE: When they grow on graves of criminals, they sprout little gold coins inside of them!

IRIS: That's...that's right, Arnie.

ARNIE: See? I know stuff.

LAYLA: Death Face Mask came out here looking for Irises...

IRIS: But the swamp is so overgrown that you couldn't find a gravesite if you tried.

LAYLA: Unless you ask a ghost for directions!

IRIS: Which is exactly what Death Face Mask planned to do! But, although his mask allows him to talk to the dead, that doesn't mean the dead want to talk to him...

LAYLA: Or anyone for that matter...

*(Over the past few lines, a slow and menacing fog has crept in on our heroes. Through that fog, come the ghostly apparitions of RITA MORTIS and REBECCA SPECTRA.)*

RITA: And we haven't changed our stance.

*(Everyone screams. ARNIE jumps into LAYLA'S arms.)*

REBECCA: What're you doin' here, huh? Huh?

RITA: Livelies such as you aren't welcome in my swamp.

LAYLA: Oh...well, we aren't all that lively.

IRIS: Yeah, have you even read her column? Borrrr-ing!

LAYLA: Hey!

REBECCA: No livelies! No livelies!

RITA: You have two options, livelies...

ARNIE: Grilled or crispy? *(The girls shoot him a look.)* Sorry—I get hungry when I get scared.

REBECCA: Leave here and live...

RITA: Or stay here and die!

LAYLA: *(Grabbing IRIS and ARNIE.)* If there's ever been an easier decision to make, I don't know what it is.

ARNIE: Crispy. I always go with crispy.

IRIS: Actaully, ah, about that—

ARNIE: Don't tell me you're a "grilled" girl?

LAYLA: Iris, let's go.

IRIS: *(Whispering to LAYLA.)* Our options aren't much better if we leave, Layla. Remember? The big boom-booms? *(To the ghosts.)* See, we're looking for something...

RITA: Yes, they always are.

REBECCA: Our gold! Our gold!

IRIS: No, no, not your gold!

ARNIE: But if you've got some extra lying around...

RITA: If not for our gold, why do you come here?

IRIS: Um...well...someone's put a bomb here, and we're looking for it.

RITA: A bomb, you say?

REBECCA: What would we have a bomb for, lively?

RITA: Yes, lively? Why would we have a bomb?

LAYLA: You wouldn't! We wouldn't! Nice talking to you, goodbye!

*(The ghosts close in on LAYLA.)*

RITA: Now, wait just one minute, lively.

REBECCA: This lively sure is a lively one, ain't she?

RITA: She is. And the more I look at her, the more familiar she becomes...

REBECCA: Hey, yeah, you're right. You know, these old eyes ain't so good no more...took me a while to see it...

LAYLA: What...what're you talking about?

REBECCA: This girl was out here not too long ago, wasn't she? With that little girl with the flashy-box-box?

RITA: Yeah...she was snooping around something fierce...

REBECCA: Fierce, fierce, fierce!

LAYLA: I...I have no idea what—

IRIS: We're friends of The Amazing Alexander—that's how you know us!

RITA: (*As the ghosts all turn back to IRIS.*) Is that right, lively?

REBECCA: Is that right, lively?

IRIS: That's—that's right! That guy right there, that's his sidekick! And that over there is his...his girlfriend!

LAYLA: (*Flattered.*) Well, I wouldn't say girlfriend...

RITA: Well...

REBECCA: If that's the case...

RITA: You said you were looking for a bomb, were you?

REBECCA: A bomb? A bomb?

IRIS: Um. Yes?

RITA: Well, let's just take a look, shall we?

REBECCA: Look, look!

IRIS: Well, if it's not too much trouble...

ARNIE: Would you mind checking to see what you've got in the fridge while you're at it?

RITA: No trouble at all...

REBECCA: Trouble, trouble, trouble!



RITA: We'll just ask our friends for help.

*(Out of the fog come more and more ghosts, encircling them.)*

LAYLA: Help.

ARNIE: Help.

IRIS: Help!

RITA: *(As the ghosts tighten the circle.)* We remember—yes, we do—we remember The Amazing Alexander. He was here with that skull-man—

REBECCA: Death Face Mask!

RITA: Death Face Mask, who was snooping around our beds...

REBECCA: Our deathbeds!

RITA: Trying to rob our swamp of its riches...

REBECCA: Our Deathbed!

RITA: And disturbing our PEACE!

IRIS: Wait! Don't you remember? The Amazing Alexander was here to help you! He stopped Death Face Mask from stealing your riches and sent him packing!

RITA: Hmm...

REBECCA: It was a long time ago...

RITA: And our memories aren't what they used to be...

ARNIE: Well, at least you've still got your looks.

RITA: And now that you mention it...I do remember The Amazing Alexander being the nice one...

REBECCA: And the cute one!

LAYLA: Hey, watch it.

RITA: You say he's not friends with Death Face Mask?

IRIS: No, of course not!

RITA: And you're not friends with Death Face Mask?

IRIS: Seriously?

RITA: Seriously.

IRIS: Of course not!

*(RITA turns to the ghost farthest away from IRIS. That ghost reaches under her sheet and pulls out the bomb, passing it ghost to ghost, but, just before the bomb is in IRIS'S grasp, DEATH FACE MASK and INKWELLINGTON stumble in.)*

DEATH FACE MASK: Iris, there you are! We've been looking all over for you!

*(The ghosts suddenly turn their heads to IRIS.)*

IRIS: Aw, seriously?

*(Crossfade to...)*

## SCENE SEVEN

*(IRIS'S bedroom. CICI and ALEXANDER lay on the bed, laughing, watching DVDs on a laptop computer.)*

ALEXANDER: Aw, man! When Super Pink Princess Marshmallow fell into the Caramel Cavern—

CICI: And that's where she found the Pretzel Prince—

ALEXANDER: But then both of them got sucked up in a terrible torrent of tangy toffee?

CICI/ALEXANDER: Classic candy!

ALEXANDER: Boy, it's hard not to love something with that much alliteration in it. This didn't turn out to be such a bad birthday after all.

CICI: It's your birthday?

ALEXANDER: Didn't you read about it in the comic?

CICI: What have I said about me and nerds? *(She laughs.)* Look, I might steal Iris's comic books sometimes, but I never read them...

ALEXANDER: You steal them? Why would you do that?!

CICI: How do you think I get her to watch Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time?

ALEXANDER: That's not nice, Cici.

CICI: Nope, but it's what I do!

ALEXANDER: *(Shakes his head.)* What's next? The night is young!

CICI: We've watched all of my DVDs...what do you usually do on your birthday?

ALEXANDER: I fight all of my enemies in the biggest battle of the year, I do an interview for the paper, I eat some cake, I read some comics, I eat some cake, repeat as necessary.

CICI: Well...you've read some comics at least?

ALEXANDER: I opened one, anyway. And it sent me here...away from my home, away from my friends...I never even ate any of Arnie's cake. He tries so hard to keep it right-side up...I've never had the heart to tell him that Pineapple Upside-Down Cake is supposed to be upside-down.

CICI: *(Beat.)* I'll be right back.

*(CICI goes quietly out the door. ALEXANDER gets off the bed. He walks around, inspecting the room. He finds a framed picture buried under papers on IRIS'S desk, and, with his back turned to the window, he studies it. CICI pokes her head in from the top of the window, sets a piece of cake on the sill, and swings into the room. She sneaks up on ALEXANDER.)*

CICI: SURPRISE!!! *(ALEXANDER jumps halfway out of his skin, screams.)* I brought you some cake.

ALEXANDER: *(Taking the cake, genuinely touched.)* Thanks, Cici.

*(CICI stops ALEXANDER from blowing out the candle.)*

CICI: Wait! Make a wish first, Al.

ALEXANDER: Can I wish for you to stop calling me Al?

CICI: You can. But I wouldn't recommend it.

*(ALEXANDER smiles, closes his eyes, wishes, and blows out the candle...or at least tries to. It is a trick candle, so, when he opens his eyes, the candle is still burning. He tries to blow it out again. Nothing. He keeps trying.)*

ALEXANDER: What sorcery is this?!

CICI: I...I don't know! I've never seen such a thing!

ALEXANDER: *(Gasp!)* It's the Carnivorous Cake Creature come back to enact its chocolaty vengeance on me! Cici—what'll we do?!

CICI: Wait! I forgot! *(She hops on the bed and reaches above the window, brings down a glass of milk, hands it to him.)* Use this!

ALEXANDER: Thanks! *(He takes it, drinks.)* Ah, refreshing! But what do we do about this cursed candle?

CICI: I thought you could use the milk to—?

ALEXANDER: Ah! Good idea! *(ALEXANDER takes another drink and tries to put the candle out by squirting milk from his mouth. It doesn't work. CICI, sighing, takes the candle from the cake and drops it into the milk.)* Hey, that was a perfectly good glass of milk!

CICI: I'm beginning to understand why you need a sidekick.

ALEXANDER: Die, cake creature! *(ALEXANDER takes a huge bite out of the cake. Through a mouthful, he says)* Cici! I need your help!

CICI: Cici to the rescue! *(CICI takes a huge bite out of the cake. They take turns eating until it's gone. Their faces and hands are covered in cake. They collapse with laughter.)* Happy birthday, Al!

ALEXANDER: Thanks, Cecilia. *(He sees the picture he was looking at earlier.)* That's you, isn't it? You're tiny in that picture! Well...tinier... *(CICI whacks him.)* That must be your sister—Iris, right? *(CICI nods.)* Who's the guy?

CICI: Uncle Todd.

ALEXANDER: *(Points at box of comics.)* That Uncle Todd?

CICI: *(Sad.)* Yeah...

ALEXANDER: Hey, what's the matter?

CICI: Uncle Todd...he left.

ALEXANDER: Oh. Were you guys close?

CICI: No. I thought he was weird. Nice, but weird.

ALEXANDER: Then why are you—?

CICI: Ever since he left, Iris has been all mopey. She locks herself in her room, she never talks to me, she makes Mom bring her meals up to her. It's been a week. *(Beat.)* Uncle Todd always brought her comic books for her birthday. Mom and Dad would get her dolls and beads and hair bows—you know, cool stuff—but...

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Uncle Todd was the one that...got her, huh?

CICI: I try to get her. But comics are just so stupid. No offense.

ALEXANDER: Only a little bit taken.

CICI: It was better when we were little. She played with me. She didn't hate the girly stuff so much. And now that Uncle Todd's gone...she won't even talk to me.

ALEXANDER: I'm sure she's just—

CICI: And last night, I made her mad and now she's gone forever and I'm never, ever, ever gonna see her again and it's all my fault and—*(CICI, crying, hugs ALEXANDER.)* It's all my fault...

ALEXANDER: Cici, it's not. It might seem like it now, but it's not. I know, because I really did hurt someone and make them go away...

CICI: *(Sniffing.)* You mean like you punched them in the face?

ALEXANDER: Well, no...

CICI: Oh. I thought you punched people in the face.

ALEXANDER: Well, I do, but—look, what I did was worse.

CICI: You...kicked them in the face?

ALEXANDER: I didn't—I didn't hurt anyone's face. *(Sighs.)* I had a friend...we'd been friends for a long time. She was a girl. I never thought anything of it at the time—she was just like me. She was—

CICI: A nerd?

ALEXANDER: My best friend. But then, when I got older, I realized that all of the other boys were just friends with boys and the girls were just friends with girls...and I stopped being her friend.

CICI: Why?

ALEXANDER: I don't know why. I just know I stopped talking to her. When she tried to talk to me, I'd ignore her or, worse, make fun of her. I was really, really mean to her, Cici, even though I didn't want to be.

CICI: But then why did you—

ALEXANDER: I don't know. I did it. I just did. I thought, because I was growing up, I couldn't be best friends with a girl.

CICI: *(After a beat.)* I never even got to give Iris her birthday present.

ALEXANDER: *(He stands up.)* Alright, where's that comic book? I think it's high time we got to work trying to get your sister back, huh?

*(CICI wipes away the last of her tears, nods, and stands up. They start looking around the room together. Crossfade to...)*

# SCENE EIGHT

*(Deathbed Swamp, right where we left off: IRIS, LAYLA and ARNIE are surrounded by ghosts. DEATH FACE MASK and INKWELLINGTON have just barged in.)*

RITA: I thought you didn't know this skull-face lively?

IRIS: We don't! I mean, we know him, but we're not friends with him!

DEATH FACE MASK: Okay, that was a little hurtful...

IRIS: You're trying to kill me!

INKWELLINGTON: You don't know that.

IRIS: You chased me into the swamp!

INKWELLINGTON: We could be chasing you to...

DEATH FACE MASK: To see if you wanted some donuts!

INKWELLINGTON: Yeah!

IRIS: *(Beat.)* Are you chasing me to see if I want some donuts?

INKWELLINGTON: ...No.

DEATH FACE MASK: Not that we had any in the first place...

INKWELLINGTON: Oh, here we go again...

DEATH FACE MASK: Everyone else brings donuts to the monthly meeting when it's their turn to bring donuts to the monthly meeting.

INKWELLINGTON: I forgot. Okay? I forgot.

DEATH FACE MASK: I don't know how you forget when you live just down the block from a bakery...

RITA: Enough! We are not here to discuss donuts!

REBECCA: Donuts, donuts, donuts!

ARNIE: Come on, you guys, this is not helping the hunger situation.

RITA: You won't have to worry about being hungry ever again—

ARNIE: Oh, awesome, did you order pizza?

RITA: We did not—

ARNIE: I hope you got Luigi's and not Antonio's. Luigi's is much, much better.

INKWELLINGTON: Agreed. I eat there once a week.

DEATH FACE MASK: And yet you can't buy donuts once a month...

RITA: We did not order pizza! We are going to kill you!

REBECCA: No more livelies, no more, no more!

IRIS: Wait! Wait a minute! You do not want to kill us!

RITA: Yeah, I think we do.

REBECCA: We do, we do, we do!

ARNIE: They do seem pretty enthusiastic about it.

DEATH FACE MASK: Know what I was enthusiastic about? A strawberry jelly donut. Maybe two strawberry jelly donuts, but that didn't happen, did it?

INKWELLINGTON: Well then, maybe you should have picked up your own strawberry jelly donuts and you could have had one, maybe two, maybe even three strawberry jelly donuts!

DEATH FACE MASK: I would have. If it was my turn to pick up the strawberry jelly donuts!

ARNIE: Excuse me? Guys? We seem awfully hung up on the strawberry jelly donuts here. What's the cinnamon roll situation look like?

DEATH FACE MASK: But instead of eating a strawberry jelly donut—

ARNIE: Or a cinnamon roll!

DEATH FACE MASK: I will be stuck here, in Deathbed Swamp, as a ghost, with these ghosts, forever!

IRIS: (*Nudging RITA.*) Forever.

INKWELLINGTON: I don't have to take this. I am the world's greatest forgery artist—a master criminal, okay?



DEATH FACE MASK: And I'm a licensed accountant. Hm? How do you like that? I do my own taxes. And I buy donuts when I'm supposed to.

RITA: *(Grabbing the bomb and giving it to IRIS.)* Take it! Take it and leave!

INKWELLINGTON: I am an excellent shuffleboard player! I've never lost a game of badminton in my life!

REBECCA: Take it and leave and take them with you! Please, please, please!

DEATH FACE MASK: I am so good at math, that I almost used Deficit of Death as my alias.

INKWELLINGTON: The only thing you have a deficit of is brains, Death Face Math.

DEATH FACE MASK: "Death Face Math." Hey, that's actually pretty good. Mind if I use that?

INKWELLINGTON: Yeah, actually, I do mind. In fact, I trademarked it. Intellectual property. It's mine.

DEATH FACE MASK: Oh yeah? Why don't you put it down in writing then, huh, pal?

INKWELLINGTON: I will, because that is my specialty and I'm really good at it!

DEATH FACE MASK: I know! I was being ironic! *(He looks around. The ghosts, IRIS, ARNIE, and LAYLA have all disappeared into the fog.)* We screwed up.

INKWELLINGTON: This is definitely worse than the donuts.

DEATH FACE MASK: ...Not really.

*(They argue more as we crossfade into...)*

## *SCENE NINE*

*(IRIS'S bedroom. It has been torn apart—sheets pulled from the bed, drawers emptied onto the floor, etc. ALEXANDER lies on his back on the floor. CICI spins on the chair.)*

ALEXANDER: It's not here. It's not here and I'm never going home.

CICI: I am not arguing with you.

ALEXANDER: I must have left it at the comic book store. How did I leave it at the comic book store?

CICI: In your defense, you were being transported across time and space—

ALEXANDER: And I couldn't manage to hold onto the one thing that could have got me back—

CICI: Not to mention the fact that it was a very heartfelt gift from your girlfriend...

ALEXANDER: Yeah...I mean, no! No! We're good friends—that's it! *(CICI rolls her eyes.)* Good friends that are never going to see each other again... *(CICI frowns in genuine concern. She hugs Mr. Wiffles. She comes down to ALEXANDER and, just as she is about to put a hand on his back, he turns to her.)* You didn't take it, did you?

CICI: ...What?

ALEXANDER: You didn't take it, did you?

CICI: No.

ALEXANDER: You take your sister's comics—you didn't take mine, did you?

CICI: Of course I didn't take it—come on.

ALEXANDER: Cici...

CICI: What, don't you believe me?

ALEXANDER: Cici—this is no time for one of your pranks!

CICI: It's no prank! I'm not lying!

ALEXANDER: Everyone I know could be in danger right now, and if I don't get back home—

CICI: I didn't take your stupid comic! I didn't steal anything, okay?

ALEXANDER: Cici!

CICI: I didn't! I didn't take it! Mom never believes me and Dad never believes me and now you don't even believe me when I thought you were my friend and—

ALEXANDER: Cici, I can't just stay here with you forever—I have to—

CICI: I don't want you to stay here forever! I wish you were never here in the first place!

ALEXANDER: *(Realizing what he's said.)* Cici, I'm sorry, I—

CICI: I wish I did have your stupid comic so I could send you away forever and never ever, ever see you again! *(CICI throws Mr. Wiffles at ALEXANDER and storms out the door, slamming it behind her. After a beat, she returns for her laptop.)* And I'm taking Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time with me!

*(She slams the door again, leaving ALEXANDER. Blackout.)*

# SCENE TEN

*(Lights up on the comic book page. We see matching images as NARRATION MAN narrates.)*

NARRATION MAN: Having discovered, collected, and disarmed the first bomb, our heroes have made their way into the very heart of Anyopolis (but not before a change of clothes, of course!) We join Iris, Layla and Adequate Arnie at the behemoth building brimming with brain busters, the headquarters of head-scratchers, the Puzzle Palace!

*(Lights up on our three heroes. They sit in a golden lobby, all on one bench that is too small for them. LAYLA flips through a magazine. ARNIE eats peanuts out of a dish. IRIS looks around nervously. Behind a reception desk sits JACQUELYN JIGSAW, seemingly paying them no mind at all.)*

IRIS: *(To ARNIE.)* You're sure you disarmed that bomb?

ARNIE: I'm sure.

IRIS: You're sure you're sure?

ARNIE: Sure, I'm sure that I'm sure.

LAYLA: What'd you do with it once you were done? Just in case...

ARNIE: Right here in my fanny pack.

*(LAYLA and IRIS scoot over in unison.)*

LAYLA: Hey, aren't you allergic to peanuts?

ARNIE: No, no, you're thinking of peacocks.

LAYLA: You're sure?

ARNIE: Sure, I'm—why, did you see a peacock?

LAYLA: *(To IRIS.)* Remind me again why we're on a sightseeing tour when we only have an hour and a half to find two more bombs?

IRIS: (*Digging into the package.*) We're here...because of this. (*She pulls out a large gold puzzle piece.*) I was thinking...

LAYLA: Puzzle piece...Puzzle Palace. I see the connection.

IRIS: I was thinking about these clues...the Black Widow Iris, this Golden Puzzle Piece, and the last one (*She pulls out a comic book for the last one.*) Well...I'm not sure what this one means yet, but we'll cross that bridge when we come to it, huh? The point is, I think all of these clues relate to past adventures that The Amazing Alexander has had.

LAYLA: I'm listening.

IRIS: These flowers grow all over Deathbed Swamp, but the bomb was planted in a very specific place—the place where he faced Death Face Mask all those issues ago.

LAYLA: Months ago. We don't measure time in issues here, Iris.

ARNIE: (*Whapping his nose.*) Oop! Peanut up the nose!

LAYLA: Although some of us certainly have issues...

IRIS: This clue—this golden puzzle piece—has to refer to the Puzzle Palace; more specifically, the Unsolvable Puzzle of Prince Unlovable.

LAYLA: Prince Unlovable? Bet it's hard to get a date with a name like that.

IRIS: Ah, he did alright. He was a prince, after all.

LAYLA: So, what, all we have to do is solve the Unsolvable Puzzle?

IRIS: Probably, yeah.

LAYLA: (*Sarcastic.*) Well, heck, we've got ninety minutes—should be plenty of time. In fact, why don't we sit in this lobby for no apparent reason while ALL OF OUR LIVES TICK AWAY.

JIGSAW: Shhh!

LAYLA: Why exactly are we sitting in this lobby, again?

IRIS: For a journalist, you really don't pay attention, do you? It's after hours, the Palace is technically closed, so the receptionist said we have to wait here to see if the manager will let us in.

LAYLA: Uh-huh. And is the manager aware that—(*ARNIE is trying to blow the peanut out of his nose, to no avail.*) Is she aware that—(*He blows again, loudly.*) That all of our lives are at stake right now?

IRIS: I did mention that, yes.

*(ARNIE blows it out of his nose, inspects it, sees something he doesn't like, puts it down into the bowl and starts whistling.)*

JIGSAW: Shhhh!!

LAYLA: We could sneak past her if we had some kind of distraction...

ARNIE: *(Getting up.)* Miss, I'm done with the peanuts, thank you very—  
*(ARNIE trips, sending peanuts flying across the floor. JIGSAW stands up to scold him. IRIS and LAYLA share a look.)*

JIGSAW: Young man! I will have quiet in my lobby!

*(LAYLA and IRIS run off as ARNIE cleans up the peanuts. JIGSAW chases him offstage as a giant heap of golden puzzle pieces is brought on. LAYLA and IRIS stand before the pile. They giggle together.)*

IRIS: I've never snuck in anywhere before!

LAYLA: You haven't? It's practically part of my job description.

IRIS: Well, let's get to work, huh?

LAYLA: Yeah. T-minus 85 minutes and counting...*(They each grab a handful of pieces and spread them out in front of them. After a beat, IRIS laughs.)* What?

IRIS: Oh, nothing...it's just that, well, my sister says that. "T-minus, whatever time..."

LAYLA: *(A beat.)* Younger or older?

IRIS: What? Oh. Younger. My sister's younger than me.

LAYLA: I'm an only child.

IRIS: Yeah...I know.

LAYLA: That's right. From the comic book.

IRIS: Yeah. *(Beat.)* Well, you're not missing much, let me tell you...getting your hair pulled, your stuff stolen, forced to watch stupid TV shows.

LAYLA: Yeah, you're probably right.

*(They work in silence for a moment.)*

IRIS: I mean...she's a brat, but... She's like three years younger than me and I swear she's three times as smart. I mean, I know adults that are less mature than her...besides the hair pulling and the TV shows, I mean.

LAYLA: Do you miss her? (*IRIS smiles, shrugs.*) Well, I wouldn't worry too much...I'm sure you'll be back home in no time. See your family and your friends again.

IRIS: (*Lightly, playing it off.*) I don't really...have any friends.

LAYLA: Because of the comic books? (*IRIS snickers.*) I'm kidding. Well, anyway, you've got at least one friend.

IRIS: You mean my sister?

LAYLA: (*LAYLA meant herself.*) Yeah! You're sister. And—(*Trying to say that she is her friend too, but she changes the subject.*) Man! We've got a long ways to go on this thing, huh?

IRIS: No kidding! Where's Arnie's genius when you need it, right?

*(They laugh, and ARNIE runs on, looking over his shoulder.)*

ARNIE: Hey! There you guys are! Turns out the receptionist's a big fan of mine, so I just autographed—(*He trips on the edge of the cart and falls face-first into the pieces. He sits up, coughing, then swallows something.*) Ooh, I think you're going to be missing a piece.

LAYLA/IRIS: ARNIE!!!

LAYLA: You idiot!

IRIS: You genius!!!

LAYLA: What?

ARNIE: What?!

IRIS: Arnie, that's just it—we don't have to solve this puzzle at all!

LAYLA: We don't have to or we're not going to?

IRIS: Both! Layla, why do you think this puzzle is unsolvable?

LAYLA: Oh, I don't know, because there's three billion pieces and they're painted gold on both sides?

IRIS: No, because it's missing a piece! That's why it can't be solved! And where do you find things that are missing?

ARNIE: (*Pointing to his tummy.*) I can feel it right about here...

IRIS: The lost and found! That's where the bomb is hidden!

LAYLA: *(Eyes wide.)* Look, Iris, don't take this personally, but I'm really starting to appreciate that brain of yours.

IRIS: Let's go!

*(IRIS and LAYLA run off, but ARNIE is left behind. He eats another puzzle piece.)*

ARNIE: You know, these are not half bad.

*(Lights dim as the set changes to the Lost and Found...)*

NARRATION MAN: And so, our two heroines rush to the lost and found while Adequate Arnie ponders whether those puzzle pieces would be better with nacho cheese or chocolate sauce. But, upon arrival, they come face-to-face with an all-too familiar face...

*(JACQUELYN JIGSAW sits at another reception desk in front of rows and rows and rows of junk.)*

IRIS/LAYLA: *(Sweetly)* Hiiiiiiii!

IRIS: Fancy meeting you here!

LAYLA: You looked busy, so we thought we'd go ahead and show ourselves in...

IRIS: Hope you don't mind...

LAYLA: You don't mind, do you?

JIGSAW: What do you think?

*(LAYLA and IRIS laugh awkwardly.)*

IRIS: Well, we were hoping you could help us find—

JIGSAW: I mind.

IRIS/LAYLA: Sorrrrrrrry.

IRIS: So...do you mind if we go ahead and look around ourselves, or...

JIGSAW: There's already somebody here. *(IRIS and LAYLA exchange a look.)* Said they were waiting for you.

IRIS: They—they did?

LAYLA: *(Whispering.)* It's E.V.I.L.! They must've figured out—

JIGSAW: *(Yelling behind her.)* Come on out, your friends are here!



IRIS: No, no, actually, you don't have to do that—

JIGSAW: Don't keep them waiting! It's very rude!

IRIS: No, please, don't—

JIGSAW: Almost as rude as bursting into the Puzzle Palace after hours!

LAYLA: Will you please keep it down?

JIGSAW: And demanding to see our most precious artifact!

LAYLA: Okay, now who's the rude one?

JIGSAW: You better get out here or they're going to start putting more peanuts up their noses!

LAYA: Hey, that was just him and he only did it once!

*(ARNIE is whapping his nose again and blowing. He shrugs.)*

ARNIE: Sorry...

JIGSAW: I'm not gonna' yell again! I have my crosswords to do and my programs to watch!

IRIS: Listen, lady—

*(Behind the girls appear BERNICIA GROVEL and CAT SNAP.)*

BERNICIA: Hi Ms. Larson! *(IRIS and LAYLA spin around, faces filled with terror. CAT SNAP takes a picture of them.)* We thought we'd find you here!

*(CAT SNAP nudges BERNICIA in the ribs.)*

LAYLA: Bernicia...Cat Snap...you're not who we expected to see.

BERNICIA: Well...here we are! And who's your friend?

LAYLA: Oh! This is Iris Meriwether. Iris, this is Bernicia Grovel and Catherine Snapopolopolis...we call her—

IRIS: Cat Snap. I—

LAYLA: Read the comic books. Right. *(To her coworkers.)* Well, guys, we were actually kind of in the middle of something, so...

BERNICIA: We know! Do you, um, mind if we, you know, come with? Cat Snap can take some pictures.

*(CAT SNAP takes a picture.)*

LAYLA: Um, sure...say, Bunkum doesn't have you...working on something, does he, Bernicia?

BERNICIA: I'm...I'm going to be writing a story on...on the three bombs that—

LAYLA: What?! But that's an Amazing Alexander story! Bunkum knows that all of the Amazing Alexander stories are my stories!

BERNICIA: Well, um, technically...

*(BUNKUM strides into the room.)*

BUNKUM: Well, well, if I knew this was an office party, I would have brought donuts!

ARNIE: No thanks, I already ate.

LAYLA: Bunkum! Bernicia is trying to tell me that you put her on The Amazing Alexander story! That's my story! They all are!

BUNKUM: What Ms. Grovel is trying to say is that this isn't an Amazing Alexander story anymore, seeing as he is currently indisposed. Therefore: I gave her the story!

LAYLA: Well, yeah, I guess, but...

BUNKUM: No buts, my dear!

ARNIE: Really? I see seven butts. Then again, math was never my strong suit.

BUNKUM: *(Noticing IRIS.)* Well, well, my dear! Who is this lovely young lady? *(He kisses IRIS'S hand.)* And do you have a subscription to our paper?

IRIS: Oh, I read about it all the time!

BUNKUM: Wonderful! Splendid! And your name?

LAYLA: Um...that's the Incredible Illustrated Iris, Mr. Bunkum! She's helping save the city...while The Amazing Alexander is gone.

BUNKUM: Is that so?

LAYLA: It is so so. And I'm writing a story on it.

BUNKUM: Well then! No sense in pulling double duty, is there? Bernicia, you're off the story. Why don't you go down to the duck pond in Anyopolis Park...rumor has it that there's a Quaxulon living among us.

JIGSAW: Look, I hate to break up this touching display of affectoin, but you are blocking the other customers.

*(They all look behind them...and find no one.)*

ALL: What other customers?

*(There is a patter of feet down the hall, and then ARNIE comes busting in.)*

ARNIE: Hey guys! Hey! You'll never guess who's—*(ARNIE crashes straight into the first rack of lost and found items and sends it tumbling. He is stuck in it. In from the same place as ARNIE run TYRANNOSAURUS TEX, COUNT MAFIOSO, and HOUSESTRIFE. ARNIE pokes his head up out of the junk.)* You'll never guess who's here!

*(A chase ensues! They weave in and out of the Lost and Found aisles. As they run past them, IRIS, LAYLA and ARNIE attempt to look for the bomb. JIGSAW even gets swept up in it. At various points, we hear these snippets of dialogue...)*

COUNT MAFIOSO: Run faster, you geriatric Triassic turtle!

TEX: Hey, bite me, vampire!

COUNT MAFIOSO: Is that an insult or an invitation to dinner?

ARNIE: I knew I should have worn my pedometer today!

LAYLA: Any luck finding the bomb?

IRIS: No! You?

LAYLA: Would I honestly ask that if I'd already found it?

ARNIE: *(Eating a piece of pizza.)* People lose the awesome-est stuff!

BUNKUM: Snap Cat! Get pictures of this!

SNAP CAT: He acts like I don't know what this thing is for.

TEX: I thought you were supposed to be able to turn into a bat?

COUNT MAFIOSO: I thought you were supposed to turn into petroleum!

TEX: My mother is petroleum—thanks for bringing it up!

IRIS: Check the top shelves!

LAYLA: You check the top shelves!

ARNIE: I checked the top shelves! There were marbles! (*A huge crash, THE COUNT yells.*) I might have dropped some!

JIGSAW: (*Reading one of HouseStrife's catalogues.*) Does this really come in charcoal?

HOUSESTRIFE: Ooh, not at this moment, but we do offer a cobalt blue, a metallic grey, and a light, light black?

JIGSAW: What's the difference?

HOUSESTRIFE: The names.

JIGSAW: (*Stopping at her desk, taking out a pen.*) I'll take two. One for me, and one for my sister that works up in reception.

HOUSESTRIFE: Fantastic! Just fill this out and you'll be all set!

*(The rest of them have run out from the stacks and to circle the desk. HOUSESTRIFE'S papers are blowing everywhere!)*

HOUSESTRIFE: Could you please go run around somewhere else! You're messing up all of our papers!

JIGSAW: That's okay, I have a paperweight.

*(She pulls the bomb out from under her desk and sets on the papers. Everyone else slowly notices it and eventually slows to a stop. TYRANNOSAURUS TEX and COUNT MAFIOSO grab LAYLA and IRIS. ARNIE runs in and sees the bomb.)*

ARNIE: Hey guys! You'll never guess what I just found!

*(HOUSESTRIFE completes the order and staples it together, catching ARNIE'S hand in the stapler. Then she grabs him. They are all caught!)*

IRIS: (*Looking to her left, right, then out to us.*) Um...to be continued?

*(Blackout.)*

# SCENE ELEVEN

*(IRIS'S bedroom. Alexander sits on the edge of the bed with Mr. Wiffles. CICI is nowhere to be seen.)*

ALEXANDER: I was a real jerk, wasn't I? *(He makes Mr. Wiffles nod.)* If you were her, would you ever forgive me? *(Mr. Wiffles shakes his head.)* Yeah, me neither. *(He sets the bear down and gets up.)* You'd think with all of the comics in this room, there'd be one that could get me home...

*(ALEXANDER gets on his hands and knees to look under IRIS'S desk. CICI pokes her head in the window. She drops a package onto the bed and enters, sneaking up behind him.)*

CICI: Sorry.

*(ALEXANDER screams, whacking his head on the underside of the desk.)*

ALEXANDER: Man, you guys have gotta' stop sneaking up on me...

CICI: I'm sorry...

ALEXANDER: Yeah, you said that. But you shouldn't have to. I'm the one that needs to apologize. I was a total jerk, I—

CICI: I don't want you to go away forever. I'm sorry I said those mean things.

ALEXANDER: Me too. I didn't mean to accuse you of anything, and I didn't mean to call you a brat.

CICI: You didn't call me a brat.

ALEXANDER: Oh. I must've just been thinking it. *(CICI whaps him with the package. They laugh.)* Friends?

CICI: Friends.

*(They shake, smiling.)*

ALEXANDER: What's that?

CICI: Birthday present.

ALEXANDER: *(Ripping open the package.)* Cici, you shouldn't have!

CICI: Actually, that was for Iris, so, technically, I didn't...

ALEXANDER: Oh...

CICI: And that was her cake that you ate earlier, too.

ALEXANDER: Boy, you really know how to make a guy feel better.

CICI: Thanks!

ALEXANDER: *(Looking at the present.)* Hey, did you get your sister a comic book? *(She shrugs.)* Cici, that's so sweet!

CICI: Yeah, well, don't let it get around, okay?

ALEXANDER: "Inter-dimensional Intrigue" #19.

CICI: Yeah, I heard her talking about it one time, and I may have gone through her entire collection to make sure she didn't already have it...girl has a lot of comics. *(ALEXANDER busts out laughing.)* What? What? Oh, like you've never done anything nice for anybody!

ALEXANDER: I'm a hero—that's practically all I do!

CICI: Okay, what's so funny then, huh?

ALEXANDER: Cici, this comic book is regarded as one of the worst issues of any series of all time!

CICI: *(Beat.)* Not counting your series, of course.

ALEXANDER: I don't mean to laugh, but this issue is known for having a huge plot hole! There are these two people from different dimensions that, for no apparent reason, suddenly switch places with one another! But—get this—one of those dimensions is a book! But the idiot writers never explain if the real person being in the book alters the course of the actual book's story, if it affects all the copies of the story or just that one...it's totally implausible.

CICI: Crawl back under that desk.

ALEXANDER: Why?

CICI: I think you need to hit your head again.

ALEXANDER: Ah, forget it. It's the thought that counts, right? (*ALEXANDER sits on the bed.*) I'm really never going back, am I? What am I going to do?

CICI: For starters, we ought to get you some normal clothes.

ALEXANDER: I hope Layla's alright.

CICI: You mean your girlfriend?

ALEXANDER: She's not my girlfriend! (*He snickers.*) You know, sometimes she used to jump out of windows just so I would come and save her. They were always on the first floor, which was lucky, because I was often late.

CICI: (*Beat.*) Want to watch some more Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time?

ALEXANDER: Ah, there's no rush—if I'm really going to be stuck here, I've got my whole like life to watch that show.

CICI: Honestly? That sounds like a pretty awesome life.

ALEXANDER: Man, I just can't help thinking that we're overlooking something obvious...

*(ALEXANDER sets the comic down in Mr. Wiffles' lap so it looks like he's reading it. That same image is briefly on the comic book page. Crossfade to...)*

## *SCENE TWELVE*

*(The Comic Book Store. MEGA CORN and RAT MASTER sit.)*

RAT MASTER: See, what many people don't know, is that rats are actually smarter than humans. They just choose not to say anything about it because they like the free cheese.

MEGA CORN: Staying quiet as a mouse, eh?

RAT MASTER: A-hah! I see what you did there! And I thought you just did corn jokes!

MEGA CORN: Why would I be that fallow?

RAT MASTER: I don't know that word, but I'll assume that it's another hilarious riff on corn. How do you do it, man?

MEGA CORN: I just don't worry about what people think of me.

RAT MASTER: *(Laughing uproariously.)* Now that is a good one!

MEGA CORN: Not a joke. Can I give you a kernel of advice, Rat Master?

RAT MASTER: Is it that I should put lasers on my rats? Everyone always thinks I should put lasers on my rats.

MEGA CORN: Stop trying to impress everyone. Just be yourself.

RAT MASTER: Really?

MEGA CORN: And maybe put lasers on your rats. That would be cool.

*(They laugh. TEX, COUNT MAFIOSO, HOUSESTRIFE, and their prisoners, LAYLA, IRIS and ARNIE enter.)*

TEX: ROOOOOOARRR-HA! Lookee what we got here, ya'll!

COUNT MAFIOSO: A sprained ankle! Someone spilled the marbles all over the floor back at the lost and found...

TEX: What've ya'll been doin', talkin' 'bout your feelin's?



MEGA CORN: I was telling Rat Master that I was thinking of getting my hair cut—he thinks I’d look good with corn rows.

*(Everyone laughs)*

HOUSETRIFE: Good one, Rat Master!

RAT MASTER: You know, rats are the comedians of the animal kingdom, so that kind of hilarity comes pretty natural to me.

TEX: *(Plopping the heroes down on chairs.)* Have a seat, ya’ll!

COUNT MAFIOSO: Yes, please make yourselves uncomfortable!

IRIS: Listen to me—you have to untie us! There is still one more bomb we have to find! The lives of everyone depend upon it!

COUNT MAFIOSO: Preposterous!

TEX: Look, sugarplum, our orders were to bring you ‘round here and wait for the big boss lady. *(He wiggles his little arms.)* Plus, I couldn’t untie you if I wanted to. Knots and I do not get along.

COUNT MAFIOSO: It’s true. He only wears cowboy boots because he can’t tie his shoes.

*(Lights up on IRIS’S bedroom. From here on out, both sides of the stage will stay lit, with action never ceasing for the other. CICI is picking up the bedroom. ALEXANDER lies on the bed.)*

ALEXANDER: What are you doing?

CICI: Just cleaning up.

ALEXANDER: Who are you?

CICI: Mom’s going to be mad enough when she finds out her favorite daughter has been replaced by a weirdo in red pajamas.

ALEXANDER: Hey, these are not pajamas. Need some help? *(He helps clean, comes across the comic CICI was going to give to IRIS.)* Funny. Both your sister and I got comics for our birthday, and here we are: neither of us is ever going to be able to read them. Not that Iris would ever want to read this!

CICI: What’s so special about that comic book that your girl—

ALEXANDER: Not my girlfriend!

CICI: That “not your girlfriend” got for you, anyway?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it's suuuuper rare. Most of the original run had to be destroyed. A printing error caused the middle four pages to be left out, creating a massive...plot...hole.

CICI: Ha! See, your stupid comic is stupid too!

ALEXANDER: No! It's perfect! It explains everything!

CICI: Oh come on, even with four pages missing?

ALEXANDER: No, the plot hole itself explains everything! It's how I got here! It's like you said before—"It's a Trap" was like a great big trap door—there was a plot hole in it and I fell through! Your sister must have fallen through her own plot hole, into my world!

CICI: Okay. Let's pretend everything you just said makes sense. You open a comic book. There's a plot hole/trap door thing in it. My sister opens a comic book. There's a plot hole/trap door thing in it too. You both fall into them—

ALEXANDER: Switching places!

CICI: My goodness, comics are stupid...

ALEXANDER: Cici—this comic, the one you gave to me—

CICI: The one that I gave to my sister, but you opened?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, that one—it might be my ticket home! I can travel through its plot hole and back to Anyopolis! Except...

CICI: Yes?

ALEXANDER: Except it only works if it's the same comic.

CICI: What do you mean?

ALEXANDER: I mean that I can only travel between two issues of the same comic...

CICI: So you're saying...

ALEXANDER: The only way I could be here in the first place is if Iris has her own copy of "It's a Trap" here somewhere! We have to find it!

CICI: I thought you said we could use the one I got?

ALEXANDER: No, if I use that one, who knows where I could end up? The only surefire path back to my home is via "It's a Trap" #24. Turns out your comic was totally worthless after all!

CICI: Gee, thanks...

ALEXANDER: Come on! Let's find that plot hole!

CICI: Somehow, I feel like I'm standing right in the middle of one...

*(They start tearing the room apart as THE ROBOT QUEEN enters on the other side. She is flanked by DEATH FACE MASK and INKWELLINGTON.)*

ROBOT QUEEN: Very good, gentlemen, very good indeed! My little captives all tied up nice and tight! I have to hand it to you—when you say you're going to do a job, you do it!

*(THE ROBOT QUEEN shoots DEATH FACE MASK and INKWELLINGTON a look.)*

DEATH FACE MASK: Hey, it was Inkwellington's fault!

ROBOT QUEEN: The only thing Inkwellington is at fault for, Death Face Mask, is for not bringing the donuts. An insubordination for which he will most assuredly be punished. Now! Let's deal with the matter at hand, shall we? *(Striding down to IRIS, pulling out "It's a Trap" #24.)* The Incredible Illustrated Iris! We meet again!

IRIS: The pleasure is all yours, I'm sure.

ALL: OOOOOOH!!!

*(THE ROBOT QUEEN silences them with a sharp look.)*

ROBOT QUEEN: Funny. Almost as funny as the crowd you find yourself...tied to, mm? I seem to remember you...claiming that you defeated the Amazing Alexander, yes? *(IRIS shrugs.)* Funny, that when I finally catch up with you, you're running around with his stooge and his girlfriend.

LAYLA: *(Flattered.)* I wouldn't say girlfriend...

ROBOT QUEEN: Just whose side are you on, Iris? *(She pulls out "It's a Trap" #24.)* And what does this comic book really do?

LAYLA: Hey! That's the comic I gave to Alexander for his birthday!

ROBOT QUEEN: Funny...Miss Iris here claims to have used it to defeat Alexander "once and for all."

LAYLA: Iris...what?

IRIS: I didn't—

LAYLA: Is that true? Were you the one that...sent him away?

IRIS: No! I didn't! I was just—that was just a lie I told to—

ROBOT QUEEN: A lie, was it? Who can trust a liar? She lies to me, she might as well lie to you. Use your famous “investigative instincts,” Layla! Can anything she's told you—anything at all—be proven?

LAYLA: No...

ROBOT QUEEN: *(Picking up the package, taking out the Black Widow Iris.)* A black widow...pretends to be your friend, strikes when you are closest, and takes the thing that you hold most dear. I think we have two Black Widow Irises in our midst, don't you, Layla Larson?

LAYLA: *(Seething.)* Yes. I think we do.

ROBOT QUEEN: HouseStrife? Why don't we let the girls free so they can...settle their differences?

*(HOUSESTRIFE cuts their ropes and LAYLA immediately charges at IRIS, who dodges out of the way. They keep this up while CICI and ALEXANDER tear the room apart.)*

IRIS: Layla, don't!

CICI: I don't see it!

IRIS: It isn't true! I didn't do it on purpose!

ALEXANDER: Keep looking—it has to be around here somewhere!

IRIS: Layla, I'm not the bad guy. I'm your friend.

LAYLA: You're not my friend. You don't have any friends.

IRIS: *(Very hurt.)* Well...you have horrible catchphrases!

*(LAYLA roars and tackles IRIS into a pile of comics.)*

TEX: Good roar on that girl.

MEGA CORN: That Iris girl is going to get creamed!

LAYLA: *(Whispering.)* Do you really think they're that bad?

IRIS: Layla, what—?

LAYLA: Shh! Keep fighting me!

*(LAYLA pushes IRIS off of her and they grapple.)*

IRIS: Layla, what's going on?

LAYLA: Hey, I had to get us untied somehow, didn't I?

IRIS: So you're not mad at me?

LAYLA: Of course not! *(IRIS pulls LAYLA'S hair in mock fighting.)* Ow, ow, ow! Okay, now I'm a little mad!

IRIS: Okay, we're untied. Now what?

LAYLA: Haven't figured that part out yet...

ALEXANDER: Did you look under the bed?

CICI: You said you looked under the bed.

ALEXANDER: No, you said you looked under the bed.

CICI: I didn't look under the bed. You looked under the bed.

ALEXANDER: I didn't look under the bed, because you said you looked under the bed!

CICI: Well I didn't look under the bed, because I asked you if you looked under the bed and you said you looked under the bed, so I didn't bother looking under the bed.

ALEXANDER: Yeah...but who's on first?

IRIS: Let's do it.

LAYLA: Now?

IRIS: Now!

IRIS/LAYLA: ARNIE!!!

ARNIE: *(Waking up.)* Oh, I was having this weird dream where I was filled with puzzle pieces...

IRIS/LAYLA: *(Charging THE ROBOT QUEEN.)* YAAAAAAH!!!!

*(At the same time, CICI and ALEXANDER dive under the bed. THE ROBOT QUEEN, laughing, zaps LAYLA and IRIS with her finger! They collapse on the floor.)*

ARNIE: Oh. YAAAHHH!!!!

*(He charges and is zapped as well.)*

ROBOT QUEEN: Not. So. Fast.

*(CICI pulls "It's a Trap" out from under the bed and goes to open it, which ALEXANDER stops.)*

ALEXANDER: Not so fast! There's one more thing about plot holes—if the exact plot hole you want to travel into isn't open at the exact same time, you could end up anywhere!

CICI: (*Exasperated.*) Of course you could.

ROBOT QUEEN: (*Striding down to LAYLA and IRIS.*) Girls, girls, girls...how valiantly you fight. And for what? The Amazing Alexander isn't coming back. Anyopolis is ours.

IRIS: The...bombs...

ROBOT QUEEN: The bombs! The bombs! You can give up on that, Iris, just like the rest of your lies! There are no bombs.

HOUSESTRIFE: (*She holds up the bomb from the Puzzle Palace.*) Actually...your Metallic Majesty...

ROBOT QUEEN: What is that?

HOUSESTRIFE: We...we found it at The Puzzle Palace with them.

ROBOT QUEEN: (*Snatching it away, deathly serious.*) But who—? Where are the other two?! Tell me, or you will feel my metallic might!

ARNIE: (*Holding a bomb aloft, standing on comics.*) Well here's one of 'em! And it looks like you've got ten minutes to let my friends go!

ALEXANDER: Give that to me, Cici.

CICI: No...

ALEXANDER: Cici, I have to try...

CICI: But...but something bad could happen to you.

ALEXANDER: I know, but—

CICI: But you might not get home, and if you're not going to home, you might as well stay here, right?

ALEXANDER: Cici, you know I can't do that. I have to get your sister back. You want your sister back, don't you?

CICI: Yeah...but...

*(CICI jumps on the bed and holds the comic out the window.)*

ALEXANDER: Cici, don't!

ROBOT QUEEN: (*Slowly, evilly, laughs.*) Look at barely Adequate Arnie! The hero at last! (*IRIS slowly starts to creep towards "It's a Trap,"*

*which has fallen to the floor.*) But, like always, he hasn't thought out his plan! You let that bomb go off and we all...go off!

ARNIE: (*Lowering the bomb.*) I'm—I'm sorry, guys...

(*THE ROBOT QUEEN throws back her head and laughs. IRIS lunges for the comic, but THE ROBOT QUEEN steps on it.*)

ROBOT QUEEN: Aha! This little comic does have power, doesn't it? This is the key to getting The Amazing Alexander back, isn't it? Let go little girl. You've lost. You've lost him too. No one here will ever see the Amazing Alexander again! Just like me!

LAYLA: It was you...wasn't it?

ROBOT QUEEN: What?!

LAYLA: It was you...you and Alexander used to be best friends, didn't you? He told me about a girl that he used to be close to...but drifted apart. It was you!

(*CICI holds the comic out the window. ALEXANDER keeps his distance.*)

ALEXANDER: Cici, come back in here! You don't want to do that.

ROBOT QUEEN: I don't know what you're talking about!

CICI: I don't want you to leave too! Don't be a hero...

ALEXANDER: I have to. It's what I do.

LAYLA: You were Alexander's best friend, but you lost him.

ROBOT QUEEN: I didn't lose him! He left me!

(*THE ROBOT QUEEN throws her palm at the floor. The room starts to turn red. She is boiling the floor!*)

COUNT MAFIOSO: Ooh, is it hot in here, or is it just me?

INKWELLINGTON: She's—she's melting the floor!

MEGA CORN: Oh shucks! OH SHUCKS! Queen, could you stop that? I think I'm going to start popping!

TEX: I survived one mass extinction already—I'm turnin' tail!

HOUSESTRIFE: She's turning the floor to molten lava!

RAT MASTER: Okay! Time to go!

(*The villains run out!*)

LAYLA: *(Hopping up on something.)* Iris, get off of the floor! Get up!  
*(IRIS just yanks at the comic.)* Iris!

*(ARNIE jumps off of his perch, pulls IRIS up with him and LAYLA. THE ROBOT QUEEN snatches up the comic book.)*

ALEXANDER: Cici. Come on. Let me do what I do.

*(CICI climbs back in the window. She still clutches the comic.)*

ROBOT QUEEN: Looks like it's just us ladies, hm?

ARNIE: Hey, I'm not a lady...although I am feeling this hot flash!

ROBOT QUEEN: Oh, look at you all the way over there...and here I am all the way over here, with your comic, and right next to the exit. Both of which I think I'll take!

*(THE ROBOT QUEEN starts to walk to the exit.)*

ALEXANDER: I'll take that, Cici.

*(CICI hands it to her. IRIS grabs whatever is closest and tosses it on the floor in front of her.)*

LAYLA: Iris, what are you doing?

IRIS: Don't worry—I have lava in my bedroom all of the time. *(IRIS jumps onto her stepping stones, bounds after THE ROBOT QUEEN, who has not noticed her. She lunges at the comic book!)* I'll take that!

ROBOT QUEEN: *(Spinning, with a steel grip on the comic.)* Not so fast! What makes you think you can beat me?

IRIS: I'm the Incredible Illustrated Iris...and you're just plain mean.

ALEXANDER: Let go, Cici!

*(CICI throws herself at ALEXANDER, giving him a huge hug. THE ROBOT QUEEN struggles with IRIS.)*

IRIS: Let go!

CICI: No!

IRIS: You have to let go!

ROBOT QUEEN: NO!

CICI: Will you be okay?

ALEXANDER: I'll be okay. Your sister will be okay.



ROBOT QUEEN: It's mine!

CICI: You promise, Al?

ALEXANDER: I promise. Cecilia.

IRIS: You have to let go of him! You just have to let go! Sometimes people leave, and you don't know why, and it is the worst thing that's ever happened to you, because you don't have anyone else but...but you just have to let go.

ROBOT QUEEN: *(Leaning in close, growling.)* No.

*(THE ROBOT QUEEN rips the comic clean in half just as ALEXANDER opens his. There is a bang, a blast of light and then total darkness. After a short beat...)*

CICI: Al? Al? Alexander? Are you okay?

*(The lights slowly come back up in both rooms. Everyone is in their same places, except for THE ROBOT QUEEN and ALEXANDER. Those standing on things slowly get down. The lava has changed back to floor. Villains filter back in.)*

CICI: Alexander? Iris?

COUNT MAFIOSO: What happened?

MEGA CORN: *(Who has popped.)* I just became Orville Redenbacher's best friend, that's what happened.

RAT MASTER: *(Walking in, eating popcorn.)* Hey guys! Someone made popcorn! *(Noticing MEGA CORN.)* Oh, I am so sorry.

IRIS: Now...now what'll I do?

CICI: Anybody?

IRIS: Now I'll never get home... I'm stuck here. I'm—I'm—

LAYLA: *(Running to her and consoling.)* It's okay. Hey, it's okay...

ARNIE: Um, guys?

LAYLA: Not now, Arnie.

ARNIE: But, guys...

LAYLA: ARNIE!

ARNIE: What's the big deal about that one comic getting ripped up, huh? I mean, I know it's a collector's item and everything, but—

IRIS: It was my only way of getting home, Arnie! And Alexander's only way to get back!

ARNIE: Oh? So you just need a copy of "It's a Trap" #24?

LAYLA: Yeah, Arnie, do you happen to have one lying around?

ARNIE: Yeah. *(He pulls one out of his bag.)* Right here. Alexander's a big collector, but I put him to shame! I always buy five copies of all of my comics. One to read, one to share, one to accidentally drop food on, one to polybag, and one in case I need it to save the world. First time I ever used the last one.

IRIS: *(Running to ARNIE, grabbing the book.)* Arnie! Give that to me! I—*(She goes to open it, but pauses.)* I—I don't...

LAYLA: *(Obviously sad.)* Oh, make up your mind, would you? *(The girls smile at each other.)* Time to go, Incredible Iris.

IRIS: Yeah. *(She starts to open the book, but notices the bomb lying where ARNIE set it.)* Wait...what time is it?

ARNIE: *(Checking his watch.)* Time to hit the deck!

*(Everyone dives to the ground. They cringe and wait. And...nothing happens. In walks B. BILLY BUNKUM, clapping, flanked by BERNICIA and SNAP CAT.)*

BUNKUM: Bravo! Bravo, I say! Jolly good story this'll make, eh?

LAYLA: Bunkum! Get down!

BUNKUM: Oh, nonsense! Nonsense! Those bombs aren't real! Anyone attempting to disarm them would have noticed that.

LAYLA: *(Eyes at ARNIE.)* You mean you planted those bombs, Bunkum?

BUNKUM: Not me, personally, no—I had Ms. Grovel and Snap Cat do it for me. You got pictures, didn't you, Snap Cat?

SNAP CAT: Yes! I know what a camera does!

LAYLA: So that's why those ghosts thought they recognized me! They mistook Bernicia for me! And I thought it was because they read my column...

ARNIE: Oh, Layla, no one reads your column!

LAYLA: But, Bunkum, why would you pull a stunt like that?

BUNKUM: For a story, my girl! For a story! It was obvious that E.V.I.L. wasn't going to create a front-pager this year, so I took matters into my own hands!

TEX: Hey now, we was just waitin' until tomorrow!

COUNT MAFIOSO: You know, so it would be a real surprise!

HOUSESTRIFE: You mean it was going to be a surprise?

TEX: Dagnabbit, Mafioso!

RAT MASTER: You just had to "rat" us out, didn't you?

*(Everyone laughs!)*

BUNKUM: All apologies, everyone, all apologies! I hope it was nothing so bad that can't be fixed by...DONUTS!!! (*INKWELLINGTON brings in boxes and boxes of donuts.*) I had Inkwellington swing by the bakery while you folks were fighting for your lives in here.

INKWELLINGTON: Oh, and sorry, Death Face Mask, they were all out of Strawberry Jellies.

DEATH FACE MASK: SERIOUSLY!?!?!?

IRIS: Wait!

BUNKUM: Oh, yes, the Incredible Illustrated Iris! Snap Cat, make sure you...well, you know what to do!

IRIS: Mr. Bunkum...where's the final bomb? We never found it!

BUNKUM: (*Pulling it out of a box of comics.*) Why, dear girl, it's right here! In the exact spot where that comic book was pulled from. Hm. I'd have thought you would have found that easily. You must not be accustomed to sorting your comics alphabetically by title, and then in descending numerical order.

IRIS: (*Shaking her head, laughing. Then, to LAYLA.*) I have to go.

LAYLA: Yeah, I know.

IRIS: (*Sticking out her hand to shake.*) It was nice meeting you, Layla.

LAYLA: (*Hugs her tight instead.*) It was nice meeting you, Iris.

ARNIE: (*Running up to hug too.*) Oh, I am so getting in on this!

*(They finish hugging. IRIS turns, starts to open the comic.)*

LAYLA: Hey! (*IRIS stops, turns.*) See you in the funny papers!

*(IRIS opens the comic book. There is a bang and a puff of smoke! As it clears, we see that THE ROBOT QUEEN has ALEXANDER by the throat. Everyone gasps!)*

ALEXANDER: Look, Robot Queen, I know that you're mad and I know that that is for a good reason, but if there's any way that I can ever apologize to you...

ROBOT QUEEN: *(Beat.)* You were so mean to me.

ALEXANDER: I know. I'm sorry! I'm so sorry. Can you forgive me?

ROBOT QUEEN: I don't know if I'm ready to forgive you yet, and I can't promise that there won't be any more death traps for you—

ALEXANDER: That's understandable.

ROBOT QUEEN: But I do think I can...let it go. *(THE ROBOT QUEEN releases him. ROBOT QUEEN turns to exit.)* E.V.I.L. unite! Hey, it looks like someone remembered the donuts!

INKWELLINGTON: *(As they filter out.)* Oh, can we give it a rest?

MEGA CORN: Yeah, guys, don't be corny!

*(They all laugh as they filter out, followed by BUNKUM, BERNICIA, and CAT SNAP.)*

ALEXANDER: Layla Larson, Girl Reporter—I should have known I'd find you—

*(LAYLA throws herself into ALEXANDER'S arms.)*

ARNIE: *(Hugging them both.)* Group hug, round two ya'll!

LAYLA: It's good to have you back, Alexander.

ALEXANDER: Aw, you can call me Al.

LAYLA: Al?

ALEXANDER: For the record, on the record.

LAYLA: Oh, that does sound stupid, doesn't it?

*(The lights go down on the Comic Book Store for the last time. Cici sits on the bed alone.)*

CICI: Alexander? Alexander? ...Iris? Please come back. Please. I'm sorry. I promise I'll be a better little sister and I won't pull your hair,

and I won't make you watch Super Pink Princess Marshmallow Party Time with me...

IRIS: *(Sitting up in her bed behind CICI.)* You promise?

CICI: Iris! *(CICI throws herself on IRIS. They hug. CICI releases her, embarrassed.)* And where have you been, young lady?

IRIS: On an adventure?

CICI: Mm-hm. I'm telling Mom.

IRIS: Are you?

CICI: Yep. I'm telling her about the candy you have in your drawer.

IRIS: Are you?

CICI: Yep. I'm telling her right now! *(She starts to run off.)*

IRIS: Hey! *(CICI stops.)* Before you do, you wanna watch some TV?

CICI: Well...I've already been watching Super Pink Marshmallow Princess Party Time all night so...maybe we could read some comics instead?

IRIS: Comics? I thought those were for nerds?

CICI: *(Shrugs.)* Eh, this one with the weirdo in the red pajamas doesn't look so bad...

*(Blackout, and curtain!)*