

Nation-X

Brave Buck

Story by William Lee

The following is an excerpt taken from Brave Buck, a short story written for EduDesign as part of their Nation-X project. Nation-X is a fictional setting created by EduDesign that mirrors the real world except that human beings are replaced with anthropomorphic animals. These characters behave just like humans (they wear clothes, have jobs, drive cars, etc) and face many of the same challenges humans do in real life.

--Begin Sample--

Two days later, Tim sat in a padded grey chair with June to his left, her shoulders hunched forward as her hands wrung tightly together. Next to her was Jinny, who sat straight and taught in a crimson blazer and matching pencil skirt.

Seated on the other side of an impeccably polished oak desk was Headteacher Melissa Graham, who meticulously flipped through pages of abusive comments printed out from June's InstaPeople and PeopleLive accounts. Her brow drew down tighter with each turn of the page.

Jinny broke the silence.

"This behavior is appalling, Headteacher. This young man has terrorized my daughter for the past three days, to the point —"

"I agree, Jinny," the headteacher said, eyes still on the pages. "Whoever is behind this should be disciplined immediately, but we don't know for sure that Tommy Gold is that person."

"Headteacher Graham, the email from PeopleLive matches Tommy's InstaPeople account," Tim said.

“I can see that, Mr. Foxe,” the headteacher replied, eyes settling on Tim with a gaze that made him feel like he was an eleven-year-old in detention all over again. “But ‘GamerGod’ isn’t exactly a very unique user name, is it? Couldn’t this be a coincidence?”

Tim sighed. He knew his evidence was circumstantial, but he had to try.

“It could be, but look at the photos on the account. This is clearly someone who’s familiar with both online games and *Brave Buck 3* specifically.”

“I’m sorry, but are you honestly going to sit there and not take action on this?” Jinny asked.

“Not at all, I plan on taking action right now,” the headteacher said. She tapped a button on a small, metal box with a microphone perched on it.

“Tommy Gold to the headteacher’s office, please. Tommy Gold to the headteacher’s office.”

The static-filled echo of the headteacher’s words reverberated in the hallway behind them. The four of them waited, silence enveloping the space around them until they heard the squeaking of sneakers from down the hallway. Tim took a deep breath. Here we go.

The door swung open, and a teenage lion dressed in a black hoodie with a video game controller across the front stepped into the room.

“Headteacher? You called for —”

He stopped mid-sentence, eyes widening when he saw June. She drew up, looking ready to explode out of her seat. Tim reached out and gently touched her elbow, shaking his head. Not yet.

“Mr. Gold,” the headteacher began. “I’ve received some very upsetting complaints that you’ve been harassing Ms. Foxe on social media. Is this true?”

Tommy’s head jerked back a little too far, exaggerating the motion.

“No!” he shouted. “I’ve never messaged her at all!”

He turned to June, smiling.

“Look, I don’t know who’s been bugging you, but it’s not me!”

June’s fists clenched at her sides, but she stayed quiet.

“Mr. Gold, do you own the InstaPeople account ‘GamerGod’?” the headteacher asked.

“Yeah... what does that have to do with anything?”

“An email account by the same name has been linked to abusive messages sent to Ms. Foxe on PeopleLive.”

Tommy’s smile faltered.

“I... that’s not my email.”

“I see, then you won’t mind me checking your phone to confirm that?”

Tommy stiffened, and Tim had to work at keeping a smile off his own face. It felt *good* to watch this jerk squirm.

“You can’t confiscate my phone!” Tommy said, taking a step back.

“I can if I have evidence that you’ve been harassing another student,” the headteacher replied, reaching out across the desk. “Hand it over, Mr. Gold, or you’re suspended.”

Tommy’s eyes darted between the headteacher and the door, and for a brief moment, Tim thought he might actually make a run for it. The teenage lion snarled, then he jabbed his hand into his pocket. He yanked out his phone and gave it to the headteacher, who deftly began tapping the screen. She turned the phone back to Tommy. It displayed an email inbox.

“GamerGod@peoplemail.com,” she pronounced. “It’s the primary email account for this device.”

Tommy crossed his arms and stared back at the headteacher.

“My friend was using it,” he said with a shrug.

“Which friend?”

Tommy and the headteacher glared at each other until he finally averted his gaze. The headteacher’s voice was louder this time, emphasizing each word.

“Which friend, Mr. Gold?”

Everyone looked at Tommy, who continued to stare at the corner. Finally, he threw his arms up.

“It was just a joke, OK? I was just messing with her. What’s the big deal?”

“What’s the big deal?” June shouted, erupting out of her chair. “You invaded my channel just to call me ugly and tell me I suck at BB3!”

Tim knew he should probably stop her; he wasn’t going to.

“You humiliated me in front of all my followers and my cousin, then said a bunch of super-gross things to me on InstaPeople. You made me not even want to play video games anymore. You made me scared to check my phone! Do you have any idea what that feels like?”

June’s fists were shaking at her sides, and a tear began to roll down her cheek. She wiped it away, then she pushed past Tommy and stormed out of the office.

“Mr. Gold,” the headteacher said, the weight of a sledgehammer in her voice. “Our school has a zero-tolerance policy against bullying, online or otherwise. You’re suspended for a week, out of school. Should this happen again, I won’t be so lenient.”

Tommy glared back at the headteacher, then he smirked.

“Whatever,” he said, shrugging. “Can I go now?”

“Please,” the headteacher said.

--End Sample--

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