

Nation-X

Digging Up the Truth

Story by William Lee

The following is an excerpt taken from Digging Up the Truth, 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--

CHAPTER 4: Robert Burrowson

Tim was waiting for the elevator at the Central Newspaper building when he saw Alley briskly walking towards him with a frown drawn across her face.

“Hey Alley, everything all right?” he asked.

“Tim, where did you hear about Stephen Moleskin?”

The worry in Alley’s voice made Tim hesitate for a moment.

“My grandparents found a bunch of his videos online,” he answered slowly. “Why?”

The elevator doors slid open with a ding. Alley pulled Tim into the empty car and waited for the doors to close.

“I did some digging into the Truth Mole,” she said, lowering her voice. “The guy’s a grade-A con artist. ‘Stephen Moleskin’ isn’t even his real name.”

Tim’s eyes widened. No wonder he couldn’t find anything on him!

“Who is he, then?”

“His real name is Robert Burrowson. He’s hardcore anti-government and has a rap sheet that goes all the way around the block.”

“Holy smokes. For what?”

“Embezzlement, fraud, identity theft, he’s even been booked on breaking and entering charges a few times.”

The elevator dinged again as they reached their floor, and they stepped out.

“I’d stay far, far away from this guy,” she whispered. “He’s dangerous, really dangerous.”

“Thanks, Alley,” Tim said, then practically ran over to his desk. He pulled out his phone and called his grandparent’s house. After three long rings, his grandmother’s cheerful voice came over the line.

“Tim, dear! So nice of you to call,” she began.

“Hey, Grandma. Are you and Grandpa still watching those Truth Mole videos?”

“Oh, I stopped watching after the first one, but your grandpa’s really taken to them. He thinks this Stephen Moleskin fellow might be onto something. He’s even decided to go to a rally hosted by the Truth Mole’s channel.”

Unease began to squirm in Tim’s gut. What had his grandfather gotten into?

“When is this rally?” he asked, trying to keep the tremor out of his voice.

“Today, as a matter of fact. It’s at Central Plaza. I’ve never been one for politics, but I’m glad your grandpa is getting out of the house! He didn’t want to trouble you for a ride again, so he asked our neighbor.”

Central Plaza was only a few blocks away, Tim thought. If he hurried, he might be able to get there before it started.

“I have to go, Grandma,” Tim said. “I’ll explain later!”

Tim hung up the phone, then he stood up and almost walked right into a lion drinking a cup of coffee. It was Brian again.

“Where are you going?” he asked, furrowing his brow.

“Family emergency,” Tim said quickly. “I’ll be back in an hour, promise.”

“An hour? We have work to do now, Tim!”

“I’ll work overtime tonight,” Tim pleaded. “And tomorrow! Just, please... I need to go.”

Brian scowled at Tim for a long moment before raising a single, golden-furred finger.

“One hour, that’s it. Or I tell the boss.”

Tim nodded.

“Deal! Thanks, Brian!”

“Darn kids...” Brian muttered as Tim ran past him toward the elevator.

CHAPTER 5: The Rally

A large crowd had already formed at Central Plaza by the time Tim got there. He stopped at its edge, panting heavily from the five-block run it had taken to get there. A stage had been erected at the front of the plaza with a large “Truth Mole” banner hanging behind it.

Tim allowed himself one more deep breath, then he started working his way through the thick mass of people. His grandfather had to be in here somewhere. Within the crowd, many of the attendees were wearing white shirts with six dark blue stars arranged in a hexagon. Inside the star pattern were the words “Truth Mole” and “No more lies!”. A few people even had white caps with the same design.

Tim squeezed between two elephants and stumbled directly into an older fox in a white shirt and matching cap. It was his grandfather. Tim groaned inwardly. Not him too...

“Tim!” Thornton said, eyes wide with excitement. “I didn’t know you had joined the movement! Here, I’ve got an extra shirt...”

“No, Grandpa...” Tim began. He sighed and lowered his voice. “This whole thing is a scam. We need to leave.”

Thornton snorted and planted his hands on his hips.

“Now, wait just a minute! Stephen Moleskin is an honest man who speaks for the people –”

“Stephen Moleskin isn’t his real name, Grandpa!” Tim almost shouted.

Thornton’s defiant expression softened into confusion.

“... What?”

“His real name is Robert Burrowson. He’s a con artist,” Tim continued. “He’s tricked you and everyone else here into believing a bunch of baseless accusations against Judge Lawson.”

“... Robert Burrowson?” Thornton said, pronouncing the name like it had a bitter taste.

A cheer spread through the crowd around them. Tim looked up to see a mole in a pristine white suit taking the stage. It was Robert. Six dark blue stars were pinned to his lapels.

The microphone whined as Robert lifted it from its stand and raised a hand to quiet the crowd.

“Thank you, thank you,” he began. “My dear friends and supporters, words cannot express my gratitude for your willingness to join me in this battle for the truth. For too long, our beautiful nation has been stolen by gangsters, liars, and thieves!”

The crowd cheered at the accusation. The irony of it all would have made Tim laugh if he weren’t stuck in the middle of it.

“My colleagues and I have devoted ourselves to exposing these charlatans,” Robert said. “And we’re doing it for you: the hardworking citizens of Nation-X!”

Another cheer, this one even louder. Robert smiled before continuing.

“Now, you all might wonder how a conspiracy this large could happen. Well, my friends, it’s because crooks like Judge Lawson have their fingers in everything, even the media! The Central Newspaper is rotten with her agents. She and her cronies won’t tell you anything **that** they don’t want you to hear!”

Dread began to creep up Tim’s spine. What in the world was he talking about? No one at the newspaper had anything to do with Judge Lawson.

“Just a bunch of pawns, they are!” someone shouted from the crowd.

“We ought to bring ‘em to justice!” another voice added.

“That’s right!” Robert answered. “But how can we do that when they control the courts?”

“We take control back!” someone yelled near the front of the stage. The rest of the crowd roared in approval. A chant began to echo all around Tim: “No more lies! No more lies!”

Tim had heard enough. He looked around for a way out, but white shirts were pressed in around him on every side, a sea of them extending all the way to the edges of the plaza. He and his grandfather were surrounded.

Back on stage, a grin spread over Robert’s face.

“It’s time for the honest people of Nation-X to stand up for our country!” he screamed, raising a fist. “Our only hope is to march down to the courthouse right now and drag these double-dealers into the light of day!”

An icy chill washed over Tim.

“This is about to get ugly,” he whispered to his grandfather. “We need to go, now!”

Thornton nodded vigorously.

“No argument here!”

Tim began leading his grandfather out of the crowd, slipping under armpits and between bodies while everyone was engrossed with the mole onstage. Step by step, they wedged their way through the swarm of white shirts until Tim could finally see open grass ahead.

“Almost there,” he said over his shoulder. “Just a few more —”

A sudden yank on his neck pulled Tim backward. He whirled around to see a young, stocky rhino with a backward white cap. The rhino had grabbed something attached to Tim by a lanyard. His work ID; Tim had forgotten he was wearing it.

The rhino held up the ID badge between his thick-knuckled fingers.

“Central Newspaper? Hey, this guy’s one of them!” he shouted.

A jolt of terror shot through Tim. He opened his mouth to speak, desperately grasping for

something to say, but nothing came to him.

Thornton swatted at the rhino's heavy hand, knocking the ID badge loose.

"Listen here, you numskull," he said, giving the rhino a poke in the chest. "My grandson here is Stephen's inside guy at the paper. How else do you think he found out about Judge Lawson's shenanigans?"

The rhino looked down at Thornton, fully adorned in white, then back at Tim.

"My mistake, brother," he said with a proud smile. "Keep fighting the good fight!"

The young rhino gave Tim a healthy pat on the back for encouragement, then he turned back toward the stage.

Tim and Thornton continued to push forward until they finally burst from the crowd into an open lawn. The fear clenching Tim's chest released in a single, long exhale.

"I thought I was done for back there!" Tim said.

"Being an ornery old grouch can come in handy from time to time," Thornton replied. "Now, let's beat it. These people are nuts!"

"Hold on," Tim said, pulling out his phone. "I need to make a call first..."

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