

## CHAPTER THREE

FIRST THING THE NEXT MORNING, I boarded a bus to Charlie's house. As it rumbled its way through town, I phoned my super-brainy friend and all-round research genius, Isobel 'Izzy' Moustique.

*'How much?'* she gasped.

*'That's exactly what I said,'* I said. *'I'm on my way to the scene of the crime right now.'*

*'A comic book so rare and valuable would be very hard to sell without attracting attention,'* said Izzy. *'This must be a pretty stupid thief! There's no way they could do anything with that comic without being noticed.'*

I shrugged. *'They could read it.'*

*'What? You're telling me that the contents of a comic like that wouldn't have been reprinted and republished'*



in a dozen books by now? No, nobody would steal it just to see what was printed in it.'

'I guess not,' I said. 'Anyway, see what you can come up with. Information on recent sales of rare comics, that sort of thing.'

'Already on it,' said Izzy. 'Come and see me later.'

As the bus chugged and bumped along the town's main shopping streets, something struck me about what Izzy had said. She was right – the thief would find it almost impossible to sell that comic without being noticed.

Unless . . .

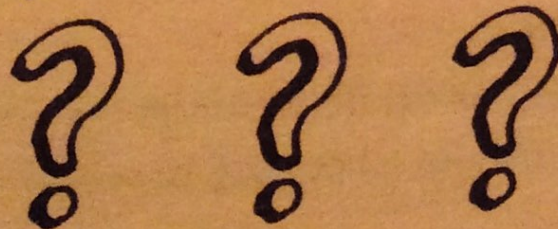
Unless they didn't plan to sell it at all. Suddenly, I jumped up with a cry! It startled the old lady sitting in the seat behind me.

'Have you missed your stop, luvvy?' she asked.

'No, I've missed an obvious suspect!' I replied.

She gave me a funny look. I think she thought I was a bit barmy.

But there *was* an obvious conclusion to be drawn here. What sort of person would steal that comic book and *not* intend to sell it at all? Only one sort of person, as far as I could see! Can you see it too?





Another *collector*, like Ed! Someone who might want to keep the comic just for its rarity alone.

At last the bus reached my stop. The old lady clutched her shopping and watched me nervously as I raced to get off. I hurried over to Charlie's house. He took me up to Ed's room first, so I could finally meet his brother.

They say that the clothes you wear say something about you. If that's true, then the clothes Ed wore said something rather rude. With a hand gesture added in as punctuation. He was without doubt the scruffiest person I'd ever seen in my life. He looked as if he'd bought his T-shirt and jeans from the local rubbish tip, and he had a scrubby beard that reminded me of those scatterings of sugary bits you get on cakes. Apart from all that, he was simply a larger version of Charlie.

His room, tucked away in a converted attic at the top of the house, was his exact opposite. It was amazingly neat and clean. One entire wall was covered in white shelving units, and housed on these units were hundreds – no, thousands – of plastic envelopes. Just visible inside each envelope was the outer edge of a comic book, and most of the envelopes had handwritten sticky labels attached to them.

Ed was sitting in front of his computer. As soon as Charlie and I came in, he bounded over to me and shook



my hand so enthusiastically I thought my teeth would come loose.

'Hi!' he said. 'You must be Saxby. Charlie's told me all about your exploits, kid. I hope you're as good as your reputation suggests.'

'Better!' I declared with a grin. 'Now then, tell me more about this comic.'

Over a glass of fruit smoothie and some rather posh chocolate biscuits ('Ooh, yes, I'll have another one of those,' I said. 'Thanks.'), Ed told us the tale of *The Tomb of Death* with a wild gleam of eagerness in his eyes.

'Way back in the 1950s,' he said, '*The Tomb of Death* was the first in a new style of comic book in America. Full of grisly stories about murder plots, evil curses and tentacled monsters. These comics were a smash. Kids loved them. And within a couple of years, they were banned!'

'Banned?' I said. 'Were they really horrible, then?'

'Naaah,' said Ed. 'They were funny! With a few scares thrown in, mind you. The thing is, parents started saying they were a bad influence on kids, and they were all banned: *The Tomb of Death*, *The Valley of Slime*, all of them.'

'I see,' I said. 'They weren't published for long, and parents would get rid of them wherever they could.'