

NO PLACE FOR MONSTERS

School of Phantoms

Written and Illustrated by
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*To my father, Rick Merritt – elementary teacher of forty years,
storyteller, and outdoor enthusiast who’s always on the lookout
for the next adventure.*

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SINISTRAL



If you are reading these words, you have been specially selected by SINISTRAL's field agent recruitment division. Yes, you read that correctly. And no, this is not a joke. SINISTRAL seldom jokes.

You may have many questions. We hope you do, since SINISTRAL specializes in asking unorthodox questions in pursuit of strange answers.

First and foremost, you may be asking the obvious:

1. What is SINISTRAL?

A fair question. SINISTRAL is a secret coalition of strange-answer seekers.

How secret?

Very secret.

So secret none of its members can agree on the secret handshake.

So secret we have no Wikipedia entry.

So secret not even our most senior agents can remember what the acronym SINISTRAL stands for.

Second, you may be asking yourself:

2. Why me? Why am I qualified to examine the following top-secret report?

We've selected you because, according to our many sources, you show promise.

Perhaps it's your attention to life's mind-boggling details.

Perhaps it's because you excel at solving puzzles no one else seems to notice.

Perhaps it's your commitment to uncovering the source of the eerie "house noises" you hear coming from the basement at night.

Perhaps it's because you look for weird bugs under rocks.

Finally, you may be asking yourself:

3. What does SINISTRAL want me to do?

What follows is a sample exercise to see if you are truly SINISTRAL material.

Please review the following eight images. Use your keen observational skills, detective prowess and gut instincts to determine which of the images are fake . . . and which are truly *out of this world*.

WARNING: the following images may be triggering to the faint of heart, so proceed with caution.









Done? That was fast.

If your instincts are truly keen, you know that six of the eight images are flagrant fakes.

The other two are genuine.

So that's a taste of SINISTRAL's overall mission: to sort through all the strange and reason-confuddling mysteries and determine if they're fake, real or something else entirely.

Now, on to the real business . . .

What follows is all the acquired evidence of one of SINISTRAL's strangest cases: the infamous *Phantom Storm*.

The enclosed evidence includes the following:

- extensive video taken from student witness phones
- footage from battery-operated school security cameras
- written accounts from undercover SINISTRAL field agents and key witnesses

These materials have been painstakingly arranged into some semblance of a narrative in order to paint the clearest possible picture of what exactly happened in Cowslip Grove during the blizzard last March.

Read with a discerning eye – we've reason to believe at least some of the evidence has been tampered with, and it's imperative that we separate fact from hoax.

If you choose to accept this task, please read on.


If not, please hide this report in the darkest corner of the library or bookstore and go about your usual humdrum life.

Thank you, and good luck,

SINISTRAL

Chapter 1


FOOTAGE RECOVERED FROM KATHERINE "KAT"
BOMBARD'S PHONE, 16 MARCH



Is it on?
Are you recording?


Levi?

Yeah, it's
recording.
Go.

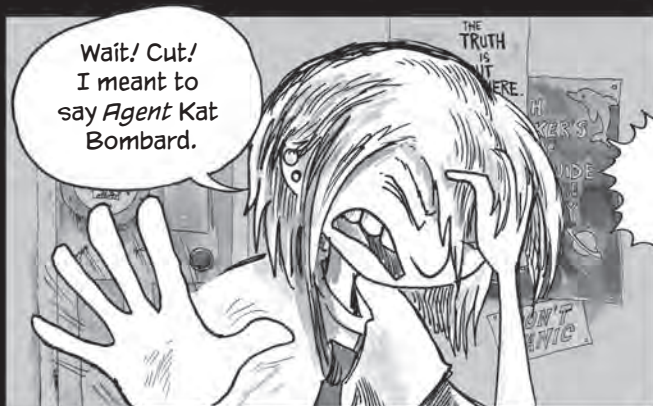


Okay. Um, wait -
start over. I
didn't know it
was on.

No, no! Never mind.
I'll just fix it in
editing. Okay. *Ahem!*



Greetings.
My name is
Kat Bombard.



Wait! Cut!
I meant to say *Agent Kat Bombard*.

But you're not an agent.

C'mon, Levi! You promised you'd help me with this!



Fine! You're an agent.

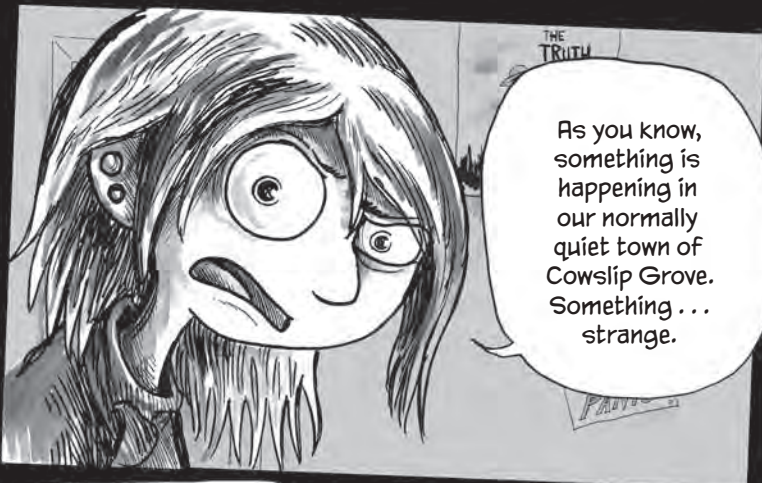


You want me to stop recording?

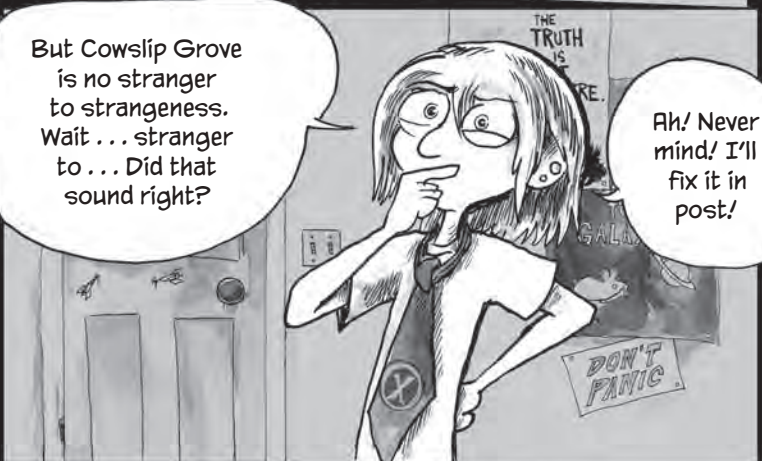
No, leave it. I'll edit it out. Okay... Take two...

Greetings. This is Agent Kat Bombard.





As you know, something is happening in our normally quiet town of Cowslip Grove. Something ... strange.



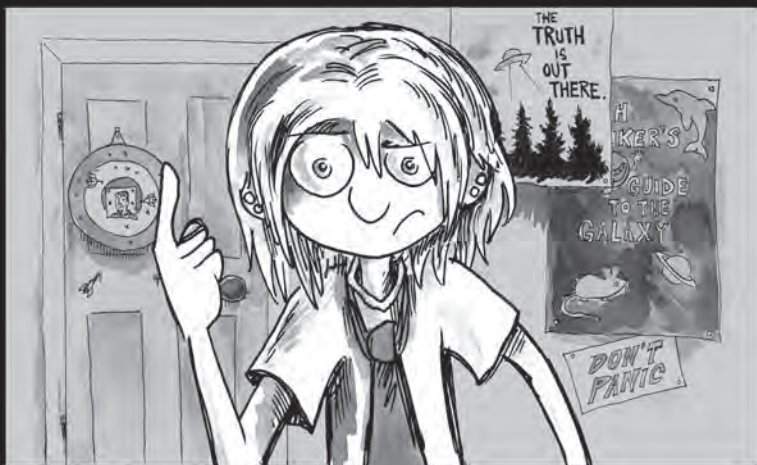
But Cowslip Grove is no stranger to strangeness. Wait ... stranger to ... Did that sound right?

Ah! Never mind! I'll fix it in post!



Strangeness, you ask?

Well! See for yourself.





Kat?
Are you
filming?

Yeah.


What do
I do?

Be natural.
Introduce
yourself.



Oh. Um.
I'm Levi
Galante.

Dude, call
yourself
"Agent Leví".



Oops. Start
over?


No, forget it.
We'll do your part
later. Let's get
some shots of
the invaders...



They appeared overnight.
No one knows where
they came from.



The people of Cowslip
Grove woke one chilly
morning in March and
found they had
arrived . . .



Who made
them? And
why? And
how?

Opinions
vary.



Okay, so now we do
some interviews with
the locals . . .



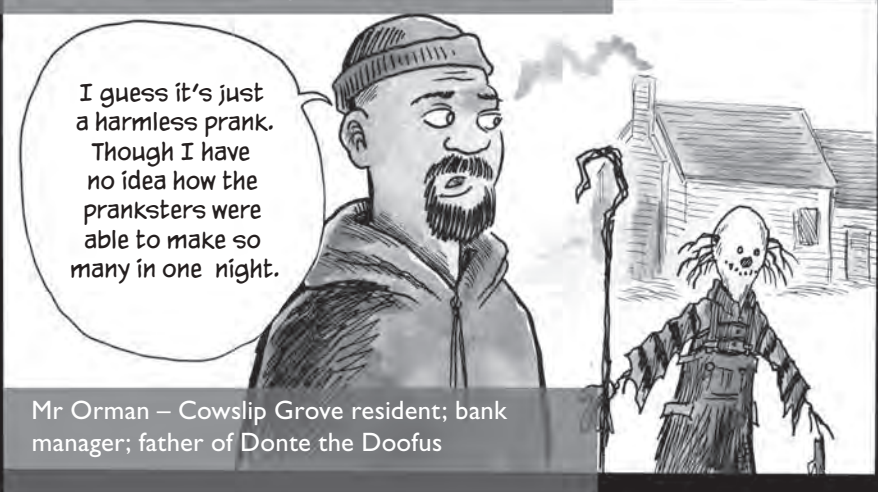
Mrs Palmer, can me and Levi ask you some questions about the snowmen?



Well, Katherine, honestly, they don't look right to me.


What happened to the traditional wholesome attire? Carrots and mittens and cute pom-pom hats?

Mrs Palmer – Cowslip Grove resident; member of the Neighbourhood Watch



I guess it's just a harmless prank. Though I have no idea how the pranksters were able to make so many in one night.


Mr Orman – Cowslip Grove resident; bank manager; father of Donte the Doofus



It's illegal!
Young punks
vandalizing
my private
property! At
night!


It's a clear
violation of
homeowner
rights!

Mr Lowe – VP of
Neighbourhood Watch




You really had nothing
to do with it, Kat? I
promise I won't tell
the Neighbourhood
Watch.

Rebecca Galante – supermarket
manager; Agent Levi's mom




... and I fully
intend to press
charges when the
guilty punks are
caught!

Mr Lowe – moustache enthusiast;
lawncare aficionado


A black and white illustration of a man with a beard and a cap, looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression.

To be honest, Kat,
I'm curious about
what you know
about the snowmen.

A black and white illustration of a snowman with a skull for a head, wearing a dark coat and holding a long stick.


This has your
fingerprints all
over it.

Mr Orman – bank manager; father of
Donte the Dingus

A black and white illustration of a woman with long, curly hair sitting in a chair, looking down at a smartphone in her hands.

Get that camera
out of my face, you
little creeps.

Regina Galante – high schooler; Agent Levi's big sister

A black and white illustration of a man's face with a wide, toothy grin and a mustache, looking directly at the viewer.

... and as Vice
President
of the
Neighbourhood
Watch, I will
not let this
vandalism go
unpunished!

Mr Lowe – world-class
grump-butt

I think they're kinda cool. Way cooler than those dumb Frosty-looking snowmen.



Twila Galante – local third-grader; Agent Levi's little sister; former missing child

All righty. This is going nowhere. We'll do more interviews tomorrow in school. Maybe then we'll find some answers.

Will I get royalty cheques for this documentary?

