



By Star Writers' Collective 5



Parameters Form

Team Details

STATE: VIC
DIVISION: Upper School
SCHOOL/GROUP: Star of the Sea College (BRIGHTON)
TEAM NAME: Star Writers' Collective 5
TEAM ID: 631

Parameters and random words

Parameters

Primary character 1 School principal
Primary character 2 Tennis coach
Non-human character Beetle
Setting Office
Issue Unexpected visitor

Random words

swept
dazzling
faded
wrinkled
quirky

Published by Star Writers' Collective 5, Star of the Sea College, 80 Martin Street, Brighton, Victoria, 3186.

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CHAPTER 1

Thomas Anderson, the principal of a high school, sat in his orderly office responding to numerous emails sent by parents, angrily reporting their children's poor well-being. His mind was as disorganised as the stacks of paper surrounding him, and the last thing he wanted was an interruption.

As if it was jinxed, the door to his office swung open and the school's tennis coach, Maurice, frantically burst into the room.



"Thom!" The coach exclaimed, sliding a photograph onto the desk. "I've solved it, I've finally got the evidence - this student right here is an *alien!*"

Thomas sighed, "Good morning to you as well, Maurice. Enlighten me as to why you, once again, are accusing innocent students of being supernatural creatures."

"Look at the golden cracks on her face." He lowered his voice, "There's no other way to explain it. They've infiltrated our society already."

Thomas barely glanced at the image before handing it back to the coach, "This isn't some vampire novel. Clearly, she's just wearing a bit too much makeup," he paused for a second. "Actually, she should be written up for that. I'll email her to see me later."

"No, Thom, you don't understand—"

"Maurice, I know you're really into this stuff, and I usually indulge you, but as the principal of this school, I have some incredibly important work to do, and all of your conspiracy theories are doing nothing but getting in my way. Now, unless you have a serious concern regarding a student, I will be getting back to my job. I suggest you do the same."

"Why don't you believe me?" Maurice asked, crestfallen.

"You have barged in six times with a new insane theory in the past week, each time more crazy than the last." Thomas exasperated.

"But this time, I am sure of it. I'll show you - I've accumulated evidence in my office." Maurice pleaded, desperately.

"I don't have time for any more of this nonsense."

"Just one last time. If you don't believe me after this, fine. I won't bother you with this again, I swear."

Thomas sighed, hesitantly obliging, "One last time, Maurice."

Maurice led Thomas through the hallways of the school, passing the students who seemingly had no care for their principal's presence. Thomas would give Maurice this, the students *were* behaving strangely; using strange robotic movements but mostly just acting plain stupid.

Soon enough, the pair approached the coach's office, Maurice's hand quivering on the doorknob as he pushed the squeaky door open.

The room was covered in mirrors, vast and minuscule, round and square, blanketing every inch of the room. There were even various objects covered with reflective mirrors and posters of famous Australian tennis players covering what little space remained on the white walls of the office. **Wrinkled** papers coated his desk, some containing handwritten notes on Maurice's conspiracy theories. A large tall cupboard stood against the back wall of the office.

"What on earth have you done to this room?" Thomas asked, rather rhetorically.

"Nice, isn't it?" Maurice replied, oblivious to the aversion in the principal's voice. "Not only do the mirrors make the room look bigger, but they also ward off any aliens."

"Judging by your appearance, for somebody with so many mirrors you sure don't seem to look into them much."

Maurice scoffed. "I'll ignore that comment," he said, sorting through the papers on his desk.

As the two continued to banter with each other, a knock sounded from the door, startling the two.

CHAPTER 2

“Who’s that?” Thomas asked. “Are you expecting someone?”

“No- they found us, they found us!” Maurice sprinted over to a cupboard on the other side of his office.

“Who found us?” asked Thomas, blankly.

Paranoia taking over, Maurice covered the keypad and punched in his 10-digit code and inside was a bunch of mirrored-covered and bedazzled sports equipment. He had a tennis racquet with a large mirror covering it, mini disco balls the size of a tennis ball, a cricket bat coated in silver paint, a football covered in glitter, sweat bands with shiny fabric, and light-up runners.

“Where did you get all of this?” Thomas asked.

“Bunnings of course.”

He grabbed the cricket bat and sweatbands and tossed them to Thomas. After another three knocks, their heads turned and their eyes fixated on the door.

“ATTACK!” said Maurice.

“No, don't do that,” said Thomas, trying to hold down his assault.

With caution, Thomas' gaze fell onto the door handle, warily he shuffled closer to the door as Maurice prepared for who or what was on the other side. Thomas slowly turned the handle and opened the door just enough to peer into the crack. It was a student.

He opened the door and said, “Oh hello, is there something you need?”

Looking into the young girl's face, he could see fear. Thomas made eye contact and the panic in her eyes was frightening. The girl rushed into the room slamming the door behind her. Maurice, now more frightened than before, scrambled to the door and locked all six locks.

“Hi Mr. Anderson, I saw you walking here and I was hoping I could speak to you?”

Staying calm, Thomas replied, “Yes, what do you need?”

“I don't need anything,” explained the girl. “I just don't know what to do.”

Concerned, Thomas focused more closely.

“I was meant to have Humanities now but no one showed up. My teacher, Ms Irwin, didn't show, and no one else was there. I kept walking around, but I couldn't find anyone! That's when I saw you walking with Coach Maurice, so I followed you here.”



Thomas looked at her anxiously.

“Well, that's absurd,” he turned to Maurice. “What have you done now?”

“I'm not lying,” interjected the girl. “I swear, everyone's gone!”

With gritted teeth, Maurice loudly said, “I told you so! Something is up.”

Flustered, Thomas wailed, “No, no, no, both of you stop. *You* need to stop this obscure conspiracy theory, Maurice! And you,” Thomas pointed to Maurice, glaring at the girl, “Need to stop encouraging his delusions!”

Sighing with irritation, the student announced, “Please, I know I sound crazy and it's hard to believe that everyone is gone. Please, this is not a joke, you guys are the only people I've seen. Just come with me and you'll understand.”

CHAPTER 3

Maurice shot Thomas a questioning glance, clearly suspicious of the student. Thomas turned to the student, who was staring around the room at the extensive supply of mirrors.

“Just give us a sec, ok?” he said, guiding Maurice into the corner of the room, turning them to face the wall, secretively.

“I think we should go with her, suss it out, see what’s going on.”

“Are you insane?! They’re out there, they’re everywhere. She could be one of them!” Maurice whisper-shouted, panicked.

“The aliens?”

“Yes Thom, the aliens. I’m not crazy, okay, trust me here mate. This is a bad idea.”

Thomas sighed, still not entirely convinced that this tennis coach wasn’t 30 levels of insane, but not being able to dismiss the thoughts in the back of his mind that told him otherwise. He looked back to Maurice.

“Fine, but I’m gonna go check this out,” he said, turning, but was stopped by Maurice gripping his arm, looking straight into his eyes, pleadingly.

“Thom, I can’t do this alone.”

Wanting to end the conversation, Thomas, accepting defeat, decided to just go along with his crazy theories.

“Yes, you can,” he said as he walked away towards the student.

“Well, I don’t want to!” Maurice shouted before Thomas and the student left the room, the door closing behind them.

Sounds of chaos filled their ears as Thomas and the student rounded the corner into the main corridor.

“What the…” Students crowded the halls, crawling on their hands and knees in a blind panic, searching the floors for what seemed like nothing at all.

“Coins, coins, c-coins, keys, coins, c…” the students mumbled breathlessly, still searching.

“This is what I was talking about! It’s like they’re on auto pilot or something, and don’t try talking to them, they won’t respond, I already tried. They seem to be attracted to anything shiny.”

Thomas looked at her, confused and disturbed as ever. *Maybe Maurice's not so insane after all.*

She led him through the corridor, snaking and dodging past the students crawling around. As they passed a room, Thomas stopped in his tracks, looking through the window before cautiously opening it.

"Is this not your class?" he asked the girl.

She shook her head. He looked back towards the class. A further look of confusion covered his face. One by one, he watched as the students each flinched, then turned from slouched teenagers with looks of boredom on their faces, to bodies of perfect posture, as all sense of individuality **faded** from their faces. Before he could process what was going on, they began marching toward them, like mindless soldiers. The leader of the group began to outstretch her hand towards Thomas' face, cornering him out of reach from the door. He looked at her, noticing a golden beetle perched atop her hand, frighteningly large teeth sunk into her skin. He slammed his eyes shut, preparing himself for whatever was about to happen.

BANG!

The door slammed open, revealing Maurice, hands on hips, standing there, covered head to toe in a skin-tight shimmery mirrorball unitard, silver underwear completing the blinding outfit.

"HERE COMES THE SUN FREAKS!"



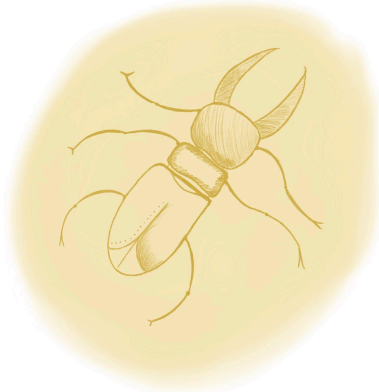
CHAPTER 4

For a second it seemed that no one knew how to react. Maurice stood there, red-faced, disco-clad, frozen in the doorway. Thomas was shell shocked, his heart hammering whilst his hand remained outstretched towards the beetle who hissed angrily and recoiled. Thomas yanked his hand away from the beetle, who scuttled back into the darkness and ran his hands through his slightly dishevelled hair.

“What...the hell are you *wearing??*” Thomas gasped, massaging his chest.

“That’s your main concern right now?” Maurice replied. “What are you doing to Jude?” Thomas shook his head frantically.

“Jude?” he asked, still breathless. “Who is Jude? I’m so- Oh my gosh, I-I think I need to lie down.” Maurice shoved past him, his surreal outfit sending a kaleidoscope of rainbows spinning across the room. It looked like a disco ball had rolled through the still classroom on its spherical escape. The beetle continued to hiss, an eerie noise that rang through the classroom and hurt Thomas’ ears. He felt faint.



“My beetle!” Maurice explained, conducting what seemed to be a thorough inch by inch inspection of the floorboards, “Jude? Judyyyy come out! It’s Daddy, that nasty young man won’t hurt you anymore.” *Maurice named his pet beetle Jude? Of course he did. I am trapped in a Salvador Dalí painting,* Thomas thought.

“Jude?” Maurice continued to call out. “Jude! Jude George McCartney, you come out this instant!” Thomas breathed deeply, trying to slow his heartbeat, his head reeling. It was all connected. The beetle, the students, the bite... they had to get out. Maurice was now attempting to fully submerge himself under the teacher’s desk in search of his beloved insect.

“Jude! Jude, this isn’t funny anymore. Please come out,” Jude’s hissing grew louder, emitting from the exact spot that Maurice was about to plunge his fist into.

“Maurice!” Thomas cried, diving towards him. “Don’t!” Claspings his fingers around Maurice’s wrist and yanking him into the light, Thomas caught a glimpse of a golden exoskeleton, inches from piercing Maurice’s flesh with its own gleaming pincers, before it retreated back into the darkness. Maurice pulled himself to his feet and angrily brushed off his mirrored attire.

“What did you do that for?” he said, grumpily. “I almost had him.” Jude suddenly began hissing again but this time it was a droning noise so loud that it made them both duck down and cover their ears. The panes rattled in their windowsills and threatened to shatter as Maurice screamed and pushed his forehead to the ground. Plunging a finger into one ear

and grabbing Maurice's wrist with his other hand, Thomas hauled them both upright and ran from the classroom, Jude's melody threatening to suffocate them.

Sprinting down the hallway with Maurice's ridiculous costume blinding him and Jude's constant droning deafening him, Thomas tried to think. He thought about how Jude had retreated when Maurice had come bursting in, how the mirror had revealed the students caked in golden cobwebs and about how Maurice had covered his offices in looking glasses in an attempt to keep them at bay.

"Maurice!" Thomas screamed to be heard over Jude's racket, "We need to get to your office." He hadn't been looking where he was going and almost tripped over a student, kneeling on all fours and scratching at the linoleum floor with her fingernails.

"Gold," she muttered to herself. "Goldgoldgoldgoldgold-" Thomas pulled Maurice to a halt in front of her, as Jude's droning finally quietened until it stopped completely. The silence was unsettling, broken only by the student's obsessive mumbling.

"Thom," Maurice hissed, tugging at his sleeve. "*C'mon.*" Thomas held up a hand to silence him and inspected the student closer. Blood ran down her fingers and sent long streaks along the tiles with each slash. Thomas took a cautious step toward her but she barely acknowledged him. Maurice hopped from foot to foot and jumped at any movement, wrapping his arms around his torso. Thomas inched closer toward the student and raised the cuff of her sleeve slightly. There were two puncture marks embedded in her flesh, golden corruption creeping its way across her skin. Thomas shuddered slightly and let the sleeve fall. Suddenly, Maurice jumped between Thomas and the student. The man hadn't been expecting it and screamed a rather high-pitched squeal. The student, however, raised her head like a meerkat, staring at Maurice with extreme interest. Maurice lept from side to side, the student whipping her head back and forth like she was watching the Australian Open, her gaze focused on him. In the reflection of Maurice's outfit, she looked like a kintsugi, touched by Midas.

"Maurice!" Thomas stage whispered, "What are you *doing?*" Maurice gestured frantically at the student and then at his outfit.

"Watch her," he replied. "Watch her eyes." Thomas rolled his own eyes but obliged, the student was obviously fixated but not on Maurice. Her eyes were instead trained on the reflections the disco-ball-jumpsuit sent scattering across the hallway.

"Gold!" she proclaimed. "Goldgoldgoldgoldgold!" She looked like a lynx, ready to pounce.

"I don't think it's light that repels them," Maurice stated, continuing to leap around the girl. "It attracts them. Look, it's not the humans they want." Thomas felt his stomach sink.

"Gold," he said, copying the girl's tone. "They're looking for gold." Maurice nodded, excitedly.

"Like the blessed diggers in Bendigo."

“Good Lord,” Thomas muttered and buried his face in his hands. Jude’s hissing started up again, far away yet still deafening, “But I still think we should get to your office.”

Maurice collapsed into his reflective desk chair and hugged his knees to his chest. Thomas had initially chosen to stand but the mirrors made him dizzy, so he sat cross-legged on the floor. They had left the Midas-touched student in the hallway, continuing her frenzied search, despite Maurice’s protests.

“She might be dangerous,” he said. “She was bitten by the beetle, she was under its control.”

“*His* name is *Jude*,” Maurice corrected briskly. “And I still don’t 100% believe he’s behind this.” Thomas arched an eyebrow.

“But doppelganger aliens are?” he asked, sarcastically. “C’mon Maurice, this is way more plausible.”

“But what does this make Jude?” Maurice exclaimed. “A gold-obsessed, people-possessing, super-beetle from Hell?” Thomas sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I don’t know,” he said, tiredly. “He’s *your* pet, for crying out loud.” Taking a breath, Thomas paused. He ran a hand through his hair before chuckling lightly, “Kind of ironic though, isn’t it?”

Maurice gave him a questioning look. “What is?”

“Y’know, for a paranoid-conspiracy junky such as yourself to have a psycho alien for a pet.” Maurice continued to stare blankly at him but Thomas didn’t feel like explaining it.

“Never mind.” They sat in silence for a while; Maurice hummed ‘*Eleanor Rigby*’ to himself softly.

“Maurice,” Thomas said, carefully. “What do you...propose we do about Jude?” Maurice didn’t look up from where he was picking at one of the mirrored tiles of his unitard. “What do you mean?”

Thomas shrugged slightly. “Well, I mean, we can’t let him keep possessing people and turning them into Anna Nicole Smith, now can we?” Now Maurice shrugged.

“It’s gonna be all good,” he said, assuredly. “I’ll talk to him.” Thomas raised his eyebrows.

“You’ll *talk* to him?” he repeated. Maurice nodded, not at all doubtful.

“I am his father, after all, he’ll listen to me.” Thomas massaged his temples, his head was starting to hurt again.

“Maurice,” he began, his patience waning. “He was seconds away from making you go all *my precious* yourself, I don’t think he cares who you are unless you’re King Midas.” Maurice bit his lip.

“No he wouldn’t,” he said, mostly to himself. “He would never hurt me. I’ve had him since he was a baby, he loves me.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Thomas said. “I just think his judgement is clouded slightly at the moment, maybe it’s best if we break out the Mortein or something.” Maurice’s head snapped up and he glared daggers at Thomas.

“We’re not going to hurt him,” he said. Thomas sighed.

“Maurice-”

“No!” Maurice shrieked, making Thomas jump. “We’re NOT going to hurt him! I won’t let you!”

“Alright, Maurice,” Thomas said, weakly. “*Alright.*” Maurice still seemed a little heightened so Thomas stood up shakily and rested his hand on Maurice’s shoulder.

“It’s okay,” he said, speaking as if he was talking to a crazed animal. “We won’t hurt him.” Maurice nodded slightly and then bounded to his feet.

“Well we’re not going to stop him sitting on our behinds in here, now are we?” he said, excitedly and strode out of the office. Thomas heaved one final sigh and trudged out after him.

CHAPTER 5

The back door of Maurice's **dazzling** office creaked open. Thomas looked nervously around the corner, his face ashen white.

"Wh-where are they?" He held a single tennis racket, adorned with mirrors, aloft as though he was going hit someone, or something, with it. *Poor man*, Maurice thought, as he watched Thomas look nervously around the tennis court before them. There wasn't a student in sight.

Maurice attempted to squeeze past Thomas to get a better look, but the reflective disco bodysuit wasn't making it easy for him. Thomas held up a shaking hand.

"Stop...listen," Thomas whispered. A rhythmic eerie sound filled the air, like the beat of a drum, repetitive and echoing. Maurice and Thomas watched in horror as the entire cohort of students marched out onto the tennis court, their eyes blank and unseeing. Many clutched remnants of keys and coins they had savagely dug up from various areas of the school, the metal glinting off Maurice's mirrored unitard. Maurice ducked, grabbing Thomas' arm and pulling him into the fake grass beside the tennis court.

"Get. Down." He hissed, tightening his grip on the small mirror he had pulled out of his trusty hat, scanning the court with narrowed eyes. The students had formed a circle, resembling an army, staring blankly outwards as if they were protecting something. Maurice's mind raced, trying to come up with a plan. He didn't want to believe it, but the thing they were surely protecting had to be Jude, his former beloved beetle. He leaned over to Thomas, whispering in his ear.

"Okay, you go right and I'll go left when I say go-HEY!" Maurice exclaimed as Thomas sped off, waving his mirrored tennis racket around.

"AH, SOMEBODY HELP ME!"

"I'M TRYING TO, IDIOT!" Maurice exploded with rage, his bodysuit shining in all directions as he rose and turned to face the aliens. As the light beams hit them, a throaty hissing sound emitted from the aliens, turning their eyes towards Maurice instead of Thomas. As the aliens drew closer and closer towards the beams of light bouncing off his suit, Maurice advanced, brandishing his mirror, about to strike, until he noticed a large golden beetle sitting on the shoulder of one of the aliens.

"Thom!" he shouted, pointing at the beetle, miming the forehand action he had taught to his students for as long as he could remember. Thomas seemed to understand, as he moved towards the aliens holding the tennis racket aloft, bringing his arm back for a swing, plunging it down on one alien's shoulder, causing it to screech in pain, tendrils of gold reflected from the mirrored tennis racket, spiralling around it. Jude was nowhere in sight.

"Come on!" Maurice yelled, as Thomas struggled to free his tennis racket.

"I'm a good principal, I'm a good principal..." Thomas muttered to himself over and over as he tried to dislodge the racket from the alien-student's shoulder. Tears slipped down his face and Maurice wanted to comfort him but this was a war. And he intended to finish it.

He could see glints of gold as Jude moved between the aliens, jumping from shoulder to shoulder causing Thomas to whack student after student as he tried to catch him. Maurice squinted as he noticed a break in the circle and he surged forward, just as the beetle made his next and very last jump, catching Jude in his hands, and skidding across the tennis court. He noticed Thomas on the far side of the circle of advancing aliens and an idea formed. It was desperate, not to mention stupid, but it was the only way Maurice could see a way out of this. *Sorry Jude.*

"Thom!" he shouted. "Catch!" Thinking it was probably the stupidest idea he'd had in his life, Maurice threw Jude over the top of the aliens, the golden beetle wiggling in the air, trying to escape Thomas' waiting racket. The beetle attempted to turn, but Thomas, despite his fear shouted into the air,

"Hey Jude!" Jude twisted at the sound of his name and Thomas caught him.

What is he doing? Maurice thought, disappointment overtaking his face. He'd hoped that Thomas would hit it with his racket.

But Thomas did something better. He threw the beetle into the air as his arm **swept** back into what Maurice recognised as a perfect serve, bringing the racket down squarely on Jude's back, with such force that he was catapulted several metres into the bush. The effect was immediate. All of the students dropped at once, golden tendrils disappearing from their faces and limbs, their eyes turning from their blank state to one of light. They began to slowly wake up, rubbing their eyes and looking around with confused expressions. Thomas, racket in tow, made his way over to Maurice.

"Do you think it worked?" Thomas looked shaken as if he couldn't quite believe what he had just done.

"Looks like it, whacking Jude that far would have broken the connection, it's like a hive mind." Thomas looked over at Maurice as if noticing his forlorn tone.

"I'm sorry about Jude, I know he was your pet"

"It's alright...I think it's time for me to move on." Maurice turned to Thomas, smiling softly.

"At least we're alive."

EPILOGUE

“Welcome to Lakeside Central High School, where our students learn to change the world.”

Thomas stood before the front gates admiring the quote on the banner coloured in blue, yellow and white. He entered the gates and slammed them shut after him, pacing through the outside of the school. He got a memory of his previous school and how he felt three years ago. As he paced past the tennis courts, he got yet another flashback of students digging up the tennis courts, the wailing scream from the coach when he witnessed what they had done to the courts he worked so hard to get redone. As he kept walking, he spotted the admin office and veered there, knowing it would be a fresh start and that he would get an induction by the Vice Principal. He darted through the doors where he was welcomed by his deputy, whose heels could be heard clacking from the next room. “You must be the new principal. My name is Donna Burn and you must be...”

“Anderson, Thomas Anderson.”

“Okay, well let's get this Induction Day started.”

After a long day, Thomas sat back in the arm chair in his pocket sized office. *It's cosier than the office at the old school, but all for a fresh start.* Ms Burke barged in, as papers **swept** their way on the desk. “Here is your contract to sign. For the most part it's that you have to stay for two years unless something bad happens here - but I'm sure you know all about that.” she said and hesitated as Thomas' eyes glazed over and his face fell flat. The ticks of the clock echoing throughout the room.

“I heard about your other school and how a... **quirky** event happened,” she said in a stern tone.

“I've put it all past me,” Thomas spoke. “Anyways, you were saying?”

“Are you ready to start tomorrow, you'll have a welcome assembly and I'm sure everyone will be eager to see a fresh face.”

At 8:00 am sharp the next morning, the school bell rang. He could hear students sprinting into Lakeside. As he walked around the school he knew something was off and it wasn't just his paranoia. The hallway was eerily quiet as he strode down the corridor, feeling slightly on edge. *It's only my imagination, only my imagination.* At the far end of the hallway stood a trophy cabinet, boasting the school's achievements. A lone student stood in front of it, behaving...oddly. The back of the trophy cabinet was accentuated by a mirror, making the trophies that bit more noticeable. However it wasn't the trophies the student seemed to be interested in. She ran her fingers over her face, tracing her skin and fluffing her hair, in apparent awe of her own beauty. Slightly creeped out, Thomas decided to approach her. Maybe she was new. Maybe she was lost.

“Excuse me? Miss?” he called out to her, but she barely moved. He stopped directly in front of her and yet her gaze didn't break. Thomas snapped his fingers and waved in front of her

eyes and she barely flinched. Her lips were moving but no sound was coming out, Thomas leaned forward and what he heard sent a chill down his spine.

“Goldgoldgoldgoldgoldgold”

Thomas lept back and whirled around. The girl’s reflection smiled at him, a golden spiderweb tracing its way across her features. Thomas’ stomach churned and he grasped at his hair.

“No, not again. WHAT THE HECK!?!”

Thomas Anderson has a lot on his plate; he's a mediocre principal at best, his students are acting strangely and the crazy tennis coach won't stop bombarding him with insane conspiracies that the students are possessed by something, or someone...

But when it gets to the point where not even Thomas can deny the student's odd behaviour and all clues point to a familiar cause, the principal must put away his misgivings about the coach and partner up to protect their school - and themselves.

This story is for 13-16 year olds.

