

# BADGE OF THE ULTIMATE STAR JAM FIGHTER

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## CHAPTER 3: LEARNING THE GAME WITHIN AND WITHOUT

A week later, and The Dorogrim Entity, the boss of **The Dorogrim Anomaly** was still tying his tail in a knot. He tried everything, every button, the light gun, anything he could think of. It didn't help that Anna's rumour was all over school and several schoolmates were asking if they could come to his "arcade" and asking if he had various driving or fighting games, despite his many protests that he only had *Star Jam Fighters*.

That night, trying again to beat The Dorogrim Entity, he angrily slammed the butt of the light gun into the board of the game. As he looked down, he froze as he saw one of the buttons cracked right through. Starting up the game again confirmed his worst fear: the button was broken.

He didn't dare tell his father—not so soon after the cabinet had just been fixed and *certainly* not over a tantrum. He unplugged the game and, following Mr. Gruffy's example, put a sock over the plug and taped it tight. Then, he took off the back of the cabinet. He was about to take the button out, then decided to make sure to label the wires going to it. Once that was done, he carefully extracted the button. When he took it apart, he discovered that just as he feared, the plastic of the button was broken. He carefully put the parts in a small bag, put it and his cash box in his bike's basket, and biked to Mr. Gruffy's shop, praying he could convince the badger not to tell his parents. He entered Willow Clearing Computers & Electronics and took a deep breath as Mr. Gruffy came to the front desk.

"Oh, 'ello, pup. 'Ow can I 'elp yer?" asked Mr. Gruffy as Russ came over to see what was going on.

"I need another button fixed," said the young dog, putting his cash box and the small bag on the desk.

Mr. Gruffy opened the bag and saw the broken plastic piece. "Can't yer ask for some 'elp from yer parents?"

Mark's ears went flat and his tail went between his legs as he looked at the floor.

Mr. Gruffy chuckled; he knew a kid with something to hide when he saw one. "'Ere, let me get somethin'." He headed into the back, then returned with a small tube of glue. "I'll sell yer this. Just glue it back together, let it sit a spell—should say on th' back 'ow long—then put th' button back together, and away yer go. Also, since yer own th' game now..." he handed a booklet and a piece of paper over. "This is th' owner's manual. I 'ad it because I was th' one t'

fix th' cabinet whenever it broke down. On th' paper is th' title of a book yer might want t' read. All th' best, Mark'us."

Markaius took the supplies and headed for the library next—though he needed to stop at the corner store for a drink; it had been a long trip to the computer shop already, and the library was almost on the other side of town. Once there, he showed the librarian the note that Mr. Gruffy had written down. She smiled and took him to the shelves which held all manner of books on electronics. "You are in luck; that book was returned just this morning," she said cheerfully.

Now that he had the glue, the button, the manual, and the book, Markaius headed home and went to work. He carefully put the glue onto both pieces, and pressed them together. He even held them in place a few extra seconds just to be sure. Tomorrow, he would complete the repairs.

The next night, Markaius tried not to look at his dad, who kept glancing at him suspiciously. He also firmly ignored his little brother Jakan's "I know you're in trouble" smirk. After dinner, he went to his room and looked at the parts. He steeled himself and carefully put the button back together. Using an old flashlight and some metal paperclips to connect the wire to the flashlight circuitry, he tested the button. To his immense relief, it actually worked.

After a few deep breaths, he started on the riskiest, toughest part of the repair: Installing the new button. He nearly dropped the new button when sliding it into place, and *did* drop the nut twice. His trembling paws lost hold of one of the wires at least three times before he managed to get it reconnected. Once he had both wires reattached, he stared at it nervously. It had been way too easy, he *knew* he'd done something wrong somewhere. But checking the book and manual over, he couldn't think of anything he'd done wrong. He carefully put the cabinet back together, removed the sock, and started up the game to confirm that he'd screwed up, maybe he'd find out how.

The button worked just fine.

He'd done it; it had really been that easy. He'd worked himself up so badly that he failed on the first level, but that wasn't important at all.

He'd fixed the cabinet *himself*.

"Well done."

Markaius almost left his pawpads behind when he heard his dad's voice from the doorway. He turned, holding his chest and gasping; by some miracle, his head hadn't left a dent on the ceiling.

"Hopefully, this will teach you not to lose your temper in the future," Lawry said, giving Markaius a meaningful look.

Mark's ears went flat again. "Yes, dad."

"Also, if you need to ever need to repair the cabinet again, just ask me for the plug lockout. I'd much rather you use that than a mere sock."

Since his one chance to play the game that evening had been spent, Markaius read over the manual in hopes that it held clues to defeating The Dorogrim Entity. While he found no such advice, the manual did have instructions on how to go into test mode (he apparently needed something called a “dongle”), how to set the game to free play, and—most wonderfully—a code to enter when the game was booting up to go to the level select screen! Markaius looked at the instructions with amazement, then went to grab a piece of paper to write the instructions. This meant he could go to any stage he pleased, and he wouldn’t have to play the previous levels! He could even see what the game had for side quests and maybe how to get to them! He no longer had to fumble for quarters! He taped the paper to the cabinet, grinning broadly. Tomorrow, he’d try the code out. It would go a long way to finally earning those badges.

After school the next day, Markaius went by Mr. Gruffy’s shop.

“How’d it go?” asked Mr. Gruffy.

“A lot easier than I thought it would,” said Markaius. “I came to return the manual.”

“Yer can keep that, Mark. Yer’ve got th’ only cabinet I know of, so I don’t need it no more. Also, I’ve got owt f’ yer.” He handed a small device over. “This is a dongle that will let yer test th’ controls. A dongle is owt yer plug int’ a computer or somethin’ if yer need it t’ do somethin’ it’s not designed t’ do. This will let yer test the controls if yer plug it in. It’s the only one I’ve got so *don’t lose it!* An’ be careful t’ follow the instructions in th’ manual. Yer a smart lad, so please read th’ manual before yer start anythin’, alright?”

Markais was stunned a moment. “Thank’s, sir!”

“Yer welcome. ‘Ave yer read all of that book I suggested, or just ‘ow to fix th’ button?”

“Just the part to fix the button,” Mark admitted.

“Yer might find the rest of th’ book interestin’,” said Mr. Gruffy.

“There’s a lot to learn from it.”

That night, Markaius decided to read the manual from the beginning. Bolstered by his success repairing the button, he began to feel that maybe he could do... well, not everything the book had talked about, but at least some of it. Suddenly he looked up at the clock and realized it was getting close to bedtime. Maybe he could get in a game. He opened the front of the cabinet and set the switches to Free Play. Then he plugged the cabinet in, and entered the code specified in the manual—and there it was. The Level Select Screen, complete with sidequests!

#### Level Select

<b>1</b>	The Port Invasion	Boarding Action
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<b>2</b>	Red Star Gauntlet	Captain Malevolas
<b>3</b>	The Living Asteroids	The Albino Asteroid
<b>4</b>	Black Hole Accretion Disc	Michellaplace Station
<b>5</b>	The Infected Nebula	Naraashun's Challenge
<b>6</b>	The Dorogrim Anomaly	The Meteor Swarm
<b>7</b>	Black Flame Fleet	Black Flame Mothership Bay
<b>8</b>	The Border Patrol	Commander BlackWahl
<b>9</b>	Ships Of The Wall	Broadside!
<b>10</b>	The Black Void Tyrant's Battleship	Part 2: The Gauntlet Part 3: General Dahrkxyyd Part 4: Showdown With The Tyrant

Well, at least he knew now that he was over half-way through the game. He selected Level 7, but again fell to The Dorogrim Entity. Sighing, he unplugged the machine, and flipped through the manual again, but could find no clue how to beat him.

The next day, the cabinet once again proved itself the greatest adversary of all: the joystick crapped out.