



## Chapter 25: Charlie's adventures begin

It was getting late.

They had just finished discussing how Ms. Jitherburrs must have been memorizing seating arrangements in the gym with the balls and ropes, when Jewel glanced down at her watch to notice that she was getting close to the outer limits of her mother's patience. If she didn't get home soon, her mother would have the police out checking for her.

"Guys," Jewel said. "I think it's time to start our way home. It's getting late and I really don't want my mom to worry."

Jewel's words seemed to reverberate on the walls. In the midst of everything that had been happening, everyone, including Jessop, had forgotten that they needed to go *home*.

Sensing the difficulty in the situation, nobody said anything for several seconds.

Charlie was a mixture of emotions. He missed his mom. He had to admit he was looking forward to a great big ant huddle from his friends, a good old antennae rub from his dad and a visit from Uncle Jaxx (he came every Thursday). But, the last two days had been some of the best of his life. Despite almost being squashed, eaten, and maimed, he was really going to miss Rock and Jewel. He was even going to miss Gunther and XL.

But what *about* his friends? And even himself? He suddenly realized that they hadn't discussed the jar's future with Professor Pethers. They had just assumed that it would be okay to leave today.

"Uh, Professor Pethers?" Charlie said hesitantly.

"Yes Charlie?"

“Um, I was just wondering if, well, if it would be all right if we all went home ourselves?” he gestured towards his bug friends who were standing on the counter beside him.

The Professor looked at the four insects standing on the counter. “Of course, you are all absolutely free to go. We can take you outside right now and leave you exactly where you ask.”

All four faces smiled in relief.

“Rock, we can just say that your jar had an unfortunate meeting with the floor. Nobody will ever know that it didn’t.”

Rock nodded. “Sounds good to me.”

Suddenly Gunther spoke, “Just theoooreticalllly, if weeeee stayyyed, howww looong would ooourr servicesss beee requirrrred?”

“What?!” Charlie spat out, shocked at the question.

XL broke in, “He done asked how many days, dat dare big dude and yo homeboy need us to be cribbin’ in dat jar?”

Dumbfounded, Charlie translated for the Professor and Rock, “Uh, XL and Gunther would like to know how long you would need them if they decided to stay in the jar.”

Just like Charlie, everyone was stunned by the inquiry. “Just two more days. Tomorrow we finish up surveying everyone’s jars, so they’d be on show tomorrow. The following day everyone monitors their bugs during class time and then the bugs get released back into the field at the end of class. You must tell them that they are absolutely free to go but that if they do decide to stay I’d be eternally grateful. I will personally guarantee their safety and Hector can tell me if they need anything,” the Professor said.

Charlie interpreted and waited for his friends to answer. Gunther was just about to say something when XL interrupted, “And we be getting dropped off in ‘zactly da righ place?”

“Where ever you need to go.”

XL was just about to say something when this time Gunther interrupted, “I’lilllll staaaayyyyyyy.”

“What? Really?” said Charlie.

Gunther looked half-annoyed that anyone should question him, “I said I’ll staaaayyyy. Issss there aaaaa problemmmmm?”

“No, no, no problem,” Charlie quickly replied. “That’s amazing Gunther. Thank you.”

Then XL burst in, “Oh, fly. I be stayin’ too. Can’t ‘ave no catepilli showin’ Xavier up. “I be stayin’ righ here in dis jar till homeboy up dare don need us no more.”

Charlie interpreted all this for everyone to hear and then asked, “But... why?”

XL looked shyly at the ground, “We be friends, and dats wha friends do. I mean, ole Jessie dude here, he don track 200 miles to save yo, yo done nearly died like five times to help yo friends dere, so I be feelin’ like stayin ain’t nothing’ compar wha’ everyone else done.”

“Wow, XL and Gunther, that’s so, so BIG of you guys. Thanks,” Charlie said on behalf of everyone looking on.

Gunther shook his head, “I’mmmm stayyying becaussse it’sss saffer. Nooo birdsss in here.”

*Nothing like the truth*, thought Charlie.

But, regardless of their reasons for staying, the fact that Gunther and XL would be helping out the Professor and Rock made him extremely happy. It momentarily overshadowed his own fast-approaching departure from his friends.

“Gunther, XL – thank you. Really thank you,” Charlie gushed.

XL, on the other hand, moved closer to Charlie and slapped him on the back, nearly knocking Charlie off balance, “No prob, my ‘sect. And yo tell Mr. Mastah o’ dah classes, dat every spring, when he done need Xavier’s services, I be righ’ dere for him. I got his back.” In a whisper to Charlie he added, “Dat dirt, who whee ‘sect, I be telling’ yo. Dat dirt be like silk. I be feelin’ like I be staying at de ol’ Ritz Carlton,” he winked at Charlie and turned to make his way towards the jar.

Rock gave a special thank-you to Gunther and XL as he helped them back into the jar. He screwed on the lid and then placed the jar back on the shelf. Charlie gave him directions, according to Gunther and XL's request about the exact placement of the jar. Gunther wanted to be able to see out the window and XL wanted a clear view of Jeremy Smyth's jars so that he could make eye contact with a sleek looking worm-girl that was batting her eyes at him.

When precise placement had been properly achieved, Jessop spoke up. "That is the only worm I have ever met that meets ant standard. I will admit, I shall miss him."

Charlie looked over at his big friend. It was unusual for Jessop to be the slightest bit soft and fuzzy. "I swear Jessop, I thought when I left you in that jar with him and Gunther that you were going to rip both their heads off to use as basketballs."

"To be honest, Charlie, during the first several minutes, that idea did occur to me. But when I went to go put XL in a pig-tie, he slipped out of it like it was child's play. I've wrestled with quite a few worms before but he is darn good. Showed me some moves that will be of benefit to the army's core training. He's a real decent worm. First one I've ever met."

"Yeah, I like him too," Charlie smiled.

There was another moment of silence before anyone spoke. Then Jessop gave a fake cough. "All right my boy. It's time you and I make our way back over the Fence to Acrivada."

The smile fell from Charlie's face. He knew Jessop was right, and while he did miss home, saying goodbye to Rock and Jewel was going to be hard.

The Professor spoke first, "Charlie, it has been extraordinary meeting you and I hope that we will meet again. You are always welcome here, anything I can do for you, I will. Please tell your friend, that he is a fine soldier and would be an attribute to any army on this earth. I salute him and you," and then the Professor did, in fact, salute them.

The gesture sent Jessop to the moon. He was being saluted by a Provider! He stood tall and saluted back, as he knew he was experiencing the greatest moment of his life. Promotion or not, this adventure had been worth every dung beetle and worm scum he had come across.

"Rock and Jewel, I'll see you on Monday – well, actually, I'll see you tomorrow at the game. It should be a

fantastic match. Wouldn't mind seeing you do the Mix Master move," the Professor bent backwards and mimed scoring a goal over his shoulder from that position. He then stood up and threw his arms in the air saying "Score!" a.k.a. Adam Reiter.

Rock and Jewel gathered their books from the counter where they had left them before being apprehended by Ms. Jitherburrs. Rock offered Jessop and Charlie his finger, "Come on guys, we'll get you home, or at least to the Fence."

Charlie climbed aboard right away. Jessop was obviously hesitant. "I shall be in violation of army code ---"

Charlie looked over his shoulder and beamed at his friend, "Not according to my account, in which you single-handedly hypnotized a Provider to rescue me from his vacuuming ear."

"I'm good at hypnosis, aren't I?" Jessop grinned.

"The best."

"Too bad I had to damage his hearing by crawling down the ear canal to break the suction that nearly killed you."

"He can still hear out of his other ear. You had to, I was so close to death."

"You saw the light at the end of the tunnel, right?"

"Actually, I did," Charlie beamed, at least he wouldn't have to lie about that part.

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Rock and Jewel left the science room and headed towards the front entrance of the building. Unlike yesterday, they didn't have to sneak around. They were greeted by many teacher, who congratulated them on "a job well done." In fact, Rock made Jewel stand shoulder to shoulder with him so that no one could slap him on the shoulder in a gesture of thank-you. The first professor they had run into, Professor Levine, had done just that and Rock had heard Jessop scream "incoming" as Charlie and Jessop dove for cover in the folds of Rock's shirt. Luckily, Professor Levine was old and his touch gentle. No one had been

hurt.

After making it past all the well wishers, Rock and Jewel pushed open the front doors. All four of them took a long deep breath of the fresh air. Over the past thirty hours everyone of them had had moments where they thought they might never see the light of day again.

Instead of making their way toward their bicycles, Jewel and Rock headed out over the field. Both were filled with dread. They knew they had to return their friends to their homes but they wanted desperately to keep them around forever, especially Charlie. Charlie had turned out to be the greatest of friends.

Rock broke the silence first, "So, uh, I guess this is it, eh? What a couple of days it has been, right pal?"

"Unbelievable," sighed Charlie. The Fence was getting closer, and unlike yesterday, he now didn't care so much if he made it over. Part of him would be just as happy on this side of the Fence.

"I bet you'll be happy to get home though to—where do you live again?" Jewel asked.

"Acrivada," Charlie was not up for small talk.

Just then Jessop slapped him upside the head.

Charlie put his hand up to his head and looked at his friend with confusion "What the crows was that for?"

"For your bad attitude soldier," Jessop barked at him.

"What do you mean my bad attitude?" Charlie stared back at Jessop still bewildered by the cheap shot he had just taken to his head.

"What do you think I mean? You've got a bad attitude!"

Charlie stood up on his hind legs and squared off with Jessop, "Bad attitude?! Bad attitude?! You bonk me on the head and you tell *me* that *I've* got a bad attitude?" All of Charlie's frustration was rising into his throat and he directed it straight at Jessop. "I've got every right to have a bad attitude!!! I've just met the coolest Providers on the planet, survived being maimed and kidnapped with them, and now I have to go home?! Pretend like it all didn't happen while you get all the glory?! This just stinks!!! I think I'm allowed

to have my moment of 'bad attitude!' In two minutes, I'm going to go back over that Fence and then they'll be gone! The whole thing will be over!! I don't want it to be over!!!!"

Rock and Jewel had stopped walking. Charlie's rant had stunned them. Jessop was just staring at Charlie in disbelief. No one spoke.

Jessop cocked his head to one side and then the other. His eyes were squinting at Charlie, the look on his face incredulous. He took a step closer to Charlie, who didn't budge a millimeter. The two looked like they might be about to undertake the largest ant fight on a human shoulder ever known to man.

To Charlie's surprise, Jessop merely leaned into Charlie's face looking him straight in the eye. For the second time in less than 24 hours the words out of Jessop's mouth shocked Charlie to his core, "Who says it's over, soldier? Why does it have to be over?"

Charlie fumbled for the right words. He held his leg out toward the Fence, "Because I'm, well, in a few... well, I'm about to..." He couldn't finish his train of thought. Another thought was dawning on him: *Why did it have to be over?*

"You're about to what?" Jessop said in the most soothing voice. "Go back to the other side of the Fence? Big deal Charlie. It's a fence. You went through it yesterday, you'll go through it today, and you can go back through it tomorrow. It's just a fence."

"It's just a fence," Charlie repeated in a daze.

"It's just a fence," Jessop confirmed.

Now it was Charlie's turn to become Adam Reiter. Charlie threw both of his arms in the air and screamed, "It's just a fence! It's just a fence! And the crowd goes wild! It's just a fence!"

His enthusiasm was contagious. Rock, Jewel and Jessop all had the sudden urge to follow suit. Moments later, at the far end of the Fiercedale Middle School field, two humans and two ants could be seen walking in circles with their hands held triumphantly over head, screaming "It's just a fence! It's just a fence!"

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Jessop jumped off onto the fence first. "Rock. Jewel. It's been a pleasure. I'm not one for good-byes so I'm

going to give you all a little time by yourselves. Charlie, I'll be waiting on the rock below... you know, the real rock, the big stone, not you know, Rock."

"See you later Jessop. Thanks for everything. We couldn't have done it without you," Rock saluted Jessop.

"Yes. Thank you Jessop. You're a real hero in my eyes," Jewel winked. Instead of saluting him, she blew him a kiss.

Jessop spent the entire descent down the fence wondering which had been the greatest moment of his life, Professor Pether's first salute or the kiss from Jewel.

\*

Charlie looked up at both his new friends and smiled, "So, every Monday we meet here at 1:00?"

"Every Monday and if we need you before then, we'll leave a dime propped up against the fence right here where Jessop can see it on his rounds. Then we'll meet the next day at 7:30 a.m., right here," Jewel sketched the details of their plan out again to reassure Charlie.

"Great. Sounds good," Charlie smiled. He felt a lot better now. In fact, he had this wonderful feeling that everything was going to be just fine.

"Take it easy pal and thank you. We'll see each other soon right?" Rock said.

"Absolutely."

Jewel bent down to make herself eye level with Charlie who was now balanced on the fence. "This has been amazing. And you know what?"

"What?" asked Charlie.

"Even though we really only kind of just met, I do love you," Jewel smiled.

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Charlie watched his two friends walk back across the field towards their bikes. He loved them too.

He couldn't wait for next Monday.

Or for Thursday. His Uncle Jaxx was never going to believe everything that he had experienced. Being an Outerling *was* the greatest gift his Uncle Jaxx had ever given him.

Charlie hiked down the Fence and met Jessop on the rock below.

"Ready soldier?" Jessop asked.

"Ready soldier," Charlie replied.

The sun was just about set as Charlie and Jessop set out, the dim light casting a mystical shadow over the woods for their journey back to Acrivada.

Jessop led the way and began filling Charlie in on the details of the heroic story he was about to deliver to the army.

"Just wait until I tell them about the everything. I've got to let them know that their mapping of Beyond the Fence is completely outdated and needs total revision, which, of course, I will oversee, we may need to send out some surveillance units and then of course, I'll need to update the manual of worm tactics. The information that XL provided me...."

Charlie followed closely behind Jessop, but he was caught up in his own recollections of the day. He needed a new title. He definitely needed a new title. He decided to play Jewel and Rock's game as Jessop droned on ahead of him.

"Charlie, the Outerling Spy."

"Charlie, the Language Master."

"Charlie, the Anterpreter."

"Charlie the Super Sleuth."

"Charlie, 007."

“Ant, Charlie the Ant.”

“Detective Charlie.”

“Charlie, the Witch Hunter.”

“Charlie, the Sky Diver.”

“Charlie, the Metal Wheel Rider.”

“Charlie, the Spider Web Destroyer.”

“Charlie, the Spider Undertaker.”

“Charlie, the Under the Counter Gymnast.”

“Charlie, the Under Counter Anti-Terrorist.”

“Charlie, the Undercover Gymnast.”

“Charlie, the Escape Artist.”

“Charlie, the Techflight Dodger.”

“Charlie, the Provider-Tamer.”

“Charlie, the Bird-Tamer.”

“Charlie, the Ant-”

Right then and there Jessop interrupted him.

“Charlie? Charlie? Are you listening?”

Charlie just smiled. Right then and there he knew that the adventures of Charlie the Ant had only just begun.

**Discussion Questions:** *Take time to read through all the questions first to find out which ones you feel will be right for you and your family. Not all will be suitable for all families since these questions were made to appeal to many different ages. And, of course, they are simply suggestions. Feel free to ask any questions that come to your mind and don't forget to get CURIOUS about the answers your children give! Ask questions related to their answers if you can.*

1. Well, what did you think of the book? What parts really stood out to you? Would you recommend it to a friend? Give Charlie the Ant a review at [CharlieTheAnt.com](http://CharlieTheAnt.com) !!
2. Charlie had a "mixture of emotions" when he first thought about going home. Have you ever had a mixture of emotions, like being happy and sad at the same time? Name a time when you had lots of different emotions swirling around inside of you and name which emotions they were.
3. Why do you think Gunther and XL decided to stay in the jar for two more nights? Do you sometimes do nice things for your friends even when it is tough for you? Talk about a time that you did that or when someone did that for you.
4. Profesor Pethers salutes Charlie and Jessop. What is the purpose of a salute? What is the message that it sends? What other gestures show respect toward others?
5. Jessop accuses Charlie of having a "bad attitude." Have you ever been accused of having a bad attitude about something? If so, were you able to turn your attitude around? What helped you or would have helped you to have a better one?

**THANK YOU for reading *Charlie the Ant: The Adventures Begin!!!!***

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Either way, please tell a friend about Charlie and his adventures!