

# Sample Chapter From



## THE KEY OF URANIA by Patrick Ignatius Molloy

When Alex returned home, he was furious with Valdeth.

"'Just break in,' you said. Your stupid idea almost got me killed by a gangster."

"So what is the clue?"

"Again – missing the whole 'almost got killed' part."

Valdeth looked at him. "You look fine."

Alex rolled his eyes and recited the clue to Valdeth.

Valdeth thought for a minute. "Where do the ignorant learn?"

"I dunno. School?"

"Exactly. Access your map and find the old schoolhouse."

"Here it is, right here. According to the current map, it's now someone's house.

How am I supposed to get into the house to look for the clue?"

"I am sure you will think of something."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't you supposed to be helping me?"

"Would you not feel better if you solved it yourself?"

"NO!" he said. When Valdeth didn't respond, he relented. "Fine. Tomorrow morning, I'm just going to go up to the house and ask if I can see their basement."

"The direct approach," Valdeth said, dubiously. "Good luck with that."

The next morning, Alex found the house. It was a small one story house with a white picket fence. It looked as though, a long time ago, it had been a nice, quaint little house. Now, the fence was in disrepair, the yard was full of weeds and dog droppings and the paint was peeling. Alex walked up to the front door and rang the bell. A balding man, in his late fifties, with a stained white t-shirt barely covering his humongous potbelly, came to the door.

"What do you want," he demanded in a gruff, you-just-dragged-me-away-from-the-television, kind of way.

"Hello, sir. My name is Alex. My class is doing a scavenger hunt. I was wondering if I could look in your basement."

The answer came in the form of a door being slammed in his face.

"So much for the direct approach," Valdeth said.

"Well, what did you have in mind?"

"You have no choice but to break in when the owner is not home."

"You want me to break in AGAIN? First, you made me a museum robber, then you had me sneaking into bars. Now you got me breaking into houses? Before you showed up, my biggest problem was that everyone thought I was a geek. Now, you've turned me into a hardened criminal."

"Relax, Caligula. It is not that bad."

"Who?"

"Never mind."

Alex found a place across the street and began to stake out the house. After what seemed like hours, he saw the garage door open and the man he saw earlier drive away. He assumed humongous had run out of beer.

Hoping the coast was clear, he snuck around to the back of the house and tried all the windows. It wasn't until he got to the one in the bedroom that his luck improved and he discovered it was slightly open. He put his hand into it and pushed it open further, then climbed onto the sill. Unfortunately, as he was climbing down, his shoelace got caught on a splinter in the sill and he tumbled to the floor, face first. When he looked up, he was face to face with a snarling Rottweiler. Slowly, so as not to provoke the creature, Alex got to his feet.

"Nice doggy. Good doggy. You don't really want to tear my face off, do you?"

The dog responded with a loud growl.

"Okay, apparently you do!"

Out of the corner of his eye, Alex saw a downward staircase behind an open door. He slowly reached into his pocket and pulled out a penny.

"Would you like a nice doggy treat?" He held his closed hand in front of the animal. "Yum. Go get it!" He threw the penny in one direction and ran in the other. The dog was fooled, but only for a second. When it realized it had been duped, it took off after Alex. Just as it was about to catch up, Alex made it through the door, slamming it behind himself. He heard the dog slam, face first, into the closed door. Exhausted, he slumped to the floor to catch his breath. He could hear the dog barking, snarling and scratching at the door, wanting to get in and rip Alex to pieces.

When Alex finally recovered, he descended the steps and began looking around. He was thrilled to find another brick, this time ONLY ONE, with the symbol. He pressed the ring up against it and retrieved the scroll.

***Oh, you have come so far, my friend  
The journey now has just begun  
For you must press on to the end  
The news en masse will soon be done***

"En masse. What the heck does that mean?"

"It is French," Valdeth said, appearing in front of Alex.

"Aaah!" he screamed. "I told you to stop doing that to me."

"'En Masse' means large amounts of people. Do they not teach anything in your school?"

"Where were you when that dog tried to rip my face off?"

"I am dead. What did you expect me to do?"

Alex thought for a minute, then realized Valdeth was right. "Okay – news in large

amounts? ... Television!"

"What is television?"

"That's right. Television wouldn't have been around in your time. How did you get your news?"

"Newspapers."

"That's it," he said. "It must be the newspaper office."

"You had better leave before the owner of this domicile returns," Valdeth reminded him.

"There's a man-eating dog out there. I'm not going out there."

"Then how do you intend to explain your presence to the owner when he returns?"

Alex realized he was in trouble either way. He crept to the door and listened. *No scratching sounds or barking. Maybe the dog went away.*

He slowly opened the door, just enough to peer out. The vicious creature was nowhere to be seen. Quietly, he tiptoed toward the window. Just as he was climbing out, the dog jumped out from under the bed and grabbed Alex's foot in its fangs. It was all Alex could do to escape. Unfortunately, Alex's Reebok was not quite so lucky. Elated that he had survived, he limped home. When he walked in the door, his brother looked at him.

"What happened to your shoe?"

"Don't ask," Alex said, heading to his room, where he pulled up the map.

"The computer says that it is now the Golden Age Retirement Home. Great, old people."

"Well, off you go."

"How do you propose ... Never mind. I'll figure it out myself."