

BOOM!

I looked toward the huge explosion up near the peak of the volcano. Red-hot lava was pouring over the lip of the crater. It was flowing down the face of the mountainside with the speed of a proverbial freight train. And not just any proverbial freight train but a proverbial freight train made of deadly magma and consuming anything unlucky enough to get caught in its path!

“Oh, dagnabbit,” I muttered under my breath. Okay, maybe that's not exactly what I said, but hey, I'm trying to keep my memoirs G-rated here. Let's just agree that what I said wasn't very nice. Then I turned my attention back to the set of wires I was working on. I fiddled with them and then glanced at the computer monitor. Nothing. Well, nothing good, anyway. There *was* a slight crackle and the stink of burnt ozone, but the monitor just continued to flash its red low-battery symbol. Huh. The small power source in the computer was still putting out a trickle of juice, but nothing was coming through from the other platform.

Double dagnabbit.

I frowned, kneeled down as best I could on my left leg and with my stiff right leg stretched out beside me and got back to work on the connections.

“DUH-NAAAAAAAAY!”

Hearing my name being shouted, I jerked my head up and looked toward the treeline.

Rae busted out of the jungle and onto the beach, directly between me and the volcano. She was running full-tilt across the hundred or so meters of sand, right toward me and the platforms. She yelled, “I got them! I GOT THEM! The time has come for us to vacate the premises! That means go go go GO GOOOOOOO!” And that girl's got a set of lungs on her, so when I say she yelled, I mean she YELLED!

“Argh! It's not ready yet!” I hollered back.

“Well, it needs to GET ready at this point in time, or the window of opportunity is likely to be closed forever. In other words, it's now or never, Sis!” Rae finally reached our OtherWorld Portal equipment and jumped up on the platform to stand next to me. Her bulging canvas rucksack hung from one shoulder.

I looked past her and saw the glowing wall of lava burbling its way toward us, swallowing up the trees right where she had emerged from the jungle just less than a minute ago. It went something like this: Tree. Then lava. Then *pffft* into ash and smoke. Tree. Then lava. Then *pffft!* Then—well, you get the idea. A massive flow of painful molten death. Heading straight for us. I gulped, trying to push my heart down from my throat and back into my chest where it belonged, and said (as casually as I could), “Hmmm. I see what you mean.”

Fingers shaking, I tried another combination of the wire strands. And felt a glimmer of hope because there was a slight tingle of electricity between my fingers! From the corner of my eye, I saw the computer screen brighten and begin to flash with the green “Battery A-OK” icon. From where I knelt, I looked down at the small panel door that was open at the base of the stand. Three fist-sized glowing spheres of energy stared out at me. I spoke to them in a trembling voice. “Okay guys! Now’s the time. Fire it up and give it all you’ve got!” In response, they began to glow brighter. And brighter and brighter. I gave them a quick thumbs-up and closed the panel.

Then I pulled myself to a standing position and turned my attention to the black little lump at the center of the metal tube around the top of the stand. (It’s called a toroid, by the way, just in case you were wondering. The metal tube, that is, and not the lump. You already know that the lump was called Rocky.) Speaking of Rocky—who was the same size and shape as its three counterparts who were *inside* the toroid stand—well, Rocky gazed at me with such a look of confidence that I started to feel as if this might really work, after all. Right on time and according to plan, the silver patterns that criss-crossed over the surface of Rocky’s black body started to glow and spark. Electricity began to flow into the little guy, electricity provided by its companions who were wired into the stand below. I quickly closed the lid over the top of the snug metal nest and fastened it tight.

Fingers of lightning snaked out from the Tesla-coil equipment and began to encircle the whole platform, including me and Rae and our gear. As it made a complete plasma globe of sparks centered around us and the coil, I looked at Rae and squeezed her hand. “See you on the other side, Sis!” My voice was confident and brave. I mean, the voice coming out of my mouth, *that* one was brave. But my inner voice, the one bouncing around inside my head, *that* voice quavered as I mentally added, “...I hope!”

A brilliant white light engulfed the center of the toroid and almost instantly swelled large enough to fill up the entire plasma globe. It washed over us with a barely audible little snap, like when your bubblegum pops. At the same time, I could see the first ropy tendrils of lava approach the edge of our platform. They began to melt everything they touched, but before they could reach us, the world disappeared in a blinding flash.