



The X-Factor: Book Three in the Galaxy X Trilogy (Hardy Boys (All New) Undercover Brothers)

By Franklin W. Dixon

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LOCATION: Galaxy X, a new theme park in California.

POTENTIAL VICTIMS: Any number of A-list celebs invited to the grand opening of the park.

SUSPECTS: Tyrone McKenzie and his family seem to make enemies by the second. But is it a new enemy that wants to keep the park shut down? Or someone from the McKenzie family's past who has suddenly resurfaced...?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Franklin W. Dixon is the author of the ever-popular Hardy Boys books.

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Bombs Away

“Aaaah!” I yelled as my mountain bike’s front tire skidded on a patch of mud. At the speed I was going over the rough wooded trail, a wipeout would be a disaster.

I wrenched the handlebars to one side, slipping through the mud at a forty-five-degree angle to the ground. Somehow the bike kept going and I managed to get it upright again. Whew!

The bike I was chasing was only a dozen yards ahead now, its rider crouched over the handlebars. Just then the ground dropped away in a steep downhill incline. There were big, jagged rocks embedded everywhere in the packed dirt. I had to pay attention so I wouldn’t hit any of them with my front tire and wind up flying head over heels over the front of the bike.

“Left! Left!” my brother Joe shouted from somewhere behind me.

Glancing up, I saw that he was right. Our quarry was veering off to the left, taking a narrow uphill trail through some tall pine trees.

I leaned over the handlebars and pumped the pedals as hard as I could. Seconds later I skidded around the corner at breakneck speed. By then the other bike was already slowing down. The hill was massive.

Even in the heat of the chase, I couldn’t help being impressed. This had to be the best mountain biking trail I’d ever seen. And the most amazing part? It wasn’t in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains or anywhere like that. No, it was part of Galaxy X—a brand-new amusement park on an island off the Carolina coast. I guess with enough money, you could build anything. At least that seemed to be the philosophy of Tyrone McKenzie, the super-successful music producer who’d created the place.

“Stop!” I yelled as I pumped up the hill. “Come on, Lenni. We just want to talk to you!”

The biker glanced back briefly. I was ready to put on more speed. This wasn’t the first time Lenni Wolff had led me and Joe on a wild chase. Lenni was a local skateboarding phenom. She had moves that even professional skaters couldn’t top. She also had a major attitude about Galaxy X. That was partly because McKenzie had razed the old skate park she and her friends had built on the same site. It was also because she disapproved of the very existence of a place like GX. Anyone willing to pay the entrance fee could come in and try out a bunch of extreme sports along with the roller coasters and other regular theme park rides. Lenni thought that cheapened real skater culture.

She wasn’t the only one who felt that way. There was all kinds of buzz about it on the Internet. Even a website called StopGX. Besides that, local protesters had been picketing outside the place since before it

opened.

That was how Joe and I had ended up there. McKenzie had called in ATAC to figure out who was behind some online threats and real-life vandalism. ATAC stands for American Teens Against Crime. It's a super-secret crime-fighting organization started by our dad after he retired from the NYPD. It sends in agents like Joe and me to investigate in locations where adult agents might seem out of place. Locations like GX.

The biker ahead slowed even more after I called out. I put on a last burst of speed, my leg muscles screaming. But it was worth it—I caught up. Grabbing Lenni by the shoulder, I yanked her off the bike.

“Hey!” The other biker hit the ground hard, then sat up and glared at me from under his helmet.

Hang on. *His* helmet?

Oops. “Um, sorry, dude,” I stammered out, backing away. “Thought you were someone else.”

Just then Joe skidded to a stop nearby. “Where’s Lenni?” he panted, glancing around. “And who’s that guy?”

I sighed. “Come on, bro. Let’s take the bikes back in. It looks like Lenni outfoxed us again.”

A few minutes later Joe and I were heading out of the mountain-biking attraction’s equipment shack. We reached the main path and stopped.

“What now?” Joe squinted against the bright midday sun and glanced up and down the path. “Should we keep looking for Lenni?”

I shook my head. “Not much point. If she wants to keep out of sight, she will.”

“Why’s she still playing keep-away?” Joe sounded perplexed. “After that stunt she pulled with Cody Zane’s skateboard, she’s, like, a hero! McKenzie probably wants to give her a medal or something.”

“Or something.” I grimaced as I noticed a paper flyer lying on the ground nearby. I didn’t have to pick it up to guess what it was. Lenni and her crew had been passing out anti-GX screeds ever since the place opened. “He thinks she tried to blow up Cody Zane just now, remember?”

That was what had set Joe and me on this chase. An hour or so earlier, world-famous skateboarder Cody Zane had started a demonstration. But he’d lost his balance and come off his board on a basic move. Weird, right?

But Joe and I had quickly figured out what was up. Someone had attached a bomb to the bottom of the board. Its weight had thrown off Cody’s balance. Only Lenni’s quick thinking and even quicker reflexes had saved the day. She’d hopped on the board and quickly built up speed on the half-pipe. Then she’d flown upward, kicking the board up into the air. It had exploded harmlessly up there, saving Cody and everyone nearby from being blown to bits. In all the commotion afterward, Lenni had disappeared into the crowd.

And now Joe and I wanted to find her. But *not* because we agreed with McKenzie’s opinion that she or her friends must have planted that bomb. No way. For one thing, Lenni was the one who’d risked her life to get rid of the bomb. Besides that, she just didn’t seem like the type. She was way passionate about her beliefs—she’d even been arrested in the past for protesting and stuff. But ATAC’s best researchers hadn’t

turned up anything in her past to show she'd be willing to hurt people in pursuit of her goals.

Still, we wanted to talk to her. Lenni was pretty tied into the local and online skate communities. We figured if anyone could help us work out who was still trying to sabotage GX, it was her. For instance, we hadn't yet tracked down the real identity of an online agitator who went by the name Sk8rH8r. Or figured out who'd planted that bomb on Cody's skateboard.

Speaking of Cody... I started to reach for my cell phone. Then I remembered. Lenni had stolen it from me earlier. She'd said she wanted a way to keep in touch.

"Rats," I muttered. "Hey, Joe, can I borrow your phone? I want to call Mr. McKenzie and find out what's up with Cody."

Joe smirked. He's always been the scatterbrained one in the family. It would take both hands and feet to count the number of times he's lost or broken his expensive ATAC-issue cell phone. He was pretty psyched that I'd been the one to mess up this time. Like it was my fault Lenni had opted to pick my pocket instead of his!

"Sure, Frank," he said, pulling out his phone. "But please, allow me to make that call. I wouldn't want you to accidentally lose my phone too."

Yeah. He's a laugh riot.

A few minutes later we had the update. Cody was still at the local hospital. It sounded like he was going to be okay, but he did have a pretty decent concussion. They were flying him to a bigger city hospital within the hour.

"Sounds like he probably won't be back." Joe frowned as he tucked his phone back in his shorts pocket.

I was tempted to pay back his earlier razzing by teasing him about his fanboy attitude toward Cody. Even though we'd discovered that Cody was kind of a jerk, I could tell Joe was still impressed by him. So I kept quiet about that.

"So what do you think?" I asked instead. "Could David have rigged up that skateboard bomb before he got arrested?"

David Sanders was our latest perp in the case. Yeah, I said latest. First we'd discovered that one of the protesters and his nephew, a GX security guard, had been behind some of the vandalism. But when the trouble continued—and got even worse—we'd kept investigating. Eventually we figured out that Cody Zane's friend and skating partner, David Sanders, had been targeting Cody to get back at him for selling out and neglecting their friendship.

Joe shrugged. "It's possible David did it," he said as we wandered past GX's state-of-the-art arcade. "But according to McKenzie, he's still denying it. Besides, it's not like that's the only loose end on this case."

"True. So maybe we should go over things." I glanced up at the skeletal remains of the park's huge man-made mountain. Mount McKenzie—yeah, the guy named it after himself—had been the centerpiece of Galaxy X. It had stood five hundred feet tall at the intersection of the two main paths through the park.

But not anymore. Someone had blown it up during the park's grand opening. Now it was pretty much a big smoking pile of rubble covered with a bunch of blue tarps. And none of our perps would admit to demolishing it.

"Well, there's *that*, of course." Joe waved a hand toward the mountain. "Along with all the online threats and mysterious e-mails and stuff."

"Right," I agreed. "Neither of our culprits have fessed up to being Skater Hater. David was For-Real, but he says he has no idea about Skater Hater."

"And Lenni won't cop to it either. Not sure I believe her on that."

"I believe her, actually," I said. "Whoever Skater Hater is, he had our e-mail addy, remember? And he started sending us stuff before we'd ever even met Lenni. Plus, he seems to know whenever something bad happens around here."

"Yeah, and so does Lenni. She's always popping up when there's trouble," Joe argued, though his heart didn't seem to be in it. "Okay, but what else is there? Oh yeah—you and Cody almost getting sliced and diced by that messed-up roller coaster."

I shuddered at the memory. It had happened on a coaster called the Leap. Its gimmick was that the cars jumped over a break in the track and landed on the other side. Only someone had messed with the landing side of the track so that our car had ended up plunging over the edge and crashing into the metal support structure. If Cody and I hadn't managed to jump out in time, it would've been our last ride. Luckily, the thing wasn't officially open to the public yet, so nobody else had been at risk.

"Anything else?" I asked. "Oh wait, I remember—there was that rock that someone threw at Erica outside the gates."

Erica was Tyrone McKenzie's eighteen-year-old stepdaughter. She'd been with Joe and me when we'd gone outside the park gates to check out some people who were protesting GX's opening.

"We probably shouldn't get too caught up in that one. It could've been that crazy old coot Jackson, even if he wouldn't admit it. Or it could've even been one of the other protesters."

"I guess you're—," I began.

KA-BOOOOOOOM!

An ear-shattering explosion from somewhere nearby cut me off before I could finish.

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Users Review

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Mae Marks:

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