

The Chasm Friends

Get a Pet



WORDS BY
DAN
WELLS

ART BY
ANNA
EARLEY

To all the little monsters.

—D. W.

For Mom, who sensibly said,

“Don’t be silly. What else would you be?”

the one time I considered not being an artist.

—A. E.

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ANNA EARLEY



It was a warm, sunny day in the Crackity Plains, and the ChasmFriends were lounging in the shade of the chasms.

“I want to race!” said Shredhead. She ran back and forth through the chasm, the ground shaking as she stomped over boulders and bones. “Come on! Let’s go!”

“You always want to race,” said Howlerina. She was moving too, but gracefully, walking on the tips of her carapace toes and raising her claws in the air. “I want to dance.” She spun around, swinging her tail behind her, knocking crem from the chasm walls.



“Food!” shouted Burpslurper. He was still a baby, and always hungry. He slammed his claws on the ground, and kicked his tiny feet—so tiny they were almost as small as boulders! “Food! Food! Fooooood!”

The biggest of the ChasmFriends started to move, and they thought he might wake up, but all he did was snore and roll over. He was asleep. He was *always* asleep.

His name was Darren.





Suddenly the friends heard a loud, crashing
clatter echoing through the chasm. Someone was
coming. They looked and saw Cleverclaws running
toward them, whooping with joy.

He was holding a box.



“Look what I found!” he shouted, and lifted the box up high. “Look what I found!”

“You found a box?” said Shredhead. “Booooring.”

“No,” said Cleverclaws. “He’s *inside* the box.”

“Who’s inside the box?” asked Howlerina.

“Food!” shouted Burpslurper.

Darren snored.

“He’s not food,” said Cleverclaws. “He’s my pet! He’s my newest, bestest friend!”

“Where’d you find him?” asked Howlerina.

“Just show him to us!” said Shredhead.

“Okay,” said Cleverclaws, and put the box in the middle of the group.

“Just be careful, okay? He’s really small.”

The ChasmFriends fell silent, and watched the box with eager excitement. Cleverclaws took off the lid.







Inside the box was a tiny little creature. It had a metal shell on its head, kind of like a ChasmFriend, and arms and legs, kind of like a ChasmFriend, but it wasn't a ChasmFriend at all. First, it only had two claws. Even weirder than that, it only had two legs! It waved a tiny stick, and made a tiny growly sound.

"Food?" asked Burpslurper.

"No," said Howlerina. "That's a Shoutie."

Everyone had seen the Shouties before. They lived on the top of the Crackity Plains, where they ran around and shouted and hit each other with sticks.

"I like his little stick," said Howlerina. "It's cute."

"I think he likes it too," said Cleverclaws. "I want to name him Stickerlicker."

"Maybe just Sticky," said Howlerina.

"That sounds too much like Shoutie," said Cleverclaws.



“Let’s play Shouties!” said Shredhead, and picked up a fallen tree. “We can hit each other with these!” She smacked Cleverclaws as hard as she could, slamming him into the side of the chasm.

“Ouch,” said Cleverclaws.

Darren snored.





“Just Shoutie, then,” said Howlerina, and peered into the box. After a moment, she frowned. “Wait a minute. He looks different now.”

“Different?” Cleverclaws looked into the box. The tiny little Shoutie had backed into a corner, staring up at them with its tiny little face. He was still holding the stick, but instead of waving it around he was leaning on it. His face was wet, and his arms hung down, and he wasn’t even shouting anymore. “Why is his face wet?”





“Maybe he’s a spren,” said Shredhead. “Like a waterspren or something.”

“A shoutspren,” said Howlerina.

“A stickspren,” said Shredhead.

“Food?” asked Burpslurper hopefully.



“No,” said Cleverclaws, figuring it out. “Those are tears. Shoutie is sad. But I don’t know why, because he’s right here with me, and I’m his bestest friend.”

But even with a bestest friend, the Shoutie was definitely sad.



“We have to find a way to cheer him up,” said Cleverclaws.

But none of them knew how to cheer up a Shoutie. They tried shouting, but that only made it worse. They tried hitting each other with trees, but that didn’t work either.

“Probably because we need sticks,” said Shredhead. “I bet it only works with sticks.”



“Maybe we’re thinking about this wrong,” said Howlerina. “We’re trying to guess things that make a Shoutie happy, but maybe a Shoutie is just like us. Maybe the things that make us happy will make him happy too.”

“Food?” asked Burpslurper.



“You know what makes me happy?” asked Howlerina. Her gemheart began to glow, because it was time to be fancy. “Dancing! Moving around all elegant and pretty, and twirling to the beautiful music!”

“That’s a great idea!” said Cleverclaws. “Let’s have a dance!”



They gave Burpslurper two big rocks, and he banged them on the ground for rhythm. They gave Shredhead a boulder to stand on, and she bellowed a song at the top of her lungs. They gave Darren a bone to blow into, to make blowy music in the air, but all he did was snore.





Then they let the Shoutie out of the box, and set him on the ground at the bottom of the chasm, and Cleverclaws and Howlerina danced and stomped and swung their tails, and the chasm rang with singing and dancing and music and fun.







Shoutie kept running too far up the chasm, but they always scooted him back into the middle of the group—just to keep him safe. It was the greatest party the ChasmFriends had ever had.

But the poor little Shoutie looked even sadder than before.

“This isn’t working!” said Cleverclaws. He stopped the dance party, and picked up the tiny, trembling Shoutie. “He’s still sad.”

Howlerina sighed. “I guess the things that make me happy don’t make Shouties happy.”



“We have to try something else,” said Cleverclaws.

“Food,” said Burpslurper.

“Hold on a second,” said Shredhead, and lifted her head toward the sky. “Do you hear that?”

There was a distant rumble in the air.

“Do you feel that?” she asked.

Now the *ground* was rumbling.

“It’s a highstorm!” said Cleverclaws.

“You bet it’s a highstorm!” said Shredhead, eyes wide and grinning from mandible to mandible. “And you know what that means?” Her gemheart began to glow, because it was time for adventure. “It means it’s time for the roughest, toughest, loudest, fastest, wildest ride in the Crackity Plains! The thing that makes *me* the happiest ChasmFriend in the whole darn chasm! It’ll definitely work on the Shoutie too, because it’s impossible to be sad in a *waterslide*!”



The ChasmFriends cheered, and the rumbling got louder, and then came the rain and a giant wave of water. They jumped up into it, riding along with the water and rockbuds and boulders and vines and chulls and carriages and everything else that the wave brought with it. Swooshing through the chasms at breakneck speed; whooping in the turns and screaming in the long, fast chutes; laughing and bouncing and cheering at the thrill of it.

Even Darren almost woke up. Almost.



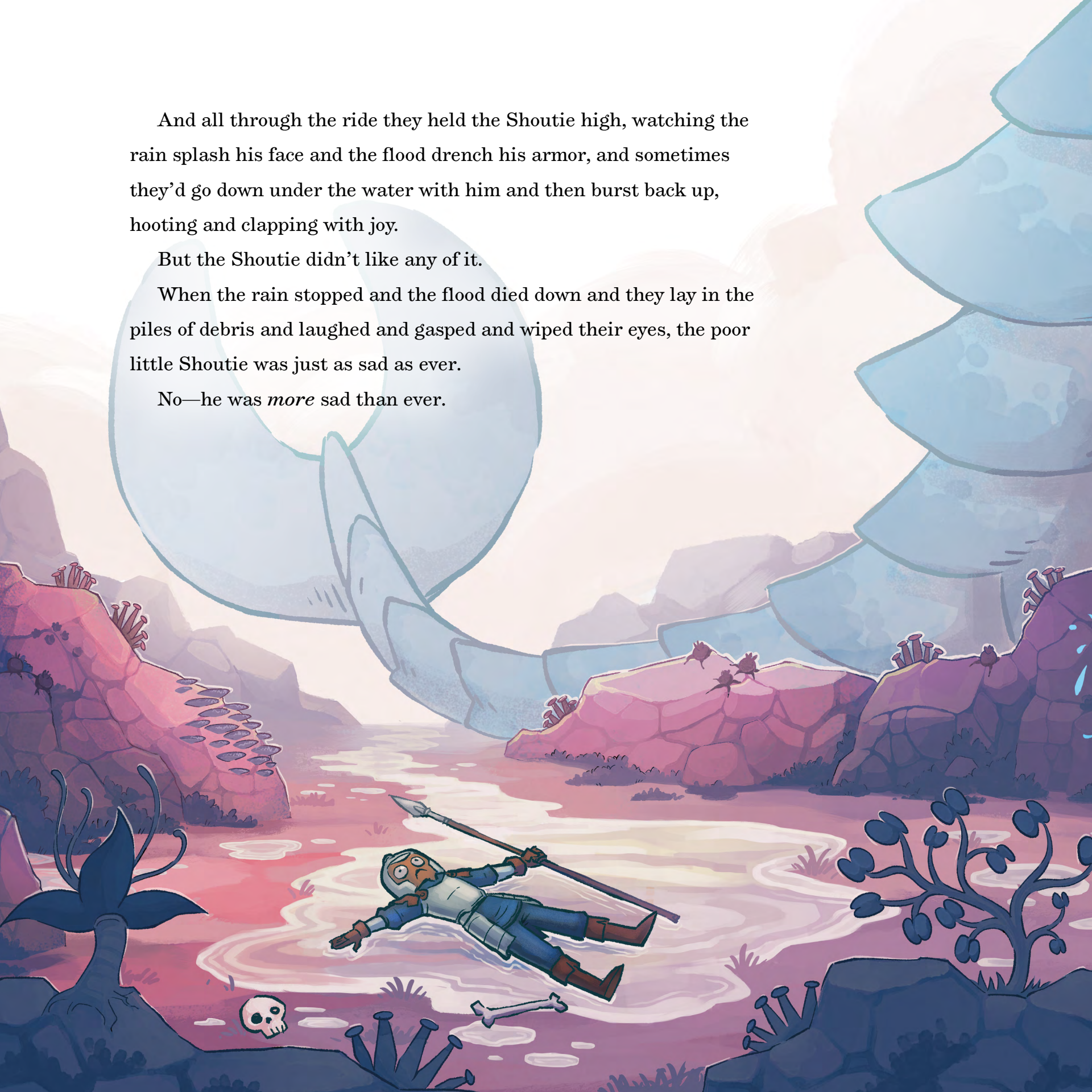


And all through the ride they held the Shoutie high, watching the rain splash his face and the flood drench his armor, and sometimes they'd go down under the water with him and then burst back up, hooting and clapping with joy.

But the Shoutie didn't like any of it.

When the rain stopped and the flood died down and they lay in the piles of debris and laughed and gasped and wiped their eyes, the poor little Shoutie was just as sad as ever.

No—he was *more* sad than ever.







“We have to help my bestest friend!” said Cleverclaws. “We have to think of something!”

“Food,” said Burpslurper.

“That should have worked,” said Shredhead. “Everybody loves waterslides.” She picked up the Shoutie and looked at him closely. “Maybe your Shoutie is broken.”



“Food,” said Burpslurper.

“There’s got to be something he likes,” said Cleverclaws.

“Everybody likes *something*.”

“Food,” said Burpslurper.

Darren snored.

“Fooodood,” said Burpslurper. His gemheart was beginning to glow, because it was time to eat. He started throwing bits of bone and debris. “Food!”



“Hang on a second,” said Cleverclaws. “What if Burpslurper’s right? What makes *him* happy is food—I bet that would make the Shoutie happy too!”

“Well, look around us!” said Shredhead cheerfully. “We’ve got the biggest feast that anyone could ask for!”



And it was true. The chasm was filled with food from the highstorm flood. Chompy chulls and crunchy crabs; rancid rockbuds with oozing innards; appetizing axehounds in bite-sized bits. They gave the Shoutie delicious slime from the chasm floor and tasty muck from broken shells, and an especially mouthwatering morsel: most of a mangled Shoutie found inside of a smashed-up carriage, tenderized and sweet.







“He doesn’t look like he wants that,” said Howlerina.

“He doesn’t look like he wants any of it,” said Shredhead.

“Let Burpslurper eat it,” said Cleverclaws, “so the Shoutie can see that it’s food.” They gave the mangled mess to Burpslurper, who popped it in his mouth and gobbled it down.

And wow, did Shoutie the sad pet Shoutie start shouting loudly *then*.



“I think he’s sad that we ate his food,” said Shredhead.

“I think he’s just sad about everything,” said Cleverclaws, slumping down on the bottom of the chasm. “And that makes *me* sad, because he’s my bestest friend ever!”

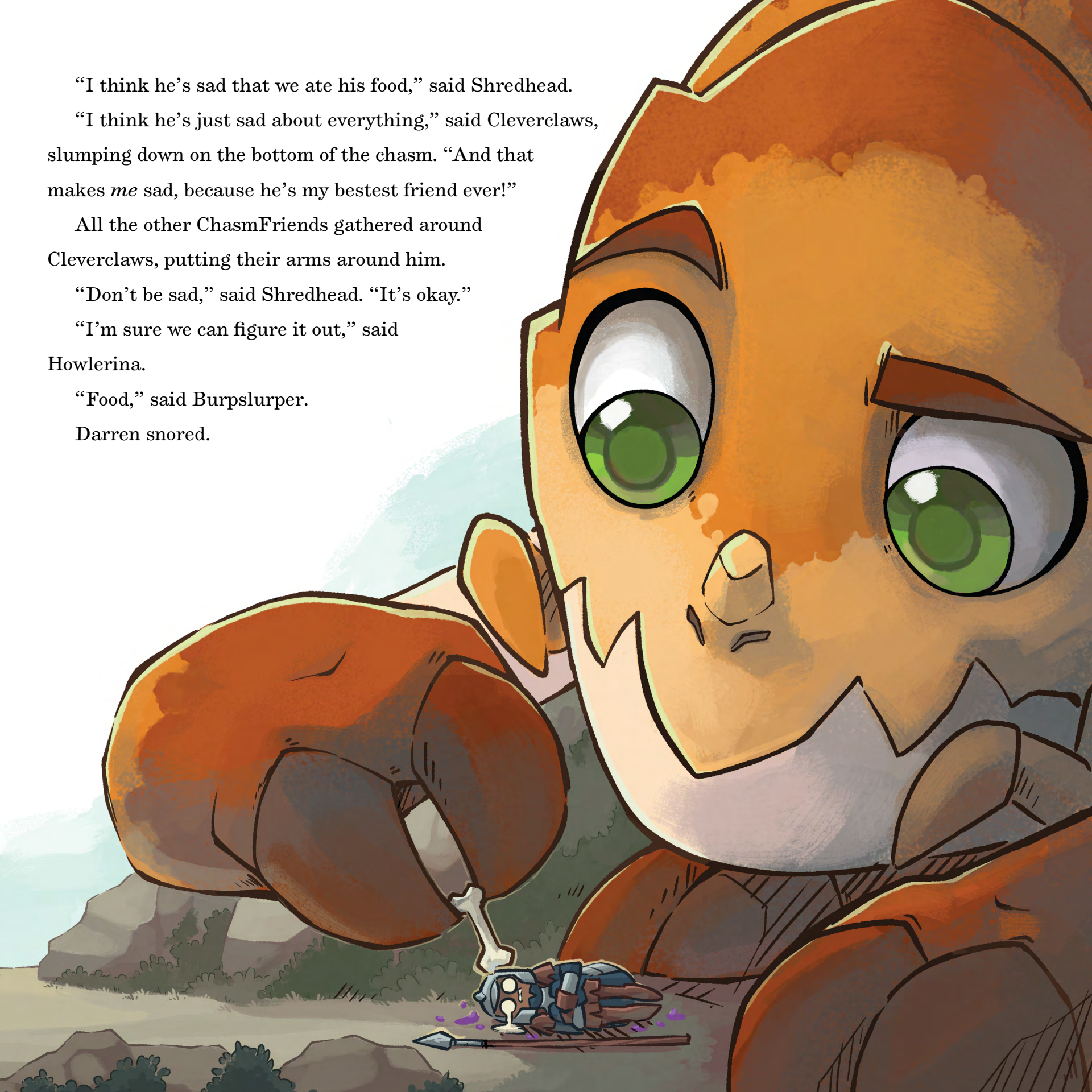
All the other ChasmFriends gathered around Cleverclaws, putting their arms around him.

“Don’t be sad,” said Shredhead. “It’s okay.”

“I’m sure we can figure it out,” said Howlerina.

“Food,” said Burpslurper.

Darren snored.



Cleverclaws picked up the Shoutie. “I’m only trying to help you be happy,” he said. All the Shoutie did was swing his stick and shout in tiny gibberish.

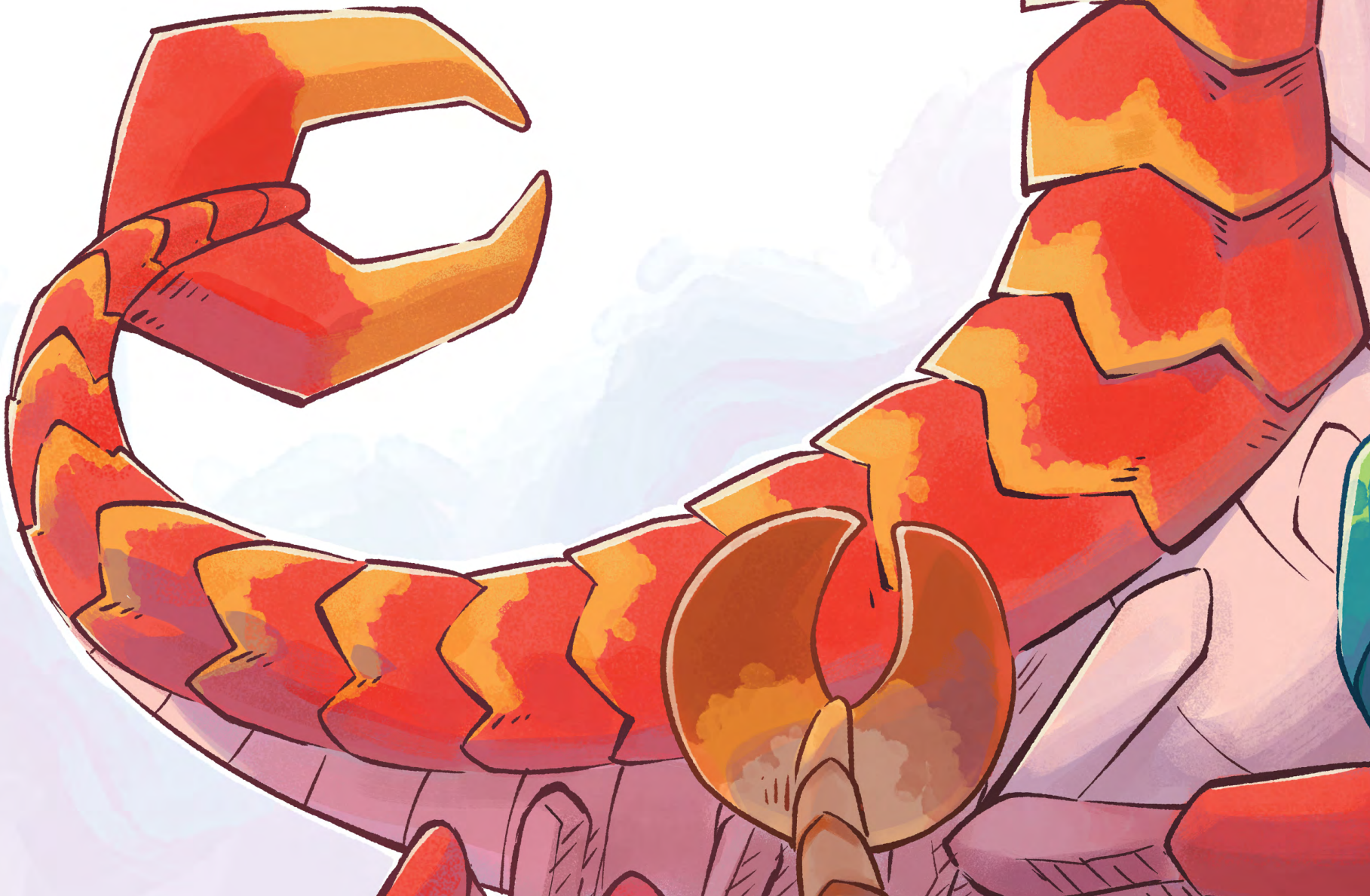
“Maybe,” said Howlerina. “And I mean just *maybe* . . .” She put her claw on Cleverclaws’s shoulder, and spoke in a soft, gentle voice. “Maybe he’s your bestest friend, but you’re not . . . *his* bestest friend.”

That made Cleverclaws saddest of all.



But then his gemheart began to glow, because it was time to be smart.

“Maybe,” he said, and looked at his friends, “I don’t need a pet to be my bestest friend.” His gemheart grew brighter. “I have all of you, and you’re the bestest friends a ChasmFriend could ever ask for!” The gemheart shone brighter than it ever had before.





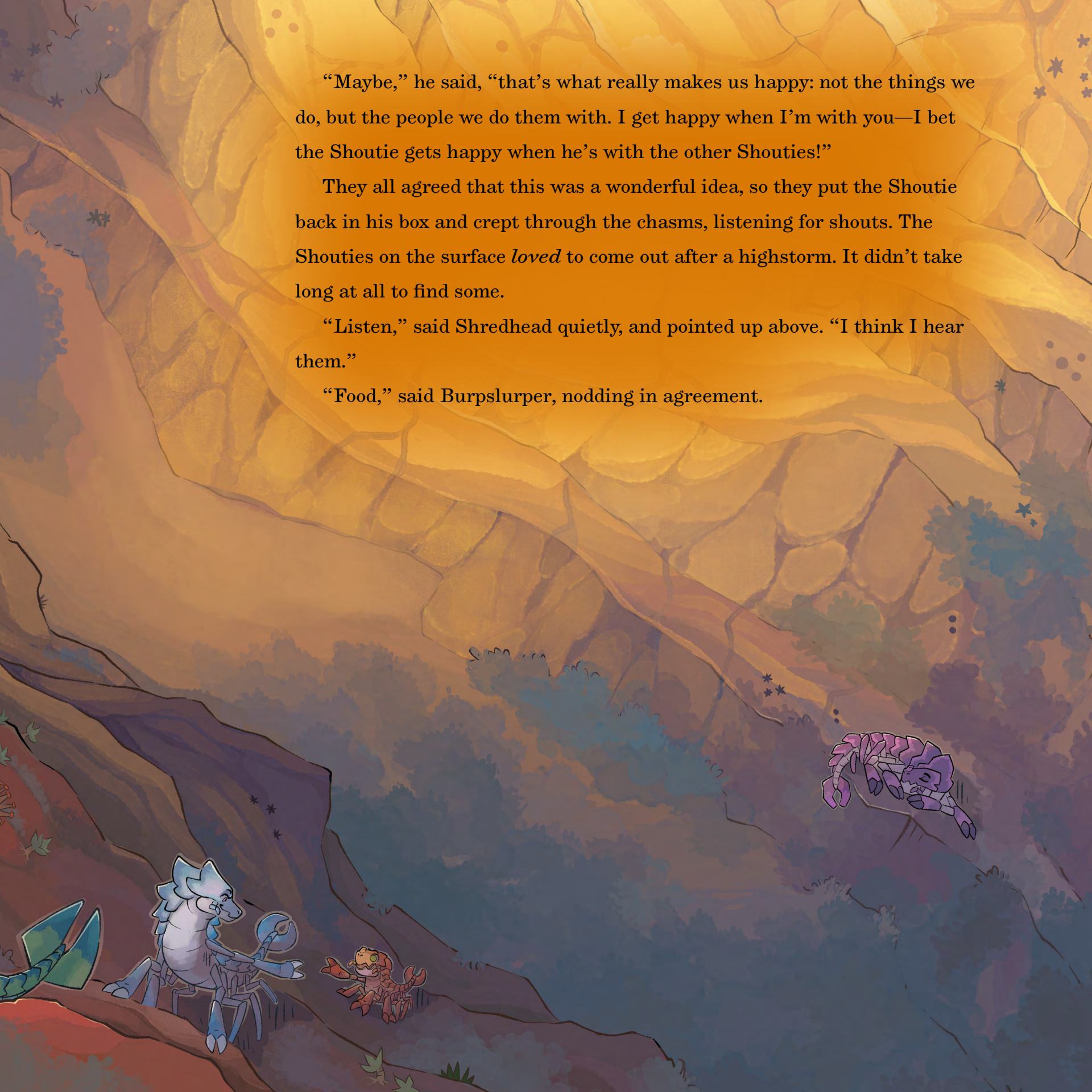


“Maybe,” he said, “that’s what really makes us happy: not the things we do, but the people we do them with. I get happy when I’m with you—I bet the Shoutie gets happy when he’s with the other Shouties!”

They all agreed that this was a wonderful idea, so they put the Shoutie back in his box and crept through the chasms, listening for shouts. The Shouties on the surface *loved* to come out after a highstorm. It didn’t take long at all to find some.

“Listen,” said Shredhead quietly, and pointed up above. “I think I hear them.”

“Food,” said Burpslurper, nodding in agreement.





The ChasmFriends climbed up to the top of the Crackity Plains, and peeked out from behind some rocks, and saw a group of Shouties waving sticks.

“Perfect,” said Cleverclaws, and gently placed his bestest little friend on top of the plateau. “Go play,” he whispered, giving the Shoutie a push. “It’ll be fun! They’re even the pretty ones, with swirly swirls on their carapace!”





“Oh look!” said Shredhead. “They’re playing their stick game!”
And the ChasmFriends cheerfully climbed back down into the chasm, happy to have helped their tiny friend, and ready to go off on another fantastic adventure.





THE END

