

# Godsquatter - A Novella

## Prologue: The Bellwether

It had been the stone age for a good long while now, and Ook was thinking it might be actually more than a fad. And he was cool with that. He didn't much like hanging around in trees anyhow, and wasn't all that good at climbing or picking fleas off himself. But those days were finally behind him; ever since that fateful day when one inspired monkey decided to check out what the ground had to offer—and made a discovery that changed everything. Suddenly, twigs and branches were passé. Walking was the way of the future. And rocks were all the rage.

Rocks. Harder than bone, stronger than steel (which hadn't been invented yet), and useful to boot. At first Ook had been content to sit back and let the early adopters figure it all out. He watched as trendsetters showed off their skills using rocks to crack shells, break other rocks, and establish dominance by beating each other senseless. And that's when Ook realized it wasn't actually rocks that were so great, it was the attention they got you. Ook tried using a few of his own rocks to pummel other monkeys and move up the social food-chain, but his results were mixed. And often painful. So instead, he decided a smarter approach would be to find the next fancy new way of using rocks. Something really cool that would catch on with the other ground monkeys and finally get him noticed. But no sooner did he have the thought than someone had already beat him to it.

Like most of his coworkers, Ook spent his days in the field enjoying the sun, avoiding tigers, and digging up and smashing things with rocks. It never got old. It could be surprisingly useful. It was trending. And it was on one of these typical rock-smashing days that Ook's old tree-mate, Gronk, showed up

and announced the greatest discovery in history; something even more exciting than rocks.

At first no one believed Gronk's desperate efforts to explain himself. But making it all sound like anything but mumbo jumbo nonsense was beyond the monkeys' primitive dialect. Eventually Gronk decided he simply needed to show them. He picked up two rocks, smashed them together, and introduced everyone to fire.

Fire was an instant sensation. Flashy yet understated, soon every modern ground monkey had their own. For some it was family campfires. For others it was communal blazes. And for many it was portable torches (which, incidentally, made twigs and branches retro and cool again). Even Ook hopped the fire bandwagon, albeit grudgingly, as he obsessively built and maintained his own fire lest any neighbor monkeys think him a luddite or technophobe.

And so, for a time, fire dominated the news cycle at every social gathering. Flammable, sharable and fun; everyone had fire, loved fire and wanted more fire. But, deep down, everyone also knew that fire was just a novelty with no real use. Before long, the ground monkeys grew bored with fire and started looking for their next fixation. They found it in caves.

Spacious, protective and trendy, caves—really just big rocks with big holes in them—were amazingly simple, yet highly useful. Ook had been too late to discover caves as well. That good fortune had fallen on some other monkey, which left Ook longing for his own viral breakthrough so he too could bask in waves of adulation from several, if not dozens, of adoring ground monkey followers.

Ook was discouraged, but not completely. Still hoping to find his chance to become an influencer, he continued his days of digging through the dirt, pulling up rocks, and wishing just one of them would inspire an idea so he could finally go mainstream. Some of what he found were sharp fire-rocks. Most

were smashy rock-rocks. But none were particularly unique rocks. And none seemed likely to make him famous.

The night before Ook's big break was, in itself, quite extraordinary. Rain was nothing new. Nor was lightning. But rarely had there been so much of both. And never so colorful. Brilliant yellows, purples and greens beamed across the sky, dazzled in place, and then exploded against the neighboring landscape with thunderous aplomb. Ook would have likened it to an acid trip or a disastrously reckless firework display, but he lacked context for such things. So instead he contented himself with cowering beneath a large rock and declaring the night to be "loud," "bright" and "scary as hell."

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Aside from the brushfires, craters, and overwhelming scent of metallicized ozone, the following morning was a lot like any other. Ook emerged from hiding, dusted himself off, and resumed his duties digging up rocks from the freshly scorched earth. But this time, as he pulled his first rock, he noticed something odd. Oblong and lumpy, it was *mostly* pretty ordinary, except for the strange spots and tawny orange color. Ook held the rock and sniffed it. Firm, he noticed. Firm, but not hard. He licked some dirt from the rock and spit at the earthy blandness. Not food, he decided.

Seeing no value in a not-hard, not-edible rock, Ook tossed it aside, where it rolled a few feet before stopping at a nearby fire. Ook returned to work, but spent the next hour finding nothing but frustration as he dug up a mounting collection of similarly useless not-rocks. Large ones, small ones, and ranging from orange to brown to even a few purples; they were each of them too soft for smashing, too squishy for fire making, and exactly the wrong shape to inspire Ook to invent the brick, the wheel, or juggling.

Ook was tired, and very near to giving up on rocks completely to instead run off and invent calligraphy or something, but was then distracted by an enticing smell wafting from behind. Ook sniffed, turned around, and looked at

his discarded, fire-baked not-rock. He walked over to pick it up and feel its warmth. He bit into the soft, crispy flesh. And he smiled.

Gronk may have discovered fire, he thought, but it was Ook who discovered what fire was meant for. And it was also Ook who'd just thought up a killer recipe for sour cream.

## **Godsquatter**

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