

Chapter 1

What's a SKOOB?

Sweat dripped off my forehead and beaded on my upper lip. It was one of summer's hottest mornings. I longed for a cool, refreshing drink. I finished mowing the front lawn and pulling the weeds from the flower beds, then went inside.

"Mom, I'm all finished. Can I go to Lennie's Lemon Blasters?" I asked.

"Sure. Great job, Ethan! Thank you for working so hard. Dad and I really appreciate it. I bet he'll bring you a fun surprise when he comes home next week from his business trip. Here's your allowance. And be careful. I love you," she said.

Lennie's Lemon Blasters had the best mouthwatering, thirst quenching lemonade in town. My parents allowed me one visit per week. It wasn't far, only four blocks away from our house. Usually, it took no time at all to get there, but I was hot so at block number two, I stopped under a tall shade tree to cool

off.

Across the street was an old grayish-purple Victorian building. That's odd, I never noticed it before. It was wedged between two shops. The building had a small porch and a bay window. A tall tree shaded its roof. Five steps led up to a door that was painted bright green with yellow stripes and the top half of the door had a tinted window. There was a flashing purple neon sign hanging above the doorway that blinked the letters **S-K-O-O-B. SKOOB. SKOOB. SKOOB** - on and off, on and off. **SKOOB.**

SKOOB? *What's a **SKOOB**?* Curious about the building, I crossed the street and peered through the hazy, purple tinted windows. Only shadowy outlines were visible. There was an **OPEN** sign posted in the window. As I entered the huge room, the door squeaked. The lights were dimmed, but I could see rows and rows of wooden bookshelves. They were stuffed with books hanging over the edges and more books stacked on top, almost to the ceiling. The air was musty and cool. There were cobwebs hanging from the ceiling and

a fine layer of dust covered the books. To complete the picture, an unusual lady stood motionless behind the counter.

Her hair was pulled to the top of her head, forming a neat bun, with a very long, silver hair pin through it. Her skin was dry and wrinkled. Her eyes were deep and dark. She was dressed in black and looked like a character from a spooky old movie.

What was this place? Was it a library or a bookstore?

Next to the lady, on the counter, was a sign: **Science Fiction Books On Sale Today Only.**

"Wow!" I said in a soft voice. "This must be a bookstore."

Science fiction books, especially space travel and planets in other solar systems, were my favorites. I approached the lady in black and asked, "Where are the science fiction books?"

She stared deep into my eyes and didn't say a word. She raised her arm and pointed her long, gnarled finger toward the back wall of the store.