

hey don't come much tougher than Artie Artichoke, whose many broad florets and pointy tips would seem to say, "Keep away." But that impression hides the truth, which is that, underneath, Artie has a heart of gold.

He's squat and short, and puts his power to good use when fighting alongside Knute Trition and all his other friends in the Green Box League of Nutritious Justice.

Today he and Knute were just leaving the gym after a workout when they heard a little trumpet play: it was Knute's smartphone. They stopped outside by their bikes while Knute read a text message his mom had just sent:

"Hi, honey. Please pick up milk, eggs, and toothpaste on your way home. Don't forget to wrap your present for your dad's birthday party, and do be careful fighting crime. We love you so. Hugs and kisses, Mom."

"Aww," teased Artie, who'd sneaked a peek at the text when Knute read it. "Hugs and kisses from mom. Ain't that sweet."

"Yeah, yeah. Well, no fair eavesdropping," Knute said, typing out a brief reply. And then he smiled. "I've got an idea: let's race to the store! Whoever gets there first wins." Artie agreed.

When both boys were on their bikes, Knute counted down: three, two, one. Go!" And he took off like a shot.

Artie pedaled after him, but his legs were shorter, and the trip took longer. When he caught up to Knute at the store, he was surprised to find his friend being surrounded by a ring of goons: O.BC.D.'s boys. They were in poor shape, but there were a lot of them, and they had Knute with his

back against the brick wall.

"All right, Knute Trition, we finally got you. The boss is gonna be happy when he hears we got you to eat a whole chocolate cake, frosting and all!" And indeed one of the goons was advancing toward Knute with a delicious-looking double-decker cake. Knute had nowhere to run. He seemed done for.

"Actually, fellas, I like a little cake once in a while. But I know when to say when, see," he said confidently. "And as it happens, I'm not hungry just now."

With that he launched himself away from the wall, toward the big fellow holding the cake, and flipped it over into his face. The goon staggered back, blubbering. Artie saw that as his cue, and started ramming the other guys in the seat of the pants with his sharp leaf tips, and they, too, howled.

Finally, they scattered.

After a few moments, Knute licked his fingers. There was a little chocolate frosting on them. "Not bad. I might have liked a small piece. A shame it's somebody's hat now."

Then they entered the store.

Artie turned around and smiled: "That's not all that's too bad, Knute: I'm in the store first. Looks like I won the race."

Knute laughed. It was true. Artie had won fair and square. But that was OK. This was one defeat that tasted sweeter to him than any victory.





THE GREEN BOX LEAGUE OF Spell Me Artie

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