

Life Needs Water
By Lukáš Hlaváč

Far in the distant future, the human race is at war with the Draxonians, a vicious race of lizard people armed with technologically advanced ships and weapons. As the war got rough for humanity, the government decided to deploy their secret weapon: technology capable of weaponizing children. Leo woke with a start. The A.I. driver's voice droned in its robotic monotone over the underground transport's speakers, "Welcome to Power Lab 01. All passengers please disembark the transport." Leo sat up and stretched, yawning as the door to his compartment hissed open. Leo poked his head out. The platform's spotless metal walls made it look like someone could open the ceiling to grab a mint. Right in front of him was a glowing sign, "IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO SURRENDER. Free tickets back home."

Leo noticed a card scanner mounted to the platform door. He looked at the card hanging around his neck; sure enough, on the other side of his card was a barcode. Leo swiped his card through the scanner. The light turned green and the door slid open. The room was painted a bright aqua-marine blue with a massive pool in the center. Grinning, Leo jumped in. After swimming for some time, Leo climbed out, dripping. Leo walked over to a locker, opened it, and looked inside. "Hello," said a voice from all around him.

Leo jumped, heart racing. "Who's there," he said with a tremor in his voice. "I am N.E.R.O, your Personal Training Artificial Intelligence, or P.T.A.I." "I have an A.I. named Nero in my bedroom?" Leo said, perplexed. "My name is N.E.R.O but you may call me Nero. And again, I am a P.T.A.I., not just an A.I." "Right, you're a training A.I., but what do you do?" Leo said, confused. "I direct you in your training so you will be ready to receive the first dose of your superpower." "What do you mean, dose?" Leo said, confused. "You will receive your powers in doses to allow you to train with each element of your superpower." "What?" Leo whined, "I have to work for this, seriously?" "Yes," Nero said. "Training-wise there is room for improvement. I was watching you in the pool." "OK, that's creepy." Leo's stomach rumbled loudly. "I'm going to go eat something. I think I saw a kitchen." And with that, Leo ran out the door.

3 months later...

Leo burst out of the water, gasping. He looked at the giant timer mounted to the wall. The timer read "1:02." "Congratulations, you have successfully held your breath for over 1 minute and you have passed your Level 1 exam. You are ready to move to Level 2 and receive your first dose of power." "Wait," Leo said, excitement mounting. "I get to have the first bit of my powers?" "That is accurate," Nero said. "YES!" Leo yelled, punching the air. "Wait, when?" Leo asked. "As soon as possible," Nero replied. Leo turned and bounded up the pool steps. He grabbed a towel, running for the door. Leo ran down the hallway, drying as he went. He ran into his living room and had just finished putting on his clothes when the door hissed open.

There was a man in a white lab coat with a scientist's badge. The man had a digital clipboard tucked under his arm. "You're Leo Fox, right?" The man sounded tired as if he hadn't slept at all last night. "That's me," Leo said. "Great, I'm Joe. Lead scientist of the Water Power Division. Your P.T.A.I. said you

have achieved Level 2, correct?" "Yes," Leo said. "Excellent!" Joe said, clapping his hands together. "Follow me," Joe said, turning. Leo followed Joe through the twisting hallways. After some time, they reached a large door with "Water Lab 1" on it. Joe pressed his hand to a hand scanner and the large door slid up in one smooth movement. Overflowing with excitement, Leo stepped inside.

The lab was a vast room with a large crater in the center. Bundles of wires connected to a large metal cocoon suspended above the crater. Leo noticed a bridge, leading over to a small door set into the side of the cocoon. "You see that," Joe said, pointing, "That's the power chamber. It's the device that gives you your superpower." Leo looked at it, eyebrows raised sceptically. That thing was going to give him superpowers? Leo shrugged and walked across the bridge.

Walking into the chamber was like walking into a metal water bottle. Leo looked up. The top looked like a giant showerhead. The door closed with a hiss. Leo heard something counting down: "5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Start." Leo heard a sound like someone turning on the faucet. Cascades of shining blue liquid filled the entire chamber. He began to float, weightless. Leo felt the power building up, pulsing, churning. He felt himself being engulfed by pure power. Suddenly, all of the power rushed into him. Then it was over.

That night, Leo had a strange dream. He was standing next to his pool. Leo looked down and saw that the pool was churning. He stepped back as the mass of water took the form of a pod of whales. The beautiful animals soared through the air, tails beating. A dazzling silver whale turned its head, looking straight at Leo. Leo backed up fast, tripped, and fell into the empty pool. Leo woke with a start, sweating. He looked around. No whales, no nothing. Leo sighed in relief.

Boom! Leo sat bolt upright, looking around. Boom! The ground shook. Boom! Nero's voice started to loop, "We are under attack. Leave the labs NOW!" over and over again. Boom! Leo was scared now. He stood up just as the roof exploded. Leo stood frozen as the second bomb exploded right in front of him. Leo was thrown backwards out of the room and through a smashed hole in the wall. He landed in a pile of rubble. Leo slid off, groaning. He lifted his throbbing head and looked around. Everything was imploding and crumbling. Chunks of rock and ceiling fell from the sky, smashing into the floor with terrifying speed and destructive impact. Suddenly, someone grabbed his arm and hoisted him up.

Weakly, Leo looked up and saw that it was a girl no older than him. She had flaming red hair and bright green eyes. She whispered, "Come with me or die." Leo followed her through the chaos and destruction all around them. The girl led him through a secret tunnel hidden in the lab walls. The tunnel opened revealing the mountain and a huge smoking crater. The girl said, "I'm Kate, by the way. I have fire powers." "I'm Leo and I can control water. Well, sometimes," he replied, remembering he never finished his training. Kate led him to a cave where 2 other kids sat on a rock. "Hi, I'm Mike. I can bend air to my will." "And I'm Joseph. I can make stones do my bidding," the second kid added. Joseph turned to Kate and asked, "The lab?" Kate shook her head, "It's gone, the whole lab was destroyed. We're the only ones left."

Many months later...

It was the middle of the night. After months of planning, their attack was in motion. Kate sneaked through the forest by the Dracxonian outpost, right up to the building where the outpost's troops stored their ammo and explosives. Silently, Kate pulled a string from her pocket. She slipped one end of the string through a small hole in the wall. Then she unrolled the string, backing deeper into the forest. Next, creating a small flame, she lit the string and ran away snickering. The string carried the flame into the bunker. Boom! The bunker exploded, sending a plume of red fire into the sky.

As the bunker exploded, Leo crept through the bushes by the lake near the outpost. Leo stopped and closed his eyes. He locked onto the water and sent his power running through it. He envisioned phantom predators like lions, bears, and tigers. Suddenly, a tidal wave roared out of the water, transforming into 21 animals, 7 lions, 7 bears, and 7 tigers. Half of the troops around the blaze ran to attack the beasts, claws gleaming, spiked clubs swinging. Laughing quietly, Leo crept off into the forest and met Kate. Then, both snickering, they crept to the meeting point.

Meanwhile, Joseph and Mike were half-way through the tunneling into the outpost. With superhuman strength, Joseph grabbed rocks and earth and tossed it behind him. After a little while, Joseph broke the surface as the last bit of stone crumbled into the hole. Joseph turned to Mike, "You're up, dude." Silently, Mike willed his power to start working. He stepped forward. His air power muffled the sound, making him impossible to hear. Grinning, Mike walked over to the captain's desk and grabbed the battle plans.

The sun was beating down. Leo and his friends were trekking back to base after the attack of the outpost. Everybody was sweaty and tired, even Leo was miserable. He hated dry days. After some time, Kate spoke up, "At least we got the plans," she said halfheartedly. Mike nodded, "Ya, but they found out what we were doing." "How?" Kate asked. "They had it rigged with an alarm," Joseph replied, grimly. Mike nodded again, "And this," he pointed to his pocket, "looks like a decoy."

Leo's spirit was sitting on a rock, staring at his dead body below. The Dracxonians had led a full scale attack on the capital. Leo and his friends had been the last line of defense and they had failed. Had he finished training, things might have been different. But like this, his water creatures were only puppets. They weren't alive. Leo had been killed. Sitting there now, Leo saw someone slowly getting up and crawling over to his body. He knew that red hair anywhere; it was Kate! "Leo," Kate said, "I don't know if you're there or not but I never got to tell you that I believe in you and I believe you can still save us." And with that, Kate collapsed, dead.

Plip, plip, plip, it began to rain. Leo felt the water falling through him as Kate's words echoed in his head. He thought about Kate. He thought about Joseph and Mike. Suddenly, Leo no longer felt the water fall through him. Instead, the water pooled inside him and he felt his power better than ever before. Water was giving him life and believing in himself was fueling his power. Suddenly, he was standing there with a glowing blue body. As Kate became a spirit, Leo held out his hand, "I believe in you too," and with that, Leo sent some of his power to her. They were standing there, alive as ever.

Then, the whales came. All the water in the air formed a majestic fleet of shimmering whales. The dazzling silver whale from Leo's dream approached them. Leo and Kate climbed on and joined the fleet

soaring through the air. They descended on the capital. The walls of the castle crumbled away, unable to withstand the onslaught of pure water power. The only thing left was the throne room floating in mid air, with the Draxonian king cowering on his throne. The silver whale descended. Leo stood up on its back and said with a grin, "It's not too late to surrender."

The End