

# Snark

*by* Tom Fassbender

Lothario Jones clawed his way out of the smoking crater, dusted himself off, looked around. He had no idea where he was, but it sure wasn't Pueblo. He ran his tongue across his teeth, then spat out a mouthful of pulverized rock. He looked back at the crater and the small hunk of twisted metal at the bottom that used to be the Colorado Button.

An orange flash caught his eye. He managed a quick but awkward tumbling roll behind the cover of a nearby boulder just before a beam of raw energy ripped a line across the dirt where he'd been standing. The sharp tang of burnt oxygen filled the air. The Snark, of course, looking to cash in on Brother Barnacle's demise.

Lothario pushed himself up, checking the angles, and caught a Penetrating Beam square in the chest. He'd managed to turn on his Charm just in time, but the impact still sent him flying back, thudding against the trunk of a massive tree. He couldn't take many more of those; he needed to end this — and fast. At least now he knew where The Snark was hiding. All he needed was a plan.

But he had nothing to work with. his Danger Pistol was out of bullets, his Bag of Tricks was empty, and he wasted his last can of Antimatter back at the lab. All he had was his Charm and his wits. His Charm wouldn't last forever, and, well, he'd always come up a little short in the wits department.

Then he remembered The Planer he'd scored after The Carpenter's defeat. He pulled up his sleeve, and there it was, still strapped to his arm. He thumbed a switch and it started to pulse yellow. He hoped that meant it was charging.

The tree he was hiding behind exploded into a cloud of wood pulp, leaving him wide open. He knew it took four seconds (or was it three?) for The Snark's Penetrating Beam to charge, so he started running.

Two-and-a-half seconds later, The Planer buzzed, glowing a solid green. Lothario snatched up a fist-sized rock, twisted The Planer's

dial, jumped through a Transverse Doorway, and stepped out right behind The Snark. He slammed the rock into the back of The Snark's head. Lights out.

He popped The Snark's Spectral Suppression Spex loose and dialed the readout for sonics. He held it up to his eye on and scanned the terrain around the crater. Sure enough, just up a nearby slot canyon, behind a waterfall, he saw an entrance to what could only be one of Brother Barnacle's secret hole-ups. Cliché, but that was Brother Barnacle for you.

Lothario Jones dropped his newly acquired Spex into his Bag of Tricks and walked through the waterfall.

