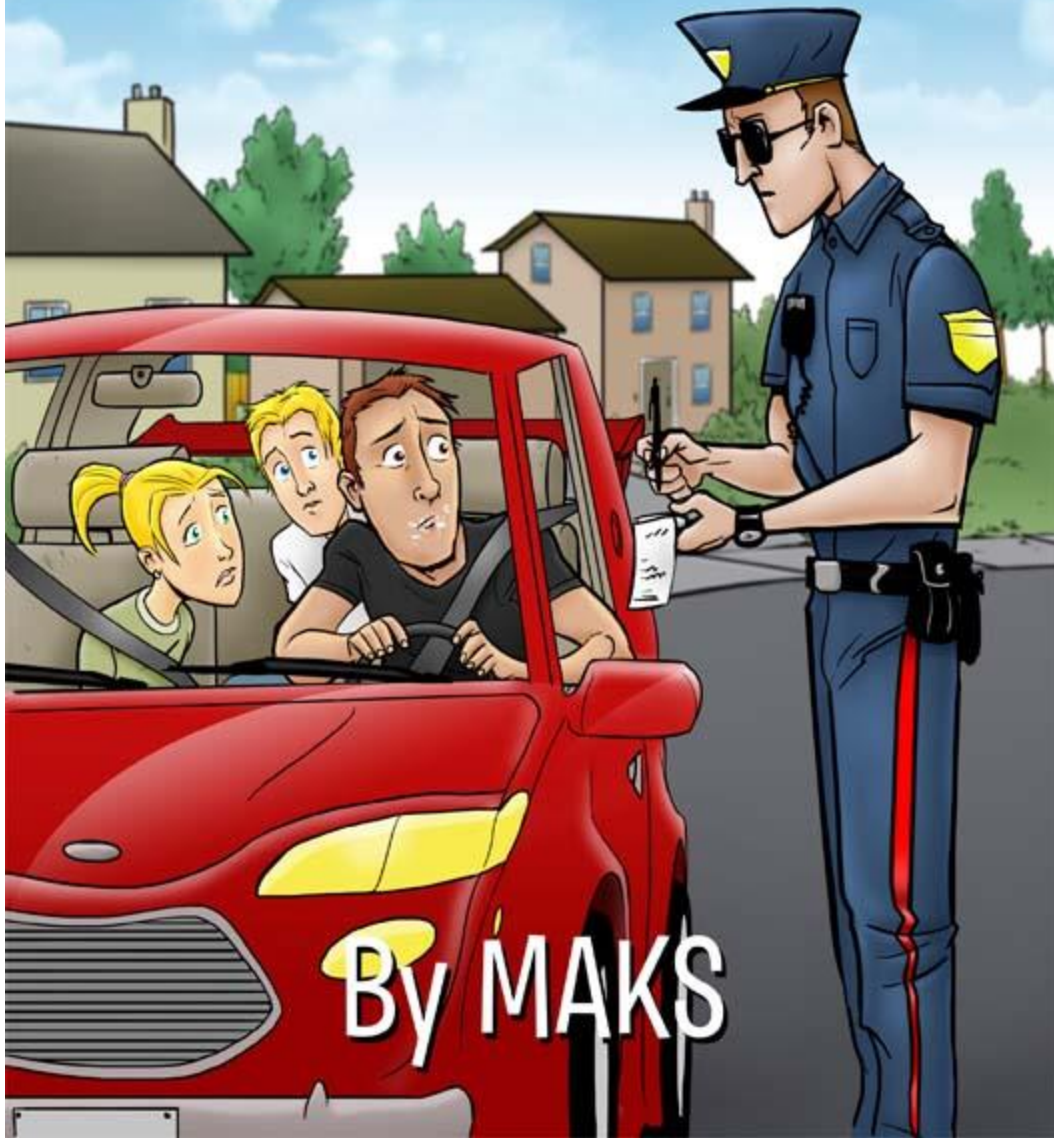


A Kids Opinions Count™ Book

But Officer



But Officer!



Book Eight in the
Kids Opinions Count Series
Agent's of Change Publishing's
Teen Fiction Series with a Difference

Written by **MAKS**

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Chapter One



The kids posted their reviews of both the Addictive Game Player and the Eurasian PC. They gave each technology the thumbs up. They also explained in detail, what ultimate-full-duplexing was, how many domestic businesses were behind it, and how the Eurasians had another opinion. The kids believed that an informed consumer was a good thing.

“Great review!” Tommie declared as she finished reading their posting.

“Yeah, you kids captured the issues and didn’t sound biased one way or the other,” Chris complimented.

“Good work,” Mac added.

“I can’t wait for the responses to roll in,” Kim announced.

Tommie, Scott and Kim waited in front of the PC in the game room...to see what the response would be.

Chris and Mac decided to head to the server room. They had serious work to do. They needed to find out who was hacking into the KOC site... and how. They had some special intruder detection software that should help.

RING... RING...RING...

Tommie answered the game room extension.

“Hello?”

“Tommie, it’s Mother,” the voice on the phone said.

“Where are you?” Tommie asked. She quickly put the phone on speaker, so the kids could talk to Erin.

“Your dad and I are home.”

“Hi, Grandma,” Scott and Kim called out.

“When did you get home? We missed you. It seems like you’ve been gone forever!” Kim said.

“Sorry Kim. We got home yesterday from the old country.”

“The what?” Tommie responded. “Why didn’t you tell us you were coming home? I could have gone over and dusted or something. Got you some groceries. You were gone so long!”

“Yeah, Grandma. You missed a ton of excitement!” Scott exclaimed.

“We didn’t miss anything. I know you had your hands full.”

“What do you know, Mom?”

“It’s always a lot of work raising parents, isn’t it kids,” Erin laughed.

“I should know,” Tommie whined.

Erin changed the subject. “So, how is that web site doing? Are you changing the world?”

Tommie became suspicious. “Why didn’t you phone us last night?”

“We were busy. You were busy. Everyone was busy.”

“Busy doing what?” Tommie asked.

“Tommie, if you can’t figure it out, you’re not ready to know.”

“Figure what out, Grandma?” Kim asked.

Now Tommie decided to change the subject. She wasn’t sure she wanted to figure anything out.

“Mom, why don’t you and Dad come for supper tomorrow night?”

“I’m afraid we can’t, Dear. We’re off again.”

“This is getting silly. What’s with all this secrecy? Tim...”

“Don’t go there, Tommie,” Erin warned.

“Are you and Grandpa spies?” Scott asked.

“Geriatric spies,” Erin returned. “That’s a good one. You kids don’t believe that, do you?”

“No, I guess not,” Scott replied.

“Well, I’ve got some things to take care of tonight. I’ll speak with you tomorrow, perhaps,” Erin said and hung up.

“What’s with Grandma and what’s your problem with Uncle Tim?” Kim queried.

“Nothing,” Tommie barked.

“I knew there was something weird between you two,” Scott said. “You hate him don’t you?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Tommie changed the subject and said, “Have you noticed there’s no hits on the review?”

“This is crazy! We need to talk to Mac and Dad. I hope they’re making progress on finding out who’s corrupting our Internet site.”

“We know who and we know why. We need to know HOW!” Scott replied.

“Yeah, these guys have been screwing with us long enough.”

“Kim! Watch your language!” Tommie ordered.

“Oh, come on, Mom. Screw? What’s so bad about that?” Scott interjected.

“If you just look at the word, nothing. But in the context your sister put it, everything,” Tommie explained. She was being hypocritical. She swore a blue streak... just not in front of the children.

“Mom, I don’t get this — good word — bad word thing,” Kim admitted. “How come fart is a bad word, but breathe is a good word? They’re both body functions. They’re both just hot air!”

“You’d DIE if you didn’t breathe,” Tommie challenged.

“Excuse me, Mom. But I think you’d DIE if you didn’t FART!” Scott proposed. “You’d blow-up!”

“What about the word ass?” Kim asked. “Why is ass a bad word? Is head a bad word? Why is anything associated with your head okay but anything associated with your butt,

isn't? Did the word police get together and put the kibosh on butt related words?"

"Why is ass hole and butt hole bad things and nose hole or ear hole or eye socket, or mouth... they're all okay? They ALL refer to body orifices!" Scott announced.

"Why is everything associated with dark colors, bad, and everything associated with light colors, good?" Kim challenged.

They were off on a tangent and there was no stopping them. Tommie would kill for a distraction. She pretended she wasn't following their line of reasoning.

"I don't get you!" Tommie replied.

"Mom, you're putting us on!" Scott returned. "You get it! You just don't want to admit it. Think about it. Shit is dark and leaves dark skid marks on your underwear."

"Speak for your own Moe Boxers!" Kim declared. She glared at Scott and continued, "Right, and the bad guy is always dressed in black. And people are afraid of the dark. What's so bad about dark?"

"Maybe we have it wrong. Maybe white should be the bad color!" Scott offered. "Maybe good is bad and bad is good!"

"I don't get how the both of you can be on the same stream of consciousness for a discussion like this, and can't agree about something simple like the kind of toothpaste I should buy. How did we get into this conversation?"

"I was trying to make a point!" Kim announced.

"Well, you can make it without swearing," Tommie ordered.

"Mom, when we're talking about something serious and we feel like we're helpless, I don't see what's wrong with saying a word like screwed!" Kim explained. "It makes me feel better. It's just a word!"

"I want to get back to the color thing," Scott said. "If you think about it, air is invisible. Pee is clear, unless you overdose on your vitamins. The good guy is always dressed in white. People turn the lights on when they're scared. You've just got to see the pattern here! I think that if we could produce white shit, then the word shit would be acceptable."

"Enough! This conversation is giving me a damned headache!" Tommie declared. She let that one slip out. 'Shit,' she thought to herself.

"Hey, this is taking us back to Leary," Scott proposed. "He said you control the people with the light!"

"CAN it, you two," Tommie ordered. She didn't have the strength to take on this war of words. She was looking for a way out. Then, she remembered how her mother handled this very same issue.

"Okay, let's get serious about this," Tommie proposed. "I realize that sometimes it seems like swearing is the appropriate response to something cruddy happening. It lets off steam and makes your point or feelings pretty clear. So, why don't we make up our own swear words and use them instead?"

"Ah, Mom! It's not the same!" Scott declared.

"Why not?"

"Swear words have OOOOMPH to them," Kim announced. "They have great sounds. Like SSSSHHHIIITTTT is way better than Poooooo. Do you know what I mean?"

"Okay, take the two most commonly used bad words, mix them up and make new ones out of them. They'll still have the good sounds in them. Fit and Heck? How about that? Will that do?" Tommie suggested.

“So, let’s say I miss an easy shot and we lose the basketball game because of it,” Scott said. “Do I mumble ‘fit’ to myself?”

“What about gosh darn?” Kim laughed. “That sure gets the message across. Oh, gosh darn, I missed the shot.”

Chris and Mac joined Tommie and the kids in the game room. They had been working on the server and the various firewalls to see how the KidsOpinionsCount web site was being compromised.

“Thank goodness,” Tommie said.

Chapter Two



“Why’s that?” Chris asked.

“You don’t want to know, Chris,” Tommie replied. “Did you fix the problem?”

“We found out where the problem is with the site,” Mac said. “Kids, come on and we’ll show you. We think we have some fixes.”

“Take them. Please! I could use the break,” Tommie admitted.

“Break? From what?” Mac asked. “Wait, I don’t want to know, do I?”

“No, you don’t. I’m heading out for a few minutes,” Tommie replied.

“Where to?” Chris asked.

Tommie didn’t answer. She took off up the stairs. They could hear her thumping down the hallway toward the garage.

MMMM... CLUNK...

They all wondered what the big hurry was, as the kids headed to the server room with Chris and Mac. On their way, they noticed Max, woofing to his friend Bibbi, on the PC.

“He sure is hooked,” Kim said.

Scott replied, “Look at them! They’re really talking!”

“Oh, not that again,” Kim returned.

“We should record these conversations and send them to a dog linguist. Maybe they can tell us what they’re saying,” Scott proposed, and proceeded to do just that.

“Right, maybe they’ve been the ones screwing with our web site,” Kim said as a joke.

“Kim! Watch your language!” Chris directed. Kim and Scott burst out laughing.

“Maybe they’re talking about us!” Scott declared.

“Maybe we need to set up a new web site for them... AnimalsOpinionsCount.com,” Kim proposed, tongue in cheek.

“Hey, that’s not such a bad idea,” Scott replied. “We’d need universal translators though.”

“I was just kidding, Dumbo,” Kim barked. “And those universal translators only exist on Star Trek! And aren’t we supposed to be helping Mac and Dad? Hey! Where did they go?”

The kids dropped the doggie discussion and joined Chris and Mac at the server. The four of them spent the next hour trying to extricate the KidsOpinionsCount site out of the tentacles of The Conglomerate... or whoever was screwing with it.

When the final fix was finished, Chris suggested, “We think you kids need to lie low

for a while. Don't bring attention to yourselves and the site. Don't give The Conglomerate cause to do anything. That way they won't notice the changes we made."

"But we wanted to get the word out on the Addictive Game Player and the Eurasian PC! How are we going to do it, now?" Scott asked.

"I think we need to figure out another way that uses other communications media," Mac suggested. "Ones that The Conglomerate don't control or can infiltrate. We need a big media event or something that we can make a global announcement at."

"Maybe Amy's dad could help us out," Chris suggested.

"What about Alex's dad? He's in the newspaper business, and you KNOW what else," Scott reminded them.

"You're right," Chris replied. "Give them both a call. I don't see why we can't let them in on what we're doing. It's not like it's a secret."

"Great, Dad, I'll see if Amy has any ideas," Kim replied.

"And I'm calling Alex," Scott announced.

Kim went first. She had Amy on the speakerphone. "Amy, it's Kim. Scott and I are getting no where fast. We're trying to use the Internet to release an important review. Someone keeps messing with our site. We need to find out if there's a big media event we can crash. Do you know of any?"

"What review are you talking about?" Amy asked.

"The Addictive Game Player review and a Eurasian PC review. It's really important! I'm sending you a copy of our review."

Amy responded immediately. "My dad was telling me about a huge event Sunday, at the basketball game."

"I know that already. Stretch Davis is going to break the rebound record. That's not big enough."

"That's not all of it. He's getting married again at half time! It's been really slow for news and they're going to make this a special news event... you know... when they break in to regular programming. Every channel will carry the wedding at half time."

"Man, that's EXACTLY what we need!" Kim announced. "Now we just have to figure out how to get Stretch to talk about our review on TV! That should be easy... NOT."

"If I hear about anything else, I'll let you know," Amy promised. The girls said their good-byes and were just about to hang up when Kim noticed Mac signaling her not to.

"You want to talk to Amy?"

"Amy, this is Mac."

"Hi, Mac," Amy replied.

"I was wondering if you could get your dad to give me a call. I'm taking care of the logistics of this whole operation and I could use his expertise in the broadcast area."

"Sure, I'll tell him to call you. Can I tell him what you guys told me?"

"Certainly," Mac replied.

Mac gave Amy his phone number and they hung-up.

As soon as he was off the phone, Scott just had to know, "How do we get Davis's help?"

"No problem!" Mac said. "I'll just call Stretch. He owes me a favor."

"What! You know Stretch Davis!" Scott exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell us before!"

"It never came up!" Mac replied.

“How do you know him?” Kim asked.

Mac ignored the question.

“I’m calling Alex. Maybe HIS dad can help.”

“We already got Amy’s dad. We don’t need Alex involved,” Kim argued.

Her words fell on deaf ears as Scott ignored her and placed the call. He explained to Alex that The Conglomerate was messing with the site again. He told him about the review that had to get out, and how The Conglomerate’s plans for ultimate-full-duplexing needed to be explained to the public.

“Scott, I have to tell my dad about this. He might be able to help. I know he’s still involved with The Company, but he’s keeping it quiet. Don’t tell anyone, okay?”

“Okay,” Scott replied.

“I’ll call you back,” Alex said.

“Actually, Alex, my Uncle Mac is working on this for us. He has connections to Stretch Davis. We were thinking about somehow making the announcement at the basketball game. Could you get your dad to call Mac?”

“I don’t know what he’ll say about getting involved,” Alex admitted.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Alex, Richard Montgomery and Joel Black were already discussing the situation. Amy had filled her dad in and he decided to enlighten Joel. They were determined to help out the kids. Joel still had connections to The Company, just as Alex suspected, and he and Amy’s dad, were convinced, that the Campbell’s approach to the Addictive Game, Eurasian PC and ultimate-full-duplexing dilemma, was the right one.

When Alex got off the phone with Scott, he went directly to his dad and explained the situation. His dad didn’t seem at all surprised.

“I agree with their approach,” Joel confirmed. “I think I can help them. Who did you say was taking care of this?”

“Their Uncle Mac,” Alex replied.

“That wouldn’t happen to be Mac Thompson, would it?” Joel asked.

“Yeah, why? Do you know him?”

“I know of him.”

“How do you know him?”

“Alex, you know there are some things I just can’t discuss.”

Actually, Alex knew a lot more than his dad gave him credit for.

Back at the Campbell’s, Mac was ready to rock and roll. “I’ve got some work to do if we’re going to get this organized. Leave it to me. I’ll call you when I’ve got it set up. You guys figure out what you’re going to say. I’ll get you Stretch. And make sure you get Amy and Alex’s dads to call me directly.”

“Good as done,” Kim said.

Mac headed home to do the event planning.

Scott and Kim tried to figure out what the connection between Mac and Stretch was. Chris didn’t have a clue, either.

RING... RING...

Chapter Three



“Hello?” Scott said as he answered the phone. It was Alex.

“I talked to my dad and he’s calling Mac.”

“Great. Maybe they can figure how to get this done. I hate to say it, but we got basketball play-offs tomorrow and we just don’t have time to save the world right now.”

“I’m with you there,” Alex replied. “Let the adults take care of this one. We can’t do everything.”

There was dead air for a few seconds. Alex broke the silence. “Did you talk to Kim, yet?”

“No,” Scott replied.

“Well DO it! What are you waiting for?” Alex insisted.

“Okay! Hold your water. I’ll do it now. I’ll call you back.” Scott was now committed to speak to Kim about their ‘dating’ proposal. He turned to Kim and said, “Kim, I need to speak with you in private.”

“What?” Kim replied.

“Would you just come upstairs with me!” Scott insisted.

Kim could see he was serious and she did as she was asked. When they got upstairs and out of earshot of their parents, Scott started to explain the boys’ proposal. Kim was shocked.

“You want us to what?” Kim asked.

“We were wondering if it would be okay if we hung out as a group,” Scott said.

“We do that now!” Kim replied.

“There’s more. We want you to pretend we’re dating each other.”

“Not in a million years. That idiot still thinks it’s funny to snap bra-straps and say the word, boobies. Not if he was the last guy on earth! Not if you paid me a zillion dollars. Not if...” Kim was on a roll.

“Okay! I get the idea. You’re not quite sure you want to do this.”

Kim was about to explode. “I obviously didn’t make myself clear! NEVER!” The thought of dating Alex, grossed her out. Kim calmed down, and as her curiosity got the best of her, she just had to ask, “Why in the world would you suggest such a stupid thing?”

Scott confessed, “When Alex first asked me, I thought it was a dumb idea. But once he explained himself — it kind of made sense.”

“Okay. Explain,” Kim demanded.

“You know how all the kids are pairing up at school, right?” Scott said.

“So?” Kim replied.

“And you know it’s just a matter of time before WE’LL be expected to, right?” Scott asked.

“Right.”

“Well, do you really want to?” Scott queried.

“No!”

“So if we don’t, kids will think we’re weird. I mean, there’s no good reason for us not to be dating. It’s not like we’re fat or ugly or have tons of acne or dress bad...”

“That sounds like Alex talking, not you,” Kim said.

“It doesn’t matter who said it first. It’s true isn’t it?”

“So you and Alex think it’s better to lie to people and pretend we’re all dating so that no one bothers us? Is that your logic?”

“That’s about it,” Scott replied.

“I don’t understand. Alex is always talking about how the chicks love him. Remember the dance? He pretended to be with every popular girl there, and he has the video clips to prove it! So why does he need to fake it with me?”

“That’s just an act. You know Alex is the world’s biggest poser!”

“You’re right,” Kim replied. “But I keep hearing in school that Alex is dating a bunch of girls at the same time. What’s up with that? Did HE start that rumor?”

“No, it’s true,” Scott admitted.

“Wait a minute. Let me see if I’m getting this. Alex is dating a bunch of girls at the same time, and he wants to date me, too?”

“Okay, Kim. You have to promise not to tell anyone this. Not even Amy!”

“I promise,” Kim replied.

“I mean, really promise. Alex would kill me if he found out I told you this.”

“I PROMISE!” Kim replied again. This time with more feeling.

“Okay. I’ll tell you. Ever since the dance, some of the girls he posed with have been asking him out. He didn’t want to say no, so he’s got three dates coming up this weekend.”

“So, THAT’S his problem,” Kim replied.

“You didn’t hear me. He didn’t want to say yes, but he didn’t think he could say, no.”

“What? They had him in a full nelson! They were shoving bamboo strips under his fingernails? They had him by the...”

“Kim! He didn’t want to say NO because he didn’t want them to think he was a poser,” Scott explained.

“But he IS a poser!”

“Okay, here’s the stuff you have to swear you’ll never repeat.”

“I swear... fit ... there, how’s that?” Kim said sarcastically.

“You’re really being nasty about this, aren’t you?” Scott admitted. “Alex doesn’t want anyone to think he was gay.”

Kim roared with laughter. “Is he gay? Is that the problem? Are we Will and Grace ‘ing it? Then who the heck are you and Amy? Karen and Jack?”

“Kim, you’re being a jerk.”

“I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with being gay. You know I believe in

equality for everyone,” Kim lectured.

“So why the attitude?”

“Knee jerk reaction. I guess I’m not as evolved as I like to think I am,” Kim admitted.

“No, you’re NOT perfect. You know how rumors get started. If a kid gets labeled in grade three as a geek, it sticks with them the rest of their life! You know how it works. Alex is afraid that if he doesn’t date someone, that people will think he’s gay! It’s not easy living with a label that so many people think is bad.”

“What about you? Are you afraid people will think you’re gay?”

“Not really. But think about it. If Alex and I just hang out together and don’t have any girlfriends, then maybe that will happen.”

“Oh, and if Amy and I hang out without boyfriends, people will think WE’RE gay? Is that what you’re saying?”

“I don’t know,” Scott admitted. “It made more sense when Alex said it. Now it just sounds paranoid.”

Kim had a confession to make. “To tell you the truth, Scott, I’ve thought about this, too. Not the gay thing, but the dating thing. I see how all the girls are positioning themselves to trap certain guys. It’s pathetic. You’d think they were nothing unless they have a boyfriend, even if he is a knob like you or Alex. I have no desire to do that. I’ve got more important things to do, than worry about that stuff.”

“So what’s YOUR plan?” Scott asked.

“I figured I’d pretend I had a boyfriend who lived in another city, and we just emailed each other. Not an Internet boyfriend, but a real one that I met somewhere.”

“Who?” Scott inquired. “Where did you meet him? Why didn’t you tell me about him?”

“Because I haven’t met him! I was going to make him up! Aren’t you listening — you idiot?”

“Okay, so we both admit that this dating thing is a pain in the rear and that neither of us are interested or ready for it,” Scott proposed. “So, maybe our idea is a good one.”

“Maybe it is. I’ll call Amy and you call Alex and we can all meet at the park and discuss this tonight.”

“Good. The sooner Alex can say you’re his girlfriend, the sooner he can cancel out with the REALLY hot chicks!” Scott explained. “He told me he was scared to go on a date with them because he’s inexperienced.”

“Well, he’s not going to get any experience with me!” Kim declared.

“Don’t worry about it! I’m sure he doesn’t want a BAD experience.”

“It would be an experience of a life time!” Kim bragged.

“Right, it’ll take him a life time to forget about it!” Scott rebutted.

They made the calls.

Chapter Four



“We’re heading out,” the kids yelled to Chris. The door was closed behind them, and they were down the driveway, before Chris could respond. Actually, Chris didn’t even hear them.

While the kids walked to the park, Tommie was pulling into her parent’s driveway. She noticed there were a number of cars parked in front of their house, including a black stretch limo.

Tommie walked to the front door, opened it with her key, flung it open and shouted, “Mom, Dad! I’m here!” She closed the door behind her. Tommie wondered where Erin and Lanny were. She could hear a lot of noise coming from their family room. She couldn’t see the family room from the foyer and started walking toward it. “Mom! Are you here?”

“Yes, Dear. What are you doing here?” Erin said, as she bolted out from around the corner and stood right in Tommie’s path. Erin was blocking Tommie from continuing on toward the source of the noise.

“What are you and DAD doing, having a party or something? What’s with all the noise?”

“Oh, that’s just the TV.”

“Did you know there’s a black stretch limousine parked in front of your house?”

Erin laughed. “Did you get a look at the license plate?”

“Yeah, as a matter of fact, it was hard to miss. It said SUPREME. Why? Do you know who owns it?”

“No, those vanity plates are usually funny.”

CREEEEK... SCRAAAP...

“What’s that?” Tommie asked. “It sounds like furniture moving.”

“Oh, that, we’re just...,” Erin didn’t have time to finish her explanation. Tommie faked her out to one side and went the other way. A good basketball move. Before Erin could stop her, Tommie was in the family room. She was shocked.

“What’s going on here?” Tommie asked.

“Just a game of bridge,” Lanny replied, and then walked over to Tommie and gave her a big hug.

“You guys go away for weeks and come home and play bridge before you see your own grandchildren? What gives?”

“Tommie, it’s so nice to see you,” Mrs. Hardy said, from one of the chairs around the table.

Tommie now realized she recognized most of the card players. There was Mrs. Hardy, the kids’ English teachers, Mrs. McDuffy, their neighbor and Melissa’s grandmother, Chuck Reimer, the Film Director, and...

“Mr. Klein?”

“Guilty as charged,” he replied, making light of the situation.

Tommie was stunned. “I had no idea you people all knew each other.”

“We don’t tell you everything, Dear,” Erin said.

“Obviously, not,” Tommie replied.

“Your parents have been gone so long, we just decided to surprise them with a little welcome back party,” Mrs. Hardy explained. “They love to play cards, so we thought that’s what we’d do.”

Tommie thought, ‘They never said they liked cards.’ She wondered what was going on, but she suspected she wouldn’t find anything out tonight.

“So Dear, what can we do for you?” Lanny asked.

Tommie was at a loss for words. “I just stopped by to see if you needed anything. I see you’re busy, so I’ll just head home. Call me tomorrow, will you, Mom?”

“Sure, Dear. You can show yourself out, right?”

It was obvious that Erin and Lanny didn’t want to be alone with Tommie. They knew she’d be all over them with questions that they had no intention of answering.

“Sure, I’ll just go. The family probably wonders where I got to,” Tommie said, as she walked to the foyer and let herself out.

As soon as the door closed behind her, she started talking to herself. “Those two have some serious explaining to do. How the heck do they do it? They go away and come back and don’t tell us anything and then have these old coots over for bridge. What the heck is going on? Maybe Tim is right. There’s something wrong here. And here I am, talking to myself again. They make me crazy! What am I going to tell Chris and the kids? Maybe I should just keep quiet about this. I won’t tell them anything. It’ll just upset the kids, for sure. Their grandparents can play cards, but they can’t visit them. Man, I am SO mad...”

As she walked to the van she now spotted two limousines parked side by side. A young man got out of one limo, walked to the other one, and opened the door. Words were exchanged between two males, but Tommie couldn’t hear what was being said. Then, it looked like the young man pulled an old man from one limo and shoved him into the second.

‘What’s he doing?’ Tommie wondered. ‘Is this a kidnapping?’

Just as she was about to shout out at the young man, she heard him say to the old man, “Gramps, I’ve got somewhere special to take you tonight. You’ll really like it.”

The door closed and Tommie couldn’t hear anything else. The second limo sped away and the first followed.

“That was weird,” Tommie said. She got into the van and started the drive home. Tommie would have been intrigued with the conversation in the limo.

“Where are we going?” the old man asked. “Are we going to a video arcade? Are we going to Circuitry City?”

“I’ll tell you when I’m ready,” the grandson replied. “You never share your secrets

with me, why should I, with you.”

“Secrets? What secrets are you talking about? Why is this a secret?” the old man asked. “Are you going to murder me and do away with my body so that no one will ever find me? I will NOT tell you my secrets. It is not time. You are not ready!”

“Oh, shut up! You’re off your rocker and I’ve already proven it to the lawyers,” he said, as the car turned down a secluded back road. “I couldn’t take your craziness anymore, Gramps. I’m sorry, but it just had to be done. You need to be medicated. You need to be supervised. You need to be taken care of, and I can’t be there at your beckon call. You’re going to a home for the aged. THAT’S where we’re going!”

“NO!” the old man shouted. He desperately struggled to open the door... but it wouldn’t budge. He tried to unbuckle his seat belt... but it only got tighter. “I am your prisoner!”

“No Gramps. You’re making this out to be far worse than it is. You’re old. You’re incompetent. You’re goofy... and now you’re going to a place that can take care of you. It’s that simple.”

“You ingrate! I am the supreme leader! You cannot do this to me!” screamed the old man. They were now approaching what appeared to be a hospital.

“They’ll feed you and take care of you!” the grandson explained.

“I need my computer! I need the Internet,” the old man cried.

The grandson ignored him as the limo pulled up to the front entrance of the building and was greeted by two men in white coats.

“NO! You CAN’T!” the old man bellowed.

The two men grabbed Gramps by the arms, sat him down in a wheelchair, and put restraints on him. One of them then sedated Gramps. The deed was done.

Problem solved?

Chapter Five



Tommie drove home. She tried to calm down before she entered the house. She knew the kids would be asking her about where she went in such a hurry. She decided to stop by the grocers and pick up something. That would be her excuse.

As she walked through the doors, the house was suspiciously quiet. She walked down the hall, and found no sign of anyone. Down the stairs and into the game room. Not a soul.

“Kim! Scott! Where are you?”

Chris came out of the server room. He was making some minor adjustments to the network and the firewall. “Where did you go?” Chris asked.

“You don’t want to know. Where are the kids?”

“Upstairs in their bedrooms, I’m guessing.”

“You’re guessing? You don’t know? I called and they didn’t answer.”

“They must have gone out.”

“At this time of night?”

“It’s not that late. What’s got you so riled?”

“Nothing. I need a cup of tea,” Tommie said.

As Tommie poured a cup of tea, Kim and Scott caught up with Amy and Alex at the playground in the park.

Scott, Kim and Alex, made the ‘dating game’ proposal to Amy.

Amy was extremely sensitive about her looks. Her worst fear was that she’d never have a boyfriend. She knew it was dumb... it was normal. She agreed to go along with the charade.

“Okay, I’ll do it. But NO kissing!” Amy proclaimed.

“Of course not!” Scott exclaimed. “Don’t gross me out!”

“So, we’re all agreed. We’ll pretend we’re dating and that’s that,” Alex said.

“Agreed,” Amy replied.

Alex was relieved. He and Scott decided to move on to more serious matters. The boys climbed on the monkey bars and hung upside-down like a couple of sloths.

“And these are the guys we’re supposed to be dating,” Kim said sarcastically.

“Tell me about it,” Amy replied.

“You two are so immature,” Kim announced.

“I know you are, but what am I?” Alex replied.

“What, meat-head?” Kim barked.

As Alex hung upside-down, he saw three figures moving toward them. He recognized the breasts.

“Ooooh, oh,” Alex said, as he quickly tumbled down from the monkey bars and rushed toward Kim.

‘Time to put the plan into action,’ he thought.

Scott noticed the figures, too. How could he not? It was the Spring Valley hotties, Cynthia, Erica and Allana. The same girls that Alex had ‘dates’ with. Scott didn’t want to look stupid, so he jumped down from the bars, too.

“Alex, don’t look now, but guess who’s coming this way?” Scott declared.

“I see them. I’m ready,” Alex replied.

Kim and Amy also noticed the girls. They wondered what Alex was ready for.

Alex figured, ‘Now’s as good a time as any to break it off.’

As the three girls approached them, Alex grabbed Kim, licked his lips and planted a big wet, opened mouthed, beginner’s kiss on her. Kim struggled to break free, but Alex hung on for dear life. The three girls watched in horror.

Scott and Amy were stupefied.

“You two timing, good for nothing gigolo!” Cynthia exclaimed.

“I’ll never go out with you! There’s no way I’d be caught dead with a guy who’s dating someone else, too,” Allana screamed.

“You’re dead meat!” Erica yelled.

At that moment, their best-kept secrets were revealed. They all had dates with Alex.

“You two have dates with him?” Cynthia remarked.

“Yeah, and you two do, too?” Allana added.

“So, how come you didn’t tell me?” Erica asked.

Cynthia confessed, “I was embarrassed. I still think he’s a geek, but he looked so popular at the dance, I just had to go out with him. I mean, even YOU were with him. So how come you’re going out with him?”

Erica responded, “Same reason.”

Allana added, “I had a date with the twerp, too. I figured if you two were with him at the dance, there HAD to be something there that I was missing. I can’t believe we all fell for it. Alex Black is nothing but a BARNEY! You can forget our date Saturday!”

“Same with me,” Cynthia yelled.

“Ditto for me,” Erica barked.

“Tell someone who cares!” Alex shouted. “I’ve got Kim, and she’s hotter than all three of you!”

Despite this bold boisterous boast, deep down inside, Alex was hurting. Reality bites, big time.

“The girls really don’t like him!” Kim declared. “They just didn’t want anyone else to have him because they thought he was popular.”

“Oh, that’s so shallow!” Amy said to Scott. “I’m glad we decided to fake it. I don’t think I’m smart enough to play these head games.”

“Amy, the problem is, you’re TOO smart,” Scott replied.

As the three girls walked off in a huff, they were quickly distracted by Cal and Jake, who were tossing a football around in the field.

“Now there’s REAL men!” Cynthia exclaimed as they headed off toward the boys.

“So, we’re agreed? All for one and one for all,” Alex announced.

“You got it. But Alex, no more kissing,” Kim ordered. “It’s not like it was that bad... it just wasn’t that good.”

“Right back at ya,” Alex remarked.

“Kim, we should go home,” Scott ordered. “We’ve got a big game tomorrow night! We all need a good night’s sleep.”

The kids agreed and headed home. That night, Alex dreamed about kissing Kim. Scott dreamed about playing NBA basketball with a football. Amy dreamed about marrying Stretch Davis. Max dreamed about Bibbi. Kim dreamed about kissing...

Chapter Six



BZZZZ...

Kim's alarm went off.

"Gross!" she yelled out as she wiped her mouth with her pajama sleeve. She was having a nightmare. "Yuck!" she said loudly. "That was the worst dream I've ever had! Kissing a monkey with Alex's face. How stupid is that?"

Scott had woken up from his dream, too. "What a goofy dream," he said.

The kids got dressed and headed downstairs for breakfast. Tommie and Chris were already sitting at the kitchen table.

"Good morning, Kids. You've got a big day, today. Your dad and I will be there to cheer you on."

"Coach said some scouts are coming," Kim said. "We'd better be impressive if we want to get asked to try out for the State Junior Basketball Teams."

"You two will do fine. Just play your game and the scouts will be impressed," Chris suggested.

"Thanks, Dad," Kim replied. Kim and Scott wolfed down their breakfast, gathered their books, and headed out the door. "We're off. See you later. Love ya."

Kim and Scott met up with Amy and Alex at school. "You won't believe what they're saying!" Amy exclaimed. She was visibly upset.

"What who's saying?" Kim asked.

"Everyone's saying you and Alex were hooking-up last night at the park!"

"What? That stupid little kiss he gave me? I'd hardly call that hooking-up," Kim exclaimed. "What's going on here, Alex? Did you start a rumor about us?"

"No way! Those big mouth girls must be paying me back."

Kim turned white as a ghost. "You idiot! You just HAD to kiss me in front of them. NOW what are we going to do?"

"Maybe, just ignore the whole thing and it'll go away," Scott suggested.

As they walked into the school, the boys were giving Kim the eye. They'd never looked at her like that before. It's the same way they look at the girls with the bad reputations. She didn't like it one little bit.

"I want to go home. They think I'm skanky!" Kim cried, as she walked down the hallway and looked down at the floor, trying desperately not to be noticed.

Amy observed the girls looking at Alex, like he was Keau Heaves... and wasn't

pleased. "Look! They think he's a stud! It's just not fair. Kim gets to be the scarlet woman and he gets to be the scarlet pimpernel!"

"Who?" Alex asked.

"Never mind, you dullard," Amy barked.

"Kim, you have to ignore the whole thing," Amy declared. "You know that this kind of stuff happens. Don't forget, you've said the same things about Stephanie and Taylor. Do you think they're really doing it?"

"I get your point," Kim replied. "What goes around comes around."

The day dragged on until World Issues class.

The kids settled into their seats, pulled out their homework assignment from the night before, and waited for Mr. Jones to speak. As usual, he surprised them.

"Okay students. I'd like you all to mark your own reports. What I'm going to do is give you the facts of the story that you watched last class. You check and see if you reported the facts correctly. Then I want you to identify all of the superfluous information that you also reported."

"We get to mark our own? Is this for real marks?" Taylor asked.

"Yes, Taylor. So I'm going to be relying on you to be objective," Mr. Jones advised. "Do you think you can do that?"

"No problem!" Taylor exclaimed.

"Okay, here are the facts," Mr. Jones said. He proceeded to list them off, one by one. He gave the students a chance to search them out in their report... or not. "So, as you can see, there were fifteen pertinent facts in this story."

Amy said. "I had a lot more!"

"Like what?" Mr. Jones asked.

Amy added some details to the descriptions of the people she had reported on. As it turned out, these details weren't connected to the story they had watched. They were however, directly derived from Mr. Jones' actions while the kids were watching the news story. He was changing his own appearance, talking on his cell phone, and basically distracting the kids while they were working on their project.

"Class, do you see how easy it is to confuse and corrupt the facts? You all watched the same story and you were all told to write a news report on the story. Instead of concentrating on the facts, you let your mind wander and you incorporated some of my activities into the report you wrote."

The kids all nodded their heads in agreement. Most of them added the same extraneous details Amy did.

"People corrupt the facts every day, and mis-communicate information. It can have devastating effects. For instance, I heard a rumor this morning about Kim and Alex making out for hours in the playground last night."

Kim and Alex turned red as radishes. The rest of the class giggled.

Mr. Jones continued, "When I got to school this morning, I had cafeteria duty. I overheard one of our students, who will go unnamed, say that she was at the park last night and she saw Kim and Alex kissing in the sand box."

"We weren't kissing in the sand box!" Alex exclaimed.

"No Alex, you're right, according to a second unnamed source. When I was on hall duty later, I overheard another person say they saw you and Kim kissing on the swings at the park."

“We weren’t kissing on the swings!” Kim exclaimed.

“I believe you,” Mr. Jones replied. “I won’t even repeat what a third source was overhead saying. So what have we learned?”

“The same thing you’ve been teaching us since you got here. Get the facts straight,” Stephanie expounded. “I know how Alex and Kim feel. There’s always rumors being spread about me and Taylor. None of them are true.”

Kim felt guilty.

Chapter Seven



“Now, for your next assignment,” Mr. Jones announced. “I want you to pass your papers to the person behind you, and they’ll grade them.”

There were a few moans from the crowd.

“What’s the problem? Maybe they’ll give you an even higher grade,” Mr. Jones laughed.

Mr. Jones read out the story points in reverse order. The kids marked their classmate’s papers and handed them back. There were quite a few comments being mumbled.

“Cheater!” Amy said to Taylor, who was sitting in front of her.

“How many of you gave the person in front of you a lower mark than they gave themselves?”

Almost the entire class put up their hands.

“Does that make you all a bunch of liars and cheats?” Mr. Jones asked.

“It looks that way,” Alex replied.

“Maybe you were just too hard on your friends and not hard enough on yourself?”

Mr. Jones said, offering an explanation. “Maybe you gave yourself the benefit of the doubt, but never gave it to the person in front of you. Maybe you want everyone else to get a lower mark than you, because you’re so competitive.”

“Mr. Jones, you’re making my head swim,” Sara admitted. “I don’t understand. You make so many points, I can’t keep track of them all. I think you’re trying to make us all mad at each other. Are you trying to start a war or something? We’re all suspicious of each other now.”

“That’s very perceptive of you! That’s EXACTLY what I was trying to do. And do you have the facts to prove it?”

“I think I do,” Scott proclaimed. “You gave us TWO sets of answers. Because the list was so long, most of us didn’t notice a difference, but I did. In the first set, you were vague, and the second set you were more specific. So, it wasn’t us that made decisions to favor ourselves, it was YOU that gave us the answers that led us to make those decisions.”

“You’re messing with our heads!” Allana announced.

“Precisely!” Mr. Jones admitted. “I’m making the point — that we are selective in what we hear — and we are subjective in what we think is important.”

“So, Mr. Jones, does anybody ever get it right?” Stephanie asked.

“Get what right?” Mr. Jones replied.

“You’re making us crazy!” Taylor declared.

BZZZZ...

The bell went. The basketball games would soon start. The kids were buzzed.

While the kids were busy with school, Mac and Natalie analyzed the visual data they collected. They also ran genealogy studies on their subjects, just in case Natalie and the kids were right, and there was some link between the images and the past.

Mac decided to take a break and call his brother, Tim. Mac and Tim didn’t always get along, but they did respect each other’s research.

“Mac, it’s good to hear from you. How’s Tommie and the family? I’ve been meaning to call,” Tim said.

“Tim, I need your help. Our research is at a critical stage and Natalie and I really need someone we can trust. I think it’s time to incorporate your pineal work.”

“Have you made a breakthrough?” Tim asked excitedly.

“You have to see it, to believe it!” Mac replied.

“I’ve got a break in my schedule. I could be there tomorrow. What do you think?”

“Fantastic! See you tomorrow!” Mac said and hung up. He then turned to Natalie and stated, “Natalie, great news. My brother’s coming. He’ll be able to help us piece together the puzzle.”

“That’s terrific, but we STILL need to address the question of research subjects. We need a larger sample now.”

“... And we have to find a sample that lives close to here,” Mac added.

“I know of a possible source,” Natalie said. “I’ll check it out.” Natalie called Steve Jeffries, the manager of Stony Mountain Senior Citizen’s Retirement Home. As a member of its private sector board, Natalie was familiar with the facility and most of the residents. She put the call on speakerphone, so that Mac could listen in.

“Natalie, how are you?” Steve asked. “Are you coming to the meeting tomorrow night? I’m really excited about the progress of your program.”

“Of course I’ll be there. I wouldn’t miss it for the world. I was wondering if you’d mind if I brought along a colleague of mine, Mac Thompson. I think he would find our project interesting, and he’s quite the systems specialist. I’m sure I can convince him to help us set up the Wireless Network.”

“Sure! I never turn down free help,” Steve stated.

“See you tomorrow, Steve,” Natalie replied and hung up.

“So, what’s this got to do with our problem?” Mac asked.

“I want you to come to the retirement home with me tomorrow night. You can help set up their computer network. In return, I think I can get the manager to agree to let us canvas the residents to see if any of them would help us with our research.”

“Oh, great! Use old fogies for our research. They certainly represent the general population,” Mac replied sarcastically.

“You know darn well that epilepsy hits the very young AND the very old,” Natalie lectured. “You’ll meet a few of the residents tomorrow. After the meeting we can discuss it with Steve, otherwise, we’ll have to come up with a Plan B.”

“Okay, it’s worth a shot.”

It was now approaching 3:35 p.m. "I've got to head out now," Mac said. "I'm going over to Spring Valley School to watch Scott and Kim's basketball play-offs." Mac headed off to the school and met Chris and Tommie in the gym. This was going to be a barnburner.

Chapter Eight



Scott and Kim were pumped about the basketball game and the State scouts. By the time 3:35 p.m. rolled around, they were totally immersed in their basketball headspace. Nothing else mattered.

Tonight was the final game of the season. The Conference Championship was at stake for both the girls' and the boys' teams. They were facing their biggest rivals, the Terra Nova Terriers. The Terriers were out for Spring Valley's butt.

Rumor had it; the Terriers recruited some ringers. Word on the street was, two hot shot brothers transferred schools just so they could be on the Terriers... and what they thought, would be a winning boys' team. Scott suspected it was the Ribald brothers. These brothers did not like to lose. Scott and Alex also wondered if John Smith Junior would be there. After his dad's arrest, they heard rumors that the family moved. No one had confirmed them.

Another rumor was that the Terrier girls' team recruited a new coach. His name was Billy Incubus. He had an awful reputation and he'd do anything to win.

The girls warmed up on the floor for ten minutes. There was still no sign of the Terrier's coach.

The ref blew the whistle, signaling the start of the game. As the girls took to the floor, they could see that the rumor was true. Billy Incubus was on the Terrier's bench. Spring Valley suddenly became very nervous. Incubus was their worst nightmare.

The girls got into position at center court. The Spring Valley girls tried to shake hands with the Terriers. The Terriers just slapped the girls' hands as hard as they could. Their un-sportsmanlike behavior set the tone for what was to follow.

The ref tossed the first tip-off ball. Melissa took the jump and tipped the ball to Kim. Kim headed down the floor for an easy lay-up. Spring Valley full court pressed right away. The Terriers had problems inbounding the ball. The five-second violation was called and the ball was turned over to Amy. She quickly passed it in to Melissa, who took a little jumper from five feet, and Spring Valley was now up by four.

Spring Valley pressed again and caused another turn over. The Terriers were frustrated. They began pushing off the Spring Valley players to free themselves. Spring Valley stuck to them like glue, causing a third turnover in as many attempts. Kim scored again. Incubus called a time out. He was furious with his team.

When the Terriers ran back out onto the court, it was clear they had a plan. As Spring

Valley inbounded the ball, the Terriers elbowed their Spring Valley checks, right in their boobs.

The girls buckled over in pain. Spring Valley's Coach Winfield cried out for fouls. No one had ever seen five fouls committed on the same play at the exact same time.

The refs didn't blow the whistle. What the heck was going on?

"Shit!" Kim screamed out. "Call the fouls!"

TWEEEEET...

The whistle blew. "Technical!" shouted the referee, as he pointed his finger at Kim. Kim was embarrassed. She and her teammates watched as O'Dinkle's daughter shot the technical. It swirled around the rim and then finally dropped in.

The Terriers inbounded the ball and took it down the floor for an easy lay-up. The Spring Valley girls were still struggling to get their breath. They ran down the floor as fast as they could. Now they had to inbound the ball in their own end.

The Terriers were all over them again, literally. They made sure they stayed that way. They grabbed the Spring Valley girls' jerseys, hair, and shorts, anything they could get their hands on. Amy had a hard time inbounding, and ended up throwing a wild pass that was intercepted by the Terriers. They scored.

"Fit!" Kim yelled out. It felt good. It let off steam, and the refs didn't do a thing about it.

'Mom was right!' Kim thought. Her other teammates took note.

This time Amy grabbed the ball and launched it down the floor, just to get it out of their zone. Kim took off down the court. Berta O'Dinkle was stride for stride beside her. She still had a metal splint on her wrist from the three-on-three game. As Kim leapt up to haul down the ball, Berta cracked Kim in the middle of the back with her brace. Kim fell to the floor in pain.

Scott screamed out, "What the heck is going on here?"

The ref heard Scott. He wasn't amused and called a technical foul on the fans. "Technical?" Tommie screamed out.

"This is ridiculous!" Chris yelled out.

"One more technical on the crowd, Sir and your coach will be gone," the ref announced.

"What? What kind of referee are you?" another parent shouted.

As the crowd yelled, Kim pushed herself up off the floor and headed to the bench. She signaled to her parents to cool it. She was okay.

Coach Winfield was stunned. He was ready to pull his team. To heck with the championship. His players were more important. The girls refused to let him.

"Give us a strategy to fight this," Amy said. "That's all we need. We'll take care of ourselves. We're not quitters."

"We're not sucks! We can handle these dogs," Melissa barked.

"Absolutely!" screeched Kim.

"Okay girls. Here's the plan. We need to change our game. We can't be taking the ball to them. We need to rely on our outside game. Melissa and Kim... we need your threes! On defense, we'll run a zone. No more man to man, except when they get close. This should reduce physical contact with them.

"Oh, and by the way... just for a little added incentive, I just saw two of the State Scouts up in the stands. Show them what great basketball is all about girls... teamwork!"

The girls gave three cheers for Spring Valley and ran out onto the court. They were pumped! Melissa was hot on the boards and Kim was dropping threes at will.

The strategy worked. By the end of the game, they had out-run and out-scored the Terriers. This was the hardest game of their life, but it also their most satisfying. They were exhausted... but they were Champs.

The scouts were impressed. They walked over to Coach Winfield to talk to him. As good as all the girls were, they knew that Kim, Melissa and Amy would have the best shot at a try out and put their teamwork to work, again. Making sure that the scouts could hear and see, the girls' team hoisted Kim, Melissa and Amy up on their shoulders and paraded them around the gym. This didn't go unnoticed by the scouts or their coach. Winfield had never been as proud of his girls as he was at that moment. He knew exactly what they were up to. This was what the game was all about... all for one and one for all.

Chapter Nine



Alex and Scott had been sitting in the stands watching the game with the Campbells, the Montgomerys and the Blacks. Alex's entire family was there, including his little sister, Mia.

It was quite the family affair. And, not only did they get to watch the game, but Mac, Richard and Joel, got to finish up their plans for the big media event. There was one more detail they were waiting for... a phone call from Stretch Davis to confirm his role.

As the boys got up to leave for the court below, they got a rousing "Good luck!" from the big group.

Scott and Alex wound their way through the balcony crowd. It was packed and there was barely room to breathe. This was probably the hottest game in town. The girls' game was exciting but the boys' game promised to be a thrill a second.

Scott felt his foot step on something. He looked down. A heavy set man looked up at him and grumpily said, "Hey, watch it Kid."

The man was talking on his cell. Scott overheard him say, "The game didn't go as expected. Spring Valley won by 12."

As Scott and Alex left the balcony, he turned to Alex and said, "Did that guy's voice sound familiar?"

"Which guy?"

"The guy with the accent. I stepped on his toe. The one talking about the score of the basketball game. He sounded like one of the MOB."

"I didn't hear anyone. And besides, don't you think my dad would do something?" Alex was right. Scott decided to get his mind back on the game.

As they walked down the hall toward the gym door, they noticed John Smith Junior being escorted to the gymnasium,

"What's up with that?" Alex asked. "Does he need protection?"

"No, but his dad does," Scott replied. "Look, he's with John Junior."

Sure enough, John Smith, The Ringmaster, had been let out of jail to watch his kid's game.

"What kind of prison system do we run in this State? They let convicted criminals out to watch games?"

"Hey, he's a convicted White Collar Criminal. You know those guys are sent to country clubs," Alex said sarcastically.

Scott watched to see where Mr. Smith was sitting. He saw Mr. Smith go up the stairs to the balcony.

“Look!” Scott exclaimed. “He’s sitting with the guy with the deep voice and funny accent.”

“Hey! Where did my dad go?” Alex asked. “He was here just a minute ago. Him and Mr. Montgomery have split. That’s just like my dad. He’s never there for me.”

“Alex, you numbskull. Think about it. What if that guy was one of the Men of Business? I think it’s Gorky”

“I don’t get what’s going on, here.”

“Neither do I.”

“Black, Campbell, get yourselves on the court. You’ve got seven minutes to warm up,” their coach shouted at them.

The boys did as they were told and took to the floor. They set up and ran through their drills.

“Alex, it looks like the rumors are true. There they are,” Scott said, as he pointed out the Ribald brothers.

“Shoot! We have to play against them... again!” Alex exclaimed. “They’ve got to be the dirtiest players in the league. I HATE those guys.”

“Hey, what’s Ricky doing over there?” Alex asked. Scott and Alex were wondering why one of their own players seemed to be sucking up to the Ribald brothers.

“They play on the same hockey team,” Ryan commented. “Their dad is the coach. Ricky probably wants to suck up to get more ice time.”

“Oh, that explains it, I guess,” Scott said.

“I don’t trust those guys,” Ryan admitted. “I’ve heard that they’ve been caught cheating at games... paying off players on the other teams and stuff like that.”

“Get serious!” Scott replied.

“Hey, my dad doesn’t lie. There’s been tons of complaints,” Ryan admitted.

“To the cops?” Alex interjected.

“You bet,” Ryan replied. “That’s bribery! That’s a criminal offense! Especially if there are big stakes!”

“What kind of big stakes?” Scott asked.

“Betting. There’s tons of money bet on junior hockey and even on our basketball games,” Ryan declared. “I heard my dad talking about it. He said something about some men of business.”

Scott looked at Alex. They were now both wondering if it really was Gorky sitting in the stands.

Alex and Scott couldn’t believe their ears. They had no idea.

TWEEEEET...

Chapter Ten



The ref blew the whistle and the teams gave one last cheer before they made their way to center court.

The Spring Valley team did their normal, “Go, Fight, Win,” chant.

The Terriers were more intense. Their coach began by shouting out at the top of his lungs, “Remember, it’s not how you play the game... but that you win!”

His boys all cheered.

As if that wasn’t enough, the team’s cheer was even more ominous. They shouted out, “Terrorists! Terrorists! Terrorists! Annihilate Spring Valley!”

The parents of Spring Valley were appalled.

“What the heck was that?” Tommie exclaimed.

“They got beat last time and they’re just trying to strike a little terror into our boys. Intimidate them. But I do agree... it IS over the top.”

Kim and Amy had just joined Tommie, Chris and Mac in the stands.

“Mom, where’s Dad?” Amy asked.

“He left for a few minutes with Mr. Black,” she replied. “Amy, I think you played fantastic. I am so proud of you.”

Amy was surprised. “Thanks Mom.”

“Amy, why don’t you sit beside me,” Mrs. Montgomery asked.

Kim gave Amy a little shove in her mom’s direction. Amy got the message. They sat together, and for the first time, they spent quality time together that wasn’t in a shopping mall.

Kim sat down beside Tommie.

“Your game was amazing girls,” Tommie said. “I’ve never seen you play better. Your teamwork was fantastic.”

“Mom, did you see what the girls did after the game?”

“I sure did. I think all of you girls deserved to be carried around.”

Mrs. Black commented, “I hope the boys’ game gets better refs than you girls had. I wouldn’t want Alex to get hurt.”

Kim and Amy giggled to themselves.

“Look! It’s the same guys!” Kim exclaimed.

“If the refs don’t keep a handle on things, this game could get out of hand,” Chris replied. “Girls are dirty, but boys are filthy.”

“Alex is filthy. Alex is filthy,” Mia mimicked.

“It’s a good thing Alex isn’t up here. He’d kill her,” Kim whispered to Amy.

“Oh, that’s my cell,” Mac said. He realized the balcony was noisy. “I’d better take this in the hall.” He stood up and walked out. He found a quiet corner down the hallway.

TWEEET...

The whistle blew and the team walked on to center court.

Unbeknownst to the boys, Mr. Black and Mr. Montgomery took new seats in the stands, right beside the man with the accent. And, sitting on the other side of the man with the accent, were Mr. Smith and his escorts.

The boys took their positions around the circle.

The ref tossed the ball. The tip-off resulted in a free ball and both teams hurled themselves on the ball. Elbows were thrown, bodies shoved, players tripped, shirts grabbed, knees raised. Scott managed to come up with the ball and Alex took off down the floor. Scott chucked a long bomb to Alex and he scored an easy lay-up.

The rest of the players were still wrestling at center court. No fouls were called. The State Scouts left the stands and walked onto the basketball court. They had a few words with the referees and then returned back to the stands.

Surprisingly, Spring Valley was given possession of the ball and the game resumed. The refs began to call a good game and used their whistles. Fair play allowed Scott to take control of his team and set the game’s pace. By half time, Spring Valley was up by eight.

The Terriers’ top players were indeed, John Smith and Beau and Brad Ribald. Like Ryan said, they’d do anything to win. After the half time break, the Terriers came out with a new plan.

RING... RING... RING...

It was four minutes into the second half. Scott had already racked up thirteen points. He was moving the ball up the floor and called the ‘clear’ play at half-court. As he beat his man, one of his own players moved into his lane, bringing his defender, a Ribald brother, with him.

“What the heck is Ricky doing?” Kim yelled out.

A major collision was inevitable. Scott was in the air. He couldn’t change direction and slammed right into Ricky and Beau Ribald. Scott crashed to the floor. His right elbow broke the fall but his head hit pretty hard. Scott didn’t move. The coach rushed over to Scott and flashed smelling salts under his nose.

Scott jumped to his feet, realized what had happened and declared, “I’m okay Coach! Game on!”

Play resumed. Scott decided to try to get rid of at least one of the Ribalds. He knew they weren’t the proficient ball handlers they thought they were. When Brad Ribald got a fast break, Scott, who was faster, managed to get in front of him by at least three feet and stood in position. Brad ran right into him and knocked Scott on his butt. The ref did the right thing and called an offensive foul against Brad.

Brad was mad... big time. He started yapping at the ref, calling him an idiot, calling him incompetent, threatening to get his ref’s license pulled, threatening to key his car...

“Technical!” the ref called out.

The mouthy brothers just didn’t know when to stop. Beau got into the act and the two

of them ganged-up on the refs.

“You’re both out of the game!” screamed one of the refs.

The Terrier’s coach jumped up from the bench and started to abuse the ref.

Then surprisingly, as the coach was getting no where with the refs, Mr. Ribald, red as a beet, and sitting right behind the man with the accent, jumped up and shouted, “You CAN’T! We had a DEAL!”

The crowd, the coaches and the players were stunned. The Ribald brothers weren’t. They knew their dad was in trouble. They knew about the ‘deals’. They’d been part of these ‘deals’ all season.

The boys needed to help their dad. A distraction was in order and what could be better than revenge on the kid that blew their plan out of the water.

“It’s your fault!” Beau yelled out at Scott. Beau and Brad took off after Scott and shoved him down to the floor. Scott hit his head on the floor, again.

This time, he was knocked unconscious.

Chapter Eleven



Alex ran to Scott.

Mr. Jones, who had been watching from the sidelines, immediately ran out onto the floor.

Tommie, Chris, Kim and Amy, who were up in the balcony, headed down the stairs and out onto the court.

Alex got there first. He cradled Scott's head in his arms. "SCOTT! SCOTT! Can you hear me buddy?" He thought Scott was dead. "Scott! Come on! Wake-up!"

Mr. Jones was next on the scene. He took Scott's hand and felt for his pulse. "He's okay, Alex. His pulse is strong. He's breathing on his own. He'll probably come to, any second now."

The coach was the third person to arrive. He brought the smelling salts with him... again. He waved them under Scott's nose, but there was no response.

It seemed like an eternity to Tommie, Kim, Amy and Chris, but they finally reached Scott.

"SCOTT! My baby!" Tommie cried out. Before she could say another word, she went off into Never Neverland. She just stared out into space. Now Scott and Tommie were both out to lunch.

"MOM!" Kim exclaimed. She was the only one that noticed. Everyone else was concentrating on Scott.

"Hey, get them off the floor! We need to get on with the game!" a Terrier fan screamed.

Scott and Tommie 'woke-up' within seconds of each other.

Mr. Jones was gone.

Mac finally finished the call. He walked back out to the balcony and noticed the craziness on the floor below.

During the commotion, the refs called the game. The Terrier's were disqualified and the Spring Valley boys were the new champs. The Spring Valley kids ran out to the floor and hoisted the boys' team into the air.

Principal Toole made his way to the middle of the mass of kids on the basketball court.

"I have an announcement to make!" he shouted out over the boisterous celebrators. "Three cheers for the girls and boys teams! Hip Hip Horray!"

The crowd cheered.

“Three cheers for the cheerleaders!” Tommie called out.

The crowd obliged.

“Three cheers for the fans!” Principal Toole shouted. The entire Spring Valley contingent roared. “It takes a village to raise a child,” he added.

The kids were pumped and after then minutes of whooping it up, they settled down and began to make plans for the evening.

“Hey, do we have to do that dumb news report tonight for Jones?” Alex asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe we can get a pass because of the game.”

“Or we can use the game for the story,” Alex offered.

“I don’t think its international news,” Scott remarked.

“Jones was here earlier, let’s see if we can find him,” Alex returned.

“He was?”

“Sure, he was. He checked you out when you were on the floor.”

“He did?”

“Let’s see if we can find him.”

The boys scoured the gym and hallways, looking for Mr. Jones.

“Hey, where did he go anyway?”

“Mystery man?” Alex laughed. “There’s more to that guy than meets the eye.”

“Maybe we should check him out,” Scott suggested. “Find out where he came from. Where he went to school. Let’s do a little sleuthing. Get the scoop on him!”

“I hear ya! Make him the news story. I bet he’d like that,” Alex replied as they headed to the locker room to change.

When they came out of the change room, Mr. Black and Mr. Montgomery were waiting for them.

“Dad when did you get back?”

“Back from where?”

“I saw you and Mr. Montgomery leave before our game even started.”

“We came right back. Why would you think we left?”

“I thought I saw...”

“When we came back to the balcony, our seats were gone; we got stuck sitting beside John Smith and his escorts. It was pretty weird, since you kids were responsible for putting him away.”

“Dad, where’s Mom and Mia?”

“Dance class,” Mr. Black responded.

Just then, Amy, Kim, Chris and Tommie approached the group. Chris asked, “Are you guys coming for pizza?”

“We’d love to, but Richard and I have some work to do. Mac was good enough to put the final piece of the plan into place, and now we have to ensure we have the technology to execute.”

Alex was so excited that his dad actually watched his game, he didn’t care if he couldn’t make it for pizza.

Amy didn’t feel the same. “Ah Dad, are you sure you can’t come?”

“Amy, you know I’d love to, but I have to take your mom to a charity fashion show and you heard Mr. Black. He and I have work to do.”

Just then, the man with the accent, the guy Scott thought was Gorky, walked by.

Mr. Black spoke to him. "Igor! I didn't get a chance to ask you, how was Flin Flon?" Alex and Scott's jaws dropped.

Gorky laughed. "It was a nice place to visit, but I didn't want to live there. It's way too hot."

"I hear you," Mr. Black replied. "Glad you could come home."

"Me too. I'm going legit, you know. Me and the survivors. We're going to do it Huckster's way," Gorky replied and walked away.

The boys' mouths were still open when Mr. Montgomery asked, "Catching flies?"

Alex and Scott realized they must have looked pretty stupid. They regained their composure and wondered what to make of what they just heard.

"Let's go!" Kim shouted. "We need to get to Za's or we'll never get a seat."

Tommie realized that neither the Blacks nor the Montgomerys were coming for pizza, so she offered Amy and Alex a ride. Mac took his own vehicle.

On the way to Za's, Kim just had to ask, "Mom, what's with the blank stare? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. What are you talking about?"

"This is the second time you've done something weird!" Kim commented.

Tommie shook her head and thought to herself, 'Everything I do is 'weird' to her lately.'

"Hey, Mr. Jones is hot isn't he Mrs. C," Amy declared.

"Mr. Jones? Your new teacher? Was he at the game?"

"Sure. He was with us on the basketball court with Scott. How could you miss him," Kim announced.

"I did!" Scott admitted.

"You were out of it," Amy clarified.

"You didn't notice him?" Alex asked.

Chris commented, "Actually, Mr. Jones looks a lot like a guy your mom used to work with. But he should be a lot older by now. Maybe he's some relative. A younger brother or something. Don't you remember, Tommie?"

"This conversation is getting silly," Tommie said. She was clueless and concerned about what might have been a second epileptic episode. She didn't want to think about it. Fortunately, for Tommie, they arrived at the restaurant and the excitement of the win took over again. The Campbells and friends were escorted to the front of the line and directly to a table.

"Now that's service!" Amy exclaimed.

"That's respect!" Scott said.

The girls in the restaurant were chanting "Scott! Scott! Scott! Scott!"

"Oh, no, that's ALL we need!" Kim declared.

"Don't worry Kim. I've already got a girlfriend, right Amy?"

"What was that?" Tommie asked. "Scott's dating Amy?"

"Oh great! Our secret's out," Scott whined.

"And Kim's dating ME!" Alex announced.

"I'm not sure I like that," Chris said. He was kind of teasing, but kind of not...

"Don't worry, it's not for real. We're just pretending," Kim admitted. The kids went on to explain their theory.

"Makes sense to me!" Tommie said. "You know when I was a kid, I had boyfriends

all over the country. They were pen pals. It gave me a great excuse to not have to date. I had more important things to do.”

“That’s you, Mom. This is us,” Scott said.

“Sounds pretty much the same thing to me,” Mac interjected.

The waiter appeared. “What’s it gonna be folks?”

They called out their orders. Chris decided a new topic was required. “Mac, how’s your research going?” He was shocked at what followed...

Chapter Twelve



“Great! Natalie and I are looking for some new recruits?” Mac replied.

“What about senior citizens? They have a high incidence of epilepsy,” Kim suggested.

“How do you know that?” Mac inquired.

“Our epilepsy page. Someone posted information on it about their grandmother,” Kim explained.

“Well, it’s funny you should suggest that, because Natalie said the same thing today.”

“No kidding?” Kim replied.

“No kidding,” Mac echoed. “So what do you know about old people and epilepsy?”

“The posting said that seniors can suddenly become epileptic,” Kim replied.

“I read that, too,” Amy followed.

Scott and Alex were busy reliving the glory of the game. They weren’t paying attention to the conversation.

“Yes, that’s true. It can be a serious problem at their age,” Mac explained. “A tonic-clonic seizure could kill them. So what else did you find out?”

“I was surprised when I found out that the people with glaucoma, heart disease and high blood pressure have a higher than average incidence of epilepsy,” Kim said. “They also say that those seniors who were prescribed a diuretic had the lowest incidence, but that those who had a combined prescription of diuretics AND potassium had the highest incidence overall. Why do you think that is?”

Mac explained. “As the body ages, it retains salt at a higher rate. Salt and potassium regulate the body’s electrochemical activity. High salt content creates all sorts of problems with the body’s electrochemical balance. This actually causes high blood pressure, glaucoma, arrhythmias, the most common diseases of the elderly.”

“So salt has something to do with epilepsy?” Kim asked.

“Right. Epilepsy is caused by a change in the electrochemical balance as well, so it only makes sense that those who suffer from this imbalance late in life are more susceptible to epilepsy and other things.”

“Well then, the diuretics should help!” Amy suggested. “They get rid of waste and that should mean they reduce the high salt levels.”

“Actually it just reduces the potassium levels and that’s why doctors prescribe potassium supplements and the incidence of epilepsy increases. Interesting problem isn’t

it?”

“Mac, what’s the difference between the diuretics that they give to old people and the stuff people use to lose weight?” Kim asked.

“Nothing, really,” Mac replied.

“Caffeine is a diuretic, isn’t it?” Kim said. “It makes you pee, right?”

“Yes, that’s why they use it in migraine medicine. It helps constrict blood vessels to reduce the amount of blood flowing in the brain,” Mac explained. “People get caffeine withdrawal on the weekends because they don’t drink as much coffee as they do during the week at work. They need caffeine to constrict the blood vessels again.”

“Tell me about it!” Tommie exclaimed. “When I worked in an office, the air circulation system was really bad. The air was re-circulated so much there was hardly any oxygen in it. Everyone felt lethargic, so we drank coffee to compensate.”

“You got addicted to coffee and caffeine because you were oxygen deprived,” Mac summarized.

“On the weekends, I was home, active and breathing fresh air, so I didn’t need the stimulus. That’s when the migraines hit!”

“So you took medication, right?” Mac asked.

“Right. I never realized until later, that it was the caffeine in the headache medicine that ‘got rid’ of my headaches,” Tommie admitted. “I don’t touch coffee now.”

“If we give Scott caffeine, we could get rid of him?” Kim jested.

“What do you use to get rid of a pain in the butt?” Scott replied. He and Alex were listening in after all.

“Something to RECTUMify the situation. How about HIMeroid medicine,” Amy quickly answered. Everyone broke out laughing.

“What about SISpositories?” Scott countered.

“What about an enemya,” Alex added. “Enema. Enemy. Get it?”

Now the laughter turned to groans of disgust. “You’ve gone a bit too far with that one, Alex,” Tommie said. “I’m sacking anymore sacroiliac references. Do I make myself clear? I knew this serious conversation was doomed to end in something to do with the end.”

“The butt police strike again!” Scott declared.

“Huh?” Mac said.

Chris shook his head.

Kim got the conversation back to Mac’s research. “It sounds like they have it all planned. Make people addicted to the caffeine, and then cure them with even more of the same addictive substance! Do people know this?”

“Probably not,” Mac admitted.

“You should do a web page on caffeine addiction,” Amy suggested. “Lots of kids are drinking caffeine beverages. Especially in school! I’ll bet if they pumped oxygen into the air they wouldn’t need the caffeine.”

“I’ll bet the average mark would go up!” Kim declared, “But I think kids are drinking coffee just to look cool. It’s like smoking!”

“You could be on to something,” Mac replied. “But you should know that a little bit of caffeine is okay. It’s a good anti-oxidant.”

“Aunti-Oxygen?” Alex quipped. “What’s that?”

“Something I should know more about,” Tommie admitted.

Thinking he was brilliant, Alex proposed, “Maybe more air would help senior citizens out, too. Maybe they’d be healthier and not need all the medications that make them sicker.”

“Speaking of old people,” Mac said. “Natalie and I are heading to a retirement home to see if we can get residents to participate in our epilepsy research.”

“Can we come?” Scott asked excitedly.

“I don’t see why not,” Mac replied. “As long as it’s okay with the manager and your parents.”

“That’s fine with us!” Chris announced. “If it’s okay with everyone else, I’ll even drop the kids off at your lab in the morning.”

“Hey! There’s Danny!” Kim said.

He was heading right towards them.

“Glad I bumped into you,” Danny declared. “You guys are NEVER home!”

“What are you doing here?” Chris asked. “Where’s Mary?”

“I’m picking up pizza. They said they were so busy, they’ve stopped delivering for the evening. So what’s everyone celebrating?” Danny asked as their pizza was being delivered to the table.

The family was famished and they all chowed down immediately. As they were stuffing their faces, Scott and Alex took the opportunity to relive the glory of the championship game... yet again. Kim and Amy made sure to tell their story, too.

Five minutes had passed when Danny heard his name called. His pizza was ready. Before he left, Scott asked, “So why were you looking for us?”

“I almost forgot! I got some news on the coins!”

“Fantastic! What did you find out?”

“You’re not going to believe this,” Danny announced. “We tried to carbon date them but they’re made out of material that was never tested before. We didn’t have a baseline to compare it with.”

“ARE they from outer space?” Amy asked.

“Could be,” Danny reported. “We found elements that were common to some of the meteors that have been retrieved. Gotta go. Talk to you soon!”

“Danny, you can’t just leave! You just dropped a bombshell!” Scott exclaimed.

“Yeah, Danny, you have to tell us more!” Kim begged.

“Sorry kids, that’s all I know right now... and if I don’t get this pizza home, right now, Mary’s going to drop a bombshell, right on me!” He was sort of kidding but sort of not.

“Okay, you can go, but as soon as you hear anything... track us down!” Kim insisted.

“Will do. Enjoy your pizza and the thrill of victory!” Danny announced, as he walked away with his pizza.

“So they ARE alien coins!” Scott exclaimed.

“Coool!” Kim agreed.

The rest of the evening’s conversation sounded like a ‘Deep Space Nine’ episode, featuring the Ferenghis and latinum as the kids theorized about the origin of the coins.

By the time ten o’clock rolled around, they were stuffed, sleepy, all talked out and ready for home and bed. They taped the global news and planned to do their assignment the next morning. Scott and Kim didn’t play the Addictive game that night.

They dreamed instead.

Chapter Thirteen



The kids had wild dreams that night. Kim dreamt she was going to marry Beau Ribald and that he was a terrorist. Scott dreamed he was trying to buy a new flat-lander bike with his alien coins and that no one would take them.

The next day came sooner than expected. The kids were up at six, working on their project. At seven, Tommie called Kim to the phone. Tommie put the phone on speaker, she wanted to listen in.

“Hello, Kim speaking,” she answered.

“Kim, this is Coach Jay Washington of the State Junior Girls’ Basketball Team. I was wondering if you’d be interested in coming to our tryouts in June?”

“Would I? Oh yes, Sir!” Kim exclaimed.

“We’ve been watching you for some time, Young Lady and we like what we see. I wanted to personally invite you. We’ll mail you all the details,” Coach Washington added, “See you in June,” he said and he hung up the phone.

“Yahoo!” Kim screamed. This was the opportunity of a lifetime.

“I did it!” she yelled and jumped up and down. “Mom! Dad! I was invited to the State Junior Girls’ Team try-outs!”

“What’s all the hub bub about bub?” Scott asked as he came into the kitchen from the family room.

“Kim’s been asked to try out for the State Junior Team,” Chris explained.

“Congratulations,” Scott replied. “I should be getting a call any time now.” He ran upstairs for one of his two minute showers.

RING... RING...

“Hello?” Tommie answered. The phone was still on speaker.

“Tommie, it’s Herb Ledbetter.”

Herb Ledbetter was the coach for the State Junior Boys’ Team. Tommie, Chris and Herb had all played for Center City University. Tommie didn’t want Scott to think he might get preferential treatment, so she and Chris never told him they knew the coach.

“Herb. How are you?”

“I’m fine Tommie. I’m calling about Scott.”

“I was hoping that’s why you were calling. It’s good news, I hope.”

“Well...,” Herb replied.

“Oh, I understand Herb. If he doesn’t make the cut this year... there’s always the

senior team in two years,” Tommie replied.

“No, that’s not it. I just need you to explain something to me before I make a final decision.”

“Fire away! What do you need to know?”

“I’m a little embarrassed asking you this Tommie, but I received some very disturbing pictures of Scott, and I need some explanation that I can take to the committee, if I get questioned about my decision.”

“What kind of pictures?”

“They were pictures of Scott’s naked butt!” Herb declared. “At least that’s what the letter said that was attached to the pictures.”

“You got a letter?” Tommie asked.

“Yes, I actually got it this morning. I was just going to call Scott and invite him to try-outs, when I walked this parent with the pictures.”

“Parent? What parent would this be?” Tommie asked suspiciously.

“Well, he didn’t give me a name. He just said he thought that the morals and ethics of the team could be compromised if we let a kid like Scott on it. He said the pictures were all over some Internet site.”

Tommie suspected Mr. Ribald was the parent. She barked back in defense of Scott, “Herb, those were probably pictures of Scott, but it was a prank that his teammates played on him at school. They stripped him down and threw him in the swimming pool. I don’t know who took the pictures or how they got onto the Internet, but it seems to me, someone might have wanted to make him look bad.”

Kim and Chris barely breathed as they listened in on the conversation. They were afraid to make a noise and miss something that was being said.

“That explains things,” Herb declared. “I sure don’t appreciate people trying to get kids kicked off teams before they even make it. What is this world coming to?”

“Hey, some mothers kill their kid’s competition. Remember the cheerleading scandals?” Tommie replied.

“I hope we never get to that point again,” Herb declared. “I’m not going to let these people jeopardize Scott’s chances of making the team, on his own merits. I’m going to be his champion with the committee and make sure he gets a fair shot. You can count on it. These low-life competitive parents aren’t going to win. Tell Scott’s he’s on the list.”

“You can tell him yourself,” Tommie said. “Scott, it’s for you.” Tommie handed Scott the phone as he came back downstairs.

“Scott, this is Herb Ledbetter, coach of the State Junior Basketball Team.”

Scott got so excited he could hardly speak, “Yes Sir!”

“Scott, I’d like to invite you to the try-outs. My reports on you have been glowing.”

Scott thought he’d died and gone to basketball Nirvana. “Thank you, Sir,” he replied.

“I’ll let you know when the practices are,” Coach Ledbetter told him. “I’ll be seeing you soon, Scott.”

After Scott hung up the phone he was verbally attacked.

Chapter Fourteen



“I am so proud of you two kids,” Chris announced.

“Congratulations, Kids,” Tommie said. “We’ll have to celebrate later. You two have an appointment with Mac, remember? Now get something to eat. And before I forget, Scott, you have an appointment with the hairstylist in twenty minutes.”

“What? Since when?”

“Since you can’t see, because your hair’s so long,” Kim said sarcastically.

“It’s not that bad,” Scott whined. “Besides, I can tie it back in a pony tail if I have to.”

“Is that the look you’re going for?” Chris asked.

“How come no one said anything before?”

“Well, we never really noticed it until the game last night. You’re hands were on your hair more than the ball,” Tommie said.

“Come on,” Scott replied. He knew she was right.

“At least get it trimmed and cleaned up a bit,” Tommie requested. “Times ticking. You’ve got fifteen minutes. Want me to drive you?”

“No, I’ll take my bike. I haven’t had any time to ride lately,” Scott admitted. “Now that basketball is over, you guys will never see me.”

“Promises, promises,” Kim laughed.

Scott wolfed down his breakfast and took off for the stylist.

Kim took advantage of the quiet time to read Tommie’s book.

Tommie and Chris decided to take Max for a long walk. He’d been on the computer with Bibbi and he wasn’t getting any exercise.

“He’s like those kids hooked on instant messaging,” Tommie said. “Who’d have thought we’d need to force him to go outside.”

“I know,” Chris returned. “But the same could be said of us. We haven’t had time for ourselves, or to relax, in ages, ever since this web site started and this darn problem with The Conglomerate began. I am sure glad that Mac, Joe and Richard are handling this.”

“Me too,” Tommie agreed. She and Chris dragged Max away from his computer and outside for a long walk. They expected Scott to be back in an hour and then they’d be off to Mac’s lab.

Before they got down the driveway, Chris just had to ask the question. “So what were you and Herb talking about so long?”

She suddenly remembered what had gotten her so worked up earlier. She couldn’t

hold back. She was fuming. “Those imbecile parents! Imagine, them trying to get Scott banned from the try-outs!”

“I can’t believe some parents would be that competitive!” Chris declared. “It must have been Ribald.”

“Everyone has a price and every parent will put the fix in if it benefits their kids.”

“Not ALL parents, Tommie,” Chris announced.

“Hey, if we didn’t know Herb, do you think he would have called some stranger and asked them about the pictures? We’re guilty too.”

“You never used influence with Herb and neither have I.”

“Let’s change the subject,” Tommie suggested.

“What do you want to talk about?”

“I think the games were fantastic last night, despite the reffing, and it was so nice that Amy and Alex’s parents were there. That had to be the first time everyone was there together. I felt so good for those kids.”

“Yeah, me too. I like their parents, but their lives are so different from ours. They have so many other activities going on.”

“Right. It seems like all we have going on is the kids.”

“Tommie, you know as well as I know, you wouldn’t want it any other way.”

“Let’s walk over to Mom and Dad’s and see what they’re up to.”

Twenty minutes later, they walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell.

There was no answer.

Tommie decided to use her key and open the door.

The house was deserted.

“Not again,” she said.

“What are you talking about?”

“I think they’re gone again!”

“Where too?”

“I have no idea. I didn’t tell you what happened the other night when I came over here.”

“You came over here?”

Tommie explained what she had walked into. Chris was surprised.

“They seem to have wanderlust recently. Did they disappear like this before?”

Tommie confided, “Yes, when I was growing up, I had to take care of Tim and Mac by myself, a lot.”

“Where did they go?”

“We really didn’t know. It’s not like they abandoned us or anything. My grandparents always moved in with us when they were gone. Actually, it was kinda neat. Most kids don’t get to know their grandparents very well. I was pretty lucky.”

“So you figure they’re off again.”

“They’re OFF all right,” Tommie laughed. “I just hope they keep in touch. I do worry about them.”

“Well, I guess we should head home now.”

Tommie and Chris walked home. When they got there, they found Kim sitting in the family room, reading Tommie’s book. Scott still wasn’t home.

“I wonder where Scott is.” Tommie said.

They waited ten more minutes.

“Where the heck is he?” Chris commented.

“I’ll phone the hairdresser,” Tommie said, as she placed the call. When Tommie hung up, she explained that Scott was going to be another thirty minutes.

“What are they doing to him?”

“They must have been backed up,” Tommie said.

“He had an early appointment!” Chris replied.

“Who knows, let’s just relax.”

Chris and Tommie poured themselves some herbal tea and took their time reading the Saturday morning newspaper. Chris turned to the sports section. “Look! The Stretch Davis wedding announcement!”

“Do you think this is going to work?” Tommie asked.

“I sure hope so.”

Time passed. Tommie looked up at the clock, just as the front door flung open. In walked Scott.

Chapter Fifteen



“Dreads! You got dreads! Cooool!” Kim exclaimed.

“I’m not so sure I approve,” Tommie said, as Scott walked into the kitchen to show off his new hair.

Chris remembered back to the various hairstyles he had over the years. He thought he’d cut Scott some slack. “I like them,” he announced. “What’s the matter with them?”

Tommie realized she over-reacted. “Nothing. Nothing at all. As a matter of fact, they do look great.”

“Wait until Alex sees them. He’ll want them too.”

“His hair’s too short. He’ll probably give himself a Mohawk or something dumb like that,” Kim figured.

“Okay, let’s get going,” Chris said. “Mac’s expecting you.”

Chris, Kim and Scott headed off to Mac’s. They picked up Amy and Alex on the way. All four of them had received a call to try out. The kids talked hair and basketball, all the way to Mac’s. The dreads were a hit, especially with Amy.

Chris arrived at the research facility and dropped the kids off. As Chris left, he drove down a hill and approached the four-way stop. He noticed the brakes were spongy.

“The brakes aren’t working right!” he exclaimed.

He grabbed his emergency brake and pulled hard. His feet pressed into the floorboards like he was trying to brake ‘Fred Flintstone’ style. His fingers gripped the steering wheel so hard, they left indents in the leather.

The van finally came to a jerky stop.

“What happened?” Chris asked himself, as he wiped sweat from his brow.

“I need to call Triple A and see what the problem is.” He called Triple A and arranged for them to meet him. Then he tried to call Tommie to let her know what happened. She had already left the house and her cell phone wasn’t picking up.

Chris didn’t have long to wait for Triple A.

“Great! You’re already here,” Chris said. A man in mechanic’s overalls exited from the Triple A vehicle. “Thanks for getting here so quickly. The brakes went. I managed to stop it with the emergency brake.”

The mechanic walked over to the van. He ignored Chris as he crawled under the front of Chris’s vehicle.

“Whose vehicle is this?” he asked.

“It’s mine,” Chris replied.

“Someone must not like you.”

“Why?” Chris asked.

“Your brake cable was tampered with. It looks like it was cut. I’m going to have to report this to the police.”

Chris was shocked.

“Can I see your registration and insurance?” the mechanic directed. “I need them for my report. I’m calling your insurance company and the cops. You’ll have to wait here. I think this is a crime scene. I’m not touching anything else and neither should you.”

“Right, right,” Chris said as he sat down on the curb.

It wasn’t long before the police car arrived on the scene. Two policemen got out of their car. They had a brief conversation with the mechanic and then one walked over to speak with Chris. The other went directly to Chris’s vehicle.

“Sir, we’re going to have to take you down to the station and ask you a few questions,” the policeman said.

“Me? Why?” Chris asked surprised.

“Someone tried to kill you! We’re taking your vehicle to the impound. Forensics will be going over it.”

“But officer... Kill me? Forensics? You can’t be serious,” Chris replied. “This must be a mistake.”

“If you won’t come of your own free will, I’m afraid I’ll have to insist,” the officer said. He grabbed Chris’s arm, escorted him to the police car and shoved him in.

The second officer joined Chris and the first officer.

“Just as I suspected,” he said to his partner, “I found drugs in the glove box.”

“What?” Chris shouted.

“You’re under arrest,” the officer said.

“You had no right to search my van!” Chris cried out.

“Oh, I’m afraid we did. This is a crime scene. We have reason to suspect you are a target of a murder attempt. The drugs were in plain view,” the officer said.

“You said you found them in the glove box,” Chris nervously challenged.

“Oh, so you DO admit to possession,” accused the officer.

“I do NOT!” Chris exclaimed.

“Well that sounded like a confession to me, right Whitie?”

The officers proceeded to drive Chris to the Precinct.

“This is insane! There were no drugs in my van! No one in my family uses drugs! This can’t be happening to me! Someone must have set me up!”

Chris was shocked, embarrassed, mad, confused... When they arrived at the Precinct, Chris was strip-searched. Every orifice was checked... He was butt naked and humiliated. They cut his nails and took his fingerprints. Then they took a retinal scan and ran it, and the fingerprints through their criminal database.

Chris was sure his rights were violated.

“I want to see Detective Nash,” Chris said. “He can vouch for me. He knows me. He’s a close family friend.”

“Are you trying to use undue influence?” the officer asked. “I think we need to put you in a cell. You’re a flight risk.”

“Are you pressing charges?”

“No, not right now. Just detaining you, Sir,” the officer replied.

“I want to speak to my lawyer,” Chris demanded.

“Phone’s broke!” the officer answered.

“What? What’s going on here?” Chris shouted, as the officers escorted him to a jail cell, pushed him in and locked the door.

Chris was stuck there all day. At 7:15 p.m. Detective Nash happened to walk by the cell.

“Chris! What the heck are you doing in there?”

He wasn’t expecting the answer he got.

Chapter Sixteen



“Your officers put me here!” Chris explained. “I asked them to call you, but they refused.”

“We never use these cells. How long have you been here... and more importantly, why did they lock you up? What did you do?”

“Nothing! My car had brake problem, and when the cops came to check it out, they said they found drugs in my van. They brought me in! It was a set-up!”

“What kind of drugs?” Nash asked.

“I don’t know. I never saw them!”

“Well, I haven’t seen a report on this!” Nash admitted. “Which officers did this? Did you get their name or badge numbers?”

“I don’t know. One called the other, Whitie. I do remember the numbers. They were 147777 and 147770.”

“Are you sure?” Nash asked.

“I’m positive.”

“Well, our badge numbers only have five digits in them,” Nash explained.

“They were imposters!” Chris exclaimed.

“I’ll get to the bottom of this. Sorry for the inconvenience,” Nash said. He released Chris from the jail, took him down to booking and gave him his personal items. Chris was happy to get out of there. He headed home by cab.

While Chris was dealing with the injustice system and Mac and the kids were visiting the retirement home, Tommie was in her own private H E double hockey sticks.

Tommie had headed to O’Dinkle’s office to give him a preliminary report. He wasn’t there. She was disappointed to say the least. She had worked so hard on this report and she was now stood-up. Tommie walked down to the parking garage under the office tower. As she stepped out of the elevator and passed through the doors, she was accosted by a powerful spray of water.

“Sorry Lady! I didn’t see you!” a voice cried out.

“What are you doing?” Tommie yelled at the guy.

“Washing down the parkade. We had some complaints that it was dirty. I really didn’t see you.”

“No kidding!” Tommie remarked, as she wiped the water from her eyes. “I’ll survive,

no problem.”

Her mascara was running and her hair was a disaster. She calmed herself, grabbed the keys from her purse and headed for the van. When Tommie got into her van, she checked herself out in the rear view mirror.

“Man what a mess!” she laughed. “I can’t be seen like this!”

She grabbed Scott’s baseball cap from the back seat, put it on, and pushed her hair up under it. “Maybe they’ll just think I’m a guy. No one will know it’s me.”

Tommie sped out of the parkade and into the street.

WEEEE... OHH... WEEEE... OHH... WEEEE...

“Ooooh, oh. I hear a siren.” Tommie checked out her rear view mirror. “There’s a flashing red light behind me. I’d better get out of the way. I wonder who the cops are after.”

WEEEE... OHH... WEEEE... OHH... WEEEE...

“Why don’t they go by me?” She checked out the rear view mirror, again.

“It’s right behind me! They want ME to pull over!”

Tommie came to a complete stop and rolled down the window. The officer pulled in behind her, got out of his car and approached her. “Out of the car Young Man,” the officer said.

“Excuse me?” Tommie replied and looked up toward the officer.

“Oh, sorry Lady. I thought you were a kid. They usually wear those baseball caps.”

“Can I help you officer?” Tommie asked.

“Yes you can. You can drive a little more carefully. Did you know you were going thirty-four in a thirty?”

“I am SO sorry, officer. I guess I wasn’t paying attention.”

“Lady, I’ll have to write you up. Can I see your driver’s license please? And, I’ll need to take your fingerprints and run them through our Department of Motor Vehicle records. I want to make sure there are no outstanding tickets or arrest warrants on you.”

“But officer... Why would you have to do that? This is just a driving violation. Why do you need to fingerprint me?”

“It’s standard procedure now,” the officer reported. “Now give me your hand.”

Tommie tentatively held out her hand.

“I see I’m going to have to cut these nails,” the officer said.

“What for?” Tommie shrieked.

“Are you refusing an officer of the law?” he asked.

“Do what you have to do,” Tommie replied. Tommie was upset and frustrated, but lashing out at the officer could only make matters worse. She decided to cooperate.

He clipped all of the nails on her hands and fingerprinted her entire set of fingers and her palms. She was a mess when it was all over.

“One last thing,” he said.

“What now?” Tommie barked.

“Retinal scan,” he replied, as he flashed a light in her face. “There, now all I have to do is run this through the databases and see what I come up with.”

“You won’t come up with anything!” Tommie declared, as the officer walked back to his car and transmitted the scanned files... somewhere.

He returned a few minutes later. “Your record seems clean. Drive more carefully next time.”

“Yes, Sir,” Tommie replied.

“You can pay me \$100 now and we’ll forget about the whole thing. Otherwise, it’s points on your license and \$250.00,” the officer explained.

She couldn’t believe this. ‘Extortion,’ she thought to herself. She paid him off and drove home slowly and carefully.

She hoped she was heading home to peace and quiet.

Chapter Seventeen



It was 3:00 as Tommie walked into the house. Chris wasn't there, the kids were still with Mac and Max was downstairs on the Internet with Bibbi. Tommie had the entire house to herself.

"I don't believe it. I'm taking an afternoon power nap."

Tommie decided to spoil herself. She lied down on the couch, for what she thought would be fifteen minutes...

Five minutes later, her head was buzzing with thoughts of things she needed to do.

"I don't know why I bother trying to snooze. All I end up doing is making a 'to do' list in my head. I might as well get up and just do it."

Tommie got up off the couch and walked to her office.

"I'll email my report to O'Dinkle," she said to herself as she turned on her computer and forwarded her report. "I hope this is the last of my involvement with him."

She checked her answering machine.

"Tommie, this is Bobby. It's Saturday afternoon and I'm in the office. Call me. I'm getting pressure from Huckster's attorney. He wants to know if you've signed those agreements or not. They seem to be anxious about putting those checks through as soon as possible."

"I guess I better do just that," Tommie said to herself. She took her pen and finally put her name on the bottom of the agreement. Then, she faxed it to Bobby's office and placed a call.

"Bobby, it's Tommie. I just sent the fax."

"Great," Bobby replied. "I'll get the check down to my bank and put it in trust for you. As soon as it clears, I'll take out my percentage and transfer the rest to your account."

"What's the big rush with Huckster?" Tommie asked.

"I have no idea, but his attorney has been hounding me. I can tell you that Molina has already taken care of it."

"I'll bet he's happy this is over with."

"I'll let you know when the check's been deposited and cleared."

"Great, thanks Bobby. It was a pleasure working with you. I just hope I don't have to again," Tommie laughed and hung up. She kicked back in her chair and breathed a big sigh of relief. Tommie glanced over at the window to the backyard and saw a huge spider

web had been built up in the right hand corner. It extended all the way to the television.

Her sigh of relief was not a sigh of reality.

“I can’t remember the last time I actually cleaned this house,” she admitted to herself. “Now’s as good a time as any.”

As she walked to the closet to pull out the vacuum, she looked at her watch. Okay, it’s 3:15 now. I’m going to make sure I get everything done in time to go to Moonbucks for a cup of their special Chai Tea. That’ll be my reward. She got to work...

Elsewhere, the phone rang.

“Hello?”

“It’s me.”

“Well, is it done?”

“It’s done. Huckster has taken care of all of his outstanding liabilities. I just cleared the last check.”

“Thanks for calling. I won’t forget this favor.” The caller hung up.

A second call was placed.

“It’s done. We avoided \$50 million worth of potential bad publicity. Now we need to figure out how to get rid of him and take over his company.”

“Do what you gotta do.”

“I understand.”

A phone call was made to the bank.

“Did my checks all clear?” Buck Huckster demanded to know.

“Let me check, Sir.”

Tap...Tap... Tap... The keyboard was stroked.

“Yes, Sir, all fifteen of them. A total of \$50 million has been transferred from your account.”

“Thank you,” Huckster said and hung up.

As soon as the phone was on the cradle, Huckster broke out in an evil laugh. “Those Cretans think they’re going to make me pay. They have no idea what I’m doing. I’ll have the last laugh on all of them!”

At about the same time Chris was being arrested and Tommie was getting a ticket – the kids, Mac and Natalie arrived at the retirement home.

“I still can’t get over your hair, Scott,” Natalie said. “It looks awesome.”

Scott was feeling pretty good about his decision.

When they approached the front gates, they noticed a huge amount of security.

“Are they trying to keep people in or out? What gives with this high-tech security system?” Alex asked. “Who lives here, George UU Tush’s dad?”

Natalie replied, “New investors just purchased the place. They moved their own grandparents and parents in here. They installed all this. It seems like overkill but they must have their reasons. Besides, with all the crime against senior citizens, maybe this is a good idea.”

As they stopped the car at the gates, a guard appeared from the security station. She signed them in and called someone to come and get them. A heavysset, bleached blonde security guard came out to meet them.

“Edith! Great to see you!” Natalie exclaimed. “Mac, Kim, Scott, Amy and Alex I’d like you to meet Edith. She’s head security person here.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” Mac said.

“Pleasure’s all mine,” Edith replied and then turned her head and winked at Natalie. Mac missed the wink but the kids didn’t.

“Okay, pretty boy. Up against the wall. Hands above your head. Spread ‘em! I’ll have to check you for concealed weapons and contraband,” Edith ordered Mac.

“What? Natalie! Is this necessary?” Mac cried out.

“Quiet, baby-face. I’m just doing my job,” Edith said as she began to frisk him. She started at his upper arms and tickled her way down to his chest. “Scrawny little guy aren’t you?”

Mac squirmed and tried to push her away.

“But officer!” Mac whined.

A tall man in a suit approached them and said, “Okay Edith, you’ve had your fun. Now let him go.”

Mac turned around and saw everyone including the stranger, laughing at his expense.

“I’m Steve Jeffries, head honcho of this place,” Steve said and extended his hand to Mac.

“Pleased to meet you, Steve,” Mac replied, regaining his composure.

“Do you guys play this joke on everyone?” Mac asked.

“No, only those that can TAKE a joke,” Steve replied. “And, Natalie assured me, YOU could.”

The group talked as they walked toward a meeting room.

“You know laughter is the best medicine. It increases oxygen to the heart,” Steve announced.

The kids were still giggling. “I feel REALLY healthy,” Alex chuckled.

Mac shook his head and ignored the kids. He was still a little embarrassed he fell for the ruse, but it was harmless, and a lot of the residents did get a good chortle out of it. He thought he might plan a little surprise for Edith on the way out.

“I’m glad you could make it. We have a lot of work to do. Trying to access free IT specialists isn’t easy.”

“What do old people need with computers?” Scott asked.

“Scott, get with the program! They’re the fastest growing user group!” Kim lectured.

“Oh, I wasn’t aware of that,” Scott admitted.

“Neither was I,” Mac said.

“I was,” Natalie bragged.

“Natalie, wait until you see the progress we’ve made on the web page. The residents absolutely love it!” Steve reported.

They had now entered a very large building. It smelled of lavender and was brightly painted. It certainly didn’t seem like an institution. It was more like an upscale apartment complex. But again, Mac was taken aback by the amount of security. This time, however, it was electronic surveillance and keypads on the walls.

Mac just had to ask. “What’s with the Pentagon-like security around here?”

“I’m still getting used to it myself,” Steve admitted. “We have a new owner and we also have some new and VERY wealthy residents.”

“Do the old people steal from each other?” Amy asked.

“Do the people who work here steal from the residents?” Kim reasoned.

“No, it’s actually more for making sure that the residents don’t leave the facility,” Steve explained. Some of these people have Alzheimer’s and suffer from other forms of dementia. We need to make sure they’re all safe and accounted for, according to the new owners. That seems to be the new mission statement of this facility.”

“It sounds like this place is a prison!” Scott said. He wished he could take that back. It didn’t sound very nice. He tried to counter it with, “But a beautiful, white collar crime kinda country club prison.”

Kim looked at him and replied, “Foot in mouth disease?”

Steve laughed, “We all get that sometimes. Even wardens like me.”

The group broke out laughing. As they talked, they walked down the sunshine yellow hallway to a meeting room. “Natalie tells me you’ll be able to get our wireless computer network up and running. I appreciate your assistance. And these four,” Steve said, referring to the kids, “Are they your helpers?”

“Sort of,” Mac replied. “This is my niece Kim and nephew Scott and their friends Amy and Alex. Perhaps you’re familiar with Kim and Scott’s web site, KidsOpinionsCount?”

“Pleased to meet you! I’ve heard great things about your site. Many of our residents are associate members!”

The kids were surprised. They had set up a category of membership who couldn’t participate in the surveys or chat rooms, but could still read all the postings and listen in. They knew about a few older people who liked the site, like Mrs. McDuffy, Mrs. Hardy, Chuck, Mr. Klein and their grandparents, but didn’t realize there were so many.

“Cool!” Scott said.

“They’ll be delighted to meet you kids. You’re celebrities!” Steve explained.

“Natalie told me you have a resident who can help me,” Mac said.

“Yes, he’s very familiar with computers and networks, among other things,” Steve explained. “He’ll be at the meeting.”

They arrived at their destination. A group of men and women were seated around the conference table. ‘These are the residents?’ Mac asked himself. ‘They didn’t look like geriatrics.’

“Surprised?” asked Natalie quietly.

“Not what I expected,” Mac admitted.

‘Some of these people look pretty young!’ he thought.

Steve sat at the end of the table and began the meeting. He reviewed the minutes of the last meeting and the progress on the new web site. There was other business to cover that wasn’t of much interest to the kids. They day dreamed about last night’s games, the coins from outer space, talking dogs... everything but what was being discussed in the room. It was now approaching 1:30 and the meeting was winding down. The kids had been all but invisible to the seniors, until Steven announced to the group, “I have a special treat for you. Kim and Scott here are the creators of the KidsOpinionsCount site. And these are their friends, Amy and Alex.”

The residents began to chat amongst themselves and converged on the kids. They had a million questions for them. All of a sudden, the Kids were important.

“You might want to head to the lounge. It’s more comfortable there,” Steve suggested.

The kids followed the residents to the lounge. Even the nurses and orderlies were joining in. Everyone wanted to talk to the KidsOpinionsCount kids.

As the residents kept the kids busy, Steve introduced Mac to his helper.

Mac was surprised, to say the least.

Chapter Eighteen



“Mac, I’d like to introduce you to Mr. H,” Steve said. “This is the gentleman I was telling you about. He’ll help you with the network. Get acquainted, I’ve got some business to discuss with Natalie.”

Mr. H didn’t look a day over sixty. He was tall and handsome with a full head of hair. Mac, not the most sensitive guy in the world, started off the conversation with, “So, what landed YOU in here?”

Mr. H was quite forthcoming. He was embarrassed to be there and felt compelled to explain his situation to anyone who would listen, even a complete stranger like Mac.

“I owned an international company headquartered right here in Center City. My son was ripping off our staff and clients.”

Mac wondered what this had to do with anything. “So how did you end up here?”

“When I saw what my son was doing, I tried to get him to undo the damage. He put me in here,” Mr. H replied.

“I don’t get the connection,” Mac admitted.

“When I tried to do right by cutting some checks to the people who were cheated, and changing the contracts with the clients we were ripping off, my son got me committed,” Mr. H explained.

“Committed? Is this an insane asylum?” Mac asked.

“No! But a few of us are only here because our children and grandchildren managed to get our power of attorney,” Mr. H added.

“There’s more of you in this situation?” Mac remarked.

“Yes. Since I got here last week, there have been ten new residents, all with similar stories,” Mr. H replied.

Mac shook his head. “Why are you telling me?” Mac asked. He was beginning to get suspicious.

“This is no joke, Mac,” Mr. H replied.

“So tell me, how did your son get your power of attorney?” Mac asked.

“When I tried to make things right, my son took the information to a judge and said I was insane. What businessman in his right mind pays people he doesn’t have to, or takes less money from their clients than their contract stipulates?”

“But it sounds like you should have paid them!” Mac declared.

“But we didn’t and I think it was criminal,” Mr. H explained. “The judge had me

committed to this place and gave my son my power of attorney. I can't do a darn thing about it and that's why I tell everyone I meet. You never know who might be able to help."

"WOW! You have to be the first business person I've come across, that actually has morals and ethics!" Mac declared.

"Don't kid yourself. There are lots of us out there... and lots of us in HERE!" Mr. H announced.

"Who else?" Mac asked.

"Are you familiar with ReallySoft? His father is in here. Seems like he wanted to leave part of his estate to his cat. The son got him declared unfit!" Mr. H said.

"Well, that does sound a little crazy," Mac admitted.

"Crazy? Is it crazy to leave money to the only animal that ever showed any love toward you? It's his money. He earned it. It's not like he was leaving the whole estate to the cat. Just enough to keep him accustomed to the life he'd been leading."

"So, if ReallySoft's pop's here, why do they need ME to help?" Mac asked.

"Because we don't want our kids finding out what we're up to," Mr. H replied.

"What ARE you up to?" Mac asked.

"If I tell you, I'll have to kill you," Mr. H replied.

Mac didn't know what to think. He hoped he was joking.

Mac decided to let that comment slide and said, "We should get down to business. What do we need to do and when do we get started?"

Mr. H explained the present infrastructure to Mac and told him what they wanted to do. Mac fired up his laptop and the two of them developed a project chart. Mr. H and Mac worked well together. Within half an hour, their go-forward plan was complete.

Natalie and Steve appeared with some herbal tea for the workers.

"So, how's it going?" Steve asked.

"We got the plan completed. Now we just have to get it implemented and operational," Mac declared.

"You guys are fast!" Natalie announced.

Natalie put the tea down on the table and they all sat down and enjoyed the brew. Mac and Mr. H explained their plan.

"When can I work on your project?" Mac asked Steve.

"Whenever you're available, day or night, just give me about an hour's notice."

"I'm ALWAYS here," Mr. H joked. "I'm ready when you are." He said good-bye and left the room.

"Mac, Natalie told me about your requirement for additional research subjects. If you have all of the papers in order and the residents sign off on liability, we can do it," Steve added.

"Fantastic," Mac replied. "I thought this place was going to be filled with senile old people, but..."

Before Mac could take his foot out of his mouth, the kids appeared out of no where.

"Mac, Natalie you won't believe this! The residents want us to start a new web site up. SeniorsOpinionsCount.com. What do you think?" Kim exclaimed.

"I think that's a GREAT idea!" Natalie said.

Mac was excited about the new subjects and the kids were excited about a new Internet site opportunity. Natalie was pleased with herself for putting all the players

together and Steve was happy with the outcome of the day. They said goodbye to Steve and headed toward the security gate.

On their way to their vehicle, an old man appeared from nowhere and approached the group.

“Help me! Please help me! I am being held prisoner,” he cried out to them.

“How can we help?” Mac asked.

Suddenly two people in white coats appeared and took the old man by the arms. They looked like doctors.

“Gramps, here you are. You shouldn’t be bothering people,” one of the men explained.

“He wasn’t bothering us. Who is he?” Mac asked.

“One of our SPECIAL residents,” one man answered.

“I am the Supreme Leader!” the old man announced.

“Special, see what I mean?” said one of the men.

They led him away. The group didn’t give the old man much thought as they made their way to the security gates. Now for Mac’s surprise.

Chapter Nineteen



Edith was still on duty. She gave Mac a swat on the behind as he passed by. Mac stunned everyone when he turned around and quite uncharacteristically, planted a big wet kiss, smack on her lips. This time everyone laughed at Edith's expense, including Edith.

Mac, Natalie and the kids drove back to the lab. Mac kept checking his watch and making sure his cell phone was on.

"Are you expecting a call or something?" Kim asked.

"Why?" Mac replied.

"You keep checking your watch and your cell phone," Scott added.

"It's a surprise," Mac announced.

"What kind of surprise?" Kim returned.

"Oh, a big surprise," Mac teased. "And that's all I'm saying."

The kids were excited.

"Is there something at the lab for us?"

"Oh, the lab, right, yeah, there's something at the lab," Mac replied. It was like he was given an easy out by the kids.

"So, what is it?" Kim insisted.

"If I told you..."

Before he could finish, both kids whined, "It wouldn't be a surprise. We get it."

Mac pulled into the lot and parked his car. The kids were anticipating a big surprise so they jumped out of the car and rushed to the building. Mac dawdled, just to drive them nuts. On the way to the lab, Mac insisted on stopping off at the cafeteria to get some lunch.

The kids were delayed with the delay, "There's no surprise is there. You're just punking us," Scott accused.

Mac chuckled and said, "We'll see."

As they finished off their lunch,

RING... RING...

Mac got a call. It was Peter, from security. "Mac, there's a guy here that looks just like you!"

"It's my twin brother," Mac whispered so that the kids couldn't hear.

"No kidding," Peter laughed. "It's freaky."

"I know, he's cool and I'm square. I'll be right there!" Mac said and hung up. "You

kids stay here. I have a surprise visitor,” Mac announced.

“Sure!” they replied. Without a word between them, they all thought the same thing. Maybe the surprise is Stretch Davis.

Mac hurried off to meet Tim. “Tim, how are you? How was your flight?”

“Domestic Airlines. What more can I say?” laughed Tim. They walked back to Mac’s lab. They entered Mac’s office. The kids were waiting impatiently for Stretch.

“Uncle Tim?” Kim cried out.

Tim replied, “You sound a little disappointed? Who or what were you expecting?”

Kim reacted quickly and ran over to give him a big hug. As Kim squeezed Tim, he rudely and quite characteristically declared, “Kim? My Goodness! You’re a woman now!”

Kim was totally embarrassed. ‘No wonder Mom, hates him,’ she thought to herself as she pulled away and skulked off to be with Amy.

“Tim, you must know falsies when you see them,” Scott blurted out. He felt pretty smug until he remembered that Natalie and Amy were also in the room.

“Scott, you’re disgusting!” Amy announced.

Totally uncharacteristic of Alex, he supported Amy and exclaimed, “Yeah, Scott. That was rude.”

Everyone in the room wondered who Alex was trying to score points with.

Tim was the one that got Scott into his predicament and decided to help him out. “Scott, it’s great to see you, too! I see you haven’t changed a bit. Still the tease, eh?”

“Right, I was just teasing Kim. It’s all her. I’m pretty sure,” Scott proclaimed trying to take his foot out of his mouth, but not having much success.

“So who are these two?” Tim said, looking at Amy and Alex.

“This is Amy, my girlfriend,” Kim said. “And that’s Alex, Scott’s boyfriend.”

“Funny!” Scott said.

“I’m Alex, Sir. I’m NOT gay.”

“I didn’t think you were,” Tim replied. He wondered what that was about.

Natalie was standing off to the side. She didn’t want to interfere with the family reunion. Tim couldn’t help but notice her.

“And who is this? It can’t be your brilliant lab assistant that you told me about?”

“Tim, I’d like you to meet Natalie, my research partner,” Mac said.

Tim was a real flirt and bowled over by her beauty. “Natalie, I hope you’re joining us. I really look forward to hearing everything about your work.”

Natalie could see right through him and teased, “Oh, I think I’ll stick around.” She knew Tim was taken with her and it felt good. Mac never paid her that kind of attention.

Tim, always being a player, he turned to the kids and thanked them. He didn’t want to appear to be too smitten with Natalie.

“So, how come you kids are here? I would think you’ve got better things to do than sit around a lab on a Saturday.”

“Hey, Tim. These two are brainiacs. Haven’t you seen their web site?” Mac added.

“What web site?” Tim replied.

“KidsOpinionsCount!” Mac exclaimed.

“That’s YOU two?”

“Yup. That’s us, and we’ve been helping Mac and Natalie with their work. Fresh eyes. Fresh ideas,” Kim replied. “We even have a page devoted to epilepsy on our site!”

“I’ve seen it!” exclaimed Tim. “Good stuff! It looks like I need to be in touch with you guys on a more regular basis.”

“Yeah, why aren’t you?” Kim asked. “How come you and Mom hate each other?”

“We don’t hate each other. We just disagree on some things,” Tim explained.

“They must be big things if she won’t forgive you,” Kim replied.

“What makes you think she has to forgive me? Maybe I have to forgive her,” Tim said, defending himself.

“We’ve got work to do,” Mac interrupted. “Tim doesn’t know about our findings yet.”

“Have you told him about our theories?” Scott blurted out.

“All in good time, Scott. Make yourself comfortable, Tim. A lot has happened since we last spoke.”

Tim and Mac had been collaborating long-distance on this project for some time now. Tim had a personal stake in its progress... he was epileptic.

Mac explained his latest work. “I’ve developed a special camera which monitors the activity in the retina and detects the onset of an aura.”

“How far have you come with this?” Tim asked.

“As you know, we were trying to determine how to identify the symptoms before the seizure occurs. We hope we can figure out a way to shut down the whole process. I decided to change my methodology and look through the eyes into the brain to see if there were any warning signs that were common to the subjects.

“You’ll be pleased to know that we’re trying to incorporate your pineal work. We’ve been monitoring serotonin and melatonin levels like you suggested. We need your help to analyze the results,” Mac explained. “Now, I think we need Tim to bring us all up to date on what he’s been up to. If you think my work is exciting, wait until you hear about his!”

“Yeah, Tim, tell us what you’re doing?” Kim requested. “Explain it in ‘research for dummies’ terms, so Scott can understand.”

Tim seized the opportunity to impress them all “I am one of the FEW western researchers studying the pineal gland. It’s my opinion that the pineal is the key to our well being.”

Mac continued to check his watch and keep his cell phone close by. Tim continued to lecture the group as if they were students in a first year biology class.

“The pineal gland is a pea-sized protuberance at the back of the brain and above the brain stem. It serves as a light detector or third eye. Light sets the timing mechanism of the brain’s internal clock each morning as it enters the lens of the eye and stimulates the retina. The pineal gland makes serotonin and converts it to melatonin. Follow me so far?”

Kim summarized. “The pineal is a little thing in the back of the head that reacts to light. It makes something called melatonin and serotonin, whatever that stuff is.”

“I’ll explain what those are later,” Tim promised.

‘Nothing new so far,’ Natalie thought.

She would soon change her mind.

Chapter Twenty



“If your body doesn’t produce enough melatonin, you don’t sleep well,” Tim explained. “Too much melatonin makes you sleep too much. You remain tired and can become depressed.”

“So the melatonin needs to be juuuust right,” Alex said. “Just like Goldilock’s porridge.”

They all looked at Alex like he was from Mars.

“Sorry,” Alex said. “It just popped into my head. I thought it was funny.”

“You’re so immature,” Kim barked.

Tim continued, “Low melatonin levels are also associated with lessened thymus and lower immune system activity. Your immune system is what works to make you healthy and fight off disease and infection and things. Since the immune system is most active at night, I hypothesize that melatonin interacts with our immune system during sleep. Melatonin may help the immune system do its job.

“I think that the steady increase in the incidence of cancer is partially because of the extended time we are exposed to electromagnetic fields, like artificial lighting. This results in extended hours each day that melatonin production DOESN’T happen. Did you know that melatonin levels in breast and prostate cancer patients are half the normal levels?”

“This is groundbreaking research!” Mac declared.

“You’re saying that we should go to bed when the sun goes down and let our immune system do its thing!” Alex summarized.

“Maybe if we slept when we’re supposed to, the immune system would work better and there’d be less disease,” Amy added. “Hey, I’ll bet every parent in the world would love to be able to quote you on this!”

“Prime time! You’re telling us we should be asleep during prime time TV!” Kim announced.

“Every television network and their advertisers would KILL to cover this up!” Scott proposed.

“They’re right,” Alex agreed.

“There’d be a huge problem if word got out,” Scott replied. “But I bet people are just so sucked into their TV world that it wouldn’t make any difference. They’re already unhealthy, overweight, inactive couch potatoes, eating sugar and drinking caffeine to

keep awake so they can watch their Prime Time.”

“Sounds like a conspiracy to me,” Amy reasoned. “We need to tell everyone about this!”

“That’s a rather negative view of the world for fourteen year olds,” Tim exclaimed.

“You don’t know half of what we know,” Kim said. “We know about Leary’s theory. They’re controlling us with the light!”

“I HAVE been out of touch for too long. You kinds know about Leary’s theories? Tim paused for a second. “Of course you do. You’re web site posted the Fahey interview. Those were great questions the kids were asking.”

Kim thought she had closed the book on a previous mystery. “So YOU were the one who answered the kids’ questions.”

Tim laughed and said, “Oh, I wouldn’t be too sure of that, but I do agree with you that big companies are making us stay up to watch television so we get sucked in to purchasing all the goods that they advertise. They help us stay up by selling us caffeine and sugar laden products. When we don’t get enough sleep and our immune system doesn’t do its thing... we get sick... and we have to buy their pharmaceuticals. The Internet is having the same effect.”

“Cool!” Scott declared. “We were all talking about this last night.”

“He thinks just like us!” Kim remarked.

They all started to laugh.

Now Mac tried to get the discussion back on track. “Tim, you’re getting off topic here. This is a whole other study. Are you doing this too, or is this just a stream of consciousness we’re hearing here?”

“It’s all related, Mac. A sick pineal gland makes a sick person! Simple!”

“A pineal a day keeps the doctor away!” Scott joked. “This is amazing. We need to put this on our site!”

“Actually it would be more correct to say a dose of tryptophan a day keeps the pineal happy,” Tim replied.

“Triptofan?” Alex said. “What’s that? More Leary druggie talk? Trip... Get it?”

“Alex, no one is more obvious than you,” Scott laughed. “But good question. What is it?”

“Tryptophan is an essential amino acid that the body can only get from natural sources of protein. Tryptophan helps convert serotonin into melatonin. So it makes sense that if the body gets enough tryptophan then it should stay healthy,” Tim concluded.

“Where do you get tryptophan from?” Kim asked.

“Foods like turkey, figs, tuna and milk. Vitamin B6 and Niacinamide together produce tryptophan.”

“Tim, tell us more,” Amy begged. “Is lack of tryptophan and sleep the only things that negatively effect the pineal?”

“No, there are lots of things. Probably the worst thing, is electricity,” Tim explained.

“Electrical transmission lines! Mutant cows and three headed chickens!” Alex declared. “I thought that was just B F!”

“B F?” Tim replied.

“Bull fit,” Scott mumbled. “Mom’s bright idea. She got mad at Kim for saying ‘screwed’ and made up some new swear words. They kinda work.”

Tim and Mac started to laugh. They laughed so hard they almost wet themselves.

“This is rich. Sewer mouth Tommie, telling other people not to swear,” Tim announced.

“What are you talking about, Tim?” Scott asked.

“Your mom had the foulest mouth on her basketball team,” Mac added. “She had the record for technical fouls. Finally, your grandfather had to figure out a solution and he started to fine her every time she swore.”

“Did it work?” Kim asked.

“No way. She never had enough money to pay him. Mom finally figured out the ‘fit’ thing,” Tim said.

“Did that work?” Scott asked.

“It actually did, most of the time,” Mac admitted. “But can we get back to the pineal?”

“Yeah, I want to know if I’m right about the mutant cows!” Alex exclaimed.

“Yes, you are right about the mutant cows,” Tim said. “For years farmers have been trying to prove that there’s some cause and effect between electrical transmission towers and deformed animals.”

“So do you think you’re getting close to proving it?” asked Mac, again checking his watch and cell. It was already four-thirty.

“First, I’m going to prove the relationship between sick pineal glands and diseases like cancer, epilepsy, hypertension, neuralgic disorders, Paget’s disease, psychiatric disorders and sexual dysfunction. Once I prove this, I’ll make the connection between a sick pineal and exposure to electromagnetic fields,” replied Tim.

“I’m experimenting on myself already. I’ve decreased the number of epileptic attacks that hit me by going to sleep when it gets dark. I don’t expose myself unnecessarily to electromagnetic fields and of course I also strap myself down when there’s a full moon.”

The kids’ jaws dropped.

Chapter Twenty-One



“Just joking about the moon bit,” Tim laughed. “It does set off attacks, though.”

“Really?” Kim asked.

“If it can make the tides change, it can certainly redirect a few neurotransmitters,” Tim replied.

“What else affects pineal health and might set off the epileptic seizures?” Alex asked.

“Noise, vibration, nutrition, smells, stress and changes in temperature, magnetism and altitude. If we disturb these processes, it can affect our immune system, alertness, temperature, hormone levels and other physiological factors. Travel, for instance, really affects our health. When we travel, we change time and our relation to the North and South Pole. We move away from our electromagnetic baseline.”

Tim asked Mac, “You say you’ve been measuring melatonin and serotonin levels in your subjects. I suppose they change before, during and after an attack. During auras the serotonin levels should be higher than average... am I right?”

“That’s correct,” Mac replied.

“So if serotonin is high, that means not enough has been converted to melatonin and this brings on the attacks,” Kim offered.

“Yes, that’s right, attacks and other problems,” replied Tim. “Epilepsy, migraines and so-called mental disorders are all tied to serotonin levels. Giarmin and Freedman’s work on the pineals of deceased mental patients supports this theory. The more extreme the disorder, the higher the level of serotonin found in the brain. I’ve been preparing an article for publication on the subject. Would you like to read what I have so far?”

“Sure!” everyone replied.

“Is this the scientific proof for what Leary believed?” Kim questioned.

“Leary, again? Where did you kids hear about Leary?” Tim asked.

“Mom mentioned him a few times,” Scott explained. “Kim and I did some research on him.”

“Your mom mentioned him? She never ceases to amaze me,” Tim said, as he uploaded the article on to his laptop.

“Tim, you said that the pineal causes aging. Is that true?” Kim asked.

“The pineal seems to reduce its melatonin production as animals and people get older,” Tim explained. “Researchers aren’t sure what the cause is and what’s the effect. There was a really interesting study done where researchers transplanted old pineal

glands into young mice. These mice quickly showed signs of aging.”

“Wow! Did they transplant young pineals into old mice?” Scott asked.

“Yes, and guess what?” Tim replied.

“The fountain of youth, or mouse in this case!” exclaimed Alex.

“Sort of. When the pineals of young mice were placed in older mice, the mice became slimmer and healthier. Researchers found out that the mice also didn’t get cancer and they lived thirty percent longer!” Tim said.

“Does every animal have a pineal?” Amy asked.

“You can find a pineal in almost all animals except for crocodiles, anteaters, sloths, armadillos, some marsupials and some bats. They still may have the gland, but we may not know it. The gland may have evolved into something we don’t recognize as a pineal.”

“So is the pineal always in the same place in the brain?” Kim asked.

“In some animals, the pineal is actually on the outside of the skull and it’s like an eye in the back of the head. It’s light sensitive,” Tim went on to say. “The third eye of the Western Fence Lizard is located on the top of it’s head. It sticks out through a small opening, and it connects directly to the pineal gland. It actually works.”

“Do any other animals have a real third eye?” Amy asked.

“The Pacific Tree Frog also has a third eye connected to the pineal, and the Pacific Sea Lamprey has two conspicuous pineal glands. The lamprey is the lowest form of living vertebrate. The most interesting is the Tuatara, which is the most ancient of all living reptiles. It lives in New Zealand and can live up to 100 years old. The young Tuatara has a third eye on the top of the brain between it’s other eyes,” Mac explained.

“So the pineal and the third eye are connected and there is clear evidence of this in the oldest and the lowest forms of living creatures,” Natalie summarized.

The kids couldn’t believe what they were hearing. Third eyes... immortality... Timothy Leary... secret gland... past lives... They eagerly began to read Tim’s paper. They were in for even more surprises...

Chapter Twenty-Two



The top of the paper read: <http://taolodge.com/tw.pineal.html>...Russ McClay
“Who’s McClay?” asked Kim.

“I consulted with him on the paper. I decided to give him first billing,” replied Tim.
Sharing the limelight was very uncharacteristic of Tim.

‘Probably isn’t even Tim’s paper,’ Mac thought.

Tim began to read out loud, “The Pineal Gland, LSD and Serotonin. There have been detailed studies done on each one of these subjects... but there are few studies, which have brought together this three-fold relationship.

“The pineal gland is about the size of a grain of rice. Its initial discovery was difficult and late in coming. In the second century, a scientist named Galen, was probably the first to describe the pineal in the West. He thought it might be a valve to regulate the flow of thought from one side of the brain to the other.

“Rene Descartes, the French philosopher, who made a number of rather remarkable scientific discoveries, wrote about the gland 1500 years after Galen. In Descartes’ opinion the pineal was the ‘seat of the soul’. He suggested there was a direct connection between the eyes and the pineal by means of ‘strings’ in the brain.

“Descartes also said that the gland acted as the chief interpreter of vision and directed the body’s muscles to respond to objects that it saw.

“The first person to give the pineal gland an endocrine status was Otto Heubner, in 1789. He was a famous German pediatrician. Because of reports of patients with delayed sexual maturity who also had pineal tumors, it was believed for the next fifty years that the pineal had something to do with the control of puberty.”

Kim just couldn’t resist. “That’s YOUR problem Scott!” Your pineal is too small!”

“Shut up!” Scott screamed back. “This from a girl who doesn’t want to date so badly she’s willing to pretend to date Alex!”

“Hey! I’m sitting right here!” Alex exclaimed.

“Shrimpy pineal and all,” Amy added.

The kids were having fun, but the adults were squirming in their chairs. The kids hadn’t connected the pineal to the penis, but the adults had.

“Enough you kids,” ordered an embarrassed Mac.

Amy suddenly burst out laughing. She whispered something to Kim, who in turn turned red and snickered. They made the connection. The boys were still out to lunch,

like most guys their age.

Tim continued, “A slight diversion from the puberty theory came in 1918 when Nils Holmgren, a Swedish anatomist, made detailed microscopic examinations of the pineal glands from frogs and dogfish sharks. In these glands he found cells that looked very much like cone cells (color sensitive photoreceptor cells) of a retinal nature in the tip of the pineal. Because of the resemblance, Holmgren suggested that the pineal was not a gland at all, but that it functioned as a ‘third eye’ in frogs and dogfish sharks. Holmgren made no study of mammalian pineal glands.”

Scott interrupted this time. “Is this where the saying ‘eyes in the back of your head’ comes from?”

Before anyone could answer, Alex shouted out, “I get it now! You girls are a laugh a minute. Maybe that explains why you’re both flat as a board. You got pineals for boobs!”

“I told you he was immature,” Kim said.

“Time out. Do I need to send you all to separate corners?” Mac asked.

“Teenage hormones... remember when?” Tim added.

“No, I don’t. You got all the girls. All I had was a poster of...”

Before Mac could finish the sentence Natalie snapped, “If I hear one more word out of any of you... except for Tim reading his paper, you’ll all have detention.”

“Okay. We hear you,” Mac replied.

Tim started again, “A new round of investigation began in 1958 when Lerner and his team at the Yale University of Medicine extracted a substance they called melatonin from the pineals of cattle. This further supported the hypothesis that the pineal gland is an endocrine gland.”

Alex finally had to ask. “What’s an endocrine gland?”

“It’s a gland that releases a hormone directly into the bloodstream. The hormone then goes directly to a particular organ and has a particular function when it gets there,” Tim explained. “You have a lot of endocrine glands in your body, like the pituitary, the stomach, and the gonads.”

The boys started to giggle. Now they knew something the girls didn’t.

Natalie stared at them. They knew immediately, to get serious.

“So, Tim, tell us more,” Alex said maturely.

Kim and Amy wondered what was going on, but they didn’t ask.

Tim continued. “Research is fragmented because of the variety of professionals interested (e.g. theologians, biologists, endocrinologists, and zoologists). The pineal is now recognized as a key element in the maintenance of the body’s endocrine regulation (hormone balance), immune system integrity, and circadian rhythm (daily metabolic balance).

“The pineal gland produces melatonin and serotonin. Serotonin is produced in the gut of the intestinal tract as well as the pineal organ. Serotonin is the most common neural transmitter. Serotonin is changed into melatonin in the pineal gland. The pineal gland is the only area where this is done.

“Here’s where the interesting stuff is,” Tim announced.

Mac had just checked his watch. “I have to make a call,” Mac announced. He abruptly got up from his chair and walked outside of his lab.

“We’ll wait for you to get back, before we start,” Tim said.

They didn’t have to wait long. From the look on Mac’s face, he either didn’t get hold

of who he wanted to speak with, or it was bad news. It was hard to tell. He just looked kinda weird.

“Who’d you call?” Scott asked.

“Tim, I need to get these kids home by 7:30. Tell us about your research.”

Chapter Twenty-Three



“Sure, Mac. Kids, and Natalie, this is where Leary’s theories make sense,” Tim continued. “Serotonin, LSD and the Epiphysis (Third Eye). Serotonin is a normal, necessary chemical transmitter of electrical impulses across the synapses (the gaps between the nerve cells). Certain hallucinogens have the same chemical skeleton as serotonin.

“Serotonin is transported via the bloodstream to the nerve cells throughout the body, but most especially in the neurons of the brain. Here they accumulate in their minutest molecular form. The molecule serotonin is utilized by the nerve cells for the complete execution of electrical impulses across the synaptic gap. The synaptic gap is the micro-gap between every connection of every nerve cell in the entire nervous system. The impulse travels along the nerve cell going through the electro-chemical processes with the ionic forms of calcium and potassium (the two vitals of the nervous system) until they reach the terminal end of the cell’s dendrites. Upon reaching the end the electrical impulse is translated into the neurochemical serotonin. This is then ‘squeezed’ out into intercellular space only to connect and meet the other side, which is the beginning of the next nerve soma (lining of the nerve cell).

“Could you dumb that down a bit?” Scott requested.

“It’s like a basketball game. The ball is the message and the pass is the serotonin,” Mac explained.

“Got it,” Scott replied.

“Few molecules can penetrate what is known in biology as the ‘blood brain barrier’. Those that do, go directly to the neuron. After that it becomes a matter of their ability to imitate one of the neurotransmitters. Our neurons have a safety device for this type of situation. The neurotransmitters have a unique molecular shape and can only fit in a specific slot on the synaptic surface. Mind-altering drugs all operate on mimicking one of the neurotransmitters.”

“Okay, let me try this one. If the ball tries to go to the wrong player the pass is blocked. Am I right?” Alex asked.

“You’ve got it!” Tim said and continued to explain, “LSD penetrates the blood brain barrier and slips into the transmission site inside the nerve cells themselves. It can mimic serotonin to the point where the body thinks it is serotonin and then shoots it across the synaptic gap. When LSD reaches the other side, it is accepted but the LSD doesn’t carry

the message any further. The impulse of electricity is redirected down less familiar pathways, pathways which have not been highly conditioned. Specifically, LSD affects the oldest parts of the brain first (e.g. upper end of the spinal cord, medulla oblongata, cerebrum, pineal gland and hypothalamus region), then the bloodstream takes it forward into the immediate back brain (location of sight interpretation), up through the area of hearing, the cerebellum, other sense interpretive centers, and motor areas.”

“So it’s like the game just got crazy because now the Wizards are passing the ball to the Spurs, right?” Kim said.

“Excellent!” Tim said, complimenting her.

“Holy fit!” Scott declared. “LSD doesn’t cause hallucinations! It retrieves real memories and information.”

“Are you sure about that?” Tim challenged. “Maybe it just retrieves parts of memories and tid bits of information and pieces them together, just like in dreams.”

“Ninety percent of the brain goes unused. What’s so crazy about thinking it’s data storage and the LSD or serotonin is simply the data retrieval system?” Scott challenged.

Natalie and Mac felt redeemed.

The kids were impressed and pumped. “I’m convinced more than ever that we need a page on our web site about the pineal,” Kim declared.

“I’ve got a dumbed down version you might want to use,” Tim offered. “I’m presenting it to the company who sponsors my research. It’s in point form. Perfect for your site!”

“Great!” Kim exclaimed.

“I’ll email it to you later,” Tim said.

“This is what our site should be about!” Scott said. “Stuff that really matters. Man, if kids took care of their pineal, they wouldn’t be sick!”

“That might be over simplifying things, Scott,” Mac said.

“But it couldn’t hurt, could it?” Natalie argued.

“Okay, enough about me,” Tim exclaimed. “Let’s hear about these past lives and the pineal.”

Russ McClay, The Pineal Gland, LSD and Serotonin, from pharmacology paper prepared at Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa, Cal., March 19, 1976

<http://taolodge.com/tw.pineal.html>

“Right! It’s time we told you about what WE’VE discovered,” Mac said. “Natalie, why don’t you start.”

Mac was still watching his watch and his cell as Natalie took a big breath to begin her lecture.

“Are we keeping you from something?” Tim asked.

Mac realized just how obvious he was being. “No, not at all. I just don’t want to get the kids home late.”

“Natalie, I’m sorry for the interruption. Why don’t you start.”

“Sure, I’d be happy to, Tim. When we first saw that there was light emanating from within the eye, we thought that it might be coming from the pineal gland. We decided to record the light and monitor pineal and other bio-med indicators.”

Mac added, “We set up an eye camera and connected it to a digital video camera to

record pupil dilation, color changes, etcetera. Our results were amazing!”

“What did you find?” Tim asked.

“Past lives!” Kim exclaimed.

“Memories!” Scott added.

“Images were projected from the back of the eye on to the eye’s blind spot. We think these images are actually traumatic memories and we think they trigger seizures. They appeared just before the start of an aura and stopped when the seizure began. We also found out that we could start this process by directing light into the eye. Certain light frequencies would set off an aura. We concluded that auras were a response to a memory that has been brought from the subconscious into the conscious. This memory is traumatic enough to set off a seizure. We’re still not sure where we’re heading with this,” Mac admitted.

“Scott, you didn’t tell us about this!” Alex exclaimed. “This is COOL!”

Mac caught his breath and continued, “When Natalie, the kids and I looked at the first of the videos, we thought we could see a horse and rider.

“The subject we were dealing with, Caroline, is a middle-aged female accountant. She’s had limited life experience, yet she was projecting fantastic images. I first thought her imagination was producing these fantasy pictures but we ran a genealogy on her and it all clicked.”

“What did?” replied Tim.

“The images she projected were experiences of her ancestors,” Natalie explained.

“Don’t tell me you’re talking reincarnation?” replied Tim.

“No, not really, but the kids and Natalie have some wild but possible theories.” Mac put Caroline’s CD in the player. “We recorded eight naturally occurring seizures and seven which we set off by using light to start an aura. Natalie and I cleaned up the images and found that there were three different images associated with auras. We also determined that the level of electrical activity and the light intensity and color were different for each of the images. Take a look at this.” The first image appeared on the screen.

“This is an image of a man on the roof of what appears to be an old building, probably a cathedral, somewhere in Ireland or Scotland.”

They continued on with the three other versions associated with this first aura. Mac explained that these were all recorded through the retina and all had the exact same electrical and light intensities.

“We think they’re of the same experience or time period,” Mac said.

“We’re back to the theory are we? Well, what is it?” Tim asked.

Kim began to explain, “We think that when a child is in the mother’s womb, that the memories of the mother are transferred from her brain to the child’s.”

“Come on Kim! You’re trying to prove that we should be a matriarchal society? That’s bull,” Alex proclaimed. “There’s no way women should be in charge!”

“Big word for such a puny pineal,” Amy declared.

“Hey, I watch the Historical Channel,” Alex replied.

“And what’s so wrong with a matriarchal society?” Natalie asked.

“They don’t exist anymore. Need I say more?” Alex replied. His manhood had taken a beating and he was reacting like a Neanderthal.

“Okay, Alex. I know this is the first time you’re hearing this. Just shut-up and listen.

It does make sense,” Scott ordered.

“Pineally challenged,” Amy said.

“I haven’t had so much fun since grade nine,” Tim announced.

“Speak for yourself,” Mac mumbled. “So what do you think about our theory?” They sat on pins and needles waiting for Tim’s response to their far out idea.

Chapter Twenty-Four



“I know about a study that may help prove it!” Tim explained. “Dr. Frank Davidson of Tufts University in Boston studied melatonin and serotonin levels in pregnant women. He was interested in the level of activity of the neurotransmitters during pregnancy. It turns out, the females produce about twice the normal amount of serotonin during the first six months of the gestation period and four times average during the last three months. The level of melatonin declines particularly during periods of rest or sleep. However, the electrical activity increased!”

“Did Dr. Davidson measure the baby’s neurochemical activity levels?” Scott asked.

“Yes, but only during the last month. He could only get a sample of ten babies. Not many of the women were willing to let them attach the electrodes to the baby’s head through the birth canal. It turned out, the babies’ levels mirrored the mothers’! After birth the levels returned to normal. Something else showed up, too. The women’s brains shrank during pregnancy,” Tim explained.

“Hey, maybe that’s because the mother’s brain is downloading all that data that Natalie was referring to,” Kim interjected.

“You may be right,” Tim remarked. “So tell me, Mac, how does this help epileptics?”

Natalie answered, “We don’t know yet but I am sure there is a connection. I think epileptic attacks occur when the aura is too negative for the mind to take. It doesn’t want to see the past and so it actually shakes up the person to shut down the memories.”

“Let me get this straight. You, Mac and the kids all think that auras are memories from the past and that seizures are off buttons? Then why are some auras not turned off by seizures?” Tim challenged.

“Different triggers bring on different memories which in turn activate different auras and result in different epileptic attacks,” Mac explained “Maybe the more traumatic the memory the more likelihood of a seizure!”

“This is an amazing theory! Show me more of Caroline’s memories,” Tim requested.

Mac uploaded more of Caroline’s images. This next one appeared to be of a bonfire. There were many people gathered around the fire and you could barely make out that a body was being burned... staked out... in the middle of the fire. The image was very brief.

“Play more!” Tim insisted.

“That’s all there is. The subject has a seizure almost as soon as the image appears.”

“I compared her genealogy to the images and found there was a correlation,” explained Mac.

“How did you get her genealogy?” Tim asked.

“Do you remember our old friend Sean from Stanford University?” Mac asked.

“What about him?” Tim replied.

“Sean is developing a web site for people to access their genealogies on-line. His beta is running and he’s given me access.”

“Can we run a genealogy on someone?” Scott asked.

“Who?” Mac replied.

RING... RING...

Natalie’s cell phone rang. She quickly answered it, mumbled a few words and before they all knew it, “I’ve got to be somewhere.” She disappeared before they could get an explanation.

“Man, she’s hot,” Tim declared as soon as Natalie was out of earshot.

“You think SHE’S hot, you should see our teacher Mr. Jones,” Amy said. “Now He’s HOT!”

“Who’s this Mr. Jones?” Tim asked.

“He’s the guy we want to check out his genealogy. Our teacher, Mr. Jones. He’s strange,” Scott explained.

“SO you girls have a school girl crush on your teacher. Isn’t that nice,” Time teased.

“He’s COOL!” Kim declared. “AND he’s really smart.” Kim decided to make it seem like the girls were into more than just his great looks. They didn’t want to be as shallow as they thought guys were. They got a strange reaction from Alex.

“He’s a teacher! He’s OLD! Give me a break!” Alex ordered. He was just a tad bit jealous of Mr. Jones.

“So what. Kim and I have mature pineals. We can appreciate older men,” Amy joked.

“Are you guys this excited about every new word you learn?” Natalie teased.

Mac was deep in thought. He had missed the last bit of verbal jousting. Out of nowhere he asked, “Mr. Jones, that’s the guy who was on the court with you when you were knocked out, right?”

“Right,” Scott replied.

“The guy that your dad said looked familiar, right?”

“Right,” Kim replied. “Why?”

“I just remembered something Jack told me,” Mac admitted.

“Jack? Do you still see Jack?” Tim asked.

“You know Jack, too?” Scott questioned.

“Sure! Mac and Jack and...”

Mac got Tim’s attention and signaled to him to shut up. No one else noticed.

“And what, Tim?” Kim asked.

“Huh? I forgot what I was talking about.”

“Mac, what did Jack say?”

Mac wished he hadn’t said anything, but the kids were relentless.

“What did he say?” Kim insisted.

“It was strange. I didn’t think much about it at the time. Jack loves to embellish. He said when he checked out the symbols on your new game, that some strange character contacted him and said that they were ancient symbols. The stranger really didn’t tell

Jack much more than that. But Jack described the guy to me, and if you changed his clothes, there seemed to be a lot of similarity between the guy Jack described and this Mr. Jones of yours.”

“We definitely need to do a background check on Mr. Jones, now,” Scott exclaimed. “Maybe he’s Jack’s mystery man.”

“And, HE always tells us to get all the facts before we make any decisions or form an opinion. He’d be REALLY impressed if we got the facts on him!” Amy added.

Scott and Alex looked at each other. Alex announced, “We already said that!”

“I didn’t hear you,” Amy replied.

Kim supported her friend. “That’s a great idea!”

“Yeah, we’re all right,” Scott added. “Let’s work together on this.”

“We need a little more information than just his last name. What’s his first name? Where and when was he born? What are his parents’ names, for starters,” Mac asked.

“Okay, we’ll see what we can find out,” Scott promised. The kids were on another mission.

“Back to business,” Mac directed. “It seems that Caroline comes from a long line of epileptic sufferers.”

“Well, that’s no surprise is it?” Tim replied. “You know better than anyone that it’s hereditary.”

Mac went on to explain, “We can trace her back on her mother’s side all the way to Kilkenny Ireland 1324. She was descended from Dame Alice Kyteler, one of the first people to be formally tried for sorcery. The person on the roof, was her son. He was found guilty of witchcraft and sentenced to feed the poor and to re-roof the St. Canice’s cathedral with lead.”

“What about the person being burned at the stake, was that Dame Alice?” Tim asked.

“No, that was her maid, Petronilla. She was accused, just like Dame Alice, but Alice was able to escape to London. Her fate after that is fairly obscure, but some say she took Petronilla’s daughter with her and she lived to an old age.”

“That’s amazing!” Scott said.

“That’s not all,” Natalie added. “Caroline is an accountant and Dame Alice was a lender. They both deal with numbers.”

Mac explained, “She was a money lender... and lots of people owed her money...”

Scott guessed, “That’s probably why they wanted her dead. They didn’t want to pay her back.”

“This is all very interested,” Tim said, “But let’s return to the present. I suppose what you’re saying is that when something sets off the vision of the witch burning, a seizure would be triggered. Caroline never remembers the actual vision. The actual memory was lost but the fear of the aura remained.”

“Do you think that every aura and seizure is based on a bad memory?” Tim asked.

“We don’t know,” said Natalie. “Maybe if we can find out what auras set off the violent seizures, we can deal with the memory. Through treatment and behavior modification perhaps we can change the aura into a memory. Bring it from the subconscious to the conscious and deal with it, head on.”

“Nice theory. Are you going to try it on Caroline?” Tim inquired.

“I don’t know if she can handle it,” admitted Mac.

Without realizing it they had worked right through to early evening.

“Ghee! I told your mom I’d have you home by 7:30. It’s almost that now. I think we should just call it quits for the night,” Mac said.

“Tim, do you want to come home and see Mom?” Scott asked.

“Not tonight, Scott. Maybe another time,” Tim answered. “I’ll just head over to your place, Mac. I’ll find that paper I told you kids about and send it to you.”

“Here’s the extra key,” Mac said to Tim as he handed it over.

The kids were disappointed. Mac was relieved. He didn’t have the energy for a reunion between Tommie and Tim.

The drive home was uneventful.... until,

Chapter Twenty-Five



“Mac, have you noticed that a police car has been following us all the way from the lab?” Kim asked.

Mac hadn’t noticed. He was still waiting for a call and pre-occupied with his watch and his phone.

“No. You’re just imagining it,” Mac replied.

“Take a couple of turns and see if he’s still there,” Alex suggested.

“We don’t have time,” Mac replied.

“Please, I noticed him too!” Scott said.

“Okay,” Mac answered and then took a right onto an unfamiliar street.

The police car followed.

“He’s still behind us!” Amy exclaimed.

“Calm down you guys. It’s just a coincidence.”

“Turn again!” Kim insisted.

“I HAVE to turn again; I need to get back onto the main street. It’s confusing in this residential area.”

Mac tried to find a way back to the main road. He appeared to be driving erratically as he started to turn; then stopped; backed up; continued on; then took another turn; realized he’d made a mistake; and, had to turn around in someone’s driveway. He was frustrated as the kids continued to announce that the police car was still on their tail.

Then, to make matters worse,

RING... RING... RING...

Mac quickly reached for his cell, but in all the excitement, and with his eyes mostly on the road, he accidentally knocked the cell onto the floor. As he reached over to pick it up, the kids screamed, “Watch out for the dog!”

By the time Mac had regained control of himself and the car, the dog was safely on the boulevard. Mac was relieved, but he had more important things to worry about.

“Hello?” Mac said on his phone.

There was silence. The kids assumed the other person was speaking to Mac.

“What?” Mac exclaimed. He was so shocked by what he was just told; he swerved the car over the centerline of the road. He quickly regained his composure, but now, the siren was blasting from the police car and its lights were flashing.

“I gotta go! I can’t believe you’re doing this,” Mac said. He hung up and pulled over.

Within minutes, the police officer was standing at Mac's driver side window. Mac rolled down the window. "Can I help you officer?"

"I saw you driving erratically. I need you to step out of the car. I want to see your driver's license and registration."

"I left it in my lab. I was just dropping off the kids," Mac explained.

"Why were you driving like that?" the officer asked.

Alex belted out, "We're lost!"

The kids were nervous and started to giggle. They didn't mean to be mean, but the officer had what looked like sugar from a donut, all over his mouth, and a coffee stain on his shirt. Some of the sugar from his own face had fallen off and landed on Mac's blue T-shirt.

"What's this? Cocaine?" the officer said to Mac, as he pointed at the fine white powder on Mac's car door and shoulder.

"No! Of course not! I don't know what it is," Mac exclaimed, not knowing if he should tell the officer that the white powder came from his dirty face. The officer shouted over to his partner and ordered him to bring the identification kits.

"I want all of you out of the car where I can see you. I'm going to have to check you all for priors and outstanding charges," the officer announced.

"But officer," Mac began to say.

"Get out of the car or I'll have to charge you with resisting arrest."

Everyone immediately piled out of the car. Alex wasn't happy with the situation.

"We're just kids!" wailed Alex. "My dad won't like this!"

The officer heard what Alex said, but he didn't know who said it. He looked the kids over and went directly for Scott. The kid with the dreads. Scott had been profiled.

"Threatening a cop are you kid? It's punks like you who are dealing most of this stuff. Hey Whitie," he shouted to his partner, "I think we've got a big bust here." He turned his attention back to the kids and insisted, "You punks are going down hard."

At that point it wasn't funny anymore. The kids and Mac did as they were told. They had to have their fingernails cut and their fingerprints and retinal scans taken. The cops said they ran them through the database and came up matchless. When Mac and the kids got back into the car, they could see that the cops had planted evidence in the car to justify their actions. There, on the back and front seats were pieces of sugared donuts.

"Look what you did! You made us waste our time on you. You knew all along the powder was from these donuts you'd been eating."

The officers headed back to the car and took off.

"What a couple of butt holes!" Alex declared.

"Watch your language, there's ladies present," Mac ordered.

"Hey, we ladies agree with Alex!" Amy replied.

"That was the weirdest encounter with the cops I've ever had," Mac admitted.

"Wait until I tell my dad. He'll make these guys pay for what they just did," Alex bragged.

Mac regained his composure for a moment, but then, he recalled the phone call. He was distracted again.

"Who called you?" Scott asked.

"No one."

"But you seemed kinda upset. Is it about the announcement? Aren't things going as

planned? Couldn't you get Stretch Davis?" Scott asked.

Before Mac could answer, he was bombarded with more questions.

"Why won't Stretch help us? Isn't he getting married anymore? What's my dad going to do now to help us?" Alex asked.

"What about MY dad? Is he having problems setting everything up?"

"No, no, no, no, no, and I think there's a couple of, I don't know, and a yes. There, are you happy?"

"About what. I don't know what you just said."

"Then we're even," Mac barked.

Scott decided he and the kids should back off. He'd never seen Mac annoyed like this before. There was definitely something up and he wasn't happy about it.

Mac had finally found his way out of the residential labyrinth and back out onto the main street. Minutes later, he joined a parade of vehicles driving down Apple Creek.

"It's starting," Mac mumbled to himself.

"Did you say something?" Kim asked.

"Hey, what's all the cops doing here, and there's a ton of media vans and things. Hey, there's Mom's van in front of us and that looks like Dad in that cab!"

All the Campbells were arriving home at the same time, along with what appeared to be every police officer and media crew in the vicinity. They were all converging on the Campbell home.

"Is this what your phone call was about?" Kim asked. "What's happening?"

Mac ignored her question. It was obvious he wasn't totally sure himself. He parked illegally on the street, behind Tommie. The Campbell's driveway was already full. The gate to their backyard was opened.

They all caught up with each other in front of their home.

"What's happening here?" Chris shouted above the buzz of the beehive of activity in their yard. People were dragging cable to the backyard to feed their television signal; the cops were taping off their property. It was an absolute circus.

"I'm afraid you'll have to step back Sir," an officer said to Chris. "We're investigating a crime scene here."

"Officer Dandy?" Tommie said.

It was already dark out and Dandy hadn't realized he was speaking with the Campbells. "Mr. and Mrs. Campbell... I'm sorry."

"What's happening here?" Scott insisted.

"We got a tip that there was a murder here this evening. From the looks of it, every news and entertainment group has also been notified."

"Who's been murdered?"

"We don't know. We haven't found a body."

"Then what the heck is everyone doing here then?" Kim asked.

"It's a slow night. There's nothing else going on," Dandy explained.

"Can we get them out of our yard?" Chris added.

"We can try," Dandy replied.

The kids and Mac ran toward the backyard. They met up with Detective Nash.

"Detective Nash! What's happening!"

As soon as the talking heads noticed the kids, they converged on them like bears to honey. They were shoving mics in their faces and asking them what they knew about the

murder... if they knew who the victim was... if they knew where the body was buried... and any other inane question that came to mind.

Mac had followed the kids to the back yard where the media scrum was taking place.

Kim looked over at Mac. She had figured the whole thing out. "This is it, isn't it?"

"Fire away!" Mac replied.

This was the media event that Mr. Black, Mr. Montgomery and Mac had been working on.

Scott, Amy and Alex caught on and between the four of them, they managed to get word out to the world, about the Eurasian PC, the Addictive Game and the ultimate-full-duplexing plan.

The media had airtime to fill, and this was better than nothing. All had gone according to someone's plan, until...

"There it is! There's the body! In the water!"

The camera crews and reporters rushed to the water's edge.

The police pushed their way through the crowd shouting, "Stay back! Don't touch anything. This is a criminal investigation!"

As the body was carried up onto the shore by the waves, camera bulbs flashed, the television lights traversed the shore and the moon light twinkled on the water. It was like a disco ball had been hung over the body. The waves turned the face toward the crowd and for a split second, everyone who could see – formed their own opinion as to who was lying dead in the water on the Campbell's beach.

"It's President Tush!"

"It's Buck Huckster!"

"No! It's Jack!"

**We hope you enjoy the next book!
It's In the Works**

Technology References

AM: amendment to an International Standard.

American National Standards Institute: The U.S. national standardization body. ANSI is a member of ISO

Charlie-Foxtrot: (colloquial usage) seriously beyond all hope.

DAM: a Draft Amendment to an International Standard. If ratified, the Draft Amendment advances to Amendment (AD) status.

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency: (ARPA) an agency of the U.S Department of Defense that sponsors high-risk, high-payoff research. The Internet suite of protocols was developed under DARPA auspices. DARPA was previously known as ARPA, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, when the ARPANET was built.

European Computer Manufactures Association (ECMA): a group of computer vendors that have performed substantive pre-standardization work for OSI.

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers: a professional organization, which as a part of its services to the community, perform some pre-standardization work for OSI.

International Organization for Standardization: the organization that produces many of the world's standards. OSI is only one of many areas standardized by ISO/IEC.

International Federation for Information Processing: a research organization that performs substantive pre-standardization work for OSI. IFIP is noted for having formalized the original MHS model.

Internet: a large collection of connected networks, throughout the world, running the internet suite of protocols. Sometimes referred to as the DARPA Internet, NSF/DARPA Internet, or the Federal Research Internet.

Internet Activities Board: the technical body overseeing the development of the Internet suite of protocols.

Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF): a task force of the Internet Activities Board charged with solving the sort-term needs of the Internet.

Open Systems Interconnection (OSI): an international effort to facilitate communications

among computers of different manufacture and technology.

physical layer: that portion of an OSI system responsible for the electromechanical interface to the communications media.

Shadowing: a form of replication in which a well-defined unit of information is copied to another name service, allowing that name server to authoritatively process transactions regarding that information

WAN: Wide Area Network. Any one of a number of technologies providing geographically distant transfer.

Source: Marshall T. Rose The Internet Message, Prentice Hall Series in Innovative Technology, 1993

Medical References

adrenaline (epinephrine) n. an important hormone secreted by the medulla of the adrenal gland. It has the function of preparing the body for 'fright, flight, or fight' and has widespread effects on circulation, the muscles, and sugar metabolism. the action of the heart is increased, the rate and depth of breathing are increased, and the metabolic rate is raised; the force of muscular contraction improves and the onset of muscular fatigue is delayed. At the same time the blood supply to the bladder and intestines is reduced, the muscular walls relax, and the sphincters contract. Sympathetic nerves were originally thought to act by releasing epinephrine at their endings, and were called adrenergic nerves. In fact the main substance released is the related substance norepinephrine, which also forms a portion of the adrenal secretion.

Epinephrine given by injection is valuable for the relief of bronchial asthma, because it relaxes constricted airways. It is also used during surgery to reduce blood loss by constricting vessels in the skin. Bantam p. 148-149

aldosterone n. a steroid hormone (see corticosteroid) that is synthesized and released by the adrenal cortex and acts on the kidney to regulate salt (potassium and sodium) and water balance. It may be given by injection as replacement therapy when the adrenal cortex secretes insufficient amounts of the hormone and also to treat shock. Bantam p. 11

antibiotic n. a substance produced by or derived from a microorganisms, that destroys or inhibits the growth of other microorganisms. Antibiotics are used to treat infections caused by organisms that are sensitive to them, usually bacteria or fungi. They may alter the normal microbial content of the body (e.g. in the intestine, lungs, bladder) by destroying one or more groups of harmless organisms, which may result in infections due to overgrowth of resistant organisms. These side effects are most likely to occur with broad-spectrum antibiotics (those active against a wide variety of organisms). Resistance may also develop in the microorganisms being treated (for example, through incorrect dosage), and some antibiotics may cause allergic reactions. Antibiotics should not be used for minor infections, which will clear up unaided. Bantam p. 24

aura n. the forewarning of an attack. The true epileptic aura is felt as a breeze or coldness passing over the body. The migrainous aura usually affects the patients eyesight with brilliant flickering lights or blurring of vision. Bantam p. 37

aura N. sensation (e.g. flickering light, halos, or warmth) that may signal the start of a migraine or an epileptic seizure. Barron's p. 49

blind spot N. normal gap in the visual field, the result of a spot on the retina insensitive to light and located where the optic nerve enters the eye. Barron p. 64

blind spot the small area of the retina of the eye where the nerve fibers from the light-sensitive cells lead into the optic nerve. There are no rods or cones in this area and hence it does not register light. Anatomical name: punctum caecum. Bantam p. 50

cerebellum n. that part of the brain located behind the cerebrum and above the pons and concerned with the coordination and control of voluntary muscular activity. Barron's p. 92

cerebrum n. main mass of the human brain; the two cerebral hemispheres that control conscious activity. Barron's p. 93

deja vu a vivid psychic experience in which immediately contemporary events seem to be a repetition of previous happenings. It is a symptom of temporal lobe epilepsy. Bantam p. 114

diuretic n. a drug that increases the volume of urine produced by promoting the excretion of salts and water from the kidney. Examples are the thiazide diuretics (e.g. chlorothiazide and chlorthalidone), furosemide, spironolactone and triamterene. Diuretics are used to reduce the edema due to salt and water retention in disorders of the heart, kidneys, liver or lungs. Some mild diuretics, including acetazolamide, are used to reduce the pressure within the eyeball in glaucoma. Diuretics are also used in conjunction with other drugs, in the treatment of high blood pressure. Treatment with thiazide diuretics often results in potassium deficiency; this is corrected by simultaneous administration of potassium salts. Bantam p. 127

endocrine gland (ductless gland) a gland that manufactures one or more hormones and secretes them directly into the bloodstream (and not through a duct to the exterior). Endocrine glands include the pituitary, thyroid, parathyroid, and adrenal glands, the ovary and testis, the placenta, and part of the pancreas. Bantam pp. 142-143

gland n. an organ or group of cells that is specialized for synthesizing and secreting certain fluids, either for use in the body or for excretion. there are two main groups of glands; the exocrine glands, which discharge their secretions by means of ducts, and the endocrine glands, which secrete their products - hormones - directly into the bloodstream. Bantam p. 182

hallucination n. a false perception of something that is not really there. Hallucinations may be visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory (of taste), or olfactory (of smell). They may be provoked by psychological illness (such as "schizophrenia) or physical disorders in the brain (such as temporal lobe epilepsy or stroke or they may be caused by drugs or sensory deprivation. Hallucinations should be distinguished from dreams and from illusions (since they occur at the same time a real perceptions and are not based on real stimuli). Bantam p. 191

hallucinogen n. a drug that produces hallucinations, e.g. cannabis and lysergic acid

diethylamide. Hallucinogens were formerly used to treat certain types of mental illness. Bantam p. 191

homosexuality n. the condition of being sexually attracted, covertly or overtly, by members of one's own sex: it can affect either sex. the cause of homosexuality remains unclear, although explanations in terms of either a deviant family structure or an environment with limited opportunities for heterosexual contacts are increasingly accepted. Homosexuality is no longer regarded as a psychological disorder but therapy may be offered to individuals wishing to change their sexual orientation. There are no drugs available for changing sexual orientation, although it is possible to depress the sexual drive. Treatment would consist of behavior therapy designed to eliminate homosexual behavior and fantasy and to increase heterosexual behavior. Persons seeking help for their homosexuality are more likely to benefit from counseling to reduce any anxiety and guilt that may be associated with the condition, rather than trying to change their sexual behavior. Bantam p. 205

humor n. a body fluid. Bantam p. 206

illusion n. a false perception due to misinterpretation of the stimuli arising from an object. For example, a patient may misinterpret the conversation of others as the voices of enemies conspiring to destroy him. Illusions can occur in quite normal people, when they are usually spontaneously corrected. They may also occur in almost any psychiatric syndrome, especially depression. Optical illusions are perceptions that do not agree with the actual object in the external world. They are produced by deceptive qualities of the stimulus and are in no way pathological. Bantam p. 217

immunity n. the body's ability to resist infection, afforded by the presence of circulating antibodies and white blood cells. Antibodies are manufactured specifically to deal with the antigens associated with different diseases as they are encountered. Active immunity arises when the body's own cells produce, and remain able to produce appropriate antibodies following an attack of a disease or deliberate stimulation. Passive immunity, which is only short-lived, is provided by injecting ready-made antibodies in antiserum taken from another person or animal already immune. Babies have passive immunity, conferred by antibodies from the maternal blood and colostrum, to common diseases for several weeks after birth. There are two types of immune response produced by two populations of lymphocytes. B-lymphocytes are responsible for humoral immunity, producing free antibodies that circulate in the bloodstream; and T-lymphocytes are responsible for cell-mediated immunity. Bantam p. 218

jamais vu one of the manifestations of temporal lobe epilepsy, in which there is a sudden feeling of unfamiliarity with everyday surroundings. Bantam p. 231

Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) a psychedelic drug that is also a hallucinogen. It has been used to aid treatment of psychological disorders. Side effects include digestive upsets, dizziness, tingling, anxiety, sweating, dilated pupils, muscle incoordination and tremor. Alterations in sight, hearing and other senses occur, psychotic effects,

depression, and confusion are common, and tolerance to the drug develops rapidly. Because of these toxic effects, LSD is no longer used clinically. Bantam p. 253

melatonin n. only hormone secreted by the pineal gland. Its function in humans is unknown. Barron's p.301

migraine. recurring vascular headache, occurring more frequently in women. The cause is unknown, but the pain is associated with dilation of extracranial blood vessels. Attacks are often triggered by allergic reactions, menstruation, alcohol, or relaxation after a period of stress. A typical attack, which may last from several hours to several days, starts with an episode of visual disturbances (e.g. aura or flashing lights), numbness, tingling, vertigo, or other sensations, followed by the onset of severe, usually unilateral pain, sometimes accompanied by vomiting, photophobia, irritability, and fatigue. Ergotamine preparations that constrict cranial arteries are helpful if taken at the onset of an attack; aspirin does not usually provide relief. Also called Megrin, hemicrania. Barrons p. 310

neuroendocrine system the system of dual control of certain activities of the body by means of both nerves and circulating hormones. The functioning of the autonomic nervous system is particularly closely linked to that of the pituitary and adrenal glands. Bantam pp. 290-291

neurohumor n. a chemical transmitted by a neuron and essential for the activity of adjacent neurons, muscles, or other organs. important neurohumors are acetylcholine, serotonin, dopamine, and epinephrine. Barron's p. 336

neurotransmitter is a chemical released from nerve endings to transmit impulses across synapses to other nerves and across the gaps between the nerves and the muscles or glands that they supply. Serotonin (5 hydroxytryptamine is a neurotransmitter widely distributed in the central nervous system, the tissues, particularly in the blood platelets and intestinal wall. It is thought to play a role in inflammation similar to that of histamine and it also acts as a neurotransmitter, especially concerned with the process of sleep and upon an injury, it acts as a vasoconstrictor; and in the small intestine it stimulates smooth muscles to contract.

neurotransmitter n. a chemical substance released from nerve endings to transmit impulses across synapses to other nerves and across the minute gaps between the nerves and the muscles or glands that they supply. Outside the central nervous system the chief neurotransmitter is acetylcholine; norepinephrine is released by nerve endings of the sympathetic system. in the central nervous system besides acetylcholine and norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, gamma-aminobutyric acid, and several other substances act as transmitters. Bantam pp. 292-293

norepinephrine (noradrenaline) n. a hormone, closely related to epinephrine and with similar actions, secreted by the medulla of the adrenal gland and also released as a neurotransmitter by sympathetic nerve endings. Among its many actions are constriction of small blood vessels leading to an increase in blood pressure, increased blood flow

through the coronary arteries and a slowing of the heart rate, increase in the rate and depth of breathing, and relaxation of the smooth muscle in intestinal walls. Bantam p. 295

optic nerve N. one of a pair of sensory nerves, the second cranial nerves, that arise in the retina and transmit visual impulses from the eye to the visual cortex of the brain. Barrons p. 350

paranoia n. a mental disorder characterized by delusions organized into a system, without hallucinations or other marked symptoms of mental illness. It is a rare chronic condition; most people with such delusions will in time develop signs of other mental illness. The same term is sometimes used more loosely for a state of mind in which the individual has a strong belief that he is persecuted by others. His behavior is therefore suspicious and isolated. This can be a result of personality disorder as well as mental illness causing paranoid states. Bantam p. 318

parietal adj. 1. of or relating to the inner walls of a body cavity, as opposed to the contents: applied particularly to the membranes lining a cavity. 2. of or relating to the parietal bone. Bantam p. 320

parietal bone either of a pair of bones forming the top and sides of the cranium. Bantam p. 320

pathological adj. relating to or arising from disease. For example, a pathological fracture is one associated with disease of the bone. Bantam p. 321

potassium n. a mineral element and an important constituent of the human body. It is the main base ion of intracellular fluid. Together with sodium, it helps to maintain the electrical potential of the nervous system and is thus essential for the functioning of nerve and muscle. Normal blood levels are between 3.5 and 5 mmols/litre. High concentrations occur particularly in kidney failure and may lead to arrhythmia and finally to cardiac arrest. low values result from fluid loss, e.g. due to vomiting or diarrhea, and this may lead to general muscle paralysis. Bantam p. 347

proprioceptor n. a specialized sensory nerve ending that monitors internal changes in the body brought about by movement and muscular activity. Proprioceptors located in muscles and tendons transmit information that is used to coordinate muscular activity. Bantam 354

psychedelic adj. describing drugs that induce changes in the level of consciousness of the mind. Psychedelic drugs, which include lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and cannabis, are hallucinogens and are used legally only for experimental purposes. Bantam p. 357

psychosis n. major mental disorder in which the person is usually detached from reality and has impaired perceptions, thinking, responses, and interpersonal relationships. Most people with psychoses require hospitalization; treatment involves the use of psychoactive

(affecting the state of one's mind) drugs and psychotherapy. Barron's pp. 403-404

schizophrenia n. any of a group of mental disorders characterized by gross distortions of reality, withdrawal from social contacts, and disturbances of thought, language, perception, and emotional response. Symptoms are highly varied and may include apathy, catatonia or excessive activity, bizarre actions, hallucinations, delusions and rambling speech. Some cases are mild; others severe, requiring prolonged or permanent hospitalization. There is no known cause; a combination of hereditary or genetic predisposition factors, together with psychological, biochemical, and sociocultural factors, is thought to be responsible in many cases. Treatment includes use of tranquilizers, antidepressants, and psychotherapy. Barron's pp. 436-37

serotonin (5 hydroxytryptamine) n. a compound widely distributed in the tissues, particularly in the blood platelets, intestinal wall, and central nervous system. It is thought to play a role in inflammation similar to that of histamine and it also acts as a neurotransmitter, especially concerned with the process of sleep. Bantam p. 392

serotonin n. chemical widely distributed in the body, esp. in the brain, where it acts as a neurotransmitter; in the blood platelets, upon an injury, it acts as a vasoconstrictor; and in the small intestine it stimulates smooth muscles to contract. Barron's p. 442

synapse n. the minute gap across which nerve impulses pass from one neuron to the next, at the end of a nerve fiber. Reaching a synapse, an impulse causes the release of a neurotransmitter, which diffuses across the gap and triggers an electrical impulse in the next neuron. Some brain cells have more than 15,000 synapses. Bantam p. 422

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