

A Kids Opinions Count™ Book

The Eyes Have It



By MAKs

The Eyes Have It



Book Seven 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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MAKS

(Kids opinions count ; 7)
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The Final Scene - Let the Play End!!



Actors

Tucker Shyster (Buck Huckster) played by Alex
Bobby Schreck (RL Bailey) played by Scott
Benedict Arnold (Benjamin Arnold) played by Jeremy
Judge Emily Flyn played by Amy
Terrance Arnold (Jeremy Arnold) played by Cal
Troy Trueman (Matt Molina) played by Zach
Vickie Virtue (Tommie Campbell) played by Kim
Harley Arnold (Farley Arnold) played by Josh
Riley Virtue (Scott Campbell) played by Elliot
Kevin White (Alex Black) played by Michael
David Goodson (David Goodman) played by Mr. Wagner
Mrs. Hardy played by Mrs. Hardy
Court Clerk played by Melissa
Jury Foreperson played by Sara
Female Jurors played by Alanna, Erica and Cynthia
Jurors, Gallery and Media scrum – played by Mrs. Hardy's English class.
Dan Ratherknot (Van Rathernot) is played by Taylor
Narrator is Chuck Reimer

Judge Flynn: I am prepared to give instructions to The Jury now. Ladies and Gentlemen of The Jury, you have heard many conflicting statements here today. I must make sure that before you leave this room to deliberate, that you consider two questions and nothing more.

Firstly, you must decide if the no-speak agreement that was signed by Mr. Arnold, affected any of the statements that he made under oath. If you decide that the no-speak agreement in fact caused Mr. Arnold to lie, then I will find these agreements suborn perjury and I will enter a ruling to the Supreme Court to make them unconstitutional and illegal.

Secondly you must decide if Mr. Shyster had any influence over Mr. Arnold's statements, whether verbal or in writing, that Mr. Arnold made under oath and presented as evidence in this court here today. If you find that Mr. Shyster caused Mr. Arnold to lie in his Affidavits or in his testimony here today, then he must be found guilty of subornation of perjury and he will be guilty of a criminal offense, punishable by incarceration in a state prison.

Now, I ask you to leave the courtroom and return when you have your decision. Clerk, please escort The Jurors to the deliberation room.

The Jury gets up and follows the clerk out of the courtroom. There is a break. The lights go off. When they are turned back on, it is 'one hour later'. The courtroom is again full. Everyone is as they were before the lights went out. The Jury has returned to the courtroom after its deliberation.

Judge Flynn: Will the defendant please rise.

Harley and Tucker stand up. Bobby stands as well.

Judge Flynn: Madame Foreperson, have you reached your decision?

Foreman: Yes, we have, Your Honor.

Judge Flynn: On the charge that the no-speak agreement is unconstitutional. How did you find?

Foreman: We find the no-speak agreement does not suborn perjury.

Ben and the students are shocked. Bobby shakes his head in disbelief. Tucker and Harley stand there cool and calm. Tucker is grinning ear to ear.

Judge Flynn: Thank you. And on the charge against Mr. Tucker Shyster, that he himself suborned perjury, how did you find?

Foreman: We, The Jury, unanimously find Mr. Tucker Shyster, not guilty of suborning perjury.

Judge Flynn: I thank The Jury for your hard work.

Harley and Tucker embrace each other. They are celebratory.

Bobby is disgusted with the verdict. He is amazed at the outcome. Bobby, Troy and Vicki console each other.

Ben hangs his head in shame.

Judge Flynn: Order! Order! Order in the court! This trial is not over! I am setting

aside The Jury's decision! I don't know how they came to a 'not guilty' conclusion. But given the evidence here today, there is no way that this decision came without a cost... to the defendant. Mr. Shyster, on the charge of subornation of perjury, I find you guilty. Sentencing to take place in one week.

Then, from nowhere, Goodson appears. He is brandishing a gun as he runs down the center isle of the courtroom, directly towards Tucker. He doesn't know the judge has overturned The Jury's decision.

Troy: It's Goodson! He's got a gun!

Vicki: My Goodness! Is he going to...

Troy: Don't do it Richard! He's not worth it!

Goodson: I have no choice.

Troy: The Judge found him Guilty!

It's too late. Goodson points the gun before the guards can subdue him. Harley hurls himself in front of Tucker. The gun discharges accidentally. Tucker has already run out of harms way. The bullet hits the table in front of Harley. Harley jumps backward and stumbles over the garbage can. The can topples. Harley falls, striking his head on the edge of the table and falling on the shards of glass. No one notices.

All eyes are on Goodson and the guards. They quickly escort Goodson out of the courtroom. Tucker Shyster is handcuffed and led away.

Tucker: I'm innocent! I did what every other businessman in this country does. It's not illegal! It's the American Way. You'll all pay for this! None of you will ever work again! Ever! We have the power!

Narrator: Still, no one has noticed Harley.

Ben has remained seated. He is crying. He thinks that Harley has left with Tucker. Ben sits in his seat with his head in his hands, feeling sorry for himself. Harley bleeds out... unconscious and unnoticed... Another victim of greed.

There is a price to pay for treasonous actions against the good citizens of the United States... Sometimes however... the guilty escape paying that price...

The curtain falls.



The end

The Eyes Have It

Chapter One



The curtain fell.

The stage lights were turned off and the house lights turned on.

The audience exploded to their feet.

They applauded until their hands were raw.

The kids' play was a success.

Then, unexpectedly, the house lights were turned off.

The crowd was again, in the dark. They wondered what was happening.

The curtain rose.

A single spotlight pierced the darkness, like an arrow, and embraced only one person on the stage, Jeremy Arnold. The rest of the cast surrounded Jeremy on the stage.

The audience realized the play wasn't over, and took their seats.

When all was quiet, and anticipation of what was to come had peaked, Jeremy spoke.

“The play you just witnessed was a figment of our collective imaginations. It is the way that things should be, not the way they are. A portrayal of the truth as we see it, not through the eyes of a corrupt judicial system, business community and moralless majority.

“We, the actors, applaud your response. We would now like to tell you how this courtroom drama, really played out.”

The curtain fell.

The crowd waited.

The curtain rose.

The cast had returned to their places in the courtroom.

Judge Flynn: Will the defendant please rise.

*Harley Arnold and Tucker Shyster stand up.
Bobby Schreck stands.*

Judge Flyn: Madame Foreperson, have you made your decision?

Foreperson: Yes, we have, Your Honor.

Judge Flyn: On the charge that the no-speak agreement is unconstitutional. How do you find?

Foreperson: We find, the no-speak agreement, is not unconstitutional.

*Bobby shakes his head in disbelief.
Tucker and Harley stand cool and calm. Tucker is grinning ear to ear.*

Judge Flyn: Thank you, Madame Foreperson. And on the charge against Mr. Tucker Shyster, that he himself suborned perjury, how did you find?

Foreperson: We, The Jury, unanimously find Mr. Tucker Shyster, not guilty of suborning perjury.

Judge Flyn: I thank The Jury for your decisions. Mr. Tucker Shyster, the jury has found you innocent of the charge. You are free to go.

The curtain falls.

Silence. The crowd was stunned. When the reality of the situation hit them, there was a deafening buzz in the theater, as the audience discussed the final scene.

The curtain rises. The cast and crew surround Jeremy on stage. He speaks directly to the audience.

“We would now like to ask you to choose between the two endings,” Jeremy declared. “If you feel as you did when we first ended the play, that Mr. Huckster should be found guilty of suborning perjury and the no-speaks should be found unconstitutional, we would like you to all write your congressmen and women.

“If, however, you agree with how the justice system decided on these two issues, we hope you never have to fight the same battle.”

The audience gave the students a standing ovation.

“Did we do it?”

“Did we make our point?”

“Can we make a difference?”

“Will our opinion count for anything?”

“Time will tell.”

Chapter Two



The curtain had just fallen on the final scene. The crowd was cheering enthusiastically and making plans to write their congressmen and women. Some even spoke of contacting George UU Tush, when, suddenly, the doors to the theatre flung open and a herd of media stampeded down the center isle. CNN&N, WOLF TV, C&BS, The Crime Channel, among others, reported live from Spring Valley School.

“They’re here to publicize our play!” Alex exclaimed. He was excited by the prospect of national coverage.

“They’re late,” Kim retorted. “Why didn’t they get here earlier?”

A reporter shouted out, “What’s happening here that’s so special?”

“I told you to come!” a voice from the audience shouted.

A man stood up from his seat. Tommie recognized him immediately.

“I’m Buck Huckster, and I told you to come!”

Buck Huckster walked up onto the stage.

“Give me a microphone!” he shouted to one of the stage crew.

The student did as he was told.

Buck shouted over the noise of the crowd and into the microphone. “I have something to say!”

The crowd became silent.

“Now, I’m not here to sue these kids for liable, although I am told by my attorneys, that I have a slam-dunk case. I am here to tell you that the judicial system made the right decision.”

“You mean Shyster was based on you!?” a parent shouted out.

“I’m sure of it,” Huckster replied.

“So did you do all those terrible things?” someone else asked.

“What if I did? The Jury found me innocent.” Huckster paused, allowed anticipation to build, and continued, “I have done nothing wrong, yet these children have found it necessary to literally act as if I did. I will not fault these children for their conviction, however wrong they may be, for our constitution was founded on the right to Freedom of

Speech and Expression.”

“Mr. Huckster! Van Rathernot here, with CNN&N. Can you give us a statement? Can you tell us what your decision means to the domestic business community?”

Buck responded as if it was a set up, “Yes, I would. I’d like to say, what I didn’t have an opportunity to say at my trial. It is time that we realize that big business, like my own company, HucksterCo, a leader in its industry, is NOT the enemy.

“I myself, recognize that the dishonest actions of a minority have sullied the reputation of the majority, like myself and my company HucksterCo, a global industry leader.

“But, you must understand, I and my company HucksterCo, are part of the moral majority. The majority of honest businessmen.

“I am an honest, honorable, trustworthy, hard working man. I am a loving father, a devoted husband, a selfless volunteer.

“I am a successful businessman who has created thousands of good jobs. I am a businessman, whose company, HucksterCo, provides products and services to influential and powerful companies such as Better Health, Divine Utterances, Dopa Soda, O’Dinkle’s, Chips, Chocolate and Cola, MogulChip, ReallySoft, Addictive Games and so many other household names.

“I abide by the rules of conduct set out by our high moral standards, by the business community’s high ethical standards and by the American legal system. I support the legal system and I am a sponsor for Center City’s University’s new law building. As well, most of my colleagues are major sponsors of The Center City University Institute for the Study of White Collar Crimes (CCUISWCC).

“Now, to protect all that I have built, I, as do all of my business colleagues, take common legal steps to protect myself from the devastating effects of liable, corporate espionage, trade secret theft and the temptations of greed and selfish actions that could damage the majority to benefit the a few. We use... no, we need... the no-speak agreement.

“These no-speak agreements protect the corporations from disgruntled employees who may lie in legal proceedings. Or worse, employees who may cause other people to lie, who would not otherwise be so inclined. Or employees who may sell company secrets to people in foreign countries, who could then use our technology and know-how to undermine our economy and put Americans like you, out of work.

“I’m talking about criminal actions like fraud, witness tampering, obstruction of justice, bribery of a witness, violation of first amendment rights, perjury and false declaration, larceny, subornation of perjury, entrapment, tax crimes and probably more. No-speaks help guarantee that we can all achieve our dreams, just as I have with my company, HucksterCo.

“The legal system agreed, that I did not suborn perjury and that the no-speak agreements are not only constitutional, but necessary. We must protect our right to no-speak and in doing so, protect the American right, to our Freedom of Speech!”

As soon as Huckster finished his speech, he strutted down the isle, through the media scrum and out to his limousine.

“Mr. Huckster! Wolf TV. Would you...”

Huckster blew everyone off, jumped into his vehicle and sped away. He watched the media reports on his televisions in the limo. Huckster’s friends and business associates

had recorded his speech and were playing it over and over again, for the world to see. Huckster sat back, lit a cigar, poured a glass of champagne, and said to his driver, "I'm not going home tonight. I'm celebrating. Take me to Bunny's."

The entire cast and crew of the play were disheartened. They had felt so positive about their message, that people should empower themselves to right the wrongs of a sick society, but with Huckster's victory, not only in court but in the media, they wondered if they could ever make a difference. They wondered if their opinions counted for anything.

They had no idea, the impact that their play did have, particularly on The Conglomerate, and Buck Huckster's future.

Somewhere in the crowd, a conversation was taking place between two men in black suits.

"I told you he was trouble. This problem has a life of its own. He's named almost all of us in our group, and managed to list off every single crime we're all probably guilty of ourselves. If this yellow-rose keeps opening his bloomin' mouth, we'll have to de-thorn him."

Chapter Three



Saturday morning, the family dragged themselves out of bed and downstairs for breakfast. As they sat and ate, they watched Buck Huckster's performance, yet again, on CNN&N.

"I can't believe this guy!" Scott exclaimed. "He's guilty but he's a hero!"

"And look at all the free publicity his company is getting," Tommie added. "I think I've heard HucksterCo mentioned more than twenty times in the past five minutes, not to mention, Conglomerate members."

"That's not fair," Kim whined. "How do things like this happen? Isn't anyone honest?"

"Yes, lots of people are good and decent," Tommie announced. "Don't lose sight of that."

"But Huckster..." Kim started.

"I really don't want to think about that idiot," Tommie admitted. "Can we direct our attention to something else?"

"We need to get moving on the Eurasian PC review," Chris declared.

"Great idea!" Tommie said. "That's got nothing to do with Huckster."

Scott got up and turned the TV off. When Scott sat back down at the kitchen table, he asked, "Dad, what have you found out so far? How's the PC?"

"It's wicked!" Chris replied. "It outperforms everything on the market and even the processors planned for release in the next year."

"We've got three weeks to totally test it out," Kim added. "Any weaknesses so far?"

"None that I can see. But, sometimes, when something looks too good to be true... it is," Chris replied.

"Maybe it's because you have a contract with MogulChip," Tommie accused. "You feel like a traitor. Is that the problem?"

"They did co-sponsor the three-on-three tournament, along with O'Dinkle's and Dopa Soda," Chris retorted. "Don't we have any loyalty?"

"They didn't sponsor the tournament out of the kindness of their heart," Tommie lectured. "These companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year on advertising and promotions and other gimmicks."

“How do you know?” Kim asked.

“She’s a mouseketeer!” Scott laughed.

“Not that again,” Tommie squeaked.

“Just kidding Mom. How much do these companies spend?” Scott inquired.

“Enough to buy most small countries out of poverty and debt.”

“That much?” Kim said.

“Sure. Don’t you kids ever listen to the protesters at the WTO conferences?”

“The what?” Kim asked.

“The World Trade Organization conferences,” Chris explained. “This is something you should know about. It’s your generation that’s making all the noise.”

“I see them protest, but I really don’t pay much attention,” Kim admitted.

“Shame on you,” Tommie said.

“Shame on us?” Scott rebuked. “You’re the one working for the big companies, and Mom, you even help them spend their advertising money.”

“I know, I’m a hypocrite. But it’s what I was trained to do,” Tommie whined.

“Take one of those courses on the Internet and train yourself to do something different, Mom,” Kim suggested.

“I wish it were that easy.”

“It is!” Chris interjected.

“What would I do?”

“Nothing,” Scott said. “With all the money we have and the web site being so busy, you could retire and just work on that!”

“You’ve got tons of opinions. Why don’t you write them down, like we kids did in the play?” Kim suggested.

Tommie pondered this for a minute. “I think you’re on to something! I could start some University extension courses. Maybe I could learn how to write!”

“You already know how to write,” Chris said. “Why don’t you just start writing something?”

“Like what?”

“Write about the stuff that Huckster’s been doing to you and the other people,” Scott said.

“Write a book about your experience that might help other people going through something similar.”

Tommie’s eyes lit up. “You kids are geniuses. I love it. I don’t need a course to do this. I can start today if I want! I have stuff from my case and from Molina and Arnold and most importantly, I have discovery and evidence from Goodman’s actual case, not to mention the no-speak case. I could easily put a draft together.”

“You never told us much about Goodman. I didn’t know you did anything for him,” Scott commented.

“I did a bit, but that was really early on. I didn’t tell you guys about it.”

“Why?” Chris asked.

“Because he and his family got destroyed, big time, and you guys were so excited about me taking on HucksterCo, I didn’t have the heart to tell you what happened to him.”

“You’ll win, right!” Scott declared confidently.

“Right,” Chris interjected. “We’re winning, just by standing up to the guy. The

money's not the issue. It's the principal. And a book will give all the evidence and let the reader decide what's right and wrong."

"I really do love the idea. And the more I think about it, the more sense it makes," Tommie admitted.

"Go for it, Tommie."

"You go, Girl Scout," Kim said.

"Yeah, Stephen King, watch out!" Scott added.

"Steven King?" Tommie said. She had a puzzled look on her face.

"Yeah, it's going to be a horror story isn't it?" Scott returned. "All about the big bad white collar criminals?"

"When I'm finished with them, they'll ALL be afraid of me," Tommie laughed.

"Now that you have a new career, how about the rest of us getting back to work on the old one," Chris ordered.

"Huh?"

"The Eurasian computer review?"

"In a minute, Dad. We didn't finish the discussion about the advertisers," Kim said. "Mom, how much do they spend?"

"I have a web site you kids can look at. It's called www.adage.com and it'll give you the numbers. It's pretty amazing."

Tommie typed in the URL and up popped the web site. She clicked on "100 Leading National Advertisers" and up came a list that gave the corporation's name, its location, how much it spends on advertising, and what kind of media buys it made.

As the kids perused the page and scrolled down to read the names and budgets of all one hundred companies, they shouted out their most startling observations.

Chapter Four



“If you add up the top nine car manufacturers’ advertising budgets in the U.S., it makes about \$13 billion,” Scott explained.

“What do they spend globally?” Kim asked.

Scott did a quick add in his head. “\$20 billion.”

“That’s a lot of money!” Kim exclaimed.

Scott wasn’t finished. “And if you add up the top three fast food advertising budgets in the U.S. it adds up to about \$2.5 billion.”

“And globally?” Kim asked.

“It says here, \$3 billion.”

“Wow!” Kim exclaimed as she looked at the figures. “And if you add up the top three soft drink manufactures’ budgets, it adds up to \$2 billion.”

“And look at the drug companies!” Scott added. “\$5.5 billion globally. Holy Anti-Depressants, Batman!”

“And that doesn’t even take into consideration what these corporations spend on lobbying the government!” Tommie announced. “I read somewhere that the pharmaceutical companies spend equal dollar amounts on advertising, research AND lobbying!”

“Man, we wouldn’t need to buy drugs from Canada if the companies didn’t waste their money lobbying the government to maintain their higher prices. And they do this all under the cover of research,” Chris complained.

“How do you know this?” Kim asked.

“Kids aren’t the only ones that need to inform themselves,” Chris replied. “But I’m on a soap box and I think we should get back to the topic de jour... advertising.”

Tommie was a little surprised and pleased at the same time that Chris was knowledgeable about the prescription drug problem. He usually only kept up to date on technology and sport matters. But he was right... this conversation could take days to explore fully and right now the kids were interested in advertising expenditures. She got them back on topic. “So, globally, where do the advertisers spend most of their money?” Tommie asked. She already knew the answer; she just wanted the kids to keep the discussion alive.

Scott looked at the report and responded. "It looks like a total of \$71 billion is spent yearly by the top 100 advertisers worldwide. \$34 billion is spent in the U.S. That's almost half. \$24 billion is spent in Europe, \$9 billion in Asia and Pacific, \$1 billion in Canada, \$2 billion in Latin America, a half in the Middle East and about \$200 million in Africa."

"How come they don't spend much in Africa?" Chris asked, hoping to challenge the kids.

"Because no one has money to spend there, that's why," Kim offered.

Chris added, "You know the money these guys spend on advertising could feed a lot of hungry children."

"I think we should post some of this information on our KOC site, under a new page," Kim suggested.

"Great idea," Tommie said. "But what should we call it?"

They all thought for a moment.

"Badvertizing! How about that?" Scott asked.

They all laughed at his suggestion.

"Actually, I think that's brilliant!" Tommie declared. "Just do it!"

"Speaking of third world countries and sweat shops," Chris chortled.

"We were?"

"That's a whole other topic of conversation, Chris," Tommie insisted. "We can save that for another day."

Scott immediately set up the page, cut and pasted the info, set up a link, and asked members for their opinions. Entries appeared on the screen as soon as the Badvertizing page was launched.

"What? Don't these kids have anything else to do but sit at their computers?" Scott asked.

"Yeah, some of these kids need to get a life," Kim added.

"I never thought I'd hear you two say that," Tommie chuckled.

"Our site is supposed to help kids live their lives, not BE their lives," Kim announced. "There's a difference you know."

A very interesting posting appeared on the screen. Scott had scanned it before the others had a chance. "Look at this!" Scott exclaimed. "Mom, do you think these statements are true?" Scott read the posting out loud.

"Summary of the World

If we could shrink the Earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look like this:

There would be 61 Asians, 12 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, including North America and South America and 14 from Africa.

51 would be female and 49 would be male.

75 would be non-white while 25 would be white.

60 would mistrust their own government.

60 would live within 62 miles of a coastline.

50 would rely in some manner on coastal and marine habitats for food, building sites, transportation, recreation and waste disposal.

The wealthiest 50 would consume an astonishing 86 percent of all goods and services.

48 would live on less than \$2 U.S. a day.

48 would lack access to basic sanitation.
44 would be urban dwellers.
36 would live in developing countries.
10 would live in least developed countries.
29 would believe in witchcraft.
25 would live in substandard housing or have no home at all.
20 would live on less than \$1 U.S. a day.
17 would be teenagers under 18 years old.
16 would lack access to safe drinking water.
16 would be unable to read and write.
14 would suffer from malnutrition.
8 would have Internet access from home.
4.5 would be citizens of the United States.
1 would be near death and 1 would be near birth.
Only 1 would have a college education.

Half of the entire village's wealth would be in the hands of only 6 people, and 4.5 would be citizens of the U.S.

When one considers our world from such an incredibly compressed perspective, the need for tolerance and understanding becomes glaringly apparent.”

Source: www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/worldpopulation.htm

“Wow! That’s amazing stuff!” Kim exclaimed. “I didn’t realize how much power was in our hands, as consumers.” Scott and Kim were reading the monitor at the same time. “Take a look at this one. It looks like The Conglomerate is a huge part of the problem,” Kim said, as she began to read another posting out loud. “This puts things in perspective.”

“Corporate Claws. Look around you: see an ad anywhere? Corporate advertising is hard to avoid, not just on TV and in the papers, but increasingly on every available surface, from playgrounds to taxi doors. Business already reaches into every aspect of our lives. But the big business players are anxious to extend their powers further through global trade rules.”

Kim took a breath and continued, “Profits and poverty. Together, the big movie company that produces mostly for kids, the big athletic shoes and clothes company that produces mostly for kids, and the big fast food company... you got it... that sells mostly to kids, spend more on advertising each year than the poorest 18 countries spend on health and primary education. The top 10 companies worldwide already make over \$1000 billion a year – far more than the combined wealth of all the countries in Africa and South Asia. But big business wants to get bigger.”

Kim stopped for a second, “Hey Dad, you were right about that lobby thing. It says here that, As well as advertising budgets, there are lobbying budgets. Major oil companies and really powerful agriculture and food companies and their corporate colleagues club together to persuade governments to agree to new trade rules that will extend their rights and influence even further.”

“Are these guys all part of The Conglomerate?” Scott asked.

“I don’t know,” Tommie admitted.

“Read on,” Chris directed.

Kim did as she was told. “Whose rules rule? Much attention has been focused on the advantages rich countries have over poor ones in the global trade system. But big business is the real winner. The World Trade Organization (WTO) sets rules to stop governments from ‘interfering’ with trade. Increasingly this means that governments cannot freely make national policies if they might restrict international companies’ trading – even on key areas such as health and education. It’s a straight battle between the demands of big business in pursuit of profit, and the rights of communities and their governments to determine their own domestic laws and put people first.”

“Does this mean if a country wants to do something, some business from another country can stop them?” Kim asked.

“Yes, that’s why they call it Free Trade,” Tommie said sarcastically.

“Big business is free to do whatever they want,” Scott assumed.

“What else did they say, Kim?” Chris asked.

She read on. “In whose interest? Companies are attracted to the WTO because it has teeth. Big teeth: power to take action on companies’ behalf when the rules don’t suit them, by punishing governments who interfere with free trade. And so the WTO helps clear the way for big business to keep on gold-digging. Rich country governments have bought the myth that free trade is the solution to everything and are happy to promote corporate interests at the WTO. Business gets privileged access to negotiators, which helps ensure that governments bend their ears to their concerns.”

Kim took a long breath. “STOP. Look. Listen. It’s time to stop pushing big business interests at the WTO. Instead they should look at the devastating effect of current trade rules on the poor, and listen to the voices of developing countries.”

Source: www.wdm.org.uk/campaign/cancun03/curcorpdetails.htm

“Well? Is this stuff true or not, Mom?” Scott asked.

“It’s true, if you ask me. But that’s just my opinion. I happen to agree with these perspectives. I’m sure The Conglomerate has another twist on this information.”

“Your mom’s right. I agree, too. And it’s not just developing countries and their people that suffer. We suffer here at home! And it’s not just the WTO that lobbies for, or are influenced unduly by big business. Our own government sometimes looks like a puppet of big business. There’s lots of stuff going on here at home, even in the technology and communications sectors, for instance, that’s supposed to be totally government regulated, with no business bias, but a lot of us have our suspicions.”

“I just thought of something,” Kim said.

Chapter Five



“If this Eurasian computer works well, then it will create jobs where it’s manufactured, and a lot of people will be able to afford to live better. That’s another thing we should keep in mind when we review it.”

Chris cautioned, “We need to review it, based on its technical merits. If you kids want to add something about the way the product could help the Eurasian economy and its manufacturers, do that separately. But, I do like the idea.”

“We tend to be brand loyal, and where we live that usually means being country loyal,” Scott said. “We live in a global economy and we have to think about the other people. If they’re poor, they can’t buy our brands and if we don’t open our borders, we can’t get better products, if they’re out there.”

“I didn’t expect a conversation about global trade today,” Chris admitted.

“We need to do a really good job assessing the Eurasian PC,” Kim insisted. “There’s a lot at stake!”

Tommie added. “We have to keep true to the mission of the web site and give every product or service or piece of information, relevant to kids, a chance to appear on the site. People can make their own decision if they agree with us or not or if they use the information or not.”

“Kim and I will check out the PC when we can. Then we can make a family decision. We need to try it out on the new games Jack gave us. We need to make sure it’s not only a good workhorse, but that it performs when and where we want it to.”

“Deal,” Chris said. “Is that all right with you, Tommie?”

“I just want to say one more thing.”

They all waited.

“You kids have to realize that the whole world doesn’t need a PC that plays one particular game. You need to make sure that you’re not just judging this PC on its ability to run that Addictive Games game. Not everyone’s a gamer.”

“But that’s why lots of kids come on our site!” Scott exclaimed.

“And kids influence 90 percent of home PC purchases. Get it?”

“Right, we could be promoting our own personal interests at the expense of even other countries,” Kim admitted. “We need to tell it like it really is, not just how it is from

our perspective. We're supposed to be raging against the corporate machine, not becoming it!"

"Right on, Sister!" Tommie replied.

The kids moaned. Hippy talk. They hated it.

"Kim, we should check out our site and see what's happening," Scott suggested. They turned their attention to the KOC web site on the monitor.

Scott exclaimed, "Kim, what the heck is this?"

"I don't know!" Kim cried out. "And check THIS out! We're in deep doo-doo. Someone's trying to ruin us!"

"Someone? We know who it is! It's The Conglomerate!"

Staring back from their monitor, at the four of them and the entire KOC membership, were video clips portraying Kim and Scott as hypocrites. "Where are they getting these from?" Kim exploded.

"They must have been spying on our every move! What are we going to do?" Scott replied.

"First, we have to purge these from the site," Chris said, as he started to remove the postings. As soon as he took one off, another appeared. Now, there were pictures of Scott and Kim drinking Dopa Soda and eating Chips, Chocolates and O'Dinkle's burgers at the basketball tournament.

The voice-over said, "And here are the Campbell kids. Gosh, don't they preach to all you kids that it's not good to drink soda and eat chips and chocolate? They have some nerve drinking soda when they tell you not to. They're a couple of hypocrites." The family gasped.

The screen lit up with another picture. The voice began again. "And will you look at this! Here they are, beating up their opponents on the basketball court. Look how Ms. Campbell viscously elbowed poor Berta O'Dinkle, of the famous O'Dinkle family. Is Ms. Campbell jealous of the O'Dinkle's money? Is she jealous of Ms. O'Dinkle's basketball skills? Is that why she and her friends badmouth O'Dinkle's? Maybe it has nothing at all to do with the food that their restaurant serves, which by the way is highly nutritious."

"That's a lie!" Kim shouted.

"Which one?" Scott teased.

"Everything! And you know it!"

Another picture popped up. This one was really embarrassing. It was a picture of Max, mating with another dog.

"Where did they get this from?" Scott shouted.

"My word!" Chris said.

The voice continued, "Not only do the Campbells want to screw all of you but so does their dog!"

The screen lit up with another image.

"For crying out loud!" Tommie exclaimed. "Can't we turn this off!"

"I'll check the server while it's on, to see how they're doing this," Chris replied. "Maybe I can shut it down from there."

Chris realized that the intrusion was more important than what they were saying. There's no way they should have been able to break through his security and into their network. Chris left to go to the server room, as the image of Scott's butt appeared and then disappeared from the screen.

A different posting popped up. This time it was Chris, playing tennis at the club. He appeared to be hammering Danny, and the comments just contained laughter and snide remarks.

“Do you think Dad really did this?” Scott asked Kim.

“Did we really drink Dopa Soda? No way! This is all a set up.”

The hits on the site were pushing the servers to the max. Suddenly, the site returned to normal, but the action on the site was far from over. The emails started to cue up. Before they knew it, it seemed like every KOC member had sent the kids a nastygram.

As they waited for Chris to return from the server room, hopefully with good news, Kim suggested, “It’s time to plot our revenge.”

“Agreed,” Scott replied.

“Get serious kids,” Tommie insisted. “There’s nothing you can do.”

“The Conglomerate is trying to destroy us and now it’s our turn to hit them where it hurts them the most... in their bank accounts,” Kim stated. “The only problem is, how will we avoid being caught?”

“Kim, you can’t beat them at their own game,” Tommie cautioned.

“But Mom!”

“Kim, I don’t want to hear another word about this!” Tommie ordered. “Now sit tight, I’m going to see how your dad’s doing.”

Tommie left to join Chris.

RING... RING...

Chapter Six



It was Scott's cell phone.

"Hello," Scott answered.

It was Alex.

"What's happening?"

"Someone's sabotaging our site," Scott explained.

"I know," Alex replied. "Where did they get the video clips from?"

"I don't know," Scott admitted. "They're real, except for the products in them and the voice-overs."

"No kidding," Alex remarked. "I'm in most of them, too! What are we going to do?"

"Well, the first thing we need to do is explain to our membership that these clips are bogus."

"I'm with you on that," Alex replied. "But then what? How do we get revenge on The Conglomerate? They did this for sure!"

"Kim and I have some ideas, the problem is, we don't know how to get to the point that we can execute them."

Alex also had ideas. He'd been dreaming them up for weeks. Now seemed the right time to share them with Scott and Kim. "I've got some ideas. I'm coming over!"

Alex slammed down the phone and was on his way.

"What's he want?" Kim asked.

"He has an idea on how to get back at The Conglomerate."

"I already told you how. Take their money."

Scott could hear Tommie and Chris. "Shush, they're coming," he said, as their parents returned to the game room.

"Well, what did you find out?" Scott asked.

"I have no idea how they did this," Chris admitted. "They didn't leave a trail. This really concerns me."

"No kidding," Tommie added. "How many other things are they able to do that no one knows about, or how to stop them?"

"The guys from MogulChip, ReallySoft, Devine Utterances, and Big Periwinkle and those other guys in The Conglomerate should be able to do this in their sleep," Scott

commented.

“But they’re not supposed to,” Chris muttered. “It’s against the law.”

“Right, Tech-law. It’s more ambiguous and harder to prosecute than white-collar crime!” Tommie announced.

“But Dad, you do work for MogulChip!”

“I know, I’m a hypocrite just like your mom,” Chris admitted. “Things have got to change around here. We need to stand by our convictions.”

“Yeah, but if you stop working for them, then what will your employees do?” Kim challenged.

Scott jumped in, “And how and why would you pay them if they’re not working?”

“Catch 22 isn’t it?” Chris said.

The kids looked puzzled.

Tommie explained, “It’s an old saying. Kinda like damned if you do and damned if you don’t.”

“Oh, I get it,” Scott replied. “It’s like what we were talking about before about the poor countries. If they don’t have real companies, making real money, then they can’t buy the products that we’re trying to sell them. So, if we don’t let them sell their products to us and the rest of the world, they won’t have the money to buy ours. It seems so simple to me. How come this is so complicated?”

“Because everyone has their own agenda,” Chris said. “It’s hard to understand because there are so many factors that we just don’t know about. We end up thinking that something is good when it isn’t and something is bad when it’s good, just because of the information and opinions we’re fed.”

“We need to explain what just happened to our KOC members,” Kim said.

“I’ll put a message on the site saying that The Conglomerate, who was responsible for the skinny scheme, probably sabotaged our site and we have to straighten things out,” Scott said, as his fingers flew across the QWERTY.

It didn’t take long for the KOC members to respond. The emails continued to arrive. Now they were supportive and not nasty. The messages all had similar sentiments...

You go, Girl Scout!

Do some damage, Dude!

“Well, that’s a good start,” Tommie said. “At least the KOC kids are smart enough to know they’ve been had.”

Someone was laughing hysterically in an office on the 75th floor of the Posh Tower in downtown Center City.

“They’re going to teach US a lesson? Dream on, Kid. You have no idea who you’re dealing with, or how far The Conglomerate’s tentacles stretch.”

Back at the Campbell’s...

DING... DONG...

“That must be Alex,” Scott shouted. He and Kim rushed upstairs. Scott opened the door.

Alex exploded into the foyer, declaring, “I’m here and I’m...”

“Queer?” a voice from outside said. It sounded familiar.

“Amy?” Kim laughed, as her friend came into view. “What are you doing here?”

“Probably the same thing girlie boy, here is.”

“No, I’m not and I can’t stay long. That’s what I was going to say before you opened your big mouth. I’m… getting picked up in half an hour.”

“I was just joking!” Amy announced.

After watching how easy it was to manipulate a situation and turn it into something it wasn’t, Kim was a little perturbed with her friend.

“Amy, it’s not right to judge someone based on their sexual orientation.”

“I know, I said I was joking,” Amy replied.

“You know how easy rumors start!” Alex lectured. “I’m NOT gay.”

“Can we get back to what Alex, the not Mo, knows?” Scott insisted. “Let’s go to my room.”

The kids stampeded up the stairs. Alex couldn’t wait to tell them what he was thinking.

“I figure the best way to pay back The Conglomerate is from the inside. It’ll confuse the heck out of them and they won’t know who’s responsible.”

“You mean plant a spy in their computers?”

“No, that’s stupid. I’m talking about doing something in particular.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know that, but I do know how to get in?” Alex bragged.

“How?” they all asked.

“I’ve got a password decrypter from my dad.”

“Sweet!” Kim proclaimed.

“Kim and I have some great ideas about what to do to get back at The Conglomerate,” Scott announced.

“We do?” Kim questioned.

“Yeah! Reallocate the Badvertising Budgets,” Scott answered.

“Yeah, Badvertising, that’s a great new page you guys started,” Amy said. “I think I know where you’re heading.”

Kim had figured it out too, and typed in the adage URL on Scott’s PC.

“Let’s see whose money we should reallocate,” Kim said.

“What are you two talking about?” Alex asked. He was still clueless.

“We want to move money from company’s badvertising budgets into important research budgets,” Kim declared.

The kids talked about issues that affected them and their peers, and made a long list of organizations that needed support. It took a while, but they finally agreed on what projects they wanted to give The Conglomerate’s money to.

They needed to select a few, so that the money would make a really big impact. They went on the Internet and checked some of them out. Diabetes was first on their list and what they found, supported their choice.

“I think we definitely made the right decision,” Amy proclaimed. “Just read these statistics!”

Chapter Seven



The kids were on a web site called insulin-free.org. It gave some obvious and urgent reasons why diabetes needed to be cured. The kids were familiar with the disease because they had a page set up for it. But some of these statistics were even more compelling. Amy read them aloud.

“More than 135 million people worldwide have diabetes, and every year, 2.8 million people die from the disease. This number has increased 15% in the last ten years and is expected to double by 2005.

90% of those who are diagnosed with insulin-dependent diabetes have no family history of the disease.

There is no known cure for diabetes.

The Centers for Disease Control and prevention refer to diabetes as the “epidemic of our time.”

Every day in the United States alone, diabetes will blind 75 people, cause 80 people to suffer kidney failure, and will result in 150 leg or foot amputations.

Complications caused by diabetes affect the eyes, nerves and kidneys of more than 50% of those who have diabetes for more than 20 years.

Diabetes costs \$100 billion annually, accounting for one of every four Medicare dollars and one of every seven healthcare dollars spent in the United States.

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness and kidney failure. Every year, new cases of diabetic blindness and kidney failure increase the cost of diabetes to taxpayers by \$1.5 billion.

60-70% of the diabetic population has diabetic nerve damage, which in severe forms, can lead to lower limb amputations.

Diabetes is the most frequent cause of non-traumatic lower limb amputation with more than 56,000 limbs lost to diabetes every year.

By the time a 10 year old child with diabetes is 20 years old, more than half a million diabetic limbs will have been lost to diabetes in the United States alone.

Diabetic amputations increase the economic toll of the disease by more than \$1.5 billion per year.

Heart disease is present in 75% of diabetes-related deaths.”

The best way to manage diabetes is to not get it in the first place... But for all of the people who already have it... we need to CURE IT.

“And, it says here,” Scott added, “that only one in three medical and health research ideas can be funded because there isn’t enough funding to go around. Who knows if they’ve already passed up the cure?”

The kids continued to discuss other research projects and made their final hit list.

“We now know what we want to do and we have part of the answer about how to do it, we just don’t know how to get into their accounts. That’s where you come in, Alex. You said you’ve got the password decrypter.”

“But how will we get into their network in the first place?” Scott asked.

“I’ve got that solved, too!” Alex declared.

“How do you know?” Amy asked.

“When I saw what was going on in the KOC site, I used some of my dad’s network infiltration software to do a reverse transaction. I figured out what they did.”

“How did you do that? My dad didn’t even figure it out,” Scott admitted.

“I’m...”

“Techno-geek,” Amy laughed.

“I’m secret agent, Alex Black. I have my ways.”

“Your DAD has his ways, you mean,” Scott teased.

“Now we have a way to get in and a way to actually get through the passwords. We just have to figure out how to do it without anyone noticing for a while and figure out how to cover our trail,” Alex summarized.

A light bulb went off in Kim and Scott’s brains. They looked knowingly at each other.

“We know!” Scott declared.

“What? Tell us!” Amy demanded.

Alex and Amy waited for Scott’s explanation.

It wasn’t what they expected.

“We’ve seen the light,” Kim interjected. “That’s all we can say.”

“Now WE need a decrypter,” Alex said. “You’re joking, right? That’s not all you’re going to say is it, Scott?”

“I guess it is,” Scott said. He thought Kim had her reasons for keeping them in the dark, so he didn’t challenge her.

“Come on! Tell us!” Alex insisted.

“We don’t know if it will work,” Kim admitted.

“Maybe we can help,” Amy suggested.

“No, only Mac and Natalie can help,” Kim explained.

“Your Uncle Mac?” Alex asked.

“Natalie from Scentorama’s?” Amy followed.

“Scott! Kim! Alex’s dad is out in the driveway waiting for Alex!”

“Saved by the bell...owe,” Scott quipped as Tommie shouted from downstairs.

“Rats, I gotta go,” Alex said.

“And he said he’d drive Amy home now, too!” Tommie yelled out.

“I guess I better go now, too,” Amy said. “But when you guys figure out whatever you guys need to figure out, we want to be the first to know!”

“We should know tomorrow,” Kim said. “We’ve got work to do. You guys can see your own way out, right?”

“No problem,” Alex said, as he and Amy headed downstairs and out to Alex’s car.

Scott and Kim stayed upstairs to work out their plan.

Chris went to the family room to watch a movie and relax. He needed a break from the idiocy of the day and an old Bob Hope movie would do the trick. Tommie brought her laptop into the family room to join him and work on her book.

Somewhere else, the shouts of an old man could be heard.

“No! No! It can’t be!”

Chapter Eight



Bart, the butler, came running into the room and saw the old man sitting in front of a blank computer screen. He was shaking, crying and generally freaking out. Francis, the maid, was standing beside him, shaking her head in disbelief.

“What’s with the old man, now?” Bart asked.

“It looks like his computer’s crashed,” Francis replied. “Can you fix it?”

“No. We’ll have to call the grandson,” Bart said.

“And what will you tell him? He’s a very important man. He hates it when you disturb him!”

“I don’t think we have any choice,” Bart barked. “Look at the old guy. He’s going bonkers!”

“I always knew he was a few bricks short of a load,” Francis replied.

“Right, he’s not cable ready,” Bart followed, as they both engaged in an exchange of silly clichés.

“His car isn’t firing on all cylinders.”

“He’s out where the busses don’t run.”

“He’s temporarily disconnected.”

“He’s a few fries short of an O’Dinkle’s Meal.”

“How about this one. His hard drive is full!”

“I’ve got a better one. There’s no juice in the cable!”

They laughed until they cried.

“Stop! We have to phone the grandson or he’ll have our heads!” Francis exclaimed. “Besides, I think the grandson will be pleased to hear the old man’s off his rocker. Maybe he’ll finally be able to institutionalize him!”

“Yeah, the grandson will be much easier to work for,” Bart commented. “I know he’s been dying to move into the mansion.”

Francis and Bart made the phone call.

“Sir, you must come quickly. Your grandfather... He’s...”

“He’s what?” asked the grandson.

“He’s gone crazy!” Francis replied.

“You made my secretary interrupt a very important meeting to tell me something I

already know! I should fire you!”

“No, he’s really off his rocker. He’s driving with one headlight. He’s been babbling like an idiot every since his computer went on the blink,” Francis explained.

“I’ll be right there,” the grandson replied and hung up. He walked out of his meeting and closed the door. The men in the room were stunned. He didn’t give any explanation.

On his way out of the office, the grandson asked his secretary, “Did you get that information I requested on the retirement homes? I need to get him in somewhere. Now!”

“Nowhere. There are long waiting lists. I didn’t realize you had to sign up for these places the day you were born.”

“Nowhere? I need a place, today! What are my options?” the grandson asked.

She replied, “You could buy one.”

“Find the best, the most secure, the one he can’t escape... I mean the one that has the best care takers, and buy it! I don’t care what it costs. Do it now!”

“Yes, Sir.”

His secretary was used to odd requests.

As the grandson walked to his car, he said to himself, “Now’s my chance! There’s no doubt he’s nuts. And, I have the maid and butler as witnesses. I don’t even have to pay for their testimony,” he laughed. “They’ll actually be telling the truth. The judge will have to find him incompetent and give me his power of attorney.”

Chapter Nine



Sunday, the kids were up early. They went downstairs, expecting to find their parents, but instead found a note on the kitchen table.

“We’re picking Max up. See you later,” the note read.

“Man, this is perfect!” Scott declared.

“Yeah, we don’t have to explain anything to them about where we’re going and why,” Kim added.

“It must be FATE!” Scott said.

“What does that really mean, anyway?” Kim asked.

“I don’t know. Get the dictionary if you want to know,” Scott said and began making himself breakfast.

Kim did just that. She was selective in what she read. “It says here, goddess of destiny. I guess The Conglomerate’s destiny is in my hands.”

“Hey, look up Conglomerate, while you’re at it,” Scott asked.

Kim did as he suggested. When she found it and read the definition to herself, she started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?”

“The definition, what else?”

“So, what is it?”

“It says here, ‘gathered into a ball. Rock of rounded pebbles cemented together. Puddingstone’.”

“That’s them all right, a bunch of pudding heads.”

“Wait, there’s more,” Kim instructed. “The noun version is conglomeration and it means confused mass.”

“That’s exactly what they’re going to be once we get through with them!” Scott announced.

“One bunch of confused pudding heads!” Kim added.

The kids ate their breakfast and discussed their plans. When they were finished, they took their bikes out of the garage and headed to Mac’s lab. They knew he’d be there.

Kim and Scott surprised Mac when Peter, the security guard, buzzed him and told them they were there.

“Kim, Scott, what are you doing here?” Mac asked over the intercom. “Did we have plans?”

“We need your help Mac,” Scott replied. “Can we come in?”

“Sure. Peter, did you hear that? You can send them in,” Mac requested.

“Okay Mac,” Peter replied, as he let the kids through the door. The kids knew the way to Mac’s lab. They ran down the hallway and burst into his room.

“Mac! Can you help us?”

“What? Not even a hello, how are you?”

Kim realized they were being rude. “Hello Mac, and hi Natalie. How are you?”

“We’re fine,” Natalie replied.

“Kids, great to see you. What brings you here today?” Mac asked. “And where’s your parents?”

“They’re picking up Max,” Scott answered.

Kim was just too excited about their plan and blurted out, “Do you think that we could transmit the light intensity you use to cause people to have an absence seizure, by using a TV screen or computer screen?”

Mac was stunned. “What are you two up to?”

Natalie wondered the same thing.

“Well? Can it?” Kim asked, again.

“Possibly,” Mac replied.

Kim continued, “What if we broke into a company’s network and transmitted the light? Would everyone on computer experience an absence seizure?”

“I never thought about doing that,” Mac admitted.

“But will it work?” Kim again insisted on knowing.

Natalie wanted to find out what the kids were up to. She decided to be more encouraging than Mac.

“Could be,” Natalie replied. “But why would you want to do that?”

Scott enthusiastically explained, “We want to reallocate some of their non-production dollars.”

Natalie and Mac were taken aback.

“You mean steal from them?” Mac accused.

“Sort of, but not really,” Kim replied.

Natalie was intrigued. “Don’t get your knickers in a knot, Mac. Hear them out.”

“Okay,” Mac agreed. “Now Kim, what the heck are you talking about? Where did you get this idea?”

“From Mom,” Kim replied. “We could easily take some of their advertising dollars for instance, and apply them elsewhere.”

“Tommie told you to do this?”

“Not exactly,” Scott replied.

“So, she has no idea what you’re up to, does she.”

“No, so will you help?” Scott begged.

Natalie was captivated by the idea. “Give me an example of what you’d do.”

Scott answered immediately. “How about this? The three major soft drink companies each spend over a billion a year on advertising. What if we got into the big three and directed their badvertising budgets, that’s what we call them, let’s say, to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Program. Three billion could do a lot of good.”

“How do you know about their... badvertising... budgets?” Natalie asked.

“The Internet!” Scott replied.

“Really?”

“Yeah, look at the money they spend on badvertising!” Scott exclaimed. He pulled out a print out from the site from his back pocket that had the annual advertising budgets for a number of companies, many of whom were suspected members of The Conglomerate.

“Wow!” Natalie exclaimed. “There’s a lot of dough here!”

“Yeah, a lot of dough that could feed a lot of researchers!” Scott announced.

“Sounds like a great plan, Scott,” Mac commented. “But don’t you think someone will connect the disappearing advertising money and the donation?”

Kim was confident with her response and answered his question. “Hey, even if they did figure it out, do you think the soft drink companies would have the guts to take the money back? They’d look like a bunch of schmucks. Besides, if we borrow from all of them, then we’ve leveled the playing field, right?”

There was logic to what the kids were proposing.

“It sounds like you kids have given this a lot of thought,” Natalie complimented.

“But, what makes you think we won’t get caught?” Mac asked.

“You, Mac. You’re our secret weapon,” Kim schmoosed.

Mac raised his eyebrows. “So, do you have a REAL plan?”

“Of course we do. We knew The Conglomerate would come after us when we exposed their skinny scheme and the No-Speak play. We wanted to be ready with a counterattack. And we are!”

Natalie and Mac were surprised.

“They came after you? How?” Natalie asked.

“I guess you didn’t see our KOC site yesterday?” Scott said.

“No, what about it?” Mac replied.

Scott explained to Mac and Natalie what they suspected The Conglomerate had done to their web site.

“Are you sure it was them?” Natalie asked.

“Pretty sure,” Kim replied. “They had pictures of their products in every shot. They can’t be more obvious than that!”

“We need to think this through,” Mac suggested. “I’m not committing until we work through every move and account for all the risks and rewards.” Mac walked over to his whiteboard. “Okay, let’s diagram this whole operation out. Who’s the target? What’s the objective, etc.?”

The four of them worked out the operation to the last detail. They were convinced they’d thought of everything. If the light worked and Alex’s network infiltration software and password decrypters did their job, they could get in and out without being caught. Now the challenge ahead of them was, how do they move the money?

“I guess our plan wasn’t as complete as we thought,” Kim admitted. “We can get in and out, but we don’t know what to do when we get in.”

“We know what to do, we just don’t know how?” Scott clarified.

Natalie was grinning. It was time to fill in the final blank.

“When we get in, I can move the money,” Natalie admitted. “I just happen to be a whiz at balancing the books... or unbalancing them... if necessary.”

“Why didn’t you tell us before!” Mac asked. He was annoyed that it looked like they’d wasted a lot of time for nothing. Time that he could have used doing his own research. He was behind schedule and Better Health, his sponsor didn’t like that.

“I wanted to make sure this plan was flawless. If you knew I could move the money, you might have been willing to take risks that you otherwise wouldn’t. Now I’m sure we can get in, move the money and get out without anyone tracing it to us.”

“Fantastic!” Scott exclaimed. “There’s no stopping us!”

“It’s all falling into place. It’s FATE!” Kim agreed. “Destiny is guided by two girls!”

“First things first,” Mac declared. “We need to see if the light theory works.”

“Right Mac,” Kim agreed. “We need to transmit the light and see if everyone at a computer basically goes to never-neverland... so we can do our thing. We need to test out our perfect... un-crime.”

“Let’s try your theory out on the two researchers in the adjoining lab,” Mac suggested, as he hooked up the light emitter. “We can turn on the light and see how they react.”

“What about us? Won’t we fall asleep, too?” Kim asked.

“We just have to wear these cheap 3-D glasses,” Natalie explained. “They cancel out the effect of the light.” Natalie reached into a drawer and pulled out four pairs. “Put these on,” she directed.

Mac put a ten-second delay on the emitter program and then turned on the juice.

Chapter Ten



They all rushed over to the doorway of the adjoining office to see what the researchers' reactions would be.

"Now whatever you do, don't take off these glasses," Mac ordered.

As they looked through the window in the door, they could see the researchers working away on their computers and talking. Suddenly, the light flashed on the screen, their conversation stopped in mid-sentence and both people's gazes were fixed to their computers. They looked like mannequins.

"What do you think they're thinking?" Kim queried.

"Do you think they're frozen in time?" Scott asked.

"Can they hear us?" Natalie wondered out loud.

"I don't know," Mac admitted. "Once we stop the light we'll just hang back here and see how they respond."

"Let's do it, NOW!" Scott exclaimed.

"Well, we know they won't react to noise," Mac said. "You could have woken the dead with that last screech."

"Sorry, I'm just so excited."

"I'll go turn the light off." Mac ran back to his office, set a timer delay and returned, just in time to see the light stop and the researchers 'wake up'.

Mac knocked on the door and opened it. Both researchers turned around and saw all four of them standing in the doorway. "Can I help you?" one of the researchers asked.

"You just did," Mac said.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nothing," Mac replied. "How's it going? How's your project proceeding?"

"Fine, but we're behind schedule, so if there's nothing more, would you mind leaving?"

"I was just showing my niece and nephew around, sorry to bother you."

"Yeah, we're sorry to bother you," Scott chortled.

Scott, Kim, Natalie and Mac headed back to the lab.

"That was cool!" Kim exclaimed. "They have no idea they were out!"

"It looks that way," Natalie agreed.

“Can we do it again?” Scott asked. “We can make more noise and do stuff to try to wake them up.”

“I’d like to see just how ‘out of it’ they are, myself,” Mac announced. “I’ll do it again and we’ll let it run for five minutes this time. I want to see what the longer-term effects are.”

“What if it leaves them like that permanently?” Kim asked.

“I use this light on my subjects all the time. I think they’ll be fine. I just want to see if the computer can hold their attention. The pixels are different and maybe I need to do a variation this time and experiment with different resolutions,” Mac thought out loud.

Mac changed some settings on the network and again put a delay on the light. They rushed to the room next-door, just in time to hear, “And therefore the hypo...” That was it. They were out.

“All right!” Scott declared. “Time for the fun to begin.” Scott rushed over to the researchers and started to shout, jump up and down and wave his hands in front of their faces.

“Don’t cover both eyes at once, you’ll break the spell,” Kim assumed.

“Kim’s right, and whatever you do...”

It was too late. Now Scott was posed like a mannequin gone berserk. His tongue was sticking out, his eyes were crossed, and his hands were forming bunny ears behind one of the researcher’s heads. The 3-D glasses had fallen off and he lapsed into an absence seizure.

“Look at that idiot!” Kim said. “I wish I had a camera.”

“I do!” Natalie announced and ran to retrieve it from Mac’s office. When she returned, she snapped a few flashless pictures of Scott and the researchers. Natalie handed the digital card to Kim. “Just in case you need to blackmail him in the future.”

“If you two are finished, I think we need to wake them up,” Mac said. “At least some good came out of this. Now we have some insight into how far we can push this.”

“And we know that we don’t have to worry about intruders. As long as they look at the computer, and they will because we’re photovores, we’re okay,” Natalie summed up. They let the experiment go for another few minutes. We better move Scott out of here. We don’t want the researchers waking up and seeing him. It would be pretty hard to explain to all three of them.”

“I agree,” Mac replied. He snuck into the room and put the 3-D glasses back on Scott’s face.

Scott immediately woke up. “Mac, what are you doing in here?”

“Waking you up.”

“Huh?”

“The glasses fell off you and you were frozen, like them,” Mac explained, pointing to the researchers.

“I was?”

“So you don’t remember anything?”

“No. You’re kidding me aren’t you?”

Kim was listening in at the door. She opened it and announced, “No, we’re not and I have the pictures to prove it, you moron.”

Scott rushed over to Kim, “Let me see!”

“I’m going to shut the light off. Everyone get out of sight.”

They did as they were told. In a few seconds the researchers were back to normal. They didn't skip a beat.

"...these is therefore, blah, blah, blah..."

Back in Mac's lab, Kim continued to tease Scott. "We've got the pictures digitized."

"Let me see them!" Scott insisted.

"When you least expect it... everyone will see them," Kim taunted.

"Okay, you two. We have work to do, don't we?" Natalie announced.

"You're right, Natalie," Scott said, trying to sound mature.

"So, what have we learned by this experiment, Scott?" Mac asked.

Scott reconfirmed what they had suspected. He didn't remember a thing.

"Let's do it! Let's give it to The Conglomerate!"

"Piece of cake," Kim said. "We need to access PC's with connections to the Internet."

"I'll get Natalie's going and set up my laptop. That should do it," Mac replied, as he quickly set out to complete the task at hand. Within minutes, he announced, "Finished."

With Mac's expert help and Alex's software, it took them a few minutes to simultaneously get access to all three soft drink companies' networks.

"Okay, Mac, do your thing. Emit the light frequency," Kim commanded.

Mac obliged and established the linkage to his emitter.

"Okay, get going, we don't have much time."

Scott and Kim's fingers were flying across the keys. Scott and Kim used the source code and password decoder they got from Alex and within minutes they gained access to their victims. Then they turned control over to Natalie, to move the cash.

"What a rush!" exclaimed Kim.

There were going to be a lot of surprised executives out there. When it was all over, they sat back and wondered if there would be any fall-out.

"We sure created a little Chaos today didn't we?" Natalie observed.

"Chaos... funny you should say that," Kim said. "Mr. Klein told us to find chaos. Do you think this is what he meant?"

"This isn't Chaos. This is Order!" Scott declared. "We're just making things even. An eye for an eye. Getting revenge for all those people they gave diabetes to."

"This should be an eye-opener for them," Natalie added.

"They won't believe their eyes," Mac said.

"Hey, I have an eye-dea for one more heist!" Kim said and proceeded to explain her plan.

"That one should raise their eye brows, poke a stick in their eye, get their I-re-up... any other's come to mind?" Scott added.

"Enough of the I'sms. It's time for a vote. Should we do it or not?" Kim said. "A show of hands if you vote, Yes."

The four put up their hands, and Kim announced, "It looks like the eyes have it!"

Chapter Eleven



They soon completed the final reallocation. It was complicated, but it had the potential to literally change the world.

“Our work here is done!” Scott exclaimed.

“Mac, you’re a kick-butt hacker. How come you do it?” Kim asked.

“There are tons of databases, research results, secret reports and the like that aren’t made public. Natalie and I like to check for hidden treasures. You never know what you’ll find.”

Natalie added, “For instance, there’s a guy down the hall who’s working on a project that would really be helpful to us, but he never even talks to us.”

“What kind of project?” Scott asked.

“He’s created three dimensional holo imaging software.”

“Like Star Trek?” Kim asked.

“Yes, just like that. I’m not interested in stealing his invention. I downloaded his digital holo software and I use it in my lab. What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him, and it sure helps us.”

“Can WE see it?” Scott begged.

“Sure,” Mac replied. “Let me image something of yours and we can play with it.”

Scott reached into his backpack and pulled out a golf ball. Mac put the ball on a rotating glass stand. He used his digital video camera to scan the entire ball into memory. Then, using special software, he began creating holo images of it.

Mac showed them the software’s capabilities. With a small hand held projector that he used to transmit light into his subject’s eyes for his epileptic research, Mac demonstrated to Scott and Kim, how to make duplicates of the golf ball and then launch them through the air.

Kim and Scott really thought the balls were going to hit them and they ducked to avoid them.

“This is awesome!” Kim exclaimed.

“Yeah, you can project it anywhere, make it larger, make it smaller, duplicate it, rotate it, you name it,” Mac explained.

“We could have a blast with this technology!” Scott laughed. “Why do you think he’s

developing it?"

"He's sponsored by a defense company," Mac replied. "Can you imagine if there was an ability to create a huge number of troops out of thin air? The military could have the virtual troops appear to attack a target while the real troops are deployed elsewhere."

"Photonic wars! Cool! Like video games. No one gets hurt."

"I don't think that's their intention. I think they still want to hurt people, this is just another way to do it," Natalie said, disappointed with the reality of the situation.

"Is this what Leary was talking about?" Kim asked.

"I don't think so. But I'm sure he wouldn't be surprised that this is how the technology will probably be used. Disappointed... but not surprised," Natalie replied, projecting her own feelings and opinion.

"Can I have a copy of this software?" Scott asked.

"Why do you want it?" Mac quizzed.

"Mac. You were a kid once," Scott proclaimed. "Can't you see the potential for this?"

"Yes, I can, and that's a problem," Mac replied. "If I was a kid, I'd use the holo image projector to make a copy of me and put it in bed. Then I'd sneak out of the house and parteeeee!"

"That's it?" Scott teased. "That's the best you can do?"

Mac took up the challenge. "Okay, if I was a kid I'd use the holo projector and make a copy of the Laker Girls and have them give me a personal performance."

"Now we're getting somewhere," Scott said.

Natalie decided to give it a go. "If I was a kid and I had a holo projector, I'd use it to make tons of copies of Johnny Deep and project them all over the globe."

"Johnny Deep?" Kim asked. "Why not copy Keau Heaves?"

"Because Deep has depth," Natalie punned. "Heaves makes me nauseous."

"I shouldn't have asked," Kim admitted.

"I'm kidding. I really like him. He's actually pretty cool. I just couldn't pass up that dumb pun."

"Okay Kim, what would you do?" Mac challenged.

"I'd project worms and creepy crawly bugs onto junk food so that no one would eat it?"

"Kim's no fun at all," Scott announced.

"But that would be a good thing," Kim replied. "Leary'd like it."

"Kim you're a very serious girl. You need to lighten up," Natalie advised. "Have some fun, even if it's just in your mind!"

"Oh, I have fun!" Kim replied.

"Basketball. That's all the fun she ever has. All she does is hang out with that dumb Amy, work on the Internet site, study, and play basketball. She's a bore," Scott said. "Now, I on the other hand..."

Scott didn't have a chance to get his statement out before Kim cut him off. "You on the other hand, hang out with that idiot Alex, who is totally out of control."

"Speaking of Alex," Scott said, interrupting his sister, "I need to call him! He'll know what to do with this holo projector."

"Yes, I remember your friend Alex," Mac admitted. "I'm not sure I should give it to you now."

"How about if I use it only in case of emergency?" Scott proposed.

“And what would qualify as an emergency?” Mac asked.

“Oh, freaking out the teachers,” Scott suggested.

“As long as you use it to do good and not evil,” Mac teased.

“Don’t worry, we don’t have an evil bone in our bodies,” Scott said.

“Oh, give it to them,” Natalie ordered.

Mac reluctantly gave them the software and a spare projector. The kids already had a digital video camera. They were all set. Scott put it all into his backpack, along with the golf ball simulation.

“We better get home,” Kim declared.

“I’ll drive you. Get your bikes and meet me in the parking lot.” They loaded the bikes into Mac’s trunk and drove to the Campbells.

As Mac and the kids walked into the house, they were greeted by Tommie and Chris.

“Where have you two been?” Tommie asked.

“We had some business to take care of,” Kim answered. “Mac helped us.”

“What kind of business?” Chris asked.

“Revenge on The Conglomerate,” Kim replied.

“You guys are kidding, aren’t you?” Tommie remarked.

Chris was concerned, too. “What did you do?”

“You two had better be sitting down for this one,” Mac suggested.

Chapter Twelve



Chris and Tommie looked worried as they walked to the family room and sat down.

“Okay, we’re sitting down. Now, spill the beans,” Tommie directed.

Scott began. “We decided we could put The Conglomerate in their place.”

“How?” Chris insisted.

“We just moved some of their money from one account to another,” Kim replied matter-of-factly.

“You what?” Chris exploded.

“We made some withdrawals and deposits,” Scott said. “We got the idea from Mom!”

“I didn’t tell you to do that!” Tommie barked.

“Exactly what did you do?” Chris inquired.

Scott repeated. “We just moved some of their money from one account to another.”

“How did you do that?” Tommie asked.

“Dad, Mom, you know when they infiltrated our system and Dad couldn’t figure out how?”

“Yes, what about it?”

“Alex was on the KOC site when it happened and he used his dad’s network infiltration software to trace the transaction. He figured out how they did it?”

“Did he find the source?” Chris asked.

“No! That’s the cool part of it. He was able to duplicate what they did, and even though he couldn’t totally trace back to the source, he reversed the process so if anyone traced him tracing the source it would go back to the source.”

“What?”

“I get it,” Chris replied. “But how does that stop you guys from getting traced?”

“Mac, you better explain from here,” Kim directed.

Mac explained the process. He described Alex’s contributions, the use of the light and Natalie’s expertise in accounting. Tommie and Chris were shocked. But now, their curiosity kicked into high gear. “So whose money did you move and where did you move it to?” Chris asked. “It better not be in our bank accounts.”

“What? Do you think we’re as evil as they are?” Scott rebutted.

Kim fielded his question. “Don’t worry; you’re going to be happy when you hear

this.” Kim explained every move they made.

Now Tommie and Chris were impressed. “Man, you two kick butt!” Tommie exclaimed.

“Hey, don’t get carried away. This wasn’t child’s play. We’re talking felony,” Chris announced.

The seriousness of the situation hit them like a ton of junk food. “So you’re certain no one will trace this to the kids... or you for that matter?” Tommie asked Mac.

“Positive. I bet they won’t even notice the money’s been moved until Monday morning when business opens.”

“What’s done is done,” Chris said. “You DO know that what you three just did is punishable by imprisonment. No matter how much good you think you accomplished, you could end up in jail.”

“We’ll just make holo images of ourselves and project them into the jail cell,” Scott replied.

“What?” Tommie asked.

Mac changed the subject. “It won’t happen, Chris. You know how careful I am. Do you really think I’d do something that would put the kids or myself in danger?”

“I don’t know, Mac,” Chris replied. “This really seems out of character for you. I don’t know what to think.”

“Besides Chris, it was my computer that did the deeds. No one would have a clue that the kids were involved,” Mac reasoned. “Don’t worry Chris. I have an alarm set up to notify me if anyone is getting even close to tracking the transactions to my PC. I have it all under control.”

“I guess we’ll just have to trust you Mac,” Tommie admitted.

“I have to get back to the lab. I didn’t get a lick of work done today,” Mac explained.

“Okay, but you’ll let us know if...” Tommie began.

“Yes, I’ll let you know if the Internet Police call,” Mac laughed.

They all walked Mac to the door and said their good-byes. As soon as the door closed behind Mac, the kids tried to calm their parents down.

“Don’t have a bird, Dad,” Scott started. “Mac does this all the time. He’s an expert hacker, and besides, no one is going to know it was us.”

“You two keep out of trouble. You’re staying home until the dance tonight,” Chris ordered.

That was fine with the kids. They had plans to make and they needed the use of their computer and the gadgets that Mac had given them.

“Ah, ghee, Dad. Can we at least have Amy and Alex over for a while?” Kim whined.

“What do you think, Tommie?”

“Okay, but no more hacking!” Tommie ordered.

“No, we won’t be hacking,” Scott promised.

“We’ll be plotting,” Scott whispered to Kim.

Kim giggled. Scott and Kim retreated to Scott’s room and invited their buddies over. While they waited, they thought about what kinds of uses they could put the holo and light technology to. Before long...

DING... DONG...

Kim and Scott both ran for the door. Scott flung the door open. Both Alex and Amy arrived at the same time.

“What’s all the hub bub about, bub?” Alex said in his worst Yogi Bear.

“Let’s head up to my room. We’ll fill you in, in private,” Scott replied.

“Okay BooBoo. But first I need to find a picnic basket.”

Tommie overheard. “I’m making an early dinner. Is that all right with you, Yogi?”

“That’s good for me Mrs. Ranger, Sir.”

Tommie shook her head. Alex was so immature at times.

“See, your mom got it. How come you guys didn’t?”

“We did,” Amy moaned.

The kids bolted up the stairs to Scott’s room. They made themselves comfortable and Kim and Scott told Alex and Amy about the light and the holo technology.

“Did you reallocate the Badvertizing Budgets?” Amy asked.

The kids explained every detail.

“Awesome!” Alex exclaimed.

“Sweeeet,” Amy added.

“Man, I wish I was there!” Alex said. “Did you get a copy of the program that generates that light?”

“Mac gave me his light program AND the holo imaging software, why?” Scott asked.

“He’s going to create a holo girlfriend,” Kim teased.

Amy was dying to ask him if he needed a holo boyfriend, but decided to give it a rest.

“I don’t need no stinkin’ girlfriend,” Alex muttered.

Amy bit her tongue and changed the subject.

“We need to see what the technology can do. Then we can decide what to do with it.”

Scott engaged the golf ball program. The balls were flying every which way around the room. Amy and Alex, and even Kim and Scott, were ducking to avoid being hit by the phantom balls.

“This is outrageous!” Amy exclaimed. “What else can you do?”

“We can do whatever we want to do with it. We can image, project, duplicate, and rotate, anything that is three dimensional.”

Alex walked over to Scott’s shelf. “What about these miniature dinosaurs?”

“Why not? Give me a couple,” Scott asked.

Alex did as he was directed. Scott made a duplicate of their images and again engaged the software. He had pterodactyls flying around the room.

“Can we use the projector to make a 3-D image of something that’s already on a video?” Alex asked.

“I don’t know, why?” Scott replied.

“Let’s download a music video of Tiffany and see what we can do with it,” Alex suggested.

“Awesome, idea,” Kim announced. “But we’d rather download Out of Sink.”

Scott and Alex were surprised.

“WE want Tiffany,” Alex insisted.

“So you can have a hollow girlfriend for a hollow guy?” Kim teased.

Amy laughed until she almost peed herself.

Kim added salt to Alex’s wound. “It will be the latest and greatest version of the blow-up doll.”

Alex was crushed.

“Yeah, Scott you can make one for yourself, too. You boys can take them to the

dance tonight,” Amy explained. “That way you don’t have to be wallflowers.”

“Right, those two nerds never get asked to dance,” Kim added.

Alex’s face began to morph as a smile replaced a frown. “While you two were thinking about how to use this technology for stupid things, I just figured out how to use it for good. What do you think about that?”

“For good instead of evil?” Kim laughed. “What do you have in mind?”

“Look you two dumb girls, I DO have an idea. Do you want to hear it or not?”

“Let’s hear it,” Kim insisted.

“Okay, but I don’t want you to laugh. It IS a good idea, just not something you’d expect from me, that’s all,” Alex admitted.

He went on to explain his plan. When he was finished, and the kids had a chance to digest it, Kim exclaimed, “I can’t believe it, but I think you’re a genius! I think THIS is what Leary had in mind.”

“Yeah, me too,” Amy added. “I actually really think your plan is good. But we could probably use Melissa’s help, just to make it more real.”

Alex was proud of himself. “Good idea. Give her a call. She might even have what we need so we don’t have to download it.”

“Man, he’s really on the ball today,” Amy whispered to Kim. “He morphs from Yogi Bear to Gandhi in ten minutes.”

Kim called Melissa and she came right over. When she heard Alex’s idea, she too was surprised and excited about the potential.

The project required a team effort. The five of them spent the rest of the afternoon, eating, fooling around with the new technology, and planning for the events that were to follow.

When they were finished, Alex announced, “This dance was going to be special for everyone.”

Chapter Thirteen



Despite all of Alex and Scott's efforts to get rid of the cliques in the school, pockets of phat people were starting to emerge again. Consequently, the more obvious groups of non-phat students, reappeared.

Scott and Alex had honorable intentions when they decided they wanted to make everyone phat. It was easier said than done. The boys now had another shot at leveling the playing field.

Chris dropped Alex, Scott, Kim, Melissa and Amy off at the dance at 8:00. The entire student body was already there.

The music was blaring and the teachers were outside in the hallway, looking for a quiet place to get away from it all.

The parents were inside, checking the dark corners for kids doing something they weren't supposed to be doing.

The non-phats were lined up against the wall and the phat kids were kicking up a storm on the dance floor.

The lines had been drawn... yet again. But this was about to change.

"Now's as good a time as any," Alex announced. "You guys know what to do, right?"

"Sure we do!" Amy declared.

Alex walked to the stage at the end of the gym. He jumped up, grabbed the microphone from the DJ, and demanded, "Please turn off the music and video for a minute."

As Alex took control of the stage, Scott tapped into the projection screen that had been showing music videos.

"I want everyone back in the gym," Alex ordered. "I have an important announcement to make. That means the teachers, too. Absolutely everyone!"

Kim and Amy rounded up the stray teachers and students and herded them into the gym. Once everyone was inside, Alex started his speech. "I'm pleased everyone could be here this evening. As you know, Scott and I promised that all students at Spring Valley would have an equal opportunity to excel and enjoy their time here at our school."

A few moans and groans came from the audience.

"I got it!" Scott yelled from behind the stage.

Alex heard the signal. "I've got a little video I'd like everyone to see. You'll get my message loud and clear. I need you to all watch it. Here it goes!"

Scott turned on the light emitter and projected it onto the video screen. This was the same light that Mac used to put people into an absence seizure. The entire student body, teachers and parents, stood staring at the screen. They were in a trance and totally unaware of what was going on around them.

Scott, Alex, Melissa, Kim and Amy had on their 3-D glasses and worked together to make their point.

The kids grabbed a dolly from the supply room and moved student bodies around the gym, like they were mannequins.

They took one of the jocks, slipped the dolly under his feet, pushed him back on it, and transported him to the middle of the chess club group. They repeated the process and relocated twenty of the phattest students to the middle of the non-phat kids. Then they reversed the process with new bodies.

When they were finished, Scott grabbed his digital video camera and began filming all the students.

"Scott, get a shot of this now, before she wakes up!" Alex ordered.

Alex had put himself in the arms of Alanna, and pretended to slow dance with her.

"Alex, you're an idiot!" Kim exclaimed.

"Hey, all work and no play and all that," Alex laughed.

"You ARE a dull boy!" Amy said.

Scott got Alex's 'dance', recorded for posterity. Alex wasn't finished. Cynthia, Zoe, Emily and Erica were his next targets. Scott continued to record Alex's antics.

"It looks like Melissa, Kim and Amy are next!" Alex shouted.

"When pigs fly!" Melissa screamed. "You forget, WE'RE not out of it!"

"Get back to business," Kim ordered.

"Okay, I think I have all I need," Alex teased. "Kim, maybe you want to get a picture of you and Cal. You know you waaanna!"

Kim gave Alex the evil eye.

"Alex, she's ready to kill you. I'd drop it," Scott advised.

Alex decided to take Scott's advice. "Scott, show me what you got so far."

Scott started the video at the beginning. All five of them quickly reviewed it and decided their plan was a success.

"We got all the video we need for part one," Scott announced. "We need to shut the projector down."

Scott turned off the light projector. As the kids, teachers and parents awoke from their trance, they realized that some of them were in the middle of unfamiliar territory.

Scott ran back behind the stage, took the movies he made, and projected them on to the screen. Now, everyone saw that the entire student body was reallocated, just like the kids did with the money. And, as with the money, this movement of resources had a surprising effect.

The non-phat kids were having fun with the whole thing because they weren't as self-conscious as the phat kids. The phat kids, most of whom were posers to begin with, were in a panic.

Perception... not reality... is everything to most teenagers.

But, before the kids could start to reorganize back into the cliques, Alex performed

his second trick of the evening. He had jumped back up on stage and announced that because of Melissa's connections with the band, Out of Sink was going to perform live for them.

Alex had digitized the band's videos and he projected them, in three dimensions, onto the school stage.

The projection was so real; no one suspected it was just that, a projection. The kids screamed and yelled and danced and had a great time no matter who they were with.

Scott digitized the entire student body, enjoying the music and each other's company. Alex's plan was a great success. Everyone got reacquainted with Scott and Alex's election platform.

The rest of the evening was just outstanding, and all of this was being digitally captured for posterity. The kids planned to load it up onto the school Internet site and on the KidsOpinionsCount site. They had made their point; they now needed to make sure it was in plain view for a while, just to reinforce it.

It was the best dance they'd ever attended.

When it was all over and Chris picked the kids up to drive them home, he asked a simple question, expecting a one-word answer. Instead he received an onslaught of teen excitement and verbal diarrhea.

He couldn't believe his ears.

"You mean you kids pulled this whole caper off and no one is the wiser?"

"Yup," Scott replied proudly.

"And it was all my idea!" Alex bragged. "And the worst thing is, only you guys will ever know! What good is it doing good if no one knows you did it?"

Scott and Kim knew how he felt. Alex and Amy would be the only kids to know what they and Mac did that day.

That evening, the Campbells hardly slept a wink, wondering and worrying about what The Conglomerate might find out. Tommie stayed up until late into the evening working on her book.

Chris monitored the news channels through the wee hours, until he finally fell asleep.

Kim and Scott were on their scorch mail with Amy and Alex, talking about the dance, until Tommie realized it was two in the morning and they were still up.

By 2:15, the Campbell family was finally all tucked in their beds and fast asleep.

Morning came, far too soon.

Chapter Fourteen



When the kids arrived at school Monday the students were talking about the dance and the bizarre goings on. The cliques had disappeared and they were one big happy student body, with the pictures on their web site to prove it.

BZZZZ...

The bell went and the students proceeded to their first class. Scott, Kim, Amy and Alex had World Issues.

“LOOK! It’s HIM!” Amy whispered excitedly to Kim, as she pointed to the front of the classroom.

Kim followed Amy’s finger. It was pointing at a young man, sitting behind the teacher’s desk. “Must be a sub. He looks familiar,” Kim admitted.

“It’s the guy from the store!” Amy proclaimed. “The ref! The cutest guy on the face of the earth!”

“Hey, a substitute,” Alex announced. “Great! That means no homework!”

The class settled into their seats and waited for the new teacher to introduce himself. He stood up from his chair and walked around to the front of his desk. He picked up the class-seating chart from the top of his desk, leaned up against the desk and addressed the class. Every girl in the class was starry eyed.

“Good morning. My name is Mr. Jones. I’ll be taking over this class from your previous teacher. She has taken a leave of absence. I’ve looked over the lesson plan. It seems to me that this class has been concentrating on U.S. history and geography. Would you say that this is true? You Young Lady, what’s your opinion?” he asked, staring right at Amy.

She couldn’t believe her good luck... or bad luck. “Ummm, I, uhhh, we’ve learned...” Poor Amy couldn’t think of an intelligent thing to say.

“You, Scott Campbell is it?” Mr. Jones said, looking at his seating chart. “Have you studied any cultures or countries or civilizations other than the U.S.?”

“Actually, no. I signed up for this class because I thought we’d be learning about the world, but it seems like this class is just an extension to U.S. history. To tell you the truth, I’m disappointed.”

Scott knew where the new teacher was heading and he thought he’d jump on the

bandwagon... with both feet.

“Right, it’s not like we’re the only people who ever did anything cool!” Alex said, sucking up big time. “There must be some other famous people who would be interesting to hear about. What about Napoleon or Alexander the Great or Nero or that Confused guy from China? I’d love to learn about those dudes.”

“Great! That’s what I like to hear. I think I’ll take this class and move it to a whole other time and place. I’ll start by giving you two assignments. First, I want you to find a biography of a historical figure from before 1700 and from a country outside North America and Europe. And, this will be the hardest part of the assignment; you have to find information on these people that was written by historians from their native country. This won’t be easy, but it is important. Can anyone tell me why?” Mr. Jones asked.

Kim’s hand flew into the air.

Mr. Jones referred to his seating chart.

“Yes, Kimberly?”

“It’s because we don’t know as much as we could about other countries, their economies, their politics, even their geography. We aren’t as smart as we think we are when it comes to things outside our own country... heck, even outside our own state.”

“You’re full of it Kim! I know everything I need to know about the world,” Cal exclaimed.

“Yeah,” Jake proclaimed. “We know about everything. We have the best newscasts, the best newspapers, the best TV, the best education, the best living conditions, the best sports, and the best of everything! And we know it all.”

“It’s true. This is a great nation. But I bet if you ask kids in other countries they’d say the same thing about theirs,” Mr. Jones suggested.

“No way!” Taylor replied. “They’d be lying!”

Mr. Jones chortled. “Yes way! I’m going to give all of you a blank sheet to paper and I’m going to give you ten minutes to draw a map of the world.”

“What’s that going to prove?” Jake asked.

“We’ll see, once I analyze the results.”

“How are you going to do that?” Kim asked.

“I have a computer program. I can get you the results by tomorrow,” Mr. Jones said, as he handed out the sheets. “You’ve got ten minutes.”

Each student busily started to draw the world as they saw it. Some kids struggled and others breezed through the assignment.

“Time’s up. Hand in your maps,” Mr. Jones ordered. “Pass them forward to the person at the front of your row and I’ll collect them.”

As the maps moved up the rows, kids were passing comments on how their classmates’ maps looked. They all seemed to see the world differently.

“Do we get marked on these?” Sara asked.

“No, don’t worry. Not today,” Mr. Jones replied. “But at the end of the year, you’ll have to do this for real and I’ll expect some accuracy then. Right now, I think you’re drawing what you perceive the world looks like, not what you know the world to be. Those are two different things. I can’t mark you on something you haven’t objectively explored yet.”

“Perceived and know! What’s the difference?” Scott asked.

“Good question,” Mr. Jones replied. “This exercise we’re doing today has to do with

cognitive behavior, which means that you form opinions, make decisions, and take actions, based on what you think you know for a fact and not necessarily what the facts really are.”

“I don’t get it,” Erica admitted.

“Me neither,” Cynthia said.

“Can you help us understand?” Allana begged.

The girls were flirting and acting helpless. Kim, Amy and Melissa thought they were acting hopeless.

Mr. Jones rose to the challenge. “Okay, for example, if someone tells you they hate a particular restaurant, you may decide to hate it too, even though you were never there. You are forming an opinion or an impression based on what someone tells you, and not on personal experience or knowledge. That person could hate the restaurant because they had lousy food, or lousy service, or it rained the night they went, or maybe they got dumped by their boyfriend or girlfriend at that restaurant. These are very different reasons and two of them really don’t have anything to do with the restaurant, but with someone else’s personal experience.”

“That’s interesting. But what’s that got to do with us understanding the world?” Amy asked.

“Everything! I’ll give you an example.” Mr. Jones quizzed, “How many of you have ever been to Scotland?”

No one put their hand up.

“Do any of you know anyone who lives in Scotland?” Mr. Jones asked.

Chapter Fifteen



“Leprechauns?” someone yelled out.

“No, that’s Ireland stupid,” Taylor shouted.

“Back to the original question.” Mr. Jones asked, again, “Do any of you know anyone who lives in Scotland?”

No one replied to his question.

“Okay. I want you to write down a few words that come to mind when you think of Scotland or the Scottish people,” Mr. Jones directed.

The class did what they were tasked.

“Now, I’ll read and write down on the blackboard, five famous quotations about the Scots.”

Mr. Jones read and wrote the following quotations. “Quotation one says, ‘In all my travels I never met with any one Scotchman but what was a man of sense. I believe everybody of that country that has any, leaves it as fast as they can.’

“Quotation two says, ‘Oats. A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.’

“Quotation three says, ‘A Scotsman must be a very sturdy moralist who does not love Scotland better than truth.’

“Quotation four says, ‘Much can be made of a Scotsman, if he be caught young.’

“Quotation five says, ‘A Scotsman’s learning is like bread in a besieged town: every man gets a little, but no man gets a full meal.’

“So, write down what you think of Scotland now?” Mr. Jones asked. He gave the kids a few minutes and then proceeded with the lesson. “Amy, given the quote I just read, what’s your opinion of Scotland?”

“It sounds like it’s an awful place to live and the smart people leave it as soon as they can. It’s full of stupid people who eat horse food.”

“Amy, do you think this is true?” Mr. Jones asked.

“It might be. It’s what the people you quoted thought.”

“What did you write about the Scots before I read the quotes?”

“I just put down kilts and bagpipes and sheep, castles, oatmeal and Mel Gibson because he played that guy in the movie,” Amy admitted.

“Oatmeal! That explains things!” Scott announced.

“Explains what?” Mr. Jones asked.

“My dad’s parents are from Scotland and my mom’s always trying to make us eat oatmeal.”

The whole class laughed. “Is your mom Scottish?” Mr. Jones asked.

“Irish and Scottish,” Kim replied.

“Oh, now I get the connection,” Sara said.

“It just so happens, we’re going to repeat the process for Ireland,” Mr. Jones directed. “Does anyone know anyone who lives in Ireland?”

No one responded. “Okay, you know the drill. Now write some thoughts on Ireland and I’ll read you a famous quotation.”

The kids did as they were asked. Mr. Jones read, “‘The Irish are fair people. They never speak well of one another.’ Taylor, what do you think about the Irish?”

“I think Alex Black is Irish. He’s always ragging on everyone. He thinks he’s so perfect,” Taylor proclaimed.

“Hey! I resemble that remark,” Alex joked.

“Well Alex, are you Irish?” Mr. Jones asked.

“I’m American!” Alex declared.

Mr. Jones asked the class, “Does anyone want to comment about the quote I read?”

“I do,” Sara announced. “I think that your quote just reinforced what I already thought about them. They’re jerks. All they want to do is fight each other. They’re always blowing each other up and killing kids and no one knows what the problem is. You can’t trust them. I’d never travel there, it’s too dangerous, just like Israel.”

Mr. Jones responded. “That’s very interesting that you said that. I would guess that it’s a very common perception of Ireland. How about writing a few words about the French.”

He gave them a minute to jot down their thoughts and then read a famous quotation. “‘A Frenchman must be always talking, whether he knows anything of the matter or not.’ Okay, what do you think of the French now?”

“They’re a bunch of opinionated loudmouths who don’t know anything about anything,” Zach shouted.

“And what did you put down for your notes before?”

“They eat cheese and drink wine and they speak French and the British and us hate them and now I know why,” laughed Zach. “And they’re chickens because they wouldn’t fight with us.”

“I’m not prepared to get into that discussion right now,” Mr. Jones admitted. “Let’s move on.”

“One more quotation and country, The United States. Write down a few words about the good old U. S. of A.,” Mr. Jones said, again waiting a minute for them to finish before reading the quotation. “‘I am willing to love all mankind, except an American.’”

The students didn’t like this one. They took it personally. All the other remarks were about other people, other countries. This one hurt. “That’s malarkey!” Alex shouted.

“Huh?”

“We’re the greatest!” Alex exclaimed. “How could any jerk not love us? This guy doesn’t know us at all. Who was this guy?”

Mr. Jones answered the question. “The same British Philosopher that said all the

other quotes about the Scots and the Irish and the French. Now what do you think about the quotes?"

"They must ALL be lies," Scott announced. "This guy sounds like he's prejudice against everyone! He's a snob AND a knob!"

"He's also the man who wrote the first dictionary," Mr. Jones explained. "Can you imagine? A person with all of this power must have influenced what everyone at that time thought they knew about almost everything, by how he interpreted the meaning of words."

"That's scary!" Taylor admitted. "This guy must have been a real big shot AND a bigot!"

"And you agreed with him until I made it personal. Do you see why it's so important to form opinions based on information and facts that you know?"

"Yes!" Kim exclaimed. "Form informed opinions."

"He's a real jerk!" Cal shouted. "What's his name?"

"Johnson," Mr. Jones replied. He went on to say, "Let's make things interesting. Let's build a profile of this man based on what he said. Throw out some words to describe him physically."

The kids were vocal on this one, even though they'd never seen him

"I think he's tall and skinny. Most people from England are tall and skinny."

"I think he has bad teeth and bad breath. Most people from England have bad teeth."

"I think he probably dresses really conservatively. Most people who would write a dictionary must be really boring."

"I bet he has a beard and gray hair."

"I think he had beady little eyes and big bushy eyebrows."

"That's quite the picture you painted of him. How about his personality?" Mr. Jones asked. "What do you think he would have been like?"

"I think he was a loud-mouthed, arrogant, conceited jerk."

"He was probably educated at Oxford or one of those other stuffy British Universities."

"He probably wore one of those stupid curly wigs that the men used to wear in England."

"Yeah, he was probably a girly boy."

"I think he thought he knew more than he really did."

"I think he had opinions about things that he knew nothing about."

"I bet him and his other British cronies used to sit around and gossip about everyone else in the world. I'll bet they thought they were the best at everything."

"He sounds like a man I wouldn't want to have much to do with," Mrs. Jones said. "I'll read how the Encyclopedia describes him." He read directly from Volume 14 of the Funk and Wagnall's.

"Many of his physical and mental traits were effects of an attack of scrofula and other illnesses suffered during this childhood. He had a melancholic, indolent disposition aggravated by physical handicaps. Johnson had a mottled complexion, myopia, and jerky muscular movements; he was a hypochondriac and he had a morbid fear of death; he suffered from prolonged fits of absentmindedness, and he was slovenly in personal appearance and habits."

"I feel sorry for the guy now," Kim admitted.

“So what did we learn today?”

“You need to research the author, the rest of the text and context it was quoted from. When you’ll be able to form an opinion,” Scott said.

“Right, you can’t just take one sentence out of an entire speech and use it to summarize the speech,” Amy added. “News does that all the time. The quotes are called ‘sound bites’. Most of the time they just get people’s attention and don’t really represent the real story.”

“That’s a great observation, Amy,” Mr. Jones announced. “Just for fun, I have one more quote,” Mr. Jones announced. ““No one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people.””

Chapter Sixteen



“That makes us sound smart. No one’s ever gone broke because we are so smart,” suggested Cynthia.

“No dummy! This means that we’ll buy anything,” Melissa countered. “Just like the Skinny Scheme... and just like how all you kids buy all that crud just to be like the stars.”

Melissa’s observation was bang-on and the kids knew it.

“She’s right!” Zach declared. “Companies can sell us anything, as long as the spokesperson is a celebrity, or if we think it will make us skinner and happier, even if we really know it’s probably bull crud.”

Alex looked perplexed. “Are you sure that’s what it means?”

“You have to interpret it yourself,” Mr. Jones said. “Form your own opinion. An American journalist wrote this one. Do you kids get my point?”

Kim piped up, “Most definitely. We all form opinions based on what other people say, and who knows what their opinions are based on. We need to see things for ourselves and make up our own minds. We need to do research on topics and make sure we go to the source. An American writing about the history of India might not truly reflect what happened because they have their own opinions and they are probably based on other people’s opinions and not the truth. I get what you’re saying. We need to learn about the world so that we can make our own minds stronger and make our own country stronger.”

“I think she’s got it!” Mr. Jones announced.

“So how come you teach this class differently?” Scott asked. He was expecting a simple answer. Instead, the class got another assignment.

“This should answer your question, Scott,” Mr. Jones replied. “I’ll give each of you a copy of a letter. I want you to analyze it and tell me why you think I want to teach this way. You’ll probably have to read it a few times. It was originally written in another language. You can work in pairs on this one. I’d like you to paraphrase and analyze it. Tell me in your own words, what it means and how it is relevant today.”

The kids moaned...

Mr. Jones handed out the following.

Dear tutor:

What is it you would have of me, Doctor? Can you reasonably desire that I should make you one of the chief omrahs (teachers) of my court? Let me tell you, if you had instructed me as you should have done, nothing would be more just; for I am of this persuasion, that a child well educated and instructed is as much, at least, obliged to his master as to his father.

But where are those good documents (instructions) you have given me? In the first place you have taught me that all Frangistan (so it seems they call Europe) was nothing but I know not what little island, of which the greatest king was he of Portugal, and next to him he of Holland, and after him he of England: and as to the other kings, as those of France and Andalusia, you have represented them to me as our petty rajahs, telling me that the kings of Indostan were far above them altogether, that they (the kings of Indostan) were... the great ones, the conquerors and kings of the world; and those of Persia and Usbec, Kashgar, Tartary and Cathay, Pegu, China and Matchina did tremble at the name of the kings of Indostan. Admirable geography! You should rather have taught me exactly to distinguish all those states of the world, and well to understand their strength, their way of fighting, their customs, religions, governments, and interests; and by the pursuit of solid history, to observe their rise, progress, decay; and whence, how, and by what accidents and errors those great changes and revolutions of empires and kingdoms have happened.

I have scarce learned of you the name of my grandsires, the famous founders of this empire; so far were you from having taught me the history of their life, and what course they took to make such great conquest.

You had a mind to teach me the Arabian tongue, to read and to write. I am much obliged, forsooth, for having made me lose so much time upon a language that requires ten or twelve years to attain to its perfection; as if the son of a king should think it to be an honor to him to be a grammarian or some doctor of the law, and to learn other languages than of his neighbors when he can well be without them; he to whom time is so precious for so many weighty things, which he ought by times to learn. As if there were any spirit that did not with some reluctance, and even with a kind of debasement, employ itself in so said and dry an exercise, so longsome and tedious as is that of learning words.

Know you not that childhood well governed, being a state which is ordinarily accompanied with a happy memory, is capable of thousands of good percepts and instructions, which remain deeply impressed the whole remainder of a man's life, and keep the mind always raised for great actions? The law, prayers, and sciences, may they not as well be learned in our mother tongue as in Arabick? You told my father Shah Jahan that you would teach me philosophy. 'Tis true, I remember very well, that you have entertained me for many years with airy questions of things that afford no satisfaction at all to the mind and are of no use in humane society, empty notions and mere fancies, that have only this in them, that they are very hard to understand and very easy to forget...

I still remember that after you had thus amused me, I know not how long, with your fine philosophy, all I retained of it was a multitude of barbarous and dark words, proper to bewilder, perplex, and tire out the best wits, and only invented the better to cover the vanity and ignorance of men like yourself, that would make us believe that they know all, and that under those obscure and ambiguous words are hid great mysteries which they

alone are capable to understand.

If you had seasoned me with that philosophy which formeth the mind to ratiocination, and insensibly accustoms it to be satisfied with nothing but solid reasons: if you had given me those excellent precepts and doctrines which raise the soul above the assaults of fortune, and reduce her to an unshakeable and always equal temper, and permit her not to be lifted up by prosperity nor debased by adversity; if you had taken care to give me the knowledge of what we are and what are the first principles of things, and had assisted me in forming in my mind a fit idea of the greatness of the universe and of the admirable order and motion of the parts thereof; if, I say, you had instilled into me this kind of philosophy, I should think myself incomparably more obliged to you than Alexander was to his Aristotle, and believe it my duty to recompense you otherwise than he did him.

Should you not, instead of your flattery, have taught me somewhat of that point so important to a king, which is, what the reciprocal duties are of a sovereign to his subjects and those of subjects to their sovereigns; and ought not you to have considered that one day I should be obliged with the sword to dispute my life and my crown with my brothers?...

Have you ever taken any care to make me learn what 'tis to besiege a town, or to set an army in array? For these things I am obliged to others, not at all to you. Go, return to the village whence you are come, and let nobody know who you are or what is become of you.

“Who wrote this?” Kim asked.

Mr. Jones ignored the question and simply stated, “I expect you to hand in a two-page analysis of what this letter means. I want it tomorrow and I’ll promise to have your maps analyzed by then.”

BZZZZ...

The bell rang. It was time for class change. The kids trotted off to their next class. Mr. Jones was the topic du jour.

“He’s gorgeous and so smart!” Amy said.

“He’s HOT! Man if all the teachers looked like him we’d ace everything!” Kim added.

They didn’t even mind that they got two assignments from him. They actually looked forward to doing them.

At the end of the day, Kim and Scott raced home. They both had the same idea.

Scott burst through the door first.

Chapter Seventeen



“Mom, can I borrow that book you bought last week? The one on that old guy from Russia,” Scott asked.

“The book on Timur?” Tommie replied.

“Right, Timur the Mongoloid,” Scott answered.

“Mongol. He was a Mongol,” Tommie lectured.

“Mongol, mango, mongrel, mogul. Just kidding, Mom,” Scott announced. “We got a kick-butt new teacher today and he wants us to pick some obscure figure in history and do an essay on them. They can’t be from North America or Europe and I think Timur will be perfect. I’ll even bet the teacher won’t even know about this guy.”

“Who is this new teacher? Is he a substitute?”

“No. Permanent,” Kim piped in. “He’s the guy from the mall.”

“What guy from the mall?” Tommie asked.

“I mean the ball game... the basketball games... the three-on-three tournament... he was refereeing,” Kim stumbled and mumbled her way out of that one.

“Kim, you seem a little stressed,” Tommie commented.

“No, I was going to ask you for the book. Scott beat me to it. Now I have to find another person to do. Do you have any suggestions, Mom?”

“Let me think about it,” Tommie replied.

“Oh, never mind. I just had a brainstorm,” Kim exclaimed. “I’m going to figure out who the guy was who wrote the letter we have to analyze, and do him!”

“That’s a great idea, Kim,” Scott added.

“So what’s this letter you’re supposed to analyze?” Tommie asked.

“Maybe Mom can help us with it,” Scott suggested.

Kim pulled the letter out of her backpack. The three of them sat down at the kitchen table and read it.

“Are you two supposed to do it yourselves?” Tommie asked.

“No, he said we could work in pairs if we wanted to,” Kim answered.

Tommie decided to help out. They worked at least an hour on the project. Line by line they dissected the letter. Every time they read it, they learned something new. They were finally satisfied with their interpretation and Tommie was quite taken with this new

teacher, sight unseen.

“I’d like to find out who wrote this, too!” Tommie admitted. “Any idea on how to do it?”

“It says here that the student’s dad’s name was Shah Jahan. This should be easy! I’ll just look up the Shah and figure out what his son’s name is. I’ll let you know what I find out.”

“Wait, before you disappear, don’t you think we should eat supper?” Tommie asked. “Your dad’s going to be late tonight. So, what do you kids feel like?”

“Soup and sandwiches would be good,” Scott suggested. “That way we can eat and work at the same time.”

“Okay. I’ll make dinner and I’ll bring it to you when it’s ready.”

Kim went to her room to check the KidsOpinionsCount site and to do her research on Shah Jahan.

Scott sat down in the family room with the book on Timur. He raced through the book, gobbling up every word, like a starved lion.

Tommie served the two of them their supper. She went to her office to work on her book. She’d been at it all day. The kids continued without a break. Scott finished the book by 9:00 and decided to try and project the book into the new video game.

He went to the game room, hooked himself up, started the game and proceeded through a door. He concentrated on Timur, all the while, and walked right into history.

His mind and the game took him to a place he had never been, yet was familiar. It was early in the fourteenth century, somewhere in Mongolia. Scott had taken the identity of a character in the book.

He was Elchi Bahatur, the Valiant Envoy to Lord Timur of Samarkand. Like Prince Murat of Napoleon’s suite, he was fond of plumed headgear and gilded boots. He always accompanied his Lord Timur into battle.

On this particular occasion Timur had returned from beating off a raid of the Jats, and was searching for the hostile forces of the kings of Badakshan, in the higher ranges where the Amur takes its rise.

Scott was somewhere in the mountains. They,

...drew back steadily, up into the treeless solitude where the snow lay deep, and the projecting rocks were worn by ages of storms, here in the gorges, glaciers crawled like inanimate snakes, and the schist of the gorge walls gleaming red and purple. And here the two small armies played at hide-and-seek around the peaks, sliding down thousand-foot slopes, and sitting out snow flurries huddled together like sheep.

A courier reached Timur with word that his advance guard had been cut off and captured by the Badakshanis who were retiring with their prisoners by still another ravine.

It was part of the rigid code of the Tatars that no leader should abandon his men while it was humanly possible to reach them. But the warriors with Timur could see no chance of aiding their comrades. Timur was stirred into a passion by the wariness and lack of hope. He summoned them to mount and set out with the courier for a guide, to seek for a way along the heights that would bring him out in the ravine the Badakshanis were moving down.

His men lagged along the ice-coated paths, where every now and then a horse and rider would slip and slide head over tail into eternity. Timur pressed ahead so rapidly that only thirteen were with him when he came out in the gorge and hastened to seize the summit of a pass before the Badakshan forces could reach it. With his thirteen - among them Elchi Bahatur - he took up his position in the rocks along the ridge and engaged the advance of the mountaineers with bows.

Only fifty warriors were in the first part of the enemy but two hundred more appeared down the ravine. Elchi Bahatur at this point executed a flank movement of his own, riding alone down the side of the ravine, and loping toward the oncoming two hundred. The sight of him in his sable cloak, bound with a flaming girdle, and his bearskin headgear made them pause. He came, apparently, from nowhere and he was undoubtedly riding a blood stallion. His bow was in its case, his sword in its sheath of ivory inlaid with gold.

“Hai, ye sons of my fathers,” Elchi hailed them. “Draw rein and look. That man up there is Lord Timur.”

Riding in among them, as if a battle were the least thing in his mind, the Tatar pointed out to them carefully the figure of Timur in the familiar crested helmet, among the flying arrows.

“Think,” Elchi advised them gravely, “if ye are slain, even your families will call you fools. What good to be slain here - now - when Lord Timur is between you and safety? It would be better to make a truce. Much better to gather together the captives and thus gain his goodwill by sending them to him.”

So Elchi blandished them. And they, all uncertain, dismounted to bow before him - convinced that the Tatars were in strength, if a lord like this came among them unescorted. Elchi dismounted also, and stroked - so the chronicle has it - the backs of their necks. Soon the arrows ceased, and the captives were brought forward to Elchi who eyed them critically.

“Will ye send his own men to Lord Timur like cattle, without their swords?” he reproved the Badakshanis. “They had swords when ye took them.”

The mountaineers were sadly bewildered. They could see the dreaded Timur over there on the ridge, apparently awaiting them. Their road to safety was blocked. In the end they did all that Elchi had advised - the plundered were restored - and Elchi led his six hundred rescued Tatars over the ridge, and announced to Timur that the Badakshanis were waiting to kiss his stirrup.

At once Timur went down, and the men of Badakshan who had been more frightened than hostile in the beginning, swore a peace on their bow-cases. Timur and Elchi kept them occupied in talk until the lagging contingents of Tatars came up.

“This is not a fit place for sitting down,” the fastidious ambassador then said. “Here there is nothing to eat or sleep in but the snow.”

The Badakshani chieftains suggested that they all go to the villages, and so they trooped down from the roof of the world to feast.³

³ Harold Lamb, *Tamerlane the Earth Shaker*, (Garden City Publishing Company, Garden City, New York pp. 85-87.)

Chapter Eighteen



It was now approaching 10:00. Scott was still immersed in the world of Timur. Kim had just found out some astonishing information on the writer of the letter. She decided to tell her brother. On her way past the family room, she noticed a CCTV story.

Scott was on the adventure of a lifetime. He'd still be there if it weren't for Max. Max wanted attention, and as he jumped up on Scott, he jarred him out of the game's consciousness and back into reality.

Scott had just shut down the game when he heard Kim yell. "Mom! Scott! Dad! Come here! You have to see this!"

"See what?" Scott asked, as he took off the visor.

Chris was doing laundry when he heard Kim shout. He rushed to the family room.

"We're on!" Kim exclaimed and picked up the phone to call Mac. There, on the big screen TV, was Alan Lasowich and the CCTV report they'd been nervously waiting for.

Lasowich: CCTV has just learned that O'Dinkle's Corporation will donate fifty percent of its global advertising budget to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Conservative estimates put this endowment in the range of \$450 to \$550 million.

A spokesperson for the foundation says, 'The magnitude of O'Dinkle's generosity will enable the foundation to undertake life-changing initiatives for children with diabetes. We cannot begin to thank O'Dinkle's for their enormous contribution to our children's organization.' CCTV has been unable to reach the President of O'Dinkle's for his comments.

This news story was followed by an O'Dinkle's commercial.

"Did I hear that right?" Chris asked. "This news story has a positive spin. There's no mention of the money being stolen!"

"That's good news, isn't it Dad?" Kim asked.

"For now, but that doesn't mean O'Dinkle isn't doing everything in his power to find out who did this," Tommie answered.

The news continued.

Lasowich: Not to be outdone by O'Dinkle's, the country's three major soft drink producers, joined together to support children. Each company donated fifty percent of their annual advertising budgets to support research and start a public education program on Epilepsy. They had intended that these donations be anonymous, but an insider for one of the corporations felt that their initiative should be used as a further example of what this great country can achieve through the generosity of its major corporations. They responded to the O'Dinkle's challenge, and millions of children will benefit from this program.

Will wonders ever cease? And this just in, the global automakers have agreed to pool all of their new product development money into a single fund to develop the hydrogen engine. They feel saving the environment should be their number one priority. They are doing this for the children. The investment of billions into this problem will most definitely result in the commercialization of a hydrogen engine and the rebuilding of the ozone layer.

This has been the most exciting and satisfying news day I've had the pleasure of working.

Somewhere, a Waterford crystal vase was smashed against a Picasso in a large white house.

Elsewhere, in a far off land, Conglomerate executives were in fear for their lives. A hydrogen engine would destroy their industry, the hold they had over the globe, and probably most importantly, the reason they could build, test and use government sponsored military equipment. In other words, the reason for Trillions to be spent on the defense industry.

They had to reason with their brethren to stop their initiative. They hoped it was a ruse, to pacify the people. If not, heads would roll, literally, and theirs could be the first.

"What do you think? Did we do good?" Kim asked, looking for reassurance from her parents that everything was going to be all right.

"Time will tell," Tommie said. "I hope these initiatives act like a catalyst and other companies follow suit. Monkey see monkey do."

Kim forgot all about why she came downstairs in the first place. They headed upstairs to bed.

"I want to check out our site to see if there's been any retaliation."

"Good idea," Kim agreed. They rushed to Scott's room to pull up the site. There was no indication that anyone knew what had happened.

"So far so good," Kim stated. Her mind wandered backward in time and she asked Scott, "What were you doing in the game?"

"Oh, MAN Kim! It was unreal! I read that book on Timur and then I actually imagined it in the game. It was like I was in the middle of his life. It was like I really met him."

"Scott, that sounds dangerous. You shouldn't have done that unsupervised! You could have had an attack or something!"

"Kim, you HAVE to read that book. Maybe we could do the game together... you know, and travel to the same place!"

"Scott, you're freaking me out. We're not talking about a time machine. We're just

talking about your imagination. We can't go to the same place. We can't get into each other's minds!"

"We could try and see what happens if we go through the same door," Scott suggested.

"Nothing will happen! There's no program; it's just what we were thinking about. We can't share a dream. Drop it!" Kim was getting scared just thinking about the possibilities. Kim wasn't one to take risks. She was uncomfortable with her own imagination and certainly didn't want to share it with Scott, even if she really didn't think it was possible.

Scott, on the other hand, was getting excited about the possibilities. He'd try to convince her to give it a try, another day.

Chapter Nineteen



Tuesday morning, Tommie surprised the kids with a huge family breakfast. All of their favorites were waiting on the table for them. They woke up to the pleasant smell of apple pancakes and syrup. Fresh grapefruit juice, strawberries and cream, and of course their usual variety of vitamins and minerals.

“Mom! This looks great! What’s the occasion!” Kim asked.

“I’m celebrating the fact that at least ten hours have passed since the CCTV story and there’s no indication that Mac has been found out!”

“Good a reason as any,” Chris said, as he joined the family in the kitchen. “It’s not over until it’s over, though.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Kim asked.

“Just what I said. It’s not over yet,” Chris replied. “But for now, I think your mom’s got the right idea. We can’t worry about it. And, Mac is right. If anyone gets into trouble, it will be him.”

The kids were sure that Mac was safe. They weren’t worried. They finished up their breakfast and then Tommie drove them to school. On the way, Tommie asked Scott, “What did you think about the book?”

“What a warrior!” Scott exclaimed.

“What about all of the other things he accomplished?” Tommie asked. “The building, the universities, the ethnic tolerance, the huge empire that he connected with a fourteenth century pony express...”

“Sounds like you both have your own opinions about what made this guy great,” Kim observed. “That’s what we’re learning about in school.”

“What do you mean, Kim?”

“We learned, that depending on where you come from, you might look at the same piece of information differently. Scott loves his war games, so he thinks about Timur as a warrior. Mom, you like smart people, so you like all the smart stuff he did.”

“That’s a good analysis,” Tommie replied. “So Kim, based on the little information you know, what do YOU think of Timur?”

“I think I’d have to read the book first AND look at some other sources before I form an opinion,” Kim announced.

“WOW! I’d like to meet this teacher,” Tommie admitted. “The more you tell me, the more I like him.”

They soon arrived at school. The kids jumped out of the van and met up with Amy and Alex in the schoolyard.

“Scott! I saw the news on CCTV last night,” Alex exclaimed.

Scott gave Alex the ‘zip it’ signal.

“Got it,” Alex answered. “Say no more.”

Scott and Alex caught up with Kim and Amy and walked to their English class together. They waited impatiently for class to end so they could get to Mr. Jones’ room and discuss the letter.

The bell rang and they ran to their next class. Principal Toole had to yell at them to slow down. He’d never seen kids actually want to get to class. He decided to sit in on this one, to see what all the excitement was about.

“Good morning class, and Principal Toole,” Mr. Jones announced as he walked into the room.

All the students were in place and accounted for.

“Did any of you see the news last night?” Mr. Jones asked the class.

“Sure, I always watch the news,” Cal shouted.

“That’s good,” Mr. Jones replied. “Was there any special news story that caught your attention?”

“No,” Cal confessed.

“Did the story have to be global? I didn’t see any global news story last night on the National. But I did see a cool story about Peter of Out of Sink. He’s doing a movie with Johnny Deep,” Stephanie announced.

“That’s not news, that’s Entertainment This Evening!” exclaimed Kim. She wasn’t a big fan of Stephanie.

“What’s the difference?” Stephanie asked.

Kim was about to put her two cents worth in, when Mr. Jones interrupted. “We all have our own version of what news is, and we all have our own opinion of what is important news and what isn’t. Most people only pay attention to news that might affect them, or news that is so sensational that it catches their attention and imagination.

Mr. Jones paused. “Scott, did you watch the news last night?”

“Yes, I did,” Scott replied.

“What channel did you watch?”

“CCTV,” Scott admitted.

“That’s great! I’ll make that another assignment. All you have to do is watch the global news for one hour a night for the next month and write me a one-page report every night on what you learned. If you do that, you won’t have to write a final exam. What do you think?”

“Excellent!” Taylor yelled out. “I can do that!”

The kids hated to study and didn’t realize they traded probably five hours of work for more than thirty. And they liked the idea. Watching TV was better than studying they thought, even if it was the news.

“It’s settled then. Now, Scott, what was the most interesting news story you saw last night on CCTV?” Mr. Jones asked.

Scott suspected Mr. Jones wanted to discuss the donation stories. He figured he had

no choice but to talk about it. Scott decided to stick to the KISS principal... Keep It Simple Scott.

Scott explained, "A bunch of corporations made big donations to medical research organizations and to an environmental cause. They reallocated their advertising and development budgets to do it."

"And why was this important news to you?" Mr. Jones asked. "Does it affect you in any way?"

Scott answered, saying, "Yes it does. It also affects a lot of kids right here at the school and around the world. My uncle is an epileptic and so the money going to epilepsy is important. And tons of kids get Juvenile Diabetes each year from bad diet and a lack of exercise, so the donation to that research organization is important to millions of kids. The research on the hydrogen engine might help us fix the problem with the ozone layer and save a lot of people, kids included, from getting cancer. AND it'll help slow global warming and even stop pollution of the oceans because there'll be less stuff running off the roads and into the sewers and into the rivers and into the lakes and into the oceans."

"So you not only WATCHED the news, you also figured out how it might impact on you and your friends and relatives. That is excellent, Scott. This is EXACTLY how I'd like you to think while you watch the news and write your reports."

The kids started to realize that this trade was going to be more work than just studying for the exam. But a deal is a deal and they'd follow through.

"What did you find out about our maps?" Taylor asked. "How did we do?"

Chapter Twenty



This was bizarre. Taylor usually couldn't give a darn about school. He was a tennis player and that was his life. He just barely got through with fifties, but now, he was excited about learning.

"Well, some of you have a very good idea of the geography of the world. Others have a rather perverted view," Mr. Jones announced.

"PERVERTS? Are you calling us perverts?" Jake asked.

"A perverted view simply means that it's corrupt or distorted. The definition of the word perverted has actually been perverted hasn't it? You kids thought it referred to something sexual, didn't you?"

The kids giggled and so did Principal Toole.

"There are lots of words like this and you have to be careful how you use them and how you interpret them. It's all part of the lesson we're learning. Get the facts, Jack," Mr. Jones joked.

"Now, about your maps. It seems a lot of you have an exaggerated perception of the size of the United States. Most of you made it the largest country in the world, and it isn't.

"You also had a strange view of the size of Europe. You made it much larger than it really is, too. You made Canada, Africa, the Far East and Mexico much smaller than they really are AND you missed most of the Central and South American countries.

"So, one might conclude, that because you live here, you have a biased view of the size and importance of your own country," Mr. Jones explained.

"So why did we draw Europe bigger?" Stephanie asked.

"Possibly because most of you are of European descent, so you also make Europe larger than it actually is. If you don't know much about a country, you tend to draw it smaller. You kids have made size equal to your knowledge. The more you know, the bigger you made it. Now, who wants to tell me what this letter means?" Mr. Jones asked.

Kim put up her hand.

Mr. Jones intended to ask for her interpretation all along, and declared, "Kim Campbell, please enlighten us."

"Okay," Kim began. "The person who is writing this letter is responding to a request

from his teacher to make the teacher famous. The teacher thought he was as good as Aristotle. He's the guy who taught Alexander the Great. Everyone's heard of Alexander the Great. But this pupil thinks that the teacher did NOT do a good job. The teacher wasted the pupil's time, teaching him things he really didn't need to know and that really didn't help him rule his country. The teacher was arrogant and spent too much time trying to impress the pupil with how much he knew, and didn't explain much to the pupil. The teacher never taught the pupil about the geography of the world or other countries that were far away, or even near by. The pupil therefore had no clue what was going on in Europe or Asia or The Middle East. He also had no idea about what made his own ancestors... great leaders."

"So why was this important?" Mr. Jones asked.

Kim replied, "The teacher didn't teach the pupil geography, history or about world politics, cultures and economics. The pupil made uninformed decisions when he ruled his country and his countrymen eventually got rid of him. It also sounds like the pupil was intolerant of other people and cultures, too, and that got him into trouble. At least in the end, the pupil knew he made mistakes."

"That was interesting Kim, but where did you get the information about him being intolerant and losing his rule? That wasn't in the letter. Did you infer that?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Actually, I found out who the letter writer was and I did some research."

"That was very resourceful of you. And just who was the writer?"

"It was Aurangzeb, son of Shah Jahan, grandson of Akbar, great grandson of Humayun, great great grandson of Babar, descendent of Timur the greatest leader the world has ever seen," Kim explained.

Mr. Jones took a deep breath at the same time his eyes seemed to open wide in surprise. He kept his cool and asked, "And why is this important?"

"Because it was important to Aurangzeb and it was something his teacher never taught him."

"What? He didn't know who his ancestors were?" Mr. Jones said.

"He did, but he didn't know what made them great, and because of this, he did not rule as well as he could have," Kim added. "He made uninformed decisions based on biased and incomplete information."

"What makes you think his predecessors were so great?" Mr. Jones asked. "Is that what the encyclopedia said?"

"No, but I inferred that. And, my mom and Scott read a book on Timur and they figure the guy was totally awesome! But getting back to Aurangzeb, when I went on the Internet to look up Aurangzeb, there were lots of conflicting reports on him. It seems like many Hindus hated him. The Islamics were split, half liked him and half hated him. Some people felt that he was a great leader and others thought he was a murderous bigot.

"So, depending on what their own experience was, or what they heard from other people, or what they read in history books that may have been biased, they formed strong opinions and still hold on to them, even today. Even though Aurangzeb's been dead for over 400 years, and people have no direct personal knowledge or experience, they still have almost fanatical opinions.

"Even though I never met the man, and have only read a little about him, I think that his letter was sensitive and that he understood where he went wrong. Because of that, he

must have been a great man, he just didn't have all the facts, Jack," Kim jested.

"Kim, I'd like you to select Aurangzeb for your project. Is that okay with you?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Yes, I planned to," Kim admitted.

Not to be outdone, Scott piped in, announcing, "I'm taking Timur!"

Mr. Jones was surprised. These certainly weren't obvious choices by any means. He looked forward to what the kids would find out and report back to the rest of his class.

"So you students realize that this letter is not slamming the educational system, it is simply bringing attention to the importance of learning and the teaching of RELEVANT material," Mr. Jones explained.

"And how important world issues are," Amy added.

"That is SO right, AND from what we learned the other day, how important it is to look at world issues from many different perspectives," Mr. Jones concluded.

"Because depending on where you're coming from, and what your own knowledge and background is, you may decide to put your own spin on it," Alex said, building on what Amy said.

"I think I'm going to really enjoy this class," Mr. Jones declared. "I see the potential for some great world leaders — right here in this room!"

"Like me!" Alex declared.

He waited for a response...

"Shut-up Alex!" the entire class yelled out in unison.

Alex and his classmates weren't the only people getting a new perspective on things...

Chapter Twenty-One



Tuesday morning, after CCTV broke the news stories, O’Dinkle’s President, Paddy O’Dinkle, called an emergency meeting of his board of directors. They needed to discuss how to get to the bottom of this theft and how to ensure that it didn’t happen again. Over the few hours it took to assemble the board, their reasons for meeting, changed. O’Dinkle’s experienced an increase in sales of seventy percent.

It became more important to find out why this particular donation was driving demand, far in excess, of any previous marketing strategy.

The soft drink producers were also reeling. Fifty percent of their advertising budget was gone and each company was suspicious of the other. Who could have done this? Who wasn’t affected?

As with O’Dinkle’s however, perceptions changed as the hours passed. The soft drink guys received more good press than ever before and their sales skyrocketed. Not a single bottle of competitors’ juice, bottled water, sports drink or soft drink sold that day. Their combined sales increased twofold. This was a marketing miracle. But how could they sustain their gains? Who was the brain behind this?

Instead of tracking down the hackers to punish them, they were desperately trying to reach them to ask for their help to maintain sales.

As Ares of MogulChip analyzed the news, he knew something wasn’t right. “These companies wouldn’t have thought of this on their own. If this continues, I’LL have to do something for the little people!”

He’d rather spend money on the Oscars. He certainly didn’t want to be associated with the bulk of his marketplace. Ares placed a call to Paddy. “What’s with this new promotion you’re doing? You’re making the rest of us look like a bunch of schmucks. We’re all going to have to follow suit or risk losing market share. What possessed you to do this?”

“Ares, calm down. If you think about it, the whole thing makes sense. We’ve lost touch with our real consumer. It’s time we...” Paddy was at a loss for words.

Ares became suspicious. “So, who in your organization came up with this brainstorm, or did an outside agency develop this?”

“I can’t tell you,” Paddy stated.

“Why?” Ares asked.

“Sorry, Ares. Don’t know, can’t say,” Paddy answered cryptically.

“Excuse me? This happened without your authority?”

“Yes, it happened without anyone’s authority. It was hackers. They broke through the firewall and reallocated the funds themselves. I guess they did it to the soft drink and car guys, too. So far they’ve only hit Conglomerate members. We’re trying to find out who they are, so we can hire them to help us maintain this sales growth.”

“WHAT! You don’t want to prosecute the heck out of them?”

“No... Well, to be totally honest with you, that was the plan when we first found out what happened. But our sales are up 70 percent!”

“Seventy? You’ve got to be joking,” Ares replied.

“No, I’m not. They created a ton of positive press, gave us a huge tax write-off, and made us international heroes. I’m desperate to find them. Ares, could your people help me?”

“Sure! We’ll get to the bottom of this,” Ares promised. He hung up the phone and called his best investigators. He ordered them to meet him at O’Dinkle’s in thirty minutes. Then, Ares contacted his buddy, Billy Barrier, at ReallySoft, and told him what was happening.

“Darn,” replied Billy. “If word gets out that the net isn’t secure, it will jeopardize our entire industry. They’ll never let us implement ultimate-full-duplexing. If the Internet Advisory Board gets a whiff of this, they’ll be all over us! We’ve got to figure out who’s behind this before these nutcases go public.”

“I agree. Meet me at O’Dinkle’s. Bring your hackers and we’ll track down the people responsible,” Ares ordered. “They’ll pay... big time!”

“Cool it, Ares! We have to handle this carefully. It’s all about perception. We could make the hackers heroes and us the bad guys if we’re not careful. Maybe these thieves want to get paid off. We better see how much we can free up between Conglomerate members.”

“I don’t think that’s what they want,” replied Billy. “They could have taken the money for themselves if they wanted to. Do-gooders like this are dangerous. Like those darn KidsOpinionsCount kids. It’s impossible to get into their heads. They don’t think like us.”

It was 4:00 when Billy and Ares hung up their phones. The kids arrived home from school and the family was about to get a surprise.

Chapter Twenty-Two



RING... RING...

“Who could that be?” Tommie asked.

“If it’s supper time, it must be a telemarketer or a market research company,” Chris complained.

“Hello,” Tommie answered.

“Mrs. Campbell, this is Paddy O’Dinkle. I’m sorry for calling you at home and at suppertime, but I really need your assistance on a very important and time critical project. I’d like to meet you this evening — if it isn’t an inconvenience.”

“Why no, Mr. O’Dinkle, I’d be happy to meet with you. Can you give me some idea of what it is you’d like me to do? I want to make sure I’m the person you really want.”

“I need a quick turn around on consumer opinion. I don’t know if you noticed, but we made a rather substantial investment in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund. We really did it out of the kindness of our hearts and didn’t expect anything in return. The consumer is responding so positively, we wonder what it was about this investment that’s making them behave this way,” O’Dinkle admitted.

“Certainly, I can help you with that,” Tommie announced. “I can be there within the hour.”

“Perfect. I’ll be waiting.”

Tommie hung up the phone and turned to her family. “You won’t believe this! That was Paddy O’Dinkle. The positive press is really boosting their sales and he needs to know how to keep it up.”

“I thought you retired!” Scott said.

“I HAVE to do this. I need to find out what they know. “You guys are on your own for supper. Make what you want. I need to get ready.”

As Tommie got dressed to go out, the rest of the family ordered Chinese food for dinner. Before long, Tommie was off to O’Dinkle’s and the rest of the family was chowing down.

Tommie was excited about the project and worried about being found out. She pulled into the executive parkade of O’Dinkle’s and parked. When she started to open the van door, she noticed two black stretch limos pulling up to the private parking garage. One of

the license plates said, MogulChip. She remained in the van, closed the door and ducked down in her seat, just far enough so that her eyeballs could still look through the window. She watched the men get out of their vehicles.

“Good grief!” she said to herself. “That’s Ares from MogulChip and Billy Barrier from ReallySoft. What are they doing here at O’Dinkle’s? They must be here to see Paddy! I’ve got to find out what’s going on!”

As soon as the men were out of site, she jumped out of the van and ran to the elevator. Tommie rode it O’Dinkle’s floor. She exited the elevator and slowed down her pace as she approached the entrance to the executive suits. She tried to look calm. Tommie peered through the glass doors and saw Meagan, O’Dinkle’s secretary, escorting Ares and Billy into Paddy’s office. When Meagan returned, she found Tommie sitting in the waiting room.

“Mrs. Campbell, how are you? It’s nice to see you. I have to apologize for Mr. O’Dinkle. He has to postpone your meeting for a while. Can you wait?”

“Sure. I have some calls I need to make. Is there anywhere I can have some privacy?” Tommie asked.

“You can use Mr. O’Dinkle’s boardroom. You know the way.”

“Thank you Meagan.”

Tommie proceeded to the boardroom and closed the door behind her. She immediately phoned home — to tell the family the news.

RING... RING...

Chris answered the phone.

“Chris, you won’t believe this! I’m here at O’Dinkle’s office — and guess who’s in the other room — meeting with him?”

“I don’t know... George UU Tush? Who?” Chris replied.

“No, Ares and Billy. The big boys are here. Conglomerate big wigs.”

“What are they meeting about?”

“Oh, my goodness!” Tommie exclaimed. “Maybe they’re here to help O’Dinkle track down the hackers! We’re in trouble now! I wish I could hear through these walls.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m in O’Dinkle’s boardroom, right beside his office. I have the door closed. His secretary can’t hear a thing.”

“Is there an intercom in the room or something like that?” Chris asked.

“Yes, right here on the conference table, why?”

“Is it clearly marked?”

“Yes, it has buttons and room numbers assigned. Oh, I get it,” Tommie said nervously. “You want me to turn it on and listen in on their conversation.”

Sounding a bit like Alex, Chris explained, “Yes, just leave the cell phone on and put it by the intercom. That way we can all hear what’s happening, and maybe be better prepared to avoid detection,” Chris figured out loud. “I’ll get the kids and we’ll listen in at this end.”

“Make sure you don’t say anything or make any noise,” Tommie ordered. “Put Max outside. Last thing we need is him barking at something.”

“I’ll turn my transmitter off. Don’t worry.” Chris got the kids, put Max outside anyway, and waited for Tommie to turn on the intercom.

Her finger seemed to be poised over the button for hours, as only seconds passed.

“Did you do it?” Chris asked.

“I thought you were turning off the transmitter?” Tommie snapped.

“Do it and tell me you did it and I will!”

She was scared, but she did it anyway. It worked!

“Done!” she said proudly.

The Campbells listened, while Ares, Billy and Paddy discussed their plan of attack for their technical teams to find the Internet invaders. The plan was very sophisticated. Chris was surprised ReallySoft had the ability to infiltrate the underlying layers of the Internet without being detected.

“I thought this was off limits even to THEM!” Chris declared. “Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency... DARPA for short... was supposed to make sure commercial entities couldn’t access their tracking codes. These were only supposed to be used by the Pentagon, the Company, the CIA and the FBI, not ReallySoft and MogulChip! This is what I was talking about!”

“What are you talking about, Dad?” Kim asked.

Chris explained, “Only the government has the right to track hackers. Civilians aren’t supposed to have access to this capability. It seems like ReallySoft and MogulChip do. This isn’t right! DARPA needs to know all security risks so they can report it to the Internet Advisory Board. It looks like breaches can be detected, tracked and terminated without the government or the policing agency knowing. This probably means that the Internet is a lot less secure than we think. This could be very damaging for electronic commerce.”

The Campbell’s TV was on in the background. “Wait,” Scott said. “Listen to this! Barrier is buying two huge cable firms.”

“And, there’s more. He just bought Straight to Home TV. Now he owns the biggest satellite service provider!” Scott declared. “What’s that all about?”

“Not right now, Scott!” Chris ordered. They turned their attention back to the conversation on the phone.

“We’ll see you tomorrow night at the meeting. We’ll work on your problem tonight, but tomorrow we need to discuss more pressing matters. We need to get rid of those darn Eurasian computer manufacturers by using the KidsOpinionsCount site,” Billy told Paddy.

“I don’t know why I have to worry about that,” Paddy replied.

“You idiot!” Billy barked. “Have you got hamburger for brains? The ultimate-full-duplexing project has profit written all over it for you!”

“Oh, right, sorry. This whole donation thing has got me rattled,” Paddy admitted.

“Get your head on straight! The Conglomerate is bigger than all of us individually and you can’t forget it. Screw up and you’ll be out and Burger Princess will be in!” Ares declared.

As the men exited Paddy’s office, Tommie made sure she was hidden from view in the boardroom. She didn’t want to risk being seen. ‘Out of sight out of mind,’ she thought. Paddy closed the door behind Ares and Billy.

“Mr. O’Dinkle, Mrs. Campbell is in the boardroom,” Meagan announced.

“Thank you, Meagan,” O’Dinkle replied and proceeded to the boardroom.

Tommie quickly turned off the intercom. She left her cell phone on and slipped it under some papers, just in time.

Chapter Twenty-Three



“Tommie, sorry for the delay,” Paddy O’Dinkle said as he opened the door.

“Quiet! Mom’s on!” Kim announced.

Paddy continued. “I’m pleased that you were able to come on such short notice. I need you to find out why the consumer is reacting so positively to the announcement about the research donation to Juvenile Diabetes. We need to sustain our momentum in the marketplace.”

“Who created this marketing strategy?” Tommie asked. “There must have been some rational for doing it in the first place?” Tommie knew he didn’t have an answer, but if she didn’t ask such an obvious question, it might look suspicious.

“Well, as I told you, we did it for philanthropic reasons,” Paddy lied to Tommie. “I have a niece who is diabetic and I thought it was a good thing to do.”

“So, you decided to reallocate a large amount of your advertising budget, and you didn’t do an analysis of how this might affect your business?”

“Yes, I’m embarrassed to say. It must be good Karma. What goes around comes around. My restaurants are packed with people. Why do you think that is?”

Tommie couldn’t believe how this whole thing backfired. O’Dinkle’s food was part of the reason so many kids had diabetes. Now, because of the donation to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund, even more people, kids included, were eating there. How ironic.

“I need to conduct some on site consumer surveys,” Tommie replied.

“Do whatever you need to do. Spend what you need to spend. I’d like to hear your report as soon as possible.”

“I’m on it,” Tommie promised. She stood up to leave. She forgot the phone was under the papers. As she went to gather up them up, she accidentally hit the phone and knocked it across the table and onto the floor.

“Darn palm pilot,” she exclaimed as she quickly ran to grab it. Crisis averted. Tommie slipped it into her brief case, threw the papers on top and closed it quickly.

“I look forward to hearing from you,” Paddy said.

Tommie shook his hand, exited his office and headed back to her car. When she was safely out of view, she pulled her phone out of her briefcase to speak to Chris. “You guys still there?” she asked.

Chris turned on the transmitter. "Yeah, what happened?"

"I knocked the phone onto the floor... right in front of O'Dinkle himself," Tommie explained.

"We heard the rest," Chris said. "Fast thinking."

"So you heard he wants me on this right away. I'm heading to a couple of O'Dinkle's locations now to interview customers and develop a survey. If I can figure out how to maintain sales, it'll distract them from the kids and Mac."

"If you can figure out how to maintain sales, you'll be doing a lot of people a lot of HARM!" Chris challenged.

"I know. But my family comes first," Tommie replied.

"Maybe that's how Paddy O'Dinkle sees it, too!" Chris offered.

"It's all in the way you look at it," Kim said.

"Don't get all philosophical on me right now," Tommie replied. "I need to stay on this job to keep on top of what's going on. Maybe I can make some recommendations in my report, fudge the results a bit. I could suggest he bake a few things and cut down on the grease. I don't know. I'll figure something out. I've gotta go. See you later — and don't forget to leave me some of the ginger fried beef!"

Back at the Campbells, Scott declared, "Dad! They said they're using us to discredit the Eurasian PC. How's that going to happen if we think it kicks butt?"

Kim had a thought. "They must know something's wrong with it that we haven't found out yet."

"That could be, Kim," Chris acknowledged. "We better get on it, then. And we better see how it works with the new game." Chris and the kids proceeded to the game room. Kim and Scott put on the skins.

"If this game and system from Addictive is as hot as you say it is," Chris stated. "And if this new Eurasian PC makes it rock, that'll be two factors in its favor. It should make considerable inroads into the ReallySoft and MogulChip market shares. And what about the new player and the game itself, still no problems, glitches, weaknesses?"

"No. None, except for the fact that it's pretty addictive," Scott announced. "Far more than the current systems and games. I mean when a game gets your adrenaline going, that's something!"

The family activated the game. Scott and Kim were shocked and thrown to the ground.

"Unhook this darn piece of crud!" Scott shouted. "What the heck's wrong with this PC?"

"Turn it off!" screamed Kim. "Turn it off!"

Chris quit the game and shut down the operating system on the PC. "Are you kids all right? What happened?" Chris said, as he helped the kids take off the skins.

"I think this thing electrocuted us!" Scott declared. He was clearly shaken up.

"Yeah, I've never been shocked like that before!" Kim added. "Could this be the connection Billy was talking about, between the Eurasian PC's and us?"

Scott answered. "This MUST be it. The Eurasian PC doesn't work with the game. They figure we'll give it a bad review!"

Kim wondered out loud, "Why wouldn't they think we'd give the GAME a bad review?"

“Because it’s American, that’s why,” Chris assumed.

“Really? Do you think that’s what they’re counting on?” Scott asked.

“Well, are they wrong?” Chris replied.

Scott and Kim thought for a moment. Scott replied, “If we didn’t have that discussion about advertising and stuff, I think I automatically would have given the Eurasian PC a bad review. Mostly because it’s not playing the Addictive game.”

“Me too,” Kim concurred. “Now what?”

“What if Addictive Games or MogulChip or Really Soft or someone else we don’t even know about, sabotaged the PC to make sure it didn’t work with the game?” Scott asked.

“This is just like the WTO protesters said happens!” Kim replied.

“Kids, I suggest we start your assessment on the EPC. You need to evaluate all of the other factors that measure its performance,” Chris said.

“Okay, Dad,” Kim agreed.

Chris, Kim and Scott, spent the rest of the evening working on the Eurasian PC. Except for the bad experience with the game, they were arriving at the same conclusion that Chris and Tommie had reached. By 10:00 they were convinced it was an awesome PC and chip.

MMMM... CLUNK...

“Mom’s home!” Scott exclaimed.

Tommie didn’t even make it past her office, when she heard Kim and Scott bellowing, “Mom! Come downstairs!”

Tommie dropped her briefcase in her office and rushed to the game room. “What’s up?”

“Mom! You were right!” Kim exclaimed.

“Aren’t I always?”

“We’re serious, Mom!” Scott whined.

“Me too! So what was I right about?”

“They’re trying to keep the Eurasians out of the market and they’re using dirty tricks to do it! They don’t play fair, Mom!”

“Who are we talking about here, The Conglomerate?”

“Yes, who else. They sabotaged the Eurasian PC. We’re sure of it!”

“Chris, do you want to explain?” Tommie requested. “Maybe you’ll be a little less emotional.”

“We tried the game with the Eurasian PC and it shocked the kids.”

“What did?”

“The game.”

“I don’t understand. Maybe I should get the dog in here. Maybe he’d make more sense.”

“Okay, I’ll explain the whole thing,” Scott proposed.

He went on to say how the game gave them a shocking experience and that they think that the PC might have been rigged to do it.

“So, Mom, if we tell everyone that the Eurasian PC’s a ‘gotta-have’, then we have to

point the finger at Addictive Games and force them to make their game compatible. This will delay their release,” Scott concluded.

Kim added, “And, if we get behind the game, then we have to push the release of the Eurasian PC back because we won’t endorse anything that won’t play the new game.”

“And if we tell everyone that they are both great, but that they are just not compatible?” Tommie asked.

“I’d rather see if it’s been sabotaged, first. Then it’s a whole other story,” Chris reasoned.

“We better be sure of what we’re doing,” Tommie observed. “What’s the plan?”

Chris admitted. “We don’t have one at this moment. I need to see if there’s any software out there that I can get my hands on to analyze the PC.”

“So, Mom, what did you find out?” Kim asked. “How did YOUR investigation turn out?”

Tommie explained the information she had collected at the few O’Dinkle’s she had visited. “I was amazed that the places were absolutely jammed packed. The people were talking about Paddy O’Dinkle as if he was the most generous guy in the world!”

“You’re joking!” Chris said.

“No, I wish I was. I phoned my buddy over at Researchers To-Go and hired some of his people. They’ll be doing the legwork and I’ll do the analysis. That way I can do the job for Paddy and still be home for you guys.”

“Great thinking, Mom,” Kim said.

“I thought so,” Tommie replied.

WHIMPER... WHIMPER...

“What’s that noise?” Scott asked.

“It sounds like Max,” Kim answered.

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know. I wonder what HIS problem is.”

“He’s okay,” Tommie admitted. “He’s been doing that for a couple of days. You kids just haven’t been home enough to notice.”

“Is he sick?”

“Love sick, maybe.”

“Huh?”

“Puppy love. I think he misses his girlfriend from the kennel,” Tommie suggested.

“What girlfriend?” Scott quizzed.

“Scott, don’t be such an idiot,” Kim ordered.

“Oh, his doggie girlfriend from the kennel. I get it.”

The whimpering got louder.

Chapter Twenty-Four



“How are we going to get Max out of this funk?” Kim queried.

“Let’s tell him a few jokes,” Scott suggested. “Animals have a sense of humor you know.”

“Get serious Scott,” Kim insisted. “Of course they don’t!”

“Are you sure?” Chris asked. “YOU animals are pretty funny.”

Now the kids whined along with Max. “Daaaad!”

“We need to take his mind off Bibbi,” Tommie suggested.

“Who?” Scott asked.

“The female dog Max bred with,” Tommie explained. “She has a very impressive pedigree.”

“Bibbi? What a weird name,” Kim commented.

“Actually, it’s quite common in some areas of the world,” Tommie said. “Especially where the Russian wolfhound originated.”

Scott wanted to look smarter than Kim, and jumped in, “Yeah, Timur’s wife’s name was Bibbi.”

“That’s right, Scott,” Tommie announced.

Max’s whining got louder. It’s as if he heard them mention her name.

“So, why would Max get bred with such a snobby dog?” Scott asked.

“Because Max has an impressive pedigree himself,” Chris replied.

“He does?” both kids responded.

“Mom, I never realized that Max was a distinguished dog. How come we got him?” Scott asked.

“He was a gift. I did some work for a Russian businessman and he gave us Max as part of the payment.”

“I thought we got him from the pound,” Kim admitted.

“When you two got home from school the day we got him, I don’t think either one of you asked where he came from,” Chris laughed. “You were just so happy we finally broke down and got you a dog.”

Tommie recalled the day. “You kids played with Max until all three of you fell asleep in the family room and I couldn’t wake you up until the next day. Now, you barely take

him for walks.”

The kids were feeling guilty.

“We need to get Max and his girlfriend together,” Scott offered.

“That’s going to be pretty hard when she lives in another county,” Tommie replied.

“Maybe we can set up a chat room for the two of them,” Kim offered. She was joking.

“Hey, that’s a good idea! Why not?” Chris added. “If her owner agrees, we can let them see each other over the web cam?”

“It just might work!” Tommie declared. “Let’s give this some thought, but right now I have some work to do, and if I’m not mistaken, you two have some homework.”

“We can do that later. Let’s call Bibbi’s owner now!” Scott insisted.

“Yeah, Mom,” Kim added. “Don’t you have any romance in you?”

Chris laughed. “Don’t say a word,” Tommie ordered. “Or you’ll…”

“Be in the dog house?” Chris guessed.

Tommie laughed, and gave in to the kids’ request. “All right. I have her number upstairs. I’ll get it. But we can’t spend all night on this. Like I said, I have work to do and I’m sure you two do, too.”

Tommie raced upstairs, retrieved the number from her kennel records and returned. Chris had already found an extra web cam and figured out how to set the dogs up.

“Man, Chris, you didn’t waste any time.”

“Anything for true love,” Chris mooned.

“You’re joking, right?” Tommie returned.

“Call them, Mom!” Kim insisted.

Tommie placed the call.

A lady answered.

“Hello?”

“Is this Mrs. Orłowski?” Tommie asked.

“Yes, it is.”

“Mrs. Orłowski, this is Tommie Campbell, I got your name from the breeders. I’m calling on behalf of our dog, Max.”

“Oh, Max, that handsome devil of a dog you have. My Bibbi has been pining away for him ever since we brought her home. I wish we could do something about it. She’s barely eating. I’m afraid she’ll harm the babies, if she is pregnant.”

“We’re having a similar problem here. My kids and I were commenting on Max’s behavior. My son Scott came up with an ingenious idea.”

“What? Tell me,” Mrs. Orłowski insisted.

“I hope you don’t think we’re all off our rocker, but he thought we could set up a chat room for the dogs. Let them see each other and talk to each other over the Internet.”

Mrs. Orłowski thought Bibbi was more human than dog, and was in full agreement.

“This is a wonderful idea! I have a camera attached to my computer and I have the voice software on it as well. I use it for my long distance calls to the old country.”

“This is going to be easier than I thought!” Tommie replied. “My husband’s already figured how to do it. He has it set up on this end so that when the dogs want to see each other, all Max has to do is click on a mouse. When there’s no movement in front of the monitor for over a minute, the connection automatically shuts off.”

“Your husband must be a genius!” Mrs. Orłowski announced.

“He’s a computer geek,” Tommie admitted. “I’ll put him on the phone and he can talk you through the set-up on your end.”

Chris was a little annoyed with Tommie’s comment, but it was true, so he really couldn’t argue. ‘At least she didn’t say nerd,’ he thought to himself as he took the phone from her.

“Mrs. Orlowski? This is Chris Campbell. I’m pleased that you think we can set this up for the dogs. Maybe we can put them out of their misery, so to speak.”

Mrs. Orlowski laughed.

Chris explained, “You just need to get your dog to sit in front of the PC, have your camera on and give her a mouse she can click. I suspect they’ll be able to work it whenever they want.”

Mrs. Orlowski turned on her PC, called Bibbi, and sat her in front of the camera. The Campbells did the same with Max. The cameras were both turned on and the connection was made. The dogs took to it like... ducks to water... They were taking technology where no dog had gone before. Problem solved... sort of.

It was difficult to sleep with Max going on and off the computer, ‘talking’ to Bibbi til all hours. They were in ‘puppy love’. The Campbells decided they would have to move the computer to a woof proof room.

Chapter Twenty-Five



The next day, the kids were busy at school, Tommie worked on Paddy O’Dinkle’s project, Chris dropped into his office, and Max chatted it up with Bibbi. All was right with the world. When they arrived home from school, the kids found Tommie in the kitchen, on the speakerphone, saying, “Really RL? Are you sure this is legitimate?”

“Yes, it is,” RL replied. “I’ve got it right here in front of me, in writing. I’ll fax it over to you.”

“Great, you know the number.”

“Call me back when you’ve made your decision. I think it’s pretty generous — and a bird in the hand and all that.”

“I know. I wonder if he made a similar offer to Matt?”

“Give him a call. You know I can’t say one way or the other. He’s my client, too.”

“Got you. Client confidentiality. I’ll call him now and I promise I’ll get back to you once I’ve had a chance to talk to the family.” Tommie hung up the phone and turned toward the kids. Her face lit up with a huge smile.

“What was that all about?” Kim asked.

“Hey, Kids. How was your day?”

“Great,” Scott said. “Come on, what was that call about?”

The kids were more than curious.

“Okay, you know that was RL, right?”

“Right!”

“Well, he got a call from Huckster’s attorney. Huckster’s made me an offer.”

“He’s going to pay you what he owes you?”

“Yes, and more apparently.”

“Isn’t that weird?”

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

“Huckster? Lose? You should be suspicious. If he won the no-speak, your little case should be a slam-dunk,” Kim figured. “Why does he want to settle?”

“Yeah, Mom. Kim’s right. There must be some catch.”

“Well, RL doesn’t seem to think there is one. At least not one that will affect me. He could have all sorts of other reasons for settling,” Tommie replied. “Why should we care

what they are as long as I get paid? And think of all the good we can do with that much money. There are all sorts of good causes out there..."

"We're giving the money away... again? Even the rich and famous don't give their money away.... Why should we?"

"End of discussion. WE have more than we need... period."

"I still think we can't trust Huckster," Scott insisted.

BEEEEEP... BEEEEEP...

"There's the fax. Let's see what it says," Tommie said. She ran to her office, retrieved the fax and brought it back to the kitchen. The kids were sitting down, munching on snack bars and drinking milk.

"Read it!" Kim ordered.

"Let me sit down, first!" Tommie snapped. She was just as excited as the kids were. Tommie got as comfortable as she could and started reading,

"Settlement of all claims and rights.

"For the sole consideration of \$4,000,000.00 which HucksterCo Corporation agrees to pay and the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged by Tommie Campbell, Tommie Campbell hereby releases and forever discharges from any and all claims, demands, damages, actions, causes of action or suits of any kind or any nature whatsoever for any and all Loss of Income which may have resulted or may in the future result from any relationship, contractual or otherwise, between the parties.

"HucksterCo and Tommie Campbell declare that the terms of this settlement have been completely read and are fully understood and voluntarily accepted for the purposes of making a full and final compromise adjustment and settlement of any and all claims of Tommie Campbell against HucksterCo for loss of income and for the express purpose of precluding forever any further or additional claims for loss of income arising out of the relationship between Tommie Campbell and HucksterCo, its subsidiaries, agents and employees."

"Holy legalese," Tommie said.

"What does this thing mean?" Scott asked.

"It means, that she takes the money and she has no rights to take him to court again. That's what it says," Kim exclaimed. "Mom, I don't think you should do this. I don't like this."

"Kim, RL said this is standard. Everyone who settles has to sign a document like this."

"But it's not fair. It's like blackmail. It's like, if you don't agree to never come after us again for anything we might ever do to you, we won't give you the money."

Scott piped in. "You know Mom, I think Kim's right. This sounds like extortion."

"It's the way the system works. I can't change the system. You kids know that. I either take the money now or risk going in front of a judge and jury and having Huckster buy them off. You know he can do it!"

"We know," the kids moaned.

"I still think there's something fishy about this. If he can buy off the judges and jury, then why is he trying to pay you off?" Scott exclaimed.

"He can't buy them all off," Tommie reasoned.

“There’s still another letter I haven’t read yet. It’s the cover letter from his attorney. It came with the settlement offer.” Tommie read out loud, “RL Bailey, 555 Center City Drive... blah blah blah. Dear RL:”

“Dear RL!” Kim exclaimed. “That’s kinda familiar, isn’t it?”

“That’s just how they write,” Tommie explained.

“But that sounds like they’re friends. Are you sure RL isn’t in on this scam?” Scott accused.

“No, RL isn’t in on this scam,” Tommie insisted. “Are you going to let me finish or not?”

“Okay, go ahead, Mom,” Scott said.

Tommie read, “Dear RL: This letter confirms that you received a check in the amount of \$4,000,000.00 to settle the Tommie Campbell matter. This also confirms your representation to me that this concludes and settles all matters related to Tommie Campbell and HucksterCo, including any claims for fees or anything else that I cannot think of right now. I will file the Motion to dismiss the case as soon as you confirm that Ms. Campbell has accepted the offer and the check has been deposited in her account. Thanks.”

“He HAS the check!” Kim exploded. “You didn’t say you’d accept it yet! Why does he have the check.”

“It looks like HucksterCo is pretty sure Mom’s going to accept the deal,” Scott said.

“So, Mom,” Kim queried. “Are you?”

Tommie started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Kim asked.

“Well, RL told me to read over the cover letter. He said you could drive a Mack Truck through the legal loopholes they left in it.”

“Like what?”

“What judge is going to accept a document that says its claim covers ‘anything else they cannot think of right now.’ How stupid is that? If I didn’t know better, I’d say their attorney is leaving the door open for me to come back at them.”

“Why would they do that?”

“Maybe their attorney actually has a conscience and doesn’t like what they’re doing to people. Who knows? RL said, this was a good letter and that we really don’t have any worries. We should take the money.”

“So, you two have it all figured out,” Kim said.

“Well, that’s his job. That’s why I’m paying him the big bucks,” Tommie laughed.

“Are you going to ask Dad for his opinion?”

“Certainly.”

MMMM... CLUNK...

Sounds like he’s home.

Chapter Twenty-Six



As Chris walked into the house, his ears were accosted by the shrieks of his family, coming from the kitchen. “Dad! Get in here, right away!” Scott yelled.

“Yeah, hurry up!” Kim added.

“Yeah, Chris, move it!” Tommie threw in for effect.

Chris, as usual, took his time. There was no rushing him, except maybe if the house was on fire. He sauntered into the kitchen. “What’s up?”

Scott couldn’t contain himself. “Mom got an offer!”

“An offer she couldn’t refuse?” Chris joked.

“Sort of,” Tommie answered. “Huckster wants to settle. He’s offered four million.”

“WOW!” Chris replied. “Are you going to accept it?”

“What do you think?”

“I’m guessing you are,” Chris replied.

“I think I’ll call Molina first, and see what he’s doing,” Tommie answered.

“He got an offer, too?”

“I think so,” Tommie said as she placed the call.

When the phone was picked up at the other end, Tommie could hear hooting and hollering. It sounded like a big celebration going on. ‘I guess he got an offer,’ she thought.

“Matt speaking.”

“Matt, it’s Tommie. How’s it going?”

“I just got an offer from HucksterCo!” Matt exclaimed.

“Me too!” Tommie announced.

“Is it what you expected you were owed?” Matt asked.

“More!” Tommie replied. “How about you?”

“Way more. My family is beside themselves. They can’t believe it. Have you told yours?”

“I sure have. They’re having a different reaction. They don’t trust the offer.”

“Really? Why?”

“I guess it’s just because we don’t trust Huckster. It’s that simple.”

“Are you going to take it?” Matt asked.

“We’re leaning that way... but cautiously,” Tommie admitted. “You know, it’s odd... there’s no no-speak gag order.”

“I didn’t see one on my offer letter, either.” Matt admitted. “Maybe we SHOULD be suspicious. That’s just not like him.”

“I think we’re just a little paranoid,” Tommie laughed. “RL says everything is fine.”

By now the family had heard enough and they wanted Tommie to get off the phone. They were making the ‘hang-up’ sign with their hands.

“I think my family wants me to get off the phone. If anything changes with you, please let me know. Otherwise, I guess I’ll see you at the next meeting of the Center City Millionaire’s club,” Tommie laughed.

As soon as she hung-up, Kim blurted out, “What are we going to do with the money?”

“I think we can save that decision for another day,” Tommie replied. “I don’t have the check and we haven’t tried to clear it through the banks yet. Maybe it’ll bounce.”

“So, Mom, are you still going to write the book?” Kim asked.

“Darn right I am,” Tommie replied. “I have a rough draft finished already. Anyone want to read it?”

“How did you get it done so quickly?” Chris asked.

“You know me, when I take something on, I go nuts until it’s done.”

“That’s why you haven’t been in bed for the last two weeks. I thought it was my snoring,” Chris admitted.

Tommie laughed and said, “So if I give you guys a copy, you’ll edit it for me, right?”

“We’re kinda busy Mom,” Scott whined.

“I’ll edit it Mom,” Kim offered.

“Great Kim. I’ll print you off a copy.”

As Tommie started to walk to her office, Scott announced, “Just in case any of you forgot, we have a chat room to do tonight!”

“Ghees, I did forget. What are you two doing?” Chris asked.

Scott replied, “Kim and I decided to post the Leary interview, the one he did with Todd Fahey, and then just have a chat room about that. We don’t need to be doing the celebrity thing every week. It’s getting boring.”

Tommie was pleased with their idea. “I’ll meet you downstairs after I print you a copy of my draft book AND call RL and tell him we’ll take the money.”

Chris and Scott cheered.

Tommie turned around and spoke to the boys before disappearing out of site. “I’m giving the money away.”

“That’s still a great reason to cheer,” Chris admitted.

Scott looked a little disappointed.

“I’ve got a couple of phone calls to make,” Chris said. “I’ll see you in five.”

When Tommie reached her office, she opened her file and sent her book to the printer on her desk. “What the heck? It won’t recognize the printer? Something must be wrong here.” She considered her options. “I’ll just send it over the network to Kim’s printer.” She change her commands and pressed Print. The icon showed it was working.

“Done. Now to give RL the good news. He’ll make over a million in contingency fees.”

Kim and Scott were already downstairs posting the Leary interview and opening the chat room. When they finished, they set-up Max's computer in a spare room in the basement. They wanted to get some sleep. When they returned to the game room, they were surprised at what they found.

"Look at the response we're getting to the Leary Page! It's amazing!" Scott said.

Scott and Kim watched the screen as it called up the fourth page of questions posted by members. "This is the best response to a page we've had!" Kim agreed. "But who are we going to get to answer these questions?"

Just as Kim spoke, the screen went blank. The page and the questions disappeared. A note popped up on the screen. "This posting is unsuitable for viewers under the age of 20 years."

"The Internet Police!" Kim declared.

"No, Billy Barrier or The Conglomerate, probably!" Scott guessed.

The KidsOpinionsCount site was bombarded with emails asking, "Where's Leary?"

Kim and Scott quickly uploaded the page, and again, it was shut down.

By now, their voices had risen to a deafening level. They were so upset, they were screeching at one another.

"This is crazy! We got this page off the Internet. How can it be a problem?" Kim shouted.

"Those jerks!" Scott replied.

"They're out to destroy us!" Kim exclaimed.

"Just like they probably destroyed Leary!"

Tommie and Chris heard the shouting and rushed to the game room.

"What's happening down here?"

"Why are YOU yelling, Mom?" Kim asked.

Tommie shook her head and dialed it back. "You kids sounded upset. What's going on?"

Chris asked, "What's with the screen? How come..."

Before Chris could finish his question, Scott answered. "The Conglomerate doesn't want kids knowing what they're up to! They shut us down."

"Let's get the chat room back up and running," Chris said.

"Right, Dad. We still have Freedom of Speech in this country don't we?!" Scott announced.

Chapter Twenty-Seven



Chris started the chat room. Most of the kids agreed with the article. They never realized before, how controlled they were by television, the Internet, phones, video and computer games and other electronic, light based, entertainment. They wanted to know what their options were.

“That’s a great question,” Scott reasoned. “I wish I had an answer.”

“Look!” Kim said. “Kids are coming up with their own answers! Fantastic!”

Some kids said that they volunteered and that they reduced their time in the light by almost fifty percent. Other’s said that they took up a hobby. Something that didn’t need electricity or batteries. While still other’s said that their parents were so mad at them for spending so much time on the computer and game players, that they took them away from them. They said they thought they’d died and gone to H E double hockey sticks, until they discovered skateboarding or BMX biking, or even walks in the park.

The chat room was humming, but before long, it shut down, again.

“Not again!” Kim shouted.

Chris was totally frustrated. “I have no idea how they’re doing this! I’m a leader in my field, and these network intrusions have me baffled.”

DING... DONG...

“Who could that be?” Kim said and ran upstairs to answer the door.

“Surprise!”

It was Jack and Mac. “What are you two doing here?” Kim asked.

“We came to sit in on your chat room,” Mac said. “The site said you were doing Leary tonight.”

Kim was happy to see Mac because he might be able to help Chris with the site. “This is good timing. We need your help, Mac.”

“And I was just dropping by to see how your game review is going,” Jack admitted. “I’m getting pressure from my bosses. They really want to know what you kids think. We just showed up at the same time.”

Kim wasn’t sure she was happy to see Jack. There was still the question about the Eurasian PC that hadn’t been properly addressed and she wasn’t sure she wanted Jack to know about it.

Kim called out, “Mom, Dad, Scott — Jack and Mac are here!”

They all headed downstairs to the game room. Chris was in the server room trying to figure out what the problem was.

“I’m in here, Mac!” Chris shouted. “Can you come and help me?”

Mac looked at Scott and Tommie. “I guess I’m being summoned,” he joked as he met up with Chris.

Jack, Tommie and the kids got comfortable and discussed the game.

Chris filled Mac in on what was happening with their site. “You mean someone has been infiltrating your firewall, and playing around with the site?” Mac asked.

“That’s right. And I have no idea how they’re doing it!”

“Are you sure it’s not the government?”

“I don’t think so. Whoever’s doing this is trying to undermine the kids and their influence with their peers. I don’t think the government is concerned about our site. But I DO think big business is.”

“And you don’t think those are the same thing?” Tommie asked, as she walked into the server room and surprised the guys.

Meanwhile, in the game room, Jack and the kids tried to get the site up and running again. As the pixels began to populate the monitor, the picture that came into plain view, wasn’t what they expected.

“Now what!” Kim said.

“What the heck is this?” Jack asked. “Isn’t that your dog?”

“Dad! What did you do?”

Chris heard Scott and replied, “Nothing! What’s the problem?”

“Did you cross the wires with Max’s computer?”

Tommie, Mac and Chris rushed to the game room to see what Scott was yelling about. There, the six of them watched Max and Bibbi on the split screen. “So, what’s this all about?” Mac asked.

“We set up a woof room for Max and his girlfriend,” Scott explained. “If Dad didn’t do it, someone, like The Conglomerate, must have crossed the connection or something.”

“How are we going to get control of our site again?” Kim asked.

The dogs disappeared as suddenly as they appeared. The KOC logo flashed up on the monitor. “Maybe we’re getting back to normal,” Tommie said. She spoke, too soon.

Chapter Twenty-Eight



“What the heck is this now?” Chris asked.

“It looks like a spy cam’s in some meeting or something,” Tommie explained.

“Hey, that’s Ares and that’s Billy and Paddy... and there’s Huckster!” Jack said.

“It looks like a meeting of The Conglomerate!” Scott exclaimed. “Where is this feed coming from?”

“Shush...” Tommie ordered. “Listen. We can figure that out later.”

Ares was speaking. “If we don’t delay the Eurasian PC compliance, we’re going to be in big trouble. Once these guys standardize with us, they’ll be in our face like the Japanese were with electronics and automobiles. We’ll have no chance of maintaining our margins OR our volumes. And worst of all, they’ll blow the whistle on our ultimate-full-duplexing plans!”

“I agree,” Billy Barrier said. “We have to stop this compliance initiative and their proposed draft amendment. We need to blow them out of the water... and soon! If the EMC...”

“The what?” O’Dinkle interrupted.

“The EMCA, the Eurasian Computer Manufacturers Association, O’Dinkle.”

“Oh, sorry.”

“Like I was saying, if the EMCA complies and gets that amendment through, the International Standards Organization will kibosh our version of ultimate-full-duplexing capability. It’ll take us years to convince the ISO to let us continue, and by that time, they’ll have leaked our plan to the public. We’ll all lose business — big time.”

Chris suddenly remembered something Scott had said. “That’s it!” Chris exclaimed. “This is WAY bigger than simply market share of PC sales!”

“What is?” Tommie asked. “It all sounded Greek to me!”

“I’ll explain later,” replied Chris. They continued to watch the monitor and listen.

“Don’t you think we should let the government know what we’re up to? They’ll take care of the American National Standards Institute for us,” Big Periwinkle said.

“You know as well as I do, it’s to our benefit to keep the government out of it,” Ares declared. “They’re nothing but a bunch of screw-ups. Look what they let happen to Billy. They let that go way to far.”

“At least that worked to make the public think that we’re all enemies and not cohorts,” O’Dinkle replied.

“That little court case was a major inconvenience,” Billy lectured.

“Cry us a river, Billy!” Divine replied. “Mr. Vega, would you please update us on Addictive Game’s plan to discredit the ECMA.”

“The KidsOpinionsCount plan is working. We’ve determined, through our monitoring, that they’re hooked on our game, our player and our new peripherals! The poser Eurasian PC was equally as impressive... until they tried it with our game.”

“What happened?” asked Billy.

“We built a shocking experience into the connection. They won’t be singing its praises, that’s for sure.”

“Brilliant! But can we be sure they point the finger at the Eurasian PC and not at your product?” asked Big Periwinkle.

“Judging by how much time they’ve logged on the game to date, on YOUR PC... it’s a given,” replied a confident Mr. Vega. “They’ll support domestic over foreign!”

“When do you expect them to finish their report on the game and to reject the Eurasian PC?” Billy asked.

“Anytime now. I’ve got my man Jack on it. He’s got a lot riding on this game, financially. He won’t let me down,” Vega assured the members of The Conglomerate.

Kim, Scott, Chris, Tommie and Mac turned to Jack.

“So YOU’RE part of this, are you?” Chris said accusingly.

“No! My company is trying to get me to quickly move the kids through the assessment phase, that’s all,” Jack explained. “Once they give it a positive review, I get a \$50,000 bonus.”

“I’m not sure we can trust you, Jack,” Chris admitted.

Before they could interrogate Jack, the President of Better Health commented, “We’re so close to ultimate-full-duplexing I can taste it. It’s taken us over twenty years to get this technology developed.”

“You need to push that review,” Divine directed. “We need to move, before the real Eurasian manufacturer contacts the kids and they find out they’re testing a poser.”

“You better have good news soon, Vega,” Ares threatened.

“Have I ever let The Conglomerate down before?” Mr. Vega said.

“If you had... you wouldn’t be here tonight,” Barrier stated. “You wouldn’t be here at all!”

“And Huckster! Have you taken care of your problems, like we told you to?” Ares asked.

“I could have beaten the charges,” Huckster whined.

“I asked you a question.”

“Yes, all mighty Ares. I made them all offers they couldn’t refuse.”

Tommie, Kim, Scott and Chris all gasped.

Ares turned to Billy and whispered so that Huckster couldn't hear. The Campbells could... "I wish we could get rid of that arrogant twit. He's dangerous."

"I know, but he's the biggest in the U.S."

"I know of an offshore company who's bigger and better."

"Yeah, but our policy is to buy American."

"I'd like to make an exception in Huckster's case."

"Maybe, the Men of Business have the right idea. Get it wherever you can, as long as you make a buck."

"Those guys have kept a low profile after the authorities arrested Smith. I wonder what they're up to."

The Conglomerate didn't know Huckster was playing on both teams. If they did, who knows what Ares and Billy would do to him.

Ares turned his attention to the group again. "So, are we all attending the WTO meeting in Singapore, next month? I'd like to see a show of hands. Who's going?" Almost everyone put their hands up.

RING... RING...

It was a cell phone in the meeting room. Billy picked it up. "Conglomerate sub-group number two." He listened intently. His face turned white as the blood drained from it. "All of them? ... Yes, Sir."

"Who was that?" Ares asked.

"The Big Gun."

Everyone in the room, tensed up. It was obvious, the Big Gun, was very important and very scary. "What did he want?" Devine asked. "Is he upset with any of us?"

"No, but it looks like sub-group five is all but non-existent."

"Five?"

"Yes."

"The hydrogen initiative?"

"Looks that way."

"They brought it on themselves — those idiots," Ares commented. "They should have taken steps, decades ago."

"This is serious, Ares."

"I know it is. If we don't take care of business properly, we could be next. As I see it, we only have two big problems right now... that Eurasian Amendment... and Huckster, here."

Huckster was visibly shaken. Sub-group five was even more powerful than sub-group two, and it sounded like they had been dealt, a deadly blow. Huckster needed to divert attention from himself. He needed to Pass the Buck, so to speak.

"I think the problem is that darn KidsOpinionsCount site. Not to mention this blasted Tommie Campbell. She's one of the people I had to settle up with. Tommie Campbell is the bane of my existence."

O'Dinkle looked concerned. "Did you just say Tommie Campbell?"

"Yeah. She used to work for me, until I let her go. Why?"

"I hired her on contract."

"You idiot."

"She does a great job! What's the problem?"

The video feed stopped and the KOC site was back up and running. The Leary interview was on the site and someone was answering the kids' questions.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



“What do you make of what we just saw?” Tommie asked. “I still don’t think they’ve connected me to the kids and the kids to the KOC site.”

“I don’t believe this!” Chris said. “We’re smack dab in the middle of this and they haven’t really figured it out yet. It looks like the right hand doesn’t know what the left is doing. Let’s hope it stays that way.”

“It’s just a matter of time. Especially if we have a traitor in our midst.”

The entire family looked at Jack.

Jack didn’t know how to respond. He, not so cleverly, tried to shift some of the suspicion to Mac.

“Mac, it looks like we all work for The Conglomerate,” Jack commented.

“Jack,” Chris said sternly. “I’m afraid we’re going to have to ask you to leave our home.”

“But I’m not being paid to spy on you!” Jack pleaded. “I’m NOT the bad guy.”

“Maybe not, Jack. But until we’re sure, it’s best if you leave,” Chris insisted.

The kids were visibly upset. They weren’t sure if they agreed or disagreed with their dad. But they didn’t say a word.

Jack, looking like he just lost his best friends, headed upstairs and walked toward the front door. Chris followed him to make sure he got all the way out. When the door closed behind Jack, Chris locked it. He didn’t like treating Jack this way, but things were just a bit to weird, and getting rid of one of the unknowns gave him a bit of comfort.

When Chris returned to the game room, he was verbally attacked by Kim. “Did you have to be so mean?”

“I did what I had to do. You agree with me, don’t you Mac?”

Chris knew that Tommie had a soft spot for Jack and he wasn’t sure he was going to get her support.

Mac wasn’t sure one way or the other, but he felt that Chris needed some help. “I can’t say Jack’s a mole, but I can say, Chris did the right thing. He’s eliminating potential problems.”

“It sound like you’re treating this whole thing like a computer glitch,” Tommie said. “It’s people we’re dealing with, here.”

“I know, but I have to be pragmatic and objective.”

Scott came to Chris’s rescue. “I agree with Dad. I like Jack, but if there’s a chance he’s in with The Conglomerate, we need to get rid of him. If Jack is clean, he’ll understand.”

“Okay, so can we get down to business?” Chris asked.

Scott was chomping at the bit. He had something important to say. “Mom! I told you that offer was suspicious! Huckster had to settle because The Conglomerate told him to.”

“It doesn’t matter who made him settle. He made the offer and I’m accepting it. Now let’s move on! Chris, what did you mean before when you said, ‘That’s it!’” Tommie asked. “What’s way bigger than the PC market share? What’s ultimate-full-duplexing and why is it so important?”

Chris explained. “That technology will allow them to watch you, while you’re watching TV or on your PC, phone or any other gizmo with two way communications capability. That’s why Barrier bought the cable firms and Straight to Home TV. They can run ads directed right at your specific desires and influence your actions. This is far more intrusive than monitoring credit card purchases and bombarding everyone with the same advertising. Ultimate-full-duplexing will enable them to completely manipulate our minds and our lives through the communications media.”

“Why is this Eurasian PC and proposed amendment a problem?” Scott asked. “Why do they want us to discredit it?”

Mac was on the same page as Chris, now. He explained, “If the Eurasians become a serious player in the computer industry, the World Standard Organization will have to consider the European and Asian ethics and sensitivity to privacy.”

Now, Kim was in sync. “Look at how the Europeans have drawn attention to genetically modified foods!”

“Exactly!” Mac replied.

“What are you talking about?” Scott asked.

Kim clarified, “The Europeans decided they didn’t like the fact that we were biologically altering the foods we export and didn’t tell anyone. They feel they don’t know what the potential downsides of these foods are on human health. The Europeans raised so much public awareness of the issue that our companies are having a difficult time debunking it.”

“Well, I think it’s a bunch of hooey and no one should care about it,” Scott argued.

“At least the Europeans are giving the consumers a choice by informing them,” Kim retorted. “Even Canada is trying to get all food labeled properly. We’re the only ones that don’t care much about the issue and we’re letting our industry ram it down our throats whether we want it or not!”

“I can see that this new teacher of yours has really got you kids using your noodle,” Chris commented.

“Is that a noodle made from genetically modified wheat?” Mac asked, trying to lighten up the conversation.

“You shouldn’t joke about this, Mac,” Kim lectured. “You know how the companies work. Profit is their only motivation. Did you know that eight companies control almost all of the agriculture and food industry in the U.S.”

“What does this have to do with anything?” Scott barked. “How is this the same as the Eurasians and their PC?”

“The Eurasian PC isn’t built to enable ultimate-full-duplexing,” Chris explained. “Europeans have been fighting the wide spread use of this technology. If The Conglomerate doesn’t maintain control of the PC industry, they’ll lose access to consumers.”

“It’s all starting to make sense,” Kim revealed. “The Conglomerate plans to control us all with light. It’s just like Leary predicted! What can we do?”

“I get it now!” Scott shouted. “We’ll be their consumer robots and they’ll turn us off and on with the light from the TV and the Internet and our phone displays!”

“What should we do about the situation?” Mac asked.

“We just have to introduce a little Chaos into their plan of order,” Scott suggested. “Just like Mr. Klein said. Find Chaos.”

“The game! Order and Entropy! The Universal laws! Chaos was missing. But why did The Conglomerate’s game give us that clue?” Kim asked. “Maybe someone sabotaged the Addictive Game!” Kim drew a deep breath and continued, “This is getting really confusing. I don’t know who’s the bad guy and who’s the good guy anymore.”

“What are you two talking about? Let’s slow down and review what we know so far,” Mac suggested.

“What we THINK we know,” Kim corrected him.

“Okay, what we think we know,” Mac continued. “The Conglomerate is trying to put the Eurasian PC manufacturers at a disadvantage in the marketplace by delaying the approval of their ISO compliance.”

Chris added, “Addictive Games sent us a modified Eurasian PC, pretending to be the distributor. They must have booby-trapped it so it wouldn’t play the Addictive Game equipment. We have to figure out how to de-bug the PC to make sure that it’s okay. Then we can decide if it gets a thumbs up from us.”

“Now that we know this is a set-up, we have to be careful to make sure we blow the whistle on the right people,” Scott said.

“I just got some special software. I can run a limited diagnostic on the PC and see what, if anything, comes up,” Chris explained. “I’ll do it now.” He went to his office to work on the PC.

“While your father’s checking out the PC, we need to determine the current status of the proposed amendment to the international standards,” Mac directed.

Mac opened a special web site and downloaded all of the proposed amendments that were submitted for review in the last year. They quickly went through each one, until they hit something that had been submitted by the ECMA.

“Here’s one!” Mac exclaimed.

Chapter Thirty



They got lucky.

“I think this is it!”

“This has to be it. It’s the only EMCA proposed amendment,” Mac observed. “This amendment has to do with adding hardware to the physical layer of the Internet without the consent of the end user. It says here that all changes to the Internet, which involves ultimate-full-duplexing, must be approved by the end user.”

“So what’s The Conglomerate’s problem with this proposed amendment?” Scott asked.

Mac explained, “If this gets approved and applied globally, it means that The Conglomerate’s ability to install devices for monitoring use will have to be done on an individual basis. In other words, each person will have the ability to decide if they want it, and in order to do that, they’ll have to be told about it. The Conglomerate will NEVER go for this.”

“Why would the Europeans do this?” asked Tommie.

Mac answered, “Europeans and Asians are more cautious than Westerners, when it comes to their privacy. They will not allow the communication medium to be used as a surveillance tool for industry. It seems, The Conglomerate has been counting on this for years, and now that the technology is here, they’ll probably do anything to stop this amendment from going through... including using the kids to discredit the Eurasians.”

“Now that we know this, what do we think?” Tommie asked. “Do we agree with the Eurasians or The Conglomerate? Whose side should we take? Maybe The Conglomerate is right.”

“Mom!” Kim replied in shock.

“I’m just playing the devil’s advocate. You guys seem to be sure The Conglomerate is the bad guy.”

“Of course they’re the bad guy!” Kim exclaimed. “The Conglomerate wants Order so they can control our thoughts, AND what we buy.”

“Maybe people WANT to be spoon-fed,” Tommie countered. “Look at how many people collect air mile credits and stuff like that. They’re giving The Conglomerate every bit of information about them and they choose to do it! This just takes it one step further.”

“The problem is, people won’t be able to choose, if this is done under the cover of the Internet... if you get my drift,” Mac explained.

“I say that we use our web site to tell our members what’s really happening and let them make their own decisions. That way the consumer is in the driver’s seat — instead of The Conglomerate OR the Eurasians. We have to tell the people what ultimate-full-duplexing means and that they’ll have the ability to choose whether they want it or not. If we state that in our review, then The Conglomerate won’t be able to ram it down people’s throats!” Kim explained. “We need to present the information fairly and accurately and without bias.”

“Diplomacy,” Scott decided. “I get it. Make both of them winners on the KidsOpinionsCount site. We can only do this if the Eurasian PC’s really compatible. We need to wait until Dad’s finished.”

At that moment, Chris entered the family room.

“What did you find out, Dad?” Kim asked. “Is there a problem with the game technology or did someone really infect the PC?”

“The PC is infected all right,” Chris replied. “Someone rigged it to short circuit and shock the game player as soon as it was activated. This test software isn’t totally reliable, but it did pick this problem up. I could do a more extensive review at work.”

“Are you sure it was rigged?” Tommie asked.

“That I know for sure,” Chris replied.

“How do you think they got the PC?” Mac asked.

“I did a search on the serial number. The Conglomerate must have stolen it,” replied Chris. “According to the U.S. Patent Office, this PC is supposed to be there, awaiting patent approval.”

“Man, these guys have access to everything!” Scott declared.

“So, we think we know that this chip works but that someone tampered with it to make it appear to be incompatible with Addictive’s games and peripherals,” Kim remarked. “We need to prove it will work.”

“We need the real McCoy,” Mac said.

“And I need at least a day to test everything,” Chris admitted.

“How will we get one?” Scott asked.

Tommie commented, “We can’t do anymore tonight.”

“We should probably call it quits for now. We can contact the manufacturer tomorrow, and see if they’ll send us one,” Chris replied.

“I agree. I’m brain dead anyway,” Mac admitted. “I’m heading home. Let’s get together tomorrow night. I’ll be back around four.”

“You kids head up to bed,” Chris directed. “It’s late and we need to get some sleep. We can think clearer if we get some rest. We’ll deal with this tomorrow.”

Scott and Kim, appeared to do as they were told. They headed up to bed, but they didn’t go to sleep, at least not right away. Scott called Alex and Kim called Amy. Both of them had missed the chat room, but for different reasons.

Scott reached Alex, but Kim was unable to contact Amy. She was out for the evening with her mother at some charity event.

“Alex, did you see what happened on the KOC site tonight?” Scott asked.

“No, I was at a dance recital for my dumb little sister.”

“So, how was it?”

“How do you think it was?” Alex replied. “It was H E double hockey sticks!”

“Come on, Alex.”

“All those little boys dressed up in leoterds. It’s just not natural,” Alex complained. “It gave me the creeps.”

Scott snickered to himself. Alex was pretty clever... leoterds... but he didn’t want to encourage him, so he changed the subject.

“We had an even weirder night,” Scott admitted.

“So, what happened on the site?” Alex asked.

Scott went on to explain how The Conglomerate removed the Leary interview and shut down the chat room, and probably put Max and Bibbi’s woof room on the KOC site. He didn’t mention the fact that someone else, they suspected, televised the meeting of The Conglomerate, right into their game room. Scott thought that he should keep the whole thing with the Eurasian computer review, confidential for now.

“Did you get the site cleaned up?” Alex asked.

“Eventually,” Scott replied.

Alex had something other than computers on his mind. “Scott, you’ll never guess who called me and asked me out?”

Chapter Thirty-One



“Animal, vegetable or mineral?” Scott teased.

“Animal of course!” Alex replied. “WILD animal!”

“Which species?” Scott asked.

“Human. Ha Ha. Guess. Guess who called me!” Alex said.

“Amy?” Scott suggested.

“Amy? Why would you say her?” Alex barked. “No, think HOT! Think REALLY hot! Think triple decker! Think triple threat! Think Cynthia, Erica and Allana!”

“Alex, I think you’re hallucinating.”

“Look Scott, ever since the dance, the popular chicks have been calling me,” Alex declared. “They think I’M hot stuff now.”

“Alex, if they ever found out how you set yourself up, they’d grind you into hamburger,” Scott joked.

“Well, no one is going to tell them, right? Those stunts we pulled were for the betterment of mankind... or at least the student body. If I happen to reap a few benefits... so what?”

“Alex... You’re gonna fall hard buddy. This little jump in the polls won’t last long. You better take advantage while you can. I suppose your social calendar is pretty full.”

“As a matter of fact, I’m double and triple booked on the weekend! I’m going to be exhausted. But, can I be totally honest with you, Scott?”

“Sure.”

“I’m scared. I’ve never gone out on a date before and I haven’t got a clue how to act. I know I can’t be myself or they’ll bail. Can you give me some suggestions?”

“Me? I’ve never gone on a date either,” Scott admitted. “What makes you think I’d know what to do?”

“Because you’re a sensitive kind of guy. Maybe Kim could help me. Do you think she’d give me some pointers?”

“If you consider a sharp stick in your eye, a pointer, go ahead and ask her,” Scott replied. “Maybe you and her could go on a practice date. That would be good for a laugh.”

“AND you can go on one with Amy and we can all figure it out together. This is

probably more complicated than anything we've done so far isn't it? Who can figure girls out?"

"Then why do you want to go out with them?" Scott asked.

"I don't really, but when the most popular, conceited, stacked, stuck-up girls ask me out, how can I turn them down? It would ruin my reputation forever! Aren't we supposed to WANT to go out with girls at our age?"

"Alex, you always talk a good talk when it comes to girls, but I never realized you were such a chicken."

"Look Scott, you know guys... we always exaggerate about everything! The truth is, I don't want to date. When I talk to the other guys who have girlfriends, they sound like they have no freedom. The girls always want to go to the mall, or to a movie, or just talk about nothing on the phone, or on the Internet. Who has time for that? These guys are wasting their life."

"Yeah, I know," Scott agreed. "Taylor is going out with Stephanie and he has to walk to and from school with her... every day! She never lets him go out with the guys and she shows up at all his practices and matches. She even makes them hold hands. It's like they're chained together."

"Why does he do it?"

"That's a good question, Alex. Why are you doing it? You still haven't explained that to me."

"Because, if I don't, they'll think I'm queer. Okay? Is that a good enough reason for you?"

"Alex! That's stupid!"

There was silence on the phone for a few seconds. Scott was thinking and then proposed, "Why don't you just pretend to go out with Kim? We could all pretend to go out with each other and then no one would suspect you were gay then."

"I'm NOT gay!" Alex exclaimed.

"I didn't mean you were. I meant if we hung out as a group, people would just think you were dating Kim and I was dating Amy. We can be friends and have fun and not have the rest of the dating garbage to deal with."

"Great idea. I'll just tell the girls that I'm already dating Kim."

"Wait a minute. You'd better run this one by Kim, first," Scott warned.

"That's true. We need to talk to the girls about this."

"I need to get to bed," Scott whined. "Let's deal with this tomorrow. You're not doing anything with your hot prospects until the weekend right? ...So we have some time to figure this mess out."

"Thanks," Alex sincerely said.

"What are friends for," Scott replied. He was extremely sympathetic and empathetic. Scott felt the same way as Alex. He wasn't ready for, or interested in, dating. He liked their plan to be a foursome.

Now, he just had to sell it to the girls...

Chapter Thirty-Two



The next morning, the kids stumbled downstairs to join Chris and Tommie for breakfast.

DING... DONG...

Kim ran to the door to answer it. It was a courier with a trolley piled high with packages. He asked Kim to sign for them, which she did. She then called out to the rest of the family to help her bring them into the kitchen.

“What’s this?” Scott asked as they put the packages on the kitchen table.

Kim opened one of the packages. Inside, she found a PC and letter. She read it over quickly. “I don’t believe this! It’s from the real Eurasian manufacturer. They’re asking us to assess the PC and consider entering into a performance review deal. It’s almost the exact same thing we got from Addictive Games. Let’s set it up with the peripherals and the game and see if it works.”

“Are we sure that’s who it’s from?” Chris asked. “Maybe this is another ploy. Maybe Jack told The Conglomerate that we’re on to them. Grab that courier and let’s see if he’s legit.”

As if she had wings, Kim flew out the front door to catch the courier. Kim was ecstatic when he showed her his identification and he confirmed that the packages came by shipment from Frankfurt. Kim ran back into the house and excitedly informed the family, “Well it couldn’t be because of Jack. The shipment took three days to get here... from Frankfurt!”

“This must be a coincidence,” Tommie declared. “But whatever it is, I’m glad it happened. This should clear things up for us.”

“Now, we just have to see if it works!” Scott announced. “Dad, can you do YOUR thing on it?”

Chris replied, “I’ll take this equipment down to my business today. I’ll get my people to run complete diagnostics on it. If, and only if, it checks out, THEN you kids can do YOUR thing!”

“Awesome!” Kim exclaimed. “I can’t wait to see how this PC runs the Addictive Games.”

“Me neither. Mom, what if we just skip school today and go to the office with Dad,”

Scott proposed. "That way we can test the PC as soon as he's finished with his tests."

"Nice try... but," Tommie replied.

Scott cut in, "But..."

Tommie cut him off, "No buts about it. You're going to school!"

"But..." Scott tried again.

"For the last time!" Tommie exclaimed.

"What are you, the but police?" Scott countered. "You won't even let me get my sentence out!"

"It's because I know what you're going to say. Now, both of you, finish up your breakfast and get going to school."

"Daaad," Scott whined.

Chris wasn't about to get caught in the middle... he just stood on the sideline and replied, "Whatever you and your mom work out is okay with me."

Scott knew he wasn't going to win. "Okay... school," he reluctantly complied.

Chris dropped them off at school on his way to work. It was going to be a long day. The seconds took minutes to pass, the minutes took hours to pass...

BZZZZ....

Finally! The last bell of the day. Scott and Kim raced home, just as Chris and Mac pulled into the driveway. They couldn't wait to find out the results.

"So what's it going to be Dad? Do we get to try out the game? Is the computer okay?" Kim asked. She couldn't wait for the response. "I'm going to get the skin on right now!"

"Go ahead," Chris agreed. "The computer is kick-butt!"

"Man, it must be good if Dad said the word butt!" Scott exclaimed.

Chris realized that he just sort of swore. "Kids, don't tell your mom. It slipped out, and it shouldn't have."

"Dad, you just said butt. What's the big deal?" Scott replied.

Chris gave Scott the evil eye, and Scott knew it was a big deal. He wouldn't say another word. He headed into the house after Kim. By the time Chris and Mac got the equipment out of the van and into the game room, the kids were all dressed and ready to go.

"It's going to take a few minutes to set this up," Chris explained.

"Just hurry Dad!" Kim insisted.

Again, seconds seemed to take minutes to pass...

"Ready," Chris declared. "We can give the game a go."

Mac and Chris started the game and watched the kids. Everything appeared to be working fine. The kids had decided to both try to get into a basketball game... just to be safe. It worked, and they were running their butts off on the spot. They were having a great time, as minutes passed like seconds. Chris decided to shut them down and get their response.

Time is relative.

"Dad! Why did you have to shut it off! We just got started!" Scott whined.

"You've been playing, whatever you've been playing, for over twenty minutes!" Chris declared.

"You're kidding!" Kim exclaimed.

"Am I a kidder?" Chris responded.

"No. Okay. So it was twenty minutes. It worked fantastic," Scott announced. "I think

we can give this equipment a big thumbs up!”

Tommie had just walked into the game room. She overheard Scott’s last words. “The Eurasian PC checks out does it?”

“It’s awesome!”

“So we can post a glowing review of the Addictive game AND of the Eurasian PC AND we can tell the kids what ultimate-full-duplexing is. Does that about wrap it up?” Tommie stated.

“Yup!” Scott said, as he pulled out a DVD from his school backpack and slipped it into the PC.

“What’s that?” Mac asked.

“The review!” Kim replied.

“When did you write that?” Tommie wondered out loud.

“Mom, what do you think we did all day in school?” Kim asked.

“Right. What was I thinking? Of course... you were writing the review. How stupid of me to think you were doing school work.”

“Hey, YOU made us go today. You should have guessed we couldn’t concentrate on school,” Scott said, making it sound like it was all Tommie’s fault.

“So how did you know the Eurasian PC would perform?” Chris asked.

“We just knew,” Kim said. “We have ESP, just like Mom.”

“Okay, so let’s see what you’re going to send out,” Mac requested.

The kids pulled their review up on their computer screen. Tommie, Chris and Mac read it over as the kids created the link to their web site. Here’s what they said.

Dear KidsOpinionsCount Members

We’ve got some great news for you!

First, Kim and I were the first and only kids asked to check out the newest Addictive Game player, peripherals and games and we’re here to tell you... they’re awesome! This new game player will immerse you in the game. You get into their body suit, which we call the skin, put on the visor and play without joysticks or keyboard or anything. It’ll be like being on a Star Trek holo deck... really! And you can tell your parents that it’s totally safe. The game is hooked up to your vitals with body monitors and it will only let you play as long as it is safe. In other words... you can’t hurt yourself playing this game.

The only downer about this game is that the peripherals can only be used by one person. You can’t share them. That means, everyone needs to buy a skin for themselves.

Now, for the second great announcement. We also had the opportunity to review a brand new PC from Eurasia. This PC is awesome, too. It outperforms everything on the market today and from what we know, there’s nothing being released in the next year that can match it. So, if you’re looking for a new PC, you have to check this one out.

Now for the most excellent news... The new PC makes the new Addictive Game Player work amazingly. They are compatible, and together, they have to be the best entertainment you can buy.

We’re giving the new Addictive Game Player, the peripherals and the games, AND the new Eurasian PC — all Big Thumbs Up.

Now, for the serious part of our review. It has come to our attention that some companies are trying to build and enable something called ultimate-full-duplexing into the underlying physical layers of the Internet. The Eurasian PC will not enable ultimate-

full-duplexing.

Here's what ultimate-full-duplexing is and you can make your own decision if you want it.

Ultimate-full-duplexing will enable the people who are sending signals to electronic equipment, to actually watch YOU. We mean REALLY see you through your TV or your PC or your telephone or your GPS in your car... anything you have hooked up to satellite, cable, wireless, telephone lines... It's more intrusive than the Internet gremlins checking out the web sites you've visited... it actually WATCHES you.

If you think about it, there are some good things about this and some bad things. It should be up to you to decide if you want to let them do this or not. That's why we want you to know about it, because if certain companies get their way... this would happen and no one would even know about it. We just didn't think this was right. We think you should have a choice, and that's why we're telling you about it, and that's why we're not saying if it's good or bad.

YOU have to decide.

So, it's up to you. What will it be? Enable or Disable?

They waited for the kids and The Conglomerate's response.

'Would the KOC site be Enabled or Disabled,' they wondered.

**We hope you enjoy the next book!
But Officer**

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 insnsitive 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 fibres 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 as 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. Barons 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

Sources: The Bantam Medical Dictionary, Revised Edition, Bantam Books, 1990
Barron's Medical Guide, Dictionary of Medical Terms for the Nonmedical Person, Third Edition, Barron's 1994

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 short-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

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