

WHIZ TANNER
and the
Mysterious
Countdown

A Tanner-Dent Mystery

Fred Rexroad

Cover Design/Illustration: Alexander T. Lee



Awesome Quest Mysteries

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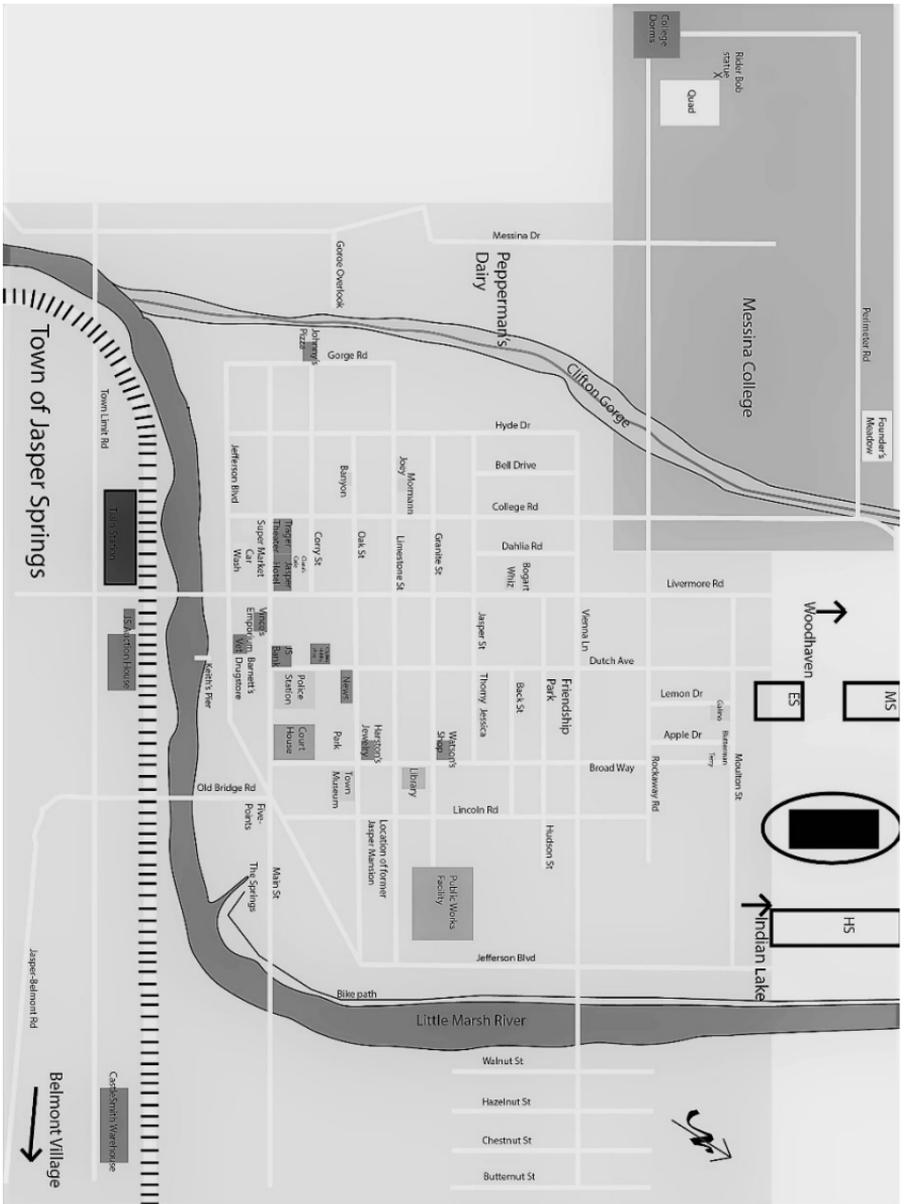
To:

Ian

For character inspiration

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Go to www.WhizTanner.com for a downloadable map of Jasper Springs.

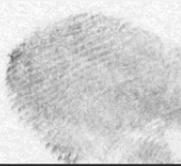


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AGENCY**

“We solve crimes, mysteries, problems...”

Wilson “Whiz” Tanner
Chief Investigator

www.TannerDent.com



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“We solve crimes, mysteries, problems...”

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Director, Field Operations

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CHAPTER 1

A Lost Book

Whiz Tanner and I both eyed the stranger hurrying down Jane Street. Everybody in New York seemed to walk fast but this guy was unusual. He moved somewhere between a fast walk and a run—but not quite either. And, he did this while balancing an overflowing armload of stuff.

We were in New York to visit Whiz's Uncle Wilson—our last big summer hurrah before we buckled down to the hard work of seventh grade. Well, hard for me, Whiz would breeze through like he did with all schoolwork. We just woke up to our first day in the city without rain. So, after climbing out of bed, we hung our heads out the window to take in a few big breaths of the fresh New York air. Cities have a different smell from Jasper Springs, but this smelled so clean after all the rain.

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Uncle Wilson lives in the city with Aunt Rebecca who was away in Idaho for the month, working with the Shoshone and Bannock Indian tribes. That gave Uncle Wilson a perfect excuse to have us visit. Whiz said that made her the catalyst for our vacation. Of course, he would use a Whiz Word like catalyst to describe her. He told me later—after I asked—that a catalyst is a chemistry term for something that causes a reaction to occur. Aunt Rebecca leaving for the month caused Uncle Wilson to invite us to New York. I think he was bored without her so she was the catalyst.

I've always liked Aunt Rebecca as much as Uncle Wilson and any catalyst that got me a trip to a big city is alright with me—Yeah for Aunt Rebecca!

I was thinking about all the sights we were going to see today as I watched the guy racing down the street.

“Hey, Whiz! Did you see it? That guy just dropped something.” The top item in his armload dropped from the stack and landed next to one of those trees that grew out of little rectangular dirt patches in the sidewalk. “Hey, mister,” I yelled.

He didn't turn around.

“He has earphones plugged into his ears, Joey. He cannot hear you over that and the street noise. We need to catch him.”

Whiz closed the window and we both ran out of the room and through the apartment. As we jumped down the front steps to the sidewalk, the guy turned the corner at the end of the block. We ran over to the object he dropped. It was a book.

“It landed on the soft dirt,” Whiz said as he picked it up. “I am sure that is partly responsible for why he did not hear it fall.”

“Let's catch him,” I said.

We both took off at a run. I got to the end of the block first and looked down the cross street. Nothing. Whiz caught up and stopped beside me.

“He vanished, Whiz.”

“It appears so,” he responded. “He could have entered any of those doorways or shops.” We eyed every possible doorway and opening the guy could have used.

“What should we do? We could put the book back where he’d dropped it ... in case he retraces his steps when he realizes it’s gone.”

Whiz turned his attention to the book. “From the binding and markings, this appears to be a library book. We could turn it over to the nearest branch. Uncle Wilson would know.” He paused and looked strangely at the book. “Or ... not.”

Without another word, he turned and hurried back toward Uncle Wilson’s apartment, leaving me still looking down the street for the guy. Too many doorways—he could have ducked into any one of them. I gave up and ran after Whiz, catching up as he got to the top step. We both went in and I followed him straight to the kitchen table. Uncle Wilson was busy making sandwiches as we entered. He was packing a picnic lunch for us to take as we explored the city.

“What’s up? Where did you guys take off to?”

“Somebody dropped a book,” I said. “We tried to chase him down, but we lost him.”

Whiz was concentrating on the book as he sat down. I don’t know how he walks around without banging into stuff when he’s like that. His eyes were glazed over in his typical Whiz World stare.

“What’s up, Whiz?” I asked a little loudly in order to jar him from his dream state.

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“I have read this book, Joey.”

“What is it?” asked Uncle Wilson.

“A rather obscure math book, Uncle.” He flipped through some of the pages but didn’t look up. It was almost as if he was studying a clue to one of our cases.

“Oh brother, this is summer vacation, Whiz. I don’t want to get involved with a math book mystery.”

“Relax. The subject of the book is not important. That is not the big mystery.”

“What big mystery?” I asked. “We saw a guy drop a book. If this is a library book, then we can return it to any branch, you said so yourself. They get the book back and contact the guy who checked it out—end of mystery.”

“I read this book last spring,” he said. I don’t think he heard anything I said.

“That’s no mystery.” Uncle Wilson gave a small laugh. “You’ve read everything.”

“No, I mean I have read *this* book.” He waved the book in the air. “This particular book.”

“You weren’t in New York last spring—let alone at the library,” I responded. “How could you’ve possibly read this particular book?”

“Joey makes a good point, Whiz.” Uncle Wilson’s laugh softened into a smile.

“This book is from the Jasper Springs Library.” He declared.

“That can’t be,” I said.

“Look.” He opened the book to the first page. Stamped in red letters were the words *Property of the Jasper Springs Community Library*.

He closed the book and I saw the cover.

“*Flatland*? What’s it about?” I asked. It didn’t look like a math book to me.

“As I said, it is an interesting book on mathematics.”

“*Flatland*? That doesn’t sound like a math book. It sounds more like an atlas before Columbus tried to sail around the world. Math books have titles like, *Algebra I*, *Fractions Are Your Friends*, *Rectangles for Dummies*, or *6X – 2Y Uses for Prime Numbers*.”

“Actually,” Whiz went on. “*Flatland* is about mathematical dimensions. A mathematician named Edwin Abbott wrote it, but he used a pseudonym, A. Square, when he first published it over a hundred years ago. The story is told from the point of view of someone from a world with only two dimensions—a flat land that has length and width but no depth as we experience in our three-dimensional world.”

“Sudo what? Now in English, please.” I didn’t even pay attention to the rest of his statement.

“A pseudonym is a fake name. Authors quite often write something under different names—not their real name. If you recall our treasure digging in Founder’s Meadow a few weeks ago, we discussed Mark Twain being a pseudonym for Samuel Clemens.”

Now that he brought it up, I remembered—the conversation, not the word.

“And you read this book?” Uncle Wilson asked. “I don’t think I’ve ever read a math book that wasn’t a school textbook. And even then, I wouldn’t say I read it.”

“I read it last spring for an extra credit assignment in Mr. Hassan’s math class during one of my pull-out sessions, but that is not important. We need to

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determine who checked this book out so we may return it to him.”

I didn't know where he was going with this, but I felt my New York vacation quickly drifting away. “I guess we do have a mystery,” I said, reluctantly. But only a little reluctantly. It's been several weeks since we were involved in a good crime back home, so I was a little bit interested in a mystery—even if it was just how a library book could travel from Jasper Springs to New York.

“There is a mystery here, most assuredly. It is, however, unlikely that we will find our stranger again in New York, unless he realizes he dropped it and comes back down Jane Street looking for it. But perhaps he is a Jasper Springs resident and we can give it to him upon our return.”

“I sure didn't recognize him,” I said.

“Me neither, Joey, but we only saw him from the back and Jasper Springs is big enough that I have not met everyone. However, the *who* part will be solved as soon as we contact the Jasper Springs Library. I am quite sure Mrs. Turner will be happy to know the book will be safely returned. Even if she does not yet realize it has been lost.” Whiz glanced at the time on Uncle Wilson's kitchen clock while he paged quickly through the book. “It is much too early for the library back home to be open so we must delay that avenue of inquiry.”

That satisfied my math anxiety for the moment. “That's simple enough, then. We can call the library later today and solve it instantly ... after we do some sightseeing.”

“That is only part of the mystery, Agent K,” he said softly while Uncle Wilson was busy putting stuff

away in the refrigerator. “Someone has defaced this book.”

Uh oh. He used my Agency code name for the first time in over two weeks, that surely meant we were just seconds away from a new case.

“Did they cut words out like Mr. Roget did on the case we solved for the Jasper Springs Library?”

He didn’t answer. But he flipped through the pages for a second time, I saw that there were many letters circled—in orange ink. The third time through, he went slowly, page by page as his eyes did their Whiz World stare. He saw something.

“These marks are new,” he said. “They were definitely not here when I returned the book.” He paused a moment, then said softly, “Orange ink ... I’ve never seen orange ink.”

“I have,” Uncle Wilson said as he returned to the table. “In fact ... wait just a moment.”

Uncle Wilson headed to his study. When he returned he had a pen and a notebook in his hand and a big smile on his face.

“I’m sure it means nothing,” he said. “But look at this?”

He handed the pen to Whiz.

“Write something,” he said.

Whiz took the notebook, opened it, and wrote.

“Orange ink,” he declared, after examining what he had just written.

“Yes, Whiz. I got that pen from one of my clients. He graduated from the University of Tennessee and orange is their school color. Those are the only pens he uses. He buys them in bulk from the alumni association. He says there is a group of them that do it.”

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“I must admit, it is farfetched, but we must consider all evidence.” He made a note on the top of the paper, in orange. Then he asked under his breath, “Where else might we find pens that write in orange ink?”

“I wonder if Messina College has yellow and green pens,” I added. “Their colors are yellow and green. Maybe they alternate each word in a different color.”

I laughed at my own joke and Uncle Wilson chuckled a bit. Whiz just gave me a look—but I think I detected the slightest twinge of a smile. I got to him. He went back to examining the book. But I made a mental note to ask my sister Patty if the Messina book store had any of those pens—ya never know.

Suddenly, Whiz got an excited look on his face.

“Joey, this is a message! These circled letters make up words.”

I looked on as he moved his finger from one letter to another—spelling out a word.

“But why are they only on some pages?” I asked. The first couple of pages had circled letters, but after that, there were pages with no circles and then farther on a page with circles.

“I have not figured that out, yet. We are still quite early in our investigation.”

My mind did a little flip-flop. He officially said *investigation*. So ... I guess my New York vacation just turned into a case for the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency.

End of Chapter One

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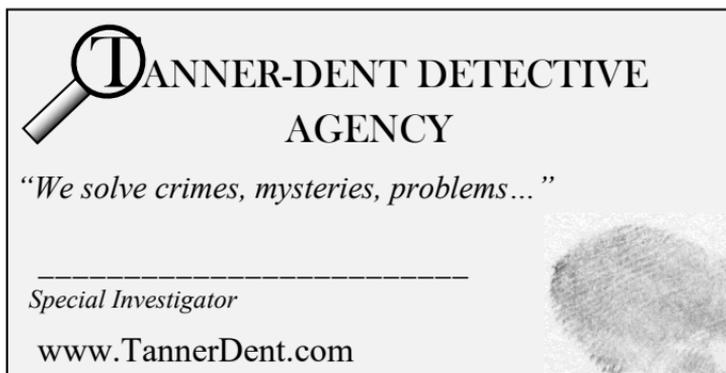
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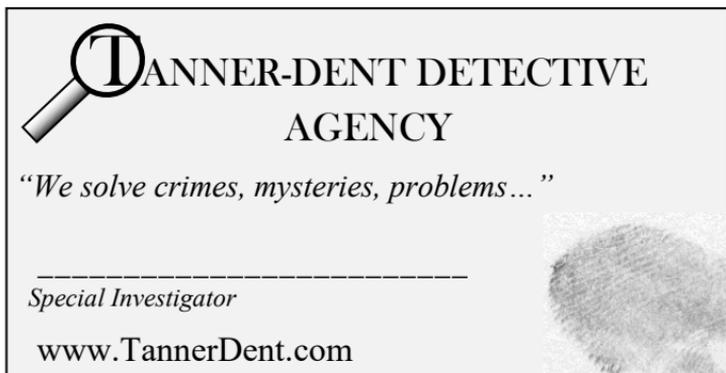


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