

WHIZ TANNER

and the

Mysterious
Countdown

A Tanner-Dent Mystery

By FRED REXROAD

Illustrated by SUSAN REXROAD

To
Ian, for character inspiration

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AGENCY

"We solve crimes, mysteries, problems..."

Wilson "Whiz" Tanner
Chief Investigator

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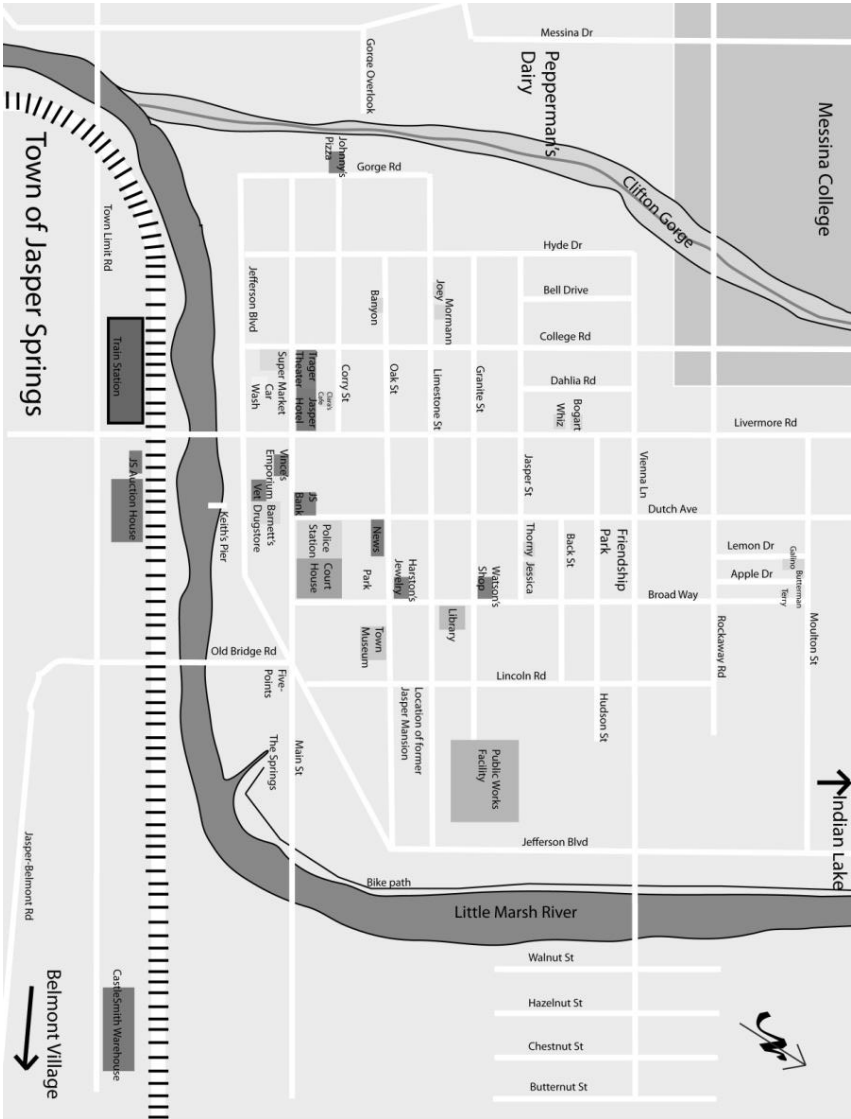
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CHAPTER 1

The Phone Call

Right off the bat I'm going to fill you in on a few things just so you know me and my buddy, Whiz, and why we were able to jump on board a multi-state crime mystery that would have scared off most sixth-graders—or I should say rising seventh graders. I'm Joey Dent and I live at 152 Limestone Street in the town of Jasper Springs, and until school let out, I was in the sixth grade here in Jasper Springs. Don't tell anybody, but I'm also Agent K. Let's keep that our secret, okay?

I'm just an average kid with a bigger than average propensity to get involved in interesting things. For those of you who are wondering, 'propensity' is what I call a 'Whiz Word'. Whiz, I'll get to him in just a minute, uses big words a lot, and I pick some of them up for my own use. Propensity means that it happens easily for me. I have an

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ability to find mysteries—actually mysteries seem to find me.

Now, Whiz, on the other hand is anything but average—but you wouldn't know it just from a quick look. His real name is Wilson Tanner, and he lives over on Livermore Drive, a couple of blocks away. Back when he moved to town, in the second grade, the kids started calling him the Book Wizard since he had read every book we could think off. His reputation grew and the name shrunk. By third grade it had become Wizard and now everybody knows him as Whiz. But to me, he is Agent M—that's another secret, if you don't mind.

Like I said, Whiz uses big words which makes it hard to understand him sometimes, but the biggest thing is he doesn't understand why we don't understand him—and he kinda zones out as he thinks. But what really makes him stand out is more of an attitude—he makes people, even grown-ups, take notice. Whiz is the smartest guy I know. Even though we both just finished the sixth grade, Whiz has taken some classes at the middle school next door in some sort of 'pull out' program they have for gifted kids.

Whiz and I have been friends since he moved to town and last year, when we both realized that solving mysteries was about the most fun we could have, we joined forces to create the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency. Whiz is the Chief Investigator and I am the Director of Field Operations.

Since school let out, Jasper Springs has become rather dull—from a crime-fighting stance. Not that anybody has complained, but it has put a crimp in our business.

But I shouldn't complain. The lull has given me plenty of time to enjoy my summer. It has been a couple

of weeks since the hullabaloo surrounding our latest case died down and I've filled the time with some day-trips to Indian Lake to fish with Dad, a two day canoe trip down the Little Marsh River with just me, Whiz, and two classmates, Theo Smith and Terry Mulligan. And, the Jasper Springs Junior Baseball League is also in full swing so practice has kept us occupied.

Even though it is the Jasper Springs Baseball League, there are only three teams in our age group from Jasper Springs. Belmont Village has two teams, Fairfield has one, and there are two from other parts of the county. Every Saturday there is a game and we play each team once during the season. On the eighth week, we have a weekend long playoff for the championship.

Last year we came in third overall, but our power hitter, Jason Mangioni, had moved to California the week before playoffs. So we lost to two teams we had beaten during regular season play.

Whiz and I are on the Jasper Springs Twins. We chose that name because this year we have two sets of twins on the team—Bill and Bobby Brown and Jack and Jill Turnberry. Now you may think a twin brother and sister named Jack and Jill is a bit silly, but don't tell them that. They've heard enough of the Jack and Jill jokes and don't care for them anymore—they probably never did. And besides, Jill, a lefty, is one of our best outfielders and a fair substitute pitcher—so she has a strong and quick left punch which could break any crown, so you better watch it. Whiz is our lead pitcher and even though he is a bit clumsy at many sports, he can through straight and fast. I play left field.

The current crime lull has provided us time to get plenty of sleuthing practice that Whiz insists we do to keep

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in shape. We spent a whole day last week tailing Police Chief Reid. We practiced using our new telephoto camera lens and a long distance listening device that Whiz recently finished building. The Chief now has a whole day of his life documented, if the situation ever arises for us to give it to him. I, for one, am not anxious to let him know we were following him.

Anyway, this is just a long-winded introduction to our latest case, which started out as a nice little vacation to the big city—the Big Apple to be precise.

The day it all began started out innocently enough without any hints at being unusual. It was a cool morning for summertime, just the way I like it. I had gotten up early and biked down to the river near Keith's Pier in the center of town.

The Little Marsh River starts at Indian Lake and runs through town. It was a small river, but plenty big for canoeing and, of course, swimming. As I got there, Chuck Boyles and Terry Mulligan were jumping off the dock and having a good time. I parked my bicycle and watched them for a few minutes and then I ran on over to Barnett's Drugstore.

I sat at the antique soda fountain, next to a couple of kids from school, and ordered a malted root beer, a slight deviation on my normal root beer float. As I drank it, I remembered the time I was in here, a few weeks ago. I was sitting with a girl and actually liking it. What a strange feeling that was.

But back to today—what a day! Summers were great. Later in the morning I headed over to Whiz's house. We had planned to meet for lunch then head to the Crime Lab to go over some training techniques that we had been working on.

I arrived just before lunch, as planned. When I got there, Whiz had a big map unfolded on the kitchen table and was having his little sister Tammy point out countries as he named them. When she got them correct, he would ask a question about the country; such as, what was the capital or what language did they speak. That little dynamo was as sharp as Whiz. She didn't get them all right, but she was good. We're going to have to come up with a good name for her someday—Whizette?

Finally, they were done and we all sat down—Whiz, Mrs. Tanner, Tammy, and me—for a quick lunch before sequestering ourselves, as Whiz puts it, in the Lab. Sequestering is another Whiz Word. It means we are going to lock ourselves away in the Crime Lab so we are not bothered by anyone.

Lunch was chicken noodle soup and ham sandwiches. Now, Mrs. Tanner is not quite the cook my mom is—don't ever tell her I said that—but she can hold her own. She made the soup from scratch, since Whiz needs to eat gluten-free and most canned soups have wheat gluten in them, and I was about halfway through my bowl and enjoying it.

Just then, the phone rang and Mrs. Tanner got up to answer it.

“Hello, this is the Tanner residence,” she spoke into the receiver.

The person on the other end said something and Mrs. Tanner's face got the strangest look.

“Sure, he's right here, Wil.” She looked at Whiz with the strange expression still on her face.

“Wilson, Uncle Wil is calling for you.” Whiz's parents are some of the few people in town that use his real name. To everyone else he's Whiz.

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She held the phone out to Whiz—the whole time keeping that strange look on her face.

Wilson Lockhart was Whiz's only uncle on his mother's side—three unmarried aunts and one uncle, Wilson, who is married. And, as is obvious from the name similarity, Whiz is his favorite nephew—but don't tell that to the three nephews on his wife's side of the family. Anyway, Uncle Wilson and Aunt Rebecca live in New York City and get to Jasper Springs about once a year for a visit. Getting either of them to leave the city, even for a short time, is a big deal.

Phone calls are the norm, but he never asks to speak to Whiz first. He always talks to Whiz at the end of a conversation with his sister and at least a short hello to his brother-in-law. This time was different.

“Hi Sis, is Whiz around? May I speak to him?” was the first thing Whiz's mom heard when she answered the phone. The uncharacteristic shortness was what put the strange look on her face.

She handed the phone to Whiz. “I want to talk to that man when you're finished, Wilson.”

I guess she wasn't going to let him get away without at least a polite amount of conversation.

Whiz said, “Yes, Mom,” and turned his attention to the phone.

“Hello, Uncle Wilson,” he said into the telephone receiver.

Whiz and his uncle talked for about ten minutes. When they finished, Whiz handed the phone to his mother. Boy did he have a big smile on his face.

“Pack your bags, Joey, we are heading to New York City!”

“Don’t pack yet, boys. I’m going to have a talk with Uncle Wilson first.”

Whiz’s mom got on the phone, and man did she give her brother an earful. I’ll bet that’s the last time he calls and doesn’t speak to her first. She was the oldest of her siblings and kinda acted like a drill sergeant sometimes—I’ve seen her at family picnics. You would think she would treat Whiz and Tammy that way, but she doesn’t.

While she was on the phone we finished up and headed out to the Crime Lab. Tammy started to follow us out—which she does more often now that she has developed an interest in what we bigger kids are doing. Mrs. Tanner stepped in to remind her she had a play date. She clapped her hands and twirled once and sat back down. We headed out.

End of Chapter ONE

For more adventures with Agent M and Agent K, go to

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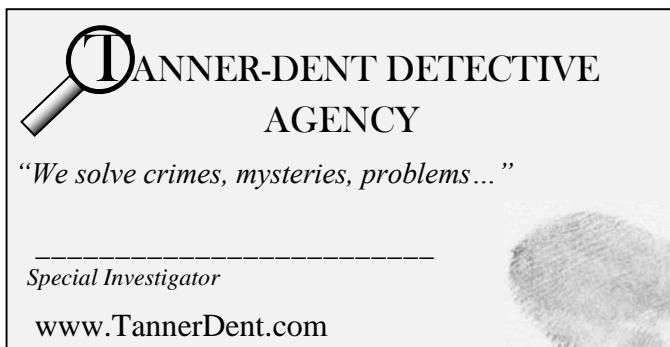
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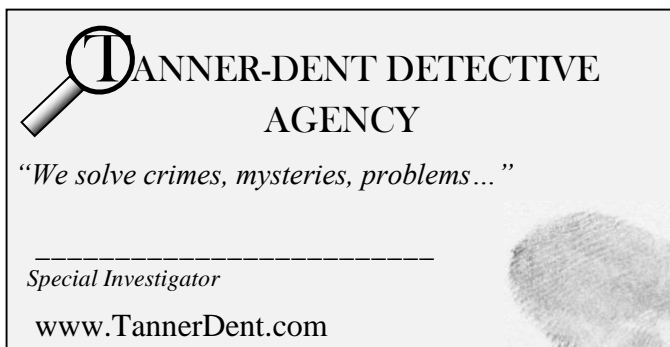




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