

WHIZ TANNER
and the

Phony
Masterpiece

A Tanner-Dent Mystery

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Illustrated by SUSAN REXROAD

To
Susan
For living with Whiz and Joey

ISBN: 978-0-9817742-2-0

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THE TANNER-DENT DETECTIVE AGENCY

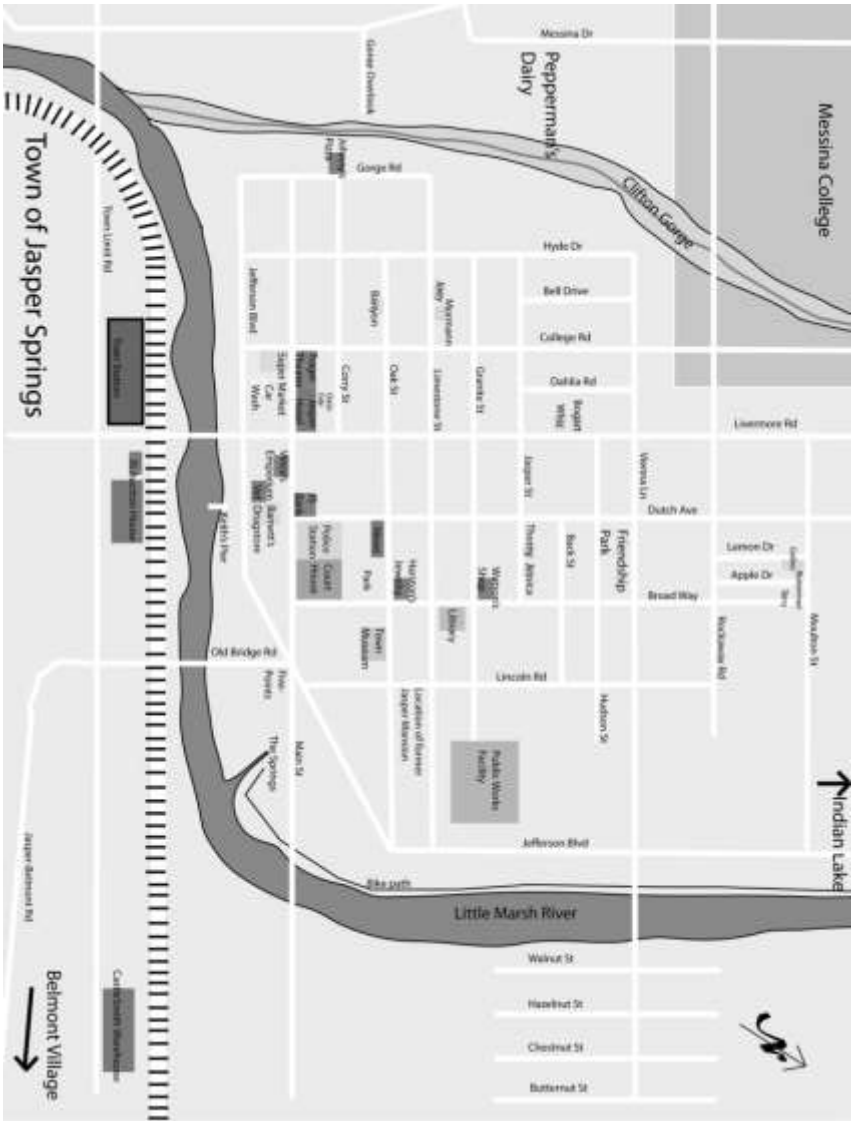
“We solve crimes, mysteries, problems...”

No case is too large or too small

www.TannerDent.com

Chief Investigator
Wilson “Whiz” Tanner

Director of Field Operations
Joseph “Joey” Dent



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

CHAPTER 1

The Ice Has Melted

“Joey!” I heard Dad’s voice from downstairs. It was Saturday and I was still in bed. I finished a long week with tons of homework—sixth grade was tough—and all of yesterday, after school, I spent mowing the yard, and other chores, for what I hoped was the last time this season. I deserved a day of rest, so I was still in bed—resting.

“Joey! What are you and Whiz up to?”

Whiz was my best friend—ever since he moved to Jasper Springs in the second grade. And, I had no idea what he and I were up to—I hadn’t talked to him since yesterday at school. I threw on my bathrobe and rushed downstairs. Dad was hanging up the phone as I got there. “What do you mean? What’s up?” I, of course, played up the

innocent look of someone who didn't know what's going on. Which was easy, because I didn't.

“That phone call, it sounded a little like Whiz. All he said was ‘the ice has melted’ and then hung up.” Dad looked at me.

I just looked back. I suppose I still looked sleepy because he shook his head, said “Go get some breakfast,” and headed toward the basement to play with his ham radio—either working on radio equipment or talking with other radio amateurs is something he does most Saturday mornings. He calls it maintaining a network of emergency communication capability—I call it playing.

My dad, Tom Dent, was head of the Jasper Springs Public Works Department, and Saturday mornings were the only times he was completely ‘off the clock’, as he liked to say. His number two guy was on call, and Dad enjoyed an interruption-free morning talking to people all over the world on his radio. But I had more important things to worry about!

“The ice has melted!” It was from Agent M. It was our secret code that meant something important has happened and I needed to report to the Crime Lab at once. I ran upstairs, changed out of my pajamas and into my clothes, and headed down for a quick breakfast. My mother, Melinda, was putting two sunny-side-up eggs on a plate for me as I came in. My sister, Patty, was already eating and gabbing away with mom about some boy she met at school. Patty is a freshman at Messina College and she has a new boyfriend every week.

I said good morning to both and zipped through breakfast. Soon, I was on my bike racing for Whiz's house. Whiz, is Agent M. I am Agent K.

I headed east on Limestone and made a left turn on Livermore. Two and a half blocks later, I turned into Whiz's driveway and dumped my bike in his backyard. After a quick look for spies, I snuck around behind the shed. Now this wasn't an ordinary old shed—well it was mostly, but the real difference is under the shed. Under the shed is a bomb shelter!

Whiz Tanner lives in an old two-story house on Livermore Street. It's over a hundred years old and in the 1950's, the owner put in an underground shelter. Some say it was a storm cellar but others say it was a bomb shelter. Building bomb shelters was a big thing to do back then—every town around here had dozens of them. This one was under the Tanner's shed and was more like a small basement than a shelter.

Whiz's dad, Jack Tanner—a scientist at the Vernay Electronics factory outside of town—let us use the shelter. Back in fifth grade, we were into performing stage magic, and the shelter was the perfect size for a secret workshop where we could build illusions and practice our act. A few weeks ago we packed up all our magic gear and started a detective agency. The shelter was now our Crime Lab.

As I crouched at the back of the shed, I gave a final look for spies, and pressed the knot near the bottom of the cedar shingle siding. It was a very realistic fake knot that was really a switch. Pressing it sounded a buzzer in the shelter.

A soft voice responded from a hidden speaker. 'Name?'

"Agent K," I answered, not much louder than a whisper, and waited. We picked secret agent names soon after we established the detective agency. The first thing I thought of was Agent K from the Men in Black movie that

I saw on television. Whiz picked Agent M because “M” was the boss in the James Bond movies.

‘Password?’ came the next inquiry.

I put my mouth closer to the hidden microphone and responded, “Ubiquitous is not ubiquitous.” Whiz, of course, came up with that password. I could never make up such a ridiculous word as ubiquitous. But, it’s a real word and is a fancy way to say ‘common’. Leave it to Whiz. He uses big words a lot—I call them Whiz Words.

I heard a click and a section of the wall popped open. I entered and closed the makeshift door leaving me in a small stairwell in the back of the shed. A wall separated the stairs to the shelter from the rest of the shed—making it very private. The dim stairwell was lit by a black-light that reflected off white surgical tape we placed on the steps. It was enough light to see the steps without stumbling.

I climbed down and opened another door, entering the shelter. Now this was no ordinary underground room. It was a real crime lab!

The Crime Lab of The Tanner-Dent Detective Agency was growing into a real lab. Whiz and I had finished installing the intercom and the remote-controlled latch earlier this week, and it worked well.

Inside we had a couple of tables, some chairs, and a big oak desk—we had to take that apart and rebuild it in the shelter. And speaking of building, Whiz was building all sorts of detective equipment. Of course, I helped.

We had a full chemistry lab with beakers, test tubes and Bunsen burners so we could test samples of stuff gathered at crime scenes. There were saws, hammers, wrenches, and screwdrivers, left over from when we built magic props. And Whiz had one table and a shelf full of computer parts that he was assembling, with some help

from his father, into a top notch Crime Computer. It was beginning to look as good as any crime lab in the country. And of course, we had a rather impressive library on a set of built-in shelves along one wall.

“What’s up, Agent M?” I asked as I came through the door huffing and puffing, still a little out of breath. We use our code names while we are in the Crime Lab.

“Work, K. We need some.”

“But, M, we just started the agency two weeks ago. You can’t expect all of Jasper Springs to come running to our door just because we solved one dog-knapping case. And after being kicked out of the police station by Chief Reid, I think it might be good to lay low for a while.”

“The Chief had no right to kick us out. We were not loitering... we were trying to learn investigative techniques by watching.”

“Even so, I think we should go slowly until we learn the ropes of being a detective.”

“If we are not working, we are getting rusty, and we need to hone a razor-edged sharpness.” Whiz sat back in his favorite chair and smiled.

I wasn’t buying his little speech. Whiz didn’t call me here early on a Saturday morning using a secret code just to say we were getting rusty. Heck, we were just starting out—it was too soon to get rusty.

“Something’s up. What is it? The ‘ice melting’ message is pretty drastic.”

“Something is up, Agent K.” He glanced at the police scanning radio on the workbench. “I heard on the scanner that the Jasper Springs police are escorting a large art exhibit into town. An advertisement for it was in the *News* last week. It consists of paintings and sculptures and jewelry from some New York museum collection. The

traveling show will temporarily cover the entire first floor of the Town Museum.”

“Has something happened to it? What’s the case?”

“Nothing has happened. You are missing my point.”

Whiz was talking in circles now. Sometimes I think he sees mysteries where none exist.

“Okay, what’s the point, M?” I let out a rather large sigh trying to show my lack of amusement.

“Think about it... there will be tremendous security around the exhibit. Both Jasper Springs police and a private security firm, Securitron, are involved. This is a perfect opportunity for us to learn professional security techniques. Hence the ‘ice has melted’ code. The truck should be here in thirty minutes and we need to be in place to effect our surveillance.”

So that’s what we did. We ‘effected’ our surveillance of the Town Museum. Whiz grabbed his surveillance pack—an old backpack stuffed with all sorts of gadgets that could be useful on a case—and we rode our bikes into town. We parked at the Courthouse and walked across the street to the museum. Once there, we hid behind one of the two trash dumpsters, in the corner of the parking lot, where we could keep an eye on the rear delivery doors. Then we waited and before long Chief Reid, the Jasper Springs head cop, drove up and parked very conspicuously on the street next to the parking lot entrance—he had his red and blue lights flashing.

“So much for not drawing attention to one’s self,” Whiz said with unconcealed irritation.

“I guess he wants to make sure everyone knows he’s on the job,” I replied.

“In real security work, the goal is to make it look like there is no job to be on, Agent K. Our Chief is not good at that.”

“But at least the siren wasn’t blaring away,” I said.

Whiz ducked down behind the dumpster and rummaged through his surveillance pack, pulling out two walkie-talkies. “Here, K, take this and stay out of sight, while I work my way over to the bushes near the corner of the building. Watch everything that happens. But, pay no attention to the objects being carried into the building. Watch the men who appear to be doing nothing. They will be the security team.”

Whiz then crawled away on his hands and knees, and before long he was in the bushes near the corner of the building.

I saw him bring the walkie-talkie up to his head. “Agent K, this is Agent M. Do you read me?”

I pressed the talk button on my walkie-talkie, “Agent K, here. I copy, loud and clear.”

“Roger, K. Keep your eyes and ears open. The target is in sight.”

And sure enough, a big truck came down the street and pulled into the museum parking lot. There was a police cruiser in front and a white SUV behind. The guys from the SUV got out and looked around. They must be the security guys. They started to move.

I put the walkie-talkie to my mouth, pressed the button and whispered. “Agent M, I have security in sight. They have split up and are closing in on the truck.”

“Copy that, K. Stay hidden.”

As if he needed to tell me that. With Chief Reid standing by the door, there was no way I wanted to get caught spying. He already had it in for Whiz and me for

nosing around the police station over the past two weeks. Several times he came in to find us asking questions of the officers. He made it very clear that we were not to bother on-duty policemen—and to stay out of his station. But the real killer was last weekend when Whiz and I solved the Great Gasoline Station Drive-away right under the Chief's nose. I stayed well-hidden and watched, but I was getting bored.

An hour and a half after they arrived, the last box was taken off the truck and a security guy closed the sliding door on the back of the truck. He seemed to be in such a hurry that he almost hit the head of the last guy out. Then, it was all over and the surveillance guys, the mover guys from the big truck, and the Jasper Springs Police, including the Chief, all went inside the museum or left. Whiz and I were now outside alone. Whiz made his way through the shrubbery, and rejoined me behind the dumpsters.

“That was fantastic, K.”

“What?” I asked. “Nothing happened. The movers carried the stuff in. The police stood around and watched. And, the security team was the most disappointing... all they did was stand there and look around every few minutes. It's not like someone tried to steal the stuff and we could see them in action. And, it's not like we even got to see a preview of the show. All the stuff was wrapped up like it was being shipped to Mars or someplace.”

“Agent, K, I am quite surprised at how little you observed.”

“Those two security guys just stood there in the parking lot. What was there to observe?”

“What about the two guys who pulled up in the light blue car and parked around the corner? Did you miss them?” Whiz gave me a look of disbelief. “One of those

guys opened the lock on the truck and went in. He stayed inside until the end. What was he doing? We missed that part of the security work.”

I mumbled a few words and waited as Whiz went on for five minutes explaining what he was able to learn from watching the professionals work—where they stood, how they watched, how they communicated. I was surprised at how much I did miss. Whiz noticed their Bluetooth cell phone devices, which was surprising since there is almost no cell phone coverage in Jasper Springs. He talked about the hand signals they used—he was even able to figure out what many of them meant, and he told me.

He went on and on and even continued talking as we walked out from behind the dumpster and came face-to-face with a massive, mean-looking man. He was standing directly in our path with his arms folded over his chest.

“So, what do we have here?” the man asked.

Whiz and I froze. I began to stammer something but Whiz quickly recovered.

“Why sir, is there a problem here? My associate and I were just sitting in this public parking lot having a conversation. And now we are heading over to the courthouse to retrieve our bicycles.”

He began to walk, but the man did not move out of our way.

“You boys were taking a considerable interest in the museum treasures. I want to know why.”

“As I said, sir,” Whiz began, “we were just loitering in this public parking lot.”

“Well, son, my job is the security of this shipment, and you two were looking mighty suspicious.” The man

folded his arms over his chest and managed to look even bigger.

Whiz was not intimidated at all. “Are you from Securitron?”

“Yes indeed, young man.” His face softened a tad.

“Then I suppose it is pertinent for us to identify ourselves.”

Whiz used another of his big words as he pulled a card out of his back pocket and handed it to the security man. It was our business card. The man took the card and read it. He shifted his gaze between us and the card several times.

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“Oh, that’s cute. You two are playing detective.” He gave a little chuckle.

Whiz was not going to let that slide. “Sir, I assure you we are not playing detective. My associate, Joseph,” he pointed to me and I gave a little wave of my hand, “and I are real detectives and have solved real crimes.”

“Well, there is no crime here, so what were you doing?”

“Observing, sir. We came to watch professionals work.”

“That’s right mister, we’re just watching,” I added with a higher pitched voice than I would have liked due to a lump that had formed in my throat.

That seemed to soften him up even more. He read the names on the card, again.

“You know, we get kids watching us all the time but they don’t hide. Do you kids have a reason for hiding?”

“Chief Reid is not too receptive to allowing The Tanner-Dent Detective Agency to be involved in any local police work. You see, we have had some run-ins with him on other cases.”

“So, the Chief of Police doesn’t like you? Well, in my book that makes you real detectives. There isn’t a police chief in the country that likes private eyes.”

“I think we may have embarrassed him a time or two, sir,” Whiz confessed.

The man chuckled at that and his big mean appearance softened even more.

“May I keep this card?” he asked.

“Of course, sir,” Whiz replied.

He stuffed it in his shirt pocket and pulled a similar one out of his jacket.

“You two remind me of my own boys. They’re about your age, I imagine. Here’s my card. I’m Bill Ferguson, Special Agent, Art & Antiques Division of Securitron.

“Glad to meet you Mr. Ferguson,” I spoke, with a more normal voice as the lump in my throat slowly disappeared and I stuck out my hand to shake his.

“I need to catch up with my crew and check-in at the Hillcrest... our new home for the next week... but come around tomorrow during setup and I’ll show you

some of our methods for keeping this show safe and sound.”

“You’re leaving the art unguarded?” I asked.

“Oh, no. The museum staff is in there unpacking and the museum has its own security for tonight. My full installation crew will be here and start the main stuff tomorrow. The museum won’t be open to the public, but ask for me. I’ll show you around.”

“We definitely will be here tomorrow, Mr. Ferguson,” Whiz said.

“Going over security with a couple of budding detectives should be interesting. See you then.”

Wow! We get to see the inside scoop on real security work. This is going to be fun.

End Chapter ONE

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

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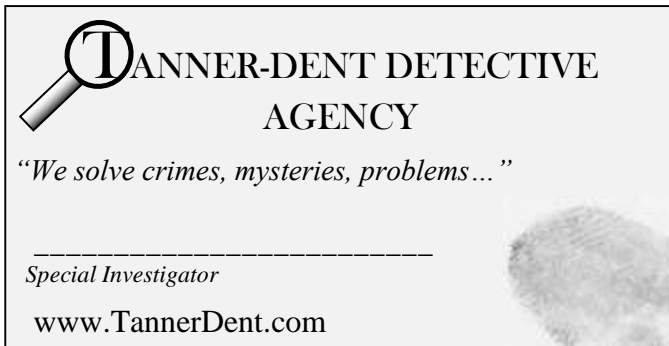
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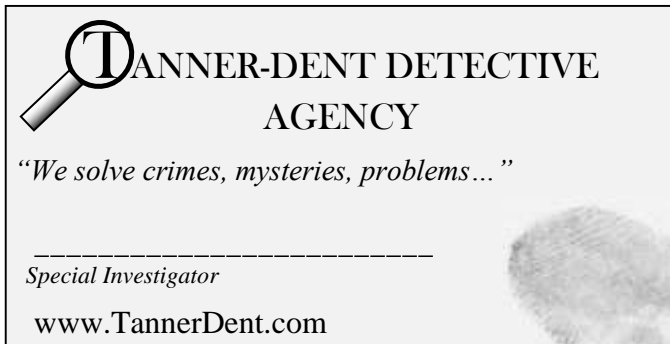




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