

WHIZ TANNER
and the
Secret
Tunnel

A Tanner-Dent Mystery

Fred Rexroad

Cover Design/Illustration: Alexander T. Lee



Awesome Quest Mysteries

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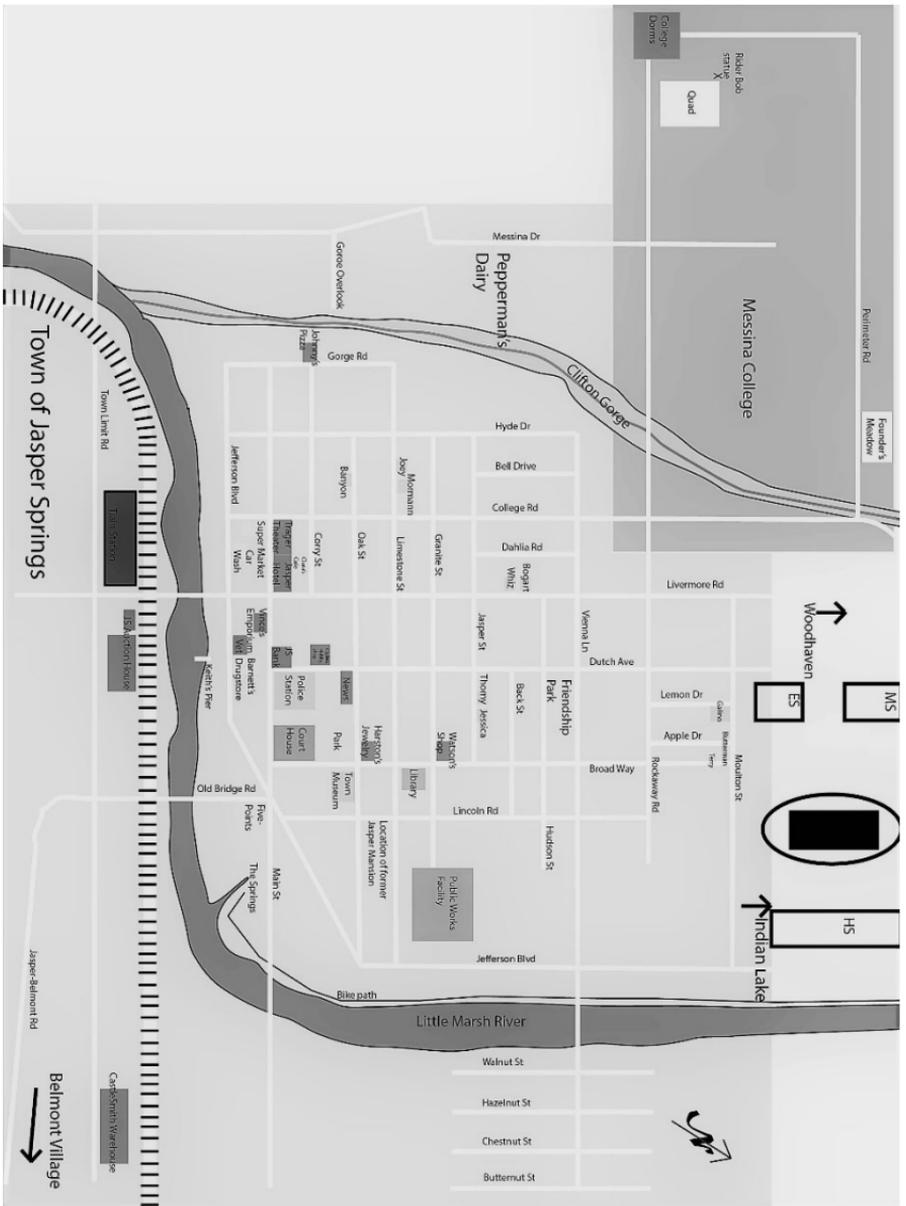
Sierra

She knows why

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



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Joseph "Joey" Dent
Director, Field Operations

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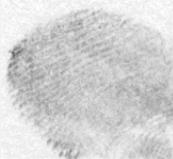


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Chief Investigator

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CHAPTER 1

What's a DeLorean?

“**T**here’s a fight by the bike racks!”

A fifth-grader nearly knocked me down as I left Mrs. Truman’s room at the end of the school day. Little kids should treat us sixth-graders with more respect, but I suppose the first good fight of the year got his excitement level skyrocketing. I picked up my pace as I headed to the bike racks myself.

I met Whiz coming out of the counseling center where he spent the last two hours in a pull-out program. Due to his super-duper brainpower, he gets the pleasure of doing harder math and extra stuff while the rest of us do normal classwork. He was about to say something, but I grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the front door.

“Come on.”

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“Joey, to what do we owe this rough behavior? Detectives should be more discrete.”

“There’s a fight by the bikes.” I continued to pull him along.

“You go on ahead. I need to pick up tomorrow’s homework from Mrs. Truman.”

If Whiz was anybody else, I would have given him the homework assignment. But Whiz isn’t anybody else. In fact, nobody’s like Whiz. Mrs. Truman gives him assignments that would scare a middle school kid. They look kinda like ours, but with more parts to figure out and more questions to answer. I couldn’t argue with him, so I dropped my grip on his arm.

“I’ll see you there.” I ran for the door.

When I got to the racks, Parvaneh Shirazi was quickly walking away, while Chuck Boyles and Thorny Rose were deep in a heated argument. Chuck and Thorny are usually pretty close friends, but something got them going. I walked toward them and stopped next to Tommy Whittacker. He was leaning against his bike as we both watched.

“I think a fight’s gonna start,” said Tommy.

“That’s what I heard already. The whole school’s heard it.” We both looked around at the growing crowd.

“I swear I saw it!” cried Chuck.

The tension eased a bit as Chuck and Thorny saw the group of kids circling them. They seem to be embarrassed by the attention. Slowly, they both pulled their bikes out of the rack.

“No way,” said Thorny under his breath, as a last dig.

“It looked just like the one in the movie,” yelled Chuck, and the tension started to rise again.

“Yeah, right,” said Thorny with his lip curled in a sneer. He turned to me and Tommy. “I mentioned to Parvaneh that *Back to the Future* was coming on TV tomorrow and she could watch it with me ... she’s never seen it. Chucky had to one-up me, in front of her, and say he saw the car. She wouldn’t know ... she’s not from here.”

This started to heat up more ... quickly. Thorny’s had a not-so-secret crush on Parvaneh since the beginning of the year. She moved to town this summer and was one of the cutest girls in our class—but don’t tell Thorny I said that. Anything that got in the way of him making a good impression on her was not gonna go over well.

“What’s so hard to believe about that?” Chuck replied. “There are lots of those cars around.”

“No way,” Thorny shouted over him. “They haven’t made them since before we were born, and there aren’t any around here. You only said you saw it ‘cause I said the movie was going to be on.”

“Ask Whiz if it’s possible. Hey, Whiz!” Chuck called out, as he spotted Whiz walking our way.

“Yeah, Whiz,” Thorny retorted. “Chuck needs some professional help here, but for his head, not from a detective.”

“Knock it off, Thorny, and just ask him. You’ll see.”

“Okay,” Thorny replied with a smirk. “Chucky here’s been seeing things. He says he saw someone pushing a DeLorean into Farmer Zimmer’s barn ... the old one out in his cow pasture. Tell him there’s no way. There’s not a DeLorean within a thousand miles of Jasper Springs.”

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“I did see a DeLorean,” Chuck yelled back. “Just like the one in the movie *Back to the Future* ... my dad has a poster of it in our garage, so I know what one looks like. Except, it didn’t have that flux thingy on the back.”

“Ah, the flux capacitor,” said Whiz. “The device that turned the car into a time machine. I saw that trilogy of movies last summer ... it was quite a fascinating concept.”

Whiz was about to go on when Thorny broke him off. “But are there any of them in Jasper Springs?”

“An interesting question,” Whiz said, with a slight squinting of his eyes as if he was thinking deeply about it. “There were not many made, as I recall ... only a couple of model years.”

“See, even Whiz says you couldn’t have seen one.” Thorny gave Chuck a push on the shoulder.

“Now, that is not what I said,” responded Whiz. “I said there were not many made. That is a long way from definitively stating there is not one in Jasper Springs.”

“Dad says they’re still making new ones somewhere in Texas,” Chuck said, directly in Thorny’s face. “There could easily be one around here.”

“No way! They made those in Ireland, and they stopped making them a long time ago. Probably before your dad was even born. My uncle, in California, drove one once and told me all about them. They had doors that opened up like wings, and the body was some special metal that didn’t rust, so they didn’t need paint.” Thorny’s face grew red and his voice got louder.

“You can look it up on the Internet if you don’t believe me.” The volume of Chuck’s voice also increased.

Chuck let his bike fall and raised his hand to poke a finger in Thorny's chest. Thorny moved a half a step back, dropped his own bike, and raised his fists.

"Whoa, whoa ..." Tommy rolled his bike between the two but was careful not to get directly between them himself. "Okay, guys ... we can solve this. We have the great Tanner-Dent Detective Agency right here." He smiled and looked over at me and Whiz. "Joey Dent and Whiz Tanner, take a bow."

By this time the group of kids that descended on the bike rack was getting large and they were all hanging around waiting for the fight to start.

"He started it by dissing me in front of Parvaneh ... and he poked me!" Thorny yelled. "You all saw that."

"I don't care how much you like Parvaneh, you called me a liar!" Chuck responded. "I did see one, and they do make new ones in Texas. My dad said so."

"As you stated," said Whiz. "The manufacturing of DeLoreans can be easily verified with a simple Internet search. You have no need of a detective for that."

I turned to the crowd. "Does anybody have a smartphone?"

Nobody pulled one out. I don't think they wanted to stop a fight—we hadn't had a good one yet this year. Or, they knew that here on the north side of town there was no cell coverage, anyway. Either way, very few kids even owned a smart phone, especially those who lived on the northside.

"Yeah, but that's not the point. He said he saw one and that can't be proved since he was the only one there," Thorny responded. "Very convenient for a made-up story, if you ask me."

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“I did see one and not because you mentioned the movie, and definitely not because of Parvaneh. Two guys were pushing it into Zimmer’s barn, and it can be proved ... just go look in his barn.” Chuck began talking to the crowd. “Mr. Zimmer has a DeLorean in his barn, and Thorny is too stupid to believe me.”

“What’s a DeLorean?” shouted one of the kids.

“It’s an old car,” yelled another. “Like the time-traveling one in the movie.”

“Why’s it in his barn? How do you know? Can we see it? What kind of old car? Can it really travel through time?” The calls from the crowd kept coming.

“Tell ‘em what you told me,” Thorny taunted. “See if they believe you.”

So, Chuck began. “Last Saturday, I was riding my bike on Jamestown Road out past Folger’s Quarry. It was getting dark, and I was near where the road turns from asphalt to dirt.”

“I know the place,” called one of the kids. “That’s where the abandoned secret Air Force antenna station is.”

“That’s not secret,” responded another kid. “You can see it from the road.”

“It used to be secret, back when atomic bombs were secret. The Air Force had them all over the country to catch enemy planes coming to bomb us,” replied the first kid.

“Well it’s abandoned now,” called someone else.

“Or it looks that way because it’s so secret. Have you seen all those keep out signs on the tallest chain link fence around?”

“What about the time-traveling car in Farmer Zimmer’s barn?” The questions—and answers—continued.

"Yeah, and Mr. Zimmer abandoned that old barn, too," someone else let out. "He hasn't used that barn in years. Nothin' but cows out there."

"They're not cows, they're bulls!" Thorny corrected.

"Well the barn is being used now," Chuck insisted. "There's a car in it ... the famous car from the movies."

"No there's not," Thorny retorted.

"Well, not *the* famous one, but one just like it. I've seen those movies a hundred times, so I know what it looks like. And, I told you, my dad has the poster which I looked at as soon as I got home. The car in Farmer Zimmer's field looked just like it."

"That's simple to check out. Someone has to go to the barn and look," said a kid in the crowd.

"I'm not going up to that barn," Chuck replied. "Thorny may not know much, but he's right about the bulls. Besides, I already saw what's in it."

"Well, I'm not going," responded Thorny with a distinct frown. "Those bulls are mean."

"Hey, I know," called another kid from the crowd. "This is a mystery, so Tanner-Dent can handle it. Mysteries is on their business card, you've seen it. We all have."

Everybody looked at me and Whiz as Tommy said, "Didn't I just say that?"

"Wait a minute," I replied as I thought about the bulls? I didn't want any part of this. "If you think me and Whiz are going—"

"Perhaps the firm of Tanner-Dent could consider this mystery," said Whiz, cutting me off. "However, our services do cost money, and since none

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of you are currently on retainer, we must decline until such a time as funding has been raised.”

With that strange, but typical, response from Whiz, the eagerness seemed to die down a bit, and some of the kids left. Well, that was the end of that—no bull fighting for me. What a relief. Then, I looked over at Whiz. He had that ‘staring into space’ kinda look he got when he was deep in thought. Uh oh.

“It *would* be interesting to see if Chuck is correct about the DeLorean,” Whiz finally said to me, as the crowd thinned out. “I would like to see one up close.”

Little did I know, not only did that thoughtful look mean I was going to be investigating Mr. Zimmer’s barn, but before our case was over I would come to think that fighting bulls would’ve been easier!

END OF FIRST CHAPTER

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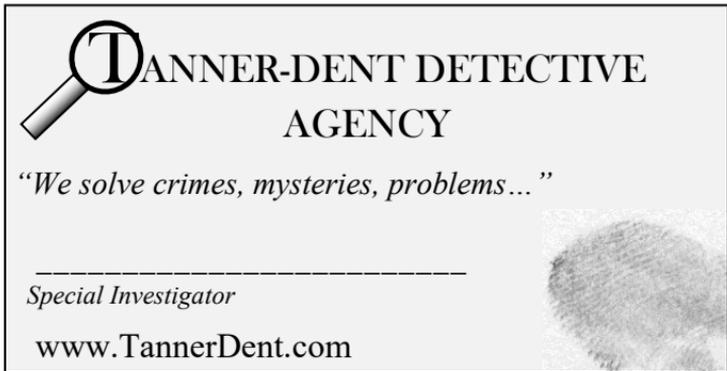
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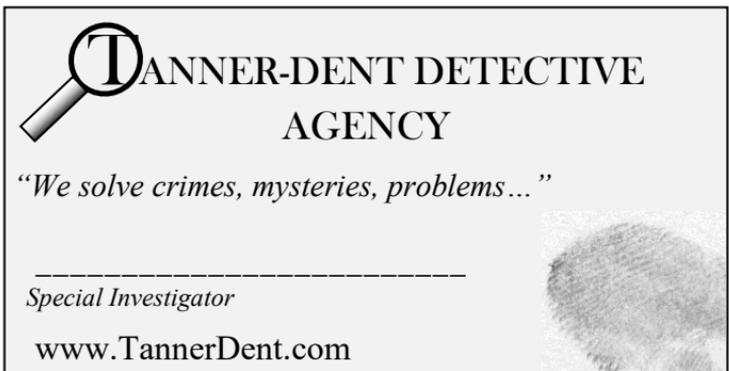


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