Plutonium's Revenge

Where Death, Deception,

And Corporate Espionage Meet!

By

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Plutonium's Revenge

Fourth Edition

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Book cover artwork done by Ryan Kurcez.

DEDICATIONS

Plutonium's Revenge is dedicated to my belated mother.

Thanks Mom – for all your love and support. I'll never forget you.
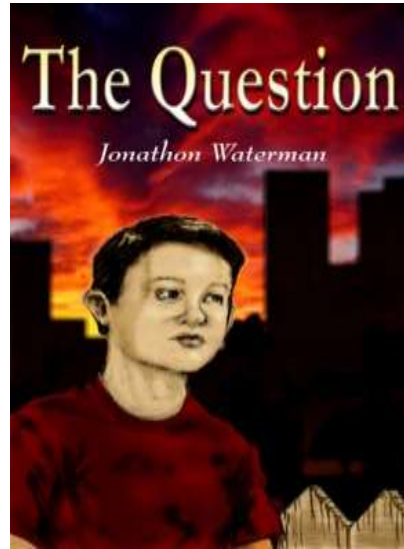
You were the true "Ellen Pontiac" in my life.

J.W.

THE QUESTION SERIES

Book 1 – **The Question**

Book 2 – **Plutonium's Revenge**

The Question

Plutonium's Revenge

MAIN CHARACTER LIST

The Pontiacs

Paul Michael Pontiac - 14 years old. Co-developer of the best selling PC game, Clash of the BattleStar & President of Gibsonville School Computer Club.

Nathan Pontiac - Paul's 8 year old, handicapped half brother.

Ellen Pontiac - Paul's mother. She is also the Guidance Counselor at Gibsonville School.

John Pontiac - Paul's deceased father. Nathan's natural father. He died in an auto accident shortly after the previous Thanksgiving.

The Heglers

Timothy (Tim) James Hegler - Paul's best friend. Co-developer of the best selling PC game, Clash of the BattleStar. Also a Gibsonville School Freshman.

Joe Hegler - Tim's father. President of Titan Industries Software Division.

Some of Paul's Friends

Cathy Skinner - Paul's girlfriend, Daughter of Gibsonville School's Principal. Member of the Gibsonville School Computer Club.

Daniel E. Whitehouse the Third - An 11 yr. old computer genius. I.Q. of 195. Also a Gibsonville School Freshman. Vice President of the Gibsonville School Computer Club.

Gibsonville School Staff

Raymond Skinner - Principal

Mr. Little - Asst. Principal

Carl Thompson - Office Skills Instructor & Computer Club Adviser

Gibsonville School Gang

Butch Edward McGuire - Gang Leader

Stan Ramirez - Second in command

Guilford County Sheriff's Department

Bill Majors - Sheriff

Mr. Lee - Deputy

Mr. Stevens – Deputy

Legal Personnel

John McKinney - Defense Attorney

Charles Greenfield - Prosecutor

Sandra Atkins - Judge

Medical Personnel at Duke Medical Center

Craig Matthews - Cardiologist

Nancy Higgins - Nurse

James Taylor - Pathologist

Mary Gilbert - Nurse

Krypton Software

Allen Sharp - CEO

Tom Steel - Company President

George Witherspoon - V.P. of Marketing

Mike Furrow - Software Development Chief

Ray Sizemore - Head of Corporate Security

Phillip Cuttingham - Security Employee and Company Spy

Charles - Security Employee

You've Got To Be Kidding

Chapter One

Monday morning – the first Monday of the year. And today was not only the beginning of a new week; it was also Day One of the Spring semester. With eight-year-old Nathan still in the kitchen actively consuming a bowl of Sugar Pops, Paul Pontiac, dropped his bowl and spoon in the sink, before trudging toward his bedroom at the same pace one would slither through a gator-filled swamp. Bus 39 was due to pull into their driveway in about twenty minutes. However, this morning it was doubtful that would be sufficient time for him to get ready.

"Paul," Nathan said, guiding his wheelchair through the doorway of his older brother's bedroom several minutes later. "Are you about ready to …?" Then instantly, his mouth gaped open, and his voice froze. "No. This can't be."

"What do you think?" Paul asked, twisting his slender fourteen-year-old torso 180 degrees, so he could catch a glimpse of his backside in the full-length mirror attached to his closet door. "It's the latest style."

"Well, I."

Paul displayed a large grin. "I know. This outfit looks so good; it literally takes your breath away. Doesn't it?"

"W-e-l-l … I."

Totally ignoring his brother's shocked expression, "You know, Nathan," Paul continued. "The kids at school are bound to like me now."

Nathan snorted in reply. "Paul. Your friends at school already like you."

"I know. But I'd like to have some outside of the computer club. Don't you think this outfit should do the trick?"

Nathan shook his head in disbelief.

Paul frowned. Even though his half-brother was a few years younger, he respected the boy's opinion. Ever since joining the Pontiac family just shortly before Christmas, Nathan had shown an incredible understanding of people – especially for someone his age.

"Tell me, Nathan," he said, plopping across the side of the bed. "Which shoes do you think I should I wear with this ensemble – my tennis shoes, or the matching boots I bought? They both look good. But I'm not sure my Converses would add the coup de maître I'm looking for."

Nathan opened his mouth to answer, but was soon interrupted by a bell-like sound coming from his older brother's desktop. Apparently, Paul's multi-core system had detected an incoming video message, and its screen was currently displaying a flashing user-id - Tim Hegler's — their neighbor next-door.

"I'm going to have to get back to you," Paul stated, dismissing his younger brother before diverting his attention to the monitor and clicking his wireless Microsoft optical mouse.

Tim's face quickly came into view, while a creaking sound from the room's wooden tongue-and-groove floor reverberated. Evidently, Nathan had decided to leave the room.

"Tim," Paul yelled into the computer's microphone, even though there wasn't a need to. "What's up, Bro? You usually don't call this early."

"I wanted to see if you had heard about the …" Tim abruptly stopped mid- sentence, and his eyes bulged outward. "Surely you're not going to be wearing that to school! Are you?"

"Don't you just love it?" Paul did a turn-around in front of his monitor. "It's the 'IN' thing this year."

Tim looked at his friend and began to shake his head. "Paul," he said, before briefly pausing. "That outfit is so hideous; I'm surprised it didn't shatter your video cam into a billion microscopic-size pieces."

Paul immediately scowled. "Hey! It's not that bad."

"Oh yes, it is! Your mom didn't buy you that for Christmas, did she?"

"No." Paul replied, shrugging his shoulders. "We stopped by the Salvation Army yesterday in hopes of finding an antique record player, and I found this on a nearby clothes rack. The overalls were on sale for just a dollar, and I got this matching flannel shirt for fifty cents."

"I can easily understand why they were so cheap," Tim stated, giving his friend an intelligent nod. "They both look like something a farmer in the early 1950s might wear."

"Really? That's fantastic!" Paul shouted as an exuberant grin raced across his face. "That's exactly the look I was aiming for."

Tim's eyes rolled upward, and he briefly gazed toward the ceiling above.

"Paul. Do me a favor and ditch the outfit. You know today is going to be my first day at Gibsonville. And believe me, the last thing I need is for my best friend to be looking like a circus clown."

"Tim. It's really not all that b…." Paul began to say, when unexpectedly his friend suddenly looked away from his video cam.

"I've got to go," Tim said. "Mom's calling. … I'll catch you a little later on the bus. … And don't let me forget to tell you what happened at our school over Christmas, OK?"

"OK," Paul answered, though he wondered what Tim could be referring to.

Just as their Skype communication ended, a bright flicker unexpectedly flashed across Paul's twenty-four-inch flat screen monitor and the front of it instantly turned black. Then after remaining that way for several seconds, it unpredictably returned to life, with its animated 3-D screensaver already in progress.

I really do need to see what's causing my video card to do that, Paul thought, taking a seat on his bed, so he could stick his feet inside the maroon-colored cowboy boots he had purchased to complete his ensemble.

A moment later, he was out the front door.

The First Day Of School

Chapter Two

"I still can't believe you're wearing that!" Tim exclaimed as Bus 39 came to a jerking halt next to Gibsonville School's gymnasium. "Just look at yourself. That outfit is absolutely hideous. Faded farmer Brown overalls. A red and white flannel shirt. Maroon-colored boots. And a bright green John Deere baseball cap? … Paul, are you out of your mind? No one would ever wear anything like that – especially to school!"

"Yes, they would," Paul nonchalantly replied as the two of them moseyed into the center aisle. "When you see him, take a look at what Butch McGuire is wearing. It's the retro look that makes him and his gang so popular."

"Butch McGuire?" A puzzled expression flashed across Tim's face. "Who's he?"

"Oh, believe me, Tim," Paul said, amidst a brief chuckle. "You'll soon find out. He and his gang worked overtime last semester to make my life as difficult as possible, and they nearly succeeded. They love to pick on anyone they consider to be an outsider, especially if they can be labeled a computer geek."

"Why? About all the programmers I know aren't much different from anyone else."

"I agree. And it's the same with the ones I've run across," Paul replied, stepping onto the gravel parking lot. "But just try to convince Butch and his gang of that."

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"W-e-l-l. Good morning, handsome," an attractive, blonde, female freshman said using an over-cheerful tone as she flashed a someday-you-are-going-to-be-mine smile toward Paul the instant he and Tim approached the school's rear entranceway.

Then suddenly – a shocked expression emerged.

"What in the devil is that you're wearing, Paul? It looks horrific!"

"What? This outfit?" Paul gazed down the front of himself. "It's a little something I picked up at the Salvation Army over the holidays. Since the retro look seems to work so well for Butch and his gang, I thought I'd give it a try."

"You've got to be kidding." Cathy said, rolling her eyes as she shook her head. "You look downright ridiculous. This is the twenty-first century, Paul, not the 1940s."

Tim suppressed a small chortle. "That's exactly what I've been trying to tell him all morning. The problem is, he refuses to listen."

"He does?" Cathy stared at her boyfriend and pursed her lips. "Oh, well. At least, you tried. … By the way, who are you? I don't believe we met."

"Me?" Tim pointed his forefinger toward his chest and gave Cathy his infamous knight-in-shinning-armor smile. "I'm Tim Hegler. This is my first day here."

"Tim Hegler? Hmm, I've heard that name before." Cathy frowned and proceeded to glance at the ceiling.

After a few seconds had passed, "Oh, my gosh! You're not THE Tim Hegler?" she loudly exclaimed. "The one who co-developed Clash of the BattleStars. Are you?"

"That's me," Tim acknowledged with a slight bow.

"Oh, my gawd! I can't believe you're here – in Gibsonville, I mean. My dad told me during Christmas break that a new freshman would be joining our class. But I had no idea it was going to be you! I just can't wait until Daniel finds out. The kid's going to freak."

"Daniel?" Tim raised his right eyebrow.

"Daniel E. Whitehouse – the Third," Paul informed him. "He's the eleven-year-old genius I told you about over the holidays. He's very emotional."

"Oh. Him."

"Well. It's been really great to meet you, Tim. And I would like to get to know you a little bit better," Cathy said, grabbing his hand and giving it a quick shake. "But if you don't mind, at the moment I've got to be going. I just can't wait to tell Daniel you're here. … You will be joining our Computer Club, won't you?"

Tim wanted to say, yes, but before he could, Cathy had already vanished.

"Wow!" Tim replied, looking a tad bewildered as he turned to face his friend. "Are all your friends like that?"

Paul replied with a sheepish grin.

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A few minutes later when Tim and Paul entered Ms. Bass homeroom class, Paul immediately cruised toward his assigned desk like a ship with its auto-navigation system turned on. Tim took an empty one behind him, and soon afterwards, the tardy bell clanged.

"Well. Well. Well," Butch McGuire proclaimed, twisting around so he could address the unexpected scene before him. "Look who's back. My favorite computer geek. And I see you brought a friend."

Paul involuntarily gulped. This certainly wasn't the way he wanted to start the spring semester.

"Just leave us alone, Butch. OK?"

Butch looked at him and displayed a medieval smile.

"Gee. What's wrong, Paul?" he then asked, using a tone as if he was speaking to a young adolescent. "Is the big bad bully disturbing the little computer geek? Maybe the little nerd needs to run down the hallway and report it to his mommy, the school's Guidance Counselor. She might even be able to change his soiled diaper."

"Shut up, Butch!" Paul growled, tightening his fingers around the edge of his desk.

"You dare to tell me to shut up, Paul?" Butch snatched a wooden ruler from inside his backpack and forcefully slapped it across his bare palm. "You must be one of the dumbest geeks around here. How would you like me to smack this across your forehead, you moron? It might knock some sense into you."

Tim instantly jumped onto his feet, raised his fists and got ready to knock a couple of Butch's teeth loose.

"I'd like to see you try, you super-size pile of crap! There is no way in hell, I'm going to let you lay a hand on my friend."

"Alright, you three!" Ms. Bass immediately shouted across the classroom. "That's enough of that. Fighting's not allowed in my classes. … Tim Hegler, and I presume that's who you are since I haven't seen you before, take a seat. Paul and Butch, chill it. This instant!"

The three of them continued to eye at each other for a brief moment. Then with steam still bellowing from each of their ears, they readily complied.

"Hey geek," Butch began in a loud whisper the second Ms. Bass finished taking attendance.

"Yeah?"

"You know we're not done yet. And before this day is over, I'm going to stomp that scrawny tail of yours so bad – they'll be carrying your geeky corpse away from here on a stretcher."

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