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Chapter 14

THE CHI-TOWN KID

On the Road

After the excitement of the cyclone and rescue, the Bikers continue north, dropping Terry off in Atlanta to catch his flight home. They stop for a couple of days in Washington D.C. to sightsee and spend some time at the Smithsonian Museum, a real treat, especially for TK. Then it's on to the Engineering Society meeting in Chicago.

Windy City

Nitro parks the truck and trailer in the parking lot of the suburban motel they have chosen for their stay. They're just in time to have breakfast with Jim, Ben, Lupé and Betty, who have already been here for two days. Afterwards everyone is off to do their own thing. Lupé and Betty go to dig around in antique shops and art galleries. They found a couple of the H²O-S separator discs already and think they're on the trail of several more.

Celeste has a few sales calls for the Tee shirt business to make and then will meet with them for lunch and go hunting for discs. TK will go with Ben and Jim to the convention. Nitro might show up there later, but first he's going to visit with some old racing buddies. Besides, he doesn't know if he can deal with a whole building full of engineers.

Engineers 'R' Us

Today TK will be meeting a lot of new people. Tomorrow he will present his paper, which he has titled "Gyro Rotational Torque and Its Effect on Traction." TK is dazzled by the people he is meeting and by the fact that they all seem to want to talk and exchange ideas and information with him.

He has read books and papers written by many of the Engineering Society members, and has corresponded with quite a few of them by computer over the last couple of years. They are all quite blown away by his age, and astonished when they listen to him and realize how bright he is. TK is feeling more and more at ease; he's lost his initial nervousness and is looking forward to presenting his paper.

In the midst of all this coolness there is one weird thing. TK has noticed a man who always seems to be on the edge of whatever group he's around. The man has a name tag, but is never close enough for TK to read it. TK always spots him because he's very thin and hawkish looking and very hard to forget.

He asks Jim if he could check the guy out. After that TK kind of forgets about it. Ben has arranged lunch with Walter Lucas, the electromagnetism expert. TK has been looking forward to this meeting. In fact, he can hardly wait for a chance to discuss the Magnebrakes idea with the foremost expert in the field.

Lunch with Walter

The meeting goes very well. Professor Lucas and TK hit it right off, and before lunch is half over, the four of them - TK, Jim, Ben and Professor Lucas - are so caught up in this engineering problem that their food has gotten quite cold. After TK explains the extremely high level of magnetism that will be required (preferably generated by a very small unit that can be placed on the bike) Professor Lucas shakes his head and takes a calculator out of his briefcase. Figuring in

the weight of RocketBike, the fact that it has a very low stall speed (and therefore less momentum to bring to a stop), and balancing that data against the amount of steel they can safely put on the elevator platform for the magnet to pull to, he calculates it would take a unit roughly the size of a refrigerator to generate the magnetic force necessary to do the job.

“Too big,” thinks TK, then he throws out the second part of his idea for discussion. “How ’bout if we had a small, high-speed turbine which could produce the torque and RPM’s necessary to spin the magnetic generator?” he says, thinking of the turbines that came with the rocket engine from the Sun Tool surplus yard.

“That would work,” says Dr. Lucas. “We have developed a very small ultra-high speed magnetic generator, but the fuel needed to produce the required turbine speeds would still take up the same amount of space.”

“There isn’t any free lunch in the high energy business, unless, of course, you plan to use atomic power,” says the professor with a laugh.

“Hmm,” says TK, “No, not atomic. I’ll have to do some re-figuring.” They make arrangements to meet that evening after dinner and work this idea over on TK’s computer.

After Professor Lucas has left, Ben tells TK, “While Walter Lucas is brilliant, he is also rather eccentric. Among other things, he’s developed a theory he calls “Magnehelics” in which he feels that magnetism can be intensified to an extreme degree and controlled very precisely.”

“Sounds interesting,” says TK, “I hope he tells me about it.”

“Don’t worry,” says Ben, rolling his eyes. “You probably won’t be able to stop him!”

Another Doctor in the House

Later in the afternoon, Jim takes TK aside to tell him what he’s found out about the man who seems like he’s always there watching him.

“He is watching you, his name is Doctor Nero C. Hammish and he works for Atlas! - I knew he looked familiar,” Jim continues, “He’s one of the men who questioned me when I retired. His father, Adam Hammish, was head of the original H²O-S project at Sun Tool!”

“They’re on to us already,” says TK, “I didn’t think they’d find me that fast!”

“I don’t know if it’s necessarily true that they know what’s going on,” replies Jim, “but I think they’re quite suspicious, and are trying to put two and two together.”

“I didn’t tell the other members of the ‘nopoll’ group my name and they didn’t know what I look like, they just knew me as ‘t-kid’,” says TK.

“What did the ‘t’ stand for?” Jim asks. “The,” answers TK. “The Kid?” queries Jim.

“Yeah,” replies TK, “Just like my favorite ball player. Cool, huh?”

Jim just shakes his head and laughs; sometimes he forgets that TK is “just a kid!”

Givin’ It Some Thought

By the time Professor Lucas arrives, TK has already run the fuel calculations; he knows that the small turbine, powered with oxygenated hydrogen fuel from the H²O-S system on RocketBike, will produce the necessary RPM’s and torque to meet Professor Lucas’s requirements. The question remaining is whether his small high-speed generator will produce the electromagnetic energy they need.

Professor Lucas is amazed by TK’s figures on the turbine speeds and torque. Nobody says anything about the H²O-S system, they just tell him they are taking power off the rocket and he accepts that. He then tells them he’s developed a magnetic field generator That’s smaller than a football, and two of them, each one driven by one of their turbines, will produce enough magnetic force to do almost anything with a vehicle the size and weight of RocketBike. He invites them to his lab, which is on the outskirts of Chicago, and they make arrangements to be there in two days, when the meeting is over.

Talkin to the Bigs

Today's the big day and TK's not even nervous. "Well, maybe a little bit nervous," he admits when he walks into the auditorium and sees the size of the crowd!

But as soon as he starts talking and they start listening, he calms right down. He notices Nero Hammish is sitting near the front and has someone with him, intelligent-looking and young, perhaps a college student.

As TK gets further into his presentation, he forgets about Nero Hammish, and is enjoying the moment, concentrating on making contact with the audience.

Nero C. Hammish

As he listens, Nero Hammish is becoming more convinced than ever that TK is the mysterious Mr. T-Kid; he is certainly bright enough to have the secrets of the H²O-S separator. Hammish knows that his very high position at Atlas (not only the head of research, he is also on the board of directors of the corporation) is secure largely because he had his father's notes and information from the original project. In fact, Atlas bought Sun Tool, a virtually worthless company, just to acquire whatever remained of the project, only to find that everything was gone. The secret of the H²O-S separator and injector is probably the most valuable commodity in the energy field. Atlas would give anything to get it, and Nero Hammish is counting on that!

Hammish had created the 'nopoll' group in hopes of flushing out someone with information, perhaps even original blueprints or prototype parts. However, what he may have found, he thinks looking at TK, is a young genius that has figured out the system. Now, after seeing him with Jim Truesdale (who strangely enough doesn't seem to be the same rather confused old man he was when they talked to him at Sun Tool), he's even more certain he is on the right trail!

"So here I am, Dr. Nero C. Hammish, respected scientist, now turned industrial spy," he thinks to himself. "And nursemaid," he thinks, looking at his companion.

Actually, Austin Lewis, the young man beside him, seems to be a nice enough chap, although rather shy. He is not only a lawyer at Atlas, but is also the only child of the owner of the company. He has a great deal of scientific and engineering knowledge and curiosity, nothing like his mother, who, as far as Hammish can tell, has no other interest except money and power, both of which she has lots of, but always seems to want more.

Austin Lewis

Sitting beside Hammish, Austin is finding himself quite absorbed by TK's presentation. Even though his schooling is in Business and the Law, as his mother wished, his interest has always been engineering--much like his father, who developed many of the formulas and designs that Atlas was founded on. His mother considered his father to be weak because his interests were in creating things that would help people and make their lives easier. He had no interest in gaining power or great amounts of money. Many of the things he invented he donated to just causes.

Austin inherited those attitudes from his father and in fact, has put together several fairly large charitable contributions by Atlas by convincing his mother and the board of directors that they were to the corporation's advantage tax-wise and enhanced their public image. However, Austin feels they aren't giving even a small percentage of what they should, considering the huge profits they enjoy every year.

This convention is like a vacation for Austin: he can't get enough of the subjects being discussed here. However, the only reason his mother sent him here was to handle the legalities of what she hoped would be closing a deal for the information that Hammish is seeking.

And Hammish seems to think he's found the person with the information. But Austin is just interested in TK's lecture on "Gyro Rotational Torque" and can hardly wait for a chance to talk to him. He has some theories on the subject and would love to actually discuss them with TK.

After the presentation, Hammish leaves, planning to talk to TK later in the evening. However, Austin hangs around, waiting for the crowd around TK to thin out so he can have a chance to meet him. It takes a while, but eventually TK is free and Austin gets his chance.

TK recognizes him immediately as the man who was with Nero Hammish and is quite wary, but he soon finds himself liking Austin Lewis. Austin, in turn, is quite at ease talking engineering with TK. It's a subject he loves, but has had very little real contact with even though he sat in on all the engineering classes he could in school and read engineering books whenever he could get away from his law studies. They trade email addresses and will keep in touch. Austin doesn't tell Hammish anything about his conversation with TK.

Later, Nero Hammish calls TK at the motel room, but TK claims he doesn't know anything about a group called 'no-poll' or some oddball project that the Sun Tool company was working on fifty years ago. And he's definitely never heard of a "Mr. T. Kid!" Hammish leaves it at that for now, but he plans on keeping very close tabs on TK, and the Bikesters!

Chapter 16

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