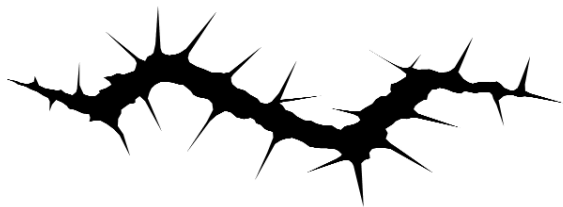


**MASTERS OF DISASTERS**

**THE EARTHSHAKING  
EARTHQUAKE  
MYSTERY**



**By  
Carole Marsh**

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First Edition

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## CHAPTER ONE:

# GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES



It's a space ship...no, it's a van...well, maybe it's a little bit of both. Alien-looking with its numerous antennae sticking out every which way, like a Mars lunar lander, the van sat on a perilous angle in front of the Masters' home. It teetered on a block wedged under the back tire that kept it from rolling down the steep San Francisco street, through Mrs. Potters' garden, past the grocery store, and into the Pacific Ocean. The black tires, thick with mud, could tell as many stories as the bumper stickers plastered on the once shiny metal bumper. A blazing orange bumper sticker stuck in the middle of Oklahoma and Nebraska reads: CAUTION: I BRAKE FOR DISASTERS!



Inside the house was a storm of seismic proportions. Gadgets upon gadgets littered the living room floor. Several television sets lined the far wall where 24-hour news and weather reports from all over the world chattered away. Stuck in the middle of the chaos was Dr. Artemis Masters. He looked exactly how you'd expect a somewhat-mad scientist to look. His hair poked out everywhere like he'd just stuck his finger in an electrical socket. Eyeglasses were perched on his nose; another set dangled from a chain around his neck, and then there was that lab coat that was two sizes too big.

While anyone else would be distracted by the unnerving jibber-jabber of countless languages around him, Artemis focused on the task at hand. He was figuring out a series of random numbers that made Einstein's Theory of Relativity seem like basic arithmetic.

Downstairs, in a room oddly neat compared to the rest of the house, Copernicus Masters, tall for an 8-year-old, fiddled with a computer game controller. His sister Curie, 11, thumbed through a science book almost as big as she was. Their unique names were to be expected. Their father knew from the moment

they were born that they would both be famous scientists, just like him. Copernicus, also known as Nick, was named after Nicholas Copernicus, the first person to propose that the sun is the center of the universe. Curie got her name from Marie Curie, famous for her work on radioactivity, and a two-time Nobel Prize winner.

Like most kids, they liked to eat chocolate, would rather do anything other than pick up their rooms, enjoyed video games and the park. They just happened to have a genius IQ, and the ability to see things in ways most people don't—adults included. And like most siblings, they were competitive, each hoping to stay one step ahead of the other.

“I just love summer vacation,” said Nick, as he focused on the television. “I’m not going to do anything but sit back and play video games.”

Next to him, Curie curled up with the anchor-sized book on the solar system, ready to read. “Well, I’m going to use my time wisely and catch up on all my pleasure reading,” Curie said.

Challenged, Nick sneaked a peek at the book. “I’ve already read it,” he said. “Twice.”

“Then what’s it about, *Copernicus*?” Curie smirked as she covered up the title.

“It’s, uhm, the theory, of...no wait, the study of...” Nick wasn’t doing so well in his video game anymore as he tried to weave a convincing tale. Suddenly, he saw a reflection of the book’s title in the television screen.

“You don’t know, do you?” Curie smiled.

“Sure I do. It’s an encyclopedia of the solar system,” said Nick.

Curie couldn’t believe her ears. “How did you know that? I just checked this book out of the library,” she said. But before Nick could answer, a red light flashed and a loud horn honked like a sick goose.

“Another one of Dad’s practice runs. Come on, let’s go,” said Nick, popping up quickly.

Curie followed her brother up the stairs. “I’ll figure out how you knew the book title,” she warned.

Artemis’ eyes were wider than the Grand Canyon as he watched the numbers on his computer screen come together in a pattern known only to him. Nick and Curie walked into the room, unconcerned, as they had done a thousand times before.



“Come on, Dad, safety positions!” said Nick, but Artemis didn’t move. His eyes were glued to the computer screen, and he heard nothing but the whirring of gears between his ears.

“I finally did it, kids. I’ve unraveled the secrets behind tectonic plates! Your dad is one step away from winning the Nobel Prize! *The Nobel Prize!*” Artemis cried. Both Nick and Curie stopped in their tracks. This was not what they expected.

“Do you know what this means?” asked Curie.

“He figured out how to track earthquakes?” said Nick.

“Then this isn’t a practice run!” said Curie.

Suddenly afraid, they both dashed to different parts of the room—Nick to the doorway and Curie under a large table with elephant trunk legs.

“What about Dad?” asked Curie. They both looked at their father, gazing at the computer screen, lost in his own world.

“Come on, Dad!” shouted Nick. He looked like he wanted to leave his protective area under the doorway and pull his dad to safety. Curie had the

same idea, and she planned to beat her brother to it. They ran to Artemis at the same time, both hoping to save him before the roof came crashing down around them all! Nick grabbed one arm, Curie the other, and a game of tug of war began.

“Curie,” said Nick. “Let go!”

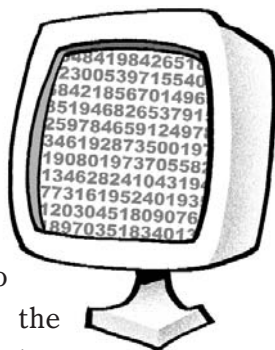
“Nick, you know that being under a large table is safer than being in a doorway,” Curie lectured, like an older sister.

“Now is not the time to drop 100 IQ points,” said Nick. “The doorway has always been the best place, so please let go of Dad’s arm and follow me.”

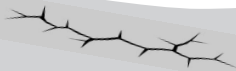
“Table!” shouted Curie.

“Doorway!” cried Nick.

The two ping-ponged back and forth, with Artemis stuck in the middle. But instead of being torn between the two, his eyes remained glued to his computer screen where the random number formula ticked down, down, down.



“Here it comes!” said Artemis, like a boy awaiting the ice cream truck. Nick and Curie studied



the computer screen, which seemed like a digital countdown to doomsday. Forgetting about who was right or wrong, they decided to **abort** their plan. They both let go of Artemis, and quickly crossed over each other as they headed to the other's safety zone. Nick cowered under the table while Curie braced herself in the doorway, both waiting for the impending roller coaster ride that is an **EARTHQUAKE**.

And they waited.

And waited.

But nothing happened.

"Did you feel it?" said Artemis, beaming. Both Curie and Nick looked at their dad as if he was just a little crazier than he appeared.

"Dad, nothing happened," said Curie, slightly confused.

"Maybe it's just a delayed reaction?" Nick said from under the table. But Curie didn't wait to find out. She hurried over to her father and double-checked his calculations.

"Are you sure you programmed the computer correctly?" asked Curie. "Took all the variables into consideration?"

Not wanting his sister to have the upper hand, Nick dashed to her side. “There’s nothing wrong. I checked his calculations myself, Curie,” he said.

“Like I said, Dad, did you make sure it was programmed correctly?” said Curie.

“That’s not funny,” said Nick with a frown.

“No, no, all the calculations are correct, see,” said Artemis. He pointed to another display monitor where a digital Richter scale was displayed. A tiny blip barely stood out on the flat lines. “This data here, the one before the marker,” said Artemis.

“You mean the blip?” said Nick.

“It’s a marker, Nick, and before that marker, these orange lines predicted this earthquake!” said Artemis, pointing to the tiny blip.

“That could be a car backfiring, Dad,” said Curie. It was her turn to frown, as she knew that the tiny movement could be anything at all.

“Or a random occurrence explained away by a series of incorrect data,” said Nick.

“Or it means that my Earthquake Early Warning Detection Device really works!” said Artemis.



He fumbled with his paperwork stacked together like a pile of chicken feathers. He grabbed all his papers and hurried out of the room.

Nick and Curie studied the data and readouts left behind.

“What do you think, Nick?” asked Curie.

“He could be on to something,” said Nick.

“Do you really think so?” asked Curie.

“Just because you said there could be a correlation to a car backfiring doesn’t mean it’s improbable,” said Nick.

“Improbable? It’s preposterous!” said Curie.

Nick felt he should break it down in simple terms for his older sister. “Curie, pressure is put on the earth’s crust like this,” he said. He brought the sides of his hands together.

“I know, Nick. The first layer, which is the crust, is broken into tectonic plates which rub up against each other,” said Curie.

“Yes, Curie, but you never know when that friction is going to create enough stress to cause an earthquake,” said Nick. He brought his words into action, rubbing his hands harder and faster, until his



own tectonic plates ruptured, creating a mini-disaster by knocking over a cup of water on the desk.

“Oh, no!” said Nick. Both kids pushed and pulled papers out of the water’s path. Nick suddenly kicked off his shoes and yanked off his socks.

“You’re not going to stop it by stinking it out,” said Curie, as she held her nose.

“Ha-ha, Curie,” said Nick, as he wiped up the water with his dirty socks. “You could help me, you know.”

“I’m not touching your stinky socks,” said Curie.

“Then get some paper towels, please,” said Nick.

Curie turned to grab them, but stopped when she saw her dad struggling with an oversized suitcase.

“I think paper towels will do, Dad,” said Curie. Artemis looked around, puzzled.

“Okay, that’s fine. We can take some paper towels, too,” said Artemis, as he pulled the suitcase toward the door.

“Dad, what are you doing with that suitcase?” said Curie. Artemis looked at his daughter as if the answer was as plain as the nose on her face.

“Well, loading up the van, of course. We’ve got a job to do,” said Artemis.



“But our summer vacation just started,” said Curie. “And Bella, my best friend ever, is having a sleepover tonight, and they got a new puppy named Chase I wanted to play with! Look, she gave me this special electronic bracelet that says *Best Friends for Life*.”

“No, no. No time for that. Copernicus, help me with this,” said Artemis. Nick forgot about his wet socks and reached for the suitcase.

“Nick, what are you doing?” asked Curie.

“Getting ready for an adventure, silly,” said Nick.

“But you said that all you wanted to do this summer was lie around and play video games,” said Curie.

“If Dad has stumbled upon a great invention, I want to be a part of it,” said Nick, as he and Artemis worked the suitcase out the door. Curie thought for a moment, and then hurried after them.

“Wait for me!” she called.

As Curie followed them out the door, red letters flashed across the computer screen: **WARNING: MOVEMENT ALONG THE FAULT LINE!**





## CHAPTER TWO:



# TWO WRONGS DON'T MAKE A RIGHT, THEY MAKE A LEFT

The van shook, rattled and rolled as if a wrestling match were going on inside. And the truth wasn't that far off. In the passenger's seat, Nick and Curie were locked in battle.

"I got here first!" said Nick.

"But I'm older!" said Curie, as she tried to squeeze into the "co-pilot" seat, where the lucky rider was responsible for monitoring the Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) Navigation system, and controlling the CD player. Nick pushed back, and then reached for the seat belt to buckle himself in.

Artemis studied a set of notes as he climbed into the van, unaware of the wrestling match next to



him. He checked the gauges that made the van look more like the cockpit of a commercial jet plane. Artemis was confused since they were not working. He tapped them, but nothing happened. He finally realized that something was missing.

“What did I do with my keys?” said Artemis. Both Nick and Curie pointed to the ignition where a rubber microscope dangled from a giant bundle of keys. “Oh, right. Thanks,” said Artemis. He turned the key and the van coughed to life. “Okay, kids. Buckle up.” Artemis finally saw the struggle next to him. “Hey, come on, kids. Only one in a seat.”

“Dad, I was here first, and she’s trying to push me out,” said Nick.

“But I always get the front seat first, because I’m the oldest,” said Curie.

“Well, now I’m taller than you, so I should get it,” said Nick.

Artemis cleared his throat. Nick and Curie stopped and looked at their dad.

“We’re wasting valuable time here while you two bicker over who is going to sit in Command-Com,” said Artemis. “You both have brains and IQs equal to

mine. Don't you think you can solve this situation responsibly?" said Artemis.

"Okay. Rock, paper, scissors," said Nick as he made a fist. Curie scoffed at his idea.

"How about this, Nick. We take turns. Since I am the oldest, I'll ride in Command-Com first, then after the first stop, you will," said Curie.

"But, what about," said Nick, but his protest was cut off by his father.

"That sounds fair to me, Nick," said Artemis.

Sulking, Nick slowly crawled into the backseat and buckled up. Artemis smiled at him in the rear-view mirror, and then turned to Curie.

"Pilot to co-pilot. All systems go?" said Artemis. Nick mouthed Curie's response, wishing he were the one up there.

"Roger that, captain. All systems are A-OK. Kick the tires and light the fires," said Curie, as she put on a pair of sunglasses. Artemis flipped his sunglasses down over his prescription lenses, gave a thumbs up, then put the van in gear. Curie turned and smiled confidently at Nick, who looked out the window.

“Let’s see. Who should we listen to? How about the Venice Beach Girls?” said Curie. She reacted to Artemis, who cleared his throat again lightly. “Hey, Nick, who would you like to listen to?” asked Curie. Before Nick could answer, Artemis had pulled over to the curb and parked the van.

“Okay, we’re here,” said Artemis, as he flipped up his sunglasses and opened the door.

“We’re where?” said Curie, confused.

“We’ve arrived at the first research point,” said Artemis.

“But, Dad, we’re less than a block from the house. We could have walked here,” said Curie. Artemis laughed as if that was the funniest thing he had ever heard.

“And carry all the equipment?” said Artemis as he walked toward the back of the van. Nick, now happier than ever with the deal he made, smiled as he unbuckled his seat belt.

“Don’t gloat, Copernicus,” said Curie.

Both kids helped their dad unload boxes, computers, cables and other stuff from the back of the van.



“Why are we here, Dad? I mean, what’s so important about downtown San Francisco?” asked Curie.

Artemis stopped and pretended to be in shock. “Are you sure you’re my daughter?” he asked.

Suddenly, Curie got it. “The San Francisco earthquake of 1906!” she shouted.

“It was one of the worst natural disasters to hit the United States,” said Artemis. “Experts estimated the earthquake to register 8.3 on the Moment Magnitude Scale. Much of what we see here was gone. This city was rebuilt almost from the ground up,” he added.

“If it was such a bad earthquake, Dad, why did they rebuild it so close to the epicenter?” said Nick.

“Maybe they didn’t know that the epicenter is the point on the earth’s surface directly above where an earthquake originates? After all, it was more than one hundred years ago,” said Curie, as she helped Artemis unpack his big black case.

“I think it’s more of an emotional thing, Curie,” Artemis replied. “The people who lived through the 1906 earthquake didn’t want to give up

what they built. Though the earthquake caused an estimated \$500 million in damage, left almost 3,000 people dead and 300,000 homeless, it was important to them to reclaim a sense of normalcy.”

“So, what are we going to do now? Stay here until the next big earthquake hits?” asked Nick.

“No, we’re going to check out the line of Masters’ Motion Sensors that I set up along the San Andreas Fault when I started this project,” said Artemis.

“So that’s what’s sending back the information to the central computer set up in the van,” said Nick.

“That’s right son, and if my calculations are correct, it will be able to tell us when the next ‘big one’ will strike,” said Artemis.

They walked to a planter where a shade tree sheltered a small mound of dirt. While Nick was proud of himself for being in tune with his dad, Curie was more interested in their surroundings. Something just wasn’t right. She looked down at several candy wrappers that littered the ground. Ordinarily, this wouldn’t be an odd thing in such a large city, but they



all seemed to be in direct proximity to Artemis' invention.

"What's this?" asked Artemis. But it wasn't the candy wrappers that concerned him. It looked like someone had been digging around the planter. Artemis got down on his hands and knees to get a closer look, but quickly jumped to his feet. "Dog," he said as he rubbed his nose and let out a sneeze of seismic proportions.

The kids knew what that sneeze meant. Their father was allergic to dogs, which doomed any chance that they'd ever own one. But that's okay. They had adventures.

Artemis tried to control the super sneeze attack so he could get back to work, but they came quicker than firecrackers. He walked to the van and grabbed a handful of tissues.

Nick followed his dad, but Curie grabbed his collar.

"Hey, that hurt!" shouted Nick. He saw the look on his sister's face, and knew she wasn't trying to be mean. "What's the matter?" he asked. His eyes followed Curie's hand down to the pile of candy wrappers. "It wasn't a dog, was it?" he added.

“A dog was here, but he didn’t eat those candy bars,” said Curie.

Nick filtered the loose dirt through his fingers. “And he might not have dug up this dirt,” he added.

The two studied the scene. It was obvious that someone was searching for something—quite possibly the Masters’ Motion Sensors. Nick grabbed his laptop. With his fingers a blur, the Masters’ Motion Sensor program popped onto the screen, followed by the words: **WARNING: MOVEMENT ALONG THE FAULT LINE!**

The kids looked at each other, wide-eyed.

“Well,” said Curie, “that means that either Dad’s invention works, or someone has been tampering with it!”



## CHAPTER THREE:

# NOBODY'S ASPHALT BUT MINE



The tires hummed across the asphalt as city turned to countryside, countryside to desert. A sign in the distance read: *Los Angeles, 17 Miles.*

Though he was planted in the Command-Com seat, sunglasses absorbing most of his face, Nick was unable to enjoy it. His mind whirred like a top, focused on the mystery. He looked back at his sister, and she too was trying to figure out if it was a coincidence, or if someone was **deliberately** messing with their father's work.



The van entered the city of Northridge, California, home to the 1994 Northridge earthquake that shook the city's foundation. Artemis kept driving until he came to a large dirt lot caged in by a tattered chain link fence. On either side were apartment buildings. Nick stretched as Artemis got out and walked toward the empty lot on a street filled with apartments and businesses. Before he could tell Curie that they had stopped, she opened his door.

"Did you come up with any ideas?" asked Curie.

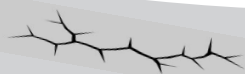
"No. Did you?" her brother asked.

"Well, other than a dog with a sweet tooth, no," she said.

"It was probably just a coincidence," Nick tried to convince himself as he jumped from the van to follow his sister. But he had the mind of a master sleuth and couldn't help but notice a black car parked just down the street. It looked out of place in this neighborhood. He took a mental picture of it, and then ran after his sister.

"What are we doing here?" asked Curie.

"Well, to know for sure if my invention works, we need to place more Masters' Motion Sensors along



the fault line,” said Artemis, “and research leads me to believe that this is the epicenter of the 1994 Northridge earthquake.”

“Was it the same as the San Francisco earthquake?” asked Nick.

“No, quite different. Which makes studying earthquakes so exciting,” said Artemis with a big grin.

“And scary,” added Nick.

“This earthquake occurred on a blind thrust fault, which is where the end of the fault, called a plane, ends before it reaches the surface,” said Artemis.

“How can you find them if they don’t reach the surface?” asked Curie.

“Well, you can’t. Which is why I have been working on this invention,” said Artemis. “And this earthquake produced the strongest ground motions ever recorded in North America. Damage was widespread. Major sections of freeways, parking garages and office buildings collapsed. And many apartment buildings were damaged beyond repair. Just like the one that used to stand here,” added Artemis, spreading his arms out.

Artemis noticed the look of fear on Nick's face, and put his arm around his shoulder. "Don't be afraid, son," said Artemis. "I know that earthquakes can be scary, but each one we study teaches us how they work." Artemis pulled out his seismic measuring equipment. "What we learned about damage to buildings from other earthquakes allowed us to retrofit buildings and reduce the amount of destruction and lives lost," said Artemis.

"What is retrofitting, Dad?" asked Nick.

Before Artemis could answer, Curie did. "It means when a building is brought up to new standards so it will be able to handle the stress from an earthquake in the future," she said proudly.

"Very good," her dad replied, then suddenly stopped. The quirky things their father did usually didn't bother them, but this one was probably one of the strangest. Artemis put his arms out like a weather vane, taking **deliberate** steps to see where the best place was to put the Masters' Motion Sensors. "Knowing where the building was will help me determine how best to monitor the fault line," he said.



“With the building gone, I need to use my instincts to find the best place for it.”

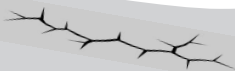
“Hang on, Dad. I think I can help,” Nick said as he ran back to the van to grab his laptop. With the black sedan still on his mind, he grabbed a small computer circuit board out of the recycle bin, stuffed it in his pocket, and dashed back.

“What have we got there, Nick?” asked Artemis as his son powered up the laptop.

“I’m looking for a database of buildings either by satellite photo or some sort of collection of photographs,” Nick said as his fingers flew across the keyboard. In no time at all, Nick pulled up a photograph of the city streets by satellite. “Here we go,” he said. He brought the image in closer, getting better and better detail until the flowers in the window box on the apartment building were crystal clear.

“Wow! That’s perfect, Nick. Don’t get any closer,” said Artemis. He studied the picture, and then looked at the empty lot. In his mind’s eye, the building came to life. He looked at a readout in his hand that described the power of the earthquake.

Suddenly, the ground shook. Car alarms wailed and dogs barked. The flower box in the window



dropped to the ground and shattered into a thousand pieces. The building tilted and groaned, then crumbled to its knees. Artemis' body seemed to move with the shaking and rolling. Nick and Curie watched with curiosity as their father relived the earthquake in his mind.

Then things went quiet; back to normal. Artemis had broken from his daydream and walked quickly toward a space almost exactly in the center of the empty lot.

"Looks like he found what he was looking for," said Curie. She and Nick followed their dad.

But Nick wasn't really listening. He was more concerned with a shiny new candy wrapper that just didn't fit with all the old trash. He quickly grabbed it as Artemis pointed to a grouping of lines that looked like mud that had dried and cracked under the hot sun.

"Do you see how this spider web of lines crisscross?" Artemis asked. "While they're not specifically fault lines, they give us a pretty good idea of just how complex the tectonic plates are."

"And they give us a great central point to put the Masters' Motion Sensor," said Curie. She turned

over the soft dirt with a shovel. Artemis readied the Masters' Motion Sensor while Nick looked around to see if he was being watched. As Artemis and Curie readied the hole, Nick prepared the decoy. He pulled the old circuit board from his pocket and placed it in a plastic bag, just like the one Artemis used for the real device.

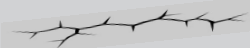
Curie stopped digging and Artemis dropped to one knee. He pushed a button on the Masters' Motion Sensor, and then carefully placed it in the hole. After piling dirt on top, he stuck a small plastic orange flag in the mound.

While Artemis was satisfied, Nick was not. He waited patiently for his dad and Curie to head back to the van. When the coast was clear, he quickly dug a shallow hole, then buried the fake device. Nick took a mental picture of where the Masters' Motion Sensor was, and moved the flag to the fake one. He dusted himself off, and then ran back the van.

"Why did you do that?" asked Curie.

"You saw that, huh?" Nick said, then handed the wrapper to his sister. "Look at this."

She did. The chocolate was still gooey. "It doesn't make sense. Why would this new candy bar



wrapper be inside this closed off area?" wondered Curie.

"See that black car over there? I think they've been following us since we left San Francisco," Nick said.

Curie slowly turned around, and pretended to tie her shoelace. She snuck a peek, but a newspaper hid the faces in the car. "Who do you think it is?" she asked.

"I don't know, but since they're hiding their faces, I don't think they're friends of ours," said Nick. He put the laptop back in the van.

"Don't put that away just yet," said Curie.

"Why?" asked Nick, as he pulled the laptop back.

"I'll show you," said Curie. She took the laptop from Nick and turned it on.

Artemis was just about ready to start the van when he looked over and saw that the co-pilot chair was empty. "Pilot to co-pilot...uhm, where are you?" asked Artemis. He saw both Nick and Curie in the backseat, laptop between them. "Isn't it your turn to sit up here, Curie?" asked Artemis.







“Yes, Dad, but Nick and I are working on something,” said Curie.

“But who’s going to kick the tires and light the fires?” asked Artemis. His voice wavered a bit, letting his kids know how much he missed their interaction.

“Can I do it from back here, Dad?” asked Curie.

“Sure, Curie,” said Artemis. He flipped his sunglasses down. “Pilot to co-pilot. All systems go?”

“Roger that, captain,” said Curie. “All systems are A-OK. Kick the tires and light the fires.”

Artemis smiled, started the van, and put it into gear.

“Okay, so what did you want to show me?” asked Nick.

Curie pulled up the same website Nick had used to locate the old apartment building. “I was thinking that if we could find satellite photos from 1994, why couldn’t we find them from today,” she said.

“Curie, that is a great idea!” shouted Nick. “But what if they have some sort of secret password or something?”



“They do, it’s a ‘Member’s Only’ page, and thanks to Dad, we are members,” said Curie. Her fingers flashed across the keyboard. “I’m going to track things back to our street address and check to see what, or who, was around us at the time we left,” she added, as a satellite photograph of their street popped up on the computer screen.

“Get in closer,” said Nick, eager to find out who was following them. Curie clicked a few keys and zoomed into their neighborhood. “There’s our van!” said Nick, excited.

“And there’s the black sedan,” said Curie. She clicked the mouse button again, and brought the black sedan into full view. But instead of being able to see the people inside, all they saw was a copy of *Scientific Times* newspaper concealing their identity.

“Rats,” said Curie.

“Maybe we can track them while we are driving,” said Nick. “They can’t hide behind a newspaper and drive at the same time.”

“Great idea, Copernicus!” said Curie. She surfed through data, and clicked through frames until she came to a clear shot of the black sedan following

their van. "I think we've got them!" She zeroed in on the car, getting closer and closer until she was right on the windshield. And clear as day was a picture of two people hidden behind dark sunglasses and big black hats. "Double rats!" said Curie, angry that they were let down by technology. "They could be anybody!"

"Maybe they're not even following us," said Nick. "Maybe some kid dropped a candy wrapper, and the wind blew it over the fence."

"Or maybe not," said Curie as she focused in on the dashboard of the black car. In plain view was the same kind of candy bar as the candy wrapper Nick found in the dirt lot.

Both Nick and Curie turned and looked out the back window, trying to find the black sedan they knew was out there.

