


GREAT WRITERS & KIDS WRITE
MYSTERY
STORIES

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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Summary: A collection of thirteen original tales by authors of adult fiction in collaboration with their children or grandchildren.

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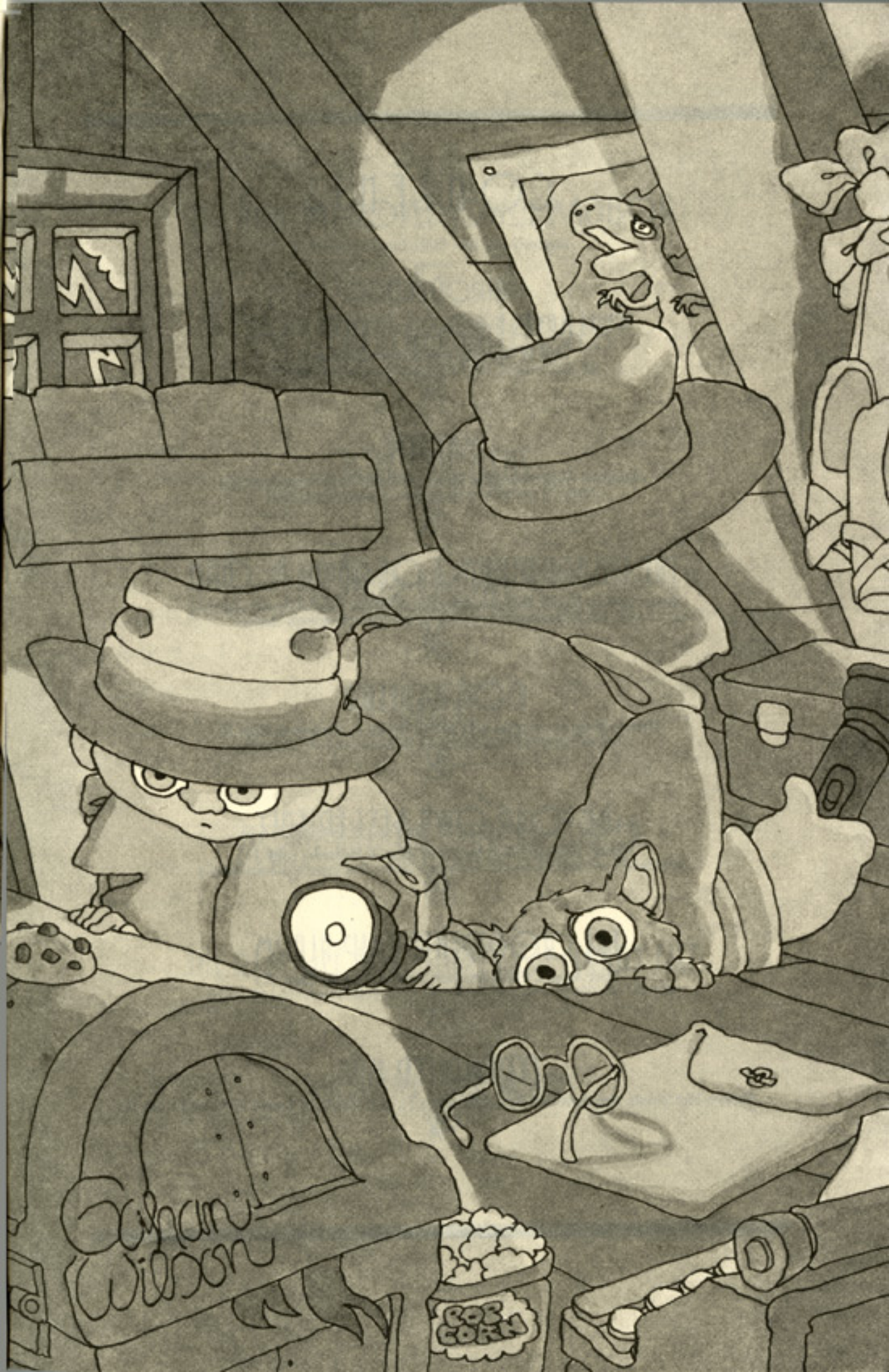
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"Hey Brian," I said, "how would you like to write a story with me?"

"Great," he said.

"It's for sort of a kids' book."

"Oh, uh-huh. Actually I'm trying to get in touch with my outer adult."

"I have an idea already," I said. "We can do kind of an update of the Sherlock Holmes thing about the dancing men."

"Cool. We'll make it an interstory."

"What's an interstory?"

"You know, like interactive. It involves giving the reader at least a couple of ways of making it come out."

"But don't they want to know what really happened?"

"What do you mean what *really* happened? It's fiction."

"But Brian, when I read a story, I want to feel as if it's really happening."

"This generation doesn't feel that way. I mean, they feel like if they help decide how it happens, it feels more like it's happening."

"Well, it—are you sure?"

"This is your son talking here."

"I'm aware of that."

"Trust me."

And I did.

Barbara D'Amato Brian D'Amato

TOO VIOLENT

BY BARBARA D'AMATO
AND BRIAN D'AMATO



I'm an agent of the U.S. Treasury Department. My assignment was to find Kenny Logon and stick to him until he passed the four million dollars he was carrying to the mob.

We knew he hadn't been told beforehand where to go with it—the mob is too careful for that—so there was no way we could get there ahead of him. The overnight surveillance told me he was heading for O'Hare Airport.

This is it, I thought.

He had been spotted going into the airport video game arcade. I caught up with him there.

I hung back behind the Plexiglas partition, where he couldn't see me, and watched. There were a lot of kids around, and a few people in their twenties, like Kenny. He didn't talk to any of them. Nobody handed him a message. He walked around the arcade, as if looking for an interesting game. Then he grabbed one called Hands of Death, put a line of tokens on the side of the screen, grabbed the joystick, and played.

He played for forty-two minutes. I almost went over and grabbed him just because I was bored out of my mind, but it would have blown the whole case. At one point somebody else came up to try to play the game, but Kenny just stared him

away with his gangster eyes. At another point he shifted his fanny pack and I could see that it was wired onto his body with a combination lock. I was feeling conspicuous out in the walkway so I strolled into the room and hung back in the darkest spot by the least-used pinball machine.

Suddenly, he turned away from the game and race-walked out the arcade door. I had been on the other side of the room, staying out of sight, I thought, but he knew he was being followed. Blast! I was just a little bit too far from Kenny; he was getting away.

I ran after him, just in time to see him slip into a crowd heading for the section that held Gates H1 through H30. I pushed through the crowd, bouncing off the stomach of an extremely overweight man, nearly overturning a baby carriage. A teenage girl dropped her bag of Gummi Fish when I rushed in front of her.

Kenny was gone. He was lost in a river of people heading all over the planet. I *had* to find him. I ran to the ticket agent at the nearest counter, flashed my ID card, and said I needed a list of all the planes leaving from those thirty gates.

"You mean the ones that are boarding now?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. Kenny wouldn't be hanging around; he'd get on a plane at the last possible moment.

It seemed to take forever to print out the list:

SAN FRANCISCO

HONG KONG

LONDON

TOO VIOLENT

MINNEAPOLIS

MIAMI

PARIS

MANILA

SINGAPORE

NEW YORK

LOS ANGELES

ATLANTA

It was still too many planes to check individually. I was in trouble.

"Delay all the planes ten minutes," I told the agent. Any more and Kenny would probably get spooked. "Tell them the runway's tied up."

Desperate, I ran back to the arcade. He had to have gotten his message there, but how? I got tokens and put two in Hands of Death and played. Kick-boxing game. I got destroyed in the first two seconds by some big bruiser named Gort. There was no message there that I could see, but there had to be.

I'm too old for this stuff! I thought. *Kids understand these things; I don't.*

I looked around.

A girl of maybe nine or ten was entering her name, KIM, on the next game to the left. She was wearing black tights and a T-shirt with a picture of Barney the Educational Dinosaur eating kids.

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU ARE THE ALL-TIME HIGH-SCORER ON THIS MACHINE, said the words on the screen.

"Uh, excuse me, little girl?" I said.

mob might have just told him what scores to get, and somehow he'd learn from that where to go.

"Probably," she said. "I have a flight to Seattle in an hour, though, I'm playing in a Sonic the Hedgehog tournament there."

"Well, I'd be really happy if you could give it a try," I said. I wasn't cut out for this decade, I thought. Kim popped four tokens, chose Stanley, and started punching Roc:



SALUTATIONS. BOX!

Then they knocked each other out:



HEAD BASH! BOTH DOWN!

"Ha!" she said. "See, I tied it. Eight hundred and fifty million. I got it *exactly* right. I matched Kenny's last score!"

The two figures shook hands:



PERFECT TIE!

"I am *not* 'little girl,'" she said. "You may call me sir."

"Uh, yeah, sir, excuse me, I'm with the FBI." I flashed my badge.

"I didn't do it," she said.

"I'm sure you didn't," I said. "You play these games a lot?"

"Sure. My mom says they're too violent. Do you think so?"

"Oh, certainly not," I said, "I think they're, uh, great. Do you know whether they change games often?" I was thinking, of course, that messages could be left by putting a doctored game in place.

"Sure they do. The best ones stay, though."

"You remember the man playing this game a couple of minutes ago?"

"Tall skinny guy with a butt pack? Dorkish hair?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"Uh-huh."

"Can you play this game for me and see if there's a message in it?"

"You are truly weird. But I'll play if you'll pay."

I handed her a stack of tokens and watched.

"Wow," she said. "Somebody named KEN got the last five high scores."

"That's the guy I'm looking for," I said.

"Hmm, there are only a few ways to get scores *this* high," she said. "You have to play as Stanley and fight Roc. That's this really baddest, lizardy-looking guy. And Stan's kind of a wuss. It's not easy."

"Do you think you could get the same scores?" I asked. The

Roc knocked out Stanley and stood in *his* victory stance.



TOSS!



ROC WINS!

"You realize I had to lose that one on purpose to match the score," she said.

"Of course," I said.

The next fight was a tie again and went like this:



SALUTATIONS.



BOX!



HEAD BASH!



BOTH DOWN!



IT'S A TIE!

And the last one went like this:



SALUTATIONS.



LEFT JAB!



BLOCK!



K.O.!



STAN WINS!

And it was over.

"Uh—sir," I said. "Is there a message?"

"Sure. You can't possibly have *missed* it! It's obvious."

"Wow, you're incredible," I said.

She didn't argue with that. "Okay, let's try for the second score," she said.

The second fight went like this:



SALUTATIONS.



UPPERCUT!



SPIN KICK!



ROC OUT!

Stanley raised his gloves over his head in a victory stance.



AWESOME!

"Creamed him," she said. "Okay, three more."

The next fight went on for a long time, but she stopped when she got to Kenny's score.



SALUTATIONS.



ROC KICKS!



HEADLOCK!

TOO VIOLENT

DEAR READER: IF YOU ALREADY KNOW WHERE KENNY'S GOING, GO TO SECTION B. IF YOU NEED TO LOOK AT HIS MESSAGE AGAIN, GO TO SECTION A.

SECTION A

"Please," I said. "I'm just an adult. Tell me what it said."

She said, "Give me more money." I did. I looked at my watch. I had lost five minutes already.

She played it again, saying, "Now pay attention. Watch the freezes at the end of the action."



PERFECT TIE!



AWESOME!



ROC WINS!



IT'S A TIE!



STAN WINS!

"Miami!" I yelled. "The freeze-frame pictures at the end spell MIAMI."

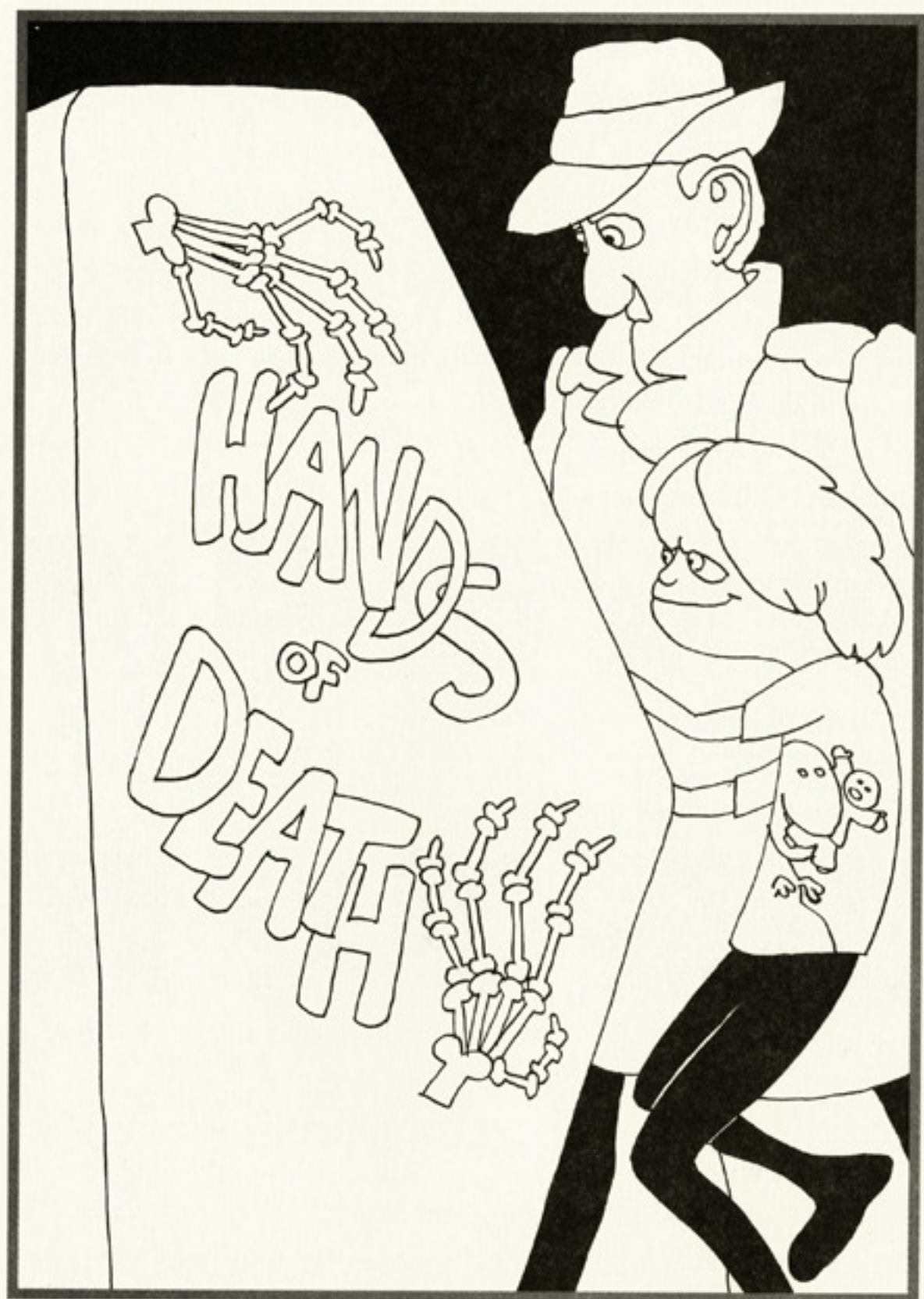
"The older generation," she said, "is *so* slow!"

DEAR READER: PLEASE GO TO SECTION B.

SECTION B

I thanked her and ran out into the lobby toward the gates. The Miami flight was leaving in two minutes. If I really ran for it, I could make it.

I reached into my pocket for my badge and noticed there



from the window. It said:

Kim is a
M. is a
F. is
T

SECTION D

It took me over two minutes to unfold Kim's note and figure out how to read it, but I still made the Paris flight with a whole three seconds to spare.

The 767 took off and a minute later I heard the wheels fold up. As we leveled off, I walked down the aisle, as though I was going to the bathroom. I felt this huge rush of excitement when I saw Kenny. Even better, he had earphones on and his eyes closed and there was a pink Post-it note sticking out of his jacket.

When I got even with Kenny, I pretended to lean down to look out the window of the seat behind him.

I may not be great at video games, but one thing I can do is pick pockets. I snagged the scrap of paper, palmed it, and walked on ahead to the bathroom and looked at the message. I held it up to the bathroom mirror.

Yes! Somebody had written Kenny a note about where to

was something in there that hadn't been there when I left home. I pulled it out and it was one of those origami birds, made out of folded blue paper.

I had a sneaking suspicion my young girl buddy had slipped it into my pocket while I was looking at the Hands of Death machine. I started to unfold it. I could see there was writing way down on the other side of the sheet, but it was so intricately folded that I didn't have time to stand there and undo it if I wanted to catch the plane.

DEAR READER: IF YOU WANT THE AGENT TO RUN FOR THE PLANE, PLEASE GO TO SECTION C. IF YOU WANT HIM TO TAKE THE TIME TO READ KIM'S NOTE, PLEASE GO TO SECTION D.

SECTION C

I was the last person to board the Miami flight. The aircraft door closed with a solid thud. We taxied to the runway. The plane took off and a minute later I heard the wheels fold up.

Now let's see where Kenny was.

I looked up the aisle, but didn't see him. Of course, from where I sat I couldn't see everybody aboard. I sat back to try to catch my breath. In a minute, I'd wander around and scope him out.

Kind of absent-mindedly, I put my hands in my pocket and found the origami bird. I unfolded it as delicately as possible—it took over a minute—and smoothed it out. The message was written to be read in a mirror. I held it up backward to the light

meet his mob bagman. It had the place but not the city, because he wasn't told the city until he got to the airport. But it was a place every city had *one* of. I could phone ahead to Paris and have agents waiting. We'd see him pass the money and *we'd have him dead to rights!*

I looked at it again:

nism, your gibber

 noo, muratwab, pnaadil

Maybe I'm not that dumb after all, I thought. And Kim was sneaky, but not *that* sneaky. I took out my notebook and wrote down the captions from underneath the freeze frames again, just so I could show it to my supervisor:

<u>P</u> ERFECT TIE!	<u>A</u> WESOME!	<u>R</u> OC WINS!	<u>I</u> T'S A TIE!	<u>S</u> TAN WINS!
P	A	R	I	S

Except for having to drop by the Bibliothèque Nationale tomorrow, this might be almost like a vacation.

I made a note to send Kim a chocolate Eiffel Tower.