

The Library Tree

By Scott Douglas

Chapter the First
Have I Got a Secret to Tell You

The first thing you should know is librarians will deny this—all of this—the entire account. And why shouldn't they? If what I say is true, which they will all surely say it's not, then everyone will want a library tree—there wouldn't be any need for libraries at all. And if there weren't a need for libraries, then who would need librarians? Does all that make sense? Yeah? Okay.

Now the second thing you need to know is why I'm telling you this...settle down would you? I'm going to tell you about the Library Tree in a second—actually, in a paragraph, but you'd better not skip to the next paragraph to find out. Okay? Okay. Now as I was saying...the second thing you need to know is why I'm telling this to you. It's not for the money. Yes I did get a lot of money for telling it, and yes I bought a new car (17 new cars actually, but only one of them flies), and yes, I bought every video game ever made, and also a movie theater screen to play the games on—but it wasn't about the money...okay so it was kind of about the money...fine it was mostly about the money. But it was also because people have a right to know the truth.

Okay so the Library Tree...wait a minute—you skipped ahead didn't you? If you did, then I guess you missed the part where I explained how to turn a single piece of broccoli into a one million dollar bill. And if you didn't skip ahead, thank you...I really am proud of you. What a good reader you are—I really look forward to having you as a reader for the duration of this book (or as long as I can keep you interested...whichever comes first). So the tree...

I was as clueless as the next guy about the tree until I became a librarian myself. And believe me, when I found out, I was shocked. On my first day as a librarian, they pulled me to the back of the library and said, “There’s something about the books in this library—all libraries actually—that you need to know, but before we tell you, you must swear you’ll never repeat it to anyone...ever.” So I swore—and I swear that I meant what I swore until I was offered that hefty sum of money, which in turn convinced me that people had a right to know this tale.

There are several things you need to know about the tree, and a few things you might actually want to know, but I’m not going to blurt them all out here—for goodness sakes, I haven’t even got through with chapter one yet. I have to leave some of it for the other chapters. Here’s what I’m going to tell you: the Library Tree grows books. Many years ago, libraries had a dilemma—there just weren’t enough good stories. Writers had run out of ideas and it was rare for libraries to get new books. Librarians were almost certain the lack of books would ultimately force them to close. Then one day they discovered a way to grow new books. It was cheap, reliable, and certain to never run out of books—as long as it was watered, groomed, and properly cared for.

Are you interested? Intrigued? Perhaps shocked? And it’s all true. Go ahead and ask any librarian and see how nervous they get as they deny it. As you can imagine, librarians hate me for hashing out this secret of theirs, and it’s on this note that I’ll end chapter one. But you’ll definitely want to stick around for chapter two because you haven’t even heard about the monsters that grow the trees (who may or may not be evil and have armpits that stink of sweat), or of the one-legged, two footed, 2 feet tall, Siberian ninjas who guard the trees, or even about Jake—the wimpy little boy who discovered it all.

Note: For an explanation of why I am placing commercials in this story, please see “Further Explanations and Exaggerations” at the end of this story

**Commercial Break:
Cereal to Save the Day**

Okay, I was at first a little turned off by this whole idea, but now I'm a total fan. What is it? Mighty Beef Cereal and it's coming to a grocery store near you. Don't let the name scare you. It's not as strange as it sounds—or looks. Yes the green chunks that turn bright purple when you pour milk on top of it is a little bit gross, but try it—you'll love it.

When I told my friends about the cereal, they gave me the same gross and confused look that you're probably giving right now. Let me explain what it is. Basically it's your basic small crisp looking piece of cereal only it tastes like a barbequed hamburger.

The cereal company recommends you only use regular milk, but I found that chocolate milk gives it a more lasting taste. I also found mixing fruits into the cereal gave it the perfect effect.

Chapter the Second
Ralph: The Keeper of the Tree

Well thank my jolly Georgia blue-eyed toad—you're back. I was afraid we'd never meet again. Did that last sentence in Chapter One keep you around? Maybe I'll use it again, then.

Okay, so what should I explain next? You'll have to forgive me for writing in such a scattered fashion. Even though librarians now hate me, I'm still a librarian at heart, and as such my mind is a little strange—a hazard of the job I'm afraid. You see, librarians by their very nature are...well not right in the head is the best way to put it—insane is another word commonly used. That's why they demand silence in their libraries—betcha didn't know that. Too much noise makes them start to jump up and down and scream incoherent words and ramblings—believe me, I've seen it happen and it's not a pretty sight, so don't make too much noise around them. Okay? Okay.

Please forgive me for that previous paragraph, but like I said, librarians are not right in the head, which also happens to be why I can't remember why I wrote the previous paragraph. I ramble sometimes. Forgive me. What was I going to tell you next? Oh, yes...ninjas.

The thing is librarians are usually pretty smart people. When they came across the Library Tree, they knew that the most important factor in its success would be keeping it a secret from the outside, non-librarian, world. They knew they needed someone to guard the tree. So they hired one-legged, two footed, Siberian ninjas who all share a common first name: Ralph. They have no last name—they're funny that way.

Now these ninjas are the most intelligent, deadly, and stealthy ninjas that are known to mankind, which I've always thought to be strange since most of mankind doesn't know about ninjas at all.

It so happens that the librarian who first discovered the Library Tree lived for some time with a colony of Ralphs before he became a librarian. His name was Salinger. He was a mysterious fellow. When he was barely a man—only 19—he went on a journey around the world to find out his purpose in life. That's how he found the ninjas, or rather how they found him. He was living in Siberia.

Late one night he heard a loud noise, which made him have one of those insane librarian fits that I was telling you about earlier. He screamed like a mad little girl—or at least that's how the legend goes, although he would later deny the girlish nature of the scream. When he came to his senses, he had no idea where he was and only vaguely had recollection of who he was—and that's when the one-legged, two footed ninjas found him. He lived with them on their colony of ninjas for many months and they helped him discover his true calling: being a librarian.

So it really should be no surprise that when librarians banded together and asked the ever important question, "Who will guard this sacred book producing tree?" Salinger said, without any hesitation, "Ralph." And when the librarians said, "Who?" He explained, "one of the one-legged, two footed ninjas I used to live with while I was soul searching in Siberia." And the other librarians said, "Oh." Seeing as how none of them had a better idea, they agreed. So that's who guards the Trees to this very day.

The ninja that was the keeper of the Tree at my library...wait, have I even told you about my library? Let me check...no, I haven't. Sorry about that. It's not really important, but I'm going to tell you anyway, because even if it means nothing to you, it still gives this story a certain reality. Okay? Okay. It's called the Harbor Branch Library. It's in Orange County, California—more specifically, Anaheim. Does that ring a bell? It should...that's where Disneyland is. That's about the only thing you need to know about it—that it's near Disneyland.

Okay, now as I was saying before I so rudely interrupted myself, the library ninja. He was a quiet ninja. When he did speak, it was usually a weird bit of factual trivia like, “Say, did you know the length from your wrist to your elbow is the same length of your foot?” And when I’d say no, he’d always say, “Really? I can’t believe you didn’t know that!” Then he’d get defensive, stand in front of the tree with his nunchakus drawn, and say, “You’re not really a librarian are you?” I’d stare at him like he was nuts and he’d say, “Well you’re not getting past me.” Then he’d give this loud, insane laugh—like a witch. He was goofy that way.

Ralphs were quite different, despite all of them sharing a similar first name. All Ralphs loved to throw out weird trivia, but each one specialized in different kinds of trivia—some knew all sorts of entertainment facts, others specialized in science trivia, and still others knew all there was to know about math. Our particular Ralph was quite commercial. He threw out facts that always seemed to go with mainstream trends. He also took his love for commercialism a notch further. What I mean by this is that he was into whatever the latest fashion trends were. He insisted on librarians buying him whatever the latest most expensive shoes were, having hair that identically matched the current hot celebrities, and wearing shirts that were eccentric, yet trendy. He was also fashionable—he never once wore socks that didn’t match his belt.

Ralph was a fine ninja, and I surely would’ve never been able to win a fight against him. But he was still a man, and thus had a weakness. Now you may be thinking, “Of course he had a weakness—he had only one leg and two feet!” If you’re thinking this, then you’re wrong. You should see the kicks Ralph can deliver with that one leg and two feet—powerful enough to knock a tree down. No—his weakness wasn’t his leg—it was Skittles. He was addicted to the stuff. All one-legged, two footed ninjas are (but not two-legged ninjas—they’re quite a different story). All you have to do to get past him to get the tree is throw enough Skittles on the ground to keep Ralph busy for a few minutes (bear in mind, however,

that Ralph *will* track you down after he's eaten his Skittles, and then of course you'll be really sorry...I kid you not).

It was quite a funny sight to watch him. Every Skittle he ate, he'd say, "Skittles—I can taste the rainbow!" Did I mention that he spoke with a Spanish accent? Well he did and this made it all the funnier.

I probably shouldn't have told you about the Skittles thing. I mean not to tempt you or anything, but you could totally get a Library Tree of your very own now. All you need is a bag of Skittles. I'd erase it, but then I'd have to hit the delete key on my keyboard and I'm kind of lazy that way. And hey, it gives librarians one more reason to dislike me.

So for what it's worth, there you have it—Ralph—which brings us to the end of Chapter Two. But stick around, okay? I can't believe I haven't told you about Jake. Half of this account—okay, most of it—is all because of him. And did I mention that Chapter Three has game cheats for every video game ever made? No? Well that's probably because it does *not* include game cheats for every video game ever made...or does it? Look, would you read the chapter already? If you will, then I promise to end this chapter right now. Okay? Okay.

Chapter the Third
Jake the Once Nearly Sometimes Great

Oh...hello. Welcome back. I didn't expect to see you quite so soon, but I'm really glad you're back. Really.

Okay, so you want me to just get right into it? Certainly would be a nice change of pace, huh?

Well all right then...as I was saying before, or actually I guess I was implying, but it's all good—am I rambling again? Sorry. Anyway...Jake's important to this story to say the very least. I'll tell you how and why a little later, but first I want to tell you a little more about who Jake is.

Jake is a ten-year-old wimp—a nerd—a dweeb. It's pretty sad when even a librarian makes fun of you, and that's exactly what I did. Never to his face of course, but we still did it, nonetheless. How could we not? If you saw him, I'm sure you would join us. He wore thick glasses, he frequently tripped over his own big feet, and more than once I heard him talking to himself. If that's not a boy crying out to be called dweeby, then what on Earth is? Maybe that sounds harsh—especially from a librarian—but I promise it will all make sense later, so just deal with my harshness, okay?

Do you want to hear more about him before I tell you why he's important? How about a description? Okay, here you go:

Jake had ears that were too large for his head, hands too small for his body, and a voice that was often mistaken as that of a little girl—nothing about him seemed to fit. His t-shirts were too large; his pants were so tight that all of the buttons had popped off long ago; and his shoes were so oversized that they flopped at the front end when he walked. How's that? Is that a good enough description? Fine—let's move on...

The first day I met Jake is not important, but I'm going to recount it anyway because it seems like a good way to fill the space,

and I guess in some respects it is also kind of funny (they are very small “respects,” however, and I doubt you will notice them...in fact don’t even try). Anyhow, the first day...it was a Thursday—or maybe it was a Tuesday—no I’m pretty sure it was a Thursday...in fact I’m positive because it was Thursday because that is the day that I always set aside for being extra rude to people. But honestly the day’s not important, so forget that I acted like it was. Okay? Okay—let’s move on.

So on this Thursday, I was sitting at that dumb little desk where people are supposed to go (but rarely ever do) to ask the librarian questions...the reference desk is the technical name. I had my head buried in my hands, because I didn’t really want anyone to come up to me, and refusing to make eye contact was always a good way of doing this. It wasn’t like I was trying to be rude or anything. Even though it was Thursday, and I was supposed to be making an effort to be rude I really wasn’t—I just didn’t want to talk to anyone.

Well as I sat there, hands buried, I heard this little voice say in an almost inaudible mumble that sounded like a little girl, “Excuse me, mister.” It was just a mumble, so I decide to ignore it. Mumbling kids tended to go away if you ignored them and refused to answer their question. But the first thing I suppose you should know about Jake is that he is persistent, and of course said again, in a still soft, but a little more audible, girlish voice, “Excuse me, mister. Could you help me?”

The second time he spoke to me I looked up, and acknowledged him. He asked me twice, and he asked it so nicely, so I decided to answer him. “No.” I clearly explained, and then looked down and studied my shoes—I noticed immediately that they were in need of a good polish.

Now this wasn’t the first time I had refused to help a child (not even the first time that day), but it was the first it had not scared a kid off. Like I said, Jake was persistent. He just stood there, scared, but confident, and said the words that I don’t believe I will long forget, “Oh—well why not?”

Here's something you need to know right off the bat about me—I take my job as a librarian very seriously. My answers are final, and they aren't intended to warrant any kind of doubt. You don't question me, and to do so was a great dishonor. So of course that is what he did.

I could only answer his question with a question of my own, “Why not?” Now I hope you're not reading this, and already forming an unfair judgment of me—believing that my attitude is not right, and that I am a major mean pooppy head. I hate to give away any ending to this story, but I think I probably should say that major characters always have to be redeemed, and I, being a major character, am going to have to be redeemed somehow. So go with that...okay? Okay.

Jake nodded, and said, “I'm sorry if I'm bugging you—I just need your help for a second. I swear it will not take long.”

I rolled my eyes. Kids and I don't exactly get along so swell—did I mention that? Honestly I don't get along with anyone too well. It's not that I'm mean or anything, it's just everyone else is not mean compared to me, so it tends to make me out like mean person.

Anyway, so that was my first of several encounters with Jake. He was such an easy target. But as much as I loved to secretly mock him, I had to treat him kindly. On top of being a quite freaky nerd, Jake was also a bookworm—the library's number one bookworm, in fact. To this very day, I've never seen anything like Jake. He'd read four books a day from cover to cover. I swear the boy must have been able to read in his sleep—how else could he have read so many? And it wasn't like he pretended to read or only read part of it (this is actually what I do). I challenged whether or not he was reading one day, and he in turn recited from memory the first chapter of the book he was reading. It was amazing.

Now this next paragraph on Jake may or may not be important in the future, so why don't you take a listen? Or I guess you'd actually be taking a read: Jake's favorite book of all time is called, *Peanut Butter Space Monsters*. It's a series of books, and Jake

was always the first to read it whenever the Library Tree would grow a new one. I've never read it myself, but Jake told me once that it was all about monsters who were always trying to help people, but people misunderstood their attempts and thought they were mean. Apparently they also liked to eat peanut butter—hence the title. The next paragraph has nothing to do with this one—in fact if this paragraph seems out of place, there's good reason: it is out of place. I couldn't think of anywhere to put it, so I decided why not place it any ole place. So that's what I did. Sorry if it doesn't feel right, but to place it somewhere proper would have taken a little bit of effort, and I'm afraid I'm pretty lazy when it comes to things that require effort.

Okay, now you have the history of Jake. What you need to know now is that newly potted Library Trees came to my library every Tuesday, and old Library Trees are taken on that very same day. They were delivered by the monsters—you'll meet them later, so forget I ever said their name. Okay? Okay. Now on the particular Tuesday you're concerned with, Jake was standing at the double door that led to the back of the library. He did this a lot—like I said, the kid was a nerd and had nothing better to do, but stand by the back door and wait for the librarians to come out so he could bombard them with questions about what the library's newest books were. He really is a weird kid—I mean get a hobby already! And reading doesn't count—don't ask why, because I won't (can't) tell you.

Do you have the picture of what the scene looked like? Let me help: Jake is standing at the back door—and I am walking out it—and the tree, which had just been delivered and was blooming with new books, is in plain sight. Somebody had forgotten to move the tree where it couldn't be seen. Okay...fine, so that somebody was me, but come on—how was I supposed to know a nosy kid would be looking in? Yes I was a bit careless, but it was just that one time—well just that one time that I had been caught by someone.

And of course that little nerd Jake asked the question, “Wow—how's that tree doing that?”

“Doing what?” I nervously replied and quickly shut the door to conceal the evidence.

“Can I see it?”

“See what? There’s nothing back there. Nothing at all.”

Jake was clearly not convinced. “I know what I saw—that tree was growing books. I want to see it...*please*.” His “pleases” always came out so polite—it was really quite annoying. That’s another thing about Jake—he’s the most polite person (young or old) I have ever known. His politeness really made making fun of him a difficult task to do at times. I mean how do you make fun of someone who is nothing but kind and polite in return? I found a way, but, like I said, it was difficult. Anyway, back to the story, or rather the dialog:

“Oh that.” I nervously replied. It may or may not surprise you to know that librarians actually go to classes to train them on how to act around nosy patrons who somehow get a glimpse of the tree. Believe it or not, there have been a few other patrons who discovered the tree (if you really want to know about them, then you can go to the end of the story and read “Further Explanations and Exaggerations”), but Jake was the most memorable of them all.

He nodded. “That.”

“It’s plastic.” I lied, “Decoration is all. One of the librarians bought it at a garage sale.”

“Can I see it?”

That’s the thing I hate most about Jake—he is *so* persistent. I know I’ve said that before, but I can’t stress it enough. And he’s polite (which I’ve also said, but must insist on stressing), which is an annoying combination with persistence. “Only librarians can go back there. I’m afraid you won’t be able to see it.”

“*Please*.”

“Nope.” I decided to change the subject, “What were you doing standing around back here anyhow?”

“I’m sorry if I wasn’t supposed to. I was looking to see if there are any new books.” That’s another thing about him—he’s always opening a sentence with an apology. Most apologetic kid I know.

“Nope—none today.”

“But there are always new books on Tuesday.” And he was right on that point—there were always new books on Tuesday because that’s when new trees were delivered—but I couldn’t very well go back and get them now—he’d be watching me.”

“Well there’s none today.” I walked off quickly before he could say anything else. Sure enough he watched me the entire day. But I was careful.

But if you think that’s the end of Jake, then I seriously doubt you’ve been reading at all. In fact I think I already mentioned that a large portion of this book is about Jake. He’ll be back in chapter four...so will Ralph, the ninja, and I promise I’ll tell you a little more about the monster. Stayed tuned.

Chapter the Fourth
*Being the Chapter That the Dear Reader Meets the Sensible
Monsters in a Quite Personal Manner*

Have you ever seen the news show something that's called dramatization? It's where you see people reenacting what really happened. That's what this chapter is—well sort of anyway. I know all there is to know about the Library Tree, but this particular part of the story involves Jake and not the least bit me...although I may or may not make a few narrative appearance throughout the chapter. How's that for suspense? I know—it's pretty lousy. That doesn't mean the whole chapter will be lousy—just the remaining part of this paragraph. So stop reading it already—I just said it's lousy. But you're still reading—what are you? Some sort of literary loyalist who must read every word of the text? Well? Are you? Do you really have nothing better to do than read this? I give you permission to skip ahead. Author's permission is like gold in the reading community. Oh for Pete's sake! Go! What's wrong with you? You're a word stocker? Do you look through my garbage for tossed rough drafts too? Two words: Get help...you just wasted a part of your life reading a pointless, lousy, paragraph.

Welcome to paragraph two. For those of you rejoining us—I'm truly sorry—that first paragraph was quite embarrassing. For those of you continuing your flight, and who read the entire first paragraph—I am embarrassed for you. Does your mother know you have this problem? You know what? That's your problem. Let's just continue with the story. Okay? Okay.

So as I was trying to say many sentences ago, I am reenacting this chapter. I have heard enough eyewitness accounts to know how

it played out, but even still my publisher, for complicated legal reasons, tells me I have to clarify this. So we all understand it's a reenactment? Good.

So here's the set-up: Turns out that Jake's love for books isn't as much as his love for snooping around. If digging around for clues is a hobby, then it turns out old Jake has one after all. Way to go, right? Not exactly. If he was just snooping around his neighbor's trash because he wanted to know what they had for dinner, then I'd say way to go—I myself do the same when I'm bored or curious. But he went beyond this and was snooping around the library. And here's the thing about librarians: we're really into privacy—especially our own. As it was, however, Jake was stopping at nothing to find out about the Library Tree. So that's the set-up—Jake's a nosy nerd intent on ruining the library's ultimate cover-up.

We, the librarians, had been careful around Jake, because we knew he was up to no good. Unfortunately for us, however, we are powerless against chance, and chance had its way the very next Tuesday.

Jake had noticed, upon arriving at the library on the Tuesday in question, a white van parked in the back of the library with the words "Tree Company, Inc." painted on the side of the van in green lettering. Jake, seeing the van's side door was opened and no one was near it, decided to do some of his snooping. Of course he couldn't be content with a quick glance inside—not after he saw that inside the van were several blooming Library Trees. He just had to examine them more closely. Here's a tip-off for my precious reader: whenever a character examines something more closely, they're going to run into trouble—this is true in almost any story.

Jake ran into trouble. Now I hope you don't feel sorry for him. So far in the story, I have narrated his character to be quite plain and emotionless. He's just your common household nerd—nosy at that. I haven't even told you about his troubled life—wait, I've said too much—you'll find all about that later. When I say he's in trouble, for right now anyway, I want you to think, "Oh well—it's just Jake—at least it's no one important."

So as I was saying...Jake ran into trouble. You see, when he went snooping for a closer look, he heard the drivers exiting the library, and, not wanting to get caught, hid behind a bushy Library Tree that was growing volume Q to T of the encyclopedia. From behind the branches, he saw three figures appear. One was Ralph (didn't I promise he'd have a cameo in this chapter?), who was rambling on about how in Japan the life expectancy was higher than any other country—life expectancy was a trendy thing to know at this time, so, of course, Ralph made a point of knowing it. The other two were much taller, bulky men with hats embedded with a tree graphic. They were both looking inside the van where Jake was, and didn't seem to be paying attention to the rambling Ralph.

At the van, one of the men pulled out a Library Tree, and handed it to Ralph. It was much larger than Ralph, but he was able to carry it with no struggle. He started to hobble away on his one leg and two feet, but the driver called out to him, "Hey Ralph?" When the short ninja guard turned, he said, "Thanks for the tidbit about Japan." He reached in his pocket, pulled out a single Skittle and tossed it Ralph's way. "There's a Skittle for all your trouble."

Ralph dropped the Library Tree, ran to the Skittle, and upon eating it, called out with a Spanish accent, "Skittles! I can taste the rainbow! I can taste the rainbow!" Then he hobbled back to the tree, picked it up, and hobbled to the back door of the library.

"Crazy ninja." The driver said to the other man, who nodded in agreement.

As all of this took place, a very nervous Jake did his best to stay still and not shake. He was certain if they found him, then he would be in serious trouble, and he wanted no part in that—but let's be honest here: if he didn't want trouble, what was he snooping around for? Fine, fine...I'll quit whining about his snooping—for now anyway.

Well of course things got worse (things always get worse before they get better—in case you didn't know). One of the men slid the van door closed, and before Jake could do anything about it, the van engine had started and the van was driving off. Jake realized then

that he was in serious trouble...well no—now that I think about it, he actually realized the van smelt strongly of peanut butter and then he realized he was in serious trouble. You almost have to feel sorry for the poor kid and what he must have been thinking...no wait, don't do that—I told you earlier that I didn't want you to feel sorry for him yet—we better stick to that idea. I don't want to change the entire story around on the account of pity.

For quite some time, Jake was still and hidden well behind a tree. He expected the van would soon stop for its next delivery, and then he could make his break. There was a wall that separated the front of the van from the back; it had a square cutout in the middle and through it Jake could see the driver's face reflected in the rearview mirror. Through the square he could also here them speaking.

They spoke at great lengths about the weather and how it would affect the season's crop. From the conversation, he learned the driver's name was Gatsby and the other man's name was Arthur. He also learned that they were quite intelligent, and everything they talked about they spoke of in scientific terms; even when the man named Arthur said he was hungry, Gatsby was able to scientifically explain why he was hungry.

As the time went by, Jake realized that it might be a long time before they stopped, and that he might as well take advantage of all the books and read. Jake was odd in this character trait of his. In situations where most people would worry, Jake would read. He figured if you couldn't escape ultimate doom, then you might as well read. It sure beats worrying.

Hours passed and Jake had read two books, when finally he felt the van slow down. He heard the driver say from up front, "Sure is a hot one today." And then in the rearview mirror he saw the driver take off his cap and reveal that he had actually been covering a third eyeball right on his forehead. He was a three-eyed man, which some people might commonly refer to as a monster. Didn't I promise we'd meet some monsters in this chapter?

As you can imagine, Jake's jaw dropped, though he managed to remain silent. And his jaw remained dropped as the van stopped and both men got out. The driver opened the sliding van door and said to Arthur, "Could you do me a favor and call the library we just came from—tell the librarian we've got a bit of a problem." He paused, "Tell him Jake Maas has found out about the Library Tree."

"Sure thing, boss." Arthur said leaving the van.

Gatsby looked inside the van and said, "Why don't you come out now, Jake? No sense pretending to hide."

Jake peeked his head from behind the tree and asked, "How do you know my name?" Now despite Jake's predicament, the tone of his voice made him seem to be more confused than worried. Fear would come later.

Gatsby looked at him sternly and said in a harsh, unforgiving, tone, "I got a third eye for that sort of thing."

I hope the ending of this chapter wasn't too corny. Even if you think it's corny, you have to admit it does make you want to read more to see what happens to Jake, and are these monsters mean, and what's that poor narrator/librarian going to think when he hears the tree has been discovered?

And how'd you like that literary reenactment technique/style I used to tell the chapter? It's quite a revolutionary literary style, huh? Do you even know what I'm talking about?

**Commercial Break:
It's Stinky Time...Or Is It?**

When I was asked to promote this next little piece, I was hesitant. I felt a little weird promoting something that I didn't think I'd use, but guess what I found—I'm using it! Coming out early next year, our next little piece of commercial fun is scented socks.

Maybe you're like me, and you're asking, 'why in the world would anyone want to wear or need scented socks?' Easy: so you don't have to change them. Scented socks are guaranteed to stay fresh on your feet for thirty weeks (up to a year if you're not very active). Just imagine—you can play an entire season of baseball in one pair of socks.

The best feature of these non-stinky beauties is you don't have to wash them—ever. In fact washing them will only destroy them. After the scent has completely left the sock, then you simply throw the sock away and by new ones.

Chapter the Fifth *A Day Dream of Sorts*

I received the phone call at the worst possible time of day (note to the reader, there is no possible good time of day to call me). The phone rang several times, but I did not answer it, because my theory is never pick up the phone until the twenty-seventh ring—you know it's important if the person on the other end of the line is willing to wait 27 rings for someone to pick up.

After Arthur had filled me in with the news that Jake had discovered the library's secret to success, I had only one feeling: hunger. Man, was I hungry. Of all the days to skip a hearty breakfast, I chose a day that now appeared to be a long one. All I could think about was what I would have for lunch. In retrospect, I probably should have been many other things: disappointed, angry, concerned...just to name a few. But man, was I hungry!

Once I cleared my mind of hunger by eating six, foot long sandwiches (hey, I said I was hungry), I was able to start thinking more effectively about what to do next. First things first, however, I would have to drive to the Library Tree distribution center and yell at everyone who might be willing to take the blame for the huge mishap. Blaming other people for something that wasn't their fault was something I believed I was quite good at, but, as you'll see in future chapters, it does not always turn out as successfully as one can hope—more on this later.

I insisted that Ralph come with me. He was the first person I blamed. "If you would have been looking out for people instead of munching on a Skittle, then you would have seen the boy and stopped him." Ralph said his job was to guard the tree, not go to the

distribution center. So I put the tree in the back of my car and said, “The tree is coming with me—if you want to protect it, then you’re coming with me.” So off the both of us went.

I should warn you here that it’s going to be a long car ride that will be twice as long with Ralph rambling on about strange trivia. I will spare you of this unpleasant discourse, and move instead into a day dream of sorts, in which I will imagine, quite factually, who the three-eyed people are and how they came to be.

Before I imagine any further, however, let me clearly state that all of it is complicated so don’t be surprised if you are at first doubtful or confused by it—but if you’re not confused or doubtful, then give yourself a pat on the back and be proud of yourself... you are one of the few that can move with the story’s pace and not be slowed down by the few technicalities of it. Okay? Okay.

So as I was saying, before I interrupted myself: the three-eyed men, who are more commonly referred to as monsters. Some time ago (nearly 100 years), a group of men and women formed a group called Gatsby (named after the founder, whom they called “The Great” and whom was the grandfather of the driver who found Jake). Together the group moved to a remote location in the San Bernardino Mountains in Southern California.

The group had one requirement for membership: you had to love peanut butter. They had reasoned that peanut butter had vitamins and minerals to make a person stronger and wiser. And so they began to eat it with everything—peanut butter pancakes, peanut butter on top of broccoli, and their personal favorite: a hot dog with peanut butter and mustard.

Before long, members of Gatsby began waking up in the morning discovering they had a third eye right on their forehead. Soon every member had grown one, and their children were being born with them also. The Great Gatsby, their wise leader, concluded that it must be their peanut butter diet that was giving them the extra eye.

Now at first they were concerned with the eye—they worried perhaps that it was a bad thing to have an extra eye. Before long,

however, they realized the extra eye made them smarter than anyone else, because they could see things that other people could not see.

With a third-eye to guide them, they began inventing many wonderful things, such as three-eyed sunglasses, three-eyed binoculars, and a three-eyed t-shirt, which turned out to be the same as a two-eyed t-shirt. But their greatest invention of all was creating a tree that grew books.

They tried to sell their idea, but people were afraid of them, and as much as Gatsby and the others tried, they could get no one to see eye to eye with them—the extra eye made it impossible.

That's when the three-eyed people met Salinger (whom, coincidentally, they nicknamed J.D. for no apparent reason), who was the first two-eyed person to recognize the tree's potential. He promised the three-eyed people that librarians would treat them fairly and be kind to them if only they would sell them the Library Trees. And so the partnership grew from the encounter, and the three-eyed people signed a contract to give libraries new books on a weekly basis. In exchange, they were given twenty pounds of peanut butter per tree (money is of no value to three-eyed people).

Now over the years, the three-eyed people have had other contracts. Many book publishers also receive trees, as do some colleges. But the biggest contractor of the trees until recently was libraries. I say until recently with good reason. The Internet has done good things for the three-eyed people.

On the Internet, they can say they're two-eyed, and people believe them. And so they started selling thousands and thousands of their books online. They even started a bookstore called Amazon (after the vast amount of trees in that region). Their first choice was BookTree.com, but that name was taken. Amazon was their second choice. They even hired an eccentric business man named Jeff Bezos to be their front man, so the public would be unsuspecting of who really was in control of the bookstore.

As a result of selling books they had money—lots and lots of money—enough for 800 million years worth of peanut butter. They, of course, didn't buy peanut butter with all of their money. The

money they did not use to buy peanut butter, they donated to charities.

Money really meant absolutely nothing to them. They didn't have TVs or radios or cars (except for the vans) or any of those other things money tends to buy. They didn't have anything. They thought the entire idea behind all of the things money bought was quite silly. They were happy having the bare necessities in life. I thought they were nuts and I still do—you'd have to be to have all that money and do nothing with it. They could have at least bought new clothes—they were always dressed so shabbily. I guess I'd almost have to say there was a lesson in their lifestyle, but it's too early in the story to talk about lessons we can learn, so forget I said it. Okay? Okay.

So there you have it: a brief history of the three-eyed people. They'll be more on them later, but for now it seems I am almost to the distribution center, and will thus end the day dream. Forgive me, but I'm going to have to leave you until the next chapter because I have to find a parking spot—it's never a good idea to day dream while looking for a parking spot. Until we meet again in chapter six, farewell to you.

Chapter the Sixth
Meanwhile...Another Reenactment

If you recall, we last left Jake staring dead on at the third eye of Gatsby, the supposed monster. And it is in this very same state that we begin this next literary reenactment.

“Where are we?” Jake asked starring amazed at the massive hundred foot trees that were covered with books outside the van’s doors.

“The book tree distribution center.” Gatsby said proudly. His tone seemed friendlier. “My name’s Gatsby, by the way.”

Jake looked at him, confused. He hoped his answer would have answered more than it did.

“Don’t try to understand it.” Gatsby suggested, “It’s best if you just take it in. I’ll explain what it is later.”

Jake nodded. “How did you see me hiding behind the tree?”

Gatsby tapped his index finger above his top eye.

“The eye?”

He nodded. “Actually I noticed you at the library.” Yes, you unfortunately read that correctly—Gatsby could have prevented the entire ordeal had he called him out of the van when he first saw him. Then again, where would the fun have been in that, and more importantly the story, had he done that?

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Jake asked. Wouldn’t all of you like to know that? Well too bad! As you’ll see from his response, you’re going to have to wait a bit before you get that answer.

“I think you’ve asked enough. It’s my turn to ask questions.” Gatsby’s voice was suddenly stern and hostile again.

Jake nervously nodded—I suppose I should explain, as I have spoken little (actually not at all) of Jake’s nerves. So here you go: he was nervous. Okay, fine...I’ll be more detailed than that. He was *really* nervous. How much more detailed do you want? Just think how you would be if you had no idea where you were, there were books growing on trees, and a three-eyed man, who mysteriously knows your name, wants to ask you a few questions. Dwell on that a few seconds, would you?

Did you dwell? Good.

Now as I was about to explain before I interrupted myself to explain something else, Gatsby got his third eye on him, and stared him down.

“Are you going to hurt me?” Jake asked.

“What’d I say? It’s my turn to talk. Understood?”

Jake nodded quickly.

“All I have are two questions.” Gatsby impatiently explained, “Can you deal with that?”

Jake, who was still partially hiding behind a tree in the van, nodded again quickly.

“Question one: why were you in the van?”

Jake quietly replied, “I’m really sorry—I didn’t do it on purpose. It’s just that I saw the trees and I wanted to know how they were growing like they were, so I got closer. Then I saw you coming and I didn’t want to get in trouble, so I hid.”

Gatsby nodded. “Fair enough.” His tone was calm and friendly once more as he asked, “Now, questions two: would you like a tour?” Yes, yes...I’m as shocked as you that he would offer Jake a tour. I mean he did something wrong—he shouldn’t have been rewarded. Where’s the moral lesson in that? Don’t answer—that question was rhetorical. I feel horrible writing it—I don’t want some reader to believe that if you do something as wrong as what Jake did, then you too will be rewarded. You won’t. Jake got lucky is all, and you’re not going to get lucky.

Do I really need to tell you that Jake nodded yes? Isn’t that a given? Even so I’m going to say it so you can’t say I wasn’t clear

later down the road—so here you go: Jake nodded yes. Really, who wouldn't want a tour?

Even though Gatsby spoke friendlier and even offered him a tour, Jake was still confused and nervous, and asked him, while climbing out of the van, "You're not going to hurt me?"

"Hurt you?" Gatsby laughed.

Jake nodded.

"Nonsense. We hardly ever get visitors at the distribution center. I've waited all my life to give someone a tour." He paused and sighed, and then continued sadly, "You know this is exactly why we hardly ever go out. We have one extra eye and suddenly everyone thinks we're monsters."

Before I continue with the reenactment, I guess it wouldn't hurt to tell you a little about the setting as Jake was seeing it. In the van he had a limited view of the trees. He saw the tall ones with books, but it was not until he got out of the van that he saw how huge the distribution center was. Thousands of trees, blooming with unplucked books, were everywhere. Some were over a hundred feet tall, while others were only five feet, like the one at the library.

Many of the trees had three-eyed men and women picking off books, and putting them in baskets. They all had smiles on their face, and some were even singing a song. They were each dressed differently than Gatsby and Arthur. Gatsby and Arthur had casual clothes on. By casual I mean jeans and a t-shirt—things that aren't too uncommon to see on people. The tree pickers, however, were wearing shabby dresses that looked homemade. Even the men wore dresses. That may sound weird, but like I said before, the three-eyed people don't spend money. For clothes they got a piece of fabric and made their own clothing. Dresses happened to be the easiest things to make—they only required a person to cut a hole out for the neck and two arms. You don't even have to measure them. Whenever their dresses got old, they got another piece of fabric, cut out the holes, and in less than thirty seconds the dress was made.

Surprisingly, Jake didn't seem surprised by the men who wore dresses—or if he was he didn't think to ask about it. He

reasoned that it was not polite to ask Gatsby why the men wore dresses. Like I've stressed before, he was a polite little boy—and a nerdy dweeb.

As they walked past the book pickers, the pickers turned, waved, and said, "How's it going, Jake?" They all were all excited and pointed when they saw him. Children followed Jake from a distance, but they were too shy and nervous to give him any greeting.

"They know me?" Jake asked Gatsby surprised.

He nodded, and tapped above his eye again.

"The eye?"

He nodded.

"Sure comes in handy, doesn't it?"

"It has its advantages—it isn't very eye appealing though. To most people, anyway."

"I don't mind."

"That's because you're special." He paused, looked ahead, and pointed at a tall tree full of blue books. "See that tree?"

Jake nodded. "What about it?"

"That's going to be a popular book at Christmas. That entire tree is just for people who live in Rhode Island."

"Wow!" Jake said, "What's it about?"

Gatsby shrugged. "It's still a little unripe—the ending isn't even grown yet. It won't be ready for another month." He paused, waved at a ninja standing guard in front of a building (did I mention that a Ralph also handled security at the center? Well he does. The three-eyed people didn't think it was necessary, but librarians insisted), then added, "I read the first chapter though and from what I can tell, it's about a group of singing cactuses trying to build the first desert snowman."

Jake laughed at the idea, and acknowledged, "I can't wait to read it."

Gatsby smiled and nodded. "It was quite a long drive up here—would you like some food?"

Jake nodded no. "Maybe a drink though—if it's not too much trouble."

“Drink it is.” As he walked him towards the cafeteria for drinks, he explained, “We’ve alerted your library. The librarian is on his way up here as we speak. We need to get you back before it gets too late.” Then he changed tones and said quite oddly and suspiciously, “I wouldn’t want to get your parents concerned.”

Now why he said this oddly, as well as Jake’s reply, I’ll save for another chapter. This one has gone on long enough already. But don’t close the book and go to sleep (or whatever it is you’ll do when finish reading this book...perhaps you were going to eat peanut butter, or perhaps not) just yet. Don’t you want to hear how these trees grow? And don’t you want to know why the three-eyed man asked the question oddly? Or aren’t you even kind of curious if I got to the distribution center safe, and if Ralph is still rambling on with constant nonsensical trivia?

**Commercial Break:
Fake What Now?**

I think all of us have been fooled at least once by the ever cruel, but deliciously humorous “Fake Dog Poop” gag. Over the years it’s evolved from a piece of cheap plastic into a piece of finely tuned laughter. In recent years, however, I’m afraid the gag poop has been in a bit of a rut. Seeing fake poop has become an old trick that isn’t as funny as it used to be...until now.

Meet the new frontier of fake dog poop, and surely the hottest gag gift of the year: “Real Fake Dog Poop.” You heard me right—this stuff is the bomb...quite literally. It not only looks like poop, smells like poop, and tastes like poop (don’t ask how I know)—it is poop! From the purest bred puppies this side of Calcutta. And unlike fake dog poop contemporaries that are toxic and easy to choke on, this stuff has nothing toxic about it.

I tried the smelly delly of a trick on several of my friends—you should have heard the laughter in the room! They were furious and disgusted, of course, but I couldn’t stop laughing! I’m certain everyone can easily get the same laugh as me.

Chapter the Seventh
My Delightful Arrival Is Ruined By a Dweeb

You should know that I've always enjoyed going to the distribution center even though it is such a long drive—almost an entire hour (understand that this is in Southern California where anything over 10 minutes is a long way away). The reason: three-eyed people are so kind. They get lonely up there—they very rarely get visitors. So when one does arrive, they go out of their way to make them feel welcome. They shout out your name, give you books, and feed you with all of the peanut butter you can imagine. Who wouldn't enjoy it?

So that's why I was so angry when I got to the center. No, I wasn't angry because they were treating me well—that's just the thing—they weren't treating me well. There was no joy for me. My moment was stolen by Jake.

From the moment I opened my door, all I heard was, "Hey, did you hear about Jake? He's here!" I wanted to shout (in fact I did shout at one point) "You fools! Why do you think I'm here?" I wasn't trying to sound mean, but come on! Why else would I have driven all the way to the center. I mean I like going, but I don't go just to go—there has to be a reason for me going there, otherwise it would be silly. Visiting three-eyed people just because—how ridiculous is that? They had it coming, right? Right? Tell me I'm right. Well then pretend that you think I'm right.

Thank you.

I got to the point where I actually yelled out, "Who cares about Jake! Doesn't anyone want to say hi to me?" I'm not trying to

sound self-centered or anything. I just like to be recognized. Is that so bad?

Ralph, who was following me and carrying the Library Tree, answered my question with a question of his own, “Did you know that kids who play role-playing video games are more likely to read more than two books a month than a kid who doesn’t?”

“Ralph,” I said sarcastically walking quickly to try and out pace him (this is actually an easy task—have you ever seen a two foot man with one leg carrying a tree more than twice his size? It’s quite easy to out pace him, because the size of the tree slows him down), “why don’t you go and taste the rainbow?”

“Skittles? You saw one?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I think there is one back by the car—nearly a whole bag’s worth.”

Ralph dropped the tree and began to skip off, singing, “Skittles” to an out of key tune as he went.

“What a sorry sight.” I mumbled as he hobbled off on his one leg and two feet singing out of tune with a slight Spanish accent.

Arthur had said Gatsby would be waiting for me with Jake in the cafeteria, and that’s exactly where I found them. They were both drinking peanut butter soda at a table. And you should have seen that unashamed smirk on Jake’s face—not the least bit remorseful for what he did.

Now perhaps this kind of went over your head, or perhaps it didn’t, but doesn’t it seem a bit odd that they’re in the cafeteria? Let’s think about this for a moment...if you recall it takes almost an hour to get to the distribution center from the library; Arthur called me about the same time that Jake and Gatsby went into the cafeteria (but also remember that I had to eat lunch before driving out to the center), so that means they’ve been inside the cafeteria for about one and a half hours (perhaps more). Isn’t that a long time? Considering Jake didn’t want to eat anything, don’t you think he’d be anxious to walk around the center? If you don’t, then keep reading, but if you do and you want to find out what really happened, then see “Further Explanations and Exaggerations” at the end of this book.

Whatever your feelings about the previous paragraph, forget it now and just continue with the story. Okay? Okay. Okay, then back to the dialog: “You really should watch your library patrons better,” Gatsby said with a smug smile on his face when he saw me.

I was angry and wasn’t afraid to show it, “I want to know who’s to blame for all of this.”

“Take it easy,” Gatsby said coolly, “Sit with us.”

“I don’t want to sit.”

“Sit.” This was more of an order than a suggestion, and so I had no choice but to follow it. You can argue all you want with a three-eyed person, but never make him mad—the third eye can work to his advantage when he’s mad. Believe me, I know from prior experience.

“Maybe just for a second,” I mumbled as I sat.

Gatsby looked at Jake, then at me. “Jake and I were just talking about how he has no parents.”

I’m sorry. I hate to leave you hanging like that, but you’re going to have to read a bit more if you want to know what’s up with Jake’s parents. It really shouldn’t be all that big a shocker though—Gatsby asking him oddly about his parents should have clued you in. If it didn’t, then really you should start reading with a bit more attention. It’s sort of rude to read too quickly, don’t you think? And you shouldn’t rush through anything in life.

**Commercial Break:
It's Not What You Think**

I'm a sucker for pop music—shamefully the girly kind of pop music. If my friends (yes I have friends) knew this, they would surely think I was a total nerd. I mean, I'm a grown man, and I should have grown out of girly music by now...but I didn't. I can't help that the melodies are catchy! Fortunately for me there's the CoolEarPhones walkman.

The CoolEarPhones walkman is by far one of the neatest gadgets I've seen this year. What is it? Put your CD in, then you select the kind of music you want your friends to think you're listening too (there's four to choose from: rap, rock, pop, or classical), then you hit play. You'll hear whatever CD you put in, but your friends will hear something quite different—from tiny speakers on the outside of the headset, they'll hear muffled sounds of rap, rock, pop, or classical music.

Just think—your parents will think you're into classical, when really you're into punk rock. It's never been so easy to make people think you're something that you're not!

**A Deleted Scene:
A Day In the Life...**

It's come to my attention that there are things that need to be said that I haven't said, or in some cases was too lazy to say. One of which is what exactly these three-eyed people do all day. You probably hadn't thought about it, but now that I've said it, I hope that you're at least kind of interested. I'm sorry if it bores you terribly, but that's why I left it as a deleted scene—so you don't have to read it.

I suppose a better name for this would be a “Deleted Chapter,” but that doesn't seem very modern—I mean whoever heard of a “Deleted Chapter.” The whole idea of that sounds a little corny. I say “Deleted Scene” and now I sound very Hollywood.

Now none of this really matters at all to the story (except for the fact that the three-eyed people are the ones who grow the Library Tree, which is what this story is about...at least I think it is, but I may be wrong; I'm open for suggestions if you think this story is about something else), but it's interesting—that's why I've included it, but only as a deleted scene, or if you insist I be technical, a deleted chapter. Sorry...I know I ramble on a little much at times.

Enough already with the explanations...as I was about to explain before I paused to explain why I was going to explain it (I can't believe I got “explain” three times in a single sentence! I am impressed), the day in the life of a three-eyed person(s):

Wait, wait, wait...before I go on to explain three-eyes, I think another explanation is at hand. I promise I'll be quick about it. That explanation being how I know so much about the daily life and rituals of the three-eyed people. The explanation is quite simple: after

I decided to expose this story, Gatsby invited me to spend a few days living with them. He suggested that living with the three-eyed people would help me to understand the tree better. After living with them, I now know that they are completely insane, but nonetheless their lives are fascinating, so without further explanations of the life I will explain, let me explain it:

The three-eyed people live lives not so different from our own...they drink peanut butter soda through their nose, write with their toes, and sleep on a bed that's upside down—okay so their lives are nothing like ours, but that's what makes reading this so interesting.

The normal three-eyed day starts at exactly 5:34 a.m. That's when they wake, and take a hot peanut butter bath (that's why they all smell like peanut butter), which lasts exactly six minutes and thirty-eight seconds.

After their peanut butter bath, they run (literally they run as if they were being chased by monsters) to the cafeteria for their peanut butter breakfast. Now you would think their breakfast would consist of some sort of peanut butter cereal, pancake, or waffle, but it consists of none of these—these, I learned, were all dinner items. For breakfast they had mustard and peanut butter corndogs and peanut butter coffee.

At precisely 6:02 and fourteen seconds, breakfast is over and work or school begins. Their age or specialty is what directs the next several hours of their life. The three-eyed people are carefully divided into the following groups:

Gardener:

This is the most respected job a three-eyed person can get. They are the people who nurture the trees. The people who know just how often a Library Tree needs to be watered to grow a bestseller. Among these gardeners, there is one person who is chief of all gardeners (the most respected job any three-eyed person can ever have); the current chief gardener is named Thomas Pynchon, but I've never seen him—

most people haven't. Like all chief gardeners before him, he keeps to himself, does his job, and hardly ever socializes.

Pickers:

Pickers are the people who Jake saw walking to the cafeteria. They were trained experts in knowing when a book is done growing. Understand that if a book is picked too soon, then the ending is lousy, and if it's picked too late the ending makes no sense. They knew how to get those endings just right.

Deliverers:

This is what Gatsby and Arthur were. They were experts in normal human behaviors, and were one of the few three-eyed people who could fit into a regular society. They went to a normal college to study normal humans, and that's why no one ever notices them when they deliver a Library Tree—they fit right in. I once asked Gatsby what the hardest part of learning how to be human was, and he said, "learning how to not be happy." Three-eyeds, as you have already seen, are always happy.

Cooks:

Cooks are trained doctors. They are the people who make breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day, but they are also the people who parents consult if their child's third eye wasn't functioning right—they knew how much peanut butter a three-eyed needed to keep that third-eye healthy.

Students:

Students are what three-eyes call their children. Students are expected to attend school right when they are born until they are 46—unless they are meant to be gardeners, who have to attend school an extra 7 years. And you thought you have to go to school forever! You should realize, however, that three-eyed people live to be exactly 124. No one ever lives shorter or longer than this, and to

top it off nobody ever ages—peanut butter is the only medical explanation for this.

Teachers:

I list teachers last not because they are not important, but because everyone knows what they do—no explanation is really needed.

Now the three-eyed workday ends at exactly 6:02 and thirty-seven seconds. At this time they race to the cafeteria for dinner (I did not mention, because it is such a minor thing, that lunch is from 11:50 to 12:53).

After dinner the rest of the day is spent telling and writing stories around a peanut butter burning fire. At exactly 8:12 and eighteen seconds they go to bed, and at exactly 8:12 and fifty-two seconds they fall asleep—except for the students who are in bed at exactly 8:09 and three seconds and have fallen asleep at exactly 8:09 and fifty-nine seconds.

So like I said, it's a quite interesting life, don't you think? Or maybe it bored you...I'm sorry if it did. In either case, it's over now and you can get back to the more important story at hand—that of the Library Tree. But before I leave you, perhaps (or perhaps not) you were wondering about why they follow such a precise time scheme. I can't answer that—I don't know why they follow such precise time. I can tell you that they don't wear watches, which makes their precision to follow time even more amazing. The cooks say it's the peanut butter that makes them know exactly what time it is, but I'm not sure if I believe that.

Chapter the Eighth

Jake's Sad Sob Story

So now you probably want to feel sorry for Jake. You probably think I'm a jerk for calling him a nerd and saying not to feel sorry for him. Isn't that a pretty harsh thing to say to the person telling you this story? The person who risked everything to tell the secret? The person who has become an outcast of all librarians to tell this story? You don't think it's too harsh? Oh. Well, fine then.

So maybe I haven't been so kind when talking about Jake in the past. But what if I make it up to you and start talking kindly about him in the future? How's that sound? You remember when I said he was a nerd and a dweeb? Well from here on out my descriptions of him will be kinder—and to be honest I didn't mean it when I said those things. What I really meant was he was a good nerd—he's not a nerdy-nerd or anything like that. How's that? Better? They'll get nicer—I promise.

Okay, okay, so what's the sad story involving Jake's parents? Do you really want to know? I mean this whole story has been pretty happy—do you really want me to spoil that tone with something sad? Fine, have it your way, but if you change your mind you can skip ahead to chapter nine, which I assure you will be much happier than this chapter—how could it not?

“Their heads exploded.” That's a direct quote from Jake when I asked him what happened to his parents.

It turns out that's not exactly what happened. That's what Jake was led to believe. Actually his parents died in a fire where they worked. It was very tragic and happened when Jake was only five. He was sent to live with his grandma, who he called, “The meanest

person who ever lived.” All she did, according to Jake, was “smoke and complain.” When Jake was nine he got the courage to ask how his parents died, but she refused to tell him.

Jake started to read to escape her torment. Then one day, she came in his room while he was reading and said, “That’s all you ever do—read. All that information is going to make your head explode. That’s how your parents died—their heads exploded—they had too much information in their heads, and the head couldn’t hold any more.” And you think I’m mean? What kind of person says something like that to a nine-year-old?

He wanted to live somewhere else, but his grandma said that she was the only person who would take him in because his other relatives hated his parents, and wanted no part of their, “horrid child.” He didn’t know any different because none of his other relatives would ever visit her.

When Jake was ten, he came home from school and found his grandma dead. She had accidentally swallowed her cigarette and choked to death.

No one came to the funeral. Only a minister and Jake. And in all the confusion of her death, everyone simply forgot about Jake. So he had been living all by himself for the past couple of months. He didn’t bother telling anyone, because he figured his grandma was right—nobody would have wanted him. And that’s why he read so much—books kept him company. They were his only friends.

Don’t think for a minute that this will happen to you—perhaps I wasn’t very upfront about Jake’s circumstances, and it worries you that nobody helped this poor boy. People would have helped Jake, but Jake made sure nobody knew about his state of living. His grandma had lots of money, and it was all left to Jake; this took care of the money he needed for food. As for the Child Protection Services—he tricked them; he paid a homeless man to pretend that he was his father. Because of all the mean things his Grandma told him, he figured that nobody would want him, which of course was not true...sort of.

The part about nobody wanting Jake was partially true. He did not know this then, and I myself learned it only recently, but every single relative was indeed dead—not one aunt, uncle, or even cousin was alive. All were dead from various tragedies of their own.

So is all that sad enough for you? I told you that you should have skipped ahead to the next chapter. I hope it doesn't make you too depressed to move on. If it does, then it's your own fault—I tried to warn you to stop, but *no* you have to find out what happened.

Well even if it was your own fault for reading this sad sob tale, I promise to make it up to you. Isn't that nice of me? Now don't you fill sorry for saying I was mean? No? Well you should.

Anyway, how 'bout if I tell you how the trees magically (although no magic is involved) grow in the next chapter? Would that make it up to you? Well okay then...read on!

**Commercial Break:
Now That's Some Shoe**

I've heard of shoes with roller skates attached to the bottom; shoes with springs on the bottom, and shoes with lights on the bottom, but I never thought I'd hear this...until now: Shoes with shoes attached to the bottom. I know, I know, what's the point of that? What's the point of anything though? Really! I mean I hate to be the one to break this to you, but this life—yours and mine—is meaningless. All of it meaningless. But you know what? At least we have fashion!

Fashion is the one thing that we'll always have. To tell you the truth, I thought shoes with lights were a bit silly and looked what happened to that idea, so who knows. I think this possible trend is one of the greatest to ever happen to the shoe industry. A shoe attached to a shoe! Just think of the possibilities! You can...well I can't think of anything now, but if they're going to put two shoes together like this, then there has to be a reason. Right? Tell me I'm right. They wouldn't be doing it just to start a trend would they? Have we really come to that?

Chapter the Ninth

Oh, Ralph!

I really didn't want to dwell any longer on Jake's sad story after Gatsby told me the gist of it. Yeah it was sad, and yeah I felt guilty, and yeah...look at me! I'm still going on about it. Here's the thing—I'm not big on hearing bad things. I really prefer to believe everyone is happy even if they're miserable. Is that so bad?

Some people, however, have to get in your face about it. Not only do they have to tell you the sad story, but they have to rub it in. That's how Gatsby is. As soon as he finished telling me Jake's sad tale, he said, "I can't believe you didn't know. I mean, the boy comes to your library every day—you'd think you'd see clues." He wanted nothing more than for me to feel guilty for Jake's misfortunes (three-eyed people are known for doing this).

"Well, I didn't."

"Obviously," he paused then persisted doubtfully, "You really didn't see *any* clues?"

I nodded no. Maybe you think I'm mean because of how I've acted in the narration during previous chapters, but you know what? I really did feel bad. I guess in some respects I should have known about Jake, but that doesn't change the fact that I didn't. It was like Gatsby wanted me to shout out that I was wrong—he should have known better than that! I would never admit that out loud.

"No clues? None at all?"

"He did a good job of hiding it I guess. How do you know about it?"

"He saw it through his third eye." Jake softly offered.

“That’s ridiculous. The only thing that third eye has ever seen is how to make a book tree.”

Gatsby leaned back in his chair and cautiously said, “That’s not exactly true.”

“What are you saying?” I laughed, “That you can see people’s minds through the eye!”

Gatsby nodded yes. “I suppose that’s exactly true—when you put it that way.”

“Well what other way can you put it?”

Gatsby stared at me blankly.

“This is ridiculous.” I paused, and then decided to challenge him, “If you read minds, then tell me what my middle name is?”

His third eye blinked once. He stared at me oddly, and then said confidently, “Elizabeth.”

Jake laughed at me.

“It’s not funny.” I replied defensively, “Lots of people have that for a middle name.”

Jake looked down and said softly, “I didn’t mean to laugh—I’m sorry.” Then he looked up and stared at me curiously, “It’s true, then? That’s your middle name?”

I nodded. And you better not be laughing while you’re reading this. It’s not funny. I’m not laughing. It’s a serious matter, as I explained to Jake, “It was my grandmother’s name, and I’m honored to have it.” I paused and then assured him, “that doesn’t mean anything. Anyone could have guessed that. It’s a common name.”

“Tell him something else.” Jake insisted. “Something nobody would know.”

Gatsby nodded, looked at me carefully, and announced, “He has two belly buttons.”

Jake laughed again at the thought, and then apologized quickly.

“You really can read minds.” I said quite amazed, “Why didn’t you tell me before?” As you can imagine I was quite hurt by this revelation. I thought Gatsby and I had bonded. I mean I never

really talk to him, but honestly I never really talk to anyone. That's just how I am. I don't like people. But you don't have to like people to bond with people do you? If you think you do, then you don't understand.

"It never came up."

"Well it seems pretty important."

"Then why didn't you ask?"

This back and forth dialog could have gone on for pages, and probably it would have, but as if acting as a literary tool to save a dying plot, Arthur ran into the room and shouted, "Two Ralph's are fighting."

"Two Ralph's?" Gatsby questioned, "But we only have one Ralph here."

I looked down, and quietly said, "I might be to blame for that."

"You?"

"I figured Ralph was to blame for some of this, so he should have to come and bear the responsibility."

"Didn't you know that one Ralph can never see another Ralph? It's commonsense."

I nodded no. "They used to live together—that doesn't make any sense."

"What's a Ralph?" Jake, who had quietly been listening, said.

"Never mind." I said.

"Don't be so mean to him." Gatsby said. I really didn't think I was being mean—just honest. He knew too many secrets already. Really, if I wanted to be mean I would said, "Never mind, you stupid puss-faced, nerd." Saying this actually would have been stupid on my part because he wasn't stupid nor did he have a puss face—he was a nerd, but a good nerd, not a nerdy-nerd. Whatever the case, Gatsby thought he had a right to know (and I'm not one to argue with three-eyed men—however nice they are), and he explained, "Ralphs' are the two feet ninjas who guard the trees."

"Cool! Can I see one?"

“We’ll see.” He paused. “Now, as I was about to tell the librarian, here, everyone knows you never put two Ralph’s together. They’re too competitive. They used to argue facts all the time when they lived together. It was fine, then—they only fought verbal fights to see who knew more trivia. But now that they protect the trees, they will fight over who’s the better ninja. It can get very dangerous.”

“I didn’t know.” And I swear I didn’t. To tell you the truth, there isn’t exactly an owner’s manual to keeping and maintaining a ninja—there really should be. My first day on the job as a librarian, I was introduced to Ralph and explained what his job was—that’s all I was told. I didn’t even know about their love for Skittles until later. So can anyone really blame me? Don’t answer that—I’ll spare you any thinking and answer it for you...no, I cannot be blamed.

I’m really sorry...I guess I went off on a bit of a Ralph tangent. Let me get back to the story...Arthur spoke up after hearing enough of my defensive banter, “I really don’t mean to be rude—this is all lovely discourse—but there’s still the matter of the fight.” Did you see what happened here? He basically told me to shut up, but he was so polite about it—three-eyed people are excellent at giving polite insults.

Gatsby nodded at Arthur’s suggestion. “Yes, I suppose we should deal with that.”

I know, I know...I promised I’d tell you in this chapter how they grew the tree, but I got carried away with Ralph and the fight. And how appealing would it have been if I said, “Read on, because the next chapter involves violence”? Just hang tight. I promise the tree recipe is coming. Then again, I guess I’ve shown that my promises count for nothing. I guess you’ll have to keep reading to see if I’m telling the truth.

**Commercial Break:
Finally a Shampoo for People like Me**

I remember when I was a boy, I hated showers—I still do. It used to be I'd never shower, but now I try to at least once every two weeks. Why? It's a boy thing, I guess. Boys like to be dirty. Finally there is a compromise: Trash Shampoo. I know what you're thinking? Trash? Shampoo? I've got one word: Yes!

Trash Shampoo is the first shampoo of its kind. It gets the smelliest trash around, and extracts its entire odor, and then it liquidizes it into shampoo form. But that's the confusing technical stuff. What's important is it smells like trash and you will too!

Finally there's a shampoo that will satisfy your mother's concern for your hygiene and your concern for your smell. Look for it wherever fine and not so fine hair products are sold.

Chapter the Tenth

Peanut Butter Space Monster

It turns out that the fight between Ralphs wasn't about competition. The idea never occurred that one might be better than the other at guarding the tree—that would have almost made sense. No—it was all over a Skittle...a single Skittle. Apparently both Ralphs overheard a young three-eyed boy say to his friend he had dropped a Skittle on the ground a few feet back. It turns out that the whole thing was a prank, but both Ralph's were too busy fighting to realize it.

By the time Gatsby and I had gotten to the Ralphs, they had knocked each other out cold. They had delivered simultaneous kicks to each other's head. Both, were hardly conscious when we arrived, and were mumbling softly about how they had tasted the rainbow.

"Those are the ninjas?" Jake doubtfully asked.

Gatsby nodded yes.

"They sure don't look very tough. They're shorter than me."

"Their wisdom and speed make up for their size."

Jake looked oddly at their collapsed bodies, and jokingly said, "Wisdom?"

"Yes, well we all make mistakes."

"I'll say." I added.

"Is that supposed to mean something?" Gatsby inquired.

"Just that this whole entire thing was a mistake."

"I didn't bring Ralph." Gatsby quickly pointed out.

"I didn't bring Jake."

"I'm really sorry." Jake said quietly.

“Why should you be sorry?” Gatsby asked, “All the people who live here got to see their biggest fan.”

“Me?”

Gatsby nodded. “I believe you’ve read all of our books—*Peanut Butter Space Monsters*.”

Jake looked surprised, “You grew that?”

“Grew? No. Not that one. We wrote it.”

“You write books too?”

“Of course.” He paused, “We don’t get out much on account of our third eye so after a long day of picking and growing books, we all sit around and tell stories—*Peanut Butter Space Monsters* is our favorite to tell. We’ve all contributed in some way to it.”

“Wow.”

“Do you think you could keep just a few secrets to yourself?” I asked, irritated. Honestly, I would not have told you about the books had Gatsby not mentioned it. There should be some secrets, but, as Gatsby will point out in the next bit of dialog, they don’t consider the books secret.

“We have no secrets here—it’s just nobody has ever asked about them before.”

“Well I hope you know if Jake starts telling people about you, then everyone’s going to be up here wanting a glimpse of the trees.”

“Nonsense.”

“I won’t tell—I swear.” Jake seemed sincere about this, but it was I, not the boy who told everyone the secret. Do you know that I asked Jake to help me with the book—just to be nice (see I told you I could be nice)—and he said no, because he promised Gatsby he wouldn’t. I’m not sure why Jake promised Gatsby he wouldn’t tell. As it turned out, it was I who should have been promising him not to tell anyone.

“I know you wouldn’t.” Gatsby acknowledged, “But we wouldn’t care if you did.”

“I would.”

Gatsby ignored me. “Now how about we show you the best part—how we make the trees.”

“Really?”

“Sure.”

So there you have it—one more chapter and you finally get to see how the trees are made...unless another mishap happens to provide further distractions to the course of the story. Not that I’m saying something is going to happen, but I’m also not saying that something is not going to happen (yes I realizes there are two “not’s” in that sentence, but I’m a librarian so I’m allowed to get away with it—I don’t know why). Basically what I’m saying is you’ll have to read to see. Don’t you hate chapters that leave you hanging?

Oh, wait—before I leave you hanging, I need to explain what happened to the Ralphs so you’re not wondering later. They were both put in a guarded room. Neither would be released until my Ralph left. So, as it seems from here, there really was no point in Ralph coming along except for making for an extra side story. But—and this is a large but—there’s a chance we haven’t seen the last of Ralph yet. He may make one more appearance before the story’s end. Would you like that? Really? I didn’t think Ralph was even that interesting a character. More of a nuisance than anything else. Well you’ll have to wait and see because I promise nothing.

**Commercial Break:
A Non-Gummy Mess**

I remember when I was in school, one of my biggest problems was getting caught chewing gum. I couldn't help it—my dad owned a gum factory and all his kids were expected to chew gum twenty-four hours a day. The only time we didn't chew gum at home was during dinner and while we slept (except for my oldest sister, who was actually able to chew gum while she slept, and was thus my father's favorite child)

Anyway, I wouldn't have had that problem if my dad had simply invented this next product: invisible gum. Isn't it a wonderful idea? Now when your teacher tells you to spit out your gum, all you have to do is say that you're grinding your teeth. There's nothing to prove you're not!

I swear you kids today have it so good. Everything is so convenient.

Chapter the Eleventh
***Just a Shovel Full of Mud Makes the Library Tree Grow...As Long
As You Combine It with Other Ingredients***

Finally. This is it. The big chapter. The chapter that by now probably seems like one I don't want to tell. The one I've been putting off for two chapters. Do you know the one? You do...fine, fine—I know I'm stalling. I have my reasons...hey, you know what? If I tell you my reason I can stall a bit more.

Okay, you want to know the biggest reason? No? Well I don't care, I'm going to say it anyway—it's my story. Okay? Okay.

The biggest reason: it's one of the final secrets of the Library Tree. As soon as I explain how to grow it, then what else is there to expose? It's heartbreaking really. It's like I have completely sold out. Yes the money is nice, but as I reach the nearing points of this story, I have begun to question who I really am. Have I become a man willing to sell all my respect as a librarian?

But, then again, you know what? Who am I? I am a rich man! So on that note, I suppose I'm ready to do it—to sell off the last bit of respect. Are you ready to hear it? I figured you were. Okay let's get into it, shall we?

So when we last saw Jake, myself, and company, they had just seen the aftermath of two ninjas fighting over an imaginary Skittle, and were preparing to embark on a tour of where the trees were made.

The story's progressed a little, but not much, since then. The setting is actually now inside the tree making warehouse. You'll note that I've purposely left out a "walking to the warehouse" scene because they're difficult to write and they're usually quite boring. I read a book once and it actually had this line: "They walked and still walked and kept walking and moved along slowly, walking, and walking, and walking, and stopped." It was horrid—absolutely horrid. So I'll spare you.

Now I'm not into descriptions, as you've probably guessed by now, but I suppose it would be kind of me to give you some image of the warehouse. So here it goes: it was big. Fine, I'll be more detailed: there were stacks of pots, seeds, and gardening tools scattered around the building. And it smelled like peanut butter—like everything else at the center. In the center of the room was a giant shredder that was surrounded by huge books. Next to the shredder was a mixture of sorts. There were half dozen three-eyed men moving things around, but no one was potting new trees.

"Over here." Gatsby proudly motioned.

Jake and I followed him to the shredder where he announced, "This is where it all goes down."

"How's it work?"

"Well I'm getting to that." He lifted up a book that said *The Non-Concise Dictionary of Every Single Word*, and said, "What we do is shred up this dictionary, and mix it with mud and our secret ingredient, then the books start to grow."

"What's the secret ingredient?" Jake anxiously asked.

Gatsby smiled and said, "Now would it be a secret if I told you?"

"You've told him about everything else." I sarcastically pointed out.

"Well, you can tell him if you want to," Gatsby told me.

I nodded no.

"Well then, you shut-up."

Jake laughed, and then apologized.

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me. All you've did since you got here is complain about what you didn't like."

I didn't speak.

There was a very awkward silence. All of the other three-eyed people had turned to stare at me. Their third eye seemed to somehow be agreeing with what Gatsby had said.

"How do you know what kind of books it will grow?" Jake asked, breaking the silence.

“It’s somewhat a surprise, but there are techniques to use.” He paused, “Such as if you want only one kind of book to grow, then you only mix one dictionary, if you want five different titles, then you mix five, and so on. The only exception is seven—if you want seven to grow, then you need nine dictionaries...we don’t know why.”

“Cool!”

Gatsby nodded no, “That’s not the coolest part—at least I don’t think so. I like the part about how to get a particular kind of book to grow—such as a kid’s book.”

“How’s that work?” Jake asked curiously.

“It’s really quite simple. If you want a kid’s book, then you use twenty percent of the dictionary. If you want a teen book take sixty-two percent. But all of it also has to have a gardener’s touch. Our kids go to school for ten years to learn how to grow a tree. Having a child that’s a gardener is like having a child that’s a doctor. They’re the most respected of all our people.”

“Really leaves nothing up to the imagination do you?” I said.

“I don’t know why it has to be a secret.” Gatsby remarked

“Of course you don’t. You live in this little book land. In the real world people need to believe in such things as authorship—there’s a reason why ‘author’ makes up the first part of ‘authority.’”

Gatsby looked at me oddly. “What reason is that?”

“I can’t remember.” Indeed the day had left me confused about several things.

“Nonsense.” Gatsby announced, “Now—Jake, enough with the tour, how would you like to read some books? New ones—freshly picked today.”

“I’d love to.”

“Do you really think there’s time for reading?”

Gatsby led us to a room I had seen only once before: the library. Several bean bag seats were placed in a neat circle in the center of the room, and bookcases lined the walls. It was full of books Jake had never read.

“I had some books I thought you’d like put on that chair.”

Gatsby pointed to the chair nearest the door.

Jake ran to the chair, and immediately began to read the covers. There was one about a pickle that ruled the world, another about dogs that doubled as spies, and finally one about a skateboarding donkey that fought crime with his magical tongue— Jake put this one on top.

“Would you mind if the librarian and I leave you to read for a bit? We need to talk.”

“We do?” I asked.

Jake nodded no and began reading immediately.

Gatsby looked at me and said, “We need to talk about the body in your trunk.”

This statement probably would have alarmed Jake, had he not already started to read. It’s probably alarmed you, or at the very least got you interested. I leave you to think about it.

Chapter the Twelfth

The Body in the Trunk

Don't you hate books that end every chapter suspensfully? Me too. Sometimes in trying not to be the thing you hate, you become that thing. I'm sorry for this, but hey, at least I kept you interested—or maybe not. Sorry again in either case.

In retrospect, making “we need to talk about the body in your trunk” probably was not the best code word. Now I know what you're thinking... “code word? What a cheap trick!” Perhaps, but you probably still want to know about why we in fact need a code word, and why in Sam's sweet jam did we pick “the body in your trunk”—I mean, that's not a code word, that's a code sentence. Well let me explain things a little better. Libraries are booming, busy places to be. Don't laugh, they are... well sometimes—okay, fine, I'm making the ‘busy’ stuff up entirely—are you happy now? Good.

Busy or not, one thing librarians and three-eyed people alike realized quickly was they needed a secret code word for when they needed to say something in private. The whole “body in your truck” thing was supposed to be said jokingly, but the three-eyed people never said it like that.

I don't know who thought of the code word (or sentence), but it was certainly a foolish idea. Oh well. There is a story that the code phrase was thought up after watching some kind of mafia movie, but that's just a rumor—never confirmed. Not that it matters.

So back to the story, and more specifically why Gatsby needed to talk with me in such a private fashion.

Gatsby led me to a small room not far from the library. There were no chairs or tables or anything for that matter—it was completely empty except for a small sign that said, “Conference Room.”

Gatsby shut the door and sat on the floor. He motioned for me to sit as well. When I did, he said curiously, “So about that body in your trunk...”

I rolled my eyes and lectured, “I’ve told you a million times to say the code word jokingly.”

Gatsby nodded and said seriously, “So about the body in the trunk.” He paused then added dryly, “Ha, ha, ha.”

“Funny—so what is it you need to say?”

“The boy.”

I waited for him to continue. When he didn’t, I asked irritated, “What about the boy?”

“Are you so hung up on yourself that you have stopped to wonder what we should do about him?”

“I’m not hung up on myself.”

“Well you can be.”

“Cannot.”

“Can.”

“Not.”

“Can.”

“Not, not.”

Gatsby rolled his eyes and said, “Fine, you’re not—now there’s still the matter of the boy.”

“The boy?”

“For Pete’s sake. You remember his sad tale? We can’t send him back to an empty home.”

“Oh that.” Now the thought had not completely escaped me. I had been thinking about it, but to be honest, I had no idea what to do with him. Certainly there would have to be a plan, but I did not know what.

“That.”

“Well what do you think we should do?”

"I'm open to suggestions—you're the librarian, after all. Aren't you supposed to be smart?"

"Well you're the one with three eyes—aren't you supposed to see things more clearly?"

Gatsby nodded. "We need to contact the authorities."

I nodded. "Not here though. I'll take him back."

He nodded. "We need to make sure he gets in a good home—it's important that they live close and he doesn't have to change schools."

"That's all a matter for the authorities to decide."

"Then put it upon yourself to make those things happen."

I didn't reply to this. I looked at Gatsby third eye and noticed for the first time the intensity in it. He was quite serious about this. There was almost a hint of rage inside that eye.

Honestly, I didn't know then why Gatsby was so personally involved in the child. All of it will make sense later. Actually, come to think of it, I don't believe it will make sense later. In fact now that I think about it this whole chapter was written just to kill time.

Here's what happened. I had ten minutes until my favorite television show came on, and I said to myself, well you better get in at least ten more minutes of writing before you call it a day. The thing was, however, my mind was pretty fried. I didn't want to go into Jake leaving yet, and there wasn't anything else to write about. But then it hit me...not literally of course. I said to myself, "Hey why not stall a bit by writing a chapter about Gatsby's conversation with you which may or may not mean something to the story by the tales end." And I thought, "What a great idea."

So this whole chapter was more than likely a complete waste of your time. I'm truly sorry if you had something better to do, and I prevented you from doing it. Understand, however, that I said "more than likely" which is a vague phrase and could very well mean it does in fact have something to do with the end...or not.

You're not satisfied with this are you? You want to know why Gatsby was so personally involved don't you? Fine, I'll tell you—but it's embarrassing. Do you really want me to embarrass

myself? Oh—it's like that, then? I thought you liked me a little more than that. Fine, have it your way. Gatsby was so personally involved because I wasn't. Are you happy now?

Well now that I told you that much, then I might as well explain the rest of it. No sense leaving you hanging. So here's the deal: About two weeks before Jake had even seen the tree in the back of the library, Gatsby saw Jake. Gatsby had come into the library because he needed me to sign for the delivery. Jake was sitting near the front of the library reading a chapter book. Gatsby knew the boy had a problem, and he knew I wouldn't do anything about the problem unless he helped me do so.

Three-eyed people are not terribly concerned with the world at large, but when they see something wrong, they stop at nothing to fix it. As soon as he saw Jake, Gatsby knew what his problems were, and he took it upon himself to help. He even figured out what time he came to the library and made sure the van arrived at the same time, because he knew he'd go snooping. And when he did go snooping, he and Arthur took their time getting to the van, so he'd have plenty of time to think he had hidden himself well.

So there you have it. Now are you happy? Can I stop the chapter now? Thank you.

Chapter the Thirteenth

We're Nearing the End

It seems I am running low on temptation steam, and I am no longer able to sustain your interest without resorting to childish wobbly dabble. I suppose I can easily go on for chapters by hinting that perhaps that there is more to the secret. I'm not going to play this tune any longer. I'm tired of writing, and to be quite honest, I just want to get my paycheck and get on with my life.

Don't worry—I'm not going to end it without a few parting chapters. Or maybe you're as sick of this book as I am and you'd like me to just end it. Is that the case? Well too bad—I've written too much to just end it like that. I need the conclusion even if you don't—is that okay with you? Yeah. Good. If you're so bored by it then why don't you just leave? Go ahead leave...but if you do, then you'll never know about the ninety-foot woman who swallowed Jake whole. I know, I know, I promised you—dearest reader—no more cheap tricks. I couldn't help myself. I really don't want you to leave. We've been together all of this time—can't you ride out a few crummy more chapters? I promise they won't be that bad...perhaps even entertaining, and maybe not even crummy. And don't you want to see what really happens to Jake? I was only kidding about the ninety foot woman who swallowed him whole...or was I?

Good, I'm glad you decided to stick around. I'm not going to let you down now that I have your attention. Well I'll try not to anyway...I make few promises and no guarantees.

Okay, then—to the story.

The setting is basically this: Gatsby and I are back at the library. Jake is intently reading a book. We are both looking on with pity, because we knew it was time to tell him that he had to go...yes you read that right—I had pity on him. I’m not that mean a guy—just misunderstood is all.

“Jake.” Gatsby said sadly with his third eye closed.

Jake looked up politely. “Yes.”

“It’s about time to leave, I’m afraid.”

Jake looked sadly down and softly said, “Leave? But I like it here.” He looked up hopefully and asked, “Can’t I stay a bit longer?”

I felt pity for the kid. If you saw the expression on Jake’s face, you would have felt pity too. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that he didn’t want to go home because he wasn’t happy being by himself. I may not have been smart enough to realize that Jake had issues, but now that I realized he had issues I was smart enough to be able to recognize them—I just needed a little bit of help is all.

Gatsby nodded no. “It’s getting late—you made a wonderful guest and we’d like you to come again, but you need to get home. You have school tomorrow.”

Jake nodded sadly, put down the book he had been reading and stood.

“Your librarian will drive you back and make sure you have a place to stay.”

I smiled and nodded.

“A place to stay? I have one.”

“A boy can’t live by himself.”

“But I like it there.” He protested.

“Do you really like it?”

Jake looked up at him and saw the third eye staring him down. He knew he couldn’t lie because the eye would recognize it as a lie and would not allow it. “It isn’t so bad all the time.”

“Then why are you always at the library?”

Jake shrugged.

Gatsby looked at him closely with his third eye, nodded, and then said, "That's what I thought."

"I don't want to go live with some stranger."

Gatsby nodded. "I know it's tough, but your librarian is going to make sure you get a real nice home."

"Him?" He said, then laughed, "Why would he care where I went?"

"I care." I argued, "Got to make sure I keep my number one patron happy."

"I know you don't want to do it," Gatsby said understandingly, "But I want you to do it for me. It will be hard at first, but I guarantee you'll like your new home." He winked his third eye and admitted with a smile, "I have an eye for it."

"Fine." Jake mumbled.

"There is one other thing." Gatsby said.

Jake looked up curiously.

"I've handpicked a Library Tree for you to take home—one for your very own."

"Really?"

"But you have to promise to still come every day to the library." I said, "Librarians may seem grumpy, but without people like you checking out books every day, then I'd be out of a job."

Before we left, Gatsby asked Jake, "You want to know what the secret ingredient in the tree is?"

He nodded excitedly.

"Peanut butter."

**Commercial Break:
I Hate Because I Hate**

Dolls and stuffed bears that have computerized chips programmed to really love are all the rage. I predict, however, that soon the product advertised in this next commercial will replace it: The Teddy “I Hate You” Bear. This bear is the first digitalized stuffed animal programmed to actually hate a child, and boy does it hate!

I’m going to teach you a lesson that you need to know sooner or later, and your parents would probably rather not let you hear: you need an enemy. It helps relieve stress. And what better enemy than a silly harmless teddy bear?

It really is cute: flaming red eyes, that light up when they recognize your face, and a hissing voice that says, “I hate you,” and seems to mean it, too! Doesn’t it sound absolutely wonderful?

Chapter the Fourteenth
Endings Aren't Always As Easy As They at First Appear

And you thought there would be no more surprises. That I'd wrap this thing up without throwing any more punches. Now don't you feel silly?! Hey, now that I told you about the peanut butter, perhaps I have a few more surprises up my sleeve. Or perhaps not, but you never know.

Here's another surprise—do you really think it's that that simple to make a Library Tree? Peanut butter! My goodness—if only it were so simple. It's not. Yeah, so that's all the ingredients, but it takes more than ingredients to make a pie and more than peanut butter to make a tree. You know why? Oh come now—you're teasing me—you must be. No? Really? You really, truly don't know? I thought it was obvious.

It takes directions, of course.

Don't fret. You're not alone in your lack of knowledge—Jake was equally confused too, at first. This was what he was thinking when we left the distribution center.

Now I know, I know—left the distribution center. What about the goodbyes, what about the so longs, and hey, what about Ralph? Here's the thing you need to know about that—I'm not into all that sappy stuff. I think it takes away from an otherwise decent story. I'm sorry if you don't agree, but don't worry—I've thought about your feelings and decided for the curious mind to include all the sappy stuff in the "Further Explanations and Exaggerations" at the end of the story.

So back to the story. As I was saying, before I had to explain myself to all those who wanted to see a sappy goodbye, Jake asked a question about the tree, "I have a question." He softly said, looking at the tree, which he had put in the back seat next to Ralph, who seemed unusually tired.

"You have lots of questions." I said sternly.

Sadly, he looked down.

“Oh come on.” I said, friendlier (yes I can be friendly—when forced) “I didn’t mean anything by it—what’s your question?”

“Well if librarians know what’s in the trees, then why don’t they grow their own?”

“As if we haven’t tried.”

He looked confused.

“You have to put the right amount of everything in it and you have to water it right—too much or too little water and it won’t grow.”

“Do you hate me?” Jake asked suddenly.

“Hate’s a strong word.”

“Why are you so mean all the time?”

“I’m not mean—why does everyone say that?”

“Maybe because you are.”

“I’m not.”

“Are.”

“I admit I’m not exactly nice, but do you really think I’m mean?”

Jake nodded.

“I don’t like people is all—I’m not a people person. I like to be left alone and not disturbed.”

“Oh.”

I looked over at Jake, and felt sorry for him (there’s that compassion popping up again). He was staring sadly at his feet. I knew he was probably thinking about home, and I didn’t know what to say to cheer him up. “Do you have any family, then?” Is what came out.

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I’ve never seen any of them—only my grandma.”

I nodded. “Well it’s too late to call the authorities to figure the whole thing out. How about if I let you stay at my house? Just for the night, and then in the morning we’ll figure out what to do next. How’s that sound?”

He seemed nervous. I realized in his fear that perhaps I had been mean to him. Like I said many chapters ago, I would change attitudes by the story's end.

"I promise I won't try to kill you or anything," I jokingly explained, "I'll even let you keep Ralph in your room to protect you."

Jake looked in the back seat where Ralph was staring at the tree quietly mumbling trivia facts about people who had successfully plotted revenge. "That's not exactly comforting."

I nodded. "No—no I suppose it's not." I thought a moment, "Well how 'bout if I teach you a few gardening tricks to make sure the tree doesn't die after it finishes blooming its books. Would that make you want to stay?"

He slowly nodded. "I guess so."

So there you have—I'd say I've changed quite a bit from the beginning of the story. Perhaps I'm still a bit of a jerk, but at least I didn't leave Jake stranded on some street corner. But wait, there's more. What, you ask? Well, keep reading already. We're so close to the end (only one chapter) it would be silly to stop reading now. So what do you say? Don't you want to finish this thing today? I'll give you a hint of what's in store for the final chapter: I had to be kind of nice to Jake for a reason—it would help me not feel so guilty when I drop him off with authorities and went about my business, and never thought of you Jake again.

**Commercial Break:
Me!**

This last commercial is something I wanted to advertise and my publisher almost didn't let me do it. What? Me. A life size poster of me to be exact. Early next year you will be able to own your own "Me" poster to put in your bedroom to stare up at each night. What better way to keep away people you don't want, than my frail and bitter figure? Standing at just over six feet tall, it promises to be the centerpiece of any room.

I know what you're thinking... 'can I really afford a poster like that?' Well, no—but your parents can. If they come up with some lame excuse like "Do you think money grows on trees" here's what I want you to say to that: "Well books do...now buy me that poster. Now." Only make sure you're polite about it.

I know, I know, that's not what you were thinking, but don't fret I got that answer too—you want to know where you can buy a poster of me, right? Hardly anywhere, but don't let that stop you from looking because you *should* be able to get them anywhere—it's really too bad that you can't get them anywhere.

Chapter the Fifteenth

Like I said: Endings Aren't Always As Easy As They at First Appear

Oh come on! Do you really think I would be so mean that I'd up and drop Jake off with authorities without a clue what would happen to him, and never think of him again? Oh—you do. Man, you must think I'm a bigger jerk than—well a bigger jerk than everyone.

I'm really not that bad. I'll prove it. You know what I really did with Jake? I let him stay quite a bit longer than one night. Bet you didn't see that coming—neither did I, to be quite honest. The thing is, as mean as I am, my heart is pretty darn soft. As much as my mind said leave him, my heart would not let me. He'd kind of grown on me, and I didn't think he was quite the dweeb I once did—he needed a friend, and on that note, so did I.

But wait, there's more.

It wasn't supposed to be permanent. Just a temporary fix until Jake's real family came and got him. Honestly, I wasn't at first happy with the arrangement, but at least it was mutual—Jake hated the idea too. But a funny thing happened as we searched for any long lost relatives. We grew on each other. By the time we discovered that there was not a single one of Jake's relatives alive, it was a natural feeling for me to ask Jake if he would let me adopt him. And so that's what I did.

It was his idea for me to write this book. He even gave me permission to refer to him as a nerd, because he thought it would give more sympathy to his character. He didn't feel right telling the story, because he promised Gatsby that he wouldn't (plus he was too young to write a book), and so he convinced me to do it for him. I wasn't

going to do it—no matter how much money they offered me. But Jake said to me, “The three-eyed people have a right for their story to be told.” And they did. They sat up there with their simple little lives, and nobody knew anything about them. People took books for granted without ever really appreciating where the books came from. The three-eyed people were people who gave up everything, and whose only joy in life came from eating peanut butter and telling stories. They had told enough stories in life...it was time for their story to be told. So I wrote it. The money part was nice though.

Not long before finishing their story, I went up to the distribution center to talk with Gatsby one final time before turning over the story to my editor. I asked him why they did do it—why they didn’t buy televisions or cars or something with all that money they got. He told me there are only two things he needed to be happy: a book and peanut butter. He had both things, so he said that there was no need to go out and get more, because, as he put it, “the more you have the more you have to take care of. The more you have to take care of, the more stressed you’ll become. The more stressed you become the more unhappy you’ll be.” So if you want a moral lesson, then I guess that’s it in a nutshell.

So I guess that’s it. That’s the story of the Library Tree. I know the story actually turned out to be about more than a tree, but that’s the way these things happen. Honestly, where would the story have been if it was just about a tree? How exciting is that? There has to be drama—suspense—and of course a little bit of action.

It’s been really fun telling you the tale...okay it’s actually been dreadful, but at least you were polite, so thank you for that. Perhaps we’ll meet again some day—although I hope it’s in the long, long future.

What’s that? You want to here what’s happened with Jake since he first saw the tree? And how about Ralph? What’s he been up to? That doesn’t really pertain to this story (at least the story as I want to tell it), but if you must know than read the “Further Explanations and Exaggerations” at the end of the story.

Now if you'd like to hear about me that's a whole other story. To tell you the truth, I'm a bit disappointed if you want to know what happened to me: I wrote this book! What do you think happened? Oh—you mean besides that? Not a whole lot I'm afraid. I still am a librarian, although all the other librarians hate me. I know what you're thinking, why don't I quit with all that money I made? Simple, because of my library fine. I have a \$154,000,000 library card fine that I simply can't pay off with the money I made from this book. As long as I keep working as a librarian I don't have to pay it off.

So there you have it. Does that about sum it up? Good. Off you go, then. I'm sure you have something better to read than this. Go on, I said—stop reading. This is ridiculous—you're still here—still reading. Go!

I hate people who read the last paragraph of the last chapter of a book before starting it, so they know how it ends. If you're one of these people, then this is for you: everybody dies.

The End

Further Explanations and Exaggerations

Commercial Breaks

This book proves groundbreaking on many levels; I do believe it is the first of its kind to offer its dear readers a commercial break. Now I suppose you may be saying to yourself, ‘Is this guy kidding or what? Commercials? In a book?’ Well I’m quite serious about the whole thing, and why shouldn’t I be? You get commercials when you see a movie or watch TV—why shouldn’t you get a commercial when you read a book?

There are of course other reasons for my decision to include these breaks. I could give a safe answer, which you will not understand, and say something like this: readers of this generation have minds that are saturated with materialism—so much so that paid product placement and advertising in books are the next evolution of literature.

I think you deserve an honest answer as to why I’m putting commercials in this book, so I’m going to give it: money. Yes, I know I have been paid quite well to tell this story, but it was made known to me that I could actually make even more money by placing commercials throughout the story. Do you know how much money companies are willing to pay to have their products advertised in a book? No? Lots. Lots and lots of money. And all I have to do is write a little summary of their product. They don’t even say I have to like the stuff—just write about it (coincidentally I am using a Toshiba laptop to write this explanation, and in doing so Toshiba has agreed to pay me a handsome sum of money).

Chapter Three

As I said, there have been other non-librarian people who have stumbled across the tree in the past. There's actually been quite a few. Here are a few of the ones I've encountered.

On my second day as a librarian, a teenager, who I will name, for no apparent reason, Steve, snuck in the back of the library because his friends bet him that he was too chicken to do it. He saw the tree, and walked closer to try and touch it. It was at this point that Ralph whacked him on top of the head with an oversized dictionary, and dragged his unconscious body into my office.

The first thing he saw when he became conscious again was an artificial Christmas tree (we had hidden the Library Tree in the break room), and then me. I explained that a book had fell on his head and knocked him unconscious. He asked where the tree growing books was, and I told him the artificial Christmas tree was the only tree we had. It was easy to convince him that he had not seen the tree because he wasn't very bright.

Another patron, I'll name her Susan, caught a glimpse of the tree in the same fashion as Jake—she saw it when the doors opened to the back of the library. She was so excited to see the wondrous tree that she had not heard the people behind her scream “Watch out for that tiger.” It turned out not to be her day, and the tiger (which had escaped from the zoo) ate her right up. It was horrible, but it sure made a funny story to tell around the table at Thanksgiving.

Most of the other stories involve patrons who thought they saw the tree, but quickly reasoned that they had really imagined they saw the tree. It's pretty hard for a person to admit that they actually saw it, because if you say you believe that books grow on trees—well let's just say people would think you're a bit crazy if you say you believe books grow on trees. I hope, if nothing else, this book dispels the notion that people who believe in Library Trees are crazy, because it's a perfectly sane thing to believe.

Chapter Seven

You'll recall that I said something happened in this chapter to make up for all the time it took me to get up to the distribution

center. If you're reading this, then you must be interested about the whole thing, so here you go:

Jake and Gatsby happened not to be alone in the cafeteria. In fact it was lunchtime, which meant that the entire community of three-eyes had turned up for a peanut butter sandwich and a good look at Jake.

Jake was nervous at first, and with good reason, but the three-eyes proved to be not only friendly, but courteous. Nearly all of them came to introduce themselves to Jake, and each of them offered him a joke. It's a good thing you're reading this, because I'm going to tell you something that you didn't know about the three-eyes from reading the story—they're funny. Very funny. Most people don't recognize they're keen because they're too busy staring at the third eye, but Jake was different. He laughed at all the jokes.

After an hour the three-eyes had to return to their jobs, and this left Gatsby time to listen to Jake tell him all about his sad story, which is of course too sad to repeat here—I've already said it once in the story, and once is enough for the entire book if you ask me.

Chapter Fourteen

Well you asked for some sad sap, so here it comes:

Gatsby called all of the three-eyes from their jobs to meet him at my car and see young Jake off. They all stood tall and proud, keeping their third-eye sharply on Jake. Gatsby opened Jake's door and explained with a tear in his third-eye, "I want you to know that this isn't goodbye. Today was one giant hello—a welcoming to a world that few people know. There will be plenty more visits like it."

Jake sadly nodded.

Next Gatsby turned to me. "Take care of the boy. We keep very special watch on our best fans, and if anything happens to him, and you're accountable in the least bit for it—you'll be sorry."

I nodded. "Yeah, yeah—Jake, get in the car and shut the door. I want to get out of here."

Like I said before, I don't like sappiness, so I pulled away from my spot and left the distribution center quickly. I knew the further away we got, the easier it would be to forget the whole day.

In all the commotion, I had nearly forgotten about Ralph, but as it turned out he was already in the car with his seatbelt fastened, and holding the Library Tree tightly. He had been depressed since his small fight with the other Ralph. His newly founded ninja woe was also at the farewell. He watched the other Ralph with a threatening evil eye from a distance.

Chapter Fifteen

So you want to know whatever happened to Jake? Fine: It's been two years since Jake first saw the Library Tree. He's been quite busy since then. He of course came to live with me. He still visits the three-eye people often. He tries to see them once a week, but sometimes it's only once a month.

He still is constantly reading. Last year he conquered a world record by memorizing word for word three complete novels in one day. He also has other hobbies now; he started his own online bookstore where he sells books that came from his Library Tree. It's not quite as profitable as the three-eyed people's business, but he's made enough money to pay for college.

And he has friends! I never thought I see the day when Jake, the library nerd, had friends—but he does! I'm so proud of him. It turns out that the tree that Gatsby gave him was a non-fiction tree that grows mostly inspirational stories. He's read all kinds about how to make friends, and they seem to be working! Go figure, a book can make a difference.

He says he wants to be a librarian, but I doubt that. On a more important note, his voice is finally changing, and he's beginning to sound like a real boy, and not a girly sounding one.

As for Ralph...Ralph's Ralph. Not long after his trip to the distribution center he nearly broke his neck after he tripped over one of his feet while hobbling on his one leg to a Skittle. For an entire

month, he rambled on nonsense facts about Skittle related deaths—I had no idea there were so many.

Ever sense I agreed to write this story, Ralph has been even busier guarding the tree. Now that people know about it, they want to see it, and Ralph has been incredibly stressed about this. He's said he plans to retire and return to Siberia, but I doubt he'll ever do this, because, as I've pointed out several times, Skittles aren't so easy to come by in Siberia where the colony of ninja's live.