

Chapter 2
excerpted from the novel

Powerball 310

K.T. Reid

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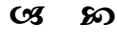
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All men are equal: nation, race, and creed,
United in a brotherhood of greed.
How well they plot to carry out their schemes,
But find it's not so easy as it seems.

D.W.J.



The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men,
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Robert Burns



Chapter 2.

The downtown branch of the Bank of Pennsylvania's high ceilings, brass trim, sleek marble panels, and terrazzo floors just whispered "bank" the moment you walked through the heavy revolving door. Trevor always went in the front, always made some clerk buzz him through to the elevators that led to his part of the bank: nine floors of cubicles and clerks.

His lush corner office captured the bank spirit with dark wood paneling, pool table green carpeting and a great view that always spoke of his accomplishments. His staff usually left him about five minutes of peace before the daily bullshit commenced. The bank was making money, but margins weren't what they used to be and it was hard work. He saw to it that people worked very hard.

Staff was lucky today, Tuesday, that Lisa Andrews was Trevor's first visitor. Lisa, a middle-level loan officer, carried a stack of approvals to run by Trevor. Lisa was thirty, a not-so-natural blond, slim, her long legs looked great in nylons. Her face was pretty, with sultry eyelids, a beautiful nose and a large, expressive mouth.

Lisa entered and closed the door behind her. Trevor rose to meet her, took the folder of papers, put one arm around her shoulders, and pulled her to him to share a long, passionate kiss.

"Trevor," she murmured, "you'll ruin my lipstick. But you're so sweet." She kissed him lightly on the cheek and slid adroitly away from his embrace. "We have work to do."

Trevor shrugged resignedly and tried to focus on her cheerful resume of the day's business. She was managing some important commercial accounts, and with the level of

risk involved, Trevor was supposed to be concerned. Today, he couldn't care less. Lisa paused and gave him an analytical stare. "Trevor, what's up with you?" She slid back in her chair. "You are not paying attention. This is important."

"Yeah, I know," Trevor protested. "I am paying attention. Look, your assessment on these is 100% right. Well, except for maybe the garbage company on the main line. They have more than it shows on the books. Give them the money they want at a little less than prime and they will be customers for life."

Lisa was a little impressed. Trevor was always more on the ball than he seemed. He was a good-looking guy all right. Maybe *she* treated *him* like a bimbo sometimes. She smiled. "But, other things are okay?" Trevor did not answer. "Maybe problems with Bonnie?"

Normally, the mention of his estranged wife would have put Trevor on a rant. Lisa actually liked that. She regretted she was attracted to married men, but they were the good ones, so it wasn't a surprise they'd been snapped up by some other woman. A while back she had dated another married man who had typically promised he would leave his sorry wife, but after three years, nothing had changed and Lisa finally left him. Trevor at least had made the move. Possibly a financial disaster for Trevor, but for Lisa it was very romantic. She just liked older guys.

"Nothing new there. I've got a lot on my mind, honey. Great work, though – if B of P makes money this quarter, it will be because of you." Lisa beamed. She stood up, smoothed her dress around her hips in a way that Trevor could not ignore, kissed him quickly, and left his office.

Trevor dismissed the flashing intercom; he punched in his own call. "Sidney? Hey friend, how you doin'?" There was a pause. "It's me, Trevor."

Over the phone came the reply, "Ah, okay, what's up?"

“Not much, just wondered if maybe you could meet me for lunch. Maybe this week, if you’re free.”

Sidney did not respond right away. “Is there something you need me to do?”

“No, I just want to, you know, keep in touch.”

“Sure.” Sidney was not convinced. “Lunch. Sounds like fun.”

“Great! How about Friday at Penn’s Mill? I’ll treat.”

“Okay, Friday. But, Trevor, if there’s something you want me to do, just let me know.”

Trevor put the phone down, scowling. He had agreed to run the lottery ticket and essentially launder the money for some people he hardly knew and certainly couldn’t trust. Well, he could trust them to be greedy. Trevor was a banker so he understood greedy, but did these nutballs know what they were doing? He wasn’t so sure.

He was pretty sure about Sidney. Sidney could run the ticket because he did that kind of stuff – he styled himself a “private eye”, but he was a lot less picky about what a private eye did than you’d guess just from watching old movies. Trevor could pull off his end of this. And, he needed the money more than he wanted to admit.



Rodger could work remote at the Lottery’s Packer Avenue Philadelphia office some of the time and skip the nearly two hour drive to Middletown. He was supposed to show up at the main office on a schedule at least two days a week. Not today.

He phoned his assistant, explained that he wasn’t up for the drive, and would be at Packer Avenue. He didn’t exactly say he had a hangover, but that is how it must have come across. She told him to drink lots of liquids.

Instead, Rodger headed toward a suburban industrial

park north of the city. For the past two years Rosedale Electronics was Penn Lottery's contractor to supply and maintain the merchant point-of-sale lottery terminals. Rosedale won the bid after the previous firm had a hard time explaining the whereabouts of all the terminals and diagnostic equipment it was paid to look after. Taking over the contract had been a chore; Rodger was still helping out.

The building complex was boxy stucco low rise, painted light tan. Rodger drove past the visitor parking out front and pulled alongside a loading dock in the shade of the building. It was just after 10:00 am, but the heat coming off the blacktop was already oppressive. He climbed a short flight of stairs and opened a heavy metal door that led to a large, dimly lit storeroom that seemed hardly cooler than outside.

"Professor!" Came the greeting.

Rodger smiled in return. "Mr. Pete, I hope all is well." Rodger shook the extended hand of the 26-year-old technician, smiling at his buzz haircut and multiple earrings; at least he was neatly dressed.

"Great. Wagering is running heavy, but the old machines are keeping up with the load. We only have two out of service, both in west state."

"That is good to hear. Usually we'd be more than half a dozen out. Hate to lose revenue, you know." Rodger went over to the dispatch desk and sat down wearily. The storeroom occupied a quarter of the Rosedale complex, but was mostly empty. The repair work was done in the front offices. "Pete, this isn't a surprise inspection." Rodger grinned. "That isn't due until the end of the week."

"Very funny," the other man said, not laughing.

"Look, I have heard that there is a problem with a couple of the blue boxes."

"Really?" The younger man looked genuinely concerned. "I'd better call up front. Do you know what

problem, or which ones?"

Rodger consulted his notebook. "I have the serial numbers. Came from a follow up inspection on a repair job that Rosedale did last week."

Pete leaned forward to look in the book. Brandishing a ring of keys, he went to a locked case. In a few minutes he returned with three metal boxes – each about the size of a cigarette pack, with several electronic connectors, and painted bright blue. These were a hardware security key that allowed a repairman to log in to the merchant terminal. The log-in was password protected, of course, but the blue boxes added a layer of security and recorded the transactions. "Here are the ones you are looking for. They shouldn't be on a problem log 'cause they don't go out in the field. We just use them here."

Rodger leaned over, picked them up one by one and compared the engraved serial number to the lines in his book. He shook his head. "These look like the culprits. You say they never leave the place?"

"No sir. They are really only used to let me and Norm check basics on new equipment. Like, do the printers work, and stuff. They are locked up tight every night."

"Hmm. That's odd. Somebody is screwing up then."

"Not us!" Pete said in some alarm. Of course there had been screw-ups, but they were trying really hard. Rosedale management made it clear that the Penn Lottery contract was worth good money to its employees.

"Well, maybe a screw up on our end." Rodger paused and studied the boxes. "Maybe we mixed up a security log. It's been crazy all over."

Pete asked, "What do we need to do? Do I have to call up front?" He looked troubled.

Rodger replied, "You should, but you may not want to right yet. Personally, I am worried about the audit that is coming down this month." Pete's eyes widened. Rodger

smiled, "I think you guys are a thousand times better than the old guys, but they are still pissed they lost the contract. They want it back; they have been putting pressure on my management, filing bogus complaints."

Rodger looked back at his notebook. "Maybe that's where this bullshit comes from. I've got to take care of this quick. Tell you what, I'll take one of these and have my techs see if it scans the same trouble as on our log. You keep the other two. I'll get this one back in a couple or three days. If it checks out, don't worry about the others, it is our error. That's my guess, unless your security is not as good as I think it is."

Rodger pocketed one of the small blue packages and pushed the others back to Pete. Pete looked uncomfortable. He started to speak, but Rodger interrupted. "Here's my card with the number." He scribbled. "A receipt. I've got a one o'clock in Middletown and I need to push. I'll see you Thursday or Friday."

Pete took the business card, shook Rodger's hand again, and watched him leave. That wasn't exactly the way it was supposed to be done. He had a funny feeling that Rodger may have been testing him. By the time Pete followed Rodger outside, Rodger was already driving away. "Well, hell, he's the client," he shrugged.



Traffic was light. Rodger figured he'd better head for Middletown as cover, and to deal with Amrik – that asshole had been calling him every twenty minutes as the caller ID on Rodger's cell phone attested. He punched a few buttons to pick up voice-mail. Amrik had even left a message. Rodger pulled his car over, fished out his silver mini dictation device and crudely recorded Amrik's message. Not exactly incriminating, but the boy ought to know better.

Just outside of Harrisburg, Rodger stopped at a Turnpike rest area. He found a working pay phone and dialed Amrik's cell number. When Amrik answered he gave Rodger an earful. "Where the hell were you all day, man?"

"No offense, Amrik, but I had a lot to take care of. I'd appreciate it if you'd quit griping. Just meet me at the Wendy's on Eisenhower in twenty minutes."

Rodger arrived early and watched the parking lot. He was surprised that Amrik was already there, coming out of the men's room.

"I don't know, man, but my gut is killing me."

"Too much spicy Indian food." Rodger grinned, but Amrik didn't smile back.

"No. Too much wondering where the fuck you've been, that's what." Amrik shot him a dirty look.

"Easy, son. I have been shopping." Rodger pulled the blue box an inch from his jacket pocket and let it drop back. "Want a burger?"

Amrik shook his head. "Maybe a Coke." Rodger ordered and they sat in the back where there was no highway noise.

Amrik tapped his straw on the table to release it from its wrapper. "I got the stuff from de Villiers. It actually might work. I don't know how he came up with it; it's unreal."

"De Villiers is a talented if overbearing individual. He is absolutely convinced he has proven the Riemann hypothesis and several other major problems, but no one will give him credit."

"I'll give him credit," Amrik said empathetically.

"Yeah, me too. The math community, however, won't give him credit. You know, de Villiers thinks he deserves to win a million dollar prize for Riemann, but he apparently can't get anyone to spend the time going over his proof to say he won. For him the Powerball lottery has taken on the

significance of the Riemann prize. If de Villiers knows enough to deliver the delay we need – you say 63 minutes – then he gets his own private Riemann prize, and a hell of a lot more money.”

The food arrived. Rodger ate; Amrik babbled on about the code.

When Rodger finished his burger, he said, “The place is still on?”

“Yes. I’ll check again, I don’t want to bug him, though. He’s a cousin, sort of an uncle, our family goes way back. I can count on him, but I got to play it a little cool. He’ll be at his store tomorrow night, he always is.”

Rodger furrowed his brow and looked pensive. “You know, Amrik, I was thinking, maybe we should wait. Three hundred ten isn’t that much money. The jackpot could get bigger next week.”

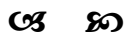
Amrik groaned, clutching his midsection. “My gut won’t last that long. Tomorrow. If it works we’ll be rich, if it doesn’t then we can try again.”

Rodger shook his head. “No. I don’t think we can try again. At least not soon. You’re still not sure what kind of computer fingerprints this trick of yours will leave?”

“I hope not too many or we aren’t going to be rich for long.”

“That’s your business. I can handle the blue box.” Amrik was silent. “So, we can stay out of each other’s way till tomorrow?”

“Yeah. I’ll pick you up at 8:00 in front of the gym at the University. We’ll go together to my cousin’s place. He is in the industrial area along the river.” Amrik got up to go. “And Rodger, this time, please don’t be late.”



Wednesday morning Melissa found her father having his breakfast in a cheerful mood. The radio was tuned to a news station. They were talking about how big the jackpot had grown. Rodger chuckled, "I love that free publicity. Everyone thinking about how they would spend a couple hundred mill. You know, the lottery mainly sells dreams."

Melissa kissed him on the forehead. "Yeah, I know about dreams. I could use a couple million myself. Hell, I'd settle for a quarter million." She poured herself coffee, fed the baby, and looked over a piece of the newspaper. "Will you be home tonight for dinner?" She asked tentatively. "We still have some meat loaf. You said you liked it."

Rodger gave her a fatherly smile. "Yes, an early dinner, say six?"

"Six it is." Melissa was always pleased when he actually agreed to be there for the evening meal.

Rodger laughed. He cleaned up his plate, kissed baby Madison on the top of her head, and headed for his car.



That afternoon, the hot spell in Washington D.C. kicked it up a notch. Etienne de Villiers stood in his tiny Georgetown apartment and surveyed a dismal mess. His one-year academic appointment hadn't paid enough for any furniture, he hadn't brought many books or clothes from France, but there was still a surprising amount of stuff to move out. For the first time he was forced to confront the reality of junk, with no plan to deal with it, and a flight out of Dulles next week. He still had to clear out his office at New American Science. *Merde.*

Etienne walked over to the window and yanked down the shade. Sweat wet his shirt. People weren't meant to live like this. He half-heartedly shoveled some cheap kitchen utensils into a cardboard box, threw in his few cooking pots

and found the top wouldn't close. He slid the box against the wall. Except for one cold beer, the fridge held nothing appealing. There was leftover Chinese take-out of questionable age, half a dozen remnants of expensive cheeses drying around the edges, some cold cuts. The bread was stale.

He sat heavily on the couch and popped the cap of a Kronenbourg. There had to be a better way. None of the brute force methods for Etienne. In a moment of nearly mathematical insight, he realized that the only reason he was trying to move out and clean up was to get back his rental deposit. He owed these American peasants nothing. It was only a matter of money. If those clowns in Philadelphia could follow directives, Etienne would be a rich man by midnight.

That made him smile. America was *une bordelle*: an idiot with money was king; a genius without money was treated like shit. To be sure, it was much that way in France, too, these days. It usually didn't pay to be so much smarter than the rest of the world, but maybe it was going to pay tonight.

He drained the bottle, flipped it unsuccessfully at the wastebasket and headed for the door. Before he left, he made a defiant and very French gesture with his right arm toward the nearly empty room – much more expressive than just waving the middle finger, he thought. He stepped out onto Prospect Street and paused. After some reflection he turned uphill toward Restaurant 1789, one of the few that might meet his standards for quality and refinement; soon he could be a genius *and* have money to burn.



Rodger was surprisingly relaxed all day. He caught up on a bunch of work and still managed to socialize with half the gang at the Packer Avenue office. He felt justified in

leaving at four.

When Melissa arrived home with baby Madison toddling alongside she was surprised to see Rodger pulling weeds from the flowerbed in front of the porch. It had been so long since anyone had tended it, it was a challenge to tell weed from flower.

“Dad, you’re crazy to do that in this heat.”

Rodger was red in the face and sweating profusely. “Crazy, yep, just felt that this place needed some sprucing up.”

Melissa eyed the parched lawn, overgrown shrubs, and weedy flowerbeds. Her mom had kept it nice, a long time ago. She felt sad. Madison tugged at her pant leg. “Come in out of the heat.”

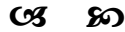
Rodger followed her and they chatted while Melissa fixed and served supper. Rodger was animated. Melissa noticed he hadn’t poured himself his usual drink. Rodger sat Madison on his lap and fed her bits of meat loaf and green peas. Happy laughter filled the room as she bounced up and down and flirted with her granddad.

After dinner, Melissa suggested they play a game or watch a movie together. Rodger smiled and shook his head. “No, honey, I’m meeting some of my math buddies tonight.”

Her good humor evaporated. “What are your ‘math buddies’ doing tonight?” Rodger didn’t answer. “Seven card stud? Is it Texas hold ‘em now?” She was surprised at how disappointed she felt.

“No honey, I’m not gambling tonight. Really. Just math.” Wasn’t that the truth for once. “I won’t be late, I’ll be good.” He picked up his keys and turned to give her a hug. She was stiff, her face hot against his cheek. He said soothingly, “Don’t upset Madison.”

Rodger felt in his jacket pocket for the little blue box and left, composed and cool.



Amrik, on the other hand, was definitely not cool. No sooner had Rodger parked in the public lot across from the U Penn gym than Amrik practically assaulted him. "Hey man, I was *sure* you'd be late again." Rodger cut him off, "Amrik, give me a break. I'm on time, exactly. You need a drink."

"I don't drink Rodger. I need to get this over with."

"Are you ready?"

"Are you fucking with me? I've been ready for two days. I'm ready, but will this bullshit work? I have no idea."

Rodger put an arm around his shoulders. "It's okay to be nervous. Think of it as a job interview. You could get a big boost in pay."

Amrik gave a short laugh and pointed to a rather beat up borrowed car. "I can't believe I am riding in that, but secrecy aside, I didn't want to take the beamer to my cousin's neighborhood. Let's go."

Amrik's cousin owned a convenience store southwest of downtown. It was an easy ride with the sun on the skyline as they drove along the Schuylkill River. The neighborhood had gone through cycles of prosperity and poverty as Philadelphia's position in America's industry waxed and waned. Rodger guessed that this was still a down cycle. At one point there had been residences scattered among small industrial buildings. Now a lot of the industrial space had been cleared out and rebuilt to attract high tech businesses. Some business had come back, but it was clearly a daytime part of town.

Depak Singh did okay with the young day-crowd, selling sandwiches and miscellany. In the evening, some of the few remaining residents of the neighborhood would come

by for cigarettes and simple groceries. Depak had a lottery machine.

Amrik pulled up front, then let the car roll halfway down the block. No one was around. It was 9 p.m. Rodger waited in the car while he went in to see his cousin. Depak was easily ten years older than Amrik, dressed neatly as always in a collarless white cotton shirt, black pants, and the ever-present white Sikh turban. This evening he was not pleased to see young Amrik.

Ignoring his look, Amrik rattled on. "My cousin, how are you? It has been a while. I am glad you can help us out, the Penn Lottery is grateful and they know this can be a hardship for you. We are having transmission problems, computers, and so on. Need to field test some new security hardware."

Depak interrupted with a hand. "Please, Amrik, it is good to see you too. Normally I will be open for another hour. Must I close early? There could still be a lot of customers." He looked hopefully out the door, but there was no one in the parking lot.

"Not right away, but a little before ten, yeah." Amrik looked around. "Not too busy this time of night?"

"No, but I never want to turn away a customer. It is not easy to make a living in this city."

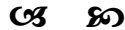
"Don't worry, cousin, you'll be taken care of. Let me look around for a minute, then I'll wait until, say, quarter to ten." He moved toward the lottery terminal, checked the connections in the back. His smile was strained. "See you in a little while. I'll wait outside."

Back in the car, Rodger seemed to be dozing. Amrik didn't smell alcohol. "Rodger, you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay, just napping. What else am I supposed to do? This place is a morgue."

"Sure, like you've been in a morgue lately? But I agree. There's usually no one around at night, that's why I picked

cousin Singh's place. It's not too visible from the street so you're not in a fishbowl. It's quiet. Connections are there and I'm ready to rock as soon as we tell him to close." Amrik patted his notebook computer.



The wait outside Singh's market became unbearable. Amrik scanned through the radio stations over and over until Rodger made him stop. They didn't talk. At 9:30, they went in.

When the pair entered, a thin, dark haired girl of ten picked up her homework and disappeared through a back door that led upstairs to where Depak and his family lived. Amrik went straight to the lottery terminal and began to set up his notebook and attach cables. Rodger said hello and thanked Depak for the use of his store. He had a story about official business. Depak didn't look like he wanted to know. Rodger handed Amrik the blue box.

"Cousin Depak," Amrik directed, "it's time to close up. How many lottery customers have you had tonight?"

"A few, maybe twenty since dinner time. Some people bought many tickets. One man spent fifty dollars. It is always like that when the prize gets big."

"Have you sold any big winners before?" Rodger asked.

"No big ones. A little prize money, but sometimes I don't think the machine is worth the trouble."

"Maybe you sold a winner tonight. They win the big jackpot, you win a hundred thousand. That isn't bad!"

Depak locked the front door and flipped the hanging sign to read "Closed". Behind the counter, Amrik pointed to the security camera monitor where a small black and white screen showed a bug eye view of the store. "Depak, how do you kill this thing? There are our own security is-

sues ... we'll be here a while tonight. Got to work when the system is at its low traffic level." Depak walked over, flipped two switches and the screen went black. He left, closing the back door behind him.

Amrik had logged in easily. He was running a standard diagnostic test for an online terminal: communication speed, protocol, printer, keyboard. On test phase two Amrik opened five tickets and fed them player-pick numbers directly from his notebook computer. They went through and after a moment, the terminal printed five slips of paper. Rodger picked them up, nodded, okay.

It was 9:50. Amrik said, "Sweet. Now my man, you have to trust those zetas. The security seed numbers I fed in for this terminal are going into effect." He launched his next set of five picks. The diagnostic was still running. Five slips printed.

Rodger cackled, "You can't win if you don't play."

"Be cool, it'll kick in. We don't know how much stall we'll get. We don't want to waste one minute." On the next five slips, only four printed. The terminal blinked a message, 'Wait'. Amrik tapped his notebook keyboard and Rodger saw the ticket numbers change on the small terminal display. The slip printed. Rodger saw the timestamp for the last one was a few minutes old, indicating the time when the ticket was first launched, not when it printed. Amrik kept launching sets of five requests. Most had printed, but a few seemed to get lost in space. When they returned, Amrik would change a few numbers and print the ticket – each with a time stamp earlier than the current time. Not that he had any idea at this point what the winning numbers were going to be. Amrik just kept nodding his head, murmuring to the electronics like a proud father encouraging a baby to walk.

Rodger was startled by loud knocking on the front door. Through the glass and wire mesh grille, he could only

make out a silhouette of a man. He waved his arm, 'go away', but the man kept knocking. It was 9:55.

Rodger walked over to the door and said loudly, "We are closed!" The man yelled something unintelligible in return.

Amrik advised, "Ignore him, the fucking sign says 'closed'. Wave it; see if he can read." Rodger flapped the sign against the door and pointed. He mouthed the word, "closed".

The silhouette grabbed the door handle and rattled it loudly. Amrik yelled, "He's gonna piss off my cousin. I don't want him down here. We have a dozen tickets hanging and over an hour to go. Get rid of the fucker!"

Rodger decided to take the human resources approach: he opened the door. The man outside practically fell over him. Rodger spoke, "the store is closed, please come back tomorrow."

The customer stood up straight and looked Rodger over closely. "You don't work here."

"No, the store is closed for repairs, I am part of a repair team."

A flicker of disbelief lit the man's eyes and then he remembered the time.

"Shit, it isn't ten yet, is it?" he said nervously, squinting at the wall clock. The man looked tired and weather-beaten. He smelled strongly of sweat. It was still hot out. "Look man," he entreated Rodger. "You *got* to sell me some lottery tickets. There's still time. I made it here on time. Powerball doesn't close until 10. Shit!" The man was in a panic; he stared at Rodger. "And I need some cigs, Camels."

Rodger could see Amrik silently pumping his fist against his forehead.

"Sure, sir." Rodger walked behind the counter and squeezed Amrik's arm to shut him up. He pulled tickets off the terminal as they were printing and grabbed a pack of

cigarettes. "Ten bucks worth of quick picks. Camels on the house, sorry for the trouble." The man gave a quick smile; Rodger showed him out and re-locked the door.

"Fuck," Amrik protested. "How can I work with that shit happening?"

Rodger looked at him blandly. "What was I supposed to do? The man was feeling lucky and he was out of cigarettes. Next time we do this, I'll bring a gun, okay?"

"No next time. If this doesn't work now, we're screwed. I've got over ten five-pick tickets floating out there. Most will drop too soon, but hopefully one will hold out long enough." Amrik looked around. "I've got to find the toilet. Watch this. If the terminal shows 'reenter slip numbers', just hit the Enter key on my notebook. It automatically feeds them right in, but do it quick. I think we only have thirty seconds or the ticket is flagged as no good." He hurried out. Rodger pulled over a stool and stood watch, his eyes glued on the terminal readout.

Shortly, Rodger looked up to see Amrik next to him, looking calmer, watching. The system was working; the kid seemed to know what he was doing. Amrik browsed the magazine rack and selected something with a nearly naked woman on the cover. He told Rodger the rest was just a waiting game. It was past ten. Rodger turned out most of the lights. The room was lit by the interior lights of the cold drink cooler and a neon sign advertising Bud Light. Over the next hour, Amrik flipped through more magazines. Rodger sat in the near darkness. Elsewhere in the Powerball world, conditions were normal; here, it was as if time stood still: Eight tickets had come through; three were still in limbo, lost in the digital maze Amrik had built using the zeta values he got from Professor de Villiers.

Outside the street was deathly quiet. A police car drove slowly past, its searchlight flickering over doorways and into shadows. Rodger instinctively ducked behind the

counter as it went by. Amrik laughed, "Guilty conscience? We haven't done anything yet. But it is getting time." He went over to a tabletop TV set that Depak's wife would watch when it was her turn to run the store. Amrik dialed the local TV channel that carried the Powerball drawing.

Shortly before the news at eleven, the screen switched to a garish game show style set with a well-dressed, jovial MC. Behind him, white plastic balls bounced around in a clear plastic bubble until they rolled one by one into a display rack. As each number was spoken, Amrik typed it in. Rodger stood silently behind him watching the TV screen and checking what he entered into the computer. Amrik made no mistakes.

The camera panned to a similar bubble filled with red balls, one of which would become the trademark "Powerball". After a moment, one red ball was sucked up the tube and rolled to appear at the bottom of the screen. The MC was clapping, lights flashed, a band played, and Amrik hit 'Enter'. Almost immediately the terminal spat out a lottery ticket. Rodger picked it up and handed it to Amrik. "Good work, lad. I think we have a winner."

Amrik looked the ticket over, comparing the printed numbers with the balls shown on the TV screen. He checked the time stamp. All okay. "Damn. I don't believe it."

"Time to break down." Rodger looked anxiously at the door.

"Give me a minute. There is no rush." Amrik headed down the hall to the rest room.

Rodger lifted an eyebrow in his direction, but wasted no time. He went to the notebook computer, with a few keystrokes he pulled down the diagnostic utility for the lottery terminal printer and clicked 'Reprint'. In a moment, a second lottery ticket spat out of the machine. He looked the numbers over, smiled and put it in his shirt pocket.



After a good meal with enjoyably deferential service, Etienne finished off a truly great bottle of Bordeaux and took a taxi into the Capitol area to clean out his old office at *New American Science*. His mood had improved slightly. He still had the ID and the keys. The night guard checked him in.

Tonight he was alone on the floor. In the winter, people stayed late, but not so much in the summer. He didn't blame them – he too wanted to be gone. In the quiet, the fluorescent lights in his little office buzzed noticeably. He sat at his desk and tapped the computer keyboard to wake it up. When the screen lit, Etienne was surprised that the picture used for the computer desktop wallpaper was changed: pine trees and some river. *Merde*.

He began to worry that his research work had been compromised. It took only a few minutes to see that the folders were still there. Most were password protected, but in other places, the file time stamp made it look like someone had been browsing his documents. Etienne opened a pack of blank CDs and spent the evening copying material and deleting the folders from the hard drive. He opened his NAS e-mail account, saw a few old messages from Rodger McCormack and cleaned it all out. Important stuff he forwarded to his University account. He left none of his files on this computer.

Around eleven, he finished. The glow from the wine had dissipated. This mess was almost as discouraging as his apartment. He had been at NAS nearly a year and didn't have a lot to show for it. He turned to two cardboard boxes filled with loose paper, mail, a few books and desk supplies. He laid several piles on the desk and made a halfhearted effort to salvage anything of value. He took a marker, wrote

“trash” on the boxes, and shoved them against the wall.

It was 11:30. He turned off the buzzing lights and paused, thinking. The room was lit only from the hall. He sat down at the computer and clicked his way to the Pennsylvania Powerball web site. *Nom de Dieu*. There was one winning ticket for an estimated \$310 million. A smile lit his face. He had a hunch he knew who had won.