

THE TRUTH CHRONICLES

BOOK II: THE CONTEST

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For Kayla and Judah



PROLOGUE

Jax Thompson screeched to a halt in his driveway, his eyes fixed on the unfamiliar black sedan parked in front of the garage. His mind raced furiously over what his mother had said on the phone just a few minutes earlier: “Just come home, now. It’s about your father.” *What’s going on? Dad’s been dead for almost three years.* After turning the car off, he jumped out the driver’s door and slammed it behind him.

An intimidating man in a black suit climbed out of the sedan and blocked his path to the house. “You must be Jax,” he said with an unconvincing smile before another man appeared on the driver’s side.

Is this the reason Mom sounded so frantic? Jax glared at the man who spoke to him. “Yeah, I’m Jax. Who are you?”

He flashed a badge and said, “I’m Special Agent Kimball and this is Special Agent Johnson. We’re conducting an investigation into the destruction of the lab where your father worked.”

Jax heard his front door open and turned to see his mom step out.

“Jax, come inside. You don’t have to talk to them.” She shifted her gaze to Agent Kimball, and her voice turned cold. “I told you I wanted you to leave before my son came home.”

“We’re sorry Mrs. Thompson,” Kimball said. “We were just leaving when he pulled up and thought we might as well ask him a few questions.”

“There’s nothing else he can tell you. Jax, come inside.”

Kimball stepped to the side. “We’ll keep you posted if we make any progress.”

Jax hurried up the steps to the door, pausing to look into his mother’s tense face. “Mom, what’s going on?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute,” she said, without taking her eyes off the agents in the driveway.

Frowning, Jax squeezed past her and sat on a couch in the living room. His mom continued her watch at the door until the agents drove away. When she finally turned, all the fire had gone out of her.

Jax tried to be patient as she slunk into her overstuffed chair, but his emotions were still frayed. Not twenty minutes ago the girl of his dreams had shot him down because he didn’t believe in her God. And now this. He couldn’t wait. “Mom?”

She looked up at him and wiped tears from her eyes. “I’m sorry I missed the science fair, but those men showed up right when I was preparing to leave.”

“What did they want?”

She shook her head. “Oh honey, I don’t know how to tell you this.” She looked at the ceiling and

took a deep breath. “They said that the investigation is being re-opened and they have reason to think the explosion wasn’t an accident, but was an inside job.”

“An inside job?”

“Your dad’s security code was the only one activated at the time. They ... they suggested that he was involved in some sort of break-in attempt to steal his technology.”

Jax shot to his feet. “What? That’s impossible. Dad would never have done that.”

She sniffled as she stood and hugged him. “I know, Jax. I know.”





ONE

Micky pushed a few strands of hair from her face, leaned close to JT, and whispered, “I can’t believe this is happening.”

JT smiled, all the while keeping her eyes on the reporters. The girls sat together at a table full of microphones in the school gymnasium. JT tried to focus on the questions.

“Are you saying you’ve actually managed to counter gravity?” a reporter from the *Silicon Valley Times* asked.

“Well, as we explained—” Micky started.

“Where is your project so we can see it in action?” asked a journalist from a national morning news program.

“Unfortunately some of our classmates—”

“How does the device work?”

“Where will you go with the scholarship money?”

JT leaned close to the mics. “As Micky was trying to say—”

“Has the government contacted you about this yet?”

“When can we expect flying cars?”

Mr. Li stepped up to the table and put a hand on JT’s shoulder. “Ladies and gentlemen. If you could ask your questions one at a time and wait until the girls have answered before asking more,

we can move this along more smoothly. Now, why don't we start with the question of how the device works?"

Micky cleared her throat. "Basically what we've done is design an emitter that puts out an electromagnetic field. The strength of the field is determined by the size of the emitter as well as the energy source. Using a wall outlet with our device proved to be too powerful, but regular batteries did the trick. So, in answer to the question about overcoming gravity, yes, we have succeeded."

"Does the device have a name?" asked the *Times* reporter.

"At the moment, not really. Some of our classmates have taken to calling it the 'floating bear.'"

"And can we see this 'floating bear'?"

"Um, sadly, no," JT said.

"What do you mean, 'No'?" asked Martin Knutson, a young, sharply dressed correspondent from Six O'clock Action News.

"Two of the guys in our class made a disintegration ray gun, and they smoked our project," Micky said.

This elicited a few chuckles from the crowd.

"So we've got hovering toys and ray guns," Knutson said. "I know this school has a good reputation, but this sounds like science fiction to me. Are you just making all of this up to get attention?"

"No way," Micky said. "We really did make

that toy hover above the table. Why else would the judges have given us first place last night?”

“Maybe they’re in on the whole thing, too,” said Knutson.

JT opened her mouth to object, but a short, overweight reporter with greasy black hair picked up Knutson’s line of questioning and overrode her. “Mr. Li, are you guys just trying to get into the news again after losing your number one science school ranking last year?”

JT blinked back the moisture in her eyes and noticed Micky’s face reddening.

Mr. Li stepped forward again to speak into the microphone. “Are you seriously accusing us of lying? Everyone knows we have a great science school. That’s why we routinely have judges from Sandia and MIT here. Do you really think they’re in on it, too? We don’t need to make stuff up to get attention. These girls worked hard for their award and you are accusing them of fraud. You should apologize immediately.”

But Knutson wasn’t finished lambasting them yet. “If you’re telling us the truth, then why don’t you just produce that ray gun?”

“We can’t,” Mr. Li said. “It shattered last night when it hit the floor during the mishap.”

“Well that’s convenient,” said the overweight man. “Maybe they could repair it at Area 51.”

Someone in the back of the group shouted,

“Or maybe Atlantis.” The entire group of reporters started laughing.

Mr. Li leaned over the microphone again. “This interview is over. Ladies, please follow me.”

JT was all too ready to leave, and Micky was fast on her heels. As they followed Mr. Li to the exit, the reporters shouted ridiculous questions after them.

JT fought back tears as Mr. Li led them down the hall. *How could they not believe us? It isn't fair.*

When they reached the parking lot, Mr. Li turned and rubbed the back of his neck. “I’m so sorry this turned out the way it did.”

“Why don’t they believe us?” JT asked. “We don’t have any reason to lie about it.”

Shrugging, Mr. Li shook his head. “Reporters are typically pretty skeptical of stuff like this. It’s their job to be inquisitive and they all get pretty competitive knowing that scandal usually sells better than success. I guess sometimes they forget there are real people involved. I’m really sorry.” Mr. Li opened the door to his car.

“We can prove it,” Micky said.

JT shot a quick glance at Micky and elbowed her in the side. “You promised.”

Micky chewed her bottom lip and sighed. “Sorry, JT.” She looked at Mr. Li. “We have four bigger devices that can make a whole car hover.”

JT put her hands on her hips. “Micky.”

Mr. Li stood with his right foot in the car, stunned. “What are you talking about?”

“I said I’m sorry, but I can’t keep it a secret. Not after those reporters were making fun of us.”

Mr. Li stood up straight. “Wait. Are you saying that you made more of those devices?”

“Yeah,” Micky said. “They’re on Jax’s time machine right now.”

“That’s incredible. I can’t wait to see them. In fact, I’m heading over to his house around 11:30 to grade their project. Would you like to meet me there? I’m sure Jax wouldn’t mind.”

“I’d like to, but I’m taking my driver’s test today,” Micky said.

JT thought of her conversation with Jax the night before and wondered if she would be welcome at his house. Her stomach clenched as she remembered how hurt he’d been when she told him she couldn’t date him. Shaking her head, she said, “I’d like to go too, but right now isn’t a good time. Thanks for the offer.”

“Sure. See you in class Monday.”

JT waved as Mr. Li got into his car and left the parking lot. Micky hopped onto her bike and looked at JT. “I hope this is the last time I have to ride my bike home from school. See ya.”

“Yeah, later.”

JT sat down on a bench and texted home. “We’re done.”

As she waited for a ride, her thoughts turned to the press conference. *How could they be so rude? I wish we could have showed them that we really were successful.* She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and cut off a small sob.

Her mother arrived a few minutes later, and she got into the car without saying a word.

“What’s the matter, honey?” Mrs. Bankers asked.

“It wasn’t good, Mom. No one believed that we actually did it. They didn’t even believe Mr. Li.” A tear fell from her eye, and her mom gave her a one-armed hug.

“I’m sorry, sweetie. I know you guys put a lot of work into that project, and it’s frustrating to have so many people doubting you. I don’t know why things happened this way, but God can work through it to strengthen you.”

“Yeah, I know.” She managed a weak smile. “It’s just a lot to take, especially after the argument with Jax last night. He was so upset.”

“Well, your father and I are both very happy that you stuck with what the Bible says. And I’m sure God is pleased that you chose His way instead of following your feelings. We can’t force Jax to believe, but we can keep praying for him.”

JT’s smile brightened a little. *I’m sure he won’t stay mad for long.*

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Yeah, that should work,” Jax said to himself as he drew out some rough sketches. He had been trying to think of ways to reconfigure the girls’ technology so that it could be controlled inside the time machine. Their previous trip through time had been dangerous enough with getting chased by a hungry allosaurus, but on top of that, the girls had needed to hang out the back doors of a car flying thirty feet in the air to manually control the rear repulsors. As far as he was concerned, that was a risk he didn’t want to repeat.

Looking at the clock, he decided to try calling Izzy again. Mr. Li would be there any minute to grade their project, which they had decided not to enter in the science fair because of the top-secret power source they’d commandeered from Jax’s dad’s prototypes.

The phone rang twice before he heard, “Hi, this is Izzy. Leave your name and number—”

Jax hung up and then slammed his free hand on the desk. *Where could he be? It’s almost 11:30.*

“Are you okay in there?” his mother asked from the hallway.

“Yeah, I’m just frustrated. I can’t get a hold of Izzy and he’s supposed to be here by the time Mr. Li shows up.”

Just then the doorbell rang. “That could be Izzy now,” she said.

Jax jumped up. “I’ll get it.” He hurried to the

front door and opened it. “Oh, hi, Mr. Li.”

Mr. Li looked the same as he did every day, except for the fact that he wasn't wearing his sport coat. *I wonder if Mr. Li wears the same outfit every day or if he just happens to have a dozen khaki dress pants, white shirts, and skinny black ties.* “Thanks again for coming over to do this. Izzy and I really appreciate it.”

“You're very welcome. Speaking of Isaiah, is he inside?”

“No, I can't get a hold of him. I don't know why he's not here.”

“I see. Well, I suppose I can look over your project without him.”

“Yeah, I just wish he were here to explain the software to you. Can you meet me by the garage door? I'll go open it up.” Jax walked into the garage from the kitchen and opened the large door. Mr. Li stepped in, and Jax led him through to a smaller door.

“My dad built the addition to make a lab so he could sometimes work at home. Izzy and I have been using it to do our work now.” He opened the door and flipped on the light switch. A smile crossed his lips when Mr. Li whistled in amazement.

“This is quite the setup. It doesn't look quite so big from the outside.”

“Well, here it is,” Jax said as he walked to the

time machine and patted the hood a couple of times. “Don’t let the car fool you. It’s not in great shape, but it runs and it was all we could afford.”

“Where should I start?”

“Why don’t you go around to the passenger side and climb in? I’ll jump in the other side and explain everything.”

Mr. Li looked impressed when he opened the passenger door. Even from the outside, it was easy to see the rebuilt dashboard full of gauges, switches, lights, and a mounted laptop. A massive conduit full of cables ran across the roof of the car from the top of the windshield all the way back to the trunk.

As Jax booted up the laptop, he explained how he and Izzy had transformed the car as well as the complex theories about time travel. Pulling up the program, he went through as much of the programming as he could without Izzy there, then demonstrated how they selected their destination.

Next he opened the trunk. “So there it is.” He pointed at a foot-long cylinder about six inches in diameter. “That’s the Space-Time Generator, which is what makes time travel possible. And this right here,” Jax said as he picked up a small cube and handed it to his teacher, “is my dad’s solar cell that we told you about.”

Mr. Li turned the battery in his hand as he studied it. “And this little thing powers the whole

car? You know, your dad was really doing groundbreaking work. Thanks for trusting me with this. I understand why you couldn't enter it in the science fair, and I promise to keep it secret."

"Thank you. I really appreciate that."

"So," Mr. Li said as he crossed his arms and smiled. "Just how do you intend to prove to me that this thing actually travels through time?"

Jax looked away. "Uh, well, Izzy and I agreed that we wouldn't take a trip without the other person, so I can't demonstrate it without him."

Mr. Li nodded slowly, a mixture of skepticism and disappointment on his face. "Listen, I want to believe you. I really do. You certainly have some high tech stuff here, but this whole idea is still hard to accept without tangible proof."

"But it really does work."

"I'm sorry, Jax. It's obvious you guys did a lot of work on the car, and I saw your paperwork, but you're claiming to have done something that no one in the history of the world has accomplished before. I can't give you a top score unless you demonstrate it."

How can I prove it? "Izzy will die if he loses his 4.0. What if I told you all about our trip? Would that count?"

"Not unless you can truly convince me."

"Okay, here goes." Jax spent the next ten minutes explaining the wild adventure he'd had with

Izzy, JT, and Micky. He stretched his memory to recall every detail, from the smell of the allosaurus' breath as it glared down at him from the cliff to the shape of the leaves on Izzy's tree.

When he finished, Mr. Li asked, "So you're telling me that they will all support your story?"

"They should. They were there."

"Alright, I'll make my assessment after talking to each of them on Monday. I need to have my grades turned in by the end of the day. But without tangible proof I think the best I could give you guys is a *B*. Even though this is a big assignment, you will probably still have an *A* for the semester."

He stepped out of the car. "Oh, one other thing. Micky mentioned the hover technology that she and JT had made. Can I see that?"

"Sure, they're underneath the car."

Mr. Li examined the devices for a few moments before Jax asked, "You wanna see 'em in action?"

Flashing Jax a grin, Mr. Li said, "You know I would."

"I thought you'd say that." Jax turned the key to engage the battery. He reached across the passenger seat and nudged the sliding levels up. The car rose slightly. "It will go about forty feet up."

Mr. Li whistled. "Wow. That really is amazing."

Jax brought the car back to the ground, turned off the power, and got out. "Yeah, it's pretty awesome, but they also run off the solar cell, so you

can't say anything about these, either."

"I understand that it's confidential, but you sure aren't making my job easy. Thanks for showing me these things and for all your work on the project." He turned to walk out the door. "I'll see you on Monday."

"Alright, sounds good. See ya." Jax followed him to the door. As Mr. Li was leaving the garage, Jax called out, "It really does work!" He turned, smiled, and then waved before walking the rest of the way to his car.

As soon as he pulled away from the driveway, Izzy raced up the sidewalk from the other direction on his bicycle. "Was that Mr. Li?"

"Yeah. I couldn't prove to him the machine works without you and we lost points. Where were you?"

"Sorry." Izzy set his bike down and kicked at the ground. "My dad stopped over. And you know how that usually turns out."

Jax's irritation lessened at the mention of Izzy's dad. He put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Sorry, man." Jax turned back to the garage. "Well, the good news is that if you and the girls corroborate my story, we'll get a *B*. Thanks to my quick thinking, you'll still get an *A* for the semester."

"In that case," Izzy said, following Jax to the garage lab, "maybe it's better this way."

"How's that?"

“We’ve already seen how quickly things can go wrong. The more I think about it, the more I realize how easily we could ruin the present.”

Jax picked up a spool of wire and pretended to examine it. Izzy’s words brought a tight knot of foreboding to his stomach, but they didn’t change his mind. He had a plan. There was something he felt he had to do, and Izzy wasn’t going to like it.