

*HACK ATTACK is a suspense thriller for the tween reader, equally loved by boys and girls. The two lead characters are humorous and smart. To rescue someone special, they hack into computers, break into buildings, and face grave danger.*

## **Hack Attack**

By Carolee Kolve, Art by Rosemarie Gillen

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# HACK ATTACK

WRITTEN BY  
CAROLEE KOLVE



ART BY  
ROSEMARIE  
GILLEN

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## Trouble Starts

The night it all began you would have picked me as the world's least likely hero. Not that I had any great dreams of being famous, I just thought it would be nice to be noticed. Like, it had been twelve years since I was born, and I was still invisible to everyone but my mother and my dog.

Of course, my sister Justine was the social butterfly of Portland, Oregon. She had spent her entire sixteen years dreaming up ways to shine. Believe me, I've never given two hoots about all her girl stuff, like cheerleading or ballet, but her basketball skills are starting to get to me. I mean, how would you like to be the biggest benchwarmer on the seventh-grade boys' team and have a sister who's known around town as "Air Justine"?

My name is Nick Ryan, and cool is not my middle name. I guess I'm smart, but brains have gotten me exactly one friend and no girls. Apparently, a lifetime of computer hacking has ill-prepared me for the social aspects of puberty. I've decided becoming a jock is my only hope, and right now I'd trade all my grades for a great free-throw shot. Of course, how would I use it from the bench?

My story begins on Thursday, December 18, 1996. I was sitting on my bed with the only girl in my life, Laser, our golden retriever. Enjoying a little peaceful self-pity, I was trying to write in my journal. Laser kept washing my face and pushing her nose under my hand.

In between dog kisses, I had managed to scribble something pitiful when my dad's bellow rocked me off the bed.

"Nick! Justine! Get down here this instant!"

This was not to be ignored. Leaping up, I dutifully trotted downstairs, bumping into my sister at the bottom. Nervously, we looked at our paternal parent. His face was so red I could barely see his freckles. This was a very bad sign.

But when he finally said something, it came out sweet and cool, like one of those blue popsicles: "Hello, my dear children."

"Hi, Dad!" I said in relief.

"Hello, Father!"

"I am a patient and generous father, am I not?"

"Absolutely!" said Justine.

"The best, I'd say," I said.

"Didn't I buy you two a computer?"

“You did, Dad. Er, thanks again.”

“And we love it, Father!”

Raising his eyebrows, he gave us each a long look then slowly held up a piece of paper.

“I’d say you guys do like it. Yes, indeed, and if I were a betting man, I’d bet you like StarLink, too. But maybe, just a bit too much!” He swung the paper in front of us. “This is the StarLink bill for November, my dear children, and it is for one hundred and seventy-five dollars! Do you live on the computer? And which one of you played *Cinderella* for eighteen hours?”

I recovered my voice. “*Cinderella*? What? The movie? I haven’t seen *Cinderella* since I was five. Well, maybe eight. It wasn’t me, Dad.” I glared at Justine.

“I never saw it either, Father. Who in their right mind would watch it for eighteen hours anyway?”

“According to the bill, it’s not the movie. It’s a new video game. And someone who loves videogames played it for a very long time, not to mention Planet Posse, Search for the Center of the Earth, etcetera, etcetera.” He folded his arms and fixed me with The Look.



“Okay, Dad”, I stammered, mustering my most virtuous expression. “Okay, I did use StarLink to research a few reports--”

“They don’t charge by the hour for that, Nick, as you well know. Only for games and movies—about seventy-five hours’ worth.” He wagged the bill in my face again.

“Uh, right, and I probably played a few games a few times, okay maybe a lot of times, but I swear I never played a stupid game called *Cinderella*.”

“Well, who in thunder did play it?”

“Maybe it’s a mistake,” Justine said, snatching the bill.

“Maybe so,” said Dad, “but in that case, Justine, since you work for the company, you’re in a perfect position to get this bill fixed. Otherwise, darling children, StarLink will be star dust in this house.”

I felt like I’d been punched in the gut. No more StarLink? That’d be like no pizza ever again.

The StarLink ads are pretty corny. They call it “The Information Superhighway your kids will cruise to the stars!”—but it really is an awesome online service. You can pick any subject in the world, learn about it, see pictures, films, and animated videos. You can also watch movies, send messages to your friends, chat

with a group, and play video games. And not just any old game, but the most radical, outrageous games ever written. You can play all the games you want—for an hourly fee, of course—which was why Dad was a bit peeved.

“Hey,” I said, feeling the grin spread across my face. I grabbed the bill from Justine and looked at it. “Maybe the Wainwrights are deliberately cheating us!”

The Wainwright family owns StarLink. I probably wouldn’t know this if their two obnoxious sons didn’t go to our school. Some days, they actually come to school in a helicopter.

They arrive just before the first bell, when at least a hundred kids are outside. The chopper comes in like a hurricane, blowing our books and papers all over the yard. Then Wayland and William Wainwright get out like rock stars, waving to the crowd and strutting around to be sure we all saw them land. It’s not like we could really miss it.

## *Hack Attack*



I thought about Wayland, and my smile grew. He's the buzz headed, musclebound star of our basketball team, and the meathead who named me "NickBrick" in honor of my rather flawed shooting. Wayland has not only perfected the put-down, but he has brought bragging to all time heights. When he's not insulting me, his conversation alternates among (1) famous athletes he has met, (2) cool places he has been, and (3) wonderful things his family owns. I felt dizzy with joy at the idea of catching them in some crooked scheme.

“Cheating? Don’t be a twit, Nick,” said my sister. “They’re the richest people in this city. Why would they risk everything for a few measly dollars?”

“Yeah, but what if they’re scamming thousands of people? Measly dollars can add up!”

“Nick,” said my dad, I’m quite sure it’s an honest mistake and Justine will get it taken care of. Right, honey?”

We both turned to look at Justine. Her mouth was open and she didn’t answer. Then she slapped her forehead.

“I don’t think it’s a mistake,” she said. “I think it’s the billing program, and I bet I can fix it!”

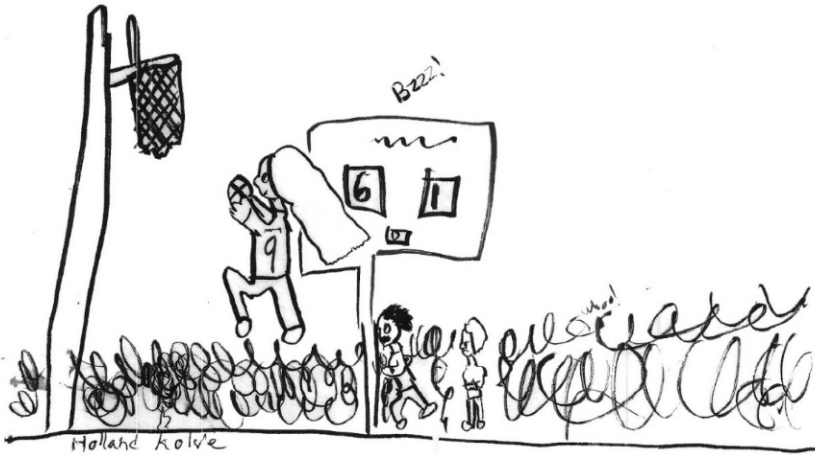
“I’m the computer nerd, remember?” I reminded her, “Don’t you need me?”

“Not tonight, small brother.” She plucked the bill out of my hand and raced off toward the study yelling, “Don’t worry Father. I’ll handle StarLink.”

I glanced at my dad, who was beaming proudly in Justine’s direction. “You’re my star link, honey, that’s for sure,” he called, walking toward the kitchen.

I stood there for a second, feeling my shoulders droop. I didn't follow Justine. Didn't ask any questions. I just shrugged and blasted back up to my room.

I opened my journal and stared at the picture I had doodled of Justine.



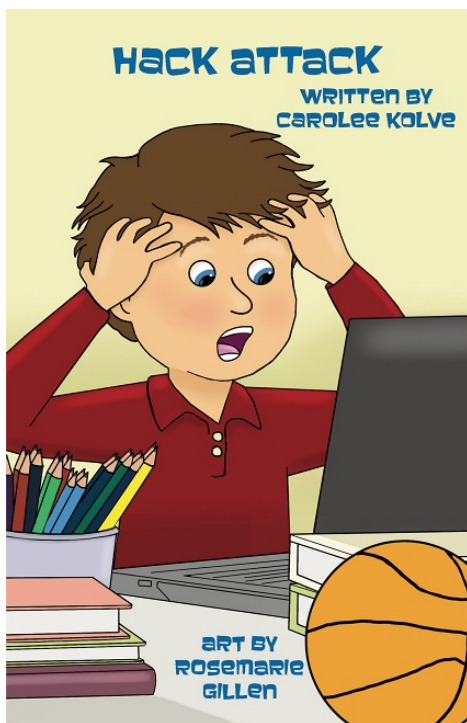
"Yo, Journal: It has been five weeks since we started basketball practice and I still haven't sunk one when anyone was looking. Naturally, Justine is expecting another season of headlines and cheers. Sometimes I'd like to knock her smug head off."

I felt a cold chill pass down my back. Whatever had possessed me to write such a thing? Of course, to be fair, I had no idea what was about to happen.

## About the Author



Carolee Kolve is a graduate of Stanford University, a wife, mother, and grandmother of five. She loves story-telling and reading with her grandchildren. Her early career was spent in the computer industry and she is the author of *How to Buy (and Survive!) Your First Computer*, McGraw-Hill, 1984, and *Golden Reflections, A Dog's Tale*, Author House, 2010. She has written humorous blogs for the Huffington Post, and numerous short stories for local newspapers.



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