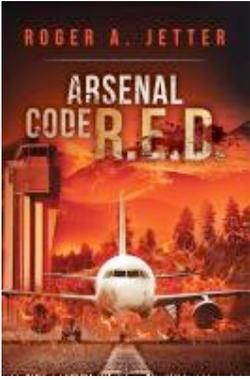


ROGER A. JETTER

ARSENAL
CODER.F.E.D.





Fifteen-year-old computer genius Blue is scared. The FBI's Domestic Terrorism Unit suspects him of an airliner crash. Blue networked a combat flight game to air traffic control computers in Denver's abandoned airport tower and commercial flight simulators. Everything goes wrong when a Red-eye crashes into the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. The FBI confiscates Blue's computer believing he is responsible. Certain his game isn't the cause, he's desperate to clear his name, figuring out who is and why.

Arsenal Code R.E.D.

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Arsenal Code
R.E.D.

Roger Jetter

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CHAPTER ONE

Jumping for joy in his living room, screaming and carrying on, fifteen year old “Blue” so nicknamed to shorten his last name from VanBluer because friends figured it was too complicated, celebrated in his living room with his Father...the Broncos football team had just won and were one game from a Super Bowl appearance. He was too, if the Broncos won their final play-off game Sunday. His Father, Edward VanBluer had promised Rod (Blue) a trip to the Super Bowl, but only if his school grades were exceptional. It appeared Blue would finish at the top of the class, his Father was happy.

He didn’t look forward to studying in his room after the game, regardless of a huge test tomorrow. He pushed his books aside and picked up his phone. “J, meet me at the old Stapleton International Airport Concourse. There’s something I’ve read about and want to check out.”

“Be there in fifteen minutes,” Jason said.

“Okay, make it exactly 6:30, cool?” Blue said. “It’ll be dark enough by then so no one will see us go in.”

The Stapleton International Airport complex, three miles east of downtown Denver, had changed radically since Denver International Airport opened. Car rental offices stood vacant, storefronts held ‘for lease’ signs and acres of empty parking were fenced off.

Since the end of the Korean War in the early ‘50’s, the miles between downtown and Stapleton had shrank. Gone were wheat fields and cornfields...suburbs bloomed; homes and businesses surrounded Stapleton’s now-abandoned 6400 acres. The only area not occupied by homes and businesses was the northern boundary of Stapleton International Airport - the southern portion of the 27 square mile, Rocky Mountain Arsenal.

Jason Emerton waited in front of the concourse double-doors, hoping Blue would hurry. The cold wind was beginning to hurt his ears. Inside the aluminum doors, a sign, taped to the glass warned- ‘No Trespassing’ and in smaller letters: ‘Security provided by InterTec Loss Prevention Services.’

Both boys knew it didn’t matter, unless there were German Shepherd dogs roaming the concourse and Blue wasn’t real sure there weren’t any. A few days earlier he had inadvertently caught the ten o’clock news – InterTec’s contract had been cancelled. The City and County of Denver decided concourse security wasn’t needed. In reality, economics forced the termination. The East Denver Police sub-station had received only one call for a cruiser in the past six months, and that was a false alarm. According to the TV news, Denver police had been instructed to make only one checkout pass per night simply because nothing of value remained in the concourse.

“Whazzup, dude? Why you want in here?” Almost sixteen year-old Jason shouted, watching Blue approach the long inter-connected buildings across the snow-covered parking lot.

“Be quiet. Want everyone to know we’re here?” Blue whispered. Blue and J had become fast friends when Jason’s parents moved into the neighborhood five years ago. Blue had decided he didn’t like the name Jason, so ‘J’ got tagged on just a few weeks after they’d met. The nickname stuck. No one would ever guess the two of them were best friends, an unlikely duo, both in and out of school. J wore a gold earring in his left ear and his head was shorn cleanly on the sides, conflicting with Blue’s dark, wavy hair. A tattoo of a propeller-driven World War II P-38 fighter plane circled a sardonically grinning skull on his right bicep, under black T-shirts, and a marijuana leaf on his left suggested he had the wrong friends. Marijuana use had dragged J’s grades down, possibly preventing him from getting into high school. He rattled the double door enough for the deadbolt to slip out of its slot. “No one’s around, what difference?” he asked, stroking his dark diamond shaped goatee.

“For your information, all those old scopes, navigation equipment, and way cool computers were left in the control tower. Someone may think we’re going to steal stuff or break it up...and maybe bust out the windows, too.” Blue answered.

J let the door close and followed. Blue stopped just inside the door and J ran into the back of Blue, his sunglasses went flying.

“Aw man, where’d those go?” J asked, feeling around on the floor, hoping his eyes would adjust quicker to the darkness so he could find them. “Don’t move, okay? I don’t want them crushed.”

“Why do you wear those at night?” Blue asked, expecting J’s smart answer.

“It’s 106 miles to Chicago, I’ve got half a pack of cigarettes, it’s dark, and I’m wearing sunglasses...” J said, paraphrasing Elwood in “The Blues Brothers” movie. “Uhm, I was wearing sunglasses before my best bud knocked them off. Ah, here they are. Okay, I’m ready now. Where we going?”

“I wonder about you, J,” Blue said, unbuttoning his coat. “C’mon, we’ve got to find the stairs. That old stuff is up a few flights.”

“Hahahaha! ‘Up a few flights.’ That’s good Blue. We’re in an airport concourse and you’re cracking wise.” J said, pulling the hoodie off his peroxide blonde hair, pushing his spike straight up. “You oughta be a comedian when you grow up.” J’s black leather jacket nearly made him invisible in the darkness. “Hey, here’s a question about that old stuff – why’d they leave it?”

“Most of it is just old. When the new D.I.A. Control Tower was set-up, the latest equipment was purchased. Uncle Jerry told me it would have been too costly to move obsolete stuff, and then update it. Denver International purchased all new technology.”

Jason followed Blue into the blackness. Nearly a block’s length from the main entrance, the tower stairs waited. “Why wouldn’t someone want it?”

“They might, but it’d take a lot of work to get it out. Getting it down six flights of stairs would be tough. Besides, they’d need a truck to haul it, too much work for a thief. Anyway, I thought maybe I could get some of it working.”

“Ain’t no way, computer-face,” Jason smirked, hitching up his everyday dress of black, baggy, surfer style Levis with oversized pockets. “You may be good with that little rig of yours at home, but an airport’s computers are way beyond your mental capacity.”

“What makes you think that?” Blue asked. J’s name-calling didn’t bother him anymore; computer nerd, wire-head, geek or any other name hadn’t fazed him since he was twelve. “Listen J, a computer is a computer is a computer, they all pretty much work the same. It’s the programming. And besides,” he added, “*You* know so much about computers?” He pulled off his Peyton Manning baseball cap and gloves and stuffed them in his pocket. He never went anywhere without a Manning logoed item, or one of his collection of John Elway sweatshirts.

“It’s not possible to get that stuff working,” Jason said. “You’re always dreamin’ way too big. I’m just sayin’.”

“If I’m going to be as successful as Bill Gates, I have to dream big...and try new things.” Blue’s grades had changed dramatically after his parents bought his first computer several years ago. He had progressed through playing computer games into understanding its unlimited use, even becoming adept at writing software. If he wanted to hack into other systems, he possessed the aptitude to do so, and his latest thing was integrating networks together.

Through a window’s dim outside light, Blue spotted the door at the base of the tower. It’d been a long walk in the dark from the front door, almost the full length of the concourse. A 'Private-Authorized Airport Personnel Only' sign hung on the door, it opened to a series of stair switchbacks; the Air Traffic Control operations room was six stories up.

“The first thing I have to do is get them up and running,” Blue said. “Hey J, grab that piece of wood laying there, prop the door open. We need warm air up there.”

“Huh? What? Why?”

“They don’t want water pipes in this building freezing, so they keep the temps above freezing down here. When it warms up...,” he pointed up the stairs. “...up there, I’ll bet you fifty bucks I can get that stuff working.”

“No way,” Jason shot back, following Blue up the darkened stairs. After the first switchback, the stairway darkened, there were no windows to let in outside light. Jason put his hand on the railing and followed. “You ain’t got fifty. You wouldn’t know what that much looked like.”

Light shined in thru huge windows on the top landing. It was littered with cans, plastic bottles, fast food wrappers, and trash of all kinds. It appeared as if someone had been living there, at least until winter weather set in.

Jason picked his way through the trash. "I can put a ten on it and a couple hits off my doob." "

"You got a doobie? Lemme see the color of your money and your doobie." Blue said. "Wait...you haven't got a ten and I'll bet you don't even have a doobie."

"I'll show you a doobie, a big doobie," Jason grabbed his crotch with both hands.

Blue laughed. "A BIG doobie? You?"

"Yeah," Jason said, propping open the door to the Control Room and exhaling, his breath causing a cloud of condensation.

Through tall tinted windows, city streetlights illuminated the room and cast an eerie green glow on the control consoles and most of the old radarscopes. Telemetry equipment and navigation equipment remained in place against the walls. Even the radios were still in place; headsets hung like pull cords hanging on drapes.

Jason plopped his butt into a dusty office chair. Its black vinyl had been ripped but the wheels were intact. The air traffic control stations were positioned directly below twelve-foot tall windows, tinted a soft green and angled outward...allowing an incredible view. "Look at all this cool stuff. Awesome."

"You bring your knife?" Blue knelt on the floor and crawled under one of the consoles, knocking over a supervisor's worn vinyl stool that had been tipped precariously against another console. It slammed the floor with a loud bang. J jumped, turned toward the door expecting someone to come barging through it.

Blue laughed aloud at the frightened look on J's face.

"You make any more noise like that to scare me and I'll put my knife in your ribs."

"Gimme a break tough guy," Blue countered. "You thought cops had just found us, huh? You didn't think being in here was a big deal just a few minutes ago, didja? Get out your knife and go back to whatever you were doing."

"Take a fly," J said and twisted the knobs on one of the radios and called an imaginary aircraft. "Emerton Air Freight, control here...steer WSW at 25 thousand..."

"Okay, okay, a little more quiet up there please," Blue said. "Hand me your doobie, your lighter and your knife, in that order."

"What?" J asked, pulling the headset off his ear. "Even if I had a doobie, you ain't getting it." He stood next to the console, eyeing the entire inside of the tower. "What you want my lighter and knife for?"

"Just give it to me." Blue made slashing motions toward Jason's crotch.

"How're you going to get this stuff running? You got no electricity." Jason's attention returned to fiddling with the switches on the consoles, pretending he was an air traffic controller. "J to Blue. No electricity, no computers. Over." J knelt next to Blue to see what he was doing. He held the lighter close to his face so Blue could see he was grinning. "Here, don't burn nothin' up."

Blue held the lighter so he could study the screws that held a rear panel onto one of the consoles. He held his hand out. “Your knife, NOW.”

Jason handed the pearl handled pocketknife to Blue. He’d showed it to Blue when he first got it, a gift his Uncle Jack had given him on a camping trip to the 1940’s era World War II Tenth Mountain Division training camp near Leadville, up in the 10,000 foot high Rockies. “Be careful with that,” he cautioned. “Don't want it busted.”

Blue flipped it open and jabbed the blade into the wall just below the framework of the console. “Watch this...!” Sawing a hole in the plaster wallboard, he reached in and pulled several electrical cables out a few inches.

“Whoaaa, that's awesome! How'd you know that was there?” Jason stood, pulled the stool up next to the console, plopped his butt on it and waited for an answer. An old headset peeked out of a drawer; he slipped it on and adjusted it.

“Computers just don’t work off batteries, ya know?” Blue said. “Electricity had to be brought up here from down below.”

J held the headset off one ear. “Okay, now that we know there's electrical up here, you still can’t get this stuff working, ‘specially the computers. Just cuz you found cables don’t mean you’ve got electricity.”

“Wow J, you surprise me sometimes.” Blue peered out from under the console. “I didn’t think you knew that. No matter, there’s a junction box or breaker box up here, or down there, somewhere...the electricity’s simply turned off. All we have to do is find the main feed, flip the breaker, blammo...we’ll have electricity.”

“Yeah...blammo...sure...!!! How’re we gonna do that? This place is huge. Hey, wait a minnit, nerd-olator, how come you know so much about the stuff in this tower? You been up here before?”

“Couple times,” Blue crawled out from under the console and grinned. “Jodi and I. We like to watch planes from here.”

“Hey, don't try to slide that by me,” Jason said, “There are no planes landing here any longer. You and Jodi huh? More like watching fireworks...your own.”

“Yeah, well, I think it's way cool up here. I keep thinking how awesome it would be to fly, pilot my own plane. If I could get these consoles working, we could pretend we're flying.”

“Oh man, that’d be so cool. That’s my greatest dream, to be a fighter pilot. It would be totally awesome to fly.” Jason plugged the headset into a console and positioned his hands on an imaginary control stick. Jet noises came from his mouth as he pushed the stick forward into a dive. “J to weapons system officer...”

He paused, lost in thought for a moment. “Hey, ya know what?” he grinned. “Those flight-training simulators are still in the old World Wide Airlines building. Wouldn't it be real sick if we got them working? Oh yeaaaahh, turn them into fighters, F-16 'Fighting Falcons', or those new YF-22’s. I've got autographed posters

at home of real fighter pilots standing next to their strike aircraft, fully loaded with bombs and rockets.”

Blue had listened to Jason’s plans to be an Air Force fighter pilot, or at the very least, a test pilot, many times. J devoured anything and everything pertaining to aircraft of any type. Every volume of the hard cover books published by the British Government entitled *Jane's Compleat Collection of Fighter Aircraft Defences* was in his collection - gifts from family, and he was always watching programs on television about aerial combat fighters - past, present and future. J had badgered his Father for over a year, to take him to the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Base in Dayton, Ohio, after they had been to the Lowry Air Base Museum in central Denver and the Buckley Air Force Base Museum, east of Denver.

“We could paint those simulators with squadron numbers and some US flags, copy my posters.”

“Whooooaaa,” Blue said, “that’d be a real kick. Are they intact? Are there computers over there?”

“Maybe. There’s a bunch of consoles upstairs above the sims. Guess it could be computer stuff.”

Blue stood and turned, pointing out the tall glass window, just to the north of the complex. “That building right there, right? The World Wide Airlines building?” His eyes gazed over, imagining the simulators working and ‘flying,’ controlled by a combat game he thought he could program. “That’s it, isn’t it? C’mon, let’s go over and look.”

“Yep, that’d be it,” J said, “...you seriously wanna go over? I thought you wanted to get this stuff working...sure, uh-hunh, now you wanna do something else.”

Blue turned and headed for the door. “Only if we run fast, that wind is cold.”

“Hold on ‘letrical jock, there’s a tunnel that’ll lead us over there, just around the backside of this tower.” Jason slipped past Blue, stepped over the trash, and pushed the door open.

“Oh yeah? Who was it that told me he didn’t mess around over here?” Blue said. “You said you’d never been in here.”

“No dude, you weren’t listening, I told you I’d never been in the tower,” Jason said over his shoulder as he leaped down the steps two at a time, Blue followed. Just around back of the tower steps, J stopped at the tunnel door. “I didn’t say I’d never been in this whole complex.” Affixed to the door was ‘Danger - Do Not Enter. Possibility of Electrocution.’ J pulled it open.

Blue surveyed the darkened tunnel from the top of the stairs. “How far is that building from here?”

The World Wide Airlines Flight Training Building was just across the main thoroughfare that led into the Stapleton Complex. The tunnel to the Training Center had been added when the building was remodeled in the mid ‘80’s, making it easier for World Wide Airlines Pilots, Co-pilots and other personnel to get to classes in the

event of inclement weather. Since World Wide Airlines recently filed bankruptcy, the equipment remained in the building awaiting a court decision.

“It's not very far.” Jason started down the stairs. “C'mon, I'll lead.”

“Is it really dark down there?” Blue squinted into the inky blackness descending with the stairs.

“No man, why? Awww Blue-boy, you're not afraid of the dark?”

“No! No, I'm not!” Blue folded a discarded soda cup, propped the door open and followed. “I'm just wondering if there's enough light to string some electrical cable through there?” Light from the open door gradually gave way to darkness as they walked deeper into the tunnel. “And don't call me Blue-boy!”

“Awww you old scaredy-cat, gimmee back my lighter.”

Jason flicked it, a yellow orange glow filled the tunnel. “Look, Blue-boy, wiring. You'll just have to find which electrical cable goes up into the tower, or one that isn't all cut up.”

“And you know which wire that is?” Blue asked following closely, not wanting to get too far from the flickering light.

“No computer-breath, I don't. You're the 'lectricity jock around here, you figure it out. I'm just the dude that pointed it out for you.”

“Maybe the circuit box is down here.”

“Yeah, maybe,” J stopped in front of a closed door. “Probably missed it back there somewhere.” The W.W.A. logo affixed to the door was peeling. “Look, this door leads into the lower level of the building. Gimme my pocketknife, someone took off the door handle, I'll have to pry it open. Here hold the lighter.”

“Are you sure this is where the simulators are?” Blue asked, somewhat wary of what could be on the other side.

Jason jimmied the door open far enough to get his fingers between the edge and the frame and tugged. Once open, his foot in place, he folded the knife and grabbed his lighter. “Look, check that out, Mr. Know-it-all.” He held the lighter high above his head. Flickering yellow light danced dimly on the sides of the two closest simulators.

“Whoooooaa.” Blue climbed steps, his feet clanged on perforated metal and echoed throughout the dark room.

Jason opened the door of the nearest simulator and stuck his lighter inside.

Blue leaned in. “This is way too sick. How many are in here?”

“Four. But these two are the most complete.” Jason guarded the flame with his hand and gently closed the door. “They've, er, well – ‘someone’ has taken parts off the other two...the seats...sticks...some of the instruments out of the panels.”

Blue had read about World Wide Airlines simulators in a computer magazine article and was well aware these flight simulators were designed to give the 'feel' of a real aircraft. To provide that sensation, W.W.A.'s simulators were mounted on six hydraulic rams, capable of moving the cabin through the full motion of a typical

airliner; roll, yaw, pitch, vertical and lateral movement and any combination thereof with a 1g force, allowing the 'cabin' to experience a complete realistic simulation of the full flight envelope.

"We probably wouldn't need instruments, but we'd need sticks...and screens," Blue said, remembering the article stated a Proteus II computer tied the hydraulic motion together with the display – screens (windows and windshield) to the side and front of the pilot provided 200 degree FOV (Field Of View) in the horizontal and forty degree FOV in the vertical. Five interfaced back projectors from a Wide Angle Infinity Display computer projected visuals onto the windshield/side screens, giving perfect simulation of flight. Virtual flight was further enhanced by standard airborne computer configurations, including pluggable memory modules, power supply modules, and discrete interfaces. In the room above the simulators, the facility engineers had designed stand-alone consoles with a full range of avionics central processors, sensor processing, flight control systems and navigation, including a new prototype - Proteus IV Digital Flight Management system.

Blue's vision of a working simulator was tempered only by his imagination, something he'd have to work on to perfect. "Hey J, where are the computers that power this stuff?"

"Up there," Jason pointed, lighter held high, the dim light barely illuminated two square openings. "See those windows? That's where the electronic stuff is. Behind us, down there through that door, are the other two simulators. Wanna see them?"

"Let's go up there first, check it out. This may work if they're not trashed. Maybe we can use these and the tower's computers, tie it and the navigation equipment and tracking together, and network it into the simulators here. I'll have to bring my computer from home. I've got a couple new CD combat fighter-plane programs; you'll like them, guaranteed. If I can get my computer networked, better yet, get all of this networked, we could be F-16 fighter pilots in real simulators."

"Yeah, that would be soo-ooo smooth." Jason started up the stairs to the computer room, his cigarette lighter above his head. "Hey, we could get our buds to come over. Charge admission. Make a couple of bucks...doobie money. Oh-ho-oh yeah."

"No, dude. Forget your smokin' buddies. This is for us. You, me, Becky, Jodi and maybe Robby. Forget the admission and the doobie money. No one else, understand? We're not supposed to be in here, ya know? The more that know about this, the more it gets blabbed around school and we'll get caught. If no one knows, we could have a lot of fun, for ourselves...and not get caught."

"Yeah, okay. I'm not into getting caught either...my Dad would kill me," J said, "...then ground me."

"One of us will have to keep an eye on my computer until we're 'flying'." Blue pulled open the side of one of the workstation consoles and looked inside. "First, we'll need to find a 220 volt power cable in that mess of wire in the tunnel. It'll take a

lot of electricity to run these simulators. I think we'll need to get an Ohm meter too. Neither of us wants to get zapped."

"My neighbor might be able to do it for us. He knows electricity..."

"No, don't ask him. Uncle Jerry knows, I'll ask him." Blue glanced at his watch. "C'mon, let's get out of here. I've got to get home, check my Dad's computer manuals again." Blue closed the console and started for the stairs. "Let's come back tomorrow night. Oh, we'll need tools, and we've got to bring black spray paint." Blue followed J down the stairs toward the tunnel. "Can you get your Dad's toolbox?"

J's lighter flickered thru the tunnel as they walked.

"Yeah, I can get it from his workshop; he won't miss it until the weekend. But where are we going to get black spray paint? The graffiti goons in this town took care of that for us decent law-abiding citizens ya know?" The dim light at the end of the tunnel beckoned. "Besides, what you want rattle-cans for?"

"Tower windows. Wait. Dad has a ton of old spray cans in the basement. Doesn't use them anymore," Blue said. "Maybe if we mix it all up as we spray it, it'll get thick and no light will come through and none will go out? Think?"

"Maybe," Jason said. "But when will we be able to fly?"

"When we get electricity working between the simulators and the tower and if I can get the computers networked together, hopefully we'll fly before the weekend. We'll need a couple of other electrical parts to make this work."

"Won't your uncle get suspicious if you start asking for a bunch of electrical stuff?" Jason followed Blue up the stairs and kicked the folded soda cup from under the door.

"I don't think so, he's cool. He knows I mess with computers. I'll just tell him I'm working on a radical prototype. Two-twenty should run those simulators, but I'll ask Uncle Jerry to be sure."

"How are we going to tie that together to a computer that works on house current?" Jason asked. "I do know that much about 'lectricity. Two different currents is going to fry your computer ... nothing will work."

"Wow...you really surprise me sometimes. I didn't think you knew anything about that but Uncle Jerry will know," Blue answered as they walked past the tower stairs headed toward the concourse door. "There's got to be some kind of interface. I'll ask him how to tell which cable carries 220, hopefully it's marked."

The boys sauntered out of the concourse into the darkness of the cold January evening. Blue was excited and bubbling with enthusiasm, confident it could be done, based on what he had seen. Jason wasn't as sure. They reached Blue's house first.

"If this works, we're going to have the ultimate ride." Blue smiled, standing on the porch. "Don't forget the toolbox. Oh hey, don't forget about next Sunday, you're invited to Uncle Jerry's to watch the Broncos final play-off game with us."

"That's too cool," J said, "see ya."

"See ya tomorrow night, Blue-boy."

CHAPTER TWO

Monday went by extremely slow. School was boring. Even the Broncos victory yesterday faded as he headed out the door of the school, done for the day. He couldn't think of anything but those flight-training simulators - the ultimate ride...*if I can get them working. It would be the closest thing to piloting a real combat strike aircraft I'll ever get...even though the graphics on my new aerial dog-fighting game are super-realistic, sitting on the sofa with a controller in both hands wouldn't be the same as a real commercial simulator.*

J thinks the computers can't be integrated so I'm going to have to prove it can be done. Dad's manuals will have schematics to help me figure out how to network the tower's computers into those World Wide workstations. Can't be that hard to hook my computer to bigger computers in the tower...then put together a LAN (Local Area Network) for the two buildings. It'll work...I'm certain, but getting my computer and monitor to the tower will take a bit of stealth. Dad will be really angry if he knew where it's going and what it'd be doing.

Blue walked home alone. J had gone off with Aaron, his smoking buddy. Aaron and Blue had a personality conflict so Blue declined the invitation to hang with them. Mel and Jodi had Choir practice and Robby's Mom had already picked him up. Home wasn't that far, he just liked having someone to kid around with, talk to on the way. He walked in the door of the house at four o'clock. "Hi Mom," he said, tossing his coat on the sofa.

"Hello, dear," Mrs. VanBluer said. "How was school?"

"Arrright. Same old same old."

"How did you do on your test?"

"I blazed it," Blue said. "Wasn't that hard."

"I'll take that to mean you got a good grade? Are you going upstairs to study?" she asked, testing the flavor of the contents of a pot with a big wooden spoon.

"Have you seen Dad's computer books, the latest ones?" Blue leaned against the kitchen door while his mother busied herself setting the table for dinner. "Smell's good Mom. What's for dessert tonight?"

"It's a surprise, you'll like it," she smiled, adjusting her apron. "I think those manuals are in your Father's den, on the third or fourth shelf. He said there was a quite a bit of new thinking in them. Are you working on a new project?"

"Sort of," Blue said as he sauntered down the hallway. He didn't want to have to explain what he and J had discovered or what they were planning. "What time's dinner?"

"About five-thirty. Your Father will be home early, he has a company board meeting tonight at seven."

"I'll be in Dad's den. Yell when it's ready, okay?"

Dinner wasn't very good, even though it smelled great. Blue hated casserole. His Mom knew that, but his Father loved it, and had requested it. The conversation wasn't very good either. His Father didn't want to discuss the Broncos or their victory, preferring to talk to his wife about the imminent board meeting. Blue could tell he was worried about it and excused himself from the table without eating much of anything, except dessert. He figured on grabbing a burrito and a soda at that convenience store near Stapleton. Once upstairs, he tackled his homework; the Algebra assignment didn't take as long as he thought, that allowed extra time between assignments. World History wouldn't take long. He'd do that when he got back home.

Jason phoned, begging off the meeting at the tower tonight, "No man, really, I can't. Dad's on my case again."

"What for now?" Blue asked, disappointed.

"Awww dude, I forgot to set the trash on the curb this morning...forgot last week too. Now we have so much of it, the garage is full. Dad can't get his car in. He's not real happy right now. I'm sorta grounded 'cuz he hates scraping windows in the morning. Besides, he's still mad at me for not getting the driveway shoveled."

"When you going to start paying attention to what goes on around you, instead of thinking about that stuff you smoke all the time?"

"It's not that..." Jason said, "...ain't got nothing to do with it."

"Hey bud-boy, don't try to slide that by me, I'm not your parents. I know, remember?" Blue retaliated. "It's getting so you can't even remember what school you go to, let alone which..."

"I...I...uh, I gotta go," J interjected. "Dad just told me to get off the phone."

"Bummer. Just don't do anything stupid to mess up tomorrow night then," Blue said. "You will be able to come over?"

"I think so; I'll have to ask Dad. See ya."

Blue was dejected. He wouldn't have a problem getting the computers networked together but he would need J's help doing the rest of the stuff in the tower- cleaning and covering the windows, finding the electrical in the tunnel. *Call Robby?* Reaching for his phone, he remembered Robby told him in school that his cousins were coming over tonight for his sister's birthday party. Blue decided to go to the tower alone, neither Robby nor J would be much help trying to figure out how to network computers anyway. He bounded down the stairs and jumped the last few steps to the main floor. The area rug on the polished hardwood floor slipped under his feet, he almost fell. "Mom, I'm going out, okay?"

"When will you be back dear?" Mrs. Van Bluer asked from the kitchen.

"When will Dad be home?"

"About 10, his meeting is supposed to be over about 9:30."

"I'll be back by then." Blue yelled, not waiting for a reply. He flipped on the porch light, let the door slam behind him, and swung the Broncos coat over his head.

He leaped the porch steps, taking three at a time and slipped his arms into the sleeves. It was cold and smelled like snow again - the weather forecasters predicted 10 to 12 inches. The snow from shoveling the driveway last week was still piled on the lawn. There had been many days last winter that Blue hadn't shoveled because the sun melted it before he got home from school...wasn't the case lately, way too much snow. He disliked winter and this winter was the worst, snow every other day and he's the one expected to shovel the driveway. There had been very few typical Colorado forty/fifty degree-days. He vowed, when he got out of college, to move some place warm, he wouldn't miss snow, the ice, or cold one bit.

By the time he had gotten to the concourse, his fingers were cold from carrying the soda he'd bought. *Why did I put so much ice in the cup anyway? That was dumb.* Sucking up the last of the soda through the straw, he set the cup down against the wall, jerked the concourse entry doors open, and slipped inside. He waited for a minute, blowing on his fingers to warm them. The place seemed extremely dark tonight. He pulled out the Mini-mag flashlight he remembered to bring. *J's lighter didn't afford much light last night.* The bright beam of light stabbed into the darkness and illuminated mottled gray, maroon, and white floor tile. He shined it back and forth in the huge, empty concourse. The whole place was really dirty, something he hadn't noticed last night. No one bothered to clean up after they'd moved out... toss the trash wherever and let someone else worry about it. Amazing how a place can become so trashed in such a short time. He picked his way around empty cardboard boxes, discarded paper and piles of debris on the floor or pushed against the walls, headed toward the stairs that led up to the tower's sixth floor.

A door creaked...the push handle on a door snapped back into position, echoed through the terminal. Blue stopped. *Did I hear that correctly? Is someone else in here?* The sound of footsteps echoed loudly against the silence of the empty building, rushing thru the corridor toward him. *Uh-oh! Better not get caught in here.* He looked back at the way he came in to see if he could get there quickly. *Too far.* He turned the flashlight off and ducked behind a car rental counter, his feet slipped on discarded Styrofoam cups, crunching them. The noise as they broke apart was deafening. *Whoever's in here had to hear that!* He scrunched himself down on the floor as far as he could. Dust swirled. He couldn't see it but smelled its mustiness. *Why is someone here? No one should be. A bum? Not likely, they're all down on Larimer Street, wouldn't venture this far away from drinking buddies. Besides, it's not that warm in here. But it is out of the snow and cold wind...and that would mean a lot to street people. Last night the tower looked like it had been lived in. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea - coming here alone.* His thoughts took on a life of their own. *Drug dealers? This place is good for that, away from prying eyes. I'm really in deep now...they'll knife me and not even ask questions.* He crowded the counter a bit more, frightened by his own thoughts.

Blue felt trapped, his mind raced. *How can I get out of the concourse if I had to? What if they decide to stay, not leave right away? What if they're waiting to meet someone? Do they live here?* He convinced himself he was trapped and scrunched farther under the counter not knowing how many people were in the concourse.

The footsteps continued toward his hiding place. *Too close. Don't even move a muscle –stop breathing.* Something grated over the top of the laminated counter...Blue cringed. Dust floated past his face, into his hair and onto his coat sleeves. He stifled a sneeze. Someone dragged something along the top. *Have they stopped on the other side of the counter? Do they know I'm back here? Waiting for me to come out? Holding a knife?*

Pressing tightly against the shelves that prevented him from squeezing all the way under the counter, Blue felt relieved as the footsteps went past; he counted...*sixty-two, sixty-three, sixty-four. One person, a man...he could tell by the heaviness of the footfalls. They've stopped again. It's eighty paces door to door - twenty short.* Blue recalled pacing it off last night when he and J had come in. *Did I miscount? Is he looking for me?* Questions raged through his head, immediate answers weren't available. Blue remained perfectly still, not even breathing for what seemed like an hour. *Surely, that man can hear my breathing.* Abruptly, the footsteps continued ... *seventy-five, seventy-six. He should be at the front door. What's he waiting for? Get out. Go! Why doesn't he leave?*

Blue listened. *What's shuffling?* The sound was unfamiliar. *That person is not going out; he's standing there, waiting for someone. Does he live in here? Why didn't we see him last night? What am I going to do now? I can't be here all night, Mom will be worried and Dad will sell the Super Bowl tickets to someone else if I don't come home.* He raised himself up, cautiously peering over the top of the counter. A wall shielded his view of the doors...and whoever was waiting there. He eased himself back down onto the dirty floor. The darkness hid him well and so did his Broncos dark blue overcoat. Putting his shoulder against the wall, using it as a guide, he quietly crept forward until he was able to see around the corner. A short man leaned against the door, pushing trash around on the floor with his shoe. He fumbled in his pockets for...a pack of cigarettes...tapped one out of the pack. He put it to his lips and fished for a lighter. A yellow flame erupted, illuminated his face and ignited the cigarette hanging from his mouth - thick, dark rimmed glasses, faint traces of an Errol Flynn mustache, and long, stringy dark hair. The man removed the cigarette from his lips and flipped back the hair hanging over his glasses. He took a long pull on the cigarette; the end glowed brightly for a second before he exhaled against the door. The combination of warm smoke and breath fogged the door glass. He scribbled something in it with his left hand.

It wasn't legible from where Blue hid.

The man took another long pull on his cigarette and peered outside.

Looks like he's waiting for someone. He certainly has long, greasy hair. Blue silently nicknamed him 'Slick.'

A shadow moved across the door glass. 'Slick' backed away, almost as if he was afraid. The door opened and a uniformed man entered.

A cop?

Light streamed in the entryway from the security light on the parking structure, spit-polished shoes gleamed below green trousers.

Blue's eyes followed the trousers up an Army green overcoat, under that a dress shirt, tie and on the shoulders of the overcoat-Captain's bars. He wore an officer's black-brimmed cap.

Regular Army. Wow!

The Captain nodded at 'Slick.'

Wonder why he's meeting with 'Slick'? Especially here?

The 'Captain' stood with his back to the door; darkness shadowed his face as he slowly and deliberately removed his gloves. He pulled something from the briefcase, turned it over and handed it to 'Slick' ... the dim light coming in through the double doors afforded Blue a look at a three-ring binder. 'Slick' fumbled with it and took another drag on his cigarette, flipped pages and nodded as the 'Captain' pointed. He was obviously telling 'Slick' something about the contents but Blue couldn't hear much of the conversation. At times, he'd heard 'Slick' object and the Captain raise his voice. Blue heard enough to know a threat to someone's life and freedom. 'Slick' took a last pull on his cigarette, tossed it on the floor, and crushed it with the scuffed toe of his shoe. The Captain pulled a long white envelope from the back pocket of the three ring binder and handed it to 'Slick.' He quickly tore the end off of it.

Whoaaa, cash...lots of it...something's definitely not on the up and up here. I'd really better not get caught now.

The 'Captain' slipped his gloves back on, nodded at 'Slick' and exited the concourse. 'Slick' waited by the door, for what seemed like thirty minutes. He finally pushed against the door and stepped outside. The security light on the parking structure cast his soft shadow against the building as he passed under it. Blue noticed Slick's long, tan overcoat was dirty and wrinkled, the rear seam torn as he walked away. Seconds later, he was gone.

Blue wasn't sure if he should move from his hiding place. *What if he's forgotten something?* He waited a few more minutes. *What if they come back?* The silence was unnerving. Quietly he slipped to the front door. *No one in sight.* Opening the door just a crack to listen, the sounds of the city roared in, but he couldn't hear 'Slick' walking. *I'll have to go outside to make sure he's left the complex.* Slipping through the partially opened door, he closed it gently so it wouldn't make a sound. The shadows of the parking structure hid him as he made his way around the corner of the building.

A car door slammed. Blue stopped, listening intently. He moved his head past the edge of the building, just enough so he could see into the parking lot...an engine

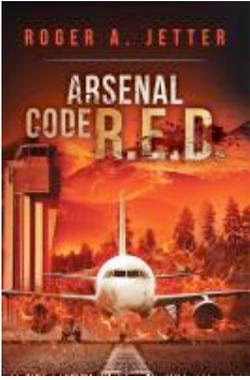
started...he watched as heated exhaust flowed out of the back of a dark-colored car, turning into condensation. The car didn't move. Blue strained to see who was behind the steering wheel. *Maybe it isn't the guy in the concourse. There is more than one car in the lot tonight. Might be someone else that just happened to get into a car at the same time 'Slick' left.* The car lurched forward, turned at the Exit sign, and headed straight for Blue.

Blue quickly stepped into the shadow, not moving a muscle as the car aimed for the sloped exit. *Did he see me?* He pressed harder up against the building, his dark coat blended into shadows. The 4-door sedan sped past and onto the street. The streetlight illuminated the man's glasses and long hair as he went by – *yeah -it's 'Slick'.* The headlights of the black sedan came on and the car bounced as it hit the dip in the street. Something white fell off the car, floated across the yellow dividing lines and twirled to a halt in the middle of the street. Blue waited until the car passed the stoplight half a block away and turned north onto Quebec Street before he stepped out of the shadow. He hurried to the center of the street and picked up the 18 by 26-inch piece of cardboard. Clear packaging tape stuck to each corner...he turned it over and saw 'InterTec Loss Prevention Services' lettered in red. *Yeah, right...he definitely isn't security...not with a sign taped to his car door. Naw, the company would have some kind of lettered door...and probably a white car or van with a light bar on the top so they can be seen, and not mistaken for burglars. That guy was trying to fool someone...not me!*

Blue walked back into the concourse carrying the sign. He pulled the door open and noticed bits of tape still attached to the inside of the glass. *This is where it came from. Yeah, it was here last night. Wonder what all that was about? Don't think he simply wanted signs off the doors and really don't want to know what either of them was doing in here.* He turned and breathed on the door in the same spot Slick had written something. His breath revealed, "Screw the FAA." *Wonder what that means?* He set the sign down against the wall and headed for the tower stairs. Partway down the corridor he stopped. *Hold on Blue! Use your head a little. The last time 'Slick' saw that sign, it was taped to the side of his car...if he notices it isn't taped to the car door anymore, he'll come back looking for it. If he finds the sign inside the concourse, he'll get suspicious, figure someone else was in here, probably spying on him and the 'Captain.'* *Don't think I want to know what they were doing anyway and certainly don't want him knowing I was here. Just as well not give him anything to be concerned with.* Blue picked up the sign and walked out to the street, tossed it to the ground in almost in the same spot he'd picked it up, turned and walked back toward the concourse. Just as he pulled the door open, he noticed the torn envelope on the floor. Scribbled in black marker was the name, 'Matt Wicks' with a slash followed by 'ATC'. *Leave it. Do not pick it up.* He kicked it out of the way and pulled the concourse door open just as automobile headlights passed over the glass door in front of him. He crouched down. *He's back! 'Slick' already noticed his phony sign missing.*

Blue sprinted for the darkness of the parking structure, vaulted over the top of the four-foot brick retaining wall, and scrunched down behind it. The headlights made the left turn into the parking lot and stopped just before they were about to disappear behind the side of the building. Blue raised his head just enough to see over the wall, shadows hid his dust-covered face. A bank of red and blue lights sat atop the roof of the white car. A real police logo affixed to the door, 'To serve and protect' lettered on the rear quarter. *A cop! What's he doing here? Someone call them? Did they see those guys leave...or me?* The police officer flashed his spotlight across the main door. Blue recalled the news story a couple of weeks ago; the East Denver police were to make one checkout pass a night. *Did 'Slick' and the 'Captain' know what time they made their checkout pass? Got out of here in the nick of time?* The police officer flicked his spotlight up the walkway to the windows of the concourse, swinging it back down over the parking structures. Blue ducked behind the retaining wall as the light passed overhead. He heard the car pull forward, go behind the building and drive across the lot to the south exit. He raised his head and watched the cruiser pull out onto Syracuse Street, make a left and go south. He stood up, and then sat down on the wall. *OK, that's enough for tonight. Too close to being caught...twice in one night. Think I'll go home.* He pulled the flashlight from his pocket and shined it on his overcoat - dusty and dirty. *Dad's gonna be mad if he sees this.* Patting the coat in an attempt to brush out brown dust, he noticed his hands and knees were just as dirty from crawling on the floor, his face felt dirty too. He stood and followed the retaining wall to the gated entrance, staying in the shadows of the parking structure so he couldn't be seen. Stopping at a pile of snow near the entrance, he washed his hands and cleaned his coat.

Better not say anything about those two guys. J won't help get this done if he knows there was someone else in here. Oh man, almost forgot, I have a World History assignment to finish tonight.



Fifteen-year-old computer genius Blue is scared. The FBI's Domestic Terrorism Unit suspects him of an airliner crash. Blue networked a combat flight game to air traffic control computers in Denver's abandoned airport tower and commercial flight simulators. Everything goes wrong when a Red-eye crashes into the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. The FBI confiscates Blue's computer believing he is responsible. Certain his game isn't the cause, he's desperate to clear his name, figuring out who is and why.

Arsenal Code R.E.D.

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