

CHAPTER ONE

Kyle Camden did not like his mother fussing over him, as she did now. “That was just the worst flu I’ve ever seen,” she told Kyle as she fluffed his pillow and urged him to eat the chicken soup she’d delivered on a tray.

Kyle also did not like chicken soup.

Correction: Kyle did not like his *mother’s* chicken soup. The broth was watery and flavorless. Kyle could make better chicken soup without even using a chicken. That’s how bad a cook his mother was. At least she kept trying, though. He had to give her points for persistence. If she kept trying, maybe someday she would get it right. Kyle figured there was a fifty-fifty chance.

“I’m fine, Mother,” he told her. Kyle knew that he hadn’t had the flu: He had witnessed something amazing the other night, out in the field by the school. And even though the local newspapers and websites apparently had never heard of that exotic practice known as “fact-checking,” at least they allowed him to catch up with what had happened since that night he’d stumbled home, delirious.

The plasma curtain had done something to Kyle. He realized it as soon as he woke up and logged on to the London *Times* website for his morning ritual — solving the *Times* crossword puzzle. (American crosswords had long ago proven too easy for him — the British ones were tough.) Instead of taking ten minutes, like it used to, Kyle had solved the toughest crossword puzzle in all of *two* minutes.

Kyle had always been smart. *Really* smart. Much smarter than his parents, in fact. Sometimes he felt a little twinge of guilt about this. His parents were nice enough people, he supposed. A bit dull. But they were kindhearted and they tried hard, which counted for *something*, right? Still, it had always been frustrating to be a genius in a family of . . . non-geniuses.

Kyle didn't mention his ramped-up brainpower to his parents. At twelve years old, he already knew how important it was to keep his own business secret. It would remain between him and Lefty, the fat New Zealand rabbit who lived in a cage in Kyle's room. Lefty was snowy white all over except for a tiny patch of brown fur on his left front paw. The rabbit placidly observed everything with his pink-red eyes as though he knew a secret he would never, ever tell.

"I don't want you on the Internet," Kyle's mother said, having finished fluffing the pillow and placing it behind Kyle's head. "I want you to rest."

Kyle rolled his eyes. “Mother, I need to catch up on what’s been happening while I was sick. And I need to catch up on my schoolwork.” That last part was a lie. Shortly after waking up, Kyle had sat up in bed with his laptop and done his missed schoolwork in an hour. Then, just to be safe, he’d also done the next two weeks’ worth of work. That had taken another hour. Superintelligence could be convenient.

Once his mother left, Kyle immediately slid his laptop out from under his bed. Then he opened the window. It was cool outside, but Mom had the heat cranked up to “Volcanic.” Kyle sighed with relief at the breeze.

Lefty started tugging on the bars of his cage, demanding a treat, so Kyle shook a couple of bits of dried papaya into the cage. Lefty scampered over and devoured them.

“It’s been a strange few days, hasn’t it, Lefty?”

The last thing he remembered after the plasma storm was stumbling home, his vision blurry, his head pounding as if someone had used it for a drum solo. His parents thought he had the flu and kept him in bed for days. Now he understood that his exposure to the plasma had changed his body and he’d needed all that rest to recover.

But recovery time was over.

His father poked his head into the room. “Hey, there, sport! Now that you’re feeling better, you can go to school in the morning!”

Great.