

T O M M Y ' S  
P O W E R



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P O W E R

A N O V E L

J O H A N  
W E S T S T E I J N



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# ONE



“SCHOOL IS FINALLY over,” Drome said with a smile. “Summer break, here we come!”

“What do you plan on doing all summer?” Geoffrey wanted to know.

“Just all those things I like to be doing. Create some wild fantasies and live them out,” came the reply.

“Let’s do something out of the ordinary and write a book,” offered Geoff. “We could even write about ourselves.”

“Nah, that’s for sissies. Besides, who would want to read another book about superheroes anyway? They’re a dime a dozen and as old as Superman.”

“Tommy might read it.”

“Yeah, that dope, he would read anything. I suppose that’s because he doesn’t have any special powers himself.”

“I wouldn’t say that. He has that constant smile and he never gripes or complains.”

“Why, that’s no super power, that’s silly. I think I’m gonna get a bike.” And with those words, Drome hopped on a fancy purple bicycle and started doing donuts and other tricks in midair.

## TOMMY'S POWER

Geoff left Drome with his fantastic bike show and was pondering how this year again had rushed by when Flair caught up with him. "I see it didn't take Drome long to come up with one of his crazy ideas and live it out," she said.

"No," replied Geoff, "whatever he's got in his head, it's not in his..."

"Rear end," added Flair. "I know it, but what about you, Geoff? Do you have plans for the summer?"

"I was going to write a book, but I'm not sure about the time."

"I understand," said Flair, "because you want to use your summer wisely. You write your book tomorrow and still need to find stuff to do for the rest of the summer." She knew that Geoff was as quick with the pen as she was with pencil crayons and paintbrushes. "I wonder if Tommy has anything going," she mused.

"I'm sure he does, if only to avoid contact with Tyran," said Geoff.

"You'd figure he would," said Flair, "for Tyran beats him up mercilessly, and still he doesn't take great pains to stay out of his way."

"I can't figure him out either, for he has been here three years..."

"No, four," interrupted Flair.

"Well, whatever, but he has never once responded to Krahmahn's invitation, though any normal human being would jump at the chance."

"And you consider yourself normal?" asked Flair.

"That's not my point," retorted Geoff. "Who wouldn't want to find out what special powers he could gain and develop?"

Krahmahn was their school principal, but he wore many hats. Besides principal, he held the offices of mayor, chief of both police and fire departments, judge, as well as the town's only physician. He had first won the mayoral position from Bronsor by offering the people to share some of his special power, and since that date he had wiggled himself into all other positions of authority. Bronsor may have ruled with an iron fist, but Krahmahn was in control. No one knew how much power he really had, or whether he ever planned on using it, and to what extent, nor did they seem to care.

Tommy did not live in town. When his family first moved into the area, he came to school on a moped. After that got trashed by Tyran and Rollo, he usually came on an old bike, although at times he arrived on rollerblades or on a skateboard. Once he had even come by way of paddle skelter, but after threatening gestures from Tyran, decided that once would suffice. Like all the other kids, Tommy had been invited (repeatedly, unlike other kids) to visit Krahmahn, but his standard answer had always been, "I do not need to hand my principle to the principal." This answer confused the town folk and got the rumor started that Tommy had something wrong in the brain. This seemed to become clearer, as he was the only one who appeared to struggle through school. It's not that he had low grades, but it sure looked like he had to work real hard at every subject. Geoff had essays written the moment the assignments were given, art projects were just a blink of an eye for Flair, Tyran punched and threatened his way through every course, Rollo and Switch never seemed to do any work and yet their marks were well above average (as were Ginny's and Jewel's, but for different reasons), and Drome simply didn't care what even the next period would bring. Most students had their strong and weak points, with their strong point obviously tied to their super ability. Gesh was an A-student in history because she could time travel; Ardy had that ability in location, which made him the geography buff. Luigini apparently was born multi-lingual, but more than that, she held mastery over every dialect possible.

Aliken Silvy called itself a mountain town. In years past, it had flourished as a mining town, but Bronsor had extracted more than was thought possible and/or regarded as safe, so the mine had been shut down and now the town extracted and extorted wealth from unsuspecting visitors, passers-by, tourists, and others who dared to come within a respectable distance of this once-so-friendly town. Bronsor had started raising the prices for the town's products to unheard of heights, but when the resources ran out, Krahmahn took over. This new mayor used

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his power to control the youth, and the youth to control the rest of the population, and all of them to prey on outsiders. Tommy was considered one of them because he attended high school in town, but nobody knew where he called home, or even if he had any family, although he always mentioned his father as if he brought him to school every day.

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**T**YRAN AND ROLLO had been waiting at the end of town, but after hiding in the bushes for over an hour and a half, they decided that Tommy was not worth waiting for in any uncomfortable position. “Let’s go check the library,” suggested Rollo. “I’m sure we can find him there.”

“Let’s not,” said Tyran, “Ms. Penelope has kicked me out for good, ever since I kicked over those five racks of books.”

“No,” tried Rollo, “but we can see if his bike is parked outside.”

“That only works if he used his bike today. Did he not come on skateboard?”

“Yeah, let’s just forget it. Let’s go to the concrete factory and bust up some curb pieces.”

As Tyran and Rollo left and disappeared around the corner, Ardy showed up, as usual out of nowhere. He had a small black box and a little shovel. He dug a shallow hole right beside the sign with the name of the town on it and proceeded to drop the little box in the hole. With the box covered to satisfaction and the little piece of sod replaced on top, Ardy vanished as quickly as he had come.

## TOMMY'S POWER

The crime rate in town had statistically dropped ever since Krahmahn came to power, but the numbers were deceiving. Sure, the bank had not been robbed, but the people lived in near poverty, for Krahmahn made sure that nobody would get wealthy enough to even move out of town. Of course, all the wealth that got pilfered from whoever came through town ended up in the town's coffers, to be dispensed according to the mayor's wishes. This made him filthy rich. Any crime, however, always got discovered by the chief of police, and subsequently severely punished. So, to the outside world, Alikén Silvy seemed like a paradise, but those who dared to travel through it soon found out otherwise. And still people came to the rustic mountain town, for the injustice against outsiders never seemed to reach the general public. The big highway signs advertising Alikén Silvy with the promising words, "Come experience the power," lured the people in, but when they left, they knew that this power had been used against them. In reality, the people of Alikén Silvy were very corrupt. They were encouraged to be that way and almost had to be in order to pay the outrageous taxes.

The main purpose for the taxes, other than lining the pockets of the mayor, was to keep the main drag through town in tip top shape. This would, of course, impress the unsuspecting tourists. Because the library stood just around the corner from one of the biggest strip malls, it also received considerable funding.

The inhabitants of Alikén Silvy rarely visited the library. The grown-ups had to work hard, the students didn't care very much about learning (except people like Ginny & Jewel and, of course, Tommy), and the older folks rightly realized that the content of the library had been heavily censored. Tourists would come in, but they would only complain about the fees, for they admired the beauty of the building and the impeccable organization of the whole system, courtesy of Penelope. What they had learned in their schooling days had dulled their senses, so they missed the perception of the older generation.

Penelope ran a tight ship, but the years showed in her face and mobility. Like most older folks in town, though, she couldn't afford

to quit her job. Even though she served the customers in a friendly manner, her eyes showed that she wouldn't mind leaving it all behind. She remembered the olden days, when people could drink in freedom, joy, neighborliness, and classic books. Her coworkers might act nasty to her, her bosses denigrating, the costumers complaining, but she lamented most that the old favorite books had been pulled from the shelves. They had reminded her of the glorious days of old. The memory of those bygone days made them more glorious, especially in light of the present times.

Another building away from the main street that got more than its share of funding housed the youth center. It stood six blocks away from Main, built up against the side of a hill. None of the hills had height enough to earn the title of mountain, but this one reached above the others. The older people vaguely remembered the building as a church building, but no one could recall ever attending. There was no easy way to get to it, so visitors could only look at it from a distance. From the parking lot by the town hall, one would have the best view of this spectacular building. Looking up to this massive building from downtown Aliken Silvy, one would still easily mistake it for a church building. Beautifully lit at night, the building had grown to four times the size of the original structure. Although it had the designation of youth center, its real purpose would be better reflected in the designation of youth indoctrination center. It seemed innocent enough, with its programs, video arcade hall, recreation facilities, and even day care. However, its underlying intent was to get the kids excited about their home town and, of course, their fearless leader. Most kids loved to go there and hang out, while some kids only stopped by occasionally, and "brain-damaged" Tommy avoided the place like the plague.

The news raced through town: a gold transport truck had been blown off of the road as soon as it had entered town. The chief of police had confiscated the gold, of course, and needed to find someone to blame. As the first and, as far as he cared, the only suspect, Krahmahn had picked

Tommy, who had unfortunately peddled his bike into town just half a mile behind the now well-known truck.

In the police station, Krahmahn's cronies roughed up Tommy to get some confession out of him, but Tommy said once that he had nothing to do with it and that he could not help in the investigation, other than his witnessing of the assault on the transport truck. The roughing up could not force him to open his mouth with any more information, which he had claimed not to have anyway. Whether he knew about the consequences of not cooperating with the authorities could not be read from his facial expressions, or even his eyes.

The town's people knew how much Krahmahn loved to place any rebel in the infamous detention center, which turned the unfortunates not just into criminals, but into little obedient Krahmahn clones.

Usually a half year would do the job; some tough cases would take almost a full year, and weaklings took no more than eight weeks to conform. Weakling may not be the right word to use, considering the amount of torture used.

The court appearance had been short, but interesting. Krahmahn presided, of course, and he gave the facts as they stood: a truck had been blown up and Tommy had been the only person in the vicinity.

He failed to mention what the truck carried and where the cargo had ended up. As he was in the process of pronouncing the sentence, he stopped briefly to reprimand Switch who, from the back of the courtroom, had tried to influence the judge's decision. Even though the words, "Switch, stop it," took a mere second and seemed almost lost in the flow of words which sentenced Tommy to half a year of detention, the audience had noticed them. Tommy may have been weird, abnormal, and an outsider, yet despite the animosity toward him, he had made no enemies. The little interruption started to make people think and wonder if Tommy was really as guilty as Krahmahn made him out to be.

Flair had been the first to be concerned with Tommy's case and she found friends in Ginny and Jewel. They discussed the possibility of running a petition, but decided not many people would sign anything

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opposing Krahmahn's decisions. Next, they decided to try to find out who could have masterminded this whole thing.

"How can we find out who thought this whole thing up?" Flair wondered, more to herself than to her friends.

"It wouldn't be hard to find out who planted the bomb if we could get Gesh to join us in our efforts to regain some kind of justice in this town," Ginny offered.

"Yeah, but Gesh always lives in a world of her own," said Flair.

"How about we entice her by letting her know that she could very likely make history," prodded Jewel, who started to get excited by this development.

"There's one way to find out," responded Flair, and with those words she headed toward the neighborhood's fast food place.