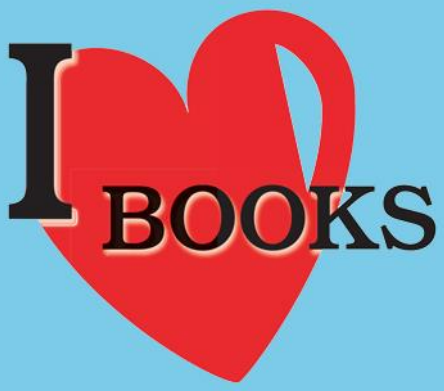


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Written by

Tom McLaughlin

Illustrated by

Tom McLaughlin

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EVERYBODY WAS KUNG-FU FIGHTING

'Ladies and gentleman, we have spent a lifetime hiding in the shadows but today we finally get what we've all been waiting for. For today is Judgment day. I look around this room and it makes me proud.' Mr X paused to puff on a large cigar.

'Look at the great things we've already done. We steal, not to make us rich, but because we can. We hurt, not because we're scared, but because we're courageous. Today, we destroy the world!'

Knowing nods rippled around the room, which was full of some of the world's most fearsome felons,

corrupt politicians, ghastly gangsters, and vile villains.

'We are finally ready,' said Mr X, sitting at the end of the very long table, 'all I need to do is press this red button and . . .'

'PIZZA!' a chirpy voice interrupted. Everyone turned to see the crash-helmeted pizza delivery boy, craning round the door. The smell of piping hot cheese and warm cardboard filled the room.

'I've got PIIIIIIIIIZZA!' he cheerfully called.

'I'm sorry, there appears to be some sort of mistake. I didn't order any . . .' Mr X said scratching his head.

'Do you have ham and pineapple?' an assassin called The Black Widow chipped in—that wasn't her real name; her real name was Doris, but Doris the assassin would sound silly. 'I could go for a bit of ham and pineapple.'

'Ew,' Ivan The Even Worse interrupted. 'Fruit *and* meat together? I find that so weird.'

Mr X raised his voice. 'Please don't eat any pizza, if you eat it they make you pay for it. I know how these people work.'

'I like it,' the Black Widow said, staring at Ivan The Even Worse.

'I'll say again. FRUIT AND MEAT TOGETHER! You're insane.'

'We're all insane. That's why we're here—we're about to destroy the world. Now if you don't stop making fun of me, I'll have to kill you to death,' the Black Widow snarled.

'Mr X, Mr X!' Ivan called out, putting his hand up, 'she threatened to kill me to death.'

'Can we all shut up?!' Mr X screamed. 'I didn't order pizza, nor did anyone else. I have a selection of light nibbles and some squash prepared for when we've finished throwing the world into a black hole of insanity, but until then, nothing,' he said, looking at the kid in the motorcycle helmet.

'Sure you did. You've got your margarita, your ham and pineapple, yeah . . .' he said, giving a thumbs-up to the Black Widow. 'And we've got your stuffed crust of whoop-ass. Now, did you want that with extra karate chops?' he said, opening the lid.

'What . . .?' Mr X said peering into the box.

The pizza delivery boy swung his fist through the bottom of the box, knocking Mr X out cold. Quick as flash the rest of the assembled baddies started reaching into their pockets to pull out any weapon they could find. But before their fingers even reached pocket lint, the delivery boy had frisbee'd the pizzas across the room, instantly taking out half a dozen of the hapless horribles. A general pulled a machine gun from his sock, but before he had chance to take aim, the delivery boy reached into his side bag and whipped out a bottle of cola, shaking it vigorously, before opening it up and sending a stream of foamy fizzy pop right at the general's face.

'AAAAARGGGGH!' the general screamed. 'My eyes!'

'Oh I'm sorry. Do you prefer it stirred, not shaken?' the delivery boy asked.

'Amateurs,' the Black Widow shrieked, pulling out her nunchucks and spinning them round her head. 'Time to let the grown-ups have a play.'

'Oh, you wanna play, do you?' the delivery boy replied, pulling down his visor. He reached inside his

pizza bag, pulled out a couple of garlic baguettes, and twirled them so fast all the Black Widow could see was a bready blur. 'Oh yeah, that's it, drink it in, this is how I roll.' He flung a garlic baguette straight at the Black Widow, striking her to the ground.

'Who . . . who are you?' Mr X asked, shakily.

The delivery boy pulled off his helmet and shook his hair back in place. There stood a boy, I mean a real boy; he couldn't have been more than thirteen years old. Mr X couldn't believe his eyes.

'The name's Twigg. Kevin Twigg. License to get all up in your face.'

'What?'

'Oh I think you heard me, you bag of plums.'

'I beg your pardon?! WHO ARE YOU CALLING A BAG OF PLUMS? See me after assembly, Twigg.'

'Twigg?'

'TWIGG?!'

'Are you listening to me?'



Kevin snapped out of his daydream and sat up with a jolt, dropping the game console he had been playing. He wasn't fighting baddies. Kevin was in assembly and in big trouble. The whole of his year were all craning their necks to look at him and there, at the front, stood Mr Plunk. He was Kevin's elderly headmaster and a spindly man who looked as if he was made of string and bad moods.

'Oh, sorry, sir,' Kevin said, his face burning puce with shame.

'What's that in your hand?!' the headmaster snapped.

'Erm, a calculator, Mr Plunk!' Kevin replied immediately. He decided to take a chance because the headmaster was very old and there was a chance he wouldn't know the difference between a game console and a calculator.

'I'm not an idiot, Kevin. I know a blasted computer when I see one. Awful things, with their internet and funny cat videos . . .' he snarled. 'I'll see you afterwards, Twigg. Now open your ears and pay attention!'

Twenty minutes later Kevin filed out of morning assembly, the embarrassment still hanging over him like a cloud.

'Hey, Twigg. Can I see your license to "get all up in my face"?' one kid laughed.

'Well done, Kevin. You find new and interesting ways to be a moron every day,' another bellowed, before punching him in the arm. Kevin desperately tried to rub the sting away without letting anyone know that it hurt. His head felt like a washing machine of bad thoughts, each one spinning round and round on a never-ending cycle. Why did he always have to get carried away, pretending he was the secret agent in the movie of his life? Why couldn't he just play his games console in secret like the other boys instead of going off into a mad daydream and shouting about getting up in someone's face? Kevin imagined life without being yelled at by teachers before realizing that he was daydreaming about not daydreaming.

'Man, you have to be more careful,' Pete whispered loudly into his ear. 'You know Mr Plunk has it in for you.'

'Pete's right. I bet you were in your own world, fantasizing about being Ninja Pizza Boy again, weren't you?' Stu said, shaking his head.

Pete and Stu were Kevin's two best friends, which was a good job as they were also Kevin's only friends. They'd practically spent their whole lives together. All the way from nursery to big school. They were a little gang of misfits, with Kevin as their misfit-in-chief.

'Well, it was good while it lasted. I just want to do something cool with my life. I bet I'd make a really good secret agent,' Kevin pondered. 'I'm practically fluent in ninja. I'm pretty sure I could take down a real baddie with one arm tied behind my back.'

'Who has ever heard of a thirteen-yr-old secret agent?' Stu asked. 'Especially one with athlete's foot and a cheese problem.'

'OK, firstly, the infection on my foot has cleared up now, and secondly, I don't have a cheese problem!' Kevin barked.

'What do you have in your lunch box, Kev?' Pete asked.

'Nothing. Just a sandwich and an apple and a chocolate bar,' Kevin said casually.

'What else?' Stu said, raising an eyebrow.

'That's it. Nothing else.' Kevin said, shuffling his feet and avoiding eye-contact.

'Keviiiiiiin?' Stu said, nudging him.

'OK, OK, SOME CHEDDAR AND A SMALL LUMP OF BRIE. MY NAME'S KEVIN AND I LOVE CHEESE! HAPPY NOW?' Kevin blurted at Pete and Stu, laughing.

'A computer loving cheese addict, huh, Twigg? Not got a lot going for you, have you, boy? No wonder your brainbox has turned to dribble.' It was the headmaster again. He grabbed Kevin by the earlobe, yanking him along the corridor as he hollered at him.

'ARRRGH, NO... NO!' yelled Kevin. 'I was just saying how right you were, sir. Computers are nothing but trouble.'

Mr Plunk narrowed his eyes. 'Yes, yes they are stupid aren't they,' he said, looking off into the distance. 'One day this fad for all things electronical will come to a crashing end. What's wrong with a



blackboard and chalk? It was good enough for me back in my day! Now get back to lessons, Twigg, you snivelling little weasel. Order, manners, and a civilized world, that's what we need.' And with that he glided off down the corridor barking at other children as he went.

'Wow, he really hates computers, doesn't he?' Stu said looking puzzled.

'Yeah,' Kevin nodded. 'I wonder why. Do you think his pet dog was crushed by a laptop or something?' Kevin watched suspiciously as Mr Plunk shut his office door behind him. 'Do you think it's odd . . .' Kevin began.

'No!' yelled Pete.

'What?' Kevin said. 'You don't know what I was about to say?'

'Yes, we do,' Stu joined in. 'You were going to say something about Mr Plunk being up to something. Like he's an evil mastermind or he goes around using puppies as slippers or something.'

'No . . .' Kevin said looking awkwardly. They walked a few more steps down the corridor, then



Kevin couldn't keep it in any longer. 'All I was going to say was that, don't you think it's strange that no one has ever been hauled into Mr Plunk's office, considering how he's always telling us all off and everything. I mean, I wonder what he's up to in there?'

'I knew it. I knew it!' Pete said, rolling his eyes. 'You always do this, Kevin; you always think that there's a mystery to be solved, a crime to be cracked. I swear sometimes you don't know what's real or what's fantasy,' Pete said, shaking his head.

'If you think I'm that weird I suppose you won't want to come round and play on my new MiPhone3000 then?' Kevin said triumphantly.

'You don't have one,' Stu replied.

'Well, no, not yet. But I will soon. I'm saving up all my money and after tonight, I reckon I'll be really close . . .'

'OK, OK, I'll ask,' Pete said, with an air of regret in his voice. 'What's happening tonight?'

'Glad you asked, Pete old buddy. Tonight I will be putting on the stunt show to end all stunt shows,'



Kevin said grinning. 'I shall be zip-wiring from the rooftops in town, before somersaulting over the fountain to rapturous applause, and a hat full of cold, hard cash.'

'You can't do a somersault, Kevin,' Pete sighed.

'Sure I can. I watched the latest James Bond film last night. It looks easy.'

'Watching something on TV does not mean you can do it.'

'Are you sure this is a good idea?' Stu chipped in. 'I mean, you remember what happened last time when you watched sword-swallowing on YouTube? They called you "Kevin the human kebab" after that.'

'Oh stop overreacting. Turns out tonsils aren't that important. Look, just spread the word around the school. I'll see you there at four, by the fountain in town!'

'Are you sure, Kevin?' Pete and Stu both replied.

'I told you, what can possibly go wrong?!'