

The MAD SCIENTISTS' CLUB

Bertrand R. Brinley

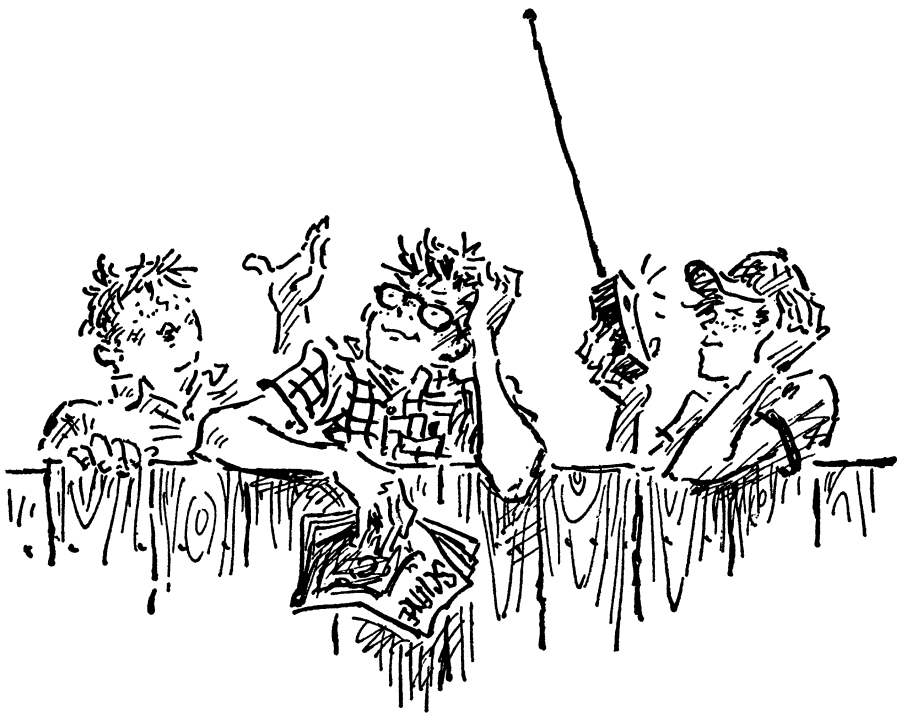


Illustrated by Charles Geer



The New Adventures

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of the
MAD SCIENTISTS'
CLUB

Bertrand R. Brinley

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The New Adventures of
The MAD SCIENTISTS' CLUB

Introduction

Somewhere beyond our daily cares lies a town with a quaint square in its center. The square is enclosed by old brick buildings with awnings offering shade to shoppers and strollers. The trees around the square are tall and ample in their maturity.

Now, in the soft light of the early evening, a group of young boys gathers together. Snatches of their talk drift across the square, telling of adventures just completed and of others yet to come.

Our young band of adventurers is about to embark on what became the second collection of stories about the Mad Scientists of Mammoth Falls which my father wrote. They find themselves encountering situations that prove more complex and dangerous than their escapades in the tales that first brought them to readers' attention.

Their curiosity—a hallmark of all scientists—gets them into trouble with criminals. They fulfill a dream many of us have, when they refit a midget submarine and mysteriously relocate it to a hidden cavern. And they apply some practical science when they become rainmakers during a hot, dry summer in Mammoth Falls.

The rainmaker story has an interesting twist in its history. It was supposed to be the eighth tale in *The Mad Scientists' Club* book; but the editor rejected it and the book was published with seven stories. Some months afterwards, the publisher wrote my father, complimenting him on the story and urging that it be included in the volume you now have.

Between tracking criminals and coaxing rain out of clouds, our imaginative band still finds time to pull off

a prank or two on the townspeople and settle accounts with the notorious Harmon Muldoon.

But there are some surprises awaiting the club members. Harmon proves himself more resourceful than they think. They also find themselves embroiled in some town politics—a harbinger of things to come—when their rainmaking is too successful.

These tales were written over a period of four years, the chronology being:

Big Chief Rainmaker

The Telltale Transmitter

The Cool Cavern

The Flying Sorcerer

The Great Confrontation

They all involved research, as did the first seven stories. In one case, I like to think that the idea for the midget submarine that figures in *The Cool Cavern* originated in Japan. When we lived in Tokyo in the 1950s, we visited the big port at Yokohama and the naval base at Yokosuka frequently. At the latter, a captured midget submarine was on display. I clambered in and around it one day while my parents ran some errands at the base. As the day wore on and they did not show up, I became a bit concerned that something had happened or perhaps they had forgotten where they left me. Much to my relief, they did return finally and pick me up. But I can't believe that the sub was not firmly planted in my father's memory after this episode.

While researching the story, he obtained photostats

of declassified Office of Naval Intelligence publications that had descriptions of Japanese midget submarines. One of these subs was the “Pearl Harbor” type, named for one that was beached on Oahu Island on December 7, 1941. This sub was forty-one feet in length and five feet across, with a four-and-a-half foot tall conning tower. My guess is that this was the model for the midget sub the club members refurbish and then hide in the underwater cavern.

In another story, the hero is not one of the Mad Scientists, but a German shepherd dog named Kaiser Bill. Kaiser Bill was our first family dog, whom we purchased in Germany as a puppy and called “Bobo.” Bobo went everywhere the family did: Austria, Massachusetts, New Jersey, California, Japan, Panama and New York. Kaiser Bill does everything—with a few exaggerations here and there—that Bobo did.

Kaiser Bill’s owner, Zeke Boniface, appears again with his mythical truck, Richard the Deep Breather. They play an important part in *The Flying Sorcerer*, which was suggested by the publicity UFOs were getting in the Fifties and Sixties. I suspect my father had many times dreamed of how much fun it would be to fly something resembling a flying saucer and raise havoc with the local citizenry and the Air Force. He knew that geodesic structures are quite light and strong, and that they are pretty easy to build. Add the Mad Scientists, and you are on your way to another adventure.

This story appears in its proper sequence, as does *The Great Confrontation*—which is the last short story about the Mad Scientists of Mammoth Falls; the others

were arranged in the order you encounter them for editorial reasons. We have, as we did in *The Mad Scientists' Club*, left them in the original sequence.

As the Milky Way blankets the sky and town with luminescent starlight, small stars dance on the low horizon. They seem to soar up and then dash off, driven by the wind. Are they really celestial lights or a trick of the imagination? Turn the pages of this book and you will learn the answer as you are transported into the realm of the imagination with the Mad Scientists of Mammoth Falls.

Sheridan Brinley
Arlington, Virginia
2002

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The Telltale Transmitter



Henry Mulligan has always had a generous supply of what is called scientific curiosity. Sometimes it gets us into trouble—like the time Freddy Muldoon and Dinky Poore got kidnapped for being too noseey about something Henry had discovered.

Henry is a great one for thinking ahead, and he always has some new project planned for the Mad Scientists' Club to work on during vacation periods. Last Easter we had about ten days off from school, and he was all ready for it with a carefully thought-out program to study earth tremors in the vicinity of Mammoth Falls. We spent the first couple of days building seismographs that Henry had designed and calibrating them in our clubhouse in Jeff Crocker's barn. It isn't very difficult to build a good seismograph. Knowing what to do with it is something else.

Most scientific projects boil down to two things: some serious thinking and a lot of hard work. In the Mad Scientists' Club we split it up evenly. Henry and Jeff do most of the thinking, and the rest of us do the work.

The seismograph project was no exception. Henry had figured out just where he wanted to place the instruments so that we could develop a good record of the pattern of earth movements around the Mammoth Falls area. He decided that we should keep one in the clubhouse in Jeff's barn and make it the central recording station where he and Jeff would analyze all the data we got. The other three instruments we built would be placed at three distant points, so as to form a large triangle with the town in the center.

Naturally, Henry had picked out three places that were hard to get to. But as I said, he and Jeff only had to do the thinking. The rest of us had to set up the field instruments and then trek out to each one of them every day to change the graph paper on the recording drums and bring the last day's data back in to Henry.

We set one up on the very top of Brake Hill and another one on the floor of the old abandoned quarry out west of Strawberry Lake. The third one we set up on the big stone slab that's used as the throne in the council ring on top of Indian Hill. We had to get permission from the local chapter of the Daughters of Pocahontas to do this, because they always use the place for their meetings, even though they don't own it. The ladies were very nice about it, though, and decid-

ed they couldn't stand in the way of science. Besides, none of them could think of any business they had to bring up at that month's meeting, anyway.

We had to balance each instrument very carefully and make sure the main beam with the bob on it was precisely leveled. Then we had to adjust the tension on the recording arm so that it would make a good trace on the graph paper and still not interfere with the free movement of the beam. All of this took a long time; Homer Snodgrass and Mortimer Dalrymple did most of it, because they have a lot of patience and like to work with fussy stuff like dissecting flies and soldering transistors in place, and stuff like that. Freddy and Dinky and I do a lot better on the big things—like hauling rocks and digging and chopping down trees. Freddy always says it's because we think big.

Anyway, we just sat around chewing the fat most of the time while Homer and Mortimer fussed with each seismograph. Then, when they were satisfied the thing would work all right, we went to work and put a pup tent up over each one to protect it from the weather.

Compared to a lot of the other projects Henry had dreamed up for us, this one seemed pretty dull. All we got out of it was sore feet and a sunburn. We'd make the rounds of the seismograph locations each day and bring back three pieces of graph paper with a squiggly line running down the center. It was always late in the day when we got back, and we were usually pretty hot and tired. Meanwhile, Jeff and Henry just bummed around the clubhouse all day, swapping jokes and eating apple

pie that Jeff swiped out of his mother's kitchen.

"Oh, Great Mogul! Would you mind telling us just what this is all about?" said Freddy Muldoon one afternoon as he plumped his ample bottom onto an apple crate and mopped the sweat and dirt off his face.

"I don't mind," said Henry indulgently, as he looked up from the graphs he was studying and pushed his glasses up onto his forehead. "That is, if you think you can understand it."

"Let's give it a try," said Freddy, unperturbed.

"Well, those 'squiggly' lines, as you call them, are a record of every movement in the earth's crust around this area for twenty-four hours. With four recording stations we can get a good picture of how strong the tremors are and what direction they're moving."

"So who cares?" said Freddy, fanning himself.

"A lot of people care," said Henry. "Someday we might have a big earthquake in this area. Who knows?"

"Big deal!" said Freddy. "After all the buildings are knocked flat, we'll know what caused it, huh?"

"Don't be a fat fink!" Mortimer Dalrymple chimed in from where he was lying flat on the floor. "Sometimes I think you just don't know what science is all about."

"Oh yeah?" said Freddy.

"Yeah!" said Mortimer.

And that was all that was said about the matter for several days.

But Henry and Jeff did try to keep our interest up by showing us more of what they were finding out from the graph traces we brought in. They had a lot of them

pinned up on the clubhouse walls that they intended to exhibit in their science class when school opened again. The prize exhibits were the three sets of traces that showed how violently the recording arms on the seismographs had oscillated back and forth each time a dynamite blast went off on the banks of Lemon Creek, where they were putting in the footings for a new bridge at Cowper Street. The drums that we mounted the graph paper on for each seismograph were rotated at a rate of one inch an hour by a little electric motor run off a battery. Henry pointed out how we could calculate from the traces just what time each blast went off, and how long it took the shock wave to reach each of our recording stations, and how strong it was when it got there.

But Henry was proudest of the traces that he claimed showed the change in earth vibrations when they turned on the reserve dynamos at the power plant late in the afternoons and then shut them off again late in the evening. Henry said anybody could detect a dynamite blast with his ear, but it took a pretty sensitive instrument to detect a dynamo being turned on.

Even Freddy and Dinky showed more interest in the project after that. Freddy has a very active imagination, and he began dreaming up ways that soldiers might use seismographs in combat to tell when tanks were coming, and things like that. Every time he mentioned this Dinky would give him a great big raspberry, but Freddy insisted it really wasn't any different from the way the Indians would put one ear to the ground so they could tell when the cavalry was coming after them.

On Thursday, when we brought the latest data in from the recording stations, we found Henry and Jeff poring over the previous day's tracings, which they had taken down from the wall. Henry grabbed the new sheets out of my hand and spread them out on the table excitedly.

"Look, Jeff! Here it is again!" he cried, running his finger down the ink trace on one of the sheets. We all crowded around the table to see what Henry was so hipped about. He ran his finger across to the time scale marked on the margin. "See! It's the same time, too. It starts about midnight and ends about four o'clock in the morning. What do you make of it?"

Jeff scratched his head and puckered his brow. "I don't know, Henry. It's sure odd. But maybe it's just a coincidence."

"It can't be a coincidence three nights in a row!"

"I don't see nothin' but a squiggly line," said Freddy Muldoon.

"Shut up!" said Mortimer.

What Henry was pointing to was a series of extremely small oscillations of the recording arm that showed up in the ink trace at very irregular intervals in the early hours of the morning. He spread out the sheets for the past three days, and we could all see little peaks that had been recorded in the ink trace during the same hours on each day. Then they stopped, as though somebody had turned something off, and the line was smooth again.

There wasn't any definable pattern to the peaks. They just occurred at random during a four-hour period and



then disappeared.

“This is a real mystery,” said Henry, “If these tremors were caused by a piece of machinery—or anything mechanical—you’d think they would come at regular intervals. There’d be some kind of pattern to them. But there’s only one thing regular about this caper. It starts at midnight and stops at four in the morning.”

“That’s real weird!” said Mortimer Dalrymple.

“Maybe it’s a drunk staggering home from a bar, and every once in a while he falls flat on his face,” said

Freddy Muldoon.

"Stow it, Freddy!" Jeff Crocker warned him. "It wouldn't take him four hours to get home."

"You oughta be on television," sneered Dinky Poore. "You're almost as funny as the commercials."

"How'd you like to work in my dad's service station?" Mortimer jibed at him. "He could use a real gasser like you."

"Okay, you characters," Henry interrupted. "Maybe what Freddy said isn't so stupid. Maybe he put his finger on the key to the whole thing."

"What do you mean?" asked Jeff.

"Whatever is causing these slight tremors is most likely human in origin. That's what I mean," Henry replied. "Whether he knew it or not, Freddy was *thinking* about the problem when he came up with the crack about the drunk. Maybe it would help if some of the rest of us did a little thinking, too."

"Okay! Everybody think for five minutes!" Mortimer ordered in a loud voice.

"What we've got to think about is who would be up at that time of night, and what might he be doing that he couldn't do in the daytime," Henry continued.

"Maybe it's a night watchman," said Dinky Poore.

"Negative!" said Jeff Crocker. "Most night watchmen are pretty quiet."

"What about the garbage collectors?" said Homer Snodgrass. "They're always banging cans around."

"Too early in the morning for them," said Henry. "Besides, they don't do anything earthshaking."

Then everybody lapsed into silence, because Henry

tilted his piano stool back against the wall and was gazing up into the rafters. We all sat down and waited until Henry got through thinking.

When the legs of the piano stool hit the floor again, Henry's eyes had that gleam in them that we all recognized as the birth of an idea. He moved over to the large map of the county tacked on the clubhouse wall.

"I think we can narrow this problem down a bit," he said quietly. "We can't tell from our recordings *what* is causing these tremors. But we can get some clues from them about *where* the vibrations are coming from."

"Good idea, Henry!" Dinky Poore cried, smelling an adventure. "Then we could sneak up on the place and find out what's going on."

"Exactly!" said Henry. "Now let's get to work."

When Henry said "work" he meant brainwork, so Dinky and Freddy and I went fishing, leaving the rest of them to wrestle with the seismograph tracings and Henry's homemade computer.

When we got back to the clubhouse late in the day, we found reams of paper all over the place, and the county map was all marked up with little circles indicating the locations of our seismograph stations and lines converging on the center of town. On the large map of Mammoth Falls on the other wall, Henry had marked a large red circle that covered about a third of the downtown business section.

"We think the source of these tremors is somewhere in this area," he said, tracing the circle with his finger. "Now, here's what we've decided to do." But before he could get started, Jeff Crocker rapped his gavel on the

packing crate he uses for a podium, had the door locked and the window shades drawn, and called the club into secret session.

Late that night I sneaked out of the house by shinnying down the drainpipe outside my window and met Dinky and Freddy in the alley back of Dinky's house. It was near midnight, and we made our way downtown through vacant lots and back alleys so nobody would see us and wonder what we were doing out that time of night. I carried a hand transceiver so we could keep in communication with the clubhouse, where Henry and Jeff were monitoring the seismograph. Dinky carried a radiosonde transmitter strapped to the back of his belt that gave out a constant *beep* signal. This would make it possible for Henry and Jeff to know where we were at all times, in case we couldn't talk on the radio. There was a directional antenna on our receiver, at the clubhouse, and Homer and Mortimer had taken another one out to the seismograph station on Indian Hill. Between the two of them they could get a fix on our location at any time.

We sneaked through all the alleys of the downtown section as quietly as we could. Every few feet we would stop and listen carefully and put our hands lightly on the ground to see if we could pick up any kind of vibrations. It was pretty slow going, and Henry would keep calling us on the radio to tell us to move along faster, or switch over to another block. We were groping our way down the narrow, cobblestoned alley behind Jamieson's Variety Store when we heard something

that brought us up short. It was a series of dull thuds, spaced about one second apart.

“Jeepers!” said Freddy, and we all froze in place with our eyes and ears alert.

The thudding had stopped, and we waited breathlessly in the darkness. Then it started again. Dinky moved forward very cautiously, with his tousled head thrust forward. He paused for a moment, listening intently, then swung his arm in a wide arc motioning us toward the angle in the back wall of Jamieson’s where the elevator shaft jutted out into the alley. We waited there for a few moments in the deep shadow of the wall. It was so quiet you could hear the sweat from Freddy’s forehead dripping onto the cobblestones.

When the thudding noises started again Dinky inched his way around the corner of the elevator wall, and we followed. Just then Henry called on the radio. “This is High Mogul,” he said. I cupped my hand around the mouthpiece of the transceiver and said, “Shut up!” in a hoarse whisper and shut the thing off. We crept along the wall of the elevator shaft and rounded the second corner to where it joined the wall of the main building again. There was a thin sliver of light visible at the corner of one of the basement windows.

“Holy mackerel!” said Freddy Muldoon.

“There must be someone down there,” Dinky whispered, with his hand cupped around my ear. “What’ll we do now?”

“We can’t back out now!” I whispered back. “Let’s go for broke!”