

# THE MEMORY MACHINE

by Bryan Kollar

## CHAPTER 1

*I've had enough of this*, he thought. *People are out of control!* Disgusted about the latest gruesome details he had just heard on the news, Nathan paced back and forth in his laboratory. Nathan's home originally had four rooms – bedroom, kitchen/dining room combo, bathroom and living room. He had converted the largest room in the house, the living room, into his laboratory.

*Stupid, sick bastard*, he thought. *How can someone be so disturbed as to stab someone that many times? Aren't one or two stabs enough? Twenty times, a broken nose and cracked ribs????*

He pushed a button on his remote control in disgust and one of the eight huge sixty inch monitors that were mounted in a circular fashion on the walls went black. He sat at his control panel type desk - blinking indicator lights flashed everywhere like the bridge of the Star Ship Enterprise.

*I'm gonna do it this time! I can't let the world go on like this!* He touched the biometric fingerprint activated groove built into his control panel-type desk. One of the monitors displayed "Analyzing" for two seconds then confirmed: Nathan Hickling.

A motorized carriage slowly rose up from what seemed like nowhere. The carriage contained the invention he had been working on for the past five years and had finally put the final touches just two days ago.

He felt the soft leather between his fingertips and thought, *If I don't do this now, I'll never do it. The world has to be ready for this. I can't take it any longer. People are getting away with murder!*

He pulled the mask over his head and buckled it in place with the leather straps which wrapped around the base of the chin for a tight fit. *I should have made it red. If I get shot when I go public with this, it wouldn't look so messy.* He paused and thought, *Maybe I should have made it bullet-proof too.*

He then switched on the small circuit board encased in plastic at the neck of the mask. "Testing...one, two, three." Nathan now spoke in an electronic voice.

"Shall...we...play...a...game?" Nathan laughed, remembering a scene from the movie *War Games*. And when the electronic voice box's laugh sounded a bit like Darth Vader, it brought on another laugh. Now he was laughing at his own laugh.

*I need to get a life*, he thought, as he kept laughing at himself. *But after this, I will have a life. More of a life than I can handle!* He took the matching color leather gloves out of the same hidden compartment in his desk.

He connected the mask and gloves together with the specially modified USB cable and then connected the gloves to the standard USB port of his super hi-tech laptop. *Way too many wires. I need to go wireless. I look like the damn Borg from Star Trek.* He turned on his webcam and sighed.

*Here goes nothing.* He clicked on the icon NateCam, the video recording software he programmed himself. In the top corner of the screen the word "recording" displayed in flashing neon yellow letters just because red flashing letters would be too clichéd. Nathan began to speak to the webcam.

"I know what you are about to see may seem impossible, but I assure you this is true in every way. I have created this mask and gloves because I am fed up with people trying to get away with murder. How could someone be so cruel as to stab another human being multiple times, lie about it when there is concrete evidence, and think he'll get away with it?" he said with anger in his voice and fire in his eyes. "Well, this is not going to happen ever again. Not with my...memory machine."

He added a dramatic pause and wished he was able to add a thunderclap sound and blinking lights for the best effect.

"It will be impossible for anyone to lie. Better than any lie detector, this device may seem like something from the future and may be hard to believe until you see it for yourself."

To prove he was a serious inventor, Nathan took this opportunity to show off another invention. He faked a cough, cleared his throat and said "Excuse me...ahem...Buddy? Can you bring me a Miller 64?" A few moments later, out came what appeared to be a man Nathan's age, but it didn't move like a man. It silently glided across the floor. In Buddy's hand was the requested can of beer. Buddy lifted the beer to Nathan, popped the lid for him, and accidentally crushed the can with ease, spilling beer all over the floor and Nathan's pants. Nathan jumped back. "Damn you! Go get me another and be careful this time!"

The near-human robot turned around slowly as if it understood every word and went to get another beer while Nathan made note of the programming glitch in Buddy and edited that part out of the video. He pressed "record" once again, sat behind his control panel desk to hide the beer stain on his pants, and continued to speak.

"I have discovered that the cerebral cortex part of your brain stores everything you see as movies. This device recalls those movies by using this mask and these gloves," he said as he held up his now-glowing fingertips for the camera to see. "I would like to use this device to prove to you that Mark Klutchko is guilty of murdering Harold Newberry. I can show anyone exactly what happened as if a camera was filming the incident from the point of view through Klutchko's eyes at the exact time and date of the murder."

Buddy came back into the room with the beer and stared at Nathan as if he knew he had done wrong before. Buddy raised the can to Nathan and popped the lid again. Nathan grabbed the beer firmly, took three huge gulps, and continued. "Thank you, Buddy. Dismissed."

"When I place my gloved hands on an individual, you will be able to see everything Klutchko saw at that given day and time through my laptop computer screen." He held his laptop up to the web cam as if no one had seen a laptop before. He realized how stupid this was and quickly continued. "Whatever Klutchko saw, we will have the ability to see it the way he saw it through his eyes. The reason for the gloves is to send the videos to the mask." He pointed to the cables with arm movements as if he were a game show host. "And the reason for the mask is two-fold. It's where all of the electronics are built in to capture these images and push them out to the computer, and also to protect my identity."

He clicked "pause" in the recording software and thought, *Identity...I haven't really thought about that. If I want to protect my identity, how is anyone going to contact me?* He pondered over that a bit as he saved what he recorded and hoped he would still

have the balls to do this tomorrow. He looked up at one of the overhead monitors displaying 11:12 p.m. He used the remote and set an alarm for seven a.m., then on three more monitors he turned on his security system which displayed views of the entire lab, the front door, and back door.

He completely undressed, slipped under the satin sheets of his comfy warm waterbed and said "Computer: Dial Saleem." A hands-free surround sound speakerphone activated and Salem answered with a friendly, "Hi, Mate!"

"I actually did it! I recorded the video!"

## CHAPTER 2

*I don't want to go to work today*, he thought as he lay there all comfortable under his covers, his naked ass nice and warm from the heat of the waterbed but the rest of his body cool from the air conditioning. He took his time to fully wake up instead of the usual rush off to work and thought about his life, how far he'd come since he wrote his first video game "Frog Jump" at the age of ten (which suspiciously looked like Frogger when it was released by Konami a year later). Now at age twenty-six, he was making a lot of money by writing ATM and point of sale software for a national company for many establishments across the United States and England. He should be happy, but he hated his co-workers and his boss. Maybe he wouldn't go to work today. Maybe call in sick, do something that mattered, like getting the video to the judge before it was too late, before Mark Klutchko became a free man.

He stretched his legs over the side of the bed and forced himself to get up. "Computer: Coffee." In the distant corner of the room, the Black and Decker coffee maker clicked on. He then commanded, "Computer: Monitor One, Channel Five." One of the blank monitors displayed the news. As expected, information about the Mark Klutchko case was being broadcast.

*"In breaking news, the Mark Klutchko case is going to be held in one week," reported Al Marcincavage, the big-time news anchor. "Eight months ago Harold Newberry was found dead by his daughter Malinda Obitz when she arrived for her weekly visit. Harold was found crumpled up on the floor with twenty stab wounds all over his body, a broken nose and cracked ribs. The puncture wound in Harold's arm indicated he was stabbed with a serrated kitchen knife which was found in Mr. Klutchko's car and confirmed a positive match for both Mr. Klutchko's fingerprints and Mr. Newberry's blood. The stab wounds on the rest of Harold's body indicate that a second knife was involved, but that knife still has not been found. Two of Mr. Newberry's neighbors, Ken Badman and Terri Kellock, stated that an hour before the stabbing, they saw a heated argument between Harold and a man matching Mr. Klutchko's description on Mr. Newberry's front porch, but the point of entry appears to be the back door which was broken off its hinges."*

Even the aroma of the coffee wasn't enough to get him motivated to get off his ass and get to work. He couldn't stop thinking about how important it was to get this video to the courts since there was only one week left before the trial. *There is no way I am going to let Mr. Klutchko get away with this*, he thought as Buddy prepared his coffee the way he liked it - three teaspoons of sugar and two percent milk. He took a sip and commanded, "Computer: Call work." The super computer dialed his workplace and Nathan was glad to hear his boss's voice mail. He really didn't want a million questions asking why he wasn't able to make it in today.

Now he had the whole day to himself. "Buddy: Newspaper." Buddy glided across the floor to the front door, opened it, grabbed the newspaper, and hand-delivered it to Nathan. Without thanking Buddy, Nathan said, "Dismissed." Buddy moved to his corner of the room and went into sleep mode. With no surprise, Nathan saw the headline on the front page, "Klutchko trial scheduled for one week." He immediately folded up the

newspaper, shook his head back and forth in frustration, and put it aside. Nathan finished his coffee and dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. It was a warm day in May, so the clothes were a welcome change from the usual work attire of khakis and a button-down dress shirt. He activated the security system on his oversized monitors and headed out the door.

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Nathan reviewed the selection of pre-paid cell phones at the local Big Lots in Luzerne and decided on Verizon. It didn't matter too much since he didn't plan on having this phone number for long. He sat in his car and struggled to break the seal on the child-proof packaging. "Come on!" he shouted out loud as he tried to rip it open with his keys, nearly slicing his finger open. Finally the seal broke which sent the phone and charger flying in all directions. The charger landed in a mud print on the floor and the phone on the top of the dried-up remains of lettuce from a Wendy's cheeseburger. He grabbed the phone, wiped it clean, activated it, and called it with his own cell phone to make sure it worked properly. The annoying cheap default ring tone blasted throughout the car. He then called his best friend Saleem.

After a few rings, Saleem answered with a confused, "Saleem Abuabrak speaking."

"Hi, bud!" Nathan responded.

"Oh! Hi, Mate. New phone number?"

"It's the number I am going to give Judge Sally when I send in my video," Nathan replied.

"Oh, that's right," Saleem said as he recalled last night's conversation. "I'm so glad you made that video. The easy part is over. The hardest part is sending it out! Are you sure you wanna do this? If someone finds out that it's you under that mask, there could easily be a hit put out on you. Think about it, you can literally solve any murder. No one will be able to lie as to where they were at any given point and time. There will be no need for lawyers, or hell, even the court system. You can put a lot of people out of a job."

"Don't you think I haven't thought of that?" Nathan said with a *no shit* attitude.

"I know, Mate. I just don't want anything to happen to you. We've been best friends since grade school. I'm worried about you."

Nathan sighed. "Thank you for your concern, but to tell you the truth, I'm worried about myself too. Once this gets out, I'm not going to have time for anything. People will be calling me all the time for every single petty thing. Everywhere I go I'll always have to be on the lookout for people trying to kill me. I'll have to get bodyguards. I'm not looking forward to this, but I don't think I have a choice anymore. There's too much wrong in this world."

"Ok, I wanted to be sure you know what you are getting into," Saleem said with concern. "Please be careful."

"Thanks. I will. Now, before I use up all of my minutes on this cheap phone, I'm gonna go. I'll call you later." Nathan hung up and headed back to his lab.

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Nathan dressed up in his mask and gloves again and tried to sit in the same position he sat in while filming his last video. He clicked "record," looked into the webcam and spoke. "I urge you to contact me immediately. You can reach me at..." He clicked the pause button. *Damn it, what's my number again?* He looked in his phone for

the number that called him last, took a mental note of it, pressed "record" again, and continued to speak. "570-555-1212. This is not a joke."

He clicked stop on the recorder and used video editing software to seamlessly merge the two videos together so no one could tell the videos were taken on two separate days. He burned the video to DVD and labeled it with a thick Sharpie marker, "Mark Klutchko Evidence." He then Googled the address for the Luzerne County Courthouse and wrote "Attn: Judge Sally Berneathy: Mark Klutchko evidence" on the padded envelope. As he wrote the judge's name, he smiled.

*That should do it.* He sealed the envelope. *Without any note whatsoever, this should pique anyone's curiosity. There's no way someone wouldn't want to see what is on this video.* He took off the mask and gloves and placed them back in the secret compartment, touched the fingerprint activated switch and said to Buddy, "Someday I'm going to program you to do my shopping or go to the post office." He got back into his car and headed out to mail the DVD. He had no time to waste.

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He arrived back at his lab and felt a tremendous amount of stress. *Am I doing the right thing? What if this becomes too much to handle? I should call off work again tomorrow. If the court wants me there immediately, I'll have to be available at a moment's notice.* He turned on his security system but didn't set an alarm, and hoped to get a better night's sleep.

### CHAPTER 3

Judge Sally Berneathy looked at the mysteriously padded envelope with concern and then looked over at Court Marshal Mike Snyder. "I think we should get this tested before we open it."

Mike frowned. "You may be right. There's no return address. What if it has ricin in it?"

At the thought of being poisoned, Judge Sally immediately picked up the phone and contacted the local police department.

"We'll get a hazmat team over there right away." Officer Ryan Powell's voice held a note of urgency. "DO NOT touch that envelope and leave the courtroom immediately, please."

Within half an hour, a hazmat team arrived with Officer Powell to quarantine the area. Eight painful hours later, they determined the envelope to be safe.

Officer Powell smiled reassuringly. "Well, better to be safe than sorry."

Judge Sally shook Mr. Powell's hand as he was about to leave. "Thank you, Ryan. Care to see what's on the DVD with me?"

Powell stepped back inside, his face alight with curiosity. "Sure!"

Judge Sally placed the DVD in the drive and hit play. During the short two minute video, they turned to face each other a few times to see if the other one had the same expression. They did. When the video ended, Judge Sally looked at Officer Powell once again and both of them burst out laughing at the same exact time.

"How ridiculous is that?" Officer Powell said, barely able to speak.

"I know! You've got to be kidding me! What a lunatic!" Sally replied, unable to control her laughter as well. The DVD made a clunk sound as it hit the inside of the empty metal trash can.

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A ringing phone blasted through the lab. Startled and confused, Nathan raised an arm quickly to tap the snooze button on his alarm clock and knocked over an opened water bottle on the bedside table. After he realized it was the phone ringing, with a groggy voice he commanded, "Computer: Answer."

"This better be good," Nate said immediately.

"Hi, Mate, it's Saleem. It sounds as if I woke you."

"Yes," was Nathan's only response.

"Its 11:00. You're not at work?"

"No," was Nathan's only response.

As if it were normal for Nathan not to go into work, Saleem continued without hesitation. "Did you hear back from anyone yet?"

"Dude, I only sent it out yesterday," Nathan said, sounding annoyed for being awoken.

"Well, there's not much time. The Mark Klutchko trial is going to be held in four days. Why did you wait so long to send it?"

"I only perfected the device three days ago. I'm surprised I even had the balls to send the video in!" Nathan yawned and then continued, "They probably haven't even watched it yet. What else do you expect me to do? The video is mailed and they have my contact number. I have to wait. I can't show up at the courthouse in that mask and gloves."

"Well, excuse me for asking! I won't bother you about it anymore. Sorry for waking you. Just please keep me in the loop, ok?" Saleem said.

"Yes," was Nathan's only response as he disconnected, still annoyed.

Nathan's mind began to wander. *Yeah, why haven't they contacted me yet? I know the mail is delivered there early. They should have received it – and even watched it by now. Who wouldn't be anxious and curious to see what's on that DVD? What if they think I am a nut job and don't call me?* His mind began to go into overdrive. *I need to prove I can really do this! But how?* Nathan was mad at himself for wasting two full days by getting the video prepared, buying the cell phone, continuing to make the video, mailing it out, and then waiting for a response. He commanded, "Computer: Dial Saleem."

Saleem answered with his usual energetic "Hi Mate!"

"You're too bubbly!" Nathan said. "How quickly can you get over here?"

"You got a response?"

"No. Look, can you come over here? Now? Please?"

"Sure thing, Mate!"

Nathan quickly got dressed and ready for Saleem's arrival. About half an hour later, the Imperial March theme song from Star Wars played throughout Nathan's lab when Saleem pushed the doorbell. The overhead monitors showed Saleem standing there, staring directly into the camera with a big silly grin on his face and holding a pizza box labeled "Mr. Pizza, Wilkes-Barre PA." Nathan pushed a button on his remote and the door unlocked. "Come on in," Nathan called through the speaker attached to the outside of the lab.

"Hope you're hungry. My parents' pizza place had leftovers again."

Nathan looked at Saleem's physique and commented, "I'm surprised you're so thin with all that pizza you eat."

Since Saleem had heard that half a dozen times before, he ignored the comment, sat down at the control panel desk and started to eat.

With a mouth full of food, Saleem asked, "So why am I here?"

"We need to prove this device works. She may have seen the video and dismissed it as me being a wacko."

"I thought about that too," admitted Saleem.

"Then why haven't you mentioned it?" yelled Nathan.

Saleem looked confused as to why Nathan was yelling at him. "Relax. I thought about it after you already mailed it."

Nathan paused for what seemed to be an eternity before he continued, "Sorry, buddy. I'm just a tad bit on edge. You're here because I'm hoping you can help me prove that this device really works by demonstrating it on you - on video."

Saleem looked concerned. "But I don't want to be involved. This is going to be big when it hits the news. I don't want there to be a hit put out on me too!"



“You’ll be safe,” Nathan assured Saleem. “I’ll blur out your face on the video. Please, buddy.” Saleem hesitated but agreed.

Nathan and Saleem took another bite of their pizza. “This video has to be mailed before 3:00 p.m. That’s the last pickup time for the post office. If it’s picked up after that, it won’t get mailed until tomorrow, and if that’s the case, the court won’t get it until the day after tomorrow, which is the day of the court hearing.”

Saleem shoved the rest of the pizza slice in his mouth, rubbed his hands together and said, “Then let’s get started!”

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Nathan got dressed in his gloves and mask once again. He plopped a chair in front of Saleem, motioned for him to sit, hooked up the Memory Machine to the laptop and positioned the web cam right at both of them.

“Ready, buddy?”

“Ready, Mate!”

Nathan took a deep breath and pressed “record.”

“Yesterday I sent out a video that may have seemed as if it were a hoax,” he said with an electronic voice. “This new video shows how the Memory Machine actually works. I have a volunteer whom I am going to demonstrate this on.” Nathan walked over to Saleem, hesitated, and walked back to click “pause” on the recording software. “Think about the date and time we should use beforehand. I don’t want to do this without asking you first in case you were busy doing something we shouldn’t be watching.”

Saleem’s eyebrows raised, mouth smirked to the left, and eyes fixed on the floor. “Thanks, I appreciate it. I had yesterday off, so how about we say, around 3:00 p.m.? I am pretty sure I was doing grocery shopping at Weis Markets at that time.”

“You’re pretty sure? Well, we are about to find out!” Nathan said with confidence.

Nathan clicked record again and continued. “Volunteer, what day and time would you like to use. Be precise.”

Saleem pretended to think for a moment. “Uh, how about May 12, 2013, 3:00 p.m.?”

Nathan entered that date and time into his laptop and placed his gloved fingertips on Saleem’s temples. His fingertips lit up with a brilliant bright light. At that moment, Saleem starting going into convulsions and spastic movements as if he were being electrocuted. Nathan took his hands off immediately and screamed with his high-pitched electronic voice, “Stop being a dick!”

“Sorry, had to do it!” Saleem said as he laughed like it was the funniest thing he had ever done.

With what could only be an annoyed look under his mask, Nathan placed his fingertips back on Saleem’s temples. Immediately an extremely clear video started playing on the laptop screen - a shopping cart being pushed through the cereal aisle. Nathan spoke at the webcam. “This is looking through my volunteer’s eyes. We can see everywhere he saw at this given point and time.”

The video kept going on and on with Saleem picking up different items and placing them in his cart - Captain Crunch peanut butter flavored cereal, tissues, several different types of meats, iced tea and soda. Nathan noticed Saleem’s face blushing when the video seemed to get stuck on an image of a woman’s ass for about fifteen seconds.

After five more minutes of Saleem shopping, Nathan removed his hands from Saleem's temples and the monitor went blank instantaneously.

Nathan continued, "Now, I urge you to call me as soon as possible, before the trial of Mark Klutchko. 570-555-1212. Thank you."

Saleem seemed absolutely godsmacked. It was the first time he'd seen the invention since Nathan upgraded it to high definition video. "Holy crap on a cracker! That was so clear! Sure beats the hell out of that low-res junk you had before!"

"Oh great, thanks, jerk wad."

"You know what I mean," Saleem said, quickly turning it around to sound more positive. "It would still have been awesome in court the way it was, but what I mean is the difference between before and now is like night and day. Well done! Your parents would've been so proud of you."

Nathan gave a fake smile. He could still vividly remember that horrible moment that happened eight years ago. The police told him he was very lucky to survive the crash. If he'd been without a seatbelt like his parents, he would've died as well. Since Nathan was an only child, he'd taken care of himself since he was eighteen. Ever since the accident, though, he was afraid to drive when it snowed for fear the same thing would happen to him. It brought back horrible memories. *There was nothing I could do! There was nothing I could do.* Nathan still missed his parents so dearly. From that day, Nathan buckled up every time he drove, no matter how short the drive was.

He realized he was deep in thought when he found Saleem staring at him. "Nice save. Anyway, if this doesn't get her motivated to call me, I don't know what will."

Saleem hung out in Nathan's lab eating more of his parents' pizza while Nathan edited out the electrocution part, blurred out Saleem's face, and burned the new video to DVD. This time Nathan wrote "Mark Klutchko Evidence" with his phone number right on the DVD and put it in a padded envelope. "Think you can drop this off at the post office on your way back home?"

"Sure, Mate!"

"Thanks for coming to the lab so quickly."

"Shall I leave the rest of this pizza for you?"

Nathan grabbed one of the two remaining slices. "Sure, thanks!"

Right after the door shut, Nathan felt depressed. He hadn't talked to his grandmother in nearly two months, and the reminder of the long-ago accident hit him like a ton of bricks.

"Computer: Dial Grandma."

"Hello?" said the sweet little old voice of Grandma Cherie.

"Hi, Gram. It's Nathan."

"Well hello, dear! It's nice to hear from you. How are you doing?"

"Just fine, Gram. How are you?"

"I'm doing ok, Nate. I'm missing you, though."

"I know," apologized Nathan. "I'm really sorry. I've just been so busy. I finally finished the invention. I made a video to demonstrate how it works, and I'm going to mail it today."

"You mean that brain thingy? You be careful, Nate, I'm worried about you."

"I named it 'The Memory Machine,' Gram. And I'll be careful. I've been waiting for this day since I started designing it five years ago."

“I’d love to see it. How about you stop by this weekend? I’ll cook you tuna lasagna, and you can show me how it works. Bring your friend, Saleem. He’s such a nice man.”

Nathan had so much to do, but there was no way he was going to say no to that. He loved his grandma’s tuna lasagna. Plus, he really felt guilty about not visiting her enough. “Ok, count us in.”

The delight in his grandma’s voice made it worth his response. It even sounded like Grandma clapped her hands excitedly. “See you Saturday. I love you.”

“I love you too, Gram. Thanks.”

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It was already one p.m., and Nathan absolutely had to get into work today to catch up on a few things. He was certain that he’d get a phone call tomorrow requesting his presence at the court house, so in his mind, he’d already made the decision that he was going to call off work tomorrow – again. He got dressed in his work clothes and headed out the door.