



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

**MAC SLATER, COOLHUNTER 2**  
**THE RULES OF COOL**  
by Tristan Bancks



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Paul and I bolted the last fifty metres up 33rd Street, dodging through the crowd. Dad lumbered along behind.

An Imaginator banner hung from the side of Madison Square Garden, next to a digital New York Knicks sign. The banner read: 'Imaginator Festival of Inventions and Creativity. 13–15 March.' Today was 14 March.

I joined Paul at the back of the short queue at a temporary box office booth out front of 'The Garden'.

'I can't believe we're actually here.'

'Check that,' Paul said, pointing.

There was a girl standing nearby, back against the wall. She was short with dark hair and eyes. She looked like her parents must've been from someplace interesting.

'Yeah, she's pretty cute,' I said.

'No, look what she's doing,' Paul said, annoyed.

She was typing into a black glove on her left hand, then she put her hand up to her ear and started talking into it.

'What is that, like, a glove phone?' I asked, as we shuffled forward in line.

'Maybe you can get them here.'

'Check the skates,' I said.

On her feet, she had these giant wheels. Or they were more like bowling balls set into the bottom of a pair of boots. Like one-wheel rollerskates. Rollerballs, maybe.

'How do you balance on those things?' Paul asked. We'd been working on a two-wheel skateboard for a couple of years and now we were trying to develop a one-wheel board. The balance thing was a killer.

'I could film her on your phone. Why don't you go ask her for a demo?' I said.

Paul just looked at me, rolling his eyes – his 'don't be an idiot' look. We both knew by now that Paul wasn't the kind of guy who just went up and talked to humans. Especially girls.

She finished her call.

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'I'm gonna go ask her,' I said. 'Those skates are hot.'

'Next!' said a voice.

A round, grey-faced woman peered at us through the box office window. Imagine someone photoshopped the head of a bulldog onto the body of a rhinoceros and locked it in a ticket booth. That was her.

I took a last look at Rollergirl, hoping she wouldn't take off.

'Um, yeah, two tickets, thanks.'

The bulldog stared at me. 'Really?' she asked. '*You two* want tickets?'

Paul had his usual, chronic bedhead and I looked a little rough in my lost-and-found-box threads, but surely we could still go inside? 'Yeah. Two tix please,' I said.

'Okay. Seven-fifty each for a two-day pass. Show finishes tomorrow,' she grunted.

I rustled around in my pocket for the cash Dad had given me. I tossed a ten and a five onto the counter. The woman stared at the notes, then up at me.

'It's seven *hundred* and fifty dollars each,' she said.

'Are you kidding?' I said. 'We don't want to *buy* the festival.'

'Imaginator is not a public exhibition. It's a major industry conference and festival for international delegates. Now, would you like a ticket, sir? If not, please step off the line.'

Paul began moving away but I held my ground. I didn't want to have to pull this card, but . . .

'We're from Coolhunters,' I said. 'The website.'

She gave me that same bitter, bulldog stare. If she were a real dog I'd have started backing up real slow.

'Good for you,' she said. 'Now step aside.'

I wanted to chuck her a treat and say 'Chew on this'. But I didn't. I moved off.

'Why didn't you know this?' Paul asked.

'Me?'

'Yeah, you. You're the one who lured me here for this,' he said.

'As if. What, you don't have the web? You couldn't have looked at the site?'

'You were, like, in charge. You kept on talking about it. I figured you might have looked at the prices!' he said.

If we were at home in our workshop I'd have wrestled him to the ground and sat on him but there was a security dude nearby who looked like he might deport us.



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'That ticket chick's pretty special, huh?' said a voice.

It was Rollergirl, standing on her skates, gently rolling back and forth.

'Yeah,' I said. 'I mean not really. Can't you get in either?'

'Nope. I'm Melody,' she said.

'Hey. Good to meet you.'

'You have a name?'

'Mac. Sorry. And Paul.'

Paul's eyes were fixed on her glove. Mine drifted to her skates.

'I heard your accents,' she said. 'You guys Australian?'

I liked the way she said *Australian*. It sounded like 'Aw-stralian'.

'Yeah,' I said.

'Get outta here. I *love* Australia.'

'Really?' I said.

'Absolutely. I've heard Melbourne is the coolest city in the world right now.'

'Yeah, I dunno. Never been.'

'Okay,' she said, the conversation kind of dying. 'Bummer about the fest. I even tried flirting with the security guy but he's unbreakable.'

'There's gotta be some way in,' I said. 'We came thousands of kilometres for this.'

'Yeah, well, *bonne chance*,' she said, and started rolling away.

'Hey, can I have a look at your glove . . . thing,' Paul said.

He must've really dug the glove to be game enough to speak to her.

She stopped and turned back.

'Um, sure,' she said, not looking so certain.

'What does it do?' Paul asked.

'It's a kind of . . . laptop, I guess. I call it a handtop. And it's a phone and internet device. It's whatever you want it to be.'

'Where did you get it?' I asked.

'I kind of made it myself.'



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Paul and I looked at her.

'No way,' Paul said.

'Yeah way.'

'We're inventors, too,' I said. 'Are you gonna sell these or . . .'

She started rolling backwards again. 'Not really. Look, I gotta go. Nice to meet you, boys.'

She gave us a peace sign and skated off.

'Can you tell me about your skates?' I called.

'I'm late,' she said above the noise of traffic and crowd. People were crisscrossing between us now. But I couldn't let her go. She was a coolhunter's dream.

'Is there someplace we can catch up? Or can we get your number?' I asked, walking towards her as she rolled backwards. Then she called out something like 'HogBender. 17464.'

'What?' I yelled.

But she was gone, skating off down 7th Avenue. It wasn't like regular skating. She just kept her feet together, leaned forward and the balls drove her along the path.

'What the hell is Hog Bender 167646?' I asked Paul.

'Not Hog Bender. Dog Bender. And she said 17464.'

'Yeah, well, what's that?' I said, unzipping my bag to grab a pen.

'I dunno. Maybe it's a street,' he said.

'Yeah, right. Dog Bender Street. Is that off Cat Twister Avenue?'

I wrote 'Dog Bender 17464' on my hand.

'You're not falling in love again, are you?' Paul asked.

'Shut up,' I said. He always accused me of falling in love with any girl we met. I think it was because he was hot on them but he didn't have the guts to do anything about it. 'She's gone anyway. Let's go check messages, see if Speed and Tony have sent us anything.'

'Yeah, right,' Paul said. 'Like we'll ever hear from those idiots again.'

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