



QUILL'S BOX

WESTON FIELDS

WESTON FIELDS

Quill's Box



Copyright © 2026 by Weston Fields

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters, and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or localities is entirely coincidental.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Chapter 1

My suspicions have been confirmed. I snuck into the basement of the hospital and uncovered the truth. There is no boiler down there. The noises people have heard didn't come from a machine. Instead, there is a wall of cells and a strange device that looks like a match for the blueprints I found. Hanging up on the wall were empty Blank suits. Since my arrival seemed to be unnoticed, I risked a glance inside the empty armor. The masks and helmets were filled with crisscrossing wires. I wanted to do some further investigating, but I heard footsteps coming to the secret room and I got out of there.

Quill lowered his pencil, staring at what he had written. His heart pounded in his chest as he tried to figure out his next steps.

Ethos is onto me, he thought, recalling the not-so-subtle warning that the Councilman had given him the week before. He peered out his window, searching for the drone that had become his constant shadow. He finally spotted it hovering a few feet away, its single round camera eye staring at him. Quill sighed, scooting out of the drone's line of sight.

"They have to know what I've discovered by now," he muttered. "The question is, what are they going to do about it?"

He was silent for a moment, running through a dozen different scenarios in his head. The calendar on his desk reminded him what time of year it was, and suddenly, he had his answer.

The Race, he realized. *That has to be it. They're waiting to make their*

move until The Race. No one will suspect a thing. They won't even need to come up with any justification for killing me.

He stopped himself, shaking his head.

No, not killing me—turning me into a Blank.

For the first time in several days, Quill felt a sense of hope returning.

“There’s nothing I can do to stop them from getting me,” he muttered. “But if I can get this information to the right people, they might be able to bring me back. Just like what happened with Mr. Kolt.”

Quill sighed, running his fingers through his hair.

Okay. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to be smart about it. I'm only going to get one shot.

He glanced over at the drone again, still lurking outside his window.

And I won't be able to do anything unless I can get rid of that drone, he added. *I can't even contact Gearwire.*

The vague beginnings of a plan began to form in his mind, and he stood up, slipping his research into his backpack before heading out into the streets of Kawts.

He made his way to Franklin Plaza, noting with satisfaction that a sizeable crowd still milled about the area, clustering near the old watchtower. He slowly wandered over to them, forcing himself not to look around for the drone. As he neared the tower, he quietly slipped his watch off his wrist, setting it in a little cavity in the tower’s base. Then he wandered at random through the crowd, slowly making his way toward the narrow side streets that branched off from the Plaza.

As soon as Quill was clear of the crowd, he began to run, darting down the streets of Kawts at random. Several minutes later, he slowed to a stop, breathing heavily.

I guess The Race is good for one thing, he thought wryly, glancing back to see if the drone had followed him. The skies were clear, and he sighed with relief.

Satisfied that he had lost his shadow, Quill allowed himself to look

around the area of town where he now found himself. The street was lined with dusty old shops, lights flickering dimly inside. There was no one else out on the street, giving the impression that these shops were rarely frequented at best.

Quill scanned the signs outside, looking for a shop that might have what he was looking for. His gaze finally settled on the dingiest of the shops, the faded signboard overhead advertising “Antiques, Puzzle Boxes, and Novelties.”

Seems like as good a place to start looking as any, he thought, looking through the window at the corridors of ancient brick-a-brack that filled the inside of the store. Overcoming his slight hesitation, he took a deep breath and opened the door.

A little bell chimed overhead, the sound seeming to be swallowed up by the unearthly stillness. The store seemed empty, and Quill looked around, puzzled.

“Hello?” he called. “Is anyone here?”

“I’m coming,” a muffled voice called from somewhere in the back of the room. “Hold your horses.”

The silence returned, and Quill contemplated heading back out into the street to try another place. He glanced out the window to see an attack drone flying overhead, scanning the streets below.

He stayed where he was.

“Now, then. What can I get for you?” a voice asked.

Quill turned around to see the proprietor of the shop emerge from the maze of shelves, an ancient, wizened little man in a mechanized wheelchair. On his lap was a carved wooden box, big enough to hold a small stack of books.

Quill stared at the strange little man for a second longer before realizing that he had asked him a question. “I’m not exactly sure,” he said at last. “But I’ll know it when I see it.”

“Suit yourself,” the man said, wheeling his way over to the register.

"I'll be right over here if you need me."

Quill nodded, but he didn't move, something about the man striking him as odd.

"I don't think I've met you before," he said at last.

"Most people haven't," the man replied without missing a beat.

Quill shook his head. "My dad's the head of the Merchant's Guild. I should have seen you at some point."

The man smiled. "Ah. That explains it. I'm... new in town."

Quill examined the man again, trying to imagine him crossing through the mountainous terrain between Kawts and the nearest of its outlying cities. "Where did you say you were from?"

"Would you believe me if I told you that I was a time-traveling prophet and scientist?"

Quill frowned, trying to process the man's words. For a moment, he half-believed the man was telling the truth, but then reason took over once more.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I would not."

The man shrugged. "It was worth a shot."

Quill waited for the man to say more, but he remained silent. For a long moment, the two studied each other, neither saying a word.

"You know what? I think I have just the thing you're looking for," the man said at last. He picked up the box from his lap and held it out to Quill.

Quill accepted it hesitantly, turning it over in his hands. From up close, he could see the carvings in more detail, including a set of strange symbols that adorned the lid.



A strange chill ran down his spine as he realized that he recognized

some of the symbols from a book he had read from the secret library.

There's a secret message on here, he realized. *But why-*

"It's a combination lockbox," the man said, answering Quill's unspoken question. Quill looked down at the box, noticing for the first time the set of dials that were mounted on the front. "And the box is pretty near indestructible. No one's getting in there unless they know the combination."

"What's the combination?" Quill asked, his plan already beginning to take shape in his mind.

If I could put my notes in here, and get it to someone I can trust...

"It's printed right there on the lid," the man said, gesturing to the box. "If you know how to read it," he added with a wink.

Quill nodded slowly. "How much?"

The man studied Quill for a moment before answering. "You seem like an honest chap. This one's on the house."

Quill shook his head. "I can't just take this."

The man chuckled. "Yes, you can. I'm the owner of this establishment, am I not? And I say you can have it, free of charge."

"Thanks," Quill said awkwardly, glancing back toward the street. The drone was still there, joined by a few others.

The man craned his neck over, trying to see what Quill was looking at. When he spotted the drones, he nodded.

"There's another door at the back of the shop," he said, jerking his thumb toward the rows of shelves. "If you'd prefer not to be spotted."

Quill nodded in gratitude. "Thank you." He started to make his way toward the exit, but then he stopped. "What's really going on here? Why are you doing all this?"

The man smiled. "Let's just say that I have some friends with a vested interest in what you're doing. One day, Kawts will be free, Quill. And the contents of that little box will be the tipping point."

Quill froze. "How did you know that? And how did you know my

name?”

“Didn’t you introduce yourself when you got here?”

Quill opened his mouth to reply, but at that moment, a squadron of Blanks trooped past, examining the dimly lit storefronts.

“You’d better get going,” the man said with a smile. “You have a lot to do before they find you again.”

Quill shook off his confusion and dashed toward the exit, emerging into an alleyway a few blocks from his house. He glanced back, confused, but the door he had just come through was no longer there.

“What just happened?” he breathed, trying to process the impossibility of what he had just witnessed. An attack drone buzzed overhead, and he shook his head, putting his confusion aside.

Whoever—or whatever—that man was, he was right about one thing. I have a lot to do before the drones find me again.

Staying in the shadows, he quickly made his way back to his house. He locked himself in his bedroom, setting the strange box down on his desk. He took out a pencil and a piece of scrap paper, quickly jotting down the key for the code on the lid of the box. It took him a couple seconds more to decode the key, inputting it into the combination lock.

G-E-A-R-W-I-R-E.

Of course it spells Gearwire. Why wouldn’t it?

Forcing himself to focus on the task at hand, he scribbled down a note to the one person he knew he could trust—Timothy Hawthorne.

Hello, Timothy. If you are reading this, it means that you know that all is not as it seems in Kawts. It also means that the Council has made me disappear, most likely by losing The Race. Tim, The Council is evil. Through my investigations, I’ve discovered things that the Council will go to any lengths to keep hidden. The contents of this box are all the evidence I have gathered. Tell Samuel as much or as little about this as you want, but tell no one else. Not even Aksell. Ethos is the most diabolical Council member of all. It is up

CHAPTER 1

to you to fight for the freedom of Kawts. Be careful.

As he signed his name, Quill's mind was already moving to the next stage of his plan. He ripped out the last page of his notebook, folding it up and sliding it into his pocket. Then he put the notebooks—his and Madison Kolt's—into the box, setting his letter on top. He slammed the box closed, resetting the lock before dashing outside once more.

* * *

“Hey, Tim,” Quill said, standing in the doorway of Timothy's father's workshop.

Timothy turned to look at him, a smile spreading across his face. He stood, leaving the project he was working on behind on the floor. His hands were covered in sawdust, and he brushed them off on the front of his shirt.

“Hey Quill,” Timothy said, walking over to him. “What's up?”

“I have a favor to ask you,” Quill said, hoping that Timothy couldn't hear the fear in his voice. He glanced over his shoulder, reassuring himself one last time that he hadn't been followed. A pair of Blanks marched past in the street outside, and Quill quickly turned away.

Timothy stared at the space behind him, a puzzled look on his face.

“Sure. What do you need?” he asked, turning his attention to Quill once more.

“Keep this safe,” Quill said, handing him the box.

“Okay...” Timothy said, raising an eyebrow. “Do you mind if I ask why I'm doing this?”

“Just trust me,” Quill said. “Someone needs to keep this safe, and you're the only person I trust right now.”

“Woah, slow down,” Timothy protested, raising his hands. “Start at the beginning. What’s going on?”

“I can’t tell you,” Quill said, with another glance behind him.

I can’t believe I’m roping Timothy into this. What if he gets killed? If I’m wrong about the Blanks, we could both die.

He swallowed hard, trying to keep his tears from falling. He turned back toward Timothy with a shuddering sigh, making eye contact with his friend.

“If anything happens to me, promise me you will keep this safe.”

Then, before Timothy could say anything, Quill slipped back out of the workshop and into the street, making his way to the library as fast as he could.

* * *

Samuel was sitting at his desk when Quill arrived.

“Quill!” he said, rising. “What brings you over here? I haven’t seen you much lately. Not since you told me...”

“I need to go upstairs,” Quill said. Samuel hesitated, and he added, “It’s important. Please. I don’t have much time.”

Samuel nodded slowly, making his way to the back room of the library.

“What’s got you so riled up, Quill?” he asked as he unlocked the entrance to the secret library. “Just last week, you were in here chattering away about this discovery you’d made, and now this? What’s happened?”

For a moment, Quill was tempted to tell Samuel about his discovery. Then he brushed the thought aside.

I can’t. If the Council were to learn that he knew, they’d come for him too.

“My hunch was correct,” he said at last. “I found the proof a few nights

ago. The Council's been having me followed twenty-four seven ever since."

Samuel frowned, but said nothing.

"I know this sounds crazy," Quill said. "But I found something that the Council doesn't want anyone to know. And they're not going to let me get away with it."

"I know the Council's not the greatest, Quill. But are you really suggesting that they're going to kill you?"

Quill gave Samuel a withering look. "You know that they would. The Council always does when people don't play by their rules."

Samuel flinched, and Quill immediately regretted his outburst.

"I left something with Timothy," he said before Samuel could say anything further. "It might be enough to help him unravel this mess." He reached the top of the ladder, making his way to the spot where *A History of Codes and Ciphers* was kept. He pulled it off the shelf, scribbling a brief note on the inside cover. Then he handed it to Samuel, who had just arrived in the secret library himself.

"If Timothy ever comes in here, can you make sure you give him this book?"

Samuel took the book in his hands, memorizing the title.

"I can do that." He paused for a moment, then said, "Quill? Are you sure you don't want to talk about this?"

"Sorry," Quill said. "I don't have time. I still have to make one more delivery before the drones find me again."

* * *

Quill took the folded piece of paper from his pocket, slipping it into the little gap in the rocks that lined the Kawts River.

QUILL'S BOX

Gearwire will find it there sooner or later, he thought, making sure no part of the paper was visible from the city. And when he does, he'll find some way to rescue me.

As Quill made his way back to the place where he had left his watch, he couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

The Council might get to me tomorrow. But I'll be back. And then I'm going to stop the Council once and for all.