

Brain Trust Study Guide

Brain Trust by Christopher Golden

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Plot Summary

"Brain Trust" by Christopher Golden and Rick Hautala is the story of Jenna Blake and her fight against a covert conspiracy that may or may not be associated with a secretive unit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Jenna is a nineteen-year-old college student at Somerset University near Boston, Massachusetts. She is a pre-medical student and plans to have a career in forensic sciences after completing her education. She works as a part-time pathology assistant at the university's Medical Center for Dr. Walter Slikowski.

As the story unfolds, spring break is a day away and Jenna and her roommate and best friend, Yoshiko Kitsuta, have plans to travel to Captiva Island near Fort Myers, Florida, for a week of fun, sun and relaxation. Dr. Slikowski, or Slick as everyone calls him, cautions Jenna to enjoy herself and forget about school and her job. Jenna is a serious and driven student and worker who find it difficult to leave her responsibilities behind her. She promises she will have fun for forget all about school, Slick and Dr. Al Dyson, the M.E.'s resident. Jenna also says good by to Danny Mariano, a local cop and friend. He's in the hospital recovering from burns that he sustained during a recent investigation. He is thirty-two and way too old for her but she can't seem to lose the crush that she has on him.

But the girls take off and everything is fine or seems to be. Meanwhile, in Vermont, an old semi-retired professor, Whitney Bannister, is framed by a student who claims he propositioned her. Two mysterious men show up and escort him to the roof of the university and push him to his death. His death is ruled a suicide by the coroner. During the autopsy the coroner and his assistant witness a strange web-like material in the man's chest and what looks to be a mutated form of cancer.

While jet-skiing in Florida, Jenna and Yoshiko witness the death of an old man who was riding on another jet-ski. The jet-ski and the old man were blown to pieces by a huge blast. As Jenna goes to cover the man up with a tarp, she notices a web-like material and strange tumor in the man's open chest cavity. The coroner takes note of the same strange tumor and substance during the autopsy.

Jenna knows that something is up when the local coroner denies that there was anything unusual in the dead man's chest cavity. She however has seen something. Dr. Dyson's friend, Alice, was the assistant coroner during the autopsy of the man in Vermont and had told Dyson about it. Jenna begins to ask questions and links the two deaths together. When Alice and the local coroner later officially deny that there were any anomalies found in either man, Jenna is certain that there is a conspiracy at work - and an evil one.

Jenna continues to dig into the case and comes to the notice of those who want to cover-up the conditions of the men. Against many warnings, Jenna continues to push the investigation and finally asks too many questions to the wrong people. She becomes the target of the murderous "agents" who are being directed by some



unknown over-boss. But Jenna is relentless and she barely escapes with her life. While hunting down Jenna, her pursuers leave a wake of death behind them. In the end, the murderers are stopped and killed. But their deaths are dissatisfying to Jenna. Why did the FBI take these men out? If they had arrested them, they could have learned who was behind the plot. Jenna is left with the dark thought that maybe the FBI didn't want them to talk.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Jenna Blake and Yoshiko Kitsuta are roommates at Somerset University which is located just outside Boston, Massachusetts. They are visiting Yoshiko's boyfriend, Hunter LaChance, in his room. Jenna considers both youngsters her good friends. It is just the day before spring break and Jenna looks forward to taking off for the tropical and balmy. She only has one last class, Shakespeare, before the break. Jenna and Yoshiko have plans to go to Captiva Island for the week.

Jenna feels bad about leaving her job at the Medical Center where she works as a pathology assistant in Dr. Walter Slikowski's office. Dr. Slikowski is the county medical examiner. She likes her job so much that she has decided to work in the forensics field after graduation. But that is a long way away. She has to get through college and medical school first. Another downside of leaving for a week would be not seeing Danny Mariano for a week. He is a police detective that she met through the M.E.'s office. Even though she is nineteen and he is thirty-two, she is quite taken with him. However, she knows that he's too old for her and that they live in two different worlds. Jenna had been visiting Danny in the Medical Center office. He'd been badly burned during a recent homicide investigation.

Professor Fournier lets his Shakespeare students out early. Jenna immediately rushes over to the M.E.'s office where she encounters Dr. Al Dyson who didn't know that she was scheduled to work. Dr. Dyson is the current resident in the pathology department. Dr. Slikowski, who everyone calls "Slick," propels his wheelchair into the office. Slick excuses Jenna and tells her to go and enjoy her break. She leaves for the Medical Center to visit Danny. He's glad to see her and is tired of being in the hospital. He is recovering well from burns to his throat and abdomen. He tells her to relax and enjoy herself on her trip and to send him a postcard. She tries to remember that he's off base but it's difficult.

Yoshiko is worried about leaving Hunter behind. But he will be with his mother who is still in mourning over the death of Hunter's sister, Melody. The girls agree to take a laptop with them because they both have papers that need to turn in.

Chapter 1 Analysis

There are a lot of things bubbling up in young Jenna's life. She is a pre-med student who wants to go into the forensics when she graduates. She works for the M.E. in the pathology department. She has a crush on a much older police detective. While Jenna likes school, she is looking forward to spring break and going to tropical locale with her roommate, Yoshiko, for some R&R. There are downsides to Jenna's world - her police detective friend was burned during an investigation. Yoshiko's boyfriend's sister recently

died. The girls are going to take a laptop with them to finish up some school papers they must turn in. Elements of the story have been foreshadowed in this first chapter and will be expanded as the story unfolds.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Professor Whitney Bannister is sixty-nine but looks ten years younger. He had continued as a professor in the physical science department at Haviland College in Vermont long after he had officially "retired" and given up department head. The secret of his vitality is that he keeps active - body and mind. It is his habit to remain at school and go through papers there. One evening Bekah Savage stops by to see him. She is a bright and beautiful young student. She is angry and hurt. She tells him that she got his note and that she'll be showing it to Dean Littleford in the morning. He doesn't know what she's talking about but she storms out leaving him baffled.

He is more confused when two men suddenly appear in his office. They tell him that they are aware of the note he sent Bekah - of how he felt about her and what he had wanted to do with her since the moment he saw her. Whit is completely confused. Why, they ask, did he want to hurt a young girl like that. They pull guns on him and tell him that he must be so upset that he's being exposed that he probably wants to commit suicide. They force him up to the roof top.

Jenna reads and Yoshiko sleeps during their flight from Boston to Fort Myers, Florida. Even though Jenna had flown a lot with her mother, who is a divorced surgeon, she hates taking off and landing. They pick up their rental car and drive on the causeway to Captiva Island which they find to be paradise. The beach is pristine and only sparsely populated. As soon as they are settled in their room, they spend time on the beach and enjoy a late dinner.

The next day that they go to the beach and debate whether to go jet-skiing or para-sailing. Jenna thinks para-sailing is too dangerous. Two guys flirt with them but they are not interested. Yoshiko mentions Damon and that it wasn't Jenna's fault that they broke up. But Jenna isn't thinking about Damon. It's Danny who's on her mind.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Whit is being set up. Bekah accuses him of sending her an explicit note and plans to turn him in. Although he doesn't deny it, she storms off and he is immediately confronted with two unknown men wielding guns. Who are they and how do they know about Bekah's note? Whit still doesn't deny sending the note but there is an inference that he is being framed. They force Whit to the roof - are they going to shoot him or push him off the roof? The big question is what has the old professor had done to deserve this treatment from these two strangers.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The dead body of Whit Bannister lays on the stainless steel table of the Bennington County M.E., Dr. Frederick Marsden. Although it appears to be a suicide, the M.E. wants to be sure that there were no underlying diseases due to the victim's age and status as a professor. Bekah Savage had come forward with the note but the case just didn't feel right to Marsden. Why would a man of his standing risk his reputation at that point in his life? Marsden suspects Alzheimer's disease may have played a role. He also plans to check for any sign that Bannister was fighting off an assailant.

Marsden makes a Y incision across Bannister's chest. The smell that emanates from the chest cavity is far worse than Marsden ever experienced. It makes the veteran coroner gag and cough. His assistant, Dr. Alice Rojas, has the same reaction. The odor is strange but stranger yet is the condition of the deceased's lungs. There is thin cheesecloth-like material woven throughout his lungs and clinging like a cobweb to his ribcage. The material disappears when he touches it with his forceps. Marsden probes further and finds the strange material throughout his chest cavity. Behind the lungs, he finds a small black object that reminds him of a budding plant. He will have it biopsied along with the strange mesh.

Jenna and Yoshiko are lounging on the beach again on their second day. Yoshiko thinks of Hunter who is visiting his family in New Orleans, just across the Gulf of Mexico. Later, they rent jet-skis and are skipping around on the waves off the shore. An old man also rents a jet-ski much to the consternation of his wife who thinks he's too old to jet-ski. They all rented the skis from the same vendor, a young man who Jenna thought looked a little shady. Jenna and Yoshiko are crisscrossing each other in the water and having a blast when there is a loud explosion. They turn to see that the old man and his jet ski has just been blown to smithereens.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The scope and dimension of the story are increasing at a fast pace. The strange "suicide" of the professor is baffling, but not as baffling as what the coroner finds inside of him. There seems to be no connection between Jenna and the death of the professor. The only link is that he winds up on a coroner's table and Jenna works for a coroner - but in different states. Perhaps an association between the two locations and coroners will be established later. Jenna feels uncomfortable with the jet-ski vendor. The old man is blown up on a jet-ski. Did the shady vendor have something to do with his death and how is his death connected to Jenna and the overall story? This chapter has caused a lot of questions to creep into the reader's mind. This tactic has the desired impact in that the reader wants to know more.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Jenna and Yoshiko get out of the water fast. The guys at the rental stand retrieve the body in their boat. The shady looking guy that Jenna had noticed seems to have disappeared. Jenna and Yoshiko try to comfort the old man's grieving widow. Jenna tells the rental guys to get a tarp to cover the old man until the police get there. Jenna takes the tarp and starts to cover the man. His chest was blown open and some of his organs are starting to seep onto the floor of the boat. Jenna notices a small black thing in his chest cavity, like a small bent finger. She also notices a cobweb-like material all around his chest. The police finally arrive and question everyone.

Jenna and Yoshiko return to their hotel. They swim in the pool and talk about their families, avoiding any discussion about the horrible death of the old man. They are both only children but Yoshiko lived with both parents all her life. Jenna's father left when she was small and they never had a very close relationship. He is a professor at Somerset and since she began attending the college, they have been trying hard to renew and strengthen their relationship. Her father is going to marry an English professor, Shayna Emerson, later that fall. Jenna is going to be a bridesmaid. She has only limited contact with her half-brother Pierce, her father's son from his first marriage. She hopes that they will renew their relationship when she sees him at the wedding.

The next morning Dr. Aaron Pilcher, M.E. For Lee County Florida, forty-six years old, arrives at the Fort Myers Memorial Hospital to perform an autopsy on the old man who died from the explosion of his jet ski. As he walks from his car to the hospital entry, two men approach him, calling his name. The two men are FBI Special Agents Duncan and Wilcox. They need his cooperation in the case of Dominic Mellace, the man who died in the explosion. It is a matter of national security, they tell him.

They will need a copy of his autopsy report. They tell him he will probably find some anomalies in the body that had nothing to do with his death. These abnormalities are involved in some research projects being conducted by the federal government. After the autopsy, he is to cremate the body. Pilcher says he cannot cremate the body without a cremation order from the family. The agents tell him to cremate it anyway - just claim it was a mistake. The agency will back him up.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Another case of the strange cobweb-like material shows up in Florida which connects it to the case in Vermont. Both of the deceased men were old and apparently being used as some kind of guinea pigs for what the FBI agents tell the coroner in Florida is a research project that the federal government has undertaken. It is a matter of national security, they tell him. Were both men killed because they were being used for this

experiment? There is doubt that the US government is behind the research. The two men who claim to be FBI agents might be the same two men who pushed Whit off the roof. Whoever is behind this "research," chose to experiment on old men and decided to get rid of the evidence.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

As Jenna and Yoshiko walk along the beach, Jenna collects seashells something she has been doing since they arrived. She spots an unusual shell and picks it up, wondering what kind it is. A voice behind her tells her it's a "Cyrtopleura costata." The voice came from a young dark-haired man who is with another young man with long blond hair. They introduce themselves as Derrick Peterson and Tom Butler. Derrick is visiting Tom who works at the Darling Animal Preserve. They are friends from their college days. The young men invite the girls to dinner. They make plans to meet at McT's Shrimp that evening.

Back in their room, Jenna writes out postcards to some friends including Danny. She had called her mother earlier. Her mother was happy that Jenna was away from school and work and having some fun. Her thoughts drifted back to the dead man. She hadn't imagined what she had seen in his chest. She keeps thinking about it and calls Dyson and tells him about the old man and the things she saw in his chest. He tells her that a friend of his, Alice Rojas, had called him and told him about a similar case in Vermont. Dyson describes the material and it sounds exactly like what she saw. Jenna asks Dyson to try to learn more about the Vermont case.

The girls have fun with Derrick and Tom and decide to go dancing. Yoshiko is worried she's having too much fun. After all, she already has a boyfriend.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The story is making the link between the "suicide" in Vermont and the explosion in Florida. It is Jenna's curious nature that is driving her to find out more about the death of the old man in the explosion. Her mother, Yoshiko and her colleague at the M.E.'s office all urge her to relax and have fun. Apparently, Jenna has a very driven, A-type personality making it difficult for her to relax and forget her work. It will take Jenna's curious and probing nature to get to the bottom of the mystery that is emerging. Since the professor in Vermont was probably murdered, it is apparent that danger lurks, especially for Jenna since it appears she is not going to let it go.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

At breakfast, Jenna reads the local paper and learns that the man who died was a noted scientist who had worked for the government. The authorities so far are thinking that a spark accidentally ignited the gas tank on the jet ski, causing the explosion. Yoshiko urges Jenna not to focus on the incident. She's on vacation and the explosion wasn't her fault and isn't her problem. That afternoon, Jenna leaves Yoshiko on the beach while she returns to her room to call Dyson. Alice had faxed him the autopsy report on Whitney Bannister. The report contained nothing about the strange substance or the black tumor-like lesion.

Jenna asks Dyson to push Alice a little on the report. He agrees to do so but he had sensed that Alice was being evasive and he probably wouldn't find out anything else. Jenna hints that she might contact the Florida medical examiner to let him know that there's a similar case in Vermont. Dyson advises her not to get involved but if she does, she needs to be very careful.

Jenna waits for almost an hour before she is able to meet with Dr. Pilcher. He is so much younger than she imagined. She tells him that she was a witness to the explosion that killed Dr. Mellace. Pilcher's demeanor, friendly at first, changes immediately. She tells him that she is a pathology assistant back in Massachusetts. She saw Dr. Mellace's body right after the explosion and saw the strange growth in his chest cavity. Dr. Pilcher doesn't know what she's talking about. He saw nothing like that during the autopsy. The body was cremated at the request of his widow. Jenna can have a copy of his report if she gets approval through the proper channels. Jenna feels uncomfortable with Dr. Pilcher. As she peers closely into his eyes she is sure she detects fear.

Chapter 6 Analysis

A cover-up and worse is occurring. Jenna is showing that she is bright and intuitive. She is making a connection between the two deaths of the men and the strange substance in their chests. Jenna senses that Dr. Pilcher is hiding something. She is sure she feel fear in his eyes. Pilcher is not the only person who is frightened. Dyson's friend in Vermont, Alice, has also changed her story about the condition that she and the coroner observed during the autopsy.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Stephanie Bolling no longer called Chicago home. She had left six years before after graduating from college when she was offered a job with a media company in Los Angeles. She lives in Santa Monica, five minutes from her office and ten minutes from the beach. She is back on the south side of Chicago to see her grandfather, Hal Bolling, who is dying of lung cancer. She hates the old neighborhood with its gangs and violence.

Stephanie drives right from O'Hare to the nursing home where her grandfather lives. They had become close after he realized she existed. His son, who lived in Philadelphia with his father, had fathered her on a visit to Chicago when her mother was just sixteen. When Hal realized he had a granddaughter he was thrilled and paid for everything from then on - clothing, education and all her needs. On their way to lunch, Stephanie tries to apply the brakes of the rental car but the car doesn't respond. They are broadsided by a UPS truck and both Stephanie and Hall are killed on impact.

Just down the street, Agents Wilcox and Duncan watch the accident with no emotion. Too bad the girl was in the car Wilcox observes. The agents refer to Hal as "the professor." Wilson didn't particularly like "national security" assignments. His secrecy in another case had cost him his marriage. His ex-wife was later killed by Libyan terrorists who wanted to send him a message. He didn't like taking bystanders like Stephanie out. Duncan is cold and seems to have no heart, something that Wilcox envies. They watch as the EMTs rush the UPS driver away in an ambulance.

Dyson tells Slick about Jenna's plans to look deeper into the death of the scientist in the explosion. Slick and Dyson are both concerned about Jenna getting involved in the case. Slick plans to call around to some of his colleagues to learn if they've heard of the strange condition that Jenna observed. Hopefully, they can put Jenna's mind at ease so she can enjoy the rest of her vacation. Jenna calls slick that evening and he assures her that she has not uncovered a conspiracy - just a medical mystery, a genetic mutation. Dyson is sure that it's a rare cancer.

But Jenna doesn't let the matter drop. She tells Yoshiko the fact that both autopsy reports were falsified indicates a cover-up. She plans to see if she can find a link between the two dead men. Yoshiko watches as Jenna surfs the Internet. Both men were old and were scientists. Each had worked for the federal government. Jenna finds a group photo from a 1979 science summit in Vienna in which both men appear. Jenna decides to try to run down the other scientists in the photo.

At a restaurant in Chicago, Wilcox and Duncan are eating dinner when Duncan gets a call on his cell phone. Someone was asking a lot of questions - the wrong kind of



questions - at the Medical Examiner's office in Fort Myers. It was a young college girl. They will be heading back to Florida immediately.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Jenna's life is at risk. The "agents" learn that she is asking too many questions to Dr. Pilcher. Hal Bolling was the target of another assassination. He is similar to the other two dead men - old and a professor. He is dying of lung cancer. He probably has the same condition as the other two men. A possible schism is revealed between the two agents. One has a heart and the other one doesn't. Wilcox feels bad that Bolling's granddaughter, an innocent bystander, was killed in the accident. Now that they are in pursuit of Jenna, will Wilcox be able to take her life if they decide she knows too much?

Jenna has involved Slick and Dyson in the case. Slick is going to call around and inquire about the condition that Jenna had observed in Dr. Mellace. If Slick happens to call the wrong person, it could put Slick in grave danger. And if Dyson pushes Alice about the Vermont case, Dyson may be placed at risk as well.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

While Yoshiko is showering, Jenna calls Dr. Pamela Martin at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Dr. Martin had helped Jenna out on a case the year before. Dr. Martin has never encountered the condition that Jenna describes to her. She does think its curious that the two men were colleagues at one time. Jenna suggests that it could be a mutated virus. Dr. Martin promises to dig into the matter and get back to Jenna.

Jenna makes another call - to an FBI agent who she knows back home. Agent Dufresne listens closely as Jenna describes the deaths of the two men and the strange substance found inside of them. He agrees that the story is odd but tries to dissuade her of thoughts of a conspiracy. He was told by his superior that she might be calling him and was told to warn her not to launch any investigation on her own. It was Slick who had called the FBI office. Jenna is taken aback. She is surprised that Slick just didn't call her instead of treating her like a baby.

Sid Marshall, owner of the jet-ski rental shop, is upset that his business has been shut down since the accident. As he sits drinking beer, he is approached by two men in suits. He figures they're lawyers or federal agents. They ask to see his records from the day of the accident. The men spot the names and home addresses for Jenna and Yoshiko. They ask Sid if he knows what hotel the girls are staying at but all he has is their home addresses. The two men tell Sid that if anyone asks, they were never there.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The "agents" are told that Jenna visited Pilcher and was asking too many questions. She's getting to the heart of the matter and it's making somebody very nervous. It seems that the Duchesne, the FBI agent who Jenna calls, would have been aware of a research program in which the federal government and the FBI were involved. Even if he wasn't directly involved, the agent probably would have had knowledge of its existence. It brings more doubt to the notion that the government is really behind the research program and the murderous agents.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The next day Jenna travels to Winter Haven to talk to Dr. Mellace's widow, Molly. Someone is trying to erase the connection between Dr. Mellace and the other dead man. Jenna is going to do what she can to stop them. Mrs. Mellace assumes that Jenna is from Dr. Pilcher's office. She immediately lays into Jenna about the cremation and tells her that she plans to sue the coroner's office. Jenna tells her she knows nothing about the cremation and asks if they could talk. She welcomes Jenna inside then tells her that she's angry with Pilcher because he cremated her husband without permission. He claimed that it was a paperwork mix-up. Mrs. Mellace tells Jenna that her husband was not suffering from any condition or disease.

Jenna tells Mrs. Mellace that she saw a tumor or lesion in her husband's chest cavity but that Pilcher claims it wasn't there. Mrs. Mellace confirms that she knew Whit Bannister. Jenna tells Mrs. Mellace about Bannister's suicide and that the same condition was observed at his autopsy. Mrs. Mellace becomes angry and tells Jenna about another colleague, Laurence Grantham. The doctors had found a black mass in his chest. About a week after Grantham told Dominic about his condition, he was dead. He apparently took his own life. Jenna remembers seeing Grantham's name under the group picture from the Vienna science symposium. A shiver goes through Jenna. She had always heard there were secret branches of government that conducted covert operations. Would such an organization order the murder of three men?

Dr. Mellace had been involved in secret operations himself with the government. He worked for Defense, Mrs. Mellace tells Jenna. He last worked on a massive radiation weapon. The weapon was designed so that it would cause no structural damage but would kill life. He had been assured that the radiation would have no effect on those involved in the project but it apparently led to the deaths of Bannister and Grantham. Jenna is aware that Mrs. Mellace has not made the connection to her own husband - that he had developed the condition himself. Jenna decides not to tell Mrs. Mellace anything further. It might put her in danger.

Jenna decides that she will tell Slick, the CDC and Agent Dufresne about her visit with Mrs. Mellace. After that, she would step aside and let the authorities take over.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The condition that the two dead men had may have been caused by their involvement in a program with the defense department. They had participated in the design of a powerful weapon with a firepower that utilized radiation. The men had probably contracted the strange mutated cancerous condition from over-exposure to radiation. Just when Jenna gets frightened and decides that she needs to step aside and let the



authorities investigation the matter, the "agents" are hunting her down to kill her. They don't know what hotel she is staying at but they are resourceful and will probably be able to find her. While Jenna is visiting Mrs. Mellace, Yoshiko is alone in their hotel. She could be in danger if the agents come looking for Jenna.

Jenna plans to turn over what she learned about the radiation project to the CDC and to the Agent Duchesne. That's exactly why the agents are ordered to kill her.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Slick and Dyson are visited by Agent Dufresne who tells them that he began looking into the matter that Jenna had called him about. His Special-Agent-in-Charge, Ben Aaronson, told him not to discuss it on an official level. He called Jenna to warn her but she hasn't returned his call. Slick is worried about Jenna's safety and asks Dufresne to contact the FBI office in Fort Myers and ask them to provide protection for her. Slick warns him that if something happens to Beth, he will hold Ben and him personally responsible. Reluctantly, Dufresne agrees to "get her out of there." (147)

Duncan and Wilcox are upset that a young college coed has stumbled onto their secret plot. Duncan fears that Lupin, their controller, will think they're slipping. The two men are sitting in their car monitoring every car that passes on the only road that leads to Captiva Island. They have the license number on Jenna's rental car and they won't miss her. A short while later, they spot Jenna and Yoshiko heading down the road. They pull in behind them and follow them to the wildlife reserve. The agents are upset when they see that the girls are meeting up with two young men. Duncan says that they will have to take out four instead of two. Duncan privately realizes that Wilcox is less than enthusiastic about murdering the girls and their friends.

The four youngsters take off on bikes on the preserve's dirt road which is congested with other bicyclists and hikers. The agents follow slowly in their car. There is so much slow traffic on the road that the agents wind up losing track of Jenna and the others. Duncan heads back to the parking lot but by the time they return, Jenna's rental car is gone.

On their way home, Jenna tells Yoshiko that she wants to go to the police station. She is sure that a black car was following them on the dirt road. Yoshiko thinks Jenna is imagining things but agrees to go to the police as long as Jenna drops it after that. Jenna assures Yoshiko that she is going to let the authorities find out what's going on. Yoshiko does think that it's more than coincidence that the two dead men had been colleagues.

Jenna meets with a detective named Roger who thinks Jenna's conspiracy theory is nothing short of bizarre. Jenna insists that the deaths of the two men - one in Vermont and one in Florida - are connected. Roger remains skeptical but he does promise to speak with Dr. Pilcher. Jenna asks Roger to keep the notes from their conversation in case anything happens to her.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The suspense is reaching new dimensions. The pressure is mounting and the forces of evil are aware of Jenna's growing interest in and knowledge of the case. She is a thorn



in someone's side since she receives a circuitous warning to back off. With Jenna's personality and characteristics, such a warning will only serve to increase her curiosity about the case.

Slick takes on a protective, paternal attitude towards Beth. He warns the FBI not to let anything happen to her. Duncan and Wilcox are planning on killing Jenna as well as Yoshiko because she may know too much, too. Duncan senses that Wilcox is not totally on board with murdering the young girls. Will he crack and listen to the better part of himself? But he faces insurmountable odds because if he doesn't go along with the program, his life will be at risk. It has become obvious that everyone involved, directly or indirectly, is a potential target of those who are behind this secret project.

Beth demonstrates how observant and aware she is by noticing that they were being followed at the preserve. Her alertness may have saved her life and that of her friends.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

When Jenna and Yoshiko enter the hotel lobby, a man calls out to Jenna. He introduces himself as FBI Special Agent William Dean. He tells her that Mark Dufresne contacted him and asked him to meet with her and pass on the message that she and Yoshiko should leave the island at once. The woman at the front desk calls to her. She has messages from Dufresne and Slick. The messages are also advising her to come home immediately. She is poking her nose into something that could potentially be very dangerous. Jenna piques his interest and he agrees to listen to her entire story.

Jenna takes Dean to her room and uses Yoshiko's laptop to show him the photo of the two dead scientists together at the 1979 Vienna meeting. She fills him in on the fact that they were working on a secret defense project that involved radiation and on the other details of the conspiracy. Dean thinks she is jumping to some conclusions but that there are elements of the story that are suspicious. Yoshiko is for leaving the island. Jenna suggests that since they have some time before they can make arrangements to leave, that they all go talk to Dr. Pilcher.

Pilcher agrees to see her but is surprised that she is accompanied by an FBI. Dean wants to hear his findings in the Mellace case. Pilcher is angry. He confronts Agent Dean. Does the FBI know what it's doing? One day Agents Wilcox and Duncan visit him and tell him to not talk to anyone about the case and then Dean shows up and tells him to repeat everything he knows about the case. Dean has never heard of Wilcox and Duncan and FBI agents don't behave in the way he described. But Pilcher clams up. The memory of Duncan and Wilcox frighten him. He won't answer any questions without a lawyer.

On their way back in the car, Jenna calls Dr. Martin. She had found no disease associated with the symptoms that Jenna had observed. Dr. Martin's guess is that the condition might be linked to radiation exposure. Dr. Martin says that everything is speculation until they have an actual corpse with this condition that they can examine. Jenna thought to herself that with the way things are going, the next corpse could be her own.

Chapter 11 Analysis

In FBI Agent Dean, Jenna finally finds someone in Florida who believes in her story or at least is willing to look deeper into it. Dr. Martin offers some confirmation that the condition is probably connected to radiation - which links the dead men because of their collaboration on the secret weapons project for the government. Finally the identity of the murderous agents are in question. Agent Dean has never heard of Wilcox and Duncan. It is doubtful that anyone else at the FBI has either. They are being exposed as

the frauds they are. Pilcher is more frightened than ever because he is aware that he may have pulled the cover off the "agents" who had warned him not to talk to anyone about the case.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Dr. Pilcher confirmed Jenna's fears that there was a conspiracy at work and that there could be more murders. The FBI arrange for Jenna and Yoshiko to fly out the next morning but they can't stay at their hotel that night. They'll find another place for them to stay. Yoshiko suggests they might be safe staying with Derrick and Tom. Agent Dean thinks that might be safer than staying at another hotel.

Duncan and Wilcox are monitoring the cars, looking for Jenna to pass by. Duncan gets a call and learns that Lupin had a tail on Pilcher. The girl came to see him again and this time with an FBI agent. Now, in addition to Jenna and Yoshiko, they were going to have to kill an FBI agent and Pilcher.

Dean takes the girls to Derrick's house which thrills Derrick because he'd been thinking about her and wishing she wasn't going to be leaving in a few days. Derrick is happy to let the girls stay the night. Agent Dean instructs the youngsters that they are not to open the door unless it's him and they are not to tell anyone that the girls are staying there. He leaves his business card, telling them to call him if they need him. Another agent will be parked across the street. After Dean checks out a few things, he'll relieve the other agent and be on guard in the car across the street all through the night.

After driving through Burger King, Agent Dean stops by the FBI office. There is a message from a supervisor that the investigation is escalating but that Dean should concentrate on protecting the girls. Dean gets a call from Dufresne who tells him that they have been able to track down other members of the secret team. So far, six of the eight original team members are dead. Dean suggests that Mrs. Mellace be given some protection.

Dean is preparing to leave the office when spots two men on the other side of the office. He sees weapons bulging from their jackets. He draws his gun. One of the men shoots Dean in the shoulder. He's in excruciating pain. They force him to tell them where Jenna is.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The extent of the evil that is attached to the secret plot is coming to the forefront. These forces are willing to kill anyone in their way to stop the plot from being exposed. Mark learns that six scientists in all have been killed. Wilcox has private thoughts about being a secret part of the FBI. But has he just been told the operation was a function of the FBI so he would be compelled to follow orders? He may have been duped into thinking he was protecting the nation even though he was murdering some of its citizens. Surely the thought had to have occurred to him.

When Dean is shot, he apparently tells the two men who invaded his office where the girls are. If that is the case, the girls, Derrick, and Tom and the agent outside will all be targets of these murderers.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Mark tells Slick the bad news that Agent Dean was found dead in the FBI office in Fort Myers. A cleaning crew found his body. What is frightening is that whoever the killers were had access to the FBI office. Mark tells Slick that every agent in Florida is on their way to find Jenna and Yoshiko. Mark assures Slick that the federal government had nothing to do with these murderers. Dr. Pilcher walks out of his office toward his car. He is carrying a small box with him. It contains the strange tumor he found in Dr. Mellace's chest. The box is addressed to Jenna Blake in care of the Somerset Medical Center. He winces when he starts his car, fearing it might explode.

Wilcox and Duncan are watching. They plan to kill Pilcher but they want it to look like an accident. They follow him to the post office and watch him take the package in and then return a short time later without it. Wilcox and Duncan continue to follow him, debating about when to kill him. They follow him on the causeway and as they are rounding a curve, they force him off the road. Pilcher's car goes into a spin and crashes into a huge palm tree. Duncan runs over to the wreck, confirming that Pilcher is dead. Duncan takes a bottle of wine from Pilcher's car so they can celebrate later when they complete their job.

Dr. Abraham Fleischer is reading in his study when there is a knock at the front door. He is a widower having lost his wife of nearly sixty years just recently. He scurries to the front door. When he looks out, he sees two men on the front porch who look like federal agents. The men identify themselves as FBI agents Frawley and Prills. They tell Dr. Fleischer that there is an on-going dangerous situation that is placing him at risk. They must take him to the Richmond FBI office for his protection. Dr. Fleischer didn't realize, of course, that the agents just saved his life.

Jenna borrows Derrick's phone and calls Dean but he does not answer. Just when they decide to play Trivial Pursuit to pass time, there is a loud thump on the front door. Everyone freezes, trying to figure out what the noise could be. Then there's another loud thump then a crack. Someone is kicking the front door in. Jenna runs to the patio door and pushes Yoshiko outside, telling her to run down to the water. They run and look back at the house and see two dark figures running into the family room. Shots are fired. Tom collapses to the floor. Jenna and Yoshiko keep running toward the water.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Pilcher performs an important role in the story. The last piece of evidence that the dead men had a strange condition brought on by over-exposure to radiation is the tissue sample he obtained while performing the autopsy on Dr. Mellace. Unknown to the "bad agents," he packaged it up and sent it to Jenna. It shows that in his heart he wanted to



do the right thing but had just been bullied and frightened. He decides to send it to the person who he feels will actually do something about it. He is confused about the FBI agents and whether he can trust any of them. Jenna has demonstrated her desire to find the truth and by selecting her to receive the tissue sample, Pilcher is picking the most reliable person involved in the investigation. Even though Pilcher doesn't live, his testimony by means of the sample he sends to Jenna lives on.

One scientist has escaped murder. Dr. Fleischer is taken into protective custody by the FBI. He is an old man who may not live much longer. After he passes, an autopsy will reveal if he had the same condition as the other men. The two bad "agents" have caught up with the girls and are murdering everyone in their wake. The chapter is left in a cliffhanger as to what fate is in store for Jenna and Yoshiko who are seen fleeing from gunfire.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

There is a roadblock on the Sanibel Causeway leaving the islands. Traffic is backed up for a half mile. Hank Tracy is the FBI's regional director and is in charge of the operation. He reminds Agent Nussbaum, who is waving cars through, that each car is to be checked for the two girls. Agent Tracy gets a call on his cell phone. They found Agent Tarses dead. Nussbaum runs over to him. There are reports of multiple shots fired on Captiva. Tracy orders all agents to abandon the roadblock and head to the island.

Jenna and Yoshiko are running as fast as they can. They are being followed and shot at. Yoshiko reaches Derrick's boat first and jumps onto it followed quickly by Jenna. The windshield of the boat takes a hit. Yoshiko screams that there are no keys. They will have to swim! But Jenna recalls that Derrick always threw his car keys under his car seat. She gropes around under the driver's seat and finds the keys. Yoshiko, who grew up in Hawaii and knows how to drive boats, snatches the keys and starts the engine. Jenna uncoils the rope that is mooring the boat to the dock. Suddenly, the murderous agents are only fifteen feet away and yelling at the girls to halt. But Yoshiko goes full throttle and takes off in the dark night.

As they travel further away from shore, they hear more gunshots. The agents shoot the locks off a big boat, hotwires it and takes out after the girls. Their boat is faster and they continue to gain on the girls. Jenna looks for a crowded area where they get some help. Jenna finds a jug of gasoline which she pours out behind them. She takes the boat's flare gun and aims at the water. Huge flames flare up behind them. It slows the men down a little but soon they are in hot pursuit of the girls again. They draw closer again and bullets are hitting the girl's boat.

Yoshiko heads for the sandy edge of the causeway and plows into the sand. She hits her head on the steering wheel and is quite dizzy. Jenna pulls her out and steadies her as they run for cover. As they cross the busy causeway trying to stop cars, the men run up behind them. They tell them that it's all over and aim their guns at them. The area is suddenly deluged with emergency vehicles with blue and red flashing lights. Men and women emerge from dark sedans with guns drawn. They advance on the two men and begin firing even though the men had thrown their guns down. The agents blast the two men and shoot them dead. Yoshiko whispers to Jenna that the men were unarmed.

Chapter 14 Analysis

After an action-packed chase through the waterways of Captiva Island, the real FBI agents are finally on the trail of the fake FBI agents. Yoshiko, who has been upset about the way her vacation turned out, takes over driving the boat. Her upbringing in Hawaii where she was around boats and water all her life proves to come in handy and in fact



helps to save their lives. Yoshiko's boating skills and Jenna's quick thinking combine to secure their survival. Although the girls are, of course, thankful and relieved that they were saved, they are upset that the two bad agents, who had dropped their weapons, were executed by the FBI agents. Had they been taken alive, they could have learned more about the plot and who was behind it. Also, it may make Jenna wonder if the men were assassinated by the other agents because they didn't want them to talk. Were some in the high command of the "official" FBI part of the conspiracy? The story ends in that mystery.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

The girls sleep a lot on their flight on the way home. They both felt guilty about the murders of their friends and feel bad that the pursuers were executed. Jenna is met by her mother, Slick and Dufresne. Mark gets the girls aside and tells them that the official report claims that their pursuers were armed. Jenna says it's a lie and she will not confirm it. They were executed. Not that she minds that they are dead but she's going to tell the truth. If they had been taken into custody maybe the mystery of who they were working for would have been solved. All Mark could find out about the men is that they had been with the CIA but were not officially on anyone's payroll.

One of the scientists had not been murdered but died of a heart attack. He was autopsied but no anomaly was found in his chest or lungs. Jenna finds the whole thing incredulous. She looks at Slick and says, "Are we supposed to believe all this?" (233) Slick responds that they have no choice.

Jenna and Yoshiko are still friends but there's a growing distance between them. Three days after returning from Florida, against the advice of her mother, Jenna returns to her job. Dyson is surprised to see her so soon but is glad she is back and safe. Slick cautions Jenna to not get involved in cases outside their jurisdiction. He softens a little, admitting that he'd done the same in the past. Dyson hands her the package from Dr. Pilcher. They figure what is probably in the box and decide to send it on to Dr. Martin at the CDC without opening it.

Epilogue Analysis

Whoever the two bad agents were associated with will remain unknown because the men were killed. Jenna is upset and skeptical. Were more agents involved in the plot? Is that why they executed two unarmed men? She is not satisfied with the explanation but has to face facts and be practical. There is nothing she can do about it - right then at least. With Jenna's character, it is possible that she will revisit this mystery in the future although she promises Slick she won't get involved in any more cases outside of their jurisdiction.

Jenna, Slick and Dyson are united in their decision not to look in the box that Pilcher sent. They are certain that it's a tissue sample from Dr. Mellace. They send it to Dr. Martin who is the appropriate person to analyze it.



Characters

Jenna Blake

Jenna is a nineteen-year-old college student at Somerset University near Boston, Massachusetts. She is a pre-medical student and plans to have a career in forensic science after completing her education. She works for Dr. Walter Slikowski as a part time pathology assistant at the university's Medical Center. Jenna is a serious student and is dedicated to her work.

On spring vacation, Jenna and her roommate and best friend, Yoshiko, decide to go to Captiva Island near Fort Myers, Florida, for a week. Her boss has to remind her that she's supposed to have fun on her vacation and that she needs to leave school and work behind. Jenna hates to fly even though she's flown all her life with her single mother who is also a doctor. But after a white-knuckle landing, Jenna and Yoshiko are ready to soak up the Florida sun and leave more serious things behind.

When Jenna and Yoshiko are jet-skiing, they witness the death of an older man on another jet-ski. His jet ski exploded in a huge blast killing the man immediately. Of course it spooks the girls but Jenna starts to think that there are some strange goings on when she sees a strange anomaly - a cobweb-like material and a mutated tumor - in the chest cavity of the deceased man. When the local coroner denies that the man had any abnormal condition, Jenna is sure there is a cover-up.

It is just Jenna's nature to always dig deeper. She begins her own investigation and keeps hitting brick walls. No one believes her conspiracy theory or at least won't admit they do. Jenna uncovers a nefarious plot and finally convinces the FBI to get involved. Jenna tempts fate by asking too many wrong questions to the wrong people. She becomes a target for a pair of assassins and barely escapes with her life. When she returns to school, she is a bit chastened. However, she still suspects that things are not what they seem to be. Although she vows to keep out of the investigation, given her curious nature it will probably be impossible for her not to.

Yoshiko Kitsuta

Yoshiko Kitsuta is Jenna's best friend and roommate at Somerset University which is located just outside Boston, Massachusetts. Yoshiko's boyfriend is named Hunter LaChance and all three youngsters are friends. Yoshiko and Jenna have plans to go to Captiva Island for the week of spring break. Yoshiko was born and raised in Hawaii. Her parents would prefer that they come to Hawaii for the week but the girls have decided on Florida - it's a lot closer.

Yoshiko is a kind of laid back girl who just likes to have a good time and not hassle with anything taxing especially when she's on vacation in a tropical locale like Captiva Island. She makes Jenna promise that she will relax and have fun. Her friend has a tendency to



be too serious and worry about school and her job even when she's on vacation and supposed to be having fun.

Yoshiko is very disappointed when Jenna begins to get involved in what first appears to be a cover-up but then devolves into a dangerous conspiracy. Yoshiko keeps urging Jenna to stay out of it but Jenna is headstrong and carries on. Yoshiko was able to save the day when the two assassins who were hunting down Jenna and her caught up with them. Her days in Hawaii around boats and the water came in handy. She was able to drive a boat that they confiscated at night at full throttle in order to escape from the bad guys.

After they returned to school, sadly the girls were both aware of a growing distance between them. Being shot at and running for your life is something one wants to forget. For Yoshiko, looking at her friend was a constant reminder of the most horrible vacation anyone could imagine.

Dr. Walter Slikowski

Dr. Walter Slikowski is the county medical examiner and works out of the Somerset Medical Center facilities.

Dan Mariano

Dan Mariano is a thirty-two-year-old cop who is in the hospital recovering from burns he sustained during a recent investigation. Jenna has a crush on him even though he's a little too old for her.

Hunter LaChance

Hunter LaChance is a student at Somerset University. He is Yoshiko's boyfriend. During spring break, he visits his family in New Orleans.

Dominic Mellace

Dr. Dominic Mellace is a retired scientist who is killed when a jet-ski that he is riding in the Atlantic off the coast of Captiva Island explodes.

Whitney Bannister

Professor Whitney Bannister is accosted by two assassins who force him to the top of one of the buildings at his college. They push him off and he plunges to his death.



Aaron Pilcher

Aaron Pilcher is the Medical Examiner for Lee County, Florida. He conducts an autopsy on Dr. Mellace. Later, he is forced to file a false autopsy report by the two men posing as FBI agents.

Duncan and Wilcox

Duncan and Wilcox are the two murdering menaces who pose as FBI agents and are charged by their mysterious leader with killing anyone who knows about the cover-up.

Mark Duchesne

Mark Duchesne is an FBI Agent assigned to the Boston office. He helps Jenna in the investigation of the suspicious deaths of several men.

William Dean

Mark Dean is an FBI Agent out of Fort Myers, Florida. He is assigned to protect Jenna and Yoshiko until they are able to leave town. Unfortunately, the assassins catch up with him and take him out.



Objects/Places

Somerset University

Jenna Blake is a student at Somerset University. She works at the university Medical Center as a pathology assistant.

Boston, Massachusetts

Somerset University is located near Boston, Massachusetts. When Jenna and Yoshiko travel to Florida, they take off from Logan Airport in Boston.

Fort Myers, FL

Jenna and Yoshiko fly into Fort Myers, Florida, to begin their spring break vacation.

Sanibel Causeway

Sanibel Causeway is the route that leads from Fort Myers to Captiva Island. It is also where the story ends when Jenna and Yoshiko are being chased by two assassins.

Captiva Island

Jenna and Yoshiko decide to spend their spring break vacation on Captiva Island which is located across the causeway from Fort Myers, Florida.

Lee County Medical Examiner's Office

When Dr. Mellace is killed in an explosion, he is taken to the Lee County Medical Examiner's Office where an autopsy is performed on his remains.

Atlantic Ocean

Jenna and Yoshiko rent jet-skis and bounce and crisscross over the waves of the Atlantic. Later, they are in a fight for their life as Yoshiko pilots a boat at full throttle through the dark waters with the assassins tailing them in a bigger and faster boat.



Ding Darling Animal Preserve

One of the boys that Jenna and Yoshiko meet on Captiva Island works at the animal preserve. One day they ride bikes through the preserve while being tailed by the assassins.

Haviland College

Whitney Bannister is a semi-retired professor at Haviland College. He is forced to the roof of one of the college buildings and thrown to his death.

Bennington County Hospital

Dr. Marsden performs an autopsy on Professor Bannister at the Bennington County Hospital Medical Examiner's facilities.



Themes

Conspiracy

The threads of an involved and dangerous conspiracy are woven throughout the story and are an integral part of the plot of "Brain Trust." Conspiracy theories are things of legend and are oftentimes just that. People who believe in conspiracies, even when facts prove them wrong are whispered about and considered whacky, on the fringe type of people. Just the term conspiracy theorist summons up an image of a nerdy fellow who looks to the sky for arriving aliens but looks at skepticism at the moon, fairly positive that our astronauts were not really ever there.

There is another kind of conspiracy, however, a real conspiracy. Just by the nature of the word, a conspiracy is a clandestine plan that can hurt people and cause real and lasting damage. A conspiracy involves the plotting of a secret operation or event. For those who become involved in such an endeavor and buy into the importance and necessity of specific outcome, the conspiracy takes on a life of its own. People often lose focus of reality and propriety because they have made the success of a conspiracy their ultimate prize and more important than anything.

In this story, the conspiracy is a cover-up that results in murder and terror. Wilcox and Duncan are puppets for a man named Lupin who has convinced them that what they are doing is in the name of national security. The men, who were CIA agents that at time actually worked for the security of the nation, have lost their perspective. They either have suspended disbelief and choose to go along with the nefarious plot or buy into the hype and come to believe that even murder is acceptable if it helps to bring about the ultimate success of the covert conspiracy.

Trust

Trust is an overarching theme in this story and is even part of the title of the book, "Brain Trust," although the meanings aren't necessarily the same. The protagonist, Jenna, is a smart young woman and has learned who to trust and, in some cases, who not to trust. She has a problem with men in that her father left her and her mother when she was a toddler. A young woman like Jenna whose father abandoned her often has a difficult time with trust, especially where men are concerned.

During most of her young life, Jenna had little or no contact with her father. He was a professor at Somerset which is the university she chose to attend. She wanted to have a relationship with her father and probably chose to attend Somerset so she could try to develop one. Jenna and her father work hard at building a relationship but it is not easy. Those missing years and that betrayal of trust are things that are hard to overcome.

Jenna and her roommate and best friend, Yoshiko, have a very close relationship. It is challenged, however, when Jenna begins to launch her own investigation into a cover-



up that she discovers while the two are on vacation together. Yoshiko is disappointed and hurt that her vacation has become a dangerous and suspenseful venture instead of a relaxing one on the beach. Yoshiko asks Jenna time and again to let the authorities handle the unfolding plot but Jenna is determined to get to the bottom of it herself. When the girls return to Boston, there is a growing distance between them. Although Jenna did not intend to hurt Yoshiko, in her own way she abandoned her and betrayed her trust. Jenna transformed from best friend and vacation pal to forensics investigator. Jenna became someone else, someone that Yoshiko did not like as well as the other Jenna, especially while on a pleasure trip.

Dr. Pilcher was warned by one set of FBI agents not to talk about the case. Another FBI officer insisted that he needed to talk about it. Pilcher didn't know who to trust and, of course, didn't know that the first two agents were fraud. But the double-speak from the agents caused Pilcher not to trust any of the agents. The conclusion of the story finds Jenna in a similar state of mind. She fears that the two bad guys were executed by FBI agents so they wouldn't talk. Were officials in the FBI actually involved in the conspiracy? Jenna doesn't know and doesn't know who to trust which is how the story ends.

Perseverance

Jenna Blake is a bright young woman who is pursuing a medical degree and plans to have a career in forensics. A quality that stands out about the young woman is her tenacity in following through on bits of information or innuendo that many people would just ignore. Because of her background as a pathology assistant, Jenna recognizes that a victim of an explosion has an unusual condition, one that she couldn't begin to recognize despite her studies and her work in pathology. It was a red flag that

When the coroner tells Jenna that he found nothing abnormal during the autopsy, Jenna knew that the man was either incompetent or lying. Most nineteen-year-olds would bow to the knowledge of an older, experienced person especially one in a position of authority and just drop it. But Jenna could not get the matter out of her mind. Instead of being intimidated by the coroner disputing her observation and thinking she must have been wrong, she wasn't about to. She knew she was right. She continued to probe and push and consult with other experts that she trusted. Her perseverance in ferreting out the truth led her to launch her own personal investigation since no one would listen to her. Even when she knew there was danger, she was not deterred. She didn't especially want to be hunted down by assassins, but it was impossible for her to drop the issue until she dug as deeply as possible.

When Jenna becomes a physician and she is a medical examiner for a community, the people she serves will be able to trust her and rest assured that no one could do a more thorough job.

Style

Point of View

"Brain Trust" by Christopher Golden and Rick Hautala is written in the third-person and limited omniscient. The protagonist is Jenna Blake and much of the story is told from her point of view. However, the reader is privy to the thoughts and motivations of other featured characters. The worries and doubts of Dr. Pilcher are made apparent when the bad "agents" tell him to not report what he had actually seen in the autopsy. The reader is aware of the fears Pilcher has that these menacing mystery men will bring harm, or worse, to him.

Of the two antagonists, Duncan seems to have no soul and almost enjoys murdering people. Wilcox's private thoughts demonstrate that he is not so thrilled with committing murder and in particular killing who he refers to as by-standers or innocent people who are killed when bullets fly and just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Both authors are experienced writers of thrillers and action stories. Christopher Golden has written many short stories and novels including "Nightstone" and "Impulse." Rick Hautala has written stories for the TV series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and for the world's most popular comic book, "X-Men." The two have collaborated on "Brain Trust" which is one book in a series called, "Body of Evidence."

Setting

"Brain Trust" by Christopher Golden and Rick Hautala takes place in several locales. The story begins when protagonist Jenna Blake is winding up her last day at school before spring break. Jenna is a pre-med student at Somerset University near Boston, Massachusetts. She is a pathology assistant at the university's Medical Center and reports to Dr. Walter Slikowski's who is the Medical Examiner. Jenna has plans to be gone the entire week and will be leaving with her best friend and roommate, Koshiko, to spend a week in the surf and sun on Captiva Island which is down the Sanibel Causeway from Fort Myers Florida.

While on Captiva Island, the girls spend time on the beach. They rent jet-skis and bounce and crisscross over the waves near the coast. They walk on the beach where Jenna is obsessed with collecting sea shells. They become acquainted with a couple of young men one of whom works at an animal preserve. One day the girls and the two guys ride their bikes on a dirt path in the preserve.

There are several coroner's offices involved in the story. There are descriptions of autopsies in the Medical Center at Somerset University. There are also two other autopsies that take place in the story. One at the Medical Examiner's facilities in Vermont and in Lee County, Florida.



The girls get into trouble with some very dangerous people while they are on vacation. They are chased in the dark night on the water off the island by two men who are out to assassinate them. Koshiko, who is an experienced boat handler, guides their boat at top speed while the bad guys are chasing them in a boat that is bigger and faster.

Language and Meaning

Protagonist Jenna Blake is a pathology assistant at the Somerset University Medical Center. She works for the Medical Examiner and assists him during autopsies. There are some technical and descriptive terms used in the passages that provide accounts of autopsies that take place in the story. For example, when Dr. Marsden is performing an autopsy on Professor Bannister, he makes a "thoracic-abdominal" incision or a "Y" incision across the professor's chest. After cutting the man's chest cavity open, the putrid odor that escapes from the area is vividly described.

When Dr. Slikowski performs an autopsy on a murder victim at his facilities at the university Medical Center, he uses his forceps to pull a bullet from the deceased's spine. When an FBI agent stops by to see him during the procedure and glances at the corpse whose chest is still "pinned open."

The CDC, Center for Disease Control, is contacted about the anomalies that are found during the autopsies of several men who died under suspicious circumstances. Dr. Martin speaks of consulting her database with the symptoms and coming up with nothing. In order to pin down exactly what the disease is, Dr. Martin tells Jenna she will have to examine a cadaver that has the condition.

The story also focuses on the FBI, law enforcement and government. There are references to the Special-Agent-in-Charge which is the title of the lead agent assigned to each FBI office. There is mention of covert operations and secret units within the FBI. The plot involves the development of a highly destructive weapon whose firepower was based on radiation. The scientists who worked on this project were apparently stricken with a mutated cancer that spread a cobweb-like material throughout their chest cavities.

Structure

"Brain Trust" by Christopher Golden and Rick Hautala" is one book in a thriller series called, "A Body of Evidence." The book is separated into fifteen medium-sized chapters and is succeeded by a short epilogue. The story covers a short period of time, about one week, in the life of protagonist Jenna Blake. A brief prologue tells of a murder that takes place before the story "Brain Trust" begins. There is no explanation for the murder and the identities of the murderers are vague. The two nefarious agents that are introduced in the prologue are the antagonists in the main story. This incident sets the stage for the story that promises to be beset with mystery and intrigue.



There is a short section following the epilogue entitled, "About the Authors," which provides the background and achievements of the two authors. The last section of the book is a fifteen-page preview of the next installment in this series which is entitled, "Prowlers: Laws of Nature."

The book is structured in a basically chronological order with a minimum of references to prior events. Although this is one book of a series, it stands alone as a single story because it does not refer to past events or characters that a new reader to the series would have no knowledge of. That can be a frustrating read and the authors thankfully avoid that with this work.



Quotes

"And I [Jenna] could use some time away from here, she thought. Somewhere balmy and tropical" (Chapter 1, p. 8).

"In her secret heart, she [Jenna] wished that they could overcome the age difference and the fact that they really did exist in two separate worlds. But she knew it just wasn't meant to be. She just had to accept that they were destined to be what Shakespeare called 'star cross'd lovers'" (Chapter 1, p. 11).

"I can't escape it, Jenna thought grimly as she rushed from the water, striding up onto the sand. Death follows me" (Chapter 4, p. 51).

"Be careful. Sometimes, once you start poking around, you can't avoid striking a nerve" (Chapter 6, p. 90).

"Though she could only guess at the sequence of events, there was no doubt in Jenna's mind that Larry Grantham had not committed suicide. Neither had Whitney Bannister. And Dominic Mellace's death was no accident" (Chapter 9, p. 137).

"But even as the woman walked her out, Jenna could see in her eyes that in some part of her, Molly Mellace knew. She knew that whatever ghosts of the past had reached out to touch her husband, they were not going to stop there" (Chapter 9, p. 140).

""You're the FBI, for God's sake. And if anything does happen to Jenna that you could have prevented...then God help you both" (Chapter 10, p. 146).

"You're poking around in something that's a lot more serious and dangerous than you realize" (Chapter 11, p. 161).

"I [Yoshiko] know what you're like when you get the scent of a mystery. And now...I'm not going to lie and say I'm not afraid. But what's happening here isn't right. I'm with you one hundred percent. Just don't get me killed, okay" (Chapter 12, p. 177).

"He [Wilcox] hated the idea of killing an FBI man. Technically, they were all on the same side. But the functional government and the shadow operations that existed side by side with it were like church and state; the two never mixed well" (Chapter 12, p. 181).

"He [Dr. Fleischer] didn't like what he saw. The two men standing on his doorstep had federal government written all over them, from their close-cropped haircuts to their off-the-rack dark suits" (Chapter 13, p. 203).

"She [Jenna] had unearthed a conspiracy of secrecy and murder, but no one was going to pay for the crimes that had been committed" (Epilogue, p. 234).



Topics for Discussion

Why does Jenna become suspicious about Dr. Mellace's death? What characteristics does she have that compel her to find out more about it?

Who are the mysterious "agents" who are trying to keep a lid on the investigation of the deaths of the old scientists? What are their backgrounds? Who do they report to?

Why were most people with whom Jenna discussed the possible subversive plot skeptical? What image does the term "conspiracy theory" engender and why?

Why was there tension between Jenna and Yoshiko? Why did Yoshiko feel the way she did about the vacation? Why did Jenna ignore Yoshiko's urging to leave the investigation alone?

Why were the girls upset when the two vicious murderers who were pursuing them were shot to death by the FBI? Would it have been better to let the men live? Why?

What evidence is there that the conspiracy went beyond just the two "bad agents" and the mysterious Lupin who is just mentioned a few times? Who else might have been involved?

Is it plausible that the scientists worked in a covert operation for the government? If the US government did sponsor such a project, would they have approved of murder and mayhem to keep it secret?