

"The Lizard of Ozzzz.com" by Mary Karlton

Plot Summary

Caitlin Leary, an attractive, brilliant young woman fresh out of MIT, hailing from a seaside village in Maine, lands a position as Director of Web Technology with Ozzzz.com, the brainchild of Silicon Valley mogul Sam Thorne. Attracted by the company's focus – a Web community for children where they can share ideas, express their creativity, and enhance development skills – Caitlin enthusiastically embraces her new life in Silicon Valley. While she is at first enthralled by the fast-paced e-culture with its promise of financial reward, intellectual challenge, and, apparently in the case of Ozzzz.com, the appeal of contributing to a greater good, Caitlin smacks up against a value system that fundamentally conflicts with her own.

As she finds her way around Ozzzz.com, CEO Sam Thorne, who has a notorious reputation for lasciviousness, moves in on Caitlin. As if against her will, she finds herself increasingly attracted to him. What Caitlin does not realize is that Sam has several hidden agendas. With the aid of his Vice-President of Marketing, J.W. Nielsen, and his business partner and former flame, Bambi Rose – one of Silicon Valley's first female "angel investors," who has a dubious past – Sam sets out to transform Caitlin into a branded commodity: Ozzzz.com's "Virtual Dorothy." Mesmerized as she is by Sam, Caitlin's career focus becomes completely sidetracked, and she emerges as one of a new breed of Web "personalities" – a spokeswoman and role model for the children and families who subscribe to the Ozzzz.com community.

Sam's personal agenda is to use the mind-control technology in an attempt to seduce Caitlin in order to prove its effectiveness, much to the chagrin of Bambi, who, while dedicated to the Ozzzz.com cause, also harbors a secret desire to publicly expose her ex-lover and destroy him. Driven by that goal, Bambi embarks on a project to gather evidence (videotapes, audiotapes, and e-mail trails) of Sam's past and present indiscretions from her women's group, a number of whom who have been victimized and humiliated by him. Bambi also insinuates herself into Caitlin's good graces and begins an all-out campaign to turn Caitlin against the egomaniacal Sam.

In the meantime, we learn that there is much more to the wildly successful Ozzzz.com than meets the eye. Sam, in conjunction with Avi Ben-Hura (formerly Israel's top fighter pilot and currently the guru of virtual reality technology) and Bob Portell (billionaire super-geek who virtually "owns the Internet" and now aspires to public office) have developed a sophisticated and extremely subtle mind-control technology that is propagated through animations, audio, and video presentations over high-speed Internet connections. The technology operates very much along the lines of subliminal advertising tested by the movie industry, where messages exhorting cinemagoers to consume movie snacks and other commodities were interjected into movie clips. Ozzzz.com, then, is actually a mind-control experiment contrived by the powerful trio. The whole *raison d'être* for the company is to determine whether gains in e-commerce activity can be achieved by utilizing this revolutionary, secret technology to direct the behavior of the children using the site. If the Ozzzz.com experiment is successful, then the technology has implications far beyond merely the manipulation of consumer behavior.

The ultimate goal is to use the tool to create a population of malleable automatons who will do the bidding of the global corporate oligarchy.

In a very short period of time, the experiment proves successful. Children all over the world become severely addicted to Ozzzz.com, to the detriment of their health, schoolwork, and family life . . . and to the great distress of their parents. A public outcry against Ozzzz.com erupts, and an ad hoc organization called OMEN (Overwrought Mothers Enraged about the 'Net) starts to command media attention. Concerned parents and teachers set out to crash the Ozzzz.com Website, and the media voraciously latches on to the story.

Caitlin finds herself caught in the middle of the backlash and begins to do some serious soul searching about the integrity of Sam Thorne and his enterprise. She shares her insights and her growing disillusionment with Trini, a young Hispanic mural artist who has a romantic interest in Caitlin and works at her favorite coffee haunt, the Café Corazon, and with Mo,' a sincere black man who cleans the Ozzzz.com offices after hours when Caitlin is often found working late. Mo' overhears snippets of conversations between Sam and his cohorts that reveals the true intent behind Ozzzz.com and informs Caitlin of his discovery.

Caitlin sets out to burrow into the infrastructure of the code underlying the Ozzzz.com Website to unearth the mind-control programs. She relentlessly pursues the project, bound and determined to get at the truth, and enlists the assistance of Internet hackers worldwide. Soon chat rooms all over cyberspace are abuzz about Sam Thorne's vile machinations. Ozzzz.com and Sam Thorne are in the eye of the hurricane, as the media runs amok with leaks. The young victims of Ozzzz.com are trotted out on talk shows, and deprogramming the young mind-control victims explodes into a huge political issue.

Armed with bits and bytes gathered from her investigations, Caitlin isolates the code behind Sam's mind-control technology. With that accomplished, she sends an anonymous letter to the Technology Editors of the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, etc. detailing her findings, and quietly slips away from Silicon Valley back to her home in Maine. The story becomes headline news, and Sam Thorne is called before the Dept. of Justice for conspiracy charges. In the midst of this, Bambi Rose experiences a bittersweet Pyrrhic victory. While Sam is publicly shamed (a result which Bambi had intended to engineer), she is deeply dismayed to see that her investment has collapsed around her like a house of cards and that she was beaten to the punch.

The story concludes with Caitlin's return to Maine with Trini; where they take over her grandfather's chowder house. Does she stay in Maine and lead a simple, humble life, or does she fearlessly step into the limelight and glory in her new found fame?

For more information, visit <http://www.ozzzz.com/> or email info@ozzzz.com