

# PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

## Carl's latest plan: steal tech ideas by lip reading

AS Carl worked feverishly on his startup prospectus for building and marketing a robot nanny, he dreamed that this, finally, after all these years of struggling, was his road to fame and fortune.

He thought about all the people who had told him he would never be able to do it. Co-workers who said that he was just not a cutting-edge guy.

Or that he was unlucky. That he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time; unlike successful startup people who just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Forget all those naysayers, thought Carl. He'd show them.

Carl thought of the boss at one of his early companies who said Carl was not cut out for the creative work. That he was a "support" guy, not a creative guy. A support guy! He'd show him.

This is part 28 of a 48-part fictionalized serial, written by John Angell Grant with illustrations by Steve Curl.

Carl thought about the VCs who conned investors. Setting up their investments in tranches, and getting suckers to invest in a tranche, where the VCs would hit in one out of 20 investments; but risk none of their own money; only yours; then skimming off the cream of the one investment in 20 that made it.

They were thieves, thought Carl. Con men and thieves. He got angrier and angrier as he thought about it.

The kids who ran startups were suckered by these VCs, in Carl's view. Much of the equity of their inventions went to the VCs.

The whole world was a swindle, Carl thought. And it had created a cultural fiction about the self-made man being the ideal that saved the world, who made America strong, and built the economy. What baloney, Carl thought. A fraud and a swindle. He got angrier and angrier.



CARL

He reflected on how the VC world was rigged. He thought of all the people sitting around cafes in little twos and threes in Palo Alto, hatching their startup plans.

Suddenly Carl had another idea: to teach lip reading. Then people could sit in the VC hatching cafes in Palo Alto, watch little groups plotting their start up plans, read their lips, and steal the ideas they were hatching.

Actually, he thought, that one's not bad. Microsoft and Apple boosted some of the their early technology from other companies, so why not steal outright. It was in the genetics of the startup world.

But how would he market a lip-reading startup. Maybe online. Although someone is probably already doing it, Carl further reflected. For the time being, he should stick with his robot nanny idea. That was the big money winner.

Then Carl's wife came in.

"Honey," she said, "You are making yourself crazy. Stop doing this. I'm happy to be the breadwinner. You just go to cooking school, and do something that makes you happy. I'm worried about your health. This is not good for you."

**More tomorrow.**