Jack and Ice hack the World

# The Girl

Jack’s journey through the world of the weird and the wonderful started on a regular day after class at the university. He was walking towards his car when suddenly a girl came running out of the bushes on his left. She wasn’t looking and ran full on into Jack.

‘I’m sorry, dude. I’m sort of in a hurry so I didn’t see you,’ she said, so fast that she could have won the land speed record for talking. ‘Can you help me? I just need a quick ride.’

Jack took a good look at her. She was a tall, beautiful blonde girl with green eyes. She looked no older than Jack himself, at 21 years of age.

‘Sure I can give you a ride,’ Jack said. ‘Follow me to my car.’ He started to walk on the path he was on before the girl ran into him, and she followed him. She hurried him on, stressing that she needed to go fast. Jack walked up to his old pickup truck and unlocked it. They both got in and Jack started the engine.

‘So, where do you want me to take you?’ Jack asked.

‘As far away from those guys as possible,’ she said calmly, pointing out the window to a black car speeding down the road. Not exactly sure what to do, Jack floored the gas pedal and they sped away, leaving black tire treads on the ground.

‘What the heck is going on lady?’ Jack asked, looking through his side mirror to see that there were now two black cars chasing after them.

‘Okay, I’ll explain. My name is Ice; I’m like a professional hacker. I sort of escaped from a top secret government facility.’

‘A professional what? Escaped from a where? You can’t be serious can you?’ Jack asked, his face dripping with disbelief.

‘Oh I’m serious alright.’

‘So, these guys are the feds?’ Jack asked, his tone starting to reveal some fear.

‘No, the feds gave up a long time ago. These guys are like some undercover faction of Interpol. Or they could be the Russian mob or the CIA. I’m really not sure,’ she said, prompting a questioning look from Jack.

‘How many organizations are after you?’ he asked sarcastically.

‘All of them. It’s a rather long story,’ she said, staying cheery the entire time.

‘What did you say your name was?’

‘Ice, Ice Whisper,’ she said with a James Bond type tone.

‘Look Miss Whisper…’

‘Ice, just call me Ice,’ she interrupted.

‘Okay, look **Ice**; I really shouldn’t be getting involved in something like this. I think I should drop you off somewhere.’

‘Oh no, it’s much too late now. You became involved the moment we spoke. Were either escaping this together or were going down together. It’s your choice,’ she said, her voice still cheery, but with a slightly more serious feel to it. Jack looked through the side mirror again, and to his surprise there were no more cars behind them.

‘It looks like we lost them. Can I go drop you off somewhere now?’

‘Nope, we have to stick together from now on. Without me they’ll catch you in a blink of an eye. And you really didn’t lose them, look up.’ Jack followed her prompt and looked up through the window. There was a helicopter flying slightly to the left of them.

‘They probably just went to switch to some faster cars. I suggest we do the same. Get on the highway over there and follow it to the next off-ramp.’ He did as she said. ‘Okay, now take the next turn left into that alley. Yes here. Okay we’ve made it.’ She got out of the car and motioned to him to follow. He did so and followed her into an unmarked door. They were in a small square room with a bed and a desk. On the desk was a laptop.

‘You can sit on the bed while you wait for me. I just have to do something on the laptop quickly.’ He sat down on the bed while she booted up the laptop. She started to fire away at the keyboard while Jack just stared at her with amazement.

‘Tell me about you,’ Ice said out of the blue. ‘I’ve told you a lot about me, so it’s your turn,’ she continued, not taking her eyes of the laptop for one moment.

‘My name’s Jack. I study economics at Yale, you know, where you ran into me. That’s basically all there is to me.’

‘Well were going to change that. You seem so boring. Well not for long. I like your name, Jack. Jackie, I think I’ll call you Jackie.’

‘Please don’t,’ he said, upset at her using the name people usually used to pick on him.

‘I’ve already made up my mind. You’ll get used to me calling you that.’

‘How sure are you about that?’

‘More than one hundred per cent,’ she said, assured.

‘What are you doing on the laptop?’ he asked her, perplexed by what Ice was doing on the computer.

‘I’m organizing a ride for us.’ She clicked a few more times and the computer shut down.

‘We have a few more minutes before our ride is here, so I’m just going to freshen up. Be good and stay just here,’ she said sarcastically. She disappeared into a doorway that Jack had not seen up until now. He guessed that that was the door to a bathroom of some sort. When he heard a shower running, he thought that she probably wouldn’t notice if he just checked out her laptop quickly. He walked over to the desk and pressed the button to boot it up. It started and after various loading screens, a password form appeared. The operating system looked like a highly customized Linux build to Jack, although he wasn’t sure. He tried guessing the password. Firstly he typed in Ice, but that failed. He didn’t know Ice well enough to be able to figure out her passwords, so he just shut down the laptop and returned to his allocated spot on the bed.

A moment later someone started violently banging against the door.

‘Open up Ice. We know you are in here! You can’t escape us now,’ a voice came from beyond the door.

Ice hurried out of the bathroom with only towel covering her body. Her hair was still wet from the shower and she had water droplets on her bare shoulders.

‘Shit,’ she said. ‘I was sure that they wouldn’t find us here. So much for that idea.’ She motioned for Jack to get off the bed and he complied. She started pushing the bed towards the door and seeing her struggling, Jack helped. Soon enough the bed was up against the door. Ice sat down at the desk and started up the laptop.

‘Why did you try to login on my laptop,’ she asked.

‘How did you know I did that?’ he asked, shocked and amazed.

‘I’m a professional, I don’t play games. I’ll forgive you this one time, but never try anything like that again. Am I understood?’

‘Yes ma’am,’ he replied, like a mischievous schoolboy would.

A black window filled with lines of code popped up on her laptop’s screen. She started typing, her fingers flying over the keyboard. She went on like this for a minute or so and then she leaned back, putting her hands behind her head.

‘There we go, problem solved. In a few moments the police will announce over their radio that we have been spotted in the other side of town,’ she said.

‘What if these guys aren’t police?’

‘That doesn’t matter, because everyone who is smart enough to even have a trace of me probably have guys listening to police communication twenty four seven.’

‘Well then, we’ll just wait for the banging to stop then,’ he sighed. Moments later it did stop.

‘Our ride is going to be here any time now. I have to get dressed. Would you mind waiting in the bathroom while I do? No offence, but I don’t know you well enough yet to show my naked body to you,’ she chuckled. He did as asked and went into the bathroom.

‘You can come out again,’ she said after a while. When he came back into the room he saw her standing around in her red underwear, looking particularly attractive.

‘Oh sorry,’ Jack said, ‘I thought you said you were done.’

‘Don’t worry. I said I don’t want you to see me naked, I don’t have a problem if I’m wearing something.’ She rolled her hips for him as if to show herself off. She produced a pair of jeans and a purple tank top from under the bed and quickly put them on.

‘If you don’t mind me saying, you really have a beautiful body,’ Jack said, blushing.

‘Oh I don’t mind at all, thanks for the compliment Jackie,’ she smile at him. They were both startled when somebody honked outside the door.

‘That must be our ride,’ Ice said. Jack helped her as she pulled the bed away from the door. She went through it and Jack followed. Outside was a wonderfully green sports car waiting for them.

‘I take it that stealth or affordability weren’t things you were concerned about when choosing wheels,’ Jack said, awestruck by the car.

‘I walk in style, I code in style and I ride in style,’ Ice said.

Jack looked around and noticed that his truck wasn’t there anymore.

‘Where is my truck, Ice?’

‘I couldn’t get this baby without some insurance,’ she said while running her hand over the side of the car.

‘Didn’t you think to ask me before doing that?’

‘I would say it was a fair trade. Oh come on Jackie, I can get it back later for you. I can do *anything*,’ she said seductively. Jack gave in, not being able to resist Ice when she used that tone of voice.

‘So, who’s driving?’ Jack asked.

‘Definitely not you. This is my baby,’ she said, pressing her body against the car and kissing it.

‘How can you be so obsessed about a car?’ he asked.

‘Are you kidding me, Jackie? Just look at its streamlined body and sleek finish. But this is nothing yet. Wait till you hear her engine and feel her run. She runs like a dream, she runs like my code. Perfectly without error, smooth as can be and extremely fast,’ she said, with a dreamy look on her face. She opened the driver’s door and got in. Sticking her head through the window, she said: ‘Are you coming or should I leave for the feds to find when they figure out that they’ve been sent to an old ladies house?’

Jack didn’t have to be invited twice and jumped into the car. She started the engine and it a wonderful growling noise. The moment she stepped on the pedal he was thrown back in his seat. The sheer force completely surprised Jack. They raced through the streets and finally hit an on-ramp. From there it was easy cruising on the highway.

‘Where are we going, Ice?’ Jack asked.

‘We’re going to drive until we run out of fuel. We’ll figure it out from there then,’ she answered.

‘Well I guess I don’t have much of a choice, now do I?’ he sighed.

‘Nope,’ she said simply, turning her full attention towards the road.

# The trip

Jack came to after a getting some sleep in the car. He looked over at Ice, who was still seriously focused on the road. She looked over at him.

‘Welcome back to the land of the living,’ she said. ‘You were out for a good seven hours.’

‘Really? It didn’t feel that long,’ I answered. ‘Where are we?’

‘Somewhere in Mexico,’ she said, as if it didn’t sound strange.

‘Mexico? How the heck did we get to Mexico in seven hours?’

‘I called a helicopter after we ran out of fuel, which took us to a jet, which took us to Mexico,’ she smiled.

‘And I was asleep through all that? How did you get the car here as well?’

‘I didn’t, this is a different car.’ He looked around the car and realized that the interior of the car looked slightly different than before.

‘How did you manage to not wake me when we were in the helicopter? Or when we were on the jet?’ he asked, puzzled.

‘That’s easy; I just fed you a sleeping pill.’

‘And why would you do that?’

‘Well you looked so cute asleep and sucking your thumb that I couldn’t bear to wake you up. And besides, you would have tried to convince me to not come here. That would’ve irritated me a lot,’ she said.

‘You’re going to have to make this up to me, you know,’ he said, jokingly.

‘Like you’re in any position to make demands. But don’t worry; I’ll make it up to you. I’ll make it up to you real good. One day,’ she said, flirtingly.

‘I can’t imagine what you mean.’

‘You don’t have to, Jackie,’ she said and winked at him.

‘So, what do you want in Mexico?’ he asked.

‘Well I have a little hideout here where we can wait until tomorrow. Tomorrow we’re catching a plane to Egypt.’

‘Egypt?’

‘My hacking partner is over there. He’s going to help me cover my tracks, after which we can decide what we’re going to do.’

‘I still don’t know my part in this,’ he said.

‘Well, you don’t really have a part. That’s my fault, because the moment I got in your car, you were added to every most wanted list in the world. I’m sorry about that.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Yeah, but hey, at least you get to hang out with me,’ she said, in her flirty voice. He looked at her again, considering it.

‘Maybe it’s worth it. You’re pretty hot actually,’ he said sarcastically.

‘I knew you would think so,’ she laughed. She looked at Jack for a few seconds. ‘You’re not so bad yourself either.’ They drove and flirted for a few more hours and eventually they stopped in front of an apartment building in the middle of nowhere. She stopped the engine and got out, leading Jack into the building.

‘Come on, to the elevator,’ she said.

‘I don’t like elevators. Can’t we take the stairs?’

‘Unfortunately no, because the stairs don’t go that far down.’ She got into the elevator when it arrived and Jack reluctantly followed her. The panel was at his side.

‘Press the button for level 1, then the button for level two and then the open doors button,’ she said.

‘Why do I have to do that,’ Jack asked.

‘Because it’s on a secret underground floor. I couldn’t make it easy for the various organizations that are chasing me to get in. Just do what I say, Jackie.’ He did it and suddenly the lights in the elevator went dark. They started plummeting, but it stopped abruptly after a few seconds.

‘Welcome back Ice,’ a computerized voice said over the elevator speaker. ‘Do you desire any specific security enforcements?’

‘Activate elevator block code D443 and motion alarm code Q22,’ Ice said.

‘Security measures D443 and Q22 have been activated and are functioning at one hundred per cent efficiency,’ the voice confirmed. Ice got out of the elevator and walked into quite a large room. There were three big computer monitors up against the far wall above a desk. There were four large tower computers on the desk plus one keyboard and mouse.

‘Why are there four computers, but only three screens?’ Jack asked.

‘The fourth one is basically just a case with ten hard drives. The others are hooked up to it for data storage. It’s quite an impressive system, with almost twenty terabytes of storage space. This is the place to where I download all the files that I hack,’ Ice said. Two of the computers were already running and Jack deduced that they probably always ran, so that Ice could access them to save data when she needed to. She powered up the computer nearest to the centre of the desk and then proceeded to pull of her shirt and pants.

‘Why are you stripping?’ Jack asked.

‘I like hacking in my underwear,’ she said. Jack looked at her with a strange expression. ‘I’m kidding,’ she said, just to relieve the look on his face. ‘I want to put on something better. These were the only clothes I could find back there.’ She walked over to a door on the left side of the room. Jack followed her because he was very curious. It opened to a large walk in closet. It was filled with funky shirts, pants and skirts. It also had an entire section filled with attractive lingerie of various colours. She picked out some black underwear, a Space Invaders t-shirt and a jean skirt. Jack was staring at her when she turned around to face him.

‘Get out; I’m going to change now. I told you that you aren’t welcome to see me naked. *Yet.*’ It could have been Jack’s imagination, but he could swear that the yet sounded almost suggestive. Against his will he followed her orders and left the closet, closing the door behind him. A few minutes later she came out of the closet in her new clothes.

‘You don’t have something for a guy to wear, do you?’ Jack asked.

‘Well there are some male size shirts and pants, but I can’t help you with underwear. Unless you want to wear pink panties,’ she said and giggled.

‘I think I’ll stick to my own clothes for now,’ Jack said, blushing.

Ice took a seat at her desk and typed something on the keyboard. She brought up a web browser and went to the website of Mexico Airlines. She browsed to the page where they sell tickets and clicked a button of a red skull on her browser window. A black window with many lines of code popped up.

‘Just have to inject some SQL code and…done,’ she said. ‘Whose credit card do you want to use?’

‘What do you mean?’ Jack asked.

‘I hacked into their credit card database. I can’t download the whole thing, so whose money do you think we should steal?’ she said as if it was an everyday thing to do.

‘I’m not entirely comfortable with stealing someone’s money.’

‘And I’m not entirely comfortable with going to prison, being hung in a meat locker or working for rogue government factions,’ she retaliated.

‘Can’t you hack it so that we don’t have to pay for the tickets? Then at least we’ll be stealing from a government company, which is the same as stealing from a criminal.’

‘Okay, I’ll see what I can do,’ she sighed. She scrolled through the code again and after finding the suitable spot, started typing in some code. After a few minutes a webpage popped up saying that the tickets have been purchased. She then typed for another five minutes before she turned around, clapping her hands.

‘I did you one better,’ she said. ‘I stole from a criminal using the name of another criminal. Two birds, one stone,’ she said.

‘How did you do that?’

‘They have weakling security code. All I did was find the part in the code that handles tickets for high profile politicians and listed us, or the fake names on our new passports anyway, as agents of various Mexican politicians,’ she said.

‘What fake passports?’

‘I hacked the Mexican internal affairs server and issued two passports. One for Mrs Alicia Whisper and one for her husband, Mr Adel Whisper.’

‘Why you’re such a wonderful wife,’ Jack said sarcastically. ‘When are we having our honeymoon, Alicia?’

‘Don’t get carried away now. It’s just our cover. If you’re good, one day we can be Mr and Mrs…What’s your surname?’

‘It’s Jack Smart,’ he said.

‘Well that’s a nice surname. Fits me perfectly. Yes, I think Mr and Mrs Smart will be perfect one day,’ she joked.

‘Don’t joke about that kind of thing. It might just happen,’ Jack said mysteriously. ‘By the way, why did you use your real last name on the fake passports?’ he asked.

‘Because I couldn’t think of anything else at the time. And it will probably never link back to me, because you are the only living person on this planet that knows my surname,’ she said.

‘Well, that makes me special to you then, doesn’t it?’

‘Oh yes, you’re very special. You’re my only real friend and possible future romantic interest at the moment,’ she said.

‘So I’m a romantic interest?’

‘Did I not use the words *possible* and *future*?’ she joked.

‘By the way, I just wondered, why are all these people after you? What did you do wrong?’ Jack asked, changing the subject.

‘Well, let’s just say that I’m a great supporter of spreading information and knowledge, while the people chasing me are practitioners of obscurantism,’ she explained. Jack didn’t even consider asking her what that means, at fear of sounding stupid. She must have read the expression on his face, because she started to explain.

‘Obscurantism is like oppressing knowledge. They want to keep things from the world that should never be kept. Well we should get some sleep, so that we are ready for tomorrow’s flight,’ Ice said.

‘How do I know you’re not going to do something to me when I’m asleep or something?’

‘You just have to trust me. Come on,’ she said and went through another door on the right of the room. Jack paced around the room, wondering what to do. He personally had no idea of what was really going on. Ice peeked through the door.

‘Are coming or are you going to stand around like a loser all night?’ she asked. He realized that he was in thought for a long time and went into the room as well. There was one double bed and a dresser with a mirror on top inside.

‘There’s only one bed,’ Jack noted. Ice smiled at him from the bed, where she was lying.

‘Oh, Jackie, you don’t have to be afraid, I won’t do anything funny with you.’

‘Well if you are okay with me sleeping in the same bed as you, I guess it is okay,’ Jack said. Ice patted the side of the bed next to her, indicating that he should lie down there. Jack complied and got in the bed.

‘Good night, Jackie, don’t let the bedbugs bite,’ Ice said and turned away from him. He stared at the roof for a while and was about to fall asleep when Ice suddenly turned back again.

‘I can’t fall asleep, I need someone touching me. Will you be my teddy bear?’ Ice asked.

‘I’ll be your teddy bear if you want.’ Ice grabbed him and held on to him tightly. She cuddled up close to him and fell asleep soon after. Jack followed her lead and fell asleep too.

A siren woke Jack up a few hours later. He got up and rubbed his eyes. Ice wasn’t next to him anymore. He could hear keys being pressed, and realized that she must have been busy on the computer.

‘What’s going on?’ he yelled, to be audible over the loud siren.

‘Come here, Jackie. We’re in trouble!’ Ice yelled back. Jack jumped out of the bed, suddenly full of energy, and rushed to the central room where Ice was. She was typing something at a high speed. On the left screen was a video feed, showing the outside of the building they were in. Three black cars were stopped in the road.

‘They found us! I can’t believe this is happening. I was so sure that they couldn’t find us.’ She looked really stressed.

‘Q22 failed. Motion detectors have been damaged,’ the computer voice said. A few moments later the camera feed died.

‘How could they know about the detectors? These guys are definitely not government!’

‘D443 breached. Elevator has been forcibly accessed,’ the computer voice said.

‘Cut the power to the elevator,’ Ice said intently. She looked over her shoulder at Jack. ‘Jack, I need you to go into my closet. Under my panties is a red button. Press it and bring me what you get.’

‘I don’t want to touch your underwear!’ Jack argued.

‘I don’t have time for this! Do it now, we don’t have much time!’ Jack complied and went into the closet. He got to the rack that had her underwear and he threw the panties off the rack, looking for the button. He finally found it all the way at the back, and pressed it. The racks started to move, and Jack stepped back, fearing the loss of a hand. The racks were retracted into the wall, which folded back. This revealed a metal hallway. Jack ran down it and came to a large square room. There were machine guns mounted against the right wall, and various other weapons around the room. In the middle of the room was a covered manhole. Jack ripped two guns off the wall and ran back to Ice.

‘Is this what you wanted?’ he asked her.

‘Yeah those will do. They are just for self-defence if the baddies get in.’

‘They have restored power to the elevator through a fuse mod,’ the computer blurted.

‘Shit. Stall them with all possible defence measures,’ Ice told the computer. ‘I’m going to hack into the substation that powers this area and shut it down. When the lights go off, we have to run to the manhole in that room you saw. Are you ready?’ she asked Jack.

‘I’m ready,’ he replied. She typed a few line of code and a schematic popped up. It looked like a map of the power lines in the area. She clicked on a large box on the bottom left of the schematic and a box with information came up.

‘Shit, I can’t shut it down from here. Wait! I can change the power load. Okay I am going to overload it, which will surely blow some fuses on the substation,’ she said. She typed some more code and pressed enter.

‘They have managed to get the elevator moving to this floor,’ the computer said. ‘It will be here in 10 seconds.’

‘Come on! Go out, power!’ Ice yelled. Almost immediately the lights in the building started to glow brighter and brighter, and somewhere and explosion sounded. All the lights went out and the familiar buzz of electricity that is ever-present in the world died away.

‘Okay, it’s out. We have to move,’ Ice said, running past Jack into her closet. He followed and caught up with her in the room with the manhole. She was wrestling with the manhole cover, but couldn’t get it open.

‘I’ll try to get it open. Cover me,’ Jack said and tossed her a gun. She rushed to the side of the doorway and peeked around it, watching the hall. Jack was struggling with the manhole, making it move slightly, but not much. A short and plump man appeared into the hall. Ice’s eyes opened wide when she saw him. She moved and stood full in the hallway, pointing the gun at the man.

‘Topiary!’ she yelled. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘I know what you did last summer,’ he said.

‘No! You can’t know! Nobody knows!’ she retaliated.

‘The Skeleton key,’ he said.

‘I deleted everything, removed every trace. Nobody could know about the skeleton key. I was sure that it was…’

‘Untraceable?’ he mockingly interrupted.

‘When did you find out?’ Ice was beginning to look panicked.

‘When a stranger called,’ he chuckled.

‘Who was it? Who sold me out?’ she asked.

‘Tron,’ he said simply.

‘That no good, idiot script kiddie!’ she yelled. She startled when there was a clang behind her.

‘It’s open,’ Jack announced.

‘You go tell Tron that I will hunt him down and get my revenge! You should look out too Topiary. Watch your back,’ she said. She aimed up and shot out at the roof of the hallway, making it crash down on the ground, blocking Topiary from them.

‘Thank goodness for crappy construction,’ she said, walking over to Jack.

‘What was that guy talking about?’ he asked. She shook her head.

‘It’s a very long story, I might tell you on the plane trip.’ Streams of sweat were running down her neck. ‘Come on then,’ she said and jumped into the open manhole. Jack reluctantly followed her. He landed on a padded floor.

‘Welcome to my emergency escape tunnel,’ she said proudly. ‘It’s a masterpiece, if I must say so myself. It runs three kilometres to the west and comes out near the airport. It has a bunker near the exit, where we can wait until it’s time for our flight.’

‘Are we going to walk all three kilometres?’ Jack asked, lazy to do so much walking.

‘Don’t be silly,’ she said, walking over to the back wall. She grabbed onto a chip in the wall and pulled backwards, opening a doorway and revealing two red Kawasaki Ninjas.

‘This is more like it,’ Jack said, a smile forming on his lips. He ran over to one of them, only to be stopped by Ice.

‘Not so fast! First, you’re going to listen to the rules. These are my babies. Firstly, you look after them like you would look after your first love. Secondly, you stay behind me at all times.’

‘Okay, Miss Bossy,’ Jacked mocked.

‘Watch it, smart guy. I’m not in the mood for your jokes. Another comment like that and I’ll smack you into yesterday,’ she threatened. Jack backed off, fearing for his life. This is the first time that she has reacted like this and in his opinion it seemed completely out of character.

‘Get on,’ she said, and got onto one herself. She sped away and Jack followed her. They drove in silence until they came up to the bunker.

‘Stop your bike in one of these coves,’ Ice said, motioning towards small rooms off of the main tunnel. Jack did as was asked. She remained silent and went through a small door. He followed her, keeping a distance between them. When he was in, she closed the door behind him and locked it. There were three beds in this room and some chairs. Ice took a chair and placed it at a corner of the room. She sat down and stared into the ceiling.

‘How much time do we have left until the flight?’ Jack asked her.

She glared at him. ‘I’ll tell you when we have to go. Just leave me alone and do whatever the heck you want,’ she said, clearly upset. Jack laid on one of the beds for what seemed like hours, Ice kept staring at the ceiling.

‘I’m sorry,’ he heard. He had fallen asleep and these words woke him up. ‘I was horrible to you back there.’ He sat up and saw that the words were coming from Ice. ‘You don’t deserve any of that. I took you from your life and your home, just to treat you like scum. You haven’t been anything but friendly to me. I’m really sorry.’ She had some tears in her eyes. She sat down next to Jack on the bed.

‘What happened back there? What did that guy say to upset you so much?’

‘He was part of the hacker collective that I worked in undercover when the government forced me to do their bidding. I had gotten into their system and sent their location data to the feds. Then I crashed their entire botnet and hacking system with a program called the skeleton key. I wiped everything, making sure that they could never trace me. But my friend, Tron, must have sold me out to them. These people are more dangerous than any of the other people after me.’

‘I’ll do whatever I can to help you,’ Jack said.

She was crying. ‘You’re so sweet. You don’t deserve any of this. I’ll make it up to you one day,’ she said. She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. This prompted him to blush. She was about to kiss him on the lips, when she caught a glimpse of his watch.

‘We don’t have any time left. Our plane leaves in fifteen minutes,’ she said, breaking the moment. She rushed over to a mailbox type thing in the wall and grabbed the passports from it. ‘They were delivered during the night.’ Jack got up to and unlocked the door.

‘The airport is just over the street from where the tunnel goes out. We should make it in time,’ Ice said.

They walked to the door at the end of the tunnel and Ice went through first. They came out in a hallway, the door looking perfectly normal from here. Ice closed the door and there was a click, the door probably locking. They exited the building, which turned out to be a motel. The door to the tunnel was in a hallway full of normal rooms. Nobody would ever suspect it to be anything else. They walked over the street and approached the rather small and unimpressive airport. They entered the lobby of the airport and showed their passports at the front counter.

‘Ah yes, here are your reservations on the plane, Mr Whisper. You will be flying first class to Egypt, am I correct?’ the clerk asked.

‘Yes, that is correct, thank you,’ Jack responded automatically.

‘Well then, enjoy your flight, Mr Adel. You too, Mrs Alicia,’ the clerk said. They went through the checkpoints and boarded the plane.

# Flight and Fight

‘*We are currently experiencing some rough turbulence. Please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts.’*  This was the voice of the captain coming over the intercom system. Jack was already seated, but Ice had gone to the bathroom. He strapped himself up and afterwards continued to listen to music through the plane’s built in MP3 player system. He had bought himself a memory card with some nice songs and a set of from the air hostess earlier.

Ice came out of the bathroom and started walking back to her seat. Suddenly the plane started shaking violently, throwing her onto a row of people. She got up and made her apologies, when suddenly the intercom came to life again.

‘*I am being held at gunpoint and the thugs are ordering me to steer off course. I am sorry for any inconvenience caused. They also requested I call a certain Mrs Whisper and her partner.’*

Ice and Jack exchanged confused glances and got up. Around them the other passengers were beginning to erupt in fear-induced chaos. A hostess appeared and escorted them to the cockpit. There were two thugs dressed in black with a gun each pointed at the pilot and co-pilot. Standing in the middle of them was a long woman with black hair. She wasn’t really pretty in the way Ice was, but she had sex appeal. She had an AK-47 in her hands and she smiled cockily as Ice and Jack entered.

‘I’ve been waiting a long time for a chance to come face to face with you, Ice Whisper. Today you stand here at my mercy,’ the woman said.

‘Who are you?’ Ice asked.

‘You don’t know me, but I most certainly know you. Every time I achieved something, you were one step ahead. You foiled my plans, even those that were slightly more brilliant than the rest. You always ruin my day, now I’m going to ruin yours!’

‘I seriously have no idea who you are! How do you know my full name?’ Ice asked.

‘Tron is such an easy person to seduce. After I let him have his way with me, he couldn’t stop answering my questions. And he lost all his loyalty to you the moment I showed him my body,’ she said and let out an evil cackle.

‘You bitch! You are the one that messed with Tron’s mind. I should have known he wouldn’t sell me out that easily. You had to give him your body like a cheap prostitute before he caved. You sicken me,’ Ice said, angrily.

‘Nobody calls me a prostitute! I did that only because I had to. It was the only way that I could finally get to you!’ she yelled. She was fuming. If you looked hard enough you would probably see steam coming from her nose. She ran at Ice and jumped on her, scratching her face with her long black nails. She pinned Ice to the ground, locking her arms to the ground and putting her full weight on her legs. Ice couldn’t move. Blood was running down Ice’s face due to the scratches. Jack summoned all his strength and tackled the woman, knocking her off Ice.

‘You idiots! Why didn’t you subdue this man? Why did you allow him to touch me?’ she asked as she got up off the floor. The questions were directed at her henchmen who were holding the pilots hostage.

‘You got lucky today, Whisper. Now you won’t die at my hands, you’ll die in an unfortunate plane crash. Tricky, give your gun to Gooney and go tie them to their chairs,’ she said. He did as asked and guided Jack and Ice to their seats. He strapped on their seatbelts and then promptly smashed the latch, making the belts unable to be loosened.

‘Good luck getting outta them their seatbelts,’ said Tricky. He was chewing bubble gum. He looked right in Ice’s face and blew a bubble gum bubble through his nose.

‘The boss going to be real happy with this when you dead,’ he said. He blew another bubble through his nose.

‘Could you please stop doing that?’ Ice asked.

‘Why?’

‘Because I find it utterly disgusting,’ she snapped at him.

‘Nobody calls me disgusting! I’m telling the boss!’ He ran into the cockpit and came dragging the woman with him.

‘She called me disgusting boss!’ he said as he pointed to Ice.

‘Why did you call this man disgusting?’ she asked.

‘Because he is. He blew bubble gum in my face, through his nose!’ Ice said.

‘That is disgusting, Tricky. I told you to tie them up, not be a complete barbarian,’ the woman said.

‘Hey! Nobody calls me that either! Hey Gooney, let’s ditch this joint!’ Gooney came running on.

‘What do you mean, Tricky?’ he asked.

‘The boss called me a barbarian. I am not going to work for her no more. Let’s go, I’ve got the parachutes,’ he said. They slipped on their parachutes and fastened them securely.

‘You can’t just jump from the plane, we are too high up,’ the woman said.

‘Not really, because the plane fell far enough for us to safely exit when we jacked it,’ Gooney said. They kicked open the door, prompting a rush of air out the door. Gas masks fell from the roof of the plane above every seat. ‘*The cabin has been decompressed. Please breathe through gas masks until recompression is complete.’* The two goons jumped out the door and a hostess ran up and slammed the door shut.

A bunch of the hostesses subdued the strange woman while her attention was with the goons. The cuffed her with cable ties and locked her in the bathroom.

‘Please remain calm, the situation has been completely resolved and we are back on course. The cabin has been recompressed to a safe level,’ an air hostess said. She then brought scissors and cut Ice and Jack loose from their seatbelts.

‘Are both of you okay?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ they replied simultaneously. The hostess nodded and went to the cockpit of the plane to inform the pilot of the happenings.

‘Who was that woman?’ Jack asked Ice.

‘I honestly have no idea,’ Ice said.

The rest of the flight was relatively peaceful, with the passengers beginning to recover from their hysteria. Jack was staring out of the window and Ice was getting some sleep. From time to time they could hear the woman that was locked in the toilet trying to get free, but her attempts resulted mostly in failure.

‘*We will be landing at an airport in London soon for refuelling. Sorry for the delay and please be patient,’* the voice of the pilot announced. Jack lightly nudged Ice in an attempt to wake her up. She came to and rubbed the sleep from her eyes.

‘Are we in Egypt already?’ she asked.

‘No, we are going to land in London for refuelling and probably so that they can deliver that quean to the authorities,’ Jack responded.

‘Quean, that’s quite a fitting description of her,’ Ice chuckled.

‘They’re probably going to want to talk to us, since she was here for you.’

‘That’s okay really. We just need to make sure we don’t blow our cover.’

‘Okay, we need to make it look like we really are married and that we are Mexican agents. Not hard at all,’ Jack teased.

‘I’m sure the first one won’t be a problem for me. It’s just the latter that we need to work hard to sell, although our fake documentation and entries on the Mexican government’s database should be enough.’

*‘We are beginning our descent,’* the pilot announced. *‘Please fasten your seatbelts and keep your calm. Thank you very much.’*

A hostess appeared and told Jack and Ice to follow her to some seats that had belts, seeing as theirs had been cut. They were led to the hostess room, where they were shown to some seats. They strapped themselves up and sat back patiently, awaiting the descent. The plane began to fall and the hostesses strapped themselves up in some more chairs that were in the room.

The plane finally touched down and slowed to a stop. A hostess told Jack and Ice to stay put, so that they could talk to a detective. After the plane had been cleared out, three police officers and a man in a brown coat boarded the plane.

‘She’s in there,’ a hostess told him, pointing to the bathroom door. He nodded to the officers, who unlocked the door. The woman jumped at the one nearest to the door, knocking him down. The other two officers grabbed her arms, which were still tied behind her back, and pulled her off. They put on some metal handcuffs and cut off the cable ties. She got loose and ran to where Jack and Ice were.

‘I will get you yet, Ice. And the last word you will say when you’re going down, will be my name!’ she snarled.

‘But I don’t even know your name,’ Ice said, calmly. The officers appeared behind her and grabbed her again. The third one knelt down and cuffed her legs too.

‘She’s a runner. Wouldn’t want her getting away,’ he said.

‘But thank you for the help so far,’ the woman said, smiling.

‘Take her to the car,’ the detective said. He walked over to Jack and offered a hand.

‘Greetings young man, I am detective Harry,’ he said. Jack accepted the hand and shook it well.

‘I’m Adel Whisper, detective. Thank you for taking that woman away,’ Jack said.

‘That’s quite the mechanic’s arm you have there, son,’ the detective replied. ‘And it was nothing short of a pleasure to relieve you of your little nuisance.’

‘This is my wife, Alicia Whisper,’ Jack said and motioned to Ice. She got up and offered her hand to the detective, which he politely accepted and kissed.

‘You flatter me, detective,’ she said, cheerily.

‘Mrs Alicia, why don’t you tell me what happened?’ asked the detective.

‘Well, when the pilot was being held hostage, that woman called me and Adel to the cockpit. When we got there, she attacked me and started clawing at my face, as you can see from the scratches and blood. My wonderful husband knocked her off me and this distracted her long enough for one of the hostesses to detain her. Her two henchmen took some parachutes from the emergency cabinet and jumped.’

‘Do you have any idea why this woman would attack you?’ he asked.

‘I’m not sure, but it may have something to do with my job. I can’t really disclose too much, but I work for the Mexican government and we recently got a lead on an infamous hacking collective. She might be part of that organization.’ The detective stared at her for a while in disbelief.

‘If you’re a government agent, I’m the queen of England,’ the detective said.

‘You can check me out if you want too,’ she said. He nodded at her and took out his phone. He dialled a number and put it to his ear.

‘This is detective Harry. Listen Wendy, I need you to check something for me. Can you confirm if a Mrs Alicia Whisper works for the Mexican government?’ he said into the phone. Jack could hear a voice on through the phone, but couldn’t make out what it was saying. The detective nodded.

‘Your story checks out,’ he said.

‘Well, your majesty, why would I lie to royalty?’ Ice taunted him.

‘I don’t find you very funny. You should have your face checked out, Mrs Whisper,’ he said, suddenly much more intent on helping.

‘I’m okay; she didn’t do that much damage. I’m just glad my hero saved me when he did,’ she said and kissed Jack on the cheek.

‘Well then, I won’t keep you two any longer. I’m going to clear the flight to go on to Egypt. And I wish you the best of luck with your assignment, Mrs Whisper. There is nothing that I hate as much as a hacker. We’ll arrange for our little prisoner to be handed over to your government as soon as possible.’

‘Don’t go to any trouble. She’s probably nothing more than a simple hit woman for these people. She isn’t important in any way to the organization, I can promise you that,’ Ice said.

‘I must say my goodbye’s then, got some justice to go deliver,’ the detective said and then left.

‘Are you sure she is nobody?’ Jack asked as soon as the detective was out of earshot.

‘No, but we don’t need these people poking around. We’ll find out eventually why she is after my blood.’

‘Well then, what are we going to do now?’ Jack asked.

‘We’re going to stay on the plane and finish our trip to Egypt. There we will meet up with my hacking partner Flame.’

‘Are you sure? What if those people got to him as well?’

‘Don’t always be so negative. I’m pretty sure they haven’t gotten to Flame.’

‘If you say so. I just don’t want you to get hurt.’

‘Why do you care so much suddenly?’

‘I might just be falling for you,’ Jack said. His cheeks turned red.

‘We don’t have time to be falling for each other right now. Maybe when were safe in Egypt, but for now, no way.’

The plane took off again a while later and their flight to Egypt was without any further problems. They got off the plane and were sitting in the airport. Ice was trying to contact Flame, while Jack was sitting back, watching her. He couldn’t stop staring at her.

‘Okay, so we’ll meet you there. I’m bringing a friend with me so don’t get a fright when I’m not alone,’ she said into the phone, and then hung up.

‘Is everything ready?’ Jack asked her.

‘Yes, we are going to meet up with him at the Sphinx hotel, from where he’ll take us to his base of operations. He’ll supply me with the necessary tech so that I can get on the net,’ she said.

‘Well then, let’s go. You lead the way,’ Jack said. He got up and they walked to the front entrance. There were only dirt roads, no gravel. Jack hailed a taxi and they both got in.

‘Take us to the Sphinx hotel, please,’ Jack instructed the driver as they got in. They drove through the dreary Egyptian town until they finally reached the hotel. It stood out like a sore thumb. Everything around it was so small, brown and dusty, but this hotel was majestic. It had metallic gold paint and stood at least fifteen floors tall. They got out of the taxi and Ice gave him a few banknotes, which he accepted eagerly. Ice went into the hotel first and Jack followed closely.

Its inside was just as amazing as it looked outside. The lobby had expensive-looking furniture and it was much cooler than outside. They both enjoyed the cool air the moment they entered.

‘He said we should just wait in the lobby and he’ll come to us. He’ll be looking for the blonde lady with the beautiful green eyes,’ she said.

‘They are quite beautiful, aren’t they? I could get lost in them,’ Jack said.

‘Would you stop flirting?’ she giggled.

‘No, we are married, after all,’ Jack reminded her.

‘Oh yeah, I almost forgot about that,’ she laughed.

The hotel’s door swung open and a teenager walked in. He was of medium length and had short, but unruly, brown hair. He was wearing a purple t-shirt and jeans. He came over to Jack and Ice.

‘Are you Ice?’ he asked.

‘Yes I am, who wants to know?’ she responded.

‘I’m Flame, the one and the only. Ice, may I just start by saying that you are extremely hot!’ he exclaimed.

‘You’re a teenager?’ Jack asked.

‘You don’t get many adult hackers in the world. But after all, you also don’t get many hot blonde hackers either. It’s a pleasure to meet you Ice. Who is the guy?’

‘That’s Jack. He’s a friend,’ Ice said.

‘Hay Jack, how are you?’

‘I’m fine thanks, but I would appreciate it if you don’t hit on my girl,’ Jack said.

‘Whoa! You two are together?’ Flame asked, seemingly shocked.

‘Yes, in a way,’ Ice said.

‘Well I might just try to steal her from you,’ Flame teased.

‘Please, you’re way too young for me,’ Ice notified him.

‘I’m sixteen, thank you very much. And I do have a thing for older woman,’ he said in a flirty tone.

‘Well I don’t have a thing for younger guys, so you can forget about it. By the way, you sounded much older when I spoke to you on the phone,’ Ice noted.

‘Advanced voice modulation,’ he stated. ‘Follow me, I have a car.’ They followed him outside. There was an old Ford standing near the road. Flame was about to get in on the driver’s side when Ice stopped him.

‘I don’t trust a sixteen year old to drive me around. I’ll drive, you direct,’ she said.

‘Fine,’ he stated and begrudgingly got in the passenger’s seat. Jack got in the back. They drove for about ten minutes, with Flame constantly giving directions, until he told them that they had arrived. They stopped at a warehouse that looked extremely bleak from the outside. Flame unlocked the door and showed them in. Inside it looked similar to Ice’s hacking hideouts, with a few computer towers and monitors set up. It seemed much less sophisticated than Ice’s system.

‘So this is my workspace, and these are my computing monster rigs,’ he said as he pointed to the computers. ‘They all have high speed internet connections, are untraceable and leave no cyber footprint. Just in case, they run through multiple proxy servers in America, Australia and South Africa. They are also set up so their IP addresses trace back to CIA computers. When someone gets that far, they usually stop, because nobody wants to mess with the CIA.’ Flame looked proud as he explained his setup.

‘Are you going to help me clear any footprint through which the government, Anonymous or Blue Circle can trace me?’ Ice asked.

‘Did you just say Blue Circle? Why did you have to go and piss off Blue Circle?’ Flame asked.

‘I was working for Creon, you know that. If Creon tells someone to do something, and you don’t, you get cancelled. I wasn’t planning on getting cancelled so I did what they asked,’ she said.

‘And what exactly did they ask you to do?’

‘I used the Skeleton Key. Rooted their entire system and then fried the internal network with the Key’s hyper kill procedure.’

‘You’re the one that brought down Zeta?’ he asked, shocked.

‘Yes, I thought that would cause them to shut down completely. That didn’t work out well I figure.’

‘The moment Zeta went down, the true leader of Blue Circle revealed herself to the world. Black Widow, she calls herself. Apparently she was Zeta’s girlfriend until he went to prison. She was pulling the strings the entire time. She is intent on killing the people that took Zeta from her. Apparently she has some type of master plan, but can only achieve it with Zeta.’

‘This answers a whole bunch of questions,’ Jack said. They both turned to face him, as if acknowledging his presence for the first time.

‘What do you mean?’ Ice asked.

‘That quean on the plane must have been Black Widow. She was the one that attacked us,’ he told them.

‘But then all our problems are solved. She was arrested back there,’ Ice said, letting out a sigh of relief. Jack thought about everything and suddenly realized something.

‘Shit!’ he exclaimed.

‘What’s wrong?’ Ice asked.

‘Remember when she thanked us for our help? Just as the police arrested her? I think it was all part of her plan. Didn’t you say that Zeta was put in prison?’ Jack asked Flame.

‘Yeah, he was. I think it was in London Super Secure,’ he said.

‘Oh no! She is going to get herself thrown in prison and then break the both of them out!’ Jack said.

‘No, that wouldn’t make any sense,’ Ice said calmly. ‘They don’t put men and woman in the same prison blocks, for obvious reasons. She wouldn’t even be able to contact him.’

‘She could sleep her way to him, you know she’s not above that,’ Jack told Ice.

‘With whom would she sleep to get herself to him?’

‘Imagine you’re a prison warden, guarding a few cells, when one of the convicts starts showing off her body. Soon enough he’s going to falter and then she would have him under her power. He would find some excuse to get her where she wanted to be,’ Jack said. Flame had wandered off to one of his computers.

‘Or she could just have hacked the prison’s network and release all the prisoners, causing a horribly big riot,’ Flame interrupted.

‘Could she even do that?’ Ice asked.

‘She already did,’ Flame said and opened up a news channel on one of the monitors.

*‘A mass riot was witnessed today at the London Super Secure prison. Sources say that an unknown female prisoner found her way through the prison’s network security and released all the prisoners from their cells. She then made a fake announcement over the intercom system that random prisoners would be executed in order to clear some of the prison population. This induced the mass riots, which the prison security is still trying to get under control. The prison is currently under lockdown and it is suspected that at least twenty prisoners escaped out of prison walls. If you see any of these people, please send a message to the anonymous tip line. Regard all these people as highly dangerous and violent. The city is under Red Alert code 4, we repeat, Red Alert code 4. Please stay indoors whenever possible and be very careful. This is Kelly Sunderland, RTD News.’*

The screen cut to a slideshow of criminal mug shots. An image of Black Widow came up near the end, followed by a picture of a young man in his twenties. This image was accompanied by the word ‘Warning’ in red text. A man appeared in front of the image and started talking

‘*This escapee in the last image is our most dangerous criminal. He is a hacker name Zeta, and he will go to any measure, even kill you, to get access to a computer. If he does make any demands toward you, we advise you to listen to him and give him what he wants, before you contact us. Be very careful around this man. He is most wanted.’*

‘That sounds like Zeta all right. This is really bad,’ Ice said. She paced up and down the room.

‘Well we can’t do very much about it right now,’ Jack said. ‘Just go on with whatever you wanted to do here.’

‘Yeah Ice, you should wipe your cyber footprint before Zeta starts searching,’ Flame said.

‘Okay, help me with it,’ Ice said to Flame.

‘No way am I helping you screw with Blue Circle. I don’t have a death wish. I’m going to watch Nyan Cat, so you knock yourself out.’ He disappeared into another room.

‘Crap, I just realized something,’ Jack said.

‘What’s wrong, Jackie?’ Ice asked.

‘I am supposed to go to work at the Juice Bar tomorrow and now I’m on an entirely different continent.’

‘It’s okay Jackie. We’ll just do a cough and call,’ Ice assured him.

‘Okay, but let’s do it tomorrow. Can I help you with anything in the meantime?’

‘Nope, I’m just going to go about with my hacking. I’ll tell you when I’m done.’

‘Okay, I’ll just go check out what Flame is doing,’ Jack said. He went through the same door that Flame used earlier. Inside this room was another computer with a large monitor. It was showing a cat with a rainbow behind it flying in space.

‘What are you doing, Flame?’

‘I’m watching Nyan Cat, non-stop,’ he said. ‘I’m going to see if I can beat my previous record of 6 hours. I want to make eleven hours while remaining sober.’

‘Why would you want to that?’ Jack asked.

‘Because some guy on an internet forum dared me to, okay?’

‘So, is hacking fun?’ Jack asked.

‘No, it’s freaking dangerous stuff!’

‘Then why would you do it?’

‘Because it’s also freaking addictive stuff, now would you please leave me alone? I really need to beat this dare,’ he said. Jack acknowledged his request and left the room, back to where Ice was. She was typing feverishly and seemed to be breaking a sweat. It didn’t look as if she would finish up any time soon. After having watched her for some time, she turned around.

‘Do you find my hacking entertaining, Jackie?’ she asked.

‘No, I just don’t have anything better to do,’ he responded.

‘Well, I’m still going to be a while, so why don’t you go get some sleep or something?’

‘Yeah, I think I’ll do that.’ He walked back to Flame’s room with the intention of asking him where he could sleep. When he got into the room, he saw that Flame was still intently watching the Nyan cat thing.

‘How long have you been watching so far?’ Jack asked.

‘About an hour. What do you want?’

‘Do you have anywhere I can catch some shut-eye?’ Jack asked.

‘Yeah, you know, like the floor and stuff,’ he replied.

‘You’re going to make me sleep on the ground?’

‘Yes I am. I only have this one bed and I need it to sit and watch Nyan cat on. Now go away please.’ Jack left, afraid he might throttle the kid. He went to where Ice was sitting and got down on the floor next to her.

‘Night Ice, I’m going to go to sleep now,’ he told her.

‘Okay Jackie, have a good few. And do me a favour,’ she said.

‘Yeah, what favour?’

‘Dream about me,’ she flirted.

‘Sure, I promise I’ll try my best.’ He dozed off with the sound of Ice typing in the background. Somewhere through the night he woke up and felt something warm touching him. He realized that it was Ice that lay down behind him. She grabbed him tightly and they both fell asleep again.

Ice woke him that morning. She was carrying three brown bags with her when she did.

‘Wake up, sleepy-head,’ she said. ‘I brought you some food after I realized that we hadn’t eaten anything yesterday. I guess we just forgot about our hunger during all the excitement.’ He got up and took the bag she was holding out to him. Inside was Styrofoam takeaway box with an egg and some bacon in. It also contained a coke. He opened the coke and took a long hard sip.

‘Where’s Flame?’ he asked when he finished gulping down the coke.

‘He’s still at it with that cat stuff,’ Ice replied.

‘Is he absolutely crazy or something?’ Jack asked.

‘I heard that!’ Flame yelled from his room. Jack chewed up the bacon and egg as fast as he could and ran into the room.

‘How long have you been going?’ he asked.

‘Ten hours and fifty-nine minutes. I should be done right, about, now!’ he exclaimed. ‘Yes, I did it! In your face, random internet forum poster. If you would excuse me for just a few more minutes, I have to go brag on the forum,’ he said.

‘I’ll never understand you kids,’ Jack said. ‘The worst thing is, I was one two a year or so back.’ Flame just ignored him, so he went back to Ice.

‘Thanks for the breakfast, Ice. You know, I felt you last night,’ he said.

‘I was hoping you would.’ She smiled flirtatiously.

‘And also, I kept my promise and dreamt about you too. You look quite beautiful in dream-lighting.’

‘Flattery will get you nowhere, Jackie.’

‘Won’t it?’ he asked.

‘Nope, because you’re already wherever it could take you,’ she said, smiling at him.

‘Now I want you to prove that to me,’ Jack said.

‘If you really want me too, okay.’ She walked over to him and stared him in the eyes. She slowly leaned closer towards him and her lips were about to touch his, when Flame burst into the room.

‘No making out in my crib!’ he exclaimed. Jack got a fright from that and his head hit Ice’s. She took a step back.

‘Was that really necessary, Flame?’ she asked.

‘Why yes, yes it was,’ he chuckled.

‘Did you finish up with your project last night,’ he asked Ice.

‘Yes, every trace of me on the internet has been permanently wiped. Nobody can find me anymore.’

‘I hope you’re right about that. You never know what Blue Circle is capable of,’ he said ominously.

‘Who are these Blue Circle guys anyway?’ Jack asked.

‘They’re this small hacker team of five people, six if you count Black Widow,’ answered Ice. ‘They have influences everywhere. Topiary, the guy you saw in my base back in Mexico, is also the leader of Anonymous. Sabre, his brother, got trained by the CIA and then betrayed them. He still has a few friends on the inside though. Zeta and Black Widow are their leaders, it seems. The other two people I don’t know. They never actually revealed anything about themselves.’

‘Whoa, these guys sound like a really twisted organization,’ Jack said.

‘They are,’ said Flame. ‘On that topic, isn’t it time you left this place? You’re putting me at risk here.’

‘Can’t we just stay here a while more? I have no idea what to do next,’ Ice said. ‘I can’t just take Jack back, he would be arrested instantly!’

‘Are you sure that that’s the only reason?’ Flame said.

‘Stop messing around with us,’ Ice told Flame.

‘Oh yeah, I have some bad news for you, Ice. You know how you said that you didn’t know who the other two Blue Circle hackers are? I’m Marker, nice to meet you,’ Flame said. ‘I’m afraid that you can’t stay here much longer, so I arranged for a friend to come pick you up.’ He took a two-way radio from his pocket. ‘You can come collect the package, they’re waiting for you.’ Five goons kicked the door open and rushed in, grabbing Jack and Ice. A sly looking man followed them inside.

‘What’s the meaning of this, Sabre?’ Ice asked when she saw the man.

‘We just want a new beginning,’ Sabre said.

‘I can’t believe you betrayed me, Flame!’ she exclaimed.

‘Do not blame him. He was just answering the call of duty,’ Sabre said. His phone rung and he answered it. ‘Yes, ma’am, I will do as you ask,’ he said into the phone.

‘Who was that?’ one of the goons asked.

‘It was the boss, she wants us to take Ice’s companion,’ he answered. ‘Take him to the truck and tie him up.’ They did as they were asked and left the warehouse, dragging a struggling Jack with them.

‘No! What are you going to do with him?’ Ice asked.

‘The boss said that you took her man away from her, so now she’s taking yours,’ Sabre answered.

‘No, please! Take me, just leave him alone!’ Ice yelled.

‘Sorry, an order is an order. I have got to go now,’ Sabre said and left the warehouse. A moment later Ice heard a car drive away, before she had a chance to go after them. She turned to Marker with a violent expression on her face.

‘I’m going to kill you, Flame!’ she yelled.

‘Please, call me Marker,’ he told her.

‘I’m going to make you wish you never met me, you little punk!’ Ice was extremely angry. She rammed Marker with her shoulder and pinned him to the wall. He tried to get loose, but ultimately failed.

‘Wow, you get really strong when you’re angry,’ he noted, uncomfortably.

‘I also get really violent,’ she said and punched his left cheek. As she made contact, a tooth flew out of his mouth. She lifted her knee at a high speed, which caused a crunching sound. She stepped back and let go of him, and he sagged into a pile on the ground, whimpering.

‘And that’s what happens when you mess with Ice Whisper,’ she said and left the room.

## Jack and the Widow

Jack woke up after his head bumped against something. It was completely dark around him and he couldn’t move. He was also struggling to breathe. He realized that he must have been in the trunk of a car, tied up with rope. The car hit a pothole, causing him to bump his head against the top of the trunk. This made the trunk open a bit, letting in light and fresh air. He stared out the small crack and saw that they were on dirt road. Finally the car stopped, and from what he could see, they were at gas station. He knocked the top of the trunk with his head again, squirming to get out, but succeeded only in making a racket.

‘He’s awake boss and it looks like he’s trying to get out!’ somebody yelled.

‘Well just knock him out again and lock the trunk!’ another voice said. Jack recognized it as Sabre’s voice, although he had only heard it for a short while before.

‘I’m on it, boss,’ the first voice answered. He opened the trunk and pulled Jack into an upright position.

‘You’re a naughty, naughty boy. Time to go back to sleep,’ he said pressed a cloth to Jack’s face. Jack began to drift away again, struggling to focus his thoughts, and eventually everything went dark again.

He woke up again much later in a plain white room. There was nothing inside but the metal bed he was on, it’s white sheets and a heavy metal door. He got up and tried to open the door, but it was locked.

‘He’s awake, ma’am,’ a voice sounded on the other side of the door. After a few minutes passed, he heard the door being unbolted. The Black Widow lady stepped inside in a black tight-fitting full-body suit. Jack guessed it was made to show off her features, which it clearly did. ‘Don’t come in here, not even if I scream, I will be screaming from ecstasy,’ she said as she closed and locked the door behind her, leaving the key in it.

‘What do you want with me?’ Jack asked.

‘You’re going to be my little slave and do everything to fulfil my desires,’ she said seductively.

‘And why would I want to do that?’ Jack asked.

‘It’ll be much more fun than anything you could get from that weak excuse of a woman Ice. And I guarantee that you won’t be able to resist what’s on the menu,’ she said and pulled the zipper of her suit down to her breasts, so Jack could see her cleavage. ‘It will be a lot of fun for you as well,’ she chuckled.

Jack gulped. ‘Okay, come closer to me,’ he said. She did as he asked and stood within reach of Jack. ‘What’s your name?’ he asked her.

‘Why did you ask that?’ she demanded.

‘I’m not going to touch anybody that I don’t even have a name for,’ Jack said.

‘My name is Black Widow, but you already know that,’ she said, confused.

‘No, I don’t want your internet handle; I want to know what your real name is.’ She stared at him as she thought it through.

‘Since you aren’t going anywhere but here, I guess it would be okay to tell you,’ she said. ‘I am Fay Lagos. Now that you know my name, you don’t have any excuse,’ she said. She grinned at him and pulled the zipper down to her belly, revealing her breasts completely to Jack. Jack gave her a big smile and motioned towards the bed. She ran over to it and sat down. Jack moved closer to her and in a flash movement grabbed the sheet from under her and pinned her to the bed.

‘Ooh, you’re a feisty one!’ she exclaimed. He nodded, but suddenly grabbed both her hands and tied them up tightly using the sheet. He dragged her arms down and tied them to the leg of the bed.

‘What are you doing, Jack?’ she asked.

‘I’m escaping from this place,’ he said.

‘You will never make it out of this room! Guards, come in here!’ she yelled. There was no response. ‘Aaah! Let me go!’ she screamed. There was still no response.

‘Here’s a tip for next time, Fay. Be very careful what you tell your guards. And be very careful where you leave your keys,’ Jack laughed. He walked over to the door and unlocked it. He walked out to see that the two guards were sitting at a table, playing cards. He closed and locked the door behind him.

‘Hey, bozo, where do you think you’re going?’ one of the guards asked.

‘It’s okay, Miss Widow said I should ask you where the bathroom is, because I need to go take a whizz,’ Jack answered.

‘Why did you lock the door then?’ the other guard asked.

‘She’s naked and waiting for me to come back, so she told me to lock the door and take the key, because she’s afraid that you guys are going to go in there and take advantage of her,’ Jack said, hoping they would buy it.

‘That does seem reasonable,’ the first guard said and chuckled.

‘One more thing, she might yell and scream, but that’s just because she is frustrated by waiting for me, if you know what I mean. So just don’t pay any attention to her,’ Jack said, winking at the guard.

The guards both nodded at Jack. ‘The loo is over that way,’ the second guard noted, pointing down a hallway. He went down the hall that he guard pointed out, trying to figure out what he should do next.

Ice was trying to hack into the Blue Circle network when her phone rung. She went into a total ring rage, as she always does when her phone rings while she is hacking. She angrily pressed the phone to her ear.

‘What do you want?’ she said impatiently.

‘What’s your email address, Ice?’ the person on the other side said leading Ice to figure out that it was a male voice speaking to her.

‘Who wants to know?’ she asked.

‘Don’t you know my voice yet? It’s Jack,’ he said.

‘Where are you? I thought they had you locked up in a cell or something!’ Ice exclaimed.

‘They did, but Miss Widow thought she could take a chance with her prisoner, so he took a chance with her,’ Jack said.

‘Where are you now?’ Ice asked.

‘Somewhere in the air vents in their lair, or whatever it’s called. I lifted this cell phone from one of the guards in the bathroom. Let me be the first to say that the muscle in this place isn’t very intelligent.’

‘Do you have any escape plans or something of that sort?’ Ice asked.

‘That’s where you come in. I was hoping you could hack into a blueprint of the place and walk me through to a door.’

‘I was trying to get into their network anyway before you called. I’ll call you when I have something,’ she said.

‘Okay, so I have to go now, I’m afraid they might trace me or something,’ Jack said and hung up. Ice put the phone down on the desk and started hacking. Behind her was a constant, but muffled, nagging and whimpering sound, Marker trying to make her let him out of the closet she locked him in.

‘Please just let me out of here, I promise I’ll be good,’ he moaned. She took off one of her shoes and threw it at the closet, making a loud thump and Marker quiet down. She proceeded to try and hack into Blue Circle, but all her attempts failed.

‘Hey script kiddie, what’s your password for getting into Blue Circle?’ she asked, facing the closet.

‘I’ll never tell you anything if you don’t let me out!’ Marker yelled.

‘I’m not going to do that, now am I?’ Ice responded.

‘What if I need to use the bathroom or something?’ he asked.

‘That’s really not my problem,’ she responded, laughing. After some thought, Ice created a new plan. ‘I have an unbeatable deal for you, script kiddie,’ she said.

‘What is it? Are you going to let me out?’ he said, his voice livening up slightly.

‘If you tell me your password, I’ll bring you some food. If you don’t, I open up the closet so that you can get to know my knee a little better again.’

‘Okay, I’ll tell you my password,’ Marker said, his voice suddenly trembling with fear. ‘It’s supergenius321, no caps, no spaces. Now bring me some food,’ he said. She tested it by trying to get onto the server with it, and it succeeded.

‘You’re in luck, it worked,’ she said, with a slight chuckle. She got up and retrieved the brown bag of food she had bought earlier. She went over to the closet and clutched the bag between her knees. She quickly unlocked the door and in a flash of the eye, she had opened the door and pressed Marker’s neck against the back of the closet, in a throttle-grip. He scrambled wildly and without success to get loose. She placed the bag next to him.

‘Are you going to be a good boy and eat the food, keeping quiet?’ she asked him.

‘Yes, I promise! Just let go so that I can breathe!’ he pleaded, running out of air. Ice nodded and let go, closing and locking the door as fast as she had opened it. She heard loud munching behind the door and walked back over to the desk, pleased. She started typing, hacking further into the network than Marker’s access had allowed her. It was much easier now, as she had already gotten past the major firewalls with Marker’s password. She got to an image database and started searching through it for any kind of blueprint or map. She finally found a blueprint with the name ‘Lair Layout’ and accepted it to be what she was looking for. After some more hacking she found a way to get into their internal signal tracking system, which she then rendered unavailable to any computer that was not hers. She synchronised the layout blueprint with the signal tracking system and then she dialled the number that Jack had used earlier. She carefully watched the map on her computer screen as the phone rang.

‘Hello? Is that you Ice?’ Jack answered. A yellow dot popped up in an area which the blueprint identified as an air duct.

‘Yeah, it’s me. Are you still okay?’ she responded.

‘I’m fine. I’ve been crawling around the air ducts and I found a place that seems like a meeting room. The guards are having what they called a plebiscite,’ Jack said.

‘That’s like a vote or something, right?’ Ice asked.

‘Yeah, they’re debating whether they should break down the cell door that I locked Fay in.’

‘Who’s Fay?’ Ice asked, confused.

‘It’s Black Widow’s real name, Fay Largos,’ he said.

‘Largos? Why does that sound so familiar?’

‘I wouldn’t know. This is so hilarious! I locked her in there and spun them a story, now they can’t decide if it’s true or not.’

‘Do you want me to walk you through to an exit?’ Ice asked.

‘Wait! Zeta just stormed into the room and he looks extremely angry!’ Jack exclaimed.

‘Can you put the phone on the air duct so I can listen in?’ Ice asked.

‘Sure,’ Jack said and did as was asked.

‘Where the hell is Widow?’ Zeta asked the guards.

‘She’s in a cell, sir,’ one of the guards answered, wearily.

‘And why is she in a cell?’ Zeta asked, getting all the more frustrated.

‘Well, you see sir, she was holding that Jack guy, and she went in there to, you know, have fun or whatever, and then he came out and went to the bathroom. He told us that we can’t go in there because Miss Widow is naked and she doesn’t want us to see her like that,’ the guard said, sure of himself. Zeta shook his head.

‘And where is this Jack now?’ he asked.

‘We don’t know, sir, maybe he’s still in the bathroom,’ another guard said.

‘How long has it been?’ Zeta asked.

‘I don’t know, but probably like two hours, sir,’ the first guard said. Zeta pounded on the table.

‘You’re all idiots!’ he yelled. ‘Go to the cell now and break her out!’

‘We can’t, sir, Jack has the key and it was you after all that suggested military-grade steel doors, sir.’

‘Well then, find Jack and get the key. If you don’t get her out now, I’m going to do things much worse than just firing you. And the rest of you, go guard all the exits, I don’t want this guy getting out,’ Zeta threatened. This prompted the two culprit guards to rush out of the room, with the rest following closely behind.

Jack picked up the cell phone again to continue his conversation with Ice.

‘He’s going to flush you out, you know,’ Ice said.

‘Yeah, so I think you should get me out, Jack said.

‘Okay, but we’re going to have to get creative. There are probably guards at all the possible exits right now. There is a smallish, unmarked room on this blueprint, it might be some kind of elevator shaft or maintenance bay, so I’m going to direct you in that direction,’ she said.

‘That works for me. If it turns out to be a dead end, we can always find some other way out,’ Jack noted.

‘Okay, so according to this map, you’re going to need to go forward from where you are now. You will see the shaft splitting into another one; you want to go in that direction. Tell me when you get to a part with a big fan on one side.’

Jack did as told and crawled through narrow air ducts, going forward and then turning into the shaft that Ice noted. He finally got to the big fan and pressed the phone to his ear again.

‘Okay, I’m here,’ he told Ice.

‘You want to go in the direction opposite to the fan. Just crawl on in that shaft and you should reach a vent through which you can enter into that room.’

Jack followed her instructions and after a few minutes came to the vent. Looking through the grating he saw nothing but walls, and was relieved to confirm that there is a floor for him to stand on. He pressed on the vent until it gave way and he climbed through. It was just a plain room in a hexagonal shape. It didn’t have a door or any windows and there was nothing inside of it but the vent and a little square block in the floor that stood out from the rest. He lifted up his phone to speak.

‘It looks like we’ve struck a real dead end this time. There’s nothing in this place,’ he said. He walked a little forward, looking around the room.

‘Are you serious?’ Ice asked.

‘Yeah, it doesn’t have a door or anything. It only has the vent that we came through and a little black square in the middle of the floor. This place is really weird,’ Jack said.

‘Well, I guess we have to figure out a new route,’ Ice said. Jack walked back towards the vent and stepped on the square. It sunk a little into the floor and he heard a faint buzzing noise. He quickly stepped off of it.

‘Just hold on a second, Ice,’ he said. ‘Something’s not right here.’ He stepped onto the pad again with his full wait and it sunk a few centimetres into the ground again. Suddenly, blue light started moving from the pad over the floor and to the doors in a way that made it seem like circuitry. The buzzing noise grew louder and the blue lights moved in lines up the wall. The walls, which were grey a few moments ago, changed into a pitch black colour.

‘Ice, what’s going on here?’ Jack said into the phone.

‘I don’t know, I’m not there. You tell me,’ she said. The lines of blue light met each other at the centre point of the ceiling and the buzzing noise grew to deafening levels. A laser like light erupted from the point where the lines met and shot onto Jack. Everything around him started getting fuzzy and Jack began drifting into a kef. It got harder and harder for him to keep a thought. The phone slipped out of his hand and dropped on the floor, bouncing once. Ice voice came over the phone as she yelled; trying to figure out what was going on. There was a brilliant blue flash of light that filled the entire room and then faded away as fast as it had come. The room was empty again, Jack was gone and his phone as well.

## The Hacker-verse

Jack opened his eyes to a shimmering blue floor when he finally awoke from his trance. Shimmering strips were speeding by him, but he couldn’t make out what they were. He got up and looked around him. The walls were also as blue and shimmering as the floor. This was a square room, so he was sure that it wasn’t the same as the one he had been in a few minutes ago. The floor was arranged in panels, and was shimmering with a crystal-like brilliance. There was a door on one side of the room that seemed to be made from glass, but he couldn’t see through it, so Jack decided to go through it to try and figure out just where he was. The door was unlocked and swung right open. Jack got a big fright when he lifted his arm and saw that his phone was embedded on his left forearm. He tried to get it out, but it was stuck, almost like it was part of him. He pressed a button and suddenly a holographic image jumped up from the screen. The phone suddenly made dialling noises as Ice’s face appeared on the hologram.

‘Is that you, Ice?’ he asked.

‘Yes, it’s me. There must have been a signal interruption because you just disappeared off the grid for a few minutes. You’re still in that room from before, right?’ she asked.

‘I don’t think so, no,’ Jack said.

‘Where are you then?’

‘I have no idea,’ his response was.

‘Fine, I’ll run a trace on your number, because Blue Circle cut me off from their internal signal monitoring,’ Ice said. He heard a few keyboard presses in the background before she spoke again.

‘What’s going on here?’ she asked, sounding flabbergasted.

‘What do you mean?’

‘When I search for the source of your signal, it just gives me an IP address, like from somewhere on the internet. And if I’m not mistaken, it’s coming from a military domain.’ Jack moved on, while listening to Ice, and walked through the doorway. He came out to a giant room with various colour schemes of reds, blues, silvers and gold. He was at the top of a blue staircase, which led to a lower floor where there seemed to be some activity. Two more shimmering strips blazed past him, but he could still not make them out. He descended the staircase and looked around. There were many more of those shimmering strips, flying overhead in all directions. There were also robot-like beings flying around.

‘I have no idea where I am at this moment,’ he told Ice.

‘What’s going on over there?’ she asked Jack. He told her everything that he was seeing.

‘Project Neo!’ she exclaimed. ‘But that can’t be possible! It was never even finished.’

‘What the heck is a Project Neo?’ Jack asked.

‘Do you really want to know where you are?’ she asked him

‘Yes, please, and while you’re at it, tell me what this project Neo thing is,’ he said.

‘This might sound slightly crazy, but you’re on the internet,’ she said, as if it was something normal.

‘What do you mean I’m on the internet?’ he persisted.

‘You were digitised into the internet. You’re probably in some computer in a secret military base.’

‘That’s unreal! Is it even possible?’ Jack asked.

‘Yes, I was there while they were working on it. But I was sure that I put a stop to it! That’s why I was on the run the day you met me,’ she said. ‘Nobody knows where they got the technology from, maybe just the boss knows,’ she said.

‘Who is the boss? The president?’ he asked.

‘The president?’ Ice chuckled. ‘He doesn’t have clearance nearly that high.’ Just as she finished her sentence, one of the robot-like life forms came up to Jack. He was blue and looked like a policeman.

‘Please state your password,’ it said in a computerized voice.

‘I don’t know what password you’re talking about,’ Jack answered.

‘Incorrect. Security breach! Security breach!’ the robot yelled and suddenly the entire room turned from blue to red in an instant. A door opened to the left of Jack and hundreds of medium sized yellow robots started pouring out of it.

‘Terminate the security threat,’ the blue robot said.

‘No, please don’t terminate me,’ Jack said, but the robots didn’t stop their approach to him, so he made the intelligent choice and started running in the opposite direction. He managed to keep a sizable distance between himself and the robots, but then he hit a wall. It was an invisible wall, reminiscent of a force field.

‘Help me, Ice, there is some kind of wall here and I think the computer’s anti-virus bots are after me.’ he said into the phone on his arm as he fearfully watched the robots getting closer and closer.

‘I think you just hit the pillow partition. I’m going to try and hack you out,’ Ice said.

‘Please hurry,’ he whispered. They were very close to him now, and their arms, which were just long sticks, started to transform into blades. The first one was about to strike him, when suddenly an extremely large amount of glimmering strips started streaming in from beyond the wall. As they entered through the wall, they struck the anti-virus bots and raced on, making everything else in the room slower. The strips just kept coming, until all the bots were struck down, and then they all hit the back wall of the room together, after which the floor started to crumble away. The far wall had completely disappeared, leaving a black abyss beyond it, with the floor crumbling away to reveal the same.

‘What did you do? Get me out of here now, Ice,’ Jack yelled into the phone.

‘Don’t worry; I’ll have you out in a few seconds. Hmm, access root, run exploit 7 and…download,’ she mumbled to herself, probably saying the things she was doing. Suddenly Jack’s feet began to turn into a blue frame, and then it spread to the rest of him. He started to disintegrate into a shimmering strip, which then sped through the wall and into the beyond. Jack could still see what was happening while he was in strip form and looked on in awe as he sped through various different locations, each with images, text and videos. He realized that they must be websites. He reached a giant blue orb which he flew right into, and it blasted him at lightning speed across the internet and into a smaller blue orb, wherein he spun around and around. He finally emerged from it into a blue room, not unlike the previous one he had been in. The strip that was Jack spun around in a circle, giving off bits of itself to the centre of the circle, where the bits started to reconstruct themselves back into Jack. Finally the strip was completely gone, leaving a full Jack standing in the middle of a large, empty blue room.

‘What just happened?’ he asked into the phone.

‘I just downloaded you over the internet,’ Ice’s response came.

‘What did you do that place I was in earlier?’ he asked her.

‘I did a DDOS on it, and then the server started to crash,’ Ice said.

‘And where exactly am I now,’ he asked.

‘You’re on my computer’s hard drive,’ she said.

‘Why is it so empty? The other one was a beehive of activity,’ Jack noted.

‘I had to empty the hard drive so you could fit,’ she said.

‘One more, big question,’ Jack said. ‘Can you get me out of this thing?’

‘I have no idea how,’ she responded. ‘Perhaps if we went back to the place where you were digitised, we could figure something out,’ Ice said.

‘No! That’s too dangerous!’ Jack exclaimed.

‘If we work together, we can take them down, go there when it’s safe and get you back to the real world. And just maybe, somewhere in between we can figure out just what the heck is going on,’ Ice said.

‘What am I supposed to do to help?’ Jack asked.

‘I’m going to teach you to navigate the web, and then you’re going to break into Blue Circle’s system and mess it up in all kinds of ways,’ she said.

‘And how could you teach me, you have no way of knowing how it looks in here,’ Jack said.

‘Give me a day or so and I’ll be there to help you. Until then, I’m going to plug in a flash drive with games on it so that you can keep yourself busy. Bye,’ she said. A few seconds later, a door rose up from the floor. It was just a door in the middle of a room, with nothing behind it that it could go to. But Jack played along and opened the door, which to his surprise led to another room, one which contained about five lines of file cabinets. Jack walked down one after the other, trying to figure out what was going on. He opened a cabinet drawer at random, and it was revealed to have a bunch of files in it. He took out a random file near the middle of the drawer and opened it. It had a black cube inside, which was strange, because the file seemed perfectly flat. There was a red button on the cube, which he pressed. The cube unfolded into one of those shimmering strips and it started to surround Jack. It lifted him up and carried him through a series of circular doorways and finally to blue room with a bunch of cables inside. The cables unplugged themselves and moved around to various other ports. The strip unwrapped itself from around Jack and flew straight into an unplugged cable. The cable plugged itself into a port that seemed to stand out from the rest and then the room suddenly flashed with blinding white light. This caused Jack to close his eyes, and when he opened them again he was on a chair, in a dark room with a screen to the one side. There was an icon on the screen which Jack recognized as the icon the computer showed when loading. It disappeared a moment later and the Pac Man logo popped up.

‘What do you know about project Neo?’ Ice asked Marker, whom she still kept locked in the closet.

‘What is Project Neo?’ he asked.

‘Don’t act so innocent! I know that Blue Circle has something to do with Project Neo. That means you’re working for the government,’ Ice told him.

‘No! Blue Circle would never work for any government!’ he yelled.

‘I beg to differ. Now you either tell me what’s going on with Neo, or I’m going to let you meet my knee again,’ she threatened.

‘I really don’t know anything. Please don’t come in,’ he pleaded. She left the room, knowing she wouldn’t get any info from him even if he did know, and sat down, starting to code. She created a 3D avatar of herself in a quick-rendering program and started to program its functions. She made it in a way that it uses the Neo program algorithms, which would make it possible for her to emulate actually being on the internet through Neo. She knew these algorithms because she had actually worked on it for a while, before she found out what it was going to be used for. She finished up the code in record time and injected it into her computer through a Neo emulator.

Jack was enjoying his game of Pac Man when Ice pulled him out of the CPU.

‘How did you get into the computer?’ Jack asked Ice.

‘It’s not actually me, it’s just an avatar of me,’ she said.

‘And you made that like in one hour?’ Jack asked.

‘I only really had to do the coding. I already had a 3D model of myself, for reasons that I’m not willing to share through this thing, so I just needed to re-render it. Come on, I’m going to teach you how to work the Neo system,’ Ice said.

‘Okay, let’s do this. I just want to get out of this cyberspace or whatever.’

‘Follow me,’ she demanded and started walking in the direction of a wall. ‘Let me teach you the basic in-computer commands first. If you’re on a hard drive like now, you need only say these commands to navigate the computer.’ She faced the wall of the room. ‘Load root directory,’ she said and a black window appeared on the part of the wall she was facing. ‘Open all ports,’ she said. The window closed again, but various circular doorways opened in a line on the wall. Ice turned back towards Jack. ‘What happens when I do this is the computer opens ways for me to access basically all its parts, be it hardware or software,’ Ice said and Jack just nodded. Ice went into the third door from the right and motioned for Jack to follow her. He entered the door after her, and on the other side saw a platform, with a giant stream of strips flowing from under it, downwards in a slide form.

‘I still wanted to ask, what are those strips?’ Jack inquired.

‘They are flowing pieces of data. This is the internet connection, so there’s a huge stream of data moving in and out,’ Ice answered.

‘What are we going to do here?’ Jack asked.

‘Were going surfing,’ she said. She knocked on a wall to the one side of her, and two silver surfboards came through it. She tossed one at Jack.

‘Come on, just follow me. This is going to be a rough ride,’ she said. She jumped off the platform, manoeuvring the board so that it was under her, and started gliding down the data-slide. Jack followed her and soon caught up with her.

‘This isn’t so bad,’ Jack said.

‘This is the mild part still in my own computer, just wait until we’re out,’ she responded. They continued sliding down and then a huge circular doorway came into their view. When they passed through it, the stream they were on split in multiple directions and began making waves and getting generally unruly. There was also a lot of noise, like real waves would make. Ice motioned for Jack to follow her and he tried his best to keep on track behind her. A huge wave suddenly erupted right in front of them and threw them from their boards in violent fashion before they could do anything. Jack managed to grab back onto his board, but Ice fell into the stream and started disintegrating into it. Jack turned his board around and sped towards her, grabbing her arm when he passed by. He tugged at her arm and sped forward with his board, eventually succeeding in pulling her out of the stream. There were giant chunks missing of her bottom half that was caught in the stream, the gaps being filled with a blue wireframe.

‘Are you okay?’ Jack asked.

‘Yeah I can just restore the missing parts. Thank goodness you didn’t fall into the stream, because then those parts of you would be lost forever,’ Ice said.

‘Well then, that sounds really scary. Where can we get off this thing?’ Jack asked.

‘Just fly towards a website, they are through those rings made of data-stream,’ Ice said. Jack directed the board into the nearest one and landed it when he saw solid ground. They got off the board and Ice fell down.

‘Just hold on for a few seconds, let me restore the avatar,’ Ice said. The avatar of Ice went lifeless and disintegrated until only a human-shaped wireframe was left. Then a data-stream flew in and started rebuilding Ice.

‘That’s better,’ Ice said when it was done and got up again.

‘Are there any safer ways to get to Blue Circle’s network?’ Jack asked.

‘You’re crazy, you know that right? We can never get into their network like this. I was just teaching you the bare essentials for navigating this place.’

‘Then how do you propose we ever get into Blue Circle?’

‘I gave a little though to it, and I believe we might be able to get you in by way of external hard drive.’

‘If only we had someone on the inside that could go plug it in,’ Jack said. Ice smiled mischievously.

‘We do have someone to go do that. I just need to get him out of the closet and turn him to our side,’ she said.

‘I’m not even going to ask,’ Jack said.

‘Don’t even bother, you’d only be wasting your own time,’ she chuckled. She pressed a button and they were zipped back to Ice’s hard drive. ‘Well you just keep yourself busy, I’m going to sort out the necessities. You’re going to fall asleep when you are on the hard drive. When you are uploaded onto the system, you will find a readme and some programs in the same file as you. Run them in the order the readme says as soon as you wake up,’ she said, and her avatar disappeared.

Ice got up from her computer and went over to the closet. Marker was snoring inside, probably asleep. She opened the door and pulled him out, waking him in the process.

‘What do you want now?’ Marker asked her, half asleep.

‘I am going to load something onto a hard drive for you and I want you to go plug it into a Blue Circle computer.’

‘What makes you think they’re going to let me into the base, after I’ve been in your captivity for so long?’

‘Tell them that you placed a tracer on me and you have the code to access it on the hard drive. I’m pretty sure they’ll do the rest.’

‘This isn’t going to work, I can promise you that. What makes you think that you can trust me?’

‘Because otherwise I’m going to nuke Nyan Cat with the Riptide exploit. You don’t want that, do you?’

‘You couldn’t do that! Riptide has never been successfully exploited!’ Marker exclaimed.

‘That’s what you think,’ Ice said.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter! I don’t like it that much anyway,’ Marker said, playing hard-ball.

‘What if I promise to make it worth your while?’ Ice said seductively.

‘Since you put it that way, when do you want it there?’ he folded.

‘As soon as possible,’ Ice said.

‘When do I get my reward,’ he asked nervously.

‘When the job is done,’ she said.

‘Can I get a little preview or something?’ he tried.

‘No, it’s not that easy. You only get anything if the job is done.’

‘Fine,’ he said. Ice smiled at him and walked over to the computer. She transferred Jack to an external hard drive and added a small program that would fool them to think it really was a tracer. She also added a few exploits that Jack could use to cause havoc on Blue Circle’s system. She handed the drive and a phone to Marker.

‘Call me as soon as you have delivered the drive,’ she said. Marker nodded and left the room.

‘Well then, this ought to be interesting,’ Ice said to herself.

## Blue Circle of Death

‘And you’re sure that the tracer is on her and active?’ Zeta asked Marker. They were sitting in a conference room in the Blue Circle base along with Fay. Zeta was inspecting the hard drive from all angles.

‘Yes, she was assaulting me in unnameable ways when I stuck the chip to her back. After a while she just left, so I decided to come here before she returned,’ Marker answered the question.

‘It won’t hurt to try. Our antivirus will detect anything suspicious anyway,’ Fay said. Zeta nodded and plugged the drive into the nearest computer. Jack was immediately loaded into the system and he began doing the things as Ice had specified in the readme.

First he activated the antivirus cover, so Blue Circle’s antivirus couldn’t get to him. Next thing, he activated a system to shut down all the external defences and firewalls. He ran off to the network port and jumped in, blasting him into their central network. From there he started the trace to find the system to get him back into the real world. The trace struck gold within minutes, but suddenly the phone on his arm rung. Ice’s face came up when he answered.

‘You have to break their system before going out. If their entire network is in turmoil, we could get you out of there much more easily,’ Ice said.

‘Okay, but what am I supposed to do?’ he asked.

‘Look inside the folder you came in. There should be a zipped folder locked with a password. The code to open it with is DeathStalker5. Find the exit port, open the folder and get out of the system as fast as you possibly can!’ she said.

‘What the hell is in that file?’ Jack asked, sounding afraid.

‘It’s just a bunch of viruses that could wipe out entire military networks. They shouldn’t have any problem bringing Blue Circle to the ground.’

‘Won’t they like attack me as well?’ Jack asked.

‘Not if you get out as soon as you can. They are going to attack the OS of the central server first, and bring the entire thing down from there.’

‘If I get killed, I blame you,’ Jack told Ice.

‘That’s fine by me, but I know that you won’t get killed. Just make sure you get out in time,’ Ice said.

‘Well then, it seems I have networks to go wreck,’ Jack chuckled. He pressed the red button on the phone in his arm, signing off from the conversation. He followed the network path towards the place that the trace indicated he could get out from. He arrived in a big square room, but this one was black with red circuitry and not blue and sparkly like all the previous computer world rooms he had been in before. There was a podium sticking out from the floor in the middle of the room, with a screen on it. Jack walked over and touched the screen, which responded by making a menu pop up. The biggest and most prominent button was red and had the words “DOWNLOAD AND BIND” on it. Jack guessed that that was probably the button to get him out, and proceeded to look for the zip file that Ice had told him about. He found it and tried to open it, which led to a giant black sphere appearing before him.

‘What is the password?’ it said in a mechanical voice.

‘DeathStalker5?’ Jack said, unsure.

‘Password accepted. Unzipping file and executing executable files,’ the voice said. The sphere lit up red and a bunch of red smaller red orbs started flying out of it. They blasted in all directions, some only barely missing Jack. The parts off the wall that the orbs struck disintegrated and soon enough the room was filled with holes like some twisted version of Swiss cheese. Jack rushed over to the screen on the podium, but just as he was about to press the button, one of the orbs struck the podium, disintegrating it in its whole. Jack thought fast and ran in a direction that seemed to have the least orbs. The entire room was starting to disappear around him and he jumped for the opportunity when he saw a portal popping up. He dived into, hoping to be taken to safety.

The portal led into a white room with seemingly nothing inside. It seemed safe so Jack decided to catch his breath and call Ice to ask for help. He pressed the call button on his phone and Ice’s face immediately came up.

‘What’s wrong, Jack?’ she asked at once.

‘I released the viruses, but they destroyed the terminal that was going to take me out of here. I went into a random portal and now I’m in an empty white room.’

‘I think you might be in some separate hard drive partition or something. All I don’t understand is why it is empty. What would the point be of an empty partition?’

‘I really don’t know. Do you have something that I can protect myself with if the viruses get here?’ Jack asked.

‘Not now! I’m trying to figure out why the place you are in is empty,’ she said.

‘I’m sorry, but I really think my safety is a little more important than why ever this room is empty,’ Jack responded.

‘Wait! It can’t be. Surely that couldn’t be possible,’ she said.

‘What are you talking about?’ Jack asked.

‘They couldn’t have that in their system. That’s top secret military property,’ she said, seemingly forgetting Jack’s presence.

‘What are you getting on about!?’ Jack yelled, but he still couldn’t get Ice’s attention.

‘Then again, they also had project Neo and they knew about the Skeleton key.’ She suddenly acknowledged Jack’s existence again. ‘What did you say Black Widow’s real name was?’ Ice asked him.

‘It is Fay Largos,’ Jack said.

‘I knew that name sounded familiar!’ Ice exclaimed. ‘Commander Largos was the person giving all the orders back when the government had me. I never saw her or heard her voice, but this makes sense now. She’s probably a rogue agent or something. That’s how Blue Circle got access to Project Neo and that’s how they know all about me. Fay is supplying them,’ Ice said.

‘I really don’t care about any of that at the moment! Just get me out of here before those things show up!’ Jack yelled.

‘Oh yeah, we still need to get you out,’ she said, sounding distracted.

‘Good to know I’m on your list of priorities,’ Jack said sarcastically.

‘I’m sorry; I just got a little distracted. You’re still on my list of priorities. In fact you are at the very top of it,’ she said.

‘Now where am I and how am I supposed to get out?’ Jack asked.

‘Well, you’re not going to be able to go back the way you came. We really rankled their system back there. It’s barely staying online.’

‘Well get me out before this thing crashes!’ Jack pleaded.

‘It’s not that easy,’ she said.

‘What do you mean?’ Jack asked, fear building up in his voice.

‘I believe you’re in a hyper core,’ she said dramatically.

‘Look I know a programmer or hacker would have probably shat in their pants if they heard that, but I’m not one of the above and I have no idea what a hyper core is,’ Jack said impatiently.

‘Think of it as a flash drive, just a little different,’ she said.

‘In what way is it different?’ Jack asked her.

‘See, a hyper core is designed to be able to send its data to any other hyper core in the world, without any kind of internet connection. It really is a marvel of modern day communication technology,’ Ice said proudly.

‘How do you know so much about this thing?’ Jack asked.

‘I helped make it. I programmed its entire communication system,’ she said.

‘Well then you probably know enough to get me out of here,’ Jack said.

‘I can try my best, but there is one other thing you should know about,’ Ice said.

‘And what is the bad news now?’ Jack asked, losing hope.

‘I sort of set all the hyper cores to purge themselves within a few days after I escaped from the government. That day is today, and it’s going to happen in a few minutes if my calculations are correct,’ Ice said.

‘Are you kidding me? Seriously, you were wasting all this time talking while you knew what was going on!?’ Jack exclaimed loudly.

‘I’m sorry! Please just forgive me! I don’t want to lose you but I don’t know what to do,’ she started sobbing.

‘No, don’t cry,’ Jack said. ‘We’ll find a way to get out of this situation,’ Jack assured her.

‘I can’t help you! I think this is the end,’ she said.

‘Well, I think I’ll have a better chance against your viruses,’ Jack said and jumped back into the portal before Ice could say anything. On the other side was nothing but a few pieces of flooring, a blue ring in the distance and a dark abyss surrounding it all. He took a step forward and suddenly the last bits of floor disintegrated and Jack fell into the dark abyss.

## Jack Smart has been deleted

Ice watched on her screen as Jack fell and fell, until the signal finally disappeared and the screen went dark. She couldn’t do anything about it. Tears were streaming down her face as she stared at the blank screen.

‘It can’t be,’ she said to herself. ‘He was the first person I ever really loved,’ she whispered to a non-existent listener. She tried to log in to the Blue Circle network, but it was completely down. She heard a sound behind her and turned around. The door opened and Marker appeared through it.

‘Hey babe, I did my part and now it’s your turn,’ he said suggestively.

‘I’m not in the mood for you,’ Ice said in between sobs.

‘Come on, no backing out now! I’m not falling for that poor sad act. You made a deal with me remember? Now you have to pay your end of the bargain.’

‘Jack died in there you know,’ Ice informed him.

‘That has no effect on the deal. The deal was I take the hard drive in, nothing about keeping some guy alive. I almost got killed as well! Do you think they were happy back there when the lights started flickering and all their computers buzzed out? They weren’t. I barely got out.’

‘I have nothing to live for anymore. I might as well give you what you want and then go drink myself to death,’ she said.

‘Well then, I’m waiting just for you,’ Marker said.

‘It feels so wrong to do this with a teenager. How old are you anyway?’ Ice asked.

‘I’m a whole sixteen years old. I’m not that much younger than you,’ Marker said.

‘Wow that’s young. I feel so wrong about doing this,’ she repeated.

‘It’s not going to feel wrong once you feel how nice it is,’ Marker said seductively. He hopped happily towards his bedroom, with Ice following behind him. He grabbed her and started kissing her as they fell on the bed.

Jack tried to push himself up from the ground he was lying on. Every part of him was in pain and getting up was agonizing. He was in a dark room that had that familiar electronic buzzing noise. As far as he could see in any direction, there was nothing.

‘Where am I!?’ he shouted into the distance. There was no echo or any other response. He decided to do the only thing he possibly could and walked into an entirely random direction. After many minutes of walking he saw a light in the distance and started running towards it. It was very far away and Jack had to stop and catch his breath several times before reaching it. It was a simple computer terminal on a podium like the one he had seen before, but this one’s podium was white, not black. He touched the blank screen and a message popped up.

*BASE LEVEL SECURITY PARTITION*

*SELECT OPERATION:*

1. *OPEN FILE LIST*
2. *RESTORE SYSTEM FROM ROOT*
3. *ESTABLISH INTERNET COMMUNICATION*
4. *RESTART MAIN SERVER*

Jack tapped the second option, but an error message came up saying that it cannot restore the system while it is still in lockdown mode. He tapped the first option and a list of files came up. They all seemed to be system executable programs, but there was one mysterious text document. Jack tried to open it, wanting to find out what it was, but it was locked with a password and encrypted. He copied the file over onto his phone and exited the file list. He tried every other button, but nothing happened until he pressed the last one. Upon pressing it the room started to light up, with the light starting on the floor and then spreading out in a circle from there.

‘System rebooting,’ an electronic voice stated. After a while the entire room was sparkling blue like the computer rooms he had become accustomed to. He could now see all the way to the walls of the room. He decided that he should probably call Ice to ask for any hints on what he should do. He pressed the call button on his phone, but except for some static, nothing happened. He looked at the terminal again and decided to try the third option again. A dial tone sounded from the terminal and died seconds later.

‘Internet connection successfully re-established,’ the electronic voice stated. Jack tried his phone again and it connected, but there was no answer from Ice’s side.

*She must be busy trying to get me out,* Jack thought to himself. He tried again, but there was still no answer. He followed his own reasoning and hit the second option. Upon hitting it, data streams started streaming from the base of the podium and spreading out to the walls of the room. They disappeared through the walls and a portal suddenly opened on the back wall.

‘All systems restored,’ the electronic voice said. Jack realized that the only way to go was forward, so he ran up to and jumped into the portal. The portal took him back to the black and red room wherein he was before the entire system crashed. It was completely whole again; even the computer terminal was rebuilt. Jack tried calling Ice again, but there was still no answer, so he decided to go ahead and get out of the system without her help. When he touched the screen, the same menu from earlier appeared, with the big button that said “DOWNLOAD AND BIND.”

He pressed it and a red circle appeared on the floor around him. His feet started turning into a red wireframe and then they were absorbed into the circle. The wireframe started spreading upwards, it being drawn into the circle as it went on. Finally he completely disappeared into the circle.

There was a flash and explosion sound before he hit the floor. He got up slowly and looked around him. He was back in the room where he first was digitized into the system. There was still no visible exit, so he started crawling back through the vent, sticking to the path that he remembered he took previously. He wanted to try and call Ice again, but was surprised to see that his phone was no longer embedded in his arm. He looked around him searching for it, and eventually found it in his pants’ pocket. He dialled Ice’s number, but it just rung and rung and eventually went to voicemail. ‘What could she be doing?’ he whispered to himself as he crawled further down the vent.

‘That was amazing!’ Marker exclaimed.

‘Don’t get too excited, that was the first and last time,’ Ice said in a disconnected manner.

‘Why? Why wouldn’t you want to do that again? Didn’t you like it?’ Marker asked her.

‘I didn’t like it at all, it was like torture,’ she said.

‘Then why were you screaming with pleasure?’ he asked her.

‘It wasn’t with pleasure, I can promise you that,’ she said.

‘What are you going to do now?’ Marker asked.

‘I’m going to drink myself to death. The only person I ever really loved is dead and I have nothing to live for,’ she said miserably.’

‘Did you really love him?’ Marker asked.

‘Yes and I should have told him while I had the chance,’ she said.

‘Why did you do that with me then?’ Marker asked.

‘If I didn’t you would never have dropped the subject. And besides, Jack is dead and he’s the only person I ever really wanted to do it with, so it doesn’t matter anymore.’

‘It looks like you had a missed call,’ Marker said, picking up Ice’s phone where it laid next to her clothes.

‘I don’t want to talk to anybody right now. Who the hell is it from?’ she asked, agitated.

‘It says that it’s from Jack,’ he said.

‘The damn retards at Blue Circle must have found his phone. They’re probably trying to threaten me or something. Take out the battery and SIM card for me,’ Ice asked. Marker did as asked and chucked everything aside. Ice got up and slipped her clothes on.

‘I’m going to a bar,’ she said as she left. She started walking down the dirt road outside Marker’s warehouse. She reached a small primitive bar after a few minutes of walking.

‘Give me the strongest thing you have,’ she said to the barman.

‘You sure about that?’ the barman asked.

‘Yeah, I’m positive about it. I just want to get drunk,’ she told the barman.

‘Man trouble?’ the barman asked.

‘You really don’t want to know,’ Ice said.

‘It’s my job to ask people about this,’ the barman said as he was mixing the drink.

‘I thought a barman’s job is to pour drinks,’ she noted.

‘It’s much more than that. We have to get to know our customers. Besides, I have nothing better to do, you’re like my only customer today,’ the barman said. Ice looked around and realized that she was alone in the bar. The barman put a yellow and blue drink in front of Ice.

‘What is it?’ she asked him.

‘It’s a secret mixture of mine. It’s not poisonous or anything, but it really packs a punch. Maybe after drinking it you can tell me what happened,’ the barman said. Ice took the drink in both hands and downed it in one go. After it was all gone she let out a loud moan.

‘That’s good drink there,’ she told the barman.

‘Thank you, it’s my best work,’ the barman said proudly.

‘Give me another one,’ Ice said. The barman quickly mixed it and Ice downed it in one large gulp, sounding another moan afterwards.

‘What are you charging me for these things?’ she asked. The barman looked at her and smiled.

‘Tell you what, if you can down another eight of these without passing out, they’re on the house,’ he said.

‘Bring it on,’ she said with a smile. The barman poured all eight of the drinks and placed them in a row before her. She downed the first three back to back in a few seconds and yelled a loud ‘Oh yeah that’s good!’ afterwards. She had five left and downed them in close succession as well. Her vision began to get blurry and her speech was slurred.

‘You’re really a woman who can hold her liquor,’ the barman said. ‘I have never seen anybody down so many of my drinks before.’

‘Well then, I don’t have to pay nothing anymore?’ she asked, her voice slurred. The barman nodded.

‘You can get as many drinks as you want today,’ the barman said.

‘Then you better mix me another one,’ she said.

‘Are you sure? You have a lot of alcohol in your system right now,’ the barman warned her.

‘The more the merrier,’ she said cheerily. The barman poured her another one and put it in front of her.

‘What made upset enough to drink like this,’ he asked.

‘Do you really want to know?’ she asked before downing the drink and making another moan.

‘Might as well tell me,’ he said.

‘Pour me another drink and I’ll tell you,’ she told him. He poured a drink again and gave it to Ice. She downed it again, followed with yet another moan.

‘See I met this guy a week ago and asked him to take me somewhere. So when we got there he got mixed up in my shit and eventually that got him killed. After that I was miserable and when this sixteen year old demanded that I have fun with him, I folded.’

‘That sounds really mixed up,’ the barman said.

‘You have no idea. I can’t believe I actually let that little idiot convince me to do that,’ she said and downed the drink before her, moaning again. ‘Give me another one!’ she exclaimed.

‘I think I have to cut you off soon,’ the barman said.

‘Why is that?’ Ice asked him.

‘Listen to yourself. You’re slurred and it looks like you’re going to fall off your chair soon,’ the barman said.

‘I need to try and forget and drink is the only thing that can help me do that,’ she said.

‘Did you love the guy that died or something?’ the barman asked.

‘More than anything you could imagine,’ she said.

‘Then you shouldn’t try to forget him. Use his memory to keep you going,’ the barman said.

‘I guess you’re right. The first thing I should do is exact my revenge on the people responsible for this,’ she said.

‘Whatever you think you should do,’ the barman said.

‘But just give me one more drink. You can’t let me leave without another one of your wonderful mixes,’ Ice urged him.

‘Fine,’ the barman said and mixed her one last drink. She eagerly took it from him and downed it all, moaning once again. She shakily got up from the bar stool.

‘Thank you for all this,’ she told the barman.

‘It’s my pleasure. Come back anytime you want,’ the barman said as Ice walked away. She didn’t get very far at all before the world turned black around her and she struck the ground.

Jack was crawling through every part of the vent system that he could find, desperately looking for a way out. He didn’t want to spend the night in the vents, but couldn’t find his way to an exit. He tried calling Ice again, but instead of ringing, it went directly to voicemail.

‘Please help me get out of this place. I figured a way out of the computer system, but now I can’t find a way out of the Blue Circle base,’ he said into the phone after the beep sounded. He heard a commotion coming from outside a vent to the left, so he crawled towards it to check things out. He peeked through the vent and although the vision was obscured, he could see a few guards dragging someone whose head was covered with a bag into a room. He realized that it had to be a cell, not unlike the one in which he had previously been. Zeta and Fay entered the room after they dragged the person in.

‘How did you find her?’ Zeta asked one of the guards.

‘We were just taking a drive when we found her passed out in the middle of the road,’ the guard answered.

‘Well aren’t we just the luckiest bunch of people,’ Fay chuckled.

‘She sure saved as a whole lot of trouble finding her,’ Zeta said. He walked over towards the person and pulled the bag off of her head. Jack gasped when he saw that it was Ice. Her mouth was bound with a cloth and her hands and feet were cuffed. Zeta walked over to her and sniffed her.

‘She passed out from drinking too much,’ he announced to the room. ‘Get me a glass of ice cold water,’ he asked one of the guards, who ran out of the room. He returned minutes later with a water-filled glass. Zeta took it from him and untied the cloth that was in Ice’s mouth. He poured the water out on her head. She let out a little moan and slowly opened her eyes.

‘Where am I? What happened?’ she uttered in a way that indicated she was in pain.

‘You’re in my prison cell, you little bitch,’ Fay said.

‘You drank yourself unconscious and we conveniently found you,’ Zeta added.

‘What do you want with me?’ Ice asked.

‘We’re going to make your life hell! You’re going to suffer for a long time. That’s what you get for messing up all my plans,’ Fay said.

‘You already did! You killed Jack you monsters!’ Ice exclaimed. Jack wanted to burst out of the vent and tell her that he’s still alive, but he didn’t dare risk anyone finding him.

‘Look, we have no idea where your ugly little slave is,’ Zeta said.

‘Don’t dare talk about him like that! I’ll kill you,’ Ice screamed.

‘He escaped from here! We have no idea where he went,’ Zeta said.

‘He is a foolish waste of human DNA. He didn’t even fall for me, the most beautiful thing in the world, when I showed him what I had on offer. How foolish can you get?’ Fay said. Ice lost her cool, sprung up and jumped headfirst into Fay, taking them both to the ground.

‘I swear I will kill you, I will take you apart bit by bit, you slut!’ Ice yelled. The guards grabbed her and pulled her back to her seat. They tied her down to her chair with some cloth that was lying around. Fay got up again and laughed teasingly at her, sticking her tongue out.

‘Now that you have returned to your seat, we can begin with your punishment,’ Zeta said. He walked over to Ice and violently ripped her shirt off. He looked at her in her bra for a few seconds, as if deciding what to do.

‘You can keep that on,’ he said finally. ‘You have so few assets; it would be a crime to hurt the little that you have. Bring me a whip,’ he asked a guard. The guard left and returned quickly with the whip. Zeta took it from him and snapped it in his hands.

‘This is going to hurt me more than it’s going to hurt you,’ Zeta said. ‘Actually, I’m lying. I’m going to enjoy this and you’re going to scream with pain,’ he laughed. He took a step back and just as he was about to let loose with the first strike, Fay grabbed the whip from his hands.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked Fay.

‘I want to go first,’ Fay said.

‘Really? This is my whip, you know,’ Zeta said.

‘Please let me go first, baby,’ she said while making a puppy-dog face. ‘If you make me happy, I’ll make you happy later. Is that a deal?’ she asked him.

‘Fine,’ he gave in and stepped out of the way.

Jack started crawling away, because he couldn’t bear seeing Ice get hurt. While he was crawling away, he remembered something. He took the next turn left in the venting system and crawled towards a big vent at the end of the tunnel. He looked through the vent to make sure the room was empty and kicked it open. He jumped down into the room. It was a small room, with nothing but a small security terminal. Jack browsed through the menu until he found what he was looking for. It was an option to activate an intruder alarm. When he clicked it, a new menu came up where he could state in which area the intrusion was. He set it to the sector furthest from where they were now and bumped the threat rating up to ten. He hit the confirm button and jumped back into the vent, crawling back to Ice’s cell. Seconds later a siren went off, and he could hear people running below him. He reached Ice’s cell and saw that there was nobody inside anymore, so he pushed the vent open and jumped in. A bag was over Ice’s face again and she couldn’t see him. She had bright red marks all over her stomach where they had whipped her and he could hear her crying. He ran over to her and untied the cloth that held her to the chair.

‘Who are you? What are you doing?’ she asked, confused.

‘Your guardian angel,’ he said and took the bag off of her head. She burst out in tears when she saw that it was Jack.

‘I thought you were dead,’ she said, crying with joy.

‘I’m much tougher than you might think. Did these people hurt you?’ he asked her.

‘They whipped me, see the marks. I’m lucky, Zeta thought I wasn’t good enough to defile,’ she said, with a slight smile.

‘We’ll get our revenge on them soon, but for now we have to get out of here,’ Jack noted.

‘I think they dropped the keys to my cuffs on that table over there,’ she said motioning with her head towards a table on the other side of the room. Jack retrieved the keys and quickly unlocked all Ice’s cuffs. She jumped up from the chair and grabbed Jack, pulling him into a tight hug.

‘I thought you died back there. I couldn’t live in a world without you,’ she said.

‘I’m sure you would’ve made due without me,’ Jack said.

‘No, Jack, I love you,’ she whispered.

‘Where did this come from?’ Jack asked.

‘Don’t ask, just kiss me,’ she said. Jack nodded and put his lips against hers. She opened her mouth and started passionately making out with him. He held onto her back with his one hand and played with her hair using the other. He suddenly broke their kiss and stepped back.

‘We have to get out of here,’ Jack said. ‘It won’t be long before they realize that the alarm was false. Let’s go,’ he said, grabbing her hand. They ran out the door and to the left.

‘There won’t be any guards at the front door; they all would’ve gone to check out the alarm,’ Jack told Ice while they were running.

‘I know the way from the blueprints I checked. Follow me,’ Ice said and took the lead. Jack ran behind her as they threaded through many hallways and rooms, until they reached a double iron door. They pulled the door open and continued running, going through a tunnel that had an upwards slope. There was a trap door at the top of the tunnel with a ladder leading up towards it. They climbed the ladder and burst through the trap door. They came out in a square room in a fuel station. The door to the room was well hidden behind a vending machine that was bolted to a false wall. They ran out of the fuel station building and down the road.

They put some good distance between them and the station and decided to stop for a while and catch their breath. There was a small downslope next to the road that was filled with enough bushes to keep them hidden from the road. They laid down there behind some thick bushes, resting.

‘I can’t believe you’re alive,’ Ice told Jack.

‘I have no idea what happened in there, but I finally escaped. I tried to call you, but you didn’t answer your phone,’ Jack said.

‘I’m really sorry about that,’ she said, suddenly being stricken with guilt.

‘It doesn’t matter; we all got out in the end. Are you okay? Those whip marks look really bad,’ Jack said, concerned about Ice.

‘I’m fine, they only hurt a little bit,’ she said.

‘What can I do to make you feel better?’ Jack asked.

‘You can finish that kiss we were busy with,’ she said with a grin. He grabbed her and kissed her on the lips. After a few minutes of continued kissing, a car slowly passed by them, prompting them to stop kissing and to watch what was happening. It was a black SUV with tinted windows. The car drove slowly by them and Jack realized that it must be Blue Circle looking for them. After a few minutes the car sped up and disappeared into the distance.

‘That was really close,’ Ice said.

‘You’re telling me,’ Jack responded.

‘What should we do no?’ Ice asked.

‘We should probably find our way to a computer or something. I got a secret file that is locked with a password from what I think is a security partition in Blue Circle’s network. I want to know what’s in it that makes it important enough to hide on a secret partition,’ Jack said.

‘That could give us an idea of what Fay is up to,’ Ice said.

‘That’s exactly what I thought. We’re in this too deep now. If we don’t take Blue Circle down, we’re going to be on the run for the rest of our lives,’ Jack said. A chilly wind picked up and Ice started shaking from the cold.

‘Wear my shirt,’ Jack said to Ice, whom had no shirt on.

‘No I can’t take your shirt. Then you would be cold,’ she said.

‘Don’t worry; I can handle a little cold wind. You need this more than me,’ Jack said. She still tried to refuse, but Jack took his shirt off and pulled it over her head.

‘I don’t want to hear any arguments,’ Jack silenced her just as she was about to say something. She rethought her words.

‘Thank you, Jack, you really are a wonderful guy,’ she said, smiling at him. She slipped her arms into the sleeves and gave Jack a little kiss on the lips.

‘Well then, we should go find a computer somewhere,’ Jack said, prompting Ice to nod. They got up and started walking again. They saw city lights in the distance and went in that direction, which was conveniently opposite from the direction that the SUV left in. After about an hour of walking, they reached the outskirts of the city. After walking around the city for a while, they reached a shop with a giant “Internet Café” neon light above its door. Jack was happy to see that it was open, despite it being late in the night.

‘Let’s go have some fun then,’ Ice said and they entered the café.

## The evil plan of Fay Largos

The café was almost completely empty, the only other people being the two teenagers that worked there. They paid the fee for using a computer for one hour and then Jack went ahead and copied the password protected document from his cell phone to the station they were assigned to. After he copied it, he got up from the station to allow Ice to do her magic. She fired away trying to crack the password, so Jack decided to go and chat with the two teens at the counter.

‘Hey guys, I’m Jack,’ he said to them, holding out his hand. The younger of the two grabbed his hand and shook it.

‘I’m Johnny and this is my older brother, Jade,’ he said.

‘Isn’t Jade a girl’s name?’ Jack asked.

‘Don’t judge me, judge my parents,’ Jade said. Johnny made a small chuckling noise.

‘You guys look and sound American, what are you doing all the way out here in Egypt?’

‘We could ask you the same thing,’ Jade said.

‘The girl dragged me here,’ Jack said, pointing at Ice. Jade let out a high pitched whistle.

‘That’s one hot lady you have over there, I would’ve followed her to another continent as well,’ he said.

‘Yeah right, as if you really have a girl that hot,’ Johnny said.

‘Don’t believe she’s my girl?’ Jack asked him.

‘Nah, she’s probably your sister or something,’ Johnny said. Jack grinned at him and walked over to Ice. He whispered something to her and she looked up, whereupon he made out with her for a few seconds. He walked back towards the counter, grinning at Johnny.

‘Would my sister do that?’ he asked him.

‘You’re a really lucky asshole, you know that right,’ Jade said.

‘So I told you why I’m here, what are you guys doing here?’ Jack asked.

‘Our parents are archaeologists working on some excavation that we don’t care about, so now we have to spend our time in this ass boring country,’ Jade said. ‘We work in this shop to keep us busy through the week.’

‘Don’t you go to school or something?’ Jack asked.

‘These people are so far behind that they’re doing what we did last year. We’ll go to school next year when they’ve caught up with us,’ Johnny said.

‘Do you get a lot of business in the shop?’ Jack asked.

‘Yeah during the day we’re quite full,’ Jade said.

‘You wouldn’t happen to have a spare shirt for me, would you?’ Jack asked them.

‘Sure, I’ll go get something for you from the back,’ Jade said and disappeared through a door. A few minutes later he came back through the door with a red shirt.

‘Here you go, that should fit you,’ Jade noted. Jack slipped it on and it fit him perfectly.

‘Thanks guys. Should I pay you for it or something?’ he asked them.

‘Nah, I took it out of the lost and found box. Nobody ever claims that stuff,’ Jade said.

‘I’ve got it!’ Ice exclaimed loudly.

‘Excuse me please,’ Jack told the two teens and went over to Ice. ‘Did you get in?’ he asked her.

‘Yeah, I cracked the encryption key,’ she said, her voice filled with excitement.

‘So what does it say?’ he asked.

‘I haven’t checked yet. Let’s have a look,’ Ice responded. Her eyes flicked over the letters on the screen.

‘This can’t be true!’ she exclaimed.

‘Which one of you was the one that set off that false alarm?’ Fay asked the guards who were sitting a small auditorium.

‘It wasn’t us, so it must have been a system failure or something,’ one of the guards said.

‘I know that it had to be one of you useless guards!’ she yelled. One guard with important looking decorations on his uniform stood up to raise an objection.

‘My men are hardworking and loyal. I know it wasn’t one of mine who did this. Perhaps it was one of your hackers,’ the guard stated.

‘And who are you to make such accusations?’ Fay asked him.

‘Well I’m Devin, your chief of security, also known as the guy that makes your entire operation possible,’ he said. Fay was about to say something when Zeta burst into the room.

‘Ice has escaped from our grasp,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’ Fay asked.

‘She got out while we were checking out the alarm,’ he stated plainly. Fay tried to say something, but she couldn’t form a word. Her voice was just stuttering with anger and her whole body started shivering.

‘I would get out before she blows if I were you,’ he said in the general direction of the guards. They all jumped from their seats and ran out of the room, until only Fay, Zeta and Devin remained in the room. Fay was still shaking and her face glowed bright red.

‘This is going to be bad,’ Zeta said, staring at her.

‘Should you be saying that so loudly?’ Devin asked.

‘She usually isn’t aware of her surroundings that much when she has one of her fits.’

‘What is she going to do?’ Devin asked.

‘It’s different every time, but it’s always bad,’ Zeta answered, fearing the next few minutes of his life. Fay’s fit suddenly broke and she began screaming and yelling at Zeta and Devin.

‘You two idiots! I have spent a shitload of time trying to track these people down, and when we finally have them, you let them get away! I’m wasting my life on idiots who can’t think further than their own noses! Aaaah!’ she yelled. She moved her head violently from side to side, as if watching a furious tennis match. ‘Aaaah!’ she yelled again and charged at Zeta. She jumped on him, catching him completely by surprise and sending him to the ground, and started to slap his face. She brought her head close to his. ‘You are the sorriest excuse for a boyfriend I have ever seen!’ she yelled loudly into his face. She brought her hands up and scratched his face, leaving ten bloody streaks on his face. She punched him in the face again and got off of him. Devin was laughing at Zeta who had been beaten up by a girl, when Fay turned her attention to him. Her face was like that of a wild animal and her snarl was as well. She ran towards him and knocked him off balance. He tried to parry her blows, but failed miserably as she drove him to the ground.

‘Your security is up to shit! Where did you learn these things? Kindergarten?’ she asked. ‘I blame you personally for letting this girl escape! And you’re going to suffer for it you turd!’ She started punching him in the face, alternating left fist and right, spit and blood spraying from his mouth with every blow. He tried to push her off, but she wasn’t going anywhere. Zeta got up in the meantime and staggered over to them. Using all his force, he pulled Fay off Devin and through her back, causing her to fall on her back.

‘You need to calm down!’ Zeta yelled at her.

‘And you need to be less retarded!’ she responded. She was trying to get up, but he jumped on her and pinned her down, keeping her from moving.

‘I’m going to try and keep her pinned down, you go get a glass of ice water or something,’ Zeta told Devin, who was still struggling to get up. He eventually got himself up off the ground and ran out of the room, clutching his aching jaw. Zeta struggled to keep the raging Fay down, but succeeded to do so until Devin came back. He jumped off Fay and ran aside. She got up and started charging at Devin, who was closest to her. Not sure what to do, Devin threw the cold water in her face and retreated out the doorway. Fay shook her head as she snapped out of her rage.

‘Was it bad?’ she asked Zeta after she calmed down.

‘Yeah, look at my face!’ Zeta exclaimed.

‘I’m sorry about that,’ she apologized. ‘I promise I’ll make up for it in full,’ she added, with a seductive grin.

‘It’s not that easy,’ Zeta said. ‘We’re going to have to find a new security chief, because I don’t think Devin is going to stay here much longer.’

‘What did I do to the poor guy?’ she asked innocently.

‘You seriously rearranged his face. I don’t understand it, why doesn’t the medication help you anymore?’ he asked.

‘Oh, I stopped taking that stuff a long time ago,’ she said.

‘What!? Why would you stop taking them?’ Zeta asked, amazed.

‘I didn’t like their taste,’ she said as if it didn’t matter.

‘So you put all our lives at risk because you don’t like how the pills taste?’ he asked, getting frustrated with her.

‘It’s not as bad as you make it sound,’ she said.

‘You have no idea. You can’t remember anything about your fits, and you don’t have to carry scars around afterwards,’ he said, eyeing her.

‘I’m sure the wounds on your face won’t make scars,’ she said.

‘I wasn’t talking about my face. Need I remind you about the big scar on my back that I got after your little sword fit?’ he asked.

‘Okay, okay, I get your point. I’ll start drinking the pills again if you promise to forgive me,’ she said. Zeta shook his head at her.

‘No. It’s over, I’m out,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked, suddenly uncertain.

‘I’m leaving, you can find somebody else to use as a human scratching post.’

‘I’m sorry! I mean it. Please don’t leave me, I can’t live without you,’ she pleaded.

‘I may have fallen for that last time, but never again.’

‘Fine then, have it your way! I lied to make you feel better, I don’t really need you. I screw every other guy anyway, so your services aren’t needed at all,’ she said, trying to use reverse psychology. Zeta ignored her and walked away.

‘Okay wait; I still don’t get what you’re telling me,’ Jack told Ice. Jack, the two teens and Ice were sitting around the computer station, Ice trying to explain to them what the document they cracked said. The teens had come closer and closer when Ice said something about nukes to loudly. From there on they were part of the team, whether Jack and Ice wanted it or not.

‘Fay has various algorithms that are detailed in this file. She can run any of them at a moment’s notice, and their results would be devastating. Here are programs to shut down key data centres around the world, effectively taking the internet offline for large parts of the world. Here are all sorts of disasters waiting to happen. But this one is by far the most harrowing,’ she said, pointing to a paragraph on the screen. ‘It details a program that can access military missile silos, and it’s basically set up to fire a salvo of nukes at all the major world capitals.’

‘What do you think this chick is going to do with these programs?’ Jade asked, very interested at the transpiring events.

‘She could demand anything from any government, or she could even start a world war if she so wished. If what this document says is a hundred per cent correct, the world is in for a heap of trouble,’ Ice said in a worried tone.

‘If she has all these algorithms at the ready, why hasn’t she used them yet?’ Jack asked.

‘I think Zeta is holding her back. He always was small-time; he wouldn’t do something big and criminal like this. If it wasn’t for him, we could have had an international crisis a long time ago.’

‘Hopefully he stays with her,’ Jack said.

‘Well he probably wouldn’t ever leave her. She would really need to get him angry to make him leave,’ Ice said.

‘Can we stop any of the programs?’ Jack asked.

‘It’s going to be hard, but we really have to try,’ Ice said. There was a beeping noise coming from the front counter and Johnny left to see what was going on. Ice continued reading the file.

‘Doesn’t that file say anything about what the chick’s plan is or how to stop it?’ Jade asked.

‘Nope, it only details the programs. It’s like a design document,’ Ice responded. ‘Wait, what’s this?’ she said, staring at a paragraph with weird letters and characters.

‘Looks like gibberish to me,’ Jade said.

‘I think it is reverse encoded,’ Ice said.

‘What does that mean?’ Jack asked her.

‘It’s when they take the ASCII value of the character and reverse its numbers. For example if the value of a letter is nine, it becomes ninety, which is a completely different character,’ Ice explained. ‘Let me just see if I can change it back.’ She highlighted the paragraph and pasted it onto an internet translator, selecting the option to reverse ASCII values. The resulting paragraph stated:

**AGENT LARGOS**

We are still awaiting your reports on the Dark Day system.

We need to make preparations to initiate the system ASAP.

Please paste details in this file and send it to us with the hyper core, to the usual address.

And we would think it wise for you to make a backup to some secure part of your computer,

in case of data corruption or erroneous transfer through the hyper core.

‘What could this mean?’ Jack asked.

‘It means that this is much bigger than we thought. She isn’t in this alone,’ Ice answered him. Johnny came rushing back to them.

‘Guys, you need to get that file off of the computer now. It released some kind of weird virus,’ Johnny said.

‘What kind of virus?’ Ice asked.

‘The antivirus said that it’s an unknown type, but the name is basic tracer key alpha, or something like that,’ Johnny said.

‘Oh shit,’ Ice said and quickly deleted all the files.

‘Why did you delete the thing?’ Jack asked.

‘That virus is a Skeleton Key agent! It can pinpoint our exact location and crash this entire city’s internet connection!’ Ice exclaimed.

‘Is that even possible?’ Jade and Johnny asked in unison.

‘Anything is possible with enough hacking skill,’ she said. ‘We need to get out of here. Now!’ she exclaimed.

‘Okay, just take it easy,’ Jack said. ‘Can you guys get us out of here some way?’

‘We have a car and I have a license,’ Jade said. ‘I’ll take you to my parent’s hotel. It’s far from here and they are working on the dig through the night.’

‘That’s perfect, we only need to stay for a while and then we’ll move on out,’ Ice said.

‘Follow me. Would you lock up for me, Johnny?’ Jade said and disappeared through a service door. Johnny walked over to the front door and locked it. They then followed Jade and they eventually arrived in a garage with a car. They got in, Jade taking the driver’s seat, and took off as fast as they could.

‘We’ve got something,’ Killer exclaimed. Fay rushed over to him to see what was going on.

‘What did you find, honey?’ she asked.

‘Somebody just opened document X at an internet café in town,’ Killer responded. Killer was a man in his late thirties and an extraordinary hacker. He had grey hair, which he was born with, and brown eyes. He was short and fat, a typical example of an internet junkie.

‘Did we get a trace on it?’ she asked him.

‘Yeah, we can go there as soon as you are ready,’ he said.

‘Do you think it could be Ice?’ she asked.

‘It wouldn’t surprise me! She must have found the file somewhere by accident.’

‘You’re so wonderful, honey, so sexy,’ Fay told him seductively.

‘I know that you are only like this with me because Zeta left and I’m the only one that could do all your dirty work. I also want to add that I don’t care,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked, confused.

‘I don’t really care that you’re only using me. As long as you keep doing what you did an hour ago, I won’t ever complain.’

‘Well, I’m never shy to perform,’ she whispered into his ear, secretly being disgusted, but doing whatever is necessary for her plan to succeed, and then proceeded to lick his face. He grabbed her and pressed his mouth to hers, sticking his tongue deep into her mouth, but she retaliated.

‘Not now, we have to go fetch our prey first. If we catch Ice again today, I will be very happy tonight. And I’ll really want to share that joy, if you know what I mean,’ she said. Killer nodded eagerly.

‘Well then, come one. We have little bitches to catch,’ Fay said.

While they were speeding down to Jade’s parents’ hotel room, Ice got a text on her cell phone. She read it and her face pulled into a surprised expression.

‘What is it?’ Jack asked her.

‘It’s just a random SMS. It says: “*Two down, four to go. Better do this fast*”.’

‘What does that mean?’ Jack asked her.

‘I have no idea,’ she responded.

‘Who’s it from?’ Jack inquired.

‘I don’t know. It doesn’t say what the number is that sent it. It’s signed by “*Yotta, your guardian angel”*.’

‘This thing just keeps getting weirder and weirder,’ Jack said, pointing out the obvious.

‘I’ll see if I can trace it when we get to a computer again,’ Ice said. ‘Are we there yet?’

‘Just a little whiles more,’ Jade said from the front.

‘What are those people going to do to our shop?’ Johnny asked.

‘They probably won’t mess it up to much if they see we aren’t there, but I can’t make any promises,’ Ice told them.

‘The boss is going to be furious if they break anything,’ Jade said, concerned. ‘And who’s he going to blame? Me!’ he said.

‘Let’s just hope they don’t mess it up then,’ Jack said. Jade pulled the car into a parking spot and turned to Ice and Jack.

‘We’re here,’ he informed them.

‘Thanks for the help,’ Jack said.

‘It’s no problem. Come on to our hotel room, you can clean up a little,’ Johnny said, pinching his nose and making a wavy motion with his other hand.

‘Yeah I know we stink, we haven’t been anywhere near good plumbing in a while,’ Jack said smiling at Ice. They all got out of the car and Jade locked it.

‘There’s a laptop that you can use if you want to,’ Jade said as they walked towards the hotel.

‘Thanks, I might be able to trace this text and do some digging on those programs we read about,’ Ice said.

‘Just as long as they don’t trace us again,’ Johnny said. They entered the hotel. It had a magnificent lobby that was red with golden decorations. Jade went up to the counter to speak to the manager.

‘Do you know if my parents are home, sir?’ he asked.

‘Nope, but they told me to give you this envelope when they left,’ the manager said, handing over a bulky package. Jade took it and walked back over to the rest of the party. He motioned for them to sit at a table, and they took some seats in a corner around a mahogany table. Jade opened the envelope and poured its contents out on the table. It contained a letter written on hotel paper, a key card and a few bills of money. Jade read the letter to the rest of them.

‘Hey honey, we’re sorry that we have to work on the dig through the night again. We’re really close to getting into the centre room that has been blocked off so far. The envelope should contain a hundred dollars and the key card to our room. If it doesn’t have everything, go punch the manager in the face.’ They all chuckled when he read that sentence. ‘Get yourselves something to eat from room service with the money. Love, Mom and Dad,’ he finished reading.

‘Great, so we have the room to ourselves the whole night. Should give you guys plenty of time to work something out,’ Johnny said.

‘Follow me,’ Jade said and got up. They followed him to the elevator, which they rode up to the seventh floor. From there they walked to room 56B, where Jade swiped the card to let them in. It was a big hotel room, with a small kitchen, living room and five beds. The living room was equipped with a gigantic LED television.

‘Welcome to our humble abode,’ Jade said.

‘It’s a giant room!’ Ice exclaimed. ‘What are you guys paying for this?’

‘Absolutely nothing, the company my parents work for covered everything,’ Johnny said.

‘I’ll set up the laptop while you guys freshen up. Johnny can order pizza for us,’ Jade said and handed Johnny the phone.

‘You can go first,’ Jack told Ice, and she nodded, going through the bathroom door. There was a click as she locked it behind her. Johnny was already speaking on the phone and Jade was busy getting his laptop out of his closet.

‘Can I watch some TV?’ he asked Jade.

‘Sure, knock yourself out,’ he responded. Jack sat down on a comfy couch and looked for the remote control of the TV.

‘Where’s the remote for the TV?’ he asked Jade.

‘Doesn’t need one, its voice controlled,’ Jade responded. Jack looked at the television and shook his head in awe.

‘TV on!’ he shouted at the television, which responded by popping to life. ‘How do you switch channels?’ Jack asked.

‘There’s a panel on the armrest of the couch you’re on,’ Jade answered. Jack pressed some buttons to figure out how everything works and subsequently started flipping through the channels. He found an interesting wildlife show on one of the channels, but its credits rolled a few minutes later, so Jack continued surfing the channels. He eventually reached the news channels and as he flipped through them, one particular report caught his eye.

‘*Reports have been coming in of an anonymous and as of yet unknown person demanding large amounts of money from various governments around the world. This person called the White House earlier today, speaking in an electronically altered voice and demanded a sum of one billion dollars. The unknown person threatens to unleash the military’s own missiles against them. The call has been written off as a hoax, but the FBI and CIA have initiated an investigation none the less.’*

‘I think you need to see this, Ice!’ Jack called and Ice came running out of the bathroom dripping wet and wrapped in only a towel minutes later.

‘What’s going on?’ she asked Jack.

‘Look at the report on TV,’ he told her. She watched it for a while as they repeated the information again and then turned to Jack with a worried look.

‘They’re only going to make her angrier if they investigate her,’ she said.

‘Okay, just calm down. Go finish your shower and afterwards we can try to figure out what Fay is up to,’ Jack said. Ice nodded and walked back to the bathroom. Jade had finished setting up the laptop, but Johnny was still on the phone.

‘What’s the hold-up, Johnny?’ Jade asked, walking over to him. Johnny hung up the phone a few seconds later.

‘I just ordered some clothes for our guests,’ he said.

‘Makes sense, but can we afford it all with a hundred bucks?’ Jade asked.

‘Yeah I ordered some cheap clothes plus four pizzas, total eighty bucks,’ Johnny answered.

‘You really know how to make a deal, don’t you?’ Jack asked sarcastically. Johnny nodded happily.

‘The internet connection is up, by the way,’ Jade said.

‘Thanks man, but we’ll wait for Ice, because she has the most skills, I’d probably screw it up,’ Jack said. There was a knock on the hotel door and Johnny went over to answer it, taking the money from the envelope. A bellboy came in, pushing a cart through the door. He took the receipt from the cart and read it to Johnny.

‘Four Hawaiian pizzas, one set of white male clothes and one set of white female clothes, total seventy nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. Is that correct?’ the bellboy asked.

‘Yeah, that’s fine,’ Johnny said and handed the two fifty dollar bills to him.

‘Keep the change as a tip for you,’ he said.

‘Thanks, sir,’ the bellboy said, took the cash and left. Johnny immediately popped open one of the pizza boxes and grabbed himself a slice. He ate it up in three bites and gave a satisfied grin afterwards.

‘Now that is good pizza,’ he said.

‘Hey, I’ll take Ice’s clothes for her,’ Johnny said slyly and grabbed the clothes.

‘Oh no you won’t,’ Jack said and grabbed the clothes from his hands.

‘What makes you more qualified to take them to her?’ Jade asked.

‘Well, she’s *my* girlfriend, not yours,’ Jack said.

‘Fine,’ Jade sighed and fell down on the couch in front of the television. Jack took the clothes and walked over to the bathroom door. He knocked on the door and suddenly he heard the shower stop running.

‘Who is it?’ she asked.

‘It’s Jack, I brought you some fresh clothes,’ Jack said. She rushed over to the door and he heard it unlock.

‘Come on in,’ she said. Jack opened the door a crack and went in. Ice was standing there wrapped in a towel. Jack handed her the clothes and she dropped the towel. Jack tried to look away, but his eyes were stuck.

‘You can stop staring now,’ Ice said, giggling.

‘I’m sorry, I was just taken by surprise,’ Jack said, making excuses.

‘Well help me with this,’ she said, holding up a bra. She put it on and turned her back to him. ‘Please just hook in the strap,’ she said. He did as asked and hooked it up. She finished putting on the rest of the clothes and gave Jack a little kiss.

‘Thanks for your help,’ she said. ‘Hope you enjoyed the show.’ She left the bathroom, chuckling.

She exited the bathroom and went over to Jade, who was still on the couch. Johnny was sitting at the kitchen counter, his face buried in his pizza. Behind them they heard the shower begin running again.

‘Where’s the computer?’ she asked him.

‘It’s over there on my bed,’ he said pointing to it. ‘There’s a pizza for you if you’re hungry.’

‘Thanks,’ she said, smiling at him. She took one box of pizza from the kitchen counter and went over to the laptop on Jade’s bed.

‘How did you know what size clothes to get me?’ she asked Jade.

‘Not me, it was Johnny. He has some type of gift for knowing people’s measurements just by looking at them. It’s scary if you asked me,’ Jade responded. Johnny looked up from his pizza box when he heard his name, and gave a huge smile when Ice looked at him, where after he turned his attention back to the pizza.

‘Thanks, Johnny,’ Ice said.

‘My pleasure,’ Johnny mumbled, in between bites of pizza.

Ice plugged her phone into the laptop with the cable that was embedded into it. She started up the trace for the text, but it failed instantly. Another text came through moments later.

*I know what you’re trying to do, but you’re wasting your time. I’ll reveal myself when the time is right. You must not waste time finding me. You must get to the remaining four. Guardian Angel.’*

She immediately unplugged the phone, for fear of being traced through it. She went to the news website to investigate the demands news story, but there was nothing noted that she didn’t know. After some digging she found a voice recording of one of the calls. She downloaded it and loaded into an audio editor. She tried to remove the modifications to identify the voice behind it all, but it was already muffled before being modified by the computer, so she failed at that.

‘Somebody bring me my clothes!’ Jack yelled from the bathroom, whereupon Ice took a bite of pizza and ran over to grab the clothes. She got to the door and opened it a little bit, sticking her head through.

‘Here you go Jack,’ she said as she handed them to him.

‘Thank you,’ he said. She retracted her head and closed the door again, returning to the laptop. Having failed in identifying the texter or the threat caller, she decided to try and find traces of Fay’s programs on the internet. This attempt failed as well and Ice gave up. Jack exited the bathroom, threw his towel and old clothes in a pile next to the door and went over to the kitchen counter, where he took to his pizza box.

‘Any luck with anything?’ he asked Ice while eating.

‘Nope, I actually can’t find anything at all,’ she said miserably.

‘That’s bad, what are we going to do now?’ he asked her.

‘I have no idea,’ Ice said. Suddenly her phone made the beep that indicates a text again. She scanned through it quickly.

‘I’ve got a text again, same guy,’ she said, getting Jack’s attention.

‘Read it out loud,’ he requested.

‘”*You can’t find anything now can you? You’re wasting your time. You won’t find anything before you take down the remaining four. Listen to me! Yotta, Guardian Angel”,’ she read.*

‘What does that mean? Remaining four?’ Jack asked.

‘Now that I think about it, the first one said two down, four to go. That means there were six in the beginning. Who else do we know that are six people?’ she asked.

‘Blue Circle!’ Jack exclaimed, finally clicking what Ice was getting at.

‘Okay, we know of one that is down, Marker. Since he’s sort of on our side now, even under protest, that would be one down. I don’t know who else is out, but if this theory is right, I have a pretty good idea of what to do next,’ she said, suddenly sounding much happier.

‘What would our next move be then?’ Jack asked her.

‘We should try to track down Topiary, he’s our easiest target. Not the sharpest pencil in the packet, you know,’ she said.

‘Topiary?’ Jade, who had been sitting up listening intently the whole time, asked. ‘Isn’t he that famous hacker from Anonymous?’

‘Yeah, that’s him. Want to help us take him down?’ Jack asked them.

‘No, that’s all right,’ Jade said. ‘How is a world famous hacker dumb?’

‘He doesn’t really hack at all. He’s more of a PR monkey,’ Ice said.

‘How do you know so much about all these things?’ Johnny asked, finally re-joining the conversation after finishing his pizza.

‘Because I was very deep in it before I quit,’ she answered. They wanted to ask another question, but she put up her hand to stop them from talking any further. ‘Don’t ask anything about that, because I won’t give you an honest answer.’

They accepted this and kept quiet. Ice turned her focus back towards the laptop.

‘Will you be able to find him?’ Jack asked.

‘Let me do my magic,’ she whispered.

‘Which one of you went to the press?’ Fay asked, looking at a big computer monitor with three faces on it. She and Killer were in yet another conference room in the Blue Circle base. Sabre and Topiary’s faces were in separate squares on the monitor.

‘What makes you think it was one of us?’ Sabre asked.

‘I know it was,’ she responded. ‘I know it wasn’t me, and Killer was with me the whole time, so I know it wasn’t him.’

‘What about Zeta? He could’ve done it,’ Sabre said.

‘Nope, he left us. And besides, he always was a push-over, he would never do such a thing. What reason could he possibly have to do this?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Sabre responded.

‘So therefore it must be one of you two!’ Fay exclaimed.

‘I don’t like being insulted like this!’ Sabre yelled, his face getting red.

‘Just go with it,’ Topiary said.

‘I won’t just go with it! I’m being insulted here! You do know that the CIA would’ve broken this organization in two years ago if it wasn’t for me!’ Sabre exclaimed.

‘Please calm down,’ Ice said. ‘I just want to know who did this. Who was the one that spoiled my plan?’ she demanded.

‘It wasn’t one of us!’ Sabre said. ‘I didn’t do it and my brother is too slow to think up such a plan.’

‘Well then, we’ll just have to see when the trace comes in, now won’t we?’ Fay said, and disconnected from the conversation. She got up and punched the nearest wall.

‘I can’t believe this! My plan is ruined again! All the element of surprise is gone. Now I have to wait before initiating my plans again. Idiots!’ she exclaimed punching the wall again. ‘Ouch!’ she screamed pulling her fist back and rubbing it with the other hand.

‘Yay, I have him!’ Ice screamed out loud, ecstatic. ‘He posted something on Twitter and I got his IP address from it. Now I can track him down easily. Give me another minute.’ Jack nodded at her finished up his pizza. He went over to the couch where Jade and Johnny were sitting.

‘Are you guys going to be all right when we leave?’ he asked them.

‘Yeah, we can fend for ourselves,’ Jade said.

‘Just be careful, just in case they traced us here or something,’ Jack warned them.

‘Don’t worry about that. Even if they get into the hotel and up to our room, which I doubt, we can just hide somewhere in here. Besides, our parents will be back in a few hours,’ Johnny said.

‘What is the time anyway?’ Jack asked.

‘Almost midnight,’ Ice said, reading the time on the computer screen.

‘Wow, that’s late. Aren’t you guys supposed to be in bed by now?’ Jack asked.

‘Well now, our parents aren’t here, so who would enforce a curfew?’ Jade asked rhetorically. Jack got up from the couch and walked over to Ice.

‘Do we have him?’ he asked.

‘Yep, he and Sabre seem to be back in Mexico,’ Ice said.

‘Would our Mexican “jobs” still get us free tickets?’ Jack asked.

‘They should,’ Ice said. ‘But we don’t have the passports anymore.’

‘They’re at Marker’s warehouse. If what you say is true and he’s on our side, we can simply go and get them,’ Jack noted.

‘I guess we could if we don’t have another choice,’ she said, fearing that she would have to speak to Marker again.

‘Then that settles it. We go to Marker’s warehouse and then we fly back to Mexico,’ Jack said.

‘Well then, we better do this as fast as possible,’ she said. Jack nodded in agreement.

‘Okay guys, we’re going to go now. Thanks for all the help,’ Jack said. Jade got up and grabbed Jack’s hand, shaking it vigorously.

‘It’s been a lot of fun. If you ever come back to Egypt for some random reason, you know where to find us,’ he said. He moved on to Ice, knelt before her and kissed her hand. ‘It’s been a pleasure meeting a beauty such as you,’ he told her.

‘Thank you very much, you’re so sweet,’ she told him.

‘Give them your cell number,’ Johnny urged Jade and he complied. He grabbed the pizza receipt from the kitchen counter and scribbled a cell number down.

‘If you ever need anything, call this number,’ Jade said, handing the receipt to Jack, who stuck it in his pocket.

‘I’ll do that, thanks man. Okay, bye guys,’ Jack said. He shook Johnny’s hand and he and Ice left the room. They reversed back in moments later.

‘Could we please borrow some money for a taxi?’ Jack asked Jade.

‘Sure,’ Jade answered and gave him a ten dollar bill from his pocket.

‘Thanks man. I feel really bad about asking you for money, but I promise I’ll make it up,’ Jack said.

‘I wouldn’t have any worries about it if I were you, you guys have made up for it already tonight,’ he said.

‘Okay, if you say so. Bye now,’ Jack said and they left again. When he was sure they were out of earshot, Jade rushed over to Johnny.

‘Did the video record well enough?’ he asked Johnny.

‘Yeah, you can see everything in amazing detail,’ he answered, turning the laptop around so that Jade could see it. On it was video of Ice, naked in the shower.

‘This is so worth the ten bucks,’ Jade laughed. ‘Play it from the start and zoom in a bit.’

## The Breakup, makeup?

‘Those guys were so nice,’ Ice said as they waited for a cab next to the road.

‘Yeah, I can’t believe they actually gave us money without wanting it back,’ Jack added.

‘The world needs more selfless people like them,’ Ice said, prompting Jack to nod in agreement. They saw a taxi coming from the distance and waved wildly to catch its attention. It stopped by them and the driver motioned for them to get in.

‘Where do you want to go?’ the driver asked them when they were seated.

‘Do you have a piece of paper and a pen for me?’ Ice asked the driver. He nodded it handed them to her. She promptly jotted down the address and handed it to the driver.

‘Take us to that address, please,’ she asked. He nodded and they sped away at a high and dangerous speed. A few minutes later they arrived at the warehouse and the driver stopped.

‘Would you wait for us, sir?’ Jack asked.

‘No,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘I will only wait one of you stays in cab, so I can keep the meter running,’ he said.

*Thank goodness, this gives me an excuse,* Ice thought to herself. ‘I’ll stay here, you go get our bags. Mine has the things we need in it,’ she told Jack. He nodded and got out of the taxi, strolling into the warehouse. He saw their bags lying in a pile near a desk, but he could also here Marker snoring away in his room. So he tiptoed to the bags, as not to wake Marker up. Just as he got the bags, the snoring stopped. Jack stood dead-still, waiting to hear if the snoring would start again. It didn’t, and Marker strolled up to Jack.

‘I knew you guys would come back,’ he said.

‘I just came in to get our bags,’ Jack said holding them up for Marker to see.

‘Where’s Ice?’ he asked.

‘She’s waiting in a cab for me. I really need to go,’ Jack said and started to walk past Marker, but he stopped him.

‘So, she’s afraid to face me,’ Marker said. ‘I always suspected that she’s a poltroon.’

‘I don’t know what that means, or even why she would be afraid to face you, but I really need to go, because the cab’s meter is running up,’ Jack told Marker.

‘Okay, it’s all fine by me, could you just give Ice a message?’ he asked

‘Sure, what is it?’ Jack wanted to know.

‘Tell her that I really enjoyed doing her and that she could come over any time she wants,’ Marker said, with a naughty grin and chuckle. Jack pushed him aside and walked out. He pulled open the cab door, threw the bags in and then got in himself.

‘Take us to the airport,’ he told the driver and closed his eyes.

‘How did it go in there?’ Ice asked, but Jack ignored her. Confused by this, she decided to find out what was going on. ‘Why are you ignoring me? What did I do wrong?’ Jack still ignored her, despite her pleading for him to talk to her.

‘Please don’t do this to me,’ she said. Jack turned his head to face her. He was in tears.

‘How could you?’ he asked.

‘What do you mean?’ she wanted to know, although in the back of her mind she already had an idea of what was going on.

‘I thought you loved me. How could you jump in bed, with a sixteen year old no less, like some common slut? I trusted you!’ he said, tears streaming from his eyes.

‘Look, I thought you were dead. I was miserable and he kept demanding it from me for taking you to Blue Circle. I had to shut him up somehow,’ she said.

‘So you thought it was okay because I was dead? It wasn’t! You obviously don’t have a shred of real love or respect for me,’ Jack said. Ice started crying as well.

‘How could you! I really do love you, I would offer up everything to be with you! But if this is how you treat me, I’m starting to think that I’ve fallen in love with the wrong person,’ she said.

‘Well, how do you expect me to treat you? You slept with another man just like that. I can never even look at you in the same way again. All I would see is a slut!’ he yelled. Ice slapped him in the face.

‘Don’t you ever call me that again!’ she yelled. ‘I’m not a slut, I just…’

‘Calm down guys, no fighting in my car!’ the driver exclaimed. Jack breathed in and out, trying to calm down.

‘This is what’s going to happen,’ he told Ice. ‘We’re going to go to the airport. You’re going to board a plane to Mexico and I’m going to board a plane to take me home. Never come looking for me, I don’t want to see your ugly face ever again.’

‘Please don’t do this to me!’ Ice said. ‘I really do love you.’

‘If you loved me, you wouldn’t have slept with that little idiot,’ he said.

‘If you loved me, you would be able to forgive me,’ she retaliated.

‘I could forgive you anything, but definitely not this,’ Jack said.

They were silent for the rest of the drive to the airport. At the airport they got out of the cab, Jack paid the driver his fee and then walked into the airport lobby, leaving Ice behind. She went in a while later, but Jack had already left.

‘What happened that put you in that hole, man?’ the guy sitting next to Jack on his plane asked. They had not taken off yet.

‘Woman trouble,’ he answered the man, not looking up.

‘Harsh man. What did the flower do to you?’ he asked. Jacked looked at the man with confused expression. He had long brown hair and was wearing a tie dye shirt.

‘She jumped in bed with another guy,’ he told the hippy.

‘Harsh, dude. Did she have a good reason for sharing the love?’

‘I don’t know. She says so, but how could I believe her?’ he asked.

‘Man, love is hard to find. If you love this flower, you should believe in her and trust her,’ the hippy said.

‘I guess you’re right,’ Jack said.

‘Go to her, before our bird flies you away from love.’

‘Maybe I should give her another chance, thanks guy,’ Jack said as he got up from his seat.

‘Go, fly to your flower, little bee. Peace, man. And if you want me to teach you how to fly, look me up. Name is Freedom, place is South Africa.’

‘Bye,’ Jack said and walked towards the exit of the plane. A hostess stopped him halfway.

‘Please take your seat sir, we are about to take off,’ she told him.

‘Listen, I’m a government agent of Mexico and there could be an international incident if I don’t get off this plane now!’ Jack explained.

‘I guess I can make an exception this one time,’ she said. ‘Just get off the plane quickly.’ Jack gave her a huge hug and a kiss on the cheek.

‘Thank you so much!’ he exclaimed. Before she could say anything in return, he pushed on and ran to the door, which was still open, but the entry pipe was already retracted. He took a risk and jumped out the door. He hit the ground hard, but luckily only scraped his knee. He ran over the airfield and into the airport as fast as he could, going to the board stating the flights. He searched for the Mexico flight and finally he spotted it.

*Flight 807, Egypt – Mexico, Departed.*

‘No!’ he exclaimed. He ran over to the information counter.

‘Is there any way you can stop flight 807?’ Jack asked the clerk.

‘I’m sorry sir, but that flight as already taken off.’

‘No, it can’t be,’ Jack said miserably.

‘I’m sorry sir,’ the clerk said. Jack shook his head and walked off into the waiting room. He slowly sat down on one of the chairs and stared off into the distance.

‘WHAT HAVE I DONE!?!’ he shouted out loud, and sagged is head down, sobbing. He desperately tried to keep his emotions under control, but couldn’t. He felt the touch of a finger on the back of his neck, and moments later someone was whispering in his ear.

‘I knew you wouldn’t go,’ the voice said softly.