

## Chapter 15: April 5-7, 2003

“Zoop?” the old lady asks Dom.

She is the woman Dom rolled under a truck as the World Trade Center tower collapsed. At the time, he left without telling her his name. A year later she saw him on *All About Hackers* — a cable TV late-night local talk show — as she was channel-surfing. She recognized him immediately; saw his name at the bottom of the screen; and found him on [www.411.com](http://www.411.com). When she invited him to dinner, he came. Dom and the old lady have become fast friends. She liked techie stuff and was already using the Internet to communicate with her children and grandchildren. Dom introduced her to Vonage VoIP services so that she could talk as long as she wanted on the Internet without running up big bills. She fed him things he liked.

After Dom intercepted the text message to Mark Cohen’s cell phone ordering his arrest, he went to the old lady’s apartment in Brooklyn with his computer, a toothbrush and Listerine he bought on the way, chocolate for her, and no changes of clothes. The only questions she asked him were whether he had a girlfriend yet and what he wanted to eat. After dinner, he immediately went to work on his computer. He didn’t use the old lady’s broadband connection, but switched between several local WiFi nets he hacked into: Verizon WiFi (from a nearby ex-payphone location) and Verizon 1xEVDO.

By 11:00 PM, he has recaptured the packets from Donna’s spy camera, and starts watching them from the time he remembers entering Larry’s office. He starts a few minutes too soon, so the first thing he sees is Donna’s face as she leaves the office.

Watching her, he sighs.

That’s when the old lady asks, “Zoop?”

“What?” asks Dom, disoriented.

“Zoop,” she says. “Do you want some zoop? Is good for you. You need it.”

“Yes,” says Dom. “Yes, I do. I’m upset.”

“*Ich weiss*,” she says. “I know. Somebody has disappointed you. Was it the beautiful lady I saw on your computer? She is beautiful but I do not think she is a good person. I do not think she is Jewish, either. Is it she what ... that disappointed you?”

“Yes,” says Dom. “I feel like I was kicked in the stomach.”

“That’s why you need zoop,” says the old lady. “Is for your stomach. And for your soul. Did you love her?”

“No,” says Dom, now breathing normally and smiling fondly at the old lady. “No, Alte, I didn’t love her. It’s not what you think. I thought she was my

friend; that's what hurts me. She is trying to make trouble for me and I don't know why. She has betrayed me."

"That is vorse," says the old lady. "It is vorst of all to be betrayed by a friend. That's why we could not belief it when our neighbors turned us over to the Nazis. They vere our friends, these neighbors, and they turned us over and we could not belief it. Drink your zoop."

"Alte, I must work. I can't tell you why. It is better for you not to know why. But I have to work all night. May I work here?"

"You are always velcome here," says Alte. "Whatever you need to do it is okay, as you say. You vill vork and I must sleep because I am an alte lady and I vill talk too much to you if I stay avake. And after the night it vill be morning and ve vill have breakfast, yes?"

"Yes, Alte. We vill ... will have breakfast. Thank you. Thank you for being my friend."

*"Gute nacht, liebchen."*

"Good night, Alte."

Dom watches himself enter Larry's office in the jerky video. "Shit," he says as he watches himself shake the mushroom jar.

After much fast forwarding, Dom sees Ahmed enter Larry's office. The two men sit down and talk for a while. Ahmed hands Larry a Lucite pyramid. Larry looks crestfallen when he sees it. He puts it on the shelf near the mushrooms.

Dom rewinds to the pyramid and zooms in on it. He stops as if lost in thought. He puts his head down next to the computer and folds his hands over the nape of his neck. After some time, Dom picks his head up, changes broadband connections, and continues watching the video.

Larry leaves the room. While Larry's gone, Ahmed picks up Larry's gun from his desk and examines it. Before Larry returns, Ahmed puts the gun back. The two men sit down again, Larry facing the camera, Ahmed with his back to it. Ahmed and Larry argue and Ahmed leaves. It is a few minutes before Larry can calm himself enough to sit down. He also grimaces occasionally and rubs his stomach. He appears to be belching. Larry picks up the Lucite pyramid, then slams it back down on the shelf. He sits down and works for a while on his desk computer. He interrupts himself with frequent breaks during which he leaves the room.

"The mushrooms?" Dom asks himself out loud. "Shouldn't have been that soon, but maybe. Or something that bastard Ahmed told him?"

Now Donna enters the video and the office. She and Larry sit kitty-corner from each other at the coffee table. The camera swings to their conversation. At first they seem amiable. Donna touches Larry's knee; he laughs at something she says. Then he shows her the Lucite pyramid. Clearly it upsets him. She pats his shoulder; it looks as if she is reassuring him. But now they are arguing. Their heads are back like two intertwined snakes hissing at each other. Now they are friendly, again. Donna leans forward and smiles at Larry. He smiles back weakly.

Donna picks up the gun from the table and puts it to her head. Larry takes it from her hand as she puts it on the table, gestures with it for a while, then puts it to his own head.

Donna in the video flinches just milliseconds before Dom watching the screen. The left side of Larry's head explodes. Dom rewinds and watches again. Then he runs to the bathroom and throws up.

###

Rachel is shown into Mark's office. Despite her makeup being fresh, it is clear that she has been crying. She is in slacks and a sweater, far more casual than when she met Mark in the fern bar the previous afternoon.

She slumps in her seat. Silently, she hands Mark a handwritten note.

#

My Dearest Rachel:

It is time for me to leave. It is not likely that we will ever see each other again.

The problem we had thought was over has not ended. I have caused a situation for which I must take responsibility. I am afraid that I will not be able to succeed, but I hope that you know me well enough to understand why I must try. For the last four days I have thought of my alternatives and tried to fix what is broken from here. It cannot be done.

I asked you to tell the policeman as much of the truth as you know, and I hope you have done so. There is no reason for you to be further at risk than my presence in your life has already put you. Now that he knows what you know, he will have to try to prevent me from taking further action myself. I cannot let myself be restrained. I must do what needs doing, Allah willing.

I have never told you that I love you. My culture did not allow me to say that. I am no longer willing to be a captive of that culture. I cannot leave you without telling you that I do love you in a very Western sense. If I were not a danger to you, if I did not have to do that which I must do, I would ask you to be my wife.

It is not to be. You must think of me as dead. You must resume the life you should have.

Please show this letter to the Jewish policeman Mr. Mark Cohen. Bring it to him yourself and show it to him. I believe that he is a good person despite his job and he can arrange protection for you.

I Love You.

Ahmed

#

“I understand why you’re upset,” says Mark. “This must be very hard for you.”

“No shit,” says Rachel.

“I have to ask you this: Do you know where Ahmed is?”

“I’m sure he’s on his way to Jenin. Can you stop him? Can you save him?”

“I’m already trying. There’s no record of him buying a ticket for international travel recently. But he’s very intelligent. I don’t want to be negative, but I don’t think he would have told you to bring me the note if he thought there was any way I could stop him. I think he knows what he’s doing, and I have to assume he’s already left the country under a fictitious name. I’ll request assistance in Tel Aviv. If he come through there, we may be able to restrain him. I just hope he knows what he’s doing when he gets to Jenin, if that’s where he’s going. He’s absolutely right that you need protection.”

Rachel argues that she can just leave town for a while. She uses Mark’s computer to go online and make plans for a two week ski vacation in Utah using an alias that Mark has provided.

Mark has her picture taken for an ID with the alias to use on her flight and, after receiving proper receipts, also gives her a credit card with the new name. He says he will contact her about transferring money inconspicuously from her bank account to cover the credit card.

She says that Barcourt won’t like it when she says she’s going to be gone for a while, but fuck them — they owe her.

Mark provides an inconspicuous escort back to her apartment and arranges watchers through the night before she leaves.

###

**From:** Det. Marcus Cohen  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 5, 2003 1:03 AM  
**To:** ultramole@znowherez.com  
**Subject:** Your information

Dom:

I appreciate your openness. It is a sign of good intentions. The audio is an eyeopener. However, your information is stale. I have good reason to believe that the deceased had decided NOT to stage the attack BUT that elements in Jenin may be proceeding on their own with an attack that is NOT victimless. Does the name Yasir mean anything to you?

It doesn’t make sense for you to put yourself at risk as a fugitive any longer since the circumstances have changed. I strongly urge you to give yourself up. You can do that through an attorney if that is what you would prefer.

**From:** ultramole@znowherez.com  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 5, 2003 1:10 AM  
**To:** mark cohen  
**Subject:** RE: Your information

mark,

yes I know who yasir is. if he is involved in an attack it is more dangerous than i thought. he is exactly the kind of person that might seriously misuse our source code even worse than what larry intended to do. this makes it all the more imperative that i get all of our users updated asap so that the old source code becomes irrelevant and this game can be stopped. you will understand why that means that i cannot allow myself to be arrested during this process just as i understand that you would not be able to give me access to what i need to do what i must do if i were in your custody.

**From:** Det. Marcus Cohen  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 5, 2003 1:15 AM  
**To:** ultramole@znowherez.com  
**Subject:** RE: Your information  
**Importance:** High

URGENT URGENT URGENT

Dom:

It is URGENT that you not do an update of your users! Part of the threat that was made is that the start of any update will trigger a massive attack immediately before the update can take affect. I don't understand the technology involved. However, I believe my source to be credible.

hackoff will probably receive some demands in some form from collaborators of Yasir although we believe that he, himself, is dead. His death is not verified, however. We know nothing about the exact motives or methods of his collaborators although extortion is quite possible.

#

Dom reads this email three times. He looks at the ceiling, then back at the email. He twists his sideburns and looks back at the ceiling again. Mousing furiously, he trolls through websites full of hacker esoterica, sometimes cutting pieces of code from one window and pasting them into others. He runs a search engine he wrote himself that crawls through websites Google will never find. Sometimes he must solve a riddle as the price of entrance into a site or give a piece of hacker history known only to a very few people.

Occasionally, he runs an applet, then a ping trace, then an app whose source code he is continually modifying. Streams of numbers cascade down the screen. Sometimes Dom turns the numbers into histograms; some appear to be fractals, others much more predictable. Some of the patterns are superimposed on a recent map of the Internet Dom has accessed from somewhere. Nodes change colors as simulated packets march through them or bounce off. Occasionally, Dom aims a real packet stream at a real router.

At Dom's first attempt to make coffee, he is nerding so deeply that he spoons the coffee grounds into the basket of the Mr. Coffee without the strainer. The grounds pour onto the floor through the hole in the bottom of the basket for several seconds before Dom realizes that something is wrong. He is unsuccessful in cleaning the grounds off the linoleum floor with a dry paper towel. Finally, he focuses sufficiently to wet the towel and does a mediocre job of cleaning up some of the spill. Straining to keep himself from taking another mental journey, he puts the mesh strainer in the basket and does finally succeed in making a pot of coffee. He apparently doesn't notice spilling almost as much coffee on the counter as makes it into his cup. He burns his tongue by drinking too soon, but his focus has already shifted out of the room and back out onto the Internet.

Dom's packet streams are aimed at the servers of the Jenin Group but they are bouncing off a cyber-security fence that Israeli intelligence has built around the Palestinian territories. Even packets that are being beamed to and from satellites directly into the territories encounter this fence. The purpose of the fence is to disrupt terrorist communication and find yet more damning evidence against Yasser Arafat. Now it is protecting the servers of the Jenin Group from Dom's probes. He goes downstairs and paces clockwise around the block quickly in the cold predawn air. Then he reverses direction and paces counterclockwise as a dirty light preannounces the dawn.

Suddenly, Dom stops, straightens, and runs back to the old lady's building. He trips on the stoop, trips again twice on the stairs, and a final time on the door jamb.

He is back at his computer. Now his packets pretend to come from the set of Internet addresses that belong to hackoff.com. Dom places an agent just inside the hackoff firewall to redirect the appropriate returning packets to him. His probe is now through the Israeli security fence and in the DMZ of the Jenin Group's Local Area Network. Dom easily carves a hole in local security, giving him access to all of the servers on the LAN. His crawlers locate several copies of

hackoff source code. Dom pauses to replace each of them with authentic-looking but crucially altered versions of the code.

Now he monitors the live packet stream in and out of the Jenin Group LAN. His filters look for the IP addresses of hackoff customers but don't find any. What he does find is a stream of VoIP packets being exchanged with an address at hackoff.com. Dom picks off a copy of these, runs them through a VoIP decoder, and plays them through his earphones. Looking puzzled, he separates the inbound stream from the outbound stream and plays them separately.

#

**From:** ultramole@znowherez.com  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 5, 2003 6:10 AM  
**To:** chaim roslov  
**Subject:** security information

chaim:

you and i met at dinner in nyc with larry lazard last november. we had an excellent discussion about the comparative etymology of human and computer languages and why hackers like puns. you also were very informed on encryption and we discussed inventing and patenting an encryption/decryption game. i assume you had no trouble decrypting this email.

since you were such an interesting person to talk to, i used some of my own sources to find out more about you. at first i was surprised at how little i could find, you hardly exist on google and are even more invisible to some other tools i use. i have concluded from the information about you that does NOT exist that you are a member of or closely connected with israeli intelligence. i have information which i think but am not sure is of intelligence value and i intend to make that available to you. i also intend to ask you a favor that is important not only to me but to many other people as well. i believe we have many of the same enemies.

to assure that i am not wrong about you and that you are actually affiliated with security i am sending my information and my request in a following email which will be more strongly encrypted. in order to decode that easily you will need to provide the MAC address of the server called gulag which is used as a filter by israeli security.

**From:** ultramole@znowherez.com  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 5, 2003 6:14 AM  
**To:** chaim roslov  
**Subject:** security information  
**Attachments:** ipaddresses.xls

since you are reading this you must be who i think you are.

i know that israeli security monitors and sometimes blocks internet traffic going in and out of the territories for security reasons. i think you or your colleagues may be aware that there is traffic between hackoff.com and an organization in jenin which we have outsourced some work to.

it may be that you are particularly tolerant of this traffic since you know it represents a legitimate business relationship. i think however you may have been complacent. i had reason to monitor this traffic and found some highly suspicious traffic streams of what superficially appears to be voip between hackoff and the jenin group. however, the hackoff ip addresses are not in service. the packets outbound from jenin appear to be empty and, in fact, fall into the bit bucket when they get here since the addresses do not exist. the packets going into jenin do not originate at hackoff despite having hackoff origination addresses. as i said, these particular addresses are not in use.

when i listen to these packets as they are being received in jenin i hear what sounds like arabic although that is not a language i know. i think that this is some sort of communication designed to be undetected and unmonitored by you. the first sheet of the attached spreadsheet contains a list of the ip addresses involved so that you can monitor this communication as you see fit and leave it up or take it down as appropriate. that is your game and not mine.

now here is my problem. without explaining all the particulars, i am going to have to take some defensive actions on computers belonging to my customers to render them safe from an attack which i believe to be imminent. it is very possible that the other side will launch its attack as soon as they are able to detect that i am taking defensive measures and these measures will take me at least an hour so there is a window of vulnerability. thats where i need your help. i would like you to shut down all communication between the territories and the ip addresses of my customers whom i must protect which are listed on the second sheet of the spreadsheet, i need you to give me a



four hour window. if you are willing to do this, please respond with the time window in zulu time. when you respond to this email, your response will appear to bounce. that is a security measure of my own; i will still get the mail.

i have one more inducement to offer you for helping me. it is clear from what ive told you that i have been able to penetrate your border ip security. it may be that no one else will ever find the hole i found. i will never use this hole for any illegitimate purpose. i assume, however, that you will still want to plug the hole and i will tell you where it is if you help me do what i need to do.

because i know you will make some inquiries i need to tell you honestly what my present situation is. i am a fugitive from the police here in nyc on suspicion that i poisoned your friend larry lazard who you probably know shot himself. i did not kill larry lazard nor would i kill or attempt to kill anyone. i must remain a fugitive until i am able to protect my customers from the attack against them.

pls let me know you will open a window for me by shutting a gate on them.

thanx.

###

Detective Mark Cohen finds Kevin Wong at hackoff on Saturday morning. In Dom's absence, Kevin is acting as CTO.

"Have you heard from Dom?" Kevin asks.

"Yes," says Mark, "I have. I want to help him. I have a question for you."

"Shoot," says Kevin. "Not literally," he adds, eyeing the bulge beneath the shoulder of Mark's jacket.

"I know this place is very secure — from a network point-of-view..."

"Right," says Kevin.

"I mean you have to worry about hackers breaking in and everything..."  
Again Mark pauses.

"Right."

"So, what I'm asking is: Do you think there could be any way someone clever, some smart hacker could get in and do the kind of thing from outside that you're only supposed to be able to do from inside? I mean, that would be bad, right?"

"Right," says Kevin, "that would be called a backdoor. That would be bad."

"I think that's what Dom's worried about."

"What do you mean? What did Dom say?"

“This is an ongoing investigation, so I’m not allowed to say much,” says Mark. “But I can tell you that Dom thought you were the person to go to for things like this. That must be why you’re acting CTO, right?”

“Right.”

“So, if you thought there was a backdoor, could you shut it down?”

“If I knew where it was, of course. Did Dom say...”

“That’s the problem. We don’t know where the backdoor is. But it looks like there probably is one. So, if you know there is one but you don’t know where it is, then what can you do? I mean, could you change all the locks or something? Does that make sense?”

“Sort of,” answers Kevin. “We have a lockdown drill. It means that we have to go to backup for email, but that’s no so bad on a weekend. It means people working at home wouldn’t be able to get in to the network. That’d be a pain, especially on a weekend. If Dom wanted us to do it, we could. Let me think...”

Mark lets him think.

“Yeah, we could do it. But ... Are you sure? I haven’t seen anything on the traces makes it look like we have a problem.”

“That’s the problem,” says Mark. “It’s someone Dom thinks is really good. Wouldn’t leave a trace. I think you should do it. I think you should lock down for the weekend at least. Then hopefully Dom’s back and we know what to do next.”

“Right,” says Kevin.

###

**From:** shalom  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 5, 2003 10:14 AM  
**To:** ultramole@znowherez.com  
**Subject:** your request

0500Z 20030406 - 0800Z 20030406

###

“Yes!” says Dom. “YES!” He slams his right fist into his left palm, gets up, and almost dances around the kitchen.

“What is it, *liebchen*?” asks Alte. “I’m glad to see you happy. You deserve it.”

“Can’t explain, but I’ve got help,” says Dom. “I’ve got the help I need. Now I can do it.”

“Good, *liebchen*,” says the old lady. But Dom is already hunched over the computer working furiously.

“No,” wails Dom. “No! Shit! Can’t be!”

“Vhat, *liebchen*, vhat is the matter?”

“I can’t get in! I’m locked out! I’m stuck.”

“Who locked you out, *liebchen*? Who would do that?”

The old lady’s voice seems to calm Dom. “It must be Kevin,” he says. “It must be. I taught him how to do the lockdown. Now he’s done it. Shit!”

“Why would this Kevin do this to you?”

“I doubt if he thinks he did it to me. Something must have scared him, made him hit the switch. But I trusted Donna... Not Kevin, too.” Dom looks as if he’s close to crying.

“This is a computer thing?” asks the old lady. “This lockdown is a computer thing?”

“Yes.”

“Then you can fix it,” she says. “You can fix anything wit computers. Even I know that.”

“I would have to break it to fix it,” says Dom. “And I made it so it couldn’t be broken. It was only for use if something happened to me. I made the lock. Kevin just closed it.”

“You will open it. I know.”

But Dom can’t. He’s now been without sleep for thirty-two hours, not that unusual for him, but wearing. His head is on the kitchen table in despair. Occasionally he tries a few keystrokes or mouse clicks, only to look away again at the result.

“There’s no way,” he says. “I can’t.”

“Yes you can, *liebchen*, you always can.”

“But...” says Dom, “this time I beat myself.”

The old lady says nothing. Dom puts his head back down. Then suddenly up, staring at nothing. “No,” he says, head back down. “I can’t ... I can’t do what...”

“What?” asks Alte.

“I can’t get into the building,” says Dom. “I mean the real building, not the network. I can’t; the cops are guarding it. And, even if I did, they must have guards in the building. They must be watching. I couldn’t be in the halls. I couldn’t ... I can’t...” His face is white.

“You can’t vhat, *liebchen*?”

“I can’t crawl through the pipe. I can’t. It’s too close, too tight, too dark. I can’t.”

“You can,” she says decisively. “*Ich weiss* ... I know you can. I saw you. You saved me. I vill help you...”

“How can you help me?” asks Dom, miserable.

“There vas a story,” says the old lady. “There vas a story from vhen I vas a little girl. There vere two animals — a lion vas one, I know, the other I think vas a mouse. One day the lion didn’t eat the mouse. And the mouse said: ‘Thank you. Thank you for not eating me. One day I vill help you.’ And the lion laughed that the mouse vould help. And he forgot. But one day the lion got a big thorn in his foot. And he couldn’t run around any more like a lion and he

couldn't catch anything to eat. And the mouse came and she took the thorn out of the lion's foot with her sharp little teeth. And she said: 'See. You shouldn't laugh when someone says she will help you.'

"How will you help me, Alte?" asks Dom.

#

It's just after midnight. The cop at the backdoor of the building in which hackoff.com is located is cold and bored. He's alert though. Detective Mark Cohen, himself, has told the officer that the suspect likes backdoors.

An old lady shuffles past him; there have been several during the night, although not as many as there would've been in the days before Giuliani somehow reduced the street people population. A minute later, the old lady screams. The cop turns, but she has gone out of sight into a small alley. There is no question where the screams are coming from. He runs into the alley and has his gun drawn by the time he gets to the still-screaming bundle of rags.

"Get him!" she screeches. "He hit me! He knocked me down. He took my purse! Get him! Is everything I have."

"Where? Where is he? Are you alright?" The cop's flashlight shows no apparent wounds on the old lady who is struggling to her feet, and nothing in the alley but trash and ... something moving. A rat.

"There," she says and points to a dark corner. The cop runs there with light and gun ready. Nothing but the scrapping of claws.

"No! He's there! Get him!" Different direction. Same result.

The old lady is in tears. "He has taken everything, all. I have nothing, now; nothing."

"Come on, grandma," says the cop. "I'm gonna call an ambulance. Then we'll get social services. They'll take care of you. You'll be all right. Fucking predators — excuse me, ma'am. It just gets me upset. But we'll take care of you, okay? Don't worry. And don't cry." He is a kind man.

"No," says the old lady. "*Nein!* They can't take me away. Don't let them. No!"

"They'll HELP you, grandma."

But she won't be persuaded. She won't even wait for the backup to come so he can bring her in to file a complaint and try to ID her attacker. "He was big," she says. "He has a very white face and a very black beard and cold black eyes."

She finally scurries off despite his objections.

#

Dom takes the grate off the airshaft in the building utility room with the screwdriver of his Leatherman tool. He puts the tool back on his belt. Sweat beads on his temples and his breathing becomes shallow and fast. He leans slowly forward so he can illuminate the shaft with his LED flashlight and pokes

his head in while keeping his body far back. He pulls his head back suddenly, then forces it back into the shaft. He puts his hands on his thighs as if using them to force his legs toward the shaft.

Very slowly he pulls his body into the shaft by the handholds above the opening. The LCD light joins the Leatherman tool on his belt and, after hesitating, he turns it off. The sweat is now dripping from his chin despite the slight chill in the room and the even colder air in the shaft. It takes him a minute to place both his feet on rungs below the opening. He sobs once with fear, then forces himself upright and resets his face from sob to clench.

Stooping in the shaft, Dom reaches out and pulls the grate back into the shaft opening. He can just squeeze his forearm out to screw the grate back in. But he drops the tool. Now he has to remove the grate again; lift it; reach down and pick up the tool and resume the job. He is moving steadily but in slow motion.

Dom climbs the shaft. Dim light filters through grates from rooms with lights. After two stories of painful but accelerating climbing, Dom reaches the grate into hackoff's server room. The room is lit faintly and LEDs twinkle on the many machines. Cool air from the shaft is drawn past Dom's sweaty neck as it whispers into the room. Dom starts to reach out through the grate with the tool, then stops and carefully puts the tool back on his belt. He takes out one of his shoelaces, ties one end around his wrist and the other to the tool, and then reaches outside. He does drop the tool as he tries to work with it but it doesn't fall out of reach in front of the still screwed-in grate since it is attached to his wrist. Dom grins slightly and succeeds in removing the grate and entering the room. He puts the lace back in his shoe but doesn't tie it.

Now Dom is comfortable again, clearly back in his element. He activates a monitor and pulls a tray with a keyboard out of one of the racks. Seated on a wooden stool, he grunts, snuffles, and talks to himself as he navigates through the hackoff server farm and then establishes contact with several customer sites. Now five monitors are in use: one is attached to a local server, a second is remoted to a customer server Dom is working on, two are monitoring other customer servers, and one is running a utility Dom cobbled together to look for anomalies in the packet streams in and out of hackoff. After a few minutes, Dom commandeers a sixth monitor and hooks into building security so he can watch the elevators coming up to hackoff.

Very gingerly and a step at a time, Dom installs his upgrade on a customer server. Nothing on the monitors indicates that the other customers are being attacked. Dom runs a few tests to verify his install at the first customer site. The test gives six greens and one yellow. Dom tinkers a bit more and the yellow turns green. He now runs scripts to upgrade multiple numbers of customers simultaneously. The scripts automate what Dom did manually to the first customer, so he is free to watch. His head swivels from monitor to monitor. Once, he quickly shuts everything down. Then, after a few checks, resumes the process.

Something catches Dom's eye on the building security camera. He grimaces and increases the number of simultaneous upgrades. Now he is also watching the door to the server room but it doesn't open. After ninety minutes, the upgrade process is apparently done. Dom runs another round of tests. He looks at the IP packet log again.

Dom goes back to the shaft but only to replace the grate. Atypically, he combs his hair and tucks in his shirt, which has come out of his belt. He tries to brush some black dirt from the shaft off his shirt but only succeeds in smearing it. Then he walks briskly to the server room door and opens it.

"Hello, Dom," says Mark Cohen. The detective is leaning against the wall across from the door and about ten feet down the hall. There is no one else in sight. Mark keeps some of his weight on the wall as if to avoid frightening Dom.

"Hello, Mark," says Dom. "I saw you come in."

"You mean I didn't activate the backdoor right after all of that?"

"No. You did fine. There is a tiny discontinuity, though, when the loop repeats on the camera. I tinkered with it as much as I had time to and figured no one would see it unless they were looking for it and no one would do that except me."

"Figures that you would leave a backdoor in the backdoor."

"You didn't have to come here to arrest me. I told you I would turn myself in when I finished doing what I had to do."

"And did you accomplish what you needed to accomplish? Are the customers safe?"

"Yes. Yes, I did. If you'd interrupted me when you first came in the building, the bots would have had to finish the upgrade by themselves, which would have been fine. But I wouldn't have known it was fine. So I appreciate your waiting. So why did you wait, though? Why didn't you arrest me right away?"

"I wanted to put you under obligation," says Mark. "Is there somewhere we can sit down?"

"Am I allowed in my office?"

"As long as you're with me."

The two men sit across from each other at the table in Dom's office. Dom is breathing heavily but slowly. He looks relaxed, although he's filthy from the shaft he crawled through. Mark is tidier but more tired-looking than Dom; his shoulders are slumped, but he is smiling.

"How did you know I'd be here?" asks Dom.

"I got Kevin to bolt the cyber backdoor."

"Yeah. Why did he do that? He's my friend ... I thought he was my friend..."

"He is your friend," says Mark. "I let him think you wanted him to do it. That avoided a conflict for him. He was glad to do it."

"He's a good guy, but he doesn't play games well," says Dom. "Still, glad to know I have a friend ... one friend."

"You paused. What did you think of?"

“Nothing,” says Dom. “So, go on... You got Kevin to lock the cyber backdoor, and...”

“And that meant you’d come here. I could’ve bet that you’d come in the real backdoor and then take a backdoor into the server room but that was just a guess. I had cops at both sides. When I got the report that the cop on the backdoor had been distracted, I was on my way. By the way, who did that? Who helped you?”

“I will never tell you.”

“Actually, that could be construed as obstruction of justice.”

“Construe it however the fuck you want.” Dom sits upright and defiant.

“Let’s change the subject for a minute... Why did you let Larry take the blame for ‘Gotcha’? Why did he want to take the blame?”

“I ... I don’t know what you mean.”

“Of course you do. You did ‘Gotcha’, not Larry. It doesn’t take much to figure that out. ‘Gotcha’ is your MO written in spades. It’s like the hack you told me about at Caltech. It has a backdoor like everything you do. I’ve suspected you did it for some time, and you confirmed it in your email when you said ‘it would be impossible for me to learn anything from the author of Gotcha’ or something like that. You can’t stand anyone thinking that Larry was a good enough hacker to do ‘Gotcha’. You’ve been wanting to tell me the truth about this since we first talked. Why don’t you tell me now?” Mark is extremely calm and has a friendly smile while he says all this.

Dom is almost smiling himself and wiggles slightly in his seat as he says, “Yeah, Larry did take credit for ‘Gotcha’. It was the best I’d done up until then, but Larry took credit for it. He could never have done it. And I let him, that’s true — I let him take the credit.”

“Why?” asks Mark with the minimum possible intensity and no body movement.

“I was afraid. I was afraid that I was going to be arrested and go to jail. I couldn’t stand that. I have ... I HAD claustrophobia. I couldn’t go to jail. I couldn’t go where there are no computers. And I couldn’t be locked in. I was too afraid.”

“You don’t have claustrophobia now?”

“Didn’t I just crawl in through a pipe?” says Dom proudly. “Didn’t I just crawl in through a very dark pipe? I used to have to pretend to be my avatar ultramole just to get into an elevator. Now, I — Dom Montain — I can crawl through a dark pipe if I have to. Don’t like it but I can do it.”

“What cured you?”

“9/11.”

“I want to hear that story someday,” says Mark. “I really do. But tell me, why did Larry want to take the blame ... the credit for ‘Gotcha’?”

“He saw the career possibilities. That kind of game he played very well. He figured out that there was going to be huge fear about hacking and that he could take on the character of the foremost authority and have a great consulting business if he took credit for ‘Gotcha’ because it was such a good

hack and because it was more a warning than an actual attack. He was right. He figured all that out. He wasn't afraid to go to jail like I was. And he tricked me."

"Tricked you?"

"Yeah." Dom looks miserable again but his breathing is in control. He rubs his bleary eyes and smears more dirt on his face. "Yeah, Larry made me believe that I was about to be caught. That the cops were closing in. He scared me. But it wasn't true. No one was closing in except Larry. He pinged my computer system — made me think the cops were closing in, so I thought I was going to be caught. Then, when I was so afraid I'd go to jail — my claustrophobia and all — Larry says he knows what's going on; that the police have told him about their investigation and that they are about to catch me no matter what he does to protect me. And when I'm most scared, he says he'll take the rap. I was almost grateful to him, I was so scared. He tells me the truth, he appears to be very sincere, how he wants to jump start his security consulting career. And he says, after he gets out of jail, he'll start a company and I can be CTO and I'll be King of the Hackers because I'll be the good guy that protects everyone else from hackers."

"Some story..."

"It's the truth," says Dom. "It is the truth. I don't mind telling you that part because you can't arrest me for 'Gotcha'. Statute of limitations and all, I checked. And it's time I get credit for what I did."

"How did you find out that Larry tricked you, that the police really weren't closing in?"

"I don't want to talk about that."

Mark shrugs. "So, Larry figured out that you were doing 'Gotcha' and then tricked you into thinking there was a police attack and then took the blame ... or credit... for what you did. I don't want to piss you off or anything, but it seems he sort of won that game pretty fair by hacker rules. I mean if he went to jail for what you did..."

"You don't get it," says Dom. "You don't get it at all..."

Silence from Mark.

"If Larry out-hacked me, right, that would be fair. But he didn't; he just violated my confidence."

"What do you mean?"

"One night while I was doing 'Gotcha' and Larry didn't know it, he took me out to dinner; he did that sometimes. We liked each other; he knew what I could do. He got me drunk. He was always trying to buy me a drink but I didn't drink and I didn't do drugs. I didn't want anything fucking up my brain. Some reason, maybe because I was more tired than usual, maybe because 'Gotcha' was getting to be such a big thing and I couldn't tell anybody, I did take a drink. It didn't do anything so I had another. Pretty soon I was drunk; I was sick. I don't remember after that. Larry took me home; I woke up in my bed in a pool of puke and my head hurt. I couldn't program all morning.



“So, this is the thing,” Dom continues. “I didn’t remember what I said or what I did when I was drunk. And the next day Larry just laughed about it and said no big deal, we’d have to go out again and tie one on. Just laughed at me a little, but it was okay because it was friendly. But it turns out when I was drunk I told him everything about ‘Gotcha’, even how my alarms worked. So it’s not like he outhacked me and figured it all out and spoofed me that the cops were coming. He got me drunk and then he took advantage of what I told him. He didn’t figure out a fucking thing. Then he taunted me about it.”

Upset now, he stands. He unbuttons two buttons at the top of his shirt leaving dirt marks where he touches the shirt front. “He fucking taunted me. That’s why I quit.” Now Dom goes over to the window and looks out, as if trying to see past his reflection into the darkness.

“When did he taunt you?”

“What?”

“When did Larry taunt you?” asks Mark.

“I told you,” says Dom. “He taunted me on March 31; he taunted me and told me how he’d gotten me drunk and I told him everything. How he’d fooled me into thinking the cops were about to get me but it was only him setting off my alarms. Up ‘til then I’d always been grateful to Larry for saving me from going to jail. I mean, I knew he was an asshole, and I knew he had his own reasons for doing it and all that, but I also thought he’d helped me and stood up for me. I owed him for that. But, no. It wasn’t that. He just got me drunk and took advantage of me and laughed at me because I was running, even though no one was chasing me. He said I was stupid and naïve. So I quit. No way I could stay at hackoff after that.”

“You told me before that you quit at staff meeting; other witnesses said the same thing.”

“I did. I just ran out of the office when Larry told me all this shit. I had to think about it. I didn’t want to quit because ... because it’s my company — I helped make it — and because I gotta protect the customers from Larry’s hack. So I try to control myself. But then he starts laying on me in staff meeting. And now I have this new perspective how he never was my friend, how he tricked me from the beginning, then I lost it and quit — for real.”

“Is that why you put poison mushrooms in his mushroom jar?”

“I didn’t say I did that. You’re trying to trick me.”

“Dom, I have the video. I SAW you put the mushrooms in the jar.”

“No you didn’t.” Dom’s back at the table, leaning on the back of the chair he’d been sitting in. He meets Mark’s gaze. “I saw the video. You saw me shake the mushroom jar. Big deal; I was in the office; I was mad; I was impatient and I picked up his fucking mushroom jar and shook it. You’re not gonna go to court with that.”

“You did more than shake the jar, Dom. You took a plastic baggie out of your pocket. You juggled the baggie and the jar and you put the baggie back in your pocket. And now, you’ve just given me a pretty good motive. You found out how he tricked you when you thought he was your friend. Then he dissed

you and he told you you were stupid. Plenty of people have been killed for a lot less than that.”

“Larry killed himself, you saw him in the video. We both saw him. I didn’t kill him; I wouldn’t kill anyone.”

“Right,” says Mark. “Charge would be attempted murder since the deceased took it on himself to administer the *coup de grace*. Although, I’ll tell you, a prosecutor might say that he killed himself because he was hallucinating from the mushrooms. Might still go for murder one...”

“They weren’t hallucinatory ‘shrooms. It was in the paper; they weren’t hallucinatory.”

“So I’m thinking,” says Mark who doesn’t appear to have heard Dom, “I’m thinking it would be a lot better for you if we could figure out why Larry would want to shoot himself. Was it something Ahmed told him? Something Donna told him? Or was it those mushrooms churning his gut?”

“I’ve got to think,” says Dom. “I get to think.” He sits down and puts his head in his arms on the table. The muscles twitching in his forearms make it very clear that he is awake.

Mark, on the other hand, appears to be asleep as he sits with his head slumped and his eyes closed.

###

It is morning in Jenin. A pair of Israeli Cobra helicopters rise above the horizon, so distant that they appear to float soundlessly straight up. They are actually advancing quickly towards the city. At a predetermined distance, each of the helicopters launches two very guided missiles. Despite its smart electronics, one missile has a mechanical malfunction and self-destructs just before hitting the desert sand. The other three missiles slam into three different small buildings in Jenin. Immediately there are secondary explosions and then thick black smoke from two of the buildings indicating that there were explosive materials stored in them.

Part of the story is on the BBC within an hour. The announcer is an emaciated woman with hollow eyes and stringy blond hair who looks as if she has not slept in weeks. The video cuts from her to a shouting man running with a bleeding child in his arms as she says: “Witnesses report that missiles from five Israeli gunships struck residential buildings in this refugee camp this morning. Many of the victims reportedly were children. UN observers were quick to condemn this further escalation of violence by the Israelis.”

There is no mention of the secondary explosions.

###

Mark’s cell phone rings.

“I’m going to have to go out in the hall and answer this,” he says to Dom who still has his head down. “I assume you’ll wait for me.”

Dom doesn't answer and Mark steps out into the hall and away from the door. After answering the call, he asks the caller to hold while he arranges for a cop lurking around the corner to keep the door in view. Then he resumes the conversation.

Dom springs up the minute Mark leaves. He quickly goes to his computer and sends an encrypted email to an address that doesn't exist at AOL. A bot running inside AOL grabs the email as it bounces, decrypts it, and forwards it. Then the bot erases itself.

#

**From:** lion  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 6, 2003 5:14 AM  
**To:** mouse  
**Subject:** we did it

not to worry, alte, we did what needed to be done. i am safe and look forward to seeing you again. don't know yet when i can but not to worry. thank you thank you thank you.

#

Mark comes back into the room. "You have friends in foreign intelligence," he says.

"If I did, I wouldn't say," says Dom. "Isn't that the way the game is played?"

"I didn't ask. That was a statement. It's probably a good thing for you."

Dom says nothing.

"Why are you protecting Donna Langhorne?" Mark asks. "She's not protecting you. Where do you think we got the video of you putting poison mushrooms in Larry's mushroom jar? Who do you think has been trying to implicate you in Larry's murder since this all began?"

"I'm under no obligation to her," says Dom vehemently. "I thought she was my friend; she's not. But she didn't murder Larry. We've both seen the tape. We've both seen Larry shoot himself."

"But we don't know why. We don't know why, and somebody's bound to say it was the mushrooms."

"We may be able to hear Larry's meetings with Ahmed and Donna." Dom has clearly just made a decision. "I don't promise, but we may be able to."

"Would be nice," says Mark. "How? Do you know what happened to the audio that goes with the video?"

"No. I don't. It seems strange that it has no audio; maybe something broke. But I used to have a bug of my own in Larry's office. That's how I got the audio that I pointed you to last night. Then someone took the bug out of Larry's office; it was in a Lucite thing the underwriters gave us after the IPO. It

disappeared from his office. But Ahmed brought it back. I guess he probably stole it in the first place, but you could see him give it back in the video. But I don't know if it was working when he brought it back."

"Interesting," says Mark. "It's part of a crime scene, though. We can't just go take it out of there. Maybe tomorrow..."

"Don't have to touch it. I can download its audio from here. If there's anything to download, if it's still working. If it's okay with you, I mean." He is exaggerating his politeness. "I can see what's on it now."

"Go ahead," says Mark. "Hopefully for you, we hear something more than Larry complaining about the mushrooms in his gut."

Dom mouses for a few seconds. "I can still get its radio to work," he says. "We have contact. First new recording is from February 28, about when I first noticed it was gone. So maybe we'll find out where it went. It's voice-activated, so we'll only hear when there's something to listen to." A grinding and screeching comes from his speakers. "Sounds like it went for a ride on a subway."

The subway sounds continue intermittently for fifteen minutes.

"It skips over the quiet parts," Dom explains, "so we don't hear anything in the stations."

"Lady, can you spare a buck?" asks a bleary male voice.

"Get lost," says an indistinct woman's voice.

"Sounds like a homeless person has it," says Dom. "Wonder how he got it?"

Now a man and a woman are talking.

"Can you back that up?" asks Mark.

Dom does and they listen again to the couple.

"That's Donna Langhorne," says Dom. "She must have taken it for some reason. I think..."

"You think what? You think you know why she would take it?"

"No... No. I was surprised, that's all. I don't recognize the man's voice."

"Noted," says Mark, "that you're holding something back again. You do have an idea why Donna might have taken it. I know who the man is and I'll tell you just because I hope you'll start telling me the truth. It's her husband Francis; I interviewed him briefly on the phone. He's out of the country."

Dom nods. "Right. I met him a few times. Scumbag lawyer of some kind." He repositions at the beginning of their conversation. "Okay, Donna and Francis, let's take it from the top."

#

Donna: (indistinct even after several tries)

Francis: What are you doing home so early, babe? What's that thing?

Donna: It's a Lucite tombstone from our IPO; Barcourt gave them to us. Isn't it nice? You won't believe what the fuck is going on at hackoff.

Francis: I'd believe anything, babe, try me. I've seen that in your office before. Why did you bring it home? Are you going to tell me? You're carrying it like it's a bomb.

Donna: It's not the one from my office; it's the one from Larry's office. It was too dangerous to leave it there. Look, get me a drink, would'ya? Then I'll tell you the whole story.

#

"She must've known it was bugged," murmurs Mark.

"I doubt it," says Dom, stopping the playback, "or she wouldn't be talking in front of it and it never would've come back. I trusted her and I told her a lot but I never told her I bugged Larry's office."

He clicks the 'Resume' button on his screen.

#

Donna: Okay. Let's start with this morning. Somehow Dom knows we're using the Israelis to write the warning thing that's gonna scare our customers into upgrading to managed service...

Francis: (alarmed) He's a (indistinct) ...on. How'd he find out you're doing it? He could make a lot of trouble. He might turn you in. Kill you. Way you explained it, babe, he's got this hacker's honor thing like religion. That's bad...

#

Dom shakes his head as if trying to clear it. "I didn't know she was in on it. God, I WAS dumb. When I found out Larry had hired those guys in Jenin to do what I wouldn't do, I told her about it. I thought she was on my side. I thought she'd help me stop him. She told me she'd help me stop him. ...Shit."

Mark holds up a finger to hush him and he subsides.

#

Donna: He doesn't know I'm in on it. He came to me all upset because somehow he knows Larry's hired those guys. So I try to calm him down. Tell him I'll try to figure a way to stop Larry. Of course what's got Dom really upset is that the Jenin Group's got his precious source code;

it's like they have his balls or something. I thought I had him calmed down. I convinced him it wasn't a good idea to start threatening Larry.

But then he goes and CALLS the Jenin Group. He gets this wild man Yasir on the phone, belongs to the PLO or al Qaida or something like that. Dom gets this radical on the phone – hates Jews, hates Americans, hates I don't know what, and here's this American Jew reaming him out. The guy goes off the deep end and takes off with a copy of the precious source code. Ahmed, he's the agent for these guys...

Francis: Yeah. I know. Remember, we talked about that. His uncle's a client of my firm sometimes, right? I told you that.

Donna: Yeah, I forgot. Anyway, Ahmed tells Larry about Dom's call and Larry goes off the deep end.

Francis: What's this guy, Yasir, gonna do with this precious source code?

Donna: I don't know. No one knows. But we haven't heard from him yet. What can he do? He's just one guy. A kid really.

Francis: So that doesn't sound too bad.

Donna: Probably not, except for fucking Larry going postal. Jesus, I need that like a hole in the head

Francis: Okay, babe, calm down. What did Larry do exactly?

Donna: Don't use that fucking condescending lawyer tone with me. What he did, EXACTLY, was go off the deep end is what he fucking did. He decided to call the whole thing off. He panicked. Truth is, he's been getting cold feet anyway. Thinks because he signed one big contract with iHudson for monitored service he can pull the whole thing off without this. Got an award from some do-gooder group in Newark, too – him and Louise go to this fancy black tie dinner. Mayor of Newark tells him he's a great guy because he helps all the poor kids. All of a sudden he's a different Larry. I think this is just an excuse; he wanted an excuse to call it off.

Francis: Maybe he was getting cold feet thinking of you being CEO?

Donna: I was getting to that. I think it's that, too. A year ago he promised. First "we gotta fight off the hostile"; then "we gotta let the dust settle"; then "now we gotta do this one more thing, force the customers over to monitored service, get profitable, that's when you take over, Donna." Right, and I keep falling for it. Now when I tell him he's a jerk to get cold feet, you know what he says?

Francis: Go on.

Donna: He says "I think that tells me you're not ready to be CEO. You don't see the big picture. You just want a quick hit." Shit like that. I don't fucking believe it. Larry's lecturing ME on wanting a quick hit. Our boy's turning into a saint right before our eyes. Which gets to why I had to take this little trinket out of his office.

Francis: (inaudible)

Donna: I didn't tell you about this before because it seemed like just a little boy's game, the kinda thing Dom likes to do. When Larry and Dom and me did the last thing to stop the hostile...

#

"Stop the recording," says Mark. "You gonna tell me what the 'last thing' was, or we just wait until she does. Looks like one way or another I'm gonna find out. Actually, I think I know anyway."

"I don't think you know," says Dom. He is miserable again.

"I'll write it down on this piece of paper," says the detective. He writes something, folds the paper in quarters, and puts it on the table between them. "Go ahead."

"So," says Dom. "I told the hackers how to get into the antihack sites so that antihack couldn't do their hostile. I did do that. But I wouldn't hack my own customers; I wouldn't hack the people who depended on me to protect them. That's wrong. I wouldn't do it." His voice is stronger on the last sentence and he sits up straight again.

"I was almost right," says Mark pushing the paper toward Dom who doesn't open it. "It was your MO all over again. I thought you hacked in and left a door open for everyone else. You sure that's not what you did?"

"I was going to. I even had the code written. But, when I looked hard enough at how to get my code in, I saw that those jerks left a hole all of their own in their development system just where I would've hacked in a backdoor. So I didn't need to use my code, just post on the hacker boards what I found."

Mark says: "Once I knew you did 'Gotcha' I knew you had to do this one, too. Before, I thought it might've been Larry."

"He couldn't've done it. He wasn't good enough. He knew that. He wanted me to do it because he knew it would work. So did Donna. We were friends again, like the old days. We did it together. We trusted each other and it worked."

"What's with the Lucite thingamajigs?" asks Mark. "Where do they come in? I still don't get that part."

"So, maybe we didn't completely trust each other. We were worried, particularly Donna was worried: What if one of us tries to rat the others out or even make sure the others get all the blame? How do we protect against that?"

She didn't really believe in hacker's honor, I guess. So we wrote down everything, that all of us were in on it, the details. Then I got this old hacker — Larry knew him, too, from MacHack. Donna interviewed him like she was gonna hire him or something, but she liked him. He's sort of a hardware hacker, too, not just software. Anyway, he makes these three 'cyberkeys' — electronic keys, I mean — and embeds'em in these Lucites we've all got in our offices from the IPO. Idea is that all three of our cyberkeys together can unlock and destroy the record. One can unlock the record but then, if the other two don't 'agree' within seventy-two hours, the record goes public. It gets blasted out all over the Internet, even onto the hackoff chat group. We agreed we'd all keep the cyberkeys where they were, in our offices, so each of us would know the other ones were safe.

"That's why I put the bug in the Lucite," he continues. "I was sure it would stay in Larry's office. And I was surprised when it disappeared, but so much shit was going on by then with the Jenin Group and all that I never did figure that out. I knew it was out of range of my receiver; I couldn't trigger it anymore. Wouldn't have guessed Donna had it, anyway. And she never told me about Yasir taking off and making threats. She should've told me; Larry should've told me. I could've done the update I just did. I could've figured some way to make sure they didn't know we were doing the upgrade or some way to hold 'em off from attacking while we were upgrading. I just did that, right?"

"You did with a little help from your friends, your Israeli friends I mean," says Mark.

"How do you know about them?"

"Never mind. It's not important now. So you didn't know that Yasir had the source code and was making threats. Did you know Larry got cold feet? That Larry wanted to call the whole thing off?"

"No. I told you; I didn't have my bug in his office anymore. He wasn't telling me shit. Donna told me that she hadn't been able to stop Larry from doing this thing with the Jenin Group 'yet', but she would keep trying. And I was working nights on an upgrade so it wouldn't matter what the Jenin Group did, they wouldn't be able to get in. I've had the upgrade ready for a while but I couldn't install it."

"Why not? Why couldn't you just install it like you did tonight? That wasn't hard, at least for you."

"We have ... we had controls. No one person is supposed to be able to do an upgrade. It's like it takes two combinations to open the safe at the bank. Larry wouldn't let me do an upgrade. He kept giving me bullshit excuses. And I couldn't do it without his key, or without hacking around his key. Not without him knowing. Still, I was working on that. But he was in the office all the time at night after the thing blew up at home with Louise because of Larry fucking the banker. Of course, now we know that Larry knew that Yasir would attack all the customers if I started upgrading, so probably that's why he stopped me from upgrading. And he couldn't tell me about that because then he'd have to admit to me that he gave the Jenin guys the source code to begin with."



“This is very complicated,” says Mark, shaking his head and obviously working to keep his eyes open. “Think we ought to draw it all on the white board or something?”

“You’ve been in more complicated games than this. I’ve seen you in ‘em, Columbo.”

“Yeah but I get to sleep,” says Mark. “Let’s listen to Francis and Donna some more. See if we can get even more confused.”

“I’m not confused,” says Dom as he restarts the audio.

#

Donna: When Larry and Dom and me did the last thing to stop the hostile Dom gets this hacker to put radio things in these Lucites so that we all keep each other honest. I mean it’s a worry someone gets cold feet or pissed off or something and—

Francis: I told you I didn’t think that was a good idea. Should’ve let ‘em do the hostile. Then you would’ve been stockholders in their company. Sue the shit out of ‘em. We could’ve done that.

Donna: Yeah, all you boys want to play the game your way. Well, Dom had a pretty good idea how to play it the hacker way and you gotta give him credit — it worked. And we get these magic decoder rings or whatever they are in the Lucites to keep everyone in line.

Francis: So why do you have to take Larry’s Lucite? He can’t use it to expose you without exposing himself. Isn’t that the point of the whole thing? Mutually assured destruction or something?

Donna: Cause, I told you, Larry’s off the deep end. I don’t know where he’s coming from anymore. Maybe he’s such a goody two shoes now that he got his award from the Mayor of Newark that he thinks it’s a good idea if we all turn ourselves in. Maybe he wants to go back to jail. Remember, he confessed the last time and it made a whole career for him. Made him rich, really. I mean I don’t know where he’s coming from and I don’t want to leave the Lucite there.

Still, that doesn’t solve the real problem. Larry’s gonna tell the Jenin Group to call the whole thing off. We’re still not going to get the company back on its feet. And he’s gonna renege one more fucking time on making me CEO like he promised. I got too much into this. I mean I’m not just gonna let it go.

Francis: Maybe you should give—

Donna: No! Fucking no, I’m not giving up! You think I should give up, you can get your pitiful rat’s ass outta here.

You don't believe in me any more than the rest of them.  
Go ahead. Get out!

Francis: Babe, wait. Chill—

Donna: Get out! Go! What're you waiting for?

Francis: (inaudible)

Donna: What? What do you have?

Francis: ... an idea ...

Donna: A real idea or some way to quit? You wanna sue everybody? Maybe even me? Is that your idea?

Francis: No, babe, no it's not.

Donna: Go 'head.

Francis: Look, maybe we can get to the Yasir guy through Ahmed's uncle. He's the kind of guy we can do business with...

Donna: Yasir? Are you kidding? He's a nutcase.

Francis: Not Yasir, the uncle. We can do business with the uncle. Maybe he can control Yasir.

Donna: So we control Yasir. Big deal. He probably isn't going to do anything anyway. And now Larry isn't going to do anything. Where's the big idea come in? How's this help me?

Francis: I'm still working on it but look ... something like this: Yasir sends a message to Larry he's got the source code...

Donna: Larry already knows that.

Francis: Let me finish, babe. Okay? Let me finish. Yasir says he's got the source code and he's gonna use it to hack all the customers unless Larry lets the project the Jenin Group's doing go on. He wants to save their jobs or something. But, if Larry does everything he says, then once Larry pays — maybe with a little extra because of how Dom insulted him and all — then he gives the source code back. If we can get to Yasir, we make sure he understands that hackoff'll pay him directly, too, if he does that.

Donna: That's not bad. It's the beginning of something. Larry's plenty worried about what Yasir might do with the source code. He says the kid's crazy but he's not stupid. He's smart, actually, Larry says. But it's too weak; much too weak. Larry isn't gonna give in on that. There's gotta be a real threat. Like Larry's gonna get killed if he doesn't cooperate. And Yasir wants lots of money. And it's all wrapped up in his Hamas stuff and Palestinian homeland and all that.

Francis: Is Larry gonna believe all that? Is he gonna believe a crazy kid in Palestine is a threat to him here in New York?

Donna: Maybe. Maybe this Lucite helps us if we play it right. I'm gonna put it in the safe. You think you can really get to Ahmed's uncle? Get him to get to Yasir? I'll be right back; you think about it.

#

"So now I'm confused," says Dom.

"Well, there's something I didn't tell you that might help," says Mark. "Maybe makes sense with this piece. One of the things I learned from my source was that Yasir DID tell Larry he'd kill him and he'd kill you if Larry got in the way. Larry took him seriously because Yasir gave Larry some evidence that he was able to steal something from Larry's office, which is supposed to be ultra secure. So that means Larry thinks that Yasir has some way of getting to him here. Maybe Yasir's still over there; maybe he's not. But he's got like a presence that can reach into Larry's office."

"You mean Donna gave Yasir a picture of the Lucite or something?" asks Dom, half to himself.

"You think?" says Mark, also half to himself. "So, was Yasir really threatening Larry or was that just a fake Donna and Francis had him do? Jesus. Turn the audio back on, ultramole, I can't wait to hear what it hears when it comes outta the safe. Time for the next thrilling episode."

Donna and Francis' voices are very angry when the Lucite hears them next. Dom and Mark recoil from the intensity and Dom turns the volume down at first to deal with Donna's shouting, then up to hear Francis murmured but equally intense replies. The display on Dom's screen indicates that they are listening to the evening of March 30, 2003.

#

Francis: I TOLD you this was a bad idea. I TOLD you this was trouble. I TOLD you not to do it. I TOLD you.

Donna: It was your fucking idea, you asshole. Now you want to worm out, make it all my fault. I don't know who the fuck's worse, you or Larry. At least he can take responsibility.

Francis: Right. If you call having someone killed taking responsibility. Jesus. Look, babe, this is serious. TELL me what he said.

Donna: Fuck you; you don't want any responsibility so fuck you.

Francis: TELL ME WHAT HE SAID. Maybe, babe, just maybe, I can help you get out of what you got yourself into.

Donna: We're in this together, asshole. I have a way to get us out. If you have a better one, fine. But you're in this up to your eyeballs.

Francis: I think you'd have a hard time making that case. But... Forget that. I'll try to help. WHAT DID LARRY SAY?

Donna: I told you: He said he had Yasir shot.

Francis: By whom?

Donna: He didn't say. Something to do with the Italian Mafia in Jersey is connected to the Russian Mafia in Brooklyn is connected to more Russians in Israel is connected to someone else and they got the job done. Larry is proud of this. He says he has "gunnections".

Francis: What's that mean?

Donna: It's from The Great Gatsby, not a law book; you wouldn't know. Anyway, Larry says having Yasir killed wasn't just for him; it was for the good of peace, for the good of the Palestinians, for the good of the Jenin Group. This is all part of the new do-good Larry.

So what's all this matter? You have a better idea or not?

Francis: What else did Larry say?

Donna: He said - I already told you this - he said that obviously Yasir had "gunnections" too, because he was able to steal the Lucite. So Larry is going to track these connections down, make sure they're not a threat to Louise or him or hackoff. "Take care of them". So we don't have a hell of a lot of choice, hubby. First we get rid of this fucking Lucite, make sure we don't get found with it. Then...

Franklin: You're not thinking straight, babe.

Donna: Cut out that 'babe', shit, will you? You're half a fag and you're as bad as all the other men. Even Larry. He doesn't like the way I'm thinking, he looks at my tits. Tells me I'm not thinking straight. He's not thinking straight; he's thinking about my tits so he tells me I'M not thinking straight. I've fucking had it. I've had it with you. I've had it with Larry. It's fucking time for me to be CEO of hackoff. And that's a lot better than Larry "taking care of" us. It's time for no more shit-

Francis: Donna, stop. You're a very bright woman. It IS time for you to be CEO. Also - no small matter - it would be much better if Larry didn't have his friends kill us, too. I do have a plan. You've told me enough so now I have a plan.

Donna: So do I. I told you that. Tell me your plan; if it's better, we'll do it. Otherwise get the fuck outta my way. I got a lot to do.

Francis: Okay. This is it. We give the Lucite to Ahmed's uncle to give to Ahmed with a story – like when he told the story about how Yasir's gone crazy and all that. Ahmed believes him...

Donna: What's the story?

Francis: The story is that Yasir's connections in the US want to stop. There's been enough violence. Yasir exceeded his instructions. They regret it, but they understand why he had to be dealt with and THEY KNOW LARRY HAD IT DONE. But they understand; they don't want to escalate; they don't want to be a threat.

So they're sending the Lucite back as a sign of good faith. But they need a sign from Larry, too, or they can't stand down because, if they think Larry is trying to kill them, they have to kill him first. So what they're asking is that Larry resign as CEO of hackoff. That's all. No big deal. But that's his sign that he acknowledges some responsibility and that he is not tracking them down. But, before he leaves, got to be a new contract for the Jenin Group. Nothing dirty. Just honest work for honest money so the dream can go ahead. Otherwise, unfortunately...

Donna: It isn't bad. It really isn't. Maybe it'll work. Can you get Ahmed's uncle to do it?

Francis: He's in it up to his ass. He'll do what he has to do.

Donna: You think Ahmed'll buy it?

Francis: You know he believes everything his uncle says. He'll buy it. He'll trot down, see Larry, tell it the way it is – the way he THINKS it is. He'll believe because it's his uncle and he'll believe because he wants to believe. And because he wants to get this Jenin Group thing out from the cloud and working again. It's his cause.

Donna: Yeah. He's as bad as Larry. But the big question is: Is Larry gonna go for it? I don't know. The old Larry probably would say, "Fuck no, no way. I hunt them down, too. I don't give up. They're showing weakness; it's time for the kill." But maybe the new do-good Larry...

Francis: You're thinking real good now, b- Donna. Coupla loose ends you pointed up. One: he might really think he's safer if he kills them so the story's gotta make the point that, even if he does kill them, there's more and more and more if there's a feud. He's never safe; Louise is never safe.

Donna: We gotta go easy on the threats. I know our boy.

- Francis: Okay. There's got to be some honey, too. After Larry resigns, goes on to being full time philanthropist or whatever, then they're going to have an award dinner for him. In New York. In Israel. Even Jenin if he wants. Big dinner about how he's done great things for people and for Middle East peace and human brotherhood. You said he likes all that crap now. He can wear his tux like he did to Newark. He can take Louise. Too bad Windows on the World is gone, could've had the ceremony there. But, anyway, he doesn't want to kill them or there won't be any ceremony.
- Donna: Okay. Enough. We'll try it. Get this fucking Lucite to Ahmed's uncle, tell him his story. This doesn't work, there's still my plan...
- Francis: NO! That's not a good plan, Donna. This'll work but forget about the other one. I'm not gonna be part of that.
- Donna: You just make sure this one works and you won't have to worry your lawyer's ass. Everything'll be nice and pretty and you can be my date at the hackoff prom, husband of THE CEO. We'll live happily ever after despite your nasty habits.
- But there's still Plan B.
- Francis: Donna, I've got to be clear. I think this'll work; I hope that it'll work. But, if it doesn't, I'm not any part of Plan B. I'm supposed to be out of town tomorrow anyway. I'm going to be gone a while, I think. I'll talk to Ahmed's uncle first; I want to help you. Then I'm gone. But my advice to you, forget Plan B. That happens and I'm not coming back.
- Donna: You're a coward! Larry's more of a man than you are, than you'll ever be.
- Francis: Right, Donna, right. But Larry's your problem and you better hope he acts with some sense and does the "right thing". I AM gonna do the right thing. I'm outta here tomorrow.
- Donna: (inaudible) you.

#

After sounds that may be a dish breaking and a chair falling, the display on Dom's computer indicates that the Lucite shut down after a period of silence. Dom and Mark look across the table at each other.

"I don't fucking believe it," says Mark.

"Neither do I. I should've known, but I never figured out all the games she was playing. Larry's working nights. She tells me he's doing that as part of the hack and to keep an eye on me. I believe that because he won't let me do

an update which is, I figure, because he doesn't want me to stop the hack with the update even though I haven't told him I even KNOW there's a hack because Donna talked me out of it. But he's working to figure a way to stop Yasir's attack — which is much worse than what I think Larry is up to — and he's only stopping me because he doesn't want me to trigger Yasir's attack by doing an update of the customers. Of course, he's too much of an asshole to tell me the truth, to admit how he gave the source code to the Palestinians and got us in all this trouble to begin with. And even though he KNOWS I did 'Gotcha' he doesn't really like to admit I'm a better hacker than him. If he told me, if he'd only told me..."

"But then," says Mark, "it's not even clear that there was a 'Yasir hack' at all, or it's just something that Donna and Francis invented to keep Larry from canceling the Jenin Group's project to scare the hackoff customers. As my grandmother used to say: 'Oy!'" Mark rubs his eyes. "I don't know how you do it. I'm falling asleep even in the middle of this soap opera and we haven't even come to the end yet. Aren't you tired? Don't you want to sleep?"

"What I need to do is eat," says Dom. "When I'm tired, I eat. Energy! Keeps me going."

"Yeah," says Mark. "Yeah. I guess I do the same. Okay. We gotta send someone out for some food. Like popcorn at the movies." He laughs.

"There are people in the NOC — Network Operations Center. If nothing bad is going on..." He glances at his screen. "Nothing bad is going on so someone could go out."

"I'll send a cop," says Mark. "We don't want our food getting mugged this time of night. Even if Giuliani did make the streets safe." Again he laughs out loud at his joke. "We'll send out to Krispy Kreme, get some real gooey energy...."

"Doesn't work for me."

"Look, you want Starbucks, cop'll stop at Starbucks, too. Don't blame you for not wanting to drink that Krispy Kreme coffee..."

"Coffee's not the answer. Doesn't do enough. What I need's Jolt and a pizza with pepperoni and extra cheese. That's what keeps me going."

"No mushrooms on that?" asks Mark. He starts to laugh again, then doesn't.

Dom's face slams shut.

"Look," says Mark. "Meant to be a joke. Bad timing. Answer one question for me, then you get your pizza and Jolt, I get my donuts and coffee."

Dom is impassive.

"Why would you poison the deceased?"

"I didn't say I poisoned Larry," says Dom. "You can't poison a 'deceased', anyway. You ought to stop saying that. It's stupid. You gotta be alive to get poisoned."

"You're not listening as well as you usually do," says Mark. "Probably need that pizza bad. What I said was 'why WOULD you poison the deceas...' Okay: Larry. This is a hypothetical question. Let me spell it out. The video

shows you handled the mushroom jar and a mysterious baggie, which could be interpreted to suggest that you poisoned Larry. So suppose that you know the jury knows you did it. They might convict you of attempted murder. Now you gotta give 'em some explanation why you didn't mean to kill him — you told me you don't kill, and I believe you, but why should they believe you? Your prints are on the mushrooms and all. Why did you give him poison mushrooms if you didn't mean to kill him — hypothetically, of course? Why WOULD you give him poison mushrooms except to kill him?"

Dom's eyes twitch from side to side as if the alternatives facing him were pinned to spatial coordinates. Finally, he decides: "Okay, hypothetically, I have a problem. I'm trying to save all the customers by doing an upgrade. Larry's here every night stopping me from doing an upgrade. Originally, it's because he wants to hack the customers. Later, because he wants to stop them from getting hurt, but I don't know that. I have to protect them. They trust me to protect them. They're MY customers. They bought hackoff protection because they believed I could protect them. So I gotta do it. Like you gotta arrest evil-doers. Now Larry got me to quit so I have no time to waste, gotta do the upgrade. It's my role. I HAVE TO PROTECT THEM." And he stops.

"Go on," says Mark after a pause.

"So ... I mean hypothetically, of course ... I need Larry to be out of the office for a while. He's tough. Something really has to knock him on his ass to get him outta there. One way, though, is if he's sick, really sick, and knows he has to get treatment right away or he'll die. I wouldn't mess around with an infectious disease, no telling who gets hurt. But I remember what he told me about these mushrooms, back when we were still talking. How it's really hard to tell the good ones from the poison ones. Louise says that's why he hunts them, the thrill of it. Playing it close to the line.

"If you look on the Internet, it says if you eat these Death Caps and don't get treatment right away your liver dies and you die. Obviously, Larry knows that, too, and he knows what the initial symptoms are. So, if he ate some, he wouldn't die, he'd get treated. He'd be really pissed off that he screwed up and picked the wrong mushrooms, but he wouldn't let that kill him. He'd go to the hospital and get treated. This is all hypothetical, though."

"Yeah, I get it," says Mark. "It's not a bad story. If you ever had to tell a story, I'd go with that. It sounds true..."

"It's hypothetical," repeats Dom. "Can't be either true or false if it's hypothetical. That's basic logic."

"Right. You're still not listening good, though. I didn't say it WAS true, I said it SOUNDS true. Much more important, really. I mean the jury — if this ever were at a jury — they know Larry dissed you really bad and you quit. Hard to believe that wouldn't have anything to do with feeding him poison mushrooms — with making him think he poisoned himself. It's sort of a hack, in a sense, getting a guy to eat poison mushrooms he'll think he picked himself. Jury might think it's too much of a coincidence that he gets this treatment the night of the day he insulted you into quitting. Could be revenge."



Dom shakes his head, not meeting Mark's eyes. "Not revenge. Not that he didn't deserve that. Not that it wouldn't be good for him to think he poisoned himself. But not a coincidence, either. Once he got me to quit and once I found out that he'd made up the whole thing about the cops closing in on me for 'Gotcha', then I knew ... would've known ... I had to work fast before I lost all access and get the users protected. So you could say there was reason why I'd act that same day. Good reason: for the users, not revenge and not a coincidence."

"Okay," says Mark. "This is helpful..."

"You said it was all hypothetical. I didn't tell you anything. I..."

"It's okay, Dom," says Mark kindly. "I didn't trick you. It's helpful to you, trust me. Maybe I did trick you a little to tell the truth. But it's for your own good, really."

"That's hard to swallow," says Dom, shoulders slumped.

"Like mush..." Mark starts and then stops. "Look, I'm sorry. Another bad joke. I'm tired. I'm gonna go tell the cop what to get. Small, medium or large with pepperoni? Diet or regular Jolt?"

"Large," says Dom. "I've been up a long time. And there's no such thing as diet Jolt. ...Thanks."

Mark is out of the room a long time. It takes him just a few minutes to give the takeout orders to the cop but he spends a lot of time on his cell phone with an assistant DA. The assistant DA has more details on a call that came to the DA herself from the mayor's office, relating a discussion His Honor the Mayor had with someone in Israeli intelligence who is using this informal channel to request both lenient treatment for Dom Montain and further access to him, since he is apparently aware of some holes in Israeli cyber-security. He also may have further intelligence regarding planned terrorist activities. And, although the DA herself doesn't give a rat's ass about Israeli security, that not being her problem, she does desire to be cooperative with the mayor who can be her problem as well as a help or a hindrance to her career. So it would be useful to work something out as far as this particular suspect is concerned.

However, the assistant DA is quick to add, one cannot bring a plea bargain into municipal court in New York City on the grounds that said plea bargain is in the best interests of some foreign country, even if that country happens to be Israel, which isn't all that foreign. There does have to be an element in that bargain that is of direct benefit to municipal justice, safe streets, and the good voters of this great city. One does have some prosecutorial discretion, of course, and could possibly use that discretion to determine which charges are actually bought.

Mark says some unkind things about the DA, the mayor, and other politicians that go bump in the night. He then explores some options with the assistant DA, who tells him which of these options may or may not work and promises that she will remember none of this discussion come the next day.

Left to himself, Dom reviews the video of this entry into Larry's office, his pacing, his time in front of the mushroom jar with his back to the camera, the

baggie in his pocket, and the jar in his hand clearly being shaken. He watches this twice; each time he backs up a little further into Donna's exit from Larry's office, which precedes Dom's entrance. Then he freezes the camera on Donna, turning from the side table to the door. He stands and hits the side of his head with his palm. He starts to back up even further but hears Mark reentering and toggles back to the window controlling the audio tap in the Lucite which had been on his screen when the detective left.

"Sorry to take so long," says Mark. "Stuff should be here pretty soon. It's amazing how fast you can make a pickup in New York when you don't have to worry about where you park."

"Thanks," says Dom. "Ready to listen to the next installment or are you too hungry?"

"Roll it," says Mark. "I can't wait."

They hear a few words between Francis Langhorne and an unidentified voice. Then the same unidentified voice, which has a Middle Eastern accent and a tone of authority gives someone, presumably a cabbie, an address that Mark remembers as belonging to Ahmed's apartment.

The Lucite hears the car door close, a sound of walking up steps, a muffled door bell ring, and then a greeting in a language neither Dom nor Mark understands. Despite the language, Dom and Mark agree that the new voice is Ahmed. They surmise that the other voice is Ahmed's uncle delivering the Lucite as planned by Francis and Donna. The uncle, if that's who he is, does most of the talking. Familiar names frequently emerge from the unfamiliar language: "Larry Lazard", most often; "hackoff.com", somewhat less frequently; "Rachel Roth", a couple of times. They are not sure whether they hear Yasir's name since they are not sure how it would be pronounced in Arabic or whatever the men are speaking.

The voices are apparently arguing. Ahmed sounds as if he is protesting. The uncle sounds as if he is reassuring, then commanding. Ahmed's voice subsides. The uncle delivers several short soliloquies; Ahmed gives what sounds like a half-hearted assent. Dom and Mark agree that they may be construing more than the voices convey. There is clearly a leave-taking. The door closes; muffled footsteps quickly recede out of audible range. There is now a sound of possible pacing.

Ahmed is talking to Larry Lazard, apparently on the phone. He makes an appointment for that evening to discuss "new developments".

Other than doors closing, there is silence until the Lucite records Ahmed instructing a cabbie to take him to hackoff's address. After elevator sounds, the Lucite records Larry and Ahmed greeting each other as yet another door closes.

Larry sounds happy, almost ebullient. Ahmed sounds very tired and dispirited.

#

Ahmed: There have been new developments.

Larry: I know, I know. I was wondering how long it would take for the good news to get to you through your "sources".

Ahmed: We wanted to be sure. We heard that Yasir had died, although at first we did not know why. We did not know if he acted alone or not. If not, other threats will materialize. So I waited to talk to you until I learned more.

Larry: And?

Ahmed: Among other things I learned that you, Larry Lazard, were instrumental in these events.

Larry: Well, what would you do? I mean he was threatening me. Threatening Louise. Threatening hackoff. You wouldn't just sit there, would you? You didn't think I was going to keep hiding forever, pretending to have an affair with Rachel. It was time for me to act and I did. Surprised it took me so long, to tell the truth; I must be getting soft.

Ahmed: My friend, I am not being critical. I understand that you were threatened. I have no sympathy for Yasir and the people he worked with. They have been a threat to the Jenin Cooperative as well as to you. But it would be better if you were not involved. It would be better if you were not KNOWN to have been involved.

Larry: Who knows I'm involved? The people I worked with to do this are very discreet. I have told no one. For that matter, how do YOU know?

Ahmed: I was told by sources I cannot reveal to you, the same sources who were contacted before to act as intermediaries. Those who contacted them told these sources that they know of your involvement. And that is how I know. I was hoping you would tell me that this is not true...

Larry: The fucking guy was threatening me.

Ahmed: Please, my friend, I am not being critical. I am afraid for you. These cycles do not end with a single death. They go and on and on. Sometimes no one remembers the original offense but the killing continues. I do not wish that you be part of this.

Larry: What are you telling me? What did your "sources" say? Who's threatening me now? By the way, how do we know that these sources really are in a position to do anything other than make threats? Maybe they just learned something and are trying to use it.

Ahmed: They anticipated that you might question their authenticity. They have sent what they call "a proof".

Larry: That's my Lucite! The one Yasir used to... They're getting a lot of mileage out of stealing this and sending it back. What the fuck do they want?

Ahmed: My source says that there IS a chance to end the cycle.

Larry: Okay. What? Am I supposed to offer my first-born? You don't sound very excited about this chance to "end the cycle".

Ahmed: I will tell you what I was told. Then, if you allow me, I will tell you what I think.

Larry: Shoot.

Ahmed: I was told that the allies of Yasir were not happy with him either. They did not wish him to take such an extreme position. They did not realize all of his affiliations. He exceeded what they had authorized. In fact, they said, had you been more patient, what you had done may have been done anyway.

Larry: Great. They should give me a medal. I solved their problem.

Ahmed: In a sense they have proposed that, I am told. But they have a problem. They have two problems. One: they would not wish to have you hunt for them as you are presumably doing. They cannot end the cycle if you are going to have them killed as well. They are sure you are doing that...

Larry: Fucking right, I am. Of course I am. I will hunt down every son-of-a-bitch who was part of this and make sure they aren't out hunting for me. That's exactly what I'm doing.

Ahmed: But you cannot—

Larry: Why the fuck not? I do have to do that.

Ahmed: With everyone you kill, there is a wider circle of those who must take revenge. You have a Western story like that. Something about cutting the heads off a snake with too many heads and it grows more.

Larry: It's not Western, it's Greek, and don't tell me fucking fables. What am I supposed to do? Wait for some buddy of Yasir's to knock me off? Not gonna happen. What were you saying about the medal? Am I supposed to shoot myself to end the cycle? That's not gonna happen, either. Wait! Hold the thought. Gotta take a quick crap. Something I ate. Be right back.

(The door closes twice before conversation resumes.)

Larry: Go ahead; that feels a little better.

Ahmed: My sources say that the people who speak to them are ready to offer you a deal. It is this: they will propose that you be honored for the work you've done in

outsourcing to the Jenin Cooperative. They will not try to kill you. But they need two things in return.

Larry: My balls?

Ahmed: They need you to give a renewed contract to the Jenin Cooperative...

Larry: I would've done that anyway, but I won't be blackmailed. You know that.

Ahmed: And they need you to resign as CEO of hackoff.

Larry: What? Why? What the fuck does that have to do with anything?

Ahmed: I am not clear on that either. They have told my sources that this is a gesture of good will and responsibility on your part. They need some sort of assurance that you will not continue to hunt for them. They may believe that, without the resources of hackoff, you will not be able to find them. I do not understand this.

Larry: Then why the fuck are you suggesting I do it? I'm beginning to think that you are much too close to these "sources".

Ahmed: Please, my friend, please do not insult me.

Larry: What are you trying to get me to do?

Ahmed: I am not sure. My source has always been very reliable. If I believed all this were true, I would advise you to make the deal and accept the medal...

Larry: And give more business to your fucking co-op, that's what you want. This is a goddamn shakedown.

Ahmed: But I do NOT believe it. I do not believe the cycle ends like this. I would not advise you to take this offer. I am not asking for more business for the Jenin Group.

Larry: You're switching sides faster than a fucking weather vane in a windstorm. Get out! Get out of my office!

Ahmed: Mr. Larry Lazard...

Larry: Which part of "get the fuck out" don't you understand?

#

The door closes. Larry burps loudly and sits down heavily. Then silence shuts the listening Lucite down. It wakens briefly as Larry apparently moves around the room. The door shuts twice but there is no sound of voices.

Now there is a knock on Dom's door which startles both Dom and the detective. The cop brings in the pizza, the Jolt, the donuts, and a Starbucks, then leaves.

Dom's face is quickly smeared with tomato sauce; Mark's with cream from his confection.

"That's better," says Mark pushing back and burping. "Shoulda got popcorn, though, for the rest of the show. I shoulda brought the video and we could watch and listen."

"Actually," says Dom, "I can retrieve the video from log file. Should we go back to the beginning?"

"No, definitely not. This epic is long enough as it is without replay. Good if you could get the video for the deceased's final scene though."

Dom and Mark scoot their wheeled chairs away from the table and hunch in front of Dom's computer so they can watch the small video window on Dom's large monitor. Dom fiddles for a while but can't get perfect sync. The audio is running a few hundred milliseconds ahead of the video but they decide just to go ahead without further tuning.

"Best for you," says Mark, "if the about-to-be deceased doesn't complain too much about his stomach or say he's so sick he wants to die or something like that."

"We already saw the video," says Dom. "Didn't look that way."

"I hope it doesn't sound that way. I really do. Be nice to have some other reason why our boy who is so tough in the last scene with Ahmed suddenly decides to blow his brains out."

"We'll see," says Dom, sounding calm.

Onscreen, Larry is seated at his desk, looking dyspeptic. He looks up at a knock on his door. "Come," he says, slightly out of synch.

Donna enters and sits on the couch away from the desk. Larry slowly gets up, pivots around the desk leaning on one hand, and sits across the corner of the coffee table from her.

"You hear anything from Dom?" Donna asks.

"He sent me an email," says Larry. "What you'd expect. Told me I'm an asshole. That I don't know what we owe him. The company is nothing without him ... blah, blah, blah. But he's right, too. He has done a lot. He's a pain in the ass, but he's right. I feel bad about insulting him into quitting. Wish I didn't have to do that."

"You had no choice, Lar," says Donna. "He was closing in on figuring out that you'd hired the Palestinians to hack the customers; he already told me he's suspicious. You know he's gonna go off the deep end if he finds that out. That's all we need now."

Dom pauses the video and sound. His mouth opens, closes. "That bitch! I don't believe it. I already told her weeks ago I knew Larry was doing that. She tells me to keep it to myself while she works on Larry. So now she tells Larry I'm 'suspicious'? She wants him to get rid of me?"

"Why?" asks Mark. "Why does she all of a sudden want Larry to get rid of you?"

Dom thinks for a moment, then says: "Only thing I can think is she doesn't want me to get the update done so that the Jenin Group can't do the

hack she wants 'em to do to scare the customers. That explains something else, too.”

“Yeah?”

“She stopped me from doing the upgrade right away after she took over. What she said then made some sense; the attack wouldn't happen until Larry gave the okay and obviously that wasn't going to happen. She'd make sure to call it off. I believed her ... but I didn't believe her. I was going to go ahead and do the upgrade anyway; she'd never know.”

“Why didn't you believe her?”

“Maybe because now she was in the role of CEO. Sounded like a CEO. Sounded like Larry when he wanted to hack the customers. But now we know she always wanted to do that. Of course, she wanted to be CEO too; I guess that figures. It's the role.”

“Look, if she wanted Larry to get rid of you, got him to do that, why did she make sure you came back, even give you a promotion?”

“That's easy. She needed some ex-hacker in the company. Larry was gone. Besides she thought I wouldn't do the upgrade if I believed there wouldn't be an attack. But that doesn't quite hold together either. What would she have done after the attack happened? I would've known she lied to me. I would've gone ballistic. She knows that.”

Mark says: “That part I can understand. You think everyone plays chess, thinks ten moves ahead. They don't. She would've figured she could calm you down; didn't have to know how. Something like blame it on Ahmed and how right you were and how glad she is to have you and shoulda listened to you and can't you please make sure this never happens again and that bullshit. Let's see the rest.”

“Still didn't feel right,” says Larry. “I had to tell him something I never told him before; really had to diss him to get him mad enough to quit. Even then, he didn't quit until I insulted him some more in staff meeting.”

Donna says: “It's for his own good, too. You know he's gonna be a target for anybody trying to get revenge. They already hate him. And he can't protect himself if he doesn't know what's happening. And you don't want to tell him. You can't tell him. So what're you gonna do?”

“I know. But it still sucks.”

“Life does that sometimes,” says Donna. “Think it was you that told me that. How'd your 'meeting' go?”

“Not good. Not good at all. I'm not at all sure I trust Ahmed anymore. He had some bullshit story about how Yasir's friends suddenly want to make peace, give me a medal for what I've done for Palestinians or something. All I have to do is call off the hunt ... oh yeah, and resign as CEO...”

“Which you're planning to do, anyway, right? I mean that's sleeves outta your vest.”

“Don't push me on that, Donna, I told you I'd get outta your way, make you CEO. But don't push it...” Larry stops and looks either puzzled or sick for a minute.

“Right,” says Donna quickly, “so what’d you say to Ahmed about this generous offer of peace?”

“So I called him on it, told him it’s bullshit.” Larry seems distracted.

“What did he say?”

“Then he switches sides, tells me he thinks it’s bullshit too. That’s too much for me, so I throw him out. I don’t know really, would’ve figure him as a friend. Think he’s a friend. But with this bullshit I don’t know and I really can’t take a chance that he helps someone get access to me. I’m not sure who my friends are anymore.”

“You sure you shouldn’t do this?” asks Donna. “I mean put aside the CEO part, that can’t be that important. You know ... maybe there can be peace. Get all this over with. You sure you don’t want to give it a try?”

Larry looks very hard at Donna. “Yes,” he says deliberately. “Yes, I’m very sure. And that’s not good for you being CEO earlier than we planned. I don’t want anything to confuse them about whether I’m giving up or not; any sign of weakness and they’ll be all over me. That’s the way it is.”

“I ... I understand, Larry. Like I said, forget the CEO thing. What’s important is to get everybody safely outta this. Also, maybe it’s good you get a medal. You really did do good for them. Like you did for the kids in Newark. That’s what I’m asking. You sure you just wanna tell them ‘no’? I mean you don’t even know who ‘they’ are.”

“I’m going to find out who THEY are,” says Larry separating every word from the one before it. “I am going to find out. I got lots of logs, security logs, email logs VoIP logs. They have to have someone inside helping them and I will find out who that is.”

“And then?”

“Like I told you this morning, nothing’s changed because of this bullshit I heard from Ahmed. Nothing. I find out who they are. I make sure they can’t do any harm. Whatever that takes. Just like Yasir.”

“Larry, you’re right,” says Donna. She squares her shoulders, faces him, smiles at him.

“What’s going on?”

“What do you mean?”

“First, Ahmed tells me some bullshit story. I tell him it’s bullshit. Then he changes the story. Tells me not to believe it. Then you come in here. You try to talk me into doing this bullshit Ahmed already admitted is bullshit. I tell you it isn’t gonna happen. All of a sudden you’re going ‘Larry, you’re right’. I’m not sure who’s bullshitting who.” Larry’s face contorts and he rubs his stomach.

“I was testing you, Lar,” Donna says. She smiles again. “You passed.”

“What the fuck are you talking about — testing me?”

“You haven’t been yourself lately, my old friend,” she says. She rests her hand on his knee across the corner of the table. “You’ve been ... out of character.”

“What the fuck’s that mean?” he asks, but he smiles back at her, almost as if in reflex, and turns to face her more squarely.



“All that stuff about the medal you got in Newark, I was afraid that turned your head. All of a sudden, you don’t wanna go ahead with our plan to give the customers a little warning, get them to switch to monitored service.”

“Yeah, so...”

“I thought you were getting soft,” she says. “I don’t like soft.” She puts her hand on the inside of his knee this time. “You know that.”

He leans forward, perhaps to reach for her hand but then grimaces and rubs his stomach again.

“I mean, I’m glad to hear you being the old Larry,” she continues. “The old, hard Larry.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re glad,” he says.

“But are you sure?”

“Am I sure what?”

“Are you sure you’re not gonna go all soft on me? I mean I’m your friend; we’re in this together. I’ll stick with you; help you fight these guys, whoever, track’em down. But I gotta know you’re not gonna go soft at the last minute. That would be ... I mean more than disappointing, that would be dangerous.”

“Yeah,” says Larry. “Soft is dangerous.”

“That sounds like the old Larry, but I don’t know.” Donna takes the gun from the coffee table; holds it to her head. “I bet my life,” she says, her eyes on Larry’s face. She starts to put the gun down.

Larry takes the gun from her hand before it can reach the table. “Yeah,” he says “I’m sure. I bet—”

Donna flinches as the sound of the shot reverberates. The left side of Larry’s head explodes.

“Run that again,” says Mark.

“What? I’m gonna be sick,” Dom says.

“Run it again. Just from when he takes the gun from her. She flinched too soon.”

Dom runs it again. “No she didn’t. She flinched at the sound.”

“You’re not being observant,” says Mark. “The audio’s ahead of the video...”

“Right,” says Dom. “I missed it. But I already knew.”

“Knew what?”

“Knew what you suspect.”

“What do you mean?” asks Mark. “How can you know? Do you have proof?”

“I have something,” says Dom. “I think we make a deal now. I think that’s how this game is played, Columbo.”

Mark explains that he has only limited authority. That the DA has to approve anything they agree on. That a judge has to agree as well. He tells Dom he wants two things. One is the evidence that Dom hasn’t shown him yet. The second is Dom’s testimony authenticating the tap and explaining the plot against hackoff customers. He tells Dom they won’t feel they have to file charges against him for the mushrooms because the evidence isn’t clear, he

may have had a good motive and the mushrooms didn't kill Larry. Maybe Larry did pick the bad ones himself and somehow got them into just the office sample.

But, Mark says, the hack against antihack is there. Can't prosecute Donna for what she did without the evidence that shows the plot against antihack. And probably they're gonna have to ask Dom to plead to something on that one because he was part of it. Should be no jail time for him on that if he's the one turning state's evidence but it's hard to be sure. Also Dom's gonna have to get a lawyer.

One more thing. Not really part of the deal, but one more thing, Mark explains. There are some people from Israel who would like to talk to Dom. It would be good if he did that.

"That's three things, not two," says Dom, "but that's okay. It's time I got credit for what I did. Also, I'm not afraid of jail anymore. No more claustrophobia. Maybe my role's supposed to take me there. So I'm gonna show you some video now, save time. But I'm not going to tell you how I got the video. So, if we don't have a deal, you don't have this video to show. But you got to turn around, face away from the screen, while I bring it up."

Mark does turn around. Dom fishes in the IP packet log for video starting an hour prior to Donna leaving Larry's office. The first frozen frame shows Larry's office empty. Dom tells Mark he can look and the detective swivels his chair back around and peers at the video window which is now animated.

There are boring sequences of Larry's empty office, appearance and disappearance of Larry, a few visitors including Donna and Larry's admin, all of which tally with what the security log showed. The camera faithfully follows what makes noise. Since there is no audio, it is hard to tell how fast the tracking is.

The room is empty and the camera grinds away, centered on Larry's desk. A woman enters the room — first the top of her head is visible, then the rest of her back as she walks under the camera and into the room. The camera swivels its focus to her. At this point it is clear that the woman is Donna Langhorne. She stands still for a minute as if talking to the man who isn't behind the desk.

Donna then reaches down to the coffee table and picks something up, but she is between the camera and the coffee table so it is impossible to see what she has in her hand. Whatever it is, she keeps it out of sight of the camera as she goes behind the desk and opens a drawer that the camera, which has now focused on her behind the desk, cannot see. Her right arm, visible from the shoulder to the elbow, apparently is taking something from the drawer.

She now turns so that she has her back to the camera. Her shoulders are moving but it is impossible to see what her hands are doing. Apparently she drops something, because she stoops over, then quickly stands up again, still facing away from the camera. She puts the invisible something back in the invisible drawer, turns so that her right arm is out of sight, and bends to put

whatever is in her right hand down on the coffee table. Then she leaves the room.

The camera resumes its bored fisheye view of the office with Larry's desk in the center.

Mark says: "Still can't tell what she picked up from the coffee table."

"I hoped there'd be more," says Dom. He plays the whole sequence again. And again. Both men crane their necks as if trying to see what Donna is shielding with her body.

Dom hits himself on the head. This time he backs up to the time before Donna enters the room. He examines the table; there are a few magazines, a piece of probably greasy paper that may have come with Larry's pizza, coasters, and Larry's revolver. Dom clips this frame into the edit buffer and fast forwards to the time after Donna is left when the camera is back to its fisheye view. He clips another frame. After a little fiddling, Dom superimposes the before and after frames. The gun and the piece of greasy paper do not line up.

"I have a list of what's in that desk drawer," says Mark. "Can't look at it now. It's on my computer at the office."

"Not a problem," says Dom. He works for a few minutes while the detective watches, bemused. Soon the windows on Dom's computer show the applications run by the New York Police Department. A minute later, the screen of Mark's computer is in a window on Dom's computer.

"You can run your computer from here," says Dom.

"Shit. So much for security. Maybe you DO have something else to bargain with. Okay, let's see."

Mark retrieves the inventory for the top drawer of Larry's desk:

pencils, 2

finger nail clipper, Swank

eighteen assorted paper clips, one straightened out

three AAA batteries, Eveready, all completely discharged, one corroded

plastic stylus, intact

plastic stylus, broken

bottle with 17 of 50 Excedrin (verified by lab)

box with 23 of 24 bullets, .22 caliber

unopened small package of Kleenex

unused pad of post-it notes, yellow (no impressions)

###

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**For Immediate Release****DONNA LANGHORNE TERMINATED AS CEO FOLLOWING INDICTMENT  
BOARD APPOINTS JOANNE ANKERS AS ACTING CEO  
COMPANY COOPERATING FULLY WITH AUTHORITIES**

New York, NY -- April 7, 2003 - (BUSINESS WIRE) hackoff.com (NASDAQ:HOFC) announced today that Donna Langhorne has been terminated as CEO following her indictment for the murder of former CEO Larry Lazard. The Board of Directors has appointed Board Member Joanne Ankers of Big Router Ventures as acting CEO. Joseph Windaw of Windaw and Wallar Venture Capital continues as Chairman of the Board of Directors.

The Company has been informed that there is a continuing investigation into the possible involvement of certain of its officers in a hacker attack against the company's competitor antihack Corp. It is possible that other charges will be filed against the company or its officers. The company is cooperating fully with these investigations. In addition, the company intends to hire an independent outside law firm in order to conduct its own investigation. It is not possible at this time to state what the effect on the company these charges and investigations will have.

Company CTO Dom Montain has been granted a temporary paid leave of absence to allow him to aid the City in its ongoing investigations.

The company notified NASDAQ and the SEC of this event prior to the opening of the New York securities markets and requested a temporary halt in trading of the company's stock. Trading is expected to resume shortly after the dissemination of this announcement.

Acting CEO, Joanne Ankers is a 1991 graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and holds an MBA from Wharton awarded in 1995. She is currently a Director of Strategic Investments at Big Router Ventures and has been granted a leave of absence from that position to allow her to assume the CEO role at hackoff.com. Ms. Ankers has been a hackoff Board Member since 1997. Big Router Ventures participated in venture financing for the company and held 500,731 shares of the company's stock as of the end of 2002.

"These are very difficult times for the company," said Ankers. "Nevertheless, our customers should be reassured that we remain willing and able to supply their security needs."

###

**The Chat Board****ITS HAPPENING AGAIN**

by: thewatcher02 (38/M/New Rochelle, NY)

04/07/03 10:10 am

Msg: 100030 of 100044

hackoff's not trading!

**Re: ITS HAPPENING AGAIN**

by: ChorusLine (25/F/Paramus, NJ)

Long-Term Sentiment: **Buy**

04/07/03 10:11 am

Msg: 100031 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100030 by thewatcher02

This can't be good. Trading is stopped again. The Street won't like this.

**Re: ITS HAPPENING AGAIN**

by: pooper

Long-Term Sentiment: **Sell**

04/07/03 10:12 am

Msg: 100032 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100031 by ChorusLine

There's nothing about hackoff for the street to like.

**Press Advisory Out**

by: Jumbo10 (46/M/New York, NY)

Long-Term Sentiment: **Hold**

04/07/03 10:15 am

Msg: 100033 of 100044

There is a press advisory out, just as there was last week, for an announcement expected at 10:30 explaining the trading halt. Last week the stock went up after the announcement. Probably just the marketmakers making money in ways that we ordinary investors can't, but could happen again, too. I'm down to hold on the stock though, because I made money last week.

**Re: ITS HAPPENING AGAIN**

by: scooper

Long-Term Sentiment: **Buy**

04/07/03 10:18 am

Msg: 100034 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100032 by pooper

pooper, last week you thought the announcement was an April fools joke and you could have made money if you bought stock like I did

**Re: Press Advisory Out**

by: Alaska60-60

Long-Term Sentiment: **Strong Sell**

04/07/03 10:22 am

Msg: 100035 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100033 by jumbo10

this is probably the time their selling jerkoff to antihack now that the lizard is out of the way the cunt figured out it was the right way to go and she did it.

**Re: Press Advisory Out**

by: scooper

Long-Term Sentiment: **Buy**

04/07/03 10:26 am

Msg: 100036 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100035 by Alaska60-60

alaska, you're as much an asshole as your friend pooper and this is not the antihack board. why don't you stay there where you belong so you can pump and dump that and not bother us here on this board. Last week antihack was down and hackoff was up. hackoff has great management now.

**jerkoff hacked antihack**

by: Alaska60-60

Long-Term Sentiment: **Strong Sell**

04/07/03 10:31 am

Msg: 100037 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100035 by Alaska60-60

The press release is on Yahoo. Finally they told the truth they cheated the way they beat the hostile from antihack was hackoff hacked antihack customers. i knew this was not right when it happened. i said that and all you jerkoffs didnt listen.

And also the cunt offed the lizard which figures.

**Re: Press Advisory Out**

by: Jumbo10 (46/M/New York, NY)

Long-Term Sentiment: **Sell**

04/07/03 10:35 am

Msg: 100038 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100033 by jumbo10

This has got to be bad for the stock. Usually Wall Street does not like indictments and this is for murder, plus antihack might sue for the way hackoff stopped their hostile. I'm back down to a Sell on the stock now. I don't know how this can go anywhere.

Only hope is that Big Router will buy hackoff for its technology. I figure that's why they put their woman in. But then they'll buy it for nothing, which means we'll get screwed so I'm still a Sell.

**Re: Press Advisory Out**

by: PacPhil (25/M/New York, NY)

Long-Term Sentiment: **Buy**

04/07/03 10:37 am

Msg: 100039 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100038 by jumbo10

Jumbo, that's good analysis. When do you think Big Router might announce they are buying the company? Does that matter to the stock? Why do you think Donna killed Larry? What will The Street think?

**Re: Press Advisory Out**

by: Alaska60-60

Long-Term Sentiment: **Strong Sell**

04/07/03 10:40 am

Msg: 100040 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100038 by jumbo10

So now pump and dump jumbo says hes ready to dump so probbly means hes going to buy. Only way big router is going to buy jerkoff is for pennies and even less than antihack would pay because at least antihack wants the customers and big router probably already has them and the technology isnt worth shit

**Whats Happening**

by: CLess

04/07/03 10:45 am

Msg: 100041 of 100044

Does anyone know why the stock isn't trading???

**Donna**

by: TestTost (35/M/San Francisco, CA)

Long-Term Sentiment: **Strong Buy**

04/07/03 10:45 am

Msg: 100042 of 100044

Too bad about Donna. She was hot. I haven't seen a picture of the new CEO, so don't know how she rates. Lar must've been messing around. I figure that's why Donna shot him but if I were him, I would've messed around with Donna.

**Re: ITS HAPPENING AGAIN**

by: ChorusLine (25/F/Paramus, NJ)

Long-Term Sentiment: **Buy**

04/07/03 10:46 am

Msg: 100043 of 100044

Posted as a reply to: Msg 100031 by ChorusLine

Murder. Hacking antihack. Other investigations. What will the Street think?

**Stock Opened**

by: thewatcher02 (38/M/New Rochelle, NY)

04/07/03 10:46 am

Msg: 100044 of 100044

hackoff's trading again! 2k shares at 1.60 up ten cents. bid 1.55; ask 1.65.

 [Buy \*hackoff.com\*](#) [Tell a friend](#) [Write a Review](#)**THE END**



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Thanks for reading.

Tom Evslin]

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HOFC Daily Trading 4/7/03 (at close)

