Anonymous Hackers
by C.D. Reimer

There must have been thousands standing in the rain that day. Looking down from behind the rain-splattered picture window of an empty fourteenth-floor condo, the people from the downtown buildings swarmed the sidewalks and streets like angry ants from a stomped hill with a jackboot footprint in the middle. The morning rush hour traffic came to a sudden halt in a bewildered blare of horns. Everyone stared at the Internet-enabled device—smartphone, tablet or wristwatch—in their hand that compelled them to brave the elements outside to see something extraordinary. I splayed my naked fingers against the cold pane of the picture window, watching a smile form on my plain lips underneath a lock of platinum blonde hair in the reflection. I have just caused the largest Internet flash mob to form in the heart of Silicon Valley.

"Congratulations!"

"Impressive!"

"I can do better than that!"

That last remarked struck a nerve. I raised my hand to slap that bitch silly—and dropped it when I realized that I didn't know which one of my three "hosts" have spoken. Like college-bound triplets dressed by an obsessive compulsive mother, they wore the San Jose State University hoodies with the hoods pulled over to conceal their faces, blue jeans tapering into yellow rain boots, and thin leather gloves with the monogrammed initials "A.H." that stood for "Anonymous Hackers," which wasn't a twelve-step recovery group for over-caffeinated computer hackers. With average height, modest breasts, and thin waist, they were physically similar to each other. (If I lost a few pounds, I would look exactly like them.) The only thing that sets them apart was the color of their lip-gloss that reflected the gray light falling through the windows.

Red, Green and Blue—a color wheel of trouble.

As a group they unofficially represented the SJSU chapter of Anonymous Hackers, an international hacking group that some

national governments had declared as a cyber-terrorist organization. These bitches were the elite hackers of the university, if not of Silicon Valley. I'm here to prove that I'm one of them. I've already impressed them when I tracked them down through the darkest hellholes of the Internet to arrange this meeting. They impressed me by revealing all the personal information they found about me on the Internet: all my social media accounts (expected), social security number (no surprise), banking account balances (way too low), and whether or not I was a virgin (damn Facebook privacy settings). I knew nothing about these bitches as individuals.

"We're not doubting your ability as a hacker," Red said, raising her gloved hand before someone said something stupid again. "A flash mob like this is quite impressive. As Anonymous Hackers, we need an audience to witness our handiwork. For this, we thank you. Let us proceed."

They went over to the kitchen counter. Each one pulled out an Apple MacBook Air laptop from the front pocket of their hoody to set down on the counter and open the lids. Three readiness chimes went off in perfect synchronization. I took my place at the opposite side of the counter in the spacious chrome-and-granite kitchen, where my ancient Dell laptop sat next to my damp book bag and jacket. If I'm going to run with the big girl hackers, I'm going have to prostitute myself for some real hardware.

"We require your assistance," Red announced shortly.

I frowned at her request. "I've already proven myself—without your assistance."

"There are no lone hackers in Anonymous Hackers. As Benjamin Franklin once said about the American Revolution, 'We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.' While our individual achievements are often impressive, adding our achievements together can add up to something quite spectacular. However, if you're not a team player—"

They raised their gloved hands over the lids of their laptop, waiting for me to answer their unspoken question. I hate being manipulated like that. If being a member of Anonymous Hackers

wasn't something I wanted so badly, I would have told these bitches off and walked out with my gear.

"Fine," I replied, cooling off my anger. "What do I need to do?"

"Connect the wireless on your laptop to the McDonald's hotspot."

I laughed. "The McDonald's hotspot is fourteen floors down and several blocks away. Their wireless signal is too weak to reach this far. Why can't I use the hotspot downstairs?"

"Your flash mob broadcast compromised the Safeway hotspot. We can't afford to have the authorities interrupt us during our hacking demonstration. As for the McDonald's hotspot, it has a misconfigured access point that generates a stronger signal than necessary that extends well beyond their building. We wouldn't be Anonymous Hackers if we couldn't pull off the improbable."

I checked the available wireless networks on my laptop screen, and, seeing that I was still connected to the Safeway hotspot on the ground floor, I disconnected it. Since I'm spoofing the MAC address—the unique serial number for my network adapter—the authorities will be tracking an Apple laptop and not a Dell laptop. Considering how prevalent Apple devices have become over the last few years, the spoofed MAC address will be the proverbial needle in a haystack that leads them far away from me.

As for the McDonald's hotspot in the wireless network list, it had one bar of signal strength. I initiated the connection—and it went through. That's surprising. Despite the extreme distance from the hotspot, data flowed through the wireless connection at a steady but slow rate. Not fast enough for browsing the Internet, but good enough for running scripts from the command line. I nodded my head to indicate my readiness.

"Now hack into the firewall of the Martin Luther King library," Red continued. "We will piggyback on your wireless connection."

"Should I hack the firewall from Internet or through the university network?" I asked for clarification, contemplating several possible strategies for breaching the library firewall. "Or does it matter?"

"Your choice."

As a rule of thumb, I've always taken the path of least resistance. I logged into the university network with my student credentials to access my home directory on the computer science department server, where I kept my scripts and other programs for hacking the Internet. With the university and library networks being kissing cousins, I had no trouble piercing the firewall that stood between them and leaving the virtual door open behind me. I nodded my head again.

"On my mark," Red said, "activate the fire alarm."

I looked at her in askance. "Pulling the fire alarm is a rather juvenile hack."

"The fire alarm is a necessary diversion for something much more impressive."

Green threaded her glove fingers together and stretched her arms out towards me, cracking her knuckles towards my face. The sparkling green lip-gloss of her smirk infuriated me, as if I couldn't do such a juvenile hack.

Despite my misgivings about pulling the fire alarm, I infiltrated the fire alarm command-and-control system that was more difficult than piercing the firewall, being deliberately designed to discourage such juvenile hacks. Beads of sweat appeared on my forehead as I worked quickly to circumvent the additional security measures. I nodded my readiness when I had the command to virtually pull the library fire alarm by pressing of the RETURN button on my laptop.

Green and Blue nodded their heads in approval, typing away on their keyboards. Red smiled like the Cheshire cat, her glossy red lips hanging in the shadows of her hood, as she looked down at the screen with her hands folded inside her hoodie pocket.

"Stand by," Red said.

A noticeable surge of network activity went over the wireless connection from my laptop. I ran a packet sniffer to look at the additional traffic. Three encrypted streams flowed through the wireless connection to the McDonald's hotspot, through the university network and into the library network, and somewhere on the Internet. My laptop didn't have the computational power to

crack the encryption in real-time to reveal the data passing through my connection.

"We're in," Green and Blue chimed together, their fingers typing faster on their keyboards. "Ready to execute."

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Standby," Red said again.

They bent over their laptops like communing monks. The clicking keyboards sounded like clicking prayer beads, counting off the seconds from the appearance of my flash mob ten minutes ago.

"Airborne," Green said.

"Tracking," Blue said. "Three minutes out."

"What the—" I started to say.

"Standby," Red repeated.

Then I realized what they were doing. "You're launching a ballistic missile!"

"We're not *that* good," Red laughed out loud. "This isn't *Wargames*."

The other two smiled at that archaic reference to the 1983 computer hacker movie, where a pair of teenagers unintentionally hacked their way into a military mainframe and played a nuclear simulation with an artificial intelligence linked to nuclear missiles that didn't know it was a game. The dream of every aspiring hacker since that movie was to leave a flaming pile of dog poop on the doorstep of the military-industrial complex, ring the bell and run like hell. Someone always answers the door to stomp out the flaming pile of dog poop while the hacker laughed her ass off at a safe distance. With the unceasing war on terror in recent years, the flaming pile of dog poop was sometimes thrown back like a flaming missile.

"Fire alarm on my mark." Red splayed her fingers above her head, counting down from five to one before clenching her hand into a fist. "Now!"

I pressed the RETURN button on my keyboard to remotely activate the fire alarm to evacuate the library. We were too far away to hear the actual alarm. I heard my heartbeats ring loudly over the rain-splattered din inside the empty condo.

"Launch!" Green said.

"Tracking!" Blue said. "Ninety seconds out."

"What are you doing?" I asked Red, desperately wanting to know what they were doing over my wireless connection.

"Wrong question!" Red looked up from her laptop. "What is the United States government doing now?"

"I don't understand."

"Watch and learn."

Red closed the lid of her laptop and gestured for me to join her at the picture window. My flash mob dotted the streets below like confused ants, thinning out after police vehicles with flashing red-and-blue lights parked up on the curb and officers in yellow slickers tried to restore the peace. Red pointed towards the library building several blocks away.

The MLK library is an eight-story library building at the corners of San Fernando and Fourth Streets, being the northwest corner of the campus where the old library and administrative buildings were before being demolished. The city and the university each had an old library building that needed replacement but each couldn't afford a new building. The old MLK library building stood empty for a decade until it got demolished to add a new wing to the convention center behind it. My maternal grandfather, being a construction worker who worked all over the San Francisco bay area, gave me history lessons on the local landmarks whenever we drove by in his one-ton flatbed truck.

"Target locked!" Green said.

"Incoming!" Blue said. "Three, two, one, contact."

I saw missiles fall from the cloud ceiling on the count of three, swooping low over the university on the count of two, disappearing behind the library building on the count of three, and complete silence on contact. The condo building shook and the picture window vibrated from the dual explosions. Plums of dust and smoke shot into the damp air from the floors pancaked into each other from the destruction of the ground floor. An eight-story building plummeted from the Silicon Valley skyline. The flash mob on the

streets below bore witness to the destruction of a public library building. As quickly as the flash mob formed, they scattered in all directions. The police officers, confused by the earth-shaking explosion and sudden dispersal of the flash mob, shouted into their radios and piled back into their cruisers to navigate the standstill traffic.

Anarchy in its purest form—this was Anonymous Hackers.

"Whiskey, foxtrot, tango," I whispered, the polite version of "WTF" from the Internet. "Unbelievable."

"That the need of the police state trumps the need for a knowledgeable citizenry?" Red said besides me. "Public funding for libraries has been in declined for decades, especially as the Internet became more prevalent. Political leaders want to eliminate the public library systems entirely to prevent poor citizens from empowering themselves with information to challenge the status quo of a one-percent society that separates the obscene wealthy from the dredges of humanity. The United States government dispatched a surveillance drone to fire missiles at a public library is icing on the cake. This was the wanton destruction of free information."

"You knew this would happen?"

"Not the first time that Anonymous Hackers got targeted for a drone attack."

"But those attacks were always in foreign countries."

"You think the Bill of Rights will protect American citizens from being blown up like an Afghanistan wedding party? If you haven't activated the fire alarm to evacuate the library, countless lives would have been lost."

We watched the surveillance drone dip below the cloud ceiling to circle above the book-burning bonfire to confirm the "kill" for a faceless operator in a dark room somewhere. Fire trucks with raised ladders to spray water on the burning rubble. Police formed a perimeter to keep the remnant of my flash mob away. Some raised their fists and shouted at the heavens in anger.

"This is the same government," Red continued, "that threatened to launch a nuclear attack against any nation that launches a cyber attack against the United States. If a network technician misconfigures a router on the other side of the world that accidentally launches a denial of service attack at the White House while the president is connecting with his Chicago beer-drinking buddies on Facebook, a nuclear strike becomes inevitable. The international community will not sit on the sidelines if a mushroom cloud appears in their backyard. Not since the end of the Cold War has humanity lived under the doctrine of mutually assured destruction."

"But—"

"No!" Red grabbed me by the arms to face her, letting her hoodie slip back enough to reveal green eyes, freckles and a stray strand of red hair. This bitch is in my women lit class. "You need to decide on what kind of hacker you are, choosing the blue pill of hacker bliss or the red pill of painful reality. Either join us at Anonymous Hackers to fight for a free society or go to Guantanamo Bay for committing a terrorist act."

"What!" I pushed her away and pointed at the picture window. "I'm not responsible for that."

"On the contrary," Green said, closing the lid of her laptop. "You used the Safeway hotspot to put a flash mob out on the street, the McDonald's hotspot to connect into the university network with your student credentials, and hacked the library firewall to pull the fire alarm."

"Within forty-eight hours," Blue said, also closing the lid of her laptop, "the F.B.I. will piece together the virtual puzzle, the university will confirm your identity, and Silicon Valley will locked down as the manhunt gets underway. Twenty-four hours later, the news of your arrest and mug shot will be all over the Internet. Three months later, your dorky high school picture will be on the front cover of the *Rolling Stone* magazine. You may even be charged for murder, mayhem and anarchy, especially if someone was so foolish enough to ignore the fire alarm and stayed inside the library."

"Let's not forget breaking and entering into this condo," Red said, pointing to the picture window. "That F.B.I. will go ballistic with that handprint."

"Handprint?" I asked, looking at my hand in horror.

"Why do you think we wear gloves?"

Panic begun to overwhelm me as considered the implications. "I'll tell the authorities what you did here!"

"Tell them what exactly?"

I stammered in incoherent protest, clueless as to what they did.

"That you don't know what we did," Green said smugly, "is a good indication that you're not a very good hacker."

I swear to God that I will slap that bitch silly when given the chance.

"If you join us," Red said, "we could erase your digital fingerprints to leave the authorities clueless to your involvement."

"You bitches set me up!" I screamed.

"You set yourself up when you contacted us. We're not another university hacking group with nothing better to do."

Together in one voice, they said: "We are Anonymous Hackers."

I sought out these bitches because I am an elite hacker. What does that mean? An *agent provocateur* who provokes the government into revealing the immoral and corrupt policies that threatens a free and open society. If enough can citizens open their eyes to what was really going on in their behalf, maybe real changes will take place in the world.

"Blue pill," I told them, using the overused metaphor from the 1999 hacker movie, *The Matrix*. "Now what?"

Red looked over to Blue and Green, who both nodded their heads in approval. They pulled back their hoodies. I already suspected who Red was. Blue was a Chinese girl with blue highlights I've seen around the student union from time to time. As for Green, who just flipped me the bird, that green-haired bitch was in my small group communications class. Red handed me a pair of monogramed leather gloves from the front pocket of her hoodie, and wiped the handprint off the picture window with the sleeve of her hoodie. Blue

and Green turned back their laptops, presumably to erase my digital fingerprints from the crime scene.

"You're one of us now." Red caressed my cheek with her gloved hand and stroked my lips with her thumb. "You need white lip gloss to match your hair."