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Hologram

“Rain again today.”

“Guess the weather machine is still down. Tunnels?”

“Righto.”

They had been planning it for as long as he could remember – James couldn’t recall exactly when it had first been mentioned. Perhaps it was sometime during freshman year when his then roommate, Everett Scott, had started lamenting about the decrease and eventual death of hacking since the advent of all the new tech. The tech had simply started to outpace the creativity of the students. No, perhaps it wasn’t just that. The administration had also changed – and not for the better as far as the student body was concerned.

“Do you think Jackie will be ready tonight, James?”

He took a while to answer. It was a tricky question. Jackie had been on and off of the team multiple times during the past three years. It wasn’t that she wasn’t enthusiastic about the plan. Or even that she was necessarily flaky...she just, like many MIT students, got overwhelmed sometimes and needed a break. They needed her though.

“We can hope.”

Everett pressed his palm against the sensor to open the basement door to the tunnels. MIT didn’t like random people in its basement. Half the time it didn’t even like students in its basement.

“She’s got to come, James. She *needs* to be done the hologram! I did the initial parts, but she’s the expert.”

“Did she say she’s completed it?”

“Not when I talked to her a few days ago on ctn...but it’s not like she would have mentioned it there.”

Ctn was short for Closed Talk Network – MIT’s own personal chat client and one that was more than likely monitored. It would surely explain why every hack that had been discussed over it since its creation had crashed and burned way before any implementation occurred. No. Jackie wouldn’t have been stupid enough to mention the hologram on ctn.

They crossed through the final door in the tunnel and out onto Mass Ave right in front of Building 7. MIT still hadn’t managed to convince the City of Cambridge to allow tunneling beneath the street. The students complained a lot about it, but that’s just how the student body was. He didn’t think it was that bad and thought it more than a little silly to complain about going out into the sunlight every now and then. It was actually pretty refreshing. Maybe they were afraid of sunburn – the majority of them were certainly pale enough.

Today was even better than normal in his opinion. The MIT weather machine was broken so MIT couldn’t regulate the rain falling on its campus. It was nice to feel the heavy drops fall on his face.

“Gah – I have no clue how you stand the rain James.”

James ignored the comment and instead tried to avoid laughing at Everett as he struggled with his umbrella. He had opened a ridiculously small umbrella and was trying unsuccessfully to keep both himself and his book bag under it. Unfortunately, he was

failing horribly. The fact that the umbrella was a fantastic neon pink color certainly didn't help the situation.

“Where to today?”

“Let's go for Barker Library. We haven't hacked from there in a while.”

It wasn't very likely that anyone would be able to track them back to whatever computer they were using anyway, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Over the past three years both of them had developed quite a knack for hacking into the MIT network. James was a little bit better than Everett, but they were both good.

James just hoped they'd be good enough.

The plan had developed slowly. First it was just a joke. Let's hack the system! Shut all of MIT down! Let's show them that MIT still has some spirit left.

Since the change in administration policy roughly 50 years ago the hacking culture had slowly but surely died. It wasn't just the technology watching every movement of the students, but also the crackdown on the students that were caught. It was said that in the past the administration looked the other way to a certain extent as long as the hacks themselves were harmless. He wished he could have been here then. After all, what could possibly be damaging about turning the Infinite into a level from the old Super Mario game. Things like that just didn't happen anymore.

Until now.

Everett and James had slowly integrated themselves into the system. Mapping it out and learning how to shut anything and everything down. They had even figured out how to distract, disrupt, and, if necessary, destroy the surveillance bots. The MIT

network was huge and complex and, unfortunately, very protective of its secrets so it had taken years, but they were almost done. They had to be.

James logged on. Everett sat at his shoulder – he'd be taking a backseat this time. There wasn't much for him to do now. James just needed to make sure nothing had changed. No new security measures, passwords, firewalls or anything else. They had just checked a few days before, but MIT changed their security more and more often as of late. No need to take a chance.

“Looks good,” Everett said from over James' shoulder after they had been searching for hours, “Perhaps we really can do this.”

“Looks like it. Nothing significant has changed. We should be able to hack it pretty easily tonight. Contact Jackie. She has the last piece we need.”

“Right.”

Jackie had the hologram. It had taken the better part of the last year for her and Everett to make it and make it interface seamlessly with the MIT system. It was a hologram of the Green Building.

In the fall of 2027 a structural flaw had been found in the base of building 54, also known as the Green Building. After months of discussion on whether the building should be left standing but with additional support or simply removed altogether, the MIT administration decided to go with the later. In the fall of 2028, they demolished the building and began construction on an extension to building 18. The construction had continued for roughly four years.

The finished product was a marvel – as everything that comes out of MIT is said to be. It fit perfectly in the courtyard and, of course, did not match any of the architecture around it. The students hated it.

The fall of the green building was seen by many to be symbolic. The green building had once, in the past, been the sight of many major hacks performed by students. Its removal so close to the change in administration and the implementation of new crack-down policies on hacking within the community was seen as being far from coincidental.

That wasn't all though – simply knocking down a building wouldn't have raised the ire of the students overly much.

When the students learned of the green buildings removal they decided to try one last hack on the building. It was to be a simple remake of an older hack to make the Boston-facing side of the building look like a giant game of Tetris. According to legend, all was going according to plan until a bunch of police officers busted in on the students in running the hack and arrested them. The students were brought before the council on discipline and quickly expelled.

It was a shock to the community. Raids on student hacks and tours to the top of the dome were interrupted more and more frequently after that with severe consequences to the student organizers. All together, it was a clear message: stop hacking.

And so the building fell and the community died.

Until now.

“She’s coming and she says it’s done.”

“It’ll run?”

“As far as she knows – yes. She said she’ll be waiting for us in Killian Court near the street.”

They logged off the computer, took the elevator down to the first floor, and walked out onto Killian. They only had to wait a few minutes for Jackie to arrive.

“Here it is,” she said pulling a...*something* out of her bag wrapped in very old newspaper.

“What are you doing?!” Everett hissed, “Not in pub – “

“Calm down, E. I promise it’s perfectly safe. Keep your voice down.”

James couldn’t help but be impressed as she unwrapped the newspaper and handed it to him. It took him a minute to realize what it was, but eventually the nagging sense of familiarity took shape.

“It’s one of those, uh, iPods I think they were called. I got it off of Ebay. I figured it would be a safe way to disguise and transport the hologram.”

She was right. The iPod looked old and outdated compared to today’s tech, but if they were seen with it no one would question them. Some people liked to collect outdated merchandise. To top it off the iPod was equipped with a USB connector that some of the machines on campus still had equipped just in case someone needed them.

It was perfect. Not only would it be able to easily connect with a computer in an Athena cluster, but it would also not draw any undue attention from any administration lackies that were watching the surveillance from the clusters.

“It’s perfect, Jackie,” Everett said as James handed the iPod over to him for inspection.

“Should be – took me forever to make everything you needed fit in there though. I know you two are bright, but just as a quick note, please don’t drop the iPod. That thing can sustain some rough handling, but only so much.”

“We’ll be careful Jackie. You all setup for lookout?”

“Yeah, I’ll be in my room in EC. I’ll let you know as soon as I see it.”

“Right, we’re off then.”

Jackie hesitated before turning around.

“...good luck guys. Let’s do this.”

Jackie turned around quickly and headed back to EC before they could respond. James looked at Everett and tried not to show the nerves that had just hit him.

“She’s right. This is it.”

Everett didn’t respond.

They walked to the nearest tunnel entrance and headed towards the closest cluster. James hopped it wasn’t occupied. Or, at the very least, didn’t have many people in it. The fewer the witnesses the better - that way if anything went wrong it was unlikely that anyone else in the cluster would also suffer their fate.

The first cluster was crowded. They moved on. After dismissing another three clusters they found one deep in the tunnels with only one other person in it – and he was clearly deep asleep.

They both knew what to do. James would be running the show. Everett would provide the distraction.

Everett logged in first. They had planned and practiced this routine in miniature on their own secure server more times than he could remember. He wouldn’t log on until

Everett had diverted sufficient network surveillance to where he was causing untraceable havoc in the Stata network.

They worked in silence.

Everett nodded to James. He logged on.

James did a quick double check on the computer and the network for any threatening changes and set up a few quick warning systems. They didn't have time for a full check – that would take hours – but anything was better than nothing.

He plugged in the iPod.

He ran the program.

They waited – there was nothing more they could do. They had built the program to run on its own. It no longer needed them. It was done.

The lights flickered in the cluster and in the tunnel outside before dropping everyone into darkness. All the computers shut down as if the power to the room had suddenly disappeared.

In the back of the room the sleeping student woke and let out a startled and jumbled sound.

And in the darkness they heard Jackie speak over the transmitter.

“I see it! I see it! It's up!”

They ran. The tunnels were pitch black. It didn't matter – they knew where to go. They ran through all the twists and turns in the tunnels feeling the walls until they reached the surface.

Everything they ran past above ground was pitch black except for small pockets where long-unused backup generators were struggling to start. Other people were running too. The news had spread like wildfire.

The hologram was a massive power drain. In the initial planning stages they had known that they would have to eventually find a huge source of power to make a hologram as large as they intended. In the end, they had taken it all. They had blacked out the entire campus to supply the hologram.

Everyone was talking in excited whispers. Someone in the distance was shouting. James let some of the weight fall from his shoulders. They were safe – there was power in numbers. There were simply too many students running around for any campus police to arrest them all. And the students knew it. The shouting from the students running ahead got louder.

Then they rounded one last corner and saw what they had waited three years to see.

The crowd roared.

The Green Building stood.

It stood as tall as the original had the day they had last tried to prank it exactly fifty years ago.

And someone was playing Tetris on it.