

Making Teams, Breaking Teams

Louise Sellers

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Chapter 1

Making Teams, Breaking Teams

Connor sat in the dreary classroom at the training centre. It reminded him unpleasantly of school. A low building with large steel framed windows. The only difference was that instead of walls covered in students' work, there were earnest posters about government initiatives. He glanced round the room. About half the class were in suits of one sort or another ranging from people who seemed to naturally inhabit their clothes to those who looked uncomfortable and awkward. The rest were in a selection of more casual wear. All of them were older than he was.

The teacher was a pretty woman; Japanese to judge by her looks and her name, though he couldn't detect any sign of an accent in her speech. She was younger than he had been expecting. She wasn't wearing a suit, as such, but she was dressed more smartly than most of the "casual" end of the class and she was hiding her looks behind glasses and a severe hair-style. She was, in fact, desperately dull. This was all a monumental waste of time but, according to Lester, he couldn't connect the Anomaly Detector to the network until he'd been trained in information security procedures and this was an official three day government run course in the same. He had to stay until they signed off a certificate for him.

They'd been allowed to bring their own laptops and he'd spent the first hour surreptitiously checking email and reading web pages. But, because he didn't want to be here and because it *was* a security seminar he decided to see exactly what their friendly wireless network gave him access to with a little help from some password cracking software he'd downloaded. Ms. Sato, he observed, had also brought a laptop with her and was using it to display her slides. There were several machines connected to the open network, one was called `Torchwood 3`. Since her name badge said "Torchwood", he set the password hacking scripts onto that machine. Almost immediately the slide show abruptly stopped. Ms.

Sato frowned. Nervously Connor watched her restart the machine. She restarted power point and continued almost as if nothing had happened.

Five minutes later his laptop crashed. He restarted it and it crashed again. He tried a third time and then noticed a sudden hush in the classroom. Ms. Sato had stopped speaking and was looking directly at him. He smiled weakly.

"Laptop's crashed," he said.

"Really?" Her tone was acid. "Never mind, you won't need it today," and she continued with the lesson.

It took him all evening to get it running again and he had to do a fresh install of the operating system. When he at last logged in again a message flashed on his screen. "What do you think you're doing?"

Connor spent the second day of the security seminar under Toshiko Sato's steely glare. In a number of exercises on the basics of machine security, while those around him grappled with the complexities of Not Opening Attachments From Strangers, Connor found his workstation under attack from an increasingly sophisticated sequence of worms, sniffing out ports someone had inconsiderately left open, almost as fast as he could find and lock them down. His machine crashed after half an hour. This time he called the Sysadmin over and watched him wrestle with the operating system reinstall while Ms. Sato sat looking smug at the head of the class.

That evening he met Stephen in the pub.

"Couldn't she just leave me alone? It's not like it's supposed to be a serious hacker defence class."

Stephen shrugged. "I bet you're learning more this way though."

"Well, yes."

"So what are you complaining about? It wasn't even your machine she crashed this afternoon. You moaned endlessly before you went about what a waste of time all this noddy stuff would be." Stephen sprawled back in his chair, lanky arms spread out, sipping his beer.

"It's all right, I suppose," Connor conceded. Stephen was right, he had learned all sorts of interesting tricks.

"Email her and apologise," Stephen added, offering a rare piece of unsolicited advice.

"Maybe."

Eventually, later than night after several more beers, Connor emailed an apology to Ms. Sato. He was rewarded with a reply containing most of the attack programs she had used. He went into the course the next morning eager to talk to her about them only to be met by some faceless suit saying she was ill. Connor

spent the morning picking through the code and trying it out experimentally on the local network. The faceless suit, actually a Mr. Grant, caught him at it around midday and raised an eye-brow.

"Ms. Sato sent me some sample hacking scripts." Connor said defensively, "I think she thought I could handle tougher exercises than the others."

Mr Grant grinned falsely, "Ah! You must be," and his eyes flickered down to Connor's name badge, "Mr. Temple. Ms. Sato mentioned you. She did indeed have an exercise for you. How do you fancy hacking something a bit better locked down than these systems?"

"Really?"

"Think you are good enough?"

"Absolutely, I'm a master hacker, me!"

Meeting Stephen in the pub again that evening, he was full of enthusiasm. It had been a lot of fun and very challenging. So challenging, in fact, he'd only managed to access about half the files on the list. He was looking forward to the next day.

"Connor," Stephen said, "what exactly were you hacking into?"

"I don't know, Ministry of Defence I think." Connor looked at Stephen's expression. "What? What!"

"I think you should double check with Ms. Sato," said Stephen seriously.

"You're just seeing conspiracies again."

"Come on, Connor, think about it. Does it seem likely they'd train you to break *in* to the MoD?"

"It's just an exercise."

Stephen stared at him over the top of his pint. "If you say so."

"I'll check with Toshiko."

Connor sent an email but, now anxious, he fretted for ten minutes awaiting a reply.

"For goodness sake!" said Stephen as Connor stopped the conversation yet again while he checked his email. "Can't you phone her?"

Toshiko's email had included mobile number in the signature so he phoned that but was rerouted to answering service. He left a message, then sat drumming his fingers on the chipped varnish of the table top.

"You've done everything you can," reassured Stephen. "It's not like you can pin point her hotel room and then bang on the door."

Several things fell into place in Connor's mind. He'd seen Toshiko's mobile. She'd been using it one lunch break. It wasn't a make he was familiar with, which was interesting in and of itself. He'd bet anything it was ultra-modern and had

integrated GPS though and one of the scripts she'd sent him could be used to track GPS devices. He explained all this to Stephen as he opened up the laptop again.

"Don't you think you're over-reacting a bit?" Stephen was starting to get bored. Connor got the distinct impression he would have left by now if they weren't friends.

"What if Mr. Grant is some sort of spy? What if I've been doing his work for him? What if he's kidnapped Toshiko?"

"Is that likely?"

"You suggested it."

"I wasn't expecting you to spend the rest of the evening hacking someone's mobile phone."

"Got it!" Connor said triumphantly. "That's odd," he added, "it's back at the training centre."

"Maybe she's just gone back there to prepare for tomorrow?"

"You believe that?"

Stephen shook his head. "You want a lift?"

They parked in the training centre car park and walked up to the glass swing doors.

"It'll be locked," said Stephen as they approached.

Connor pushed and the door opened. "No."

Stephen shook his head. "The luck of fools. Best be careful."

"There's a security office on the right as you go in."

The security office was empty. The CCTV was working though and on it they could see Toshiko and three men in one of the classrooms. Toshiko sat in a chair looking stubborn. All three men were armed.

"Can we get sound?" asked Stephen.

"I shouldn't think so." Connor hunted through a couple of menus. "Nope nothing here. We should do something."

"Phone the police."

"Oh come on Stephen. How feeble is that. We're professional dinosaur hunters. We should be able to handle a few goons."

"I hunt animals not people, Connor. They're a lot less dangerous for one thing."

"But what if something happens while we're waiting for the police?"

Stephen was already on the phone. While he talked to the police, Connor found his way through the security systems, an idea dawning. First he routed the CCTV footage to an external server and wrote and passed Stephen a note with an

explanation and the address. Stephen nodded and started passing on the details. Next Connor started up his own laptop and pointed it at the same external server so he could now see where everyone was inside the building. Then he set the monitors in the security office to display some looped footage.

"Can I have your iPod?" he asked as Stephen came off the phone.

"Is this another of those, if you die can I have your iPod conversations?"

"No, but I'm glad you remember that. I need it now."

Connor connected the iPod into the security systems and set it on random play.

"We need to get to the classroom next to where they're holding Toshiko."

"The police said to stay put here. Actually they said to leave the building."

"But something might happen to Toshiko. It doesn't look like she's co-operating."

At that point, as if to underline his point, Grant took the opportunity to hit Toshiko. Stephen flinched.

"We *have* to do something," pressed Connor.

"What's your plan?"

"I get most of the men out of the room. Then we break in, overpower the guard and escape with Toshiko."

"Overpower the guard!"

"It'll be two against one."

"One who's armed."

"Well we ambush one of the other guards and take his gun."

Stephen shot him a withering look. "OK," Stephen winced again as Grant hit Toshiko a second time, "give me a minute and I'll get my tranquiliser rifle from the car."

Once they were secured in the next room. Connor did two things. First, he woke up all the computers in the building. He set their screensavers to show looped footage of Grant and the other men marching Toshiko into the building. Secondly, he connected them all to Stephen's iPod.

Run for you life if you can little girl

"Beatles, nice!" he shouted to Stephen over the din.

On his laptop screen he was pleased to see the men start as the screens flickered on and the music blared.

Hide your head in the sand little girl

Grant was gesturing with his gun. Hopefully ordering the goons to the security office to see what was going on.

Catch you with another man, that's the end, little girl

"Now?" asked Stephen watching over his shoulder.

Connor nodded.

They paused outside the classroom door. Stephen stood braced with the gun. He nodded to Connor who threw open the door. Stephen shot. Grant yelled, his voice just audible above the music, and whirled round to face them. Then he looked down at the dart. Stephen had already ducked to one side of the door. Connor ducked to the other side waiting for the thump.

There was a thump.

"He's out," came Toshiko's voice.

"Thanks!" she said to Stephen, smiling weakly as they entered the room.

"It was Connor's idea," he said.

She smiled at Connor and nodded her head, "Thanks!"

"Now out," said Stephen. He strode to the nearest window, but it was nailed shut. He threw a chair at it, which bounced.

"Security glass," said Toshiko.

"We can't go out the front," said Connor panicking. "They'll be in the security office," he checked his laptop, and felt cold. "Actually, they're on the way back."

At that moment, the door to the classroom opened and the two men tumbled in. One glance at the scene before them and they raised their guns.

I'd rather see you dead little girl

Two shots rang out. Toshiko held Grant's gun. She'd picked it up when he fell and hadn't waited for his henchmen to register the situation in the classroom. Her face looked shocked and scared. So did Stephen's for that matter. Connor supposed his face must look the same though all he felt was a kind of numbed sense of relief that they were all safe.

Two hours later, they ended up in the "gastro pub" across the road from the training centre. Tosh hadn't eaten for twenty four hours and wanted food. Since Connor and Stephen had missed supper they didn't object, especially since Tosh's credentials had bypassed what had looked set to be a lengthy police interview for all of them. Tosh wolfed down a Chicken Kiev with a glass of white. Connor had the Tikka Masala. Stephen opted for steak.

"I thought we were dead!" Connor kept saying, sounding like an idiot even to himself.

"Thanks!" Tosh kept saying, almost as repetitious as Connor. "They were hoping to use my access clearance to get into some highly secret files."

"Which I nearly gave them," said Connor, gloomily.

Tosh waved her glass expansively, her mouth full. "You didn't get through to anything very important. I'll make sure there's no come back. I owe you that much at any rate."

"I'm just glad we could help," said Stephen.

Tosh blushed at that. Women, Connor had noticed, had a tendency to blush when introduced to Stephen. Tosh looked back down at her food.

"I wasn't going to give them anything," she mumbled, indistinctly.

"That's not the point," said Connor surprised at his own fierceness. "They might have killed you."

Tosh looked up at him. "I know, and thanks."

The evening went well for Connor after that, though he got the impression Stephen got a little bored whenever he and Toshiko got too involved in discussing operating system specs. Stephen, as the driver, was also drinking apple juice which probably didn't help either. Connor learned more that evening about both securing and hacking systems than he had in his previous ten years of off and on interest. After the pub closed, they stood in the street for a few minutes still chatting, then Tosh spotted a cab and flagged it down. She pecked Connor on the cheek before she got in. "My hero," she said, before blushing again and then she was gone.

"She likes you," Stephen observed.

Connor straightened his hat. "Lots of women really go for suave intelligence."

Stephen laughed kindly and said something which might have contained the word "geeks". Connor hit him on the arm.

Stephen grinned, "Come on, let's go home."

When Stephen died, Connor nearly resigned. Wrote the letter and everything. He decided to wait until after the funeral though, unsure if he could cope with that if he wasn't part of the team. Then after the funeral they rushed off immediately to another anomaly site and were all too busy for a day or so.

When he had finally got back and picked up the letter he wasn't so sure about sending it. Abby had found him in the centre of their living space, holding it in his hands and staring at it.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Resignation letter."

She moved next to him and placed a hand on his arm. "Don't go."

"It's just... it's just I don't think I could bear it if someone else died. I keep thinking what would have happened if we'd phoned Stephen? Phoned him as soon as we knew who the traitor was. Let him know."

"He'd already resigned."

"But if he'd known he might have realised it was a trap he was walking into. Why didn't we phone him?"

"It wasn't a trap, Connor. Not for Stephen anyway. You know what would have happened if you'd phoned. He would have gone anyway to save Cutter. It wouldn't have made any difference."

"We were friends, Abby, and when he died we weren't talking to him."

Abby had wrapped her arms around him then. "I know," she had whispered, "but resigning won't make it any better."

So he'd stayed, after all, she was his friend too, but he kept the letter in a drawer. He felt apart from the rest of the team, disturbed by how a mixture of hostility and indifference had conspired to bring about Stephen's death. He sometimes wondered if they were a team at all in anything but name, if they had ever been. If they had been a proper team, Stephen would still be alive.

From: Toshiko Sato

To: Connor Temple

Dear Connor

I'm sorry to have to send this to you. It's not actually from me but it's from a monitoring program I've set up. If you're getting it, it's because the monitor program can't get in touch with me and it has detected some strange behaviour in our system. I wouldn't send it to you except I know you have security clearance and experience with weird stuff (we have access to a lot of files over here) so hopefully (!) you should be able to cope with whatever is going on. At the end of the message you'll find details for accessing whatever logs and files the monitor thinks are relevant and our address in Cardiff. It doesn't look like much from the outside but there should be someone at the desk. Ask for me and, if I'm not around, Jack Harkness. If all else fails get them to check back with your boss and say I sent you.

Tosh

"Ummm, hello?" Connor glanced around himself nervously. *This* was not what he had expected. A tiny tourist office, down some steps, in a back street (albeit a back street off Roald Dahl Plass). He'd expected a big modern prestige building like the ARC. There'd not even been anyone behind the desk when he had arrived and he'd had to ring a small bell. After what had seemed like an age,

in which his confidence in Toshiko's directions had fallen even further, a bored looking receptionist had emerged and sat behind the desk.

The receptionist had looked Connor up and down, a faint smile at the corners of his mouth, but hadn't said anything, leaving Connor to start the conversation.

"Hello."

"Hello?" the receptionist replied to Connor's prompt, giving away nothing.

Connor looked around again, could this really be whatever ultra-secret organisation Toshiko worked for? But then, ultra-secret? Wouldn't this be exactly the sort of front he'd set up if he had an ultra-secret organisation?

The receptionist was still looking at him. At some point the man had raised his eyebrows. Connor felt a bit warm and suspected he had started to blush. 'Remember, Cool, Professional, Discrete' he told himself. 'We're all ultra-professional, super-secret government special projects people here'.

"Ummm," he said and winced inwardly - not a super-cool start. "Is Toshiko Sato here?"

"Who?" deadpanned the receptionist. He'd stopped smiling at least, which made Connor feel a little more comfortable. Connor also noticed, because he was watching out for indications he was in the right place that the receptionist had moved one hand under the desk. Connor hoped he was signalling someone to start watching surveillance cameras and not summoning a SWAT team.

"Or Jack Harkness?" he hazarded.

"I'm sorry I don't think I can help you."

"Look," Connor floundered, "I got an email from Toshiko Sato. It said to come here."

"Really, and what was this email about?"

Connor opened his mouth and then clamped it shut again. He'd looked over the log files he'd been sent and knew what they were telling him. An ultra-secure system, one with more checks, traps and guards than he would have been able to put in, was fighting multiple, increasingly sophisticated hacking runs from an unknown source. If he wasn't in the right place he didn't want to be telling random people about the system. If he was in the right place then he didn't want them to think he might tell random people about their system.

"I think I should talk to Tosh personally, or to Jack Harkness, before I divulge that," he said, and began to wonder frantically how he might identify Jack Harkness if he got to meet him.

The inner door opened. A tall man leaned casually against the door frame, wearing a long great coat.

"I'm Jack," he said in something approximating an America drawl, "how can I help you?"

The man grinned, a smile that was almost an invitation. Connor realised he was blushing again.

"Ummm," Connor repeated; continuing a serious failure of cool. He fished in his bag and produced a print out of Tosh's email. He held it out and Jack took it from him. The man glanced over the print out and then up at Connor.

"Who's your boss?" he asked.

"Professor Cutter, Central Metropolitan University," said Connor automatically. Then his rational brain cut in with the reason for the question. "Oh, she probably meant James Lester, Home Office."

"Probably," agreed Jack. "Wait here!" and he disappeared in a swirl of grey fabric.

Connor looked around. There was a rather tatty armchair against the wall so he sat down. The receptionist smiled at him again, seeming more friendly this time. "Coffee?" he asked.

Fax

From: James Lester, Home Office
To: Jack Harkness, Torchwood 3

Captain Harkness

Following our recent phone conversation I attach copies of Mr. Temple's employment files and security clearance. I repeat, as I said on the phone, that he is an enthusiastic employee, valued by his colleagues, and a talented zoologist, engineer and programmer. However I should like to, once again, draw your attention to his lack of formal training in security work or computer systems and to the fact that his inexperience frequently manifests itself in the field. Do not give him access to any weaponry. I am happy to agree to his temporary secondment to Torchwood 3 for a provisional period of two weeks, to be revised, if necessary, next Monday. I should like to add a request that you do not needlessly put him in danger. There would be no end of upset among my staff if he were to get broken.

Yours faithfully

James Lester.

Connor didn't usually pay much attention to coffee. It was hot, it gave you a bit of a boost. That was pretty much it. So he didn't pay much attention when the receptionist put a cup down beside him. By this time he had his laptop out and was tweaking some of the programs he'd already written to data mine the full system logs if/when he got access to them. However, when he took the first sip he was jolted out of his concentration in surprise. This was really good. He glanced up at the receptionist and smiled.

"Nice coffee," he said.

The receptionist smiled back, a proper genuine smile this time.

"I had to guess what you'd like. Glad I got it right."

Connor realised he'd never introduced himself, "I'm Connor," he said, holding out his hand.

"Ianto Jones," returned the receptionist. They shook hands and grinned at each other.

Ianto nodded at Connor's laptop. "What are you doing?"

Connor glanced down, "Data mining programs for your log files, that sort of thing. Though, once Tosh gets back, she'll be able to do something much better. I got the basis for these scripts from her in the first place. She's really good at this shit. Where is she by the way?"

Connor glanced up and faltered. The smile had gone from the receptionist's face and he didn't meet Connor's eye. Two months ago Connor wouldn't have been able to interpret his expression. But he'd seen it all too often since on Cutter's face and Abby's, sometimes he'd even seen it looking out from the mirror back at him.

"Oh," he said and put down the coffee cup so suddenly that hot liquid splashed onto his fingerless glove. He looked back at his computer unable to meet Ianto Jones' eyes, remembering that evening in the pub, laughing with Stephen over the absurdities of ARC bureaucracy and swapping tales of idiotic IT directives. His hands, he realised, were shaking slightly. He took several deep breaths to calm himself and then, without looking up again, returned to his programming. Tosh whispered to him in lines of Python.

"Right. Here we go!" Jack burst into the reception area again. "You're on the books."

"On the books?"

"We've got you for two weeks after which your James Lester wants you back."

"Two weeks?"

"Yup! I want you to track down whatever it is Toshiko's system is worried about *and* I've heard lots about your creature database. If possible I'd like you to

do something similar with our files.”

”Your files?”

Ianto was grinning again, ”Creature database?” he asked.

”A database of prehistoric creatures, with a searchable interface.”

”Prehistoric? Does that mean you’re something to do with the Anomaly Research Centre?”

”Got it in one,” said Jack.

Connor glanced between them, ”How do you know about the ARC?”

”Oh, we like to be informed,” said Jack.

”How come I don’t know about you?”

”We don’t like other people to be informed,” said Ianto, with a smile.

”Come on through,” and Jack lead the way into the interior of the building.

”Oh! Wow!” Connor couldn’t help saying. He was in a vast circular chamber. Multi-level walkways, computer stations, and simply weird but sophisticated looking machinery filled the space. It wasn’t as modern-looking or as sleek as the ARC’s minimalist splendour but every corner Connor looked at was stuffed with interesting looking pieces of equipment. A tall central column, covered in switches and dials and exuding a pale light dominated the chamber rising up into the roof. ”Now this,” he added, ”is a secret head-quarters.”

”Glad you like it,” said Ianto from behind him.

Up above him there was a sudden screeching call and a pterodactyl swooped down and circled around the column.

”That’s a Pterodactyl?” Connor said, amazed.

”Do you like her?” asked Ianto. ”She’s called Myfanwy.”

”Did she come through an anomaly?”

Ianto shook his head, ”Space time rift, centred on Cardiff.”

”Space-time?”

”That’s what we do,” interrupted Jack. He looked pleased by Connor’s reaction. ”Monitor the rift, collect, safe-guard and, if possible, return the various time-travellers, aliens and inter-dimensional beings that come through it.”

”Aliens?... and inter-dimensional... This is amazing! You have files on aliens!”

Jack grinned at him. ”All yours, Connor Temple, if you can get them into a searchable database for us.”

”I most certainly can.”

”And these,” said Jack, ”are Mark Blackwell and Fiona Bishop.” A tall blonde-haired man and woman were standing together at a desk. They both looked up in unison, ”Mark is our computer expert and Fiona’s our Doctor. This is Connor

Temple. He's going to provide some extra assistance on the computer front while you get up to speed Mark."

Mark didn't look all that happy but he held out a hand nevertheless. "Pleased to meet you, Connor."

"And you."

"There's one other member of the team, Gwen Cooper, but she's on a week's leave. I imagine you'll meet her in due course."

So Connor started digging around inside the Torchwood computer system. To say it was labyrinthine was an understatement. On the face of it the set up was all pretty straightforward and standard but the logs Tosh had caused it to send him gave him an idea where to look and there were whole extra layers of security under the standard stuff. Innocent-looking extra lines inserted in system scripts that redirected the security systems elsewhere. No wonder Mark wasn't seeing anything. Connor wondered idly if Tosh had left a guide somewhere that had got misplaced or if she had simply assumed that her successor would be good enough to follow the bread-crumbs trail. It was possible she'd never considered her successor, but he thought that was unlikely. Ianto had told him about her farewell message that first evening when they'd gone out and got drunk and Connor had pressed for details, asking "What happened to Tosh?"

Going to the pub with Ianto became a regular part of Connor's day. He caught himself texting Ianto around five thirty, as he had once been accustomed to texting Stephen: *fancy a swift half?*. A couple of times Jack joined them, making the trips considerably more drunken and riotous than they were otherwise. Connor was amazed by Jack's management style. It was a startling contrast to Lester's harried disdain and Cutter's driven intensity. Torchwood was easy-going and relaxed. People had fun. They formed a *real* team. True, Mark and Fiona were less friendly but they were always polite and never hostile. They had an immaculately dressed, socially refined, aloofness that Connor found a little intimidating. Mark was a good programmer but not inspired, something Connor took quiet pleasure from. He had an impressive CV (the Hub's systems made most hacking ludicrously easy and the first place Connor looked was its own personnel files which Tosh had obviously never considered important enough to lock down) but Connor rapidly knew more about the system and could do more with it than Mark. He harboured vague ambitions to get Mark's job.

It was Monday morning: his second week at Torchwood. He hadn't yet managed to get them to let him out on a mission but he was working it. Reading Tosh's shell scripts was making his head hurt so he had turned his attention to the creatures' database. First he ripped out the bits that were specific to palaeontology.

Then he designed an interface to let him import all the Torchwood data.

"What do you think you're doing?" He looked up to see a dark-haired woman in a leather jacket staring at him across the screens he was working behind.

"Who the hell are you?" she added, pointing a gun at him.

"I'm Connor. I'm doing some security work?" Carefully he took his hands away from the keyboard and held them up.

"Jack!" she called.

Jack emerged on the upper balcony. "It's all right, Gwen. He's with us."

"Who is he? What's he doing?"

"Someone's trying to compromise our systems. Tosh left a program in the network and it contacted him."

"Is that why he's at her desk?"

Connor looked anxiously between the two. Jack had actually assigned him a desk on the other side of the room, "Tosh keyed the security system to this location. You can only access the super-user from this desk," he said. This was true, but he was suddenly uncomfortably aware of the way he'd spread his personal belongings, a mug, three photos, Stephen's iPod, a hand-held and a laptop, around the area. The empty, pristine shrine had become a Connor place. He wondered when it had happened and whether anyone else had noticed. There was a small fluffy ball with eyes and a "Welcome to Cardiff" ribbon stuck to the corner of the screen. Ianto had given it to him on his second day. "To make you feel more at home," he had said.

Gwen glared at him and then tucked the gun back in its holster. She marched up towards the balcony. "Jack, I need to talk to you!"

Jack rolled his eyes at Connor but followed her into his office. Connor thought maybe it was time to get back to the security logs.

"Don't worry about Gwen. She gets a bit suspicious of strangers," advised Ianto appearing at his side with one of his customary cups of coffee. Connor had a nasty feeling he'd be right off Nescafe by the time he finished this job.

"That's all right. I dread to think what would happen if Abby walked in and found a stranger at Stephen's desk... or what Cutter would do for that matter." He thought about Jenny. That probably wouldn't be pleasant either, but at least violence wouldn't be involved. "I'm probably lucky all she did was point a gun at me."

"She and Toshiko were good friends. She found Mark and Fiona turning up hard enough, took a week's leave to get used to the idea."

Gwen emerged from Jack's office.

"Mark, Fiona, you got any lunch plans?" She didn't even glance at Connor.

He watched Mark and Fiona look at each other, then Mark said, "No, you have any ideas?"

"I thought I might check out that new Bistro. You coming Ianto?"

Ianto shook his head, "No, I'm good. I'll stay here."

Without a glance in his direction Gwen stalked out of the hub. Mark spared Connor a rueful grin before he and Fiona followed her.

"Well, I suppose, at least you've made her happier about them," Ianto observed.

"That doesn't really help."

"No I suppose not," said Ianto. "Anyway, what are you doing?"

"Trying to work out what your hacker is after."

"Any ideas?"

"Well," he started, and then glanced anxiously at Ianto to see if he really meant it.

Ianto sat down in the chair next to him. "Go on."

"Well the attacks are coming in waves. Most of them don't get anywhere at all, just a lot of false login attempts. Early on they cracked Fiona's password and a whole lot got into the system."

"What did they do?"

"Not a lot, to be honest. They simply tried to get deeper into the system by over-riding her access permissions or stealing the login of another user. They managed to copy a few files. All text files so I did a keyword breakdown."

"And?"

"They were copying anything that contained the word 'rift' "

Ianto's mouth formed a silent "Oh".

"Yeah," Connor nodded, "by this point Tosh's security systems had got Fiona to change her password, but they managed to guess it again and this time they went for a very specific bunch of Word Perfect files. Torchwood briefing minutes from the eighties."

"When they got the rift manipulator!"

"Ah," said Connor. He'd skimmed some of the files but they were incredibly dull, managing to make even foiled alien invasions sound like administrative exercises. Mostly they just detailed arguments over office budgets and the minutiae of who was responsible for keeping the fridge clean. He'd given up before he figured out their significance.

"Then what?"

"Not a lot. They've been trying to break into some files that Tosh had secured personally. That's what triggered the email I got sent."

"What's in those files?"

Connor shrugged. "I can't get at them either but I'm working at it. No security measure can hold out Connor the master hacker for long."

Ianto smiled. "You're enjoying this."

"A little, it makes a change from the basic systems maintenance work I do normally. It's not as fun as going out in the field though."

Ianto looked serious. "Since the public never dress up as weevils so far as we know, I suppose you wouldn't pose a threat to civilians."

"Oh, you heard about that?"

"I believe James Lester went into considerable detail."

"Oh," was all Connor could think of to say.

Ianto nudged him, "Don't worry about it," he nodded at the screen. "We should talk to Jack about those files. He may be able to access them."

"I hear my name?" came Jack's American drawl. He wandered over from his office door and dropped an arm round the shoulder of each of them. "What have my boys found?"

"Tosh had a folder," said Connor. "It contains something of interest to our hacker."

"Really! Where?"

Connor typed in the location and a `Read Permission Denied` message flashed up. "Are you super-user?" asked Jack.

"I should be but I think she made some changes to the user hierarchy in the operating system."

"So who is the super-user?"

Connor typed in a random sequence of alphanumeric characters and a password prompt flashed. "Only user the super-user can't access."

Jack stared at the screen a moment then cautiously leaned over and typed in a password. The directory listing flashed before them.

"Oh!" said all three of them at once. It was the number of executable files with the word `RiftManipulationSystem` in the title that sprang out at them.

"Ah!" said Jack. "When we first got the rift manipulator our computer officer was supposed to write some software that could actually control the thing properly. He never got it to work. It was too complex. I wonder if Tosh did?"

"Could it bypass the retinal security system?" asked Ianto.

"Toshiko's code," said Jack, and shrugged.

Suddenly Connor's monitor flashed red.

"What's that?" asked Ianto.

"Someone's hacking in. They must have noticed the file access or something."

"Stop them," said Jack.

"What do you think I'm trying to do?" said Connor irritated. The programs were accessing the system through Fiona's account, again. He'd already had a word with her about password security. It appeared another was needed. So far the programs weren't getting anywhere, so Connor began trying to trace them back to source.

"They're coming from Mark's machine," he said in surprise. They all looked over at Mark's chair. It was empty; Mark was on that lunch break with Gwen and Fiona. Jack walked over and jiggled Mark's mouse. A locked screensaver popped up.

"Could someone be accessing it wirelessly?" asked Ianto.

Connor shook his head. "No, no wireless ports. Security measure."

Jack was now levering the side off the computer box.

"Hello!" he said and reached in. Abruptly the red lines on Connor's monitor all dropped back to green. Jack stood up holding a small blue half-sphere.

"What's that?" asked Connor.

"A hacking device. Very common in the next century."

Jack tossed it up and down thoughtfully. "I'm going to go and ask a few questions around and about. Ianto, you and Connor stay here. When the others get back from lunch tell Gwen and Fiona to come out to join me. Tell Mark to stay here and help Connor monitor the system." Jack pointed at Connor, "Don't let him see too much."

Left alone, Connor and Ianto paged through Tosh's files.

"I don't suppose they work," said Ianto.

Connor shrugged. "Hard to say. She'd obviously been working on them."

"How do you know?"

Connor pointed at the screen.

```
// Tosh: This is a hack to increase the speed -
// should be a better way to do this.
```

"That's a comment, she was leaving reminders to herself in the code."

"If the hackers want these files should we delete them? If we don't want to or can't use them?"

Connor and Ianto looked at each other helplessly.

"Where's Jack?"

It was Gwen. She was flanked by Mark and Fiona. She had her gun out again and once again Connor raised both his hands cautiously.

"We found a hacking device planted in Mark's computer. Jack's taken it," Connor petered out realising how inadequate his answer was going to sound, "some-where."

"Where?"

Connor shrugged, "I don't know."

"What's all this about, Gwen?" asked Ianto. Out of the corner of his eye Connor saw Ianto casually log out of Tosh's super-user account.

"There's no such person as Connor Temple."

"What?" asked Ianto.

"What!" repeated Connor stupidly as the remark sank in. "Course there is."

"We double-checked with the Home Office," said Ianto. "James Lester. He's all cleared."

"Mark's been checking deeper. There's no Connor Temple. There's no James Lester and there were no hacking runs until he arrived here."

"That's not true," protested Connor.

"Oh, you've been very clever," said Mark, "fake phone directories on the government intranet, intercepting our outward calls. The little friendship with Toshiko Sato was a particularly nice touch, playing off everyone's grief."

"But the Anomaly Research Centre! You can't just fake something that big."

"Really? I've never seen it, never heard of it before you showed up. Had you Gwen?"

"No."

Ianto raised his hand. "I had."

Gwen glanced at him a minute. "OK, so the ARC's real but we have no way of knowing he works there. We lock him up," she said firmly. Then, catching Ianto's eye, "At least until we find Jack and," addressing Connor directly, "you better not have had anything to do with his disappearance."

"He just went out. He's not been gone 10 minutes."

"That's the truth," Ianto backed him up.

"Whatever," said Gwen gesturing with her gun. "Lead the way Connor Temple."

Once she'd locked him in she stood and stared at him through the clear screen.

"This is all a big mistake," said Connor.

"You'd like us to think that," she said.

"I really did meet Tosh. She," but she'd never mentioned Gwen. He had no message to give Gwen that might convince her he was telling the truth. "She was quite small, about so high," he gestured with his hand. "She could be quite stern,

but I think she was mostly shy and she was really fun once you got her talking. She liked Chicken Kiev and white wine.”

Gwen’s face was expressionless, ”That could be anyone.” She turned and left one hand pushing her hair out of her face, or possibly wiping her eyes. He couldn’t tell.

She passed Ianto coming down the stairs, bearing more coffee. ”Don’t let him talk you into anything,” Connor heard her say.

”It’s all a mistake,” said Connor.

Ianto glanced up at the prison camera. ”I know,” he said quietly.

”You know?”

”Sssh!”

”You know?” Connor whispered.

”If this is a deception what’s the point of a Monster database?”

”Could be deep cover,” Connor said, in spite of himself.

Ianto shook his head, ”and I remember Toshiko teaching that training course.”

”That doesn’t prove anything!”

”And it takes more than a faked phone directory to fool Jack.”

Connor opened his mouth and then shut it again. Who was he to argue if Ianto was on his side?

”Are you going to let me out then?”

Ianto shook his head, ”I need to get Gwen alone and talk her round. At the moment I’m out-numbered.”

”If you let me out and called Jack we would be evens, that’s got to be worth chancing right?”

Ianto shook his head, ”I don’t know enough about what’s going on. They’ve scrambled the communications somehow. I can’t get a signal on my mobile and the Internet is down. The satellite phones are still working though.” He fished a ludicrously small device from his pocket.

”So phone Jack on that.”

Ianto shook his head. ”Can’t, Jack’s not carrying one. We don’t normally. They’re pretty power hungry. I’m going to go out and find him. Then he can phone back and reason with Gwen.”

”But they want Tosh’s files! They must have a plan they think will work before Jack gets back.”

”And we know they’ve not succeeded in getting them despite easy access to the systems for several weeks. Nothing’s changed there. Maybe Jack finding the hacking device has forced their hand. They could just be desperate.”

Ianto suddenly raised his voice.

"I'm sorry Connor," he said in a clipped tone. "Right now I see no evidence you are who you say you are. Once Jack gets back I'm sure all this will be resolved."

Connor banged the glass door to the cell in frustration as Ianto walked away.

Suddenly he was alone, ignored, mistrusted while everyone carried on without him. He thought of Stephen, alone on that beach, armed only with a harpoon. How come no one had thought to phone him except Helen? Connor rested his head against the cool plastic of the cell door uncomfortably aware that there was no one here he really knew or trusted.

Half an hour he was still there, waiting because there was nothing else he could do. His mind rehearsing, yet again, all the events that had led up to Stephen's deaths all the ways in which a word here or there might have made a difference.

"Connor!"

It was Abby, large as life, outside the cell. Connor could hardly believe his eyes.

"Abby! what are you doing here? how did you get here?"

"James intercepted some outgoing email activity and realised something was up. He sent us to get you out." It was Cutter.

"Great! who else is here?"

"Just us," said Abby, "James wanted to keep it low key so he sent me and Nick. 'Less conspicuous,' he said."

Connor frowned. This didn't add up.

"You going to get me out then?"

"Give us a minute," grinned Abby. She walked over to the control panel, all self-assured grace, and typed in the combination. The door slid open.

Cutter draped an arm round him as he left the cell. "James thinks Torchwood has been infiltrated by aliens, in the form of Mark Blackwell and Fiona Bishop."

"That's what I think too!"

"He reckons they're after some files, for a rift manipulator?"

Connor nodded.

"Which he thinks could be useful at the ARC. He wants you to take a copy of the files and delete the originals from the system."

"Right," said Connor carefully, "that'll take some time. Aren't they all upstairs still?"

"No," said Cutter. "We manufactured an emergency. They're all out on wild goose chases. The place is deserted."

Connor thought hard. None of this added up but if this was really Cutter and Abby he didn't want to place them in danger. He didn't want any more deaths.

Not after Toshiko and Stephen.

"Do we have back-up nearby in case of trouble? Captain Ryan?" he asked. He would have asked after Stephen but guessed that even a cursory glance at the ARC's files would have revealed Stephen's fate.

"Ryan's on stand-by," confirmed Cutter. "He'll extract us if we give the signal."

Connor nodded, "OK! let's get going," and he left the room Cutter before him and Abby behind, almost co-ordinated in their movements.

Connor had done this before. Well, that wasn't strictly true. He'd *thought* about doing it before having read about it in a book. He'd planned how he'd do it, just in case. He'd even written a few scripts which were on machines inside the ARC. First he fired up the hacking monitor and explained what it was to Cutter and Abby.

"We should keep monitoring, just in case," he said.

Cutter, sat on one side of him, nodded sagely. Abby was hovering behind him. He couldn't see her reaction. Hopefully they would enjoy watching the pretty bars bob up and down. He'd certainly found it distracting enough over the last couple of weeks. He then tried to log in to the ARC to get his programs: no connection. He swore.

"What's the problem?" asked Cutter.

Remember Connor, act natural. "Ummm, well, I've spent the last two weeks trying to stop people breaking into the system. Not the same as breaking in myself. If I'm to go poking around the internal security I'm going to need some of my code from the ARC. Can't seem to get a connection though."

Cutter looked behind him, presumably at Abby.

"I'll have a fiddle with the network router, see if any wires are loose," he volunteered. Cutter stood. Abby slipped into his place beside Connor.

OK, so Cutter was the computer literate one. Hopefully he was off undoing whatever it was they had done to block all outward communication from the Hub. In the meantime Connor set a few fruitless searches and hacking attempts running where he was. It generated plenty of output to keep Abby amused. Then, in another window, he opened a command line interface to his new aliens database and started randomly browsing.

"What are you doing?" asked Abby.

"Waiting really," he explained. "We'll see if we get any output from those searches and whether Cutter can get the Internet up again. In the meantime you should look at these. I can't believe all the great aliens they've encountered. You'll love them."

Abby nodded slightly. Her attention, he hoped, wandered back to the search output. Connor input a new search term and piped the output to a file on his palm pilot, docked next to the machine.

"Maybe I have something on my palm?" he said brightly, picking it up. "I sometimes take files home on it." He scrolled through the file output, relatively confident Abby couldn't really see the screen.

Species Name: Noruien

Status: Mythical

Features: Shape Shifting, Mimics, Telepathic communication.

Details: The Noruien are an ancient species allegedly trapped in the space time vortex. Tales tell how they once ravaged planets, swarming the surface, surfing on the time winds feeding of paradox until the planet was gone, no past, nor future remaining.

A hive creature, individual Noruien were reported to be relatively harmless, choosing to blend into the local surroundings until the swarm arrived. When adopting the form of a local species they possess the same weaknesses and vulnerabilities as the species.

Legend tells that the Noruien were trapped in the vortex during a Time War, endlessly seeking release by exploiting rifts in time.

Not so good.

"Nothing," he said to Abby, putting the palm back in its cradle.

"We've got Internet," called Cutter suddenly from across the room.

Connor logged in to his file-space at the ARC and copied across his scripts. He ran the first program. Immediately his desktop switched to a random pattern of numbers.

"Sorry," he said to Abby and Cutter, who was now leaning over his shoulder, "I thought it would be cool to show the algorithmics at work."

Cutter shrugged. "No problem."

Connor set some more, hopefully useless, hacking attempts running. Then carefully he moved the cursor to the top corner of the screen. There should be a hidden window there. He watched the bottom left as he typed, the letters going past showing his input. He felt a small flush of triumph as the letters appeared in response to his key presses. He had made it work. He was going to fix this. First he uploaded the Noruien file to Jack's email drop box. Then he connected to a remote email-to-SMS service and texted all the Torchwood satellite phones.

N o r u i e n @ h b = M a r k / F i o n a n o w C u t t e r / A b b y . S e e e m a i l . C o m e b a c k p l s .

Now all he had to do was keep up the pretence, wait, and hope Ianto found Jack soon.

Half an hour later he noticed the letters at the corner of the screen winking back at him.

t s i d e d o o r . l c k d . O p e n p l s .

Quickly Connor brought up the main security console.

"What are you doing?" asked Cutter.

"One moment please, I've had an idea."

Pulling down the emergency situation menu he hit the "Fail Safe" button. Sirens sounded an evacuation signal. He could hear locks opening with heavy clunks, including, probably, the cell doors - that would keep the team busy hunting weevils for a bit. Cutter rounded on him.

"What have you done?" he grabbed Connor. There was a knife in his hand. Connor froze. Now he was going to die.

Two shots rang out. Connor blinked. Almost in slow motion Cutter collapsed back. A small red hole in his head. Next to him Connor heard Abby fall to the floor. He looked down. She was face down on the grating, blood leaking from the back of her head. Connor thought about the path of the bullets and was glad he couldn't see her face.

Slowly he turned round. Jack and Gwen stood side by side, each holding a gun. Ianto stood behind them.

Connor was packing his bag, "You could stay, you know." Jack was leaning against the next desk. "We need a new computer specialist, more than the ARC does. Dinosaur's don't try to hack your systems. Not in my experience anyway."

His mind's eye flashed back to the fallen bodies of Cutter and Abby. He'd not seen Stephen die, or Ryan or Toshiko. It might not have actually been them but he still felt his heart-beat quicken when he thought of the scene and had to fight back tears. He'd tear up that resignation letter when he got back. He knew, now, where it was he belonged.

Ianto obviously spotted the answer before Connor said anything because he patted him on the back.

"Good luck," he said. "We'll miss you. Don't forget you have friends here."

"I won't forget." Connor shook Ianto and Jack's hands then he headed out of Cardiff and back home.