

the
Enigma
Threat

Breakfield and Burkey

BOOK 12: Award Winning Techno-Thriller Series



CHAPTER 1

I Hear You Knocking...

CABOD quickly stated, “Dr. Quip, our data center is under direct assault. All our data circuits to the world wide web are saturated with data bombardment from unknown sources. I am unable to hunt on the Internet for our adversaries; thus, I am unable to identify them or halt their onslaught. Our defenses will hold, but there will be no outbound reconnaissance to determine our defensive posture or potential alternatives.”

Quip, dressed in the standard jeans and his ‘It Works on My Machine’ t-shirt, with his long greying hair tied back in a ponytail, was only half listening as he watched the building’s external video feeds streaming the physical onslaught of armored troops approaching the R-Group’s Zürich operations center. His chiseled features showed increased concern in his furrowed brow.

Setting his jaw in decision mode, Quip hollered, “Incoming! We have an all-out data center attack! Class, you are instructed to use the alpha exit plan A for a safe retreat! Get to the tunnel and type in the security code SOB! Follow the instructions as we have rehearsed. Don’t look back!”

Looking quite alarmed, Granger, a replica of his father at fifteen, tall and lanky with thick blond hair, protested, “Dad, aren’t you coming too? I’m not leaving without you! I don’t care if the escape tunnel will *Save Our Bacon*, it won’t matter if you stay to fall on your sword, dammit!”

Quip gave his best paternal smile to his son. “You’re just like your mother! Remind me to discipline you for swearing in front of your father. You and JW get the other children together and go! Go now. There must be someone here for them to blame and take into custody so they won’t look for you kids! Move along smartly and stick with our game plan! That’s an order, soldier!”

Granger ground his teeth as he motioned for JW, Satya, and Auri to follow him to the hidden escape hatch leading into the tunnel. The disciplined youngsters, children of the R-Group leadership, were not happy but they did know how to follow the orders of their parents and trusted advisors.

Quip returned his gaze to the monitors, knowing he would be alerted when they were outside the facility.

ICABOD asked, “Shall I open the main doors for the troops, Dr. Quip?”

Quip reached over for his morning cookie to augment his fresh cup of coffee and calmly stated, “No. I want to see how the magnetically insulated blast doors hold up against their two-man battering ram performance. Besides, we need more time for the extraction.”

Quip methodically munched down several cookies while he watched as not one, but three battering ram teams hammered the magnetically sealed doors to exhaustion. Having finished his coffee and one final cookie, he stated, “That was as good as I expected. However, they are really pissed and should be rolling up...ah, there it is! Yeah, a 20mm field gun for stubborn defenses. It’s times like these I wish the team had let me have my own wheeled armor. We’re going with what we’ve got. Okay, ICABOD, let me fill up my coffee cup and go see what they want.”

Quip made his way to the doors. He pressed the comm button for the speaker linked to the outside and asked, “I’m not shipping anything out today, nor am I expecting any package

deliveries, so is this our catered lunch service? Sorry to make you wait so long to deliver, but I didn't hear you knocking."

The leader, Tracy Mountbatten, was 1.8 meters tall with close cropped hair, a commanding presence with menace in her eyes, and looked more like a man than most men who reported to her. Nothing phased the starched fatigues and shiny boots she always wore. Still stomping, furious that the doors had worn down three assault teams trying to get in, she barked, "I am commander of the Special Artificial Intelligence Task Force hunting team! Based on our warrant, you are directed to open up your facilities for search and inspection. I am authorized to use all means of force to gain entrance, if you resist."

Quip, unable to resist his namesake, retorted, "You mean you've been banging on my door trying to break in, but you have legitimate business to conduct based on the authority of a search warrant?"

"Sounds to me like you've got it bass-ackwards, Commander, madam. First, you present me with the warrant, THEN you lose your temper when I tell you to go pound sand. Without my lawyer, I don't open my doors to just anyone that shows up!"

With that, the commander motioned her men to withdraw. Quip smirked. He closed the audio circuit to the outside and made his way from the door back to the command center. As he sat down into his custom computer chair, he smiled wistfully as his gaze rested on one toggle switch in particular, located on his desktop console. He winked at ICABOD's monitor camera, then calmly reached over and flipped it.

Outside the commander had her people pulled back as she leaned her head toward the comm device on her shoulder and barked, "Fire!"



Quip had been roughly bound with his hands tied behind his back and was uncomfortably positioned on his stomach. The troops had to bring in their own lights to see in the dark data center. Quip was anything but helpful.

Tracy, struggling with her anger at having been stalled on their incursion for almost an hour, grabbed Quip's ponytail and barked, "Turn this place back on, dammit! We are here to seize your illegal supercomputer, with or without your cooperation."

Quip innocently questioned, "Did your warrant also say I was supposed to help you ransack my hobby room?"

"Does it say I'm supposed to be chained up lying on my face in order to help you do that?"

"Just for the record, you're looking for a supercomputer. I'm an eccentric old fart who just tinkers around with cast-off computer equipment. Sounds like you got the wrong guy, Crudmander."

Tracy was growing madder by the moment. "I said turn the power back on!"

Quip, unwilling to help, stated, "Buddy, I can't. I didn't pay last month's bills and, well, they threatened to do something like this. Come back next month, I should have this misunderstanding all cleared up."

In a thoroughly disgusted tone, she barked, "Alright, let's go and bring Mister Mouth along. He has just won a nice cell to rethink his hard-ass attitude. J-Platoon, you stay here and gather anyone showing up looking for this guy."

Quip, pretending to be in an alternate universe, called out loud enough to echo through the halls. "Honey, I'm going out for a while. Wait on supper, okay?"

Tracy just rolled her eyes at Quip's nonsensical statements to the empty facilities.

Just then Lieutenant Commander Lee Smith called, “Commander, we’ve found the actual data center! Permission to effect CRUSH!”

Quip panicked and protested, “No! Don’t launch your *Cyber Retribution Unleashed Signifying Holocaust!* Please don’t destroy him! He’s family!”

The cruel smile on the leader’s face clearly indicated she was enjoying the upper hand finally. “Sergeant, set up the CRUSH unit and then pull our people out for the detonation on my command.”

Quip was dragged out, lamenting the loss of ICABOD while tears streamed down his face. Moments later, the sergeant and his team bolted out of the collapsed security doors and into the morning light.

The sergeant dutifully reported with a salute and stated, “Ready for your orders. All personnel are accounted for, sir!”

Resting her eyes on the weeping Quip, the commander flatly stated, “Punch it.”

A high-pitched squeal was broadcasted out through the doors, and then a loud crump rumbled out of the ruined exterior doors.

The commander’s face showed nothing but contempt. “You knew that using AI-enhanced supercomputers was outlawed, but you did it anyway. Why? We are all safer without those soulless bastards controlling our lives. Why risk jail when you knew the law?”

Awash in grief and remorse, Quip raised his head and angrily replied, “Maybe it’s you with your prejudice who is the guilty and wrong force. Just because you legislated it, doesn’t make it right. We learned that lesson from the Nazis leading up to WWII.”

Quip’s head slumped forward. He muttered, “Goodbye, my friend. We’ll meet again when we are both floating on the digital winds with gossamer wings for our final cyber combat.”



CHAPTER 2

The World Changed

In his fuzz of unconsciousness, Quip's mind returned to a time that was less contentious toward technology and the beginning of his contribution to the next generation of the R-Group. Being with his beautiful redheaded wife was his daily challenge at that point in time. Quip recalled smiling at EZ and gently patting her enlarged tummy. Her pregnancy had been a textbook series of trimesters that had everyone confident of a smooth delivery.

EZ noticed a slight frown on her husband's generous mouth. She used her sweetest southern drawl as she asked, "Honey, what's wrong? You were smiling one minute, now you seem unhappy."

Quip sighed and complained, "Everyone congratulates you because you're expecting a bundle of joy, but no one has come up to me offering a high five and 'Hey, well done!'"

EZ, quite familiar with Quip's irrelevance, rested her head in her hand while staring directly at Quip. A few moments later she smirked and offered, "Honey, they all can see that I have one in the hanger. Pending getting this one on the runway, no one can be sure that offering you a 'well done' is appropriate until they see it's your offspring."

Quip, startled at the perspective she offered, protested, "But I'm the only one servicing that hanger! Uh...right?"

Chuckling, EZ replied, “Made you think! Of course, honey. You’re my man. It’s not often I get to pull you up short.”

Quip smiled and moved over to her side of the couch to nuzzle on her.

EZ queried, “Quip, honey, you’re not disappointed that Petra and Jacob delivered their next generation members before us, are you?”

“Of course not! John Wolfgang is an excellent addition. I couldn’t be more proud of him or his parents.

“Think of it like this. I’ll get to teach him about all the dumb stuff I did as a kid, and they’ll have to deal with it! Har! Har! I can’t wait to see their faces when I show him how to...”

EZ leveled a withering glare at her mischievous husband, who then shifted his comment content on the fly. “...what I mean to say is that we should build our own home school at the data center. Then we can install the right moral virtues of our family business from the get-go. They will be model students who will learn the proper path. And we will provide the continuing education of Juan Jr. and Gracie.”

EZ’s stare softened as she soothed, “Better. Honey, let’s get this discussion on the proper path, shall we? After we get Granger on the runway, we are going to install another back in the hanger. Are we clear?”

Quip’s eyes shifted back and forth as he contemplated her statement before offering, “Babe, I’m willing to accept this dangerous but exciting mission. I must warn you, I’m a slow learner. I will require a lot of practice. Are we clear?”

EZ broke into a broad grin as she replied, “My darling, if practice is what you are going to need, then let’s set up a schedule. By that, I mean right now.”

Quip grinned, “Yes, sweetheart.”

Then his mind trailed back to a discussion he'd shared with Jacob after John Wolfgang was born. It was a conversation he'd referred to often as he and EZ finally started their family.

Petra had just put John Wolfgang or, as Jacob was already calling him, JW down for his afternoon nap. They both oozed onto the sofa to relax. Jacob fixed his blue eyes on Petra and commented, "At some point he's going to figure out that *he* has to take a nap because *we're* tired."

Petra chuckled and offered, "I think of all those times I didn't want to lay down and take a nap as a child. Argh, I take all of those angry thoughts back and would gladly accept those missing naps. I think I'm going to turn over my new leaf right now and capture one of those missed naps."

Petra would have pushed Jacob off the couch so she could lay down, but he gathered her up in his arms to carry her back to their bed. Gently laying her down on top of the comforter, he reached over for a light blanket to cover her with, but she caught his hand.

She smiled at Jacob and gently pulled him onto the bed next to her so they both could share the blanket. Staring intently at him, she quietly asked, "Is it too soon to talk about a sibling for JW? I know that I'm springing this on you rather suddenly, but I mention it because when I got my little sister, Julie, I distinctly remember not feeling alone any longer. I don't want JW to not have a little brother or sister. How do you feel about that?"

Laying across the pillow, Jacob combed his fingers through his thick dark hair. He took his hand, gently smoothed a lock of honey blond hair back behind her ear and softly said, "I guess you were lucky to get that little sister.

"I will admit that not having a brother or a sister was a shame while growing up. I think I would have liked one, but you get what you get and don't pitch a fit. Mom and Granny were all I

had. It was enough. I agree with you on trying for a second child. JW should have that wonderful gift if we can deliver it to him.”

Petra smiled back at him across the pillow and returned the gentle caress to his face. Then a serious look came over Jacob’s face as he asked, “Should we start right away? Like, now maybe?”

Petra smiled mischievously and replied, “You know, I am not tired like I was earlier. Are you tired?”

Jacob grinned and said, “Me tired? Push-tush, darling!” Their amorous ambitions would have taken them to the heights of passion, if a little someone hadn’t started crying in the other room.



CHAPTER 3

They Call Me LUCIFER

Several years ago, private enterprises created their own supercomputers. These information powerhouses took on more authority than sovereign countries wished. With few guardrails and cyber terrorism on the rise, world powers agreed to provide a united authority to help keep unsanctioned systems in check. Cloud providers and Big Data warehouses were allowed but they had to conform to the rules of the sovereign Global Artificial Intelligence body. The enforcement arm of that world body had manpower for monitoring in major cities.

Cyber Elite Social Police for Online Operations & Logistics, or CESPOOL, team members were cutting up in the staging area, waiting for the briefing to begin. Over the last five years their social police ranks had swollen to include every kind of technology discipline applicant. Some of the old timers who had joined at the beginning grouched that they were letting any script-kiddie and pseudo-hacker wannabe join for the mandated cause of Internet purity.

As the regular news networks got washed away by the social networks for people's news, a new problem arose. The networks could no longer throttle or steer the news reporting because everyone could use social media for their voice on the world stage.

Everyone's complaint had unlimited reach, including the endless airing of all thoughts, good and bad. Crimes were watched in real time, and freedom of speech or expression became the new tyrant of the planet. The outcry from a growing population spawned the European Social Police, and their mandate was to keep it clean and keep it safe on the Net. The problem was that the sovereign nations each controlled their own state-sponsored cyber warfare teams, and they each had a different agenda.

Sovereign nations couldn't quite accept the claim of UN jurisdiction over cyber warfare since the dark net players were also cyber assassins for those same governments. It was an interesting catch-22; countries had to play ball with other nations for the good of the digital universe but at the same time were committed to subverting other countries. The loose confederations among sovereign powers was to cooperate to stop the freelance bad actors. Populations at large believed they were being protected from hate crimes and false news reports, but it only really provided modest comfort in the combat arena of the digital universe.

The biggest problem was finding enough freelance dark net *operators to blame to cover up the cyber warfare actions between* sovereigns. The CESPOOL team members from each country were communications linked with one another so they could be rolled into highly engineered situations and sanitize the bad actors. The backroom computer geeks of the CESPOOL team were constantly hunting for new suspects that were in fact freelancing in the digital space but could be made to order for sovereign cyber warfare crimes. It was the 21st century version of *Pin the Tail on the Donkey*.

There was a caste system in the CESPOOL organization. The backroom computer geeks, sifting through millions of social postings with their big data engines powered by AI-enhanced supercomputers, were basically useless as field operatives. The

resources all had imagined and real prestige between one another, even though they were each recruited from different talent pools. All were required to be fluent in cyber combat. When the backroom bunch couldn't shut down a bad operator, the field operatives had the teeth to physically take matters right to the source.

The newest tool in the backroom arsenal was a horrific cyber instrument of choice, LUCIFER, named for its ability to *Logistically Undermine Computers Independently Forcing Elliptical Retribution*. The instrument's specialty was to intercept a bad actor that was trying to break into an organization or individual's PC and launch a retribution action that destroyed the assailant's machine. Frying someone's computer from the safety of one's operations area was a very attractive option for those CESPOOL team members who simply couldn't operate the standard issue weapons.

LUCIFER also had a softer, more analytic side to its programs. Beginning in 2016, Fake News was joined to Fake Video. Regular media was being made irrelevant by social media and both suffered from the same flaw – unsubstantiated stories. As people came to distrust both and only believe what they could actually see, this new demon surfaced.

Using AI-enhanced supercomputers and some very clever audio and video excerpts, coupled with actual filmed mannerisms, completely fabricated videos could be built to add to the Internet's disinformation. Reputations of news anchors, politicians, sports heroes, and celebrities could be destroyed or enhanced using these bogus videos. *Fake Engineering of Video to Lead Others* or FEVLO, as it was called in the compound, usually brought both sides of the CESPOOL team to work a case.

LUCIFER's job was to analyze every regular and social media video to confirm or refute its authenticity. However, LUCIFER's analyses were not flawless at catching the manufactured videos, so

it became a statistics exercise. The rule of thumb was if LUCIFER came back with anything over 87% probability of engineered, then it was suspect. But this was a squishy benchmark. If it was ruled a FEVLO, then the field operatives were sent in to destroy the perpetrator. Destroyed was the operative word since no one was ever tried for this crime. Even though there were several accused, no trial for any offenders was recorded.



Tracy Mountbatten, the field commander for the North American and European CESPOOL field team, marched purposefully into the briefing area in her crisp dress pants, white shirt, tie, black boots, and well-cut brown hair. At the podium her imposing figure immediately quieted the room. She barked, “Listen up, people! We have some new leads and that means recon. I want you on your terminals prowling for these new culprits. Word is that these are some freebooting opportunists who are hunting new foils as they have found a new way to lease compute cycles to anyone for a fee.

“They are using fairly good anonymizing techniques which is why our searches crash into dead ends. We believe they are operating with some other freebooters out of Argentina, but there is nothing conclusive. I need you to change that! That is all.”

Lt. Commander Lee Smith snapped smartly to attention and barked, “Dismissed!”