

CHAPTER 1

Guy sat back from the computer screen, folded his hands behind his head and sighed with satisfaction. "Great, I've just withdrawn five billion from the Bank of England."

"That's cool," murmured Howard from where he was sitting huddled over his monitor on only the other computer console in the room. "Great hacking."

The room was part of the Telesoft offices. The main entrance led from the twin lift doors. To the left of the lift was a coat stand on which hung two wrinkled anoraks, one green and one blue. A large desk spanned the left wall. It contained the two computer consoles and two telephones. Guy and Howard were each sitting at one of the consoles.

"Not me this time, my son, Trickster Trader," explained Guy. "It's a game I'm road testing. You've got to withdrawal as much money as you can from the world's largest banks, escape from Hong Kong, keep out of jail and catch a plane to the Bahamas without the world's press, your wife and your mistress, in Newport Pagnell, being none the wiser."

"Why Newport Pagnell?"

"Ah! That's due to the brilliants of my game play. No one would suspect anyone having a mistress in Newport Pagnell. Bet you can't beat my score."

"You're on. Mail it over."

Guy's finger's fluttered across the keyboard. "On its way ... Now!" He jabs one final key with a flourish. "Got it?"

"Nope."

Guy groaned. "Oh No. I hope it's not turned up in San Francisco again." He turned once more to the keyboard and began tapping. "How's that?"

"No ... Wait ... Yep. Comin' through now."

The telephone on Guy's desk played the first four cords of Beethoven's Fifth. He picked up the receiver. "Telesoft! Really ... It has ... It wasn't supposed to ... What now. I'm afraid everyone's at a meeting ... Oh." He hung up.

"Spike has added his greetings from The Golden Gate Bridge," continued Howard.

"Forget about that now. That was "Gifford Sports". All their computers have crashed."

"Far out! They dig our help?"

"They say it's our software that's caused the crash."

"Uh Oh."

"They're our best customers."

"They're our only customers," said Howard. "Still Big Daddy runs the company. He won't mind. He's sweet Mr G. I really dig your Dad."

"Will you stop going on about my Dad! Luckily he's out of the country at the moment."

"Where's he at?"

"Somewhere in the states. I only hope it's not San Francisco. They're sending someone over to see us now."

"Who is it?"

"A legal advisor. They didn't say who."

"Uh Oh."

"Still it won't be too bad. We've been paid. We've just got to lie low. He won't be able to program the lift to stop at our floor. He won't know the password. Only you and I know that. There's no way anyone can breach our security."

A ping sounds the lift doors open and a smart young woman stepped out. She had the same sandy hair as Guy and the same bright blue eyes. She was wearing a dark-blue pin-stripe suit, black shirt and a thin gold chain necklace. Her skirt was tight and cut just below the knee. Below the skirt were sheer black stockings and shiny stiletto

heeled shoes. She smiled a fake demure smile. "Hello, Guy."

"Sylvia!"

"Who is Sylvia?"

"Oh no, not that old line again, 'Who is Sylvia What is she'. I am Guy's sister. Who are you?"

"Wow, Guy. You never told me you had such a sister. I'm Howard. How did you bust the password?"

"It wasn't hard my little brother has got such poor imagination. "Open Sesame". He used that to stop me gaining entry to his sixth birthday party."

"Far out you must have some memory to be able to recall that."

"He used it again for his sixteenth birthday bash, and again for his twenty first. Add to that, it's probably the most famous password in the world."

"That's why it's so good," said Guy. No one would ever think of using it.

"No one but you Guy."

Guy stood up, put his arm around her shoulder and turned her back towards the lift. "It's nice to see you Sylvia. Great that you could break the password, good test of our security. Thank you very much. But we're very busy here – lot of work on. I'll phone you sometime."

She shrugged off the arm. "Wait! I'm here on business. I'm Daddy's legal advisor. And I'm here to inform you that "Gifford Sports" is considering suing you over the damage to its computer equipment."

"Your sister's a lawyer? That's cool," said Howard.

"Barrister," said Guy. "I thought all your time was taken up with defending the poor and needy of the criminal classes, Sylvia."

"It was, but when I heard that Daddy had hired you I thought that I'd better take an interest otherwise I could see him joining the ranks of the poor and needy too."

"Well, you can't possibly sue us. Can she, Howard?"

"Why not? You're Telesoft aren't you? You and ... You're H. T. Jones are you Howard?"

Howard's voice took on a sullen tone. "Fraid so," he said.

"You both signed the contract and supplied the software."

"Wasn't us," said Guy.

"Don't be childish, Guy. You're a big boy now. Own up to your responsibilities."

"We subcontracted it, didn't we Howi?"

"Did we?" asked Howard then he caught a glare in Guy's eye. "Yeah we did."

"Who to?" demanded Sylvia.

Guy began to stammer. "Er?"

"Mario," said Howard.

"Mario!" agreed Guy emphatically.

"Oh, you must mean Super Mario." Sylvia nodded her head and folded her arms. "He's a computer game character isn't he? Really, Guy you must think I was born yesterday."

"Mario's not his real name of course," explained Guy. "It's a nick-name. A lot of computer programmers have them."

"And what's yours, Donald Duck?"

"Don't be silly Sylvia," said Guy. "Donald Duck's a Disney cartoon character. Look, I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll contact Mario and get him to sort out the system. I'm sure he'll sort it out in no time."

"Well, it had better be sorted out by the time Daddy gets back from America."

"When's he due?"

"In two days."

Guy stroked his chin. "Two days. I don't know if we're going to manage that. We've got a lot on."

"I thought you said Super Mario was going to handle it."

"He will, he will. But he might well need some of our expertise, 'ay Howard."

Howard nodded in agreement. "He might well."

"What are you doing that's so important anyway?" Sylvia looked over Howard's shoulder at his computer monitor. "Goodness gracious, what are you up to with the Bank of England? A five billion pound withdrawal. What's this all about?"

Guy hurriedly turns the screen to face the wall. "Sorry, Sylvia. This is highly classified."

"Surely, they can't be trusting you with their computer systems."

"Stranger things have happened, haven't they Howi?"

"They sure have," agreed Howard.

Sylvia shuddered. "The nation's economy? It makes my blood run cold."

"Telesoft's a highly important firm," said Guy.

"We're top dudes," said Howard.

"I'm speechless," said Sylvia. "Just what exactly are you doing for them?"

"Checking out their computer security," explained Guy. "Now that's highly classified. I've told you too much all ready. You must forget everything you've seen here today. Mustn't she, Howi?"

"Mum's the word," said Howard.

Sylvia shook her head. "Oh, no, Guy. I don't believe you. You and your pathetic passwords. No way. I know someone who works in the Treasury. She'll know."

"Fraid not, said Guy. "Like I said." He put his right index finger to his lips. "It's highly classified."

"Only the guys who need to know, know what they need to know," said Howard and then added another, "You know?" for good measure.

"Look I don't care what little games you boys are playing," snapped Sylvia. "What I do know is that if you don't sort out that computer system by the time Daddy comes home, there's going to be big trouble. Got it." She turned and marched to the lift and pressed the keypad. "Open Sesame." She said and spelt it out on the keys. "Gosh you are pathetic, Guy. The lift door opened, she stepped in and the doors close behind her.

"Cool," Howard murmured in appreciation.

"Couldn't you think of a name more original than Mario?" Guy asked him.

"A spur of the moment thing. Anyways it wasn't like I was the one who took two months to come up with "Open Sesame".

Guy waved a dismissive hand. "Never mind that now. We've gotta think of way of getting out of this before Dad comes back. Good ploy that of mine though, blame it on someone who doesn't exist. Good ruse. Now all we've gotta do is find some unsuspecting clown to go over there, attempt to fix the system and then carry the can if it still doesn't work. Simple."

Howard nodded his agreement. "And he's gotta be called Mario."

Guy sat down at his computer and Howard rested his hand on his chin. Then Howard said, "Sorry I don't know a dude called Mario."

"Well as it was your idea for a name, you'll have to pretend to be Mario."

"Cool. Wait, they know me. I installed the software."

"Take your glasses off. Now pull your hair back like it's in one of those trendy pony tails." Guy watched as Howard did his bidding. "There you are. Your own mother won't recognise you."

"I'm almost blind without my specs. I won't be able to see the monitor."

"Well, someone will have to go with you then. But it can't be me. They all know me over there, ever since I was a small child."

Howard replaced his spectacles. "Wear your crash helmet. The one you use on your moped. No one will recognise you."

"It's not a moped. It's a scooter. The latest in Japanese Technology."

"Whatever," said Howard. He got up and retrieved the helmet from behind Guy's chair and handed it to him. "Here."

Guy put it on and Howard stood back to admire it. "Far out," he said.

"What did you say?" asked Guy. "I can't hear a thing. It doesn't matter much in traffic but I really need to understand what you are saying." He shook his head. "It's no good it'll never work."

"No, wait!" Howard shouted while at the same time mouthing his words. "I'll be your ears; you'll be my eyes. We'll work as a team. It'll be tight. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah, cool," said Guy. But he sounded unconvinced.

The "Gifford Sports" reception lobby was shiny white. Even the floor was of white marble. The walls were covered with football shirts and shorts, cricket bats, cricket pads and hockey sticks. The reception desk spanned one of the walls and was opposite the main entrance to the building. It contained a telephone switchboard and a computer terminal.

Guy entered with Howard. He was wearing his crash helmet and guiding Howard by the arm. Howard was minus his spectacles, sporting the ponytail and carrying a laptop computer.

A buxom receptionist was behind the switchboard, earphones clamped tightly across her bottle blond head.

She was talking into the attached microphone. "Yes, sir you would like to order two gross cricket balls ... Would you like the ones with the reverse swing? They're the ones with the easy to pick seam ... Yes ... Fine I'll pass your order on. She pulled a plug out of the board, looked up and noticed Guy and Howard. "Yes?"

"We've come to fix the computers", said Guy.

"Thank goodness for that. Will you take a look at mine first?"

"Pardon?" asked Guy

"Where's the machine, babe?" asked Howard.

She pointed to the terminal. "Over there of course."

"Pardon?" asked Guy once again.

"Wouldn't he hear better if he took his helmet off?" she asked Howard.

"Sorry, Doll. Bad vibes, sensitive dude. Know what I mean?"

"What's she saying?" Whispered Guy.

"Nothing to worry about". Howard whispered back and tripped over a hat stand. Guy helped him to his feet. Howard noticed his eyes watching him anxiously through the helmet and silently mouthed, "Take me to computer".

Guy guided Howard around the reception desk to the computer. "What's been happening?" he asked the receptionist.

"Well, it's very funny really. The screen gets filled up with all these pictures of teapots. Look I'll switch it on."

The screen came alive and was immediately filled with pictures of multicoloured patterned teapots. Some of the patterns were of flowers and some of the pots had flowers protruding from their spouts. Guy took a great in take of air and let it out noisily. "What a relief. It's not our fault. It's a virus."

"What did he say?" asked the receptionist.

"It's a real cool computer virus called Mad PC Disease," explained Howard.

"Oh dear. Could I catch it?"

"Only if you eat the software bits," said Howard.

"They look pretty firm to me," said Guy staring at the receptionists enhanced chest.

"What did he say?" she asked Howard again.

"Our firm's pretty cool. We can fix it."

"Pass the laptop," Ordered Guy.

Howard tried to place the laptop in Guy's outstretched hand but missed. It dropped to the floor.

"Idiot" hissed Guy but he retrieved it and began connecting it to the computer.

"What's he doing?" asked the receptionist.

"He's going to transfer some anti-virus software from our laptop to your computer. It's like medicine. Like a really cool vaccine."

The receptionist giggled. "Perhaps I ought to have some. In case I accidentally catch something off those infected software CDs."

"So you've been using pirate disks have you," said Guy. "I'm not surprised your computer's been infected. Do you realise what damage you could cause?"

The receptionist bursts into tears. "What does he mean? I've done nothing wrong," she sobbed.

"There, there, babe. He don't mean it", said Howard and reached out to put a consoling arm around her shoulder but instead touched her ample bosom.

She screamed and pressed a panic button under the desk. A siren sounded.

"Good gracious what's the darn thing doing now," muttered Guy. "This must be some unusual variant of mad PC Disease." He started banging the computer with the flat of his hand. "Howi, I think we've got problems."

A security guard appeared.

"Oh no!" cried Howard. "It's the fuzz."

"What's going on here!" demanded the guard.

"This man has molested me and this man is damaging the computers," protested the receptionist.

Howard tapped his companion on the shoulder and spoke into his ear, "Guy, I think it's time for us to blow!"

Guy still had his back turned to them and was oblivious to proceedings. "Don't be a Wally, Howi. Blowing on it's not going to do any good."

The guard raised his voice. "Just who do you two think you are?"

At that moment Sylvia arrived and on hearing the question pointed to Howard. "I believe he's Super Mario and the other one's Donald Duck!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

Five minutes later and Guy was standing in Sylvia's law book lined office, holding his crash helmet beneath his arm. His sister was standing behind her desk facing him, arms folded in front of her, glowering at him as he stood by the door.

"You really are most childish, Guy," said Sylvia. "Why couldn't you just admit it that you installed the faulty software instead of going through this ridiculous charade?"

"It was not a charade," protested Guy. "We were just checking your security that's all."

Sylvia sighed. "Not that again. Couldn't you be original just for once?"

Guy ignored the remark and began looking examining his surroundings. "Dad's set you up with a nice little office here, Sylvia. What a lot of expensive books."

"You can talk. He's set you up in your own business. And the books are mine. And don't go trying to change the subject. You're still in big trouble."

"No we're not. That computer fault was caused by a virus – nothing to do with us. Someone here has been

careless when accessing the Internet. Either that or they've been using dodgy software."

"What do you mean? Someone here? You've been playing around with illegal software since you were six years old. How do we know that the fault was not down to you or that hairy friend of yours?"

"Howi's all right – and he's a whiz with computers. He's fixing up the system now and we'll be having the whole thing up and running in no time."

"You're sure?"

"Er ... Quite sure." There was a computer and telephone on the desk, and also a photograph of a high court Judge in wig and gown. To cover his hesitation Guy picked up the photograph. "Who's this old geezer?"

"That's Ronald. He's not old; he's one of the youngest judges on the circuit."

"But he's got grey hair."

"He's wearing a Judge's wig and gown."

"He's bald then."

"All Judges wear wigs and gowns as you well know. Don't be so tiresome."

Guy chuckled. "I know that – just teasing, Sylvia. Still he looks a lot older than you."

"He's got one of the best legal minds in the business."

"Ah, so it's his mind that attracts you."

Sylvia grabbed a book from the desk and threw it at him. "You're insufferable!"

The book hit Guy on the chest. He replaced the photograph. "Well, I best get on and see if Howi needs a hand. See you Sis." He started out the door.

Sylvia called after him. "Don't forget. All the computers must be up and running by the time Daddy gets back or you'll be in big trouble!"

Guy and Howard returned to the Telesoft offices an hour later. Guy dumped his crash helmet down in the

corner by the coat stand and slumped down in the chair by his computer. "What a day," he sighed.

"Well 'least Gifford's Sports system is back and running okay," said Howard. He still had his hair in a ponytail but was wearing his glasses.

"Yeah. But I could do without all these hassles. Howi, you haven't been using any dodgy software have you?"

"Not since my old ZX machine caught that LSD bug when I was seventeen and went psychedelic on me. Guy, you know me. I'm a pro, man."

"Yeah, sorry – but I'd still like to know how it got there."

"Perhaps someone fed their computers a dead sheep. Like with Mad Cow Disease."

"Ha, Ha," said Guy ironically. Then he sighed once again. "We'll probably never know. It's probably in the air like flu."

The phone on Guy's desk rang and he answered it. It was Sylvia. "Daddy's back."

"I thought you said he wouldn't be back for two days."

"Well he arrived soon after you left. He is hopping mad and is on his way round to see you."

"What now! You didn't tell him the password, did you?"

"No I didn't but you'd better let him up right away." She hung up

Guy replaced the receiver. "Dad's back."

"Uh Oh. Has he found out?"

"'Fraid so. Sylvia claims she didn't tell him but she rang to warn me."

"Cool."

"Still she says she hasn't told him the password. And if that's true, he'll never program the lift, so we're safe."

A ping sounded, the lift doors opened and out stepped a corpulent man in late middle age. "Hello, Guy." He had

sandy hair like Guy's but it was going grey and very thin on top. He was sporting a thin pencil moustache and wearing a dark-grey suit, matching waistcoat and a blue tie with diagonal yellow stripes.

"Hello, Dad. It was Sylvia wasn't it? Sylvia told you the password."

"No. You did when you were six years old."

"Far out," said Howard. "Nice memory, Mr. G."

"But I expect she told you about the problems with your computer system," said Guy.

"No. The Receptionist did. So did the Security Man and practically everyone else – everyone that is except Sylvia."

"Cool," said Howard.

"Well, everything's okay now," said Guy. "We fixed it. It's still okay isn't it?"

"At the moment, yes – I've got great faith in your ability with computers; otherwise I wouldn't have put in the money to start you up over here. But I won't put up with you upsetting my staff. You have the business sense of a ... a Hyena."

"Sorry Dad. Look you needn't have come all the way over here. You should have phoned and we'd have been over to see you. Sit down. Howi, get Dad a Cola."

"No thank you Howard. I wanted to see exactly what you've been up to while I've been away. I've got to think of my investment. Sylvia mentioned something about the Bank of England."

Guy groaned.

"I hope you're not mixed up with this scandal that's just broken on the news."

"What scandal?"

"Apparently the police in the USA have arrested a man who's being trying to embezzled billions of pounds from the Bank of England. They're going to extradite him to

Hong Kong. He's name's Spike something or other – sounds a very despicable character. Apparently he's married and has got a mistress in Newport Pagnell."

"Nothing to do with us is it, Howi?"

"That's right Mr G. We've definitely had no dealings with the Bank of England."

"Well, what's Sylvia been on about then?"

Guy shrugged. "I've no idea."

Ralph frowned. "Well, I've got to get back to the office. Guy, I expect you to behave in a more dignified manner. Episodes like that in "Gifford Sports" lobby just have to stop. Got it? Good-bye. Good-bye, Howard."

"Well that's telling us," remarked Guy after he had gone. "I'll order some flowers and send them over to the receptionist but we'd better keep a low profile there for now."

"Tough about Spike," said Howard. "I was going over there to catch some waves."

"He'd invited me too," said Guy.

"It's your fault he's been busted you know."

"What do you mean my fault? It's you who's got the crazy e-mail address."

"There's nothing uncool about cooldude@telesoft.com. It's you who mix it up with spike@cooldude.com in San Francisco. It's uncool he's gotta suffer 'cause of your mistake – bad for our rep. Bad vibes."

Guy picked up the phone. "You're right. And I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to get him some legal help."

"Are you phoning Sylvia?"

"No. What Spike needs is the best legal mind in the business. Hello, can I speak to Ronald please ... I'm sorry; I do mean his Lordship ... Oh, I'm speaking from Miss Sylvia Gifford's office ... I'm her personal assistant ... Could you tell him that she must speak to him urgently ...

It's about a pregnancy test and a possible paternity suit. Could he meet her at eight o'clock at the Passion Restaurant in Soho ... Thank you so much. Good-bye." He hung up and leant back in his chair. "That should set the tongues wagging around the High Court," he said with satisfaction.