

Cyberspiracy

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RoRo
Las Vegas

Transmedia

This book forms the basis of a transmedia story. It contains hyperlinks to other media that expand the adventure beyond the written word. By choice, these side trips are *not* needed to understand the story. Feel free to skip the links. Or, click them for fun experiences.

Technical Gobbledygook

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Some of these pages show other artists' creations. They need to earn a living, or they can't create new art to entertain us. Rather than copy their works, the landing pages may redirect you to other sites, and these may show advertising or ask for donations to support the artists.

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www.Cyberspiracy.com/story/transmedia

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1. Pink Paradise

Before I tell you what really happened, realize that hacking computers can end your life. Permanently. I survived cause I have a friend in the highest place, and she mega owes me. Besides living through it, I know *all* the details from the top-secret Fibbie report classified by Federal Executive Order 13927. The girls and boys from the Federal Bureau interviewed everyone who knew anything. They also grabbed recordings that anybody made out of sheer stupidity or to cover their butt.

I know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So if you want to hear the story, raise your right hand. Cross your heart and hope to die.

It all began on a dark and warm (in my room) October day. I rarely go outside.

I love my room. It's safe—the way hacker girls like it. At least, I think so. I don't know many hacker girls. Actually, none besides me. More precisely, I met none in real life. Online, girly profile pics, avatars, or handles prove nothing but earn mega mean comments. Many hacker boys look down or despise us. Girls can't hack. Or code. So they say.

Don't get me wrong. I have many hacker friends, and we get along just fine. None have been to my room, natch. Being guys, they'd probably find it weird. And girlish.

Others have “Don't Enter” signs taped to their doors, but I'm not a kid anymore. Some let my five foot one and a quarter inches and my hot-pink ponytail fool them.

But this year, I celebrated my Sweet Sixteen by starting college. Virtually. MIT lets me take all the computer science courses online thanks to my parents' generous donation. My family can afford it. In Virginia, the Allertons go back forever. Like Jamestown forever. Don't get me started. Yes, the settlers began to leave, but the supply fleet arrived just in time. Trust me. Father told me his father's story mega million times. But I digress.

[\[Check the colony's history\]](#)

My door has Hello Kitty stickers all over it. Nothing wrong with that. They're pink, cute, and tell Mommy where my room is. I don't have any other visitors. Not even Father (smiley face ☺).

The room has windows, but I always keep the heavy curtains closed. Bright light wakes me up in the morning. Besides, too much snooping going on with all the cameras and stuff. I don't need anyone taking pix of my screens. Not while I'm surfing dark places.

My three monitors give me all the light I need. Mommy bought me a prototype laptop with foldout panels so I can have the class notes, assignments, and an editor up at the same time—at least that's what I told her. Hacking takes center stage with multiple windows full of Python and JavaScript code to take over a website. The left screen shows social media feeds from sixteen separate accounts I created. Don't want to make it too easy on the Fobbies while I'm keeping up with what happens on the Net. On the right, I monitor the important apps, my voice changer, streaming news, and the Katy Perry channel (#GirlPower).

[\[Leia the Laptop\]](#)

So that October day, Vice President Sarah Drummel probably again bashed her fav target North Korea during her campaign speech. I had muted her to sing along to “I Kissed a Girl,” but Mommy interrupted me with a knock.

[\[Experience the Song\]](#)

Edith is a gorgeous Southern belle in a business suit, if you can wrap your head around that. I can see why Father wanted her on his arm. But don't underestimate Mommy. Her name's really Editta, but as head of Intercomm, one of Richmond's (and Virginia's) leading communications companies, she'd rather not show her Italian roots. She had enough grief about her ethnic name in school. Kids are kids, but my proud Granny Ita can trace her lineage all the way back to the Renaissance and insisted on keeping the names from the old country.

Mommy opened the door partway. "Lasagna's waiting." She played on my Garfield-like addiction to her pasta casserole loaded with tomato sauce.

Always happened when I sang my fav tunes while coding something mega important. "Can I eat in my room? I'm in the middle of homework."

"As much as you love it, that computer is not your family."

"Five minutes. Pretty please." I know she's a softy.

"I'll keep it warm, babycakes."

Mommy closed the door, and I could have finished the song and the program, or so I thought. My fingers flew across the keyboard, but a group chat popped up with cartoon avatars for Master Leg0, DEFCON0, and FlashM. We were as close as hackers get, but that didn't mean we showed each other our real faces. Their wisecracks about my pink hair would have never ended. If they'd talk to me at all.

Fortunately, hackers are camera-shy, even the white hats, the good ones that protect others from black hats. We prefer showing pix from cartoons or fantasy epics. Once video chat becomes the thing, I'll have to get a rad visual effects program.

In a voice I synthesized from the movie, Leia announced, "Chat from Lego." Yes, I named my laptop after the *Star Wars* princess (#MegaGirlPower).

I donned my wireless headset so Leia could understand me better. Plus no hidden microphones could eavesdrops on what anybody told me. Okay, maybe I'm paranoid, but that doesn't mean the Fibbies aren't out to get us hackers. Ditto the Secret Service. Or the NSA. Or the IRS. Never mind cybercriminals in Russia, China, or the European Union. It's a cyberjungle out there. And, vitally, the headset made me one of the boys. "Answer chat."

Leg0 lived close to me, near the Department of Defense in Arlington and across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. He loved showing us video of his room full of things built from Lego electronics kits, like futuristic buildings, flying cars, jet planes, robots. Calling him fanatical missed the point. His parents didn't have a Pentagon budget to buy him laptop prototypes, so he'd scrounged together multiple computers, monitors, and many other hacker gadgets including a converter to tap into the RG-6 TV distribution coax cable that ran haphazardly across his desk and through the wall to the outside.

[\[Virginia Maps\]](#)

His high-pitched, child-like voice was more hyper than usual. "I've done it. Check my private channel, guys. Decrypted live video of Russian bombers in our airspace courtesy of the Pentagon."

I brought up the Darknet website that he hosted at home, and, no kidding, it showed two Russian TU-95 bombers from the point of view of a trailing F-22 fighter. Weird, in the age of jets, to see huge planes with propellers, but they still ferried nuclear bombs around for the Russian Federation. The running timestamp proved his boast. He did it—hacked our Defense Department's encrypted battlefield live streams coming in from all over the world. Every military intelligence service would kill for that capability, literally.

"Rad, man." DEFCON0 was older. As you could tell from his handle, short for DEFense readiness CONdition 0, a made-up alert state beyond thermonuclear war, he loved shooter games. He ranked in the Call of Duty World League. "How did you get into the Pentagon?"

"Didn't have to. Took it right off the satellite feed. Untraceable."

Online, I'm Cowabunga Dude, a surfer's nickname with a nod to the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I picked a cartoon version of Michelangelo's grinning face as my avatar, natch. "Mega."

“I know a vlog that will pay heavy Bitcoin for an exclusive. Can you say new accelerator board?” Leg0 had cryptocurrency signs in his voice. What happened to his previous high-minded view about these bomber intrusions into our airspace? Act tough and let the Russians know who's boss. Reveal the truth to force our military brass to take a stand.

“So mega-mega, Lego, I'm jealous.” When I spoke, two different dancing waveforms filled the black windows of my voice changer app. To the boys, I sounded like a hunk.

“Mjolnir Twenty-One, stand by for orders.” The distorted audio from the Pentagon feed suggested an Air Force general barking at a speakerphone. So rad that we could also listen in on the mega secret convo in the Sitch Room.

2. Mega-Situation Room

Sarah Drummel entered the White House Situation Room unacknowledged. Nothing unusual that nobody paid attention to her, but still aggravating after four years. Vice presidents throughout history had received no respect for their limited role in the US government, often relegated to waiting for their bosses to die. Add in the lack of female representation among general and flag officers, and she had to fight twice as hard to gain any credibility in national security matters. Only since she had to shoulder the burden of a presidential candidate had she even received briefings, almost exclusively from male analysts.

All the Joint Chiefs of Staff and most of the political members of the National Security Council sat around the huge table, at its head the empty chair of President McCable. He awaited surgery for a heart condition. His incapacity led to her first time in this inner sanctum of power.

The big screen against one wall showed the feed with the TU-95 bombers. Smaller screens displayed maps with the flight route along the north coast of Alaska and tables of data from and about the aircraft involved on both sides.

Her knuckles touching the soft wool of her suit, she angled her arms at her sides and took a power stance in front of the heavy double door. “What happened to standing for the commander in chief?”

All attendees stood.

The difference one word made. As *vice* president, she had no constitutional military responsibilities whatsoever. Lose the prefix, and everyone jumped as high as she commanded. Four years of humiliation finally paid off. She sat down in the President's chair.

The men retook their seats.

With a military mission on the agenda, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs turned to her. “Madam Vice President, this is a routine—”

“President! Until ex-President McCable comes out of surgery, I'm in charge.” What a delight for her to correct the past injustices.

“Yes, Madam President.”

“Continue.”

“This is another routine incursion by Russian bombers. The fighters will escort them out of our air space.”

Drummel tapped her fingers. Everybody knew McCable had picked her to garner the women's vote. She delivered, and since then had spent more time twiddling thumbs than most of her predecessors—common gossip in Washington. The President's failing health saved her from continuing to wait idly in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, on the periphery of the real seat of power. A show of strong and confident leadership would convince the men in the room that she belonged here forever. “How many this year?”

“Dozens. It's routine. They merely want to provoke a—”

“How many engines does that thing need to fly?”

“Pardon?”

Typical condescending male. At least, she had everyone's attention. Time to take a stand for women in government and everywhere else. “You heard me.”

The look on the Chairman's face, priceless. Shown up by a female commander in chief, he beat a retreat back to his old-boys network and looked to the Chief of Staff, US Air Force for an answer.

The graying man in a dark-blue dress uniform stared down and played with his brass buttons. "A Bear bomber can stay airborne with two engines, but—"

"Shoot out one." Her opportunity to show her military mettle honed through watching hours and hours of war movies in her office. The top actresses would claw each other's eyes out to play the leading lady when Hollywood filmed the biopic of one Sarah June Drummel.

The Chairman objected. "Madam President, there's a high risk—"

She knew why she had strenuously opposed the appointment of that coward as principal military adviser to the President, but McCabe ignored her. Tragic for her that word of her disapproval had leaked. Soon it would no longer matter that the Chairman held a grudge. She made sure he got the message. "We need to show these Russkies that I will not tolerate this kindergarten behavior once I'm President."

"If you win in two weeks."

"Or McCabe dies today." The only real benefit of her job, the constitutionally guaranteed line of succession. She had the guts, and now the power, to shake up career military brass who preferred to keep their cushy jobs rather than deal with real problems.

Stunned silence best described their reaction. High and mighty men avoided each other's eyes to escape shouldering responsibility. The Chief of Staff of the Army sank so low in his seat he threatened to vanish completely. Cowards. No question why God had preordained her rise as their boss.

"With such an aggressive act, we could be provoking World War III." The Chairman regained his posture.

"We?" Thanks to the regular security briefings, she no longer had to rely on journalists snooping out details of the Russkies' belligerent behavior. "How often have their planes thumped ours this year? Isn't that an aggressive act, flying by so close we can feel their jets' wash?"

"Well, yes, but they've been doing that throughout the Cold War."

"And after sixty years, I'm ordering an end to their childish games right now."

The Chairman nodded to the Air Force chief. "So ordered."

He pressed the talk button on the center phone console. "Mjolnir Twenty-One, disable one engine on one of the intruders."

Accompanied by radio static, the pilot's voice sounded from the console. "Please confirm, sir. You want me to target an engine on the bandit?"

Did all these recalcitrant men deliberately sabotage her efforts, or were they truly this dense? She rose, leaned across, and slammed her hand on the table. "Molnir Twenty-One, this is your Commander in Chief. Fry one of those engines. This is an order."

"Roger, ma'am."

At least, the military chain of command worked in her favor. Crosshairs appeared on the video feed. The Image zoomed in on a turboprop engine of the bomber.

"Moving in. Mjolnir Twenty-Two, stay back."

Bright tracer rounds streamed toward the target. Flames engulfed the propeller. Smoke billowed. A dark object dropped out of sight. Drummel folded her arms. What glorious success in her first battle. The military would learn to respect her. And bringing the Russkies to heel would play well with her base. It might even cement her election victory.

Mjolnir Twenty-One confirmed the visuals. "Target hit. Falling back."

The image zoomed out. A bright flash engulfed the two bombers. The feed went dark. A soft crackle of static provided the only soundtrack.

The camera must have failed. How could the unimaginable become reality? Impossible. Never would she have ordered an attack if she had reckoned with such stupidity among Russian air force generals. Never. Drummel stared down the center console. All the power it bestowed upon her mere moments ago had vaporized in a flash.

Everyone gaped at the big black screen or a smaller one with satellite video showing flaming debris raining down from dissipating smoke.

The Chairman gave a quizzical look to the staff sitting in the second row.

A young captain removed her earbud. "I'm sorry, sir, all signals lost from both aircraft, including the..." Her voice cracked. "...transponders."

Arms flailing, the Air Force chief jumped up. "This is madness. What maniac sends live nukes on an incursion into our airspace?"

A valid question that absolved her. Russian imbeciles killed their aircrews and two American pilots.

Not her fault.

Chin up. Drummel stiffened her shoulders and surveyed the men in the round.

Those eyes no longer glued to the blank screen pierced the armor of her competence and questioned her judgment.

Not her fault.

These men had to understand that she made the only decision possible under the circumstances. She wouldn't take the fall for Russian ineptitude. Certainly not this close to her election.

She had to keep a lid on the deaths for two weeks. Fortunately, national security trumped all other concerns, including relatives and reporters' right to know. "The Russkies will keep their mouths shut. This ... incursion is Code Word classified. You'll have an executive order within the hour."

The Chairman raised his hand. "PNSN, Berkeley, the Prep Commission, they'll all know. You can't hide a nuclear explosion, even in remote Alaska."

No man would rain on her parade. "This is a national security matter. Deal with it."

With a spirited shove, Drummel pushed back the large chair, rose, and strutted to the door. She'd shown the men her abilities and shut their mouths. Victory called. They had better not fail her in the next two weeks. Or else.

3. Turtle Time

My room turned into a black hole when the video of the flying planes went dark. Sudden nightfall. But voices of the generals accusing each other flooded my headphones. Sitting on my rolling chair, I mega hyperventilated while hugging my knees to my chest. I know it's childish, even silly, but I feel more protected, like a turtle hiding in her shell. Honestly, it didn't lessen the heart pounding. Not really.

DEFCON0 didn't know my fears and didn't care. "We've reached the bonus level."

"Man, price for my vid just went to Pluto." Leg0 obvi couldn't get his Bitcoin haul out of his mind.

Didn't the boys have a clue what just happened? What grave danger we faced? Idiots. Drummel ordered a strike on a nuclear bomber. "Guys, the Evil Queen just started World War Three. I want to turn seventeen."

"Cowabunga, you whine like a little girl." Leg0 always ragged on me.

"Take that back. I'm not a girl." Silly to pretend, but you heard him. He hazed me even though my voice changer made me sound like a growling male bass. One of my dream actors. I tweaked it so nobody recognized him. My screen showed me the two different waveforms. I could see what they heard.

Think how much grief I'd have gotten if they *knew* I'm a girl. Remember that ancient cartoon floating around the Net? One canine explains to another how to work a computer and says, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." You think the boys would hack with me if they thought I walked on four legs? Better this way.

"Hey, you two babies, we have to make this public before the election." FlashM didn't usually involve himself unless we talked bits and bytes. He used words from my university classes and sounded older. I didn't know much about him beyond that. Like me, he didn't share vid of his room or much of anything else. At least he understood the gravity of the situation, and I'm not talking physics here.

"No problemo. The media will stand in line to get the footage." Leg0's new favorite gig, fame and fortune.

He acted like a little child. How could he not see the danger of global war?

I had to stop the madness. "We must—"

"Drummel will just claim it's fake news. No, we give it to a trusted source—" When things heated up, DEFCON0 unfortunately lived up to the aggressiveness of his name.

But Leg0 bullied just as much, despite his childish handle. "No way, Defcon. This has virality coded all over it. My virality."

I learned manners from my mommy and let him finish talking. "We can trust—"

For a change, FlashM cut me off. "There's only one credible source. We have to get the Pentagon to release the—"

DEFCON0 stepped right over him. "And giving it to WikiLeaks will force them—"

These boys obvy lacked mothers who taught Southern politeness. I pressed my knees closer to strengthen my imaginary shield. Wavering between despair and disgust, I shook my head. They

couldn't see me, natch, but I felt better. Good enough to yell at my misguided friends. "STOP. Heidi's campaign will know what to do."

Silence, finally. You see, when the campaigning started eons ago, I convinced them that we had to use our powers to fight evil. And, no matter what Mommy and Father say, Drummel *is* evil. On my fake social media accounts, people told me vile things that I then cross-referenced with news sources from around the world. You could figure out quickly who's on the right track. And Heidi Carlton was, most of the time.

Didn't hurt that she governed Virginia while campaigning. Nothing like a little state pride in the South. The boys didn't know since my social media listed MIT as my location. Nevertheless, in support of her, we formed "Heidi's Hackers," or in computer lingo, "H²," pronounced H-squared.

We'd not achieved much so far other than owning Drummel's website. No wonder Leg0's explosive find had them so excited, they couldn't help but talk over each other.

"I hacked the vid. I get the brag and the coin."

"WikiLeaks will get the whole world involved."

"Remember what happened to Snowden, and Manning, and Rich."

Living up to their reputation as computer nerds, the boys still looked at Drummel's deadly revelation as a coding problem with a straightforward solution, leaving my voice of reason no choice but to scream, "I don't wanna die." Yes, I hid my head in my turtle shell. I'm allowed to, okay?

DEFCON0 ended the moment of peaceful silence. "Let's not do anything rash. Pause game until tomorrow, agreed?"

I figured him the oldest in the group. At least he seemed to have the most hacking experience. He'd helped me out a number of times when I hit a byte wall. Anywho, we all kinda respected him.

Despite my fear, I went along. "I agree with Defcon Zero."

So did FlashM. "Fine."

Even Leg0 complied in hacker slang. "Tee."

After ending the chat, I stared holes into my screen. Twenty-four odd hours until we'd decide how to stop the Evil Queen. I shoulda come up with a solution, but I couldn't. Only one thought went through my mind. Would I live to hear the next meeting?