



WHALING

FOR

BEGINNERS

Jerome Vincent

Whaling for Beginners

Book One

By Jerome Vincent

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Foreword

Who Said Crime Doesn't Pay?

Ever had that experience that something is going very wrong but you're not quite sure why? That things are slipping out of control for no discernible reason?

The spread of networked computer systems across industry and business has made life a lot easier, a lot more efficient and a lot more creative. But innovation on this scale has inevitably brought some risk with it. And that risk has to be managed.

The only computer that is 100% safe is one that is switched off. But those who take their security seriously can drastically reduce the threats to their systems. This, in turn, means a decisive advantage over competitors.

Almost every week there's a news story about a big corporation that's been caught off-guard by hackers.

Often the direct financial damage of a security breach is minimal, but the reputational harm is immense. Household brands instantly become bywords for corporate carelessness. Seemingly impenetrable networks and systems are shown to be worthless, not because the technology doesn't work, but because the people who use them are careless.

In *Whaling for Beginners*, a short fictional account of one man's realization of his vulnerability and that of the company he worked so hard to build, we discover just how dangerous being a top executive can be. A simple mistake leads Jim Baines to fall victim to a carefully targeted cyber-attack. His company isn't resilient enough to withstand human error: his own. And, it turns out, nor is his biggest client, a giant food multinational that should really have known better.

This novella emphasises that leadership at the highest level is needed to protect organizations from 'whaling' attacks. Top executives are, quaintly, known as 'whales' in the hacking community and it's surprising how easy it is for hackers to stalk them. The novella also reveals that it's important to know your enemy: they aren't just after cash; they're after intellectual property and commercial secrets too. Most importantly, many of them just want to show the world how clever they are: a fact that makes them even more dangerous and very hard to combat.

Whaling for Beginners is not only a wake-up call for leading executives everywhere, it is a gripping and fascinating read in its own right.

Misha Glenn

*“I have been asked to teach a business class once
I get settled in.”*

*Bernie Madoff in a letter to his daughter from
Butner Prison, North Carolina, 2009 quoted
in ‘Swindle & Fraud’ Lapham’s Quarterly,
Vol VIII, No.2 Spring 2015*

Whaling: *Spear-phishing emails that target the upper management of all companies, corporations and public organizations, because of their unique access to sensitive corporate information and intellectual property secrets.*

Some hackers are looking to undermine the reputation of people and organizations they don't agree with or oppose because of their activities – for instance, relating to environmental or political concerns.

Whatever the motive – when the bosses get hacked everyone suffers!

Chapter

1



WildCat8 (Online)



WildCat8
Time to get the whale



NicholsonWay
Call me Ishmael



WildCat8
Predictably Pretentious 😊



The piano groaned; violent chords clanging every time the old truck laboured around a tight curve. Ropes that looked like overused rubber-bands strained taut then slacked as the truck coughed out clouds of blue smoke. Jim feared for his life. It would be a strange twist of fate if he were to be crushed by an old, scuffed upright piano just like the one his mother used to play. The one she used to force him to practice his scales on when he was a child back in Dorset, England.

“But this is America!” Jim shouted. “You don’t get crushed by old pianos in America!”

Jim kept his new car as far back from the truck as he could without grinding to a halt. A woman in a luxury SUV behind him was leaning on her horn. Jim threw her puzzled glances in his mirror – but she wasn’t looking at him. She was screaming at a brood of kids eager for soccer practice, and the driver of the truck ahead.

The winding roads of Connecticut were beautiful at this time of year – mid-October in the lee of Halloween. The mid-morning sun was golden, and the reds, ambers, browns, and a million shades of ochre were enchanting. Jim loved to drive these roads. Usually they were empty. The odd old soldier out to get his paper, and a mail truck winding its way from mailbox to mailbox – but few others – just Jim and the glory of the fall.

Jim remembered the small street on which he grew up in a minor market town near the south coast of England. A limping postman with a bulging bag and a wry, experienced smile, stopping to chat with almost every householder whether they had post or not.

‘Post!’ Jim smiled. Americans called it ‘mail’ even if it came from the Post Office. When he’d come to America at

the age of 25 – more than a quarter of a century ago now! Jim shook his head in disbelief – he’d asked how he could post a letter and got blank stares. He was a quick learner. Within a year he’d switched from British to American English but never lost his accent.

Jim braked suddenly. The piano looked as if it was about to tip forward onto the hood of his car, but it bounced back with a discordant clang.

The woman screamed and honked again.

A rugged arm appeared from the driver’s side of the truck and waved apologetically. The guy was sure of his tethers and Jim decided that he had to trust him or just stop. He couldn’t; he was already late for his meeting. And this meeting was a big one. He had an important presentation on his laptop, with copies on a specially branded Flash-drive. As CEO of Baines Packaging he had to be there. CEOs have to be where they have to be. A CEO’s presence is what counts – sometimes more than his thoughts, plans or aspirations. Jim didn’t mind. He’d worked hard to become CEO of the company and he wanted to make the most of his time at the top.

He didn’t know that he was, in fact, a whale.

Crawford Sykes reached for the phone on his desk, hesitated, picked up the handset, then put it back down again. He sat back and rubbed his eyes, ran his bony fingers through his thin, grey hair, and pinched his craggy brow.

“Explain that to me again?”

“Turns out that ZanderTech outsource some of the

secondary printing work to a company in Laos,” said the young woman sitting in front of Crawford’s rough-hewn, pine desk. She was dressed in a mismatching array of what looked like thrift store clothes – her sweater looked as if it had been donated by a veteran of the Korean War (who’d worn it in combat!). Taryn Lowell. The newest and brightest member of Baines Packaging’s IT team. She had a forensic mind, and a penchant for security. She distrusted every attachment or email until she was sure it was safe. Taryn was what marketeers call a Digital Native, though she hated the term. It just meant she’d grown up in the digital age when everything was – well, digital. Including crime. She wanted to be the Sherlock Holmes of cyberspace.

“Laos? Are you sure?” Crawford sounded indignant as well as surprised. He’d been to Laos – and Cambodia and Vietnam. A long time ago – and *not* for a vacation.

“Are you going to blink a lot and smack the side of your head and go postal?” Taryn said, smiling broadly. She liked to rile her boss.

“I hate all this outsourcing... offshoring... re-shoring... whatever they call it. Too complicated,” Crawford growled.

“Why does anyone outsource anything for? It costs less. They make a better margin on what they sell to us. It’s, like, *Global Capitalism*, Mr Sykes.”

“Don’t call me Mister.”

“Sorry, Crawfie.”

“Don’t call me that either. Don’t make me sorry that I hired you, Miss Taryn.”

“It’s Mzz – this is the third feminist era, dude.”

“What?” Crawford got confused by Taryn’s wry tone. As an IT guy who’d been around since even before the

CRAY Supercomputer in the 1980s, he understood valves, VDUs, chips and virtualisation... but not comedy.

“Be specific Ms Lowell. Tell me what got through from Laos,” Crawford didn’t want to indulge in idle chat anymore. He was worried.

“OK, it looks like we’ve been breached. So far...I know it’s through ZanderTech and I think it was through their third-party supplier in Laos... but I’m not sure yet. All I know is that *someone somehow* has breached our defences. The hackers are lazily rummaging through all our data – right now. You need to tell Mr. Baines. Right now.”

Taryn looked serious. Taryn hardly ever looked serious. She was a serious talent in the field of all things technical, but she was not a geek. She was nobody’s cliché. She was Crawford might admit, if he was pressed, the future of the IT world. But she wasn’t boring or narrow minded or even slightly anti-social. Some of his peers told him he had gone out on a limb when he’d hired her. She was the only woman on the IT team. But there was something about her tenacity and intuition to get things done and finds things out. Right at that moment, Crawford didn’t feel safe.

“My goodness, what do we do?” Crawford breathed heavily and rubbed his brow again, pinching the furrows so they turned from anxious red to a frightened white. This had never happened before. Crawford prided himself on running a tight ship in IT. He’d argued for strong defences. He’d made the case for substantial investment in firewalls and security training and fail-safe procedures to protect the company’s proprietary designs and manufacturing methods. The assets and intellectual property that made Baines Packaging the success it was. That approach had

helped win the company's contract with one of the nation's biggest food companies – SilasFoods.

“Jim's on his way to Silas now..”

“Call him. He has hands-free. Actually, he's the CEO – he should have a driver. Nice, burly one with a uniform.” Taryn laughed, but Crawford didn't even register the joke.

“OK – I'll call him.” Crawford picked up the phone and didn't put it down. He pressed auto-dial for Jim's cell phone. He sat and looked at Taryn as the call got routed, was hiring Taryn Lowell the best decision he had ever made?

Ercan sat back in the extra cheap copy of a very flexible ergonomic chair and felt as if he was going to fall flat on the wooden floor of the library. He grabbed the edge of the desk and pulled himself upright. Ever since they'd 'upgraded' the library, which sat in the shadow of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club's stadium in North London, he'd been unsure of himself. He'd been used to the dark, wood fittings that had survived since the 1920s. He hadn't minded the lack of light. He'd liked the smell of dust, the musty fragrance of old books retired to high shelves and never consulted save by old men with wild theories. He liked those old men. Some were cockneys and some were West Indian, many were old Turkish who all found common ground by being horrified by the changeable weather and constant grey cloud.

For Ercan, England was home. His country. He was Turkish only because his blood was Turkish. His parents had heavy accents, but they instilled in him a love of his

new land: The land where he could thrive. And that's what he wanted to do; thrive. Only, he'd discovered that trying to do so in minimum wage jobs wasn't the answer. He'd had no love for school.

But Ercan excelled at maths. He had a brain that could solve equations in a heartbeat. His synapses had been lifted from a supercomputer – that's what his teacher at school said, when he was 15; when he was growing into a tall, good-looking, man with penetrating brown eyes, and a shock of black hair that would carelessly float above them. The girls loved him. The boys taunted him. He learned to fight. He knew he was better than them. Better than all of them. Smarter than anyone he knew.

But he was trapped. When he tried to get jobs – real jobs – in banks or big companies he was always rebuffed.

His accent was wrong. His background was wrong. His loping, casual style of walking and sitting and being were all wrong. He didn't fit in. Why should he play the game the establishment wanted him to play? Be the nerdy son of immigrants grateful for a chance to go to Oxford or Cambridge or Imperial College? Who would pay for that? Not his parents. Their grocery store was suffering. The big supermarkets had decided Tottenham was ripe for profit. The plum aubergines that used to fascinate Ercan as a kid now stayed in their boxes long enough to look forlorn and then – inevitably – appear on the family's dinner table too often.

He wanted to achieve more than that. He would not become a stereotypical man who may sit in a greasy café or sport clubhouse, watching an obscure foreign soccer match on big screen TVs, drinking too much coffee and talking about the mother country.

Ercan would make money. Ercan would be the smartest guy online. Ercan would forge his own path.

And that's why he went whaling.

Not here. Not in this library. This was the clean place. Here he'd open up his legitimate laptop. It had his straight email accounts. He bought stuff from Amazon on this computer. This was the computer that showed he was a legitimate citizen.

No, his real work was done in two Internet Cafes on Tottenham High Road. One near Seven Sisters underground station, and the other just past the McDonalds about a fifteen minute walk away from where Ercan was now.

He loved whaling.

Whaling was the best and biggest challenge for any hacker.

And he was good at it.

The truck wheezed to a stop at a light. The piano hummed. It was a surprisingly musical hum. A chord that made Jim smile. The phone rang. His dashboard display blinked – it was Crawford.

“Crawfish!” Jim shouted.

The woman in the Grand Cherokee screeched round Jim and squeezed into the lane next to the piano truck – as soon as the right turn light even thought about going green she gunned her engine and was off.

“Jim – are you alone?” Crawford sounded serious.

“No, I have four clowns in the car and we are off to the circus.”

“Jim, be serious.”

“Sorry, I should act like the CEO I am you mean? Will do. What’s up?”

“How close are you to Silas?”

“Not as close as I should be. I took the scenic route. Big mistake. I love the fall and...”

“We have a problem.”

“What kind of problem?”

“Security.”

“Someone get in?”

“No... cyber security... I... listen... don’t say anything at Silas... but... listen... the new Green Living range... the designs, the KPI’s the... the everything... we think they’ve been breached...”

“You’re not making sense, Crawford, calm down. What do you mean ‘breached?’” Jim said.

“Compromised. Security wise. Somehow... someone has got through our defences.”

The truck pulled itself into the intersection and coughed out smoke again. Jim was glad to go slow. His brain was running through a thousand scenarios even though he couldn’t make sense of what Crawford was telling him.

“Is this bad?” Jim asked. “Just tell me if this is bad.”

“This is bad.” Crawford’s tone was funereal.

“Does it... I mean... is there an impact on Silas?”

“We don’t know.”

“We?”

“Taryn and I.”

“Taryn?”

“Taryn Lowell.”

“Oh... of course... does *she* understand what’s

happened?” Jim liked Taryn. She was bright. He’d been to see her play in her latest band only last week – *Semblance Circus* – they’d covered a song by *The Cure* he really liked. Then one by *Joy Division* he liked even more. It took him back to the early 1980s – to the London he knew so well when he was at college. Back to when he’d met Hannah and Brandon. And now Brandon was half way round the world and Hannah was CFO at SilasFoods. Hannah trusted him and his company to deliver quality packaging for their global markets. And a security breach could undermine all of that – in an instant. Just like he’d gone from thinking major Wall Street banks were made of solid granite to ones that might as well be made of balsa wood after repeated stories of them getting hacked...

“Are you listening to me?” Crawford said, sounding impatient now.

“I need facts... I need... time to think... but I can’t cancel with Silas... if I cancel they’ll suspect something.”

“Just do the meeting as normal. If they say something... then... I don’t know... stall.”

“Stall? I can’t stall. I’m the guy that’s supposed to *know* what’s going on!”

“So pretend to. You’re good at that. It’s how you got to where you are now.”

Jim knew Crawford wasn’t joking. From anyone else, a comment like that would be laced with friendly sarcasm. It would actually be an underhand compliment which celebrated one of Jim’s great strengths – the ability to put people at ease by looking as if he was calm, knew what was happening, and could control events effortlessly – but Crawford never bought into that. He was uneasy unless he

had concrete facts, and didn't like people who could bluff their way through a situation.

"Get me more details when you can." Jim ended the call. He was about to punch the horn in frustration when the truck carrying the battered piano turned off into what looked like a wrecking yard. Jim felt sorry for the piano. He also felt lost. He saw himself sitting at the keys of his mother's piano, staring at the yellow stained ivory. They reminded him of his grandfather's nicotine stained teeth.

"Keep going, son," Jim's grandfather always said, "Just keep going and soon, you'll be the only one left."

Jim always feared that something would appear that might undermine his achievements. But hackers? He never thought that they might be the cause of his demise.

"Come on! It can't be that bad!" he said to himself. He thought of the presentation on his laptop – the branded Flash-drives – the potential business he might lose. His company's reputation. *His* reputation. No – it would be OK. Crawford and Taryn would sort it out.

He drove on, a terrible feeling in his chest. He was not in control. Everything suddenly seemed beyond his control, and he did not like that feeling one bit.

Ercan stood at the checkout desk at Tottenham library. He'd found a short book about China. He was interested in China. He didn't quite know why. He was just interested. In front of him was a teenager arguing about a fine. She'd taken out a book to help her with a school project and then forgot it under her bed.

“I’m not paying. I never used it. My mum found it and... I never used it.”

The librarian was calm and firm. He discounted the fine due to ‘special circumstances’ and avoided a confrontation. When Ercan gave him the book about China the librarian smiled, “Interesting book,” he said scanning it, “fascinating history.”

Ercan nodded.

“You’re always on your laptop... do you work in computers?” The librarian knew all his regulars and their quirks and interests.

“Something like that,” Ercan said.

“You might be able to help us... on a voluntary basis... would you?”

“Sure... yeah... is there a problem?”

“We get all kinds of people using our computers,” the librarian said turning to a row of basic PCs sitting along a wall at the far end of the library. Ercan had never used them. It was against his policy. Internet Cafes were where he did his business.

“You’ve got to be sure of your firewalls and filtering,” Ercan said.

“Could you check it for me? I’d be very grateful. Save some poor kid from seeing something he or she shouldn’t, or getting the whole lot infected with something awful.” The librarian smiled broadly. His eyes were kind and fatherly. Ercan couldn’t refuse.

“Sure.”

“I don’t understand all this technical computer stuff... but I know you’ve got to be careful of viruses and all kinds of bad computer code. Seems like you’ve got to be a boffin

to understand it all.” The librarian said handing the book to Ercan.

“It’s people you have to worry about. People make the mistakes. People are always the weakest link,” Ercan said.

The librarian frowned, he was curious. “You mean... for all the anti-virus subscriptions we have to pay it’s the people who let the bad stuff in?”

“Always.”

The librarian laughed. “Of course, ‘twas ever thus. You’ll read about it in that book. The Great Wall of China repelled invaders for... oh, two thousand years or so... and what made it finally fail? What caused it to be breached eventually? A man. It had been engineered to be secure – totally secure, but then in the seventeenth century a corrupt Chinese general accepted a bribe from the Manchu army – and they poured through to conquer China.”

“Yeah, that’s it. That’s what happens now. Online.” Ercan felt at home. He felt safe. The librarian made him feel like exploring whole new worlds.



WildCat8 (Online)



WildCat8

You're good – very good



NicholsonWay

Everyone tells me the same thing – it must be true



WildCat8

Harpoon the big whale and it's bonus time



NicholsonWay

Harpoons loaded!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerome Vincent has been a script and copy writer for many years and has written widely about corporate technology issues for many of the world's leading multinationals. He's also written copy and films for heritage sites and museums, including Hampton Court Palace, The House of Commons, and The Tower of London, amongst many others. His broadcast work includes 15 plays for BBC Radio 4 and TV documentaries for the BBC and Channel 5. He has written three children's TV series as well as an educational series for BBC Bitesize. He has one feature film under his belt, *Chasing the Deer*, which starred Brian Blessed, and has just finished writing the second series of the comedy show he created, *The Future of Radio*, for BBC Radio 4 (with Stephen Dinsdale).

Misha Glenny is an award winning investigative journalist, author and broadcaster and is the former central Europe correspondent for the Guardian and the BBC. His books include 'McMafia: Seriously Organised Crime' and 'DarkMarket: How Hackers Became the New Mafia' and he is recognised as one of the world's leading experts on cybercrime and global criminal networks. His awards include the Sony Gold Award for outstanding contribution to broadcasting.

He has been regularly consulted by the US and European governments on major policy issues and ran an NGO for three years, assisting with the reconstruction of Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo.