

Chapter 3

Just Another Day at the Office

by Joe Grand

All in all, it was a very shady operation, but I was in too far at this point to do anything about it. Besides, who was I going to complain to? The Feds? Not likely. Then I'd have the fuzz breathing down my neck *and* these guys looking to kill me. No way. I decided to go along for the ride, no matter where it took me...

Setup

I had been working at Alloy 42 (A42) since its beginning. A recruiter from around town, a guy I grew up with in Boston, gave me a call when he heard the scoop about this new research organization forming. He told me that they needed an electrical engineer on staff. The recruiter, who shall remain nameless to protect his identity, worked for a local headhunter. I had been freelancing for a few years after leaving my job at Raytheon, where I had designed the guidance-control system for the SM-3, so I was well-qualified for this position.

I didn't like working for other people, and consulting was the easiest way to earn some cash without having to kiss anyone's ass on a regular basis. Billing by the hour is sweet, especially if you can squeak out an extra hour here or there, while watching some TV or playing Super Mario Sunshine. On the other hand, having a full-time job meant I didn't need to work 16 hours a day while trying to think of the next good way to make some dough.

A42 was contracted by the U.S. Government to research new technologies for a next-generation stealth landmine. I guess that's why the U.S. didn't sign into the Mine Ban Treaty back in 2000. Now don't get me wrong, I don't necessarily enjoy strengthening The Man. I'm not a big fan of Corporate America, but the job seemed interesting, and the pay was good. Right from the beginning, A42 was run like a typical startup, swimming in government and private money, and not shy about spending it.

The first year at A42 was uneventful, and dealing with incompetent middle management became the norm. One day, out of the blue, I got a call from the recruiter. I was surprised to hear his voice. We hadn't talked since he hooked me up with A42. He told me about a few guys who wanted to meet me—they had heard good things about me and thought I might be able to help them out. Being the nice guy I am, I agreed to meet them the next night, at some alleyway joint in Roxbury.

Welcoming Committee

The scene was like something straight out of *The Godfather*. These guys sure as hell weren't politicians or executives. Everything from the Cuban cigars down to the shine on their wingtips was topnotch and of the finest quality.

The man with the commanding stare spoke first. I'll call him The Boss. I never knew his name, which is probably for the best.

"Welcome," he said, "I'm so glad you took the advice of our mutual friend to come here." The Boss was seated at a flimsy table covered with a stained, green tablecloth, and he was flanked by some of his associates. It looked like they had been sitting there for a while. The small back room was cloudy with smoke, and the ashtrays contained the remnants of many half-smoked cigars. Poker chips were thrown all over the table, and piles of cash were stacked up in the middle. Wine in cut-crystal carafes sat beside the table, and The Boss had a half-full glass of red. He was dressed in a black, double-breasted suit, which was probably an Armani. The associates were dressed slightly more casually, in black slacks and tight, black turtlenecks, with gold chains around their thick necks. One of them shoved a chilled shotglass filled with Icelandic Brennivin towards me. I took it down in one gulp.

The Boss grumbled through a proposal. I bring them the information they want, and they bring me cash. No questions. No problems. I sat there silently for a few minutes, the schnapps warming my body and relaxing my mind. For some reason, I didn't feel guilty about taking anything from A42. It didn't even seem like stealing, actually. It's not like I'd be walking out of the office with \$5,000 workstations. This guy just wanted some data—numbers on a page, bits on a disk. I had no problem keeping my questions to myself. What these people use this information for is none of my business, as long as they pay me.

I agreed to the deal. No legal documents, no signing in blood—just a handshake. And that was that. They wanted a sample of my work. I said I'd get back to them in the next few days.

Low-Hanging Fruit

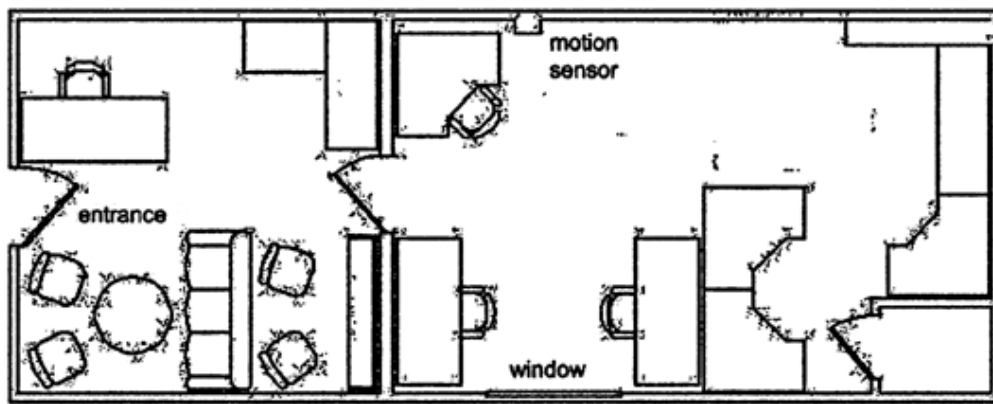
It started off easy. I decided to stay late in the office one night and go for some of the obvious pieces of information first. Flickering streetlights outside the building spilled a weak, yellowish glow over the papers strewn across the desks. Unfinished client projects lay on a small, communal meeting desk in the middle of the room. Piles of credit card receipts and invoices sat unprotected on the accounts receivable desk. "People should lock their documents up at night," I thought to myself.

50 Chapter 3 • Just Another Day at the Office

I grabbed an employee directory that was tacked on a cubicle wall and ran off a quick copy. I didn't know exactly what The Boss was looking for at this point, but I stuffed the directory copy into my pocket anyway, thinking it might be good to have down the road. As harmless as it appeared, the directory contained all of the employee names, which could help me with identity theft attacks and social engineering. It also listed telephone extensions, useful if I ever wanted to target voicemail systems.

I headed down to the communal trash area, where the day's garbage is emptied and stored until the weekly pickup by the city. It's a small, unfurnished room in the basement, with cracked concrete floor and walls, reeking of stale coffee grinds and moist papers. I grabbed a few plastic bags of trash from the dumpster, laid them down on the floor, and ripped them open. I pulled out some papers that looked interesting and peeled off the candy bar wrapper that was sticking them all together.

After about 20 minutes of trash picking, or "dumpster diving" as my buddies used to call it, I had a two-inch stack of documents that would please The Boss immensely: sales account status reports, new lead lists, work agreements, lists of clients and accounts, resumes, HR offer letters with salary listings, business development plans, and personal to-do lists. A marked-up blueprint of the first-floor office showed the different entry points into the building. I set that document aside.

Floor Plan of the Office Pulled from the Dumpster

I had seen some surveillance cameras around the office, but heard rumors that they weren't monitored. I brought this up with my manager at one of my "employee reviews," and he just blew it off. In one ear and out the other.

What's the point of having a security system if you're not going to review the tapes? It's like running an IDS on your network but not monitoring the logs. Chalk one up to laziness and the typical corporate mindset.

In the Palm of My Hand

The Boss liked what I delivered and paid handsomely, as promised. I was really starting to get into this gig. I'd heard about guys getting busted for stealing trade secrets and trying to sell them to foreign governments. There were stories about government-backed foreign nationals getting jobs in legitimate U.S. organizations in order to swipe confidential project plans and genetic material from biotech firms. That all seemed like spy stuff, and they probably did something stupid to get caught. Selling a few documents to some nice gentleman for a little bit of cash wasn't going to cause me any harm.

I reserved one of the meeting rooms near the executives. I had my laptop set up on the table with schematics and documents laid out, so it looked like I was actually doing something useful. Halfway through a game of Windows Solitaire, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the CEO walk out of his office with his secretary, his door left wide open. "Probably heading off to another cushy off-site board meeting." I groaned bitterly. This was a daring mid-day raid, but it was a perfect opportunity. I stood up and casually made my way toward the office. Taking a peek around and seeing nobody, I slid craftily in and quietly closed the door.

The CEO's desk was covered with papers—business proposals, phone notes, financial reports—and a Palm m505 filling in for a paperweight on top of them. "This is a good place to start," I thought. "I can try to copy some information from his Palm, maybe getting his passwords, contact lists, or memos." I knew the IT department used PDAs, too, to keep track of passwords, hostnames, IP addresses, and dial-up information.

I hit the power button on the m505 and was prompted for a password.

52 Chapter 3 • Just Another Day at the Office

Palm m505 Showing Password Lockout Screen



No problem. The beauty of some of these older Palm devices is that the system lockout means nothing. I had heard of the inherent weaknesses in PDAs and now I could see if it was really true. I hooked up a readily available Palm HotSync serial cable between the Palm and my laptop. Then I loaded the Palm Debugger, entered the debug mode with a few Graffiti strokes, and was in.

Graffiti Strokes Required to Enter Palm Debug Mode, Called "Shortcut Dot Dot Two"

2

The Palm Debugger is a software component that comes with Metrowerks CodeWarrior. The tool, designed for third-party application development and debugging, communicates with the Palm device through the serial or USB port. Through the documented debug mode, I could load and run applications, export databases, view raw memory, and erase all data from the device, among other things.