

A DEADLY GAME

JANET LORIMER



PAGETURNERS®

Chapter 1

Jim Salvatore sensed trouble as he climbed out of his car. He'd parked in one of the campus parking spots marked Tech Security. Now he wished he'd parked on the street. He didn't want everyone on campus knowing who he was. As he locked his car, Jim looked around cautiously. Nobody paid any attention to him.

He pulled a campus map from his pocket. When he'd interviewed for this job, he'd taken a quick tour. The campus was huge. It sprawled over dozens of acres. Now it was a week later. He was having a hard time remembering where everything was.

Jim admired the campus as he crossed it. Mayfair College was famous for its

beautiful grounds. Wide paths cut through broad green lawns. Gardeners worked on beds of colorful flowers. The center of the campus was especially beautiful. There was a marble fountain. Water leaped from it into a clear pool.

He glanced at the buildings he passed. Most of them were made from brick. Many were quite old. He found where he would be working. The building was newer. It had been built only a few decades ago. The building housed the college's first giant computers. Now students used computers of all sizes.

Something disturbing had happened a few weeks before. Computers all over campus had been attacked by a virus. People tried to do their work. But a cartoon of a ladybug appeared on the screen. The virus became known as the Love Bug. It quickly spread from one computer to the next. It slowed down all the systems on campus. The virus was finally erased.

The president of Mayfair decided to step up computer security. The college had a great IT department. It had set up external defenses. But the attack came from inside. Who was responsible? An argument broke out. Students and faculty wanted privacy. The administration said no. Privacy was not a sure thing.

It was decided. The IT department would fix computers. It would install new systems. It would upgrade software. But the campus needed an expert. A security expert. Someone who knew all the tricks.

The college's president was Alan Delaney. He had insisted on having his way. Delaney added a security team to the tech department. He had interviewed many good people to lead the team. In the end he'd hired Jim. Why? Jim had a dark secret. It made him the perfect choice for the job.

Chapter 2

Jim paused in the doorway. The security office was separate from the rest of IT. The security team needed privacy. The office was in a big basement. The day he had first toured the campus, he had taken only a quick look. Now he let his gaze travel slowly around the room.

Bright white LED bulbs provided the only light. There were no windows. One end of the room had been divided into workstations. Each cubicle contained a desk with a docking station and a chair. Computer servers lined the other end of the room. There were plugs for various cables and routers. The place was functional, not attractive.

Jim closed the door behind him. Two young men and a young woman were grouped around a laptop. Jim walked into the middle of the room. They turned to stare at him. Then one of the men stepped forward. His hand was outstretched.

“Mr. Salvatore? Welcome to the team. I’m Pete Harris,” the man said with a smile. They shook hands. Jim sized Pete up. The guy looked young. Maybe he was in his mid-twenties. He wore his hair in a neat ponytail. His clothes were basic. He looked intelligent and alert. Jim sensed that Pete was serious about his work.

“Hey there, Cybercop,” the woman said sarcastically. “I’m Tori O’Neal, at your command.”

“Tori!” Pete said, looking a little embarrassed.

“That’s okay,” Jim said with a grin.

Tori looked about twenty years old. It was hard to tell what color her hair really

was. It had been dyed so many colors. She wore a nose ring and heavy eye makeup. Her edgy clothes and Doc Martens made her look tough.

Steve Klein was the third worker. Steve still looked like a teenager. He was the stereotype of a computer nerd. His hair was messy. He wore glasses. His jeans and sweatshirt were rumpled.

“We’ve been trying to hold down the fort until you arrived,” Pete said. “But we weren’t sure ...” His voice trailed off.

Jim realized they were waiting for him to take over. He smiled. “You guys can call me Jim. Some people use my last name. But I always look around to see if my father’s in the room.”

His try at humor was lame. Steve and Pete laughed nervously. Tori rolled her eyes. She looked bored.

“Okay,” Jim said. “I’ve already met with the head of IT. Would one of you show me

around? Then maybe you can tell me about internal security.”

His words struck the right tone. Even Tori seemed to thaw out a few degrees.

Jim picked a cubicle no one else was using. He dropped off his briefcase. After that, Pete gave him a quick tour of the room. He could tell the office had been hastily put together.

“Right now we’re just trying to manage it,” Pete said. “New users need help setting up secure accounts. We make sure the system keeps running smoothly.” He shrugged. “We look for inside hacks. But that hasn’t happened lately. The damage is almost repaired.”

“We’re always one step behind,” Jim said. “Until we catch the hacker. We need to get ahead of him somehow. Plug the holes in advance, you know?”

Steve and Tori had gone back to their laptops. Jim passed their cubicles. He

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A DEADLY GAME

The students on campus feel that privacy is a right, but the computer system at Mayfair College is under attack. Is the hacker a white hat or a black hat? The new tech hire's past makes him the perfect cybercop—and especially qualified to answer that question.

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A woman with dark hair is lying down, looking up at a snake. The snake is orange and yellow with red markings, and it is coiled around the woman's head. The background is dark.

JANET LORIMER

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EYE FOR AN
EYE

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Chapter 1

Sandy Norris took a deep breath. She closed her eyes and concentrated. A large brown envelope was on the table in front of her. Her right hand moved lightly over it. Little by little, her breathing slowed.

Detective Sam Kennedy sat across from her. He leaned forward, watching her closely.

Sandy suddenly slumped forward. Her hand continued to make a circular motion over the envelope. Only the movement of her hand told Sam that she was still awake.

The small room they were in was bare. One thing broke up the monotony of the décor. It was a large mirror on the far wall. Behind the one-way mirror stood a man in

a dark suit. He gazed fixedly at the curly-haired young woman.

Sandy suddenly gasped. "I'm in the country," she said. A slight frown drew her eyebrows together. She tilted her head to one side. "I'm in the foothills, not on a main highway. I see a dirt road leading into this place. Dry grass. A fence is falling down. There's a barn with big holes in the roof. No one's been in this place for a long time."

Her hand began to move faster. Her breathing speeded up. "I'm going into the barn."

Then she paused again, frowning. Her face crumpled. Tears began to trickle out from under her lashes. "I'm so scared," Sandy said in a strange, high voice. She sounded like a frightened child. "Oh, please help me. I'm so scared. There's a"—Sandy gulped—"snake!" she cried. "I see it."

Sam's lips drew back over his gritted teeth.

Sandy huddled down in the chair. “It’s too dark in here. I’m scared,” she said in the childish voice. “I’m so tired. Mommy? Where are you? Daddy, why did you leave me here alone? Mommy? Daddy? Help me!”

“Good work, Sandy,” Sam said. “Now tell me where you are.”

Sandy groaned. She straightened up in her chair. A moment later she opened her eyes. She blinked. Then she shook her head and gazed at Sam. “I need a map.”

Sam opened a laptop. He pulled up Google Earth. Then he put the computer in front of her. She typed on the keyboard. *Click. Click.* Again she closed her eyes. Her hand hovered over the screen. Then her finger pointed directly to a spot on the map.

Sam leaned over the table. She opened her eyes. He took a closer look at the map. “Hmm,” he said. “Carson Meadows. Look at the satellite image. There was a ranch here fifty years ago.”

“You’d better hurry,” Sandy said softly. “I think the little girl is in or near a building. But there are snakes. And she’s scared.”

“I’ll get right on it,” Sam called over his shoulder. He bolted out of the room. She sighed in relief. Then she leaned back in her chair. She closed her eyes.

A moment later Sam returned. He handed her a glass of water. “How do you feel?” he asked.

Sandy opened one eye. She grinned and reached out for the glass. “I feel like someone just dropped me off a ten-story building,” she said.

“Huh!” Sam said. “If you fell off a building, you wouldn’t feel a thing. You’d be giving violin lessons to the angels.”

Sandy laughed. “Thanks for the support, Sam. You’ve always been my cheering section.”

The detective grinned. But then he grew serious.

“The search party has been contacted. They were told what you’d come up with. They’re on it.”

“How long has that child been missing?” Sandy asked.

Sam’s red face got a bit redder. He was a seasoned detective. He’d hunted for many missing children. The worry never stopped. Would a lost child be found alive?

“Just a few hours,” Sam said. “She was on a hiking trip with her family. The little girl wandered off after lunch.”

“How old is she?” Sandy asked.

“Six,” Sam said quietly. He glanced over at the wall clock. “It’ll be dark in fifteen minutes,” he said. “We’d better not lose any time. The temperature has dropped. It’s been below freezing the last couple of nights.”

Sandy shivered. Then she was again overwhelmed by the child’s feelings. She felt wave after wave of fear and loneliness. And

something else. She struggled to identify the last powerful emotion.

Anger! The child was angry. Her father had left her alone on the hillside. The little girl hadn't accidentally wandered away. She'd been deliberately left behind. Sam wasn't telling her the truth.

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AN EYE FOR AN EYE

It sounds like the founder of MiraMed needs a detective, not a young psychic who specializes in finding missing persons. A lifesaving formula has been stolen. Is Sandy's new client really interested in saving humanity? Or is he just looking for money?

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