

The **BOOK SPY**



MARK CARTON

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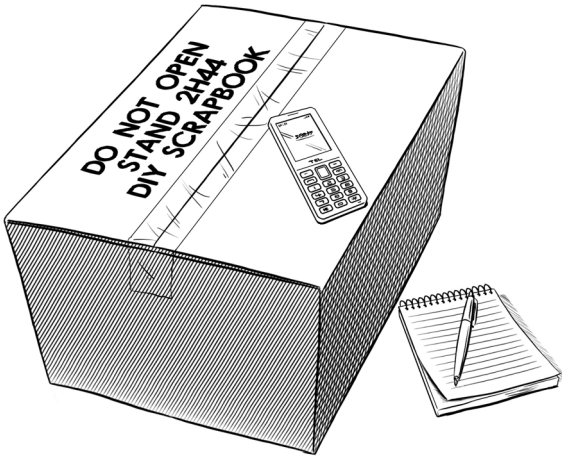


ANYA AND DANIEL
2018

— STORY FIVE —

TECHNIQUEST, CARDIFF WALES

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As Dan stood in the queue for the Cardiff ComicCon, he wondered if he was the only person attending on his own. Everybody else seemed to have someone with them: parents with children, teenagers in groups, brothers and sisters, boys and girls, old and young – everyone seemed to know someone.

Apart from Daniel Goulding. The loner. It wasn't his

fault he was an only child, with a single parent who worked long hours at the hospital.

No one else seemed to mind that the queue was infuriatingly slow. They had friends to occupy their time.

He pulled his hoodie further over his head. He was only staying for an hour. CardiffCon18 wasn't really his thing. He wasn't one of these sci-fi freaks. He looked around and inwardly sneered at everyone wearing costumes. CardiffCon18 only held one appeal for Dan.

Mutant Anarchy (MA) – Dreamcatchers!

This was a fully immersive strategy experience, with over thirty million online users worldwide. In *Mutant Anarchy*, Dan roamed the deserted streets of post-apocalyptic Paris, scavenging resources and forging alliances to help him survive the ongoing mutant insurrection. Dan's only reason for attending CardiffCon18 was to see the unveiling of the next generation of mutants, and to get a free download of the new crypt-mapping tool, which provided unparalleled access to the Forbidden Zone.

The queue lurched forward slowly, and Dan shuffled with everybody else. With no one to talk to about MA, the time was passing extremely slowly.

The living room was dark, with just a flickering screen to illuminate the gloom. The screen and keyboard were old. IBM. From a generation before Apple made computers stylish. Heavy, cumbersome, out-of-date – exactly how Giles liked it. With a smile he tapped the keyboard. Today he was going to put someone through the challenge of their life.

He stood in the corner of the room, rubbing his hands. The trap was set – now he just needed his prey. He felt a warm glow of excitement. Thirty years of hunting Book Spies, and now he was on the verge of catching two of them at once. Not only that, but discrediting their entire organisation into the bargain! And he couldn't lose! If the Book Spies beat his challenge, yes, they might save many lives, but they themselves would perish. And if they were unsuccessful, thousands would die, and the CRIA would take the blame.

'We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy,' he quoted aloud, with an air of sarcasm. 'Not today,' he said with a laugh. 'NOT TODAY!'

Anya just loved *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. Anything *Doctor Who* was good in her book. As the presenters for the Sarah Jane Extravaganza took to the stage, she looked on with anticipation. This was going to be great!

And then it wasn't.

No Russell T Davies -- just a video message pre-recorded somewhere in California. No Maria, no Luke, no Mr Smith. Not even K9!

As a local radio presenter tried to inject some enthusiasm into the audience, Anya checked her Snapchat. Lettuce and Zadia were still in Hall Two, looking at the latest Virtual Reality role playing games. Well, it *had* to be better than this.

Anya made her way up to Level Two, consulting a wall map to see where the VR area was. As she entered the hall, a crowd was waiting to get their photo taken with a Slitheen. Anya forced her way through the crowd, looking around for her friends.

She emerged next to the Mutually Anarchy stand. Anya wasn't really a games person like Lettuce and Zadia, but she couldn't help but be amazed by some of the graphics on display. She stopped for a moment to watch a screen displaying an unfolding vista of a post-apocalyptic city, all abandoned streets, litter, graffiti and explosions. A series of motorbikes tore into view, the riders wearing spiked helmets and wielding baseball bats.

You'd never get that in Downton Abbey, thought Anya. Generally she preferred reading and watching box sets. She

was always planning to start a blog dedicated to her hobbies, but every time she put time aside to write up her thoughts, she just found something else to watch or read.

She made to move away but, still watching the screen, she found herself nearly walking into a boy wearing a grey hoodie. The boy seemed completely transfixed by the motorbike chase on-screen. Anya dodged just past him, thanking her lucky stars she had not caught his attention. After her *Sarah Jane* disappointment, an encounter with a DiffZomb was the last thing she needed.

A DiffZomb was the name given by Anya and Lettuce to any boy from Cardiff who wore a hoodie and baggy jeans, a drawstring bag, and had the complexion of someone who ate nothing but pizza. A DiffZomb probably spent most of their time living in a darkened bedroom, with only the light of a computer screen to guide their movements. Anya stole another glance at the boy: yep, a classic DiffZomb.

Daniel edged nearer to the promotional staff, who were handing out the free goody bags containing the codes that unlocked the Forbidden Zone. He cut across another boy who was reaching out his hand. Got one!

Clutching the bag, he considered taking a look around the rest of the event. It had cost £12 to come in, so he supposed he should get his money's worth. He started towards the central aisle, but it was heaving with bodies. He looked around, and that was when he noticed stand 2H44.

All the other stands were lit with large screens, flashing lights and excitable promotions staff offering incentives. But stand 2H44: no lights, no screens, no staff – just a trestle table and a brown box. Daniel made his way over to it. On the box printed in block capitals were the words 'DO NOT OPEN – STAND 2H44 – DIY SCRAPBOOK'.

Daniel looked around. *Do not open...* It was almost like a dare. He looked around again to see if anyone was watching. The only person nearby was a girl staring at her phone. Nobody was looking. The name on the box made no sense. Who would leave a do-it-yourself scrapbook in an exhibition hall? Perhaps it was one of those TV prank stands – perhaps he was being filmed secretly right this very second. Daniel considered, and then on an impulse he ripped off the tape holding the lid of the box closed.

Anya watched the boy. The box was clearly marked 'DO NOT OPEN', and yet this Zomb was doing exactly that! She looked around to see if there was anyone from the

exhibition she could alert. Of course, there was nobody when you needed them. Now the boy had started to look through the box's contents. Anya decided that enough was enough.

Daniel was more puzzled than ever. All the box contained was a notepad, a book lying on top of another, smaller box, and a mobile phone. Why would anyone...? *OUCH!* The girl who had been on her phone had walked over and slapped him on the back of the head!

'Sorry,' she said immediately, and then she laughed, more in shock than in mirth.

'What the heck did you do that for?' demanded Daniel, clutching his head.

'I'm sorry,' said the girl again. 'I just wanted to stop you. That's not your property!'

Daniel stared at her incredulously. Who did she think she was, hitting him like that? She could have cracked his skull. Well, perhaps that was a bit dramatic. But she *had* hit him hard, and it *did* hurt.

'You shouldn't have done that!' he said firmly.

'You shouldn't have opened the box!' the girl snapped back.

They were interrupted by the sudden ringing of a phone. But it was neither of their phones. It was the phone in the box.

Whoever was ringing would probably know who the box belonged to, Anya realised, so before the DiffZomb could do or say anything, she grabbed the phone and swiped the answer button. The voice on the other end was robotic, like a satellite navigation system in a car. 'Congratulations,'

it said, 'you have been selected. Your first challenge is to find the location of the computer. You have fifteen minutes. Hit redial when you have your location.'

The line went dead.

'Who was it?' asked Daniel, as the girl lowered the phone from her ear.

'I don't know,' said Anya. 'They said I had been selected for something...' She felt a little shiver run down her spine.

'Selected for what?' asked Daniel. The girl's eyes were wide, like those of a scared cat.

'It was a man,' started Anya, 'at least I think it was a man's voice. It was disguised. Like when you hear a kidnapper speaking to the police in a film. He said we had to find some computer. He said we had fifteen minutes and to press redial when we found it.'

'Well, you can do what you like,' said Daniel. 'I've got plans.' And with that he slung his goody bag over his shoulder and strode off. *When in doubt, back out*, he thought.

Anya watched the boy walk away. She supposed he was doing the right thing. Who cared what some mystery voice told her to do? She reached into her bag and pulled out her own phone as she walked away, but before she could check her messages to see what Lettuce or Zadia were up to, it began to ring, the screen flashing 'No Caller ID'.

Anya answered but did not get a chance to speak. The voice was cold and metallic, just as before. It said: 'You have been selected. Go back and find the computer. Do it now, or there will be consequences.' The line went dead.

She looked up from her phone to see the boy stood in front of her. He was holding his own phone, and he had gone white with fear.

Giles watched the screens at his makeshift monitoring station. He laughed as Daniel and Anya stared at each other, both of them still clutching their phones. He switched between CCTV cameras to get a better view. He had already run an image of the children through his facial recognition software. One of his other screens was now loaded with details about both of them.

Daniel Goulding – Age fourteen. Lives in Roath with his mum and twin sisters. Above average at school. No clubs or associations.

Anya Romanowski – Age seventeen. Lives in Cogan with her parents and three dogs. School council president. Silver Duke of Edinburgh award.

Both good CRIA candidates. They just need encouragement.

Giles' message to the children had been clear. Find the location of the computer and call back. He was still waiting! He walked over to another computer. His original computer. He typed a password and the antique machine sprang to life. Despite its age it was still working. Just like him!

'Well get on with it!' he said aloud, glancing back at the CCTV feed. He shook his head in frustration. Young people had lost their sense of adventure. Technology had made

them observers instead of participants.

And thank God too! he thought. That's what ensures my victory!

‘**W**hat’s your name, by the way?’ Daniel asked the girl. ‘I’m Daniel.’

‘Anya Romanowski,’ she replied, glancing nervously at the open box. ‘Do you think whoever-it-is can see and hear us?’

‘Probably,’ replied Daniel.

‘Who do you think it is?’

‘Don’t know, don’t care,’ said Daniel. ‘I just want to find this computer and get out of here.’

‘To be fair,’ Anya started, ‘you opened the box, not me.’ She looked around pleadingly, hoping that the phantom caller would recognise this.

‘But you answered the phone,’ Daniel shot back. ‘So whether you like it or not, we’re in this together.’

Anya knew he was right, but she’d have rather died than admit it. She nodded at the box ‘What else is in there anyway?’ she asked, trying to change the subject.

‘Apart from the phone, there’s a notepad, a pen...’ Daniel paused for dramatic effect. ‘And another box.’ He laid the second box on the table and carefully opened it. Inside was a battered A-Z map of Cardiff, a children’s book called *Six Cousins at Miseltoe Farm*, a tin toy soldier (painted decoratively and carrying a musket of some sort) and a white card with some sentences written on it.

Daniel held the card up to the light. The writing was faint. It looked like it had been typed on an old typewriter.

The card read:

Chapter Seventeen – the first line
will tell you the place.
Page sixteen of the map will
show you the way.
Our soldier will point you in
the right direction.
Do-it-yourself.

Daniel was flummoxed, but Anya saw right away that it was a puzzle. She picked up the A-Z and threw the other book at Daniel, who almost didn't catch it.

'Flip to chapter seventeen,' she instructed him.

Begrudgingly, Daniel did as he was told. The chapter was entitled 'A Visitor Is Expected'. He started reading. '*Harvest time had come. The wonderful binder came into the field and like a galleon ship making its way through the sea...*' He stopped. How on earth was that supposed to help?

Anya had opened the A-Z and turned to page sixteen. It was a map of Cardiff Bay, showing the roads and the buildings. 'Read that again – slowly this time,' she instructed to Daniel. Daniel obliged, and then with a burst of sudden energy, Anya stabbed at the map with her finger. 'Like a *galleon ship making its way*,' she said. 'Galleon Way! Look, it's here on the map.'

Daniel studied the map. He had to admit he was impressed. But seeing that Anya was about to press redial, he reached across and grabbed her hand, stopping her.

'What are you doing?' she demanded angrily, tearing her hand away.

'The final clue,' said Daniel. 'Our soldier will point you in the right direction.'

Anya hesitated. In her excitement, she had forgotten that one. For a moment they both stared at each other in confusion. Then Daniel looked at his book, Anya at her map. Then both of them studied the soldier. They could not see how an old toy could point them in any direction, let alone the right one.

‘What type of soldier is he?’ Anya asked. ‘He looks like a pantomime character with that big hat and ruffled trousers.’

Daniel loved History, and one of his favourite projects at school had been on the English Civil War. ‘The Cavaliers and the Roundheads,’ he said, grateful that he had paid attention. ‘This is a Cavalier soldier.’

Anya pointed at the map. Halfway along Galleon Way was a building called Cavalier House.

‘That’s it,’ she said excitedly. She grabbed the phone again and pressed redial. It had taken them ten minutes to solve the clues. She hated to admit it, but she would have never worked out the soldier’s clue – teamwork had won the day. She studied Daniel as the phone rang.

‘You have the location?’ came the dead, metallic voice down the line.

‘Yes,’ said Anya. ‘The computer is at Cavalier House on Galleon Way in Cardiff Bay.’

‘Nearly correct,’ said the voice, and Anya couldn’t help but look disappointed. ‘The computer is in Room 2H44, Cavalier House, Galleon Way, Cardiff Bay.’

Anya shrugged. The clues had not suggested considering the stand number – how could they have guessed?

‘Pick up the notepad and pens and make your way to this address,’ said the voice on the phone.

‘No way!’ said Anya. ‘We don’t even know who you

are.'

'Come to this address now, or everyone at ComicCon will be dead in fifteen minutes,' the voice commanded.

'What? How? Why?' blurted Anya, but the line had gone dead. She felt suddenly sick, and once she had filled Daniel in, he looked like he was feeling the same way.

'What shall we do? Shouldn't we call the police?' he asked.

'I don't know. Can we take the risk? We're being monitored, aren't we? Besides, could they really evacuate this place in time?'

Daniel swallowed, nodding. She was right – they had no choice.

Anya and Daniel found Cavalier House quickly enough. After all, they could hardly have missed it. It towered above the skyline, overlooking 1 East Dock, which had become a bit of a tourist attraction, with its little walkways and fishing points along the water's edge.

The entrance to the building had a long list of property numbers and bells for each apartment. Daniel hesitated. What was the etiquette for this sort of thing? Should they ring the bell or try to sneak in?

Anya took the initiative and rang the bell, looking straight at the security camera above the door. Daniel looked at his feet.

The door clicked and, without a word, they were admitted into the building. An open lift was waiting for them. There was another typed card stuck just above the buttons inside the lift. It read: Sixth floor, 2H44. Anya pressed the correct button and the door slid closed. With a slight bump the lift started to rise.

A few minutes later Daniel went to knock on 2H44's door, but he found it was already unlocked. He pushed lightly, and the door swung open. They crept into the room.

'Hello...' whispered Anya into the gloom.

No response. Anya grabbed Daniel's hand for reassurance, but catching his eye she saw that he looked just as terrified as she felt. Slowly they edged into a darkened living room, still holding hands. In front of them was a desk and chair. There was an old computer, probably the oldest Daniel had ever seen. It had a bulky screen, which was dark

apart from a single flashing green line of text.

Letting her hand come free, Anya walked over to the screen. The line of text said: 'Press to Play.'

'Good afternoon,' said a voice from the darkness, making them both jump.

Spinning around, in the shadows Anya could just make out a figure in a hood.

'I'm here to guide you through the final challenge,' the figure said. 'All you need to do is solve my puzzle.' The figure was clearly projecting his voice through some sort of disguising device. He was the man from the phone call, no doubt about that.

'If you solve the puzzle you will be free to leave,' the voice continued, 'and your friends will all be safe. If you fail, there will be a massive explosion at the Cardiff ComicCon, and the CRIA will be held responsible!'

'CRIA?! What is the CRIA?' asked Anya.

Daniel raised his hand vigorously.

'No need to put your hand up. You're not at school now,' the figure said. 'What's your question?'

'Can I go to the toilet please, sir?' said Daniel.

'What?' demanded the figure, irritated by the boy's impertinence. 'If you must, but don't have any bright ideas. I'll be watching the door. Don't call me sir. My name is Giles!' He turned back to Anya, frustrated at the interruption. 'The CRIA are always there, hiding in the shadows. I used to work for them. They were my salvation once, but now they are my torture. I have waited a long time to discredit them.' He paused. 'So, now the choice is yours. Their future depends on you. You're the generation who fell out of love with books, who treat you devices like your

gods.'

Anya wasn't having that. 'That's a bit unfair. I like boo—'

'I shall now tell you your puzzle,' interrupted the man. He waited for a moment as Daniel rejoined them, then began:

'What king can you make if you take,
the head of a lamb,
the middle of a pig,
the hind of a buffalo,
and the tail of a dragon?'

And with that he withdrew into the shadows.

The children stood contemplating the puzzle. 'It sounds like some sort of a strange hybrid animal, made up of parts of other animals,' said Daniel.

Ignoring him, Anya jumped into the seat next to the computer. She was just about to press 'PLAY' when Daniel stopped her.

'Hold on!' he said. 'Why did Giles lure us here?'

Anya looked perplexed. 'What do you mean?' she asked.

'This is a trap,' said Daniel, thinking quickly. 'If he is telling the truth, he could have blown up the ComicCon whenever he wanted to. But he didn't. He needs us here, in this flat, for some other reason. What was he saying to you when I was in the toilet?'

'Something about books and how our devices were our new gods.'

Daniel turned to the computer. 'He reckons we'll use the computer and not our brains.'

Anya's fingers were still poised over the keyboard, ready to hit the ENTER key.

'He gave us this, remember,' said Daniel, taking the notebook from his pocket. He flipped it open and wrote down the words 'lamb', 'pig', 'buffalo' and 'dragon'. 'Why these animals?' he said. 'What connects them?'

'Nothing,' said Anya, but then she corrected herself. 'No, one thing – they're all made of letters. They're all words! Look again. The head of a lamb is L...'

'The middle of a pig is I,' picked up Daniel.

'The hind of a buffalo is O,' continued Anya.

'The tail of a dragon is N', said Daniel.

‘What type of king am I? I am a LION King,’ they finished in unison, high-fiving each other.

‘**Y**ou wanted us to use the computer,’ said Anya, addressing the shadows. ‘And kill all those innocent people. That’s horrid!’

Giles removed his hood and stepped forward. He’d planned to film the children destroying the centre, post the video online, and blame the CRIA for the deadly attack. Once again he had failed. Well, not failed. His triumph had been delayed, that was all.

‘OK, plan B,’ he said, ‘I shall activate the bomb myself.’ He barged past Anya, knocking her to the floor.

Anya grabbed Giles’ leg, tugging at his trousers, and he viciously kicked out. She felt blood spurt from her nose as his foot hit her squarely in the face.

‘Daniel, grab him!’ she screamed, but Daniel was nowhere to be seen.

With surging pain running through her body, Anya tried to get back on to her feet. She watched in desperation as Giles tapped at the keys. Why had Daniel left her? What about her friends? She tugged at Giles’ jacket, but he forcefully pushed her away with his coarse hand.

‘Daniel!’ shouted Anya once again.

Meanwhile, Daniel was trying to locate the wi-fi hub. It didn’t appear to be in the living room, neither was it in the kitchen. The bedroom was locked!

Daniel grabbed a nearby fire extinguisher and rammed it into the door handle. Nothing! He tried again, but this time with as much force as he could muster. The door crashed open and he stumbled into the bedroom. Pinned to

the walls were pictures of children, some were in black and white, some were in colour, some were really old, and some were quite modern. He dashed over the wi-fi hub and pulled out the plug. Result!

With relish, Giles pressed the ENTER KEY.

The words 'You are not connected to the Internet' appeared on the screen. His face a mask of shock and horror, Giles hammered at the keyboard in frustration.

'You might as well give up,' came Daniel's voice. Anya scrambled to her feet and saw her DiffZomb friend emerging from the darkness. He was carrying the wi-fi hub. As Giles watched, he threw it to the floor and stamped it into pieces.

Anya sprung to her feet and threw her arms around her new friend. They had done it!

As the children hugged, Giles spotted an opportunity to make for the door. But as he sprinted down the hallway, the lift at the end of the corridor slid open.

'Going somewhere, sonny Jim?' said a policeman, stepping out into the hall. Giles spun around, making for the staircase. But there was another policeman, waiting for him.

Daniel emerged from the flat with Anya draped around his shoulders. 'I made a phone call,' said Daniel. 'When I was in the toilet.' He held up his phone. 'It's still connected, look. He held up the phone. 'The police heard everything! I guess these devices aren't stupid after all!'

Once again Giles had been beaten by children. 'Damn you,' he said.

Giles had underestimated Anya and Daniel. They had used

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