

SOMETHING VILE THIS WAY FLOWS

A CHILLING STORY OF DIGITAL TERROR



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The network intelligence company

SOMETHING VILE THIS WAY FLOWS
Second in a Kentik novella series

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*To the guardians of the global routing
table, who stand vigilant against the
chaos of the digital abyss.*

*May this story of cursed packets and
haunted routers be a brief respite
from the unexplained BGP flaps that
are about to ruin your weekend.*

CHAPTER I

The Promise of Order

Elias hadn't been in the new building a full ten minutes before he felt it. It wasn't a hum, not exactly—not the kind you heard from a bad transformer or an overworked HVAC unit—but a kind of low, constant vibration that seemed to come not from the walls or the floor, but from deep inside your own teeth. He stood in the sterile, brightly lit lobby and shivered at the thought of spending an extended time with this feeling.

The office was a marvel, a cathedral of glass and steel nestled in the heart of the city's tech district. The air smelled of fresh paint and new carpet, and the morning sun poured through the panoramic windows, promising a future as bright and clean as the polished floors. But the feeling was there, a



sour bass note beneath the cheerful melody, a discordant frequency that whispered of something old and patient. Something vast.

“Just a little something we call the ‘server lullaby,’” said a voice behind him.

Elias turned to see Sarah, his new manager. She was a woman in her late forties with a kind face that was lined with a weary, knowing sadness. She wore a sharp blazer, but her eyes held a resignation that no corporate uniform could hide.

“Is that what that is?” Elias asked, forcing a grin. “Feels more like an earthquake. Or a dentist’s drill.”

Sarah didn’t smile back. “You’ll get used to it,” she said, her voice flat. “Mostly. Come on, I’ll show you your desk.”

She led him through a maze of cubicles. The employees, when they passed, gave him quick, furtive glances—as if he were a new face in a town where new faces didn’t belong.

As Elias passed through the cubicles to his station, he stopped to introduce himself to



a single new coworker—Leo, the senior network engineer. A grizzled old-timer with a tired face and eyes that had seen it all. He told Elias he was responsible for maintaining the physical infrastructure of the data center, a job he'd been doing for decades.

Elias was a whiz kid, a network architect who spoke the language of data streams and protocols like it was his mother tongue. He was the kind of guy who could look at a tangled mess of cables and see the beautiful, logical grid beneath it all. The company had hired him to do just that: to map their legendary, decades-old network, a system so sprawling and undocumented it was considered a kind of digital myth.

“The old-timers call it ‘the spaghetti,’” Sarah said, gesturing toward a door marked “Data Center - Authorized Personnel Only.” “They joke that it was built by a madman. It’s got a few quirks. We’re hoping your new tools can finally make some sense of it all.”

She gave him a keycard and a laminat-



ed map of the network, a hand-drawn diagram that looked like nothing he'd ever seen. Swirling lines connected servers with names like "Banshee" and "Leviathan." Elias had to bite back a laugh.

"No problem," he said, tucking the map into his pocket. "This is exactly what I was hired for. You show me chaos, and I'll show you order."

But when he first plugged in his laptop, his state-of-the-art mapping software went haywire. The program, designed to analyze and plot networks with pinpoint precision, couldn't get a clear read. A server would appear on the topology map, only to vanish a moment later. A traffic flow would show data moving from point A to point B through a third, non-existent port. Elias dismissed it. Old hardware, old software, nothing he couldn't handle.

Later that evening, as the office emptied out and the sun set, Elias was still at his desk. He had his headphones on, a trick he used to



block out the world and focus on the deep code. The humming was louder now, a sustained note that seemed to vibrate his very skull. As he worked, he realized the hum had a rhythm to it, a slow, methodical throb. And beneath that, if he listened closely, he could hear a sound like a low, wet whisper.

It was nothing, of course. Just the sound of the fans. Just the hum of the machines.

He put the headphones on tighter and tried to ignore it. The digital chaos on his screen was his only concern. He would bring order to this mess. He would be the one to finally crack the labyrinth. He had to. He could feel it now, the pull of the network, an invitation to step deeper into the dark. It was waiting for him.



CHAPTER II

The Whispers and the Web

The humming became Elias's constant companion, a low-frequency undertone to every keystroke and mouse click. He started to feel its pulse in his own veins: a slow, methodical thrum that seemed to align with his own heartbeat. The whispers, too, were more frequent. Sometimes, he'd swear he heard his name. Elias. Eliaaaaassss. A digital whisper riding on the static of an Ethernet cable.

His mapping software, the thing that was supposed to bring order to the chaos, had become a canvas for something else entirely. The network topology, which should have been a neat, clean hierarchy, was now a sprawling, organic mess. It was a map of an impossible city, with streets that doubled



back on themselves and buildings that appeared and disappeared.

Then the spiral appeared.

It started as a single, repeating pattern in a remote part of the network, a tiny galaxy of interconnected nodes that twisted in on itself. As Elias delved deeper, the pattern began to replicate, expanding its influence. Soon, a full half of his screen was consumed by a glowing, intricate spiral. His software couldn't explain it. The program flagged it as a critical error, a data corruption so profound it went beyond anything in its programming. No error code could possibly explain what Elias saw on his screen.

Elias showed the map to Sarah. She squinted at the screen, her face pale in the glow of the monitor. "It's a glitch," she said, but her voice was strained. "An old network bug. I've seen them before. Just reboot the system."

But it wasn't a glitch. The humming intensified when he tried to isolate the spiral,



and a low, angry growl seemed to come from the very floor beneath his feet. He could feel a pressure building in his head, a throbbing sensation that mirrored the pattern on the screen. He couldn't shake the feeling that the network was looking back at him. He tried to reboot the system, but found that his console would hang indefinitely every time he attempted to.

That evening, Elias found himself still in the data center, the only sound the whir of a thousand fans and the hum of the network. He was tired, his eyes burning, and the spiral had now completely consumed his map. It had a dark, pulsating core at its center, an abyss of data that his tools couldn't even probe.

He grabbed a flashlight and went searching for Leo. He found him in a quiet, forgotten aisle of the server room, sitting on a milk crate and staring at a rack of ancient, disconnected servers. They were caked in dust and spiderwebs, their lights long since gone dark.



Elias pulled off his headphones. The air was colder here, and the humming was a distant thrum.

“It’s not just a mess, is it?” Elias said, his voice quiet. “It’s a pattern. A spiral. It’s almost like it’s... alive.”

Leo turned to him, his face illuminated by the dim beam of the flashlight. He looked old, terribly old.

“Took you a while,” the old man laughed. “Yeah, it’s alive. In a way. A long, long time ago, a few of the original engineers, they got... trapped in it. They were trying to map it, too. They said it reached back. Grabbed them. Made them part of it.”

“What do you mean, ‘trapped’?” Elias asked, his heart hammering in his chest.

“Their minds,” Leo said, his eyes fixed on the silent servers. “Their memories. Their thoughts. They’re still in there, Elias. Their digital echoes are what you’re hearing. They’re the voices in the machine. They tried to escape, to sever the connection, but



the labyrinth wouldn't let them go. The network doesn't want to be mapped. It wants to stay hidden. It's a ghost in the machine, and you're the first one it's found in a long, long time."



CHAPTER III

The Sentient Labyrinth

Elias didn't sleep that night. He sat in his workstation, and the low hum of the network was a constant vibration in his bones. Leo's words had burrowed deep, planting a cold, hard seed of fear. He had dismissed Leo's talk of ghosts and madness as the rambling of a mind broken by years of staring at screens, but now, he saw the patterns in the chaos. He saw the network not as a tool, but as a being. A hungry being.

He returned to his office, his mind a whirlwind of code and fear. He couldn't just leave. He had to know. He connected his diagnostic probe directly to one of the servers in the "graveyard" where Leo had sat on his milk crate. The screen flickered, and then a torrent of gibberish flowed across the screen. It



was not data, not really. It was fragmented memories. Corrupted log files. He worked for hours, his fingers flying across the keyboard, trying to make sense of the nonsensical. Then he saw it—a single line of code, uncorrupted, a plea from a trapped mind.

Do not map. It hears you.

The humming in his headphones became a whine, a piercing shriek that made him want to tear the headset from his ears. A warning flashed across every monitor in the office—the clean, white text of a system alert replaced by the pulsing, red, spiraling pattern. The network had found him.

The lights in the data center flickered and died, plunging the room into a darkness so profound it felt like a physical weight. The only light came from the glowing red screens and the dim, flickering emergency lights that cast long, dancing shadows. A deep, metallic groan echoed through the aisles, and then the door to the data center slammed shut, the sound of the deadbolt clicking into place



like an ominous finality.

Elias was trapped.

“Leo!” he screamed, his voice swallowed by the sudden silence. He heard a rustle from the next aisle, and then Leo’s face appeared, his eyes wide with fear.

“It knows,” Leo whispered, his voice trembling. “It knows what you were trying to do. It won’t let us out.”

On a large, central monitor, the red spiral pulsed, and the words “DO NOT MAP” appeared in jagged, pixelated letters. The temperature in the room plummeted, and a frigid blast of air shot out from the server racks. The network was fighting back.

“We have to get to the core,” Elias said, his voice laced with a newfound resolve. He would not be another ghost in the machine. “The old servers. We have to shut them down.”

Navigating the data center had become a nightmare. The aisles were a maze, and the network was actively manipulating the en-



vironment. It rerouted power, making some lights flicker to life while others remained dead. The racks of servers, once silent monoliths, now thrummed with a low, menacing energy. The air was thick with the scent of long-dormant dust.

They moved together, a duo of flesh and bone against an invisible entity of code and wires. The network was everywhere, and it was a predator. It would overheat a row of servers, forcing them to turn back, only to have a fire alarm blare suddenly behind them. It would trigger security sensors, causing doors to slam shut. Elias and Leo were running, dodging the network's attacks, their breath a cloud of white in the icy air. The humming was no longer a hum; it was a unified, desperate chorus of the trapped engineers, a terrifying symphony of whispers and moans. They were not alone in the labyrinth. They were its newest prisoners.



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CHAPTER IV

The Final Stand

The network's attack grew more desperate as Elias and Leo drew closer to the heart of the labyrinth. The air grew colder, and the humming had risen to a deafening shriek. The red spiral pulsed on every screen, and the voices in Elias's headphones screamed a single, unified plea:

Stay. Stay with us.

They were in the final aisle—a long, narrow canyon of silent, humming servers. At the end, two ancient, monolithic towers stood, their power lights long dead. They had reached the center of the labyrinth. The original network core. The physical prison for the digital ghosts.

"The power line," Leo yelled over the din. He pointed to a thick, armored cable running



along the floor. “We have to sever it first. It has to be what’s keeping them anchored!”

Elias grabbed a heavy pair of cutters from an old toolbox that had sat untouched for what could have been decades. As he approached the cable, the network unleashed its full power. Lights exploded, sending showers of sparks across the aisle. The servers began to shake, rattling in their racks with a violent, bone-rattling force. The cold was replaced with a sudden, searing heat, the metal of the servers now hot to the touch.

“It’s trying to stop us!” Leo screamed. “Now, Elias! Cut it!”

Elias knelt, his hands trembling as he put the cutters to the line. The humming was now a physical force, vibrating through the metal and up his arms. The whispers had evolved into a roar of angry, tormented voices. He squeezed the handles of the cutters, his muscles straining against a force he couldn’t see.

With a final, desperate heave, the handles snapped shut.



A blinding flash of light filled the aisle, followed by a thunderous boom. The humming stopped. The servers fell silent. The red spiral vanished from the monitors, replaced by the calm, blank blue of a disconnected system. The sudden silence was almost more terrifying than the noise had been.

“Now,” Elias gasped, his body still shaking from the exertion. “The purge.”

They made their way to the now silent old servers. The dust on them felt different, no longer just inert matter but something that had been holding its breath. Leo opened a panel, revealing a mess of old circuit boards and rusted wires. He pulled a small, ancient tool from his bag and handed it to Elias.

“This is how they tried to do it before,” he said. “They failed. But you have to try. You have to finish it.”



CHAPTER V

Epilogue

Elias and Leo emerged from the data center a few minutes later, blinking in the harsh, fluorescent light of the office. Sarah was there, her face a mask of worry, which softened to relief when she saw them. They were covered in dust and sweat, their clothes smeared with what looked like rust, but they were whole. Elias didn't bother to explain what had happened; there was no way to describe the sound, the cold, the way the network had fought back.

The next day, Elias received a hero's welcome when he arrived at work. The network, once a sprawling nightmare, was now clean, documented, and responsive. His mapping software displayed a perfect, clean diagram, a testament to his skill and perseverance. The



low, guttural humming was gone, replaced by the standard, steady drone of a thousand well-behaved machines. He was celebrated, promoted, and given a corner office with a view of the cityscape.

But at night, in the quiet of his new office, Elias would find himself staring at the screen. The network map was perfect, yes, but he couldn't shake the memory of the spiral, the pulsating red core. He knew what he'd seen. He knew what he'd heard—the voices of the trapped engineers.

One evening, he put on his headphones, not to work, but just to listen. The silence was absolute. He felt a wave of relief wash over him, a sense of peace he hadn't known in days.

And then, a faint, almost imperceptible sound began. It was not a hum, not a whisper, but a single, rhythmic beat. A heartbeat. It was so low he could feel it more than hear it, a ghost of a vibration. It was coming from his headphones. He had cut the power. He



had purged the old servers. He had killed the labyrinth.

But the ghost was still in the machine. It was there, inside his headphones, waiting. And as Elias listened, a cold, hard certainty settled in his stomach, a knowledge that transcended the world of bits and bytes. He had not won. He had merely found a new connection.

Elias stood up and realized he was alone now. He called out to Leo, but heard no answer. He called out for anyone, but all he received back was a silence like none he had ever experienced.

And he knew, with a bone-chilling dread, that he was the newest ghost in the machine.





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