

# THE CYPHER KIDS AND THE GLITCH THAT STOLE THE GAME

A STEM Adventure Teaching Kids Real Cybersecurity

Ages 9-14 Years



Rajni Sharma



# **The Cypher Kids and the Glitch That Stole the Game**

A STEM Adventure Teaching Kids Real Cybersecurity Skills



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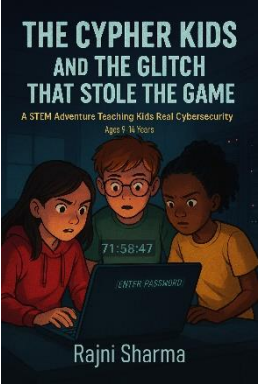
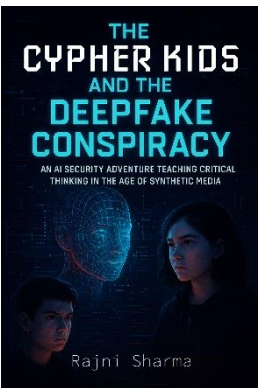
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## **Important Disclaimer**

The actions taken by the Cypher Kids, such as scanning the school network without permission, are fictional and shown with consequences to teach ethical lessons. In real life, such actions may violate school policies or laws, even if done with good intentions. Always obtain explicit permission before accessing or testing any system you don't own. The activities in this appendix are safe, legal, and designed for learning with parent or guardian approval.

## The Series

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <p><b>Book 1: The Cipher Kids and the Glitch That Stole the Game</b></p> <p>Join Maya, Leo, and Sania as they dive into their first real cybersecurity mystery—tracking a hacker who’s sabotaging their school’s tech fair. Along the way, readers learn real coding and cyber safety skills through a thrilling adventure about teamwork, ethics, and digital responsibility.</p> |
|   | <p><b>Book 2: The Cipher Kids and the Phantom Signal</b></p> <p>When strange radio signals threaten to lock down their smart school, the Cipher Kids must uncover a high-tech hardware conspiracy. This fast-paced story blends mystery, maker culture, and real-world lessons about IoT security, showing how curiosity and integrity can outsmart danger.</p>                    |
|  | <p><b>Book 3: The Cipher Kids and the Deepfake Conspiracy</b></p> <p>A viral video sparks chaos—and only the Cipher Kids can prove it’s fake before their school’s reputation is destroyed. This gripping AI mystery teaches readers to question what they see online, revealing how critical thinking and truth can fight misinformation in the digital age.</p>                  |

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## Prologue: 72 Hours Until Deletion

**[Time stamp: Friday, 11:47 PM]**

Maya's fingers froze over the keyboard.

The countdown timer on her screen ticked down: 71:59:23...  
71:59:22... 71:59:21...

"We're really doing this," Leo whispered beside her, his voice cracking slightly.

Sania's hand hovered over the Enter key. "If we're wrong about the password—"

"Then three years of everyone's projects get deleted," Maya finished. "Every line of code. Every design. Every—"

"I know what gets deleted, Maya." Sania's jaw tightened. "I'm asking if we're SURE."

The school server room hummed around them, racks of blinking lights casting shadows across their faces. Somewhere in the hallways above, a door slammed. They all jumped.

They shouldn't be here. Not at midnight. Not breaking into the school's server system. Not three thirteen-year-olds playing detective against a hacker who'd been two steps ahead of them for weeks.

But the message had been clear: **FIND THE PASSWORD OR WATCH IT ALL BURN.**

Maya pulled out her crumpled notebook—three weeks of investigation compressed into coffee-stained pages. Digital breadcrumbs. Metadata trails. A golden retriever named Rocket.

A GitHub repository from two years ago. A pattern that only made sense when you looked at it sideways.

"The password is R0ck3t2011," she said, with more confidence than she felt. "It has to be."

Leo's Python script waited on screen, ready to attempt the login. One try. That's all the system would allow before lockdown.

71:58:47...

"How did we even get here?" Sania asked, not really expecting an answer.

Maya thought back to three weeks ago. To the moment everything started unravelling. To the innocent notification that had appeared on her phone during lunch.

"It started," Maya said softly, "with a vote I never cast."

71:58:33...

Sania looked at both of them. "Together?"

Three hands moved toward the keyboard.

"Together," they said.

And pressed Enter.

**[The screen went black.]**

## Chapter 1: The Notification

**[Three Weeks and Four Days Earlier]**

**[Monday, 12:17 PM - Lincoln Middle School Cafeteria]**

Maya Chen, 13 (turned 13 in January), was in her second semester of seventh grade when everything started.

Maya's phone buzzed during the worst possible moment—right when she was explaining to Leo why his TechFest robot kept spinning in circles instead of following the line.

"It's your centre of gravity," she said, sketching a quick diagram on a napkin. "The sensors are fine, but you mounted the battery pack too far—"

*BUZZ.*

She glanced at the notification.



MASCOT VOTE CONFIRMED!

Your vote for "Beatrice the Badger" has been recorded.  
Thank you for participating!

Maya frowned. "That's weird."

"Your robot physics explanation or the fact that you're ignoring me?" Leo asked, stabbing at his mystery meat with a plastic fork.

"I didn't vote for the mascot yet."

Leo looked up. "So? App glitch. Delete it."

But Maya didn't delete things. She investigated them.

She opened her phone's browser history. No visits to the voting site today. She checked her email. No confirmation message. She opened the voting website itself.

The page loaded: **LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL MASCOT FINALS - VOTE NOW!**

Three choices remained:

- Victor the Vole (847 votes)
- Beatrice the Badger (1,203 votes)
- Reggie the Raccoon (692 votes)

Below the options, in small gray text: *You have already voted. Thank you!*

"Leo. Look at this."

He leaned over, chewing. "Yeah? So you forgot you voted."

"I. Didn't. Vote." Maya tapped the text. "Someone voted using my account."

"Maybe you pocket-voted? Happens to me all the time. Last week I accidentally ordered seventeen boxes of—"

"Leo." Maya's voice had that edge that meant she'd found a pattern and was about to spiral into detective mode. "This is different."

"How different?"

She refreshed the page.

Victor the Vole: **0 votes**

She refreshed again.

Victor the Vole: **1,247 votes**

Again.

Victor the Vole: **-34 votes**

"Okay," Leo said slowly, putting down his fork. "That's... not normal."

"It's not a bug," Maya whispered, her mind already racing. "Someone's attacking the voting system."

---

### **[12:23 PM - Three Tables Over]**

Sania Okonjo noticed Maya's expression before Maya even looked up.

That was Sania's superpower: reading people. While Maya read code and Leo read circuit diagrams, Sania read faces, body language, the tiny shifts in tone that meant someone was lying or scared or about to do something stupid.

And right now, Maya had that look. The hunt-mode look.

Sania grabbed her lunch tray and slid into the seat across from them, her usual spot since their fifth-grade robotics club win, where Maya's debugging, Leo's circuits, and Sania's team-building had earned first place. "What'd you find?"

"How did you—" Leo started.

"Maya's doing the thing with her thumbs." Sania pointed. Maya was indeed drumming her thumbs against her phone case in that rapid-fire pattern she did when solving puzzles. "She only does that when something doesn't add up. So. What doesn't add up?"

Maya turned her phone around, showing the vote count glitching in real-time.

Sania's eyes widened. "Someone's cheating the mascot vote?"

"More than cheating," Maya said. "Look at the numbers. They're going negative. That's not just vote manipulation—that's someone with access to the database itself."

"Or," Leo offered, "someone who found a really, really good exploit."

"Can you check?" Sania asked.

Leo was already pulling out his laptop—a battered ThinkPad covered in Python stickers and duct tape. "On it."

His fingers flew across the keyboard. Chrome opened. He navigated to the voting page, then right-clicked and selected **View Page Source**.

A wall of HTML code filled the screen.

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">
<head>
  <meta charset="UTF-8">
  <title>Mascot Vote - Lincoln MS</title>
  <meta name="generator" content="GlitchAPI-v0.3-
UNSTABLE">
...
```

"There," Leo said, pointing. "The meta tag. This site was built using something called GlitchAPI version 0.3." He kept scrolling. "And look at this form action..."

```
<form id="voteForm" method="POST" action="/api/vote">
  <input type="hidden" name="student_id"
value="847291">
  <input type="hidden" name="vote" value="">
  <!-- TODO: Add rate limiting - currently unlimited
submissions -->
  <!-- TODO: Add CAPTCHA before finals week -->
  <!-- TODO: Fix SQL injection vulnerability in vote
parameter -->
</form>
```

The three of them stared at the comments in the code.

"Did the developer just..." Sania began.

"...leave a to-do list of security problems in the public source code?" Maya finished. "Yes. Yes they did."

Leo looked up, grinning. "This isn't a hack. This is an invitation."

---

### [12:34 PM - Lincoln MS Library, Tech Club Corner]

They commandeered their usual table in the back corner of the library—the spot with the broken overhead light that flickered if you typed too loud, surrounded by ancient computer science textbooks no one had checked out since 2009.

Maya opened her investigation notebook. She always kept one—a beat-up composition book where she logged interesting problems, bugs, and puzzles. She'd filled three already this year.

At the top of a fresh page, she wrote: **THE MASCOT MYSTERY**

"Okay," she said. "Let's break down what we know."

Leo pulled up the vote page again, this time opening the browser's **Developer Tools** by pressing F12. The screen split—webpage on top, code console on bottom.

"Watch," he said, clicking the **Network** tab. "Every time someone votes, the page sends a request to the server." He clicked "Vote for Beatrice" and immediately a new line appeared:

```
POST /api/vote
Status: 200 OK
student_id=847291&vote=2
```

"See? That's a normal vote. One request, one vote counted."

He refreshed the page.

The Network tab exploded with activity.

```
POST /api/vote - Status: 200
POST /api/vote - Status: 200
POST /api/vote - Status: 200
POST /api/vote - Status: 200
[127 more requests in 0.8 seconds]
```

"Someone's sending hundreds of vote requests per second," Maya breathed. "That's a bot."

Sania leaned closer. "Can you tell who's running it?"

Leo clicked on one of the requests, expanding its details. "Every request comes with information about the sender. See this? The **User-Agent** string tells us what browser—or in this case, what script—sent the request."

```
User-Agent: python-requests/2.28.1
```

"Python-requests," Maya read aloud. "That's not a browser. That's a Python library for automation."

"Meaning," Sania said slowly, "someone wrote a script. Someone who knows how to code."

The three of them exchanged glances.

"Someone at this school," Leo added. "Because the requests are coming from inside the school network. See?" He pointed to the IP address: 10.48.3.0/24 subnet - the school's internal network range (this is a private IP address range that's not routable on the public internet).

Maya's pen flew across her notebook:

- **Attack method:** Automated POST requests
- **Tool:** Python requests library
- **Location:** Inside school network
- **Skill level:** Intermediate coding knowledge
- **Motive:** ???

"Why would someone do this?" Sania asked. "It's just a mascot vote. Who cares if we're the Badgers or the Voles?"

"Maybe it's not about the mascot," Maya said quietly. "Maybe it's about proving they can."

Leo scrolled down in the Network tab and stopped suddenly. "Uh, guys? There's another pattern."

He pointed at the timestamps:

```
15:47:23
15:47:24
15:47:25
...
16:15:01
16:15:02
[No activity]
17:01:12
[No activity]
```

"The bot runs every day from 3:47 to 4:15 PM. Almost exactly 28 minutes. Then it stops."

"Like someone's doing it during a specific window," Sania said. "When they have access to a computer without being watched."

"Or," Maya added, her eyes lighting up, "when they're in a place where running scripts wouldn't look suspicious."

All three said it together: "Computer Lab."

---

**[12:51 PM - Five Minutes to Next Period]**

They gathered their things, but Maya's mind was already three steps ahead.

"We need to figure out who this is," she said. "Before TechFest."

"Why TechFest?" Leo asked, slinging his laptop bag over his shoulder.

Maya pulled up the school website on her phone and showed them the announcement:



LINCOLN MS TECHFEST - MARCH 15TH

Grand Prize: Early admission to CyberStart Summer Academy

+ Full scholarship (\$4,500 value)

All participants' projects stored on school server.

Final judging: March 15, 9:00 AM.

Sania went pale. "That's three weeks away."

"Right," Maya said. "And if someone can manipulate a simple voting database, they can manipulate anything on that server. Including—"

"Our TechFest projects," Leo finished, his voice hollow.

The bell rang.

Students flooded the hallways, but the three of them stood frozen in the library corner.

"So what do we do?" Sania asked.

Maya looked at her notebook, at the growing list of clues, at her two best friends.

"We investigate," she said. "We find this person. And we stop them before they can do real damage."

"Just the three of us?" Leo asked.

Maya smiled—the slightly manic smile that meant she'd already made up her mind.

"Just the three of us." She held out her fist.

Leo bumped it. Then Sania.

"We need a name," Sania said. "If we're doing this for real."

Maya thought for exactly two seconds. Then she wrote at the top of her notebook page, in large letters:

## **THE CYPHER KIDS**

"I like it," Leo said. "Very dramatic. Very hackery."

"Very likely to get us in trouble," Sania added. But she was grinning.

Maya's phone buzzed again.

Another notification:

MASCOT UPDATE: Victor the Vole has been eliminated from voting.  
Reason: Data corruption.

Below it, a new file had appeared on the voting website's homepage: **GLITCH.txt**

Maya opened it.

Inside was a single line of text:

You can't catch a ghost. But you're welcome to try.  
- G

"Oh," Leo said softly. "It's ON."

Maya felt her heart race—that electric feeling when a puzzle goes from interesting to personal.

She didn't know it yet, but in exactly twenty days, fourteen hours, and thirty-six minutes, she'd be standing in the server room at midnight with a password, a countdown timer, and a decision that would change everything.

But right now, at 12:53 PM on a Monday in March, all she knew was this:

The game had begun.

And the Cypher Kids were playing.

### **[Maya's Investigation Notebook]**

#### THE MASCOT MYSTERY

- Attack started: Unknown (before today)
- Method: Python script, POST flooding
- Location: School network (10.48.3.xxx range)
- Pattern: Daily, 3:47-4:15 PM (28 minutes)
- Signature: "You can't catch a ghost - G"
- Connection to GlitchAPI-V0.3-UNSTABLE???

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Who is "G"?
2. Why the specific time window?
3. What's the real target?
4. How do we stop them before TechFest?

#### NEXT STEPS:

- Research GlitchAPI
- Check computer lab sign-ins for 3:47-4:15 PM
- Monitor the voting site for more clues

- Don't get expelled
- 

## Chapter 2: The Pattern in the Logs

**[Tuesday, 3:42 PM - Computer Lab B]**

Maya arrived five minutes early.

She'd spent all of last night researching GlitchAPI. Turned out it was an abandoned web framework from 2021—built by a college student who gave up halfway through and never fixed the security holes. The GitHub repository had 47 open issues, most of them screaming "PLEASE DON'T USE THIS IN PRODUCTION."

Lincoln Middle School's website? Definitely using it in production.

The computer lab was nearly empty. A few sixth graders worked on typing practice in the front row. Ms. Rodriguez, the tech coordinator, sat at her desk grading papers, her headphones in.

Perfect.

Maya chose a computer in the back corner—station 18, the one with the slightly wobbly monitor and the keyboard that stuck on the 'H' key. The worst computer in the lab.

Which meant no one ever used it.

Which meant no one would look over her shoulder.

She logged in with her student account and opened Chrome. Then she pulled up the voting website and opened Developer Tools again (F12 had become her new favorite keyboard shortcut).

3:47 PM.

She waited.

At 3:47:18, the Network tab lit up like a Christmas tree.

```
POST /api/vote - 200 OK  
POST /api/vote - 200 OK  
POST /api/vote - 200 OK
```

Requests flooded in, one every 0.3 seconds. Beatrice the Badger's vote count climbed impossibly fast: 1,203... 1,447... 1,691...

Maya's heart raced. It was happening RIGHT NOW. The attacker was here, in this building, running their script.

She glanced around the lab. The sixth graders were still hunt-and-pecking. Ms. Rodriguez hadn't moved.

But someone, somewhere in the school, was running a Python script.

She grabbed her phone and texted the group chat:

**Maya:** IT'S HAPPENING NOW. 3:47. Bot is active.

**Leo:** Can you trace it???

**Maya:** Working on it.

She clicked on one of the POST requests and expanded the details, looking for anything—any clue about where it was coming from.

```
Request Headers:  
POST /api/vote HTTP/1.1  
Host: lincolnmns.edu
```

```
User-Agent: python-requests/2.28.1
Accept: */*
Connection: keep-alive
Content-Type: application/x-www-form-urlencoded
X-Forwarded-For: 10.48.3.147
```

There. The X-Forwarded-For header. That was the internal IP address of the machine sending the requests.

10.48.3.147.

Maya opened a new tab and navigated to the school's internal network page—the portal where students could check printing credits and see which computers were available.

She held her breath and entered the IP address in the search box.

```
Device: LINCOLN-MS-LAB-C-12
Location: Computer Lab C
Status: In Use
Current User: [AUTHENTICATED SESSION]
```

Computer Lab C. That was one floor down, in the newer wing of the building.

Station 12.

**Maya:** Found it. Lab C, computer 12.

**Sania:** On my way.

**Leo:** Wait for me!!!

---

### [3:52 PM - Hallway Outside Computer Lab C]

Sania arrived first, slightly out of breath from speed-walking (running in hallways = instant detention).

Maya was already there, peering through the narrow window in the lab door.

"Can you see who's at station 12?" Sania whispered.

Maya squinted. The lab was more crowded than Lab B. Maybe twenty students scattered across thirty computers. From this angle, she could see stations 1-8 clearly, but stations 9-15 were blocked by a support pillar.

"I can't see it," Maya admitted.

"So we go in," Sania said simply.

"And do what? Walk up and say 'Hey, are you the hacker?'"

"I'm a social engineer, Maya. Watch and learn."

Before Maya could stop her, Sania opened the door and walked confidently into the lab. Maya hesitated, then followed.

The lab monitor, Mr. Chen, glanced up. "Help you girls?"

"Forgot my flash drive," Sania said smoothly. "I think I left it at one of these stations yesterday. Mind if I check?"

Mr. Chen waved vaguely. "Make it quick. Lab closes at four-thirty."

Sania walked down the aisle, Maya trailing behind. As they passed station 12, Sania slowed down, pretending to check under the desk.

Maya risked a glance at the screen.

A boy sat there, maybe seventh grade, with messy black hair and headphones on. His screen showed... a coding tutorial? Python basics. He was working through a lesson on loops.

But there was no script running. No terminal window. No sign of the attack.

Maya's phone buzzed.

**Leo:** Vote count just jumped again. Bot is still active RIGHT NOW.

She looked back at station 12. The boy was typing slowly, following the tutorial step-by-step. He didn't look like someone running a sophisticated vote-manipulation script.

"False alarm," Sania muttered. "That's not our guy."

They walked back toward the door, but Maya's mind raced. The IP address had said station 12. The bot was active. But the person at station 12 wasn't running anything suspicious.

Unless...

"Wait," Maya said, stopping. "What if it's not the computer?"

Sania turned. "What do you mean?"

"What if someone's not using the school's computer? What if they're just using the school's network?"

Sania's eyes widened. "You mean like... their own laptop?"

Maya pulled out her phone and quickly searched "how to see all devices on network."

The results weren't helpful—most required admin access or special tools. But then she remembered something Leo had mentioned once about...

She texted him:

**Maya:** Can you see all devices connected to the school wifi? Like a list?

**Leo:** Not with student access. But I can scan the network for active devices. Want me to try?

**Maya:** YES. Do it now.

**Leo:** On it. Give me 5 mins.

---

### **[4:01 PM - Back in Computer Lab B]**

Maya's laptop was older than her brother—a hand-me-down Dell that took three minutes to boot and sounded like a small aircraft during startup. But it ran Linux, which Leo had convinced her to install after she complained about Windows updates.

"Linux is for people who want to actually control their computer," he'd said. "Plus, all the good hacking tools run on Linux."

She'd rolled her eyes at the time. Now she was grateful.

Leo burst through the door, his backpack half-unzipped, cables trailing. "Okay, so I wrote a quick script—"

"You wrote it in five minutes?" Maya interrupted.

"I had most of it already. I was messing around last month trying to find my phone on our home network." He pulled out his laptop and opened a terminal window. "Basically, it pings every IP address in the school's range and lists which ones respond."

He showed her the script:

```
import os
import subprocess

# School network range: 10.48.3.1 to 10.48.3.255
```

```

network = "10.48.3"

print("Scanning network...")
for i in range(1, 256):
    ip = f"{network}.{i}"
    # Ping once, wait 1 second
    response = subprocess.run(['ping', '-c', '1', '-W',
                              '1', ip],
                              stdout=subprocess.DEVNULL,
                              stderr=subprocess.DEVNULL)
    if response.returncode == 0:
        print(f"✓ {ip} is active")

```

"It's not sophisticated," Leo admitted, "but it'll show us what's online right now."

He ran the script.

The terminal filled with results:

```

Scanning network...
✓ 10.48.3.1 is active (School Router)
✓ 10.48.3.2 is active (Server)
✓ 10.48.3.15 is active
✓ 10.48.3.23 is active
✓ 10.48.3.24 is active
...
✓ 10.48.3.147 is active
✓ 10.48.3.148 is active
...

```

"Okay, so we know 147 is active," Maya said. "That's the IP that's attacking. But we still don't know whose device it is."

"Actually," Leo said, grinning, "we can find out a little more."

He modified his script:

```

import os
import subprocess
import socket

```

```

network = "10.48.3"

for i in range(1, 256):
    ip = f"{network}.{i}"
    response = subprocess.run(['ping', '-c', '1', '-W', '500', ip],

stdout=subprocess.DEVNULL,

stderr=subprocess.DEVNULL)
    if response.returncode == 0:
        try:
            hostname = socket.gethostbyaddr(ip)[0]
            print(f"✓ {ip} - {hostname}")
        except:
            print(f"✓ {ip} - (no hostname)")

```

"Hostnames," he explained. "Every device on a network has a name. School computers are named like 'LINCOLN-MS-LAB-C-12'. But personal devices?"

He ran the script again.

This time, the results were more interesting:

```

✓ 10.48.3.1 - lincolnms-router.local
✓ 10.48.3.2 - lincolnms-server.local
✓ 10.48.3.15 - LINCOLN-MS-LAB-A-03
✓ 10.48.3.23 - LINCOLN-MS-LAB-A-11
...
✓ 10.48.3.198 - Alexs-MacBook-Pro.local
✓ 10.48.3.148 - (no hostname)
✓ 10.48.3.149 - LINCOLN-MS-LAB-C-13...

```

They all stared at the screen.

"Alexs-MacBook-Pro," Maya read aloud. "Possessive. No apostrophe."

"Someone named Alex," Sania said. "With their own laptop. Connected to the school WiFi."

Leo scrolled through the rest of the list. Most were school computers with predictable names. A few teacher devices. But only three personal laptops:

- 10.48.3.89: Emilys-ThinkPad.local
- 10.48.3.147: Alexs-MacBook-Pro.local
- 10.48.3.201: Jordans-Chromebook.local

"Three possible people," Maya said. "That's... actually not bad."

"Wait." Sania pulled out her phone. "I can narrow it down."

She opened Instagram and typed "Lincoln Middle School" in the search. The school's official account appeared, along with dozens of student accounts.

She searched for "Emily" first. Three Emilys in the results. She clicked through them quickly.

"Emily Rodriguez—sixth grader, only posts dance videos. Emily Patterson—seventh grade, just moved here last month. Emily Santos—"

"Wait," Maya interrupted. "If Emily just moved here last month, she wouldn't have known about GlitchAPI two years ago when that GitHub comment was posted. And the sixth grader wouldn't have had access to coding club back then."

"Good point." Sania moved to the next name. "Jordan Chen—lots of basketball photos. Jordan Kim—seventh grader, class president. Jordan Williams—transfers to Kennedy High next year."

Leo leaned back. "So we've got six possible suspects. But we still don't know which Alex we're looking for."

"Actually," Maya said slowly, "we might."

She pulled up her investigation notebook and flipped back to yesterday's notes.

"The attacker left that message: 'You can't catch a ghost—G.' What if that's not just a taunt? What if G is part of their username?"

Leo opened a new browser tab and went to GitHub. He searched: "GlitchAPI issues"

The repository appeared. He clicked through to the Issues tab and used the search box: "author:G"

Dozens of results. Too many.

"Try more specific," Maya suggested. "Search for the exact comment we saw. About the SQL injection."

Leo typed in the search: "SQL injection vulnerability"

One result.

Issue #34: **[CRITICAL] SQL Injection in vote parameter**

Opened by: **Gr1ff1nC0de**

Opened: September 14, 2022

The issue description was short:

The vote parameter in the API doesn't sanitize input. You can literally inject SQL and dump the entire database.

Example: `vote=' OR '1'='1`  
(In actual use, this would be URL-encoded as:  
`vote=%27+OR+%271%27%3D%271`)

**10.48.3.xxx**

This is CRITICAL. Fix it before someone actually uses this thing.

Below it, a response from the framework's creator:

```
Thanks for reporting. Will fix in v0.4.
For now, just don't use in production lol.
```

No v0.4 was ever released. The repository went silent after that.

"Gr1ff1nC0de," Sania read. "Griffin Code. G."

"And he reported this two years ago," Maya added. "Which means he knew about the vulnerability even back then."

Leo clicked on the username. A profile page appeared:

```
Gr1ff1nC0de
Joined GitHub: July 2021
4 repositories
23 contributions in the last year
```

The profile picture was a simple cartoon griffin—a mythical creature that was half eagle, half lion.

"No real name," Leo said. "No location. Just the username."

"But look at the repositories," Maya said, pointing. "Three of them are private. But one is public."

**PythonVotingBot** - *Last updated: 6 months ago*

Leo clicked it.

The repository was a simple Python script—almost identical to what would be needed to spam votes on a website. The README file was sparse:

```
# PythonVotingBot

Educational project for demonstrating API rate
limiting.

DO NOT use for actual vote manipulation.
```

This is for learning purposes only.

—Alex Zhang, Lincoln Middle School Coding Club, 2023

The three of them sat in stunned silence.

"Alex Zhang," Sania whispered. "He literally signed his name."

"And," Leo added, clicking through to the commit history, "look at the timestamp of his last commit."

Updated voting delay - 6 months ago  
Committed by: Gr1fflnC0de  
Commit time: 3:58 PM

"3:58 PM," Maya said. "Right in the middle of the 3:47 to 4:15 window."

They had a name. They had a pattern. They had proof.

"So what do we do now?" Leo asked.

Maya checked the time: 4:14 PM.

"Right now," she said, opening Facebook on her phone, "we figure out who Alex Zhang is."

She typed the name into the search bar.

Four results appeared. Three were adults. One was a student at Lincoln Middle School.

She clicked the profile.

The photo showed a boy, maybe thirteen or fourteen, with messy black hair and glasses. He wore a hoodie with a pixel-art griffin on it. The profile was mostly private, but one detail was public:

**Current School: Lincoln Middle School Class of 2026**

And in his profile picture, just barely visible in the background, was a laptop.

A silver laptop.

With a sticker on it.

A sticker of a cobra.

"Found him," Maya said.

---

### **[4:16 PM - Computer Lab B, One Minute After Attack Window Ends]**

Maya's phone buzzed. A new notification from the voting website:

MASCOT UPDATE: Beatrice the Badger has been removed from voting.  
Reason: Data corruption.

Final candidates: Reggie the Raccoon (voting reopens tomorrow)

Check GLITCH.txt for details.

She opened GLITCH.txt.

This time, the message was longer:

Impressive. You figured out it's not a bug.  
But finding the pattern isn't the same as catching the person.

You're running out of time.  
TechFest is in 19 days.  
I wonder if your projects are as clever as your detective work?

Let's find out.