

WEDNESDAY MORNING: A WHITER SHADE

*She said, 'There is no reason
and the truth is plain to see.'
But I wandered through my playing cards
and would not let her be*

– excerpt, Whiter Shade of Pale by
Procol Harum
cover here by Annie Lennox

I've been on an Annie Lennox jag, sorry. I'm indulging myself here at the intersection of a favorite song which fit today's theme and a favorite performer. Some of you will take me to task for not using the original version by Procol Harum, or another cover like Eric Clapton's. Knock yourselves out; it's Lennox for me.

Speaking of a whiter shade and truth...

FBI used a 'gray hat' to crack the San Bernardino shooter's phone

Last evening after regular business hours WaPo published a story which made damned sure we knew:

- 1) The FBI waded into a fuzzy zone to hack the phone – oh, not hiring a 'black hat', mind you, but a whiter-shade 'gray hat' hacker;
- 2) Cellebrite wasn't that 'gray hat';
- 3) The third-party resource was referred to as 'professional hackers' or 'researchers who sell flaws';
- 4) FBI paid a 'one-time fee' for this hack – which sounds like, "Honest, we only did it once! How could we be pregnant?!"
- 5) A 'previously unknown software flaw' was employed after the third-party pointed to it.

This reporting only generated more questions:

- Why the careful wording, 'previously unknown software flaw' as opposed to zero-day vulnerability, which has become a term of art?
- How was the determination made that the party was not black or white but gray, and not just a 'professional hacker who sold knowledges about a flaw they used'? Or was the explanation provided just stenography?
- However did Cellebrite end up named in the media anyhow if they weren't the source of the resolution?
- What assurances were received in addition to the assist for that 'one-time fee'?
- Why weren't known security experts consulted?
- Why did the FBI say it had exhausted all resources to crack the San Bernardino shooter's phone?
- Why did FBI director Jim Comey say "we just haven't decided yet" to tell Apple about this unlocking method at all if 'persons familiar with the matter' were going to blab to WaPo about their sketchy not-black-or-white-hat approach instead?

That's just for starters. Marcy's gone over this latest story, too, be sure to read.

Volkswagen execs get a haircut

Panic among employees and state of Lower Saxony over VW's losses and anticipated payouts as a result of Dieselgate impelled executives to share the pain and cut their bonuses. Germany's Lower Saxony is the largest state/municipal shareholder in VW, but it's doubly exposed to VW financial risks as nearly one in ten Germans are employed in the automotive industry, and VW is the largest single German automotive company. The cuts to bonuses will be retroactive, affecting payouts based on last year's business performance.

Fuzzy dust bunnies

- Verizon workers on strike (Boston Globe) – Until

minimum wage is raised across the country and offshoring jobs stops, we'll probably see more labor actions like this. Should be a warning to corporations with quarter-after-quarter profits and offshore tax shelters to watch themselves – they can afford to pay their workers.

- Facebook deploys bots across its services (Computerworld) – But, but AI is years away, said Microsoft research...meanwhile, you just know Amazon's Alexa is already looking to hookup with Facebook's chatbot.
- Google's charitable arm ponied up \$20M cash for disabled users' technology improvements (Google.org) – IMO, this was a great move for an underserved population.
- Judge's rejects Obama administration blow-off of apex predator wolverines (HGN) – Wolverines, a necessary part of health northern and mountain ecosystems, need cold weather to survive. Montana's U.S. District Court ruled the administration had not done

enough to protect biodiversity including the wolverine. Crazy part of this entire situation is that the feds don't believe the wolverine warrants Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection and that they can't tell what effects climate change has on this species, but the species is seen rarely to know. Hello? A rarely-seen species means the numbers are so low they are at risk of extinction – isn't that what the ESA is supposed to define and prevent?

UPDATE – 12:10 PM EDT –

From @cintagliata via Twitter:

Back in 1971, researchers observed Zika virus replicating in neurons and glia. (in mice) <http://bit.ly/1XvsD4d>

I'm done with the pesticides-as-causal theory. It may be a secondary exacerbating factor, but not likely primary. In short, we've had information about Zika's destructive effects on the brain and nervous system for 45 years. It's past time for adequate funding to address prevention, treatments, control of its spread.

It's all down the hump from here, kids. See you tomorrow morning!