

Idiom by Lon Yan

風聲鶴唳

feng1 sheng1 he4 li4

The world is under the attack of “WannaCry.” The ransomware locks up files in victim computers and demands payment of hundreds of dollars for unlocking. It threatens to double the ransom if payment is delayed too.

The bug has already infected hundreds of thousands of organizations and even homes computers in 150 countries.

Organizations have sophisticated security systems to spot an attack and isolate infected document. But individual do not have such protection, and might lose access to all information on their computers. So people are concerned, flooding hotlines with enquiries about how to protect their computers.

WannaCry causes great damage, so people are understandably scared. So when their computer acted a little out of the ordinary these days, such as becoming

slower, or freezes up for no apparent reason, people will really wanna cry, suspecting that they have become a victim too.

Such a state of mind can be described by the idiom “風聲鶴唳” (*feng1 sheng1 he4 li4*).

“風聲” (*feng1 sheng1*) is “the sound of wind,” and “鶴唳” (*he4 li4*) “the wailing of a crane.” Literally, “風聲鶴唳” (*feng1 sheng1 he4 li4*) is “wind sighing and crane calling.”

The idiom is about retreating soldiers in a battle in ancient China. They have lost their nerve and became very jump, thinking it was the enemy’s army coming even when all they heard were just the sound of wind and the crying of birds.

So the idiom means “to sense danger everywhere,” “to be afraid of one’s own shadow,” “to nervously apprehend danger in every sound,” “to be very scared and jittery,” “to panic at the slightest move.”

Terms containing the character “風” (*feng1*) include:

風波 (*feng1 bo1*) – disturbances; disputes; quarrels

風險 (*feng1 xian3*) – risks; danger

風格 (*feng1 ge2*) – a style; a genre

風暴 (*feng1 bao4*) – a storm; a typhoon