

# SHADO is Green

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Ed Straker waited to enter SHADO HQ cautiously. By the calendar display on his Swiss watch it was the 17th. That meant trouble. That meant half the staff had suddenly again gone Irish, and things would have suddenly turned green. But as he stepped into the hall through his office lift entrance he was met only with the dark, vibrant face of the female operative on duty who smiled and said good morning to him. Personnel walked by him and nodded and said their good mornings. Ed began to seriously worry now. The whole thing stank like a rat caught in a particularly offensive smelling part of a sewer. Alec Freeman, who was no more Irish than he was, undoubtedly was up to something. And he'd get Foster to help him out.

Ed mused that since their jobs at SHADO wasn't exactly a nine-to-five paper pushing, seat warming experience, the occasional celebration and temporary lack of discipline was good for morale. The only thing not good was that when Alec was around, Ed would be his target.

Ed narrowed his eyes at Keith Ford, hoping to read some clue about what his senior officer was up to, but the operative only nodded at him. He busied himself with the clatter of the computers as they continued to search for UFO's. Ed then eyed his office door. How could he be so foolish? Of course! The office! His office. No doubt Alec had it spray painted green!

"Ford, have Colonel Freeman see me at once." Ed barked in satisfaction.

"Yes, Sir." came the calm response.

Ed took a deep breath and entered his office. He exhaled as the doors hissed closed behind him. Nothing. Nothing was amiss. Not a thing. Ed fell into his chair, grumbling to himself. Something was terribly wrong. He jumped up, inspected his chair. He inspected the back of his pristine cream coloured jacket. No stain. No paint. No green.

Lieutenant Rodgers hummed a tune softly as she came in, set down his breakfast tray. Aha, he thought. Her. That one. She'd be in on it.

"What's been going on in Control this morning, Lieutenant?" he snapped, searching her face carefully. If anyone would break, she would. He studied her, giving her his best patented Ed Straker put fear in the hearts of his personnel look, waiting. Waiting for a nervous reaction, a telltale giggle. It didn't come.

"Mostly quiet, Sir. One sighting. Captain Carlin got it. Report's on your desk, Sir. Enjoy your breakfast, Sir." She walked out, humming. Ed stared after her.

He approached his breakfast tray as if it were a serpent about to bite him. Thinking carefully, he took a pen and using it as a tool, knocked aside the bright orange napkin covering the toast and coffee. Nothing. He slowly sniffed the coffee. No booze. He gave it a cautious sip. It tasted like coffee, light and sweet. Hmmm. Well, he would find out what his people were up to soon enough. Ed took a few bites out of the toast and then started in on the day's work.

Ed was sipping some coffee, looking over a maintenance form when Alec came in.

"God, will I be glad when that detective film on stage 7 is over. We've already gone through three directors on it. What did you want to see me about, Ed?" Alec sauntered over to

the dispenser and poured himself a scotch.

Ed looked at him. "All right, all right, WHAT is it this time?" Ed demanded.

"What?"

"ALEC. I **know** you are up to something. Every Saint Patrick's Day you pull something. Usually at **my** expense, and everytime you do it you tell me it helps morale. So don't tell me this is an exception." Ed picked up his paperweight and toyed with it, his eyes on Alec. He'd get a confession now.

Alec slapped his forehead. "I completely forgot. Damn! I promised Bridget I would take her to lunch today! Ed, if you hadn't reminded me I would have been in real trouble! Ed, would you mind if I took the rest of the day off? You know where to find me if things get hectic."

Ed stared at his friend, mouth slightly open. He waved a hand at Alec in dismissal, nodded. He put the paperweight back on the stand, feeling deflated, disappointed. And, yes, hurt, although that didn't make any sense.

"Thanks, Ed. Oh, wait, what did you want to see me about?"

"Nothing. Enjoy your holiday."

"Right." Alec flew out the door.

Ed stared at the door for a moment, trying to understand why he felt so glum and then went back to work.

#### **Later that evening . . .**

Ed stretched and yawned. He picked up his remaining paperwork and after saying a brisk goodnight to Miss Ealand, went up and out and headed for his car. He could not see the screen in Control where half the night staff including Alec and Paul and other operatives, gleefully gathered around to watch the transmission of a remote broadcast. The camera had been fixed on a parking lot. The executive space. Where Ed's car stood, waiting for its owner to fetch it.

Ed walked toward the car and stopped. He stared. A small chuckle escaped his lips. DAMN. Alec got him again.

His sleek SHADO car was not its usual bronze. It was, well , green. Streamers of lime-green decorated it. Green silly string had been sprayed on it. Paper roses, green, decorated it. Shamrocks were strewn all over it. Banners were taped on it. Ed thought a moment. He made a dramatic show of turning toward where he knew a security camera would be. He let the grin he'd been hiding vanish and he looked sternly at the light on the camera. He put irritation into his voice.

"Happy St. Patrick's Day to you, too, Mr. Freeman. Oh, by the way, Alec, I'm taking the cost of having my car repainted and cleaned out of **your** pay cheque. Now are **you** turning a bit green? I thought so. And the rest of you, I believe you have jobs to do? "

Ed got into the car after removing a long banner that said Happy Irish Day off his door and a streamer that said Kiss Me I'm Irish off his windscreen. He then drove off the lot grimly. As soon as he cleared the lot, he chuckled .

"Happy St. Patrick's Day, Alec," he said aloud, with a warm smile.

In Control, staff and officers dissolved into laughter, and began heading toward their respective stations.

Alec Freeman alone smiled at the screen where the image of a stern Ed Straker had been. Alec alone had caught the twinkle in Straker's eyes, the playful tone.

"Happy St. Patrick's Day, Ed," he said.

The End