

Melissa, a short SHADO-MarsBase story

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Copyright April 1, 1999

"What about the back-up system?"

"It will take ages to load, Commander."

Straker stared at Ford, then barked "Find Col. Freeman - immediately."

"Yes Sir."

* * *

"Sorry I took so long, Ed."

"Never mind that, Alec - what about the computer?"

"Both the Moonbase computer and ours are out. Systems will be restored within five minutes or so I was told just now."

"How could this happen?"

"Melissa was responsible for shutting down systems all over the world - even the CIA and FBI had problems."

"Good lord, she sure got about. Where did Paul pick that one up again?"

Alec laughed out loud. "Not that Melissa, Ed. Melissa the virus."

Straker grinned. "I know."

Alec stared at Straker, then went for the drinks dispenser and poured himself a stiff whisky. He got Ed a coffee and sat down. "At least your sense of humour is still intact."

"Barely. How come MarsBase wasn't affected?"

"Ah - well - eh - they use Linux and Col. Peten has forbidden the use of MS products ever since the change-over."

"Linux? Surely - " Straker frowned. "About a year ago she put in a request form for the change-over and I refused since it would have taken an 8 hour total shut-down of the MarsBase computer."

"Yes - eh - they must have found a way around that."

Straker pushed a button on the console in front of him and said "Get me MarsBase, Ford. Now."

"The video link is only just restored, sir. We're still testing it."

"Get me Col. Peten - Now!"

"Yes Commander."

* * *

She nodded a friendly "Hi, Commander" and as usual Straker wasn't sure how to address her. She confused him. He would call her Lieve and she would say Commander, if he called her Colonel she would call him Ed.

"Colonel, glad to see the video link is restored. You heard of our problems?"

"Obviously."

Right, silly question, Straker thought.

"MarsBase was the only one that wasn't shut down or so I hear, Colonel."

"Thanks to Col. Wright and Lt. Hemmings, Commander."

"When did they install that Linux system?"

"Last year - on July 3rd."

"Your birthday." Straker said, then wished he hadn't. He didn't want her to know how that evening was still with him as if it had been yesterday.

"You remembered! Now I'm flattered."

She sounded amused and Straker felt even more at a disadvantage.

"Didn't you put in a request for the change-over and it was denied?"

She nodded. "That's right - but you refused permission on the base of it requiring an eight hour computer shut-down. They did it in four hours and the shut-down wasn't complete at any time."

"Who is 'they'?"

"Richard and Rob, of course, as I said just now. But I take full responsibility, they carried out my orders, that's all."

Was that why she had accepted his dinner invitation? To make sure he was well away from Shado at the moment they effected the change?

Straker sighed. "You mean you ignored a direct order?"

"That's right," she said pleasantly. "Do you know who was responsible for downloading that virus into your system?"

"Well - eh - no."

"Oh really Ed" - she was laughing at him now! - "why don't you get a few real computer experts down there? Richard and Rob figured it out ten minutes ago, the moment the links were restored."

"And who was responsible?"

"Your secretary, General."

Straker frowned. He hated being called General and she knew it.

"Amelia?"

"That's right. Blame her internet habits. She's on some silly email list called Fab-Ufo. Maybe you should tell her to connect to the Net from home rather than from the Shado computer system, then it wouldn't have happened. Anyway, a message from a guy called Batz came through that list with the virus attached and the Shado computer was infected."

"And MoonBase?"

"Ah - well, that was Paul's doing. His girlfriend Yuchtar sent him that virus as an April fool's joke, assuming he would know quite well it was a virus - seems like he didn't. Better send him on a crash computer course, don't you think?"

He hated it when she gave him advice. Especially when she was right.

"How do you know all that?"

She laughed. "Because Richard, Rob and I are on Fab-Ufo as well of course. Actually the guy who started that list is right here - Lt.-Col. Martin."

"A silly email list? Your words, not mine."

"What's wrong with having a bit of fun in life? One shouldn't be serious all the time. It's relaxing to be silly. Maybe you too should join the list... All work and no play? That's not me..." She grinned. "As you well know."

Straker bit his lip. Yes, he did know.

"I want you and Lt. Hemmings on the next flight to earth, Colonel." He said sternly. "And Col. Wright on the next flight to MoonBase."

"You're going to court-martial me? How exciting!"

She was laughing again. She knew him too well - he hated that too.

"Tell Col. Wright to change over MoonBase to the Linux system asap. Lt. Hemmings can

do the same here."

"And why should I come over?"

"Because I want a word with you, Colonel, that's why."

"I can't leave - not now." She sounded faintly worried. "What with Colonel Plamondon still missing - getting both Richard and me away from here would leave MarsBase without senior officers."

He sighed. "I'm sorry about Danielle. If only we knew for sure..."

She frowned. "We suspected she was on the UFO we shot down the day she disappeared but there was another bleep - they may have gotten her out of here after all on that other UFO. Actually Richard theorised that the aliens may have tortured her and gotten some information out of her - that they were the ones who manufactured Melissa - to shut down the Shado computers. Danielle was on Fab-Ufo too."

"Then why aren't they attacking?"

"They did - two hours ago. But we were watching. The report should be in by now, we sent it along as soon as the computer link was operating again. Thirty of them. We knew about the virus since we downloaded it but it didn't become active, we knew it might shut down the SHADO computers so the moment the earth link blacked out - which was just before we sent out a message to warn you guys - we sent the MarsCeptors out. We got them all."

"All thirty of them?"

"That's right."

"Well-done, Colonel."

"Thank the team, not me."

"I will. I still want you down here, Colonel." His voice sounded harsh as he went on. "You ignored a direct order, Colonel. Even if this was for the good of Shado and the good of MarsBase I cannot ignore that. Tell Lt-Col Martin to take over from you, it's about time we made him a full Colonel anyway."

Her eyes flashed in anger as she said. "So you're court-martialing me after all? Oh come on, Ed, you can't be serious."

"It was you who said I'm serious all the time, so you must know I am."

"But -" She hesitated. "My men won't stand for it, Commander. They'll protest."

"Are you going to turn this into a battle between you and me, Colonel? You didn't follow regulations, if they back you up and cause trouble they'll be charged with mutiny."

"Ed -"

"I want you down on the next flight, Colonel, and that's final. I'll teach you what 'chain of command' means. Straker out."

He shut down the video link and burst out laughing. Just for once he had fooled her - and gotten the last word! Court-martial indeed! He leafed through the yellow pages and stared at the restaurant section. What was the name of that cosy little restaurant again he had taken her to on her birthday? Ah - he got it, he had better call now and make a booking. He frowned - should he call her back and tell her not to worry? Remind her that it was April Fool's day still? Surely she would know he wouldn't court-martial her!

He picked up the phone and dialed the restaurant. No, he would not call her. Let her worry for a while, she deserved it - she shouldn't have fun at his expense. Just for once he would have the last laugh.