

"He's back, and this time he's got a portable bulk-eraser!!!"

It's...

It's...

IT'S!!!!....

The Bastard Operator from Britain #1

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"...I'd like to escalate this call please.."

"I'm sorry?" I can't help but be a little surprised at this guy's tone.

"I'd like to escalate the severity of this call. Surely a person in your situation is aware of the new International Standard regarding fault logging and tracking..."

He's obviously insane. There's no other reason why he'd call me this early on a monday afternoon, as soon as I've got to work...

"What was your username?"

He tells me, and some all-too-familiar key clicking noises follow. I notice his account has the pervert flag set, and yet he has no gif files in his directory - which can only mean one thing....

"Now, this escalation business, you want me to increase the priority with which I'll handle this call?"

"Yes!"

"Tell you what, I'll double it" I say, in gentle, soothing tones

"Good" he mutters

"...Now, twice nothing is nothing, and because it's an ESCALATED priority call, it goes into the RED rubbish bin instead of the brown one."

"WHAT!" he screams "DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO?!?!"

"Well, I could look up your username and find out, but we deal with so many people here. Your name wouldn't mean anything. Not unless we'd seen you doing something *really* depraved on one of our hidden security cameras - you know the sort that were destined to be put in the computing labs to stop piracy, but actually got put in toilet cubicles after the installation order got corrupted somewhere between the purchasing office and the maintenance department. A freak electrical storm maybe... Anyway, unless you'd done something really disgusting that got caught on film...

...like..

(I look him up in the blackmail book)

.. like dressing up in women's underthings and dancing what looked (to the untrained observer) like the lead from "Mary Poppins", I'm afraid that your name wouldn't mean anything to us...."

I've heard the sharp intake of breath - he knows I've heard it, for him it's all over.

"Of course, if you were one of THOSE people, well, I'd remember you immediately, especially when reminiscing to the promotions board, all of whom are squarer than a Rubik's Cube. But I'm in a forgetful mood at the moment. I hope you don't mind if I forget that you called..."

"Yes, of course" he says, the last vestiges of self-respect vanishing.

"Goodbye now!" I cry cheerfully "But before you go, if you could be so kind as to send some money to the Operators Benevolent fund, I'd be so grateful - in fact my gratitude might make me careless with the bulk eraser, if you see what I mean.. .. Mary.."

He makes some wild promise of a large amount, and I keep my side of the deal by being careless with the bulk eraser. His account backups are a mere memory... Then I look thru the exabyte rack for the video tape in question, (Labelled Archive-26/5/90) and throw it in the "Post awaiting cheque clearance" bag, addressed to his boss..

It's for the best really, he was under a *lot* of pressure.

The next call of the day is from the User-Union, a pressure group that sprung up because some users thought they were getting a rough deal.

There's no pleasing some people!

Anyway, to get them off my back, I invite them in to see just how hectic an operator's life really is, and have prepared lots of flashing lights and alert sounds to keep the mindless cretins fooled...

They all file into the control room, about 10 of them in all, the dweebish types who hang out in groups like this as a social event. Things are going well, I'm answering calls and resetting "alarms" when some sour-faced old lard jockey ruins everything.

"These bells and lights don't fool me you know. I was an engineer on these babies when they first came out. This alarm sequence is invalid. There's no such alarm as 00-10-03-15-E. That just can't happen. You've probably just programmed the status display to say that! This is all a sham!!"

Trust there to be some re-education loser in the audience to totally stuff up my day. That just leaves plan B, although it's risky...

"Yes, it's true" I admit, cowering like Joan Crawford on a bender "It's all fake. I just didn't want you seeing what's in the computer room..."

They can't resist the bait. As soon as it looks like I'm hiding something they're in for the kill like Piranha.

"WHAT'S IN THE COMPUTER ROOM?!??" they demand, chomping at the bit

"Well," I say in my best 'this-is-it' voice, "you'd best see for yourself.."

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Later that day, I help the police try and piece the shocking scenario together...

"It's shocking!" I say, voice oozing with the horror of it all, "just terrible!"

"Yes yes" the officer mumbles, irritated "Let's just go over this one more time. You left them in the computer room to go and change some paper and they inadvertantly triggered the Halon fire extinguishers..."

"Yes, yes, it's awful isn't it officer?!"

"..and even though there's a 30 second warning, they didn't manage to make it out the door..."

"Yes, it's such a tragedy"

"..even though two of the people who are supposed to have been smoking and set off the extinguishers in the room are dedicated non-smokers.."

"Yes, what an unfortunate time to take up the habit!"

"..and even though it looks, judging by the scratch marks that the door was in some way locked or jammed..."

"..probably jammed officer, It's a matter of public record that I voiced some concern over this very topic although no-one could find any problem with the lock in question..."

"And even though someone outside at the viewing window could have sworn that they saw you pressing the manual release button on the Halon panel.."

"YES, to try and reset the system and save those poor, innocent people.."

"After ALL that, you still expect me to believe it was an accident?"

"..Well officer, I don't really know what I expect you to do, but your face looks vaguely familiar. You haven't used the toilets around here in the past have you?"

"Well, I may have once or twice - we get a lot of calls over here since you've been here - suicides mainly..."

"Yes yes officer, well how about we go into the control room and look at a copy of a video I have, with someone who looks awfully like you, and what they do to a loaf of bread...."

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Things are looking up!

He's back from the beerfest, and he's hungover and annoyed. It's....