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THE ALEXANDRIA PROJECT :

Chapter 3: I Just HATE it When that Happens!

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The complete Alexandria Project can be found on line [here](#)



Monday morning Frank arrived at work early. He scooped up the office copies of the daily newspapers from the pavement outside the staff door of the Library of Congress and noticed that the **Washington Times** was missing. No need to wonder who arrived first today – that would be Rick - the only employee that wouldn't bother to bring a paper in for anyone but himself.



Sure enough, as Frank strode up the half-lit, half-high walls of the LoC's Cube Town, he saw Rick, coffee cup in hand. His face lit up as soon as he saw Frank. "Morning, Frank," he called out. "Recovered from your big Saturday night yet?" He raised his coffee cup in a mock toast and leaned casually against his cube so Frank could barely squeeze past.

But to Rick's surprise, Frank gave him a hearty welcome as he passed by. "Great to see you, Rick, 'ole fella! Only 70 more security-filled days you're your big deadline, huh?" Rick's smile evaporated. Frank wondered just how long it would be before Rick showed up at his cube, shamefaced, to ask for help. A week, tops.

Frank's own smug smile faded when he snapped on his cubicle lights and saw the note waiting for him: "See me ASAP - George."

George didn't turn around when Frank appeared in the doorway. He was clearly lost in thought, staring at the whiteboard in his office. Frank realized that George had sketched out the LoC's IT system at a high level, noting the particulars of the security defenses that stood between the jungle that was the Internet and the data resources of the LoC.

Frank suddenly thought of the scene in Tracy Kidder's [The Soul of a New Machine](#) where Tom West, the legendary [Data General](#) project manager, sat alone in an office opening off of a darkened room of computer work and test benches. West's career was on the line. His future depended on whether the "Whiz Kids" he had hired out of college would be able to debug the new computer he'd convinced management to let him design and build. Things weren't looking good at that point, but West knew that all he could do was let things run their course without interfering and hope for the best.

His boss looked old, Frank thought. George was getting old, Frank realized with mild surprise – probably past retirement age, now that Frank thought of it. And the members of the IT staff at the LoC weren't whiz kids, either. George was probably worried that this project might come to a bad end, making him look bad, too. Well, that wasn't Frank's problem, now was it?

Frank was raising his knuckles to tap on the open door when George spoke.

"Hi, Frank," he said, without turning around. "Close the door and have a seat. I'll be with you in a moment."

Frank sat down, wondering for how long George had been aware of his presence.

*You know, this isn't a game,
Frank. You and I may have
known each other for twenty
years, but to them, you're
nothing*

A few moments later, George swiveled his chair around. He leaned forward, both elbows on his desk and folded his hands together. He looked Frank straight in the eye as he spoke.

"You know, this isn't a game, Frank. I didn't appreciate your email on Sunday, and if you want to keep working here, that's the last email like that you'll ever send me. Understood?"

Frank was taken aback; this wasn't what he had expected. "OK, George, no problem. I just wasn't sure what you expected me to say. Who the hell has ever seen something like that before?"

"Like what?" George snapped back.

Now Frank was really confused. "Well, like that fiery screen, and the logo? And what the heck is the Alexandria Project, anyway?"

George didn't say anything, but slid his Blackberry across the desk to Frank.

Frank picked it up and looked at the screen. The email he had answered was open on its screen. What was it he was missing? "It's the email you sent to me. What's your point?"

Then he noticed something that he'd missed before: the email wasn't addressed to just him, but to "All Personnel" in the LoC.

Frank looked up and saw that George was watching him closely. "Would it surprise you, Frank, to learn that you were the only one who replied to my email message?" Frank said nothing. "And what exactly were you looking for on a weekend in that particular directory, anyway?"

Frank was annoyed rather than flustered. "For Pete's sake, George, I was looking for the draft of the security project outline I'd been working on – that's all."

"Looking for it, or deleting it out of spite? And how about the other files in that directory? Did you want to make it that much more difficult for Rick to get started?"

"What files?" Frank responded, "Are others missing as well?"

"Of course!" George barked. "Two of them. And one of them was Rick's project outline – involuntarily 'contributed' to the Alexandria Project, whatever that is."

Now Frank was alarmed. "Wait a minute, George! Yes, I was ripped at Rick on Saturday night, but no – I'd ever pull a stunt like that! And before you say anything, I know that the backup file for my outline is gone, too – probably yours and Ricks as well. But I didn't do that, either. And I also know that it doesn't look like there's else missing, or at least not much, if there is. We had almost the same gross storage numbers Sunday morning as we did the night before."

"I know that!" snapped George. "Do you think you're the only guy around here that has a brain? I've already run a complete scan, and there were only three files deleted anywhere in the entire system that night."

George leaned back. "Frank, are you aware that you and I are the only two people in the entire Library of Congress that have access to other people's material in that directory?"

Frank shook his head slowly from side to side.

George gave him a humorless smile. "You should be a bit disappointed in yourself, Frank. Maybe you're not such a security hotshot after all."

Frank couldn't listen any longer. "Can the crap, George! We've known each other for more than 20 years. I know this looks like some kind of silly stunt on my part, but it's not. What would I gain by deleting documents? And hey – I'm no scholar of ancient Greek – I can't even speak a *modern* language other than English. If it wasn't for [Google Translate](#) I wouldn't have a clue what that inscription said."

George was looking less certain, so Frank pressed on. "And anyway, how could I come up with something like that screen overnight – with all that fancy flash animation?" Frank was feeling more confident now. He sat back and waited.

"Okay, Frank. Nice points," George said at last. "But this isn't over yet. If you didn't delete those files, then we've got a real problem here. You've got the security clearances to know that the CIA security hotshots use the LoC as a low

public-profile testbed to stress test new security protocols before they roll them out in the Pentagon, the White House, and all the other Level 1 security government agencies.

"That means that if someone could hack your files, they could hack anything anywhere." George looked at Frank, but Frank couldn't think what he might be waiting for Frank to say.

"I'm going to have to ask the CIA to check this out," George said at last. "You and I may have known each other for twenty years, but to them, you're nothing. They'll be asking you a lot of questions, and if I were you, I wouldn't get cute with my answers. Do you get it, Frank?"

Frank nodded. "I get it."

"That's all then." George swung back to his whiteboard. Frank stood up to go, but then had a thought.

"George . . . you said that there were three files deleted in all. What was the last one?"

George replied without turning around. "The last one was my security folder." Then he did turn around. "I really would watch my step for a while, if I were you."

Frank closed George's door softly and walked back towards his cubicle in a daze. He barely noticed when Rick jumped up, obviously alarmed, as Frank passed by.

"Hey Frank! *Frank!* Can I check something out with you? I just saw the damnedest thing on a computer screen I've every seen in my life!"

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