

M.M. LOGAR

**SELECT
NEW
SOFTWARE**



SHORT SF STORY

SELECT NEW SOFTWARE

“Your biometric status indicates that you are in a conscious state. Welcome aboard Incommunicado, interstellar judiciary ship owned by the Select New Software corporation. I am your non-organic host and I have no harmful intention. Your case has been outsourced to SNS Corporation, we will do analysis and legal interpretation and, if needed, implement the necessary measures which will lead to your safe return to your place in the society. Do you think you are able to continue this conversation?”

The robot was right, I was awake. The rest was questionable. A quick look around made me worried. Just a tiny bit worried. I was lying in a reclined position held in place with some kind of force field. The only thing I could freely move was my head. I was butt naked in a small white room with a single doorway and a robot.

“Do you think you are able to continue this conversation? I have no harmful intent.” The slim robot repeated.

“I guess so. It’s not that I am going anywhere.” I answered.

“You are correct. I am glad that you are feeling good.” Robot’s flat voice was already going on my nerves.

“I will ask you some general information questions. Please answer truthfully.”

I nodded, still trying to get myself together and realize how I got in this mess.

“Name?”

“Pax Quince, I am a financial advisor to...”

“These are not open-ended questions, Pax Quince. Please just state the facts I need for the record. Name?”

“Pax Quince.”

“Current occupation?”

Fuck.

“I am a financial advisor to the Mars municipality agroindustry minister. I specialize in water production and flow. ”

“Your identity is now confirmed. Your current status is set by Law enforcement to ‘Fugitive, on the run.’ I will change that to ‘Incarcerated, in processing’.”

“Fugitive? On the run? What the hell do you mean?”

“I stated exactly what I mean. I must add that I have no harmful intent.”

“Listen to me, Robot. I was never a fugitive, I was at home when police burst in like I was a drug dealer. I never, ever refused to comply with law enforcement or judiciary forces. I am investigated by the Mars prosecutor for a minor financial offense...”

“Pax Quince, are you a drug dealer?”

Oh boy. Trigger keywords. Conversation with this dust bin is not going to take me anywhere.

“Is there a possibility for me to get in touch with my family, or my lawyer.”

“Not at this moment.”

“I will never forget the way I was treated. I distinctly remember I told the Mars prosecutor not to send the police after me as I intend to show every time I am summoned to testify. I was very clear about that. Zero risk of flight so please do not send police to arrest me during the night. He assured me he won't do that.”

“His excellency the High prosecutor of Mars did indeed keep his word. Judiciary assault force was sent in the morning, certainly not during the night.”

This was beyond comprehension, a burlesque unveiled in front of my eyes.

“I guess you can't argue with an idiot,” I said aloud.

“Sir, please don't think so low of yourself, you are a perfectly normal human. I hope you have no harmful intention towards yourself.”

My jaw dropped. Suddenly I felt the pressure. Anxiety took over and pressured my chest.

I am trained for this. I am in control.

Breathe in. Remember the training. You are the best financial negotiator in the Solar system. Breathe out. I don't show emotions.

Breathe in. I don't get upset.

Breathe out.

I don't lose my calm, especially in front of a god damn stupid robot, if I ever get out of this he is going to be the first to suffer irreversible damage, and oh my it's going to hurt, and then I'll find out who set me up and...oh shit...BREATHE IN, QUICKLY.

Breathe out. Calm yourself.

*

As they were strolling me out I was swearing a lot and doing everything to make big guard robots feel uncomfortable. The end result wasn't much, as I wasn't able to move and robots are immune to empty threats.

We went down a long corridor with a security door every few meters. We stopped at number 135. The doors opened and we went in. They fixed my slab to the wall and left. Then I realized I was in a

jail room with 5 more creatures, similarly held in a fixed position on the slabs. Force fields fuzzed and ceased to exist. I was finally free to move, and I badly needed to take a piss.

The others left the slab beds. I guess they were looking at me. One of them approached me. Ugly looking alien, almost looking like a fish.

He communicated something with a series of strange pitch noises. A second later universal translator in my ear kicked in.

“New guy. I am Zob. I am the boss of this cell. You follow the rules and we are all good. If you don’t follow the rules [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] will kill you.”

“Sure, I agree with that,” I said, looking at [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] whose tentacles were as thick as my body.

“Very well human. Zob will now tell you the rules.”

I nodded.

“First. Zob and [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] exercise once a day on the floor. When we do that the rest of you lie down on the beds looking away from us.”

“No problem.”

“Second, tell me which extremity do you use to excrete?”

“I...uh...I am not sure if this was translated correctly. Excrete?”

“Yes. Body fluid and garbage.”

“Ah.” I nodded politely. “I am right-handed, I use this one,” I said waving my right hand.

“Follow me now.”

He made a couple of steps reaching the end wall of the cell. All the other cellmates moved to avoid getting into his way. He touched a panel on the wall and doors opened leading into a compartment crammed with different things sticking from the wall. Amongst them, I recognized a very small toilet seat. The rest of the gadgets, I suspected, had a similar usage for different species.

Zob addressed me again.

“You will use only your other, clean extremity to touch the panel.”

“Sure.” I waved my left. “Only this one. No problem.”

“When you enter inside you will not touch anything with the foul extremity but yourself. When finished you will sanitize the extremities.”

“Got it.”

He made a gesture that my translator returned as “Is punishable.”

He moved on. I stayed, watching the cell, getting my nerve back. One of the mates approached me. He was half my size, hairy, almost like a dog. Likable fellow. He burped something. Translator instantly whispered in my ear: “Are you edible?”

I smiled at first, then I looked around. They were all looking back with grim expressions. This was an intelligence test of sorts, but not in a funny way. The little fellow was obviously more dangerous than I anticipated.

“No, no, absolutely not. If someone was to eat me he or she would die in agony. I am terribly poisonous.”

“Nothing then.” The dog-like creature returned.

“Alas.” I concurred.

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The next three months I recall as days of boredom. We were fed three times a day. I slept most of the time, avoiding depression and thoughts of my family. Zob and [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] trained once a day. I respected their wish to look away when they do that.

Then it all changed. Exiting the bathroom I accidentally brushed [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] and he made a startling movement. I apologized, thinking he was disgusted by me touching him, and we started to talk. Very soon I realized he was actually afraid of me. I was just a human water economy expert, with no prior knowledge about other space races. I didn’t realize, until that moment, that others perceived humans as a warmongering, bloodthirsty race with a resource-rich planet. [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] just appeared big, but in a fight, human would easily destroy him. What Zob said was an empty threat. Which reminds me, he considered Zob to be a borderline idiot.

[Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] was an interstellar biologist, a member of the trade delegation who made regular visits to Earth. That’s where things got interesting. His skin turned to sickly yellow as he explained to me that we are all doomed. Select New Software corporation bought the personality transplantation technology from them and used a loophole in space laws to create a private detention center on a DFH-52 planet’s moon. He suspected that the corporation is treating all the enemies in the detention by erasing the personality and applying a new one. A very compliant one.

That’s when I got the epiphany. CEO of the Select New Software corporation was Axel Lupo, the guy I screwed for a lot of money by advising Mars water minister not to allow the private sector into state-run waterworks. It has been downhill for me since then. Someone tipped the prosecutor how I abused a certain financial fund for personal use. No big deal, it’s all in the gray area, but enough if someone wanted me out of the picture for a while. If what [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] said was true about personality transplantation then I was on the road for a permanent vacation.

Oh, and [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name]'s crime? He tasted Coca Cola and got addicted. His colleagues decided to make a private initiative, instead of informing the collective. So his personality will be wiped and a new one, which does not know the taste of Coke, will be installed.

Great things exist in space.

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I started to train with Zob and [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name]. Vigorously. I needed a way out, even if it meant fighting my way out. My new biologist friend was very eager to talk to me. He told me everything he knew about each of our roommates. How they live, procreate, fight. The dog fellow piqued my interest.

“He is Tassian, new genesis, c mutation. He is hungry.” Said [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name].

“Yeah, he asked me if I was edible.”

“He would have eaten you if you said yes. They eat as much as it is given to them, and they don't stop growing if there is enough food. Likewise, they shrink when there is no food. His size means he hasn't been properly fed for about [unit of time which equals five solar revolutions].”

“Five years? How the hell is he still alive?” I asked.

“He was much bigger than this. Probably half the size of this ship. He was starved until he was little enough to fit this cell.”

“What?”

“Yes. Everything is large on his planet, Tassians are pets. The bigger the better.”

“What is he doing here then?”

“He wouldn't play fetch with his owner.”

I stayed silent for a while. I don't know stellar biology but I know my dogs. I approached the Tassian and said “How would you like to be mine? I would tell you what is edible, and I promise you won't have to play fetch.”

I swear, I think there was a tear in his eye.

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When the ship landed, we were a small force with a plan. Nobody had anything against the bloodthirsty human financial advisor taking over. I was the new boss of the cell and the escape operation. The whole plan rested on my assumption that the detention center is not fully automated and that there will be humans there. Edible humans.

I was right. Once the ship landed the robots took us out, restricted on our slab beds, and strolled us out. There we were met by a human crew. Odd bunch. They looked and smelled like they neglected personal hygiene for some time.

The whole ship was emptied to a large hall, where we awaited the personality wipe. Hundreds of slabs filled with different aliens stacked in perfect order. What my fellow humans didn't know was the simple space biology fact. [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] race can choose to be solid or, well, sort of marshmallow liquid. In other words, the force field can't hold them in place unless they want to.

[Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name] wiggled out and set us free. I cuddled my Tassian pet and reminded him of a few things.

"Remember now what I told you. All the other humans are edible. You can eat all of them. Except me."

He left. We released all the others while Tassian's bloodthirsty dance lasted. I cannot compare my Tassian pet to anything else than a shark, a land shark. Hidden behind his curly hair sits three rows of razor-sharp teeth. Evolutionary perfected killing machine.

It was over quickly. Tassian ate about a dozen humans and increased in volume by so much.

"Good boy!" I told him when he returned. He was already bigger than I was. Everyone was looking at me. I was their savior. I jumped on one of the slabs, looked around and yelled:

"I am Pax Quince, it's time for us to return home. Who is with me?"

They cheered.

"Anyone know how to drive a spaceship?"

*

I returned to Mars with my cell crew. We landed and surrendered to the authorities, but not before I reached to my friend the Mars water minister. [Untranslatable grunt noise used as a name]'s testimony revealed that Select New Software used the technology to infiltrate government and install doppelgangers. A purge followed.

I was offered and accepted to become minister of Revenge ministry. My task? To seek, destroy, and purge everything related to Select New Software corporation.

But that is another story.

Illustration Photo by Rakicevic Nenad from Pexels.