

Short stories

A BINARY TALE

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This story is inspired by the daily work of a software developer, from a different perspective.

1

Vera woke up a bit shaken. She had a weird dream but she could only remember bits and pieces. She sat on her bed, the bright morning light fading through the window, touching her messy hair.

Last night things didn't go as planned. She had a job to do but something went wrong and now she couldn't recall what happened or how she ended up in her bed, yet.

Slowly, she went to the kitchen to make a fresh coffee. She needed one for the headache to think clearly. Somehow she felt like her memories were wiped out by something, or someone. She gave the thought another couple of seconds, then her focus shifted to the scent of coffee aroma that was spreading through the room.

"That's what I'm talking about" she whispered while enjoying the taste of it . Her head would feel better soon.

She looked up and stared at the items on the table: some objects, a bunch of keys, a note with a TODO list, and other seemingly random things. Behind the table, on the wall, pages and pages of documents were hanging all over the place. Most of them were connected by multiple threads in a way that seemed random at first.

She liked to look at them from a certain distance and try to make up possible figures from the shape of them, like an abstract piece of art.

She got closer, still holding her coffee cup on her hand, and looked at some of them. She couldn't help but notice that Mister P. came by and cleaned things up a bit, as usual.

She was thankful for his contributions and she couldn't imagine her life without him. He has been part of her family for many years, since she could recall. Her mother had told some stories of the times he wasn't around, decades ago, and how things were different, more "messy".

The doorbell suddenly rang, bringing Vera back to reality. She approached the door, knowing what to expect. She opened it and picked up the envelope left there for her, almost not bothering that there was no one there.

She went back inside and sat at the table. The caffeine was working and her mind was ready to think clearly. She looked down at the envelope, holding it with both her hands. A little smile appeared on her face.

The envelope was encrypted but she knew what to do. It took her a few seconds to successfully pass the security protocols and to access the content of the envelope.

"Finally", Vera thought. Her time had finally come and she was ready for it.

She read the message again: "Mission: Ship It".

This was her moment. She trained all life for this and there was no room for failure.

"Let's get to work!"

2

The World Control Centre is an enormous facility owned by the world government, working non-stop to process information and tasks coming from all around the world.

One of its departments concerns itself with space travel, where shipments of all kinds are sent daily to specific planets and destinations.

Agent 7570 was standing on the boardwalk in hangar B7-5C, about 100 meters above the ground. At the centre of it, an unfinished spacecraft was getting worked on by a series of mechanical robots and drones.

The aircraft wasn't fully finished yet and Agent 7570 was there to overlook the final preparations and make sure that it was ready on time. Soon, that little toy would be traveling full speed to the planet G3A, with its cargo, according to the mission logs.

The last 3 attempts have not been successful, for different reasons. It wasn't Agent 7570's fault, yet he couldn't shake a nervous feeling about how things will go this time. Still, as long as he was doing his job properly, he couldn't care less about the outcome of the mission.

He gave another look below his position, to check that things were proceeding as planned.

Then he turned back and headed to his office.

Vera arrived at the central station in a bit of a hurry. This was one of the crucial parts for the success of her mission and she needed to be ready.

The station was crowded but not too much at this time of the day. She looked up at the departures screen, scanning through the list, to find her destination. "There you are, platform #295". She had about 15 minutes before the air transport would leave.

She checked her bag again, making sure that she didn't forget anything.

Vera reached the platform soon after without any inconvenience. She wasn't the only one travelling. It didn't bother her too much, yet she stayed on alert in case something were to happen. Old habits.

She sat on her spot quietly, waiting for the transport to take off. The engines were already running.

A robotic voice started talking from the intercom: "Fasten your seatbelt, next stop World Control Centre".

With a roaring sound the air transport took off, headed towards its next destination. From there Vera will reach the space travel department and she will be one step closer to fulfil her mission.

3

The air transport was approaching the landing platform. Vera peeked out of the small window, noticing an unusual amount of security droids waiting on the platform.

That made her worry a bit. The travel has been pretty smooth so far, the usual ID checks but nothing out of the ordinary. She had official clearance to reach her destination, with all the necessary documents prepared. Everything she needed was in the envelop she had gotten that morning.

Travelling with her, were a bunch of other people. Maybe one of them was in trouble. At least, she hoped that.

A few moments later, they safely landed. Vera and the other passengers stepped outside of the vehicle. Vera looked around to assess the situation a bit. In the background there were countless of other landing platforms with vehicles coming and going non-stop, all connected to buildings and structures stretching out to the horizon. The World Control Centre was so vast and big that you could think of it as an own country.

Standing in front of the entrance doors were a bunch of security droids. Vera noticed that they were checking and scanning each passenger before letting them through.

It was her turn and one of the droids approached her. It scanned her face and asked to check her documents. It

took a couple of seconds to analyse the data, then it stepped aside and asked Vera to pass through.

For a moment Vera thought she was in trouble, but she apparently wasn't. Her mission was too important to be compromised now.

She was about to enter the sliding doors of the connection platform when one of the other droids called out her name. She panicked, then slowly turned around to see what the droid wanted with her. The droid, and another one, approached her. "Stop right there. Your travel documents don't seem to check out. Please come with us."

What? How was that possible? She was given those documents from a trusted source and she knew they had to be good if she was put on this mission. Something wasn't right.

She wanted to protest but getting on an argument with a droid wasn't a good idea, as things could get even worse. She had to follow along for now, and find out what they wanted with her.

They entered the building, one of the droids being in front of Vera and the other one behind her. The droids were moving quite fast so that Vera had to step up the pace a bit to keep up with them. The three of them went through several corridors and doors, in a section of the building that was on restricted access.

Vera was trying to stay calm and focus on the mission. Whatever they wanted with her, she had to reach the space travel department in time, no matter what.

At last, the droid in front entered a room, followed by Vera and the second droid. Then the two security droids left, without saying anything.

The door closed, leaving Vera in the room by herself.

She was starting to feel unease when the door on the other side opened. A small figure entered the room. "Good day, Miss Vera. I'm Mr. Tschek. I'm afraid we have a problem".

With a unfriendly smile, Mr. Tschek explained to Vera that the documents she was travelling with were using an old security code and that she had to explain how she got that. Vera looked at the little man with a bit of a surprised face, trying to hide her emotions of anger and fear.

"I'm sorry, there must me a mistake. Those documents are valid and I need to get on with my travel." she replied.

"The documents *appear* to be valid" corrected Mr. Tschek "The security code is what concerns me. We don't produce this format anymore and I'm very interested to know who gave you that. Who are you working with and what is your business here?"

The situation was starting to get out of hand and Vera didn't like that for a bit. She had to do something, she had to do it now.

"Of course, let me explain..." as she started talking, she suddenly jumped forward without hesitation. Her agility

was so fast that Mr. Tschek didn't realize what was happening. Then, everything went blank.

Vera dragged the unconscious body to a corner of the room. She was in trouble now and she didn't have much time until someone would figure out what was going on.

She reached the terminal in the room. She had to hack into the security feed and erase the encounter from the last few minutes. No one had to know that she was there, not until she had reached the space department and left the planet.

She pulled a small device from her bag and hooked it into the terminal. She had done this before, so it didn't take her long to finish the hack. She was safe, for now.

She still didn't know how the security code got compromised. She trusted her source but it didn't matter anymore. Now she needed a new security code that would keep her out of trouble.

Before leaving the room, she made sure that Mr. Tschek was still alive and properly tightened up, unable to scream or move.

Then she left, carefully checking that no one was there, heading to the only place where she could get a new security code. The Krypt.

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The Krypt is a highly secured building located underground. Without proper clearance it's almost impossible to get inside.

Vera approached the location carefully. She had managed to get there without any inconvenience, but for how long? She was checking the entrance when someone that looked like a maintenance worker came out of the building. "That's my chance" Vera thought.

She waited behind the corner where she was standing, as the worker was walking towards her position. As he was about to make the turn, Vera stepped forward as she would walk around the corner as well.

The two of them bumped into each other.

"Aah" shouted Vera, as if she was taken by surprise.

"Oh I'm so sorry miss, are you ok?" replied the worker, a bit afraid of getting into trouble.

"Oh yes thank you, I'm ok I think."

Vera deliberately took a deep breath, then she hinted a smile "Well, I have to go. Have a nice day sir" and moved along without letting the worker reply back to her.

He looked at Vera a bit puzzled, then discarded the thought and moved along as well.

Vera arrived at the entrance of the Krypt. She waved the badge that she borrowed from the worker a minute before.

The doors opened and she stepped inside, quickly looking around to make sure that she wasn't seen.

The Krypt had many rooms but only a few people and a bunch of maintenance droids worked in there, as most of the work was automated.

She got really lucky that someone got out of the building and that she was able to get the access badge.

Now she needed to act quickly. She entered one of the rooms that no one was using and reached for the terminal.

Same as before, she plugged her device into the terminal and did her thing.

It took her a minute to get a new security code and update her travel documents. Then, carefully, she exited the building unnoticed and headed towards the underground station to get a transport to the space department.

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The underground station near the Krypt is one of the many connection points of the World Control Centre.

To get on board of one of the high speed transport modules, you have to go through one of the security access points, with a valid security code.

Vera scanned her travel document, feeling both nervous and excited at the same time. If the hack was successful, that was the moment of truth.

A little green light flashed in front of her, indicating that everything was correct and that she could enter the station.

“One step closer” Vera thought with a bit of relief, moving forward and into the station.

There were different transport modules available, depending on the destination. Some were able to host several people, others only a single person. Luckily, for where she was headed, single-person modules were available. She didn't need any more trouble along the way.

She approached her docking spot. One small module arrived at the dock almost instantly. Automation was a big thing in the world she was living, making it a lot more easier and efficient to perform any kind of task.

She entered the module, took a sit and scanned her travel document. Then the module took off.

About ten minutes later the transport module entered another station. Vera was now in the space department area.

Her excitement didn't last long though.

As the module was approaching the dock, she noticed that an increased number of security droids were patrolling the station.

Was she in trouble again? Did they find out what happened?

There was no alarm yet. Maybe they weren't looking for her, or maybe they didn't know it was her.

Hope wasn't completely lost yet.

Vera got out of the transport module and headed towards the station exit. She needed to stay calm and act normally.

She joined the waiting line and when her turn came, one of the security droids asked for her travel documents. She showed them to the droid.

It only took the droid a couple of seconds to run the checks but for Vera it felt like ages.

Finally the droid replied "Move along, next!".

"It worked!" shouted Vera inside her head, with a relieve.

Then she exited the station.

Agent 7570 was waiting at the entrance of the hangar B7-5C. Everything was on schedule and the spacecraft was ready to take off. Only the passenger was missing.

The agent checked again the travel logs to make sure that everything was prepared, then noticed someone coming down the corridor.

Vera was now almost running when she saw the hangar and the agent waiting for her. She stopped in front of him, smiling.

"Hi there!" she said.

"Hello and welcome, I'm Agent 7570. I take that you're Miss Vera?"

"Yes, that's me."

"Perfect, we were waiting for you. Everything is prepared, I just need your travel documents first please."

She handed them to the agent.

"All good, please follow me Miss Vera." replied Agent 7570 after making sure that the documents were valid.

Vera entered the hangar. The spacecraft was standing there, pointing its nose upwards.

She looked up, happy to have made it there, and ready to proceed with the last part of her mission.

She listened to the final instructions from Agent 7570. Then, she entered the spacecraft.

A few minutes later, Vera was watching her planet from the side window, getting smaller and smaller as the vehicle was leaving the atmosphere.

Once it reached the outer space, the spacecraft ignited the hyperspace engines. A second later it was gone, travelling at hyper speed towards its destination: planet G3A.

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Vera's voyage didn't take long, at least that's what she felt. The ride was a bit bumpier than expected, but still a pleasant one.

When the spacecraft jumped out of hyperspace, she looked out of the window again. There it was in the near distance, planet G3A. Her destination. Her mission objective.

The planet looked quite nice from where she was. Vera could spot different areas of the surface that had different colors, as well as large areas of faded white, like a soft mantle of snow.

She couldn't wait to land and start exploring the planet.

The spacecraft entered the planet space a few moments later, descending fast towards the surface and the pre-defined landing spot.

The engines roared with a loud noise as the vehicle was touching the ground. Then they turned off and the door opened, bringing a fresh breeze from the planet's air inside the aircraft.

Vera closed her eyes, breathing the new scents and odors into her lungs.

She smiled, then slowly stepped outside.

Her mission was complete.

Now she could show the universe her true purpose.

0

The *clickety-clack* sound of the mechanical keyboard was going on almost uninterrupted for the past few minutes. Her fingers were moving faster than an average person, almost like they had their own will. A result of hours and hours of experience.

The light of the 32" monitor was the only thing lighting up the room, projecting sinister shadows on the walls. Gemma's gaze quickly moved to check the current time. She stopped for a second what she was doing and looked at the window next to her desk. One hour ago she was staring at the same window, watching the sunset as it was setting the sky aflame.

"Look sweetheart, the angels are baking" her father used to tell her when she was a little girl.

She smiled, then quickly continued what she was working on.

It wasn't unusual for her to work long hours. She also kind of liked to work in the evening. Things are more quiet, there are less people around, and she could concentrate better. This time it was a bit special though.

She was able to finish up her algorithm and now she was wrapping up the final details, making sure that everything was working as expected.

Gemma's website was due to go live within the next hour, for anyone around the world to see it. How exciting!

She took a deep breath and leaned back to her chair. That's it, the last piece of code was saved and pushed to the cloud, on its way to the production system. Within the next minutes the website would be accessible on the internet.

`https://g3a.com`

She liked the domain she chose, a shorter version of her name, which gave it a bit of a mystery.

She drank the last sip of water from her glass, anxious to finally show the world the fruits of her work.

Gemma's code editor was still open on the screen. As she was waiting for the deployment of the website to finish, she stared at the letters and words of her program, almost unconsciously. She really liked the new color theme she picked for her editor, it made her happy.

For a moment she felt a strange feeling as she was looking at the code, like a friendly presence that has always been there with her, for her.

At the same time, in another world, in another reality, Vera felt the same feeling as she jumped out of hyperspace, reaching her final destination. The planet G3A.

Gemma looked up again at the screen, the deployment was successful and the website was live. Yes, she did it!

She opened up the browser and entered the URL in the address bar. You can tell she was excited by looking at her face, like a kid that just got a blue ice cream.

The page finally loaded, except that the screen was blank.

Gemma's heart skipped a bit.

She hit the refresh button. Same result.

"Wait a second" she thought.

She checked her internet connection, turning the laptop's Wi-Fi off and on again, just in case.

She hit the reload button again. Nothing changed.

"Aaaargh" she wanted to scream.

She was so close for everything to be perfect. Did she miss something?

She grabbed the keyboard, hitting a combination of keys to open up the browser developer tools. And then she saw the error message.

Cannot read property name of undefined.

"I'm such an idiot!" she shouted, and face-palm herself. It was definitely going to be a long night.

Credits

Book cover photo by [Daniel Olah](#) on [Unsplash](#).