PASSWORD RULES

(from THE MANUSCRIPT)

by Michael Stephen Fuchs

"Good afternoon, Mr. Luther," said the crewcut man behind the desk.

Stanley Luther flashed an ID absently as he strode to the single door in the room, set in the back wall. It clicked faintly, and he gave it a solid yank. Beyond the embrasure lay a ten-foot hallway and another, identical door, which emitted another click. In the small room beyond sat an additional receptionist, a door with biometric access controls (a configurable combination of voice, thumbprint, retinal, and skin current), and two unblinking black-clad twenty-two year old men with submachine guns standing behind a pane of glass.

This last – a fabulously bizarre perversion of the notion of the display case – gave Stanley the howling fantods every single time he passed it. He couldn't bring himself to meet the matching, disapproving gazes of the lethal mannequins inside.

Today the biometrics combo was thumbprint and skin, a quick and complementary pair; he was in the complex in a few seconds. *Hate this fucking place*, he thought, as he often did, regardless of the vicissitudes of the access control mechanisms. He thought about contract work.

But then cut himself off quickly – he did not even want to bring that forbidden thought into this sacrosanct and terrible place. Sensibly enough, he worried that wandering thoughts could precipitate a verbal slip-up. But another part of him feared that his thoughts might literally be read out of his head in some way – a level of paranoia to

which he had not previously subscribed. However, as he had now actually taken on some contract side work (utterly forbidden, under pain of he cared not to think what), no level of anxiety or caution could really be considered excessive.

He nodded at a few familiar colleagues, ignored the rest. He came on-site only rarely. He ducked into his uncluttered and sterile cube. The building kept dust out of the air, or there would be plenty on his terminal. He logged in. There would be an assignment waiting for him. He settled down to read it, not missing the days when he had to speak with a supervisor for routine gigs.

```
Console Login: SLuther
Employee ID: SDL4261cmwalpha1
Password: *************
Login incorrect
```

Fuck.

```
Console Login: SLuther
Employee ID: SDL4261cmwalpha1
Password: *************
Password has aged. Please enter a new password:
Old password: *************
New password: **************
This password can be guessed, it is too similar to your old
password. Please enter a new password.
```

Goddamnit.

```
New password:
New password:
New password (last prompt): ********
This password can be guessed, it is based on your logon id.
Please enter a new password.
New password:
New password: **********
This password can be guessed, it is part of a known
computer word list. Please enter a new password.
New password:
```

Fuck. "What the fuck . . . ?"

```
New password.****
This password is too short, passwords must contain at least 12
characters. Please enter a new password.
```

"Sonofabitch! Fuck you!"

An annoyed cough floated over the cube wall. It was very quiet in the complex.

Stanley clenched his teeth.

```
New password:
New password:
New password (last prompt): **********
Password can be guessed, it does not contain enough
different characters. Please enter a new password.
New password:
```

Stanley looked from left to right around the cramped cube, contemplating the

destructive potential of various heavy objects therein.

```
New password:
```

He bit his tongue, imagining a scene of blissful violence.

```
New password (last prompt):
```

He could take that desk clock, brain the coughing bastard in the next cube, then

march down the hall and ram the bloody hunk of chrome and glass straight up the tokus

of that punk sysadmin who managed his account. He knew where he sat. He knew the

guy had been doing "security auditing" of their systems – including the password rules,

and a whole bunch of other worthless crap that no one—

```
Logout.......................
Console Login:
```

"You piece of fucking shit!"

"What is it with you, Luther? Can you let a guy get some work done?" His coughing neighbor had made so bold as to march into Stanley's cube, in a thin mist of self-righteous annoyance. Stanley's face – chin on his left shoulder, his eyes twisted into the corners of their sockets – turned a rich crimson hue, with knuckles accented in white. He paused six full heartbeats, smiled sheepishly, and said, "Sorry, Bob. Computer's gettin' under my collar again."

Bob served up an indulgent grin. "That's okay, Stan. Darned thing gets to me, too." He put his elbow on the cube wall. "Nice to see you in the office."

"Yeah. I've been in the field, one thing after another."

"Anything interesting?"

"Oh, no." Stanley's teeth had already begun bulling in on his grin. "Gotta get this thing going. Got an assignment. You know."

"Okay." Bob nodded. "Take it easy!"

```
Console Login: SLuther
Employee ID: SDL4261cmwalpha1
Password: *************
Password has  aged. Please enter a new password:
Old password: *************
New password: ****************************
This password is too long, passwords must contain no more
than 14 characters. Please enter a new password.
```

What? Between twelve and fourteen characters? Twelve, thirteen, or fourteen

characters?!

Contract work.

```
New password: **************
Password must contain at least three non-alphanumeric
characters (no letters or numbers--use special characters,
such as !,@, or #). Please enter new password.
```

Contract work. Contract work.

```
New password: *************
This password can be guessed, a reversed part of it is part
of a known computer word list. Please enter a new password.
```

Contract work. Contract work. Contract work. Contract work.

"Hey." Bob again. Stanley was beyond caring. "You know, there's a password

generator program." At Bob's direction, Stanley ran it. It produced "ABlgr@@xmy!!wk",

which he promptly scribbled on a 1-inch Post-It note and stuck to the front of his

monitor. Then he read his assignment.