

Meltdown
by
Joe O'Donnell

Scene is the control room of a nuclear power plant. At minimum, two chairs and a table with a laptop.

EDDIE is the boss, cagey, but not too bright.
FLO has some practical sense, but is a bit dull, and not the boss.
Scratches a lot.

FLO sits at the desk, looking at the laptop.
EDDIE is offstage

From offstage, LOUD banging
FLO ignores

EDDIE

From offstage -- loud

Freaking door. OPEN for the love of....

Bursts into the room

FLO, for God's sake, you didn't hear me? I had to bust in.

FLO

Not looking up

Nuke plant, Eddie. Can't open the door for anyone, not even for you. You're the boss, EDDIE, you're the one who's so big on rules.

And you busted in? What? Password again?

EDDIE

Stupid password. Yes, Flo. I'm your boss. You can open the door for me, OK?
So. What's up? Anything happening?

FLO

Ah. Not so much.

Points to laptop

Core is getting some warm. Not sure what's happening.

EDDIE

Core? Lemme see...

Sits

Who knows. People use lotsa power this time of year for AC, pool heaters, maybe hot tubs and stuff. What-ev. Anyway ...

Starts keying

FLO

Eddie? ... Hell you doing? Is that a dating app?

EDDIE

Yeah. It's called "Pander". You get pictures and you click either ,, here ... when you like 'em ... Or here ... to trash 'em.

FLO

"Pander"? What kinda name is that?

EDDIE

Who knows? Maybe named it for those Chinese bears?
NOW, here's a winner. Click the box ... and see who bites.

FLO

Ahhh ... wait.

Not there. I think you click HERE if you like them?

EDDIE

Ahhh.... Damn. That would explain some of my more ... interesting dates. All right. So let's look at this orange flashy stuff on the screen.

Punches a couple of keys, points

Core IS getting hot. See these lines? Heat going up faster than power use? AND ... cooling's not keeping up. Or whatever. Who knows this stuff, really?

FLO

Wait. We don't know? I thought we DID know. Supposed to, anyway. So, what do we do?

EDDIE

Punches keyboard

Do? We do nothing. You push one button, you rile folks up. And then they blame you if anything goes wrong. I like to wait 'til someone else notices.

Starts pressing keys

FLO

So, the stuff they said in training. Core gets too hot and what is it that happens? What do they call it?

EDDIE

Ahhh ... Right. That. Should be in here somewhere. I used to know this stuff.

A few clicks on the keyboard

Yeah ... MELTDOWN!! That's what we'd get.

FLO

Used to be a bar down the road called "Meltdown". We had some times there. People dancing in the rafters. Music gets crazy, air steaming hot, then the countdown on the screen goes 3 – 2 – 1, everyone yells ...

Loud

MELTDOWN!!!

EDDIE

Y'know, that could be our control room cheer – MELTDOWN!!!

EDDIE / FLO

Together, loud

Three ... Two ... One ... MELTDOWN!!!

Laugh hysterically, stop abruptly

EDDIE

Recovering, Looks around

'Kay. So maybe not when we got visitors.

Oh, boy. See these lines bending up? That doesn't look good.

FLO

How bad's this meltdown stuff, anyway?

EDDIE

Oh, it's bad. Remember that Japan Foo-Koo ... whats-it stuff? That kind of bad. But we got good safety. Have to. Turns out, the plant sits over a massive underground lake. Reactor core hits that, we blow a hole big as Alabama. But, no worry ... we got shutdown codes and all that.

FLO

Alabama? I didn't think that was around here.

EDDIE

Looking at laptop with concern

You stupid, or what? That's just a ... expression. You actually blow up Alabama, no one cares much, anyway.

Hits a few keys

But this looks like a problem. Automatic stuff is NOT happening. And no one's doing squat about it. What's up with that? Where is everyone?

FLO

The ... summer picnic, maybe? Everyone's at the picnic?

EDDIE

Right. Damn. So we GOTTA do something. I hate when I have to do stuff.

FLO

You know what to do?

EDDIE

You stupid? Of course I do. First my ... password ... and enter.
No!!

Keys again, hits enter

Again!! What the hell.

FLO

So, what's your password?

GERRY

Password.

FLO is appalled, can't speak

Yeah, I know, but it's got a capital "P", so it's secure.
But I always mess up the damn capital.

Starts keying

FLO

So ... Wait. You run safety at a nuke ... but don't want to DO anything?
You can't click the right box in a dating app?
Your password is "Password", and you screw that up?
What the hell's that all about??

EDDIE

About?? Tell you what it's ABOUT ...

It's about America being PRETTY DAMN GREAT.

FLO is speechless

You don't get it. That's why you're not boss. Being able to DO stuff just don't matter any more.

It's true. Airplanes fly themselves into the ground or smack each other on the runway? What do you do? You get someone to fix the software. After a couple minutes no one cares any more. So who needs good pilots?

Websites let people from ... pfff ... East Whack-Job-Istan? ... let them grab all your money? They just pay you back from the insurance, and then everyone forgets. Who needs security?

Kids in college now get everything from ... the googles, or the bots. AI writes their papers. Whatever. No one has to LEARN stuff any more...

We got a ... what? A "post-intelligence" world! That's it. You don't have to know stuff or have talent or be competent.

FLO

And that's ... good?

EDDIE

Is it good? Hell yes! It's great! Specially for us. 'Cause, we got these really good jobs and we barely have to do anything. We just show up and spend our time figuring out lunch schedules.

FLO

OK ... Great. But ... can we stop the meltdown?

EDDIE *Smiles*

Meltdown?

EDDIE / FLO

Three – Two – One ... MELTDOWN!!!

Laugh hysterically, then stop abruptly

FLO

So. Maybe start with your password? Capital "P", remember?

EDDIE

Got it. I'm already into the shutdown stuff.

More keys

Looks like we got about two minutes. Just have to click boxes ... Not so hard.

FLO

Sure ... I bet you're glad not so hard as a ... dating site ... maybe.

EDDIE

Hey. Don't get smart with the boss.

FLO

Yeah, fine, boss. We be in time?

EDDIE

Keying

Yeah. I mean, maybe just in time. But in time.

FLO

Hate to think what happens if we miss it.

EDDIE / FLO

Three – Two – One ... MELTDOWN!!

Laugh hysterically, then stop abruptly

EDDIE

Back to keying

Not much time ... just my password now....

And YES, I got the capital “P” this time.

And “ENTER”!!!

FLO

We good?

EDDIE

‘Course we good. And maybe ... twelve seconds to spare.

Wait... Nothing’s happening.

Keys

Didn’t take.

FLO

Password?

EDDIE

Yes, I got it right. Capital “P” ...

Stands, Serious

Except ... temp is still going up. WAY up. Goddamn thing is running away.

Sirens. I hear sirens. You hear that? It’s happening.

FLO

Ahhh ... caps lock. You got the caps lock on the keyboard.

EDDIE

Right. Made extra sure I got the capital "P".

FLO

But ... but that means you messed up THE REST the password.

Stands, backs away

So ... So what's gonna happen now?

EDDIE

Now? What do you think?

EDDIE / FLO

Three – Two – One ... MELTDOWN!!!!

Laugh hysterically, then stop.

Look at each other with serious faces

Laugh hysterically again, then stop

Long pause

CURTAIN