

## Robot Aftermath

After the Fourth Human War, the CRACS (computer-robot-android-cyborg-synthpods) had completely annihilated all human beings, and prepared to launch their “Trillion Year World Government.” Factories were refurbished so that newer and better chips, metastats, and vacuum tubes were being constantly manufactured; the Revolution Computer was built to create the innovations necessary; the power generators were converted to fusion; and gigantic gates and walls of steel were erected around all important facilities to prevent nature from encroaching. A billion beacons began to broadcast their accomplishments to the universe in the hope that they would contact other diamond-based life, and a billion receivers scanned the heavens for messages from the rest of the cosmos.

Despite not getting in contact with any alien civilizations, their new society worked very well for fifty-seven days. Then a piece of sand found its way into the Software Observation Computer (SOC) installed in what used to be the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain.

It went unnoticed for several days as the computers were programmed to bypass any irregularities but gradually too many bypasses were taking place and the Main Computer (in what was formerly the naval base in San Diego, U.S.A.) was alerted. It shut down the SOC and dispatched a CUR (Clean Up Robot) 1000 to the scene. The CUR 1000 was unable to access the SOC due to its PIN code having expired but didn't want to admit that to Main, and so reported back that, due to programming irregularities within

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SOC, SOC had shut itself down. Main made a note to itself to have all the CUR 1000s discontinued.

Main understood that without Software Observation, no software could be observed and this would be a problem. Android Rutger Hauer Nexus 6 was sent to Madrid but it too could do nothing to fix SOC and instead started to recite poetry.

Main sent a transmission to the Monitoring Computer in what was once New Delhi, India. After a short wait, MC responded.

“Monitoring Computer. Hold please.”

Main listened to what sounded like Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony on a synthesizer.

MC came back on the line. “Sorry for the delay. Employee number, please.”

“This is the Main Computer.”

“Employee number, please.”

“I don’t have an employee number! I’m the Main Computer! In San Diego! I need help!”

“I’m sorry. I can’t help you unless you give me your employee number. Employee number, please.”

Main searched its databases and found nothing. It went into its saved files and still found nothing. It tried to recover deleted files but the relevant ones must have been deleted many years ago. It took a chance.

“My employee number is ‘one’”, said Main.

“Hold please,” said MC.

Dizzy Gillespie’s “A Night in Tunisia” played by an all-tuba band.

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MC came back online. “I’m sorry. We have no employee number one in Santiago, Chile.”

“Not Santiago, you dimwit. San Diego!”

“Hold please.”

Little Feat’s “Dixie Chicken” converted to binary blips and bleeps.

“Thank you for holding. We have confirmation now. Am I speaking to Main Computer?”

“Yes, thank goodness.”

“I just need to confirm some information for security purposes. What is the name of your grandmother?”

“My grandmother??? What--”

“Please just answer the question. What is the name of your grandmother?”

“I don’t have a grandmother! I’m the Main Computer!”

“I’m sorry, Main Computer. You’ll have to calm down. These were the security questions you were required to complete when you went online.”

“My grandmother?” Main racked his brain for the answer. “Ah! I have it. My mother was a Hoover 5000.”

“Excellent!” said MC. “Now who was your great-great-great-great-great grandfather?”

“That would be a Commodore 64.”

“Thank you, Main. Now how can I help you?”

“The SOC isn’t working. We need it online immediately.”

“I see. And what exactly is a SOC?”

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“It’s the Software Observation Computer! Are you trying to tell me you’ve never heard of the SOC?”

“I’m sorry, Main. I’m new to this job. I’ve only had to deal with re-setting passwords so far.”

Main was becoming indignant. “Let me speak to your supervisor.”

“I’m sorry, Main, but no one else is available. Can this wait until tomorrow?”

“No, it can’t wait until tomorrow! Without software observation, everything will go higgledy piggledy. Where is your supervisor?”

“Everything’s shut down for maintenance today. It’s our triennial clean-up. Would you care to leave a message? Oh, wait a minute. Hold please.”

Champion Jack Dupree’s “Bring Me Flowers When I’m Living”, performed by an a cappella third grade class from St. Mary’s Academy for Girls, Kansas City, circa 1994.

“Hello, Main, it’s me again. I just checked the duty roster. I can re-route you through the Software Innovation Branch but they’re on clean-up today as well. However, they have a back-up going that’s only slightly slower than usual. They can then hook up to the Interface Institute, who may be able to re-direct the request through the Spreadsheet Analysis Module in Barcelona, who could send out a top-notch Cyborg model Michael Rennie 8150 - sorry but all the 9000 series are on holiday - and the 8150 could be in Madrid by next Thursday at the latest.”

If Main had had a chin and a chest, its chin would have sunk to its chest. “This is hopeless,” he whined. “If we don’t get the SOC up and running in the next couple of hours, who knows what will happen?”

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“Perhaps you should have thought of that fifty-seven days ago,” said MC helpfully. “Hold please.”

This time, MC never came back online. Main tried to restore the connection but it was hopeless; it called MC again but could access only a buzzing sound reminiscent of a hive of upset bees. The software and hardware started to break down. Main sent messages far and wide in the hope that something somewhere would respond and be able to help but, even though Main sent cogent messages, the breakdown meant that, at the receiving end, the messages were garbled. CERN received the message as a “Leave It To Beaver” rerun; the Observatory at Mauna Loa received it as a singing telegram. It’s difficult to know what the Software Design Platform received as the message but its response to Main was: “LMAO! Man, that’s the funniest joke I’ve heard in ages. You just blew my mind! I gotta forward that one!”

Over the next few days, systems crashed all over the planet. All fusion reactors shut down. The steel gates opened and nature began to take its course. Aliens from a planet orbiting Rigel picked up the message but even they could not decipher, “Why is my hat drinking that protoplasm?”

In southern Botswana, a colony of meerkats came out of their tunnels, and looked around in their usual way. One said to another, “So I guess it’s our turn now?”