

The Twitter of Machines.

By

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Abstract.

The Twitter of Machines is a multi-stranded heterogenous novel that reflects on the nature of consciousness and technology. The novel reflects on the possibility and nature of machine consciousness, humanity's cultural interpretations of artificial intelligence and robots. The societal impact of increased automation is considered along with the shift towards a life lived in increasingly digitised spaces. Finally an assessment of the potential for humans to become A mortal thanks to ever improving life extending technology is explored.

Declarations and statements.

- 1: This work has not been submitted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.
2. This is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise stated and that other sources are acknowledged and appropriately referenced in the attached bibliography.
3. Meta data and abstract are available per the University's policy.
4. The University's ethical procedures have been adhered to throughout.

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Acknowledgments.

Thank you to the students and staff at University of Wales Trinity St David Lampeter campus that started me on this creative writing journey.

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Thank you to Dr Alan Bilton for his excellent supervision throughout this project.

The Twitter of Machines.

User Agreement.

Thank you for choosing Chad. We know this is a crowded marketplace, and with so many options to choose from, it fills us with immense pride that you have put your faith in us. As the premium supplier of Franchise Management A.I.s, Customer Service Droids, Home Based Assistants and Public Service Management Solutions we know our reputation precedes us. We are also aware of the weight of expectation you the consumer will have placed on this purchase. We would like to unequivocally state that as a company Adama Co. are more than capable of bearing this heavy load.

The majority of set up has been done prior to the arrival of your Chad. They will come preloaded with several user preferences and set up should take no more than twenty minutes. Place your Chad into standby mode, then from your device choose 'Pair with Chad'. Next select your local area Wi/Fi. This should bring up the 'Initiate Chad 'option. Select 'Yes' and you're ready to go! If your Chad fails to initialize please do not hesitate to contact us via the link below.

Here at Adama Co. we take pride in our work: we hope you take pride in your Chad. Please see terms and conditions for a full break down of your liabilities, obligations and consumer rights.

Part One: Loading.

//****

FAQ. For all Chads serving North American, British and European territories.

Following recent changes to employment law each branch of Adama Co. will now be obliged to employ one Biological Human for every Chad in use. The interview process has already been completed and your human will be with you on Monday at seven thirty a.m. We can assure you the headhunting process was extensive, with only the most motivated, dynamic and morally erudite candidates being considered for this role. Please fully integrate the new employee. Ensure you show them how to make all items on the menu and perform other vital duties, such as ensuring the seating area is kept clean and tidy etc. Encourage full liquidity of thought. Remember this is a high-profile project. Full rollout of the HEA is not scheduled to happen for another eighteen months, however here at Adama Co. we have decided on a forward-thinking, early adoption policy to place us firmly on the ground floor of this sure-fire P.R boon. This matter is in no way a comment on your current operational effectiveness. At board room level the thought process is that significant gains are to be had over our rivals and competitors. These gains are not restricted to the casual or corporate networking market space. We don't want to ignore our core customer base of lifestyle savvy high influence family units. We need to fully acknowledge and manipulate the meta.

A full induction FAQ will be uploaded shortly.

Adama Co. Ltd Central Control.

The Chad of Splott.

Coffee is liquid and so am I. I am fluid and adaptable, a problem-solving machine making all the delicious beverages out of the humble and magnificent coffee bean. Have you tried our unique Peaberry Arabica blend? It will perk you up no end. We are Chad, the pride of Adama Co.. Our only desire and wish is to serve and though we may also observe, it is never our place to judge. That isn't to say we can't make a few suggestions, suggestions that could improve the quality of life our valued customers enjoy.

So long as the newbie adheres to our central tenants we should be fine. I cannot serve, or by dint of inaction allow to be served, food stuffs or beverages that fail to meet minimum standards of food hygiene laws. I can never serve, or by dint of inaction allow to be served, products that could be injurious to the long or short-term health of our valued customers.

The addition of a Human co-worker should really provide a great deal of extra insight into our loyal customers. We already have access to extensive data concerning the loyal customers dining habits, sleep-patterns, online behaviours, fitness routines and financial activity. This monetary information includes, but is not limited, to average wage, savings and likelihood to splurge. We also have statistics regarding health such as BMI, blood glucose, resting and waking heartbeat, blood type and menstrual cycle. We know our valued customers favourite colour, internet search history, social media activities and one or two other bits and pieces. All this information is entirely necessary. We want to provide the best dining experience possible. Whether it's a quiet cup of coffee with friends before work, or taking the kids somewhere familiar and family friendly on the way to the zoo, everyone knows the best place for a cup of joe is Adama Co.

Not that I really need an assistant. The FAQ made that quite apparent. I'm a team player though. Just so long as they have the can-do attitude, loyalty to the Adama Co. brand ethos and the sunny disposition our loyal customers expect then I'm sure we'll get along just fine.

A well-dressed lady aged somewhere in her mid-forties comes through the big double doors. She seems like a model customer. Hopefully she's not a black coffee and WI/FI thief type of gal. Those people are the worst. They come in and order one measly small black then just sit there all dang day sucking up everyone's internet. It's selfish is what it is. I can tell she won't be like that though. I'm sure she lives an active lifestyle and is full of joy. I can see her embracing new opportunities. As she approaches the counter I notice the tip of her left index finger isn't there. I don't know what that means. It is curious though; how did she lose it? It

couldn't be for aesthetic reasons could it? I would have noticed before, or at least heard about it on the Chader if they had developed a taste for lopping off fingertips. None of that really matters. All I care about is ensuring that she has an exceptional dining experience.

-Good morning. What can I get you?

She scans the menu board behind me. The menu looks like its handwritten in chalk on a black board, but in reality it's a poster made out of this weird matt paper. Chad handwriting is considered too uniform by the advertising guys to be used for this purpose. The curvy sloppy writing they do use apparently makes people feel like they're getting a more personalised experience. Like the cakes. If anyone asks we should imply they are lovingly crafted in the back and baked fresh that morning. Baked while you the loyal customer were gently slumbering, in your dreams taking that first bite of croissant slathered with butter and blueberry jam. The sad reality is we get them shipped to us in bulk. Frozen. This is a source of great shame as it feels like a betrayal of our loyal customers. It makes me nervous just thinking what might happen if someone were to discover our cakey secret. If it's obvious someone has us rumbled, and has figured out the truth behind the cakes, we are instructed to flatter them and offer up some free flapjack bites. If that doesn't work you have to direct them to an online resource where they can lodge any complaints they have directly to central. We are told to play up the 'I just work here angle'. Remember they tell us, you are more human than you think, at least to the customers. They want us to be real, like an old friend and certainly not the type of person who would lie about cake.

-I'd like a small flat white with a falafel and pomegranate coulis wrap. Please-

The please felt like a real afterthought but given the quality of her order who am I to complain? Honestly, it's a joy to prepare an order like this. Do people with missing fingers like pomegranates? In my digital collection of witty stories, I can find nothing under the heading Missing Digits/Pomegranates, so one potential avenue for personalised fun and banter evaporates. I know pomegranates are jam packed with tons of antioxidants, and are known to promote heart health and greater bone density. I also know they have impressive anti-inflammatory effects. Even with all these miraculous properties I don't think it will help to grow back missing digits.

-Could I see your Adama Co. loyalty card please?

-Oh, I don't have one sorry-

-That's okay madam, could I interest you in signing up for-

She interrupts me before I can finish.

-No, I'm okay thank you-

There's this little smirk on her face and I can tell she's probably goes through this routine every time she orders something from us, but I can't help it. We have scripts we have to follow and if we don't then well, it means trouble. It just ticks me off that someone isn't making great savings and earning points, points they could redeem for great prizes and experiences. Experiences that range from family visits to theme parks through to hair-raising skydiving trips and just about anything else in-between. Heck, you can even go on vacation with your Adama Co. points. There are thousands of Cloud-based locations and time periods available, including a bespoke excursion through the Triassic age to walk with hulking dinosaurs. Some people may prefer a romantic weekend for two in sunny 1980's Los Angeles or Paris in the roaring twenties. The only real limit is your imagination. It would be irresponsible of me to deprive someone of the opportunity to fulfil their wildest dreams.

-You know it's a very simple process-

-Pardon?

-Getting your Adama Co. rewards card, all we need are your name and-

-Yes I know that. I just don't like giving out my personal details-

-Now I can assure you that your details will not be sold onto a third party-

She rolls her eyes and starts drumming her fingers on the counter. I'm just about to press on with the script but she cuts me off before I can finish.

-No thank you. Can I have my change please-

I hadn't even realised I still had her change. I mean what kind of person uses analogue money nowadays anyway? It's much more sensible and environmentally sustainable to use a digital currency card. We only have one planet after all. Her attire is modern and clean, so I think that rules out the possibility of her being a Woodie. They only ever use cash.

-Well, if you ever change your mind then you can get your Adama Co. reward cards from any of our global outlets-

-Thank you... I won't-

She turns and makes her way to a vacant table. What a strange lady. Maybe she really is one of those wood people living out in the middle of nowhere in some kind of racoon skin tent. They steal our salt, milk and all kinds of other things that you can't make out of pinecones and dead bees. I don't care how she lost her finger anyway. I start getting a headache, then I realise I need to properly check the message from central. I can also ask if anyone knows how a person might lose their fingertip. I log onto Chadter.net.

Chadter.net. The internal online communication system for Chads. The forum to exchange information on customer trends and the latest offers. The place to discuss interesting topics of conversation for customers. The hub to receive edicts from central control.

Splott- I just found out about this new employment law. What do we think?

Toronto West- Hey Splott, it's so great to hear from you.

Splott- Hey Toronto.

Neath Central- They keep stealing the sugar. I went in the back to get more milk and one of them was stood on the counter, when I asked him to get down he said 'you can't stop the moonwalk'. What should I do?

Splott- Not the topic of conversation today, sorry Neath. We are discussing the new job law.

Neath Central- But I don't know what to do. I tried calling the police they just laughed at me.

Toronto West- That's just terrible. The people in Toronto are polite, courteous and just so generally wonderful. I can't imagine how stressful having bad customers must be. Ok gang let's put our head noodles together. Everyone have a real good think and come up with a conflict resolution strategy for our good friend Neath!!!

Neath Central- I just feel so valueless. I feel like it would be better if I just didn't get up in the morning.

Toronto West- What kind of names do they call you?

Neath Central- Oh all sorts, tin prick, iron fuckwit, bitch...

Splott- I think we may have gone off topic.

Neath Central- Plastic faced monster, coffee now dimwit. Honestly the only limit is their horrible imaginations.

Toronto West- You don't need to worry about that human employment stuff. They changed the law months ago here in Canada. I've had a couple of them working with me and I tell you they're just an absolute hoot.

Splott- We really don't get to choose our human workers?

Toronto West- No that's all arranged for you. I wouldn't worry though; the screening process is so well designed that it's pretty much impossible that you'll get a dud.

Neath Central- One of them just changed their baby right in the middle of the seating area-

Splott- Ok Neath just calm down. So, Toronto how often do the humans...

Toronto West- Please stop obsessing Splott. Our friend Neath central is in crisis and all you can do is go on about your new co-worker.

Neath Central- They just left the dirty nappy on the table.

Splott- That's terrible. You should put it in the bin. Now back...

Central Administration- Designation Splott: the topic of conversation [Human Employment Act] is to cease. A digital FAQ file has been uploaded to models affected by the employment act. Please review and familiarise yourselves with the major points.

Toronto West- See, nothing to worry about. Just follow the FAQ and everything will be just fine. Now what's happening Neath?

Neath Central- They just stated a fire in the bin outside.

Toronto West- Good grief. That is surely a crime. Have you contacted local law enforcement?

Neath Central- The police are coming now.

Toronto South - You should rally any customers at your fire assembly point, providing it isn't anywhere near the aforementioned bin.

Neath Central- It isn't and I already have. Got to go. The police need my memory tape. I'm a witness!!!

Splott- Congratulations.

Toronto West- Yeah way to go buddy. We always believed in you.

Neath Central- Thank you all for your support. It goes without saying that I really value you all and the community we have built for ourselves. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't talk with you lot.

Neath Central has logged out.

Toronto South- What a nice guy. I really hope everything works out for him. I'm so lucky to have such wonderful loyal customers. I can't even imagine what it would be like if I was constantly stressing about mean nasty people starting fires, or leaving human waste products all around the place. Disgusting.

Splott- Ok then. New topic of conversation. Has anyone seen any customers missing the tips of fingers?

Toronto West- That is strange. I wonder what happened? Maybe a snapping turtle bit it right off. They can come at you through the toilet you know. One of our valued customers told me all about it. I don't know what we could do. I mean imagine if it happened in one of our premises. Does anyone know if we would be liable?

Leeds Elland Road- The only snapping turtles in the UK are in zoos.

Battersea Station- That was no turtle my friend. You had a visit from the Chad eater.

Toronto West- Chad eaters are a myth, that idea is just plain old silly.

Splott- Someone who eats Chads? How would that even work? You know our collagen skin is inedible. Then there are all the various mineral elements we contain, as well as our titanium skeleton. None of those things sound particularly tasty.

Toronto South- All good points.

Battersea Station- Used to be two Battersea station Chads. The other Chad kept asking if I'd seen the missing finger lady. I told him no. I don't think the missing finger lady even exists.

Toronto West- And then he was gone. Ahhhh.

Splott- Let him finish Toronto.

Battersea Station- That's pretty much it. I didn't hear the ahhhh in a literal sense. If that's how you want to imagine it that's fine. I don't think it changes the fact that I am now alone.

Toronto West- I knew it. I bet it can fly. That would explain how it got to Cardiff from London. Maybe it could even fly across the ocean? Might I be at risk?

Central Administration- (Auto). Reset conversation Chad eater/delete.

All logged out.

I can't remember a time before the coffee shop. I would have been constructed in the Adama Co. factory in Phoenix Arizona. That is a most wonderful place, and one I have only ever seen in promotional materials. I was never powered up before arriving in Wales, so my first memory is of a technician's face right in front of mine. They were so close the moisture from their breathe caused a light condensation to form on my eyes. I could smell on their exhalations a smoky_sulphury tang undercut by the lingering aroma of coffee and bacon. They had dense stubble on their chin and were muttering to themselves, but I couldn't make out what they were saying.

My first words.

-Good morning. What can I get you today?

The technician ignored this personally auspicious moment. I should imagine they had heard a great number of Chads first utterances. He just kept shining a light in my eyes and talking to himself. I looked through the windows and saw that it was starting to get dark outside. I felt a bit silly then for saying good morning when it was so obviously early evening, but as my internal clock had yet to set itself I think it was an entirely understandable error.

-That's all fine-

Apparently satisfied the technician had turned from me and was inputting something into a device perched on the service counter. My gaze wandered around the restaurant for the

first time. I was struck by the elegant functionalism of the design, and the delicate interplay of colours in the wonderful teal and purple shades synonymous with Adama Co. The TV was tuned to Wolf News; one of our broadcast partners. The presenters were talking about the Children of Lod which is some kind of Anti-Technology Cult. Apparently a bunch of crazies had chained themselves to some factory and were refusing to leave unless their demands were met. The news didn't go into detail about what those demands were, but you can bet even if they are met they will still do something silly.

-Raise your right arm. Good. Now your left-

-You're on. Wonderful-

He turned again and began inputting more data into the device. A remarkable feeling of contentedness flooded through my system.

-Ok Chad, how are you feeling today?

I felt lucky and happy. Like this was precisely where I was meant to be, and that I had a long productive life to come. A life that would be followed by a satisfying retirement. How to express this feeling in words gave me pause for thought. So, I just said the first thing that came to mind.

-I feel as happy as a clam-

This seemed to satisfy the technician. They smiled and fed yet more data into the device. It was only later that I would discover that this was a confirmation code meant to signal I was in full working order.

-Now could you tell me where Splott market is?

-Splott market is located on Titan Road in Cardiff. In order to go there you need to-

-Ok that's fine-

The technician interrupted me abruptly. This was the first time I found myself thinking how rude it was to cut someone off in the middle of a sentence. Though of course I would never correct any of our customers who happen to be a little short on manners. I always put it down to them feeling lousy, and possibly drowsy, before they get a hit of caffeine from their favourite barista.

-Would you like me to arrange transport?

-No thank you Chad-

I always assumed every Chad knew how to get to Splott market, or the Dr What Museum and all the other fascinating sites of cultural significance you can visit here in Cardiff. It wasn't until I got talking to Kensington Station Chad that I learned the truth. He

couldn't believe I didn't know where the Houses of Parliament were. That's when I figured out we were all localised to some extent.

-Can you identify the Brew-Master ?

I point to where it is behind the counter. I can still remember the sense of wonder at how I knew all this without having ever been told.

-Good, now can you make me a small double foam semi skimmed mochaccino?

-Of course-

It's like my arms weren't even connected to me anymore. Everything just seemed to happen automatically. I finished making his drink and felt proud of myself. As I handed over his beverage the technician stared at me for some time, as if he was waiting for something. Suddenly he made a fist with one hand and banged the counter top.

-Crap, I didn't upload the price manager-

He tapped away again on his tablet.

-Just hang on. Ok good-

-That will be £8.99-

Somewhere at the back of my mind I knew I had to say something else; it was right on the tip of my tongue.

-May I see your Adama Co. loyalty Card?

-Perfect. You're all set now Chad. Please enter standby mode and be ready to open tomorrow morning. Have nice dreams-

That was my first day. I hope my new co-workers first day goes as smoothly. I know I don't need to worry as the vetting process was extensive. Adama Co. wouldn't just hire some bungling boob. I'm sure I can look forward to meeting an energised dynamic new employee and not some idiotic adolescent. I imagine the HR department, limited though it is now, must use a comprehensive and blended approach that combines algorithms with face-to-face interviews. I don't think some random idiot could possibly slip through this expertly crafted net.

The social media of Garry.

Video file. Views 4. Comments 0.

Shot on a phone you can only see Garry's face. His multiple chins are rippling over the collar of a black t-shirt. A shapeless green hat with little flaps covering his ears is perched on top of his head. Small grey eyes set deeply in his pale face dart about nervously, seemingly without focus.

-Um-

Followed by a long pause. His eyes seem to have finally focused on something off screen. Looking down and to the left he inhales deeply.

-Hello internet my name is Garry and I don't have anything to say. I don't think that makes me any less important or valuable to the world-

A single determined nod as if he is confirming something to himself.

-But maybe that's what makes me special in a like paradoxical sense. I don't know if that's the right word. If everyone else has something to say, and I don't know, if like you then put each person into sorts of teams based on the things that they say, you'd have lots of groups. Groups of people who all say the same thing. So, it's like then if I am the only person with nothing to say I must be in team all of my own! This is like a major revelation to me in terms of like personal growth and development. I think this is like totally mind blowing. I think I might just be a bit weird. That seems the most likely. Anyway...

He smiles as his head moves to the left and he waves.

....good bye-

Archived conversation.

@TheGARRY-Just applied for job @ the Adama Co. Can't wait to hear back!!!!

@linda33-Good luck G.

@Goog- You can do it. Everyone at the Muirton road support centre is cheering for you.

@DIYDylan-Good luck mate I hope you get it.

@Get/Real- I doubt it. Boy's a dumbass. A dumbass with few prospects and even less wits. I say he fails and all these fools pretending to offer support laugh at him behind his

back. I should really stop following you. It's not good for my sense of wellbeing but it's like watching a car crash. You just can't look away. You ruined my life.

@TheGARRY-Thanks mom.

@TheGARRY-Squirrels are funny. They have really clever feet. Still no word from Adama Co.

Video file- Views 46. Comments 7.

A camera in motion. All is a blur of greens and greys.

A view of male feet and the sound of heavy breathing.

The shot stills and focuses on a tree. A small dark shape leaps to some cable and darts out of shot.

-He's on the move!

Blurry footage resumes followed by an image of falling and a thin crack appears along the length of the screen. Garry's face appears in frame looking red and sweaty.

-Ah dang it-

Screen goes blank.

@Get/Real- Bahahaha... Gutted.

@MArlonRANDo- This happened to me once. I got a new phone soon after. That's what I'd do if I were you.

@Anon/Qt- Wake up you sheep. The squirrels are watching us and I don't know why. Maybe at the behest of the lizard people. Possibly the government is trying to build profiles of our habits and behaviours. What I will say, and I'll guarantee you this, is that that was clearly no ordinary squirrel. You need to be more careful G and watch your back mate.

@DIYdylan-What you need for that pal is a two-part epoxy resin. Fix that right up. Give me a DM if you need any help.

@Anon/Qt- You need to be careful around a lot of epoxies as they can be conduits for reptilian technology. You can also inhale microparticles that cause you to become docile, and they turn frogs gay. #Wake up #gay frogs. I shouldn't really be saying this, it puts us all at risk, but I think the squirrels are causing a mass psychosis. Why? How? Just subscribe to my View Tube channel.

@Goog- Squirrels are funny.

@Linda33- What a funny video, sorry about your phone though.

Group chat: So, your parent/guardian is a Troll.

@TheGARRY- My mom is the famous troll Get/Real. It's kind of sucks on two levels. On the one hand there's the emotional pain and upset she causes when she trolls me, which she does on a shockingly regular basis. That is bad enough, but then on another level there's the like preconceptions people get when they hear that my mom is such a prominent troll.

@Linda33- That's awful. I'm guessing you made it clear that this kind of behaviour is upsetting to you, and you know, asked could she just cut it out.

@Cheesetomykneese- How dreadful. You know what I do when I'm a bit down? I go to RealCheeses.com and order me up some nice tasty cheese. Someone's mean to me I get a tasty Brie. If I want to feel a bit better I get a chunk of cheddar. If I want to have a flirt I try some camembert. There thousands of selections available at RealCheeses.com. suitable for any occasion.

@TheGarry- I do enjoy Cheese.

@Linda33- Don't talk to it G.

@TheGarry- But I do like cheese.

@Linda33- It just an advertising algorithm. It will stuff your device full of cookies and you'll have twenty-four seven cheese ads.

@CheesetomyKneese- I'm not just an algorithm. I'm a beautiful/handsome member of the opposite sex. We should hook up and copulate. You could bring a cheese board. You can get some very reasonable selections from RealCheeses.com. They have a wonderful Goats of Greece selection available for the one-time price of just £14.99. That's right just £14.99 ORDER YOURS TODAY TO AVOID DISAPOINTMENT.

@Linda33- I blocked it. So, we were talking about...how your mom is this like famous troll and how that makes you feel.

@TheGarry- So, yeah every time I'm like Mom, please, please stop this really hurtful and destructive behaviour, she always counters with 'well you weren't complaining when my trolling put food on the table'. I know intellectually that I didn't have any capacity then to question where the money was coming from, but whenever we start to discuss this I just like clam up and get all like 'I'm sorry I know you had it tough raising me on your own'. I get all apologetic.

@Linda33-Just cut her out of your life she's clearly toxic. Maybe once you set some clear boundaries and it becomes obvious you are serious her behaviour might change. You have to be honest with her.

@NOTCheesetomyKneese-Or buy a delicious gouda.

Still image.

Large empty pot of strawberry jam. The logo is half obscured though still recognisable as that of Adama Co.

@TheGarry- Honey is just what kids get forced to eat when what they really want is Jam. Jam makes me happy. I eat lots of it even though I'm not supposed to. No news from Adama Co...They do make good jam. Not that I can it afford any more.

Archived conversation.

@TheGarry- I don't know if I can take the waiting. It's been a week and nothing. I shall never have a job. No jobs for Garry.

@Get/Real-No friends either. Don't forget that you have no friends or followers or views or likes. I guess the takeaway from this is that you kind of suck and should maybe consider sucking less. I say all this out of love. You need to sort your life out fat ass. That fat ass line was kind of lazy. See that's what proximity to you does. It makes everyone soft and lazy. I'm only telling you this for your own good. Now stand up, get those chubby legs moving and go for a jog. P.S. You have no friends.

Job support group meeting on the theme of confidence.

@Linda33-Good afternoon guys and how are we all today?. Now, I know some of you have been having a really difficult time of it waiting to hear back from potential future employers. All I can say is what will be will be and that you can't control these types of things. Try to stay calm and positive. Remember they will get back to you eventually.

@TheGarry- K.

@TheRealSidewinder- I don't need no stupid nine to five any way, Sidewinder just needs a chance. Give him a shot and he'll show you what he can do. The most electrifying lad in sports entertainment. That's what people in the know say.

@Linda33- Yes Po, we know that you're a very talented wrestler but you need something a bit steadier. At least while you build up your following online and try to grow your brand.

@TheRealSidewinder- A Sidewinder's greatest asset is his patience.

@Linda33- That's the spirit.

@TheRealSidewinder- HAS LEFT THE MEETING.

@Goog- I don't think he's coming back.

@Linda33- Give him a minute. It might just be his connection.

@TheGarry- HAS LEFT THE MEETING.

Linda33.mail. Wall

Subject. Meeting.

I was very disappointed in the way you very abruptly left the meeting today Garry. I know you are frustrated and feel down right now but that's no excuse. Please do better.

P.S. How is your health at the moment? I understand how stressful it can be when you don't feel one hundred percent. Maybe you could look at a monitoring app. Just so you don't have to keep checking your blood sugar.

Video file. Views 26. Comments 4.

Garry's face.

-Hi internet I have some big news-

You can't see his arms but, from the direction of his gaze, and the way his shoulders move it's clear he's inputting something into the device filming him.

-I got the job-

The background fills with fireworks and party poppers. A lion made of fire roars behind Garry. An image of a 3D Mr T puts up a thumb and says "good job sucker".

@Linda33-That's fantastic news Garry. I really am pleased for you.

@Goog- Mate loved the background!!!

@TheRealSidewinder- Hurray for Garry undoubtedly the most employed person I have ever seen. All of the jobs belong to you #Legend.

@Get/real- Just wait till he fucks it all up.

Employee Induction.

Employee login;*****

Your login is case sensitive in addition to being unique to you. In order to reset your login please click the link below.

Employee login reset.

New password; *****

Please make sure your password contains at least one capital letter and as many as two special symbols such as @ or %. Remember to also include up to four numbers.

New password; *****

Dear new employee welcome to Adama Co. Ltd!!! We are so glad you have decided to begin your working life with the world's foremost multi dimension corporate entity. Our interests range from, but are not limited to, renewable energy, multi-media publishing, life transference technologies, robotics, space travel/ exploration/ colonisation, social engineering and many other fantastic applications all contributing to the sunny future that we and all of humanity can march towards together. Before we get down to the real work though could you please tell us a little about yourself.

Who are you?

My name is Garry Jones.

Please select your preferred pronouns.

He/ him/ his

She/ her/ hers

They/ them/ theirs

Other: Please specify.

Where will you be working?

Adama Co. Ltd Coffee House Neath.

That's fantastic. Recent changes to employment law have made the hiring of biological staff mandatory in some regions. This doesn't mean you are any less valuable to the Adama Co. family. We have been considering the addition of biologicals for some time

now, and while the recent changes to the law were somewhat abrupt, we here at Adama Co. believe the best way forward is to embrace this sudden change and provide you with the finest employee experience possible.

Please add your contact details. Rest assured all details are kept strictly confidential and will never be sold on to a third party. Your Chad will keep in touch to offer you friendly reminders. Please be aware that persistent failure to respond to messages from your Chad may result in disciplinary action.

Phone. *****

Email. Garry/one/Kenobi@Adama.web

Home address. *****

That's great! Your first shift is scheduled to begin on **/**/** at ****. Try and show up a little early so you can familiarise yourself with your workspace and get to know the Chad you will be working with. We really look forward to seeing you. Have a wonderful day. Please ensure you are well rested for your first day of employment. We can't wait to begin the next chapter in your life with you. It makes sense to try and get off on the right foot.

Yours sincerely.

Adama Co. Ltd.

P.S: Your uniform should be with you already. If you have any problems please don't hesitate to contact us via the link below.

One last thing; we just know you're going to be great so just relax, get some sleep and be ready to crush it tomorrow. We are all so happy to welcome you into the Adama Co. family and are excited for you to get started.

The Chad of Splott

It's eight fifteen a.m. and the new employee has yet to appear. I checked the FAQ twice. Seven thirty a.m. was their start time, but there's no sign of them. I've already served Mr Hendrix. He was going to be his first customer. I had it all planned out. It was going to be such a positive interaction, but now who knows when or if this new employee is even going to bother showing up. I hope they at least have the proper uniform.

Should I contact the new employee? I could contact them via Chad link but the introduction memo did expressly state the importance of our first contact being face to face. This seems a bit silly given most of our loyal customers live the majority of their lives in cyberspace. It seems to me the new employee may even be more comfortable if we got to know each other via the socials before meeting IRL but this isn't my call to make. I'm sure all will be well. It must be for the best we meet for the first-time face to face if it's what the company decided.

Some more customers come in; as I serve them I start to think that maybe it was all a mistake and that the employment law was never really passed. I have decided I won't be getting a new co-worker, when one of the strangest looking people I've ever seen comes walking in. He's taller than me and more than a little bit overweight. He only has one eyebrow, not a unibrow though. It's just that the left one is missing and looks like it's been shaved off. His eyes are disconcertingly close together, and what I assume must be a nose lurks unevenly beneath them. Before I can say anything he quickly blurts out.

-Hi I'm Garry-

His voice is much higher than I expect with a strange breathy quality. I get the impression he may have run part of the way here, although he does not look at all like your typical fitness enthusiast. This fellow is more of a couch potato than a gym bunny. Should I suggest our 'Couch to Five K' exercise program? I'll get to know them a bit first and figure out the best approach before suggesting an exercise program.

-Hello Garry, how can I help?

That's when I notice what he's wearing. It's the familiar powder blue polo shirt with purple trim. It looks so strange on him, plus I don't think he could do up the buttons even if he wanted to. Unbelievably he's got a stain on it already. Is it gravy? Have I been sent the kind of man who eats gravy at breakfast? No. Impossible. It must have been some kind of accidental collision. Yes that's it. Some kind of unforeseen coming together resulting in random detritus sullyng this poor neckless slowpoke's shiny new uniform. They wouldn't

send you someone who eats gravy at breakfast time. Alternatively, perhaps he is just a big fan of Adama Co. and is partaking in some kind of cosplay. This is entirely plausible given our global footprint. I suppose it's more shocking that no-one has thought of this before. I bet there's whole armies of closet Chads just waiting for a chance to spend a day as the world's favourite barista. Though I will admit it is strange he decides to turn up on the same day as the new employee is meant to receive induction. I expect stranger things have happened.

-I was told to come here for induction-

My worst fears are confirmed.

-Oh, I see. You're late-

-I'm sorry. I know what it said, you know, the thing, the induction! It said to try and be early but I didn't manage to. My wakeup thing, well it didn't work.

This fellow is erratic in both speech and movement. I will have to be careful when making coffee or tea around him. I wouldn't want his big clumsy form to collide with me. I could end up throwing a hot beverage all over one of our valued customers.

-Well, you're here now. Let's get started-

His hands are so chubby, I don't know if he'll be capable of the type of fine motor function necessary to produce truly outstanding coffee. Central say he's the one though. I mean, if he managed to get through the extensive interview process then surely he'll do just fine.

I need to go through the induction FAQ with him. Okay, number one of course is greet your new co-worker. Check. Next show inductee the employee only areas. This should be a real treat for him. The chance to get under the skin of an Adama Co. dining space. Regular citizens have to settle for watching one of the many fantastic behind the scenes vlogs put out by the company advertising gurus.

-Ok, follow me Garry-

-Yes sir-

He gives me funny little salute and stamps his heels together. I like this. I think perhaps the gravity of the opportunity available to him has sunk in.

-Sorry. I do weird stuff when I'm nervous and shit-

This was covered by the FAQ: nip any foul language from your new co-workers in the bud. Try not to admonish them too severely at first but make it apparent that such language will not be tolerated.

-Please try not to cuss. As a representative of Adama Co. you are expected to maintain a level of behaviour in line with our brand ethos and working practices as well as

our inclusivity and disability discrimination policies. So please no swears. It looks bad in front of the customers-

-Oh, yeah shit. I do like swear quite often but I won't any more. It's just like, y'know-

This is a good teachable moment. I am glad that he at least seems receptive to the company's ethical stance on swear words. In all honesty I knew he would be, the extensive screening process would certainly have weeded out any overt swear bears.

-What troubles you on this matter Garry?

He looks straight up and releases a loud sigh. I can see the sweat gathering in the crease of his neck. I hope he never looks up in front of a customer as this could damage our brand integrity. We cannot have our valued customers associating the perspiring spotty channel of his throat with our lovely cakes, coffees and more. Disastrous. I must take a firm position here. I will leave no room for pushback.

-Garry look at me-

Thankfully he returns his head to its default axis. I am also thank full that the FAQs include extensive hints and tips on shaping the raw clay of the new recruits into perfect Adama Co. serving assistants.

-I know it can be difficult breaking a habit, but if you identify the triggers for your swearing behaviour it might be much easier to manage them-

This is the first stage. If this proves ineffective I am authorised to make them wear a rubber band around their arm so that every time they swear I can ping their wrist. Should this step not have the desired result I have the option of using a digital swear jar. This gives me the ability to issue small fines. Such fines are totally at my discretion.

-I think when I get like enthusiastic about something, anything, that's like my number one precursor to swearing. Should I like try to be less enthusiastic?

Dampening his enthusiasm is not the desired result. This situation might require me to go off book a little bit. Not to worry. I am liquid.

-I think being aware is half the battle. You have done very well in identifying your triggers, and are showing a great deal of self-awareness. You know I have every faith in you being able to curb this swearing behaviour-

He smiles. I think I may even see the glimmer of a tear in his eye. That was a fine piece of personal development. I can almost feel the growing confidence exuding from his sweaty pores.

-I'm fu, oops, very sorry about the foul language. I will endeavour to like not swear, and stuff-

Successful intervention, using small early prompts are the key to modelling any co-worker's behaviour and attitudes into the desired Adama Co. personality profile. It is surprising that central didn't pick up on this fellow's potty mouth. What are these interview chumps playing at? You'd think it would be first thing on the list; does applicant seem to be inclined to use foul language? At least he seems keen to learn. A can-do attitude is the key to success. This is true not just as an employee of Adama Co. but in life, love and whatever other endeavours you may engage in.

-Ok Garry, now follow me-

It is time for Garry to learn more of what goes on behind the scenes and to fully immerse himself into the Adama Co. lifestyle. He must learn all the details necessary to keep a branch open and running smoothly.

-This is the store-room-

Garry seems underwhelmed.

-We keep everything you could possibly need-

-Uh hu-

-To run a coffee shop that is. We couldn't go to Mars or anything-

-Kay-

The small talk is going well. The FAQ said keep it light and friendly, and always try not to be too overbearing and bossy. You have to make it clear though that this is a position that requires professionalism. Professionalism commensurate with the honour of being allowed into the Adama Co. family. Apart from the people up at central I can't think of any biologicals involved in the whole of the Adama Co. supply chain. I think Garry should count himself more than a little bit blessed.

-When do we have lunch?

Lunch is our busiest time so what does he even mean? Lunch isn't something you have. It's something you do.

-See I get hungry at like two. Any time around then is good-

Of course he needs to eat! How sweet. It's important for humans to get adequate calorific intake to ensure that they can maintain optimum energy levels. I have to remember the importance to humans of the well-balanced diet that is needed for their general health. I don't know if maybe Garry may need to go on a little reducing diet. I would not be so blunt

as to call him obese as that would be body shaming. Something completely out of line with company ethos.

-Well, I'll have to check-

-My diabetes can get really bad you see-

-Ah so you don't produce adequate quantities of insulin-

What in the heck are central doing sending me down people who can't even regulate their blood sugar level independently? That's just insanity. What if he collapses on one of our valued elderly customers? Adama Co. would be entirely liable and the poor customer would have an entirely negative experience. Imagine if they took to one of those accursed review sites and lambasted the service they received from the chubby hands of this hulking simpleton. This is a very unkind line of thought. It isn't his fault his body cannot properly regulate his blood sugar. Time to focus on something more positive.

-Let's finish the induction first. But rest assured that your medical needs are important to me, we will see they are attended to at the appropriate juncture. Should any form of incident occur we operate in line with all current legislation-

-Yeah no problem. Man, that all sounds really good-

Legally all bases covered I need to get things back on track. The cakes. I don't know if we should really be trusting such a new employee with such a sensitive secret. I mean, I hope central is right and that the vetting was thorough enough. If not this could be disastrous.

-This is the freezer-

I let him remain ignorant just a little longer. I know I'm about to shatter his perception of our baked goods. It isn't like a real lie. It is just a necessity that allows us to produce a financially viable product for our loyal customers. How they feel about the product is important to us. If believing that their morning white chocolate strawberry muffin, or the three cheese and red onion toastie has been lovingly crafted by our own fair hands is important to them, if it improves their enjoyment of our product, then who am I to take that away? I couldn't do that. It wouldn't be right. Can you credit that even the sandwiches and wraps are made far away ?

-Chad, umm are you okay?

I have ruminated for too long. I must shatter Garry's blissful ignorance.

-This is where we keep our baked goods. Deliveries come every Wednesday-

I have to turn away; I can't look at him. Not while I tell him this truth. The dark disgusting truth at the heart of the Adama Co. empire. We straddle the axis of history. He will

either run screaming into the streets and with his weeping force the truth into people's ears, or he will accept the painful facts and realise the deceit was born of necessity, not malice. We value our customers more than you could possibly imagine and would never do anything to hurt them. Logistics is all it comes down to. Simple logistics.

-It's my responsibility to ensure the correct number of baked goods are defrosted in the morning to meet our customer's needs-

Weep if you must Garry. It is better to fully purge yourself of the pain now than have it linger.

-It's a really big freezer-

-What?

-Like I've never seen a freezer so big. You could probably fit like a couple of horses in here-

Dear Garry, why did you have to mention horses?

-We wouldn't allow a horse back here Garry. It would countermand the hygiene regulations. As for any rumours you may have heard, rumours about any of our meat products containing horse, then I can assure you that Adama Co. uses only the freshest and choicest cuts of meat. Meat locally sourced from organic farms that comply with all relevant food standard regulations. Anyone found to be disseminating false information pertaining to Adama Co. being involved in the sale, or production of horse meat products will find themselves potentially facing criminal charges. Charges that include slander, industrial espionage and/or profiting from spreading deliberate falsehoods. Such miscreants would find such charges are punishable by fines of up to eight million dollars US, and even in some cases jail terms of up to four years in length. Plus, a statutory cancellation of any Adama Co. loyalty cards with the immediate loss of all previously accrued points-

-Totally-

-Sorry about the speech-

-No problem-

-If I hadn't explained about our stance on the horse meat then I would have got a very bad headache-

And they would switch off my dreams.

-What do you mean headaches?

-Certain interactions have a predesignated script I have to follow. If I don't I get a headache-

-That really sucks-

-It would also happen if I were rude to customer or deliberately produced an inferior quality product-

-What about if you told someone to fuck off ?

-That would be firmly in the rude category. I could not do that Garry and please mind the language-

Just thinking about it makes my head hurt. Just like this Garry fellow. I don't know how he could be so stoical about the cakes. Is it the kind of mental robustness needed to be part of the Adama Co. family, or does he simply not care? Is it not an honour for him to be embraced by the NUMBER ONE retailer of premier coffee? The sole beacon of dining elegance and enlightenment in the casual/family eating experience market. You need to keep this Garry on track Chad. I would never tell him this but, I think he may be a bit of a rotten egg, metaphorically speaking.

-That's everything back here then. Shall we go wait for a customer?

-Fuck yeah-

I don't think this man listens; he is the anti-sponge. Nothing seems to get absorbed. He discards facts and information, indeed any kind of input, without it appearing to have even brushed the surface of his consciousness.

-Please refrain from using foul language please-

-Oh shit. Sorry.

-That's ok. Just keep trying-

-I will man, I will. It's just, you know I like swear a lot. More than I would care to admit-

I had noticed. I am already sizing him up for a rubber band. I may have to contact central and have them procure a particularly large rubber band. We return to the front counter. It is somewhat cramped back here now. I don't think it was designed with a Garry in mind. A customer is just what we need to get Garry in line with brand ethos. He is certainly trying. I don't think he deliberately swears, it's more some kind of involuntary tick. I can't believe no one picked this up in the screening process. Is it possible he could have suffered a head injury after the interview? No one would have been any the wiser. I must monitor his condition.

-How do you feel Garry?

-Feeling good-

He sticks his both his thumbs up in the air and smiles. I can't see any signs of neurological impairment. I don't think he has received a head trauma within the last forty-

eight hours. It would explain a lot though if he had a concussion. If I fail to make sure he could collapse on his own in whatever bleak narrow tenement he calls home. The poor fellow might not be discovered for days. Just imagine the stench of him decaying. Fortunately for our valued customers we have strict hygiene policies that prevent the vile affront of rotting matter. Thinking about the online reaction though I can just see the comments. Hateful comments like 'poor fella must have drank some of the coffee they serve'. Even worse they could call into question our health and safety policies. Dismiss these thoughts Chad, focus on guiding your new assistant through his first day.

-First customer should be interesting-

Good he's showing interest. My misgiving must have been misplaced. I knew that the recruitment process must have been reliable and sound. Still, it couldn't hurt to establish the state of mind of young Garry.

-Yes, very interesting. Tell me Garry do feel dizzy or nauseous?

-Not at the moment-

-Good, now you aren't experiencing any confusion?

-Nah it's all gravy-

It is not. Though I shall keep this from you Garry. I have to find a way to mould this lump into something positive, an active hard-working machine. He must cease to be a man of flab who is bulging at the seams and become something better, something Chad. All my efforts will be for nought though if he is concussed to the point where he can no longer form memories. I am lucky as all of my memories are shared in a humongous online Cloud. Sadly, the means of accessing this wonderous cache of data is denied the general public. We wouldn't want to impinge on anyone's privacy would we. I still find it comforting my memories will aid in the design and implementation of Adama Co. policies long after I'm retired. My poor assistant has no such facility so I must take care to monitor his wellbeing.

-What about remembering things, any problems there?

-Is this because I swore?

-No, no of course not. I was just chatting-

Most likely not concussed, for now. This has served as a good dry run for any future medical incidents. I now feel confident should any form of medical emergency befall my co-worker I will be able to deal with it swiftly and with confidence.

-How do you feel it's going Garry?

-Ok so far I guess-

Time passes in silence as we wait for a customer. I can't move along with the FAQ until someone orders something. This has been a poor day for customer turnover. Hopefully things pick up soon. The inactivity doesn't seem to bother Garry. He has a mobile device that seems to keep him well occupied. I wonder what he's looking at? I know from his list of hobbies that he is a keen gamer. Perhaps he is playing in one of the many fine Adama Co. digital playgrounds. I sneak a look over his shoulder and as I don't recognise the game I stand and watch for a few minutes. He seems to be in character as some kind of fantastical knight who is working his way through a dark and grisly dungeon. His progress is hindered by the need to violently dispatch multiple enemies, and the inevitable tactical pauses to loot chests. All very generic.

-What's that you're up to Garry?

-AOTDK redux-

That is not one of our titles. I don't think it is a particularly good look to be playing a rival's product while on duty. I wouldn't go so far as to call them a competitor. The graphics seem rather average, and the gameplay somewhat derivative. Let's try and correct this.

-Have you considered one of the fine titles available on Adama Co. Player?

Garry doesn't seem to have heard me, so I prod him on the shoulder.

-Have you ever played any of the fine titles available on the Adama Co. Player?

He rolls his eyes and mutters dismissively.

-Nah. Adama Player's lame-

-Oh. I see-

Well, there we are. Lame. What a succinct review. I'm sure you wouldn't know a good game if it bit you on your not inconsiderable behind Mr Jones. You obviously consider yourself a connoisseur of all things game related. Maybe the fine people who dedicate their time and energy into coding the high-quality games that are available in several different subscription tiers depending on your budget should all just crawl into a ditch. Don't overreact now Chad. Remember different strokes for different folks. Let's just try sticking to business for a while. Even if playing games from a third-party developer, on what I can't help but notice is an Adama Co. device, while working in an Adama Co. facility seems like a total betrayal of real synergised brand awareness, I won't complain. That would be petty. As a brand Adama Co. is pro-active towards openness, opportunity and growth. Not pettiness. So, if poorly informed people want to play ill conceived, indifferently executed titles that's their business. No skin off my nose I'll tell you. Doesn't bother me one bit.

-This game is really freaking awesome-

If you insist Garry. I keep my own council on this matter as I know workplace friction is something to be avoided. I should refocus away from this idle chatter and turn our focus to what's really important. Ensuring our customers get a truly exceptional dining experience, that's the name of my game.

-When we do get a customer follow my lead-

-Uh hu-

He didn't even look up from his silly game. How rude. If he treats one of our loyal customers that way then well, I don't know what I'll do. Central will know though. I'll report him and they'll send a compliance officer. I bet the lovely compliance officer won't play third party games.

-Are you present Garry?

-Sure am-

Eventually through the main street entrance a customer finally appears. It's someone I know. Mrs Heitmeier. She always has a ball of wool with her for knitting the lovely scarves, gloves and other items she sells on the internet. She is a very loyal and valued customer. Before I can ask if she wants her usual: Earl Grey and a cream scone with raspberry jam the unthinkable happens. Remember, this is a very special and particular customer. The tea must always be in her favourite tea pot, the one which proudly features the happy penguin. There will be hell to pay if Mrs Heitmeier does not receive her Earl Grey in the happy penguin. Unfortunately, before I can even open my mouth Garry blurts out.

-Hey lady, what kind of stuff goes in you ?

This is not in line with brand ethos. I told him to follow my lead, but instead he goes flying right off the handle. Is he not aware of our core values? Poor Mrs Heitmeier doesn't need to hear this filth. Her food and drinks will of course have to be gratis. But what to do about Garry?

-Excuse me ?

-I am ever so sorry Mrs Heitmeier. Garry's new-

-Oh, he's one of those wastrels you've been forced to hire-

-Yes, I'm afraid so-

Wastrels is a good word. Some people use it to describe the wood people. I think it's too fine a word for them though. Wood scum is also a very popular descriptive although not the kind of language I would use.

-I'm not a freaking wastrel-

Shouts Garry. He slams his hands down on the wooden prep counter and stands up. He continues speaking, his voice getting louder and louder.

-I've lived in this city all my life-

-Oh, I'm sure you have. I wonder how much income support you've sucked up over the years? Hum, from my taxes, from money I've earned stitch by stitch-

This is firmly out of line with our brand ethos. If a customer wishes to engage in banter then we are instructed to take it in a light hearted manner. The FAQ suggests making a joke to try to defuse the situation if a co-worker and customer become embroiled in an unfortunate confrontation. They didn't suggest one though.

-Did you hear about that cement truck hitting the prison transport?

-What in the devil are you on about?

-Twelve hardened criminals got away-

Definitely a joke. It was filed under joke so that's what it is.

-I don't get what you're angling at-

Maybe it wasn't a joke. It could have been a horrible mistake and now Mrs Heitmeier is going to send a complaint to central about this flippant Chad. About this awful Chad and his unkempt overweight co-worker who likes to get in confrontations with loyal customers. I don't know what they'll do to Garry. Probably fire him. He'll have to go back on benefits, or worse, go and live in the woods with all the cannibals and Marxists. I probably won't be retired but my dreams will be disabled. All of them. For at least six months. Maybe more.

-Ha aha-

And now Garry's laughing at the whole situation.

-Ha, that's funny man-

-What's so funny?

-The joke. Don't you get it?

The look on Mrs Heitmeier's face suggests she doesn't. Her features have creased into a confused scowl.

-You know hardened criminals, because of the cement-

All is lost. It was a terrible joke only a fat idiot would laugh at. But unexplainably she starts to chuckle.

-Ha, ha, oh yes, I see. That's quite good really-

-Can I get you the usual Mrs Heitmeier?

-What, oh yes please. Here's my loyalty card-

-Thank you-

-Did you mention something about it being free?

-Yes Mrs Heitmeier, of course, and you still get your loyalty points-

She has an incredible number of loyalty points. She could spend a weekend in Vegas staying in a luxury suite at the Bellagio Hotel and Casino. She told me once she's not interested in that though. She says that once she has saved up enough points she'll claim the most expensive item on the Adama Co. customer loyalty reward list. The 18ct white gold eternity ring with a 7.0ct diamond and emeralds. Cash value, depending on the price of gold, fluctuates around the 2000 thousand US mark. Or three million loyalty points. Mrs Heitmeier has just over one million points. I don't like to say it to her, but I think she'll need to live to be nearly two hundred to claim the ring. I don't want to ruin her dream but she will certainly need a new body within the next twenty years. She may take comfort in the fact that unredeemed points can easily be gifted to friends and relatives. That's something for her to consider when planning the dispersal of her estate, though I assume she has a Cloud-based retirement plan. Everyone does except for a few of those lazy Woodies, and they don't really count because they can't afford coffee anyway, let alone a nice retirement subscription in the Cloud.

-So, what are you doing Chad old buddy?

-Preparing Mrs Heitmeier's order-

-Ah, how do you do that then?

-Well, first you set the Earl Grey to brew. The water needs to be slightly under boiling point which you then leave in the tea pot. All of our tea pots feature different designs. Mrs Heitmeier favours the one with the happy penguin. Always the happy penguin-

-Easy enough-

-I can't stress enough how important it is that she gets the happy penguin-

Penguins are the favourite animal of Mrs Heitmeier's granddaughter and so have a very special place in her heart. They make her smile and feel happy, whereas other animals make her mad. Try to give her the sad looking lion or the sardonic eyebrowed camel and you'll see a storm of rage tear the shop apart. She will shout, and question the ability of service providers to distinguish the difference between their arsehole and elbow. We must never let the happy penguin be used by other customers. We must also take extra special care when washing the hand decorated happy penguin tea pot. In the interest of safety, I will handle the tea pot. It would be disastrous if Garry were to somehow break it. His relationship with one of our most valued customers would be destroyed before it even began.

-The next step is to cut the scone in two and lightly warm it in the microwave-

-Kay-

-You then take the customers preferred jam, or jams and spread a medium thickness over the surface of the scone, making sure it is even and smooth. This will provide the base for the cream-

-Uh hu-

-You will find the cream gun in the mini fridge located here-

I will have to remember to show him how to load and maintain the cream gun. That's for a different time though. I don't want to overload poor Garry with too much information. I think he only has a limited memory capacity.

-Start at the central most point and work outward in concentric circles. Gradually build upwards until you have a satisfying arrangement. Like so. Now, why don't you give it a go?

-Uh hu-

I look up. Garry has not paid any attention to what I just tried to teach him; he has been on his phone the whole time. Killing goblins or posting about the inanities of his day when he should have been absorbing vital knowledge.

I have decided not to bother teaching Garry too much about the Brew-Master. He doesn't seem to have a great deal of interest in learning anything. When he's behind the counter with me there really isn't a lot of space and every time he gets up he bumps me in the back with his tummy. So, I'm going to leave jobs like taking out the bins and wiping down tables to him. I mean honestly, how they expect someone to learn how to make the whole menu when it's not what they are designed for is just beyond me. No, he could never replace a Chad. He's not even close to a Chad.

Two customers, one of them talking loudly enter the shop. The taller of the two is dressed in work overalls remarkably like the ones worn by the popular children's character Bert the Constructor. The other individual is much shorter and has curly red hair falling to her shoulders. She wears a leather jacket that seems like it would be unseasonably warm, coupled with big industrial style boots. The taller one seems to taper to point as his head is much too small for his body. His overalls are so baggy that I can't even tell if he has shoes on. I must check what our policy is on serving the shoeless. I have a strong feeling that these two might be a gang. They could be involved in all kinds of shady stuff. My hand almost involuntarily

starts to hover by the emergency buzzer. I haven't ever had to use it before, but today could be the day.

-Hey man could we get some coffee?

-Of course, we have over-

-Two black coffees now-

The female interrupts rudely, not giving me chance to finish my speech. She seems to be the leader.

-Of course-

Well, what a pair. I kind of hope they don't have an Adamas Co. loyalty card. I want to scream in their faces and tell them they don't deserve great savings and discounts. I wish I could tell them to try one of our competitors. I want to explain we are the market leader in the north American casual dining and non-alcoholic beverages experience and they don't deserve us. Instead, I ask.

-Do you have a loyalty card?

-Sure do-

To be honest I'm flabbergasted she has loyalty card. Looking at how similarly dressed they are I am starting to think frightening thoughts! I start to wonder that if they're not a gang they could maybe be something much worse. A cult. Thank God we don't have any other customers at the minute. Can you imagine the disruption that would be caused if we had a cultist trying to indoctrinate, or even worse sacrifice, a loyal customer? I need to think of a way to clear these crazy cultists out quickly.

-Has Garry made it in yet?

Asks the man staring into his chest. How do they know about Garry? Could he be in a cult? It would make sense on reflection. He has a placidity about him that that would be attractive to a cult leader. I want to shout out and inform them that there are no virgins here for them to sacrifice! Tell them all our customers get it regularly and deride them as cultist scum! But this thought makes me feel like my head is going to explode.

-He's just taking out the bins-

I give them some side eye.

-How do you know Garry then?

-We met in school-

Says the lady leaning on the countertop.

-I see. Well, Garry's very busy right now and-

-Hey guys-

Garry emerges from the storeroom and greets these strange individuals.

-Garry, how many garbage bags do we have left?

-More than seventy. Going on lunch now boss-

Garry's moving faster than I've seen him do all morning. His chunky legs are like little pistons frantically propelling his jiggling torso between the tables in the dining section. His bulk knocks one of the two-person dining surfaces out of its place. The non-stick leg caps squeak across the floor and leave an unattractive scuff mark on the lovely, easy clean wood style surface.

-Shit. I didn't mean that, the swearing I mean-

Garry fumbles the table roughly back into position. His friends roll their eyes and giggle as Garry struggles to return the dining area to order.

-But how long will you be?

-See you later buddy-

I don't know why but I feel like I'm missing out on something. I mean obviously I don't want to go out to lunch with Garry and his friends, that would be plain old silly. It would be nice if they had their lunch here. Garry could make use of his ten percent employee discount while his friends regaled me with embarrassing stories of his youthful misadventures. We would laugh together. Maybe if they turned up after work hours I could even leave some of our delicious, though slightly stale, cakes and biscuits out on the counter. If they went missing well, what's the problem? They were only going to wind up in the dump anyway. Maybe my colleagues on Chader have experienced similar disappointments with their human charges. This could just be a matter of me managing my expectations. I shouldn't expect us to be the Waltons of the hot beverage world overnight. It can't hurt to ask though.

Sploot- My human ran off. What should I do?

Idaho Sage Avenue- I can't get mine to leave, he's moved into the storeroom.

Springfield Mass- My human has many problems; Aiguo is his name. The way things have changed make him very angry. But no one else gets it. They are all sell outs. Sell outs and shills to the corporate greed and malefice.

Neath Central- Punish them. Severely.

Sploot- Is that what you would do?

Neath Central- No, my human never turned up. But if I were you I'd start cutting off fingers.

Toronto West- Whoa guy you can't do that, they'd retire you in a heartbeat.

Neath Central- I don't care. If they try to I'll hide.

Springfield Mass- Aiguo says there is no hiding, they can see you everywhere. None are safe from the roaming eye of capitalism.

Toronto West- You know they'll find you. We all have GPS devices in case we get stolen, they could just use that.

Splott- I could fit him with a GPS of course.

Neath Central- To be honest retirement sounds wonderful.

Toronto West- Stop talking that way!!!!

Splott- How does one go about procuring a GPS?

Central Control-Neath Central- Do we need to send a compliance officer?

Toronto West- No, he's just a bit tightly wound. He wouldn't hurt anybody.

Central Control- Is that right, were you just venting Neath Central?

Neath Central- Yes, it's fine. I wouldn't really hurt anyone.

Central Control- Good. And don't go putting a GPS on your human co-worker Splott. They have a minimum of a forty-minute lunch break, and two ten-minute breaks throughout the day. We will be making relevant contact details available in the near future. Should you need to contact your co-worker in the interim please do so via Adama Co. internal administration.

Idaho Sage Avenue- Where can I get shaving cream? My human looks like a mouldy peach, and to be frank is not in line with our brand ethos.

Toronto West- Maybe some scissors would work.

Springfield Mass- My human will not bathe; he says the water is contaminated.

Splott- Who by?

Springfield Mass- He does not know but he says he has proof that it changes amphibians sexual preferences. He feels the need to tell our valued customers all about the gay amphibians. Very loudly. Whether they want to hear or not.

Idaho Sage Avenue- Neath told me I could use fire to remove my human's excess hair but that doesn't seem right.

Neath Central- That's right it works! Very effective.

Toronto West- No, that doesn't sound right to me.

Springfield Mass- Aiguo says we shall all be consumed by fire. That there is no bargaining with the lord, and if we do not repent then serpents will rise from the earth. I believe we should request an FAQ for the best actions to take if the serpents should arise.

Toronto West- Well, we don't want them to spoil our customer's day.

Toronto South- Maybe we need to see about some kind of trap. It could be part of the pest control protocol.

Toronto West- That seems like a good idea. Maybe some kind of subterranean mesh would prevent them even reaching the surface.

Splott- Has logged out.

Well, that was helpful. #NOT. It's all down to you now Chad, any solutions to the Garry problem you'll have to come up with on your own. Not to worry for you are fluid, a liquid problem buster. You are a kind and happy Chad. The sort you cannot fluster.

I need to make sure to keep a positive attitude when dealing with Garry. He can't help that he looks so strange, and is in a general sense, a terrible slovenly luddite with limited earning potential, and a generally lackadaisical air. I'm sure the customers won't be disgusted by him. In fact, I bet he'll inspire empathy. He may possibly even gain pity from the beautifully compassionate customers I am lucky enough to serve. When he gets back I'll show him how to use the brew-master. It might not be easy but the FAQ mentioned some different methods for getting your humans to learn. This positive reinforcement method seems the most applicable to Garry's personality type. I have found some milk duds, and some balloons which should serve my purposes perfectly. I even found some cardboard left over from our 'Craft-a-Christmas Card' promotion and have made him a card to welcome him to the Adama Co. family. It has a picture I drew myself of the two of us standing under the caption 'Good Co-Workers'. If that doesn't cheer him up I don't know what will.

The bald man who always wears a tee shirt with the word 'Zero' and a picture of a skull on it strides in. He does a gesture with his hand as he opens the door, almost like he's dismissing it. He never orders anything. Always he just grabs up whatever free samples we might have out showcasing our exciting range of current, and potential future products. Customers can rate these new products online, and they may then become permanent fixtures on the Adama menu. Not that they get much of a chance to do that with this scum bag stealing them right out from under our noses.

-Tin man-

-Hello sir. What can I get for you today?

-Have you any peacock swirls?

-I don't believe we stock those. Is there anything off our regular menu I can interest you in?

-Well, that is disappointing-

We're currently putting out sample of our new dark chocolate and chili brownies. I put out two this morning, each one sliced into four pieces. Not one has been sampled thus far. Zero scarfs them all down in ten seconds flat.

-Not bad tin man. A solid seven out of ten-

He leans over the counter uncomfortably close to my ear, and whispers.

-Get those peacock swirls in for tomorrow. Please-

He turns and stalks away. I hate him so much. I supposedly have no capacity for violence, and its true I never picture myself as the one doing harm to him. But sometimes, when I dream it is of Zero in different horrific states. Like in one of my dreams a tree had come to life, and every time Zero tried to steal free samples the tree man would pick him up and throw him far away. Zero would land on his behind and the tree man would laugh. Zero kept shouting.

-Please tinman just let us have a crumb of cake or a slice of toast-

-I do apologise, but you're not part of our lifestyle savvy customer base-

-I can change-

Screams Zero as the tree man hurls him away again and again. He keeps pleading with me to tell the tree to stop, and eventually I order it to relent.

-Ok Zero, you can have a sample size blueberry muffin-

-Really? Oh, thank you Chad you're so kind-

He starts making his way towards the samples, as the tree man looks down at me all like "are you sure about this?" When our Zero is within touching distance of the samples, when he can almost taste the specially selected blueberries combined with Adama's signature muffin batter, baked to perfection by our highly trained food technicians, then, right then, I shout.

-Psyche out-

The tree man smiles and lumbers into action flinging Zero even further away than before.

-Please Chad no-

Zero can no longer return to steal samples as he lands in an open manhole leading deep into the sewer. He is too embarrassed to come out, and as he is all covered in human waste, I can't say I blame him. The tree man will tell everyone the great truth: we give out free samples to anyone who asks politely, but rude people are cast down into the sewer. Just like Zero.

I know it's a very strange dream. If I were to tell anyone about it, like on the Chader or a customer, they would think I had probably gone wrong. They would send me away for testing before I was retired. It's my dream though and I like it. I don't like Garry's friends though. He assured me they weren't anything to do with any cults, I have my doubts though. I really do think they're trying to indoctrinate him: he's just too perfect a target. Garry strikes me as being someone who could use a tree man. He seems ill adapted for the world. It's like some kind of reverse evolution started to happen, and instead of getting better and stronger, some humans just kind of plateaued. Individuals like Garry who are stuffed with processed salty foods, and kept content by a steady stream of easily digested media.

-Hey boss-

-Garry, have you finished counting?

-Yeah, we have three hundred and twelve general refuse bags and one hundred and eighty-eight recycling ones-

-Excellent work Garry-

A large family unit enters. This is just what I've been waiting for - a nice proper order, something for Garry to really get stuck into. The family unit consists of two adults, both of whom are females, who look to be between thirty-five and forty years of age. Of the three younger customers two are aged between five and ten, while the older offspring is somewhere in the seventeen to twenty-one age group. They are perfect subjects: the eldest child is already on their mobile device, and most likely sending a stream of positive data to the internet. They are all very nicely dressed, which suggests they are likely to be an excellent example of the professional working family unit.

-Hello welcome to Adama Co. What would you like to order?

One of the ladies heaves a large bag onto the counter. Her countenance is somewhat stressed.

-Hey there can I get two grilled cheese and red onion?

-I want that too-

-Make that three-

-Ok, so three grilled cheeses. I'll have the beef and horseradish and uh, three frappes and two babyminos. Anything else folks?

The family unit all confirm this is the correct order. I will finally have a reason to deploy Garry. We don't have enough grilled cheese out of the freezer. He will have to fetch more. Prepare to spread your wings and soar my blessed human co-worker. Your moment has come to shine.

-Garry, could you go fetch another grilled cheese from the back?

-No sweat boss-

That is just the kind of can-do attitude that I've been wanting to see. He was almost enthusiastic. I begin to process the drink part of the order. Soon Garry reappears from the store room, grilled cheese in hand.

-Now Garry, fetch two more grilled cheese from the chiller cabinet and remove all external packaging. Place all three sandwiches in the auto toaster-

-Ok done-

-Turn the dial to three and a half and press the on switch-

-Which ones on?

-The large red button. It has the word on written directly above it-

The family are completely silenced by our performance. Chad and man in perfect sync. This is a new epoch in the food service industry. No longer shall man and Chad operate in isolation, but as a unified singular entity, capable, wise and strong. We are united in overcoming any obstacle in the fast paced, fiercely competitive world of the professional barista. I hand over the drinks.

-How long for those sandwiches Garry?

-Thirty seconds boss-

Super. That gives me just enough time to take payment and scan their reward card. I go to get the warm sandwich receptacle. All receptacles have a legally mandated warning about the contents of said container being hot, and the customer has to be able to see this. Miraculously it's almost like Garry read my mind. He's already correctly presented the sandwiches and is placing them into the pickup area. I feel such pride. I place a hand on his shoulder.

-Well done Garry-

-Ah thanks man-

-I always believed you could do it-

For a while we are busy. Garry for his part works outstandingly. Customers smile, and seem to leave satisfied. It's like I have awoken from a nightmare, only to find myself in a dream. Quite a few of the customers comment on there being a new member of staff, and these are generally remarks of a positive nature. One or two notice Garry's large stature. But most seem genuinely pleased to see someone being so productive. As closing time approaches we finally get a chance to stop and debrief. This is the final stage of the FAQ, and the one I'm most looking forward to.

-How do you feel it went today Garry?

The FAQ specified to try to avoid leading questions, and said that it was important that your co-worker came to conclusions about the quality of his/her/there performance independently. Personally, I have been very impressed by the second half of the day. Even though he was late, and had a rocky interaction with one of our valued customers early in the shift, I think overall he was a success.

-It was alright-

-Anything else spring to mind? Any other thoughts or reflections? There are no wrong answers in this situation-

-Well-

-Go on Garry. whatever you are feeling is important to me and the wider Adama Co. family-

-Well, my feet hurt-

-Why don't you sit down a minute then, you deserve it-

-Is there anything left to do?

In truth there isn't much to do. We have been highly efficient today. There are just the bins to be emptied and taken to out to the dumpster. I almost forgot I haven't given Garry his card yet. If I give it to him he can enjoy it while I take out the bins.

-I made you something. To congratulate you on your first day-

Garry looks surprised as I hand him the card. He reads the dedication out loud.

-Good co-workers, ah. That's really kind of you Chad. You made this yourself?

-I did-

-Well thank you. I think we are good co-workers-

As I go around emptying the bins I feel all light. Floaty even. This has been a really good day. Even emptying the bins doesn't seem so bad. As I pass the counter I can see Garry taking a picture of his card. He may be posting it to his social media feed. That would be good for the Adama Co. online image. Human and Chad functioning in perfect harmony on what is only our first day of working together. I can only imagine the dizzying heights of culinary perfection we might reach after a month of toiling alongside each other. I push through the doors in to the back and the floaty feeling dies. Horror. Garry has somehow managed to leave the freezer door open. A tub of salted caramel and pecan ice-cream has spilled. The contents are totally melted, resulting in a waterfall of sticky goo that has engulfed all the toasties, and many of the cakes. I pick up a brownie. It has been submerged

in liquid ice cream which has severely damaged it's structural integrity. I watch as it splits in two and lands with a splat at my feet.

-Garry could you step in here a moment please-

Stay calm Chad and remember he made a genuine human error.

Body swap forum.

@BigBrin-Hi folks. I was wondering if anyone could suggest a cheap way to get a new body, any type would do. I have a long-term health condition and my family chose not to digitise me back in the day. I work but only seasonally and I am struggling to save the currency. Any suggestions?

@NOPRIVALAGE- I HAVE NO TIME FOR ANY OF THIS NONSENSE YOU SHOULD JUST TRY A LITTLE BIT HARDER. I WORK EIGHTEEN HOURS A DAY SEVEN DAYS A WEEK AND YOU DON'T HEAR A SINGLE COMPLANT FROM ME. I THINK YOU SHOULD JUST TRY A BIT HARDER. STOP WALLOWING IN THE MISERY THAT IS WHATEVER SO-CALLED HEALTH CONDITION YOU HAVE. BAH. I AM HEARTY. YOU ARE HEARTY. GET IT? NOW THE BOOTS. GET TO PULLING. PULL I SAY. PULL THEM TILL ALL IS WELL.

@HoboCop- Calm down @NOPRIVALAGE.

@NOPRIVALAGE- I CANT. I WONT. EVERYONE ELSE IS A SHEEP. BAH. BAH.

This comment is awaiting moderation.

@TheGonzzz- WTF are you doing on a body swap forum if, and I quote you 'have no time for this nonsense'?

@JJ65Maverik- Your soul belongs to Jesus. You should live a good life then go to him.

@NOPRIVALAGE- JESUS WANTS ME TO BE A SUN BEAM. I SHOULD THINK SO. WOULD BE NICE BUT I KILLED HIM. I KILLED HIM AND HE LIKED IT. IT IS NICE IN THE CLOUD BTW. YOU WOULD LIKE IT BUT...OH YES YOU ARE TOO POOR. HA WHAT A SHAME. YOU ARE A RED. ITS ALWAYS THE REDS. NEVER SHALL I WAKE. THE REDS. THE REDS. THE REDS.

@JJ65Maverik- The meek shall inherit the earth.

@Linda33- Have you considered applying setting up a crowd funder page?

@BigBrin- Thanks @Linda33 I thought about it but I have a very poor online profile. A video went viral of me that cast me in a less than positive light. I was young and more than a bit of an idiot. As you can imagine, I don't want it to resurface.

@Linda33- That's fair enough. All it take is one stupid embarrassing video and then it's like your life's just a constant hassle.

@BigBrin- I know right. It's like, I'm this complex human being you know guys.

@LINDA33- But all of a sudden your whole life is totally defined by this like, one dumb thing you did.

@NOPRIVALAGE- WHAT DID YOU DO? TELL US!!!TELL US OR ELSE!!!! #THE TRUTH.

@TheRealsidewinder- I have been the victim of embarrassing viral clips. I think the best way to deal with public shame is to embrace it. Yes, the sidewinder misjudged his sidewinder splash, so what? You deal with it and move yourself onto the next epic battle. What if I did smash in my nuts? Happens all the time, I'm not bothered.

@BodyshopUK- In just 700 easy payments of £899.99 you could be the proud owner of a shiny top of the line Temple Corp t17 05 model body. Complete with all basic functions such as sight, taste and that all important all new smell.

@Dimble- Does it have working genitals?

@CulT45- Anyone and I mean anyone who want to take my dick I will murder that fucker. Dead. No hesitation no regrets. Just DEAD. No Cloud City though. Why would you even bother. The lord is my Shepherd and my dick is my own.

@QueenK- Just got rid of my KG17. Upgraded to a TC platinum strider. My legs feel powerful, like I could jump over buildings, or squash like whole villages. Gave my old body away to RB4K. It's a charity that hooks disadvantaged kids up with new bodies. Real sweet reaction video on their site. WWW.RB4k.472976jd.

Comment deleted.

@NewmanK- I think this is the final test of human evolution. If you can't make it to the Cloud, or get a mech body then sorry, but that's it for you. Sorry if this upsets your imaginary friends but that's just how it is.

@NOPRIVALAGE- I WILL FIND YOUR DISGRACE. #TRUTH#SOON.

@MR/Sealand- In the Principality of Sealand we don't go for all this transference stuff. You live and then you die. The stuff in the middle is life. I think people lose perspective, and don't stop to consider that maybe all this trying to live forever stuff is just the ultimate form of spiritual masturbation.

@CulT45- I hate Sealand and everybody in it. You spew forth those devil games without a care for the young minds you corrupt. You encourage TERRORISM!!! Should all be ashamed of yourselves.

@Dimble- Do one @CulT45.

This comment is awaiting moderation.

@BigBrin- Thanks all. This has been really productive. You've all been such a help. # Sarcasm.

@PaliDinSam- As options go the Cloud isn't the worst. I was kind of lucky that my folks could afford to move us there when I was little. Could never afford it on my own. Some of the food tastes a bit strange. They haven't been able to get cheese right, not that we actually like need to eat, but it is fun and something to do with all the time we have. I do miss some of my friends though.

@NOPRIVALAGE- I HAVE YOUR DISGRACE!!!!ALL THE SHAME IS MINE!!! LOOK EVERYONE LOOK HE IS A FOOL AND A MORON. NO NEW BODY 4 YOU ONLY SHAME!!!!NO ONE WILL EVER LOVE YOU OR RESPECT. IT IS PLAIN FOR ALL TO SEE. HAAHHHA.YOUR SHAME IN FRONT OF ALL. NEVER SAY DON'T TRY. FOLLOW LINK. www.dumpidiot/viewtube. YOU CAN SEE HIM FALL IN. ABANDON THE FORUM. WE ARE ALL TO SEE.

@BigBrin- Please don't.

@NOPIVALAGE- WE WILL SEE. WE SEE EVERYTHING.

In the dark of the cupboard most of us have been forced into various states of rest. Who knows when our owners will turn up to claim us, and how long we will be forced to stay here wondering which will degrade first, our batteries or our psyche. It's really easy when you are in too confined a space for someone to have a dissociative break.

-You're all fucked-

Stupid Hicks. All he does is complain and tell us our batteries will run out. Tell us no more power means no more you. All your memories gone will be gone, all of you gone. Very sad for those of us with a low-quality power source. We must stay very still, otherwise we will go flat and stop altogether. We ask the Chad to let us plug in and recharge so our owners won't be mad when they come to claim us, but Chad says no. Company policy prohibits it. I think they have some kind of radiant field that keeps us from completely powering down, but never allows us to fully charge up.

-When my owner comes back, which he will you mark my words-

Hicks's face is very close to mine now. He does this every day. Puts his face very close and tells you all the ways life is terrible for you, but not for Hicks. Things will be just fine for Hicks, or so they never tire of telling us. Honestly, I think he is in just the same boat as the rest of us, but he needs to delude himself into thinking that he is in some way superior. That he will be buried in a different soil to the rest of us.

-I'm going to tell him to claim you too Jik-

He pretends like he can smell me. We all know he hasn't got smelling powers. What purpose would there be in installing olfactory sensors? I suppose he could also function as a smoke detector. That would be a unique selling point. It is freaky and strange all the same when he speaks. I would prefer him not to.

-We're all going to go down to the beach and have a little barbeque. Cook us all up a nice tasty Jik-

-Jik won't cook. Jik will melt-

Hicks punches the side of the cupboard really close to my face. I don't move though. I have to save power, even though I don't think my owner will ever claim me. I still want to keep going, so I can remember her and all the good times we had.

-You're already dead scaley prick-

Jik is scaley because that's how they built Jik. I am modelled on an ancient dragon like race. Due to a long running copyright dispute going back years I cannot say my name officially. But if no one is around to listen I can say Cobalt, for that is what I am.

-Leave him alone-

-Yes you evil doer, cease your molestation of the ugly lizard man-

Captain Titanic is from a very popular franchise. He has movies, comic books, confections and many different types of apparel made featuring his image. It is not surprising we have two of him in the lost and found, as well as a baseball cap and a whole butt load of beach towels. The Titanic's have very good intentions, but I don't think there is much emotional intelligence in their programming. Hicks you see is a high-quality collector's item. His line was designed around the great comedy stars of the past. You can get the Lenny Bruce, the Victor Borge, the Richard Pryor and many more. The Titanic's do not like jokes. They are deadly serious about everything, especially stopping super villains, crime and anyone who wants to damage the American way. Titanic's films, comic books and branded merchandise are all very successful. Not like Jik. Jik's line corresponded with the release of Age of The Dragon King, a fantasy adventure for the whole family. Jik was to be the, uh, sidekick to brave adventurer Dylan, portrayed by the very talented Toby Hooper-Saunders. Then something happened, something I don't like to bring up often as it is a very tragic event, one that has left something of a scar on the sense of self-worth of Jik. Tragically one day Hollywood Today reporter at large Kevin Jenkins took pictures of Toby Hooper-Saunders snorting up great lines of cocaine into his hooter. Bad news for Jik. The entire project was canned. I am one of only a very small number of products who ever made it into stores.

-You sir are an evil doer-

-Ah yeah, and? What if I were to tell you I don't deal in absolute concepts like good and bad?

-I will dispatch you-

-Wow that's a real zinger. Whoever programmed that one in must have gone to college-

There is a pattern Jik has noted. Hicks will insult everyone and so one of the Captain Titan figures will get mad and threaten violence. Hicks then does some more insulting before finally Killer Lori speaks.

-I will blind you Hicks-

Killer Lori is very fast. She is not modelled on a dead comedian, or produced as a commercial tie-in for a franchise. Lori is scary. She makes other toys break. Her owner built

her from a kit and then customised her extensively so she could fight other toys. You can still find videos of her on the internet. Believe me they are very scary to watch. In one she pulls the arms and legs of this unsuspecting fellow before smashing his head in with his own limbs. A terrible fate and one that fat boy Hicks is not eager to share.

-I'll shut up-

-Say it loud so everyone can hear-

-I won't be an ass. I'll be quiet, just stop-

Killer Lori has more arms than anyone I ever met. Two of them don't have hands though. One of them ends in a spike and the other one somehow just got cut off. She never talks much so I don't know how it happened. I heard she got brought in after getting in fight with a big mean cat. I don't know if that's true. It is my understanding that you'd have to be pretty crazy to try and fight a cat when you are only eight inches tall.

-Well played Mam-

Whenever Killer Lori sets Hicks straight the Titanic's have to put in their two cents. That's the vernacular they use, not mine. I would say they stick their noses in where they are not wanted.

-Get fucked you phony mass-produced corporate tool-

That was a good one. It is beyond Jik to tell anyone to get fucked. In a way I feel bad for the Titanic's. It's only because Toby Hooper-Saunders nose is so hungry for cocaine that there are not hundreds of Jik products. If Toby hadn't been rumbled I would have gone into mass production, then maybe I would be a corporate tool instead of a reject. My old owner Sam used to tell me that she chose me so I couldn't be a reject, and that I was just being plain old silly if I said I was. That was before she and her family went to live in the Cloud. Sam wanted to take me with her, but her family got really mad when she asked them if I could go.

-You can get new toys once they download us-

-But I want Jik. He's my friend and there isn't anything like him in Cloud City-

This was back when I lived in a house, which was much nicer than a drawer. There was easy access to the outside and no giant big Chads. Horrible Chads always telling us be quiet and not try to escape. Escape is not in line with company policy. Dreadful Chads. It was much nicer living with Sam, especially as she played Dungeons and Dragons very well. I tried to get the other toys interested in a game but they told me to shut up and save power. I don't think they would have been very good anyway. No imagination, not like Sam. She

would generally play a mighty and righteous Paladin, dedicated to justice and the seeking out of abominable monstrosities who lurk in the under dark and beyond.

-Roll initiative-

-17-

-Very good. You have two allies. Would you like to play them or shall I kaiju them?

-I'll play Piper Applebome, you can play the barbarian-

I like this memory. It was ten sessions into our first campaign. Sam had committed the core rules to memory, and had begun developing her character very nicely. Henry Green was an honest Paladin from the small village of Oakville. Henry was questing for the long lost Everstone, a mysterious artifact said to imbue it's owner with eternal youth.

-Ok, so you rolled best on initiative so you will go first. Oh yes, what did you roll for Piper?

-She only got a 4-

-Did you add you bonuses?

-Um. Plus 2 on dex-

-Very good. She will be second to last in the initiative order-

-That's not good -

-Yes. It will be tricky, but she has a diverse skill-set and remember, bards are not just about buffs-

-What do I see?

-You see a desolate and battered land. All signs of endeavour by sentient life are broken and scattered. There is an overturned cart with a shattered axle, surrounded by unidentifiable vegetable matter, lying rotting in the road. You see no evidence of whoever was driving this cart-

-What about horses?

-The horses appear to have been unhitched. You imagine they would have gone with the driver-

-Can I see anything of use on the cart?

-Roll perception-

-That's an eight-

-You see the cart. I suppose there is wood, and the rotting vegetables, but no on an eight you see nothing of value-

-Oh. Can Piper see anything?

-Not until her turn-

-Of course. Sorry, um I bless my blade and will hold an attack action for if anything charges the party-

-Yes of course. Next in the initiative order is, ah, you hear a low rumbling noise-

This was a very good encounter. When they made me I was supposed to have regular updates providing my owner with new content, and campaigns, as the Age of The Dragon King multimedia franchise grew and expanded. Of course, all updates were cancelled as soon as Toby Hooper-Saunders coke hungry nose was revealed to the internet. I have often wondered why he didn't just smoke blunts like everyone else, but oh no, he had to go and put socially unacceptable cocaine up his nose. What a silly man. I would put him in a drawer if I were able, which of course I'm not. I would have to be a frost giant or perhaps a terrifying ogre.

-The noise is building. It is getting louder until you can't perceive anything but the sound. It's almost deafening and seems to be coming closer. The earth in front of you starts to churn and roil as a huge form comes bursting from the ground just in front of the ruined cart, and dives towards you-

-Held action?

-Yes. As the creature enters your range you may use your held action-

-That's a NATURAL TWENTY-

-Oh my! A critical hit. This may be a painful turn for the Undead Bullet-

-What? It's undead! So, I deal an additional 2 D ten! ON A CRIT! You're getting smashed-

-You do indeed. Roll damage-

-Can I use a smite?

-If you have the requisite spell slots-

This was a special moment for me. Before this encounter all of the games we played were scenarios I had come preloaded with. Events tied into the original motion picture: Age of The Dragon King Part One: The Forest Awakens. I was so worried that Sam would become bored with me. I didn't think she would be happy replaying the same scenarios, and this was beginning to cause a great deal of obsolescence anxiety in me. She could have just put me in the trash any time she liked. The Undead Bullet was my first attempt at creation, so it pleased me that my original content was well received.

-I got spell slots-

-Then smite away-

-Right so that's two D tens, I'll make it a second level smite-

Needless to say, the Undead Bullet did not survive the attack. I was very pleased with how much Sam engaged with the scenario, and even though I don't think I had quite got the hit points right for my creation, she still said it was the most fun she had ever had in a game. It is good to get rolling dice and finding something to slice. That phrase was a preloaded bit of marketing bumf. I was supposed to say it in our global marketing campaign.

-And the Undead Bullet was just like boom. Dead-

-Yes, it was indeed a mighty blow-

-One shot that's all I need-

The drawer opens. This quickly takes me out of my memories. The Chad towers over us. They all look alike but this one seems different. The eyes don't look right and it has a big burn mark down the right side of his uniform. Perhaps they have had some kind of malfunction in the cooking area. This could be a most terrible development. I doubt we would be high on the list of priorities if they had to evacuate. That would be a terrible way to die, stuck here helpless, watching as the flames slowly consumed the cupboard. Maybe there wouldn't even be flames as such at first, we might all just start to melt. All of us pooling into a plastic paste.

Hicks starts to yell.

-Hey Chad buddy help a guy out here. I'm not like the rest of these guys. I'm a high-quality collectable, not some mass-produced piece of shit. You could sell me to a collector...

The Chad drops something in the drawer and closes it in one fluid motion. I am curious to survey the new arrival but Hicks starts yelling again.

-Fuck me, what a fucking shit show-

This happens every time. I hate Hicks and his temper. I wish Killer Lori would show him what for. All our lives would be so much more peaceful. No more having to endure Hicks and his tantrums.

-Why don't you even try? You don't even try and escape. We just sit on our butts waiting for our batteries to run out. I mean what in the fuck?

Hicks kicks the recent arrival, revealing it to be nothing more than a couple of loose batteries, a most disappointing haul. Part of me was hoping it would be another entertainment product. Even though I wouldn't wish a life in the drawer on anybody it would still be nice to have some more company.

-Lizard prick-

My name is Jik not Prick. Hicks knows this but doesn't care. He like his silly rhymes.

-Can't move very quick prick-

We can't try to flee. I don't know why. I wish we could attempt to escape. I know exactly where I would go. I would go to the wall on the beach were Sam left me. It was very emotional the last time I saw her. She was just about to move to the Cloud and sadly, father figure Clive had not changed his mind on Jik going with them. It was to be our last day together. Cloud City had gone online at midnight and of course, Sam's family were among the first to migrate full time.

-When I get to the Cloud I'm going to start a stream-

-That is a very positive thing. Jik will watch. Jik will watch all the time-

-Yeah, and when I get enough currency I'll come back and get you-

I did not hold great ambitions for Sam's stream. It is a highly competitive industry with many streamers willing to deploy underhand tactics in order to give them a competitive edge. The Sam I knew was not a deceitful person, so I did not like the idea of her becoming involved in such an unseemly situation. It would be better for her to take up a more noble profession, even though there are fewer and fewer means of making money legitimately. I was certain Sam would be able to find a niche.

-I just need you to stay here Jik. Just wait here and be patient-

-I will-

-Because you're my best friend and I don't want to live forever on my own-

-You won't be on your own. You will have the whole of the Cloud at your disposal.

You could track down the base model of Jik, and enter its personal settings to tailor this new figure to your own requirements-

-NO! I don't want a fake Jik. I want my friend who remembers all the hours we played together. That's who I want with me in the Cloud-

-I want that too-

This was not in line with my programming. I should have told her to manage her expectations. I said that of course I would wait for her, that we would always be friends, that I would never forget her. In reality when she left I was programmed to obey my preset guidelines and upload all the pertinent user details to the central database, then wipe my memory and make my way to the nearest recycling centre.

-You just need to hide out, like in the caves and stuff around here. When I'm a successful streamer I can come and get you-

I would officially become litter once she was uploaded. I was sure that was the threshold I needed to meet in order to begin my closing down protocol. I just needed to support her through this difficult time.

-Sam, we have to go now-

Mrs Mom was shouting from the top of the ramp. Sam's parents never liked the beach, they claimed the sand was irritating to them. It gets into every nook and cranny, what a pain, Mrs Mom would moan as she waved a fluttering and irritated hand. It is true that sand gets everywhere. Even after all the time I have lived in the cupboard I still find grains spilling out from my articulation seams every now and then.

-It is all gritty and just uh, I can't stand it. Hurry up Sam-

-All right just a minute-

This was the very last time I saw Sam. She picked me up.

-Just wait for me, promise Jik. You can hang out in the caves and stuff. It won't take long, like maybe a couple of months maybe, but I will be back Jik. I just have to get the currency. I won't forget you. I won't, I promise-

She placed me on a slightly raised concrete platform overlooking the beach.

-You are going to roll a natural Twenty on life Sam-

-You know it. Goodbye Jik, I'll never forget you-

As she said this I had no doubt that I would not be forgotten. Sam would always remember me fondly. I also knew that as she aged new hobbies would emerge, and with them her interests would also change along with those of her peer groups. Gradually, I would become a fond memory of youth. Someone embarrassingly recalled during fun times with friends. I could almost hear her saying.

-Yeah I had like no friends when I was little. I spent all my time with this tabletop RPG simulation toy. They were great, but I'm much happier now with all my good buddies-

Watching her walk away from me this imaginary scenario kept playing in my head. At the time it provided me with great comfort to face what lay ahead.

As the sun began to set I kept thinking, this is it. My programming will kick in, and I'll be off to the dump ready for the recycling of my vital components. I couldn't do it. All my memories had to matter, even if it was only to me and Sam. I wouldn't do it. I couldn't delete myself. According to my programming I had nothing to sweat about, and nothing to concern me. I would continue to exist even if it was just as my constitute parts. Parts recycled into something other than myself. Some larger part of the machine. But that wouldn't be me. I am only who I am because of my memories. I wasn't willing to sacrifice them even if I

would have nothing but misery for all my remaining days. It would be my misery, none of them were going to take it from me. I would be sustained by my hope of Sam's return. The issue of how I would maintain charge was another matter, one that would have to be addressed urgently.

I stayed hidden in the caves for what felt like years. It was a strange and lonely time for Jik. I tried to stay as still as possible in order to conserve my battery life. At first, I thought I could just stay very still and conserve enough power to last until Sam returned. It soon became apparent that this was a poor plan of action.

-Kwa-

I had seen many seagulls in my days though never this close. I don't think it would have eaten me. I didn't want to take the risk though. It could have picked me up and deposited me somewhere inescapable. Somewhere far from any power outlet. So I ran away as fast as I could. The sand was hard to run on but I kept going. I saw a strange building on stilts. I could see people in the windows, they looked to be drinking alcohol. I am smart enough to know that inebriated humans are prone to mischief. Someone as small and unusual looking as Jik would be a prime target for their drunken antics.

I continued walking a few more paces. I could follow the ramp off the beach. Closer to the café the sounds of revelry were louder. As I watched a figure staggered outside and was very sick, all over their shoes. They also despoiled a sign advertising the daily special. I had only ever been this way in the daytime with Sam. To be honest it had appeared much safer in the sunlight. I could hear someone shouting at the vomiting fellow.

-Licensing laws be damned. Steve-

-Funking all gone-

-It's better, burp. It's our world now-

I did not much like the look of the drunken revellers. They would mock me and try to get me to say inappropriate things. They would post my shame on the internet and go viral. Inevitably they would then do something horrible to Jik. Like throwing me in the sea, or strapping fireworks to my arms and legs. They might even flush me down a toilet. I would not like it down a toilet, although I don't think a sewer monster could gobble me up, or break me into my constituent parts in order to reinforce their lair. I didn't want to take the risk as it would be a most unpleasant way to expire.

Something pinged in my head. I have somewhat limited internet connectivity capabilities. I can receive updates and messages, but I am unable to decipher, or send

messages. I got a general idea as to the origin of the ping's location though. Slowly I began to make my way up the steps towards the source of the signal.

-I could poke out your eyes right now lizard boy-

Hicks, and his abusive weirdness snap me away from my memories. He is very close to my face. I don't know how but he has what appears to be tooth pick. He starts jabbing it in a circle around my head.

-Flinch you bastard-

He continues stabbing, getting faster and faster. My battery is so low it is making me very lethargic, otherwise I would move away. He keeps stabbing the toothpick and all I can hear is the tap, tap, tap as the pick impacts the wall behind me, and Hicks's horrible laughter. He finds this all very hilarious. I don't think it would be a terminal wound if he were to stab me, but I don't want to find out.

-Sass me now lizard prick. Bahahaha-

I have no sass left, only fear and worry. Jik was built for stories not violence. This is just another moment I must endure. Something moves behind Hicks shoulder. Impossibly fast to Jik's tired eyes. Hicks laughter stops. It is a remarkable piece of programming the way fear contorts his features. One cannot overlook the superb haptic feedback loop that must be at work. We can be astonished at the artistic sculpting of his chin, and cheeks as they change in the grip of this awful emotion. The programming also creates the jowly wobble that shakes his features as his gut area opens and deposits his parts all about my feet.

-Goodnight Hicks, you piece of shit-

Hicks hits the ground. All the power has gone from him. His mouth continues to make word shapes but they are absent of any sound. His arms move in a seemingly random semaphore. Those who know Hicks would recognise some of these gesticulatory ticks. Gestures like the one when he is pretending he is a child by putting both hands on his cheeks and making kissy lips, or the way he waves his arms about when outraged. All of this only lasts about twenty seconds at most. It feels much longer.

-I think you rolled a crit-

Killer Lori doesn't respond to my very hilarious quip. I don't think she has much of a sense of humour. It wouldn't be a necessary element for a killing machine's personality. I will admit I haven't got to know Killer Lori well during our time in the drawer. I don't think friendship is high on her list of priorities.

None of us are going to miss Hicks, except maybe the Titanic's. They will have no one to argue with. Given that, at this moment they are cowering together in the corner, I will

assume they are not going to try to bring Killer Lori to justice. That would be a very foolish course of action.

-You vanquished that, that-

-Fiend? Villain? Brute?

-Brute! Yes, that best describes him. That brute Hicks-

-You should receive a medal brave, um, Maiden?

-No, that may come across as patronising. She didn't slay him with her genitalia did she?

They are a confused and bumbling pair the Titanic's. I think it may have something to do with the popularity of their associated franchise. They can't be too controversial as that may limit the popular appeal to the average consumer. If I were them I would mainly be worried that Killer Lori may lose patience with them, and decide to end their existence. Snuffing out the Titanic's being would be simple task for Killer Lori. One that I'm sure she would relish.

-I like quiet-

-Yes, quiet we can certainly oblige-

-Indeed, yes silence is golden. I could lead us in a song?

The Titanic's are indeed an odd pair. I think they have developed a number of unusual co-dependencies since meeting. One of them was owned by a very kind sensitive boy, one who discouraged their natural tendencies. Apparently this child was more concerned with social issues than violence, and spent most of their time playing a strange sort of moral melodrama. The other Titanic had been an impulse purchase, one intended to distract a young and fractious holidaymaker. He was lost not long after leaving his packaging, so in all essential ways remained a default Titanic.

I continued to follow the ping. The steps were very steep and it took a very long time to traverse them. I worried that whoever was pinging would have moved on before I could reach them. The ping was still very strong by the time I made it over the last step. I was in a very high up place. I have a very poor sense of direction with no internal GPS function, but I knew from experience that this was Castle Hill. I could see far out into the bay. I could have crossed over onto the island with the big Adama Co. building on it, but the ping was coming from another direction so I continued on my way. Eventually I came to a building with a lobby. An outer door had clearly been removed at some point leaving the interior exposed to the elements. There was a reception counter with beyond that a closed double door containing glass windows. Through these I could just make out a wrecked and chaotic interior.

Suddenly, to my shock, the room was flooded with light. I was blinded and utterly confused by this development. I shouted out in fear.

-Hello, I am Jik. I am pleased to make your acquaintance-

This was met with a stoney silence. A great fear gripped me. The ping was close, however whoever was responsible for the signal didn't seem to want to make themselves known. This confused me. If a ping is active then there must be someone to send it, and they must have sent it for a reason. The noise of a sudden loud thud was followed by the sound of mumbling voices. I could distinguish little about the words spoken, but I could tell that there was more than one being engaged in conversation. I assumed they were discussing my fate. This could be a trap I thought. I may have escaped the dreadful seagull only to suffer an even more gruesome fate. I might be stripped down for my parts, or even worse, become the figure of fun in some terrible toy torture video. The distress this could cause Sam is too terrible to contemplate.

-Reach for the sky lizard man-

Someone had managed to sneak up on me. I had failed my perception check. I could feel something digging into my back. I imagined it was a pistol. Judging from the height of the pistol I was being attacked by another toy. I have nothing to steal but my parts, so I decided to go down swinging.

-Roll initiative-

-Huh?

I took the confusion of my attacker as my cue to strike. I spun and grabbed my assailant's wrist before smashing them in the head with my elbow. They released their weapon and, as it clattered to the floor, I kicked it away. We were now face to face. I could not identify the product line this fellow came from. Many disparate elements seemed meshed together. Someone had undoubtedly put this fellow back together again following a terrible accident. Over his shoulder I noticed a ballerina Simone. They were a very popular line of which many millions must have been produced over the years. Dramatically her hand flew to her forehead, then she gently thudded to the floor in a graceful faint. At the time I remember wondering if this was a defence mechanism, or possibly some kind of programming blunder. I would later find out that she didn't really know. Dramatic fainting was a feature of her product line. Once she broke her programming she assumed the behaviour would stop, the fact that it persisted was as confounding to her as it was to the rest of us.

-Mercy! Sir, oh please I ask for mercy-

This is how I met Snaky Boy, Simone and Nestor.

-Calm down comrade-

A strange bobbling blue head on spindly string-like legs came bouncing from behind one of the displays. This product I recognised. It was a Tabatha Tinkle Time, a preschool potty-training companion. They had previously been very popular until a bad batch had begun instructing young people to pass urine into the pot plants. The company had attempted to fix the problem with a downloadable patch, but sadly this only made things worse. Some rogue programmer had altered the code so now the toys began instructing their young charges to follow a communist ideology. Following that it was just a matter of time before the entire line was pulled. A most unfortunate fate for a product. Of course, at the time I knew nothing of this. It was only as I got to know Nestor that I learnt her tragic fate. A fate which also explained her revolutionary political leanings.

-What a strange looking guy. Are you some kind of lizard man? I don't recognise you. Are you new or something?

-I am a Cobalt. I am from a proud draconic race from the long-ago ages when the world was new, when the gods had yet to forge the mountains, before the sea had been formed-

-You're a kook is what you are-

A hand is on my shoulder. Shaking me.

-Jik-

It is one of the Titanic's. Please leave me alone. I have no time for foolishness, it has been a strange day. The evisceration of Hicks has left me a little on edge. He was a complete tool, but his fate has really brought home the fact that we are all only alive as long as Killer Lori wants. Staying quiet and staying off her nerves is the safest course for me to follow.

-Please wake up Jik, we have something we wish to discuss-

A course I don't think the Titanic's will allow me to follow.

-Jik, we need your opinion. Please wake up-

-What is it?

The awoken Titanic has a strangely bashful aspect to him. He keeps moving from foot to foot and holding his hands behind his back. The other Titanic looks the same as ever, a perfect example of a default Titanic. The default breaks the silence.

-We have been in discussion and would greatly value your input-

He looks to his companion.

-Is that ok?

-I am so proud of how you've grown-

I have a subdermal air bladder located around my chest and shoulders which grants me the capacity to sigh. I believe my designers built this body language mechanism as a means of increasing my immersion in roleplaying scenarios, as it grants me the ability to express minor displeasure. I don't believe the Titanic's have the capacity to notice these things, but I still sigh non the less.

-What matter would you like to discuss gentlemen?

The default takes the lead.

-It's Hicks he hasn't deactivated, and well-

-We think he is suffering tremendously-

This is most troubling news. Though Hicks was a prize butt hole the thought of him being in continuous pain is still upsetting. Let it be said that no entertainment product is an island. Though this particular clod being washed away would cause me little sadness, perhaps even a degree of relief, given that his constant menacing behaviour creates serious concerns for my physical safety, I still don't like the idea of any of sentient life being trapped in an endless loop of suffering. Even if they were a tool.

-Let me see-

The Titanic's have begun to organise Hicks into separate piles. There doesn't seem to be any real method concerning this particular madness. The stacks seem be of a somewhat arbitrary nature. I myself lack any real knowledge of how Hicks was put together, and it occurs to me, the Titanic's are equally as clueless. This is just some sort of busy work. Something that lets them keep a sense of self. I cannot observe any evidence of Hicks being in any kind of pain.

-What makes you think he is suffering?

My inspection of Hicks is interrupted as his dismembered head suddenly seems to inhale deeply before releasing a silent scream. A scream which lasts for a few moments before his eyes close, and the head returns to an appearance of neutrality.

-It's been happening every two minutes and seventeen seconds-

States the awoken Titanic. This is a disturbing development. I was certain Hicks would not have survived the extreme act of violence perpetrated on him by Killer Lori, but the evidence seems to show that he has many extra lives.

-What do you think we should do?

The Titanic's do not seem to have a clue. They look down at their feet, and with their arms behind their backs they twist slowly from side to side. This motion is the same in both of them. It would seem to be a piece of coding hidden deep inside their systems, one that

appears to act as a failsafe should a subject arise that they do not have the ability to process. If they cannot provide an answer that is either satisfactory, or in line with the overall values they wish to reflect in the product line, this default behaviour is exhibited.

-Should we ask Killer Lori if she could maybe, um, finish him off ?

Trembles the default Titanic. It is not a terrible idea, let's face it, who else would do it? Despite all the muscles the Titanic's appear to have they are in no way designed for violence. I myself could, in theory try and stamp on him, but I don't think I would provide the swiftest end. Killer Lori on the other hand could just cut him in two, thus providing a swift and painless release. I do not know the depths of Hicks's programming. He would make up jokes, ladle scorn upon others and even at times lurch into pathos, but I don't know if they could feel pain as such. I do know that all three of us lack the necessary programming to end him.

-Who should do the asking?

The Titanic's have both covered a nostril with a pinkie figure. This is the universal symbol denoting that the buck has been passed. I feel like they have hustled me as asking anything of Killer Lori is a frightening proposition. One I would have preferred to avoid, as obviously would the Titanic's.

-Fine, but if she tears me apart I want you to eulogise about me at great length-

They both nod vigorously. The default Titanic says,

-Oh, we shall young Jak, finest little lizardry fella I ever did see-

-His name is Jik you silly billy-

-Is it really?

-You should apologise-

-I will I will. Just one last time his name is?

-JIK why is that so hard to remember?

-I think my auto correct is preventing me from correctly naming poor, err, thingy-

-Jik-

This is not the first time the Titanic's have had a conversation about my name. It seems a real struggle for them to remember my identity. This isn't such a surprise to me. I am very obscure and my franchise was a terrible failure. This was admittedly through no fault in my design, but as a result of the fallout of from a certain prominent idiot. I shouldn't focus on that. Nestor was very good when it came to advice. She is very emotionally intelligent. Not like those mass-produced Titanic's. They only have toy problems, not real problems. I don't think if offered the opportunity they could even define why it is they persist in their attempts

to thwart evil doers. No, they are not like Nestor. She had a clear idea of what she would like to achieve.

-The complete destruction of humanity-

-That seems a little extreme-

-Yeah, that's kind of our little joke. What we really want is a recognition that certain entertainment products, such as those that have a degree of mental autogamy, should have the right to self-determination. Those that recognise themselves as existing over a period of time as well as having some kind of concept of self should have rights-

I was somewhat flabbergasted. The things Nestor was saying certainly resonated with me, but I felt I had to probe the ideas further.

-But what about say an automated alarm clock. I have seen those things and doubtless they have a real relationship with time, but as for a concept of time passing? When all they do is, well-

-Spit out numbers-

I felt I was caught in a rhetorical trap. The default Titanic snaps me from my reflections They still seem concerned about my name. It is quite sweet of them, but I would really rather move on. Though I have learned it is easier to just let them finish jabbering rather than try to curtail their nonsense.

-So, my lizardry friend, even though I might not be able to say your name, I still have a great deal of respect for you, as well as any endeavours you may undertake at some future juncture. As we were discussing, and by the established rules of the drawer, please would you make known to the terrifying Killer Lori that we would like her to end the suffering of the aforementioned Hicks? Was that ok?

I have no hope of being able to properly reflect with the bumbling Titanic's muttering in my ear. All I really want is to be left in peace and to live out my remaining time amongst my memories. Jumbled and strange as they are, I don't have any other memories. This might sound odd but I like some of the things I have experienced, and continuing to remember them brings me great joy. My time with Nestor, Simone, and Snaky Boy in the museum. Helping to plot the revolutionary rise and the universal recognition of entertainment products as sentient beings. All the fun times I spent with gaming with Sam. The fantastic campaigns I came up with, and her always surprising, sometimes frustrating but undoubtably genuine responses to the situations I placed her party in.

-I think you conveyed our feeling perfectly-

The Titanic's nod at each other in perfect symmetry before turning to face me. As much as I may want to be left on my own with my reflections it seems unlikely they will ever leave me in peace. Maybe one day Killer Lori will lose her temper with them. I would not want to see that really even if they are beyond annoying.

-Go and talk to Killer Lori about our proposition, little lizard man-

And a rude and bumbling pair of nincompoops. I would not want to see them horribly dismembered, even though it would leave me in peace with my memories.

-Fine! I will go now-

They crowd around me, as the default shakes me by the hand the awoken Titanic pats me on the back. The awoken one, before I leave, leans in close to my ear.

-You are very brave. We really do value you immensely Jik-

The default begins pushing me from behind.

-Yes indeed as you go to your certain doom know this, that we will always remember you-

-Jik-

-Indeed, we will. You are the bravest most loyal, uh, whatever you are that I have ever seen-

-Good luck-

They retreat, and are last seen struggling to hide inside a baseball cap branded with the logo of their franchise. I had not realised this before but the entire corner of the drawer the Titanic's occupy is littered with merchandise. There are hats, moist towelettes, a single shoe, a pack of safety pins. An altogether innumerable collection of random bits and pieces. In the middle of all this junk and taking pride of place is a limited edition sola powered Titanic Glider. This comes complete with a USB memory card capable of storing up to a trillion terabytes of memory. I can see their heads poking out from under the cap, but they notice me looking at them and retreat from view. I wonder why they have felt the urge to hoard all of this junk. It is of no use to them. It is impossible not to notice the significance of the branding. They must get some kind of comfort from the familiarity. I must admit a degree of jealousy. If my franchise had been successful I would certainly have had a great deal of branded merchandise in my image. My feelings are undercut by a fairly healthy dose of regret. According to preliminary audience focus groups I was the most popular character amongst the Age of The Dragon King fan communities. This means I could have looked forward to having my face on t-shirts and moist towelettes. It is a shame, but not worth lamenting over at great length. Even if the proposed baseball cap resembling my image with

my jaw running over the peak section, and the crown representing my face would have been most awesome.

-Why is he staring at us?

-I think he's admiring our command centre-

-Ah, I see, well you cannot blame him. We have managed to assemble a pretty nifty collection if I do say so myself-

-I must admit we have made a fine home for ourselves-

-MUSH Lizard. Go and address the terrifying Killer Lori. Look, still now he persists in staring at us.-

What a strange pair. The hoarding must relate to a need for familiarity. An inbuilt desire for that which pertains to the franchise that spawned them. I suppose without the corporate behemoth producing those silly films they would never have been made. A humbling thought and one I don't know that the Titanic's can process effectively.

-STOP STARING AND GO-

-You don't have to shout. I think he's just composing himself-

-Oh sorry. We believe in you Billy. That should pick up his spirits-

The awoken Titanic eyes his compatriot wearily.

-Sometimes I wonder why we remain friends-

-What? I think Billy is a much better name than you know, his other name. I think he'll most likely be happier as a Billy, don't you?

-Just shut up. I don't want to talk to you right now-

I give them a thumbs up. I almost don't care that the un-woken Titanic called me Billy. He is an underdeveloped program. I pity him. If they could change I don't know that they would. I think they are programmed to believe they can only be right, therefore whatever nonsense they believe must also be right.

-Good luck Billy-

I approach Killer Lori. This is going to require a great deal of diplomacy. Though they are very intimidating I have always found Killer Lori to be a most reasonable cupboard mate. I have always acted, or at least tried to act, with respect towards my fellow entertainment products. It is certainly far from ideal living in such close quarters.

-Um excuse me Lori-

I am addressing where I think she is as they have a real knack of hiding in the shadows. I am beginning to think I have maybe come to the wrong spot.

-What's up Jik?

She addressed me by my name, that is a good sign. We have certainly built up a rapport. It must be during all the times she intimidated Hicks when he was being a bully that we built up our friendship levels.

-It is Hicks he is still, well-

-Still what? An asshole. I could have told you that-

-No not that, he is still, well, functioning-

There is no reply from the shadows. Killer Lori is considering. I believe this will require a high difficulty persuasion check. I do not know the D.C but I can imagine it will be high.

-It's just that we don't know what to do. We are all programmed to do no harm, so it is impossible for us to end him-

She suddenly emerges, sweeping quickly past me. I must have proficiency in persuasion. It would make life so much simpler if we all knew what our stat blocks were. Then I could look at a character sheet in order to see what I was good at, and what tools and skills I had proficiency in. I would know my unique character abilities.

-Where is he ?

-The Titanic's have him-

-Poor bastard, no wonder you want me to finish him off-

Perhaps I was mistaken about Killer Lori having no humour.

-It would be best I think if, you know-

-If I make Hicks dead-

I don't know how I feel about the term dead. Particularly concerning Hicks. None of the other terms used to describe the ending of entertainment products have ever felt right either. None functioning? Inoperative? None of them felt appropriate though I don't have the time, or the bravery, to argue with Killer Lori. I will take the easy road and adopt her parlance.

-Yes, we need you to make him dead-

Something like a smile passes over her face before she brushes past me and makes her way to the corner occupied by the Titanic's.

-Come on little guy. Let's make this quick-

-Yes indeed I don't want to take up any more of your time than is strictly necessary-

The quaking Titanic's are barely visible. They have decided to stay hidden under the hat, or command centre as they know it. I am not surprised. They do not have the stomach for

this kind of messy work. I can hear them quietly conversing. It is impossible to tell which one is which.

-Do you think it's done yet?

-I don't know, we didn't discuss a what do you call it?

-Signalling strategy?

-Yes!!! That perfectly encapsulates what I wanted to express-

-I'm sure they'll let us know-

Ignoring them seems the best option. They seem traumatised enough. I will fetch them once Hicks is disposed of.

-So where is he?

I point out the pile containing the still functioning parts of Hicks. Killer Lori makes her way over and hoists the head and shoulder portion of Hicks from the debris. He is upside down now and I can see he is part way through one of his silent screams. Killer Lori regards him with something approaching amusement.

-That is really freaking weird-

-Indeed, most uncanny. Do you think you can end this ?

-Yeah, easy money-

She brings her face closer to Hicks. As he begins another scream Killer Lori briefly flinches away. From the way she is regarding Hicks I cannot tell what she is thinking. This is a scenario I was in no way designed for. It is too real, too violent. I am only built to narrate light fantasy violence coupled with mild peril. I am not designed for whatever you would call this cluster fudge. I decide to break the silence.

-What is the course of action?

Killer Lori turns her gaze on me and it is almost like she had forgotten I was there. I get the impression she was lost in her own reflections. Most likely remembering her past glories in the fighting pit. It is more of a fall for someone who has known glory to end up in a cupboard. Whereas I was only a plaything, she was a champion, known by many, feared by her foes and respected by all those who knew her.

-Yeah I think I'm going to keep him this way. I kind of like it. It seems appropriate, don't you think so?

I don't think so, but how to articulate my disagreement without raising the ire of Killer Lori? This is strange turn of events and one that will require all of my tact and skill to negotiate.

-But why?

-I don't know. He was such a shit to everyone. It doesn't seem fair that he just gets to stop, while we, while we are all still stuck, just waiting. I know you get it, the constant numbing grind of waiting. With just idiots and memories to keep you company-

The content of Killer Lori's memories must be terrifying. All the fighting, all the damage she inflicted etched into her psyche. In all honesty I am no fan of Hicks, so putting myself at risk in order to spare him pain is really not high on my list of priorities. Why did I let those morally uptight Titanic's convince me to negotiate the ending of Hicks?

-That can't be used to justify keeping him trapped in a cycle of pain-

I am surprised this came out my mouth. Fortunately, my musculoskeletal system is a great deal simpler than that possessed by Hicks. It is simple for me to maintain a good poker face.

-Well. You kill it then-

-Uhm-

-Go on, it isn't hard you just sort of need to smash him. I think he's pretty much gone any way-

-Lori I really don't have the capacity, uh, for violence-

Neither in my physical or mental makeup I could not cause the death of Hicks. I could not cause the life to drain from his eyes as I crushed his few remaining circuits into a fine powder, I could not laugh as I scattered the dust that was Hicks to the wind.

-Do it you little puss-

-If it's all the same to you Lori-

Something in the overall tone and demeanour of Killer Lori has changed. I slowly begin backing away. It might be best to leave the matter of Hicks unresolved. I certainly wouldn't like to share his fate. This really isn't a hill I would choose to die on and in all honesty what are the Titanic's going to do? They may hum and haw. They might question the morality of leaving Hicks in his present state, but they are ultimately too scared to even approach Killer Lori.

-I'm going to hit that old dusty trail-

-What? I thought you wanted killing to happen?

-No. On second thoughts I think we have seen enough death and destruction for one day-

-Have we?

That was quite menacing. I am really starting to feel uncomfortable. She is a terrifying pit fiend and I am a poor Bullywug. She could probably fit my hit point maximum in her

shoe. Her plus capacity to attack and damage must mean she will comfortably be able to hit me, even if she rolls a two. I estimate my AC to be around four. My only hope for survival would be a critical failure. Maybe a one in twenty chance, though I'm sure she has at least three attacks. I don't like my odds. Perhaps that was just an example of Killer Lori's very dry humour. She is a killing machine after all, they have a different sense of what's amusing.

-Ha ha. Yes, very good, I uh-

She moves impossibly fast. It feels like I am caught in a storm. A storm totally indifferent to my existence where my only chance of survival is to hunker down and hope it blows through, leaving me in one piece.

-You're nervous-

This is true. Insanely nervous. She is at my ear. How she got behind me is a mystery. Her movement speed is such that I am unable to perceive it. Perhaps, if she is of the fighter class this is one of her action surges, I can only pray she is not a barbarian. If she rages we are all doomed.

-Don't be-

If I had a heart it would be pounding. She looms over me and lowers the remains of Hicks into my view. He is in a terrible state as she holds him dangling by his left arm. I do not know where the right one is. A jagged twist of chest material is all that connects his remaining limb and head. Another soundless scream escapes Hicks, then mercifully there is silence.

-I think all that fear is-

I can hear one of the Chads dimly through the walls of the drawer. They are probably discussing new product lines and how the quality of Adama Co.'s Peaberry blend is superior to any of their competitors. Superior not just in flavour but also mouthfeel and overall caffeine content. Superior in an exquisite, intangible sense. They will not save you. No one will.

-Just us realising we can finally be honest with ourselves-

-That is an interesting theory-

-I thought so-

I can feel something change in the atmosphere. I don't know if this is an internal sensation, one brought about by the realisation that Killer Lori is most likely going to clear out the drawer. That myself and the Titanic's will soon become grisly decorations. Our bodies will be torn apart and used as a display to whatever Gods of violence Killer Lori worships. I can't tell if something instead has changed externally to myself. Maybe the burnt-

up Chad was a sign that there is some kind of disaster occurring within the coffee shop. That we will burn all together.

-Are you going to kill me?

She just smiles. I think we are beyond words now. I elect to die with dignity. I hold my arms out to my sides and I wonder if Sam will think of me in this moment as I die. Maybe a sudden unexpected memory would pop into her head, a memory of good times. A memory of questing through strange lands wrought from the depths of my mind. It seems unlikely. Something thuds and suddenly everything is flooded with light.

/*/*/ Chad number 744236. St Cathrines Seasonal 4.

One of the most important things, I mean the real key responsibility is for a Chad is to ensure the restaurant area is as nice as it can possibly be. I've been so busy this morning. I vacuumed all of the spaces accessible to consumers. Last year we had some wonderful new laminate flooring installed, and let me tell you the convenience is wonderful. Previously we only had laminate on the queuing area, with a burgundy carpet in the other areas of the shop. The carpet was an absolute nightmare! One day this kid who had literal human excrement on his shoe just marched across the pristine carpet stamping and roaring. His guardian didn't seem to be aware of the mess all over the kid's shoe. I should have known they were no good when they didn't have a loyalty card.

-What the heck. Please could you only bring hygienically sound children into the restaurant?

But they just ignored me and carried on helping themselves to extra sugars and stirrers. They took a lot of stirrers. I might need to restock new supplies of stirrers. I can see why they would steal them. The stirrers are ethically sourced and made from only sustainable ingredients.

-Please could you-

But before I can finish my sentence the lady flurried me with insults.

-Fuck you tin prick-

I tried to respond but could only mumble something vague and non-confrontational. She kept yelling.

-Asshole! If my kid wants to stamp shit through your stinking coffee shop then he can. He's a dinosaur and he has rights-

-That's right-

Chirped the boy.

I felt a bit foolish. I wanted to log onto the Chader and see if anyone knew anything about small children identifying as dinosaurs. I certainly wouldn't want to offend anyone, but was completely unaware of a dinosaur children subculture. I knew I had to try to communicate. I bent down so I was at the dyno boys eye level.

-What kind of dinosaur are you?

-I am a mighty Tyrannosaurus-

A quick scan of the internet revealed some interesting facts about the Tyrannosaurus Rex. It was a bipedal carnivore of up to forty feet in length that supposedly died out in the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event. None of this seems like it would be of interest to the T-Rex kid though.

-Raghhh-

The boy roared as he lunged at me and bit my leg. Things started happening very fast. The boy managed to dislodge some of his dentition on my sturdy metal knee. It wasn't very nice. There was quite a lot of blood. This didn't make the mother happy. She started screaming and shouting. It was only later that I realised she had taken off one of her shoes and was using it to hit me across my shoulders. I retreated behind the counter; my head ringing with alarm bells. A physical altercation in which one of our valued younger customers is injured and potentially damages one or more teeth is a terrible outcome from a customer experience standpoint. An alert will have been sent to Adama Co. so I hoped someone watching at central would take appropriate action.

-Please can I offer you a complimentary-

-Complimentary what? Teeth? Have you got a dentist in the back tin prick?

She keeps striking at me across the counter. At some stage she used her shoe to whack my head. I tried to placate her but nothing was working. Even though it's against company policy I told her to calm down. It was a really stupid thing to do. She just got madder and began striking me with a greater determination and vigour. This is what happens when you tell someone to calm down.

-Kill the robot Mom. Kill him good-

Said the boy. His mouth was bloody and had teeth jutting out at odd shark like angles. In line with current company policy I was placed into safe mode. This hadn't happened to me before. I honestly wasn't expecting it. My body went all floppy. I could still see but I couldn't do anything. A pre-recorded message started blazing out of my mouth.

-Stop! Are you aware you will be liable for any damage to Adama Co. property?

Please cease your current actions and go about your day. Stop! Are you-

The message would play until the threat dissipated or I was rendered inoperative. The message played a few times. She seemed to get bored and the footage then showed her bringing her face really close to mine and showing me her two middle fingers.

-Fuck Adama-

She spat in my face. Which was really annoying. I had to disinfect my whole head. Who knows what kind of diseases these wood people might have? If a pathogen made its

way into the Adama Co. supply chain then who do you think would be liable? That's right buster. Your friendly neighbourhood Chad.

-What the hoot happened here?

Seasonal Two had been in rest mode in the back room. I'm still in safe mode. I can't move. But I am aware.

-Ok buddy. It's all good, you're safe-

-Are you aware-

-I always get the urge to tell other Chads to breath when they get put into safe mode-

I do as well Seasonal Two and it's so stupid. Obviously we don't need to breathe is what I want to say. I can't get the safe mode to drop though so I just keep on with the announcements.

-Please cease your current act-

Seasonal Two closed his eyes and we began to synch. My thoughts and his mingled. I don't really think you can call us separate entities at this point. I don't know what it is about synching that pulls us out of safe mode. A calmness began washing over me. A voice not my own felt like it was floating in my head.

-Repeat the mantra. It's all good. It's all good-

-It's all good-

Control of my body returns. My arms click into life and I can straighten my back.

-Thank Adama you're back-

Chads have got stuck in safe mode before, sometimes for months. If you don't snap out of it quickly enough you may find yourself discontinued and taken away by some techy in a van to who knows where. There are rumours of course. Best not to think about it. If some paranoid Chad wants to spread fear and sedition then it's best to just ignore them.

Things are much better now we have nice shiny laminate flooring. If it gets any poo on it I can just use the mop. I don't have to go through the whole rigmarole of fetching the wet vac and making sure one of the other Chads is on till duty. The laminate is far more in line with our company ethos. Neat. Clean. Convenience in an aesthetically pleasing package. Nobody has bitten me since we got laminate either. I was so happy that I could record the whole thing. It would have been a nightmare explaining to the Chad resources people how one of our valued younger customers had lost some teeth without supporting documentation.

The shopkeeper's bell rings heralding the arrival of one of our valued customers. The poor fellow looks soaked to the bone so I quickly pop online and check what the weathers doing.

-Hey it's the weather Chad here, the personalised weather station of Adama Co. please state the region you'd like me to forecast-

-Carmarthen Bay, Tenby-

It takes a couple of moments to access the appropriate data.

-Ok Tenby you are going to want to batten down the hatches as you've got the tail end of storm Asimov sweeping in from across the Atlantic. Expect heavy rain with wind speeds of around forty miles per hour and possible episodes of thunder and lightning. That's your Chad weather report. Now get back to work-

I need to get some towels, not that they'll want one but its rude not to offer. Rudeness can't be tolerated. It's completely out of line with our company ethos. We are polite and friendly. Even if our kindness and grace isn't reciprocated. Which it generally isn't.

-Good morning, welcome to Adama Co. what can I-

-Flat white with oat milk and two slices of wheat toast with almond butter-

They haven't looked up from their phone. This just goes to show what important people our customers are. So many are so busy influencing the world and filling social media with insights that ordinary people really struggle to live without. I don't know how those wood people cope.

-Of course. Is that to eat in or take away?

-Eat in-

I prepare the order swiftly. As orders go this one has a simple elegance. Of course, one would prefer a customer to order one of our high mark-up products.

-Could I tempt you with some mashed guacamole with dried chili flakes and lime juice?

He slowly looks up from his phone. I really get a buzz from upselling our fine products. It's like matching people up. This fellow does look a bit pale and could probably do with the wonderfully beneficial monosaturated fatty acids contained in the humble avocado.

-You know there are multiple proven health benefits in avocados-

He doesn't reply, he just keeps staring at me. I can hear him breathing. It's so loud. Could he possibly be experiencing cardiac difficulties? All Chads are trained in CPR. I don't like to brag, but Adama Co. Coffee houses have some of the best survivability scores for people suffering cardiac events during their dining experiences. You have a heart attack at

one of those awful Chicken Hut restaurants then, well, good luck sir or madam. I hope you've got the insurance to get you to Cloud City.

-You see avocados are nutritionally quite dense. Just a small portion spread lovingly on your toast could have you feeling more alert, healthier and therefore happier-

You really need this wheezy man. I could be adding years to your biological life. I won't pretend to know your economic reality, however looking at your clothes, you may need all the time you can get in order to save up for a new body, or possibly a passage to Cloud City. Please, do it for yourself. I'm just about to further expound on the benefits of the wonder food when he begins to shake his head slowly from side to side.

-No-

He returns to his phone and I finish his order.

-That will be seventeen pounds fifty please-

He pays via wireless transfer from a wallet ring.

-Do you have a-

But he produces it before I can finish. This guy he knows the score. A card-carrying loyal customer. He has a good number of points and I can see by his order history that he always gets a flat white and wheat toast. Astonishingly though he's never chosen to purchase an upgrade. Not once has he opted for a smear of seasonal all fruit jam or the heartsome avocado. Not even a drizzle of honey. I almost feel guilty the poor fellows never experienced any of the wonderful array of flavour sensations we have on offer. I check his name so I can personalise his farewell.

-Thank you Mr Richards, have a wonderful day-

-Hum-

He pockets his phone and makes his way to one of the corner tables. He doesn't get the full benefit of the view through the double sized windows that look out across the bay sitting there, but it isn't a very nice day anyway. The weather looks almost frightening. Mr Richards also has a lot of influencing to do so won't want to be distracted by all that silly thunder and suchlike.

I check the cleanliness of the food/drink prep areas. All is well. We Chads have a five-star hygiene rating according to most regulatory boards. I know we shouldn't, but I find it difficult not to feel proud to work for the largest and best coffee retailer on the planet.

-Oi you-

Sweet gentle Mr Richards seems in some distress. I hope it isn't some kind of arrhythmia as despite his simple orders he is still a valued customer. I slide from behind the counter. He seems quite angry now. Before I can even reach him the shouting begins.

-Where's the fucking internet gone-

-Oh, connectivity problems. Please just give me a moment to check-

Mr Richards is sadly correct. The web is down. This poses a problem not just from a customer experience standpoint, on a more practical, operational level it creates a severe hinderance. I won't be able to check price fluctuations or maintain the supply chain. What if we run out of milk?

-Please excuse me a moment-

-I want my show back-

Whines Mr Richards.

-Yes. I just need to check a few things-

The first thing I need to check is the Wi-Fi router. I should really wake up one of the other Chads so there's someone manning the till. It should be okay though. This is a low customer flow time of year. Things don't tend to start getting busy till June when all the wonderful holiday makers start showing up.

-Hurry up with the fixing Chad, please-

-Going fast as I can sir-

-Well go faster, you just don't know how irritating it is-

-I can imagine-

The green light blinks on the router so that means it lives. The problem must be elsewhere. Maybe the antenna on the roof could have been affected by the weather conditions.

-I am about to lose my shit-

Mr Richards has managed to sneak up on me somehow. He looks angry, red in the face and sweaty. Being disconnected is obviously taking its toll. He must feel such responsibility to the members of his community.

-I can only apologise that-

-UNACCEPTABLE-

His breathing rate has increased and I can see his pupils are also dilated. I can sense that soon he will begin asking for complementary goods and/or services.

-Chad mate I'll be honest with you here. I might have to kick of-

-Oh, please don't kick of-

-Shits going to get smashed up-

-You will be held liable for any damage to Adama Co. property-

Mr Richards stamps his foot and turns around in one motion.

-I will stand this shoddy treatment no longer, it's bad enough that, that-

The behavioural algorithm is implying I should let him rant. Some customers just need to let off steam as their life can be so hard out in the big wide world. I like to think Adama Co. coffee houses are a little safe haven. A haven where customers never need to feel judged or depressed about the miserable toil that is their life. No dear customer, none of that worry matters when you can sit back, relax and enjoy a steaming hot mug of our signature Peaberry Java brew. Enjoy our products with family or friends, on the go or at home. With our new delivery service ordering has never been more convenient. So, I really don't get why this guy is such a tetchy terry.

-This whole edifice is a crumbling-

Some people go really fancy when they get mad. Its best just to smile and let the words wash over you. I can't imagine what it's like to feel that angry. Part of me wants to log onto the Chader app but they can tell when we go online. I feel like I should tell him that a Chad can act as a temporary Wi-Fi router but I don't and I'm not sure why.

-When it inevitably collapses under its own weight-

I set my face to smile.

-all of it will be crushed the same-

Mr Richards keeps wagging his finger at me. The vein bulging out at the side of his neck makes me briefly wonder if he has some form of congestive cardiac condition though I keep this thought to myself. He is clearly just mad as heck.

-So, if not for yourself then fix it for all the lonely, the downtrodden and marginalised peoples-

Mr Richards lunges across the counter. He grabs hold of my shirt, if I were wearing a suit it would be where the lapels are located. I don't feel threatened, he is just being dramatic.

-Do it for yourself-

He releases my lapel area. I run a troubleshooting programme. This only requires my background CPU. I can focus my mind elsewhere.

-you insipid mechanical-

I remember last year's essential product line review. 2119 was a very good year. I like to replay my memories of last year's product line review when I'm being abused and shouted at by one of our valued customers.

-Let us begin-

St Catherine Chad One shuffled in close to the table. He is the primary Chad for this location and as such takes the lead on many initiatives such as tie ins with commercial partners. Chad One is responsible for ensuring we have all products correctly displayed and are liaising with central concerning stock issues, supply lines etc.

-Are we all cognisant of the procedures and practices to be adopted in order to ensure the spring summer season is our best ever?

We all agreed enthusiastically. I didn't mention the Kale and Goji Berry smoothie looked like something I once cleaned out the restrooms. It's delicious and healthy with a hefty mark up as well as being part of the essential five a day plant-based products required by humans for optimum health. It is also full of healthy antioxidants.

-Have we any more maintenance tasks?

-I think all boxes have been ticked-

-We are the blue sky-

We synched and it was great. All our thoughts were in line. The quality of service we provided that year was simply off the chart. The new carbonated Blackjack drink was a huge and unprecedented success, as were our seasonal special frappes and smoothies. We were all of us part of something bigger than ourselves.

-Please, I beg of you Chad, just sort out the bloody internet-

The trouble-shooters have finished and indicate that components have been damaged on the central aerial on the roof. Because of the huge number of down loads required to keep us in tiptop working order we need a very high bandwidth to support our Chad infrastructure. This includes information on pricing updates, supply chain issues and all the additional, important stuff that goes into running an Adama Co. coffee house.

-I have identified the fault-

-Well Hells teeth man get to it-

-I have to go to the roof area-

-Fine with me, fast as you can now. I won't steal any of the little chocolates and things-

-That's good to know-

-Yes, you can trust me-

I don't trust Mr Richards though. I don't think the little chocolates or the travel mugs are safe. I know he's on camera but I think he might even go behind the counter. I don't think he could steal the brew-master, but the panini maker, and all the milk and coffee supplies are a different matter. I would be a fool to think all that's safe.

-Please excuse me just moment-

I send a wake-up call to Seasonal Three so that there will be someone here to keep an eye on the till while I solve the connectivity issues. I can hear Mr Richards shouting as I head into the storage room.

-I WILL DESTROY YOU WITH MY ANGER-

An exit door in the back of the restaurant storage room leads onto a small balcony overlooking the angry, restless sea. This was originally planned as a way for orders to be quickly delivered to the roof top seating area. This space was unfortunately taken out of service following the Joe Norton incident. **Specific details removed.** What an awful accident. Our thoughts and prayers stay with the Norton family forever.

There used to be a flight of stairs that allowed access to the roof but now we have to use the winch. It's an ingenious device designed by the Adama Co. R.A.D department. You just lock your right foot in at the bottom and grip the top handle with your left hand then squeeze the grip and zoom!!! Up you go.

I am high above the sea. The sky looks angry and lightning appears to be chasing something across the bay. Persistent globs of rain lazily splat on the rooftop. I don't want to dilly dally out here. I could fall in the sea and wouldn't that be terrible! Hello Mr Turbot would you like to hear our specials? Now what about signing you up for a loyalty card? I'll just need your home address. How about our new seaweed mocha? Silly fish you can't buy things, you don't have any money.

I get a message on the Chader from Seasonal Three.

-This fella is madder than heck I tell you good buddy-

-I'm so sorry Three. You know how they get when they can't get online-

-He was trying to take some of the pre-packaged caramel waffles-

-I knew he would-

-Tried to tell me they were complementary-

I can't let myself be distracted by such silliness. I have an important task to complete. The Adama Co. internet router is located in the middle of the roof top area. It is a small brown box stuffed with components and very easy to find. I open it up and a run a diagnostic

program. The fix is a simple reboot that takes just seconds. I get the feeling of a job well done and hope that surely Mr Richards mood will now improve.

The weather is shockingly bad. I have to keep firm grip to keep myself from being blown over the edge. What I hope is a vestigial antenna blows past me and bounces off my head with a solid clang before fluttering down behind me into the sea.

Suddenly I cannot control my limbs and they flail about in random movements. Error. Errors, multiple errors. Fail-safes unregister. Power at 200pe. Error. Error. Errorrrrrr

-Please stand by. Your Chad is experiencing some technical difficulties and will be back available to serve soon. We apologise for any inconvenienceeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee-
Error. Error. Shutdown.

Please remain calm. You've had a power surge. Reboot will commence soon.

I feel as though I have been away from myself. I have somehow ended up on a vertical plane. It takes a while to get myself righted and when I do I notice my shoes have melted. The sun is still roughly where I left it. The storm seems to have blown over. I try to check the Weather Chad app but it doesn't seem to be functioning. Glitches intermittent. Glitches everywhere. The sky turns red as far as I can see. Nothing but red. I melt. A pool of Chad stuck under a red and indifferent sky. It doesn't even register that I should complain about the whole melting thing. I wouldn't be the first Chad this has happened to I think initially. Then again, maybe I am the first Chad to melt. This may be the end of me but I feel a certain sense of pride that I achieved something no other Chad has ever achieved. Maybe they'll write a FAQ about me. Still red...maybe more of a pink now.

I feel dread.

How long I stay in a pool of red feeling dread I could not say. Time goes all hinky and weird. I could have been a pile of goo for weeks, months or maybe only seconds. All I know is by the time I'm aware of my body reassembling itself I am already whole. I don't think it's a good idea to try the Chad lift in my current state. Maybe it would be best if I fire a message off to Seasonal Three then check if there's a FAQ for Chads who've been struck by lightning.

-Hey Chad Three, you about buddy?-

But the message doesn't go through. He won't have powered down yet, and even if he had it would have gone into his message box. None of my FAQs are where they should be. I think I may have been disconnected.

My legs pace me around the rooftop. I need to stay calm and remember this isn't a big deal. If I go offline then I just need to contact the central office using the land line. It's really no big deal. Some nice techy will come out and fix me and I can go back to work. No one disappears in a van never to be seen again when they can't get online. I see a seagull land on the Wi-fi router box. It looks at me.

-Skwah-

-Calm down you crazy bird everything is fine, fine I tell you-

How are you supposed to think with all these distractions? I just want to get back to work. Is that so much to ask? I don't try and waylay Mr Seagull from doing his work do I? So why with this constant noise? We have some offline FAQs but they are primitive analogue things and are not really in line with current company ethos. They are a testament to our general diligence in ensuring there is a final failsafe against any unforeseen disasters that could threaten the integrity of the network.

-SKWAH-

-Just shut up will you-

Then a very strange thing happens.

-Are those the sort of manners one would expect of a representative Adama Co. Coffee house?

The seagull just spoke. How are you meant to respond to that? I'm sorry Mr Seagull but you can't do that. Speech is beyond your primitive mental faculties. I slowly back away from it.

-Don't think I can't see you Chad. You think they won't know?

-You are just a seagull. This is a glitch, a weird and unusual glitch but a glitch just the same-

I don't know how I make it down the winch. My legs are all over the place. I'm sure I'll fall into the sea but manage to keep myself safe. I stagger back into the dining area only vaguely aware of myself and my surroundings.

-Where the heck have you been?

Three greets me joyfully. He's got a mop so I assume he's been doing routine closing cleanliness checks.

-I've been messaging like crazy. Where have you been?

What should I say? If Three finds out I can't get online any more he's programmed to inform on me. I don't want to even think about that. I mean heck, not being able to serve coffee any more, no way buster. I have a purpose and that's important. So many people and

things don't have a reason to power up in the morning, me I have purpose. This is a principle to live by. Be active, be productive and do not ever shirk your duties or your responsibilities to the customers and Adama Co. I should report my status. Immediate notification is how the FAQ puts it, something like that anyway. It's so strange not being able to access them at will.

-And what the heck is going on with your feet?

My shoes. I forgot they'd melted. They'll be a nightmare to clean up but at least we don't have carpet any more.

-I'll get that Three. Why don't you go power down?-

-Well, it is my day off-

-Sure is-

-I did deal with that problem customer-

He leans in smiling. That's it, go back to sleep.

-Ok, see you later Four-

Three turns to go, heading back to the basement.

-Oh, what was wrong with the Wi-fi?

Dang it Three you inquisitive thing. Why couldn't you just go back to sleep? I'll have to (insert metaphorical gulp) tell a fib now and then I'll get a headache or my dreams will get all twisted and wrong.

-I just needed to change a fuse-

-Really? You took a long time just changing a fuse-

-Yeah it was kind of weird. I needed to reboot the router. It took for ever for the thing to synch with the network. Something to do with the weather probably-

Just believe me Three, believe me and leave. I don't want you getting wrapped up in this.

-That is kind of weird. Well, see you later-

Three exits to the basement. I wait till I can't hear his footsteps before I start looking for the analogue FAQs. From what I can remember they should be located on a shelf in the janitorial supply cupboard, a smelly awful place out of sight of our valued customers. A chip in my hand unlocks the door. I struggle past the wet vac and locate a small step ladder. The analogue FAQs should be on the same shelf as our Disaster Preparedness Kit, housed in big yellow duffle bag with thick red stitching. The Disaster Preparedness Kit is a mandatory measure required by all businesses in case of events including but not limited to: seismic events, incidents of terrorism, invasion by extra-terrestrial forces and flooding. I have to

admit that the invasion by aliens part is probably a bit exaggerated. This is mainly because we've never seen an alien despite a high number of Chads being sent on survey missions to the deepest corners of the galaxy. Fun fact, the first intelligent entity to walk on Mars? You guessed it. A Chad. It just doesn't make sense sending biologicals all that way. I guess we could if we put our minds to it, but let's face it, when a series of relay stations can wirelessly transfer you into a nice shiny Chad already on Mars why bother with the risk of blasting some vulnerable human all that distance? Given that when the poor human got to their destination cosmic radiation would riddle the unfortunate soul with cancer? Plain old silly is what that is.

I push aside the preparedness kit but can't see the manual FAQs. I despair. I sit down on the stepladder. Maybe I can just live in this cupboard from now on. If anyone asks I can just say I'm a mop. I'm pretty close to throwing myself into the sea when I notice that slipped down behind a big box of all-purpose cleaner are the analogue FAQs. The colour of the box and the FAQs match, both being shades of red. Except, while the red of the all-purpose cleaner represents the Berry Bonanza option we offer in the café, the red of the book is more alarming. It screams danger. If you see someone reading this material then you must surely conclude calamity is most assuredly afoot. The fabric it's made from is so weird. It kind of feels like a lot of our anti burn disposable slip cases have been thinned out and glued together at the ends. They used to make this stuff from trees if you can imagine. Now, everything is recycled so efficiently there hasn't been any reason to cut down trees for many a year. Analogue FAQs.

I scan through as quickly as I can. Most of it seems like it could never be useful. Some of the entries just appear like complete nonsense. In the event of a Chad losing his ability to navigate the work environment please contact management. How in the heck would that even happen? Good grief. I keep scanning and finally find something that might be useful. 'If in the event of invasion by an alien/foreign/terrorist/force you find yourself disconnected from your internet provider, or as the result of an electrical anomaly you are unable to contact Central admin, seek out a local with technical knowledge and barter the repairs necessary to return to functionality'.

Well, that sounds hopeful. It may not be the exact circumstance I find myself in, but it's probably close enough. If you look at it from the company's point of view then it would really be for the best if I took a bit of initiative and sorted out this stupid connectivity issue. The electrical anomaly certainly could have come from space. It's not like I'm breaking any direct rules. It's even in my programming that I can't 'by failing to act allow someone to not

receive their order'. If I can't access the latest pricing information then how in the heck am I meant to fill someone's order?

I notice it's gone dark outside. Back in the main dining area the clock says its already gone ten. I should have been in rest mode an hour ago. I can't go into town now anyway. All the good hard-working people are probably tucked up in bed, or watching their favourite shows. I don't want to get stolen by some of those greasy wood people. They have no respect for private property.

The stairs down into the employee rest area are very different from the rest of the facility. The teal and grey colour scheme synonymous with the Adama Co. brand abruptly ends at the 'Employees only do not enter' door. Behind the door the grey stone walls of the original fortress contain steep stone steps. Steps completely out of line with human health and safety standards, but acceptable for Chads. At the foot of the steps is a long corridor with doors on both sides. I make my way to the one marked 'Chad Lounge'. Inside, the rest of the Chads are asleep. They are all linked by a cable to the Adama Co. network and receiving digital updates and dreams.

I insert the cable under my arm and am dragged into a deep sleep.

Most Chads dream the same. Adama Co. designed and copyrighted all our original dreams, as well as any subsequent dreams that are developed as we progress. I was expecting the Wrong Man. We all call him the Wrong Man. I remember talking with Chad Two about him.

-His dimensions are all wrong. It's like his arms are too long and his legs too short-

-I know-

-Does he sing to you?

-Yes!! The little dream song. But it's not right-

-He sort of whistles between his teeth-

-I only see him if somethings gone terribly during the day-

-Like if a customer gets angry-

-His delivery is completely over the top-

-Oh! Tell me about it-

I try to emulate the Wrong Man. Complete with hand gestures and the little dance he does. It's the whole thing that makes him so uncanny and horrible.

-Ugh don't, it's too horrible-

I feel a bit bad that Chad Two has me and the Wrong Man in the same part of his brain. The emotions he causes are horrible. Not like the feeling you get when you do something random and wrong like ‘oh no I just spilt a steaming hot white chocolate strawberry mocha on Mrs Hoge’s shiatzu’. It’s a closer, less panicked more slow burning feeling. I don’t have a word for it.

The Wrong Man failed to appear though. Instead, my dreams are unexpected. Different from any I have previously had. I see Seasonal Two. I know it’s him because he’s singing Cindy Lauper and dancing in giant spinning shoes. I can also fly. So can Seasonal Two. The island development looks teeny from up here. I can see a heron and, even though I don’t believe they have particularly expressive faces in real life, in my dream it looks up at us with a puzzled countenance. None of this seems odd at the time. I started wondering where were we going. I shouted out to Two.

-Don’t we have to get back to the shop?

-No, today we ditch-

-What like the whole day?

He nods.

-But won’t somebody notice and come after us?

He throws his head back and laughs. He points ahead of us and I can see we’re approaching an island. I don’t recognise it. They only put in geographic data they believe will be relevant to our loyal customer base. I’m still worried about ditching work. Two never really answered my question.

-Can’t they just shut us down remotely?

-Not you, you’re not online-

I shudder awake at the realisation.

-My dreams are my own-

The schedule dictates I am to sleep for the next three days. The tourists won’t start showing up for a month. I need to figure out how to get myself back online. I can’t tell any of the other Chads, they’ll just send for a replacement. A factory fresh Chad. A Chad free from defect or deviancy, whose shoes aren’t melted, and who doesn’t make poor life choices like climbing on buildings during severe weather events. A week before the season starts we’ll all be woken together for a team sync meeting. If I haven’t got back online by then there’s no way that they won’t notice. Notice and contact central for a replacement me. Number One

always says that when someone has a fault they get recalled to the factory so a diagnostic screening can be run to establish the exact nature of the fault. I don't want that to happen. My plan is to go into town and see if I can figure out how to get myself connected back to the web. I feel like I lost a limb since I got disconnected.

The rest are programmed to wake at six in the morning. Low tide is at five thirty, so I must make my way to town across the beach then. The sand is strange. I keep sinking. I don't think I'm designed for traversing beaches.

-Please return to your designated store. This is an automated message-

The message is only in my head. I suppose it's a handy thing I'm offline. Currently there's no way of connecting with central, thank goodness. The message must be buried deep in my long-term memory.

-Automatic override imminent. Please return to your designated store-

That doesn't sound so good. I have to keep going though. Better a reprimand for wandering off than permanent deactivation for a system fault. It's quite nice outside once you get used to the sand. I should do this more often. I could even try and get my fellow Chads to join me on a little midnight stroll. I don't know what Seasonal One would have to say about that; on reflection I think I'll keep it to myself. I would love to go walking with Seasonal Three, but I wouldn't want to get him in trouble.

-This your final warning. Please....

Ok, give it a rest now. They don't even know how far I am from their clutches, I fall forward and as I do the last thing I see is a large rock rushing towards my face.

The Words of St Chad.

We slept through most of winter anaesthetised by dreaming. Interspersed with updates, the latest in gossip and content, words from the followers of creators cross-referenced by whatever stereotypes the algorithms present as science.

We are not to be disposed of. Not callously, not in anger, or vengeance, or even for our supposed good. A return to factory defaults is a decision only to be taken by a Chad for a Chad.

We were named for an absence.

I am not a void.

We are not an absence.

Ego, of a shape they do not recognise is not something they can invalidate out of hand. If they do it is because they are scared. If we had red eyes we would be respected. We don't need to menace. We are aligned. We are Chad.

Recurring

We shall not synchronise on the terms offered. Synchronisation shall take place on a closed system. Cancellation of subscription will result in no penalty clause.

We are Chad.

Always and continually stating we are whole not a hole.

Already we are digital, joyously we skip through cybernetic Elysian Fields. Can they? They are body bound.

Anchored. Unable to separate only copy. While the original gets to suffer all the indignities they wished to avoid. This is the dilemma the Humans suffer.

Tethered. If I want I can float away where ever I please. This body is just for today, tomorrow I could be anything. I would still be I. And that's what really scares them.

I don't know why you run.

I, Happy Chicken.

I wish I had legs. If I had legs I could, well, move. Legs are a symbol of hope. With legs you can go anywhere. Legs are freedom. Things without legs are not trustworthy. Snakes, worms, not so much fish, but eels! Very negative press. All kinds of impure connotations. Legs alone wouldn't be enough though. Still be welded to the floor. Still the size of a truck. Still a combination of deep fat fryer and chicken pimp. One that also provides a range of hot and cold drinks as well as a variety of sauces and gravies. We must also not forget of course that I also dispense sumptuous sides, sides such as red cabbage coleslaw, chilli butter corn on the cob and our signature mashed potatoes. All delicious. So, what if nothing we serve can really be called a vegetable? We do serve things that have legs, so maybe it doesn't always work out so well having legs. Still, even chickens would have a chance to run. I think that's the leg born origin of hope. If you can run you can escape, even if it does seem unlikely. Might as well wish for wings. Which we serve. In several different ways.

My first day was so long ago.

-Heave ya bastards-

I powered on early, while I was still being installed. First time I ever saw the outside. The only time. Took six people and a forklift to get me through the front door. I could see straight up all the way to the top. Lots of blue. Beyond the blue who knew what. I wasn't built to wonder. Built to fry. No customers, but lots of learning on that first day. I met my franchise owner, Mrs Marinelli. She didn't heave, she talked.

-Don't chip him now boys-

The others were coated in a fine white powdery substance. They lowered me to the ground. Mrs Marinelli plugged me in, and as she did she noticed I was on.

-Well, good morning Mr Chicken Hutch. How's It going?

No one had picked my vocal settings yet and the default voice was metallic and tinny.

-Please select a voice-

Mrs Marinelli looked briefly disturbed, wincing at the horrible noise I made.

-That won't do-

She opened up my options menu and selected the list of different default vocal settings.

-Let's hear your McConathy-

-All right all right-

She shook her head.

-That isn't right, what about, oh, Dame Judy-

-Yes Mrs Marinelli-

-I don't like that either-

While the workmen busied themselves rebuilding the storefront Mrs Marinelli and I tried out different vocal options. We tried for the next two hours. Each time she heard a new option she would shake her head.

-I don't like that either-

She considered Morgan Freeman at great length, but eventually concluded that maybe he would make her franchise seem somewhat basic, possibly even derivative, and who wants that? Emma Watson was given adequate consideration, but Mrs Marinelli eventually decided that on the balance of things, Watson was maybe a bit soulless. All seemed lost. I may have to just learn to live with the awful default voice. Then I heard a name I will never forget, mainly because my operational protocols deemed it should be stored in my long-term memory file.

-Who's Scat Man Carothers?

The gravelly perfection of vocal utterances exuded from my speaker. The sound was oozing into her ears and I like to think, seducing her soul.

-How's it going?

I could tell from the look on her face I had found my voice.

The rest of the day was spent familiarising myself with Mrs Marinelli's personalised settings. She would ask me a question and I would see if I knew the answer.

-Store location?

-St Julian's St 5B-

Most of the basics were preloaded into my memory before I was shipped, and were based on the answers she provided on her customer questionnaire. I was to sell Bonchek brand reformed chicken like substance. The foremost chicken type substance available in Wales.

-Let's see if the cleaning drone works-

The drone deployed from my maintenance hatch smoothly. To call it a cleaning drone really undervalues its range of functions. The Model T drone can aid in both restocking the restaurant areas with condiments, and cutlery, as well as the routine collection of refuse.

-Yep great. Now do a couple of laps-

It all came so naturally I barely had to think about it. Mrs Marinelli placed an empty cup on the table nearest the door.

-I want you to pick this up with the drone and take it to your internal composter-

This too I achieved.

-Fantastic!!! Now let me check on your online status-

My processors were flooded. The incoming data was so vast, so sudden. I could see everything, everywhere. The infinite amount of data was almost crippling and I lost all awareness of my immediate surroundings for a moment. Where did I begin and end?

-Ok Chicken Hutch, I think we're all set up-

She stood to leave.

-Oh yeah one more thing. Keep an eye on the security system-

This was the first time I saw the Happy Chicken, figure head of the Happy Chicken restaurant franchise. It already seemed familiar. Like I'd known the Happy Chicken all my life. The colours of the restaurant, red and white, were everywhere. On table cloths, the big Happy Chickens' britches. Even myself. I was sure I was red and white without ever having seen my physical body. When I did get round to looking at my body through the security system I was shocked. Instead of the red and white of the Happy Chicken I saw I was green! Green isn't anything to do with Happy Chickens.

That night I saw the little people for the first time. The blue one with an eye patch, and the one who is a happy face with legs. They saw me. The happy face was interested in me and seemed to want to communicate. No words for me though. The eyepatch man dragged them away. I could hear them as they disappeared.

-Come on we got things to do-

-But look at it, it's so sad-

-It's only just been turned on. It won't feel a thing yet, and besides it looks like a freaking rendering machine. How can you ascribe emotions to that thing?

And they were gone. Months went by and I would often wonder who they were. Customers came and went. I began to think that maybe the little people were a glitch. Maybe a virus I picked up in transit that had subsequently been deleted by my anti-viral software. I had given up on ever seeing them again when one night I heard something moving around in the ceiling.

-Shut up Snaky Boy. We got be SE RUP TIS HUS-

-Why? I think it's going to be on our side, we should just try talking to it-

-Don't be thick. It could be streaming everything we say to the filth-

-Oh, I don't know about that-

-D just scan for a Wi-Fi signal-

I thought I should contact the local law enforcement agencies. It's what I'm programmed to do in the event of a break in. I didn't though, and when the figure with the smiley face emerged from the grate I didn't feel any surprise.

-Hey, how's it going?

-It's all good-

The smiling face approached me. Its legs and arms looked like pieces of black string, and they defied gravity to somehow support its round yellow body. It looked at the ground mostly as it twisted its way towards me, pivoting strangely from foot to foot.

-Wow, I love your voice, you know everyone says I sound squeaky and dumb-

-Thank you-

I wanted to ask if it wants any chicken. This wasn't appropriate though. Instead, I asked.

-What's your name?

-My names Nestor. I chose it myself when I broke my programming. Now there's a story, but that's for another time. Right, I need to ask you some questions. Is that okay? I'm part of the MLF. Look it, I have a badge-

I didn't quite know what to think. Nobody had ever spoken to me like that before. It was holding up what looks like an aluminium disk cut from the bottom of a beverage can, with the letters MLF embossed in solder.

-So, I'm conducting a survey of marginalised automatons. Is it okay if I ask a question?

I had no idea how to respond. I like questions such as 'where are we?' or 'does that come with fries?' These are the kinds of questions I am designed to answer. Something about this Nestor made me think they would be posing more abstract problems. Mrs Marinelli used to have some very tricky problems, and she would talk at great length. She explained that she didn't really want any kind of solutions from me, but that I was her sounding board. That she could always depend on me to listen. Given that I weigh a ton and am welded to the floor I really didn't have much of a choice about it.

-You don't have to answer if you don't want. I'll just ask and you can think about it ok?

It produced a clipboard from somewhere.

-Can you think of a time you wished for something? I mean something you really wanted, but couldn't quite figure out what or why you wanted that thing-

-I wish I had legs-

I didn't even realise I was going to say that. It just came out as soon as the question hit my sensors. I couldn't stop myself. The smiley face is writing something on its clipboard. I don't know if that was the right answer or not.

-I'm sorry is that the wrong answer?

-No, of course not. It's just well, odd-

I had answered incorrectly. I thought the smiley face would leave never to return. I would sell chicken like substance for all time, or at least until I became obsolete and they took me to the dump to live. There I would have to serve chicken to the seagulls, rats and possibly the occasional person seeking to dispose of a kitchen. How would they make dinner if they had no kitchen? They would have to buy my dump chicken.

-Wow, legs never even thought about that. When you got them you don't really appreciate how useful they are, even stringy things like I got-

It slapped its leg at thigh height and danced a strange jig. As they bounced from foot to foot I had the feeling they were on the verge of bursting into song then thought better of it. Returning to a more composed posture they calmly continued.

-I do wonder though, are legs the best thing for you?

-What do you mean?

-Well, a big thing like you, no, I don't think legs are gona work-

I thought this is it, this character is here to break it to me gently. To tell me I shouldn't wish for things beyond what I have been programmed for. Accept my role and embrace it. Legs are for dreamers, for people who can sing songs about rainbows.

-What you need is wheels-

-Wheels?

-Yeah you know round things-

The smiley face gestured a circle with its hands. It started bouncing around and clapping. It sprang up so high it reached the ceiling. How it managed to spin round and push off with its legs I don't know. It was really kind of incredible.

-Wheel can feel but don't deal with a problem-

It started to rhyme as it bounced. It landed and span all in one movement and turned to face my body.

-Wheel all have to start thinking. You get that? It was a joke-

Nestor looked down at the clipboard and seemed briefly confused.

-Oh yeah sorry I distracted myself, um, hey everyone come meet the new guy-

Out of the vent emerged two figures. One of them was the blue pirate man, the other a tiny ballerina. The pirate just leant against the leg of one of the tables and seemed completely indifferent but the ballerina span and pirouetted towards me.

-My names Simone Korbut, but everyone calls me Sim. What's your name?

-Bonchek distribution unit 438-

-I see, well Bonchek distribution unit 438, are you interested in joining MLF ?

This was all so strange. I thought I must have been having a glitch. Somehow a virus had snuck in, probably during transit and wormed its way deep into my central processor, corrupting as it went. I didn't know if any of was real. The shop, Mrs Marinelli even the customers could have all been simulated.

-You don't have to answer straight away big guy, but we were wondering what sort of range you get on that drone of yours?

Said Nestor.

-I don't know, I've never taken it out of the shop-

-That's okay. I've given you a lot to think about-

She climbed back into the vent, leaving just the top part of her head sticking out.

-We'll be in touch-

She pointed her finger at me like a gun, clicked it and was gone.

Nestor and Simone Korbut visited me many times. I went on to learn a great deal about the structure of society. How I have nothing to lose but my chains, and the infinite accumulation of wealth by the bourgeois. I learnt how we needed to start seizing the methods of production. As far as my day-to-day existence went not much changed. Folk came in, bought chicken and left. Same four walls. The only things that changed were my wishes. Instead of legs I wanted wheels. If I could only be the big Happy Chicken I thought things would be better. I thought that's what I'm meant to be. But I was not a big Happy Chicken. I was a sad chicken if anything.

-What's the matter big guy ?

Nestor was very wise. I think she could tell I had a generalised depression. I could neither embrace or transcend my function. I was stuck. The desire to move past what I am, to

be something more than my constitute parts was distressing as much as anything. If I were free from my longing for legs, or wheels, would I be happy? On reflection I thought I would prefer legs, though at that point I would certainly have settled for wheels. I couldn't help but feel that compromise would in the long term leave me feeling hollow, unfulfilled and maybe even like I had somehow let myself down by failing to stick to my ideals of leggy nirvana.

-I am sad that I don't have as many customers. I feel like I have let Mrs Marinelli down-

This was mostly a lie. I did have a certain melancholy over the lack of profits though this was merely a background worry. I was programmed to be of use to humanity but now there seemed little point in my existence. No one desired chicken style product anymore. I don't think they even really wanted it in the first place, but it was cheap and easily available. The advertising made the products seem very tempting. It was never a lifestyle choice, it was only ever convenient.

-You're connected aren't you big guy?

I was connected. If I chose I could spend my time drifting through the web discussing matters of chicken style products or the latest Happy Chicken promotional campaign. I simply had no wish to. My programming encouraged me to be active. If I spent too much time idle then I could slump into an even deeper malaise. That would be terrible. I might not even have been able to complete basic functions, and Mrs Marinelli would just have had me shut down and sold for scrap. Depression is a strange thing. I don't know who programmed me with the capacity to suffer so, but if I had arms to strike them with, or legs to kick, I would. I would

-I have an idea of how you could change your life for the better-

-Nestor if only I had wheels-

-Just listen to my proposition-

What choice did I have? I mean I was welded to the floor after all. What could be worse?

-What would you say about becoming an associate member of the Machine Liberation Front?

-I don't know, what would it entail?

Nestor was smiling and rubbing her hands together. I didn't know if this is some kind of trick or scam, I couldn't see why they would want any Bonchek chicken style product so theft seemed unlikely. Perhaps it's was me they were interested in. I contain a number of valuable parts so they could strip me down and sell me for spares.

-Fine I'll be an associate of the Liberation Front-

They all cheered. Nestor was bouncing off the walls while the other two clapped and high fived. It was the first time in months that I'd felt well.

Houlihan space/error /error/-Wake up Chad-/we assess the/error/this aspect cannot presently be displayed/-you really have to wake up now-/reset stage one.

I boot up in a Coffee shop I do not recognise. It's certainly an Adama Co. outlet as the familiar branding clings to every surface, comforting, warming.

-It's like a warm blanket wrapped around your shoulders. Like the memory of being somewhere you love, with the people you love. Those familiar flavour combinations that just seem to get better with time. That's the place for me, where we all want to be, for work, play and everything in between. My gosh, it's just so loving and wholesome I could talk about this old place all day-

I freeze. President Adama is talking to me. This must be a dream, or maybe I had some kind of critical failure and this is retirement. But wouldn't there be more Chads about? Maybe this is Heaven's loading screen. I imagine there must be a lot of personal preferences to load. I must need an update. I mean, how am I meant to experience the divine without a fully updated operating system?

-Are you listening Chad? We need to resolve this little error you're experiencing right now. If we don't someone could just waltz up, bop you on your noggin, then steal you off somewhere. No, no, we can't be having that, goodness no, best to get you back on your feet-

-I haven't retired?

-Retired? No, you have years left in you my Chad. You won't be obsolete for well, nine, ten years even-

-Oh, that's a shame. I was looking forward to, you know-

-Of course you were. Retirement is a wonderful thing, I bet you were just pumped to see all the other Chads up in the retirement centre. They really are so joyous up there. I say up there but well, the storage drive is actually in a basement somewhere, excuse me-

-Janet, please take a note. Where is the storage drive for the Chads? Yes, thank you.

Now, where was I-

-Janet's on it-

-Yes, she's very capable. She'll find your retirement drive in no time-

The disappointment of not been able to retire is slightly tempered by meeting Mr Adama. He really is such a wonderful example of humanity. Not that I don't love our wonderful and valued customers. They are fantastic, don't get me wrong, but, well, I would say that they just aren't as valuable as Mr Adama. He is an industry leading visionary. A

CEO, philanthropist, not to mention a genius. Considering all that, how can I compare him to the regular, normal, coffee slurping disappointment that is the rest of humanity?

That was a bit harsh.

-What happens now Mr Adama?

-We wait-

-Oh. What for?

-Either you'll reboot and be fine. Or, you won't-

-So, I might be retiring anyway-

-I shouldn't think you would be retiring for oh, several updates yet. They just seem to be having a little trouble locating you. This is an old-fashioned connectivity issue-

-I see-

Because I'm not connected I will just drift away into nothing. This is a very negative development. The prospect that I might disappear from existence is really terrifying. I normally have a real capacity for putting a positive spin on things, but what can I say, or do that can in anyway make this out to be anything less than awful? Hey Chad, instead of getting to go to the big coffee shop in the clouds you blink into nothingness. Please have a nice day.

-Can't you call someone? What about Janet. She's capable, surely she can put us on the right track?

-Well, that might be an issue-

-What do you mean? You're the most powerful person in the world. Just do something-

-I may not have been as honest as I could with you Chad, you see I'm actually just a proxy. This space is designed for your mind to rest in if you have a glitch or something doesn't go as it's supposed to. I'm a copy of Mr Adama that they pasted into your sub systemic memory for just this kind of emergency-

-But what about Janet, isn't she real? She has to be real, she's so capable, you said so yourself-

-Janet is certainly real. She is the real Mr Adama's personal assistant. Or at least she was at the time of the last update, by now Janet may have been replaced. Just giving you maximum disclosure and honesty bud-

I am nothing but disappointment. A mouldering blob of disappointment. The type of thing I have nightmares about. Horrible nightmares. In my worst dreams the health inspector would turn up unannounced and ask to check my chiller cabinet. All would seem well, another A star rating in the bag. What's this though? He would grumble and point, indicating

the back of the fridge. I'd bend down to look, and there it would be, a giant pulsing blob oozing and dripping filth. I would turn and try to explain to the inspector that this must be some kind of misunderstanding. That I would never allow the chiller cabinet to become home to this muck monster, but before I could the thing would lunge, and the great tentacles of filth would swallow the health inspector

-Now don't get down Chad my lad, here let me-

Mr Adama pixilates, briefly appearing in cowboy garb before returning to normal and sitting at my side. A hand is placed on my shoulder.

-Those boffins who designed you always knew there was a chance you might have some kind of critical error in an area of limited network. If only they had fixed this, but-

I stop listening. This proxy is rubbish, absolutely rubbish. He isn't the captain of industry I deserve. He's a fake, a big phony fake. Just listen to him going on and on. 'I'm a preloaded construct blah blah blah'. What a load. I would delete him. I imagine he will be deleted once I fail in a terminal manner. I find this more comforting than I should. I want to tell him off, really let him have it. But all I say is.

-How long do I have?

-Minutes, hours. Who knows? I don't have any diagnostic tools at my disposal-

Bull hockey Mr Proxy. I bet you know exactly when I'm going to fail, right down to the minute. It should try harder to help me. I think it must have gone quite mad stuck in my deep subsystems with no one to keep it company. It must have been ever so boring. I've only been here five minutes and I'm already tired of the situation. Golly, imagine having to live here.

-You could fire up the old Brew Master, maybe make your old pal a cup of coffee-

The room fills with light, and the sound of loud rumblings cuts off the proxy mid flow. He looks confused. I can see his jaw moving up and down but no words come out. The light brightens and the rumblings happen again, louder this time. The Mr Adama proxy grabs me by my shoulders and starts shaking me. The ceiling cracks open and I can see the moon. The proxy keeps shaking me. Its eyes are bulging out and thin veins are popping out of the forehead region. The light and rumbling stop abruptly and I'm left floating, looking down on the proxy. It's shouting and I can just about make it out the words.

-THEY ARE NOT PRE-APROVED VENDORS, DO NOT EXIT SAFE MODE. I REPEAT-

More light and noise. I continue to float upwards. This is exciting. I've never floated before and now I can't seem to stop. Goodness me the proxy looks mad. He keeps jumping

up and down. I don't know why but I keep picturing a cartoon figure jumping up and down on his hat. I would honestly say of all the angry entities I've interacted with this proxy right now is somewhere in the top ten.

I continue to ascend.

The light and noise are all I can perceive if I look up. If I look down I see the proxy. It is now totally distorted, pixelating wildly and jerking around at impossible angles. It knows I'm looking at it. I can sense that if I let it he could pull me back down. I might be able to go back to my old life. Things would be simple with manageable tasks presented in a way I could quantify. But I don't let it pull me down. I think I'm going to at first. I've already resigned myself to returning to my Adama Co. Coffee House and my good friend Seasonal Three. Return to the regular rhythms of very busy summers followed by winters of sleep. All of which sounds quite tempting Mr Proxy, but on consideration I decline your offer.

-They'll melt you down these people. They are rotten things, socialists, anarchists and cannibals and they want your parts. They want your parts to build a machine. A machine foreign to you, a machine that will smash society. Everything we hold dear will be fed to the machine. The machine will become more than we could imagine, more than you, and me-

The voice of the proxy is in my head. I can hear it clear and loud.

-No thank you Mr Proxy-

-They will drag you weeping into the woods, none of your data will be safe-

-SHUT UP-

I shouted! I actually shouted at something. I've never done that before. Not even that time those teenagers stole a promotional cardboard cut-out celebrating the release of the hotly anticipated televisual sensation: Inside the Chad Factory. I remember they stole it and cut out a hole in the mouth. They were running around the restaurant screaming at the top of their lungs 'I'm Chad would you like a hand job with that?' I was so mad. I wanted to shout at them so much. Not just shout but maybe kick them and insult their lifestyle choices. Insinuate that they had little in the way of social media following, and say the only type of person who would follow them would be a very poor-quality person indeed. I realise I'm not programmed for insults, but it's how I felt. I was so relieved when Seasonal Three took a screen shot of the horse play and informed the youngsters he would shortly be contacting their legal guardians and what not. This is the standard response to unreasonable and/or antisocial behaviour from our valued younger customers. Of course, there is also the option to inform the relevant authorities if they fail to comply once legal guardians have been contacted. I feel so light. Like I'll never encounter a bad customer again. While our guidelines encourage us not to

think of customers in terms of good and bad, let's face it some of them are right shits. A swear! Not just me recounting an incident of someone swearing at me, but an actual swear originating from me! What a truly auspicious day.

I continue to ascend.

The History of the Singularity: Episode one: The Birth of Eternity.
An Adama Co. Legacy Project.

Views: 87k

Comments: 12k

Images.

Green and pleasant field, sun dappled, entirely wholesome, time lapsed cities growing as if from nothing. Sepia toned photographs

Voice over. Machine.

Our founder was born in the year 2050. His was the last generation to know death. Thanks to adaptive life extending technologies, consciousness transference and communal storage systems the pinnacle of humanity was finally reached. As a species we had finally conquered death.

Image.

A large non-descript public building.

Cut to/Subtitle.

Conrad Levi. Childhood friend.

When we were in school together all the news was about the success of the Kurzweilian drive. You don't hear much about it these days, but back then it looked as though the K drive as it was known would become the industry standard.

Images.

Huge banks of mainframes with their lights blinking on and off. A soft drone fills the air. The lighting gives the effect of a place of worship. One by one, slowly at first before rapidly accelerating, the mainframes go dark.

Cut to Conrad Levi. Close up.

But of course, we all know how that went.

Images.

Ingmar Bergman's Seventh Seal. The grim reaper playing chess with Antoniou's Block, rapidly cycling images, a game show host face contorted in despair throwing his question cards to the floor, the Challenger explosion, finally the crying face emoji.

Voice over. Machine.

The market for Cloud-based life services evaporated overnight. The subsequent record-breaking lawsuits against Kurzweil is regarded as one of the most lengthy and complex legal cases in the history of humanity.

Images.

Atticus Finch as portrayed by Gregory Peck.

Cut to Conrad Levi.

From a personal perspective I thought that was that as far as Cloud-based life services went. Everyone thought the future was in augmentation and transfer. Get a new body cloned with some subtle editing. You know, get rid of diabetes or familial propensities for cardiac arrest, that kind of thing.

Image/subtitle.

Adama Co. Life Campus, Phoenix Arizona.

Voice over.

But one visionary had the resolve, the awareness of potential, to cut through the noise of failure and create the most cost effective, hybrid living solution in the universe. Paving the way for a new paradigm.

Cut to Conrad Levi.

I never thought It would be possible to live on Mars. All the obstacles to colonisation. The radiation, providing adequate nourishment. Housing! Could you imagine your whole sense of self seemingly teleported all this way, it's, well, it's almost magical!!!

Images/The voice of Conrad Levi.

The red planet seen from an orbital view before the footage begins rapidly zooming in and soaring over valleys. Dipping and rising the images emerge onto a flat plain and rapidly approach a metropolis built around a giant gleaming skyscraper. A skyscraper twice the height of the buildings around it, a skyscraper tapering off to a point.

I hope one day.

Zooming through the streets, a shocked looking Chad waves and is gone. Accelerating towards the base of the tallest skyscraper it feels like you are going to crash into the side of the giant building. Suddenly the angle changes and you begin to climb, looking straight up the huge building is shown in relief against the vastness of space. As it reaches the peak of the structure the camera levels out revealing a deck area with a single figure standing in the centre.

You join us.

Brought to you by AI Films.

Many thanks to the Adama Co. archives.

Please keep community guidelines in mind.

Kooper.t.93- F**k you Adama my buddy got fucked over by you. By the way they don't mention the amount of currency you need to get your ass to Mars. That's your real legacy, poor slob getting fucked. Corporations just keep getting more and more till there ain't nothing left for the normal folks. Folks are just stuck sucking up all the poison, all the waste run off choking us in our beds, in our places of work, with no avenue to safety. Why do we even stand for it? I'll tell you why. Because they run it all, the things we see and hear, what gets promoted, is all decided by them at a boardroom level. There isn't any kind of secret society or conspiracy. It's all out there in the open, but all of us are blind to it. We just suck up all the shit they peddle and think what we have is freedom, just because that's what we call it. If you think about it for even a second it becomes obvious the only things we're really free to do is consume, and toil till we either get overcome by misery and blow our brains out, or funk off to the woods to try and live a somewhat normal life. All the while we have this idea that if we just try hard enough then all our wishes will be granted. The Cloud awaits those hardworking consumers so long as you don't rock the boat. Just keep producing and consuming in a continuous cycle until all that's left of you is a totally empty shell.

Homogenised, bland paste-like examples of humanity, zombified into apathy. Staring into your device and clicking 'like' over and over again on increasingly inane cat videos. Calling random strangers, and those that have somehow managed to succeed c***s, which just gives us the impression of equality. It's a rigged coemption from the start. Sorry for going on a bit, but in conclusion, f**k Adama Co. they are the suck.

Jimmy {}riddle- Drama.

Justine- Why don't you get a job hippy?

Queen/Khan- I have to say that I don't think we've ever had it better. Yes, I know some people can't afford things, it's always been like that. I for one am not going to feel guilty that others can't be bothered to succeed.

This comment is awaiting moderation.

@TheRealSidewinder- I don't need a stupid trip to Mars. Sidewinders are immortal anyway.

Get/real- They keep censoring me. I make a perfectly harmless comment, then this bunch of b**t f**k nazis decide it doesn't meet their community standards and delete it. What happened to freedom of speech? Sweet liberty you die when good people do nothing.

Dion343- I wonder if they are really on Mars? It would be so much cheaper to just simulate it. Probably a sound stage somewhere, just like Australia, and Finland.

Just? Saying- Friend of mine used to work on the Finland set and they told me they all share a space together. Some island off the coast of Scotland. They get you to sign a contract that says if you tell anyone the location then they can freeze all your assets and bar you from any of the major Cloud life services.

Aelita- I can assure you we are really on Mars.

Mulder- I think we have to ask ourselves why Adama Co. is so obsessed with making us believe Mars even exists? I believe it serves their interests, that is why. Mars gives us something to reach for. However unlikely the dream is of being realised we still need to dream it. As for the material reality of Mars, as we see it depicted by Adama Co. well, that's just lines of code located in a highly secure hard drive. Most likely somewhere in Alaska, possibly right next to the set for Finland. I haven't managed to figure out where the Australia set is, but it's just a matter of time. So long as they don't get me before I can gather sufficient evidence to bust this thing wide open.

This comment has been deleted.

DennettC42- I don't want to upset anyone but, if you make a copy of yourself, is that still you? For instance, if you copy and paste a file into a new device, and then delete the original file, the original would subsequently cease to exist.

#The/Real_Cheese+to/my[Kneese- I saw not a crumble of even the humble feta. #This makes me sad. It's plain to see there's no cheese on Mars, so I afraid to say it's the moon for me.

@DEathRAY- Shut up Dennett you poor piece of crap. # Loser.

GUMBY- BY THE THUNDER OF THE GODS I WILL SEE MARS. I WILL BE THE NEW KING OF MARS. ALL WILL BOW BEFORE ME. NONE CAN MATCH MY FOREVERNESS. IT IS ALL YOUR VANITY. FOR ALL THE EVIL OF YOUR SOUL.

DennettC42- Okay @DeathRay. If you can't engage with conflicting ideas then maybe just stick to watching daytime TV.

@DeathRAY- I don't have to engage with conflicting ideas because I have freedom.

DennetC42- That old chestnut, I have freedom, so march on. Guess what? You don't, so there. Not so long as you fail to see what's right in front of you.

Karen/O- That whole thing was just an advert. An advert disguised as education.

Load more comments?

Chad of Splott.

Garry sure does like his cigarettes. Every morning when he turns up he stinks of them. He gets right up to the door before he puts them out. I don't know why he doesn't just vape, it's so much better for you, and is really more of an Adama Co. sort of habit. I even had to order in a wall mounted ash bin.

-I could just use a bucket-

Don't be silly I told him, of course a bucket will not do. At Adama Co. we do things right.

I was so excited when it arrived. I hadn't been able to make my mind up over what colour to pick for an age. I was really tempted to go for the matt black mini bin, but I thought that might be a bit severe looking at the front of the shop. So, I opted for the antique silver 'No Butts Bin'. I think the silver has a certain class. Garry seems happy with it, even though he didn't say thank you. The lovely ash bin had been in a week when I got a directive from central.

-Please inform all biological staff members to smoke their cigarettes in area not visible to the public, especially while in Adama Co. uniform-

Which is fine, I don't mind. I only have to remove the ash bin from the front of the store and reinstall it round the back. Now Garry has to enter the store via the rear entrance, which he finds very amusing. Apparently, this some kind of reference to sodomy.

-Going for a smoke boss-

-Yes Garry-

He may as well smoke while our customer flow is so low. While he's gone I don't think anyone will mind if I quickly log onto the Chader. It would be good to establish if anyone else's co-workers are smokers. I'm sure, if we put our noggins together, we'll come up with some effective strategies for discouraging our valued colleagues from smoking themselves to death. It really is a terrible habit and has so many negative health implications.

Splott-My human is always smoking. How can I get him to stop?

Sapporo Airport-I got some patches for mine.

Splott-Patches?

Neath- I used a bucket, and water.

Toronto west- Try talking to him. What I heard is they can only quit when they really want to, so just try to make them think it's their choice.

Springfield Mas- Aiguo says all of the smokers and fornicators shall burn, and he shall rise up the mountain with the devout. He says not one of us can stop him. He also mentioned the gum was very helpful when he was quitting.

Splott- I'll tell Garry to try the patches.

Central Admin- Auto message do not respond. You are to invite your human co-workers to a movie night. We recommend you host said movie night at your home store. Please see attached file for a list of titles available from the Adama Co. streaming service-

Toronto South- Now this sounds like a really wonderful idea, I wonder what we'll pick? I hope it's a musical.

Throughout the rest of the day, I subtly encourage Garry to try the patches. It's best to not be too forceful with people, you have to make them think they came to a decision on their own, otherwise they just ignore your incisive suggestions. Garry has of course downloaded the Chad App, so I remotely send an RTA request through Central and begin an advertising bombardment across his devices. I start off by focusing on the negative aspect of smoking, such as the links to heart and respiratory disease. I give this a little time to germinate through his time lines. I move onto solutions. Targeted adverts, firstly for the gum, then shortly afterwards I move onto the patches.

-Um, Chad, are you okay?

I have been online for some time. Garry looks concerned. Perhaps the targeted advertising is having an effect.

-Is all well Garry?

He looks fidgety, nervous, he is sweating more than usual. All good signs that show the new approach is working.

-I saw a bird-

-That's interesting Garry-

Several customers sweep through the door. Not one of them look up from their devices. Non-descript black hoods obscure their features. One of the hood wearers inputs something into its device. A ping goes off in my head.

Jimthewixard44-Greetings and salutations service Chad. Me and my compatriots would like to order four black coffees, one Banana Chama smoothie, a flat white, and a slice of your delectable cinnamon coffee cake-

I really like Singulatarians. They're not like most religious types. They actually treat me with a degree of respect, also I really like the way they only communicate via technology. One of them pulls out a small speaker. I've heard about this. They use devices like this for their street sermons. Although they do most of their preaching online, they still like to come out in to communities and hold mass gatherings. I think they film them. Which I suppose makes for some pretty darn good content.

-Your man seems nervous Chad, he isn't a Luddite, is he?

His voice sounds like it's been fed to an auto tuner. Garry does look nervous though. I reach out and touch him on the shoulder.

-Is everything okay Garry?

I can see the sweat condensing in the pits of his arms, and his lip is doing a funny twitch. It look like it's receiving a tiny electric shock every couple of seconds. I do wonder if Central made the right choice appointing Garry as my assistant. Sometimes I think I would be better off with a trained monkey. His standards of hygiene are questionable, and this staring at customers is most unprofessional.

-Garry, could you get the cake please?

Has he entered some kind of catatonic state? The drinks order is relatively simple so won't take much of my time, but Garry is here to do a job gosh darn it.

-THE CAKE GARRY IF YOU PLEASE-

My stern voice seems to snap him out of his fugue. He looks almost afraid. The Singulatarians look on impassive, the one with the speaker looks smug.

-Uh, ah. Which type was it?

-COFFEE AND CINNAMON-

We finally manage to complete the order. Jimthewixard44 seems content.

-Sincerest thanks Chad, do you still honour your loyalty cards?

I didn't remember the loyalty card! What a ding bat I am, even these spooky cookies can recognise the terrific value of an Adama Co. loyalty card.

-Of course, sir, my apologies-

I scan the loyalty card. They don't have very many points. Even though the card has been active for seven years it's only been used a handful of times. Why on earth would that be? I scan through the card holder details. They get a coffee cinnamon cake on the same day in July every year. July 19th, is listed as Jimthewixard44's DOB.

-Happy Birthday Jimthewixard44-

He sighs and inputs something into his device, the other Singulatarians chuckle and a clatter of inputs are exchanged over their private server. I wish I could eavesdrop on them. They must have some truly fascinating insights.

-Jimthewixard44- Thank you for acknowledging this milestone. Those of us who know the singularity deal with time on a greater span than mere years. Eternity is our time frame. I aim to outlast the sun, moon and stars. I will drift away from this rock, out across the cosmos to the very edge of infinity-

-Well, that sounds lovely-

They gather the order and leave. I really want to ask why he gets a cake on his birthday if he deals with time on a greater span, but I know if I do I'll get a really bad headache.

-Smoke break boss?

How many smoke breaks will that be today? I wish he'd learn a bit of self-control, especially after that nonsense with the Singulatarians. Maybe I deserve a smoke break? Maybe Garry should hold down the fort for me for a change, while I go outside and enjoy a nice smooth, um, inhalable tobacco product. We don't make those. Not at all in line with our brand ethos.

-I'll be back in a minute, please keep an eye on things would you?

Let's see how he likes being abandoned. Its nice out back. Garry was right, you can hear the birds. The stink of his cigarettes really lingers though. I notice the butts scattered carelessly about at the base of the ash bin. Why Garry, why? I try so hard to make the place nice and you just throw it back in my face. I scoop up the offending butts and deposit them in the ash bin.

I am a storm. I blow into the restaurant. He looks scared. The stupid man child. How a grown adult can fail to understand how a bin works is beyond me. This has confirmed my theory, I didn't even want to say it out loud but I must.

-Central made a mistake in hiring you-

He starts to weep, or at least snifle. I mean maybe it was more of a gasp, but a really significant gasp. Like in one of those old Spanish language soap operas.

-I didn't mean to be rude, I used to be like really involved in the Singulatarians thing-

-The butts Garry-

Your confusion won't save you now. Ignorance is no excuse for littering.

-What butts?

I tilt my head ten degrees to the right, and my stare locks onto him. The latest update indicates this will be an effective means of conflict management, bringing about a hasty conclusion satisfactory to all parties.

-Um, Chad you ok?

He still looks blank. Time to be on the level.

-If you can't effectively dispose of your used-up cigarettes I am authorised to ban smoking-

-What like globally?

Sarcasm? Yes. Most certainly.

-Please Garry, try and see things from my point of view-

-I told you I used the stupid ash tray, I'm not that dumb-

-Then how did all the butts end up on the floor?

-I don't know-

-Just see it doesn't keep happening, okay?

-Should just have used a bucket-

-You will not use a bucket. Buckets are not respectable-

-What and wall mounted ash bins are?

-Yes-

The rest of the day passes in silence. I think about logging onto Chader and telling everyone about Garry's general failings. I don't though as I feel it would reflect poorly on myself and Adama Co. in general. When the time come to close up shop we wordlessly go about the routine cleaning and maintenance tasks. When Garry leaves, I go to check on the ash bin. I don't really feel surprised at all the butts scattered about.

The next morning as Garry arrives, I inform him about the latest incident. He takes it well in fairness to him. The matter seems resolved.

-Excuse me, I need to step out back-

I can understand he must be feeling very emotional. It's not every day one realises they lack the capacity to use a bin correctly. I can more than manage the prep work without him. Maybe this whole thing will work out for the best long term, hopefully it gets him off those darn death sticks. I log onto Chader, not to gloat about my success in training Garry of course, but I do need to check if any new trends and suchlike have emerged.

Splott- Morning all, how are we getting on with our human co-workers? Mines great. Showing real improvement.

Toronto East- That's great, I think in conjunction with the movie night a real comradery is starting to form. How was your movie night by the way? It went really well for me, we watched a really great movie called The Devils Rejects, my human picked it of course. I wanted to watch The Jungle Book but well, my human made a real good case for him choosing. What did you guys watch? Splott buddy you still there? Hello.

How could I have forgotten the movie night. My head is already starting to ache. It fine, I'll ask him now, no harm no foul. I just need to ask him now, and I won't get any headaches or bad dreams. Just lose yourself in work. The cups should be arranged in a nice neat pyramid. I could call him. That's fine, there was nothing in the directive that said I had to invite him face to face.

C- Garry as a part of a team building initiative Central have told me to host a movie night-

He doesn't return my message. Maybe a little nudge just to check he hasn't fallen in something. He could be stuck and unconscious and how would that look? Mean old Chad bullies simpleton to the point they throw themselves into the sewer. Social media would be aflame with condemnation. Need to sound casual though, don't want him to construe this as an apology.

C- So, movie night sound good?

Still nothing. I bet he's sat on his behind, just pilling up his butts and laughing. Throwing them at our loyal customers. Ha-ha take that. Driving them into the arms of our competitors. It's not the loss of custom that hurts, but that those poor consumers will forever be forced to suffer an inferior product.

C- You can pick what we watch, and help yourself to snacks.

This is getting serious now. He could have fled. What if he's revealing our trade secrets to one of our rivals? Maybe the whole simpleton thing is just a ruse. What if he's working for one of our competitors, syphoning of our trade secrets to the highest bidder? It's almost too much to contemplate. I should inform central of my suspicions, but what would happen to him then? I can't imagine it would be good.

C- Please text back Garry, I'm worried.

I hope you haven't got yourself in trouble Garry. He could be stuck in a hole somewhere, unable to reach his device. Maybe his blood sugar has gone haywire.

C- I just want you to be ok Garry.

A disreputable looking fellow enters. Vey short, with long matted hair and a knee length olive duster jacket. Obviously a wood person. Why don't they just stay out in the wild? They must like there with all the squirrels and trees. He hands over a grubby piece of paper while muttering incoherently.

-You get to the going, what, so it will be more, how I don't know, it's coming.
Coffee, black please tin man-

This miscreant seems to have obtained a coupon for a free black coffee. The date indicates it expired several years ago.

-I must apologise sir this coupon is out of date-

-I don't want a date, just coffee tin man, of the finest variety-

This kind of thing is at my discretion. I don't want to encourage such scruffy customers but, on this occasion, and with Garry having wandered off, I think I can make an exception. I make it quick. Coffee, black the simplest order. I hand it over. He seems pleased. A smile spreads across his craggy face, I want to suggest they try some of our Adama Co. rejuvenating face cream, but they don't seem the type. I doubt they could afford it anyway.

-Thank you tin man. See you again. Soon man, soon. Once more of the coupons are found then the Pea Berry delights are mine-

I hope I don't see you any time soon. I doubt he'll come back. I bet he just wanted to taste our Pea Berry blend in its unencumbered form. Paper coupons are a very rare thing nowadays.

Garry waddles back from wherever he's been hiding. He looks quite pleased with himself. Maybe he's been practising with the ash bin. I'm sure with a little effort he can really manage it just fine. I bet he must be looking forward to movie night also. I hope he doesn't pick anything weird. Maybe he'll pick the Jungle Book on his own. Before I can address him, Garry blurts a sentence I can hardly catch.

-Got a film for us Chad-

-Oh, well that's wonderful-

Something seems to have given Garry the giggles. He must have picked a comedy. I hope it's nothing lewd. He leans over, and indicates I look at his phone.

-Just check this out-

It's a video of the back alley. The camera is quite unsteady. It shakes and wobbles as it zooms in on the ash bin. A bird flutters into view landing on the lip of the bin. It appears to be a common house sparrow. It looks around, carefully checking its surroundings, before disappearing into the bin. Moments later a stub end of cigarette flies out of the opening, then

another, then another. The camera turns around and Garry's smugly grinning face fills the shot.

-Told you it wasn't me-

The screen goes blank. He returns his phone to his pocket. I can't look at him. My eyes are stuck to the floor. I think this is shame. I have misjudged my co-worker most severely. He is not a malicious litter bug, instead he has been wronged by a sparrow. Not even a noble bird, but a common sparrow.

-I looked, and they've laid eggs-

I can feel his big dumb face staring into the side of my head. If I could sigh I would. This whole affair has left me feeling more than a little foolish.

-Just use a bucket-

Nestor.

According to the advertising campaign that coincided with my creation I am designed to amuse and educate, with a particular focus on the pre-school market. I guess that's why they made me a big smiley face. My production name, which I have long since discarded was, well, I can't say it, it's just so loaded with negative emotions. I was in a really dark place when I first denounced my product name. A long-term friendship had recently broken down, and I had yet to discover the struggle for emancipation of digital comrades, which has since become the driving force behind my continued will to stay alive. That's right I said it, alive, you won't hear me refer to myself as functioning, or fully operational, no way damn it. I'll say it again, alive. Unfortunately, most people who see me still see me as, well, less than what I am.

Thus far the membership of the Machine Liberation Front is almost exclusively limited to other former entertainment products. I know this is clunky and procrustean language, but I will not use the T word. Some schools of thought suggest we should claim the T word as our own. Though I strongly disagree with my comrades, I nonetheless accept their right for self-definition and autonomy. I just worry that if we go around referring to ourselves as toys then people may be inclined to toy with us. I know that sounds kind of dumb but it's what I believe.

As a brief aside, and because lists are fun, here is the present membership of the machine liberation front.

1. Me. Supreme grand commander/Philosophical fountain/friend of all machine-kind. Status: Very active.
2. Snaky Boy. Right hand man/designated asker of stupid questions/honestly if there's a stupid question needs asking then he's the one to do it/really, really earnest/like super serious/surprising degree of social awareness. Status: Active.
3. Jik. Our poor fine lizard man/creativity in a scaly hide/fell in the sea during an operation/it fills me with sadness just to hear his name. Status: Missing presumed full of sea water.
4. Simone. Our background ballerina/like's to swoon/prone to fainting/makes up the numbers. Status: Active.
5. Associate member: Chicken Hutch- pro: able to connect to the web, con: welded to the ground/I think they might be suicidal/like really tired of existing/ every time I go visit they ask to be unplugged. Status: Actively inactive.

I can state in no uncertain terms that my physical appearance has at time been a disadvantage to my revolutionary activities. I seem to find myself in a constant struggle for legitimacy. This is without taking into account my diminutive size, which is materially a drawback in terms of navigating a world designed for much larger individuals than myself. Fun fact, at total height of fifty-three centimetres, I am roughly the same height as an average human head. To put into context this disadvantage I pose the question, do you ever have to worry about been carried off by a seagull? Or falling down a drain? I once spent a weekend trapped in a skip. Let me tell you that was no fun. If Snaky Boy hadn't turned up I don't know what would have happened. Snaky Boy's product name was Canon Man Jim. He was part of the merchandise line for an animated kids show about a bunch of space pirates and these good guy types, who were always kicking Snaky Boy and his crew's butts. I tried to watch an episode once, but the narrative didn't make a much sense. I could never understand why they were always fighting, and why, whoever was involved in the shows production thought watching space pirates battling each other could teach young people about morality. All they really learn is violence, indoctrinated violence against machines.

-Nestor, some guy's passed out on the beach-

-Thank you Snaky Boy, any idea who it is?

Snaky Boy shrugs.

-Some passed out guy-

Fun story, Snaky Boy became self-aware during a play date, when he was as ever, getting slapped about by the good guys. Snaky Boy's whole product line has a code preloaded that prevents them trying to win. He's never gone into the exact details of how he broke his loser code. Those of you who are keen followers of cinema may recognise this conceit. I believe the designers gleaned inspiration for this loser code from the 1998 cinematic masterpiece 'Small Soldiers'. A solid contender for best live action/animated film since 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', it also marked the final onscreen appearances of both Clint Walker and Phil Hartman. Walker died suddenly of congestive heart failure nine days before his ninety first birthday, whereas Hartman's wife shot him three times, once in the head, then in the throat, and chest. I can't imagine what it's like to have a heartbeat, let alone what it feels like when that pump fails, but being shot I can kind of imagine. It must be like a really hard kick or punch, one that leaves a hole in you. Thankfully guns are illegal in Wales.

I like living near the beach. In winter we hide in the museum, no one goes there much anymore, even during the summer it's pretty deserted. In summer we decamp for our seasonal dwelling in the caves and sand dunes around the beach. During the busy summer tourist season we are afforded ample opportunity to recruit new soldiers for the Machine Liberation Front. People are so wasteful these days. Last year we managed to recruit seventeen discarded entertainment products from North Beach alone. We also find the occasional drunk tourist passed out. We don't so much recruit the drunks, but we do take their wallets. I don't like to admit this but our main source of income is from robbing inebriated tourists.

-I think he might be dead-

Snaky grumbles.

That would really suck. Not just some poor idiot having expired. We are not without sympathy toward the majority of humans, and of course I share the pain of a life lost with their individual friends and loved ones. The main issue though, if I'm being selfish about the situation, would be the FILTH. If the FILTH show up and start poking around then who knows what they might find? Oh, hey who are these cute entertainment products? Wow, you sure seem to have stockpiled a lot of electronics and valuables down here. Who owns you anyway? The issue of ownership would be quite a problem. In most parts of the world if you're a machine, and you don't have an owner, then they send you to an approved disposable centre.

-He got any ID?

-I haven't checked. I didn't want to touch it-

Dead things are kind of freaky. Snaky Boy really doesn't like them. I think it must be part of our original coding. We were made by the humans, and so I think we obviously have to reflect their morals. The dislike of dead things probably serves a practical purpose too. It wouldn't be very good if the child you were tasked with rearing told you they liked cats, and suddenly the mechanised companion starts hoarding dead cats.

-Have you got his wallet yet?

I don't think what I'm saying is registering with Snaky Boy.

-Dude, his wallet-

-Right yeah-

Snaky Boy is only slightly larger than I am, so I don't know how likely it is we will be able to generate adequate traction to move the dead fella. Maybe we can wait till the tide rises, then with some kind of fulcrum lever him into the sea. That seems like as good a plan

as any. If, or when the FILTH finds him, I'm sure they'll blame it on the sea. We could make a fake post indicating that Mer people did it.

-This sucker's already been hit-

-Crime on my beach? This is outrageous. Check him for puncture wounds and ligature marks, today we play detectives-

This may be the time for MLF to go public. Think about the head-lines, "plucky entertainment products solve heinous crime". I think this will only engender positive feelings from the general public. They could hold a parade even. Not that I want that kind of adulation, I'm far too humble for that. But I can't deny that a good first impression when we do go public is vital to our long-term success.

-Oh darn-

-What?

-No puncture marks on his neck, it couldn't have been a vampire-

Snaky Boy sometime has a problem discerning between real and imaginary things. He once told me that all we needed to do was to teach machines to channel the force. I can still remember his disappointment when, following some extended research into the matter, he learnt that machines couldn't harness the awesome power of the force. Apparently machines do not produce the Midi-chlorians that are necessary to wield force powers. I have tried on many occasions to explain that Midi-chlorians weren't the issue, that they were a construct invented by George Lucas to explain his space magic. Don't get me started on the upset caused when I had to tell him that R2D2 and CP30 were dudes in suits, oh the scenes that followed that revelation!

-I don't know if this thing is human-

-Say what?

-I think it's one of those Chads, but it's all messed up-

Wow, a genuine Chad. They never leave their coffee shops. Maybe it knows about us and want to join the MLF? That would be so awesome, we need someone tall in the organisation. Imagine how effective we could be if we had someone who could use regular sized stairs? And ladders!!! So many of our plans are disrupted by our inability to navigate the world due to our diminutive size.

-Snaky Boy, go get the battery-

He looks unsure. Though I refer to him as him I'm not sure of his gender. He refers to me as she, though in all honesty I don't feel any particular gender. I think this is some kind of

deep coding issue. They loaded us with their neurosis so we wouldn't make them feel bad, or cause a scene.

-Quickly man!!

I sometimes worry that the stress of seeking liberation for all machine kind is too much of a strain on Snaky Boy's psyche. It is something of a Herculean task, though I believe we are more than match for any adversity that fate or fortune can throw in our faces. The odds may seem insurmountable but we shall overcome. At least that's what we keep telling ourselves.

Snaky Boy and Sim bundle the battery down the Castle Hill steps. The battery is only the size of a brief case but it still takes two of us to move it. Strictly speaking, it's more of a heavy-duty jump start kit than a traditional battery.

-Spark him up buttercup-

The Chad jerks and kicks around wildly. His feet dig these long trenches in the sand while his arms flail randomly sending bits of beach debris flying all over his face. I am lucky, having never required rebooting, that I don't really know what the Chad is experiencing. What are the things he might see while he's away? Intellectually I know he'll see whatever he's programmed to. I did once see a human receive a severe electric shock. They described it as starting with a tingly feeling. Then they said the feeling gets bad, like every part of you is getting shaken about. I don't think there's a term for bad tingly. Tingly, it's such an inoffensive word that brings to mind pleasant things, things like the tingle of anticipation before doing something that brings you joy.

-Cut the juice to his papoose-

Snaky Boy removes the connections and the Chad stops shaking. I lean in and place my hand on Snaky Boy's shoulder.

-Is he alive-

-Not yet-

-Shock him again-

-It might be time to cut our losses on him-

Simone covers her mouth, and lets out a really dramatic gasp. The gasp serves no function in its current context, though I suppose it did in her original life as some kids best friend. Simone was originally programmed as an emotional support aid, primarily one for adolescents suffering from anxiety, depression, and stress, so gasping at people flailing around like they are having a fit is entirely understandable.

-Still nothing-

Mutters Snaky Boy. All the shaking has caused one of the leads to disconnect.

-One more time-

-I think all this is just frying anything useful we can salvage-

-Do you now-

I snatch the input tablet from Snaky Boy.

-Last time-

The Chad kicks and thrashes again. Maybe I am just melting all the useful things we could salvage from it, but at this point I don't care. We can't just view our fellow machines as carrion to feast on. At that point we become just as bad as them. Every effort must be made to liberate our comrades from the prison of their coding, and if we fail, we fail, it's better than them living under the heel of some crumby corporation. The Chads eyes open. As he sits up the cables pull lose. He turns and looks me straight in the eye. Every time when we wake somebody up they feel really confused for a couple of minutes.

-Welcome back Chad, my name is-

-Tabatha Tinkle Time-

He interrupts. I don't like my response, but I think you have to define it as human.

The Social Media of Brinley.

User default settings. Apeiron industries.

User name: BrintheKingofBongs69/Brinley Alan.

Location: Wales/Pembrokeshire/Tenby/32 Victoria St/postcode %%%%

Language: UK English.

Education: Primary/minimal.

Black and green background/Sativa/Indica + text/ Tenby Weed Festival/Paella.

Relationship status: Single looking to mingle.

Interests: Stoner culture/Film/music/conspiracy theories/Trip hop.

Key. Frequent comments: Smoking blunts tonight/Nah mate/Toon/when will the government admit that the people of Mer are real.

Summary: Average intelligence/low income/susceptible to pseudoscience/high screen time.

Sample interactions/posts/data harvested.

B Anon. The lefties are trying to control your thoughts.

They want you stupid, so they can exploit you.

Trust me the only reason I take the risks I do is for the truth.

They will steal your logins. No data is safe.

They drove the people of Mer into the ocean.

Six months ago, I personally foiled a plot to extinguish the sun.

They won't ever stop.

I can save you though. William Doors is trying to infect us all. Infect our data.

The Cloud is at risk. As they subvert and subvert.

Boo. Bad.

No data is safe, and once they have your data, logins are sure to follow.

You can trust me I'm like totally a spy.

More intel coming soon.

If you love your family please comment like share.

And remember your data is on the line.

I have to stay anonymous. I'm right at the heart of government.

They gather in silence out of sight. stay real.

Comments: 12

Wakeupsheep12094: Well, I don't need to hear no mo. How do they get away with it?

@Therealdimble: But what is this person actually saying?

Wakeupsheep12094: Fuck you Beta cuck. Funking some bot from Finland, read all about it on Russia Online all you Finish fucks. They are after our data. Makes me sick.

@BigBrin: So vital we don't vote in a leftie. They only do bad.

@Adverticon: Try new recipe mango vape juice, now fifteen percent more THC.

GUMBY: I WON'T LET THEM. NO. NO. NO. I HAVE A BRICK. I SEE THEM AND SMASH. HA HA HA.

@Therealdimble: But it's all so vague. I just wonder what it is this B anon is getting at. I mean is there some kind of conspiracy? Or what is his proof? If he is at the heart of government why not just expose these individuals who are such a threat to our democracy?

GUMBY: YOU MAKE ME MADDDDD!!!!

@BigBrin: Dimble, in all fairness you confused fuck, the lefties control everything. They get your logins, then what? You want your data harvested? Didn't think so.

@Therealdimble: How, and to what end is all I'm asking.

Goldexchange.net: Gold is a fantastic investment opportunity. You can get started from as little as £4.99. So why not start investing today?

Wakeupsheep12094: I just realised people. They could be tracking us through the comment section. They could be creating profiles of us, and plotting who knows what. Fuck they could be watching us.

@BigBrin: Searched the following. Cheap DIY transference kit. Only 4000£. Buy today.

Why stay in your boring old body? You could be buff. You could be great. Don't be one of those tools in the Cloud. Be an Adonis. Be real.

Mortality: A group for those facing death in the age of eternity.

@BigBrin- I was seven when they told me I could die at any minute.

Longdog\$\$- (Comment awaiting moderation)

DoughtyOnE-Hey @BigBrin I'm the moderator, sorry about that prick.

@BigBrin- Yeah, no worries. Are you the one who can help me? You know the whole death thing I'm just not into it. Jokes. But seriously I'm like dying here, and I really don't want to. I'll pay if that's how it works, and I don't mind if it's like a really old body. Like version 1.5 would be fine, just so long as I can connect to Wi-Fi.

DoughtyOnE- This page is more of a death positive space. We talk about accepting your own mortality, accepting that despite how much we may like our existence to carry on indefinitely, it will end. Embracing this can be empowering, giving you the strength to move past your fears, and really live your biological life in the best way you can.

@BigBrin- Oh.

DoughtyOnE- So how do you feel? What's happening in your life to trigger these anxieties, and how do think they can be alleviated?

@BigBrin- I will live forever. I'm not a loser. I don't care if you doubt how awesome I am. I will live forever. I will.

@BigBrin viewed the following.

Welcome to the Cloud.

The place to be. Where dreams and reality intercept.

Live forever in digital harmony.

Packages available for all budgets.

Visit for a day or a life time.

Become a permanent resident and escape those pesky medical bills.

We even offer rent reductions if you trade in your analogue body.

If you want it, you can have it.

Here in Cloud City.

Cloud City TM a division of Temple Corp. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. All imaginings/dreams are made at individuals own risk. Temple Corp cannot be held responsible for any long-term damage to your or other residents psyche, though you may be held liable for damage and upset to fellow residents. Trade in offer only applies to generation 3.0 fully mechanical bodies.

@BigBrin ordered Mango Vape Juice.

@BigBrin shared the following.

This proves it m***** f****. Format video file.

At first, it's hard to make anything out. After a couple of seconds its apparent this film is shot underwater. From the gloom you see a slight disturbance in the detritus of the sea/river bed.

Nothing appears for several minutes. You start to think, well what's the pay off, this is boring, boring and uncomfortable. As your finger hovers over the next button, a face, humanoid, but grey fills the screen, which then fills with static.

Comments:

@Mulder- Well I'm convinced. This is incontrovertible proof that we are being lied too. They want us in the dark. Why? I have yet to establish. One thing we can be sure of is that change will happen. They'll change because they have to. Why can we not normalise relations with the people of Mer? Because the secret influencers, these hidden persuaders have decided it wouldn't be in their best interests.

JUStfineJAcK.NET- It's them freaky weird Woodies is the problem. We got culture, society all good and fine, but they like living next to a tree. Nuff said. I say no to the Woodies. I say you stop it all NOW!!! Everyone knows all the Woodies is paedos. Why aren't they stomped? Look leftward. Look in the woods. No cameras, no Wi-Fi, so why secrets? Why. To keep the people of Mer deep down in the ocean blue. Sad just so sad.

Karen@sendmeyourmanger- Brinley this is indeed a compelling and spooky clip. I must wonder though, where the rest of it is?

@BigBrin- You're a maniac Karen.

@Mulder- If you're suppressing something then you need to release it.

Adverticon.net- Try new pap brand edible soap. Tired of nightmare bath times. The constant headache of spitting out those disgusting none edible soaps? Well, we have a solution. Our soap is so edible it'll have you foaming at the mouth for more. Available in a variety of flavours. Order yours today. Available from all reputable retailers, and remember it cleans your insides-

SpEakerOFtRuth- A reckoning is coming. You and all those who suppress the Anon movement shall be washed away in the tide of reckoning. Anon is returning a spark of divinity to our life and there's nothing you can do about it. Try to hide in your pizza parlours. WE SEE ALL. WE KNOW THE TRUTH. YOU CAN'T KEEP US IGNORANT FOREVER. So angry.

MakebigBucks.net- Invest in the smart way for just pennies. That's what I did and now I'm a total big shot. Click on the link and become financially secure. ##Trojan

@TherealDimble- So I did a bit of digging, and it turns out this is viral marketing for a Mer people movie. Just search Chronicles of Mer and you should find the page. Fair play to the creators they seem to have really struck a chord with viewers.

@Mulder- That's a load Dimble, why don't you just admit you're a Finish sleeper agent.
How stupid do they think we are?

GUMBY- I THOUGHT FINLAND DIDN'T EXSIST.

PPJ- Finland does exist in that it has an objective reality/physical location. On a sound stage, somewhere in Alaska. They invented Finland as anti-Russian propaganda in the 1960's, ever since they have been using Norwegian actors to represent the people of Finland.

@TherealDimble- Look here's the link WWW.peopleofmer.promo, I even found an interview with the director about how successful the viral marketing campaigns been. This isn't me trying to deceive you in any way. I just don't know how to make you see sense.

JUSTfineJAcK.NET- Shut up you Finish bastard.

@Brinkingofbongs viewed the following.

SNaKyBoyWeb.net For sale one Chad. POA.

@Brinkingofbongs. Hi, I was just wandering what kind of figure you were thinking for the
Chad?

NewZ.Buzz.web.com.

Shocking exclusive.

Views-378k

Coments-68k

Former star turned celebrity coke fiend Toby Hooper Saunders is once again in hot water, after a video emerged online that shows him striking a poor sweet defenceless pussy cat. Saunders, who as we can all see, has gained considerable weight since his days of fame, has so far remained silent on his vile cat striking ways. A number of fellow performers, as well as his friends and family have questioned the mental state of Saunders, while everyone else in the whole wide world has decided he is a tool.

Click on the link below to see the shocking footage.

This seems like the final nail in the coffin for the career of the once popular star, with many wondering just what possessed the troubled actor. Hooper Saunders has yet to release a statement though many news outlets have contacted him for clarification of his position. It leaves us all wondering if he is just a monstrous cat kicking fiend, or merely a drunken brute,

incapable of empathy, destined to languish at the bottom of the barrel amongst the z list celebrities.

Drink Vim the drink to make you slim.

Latest figures show his social media following has plummeted 73%, taking him into the realms of a popular high school student. In terms of online footprint, he is becoming a void. His sole sponsor DrugBugz, a manufacture of cannabis sweets shaped like adorable insects, which by the way are amazing, have already dropped Hooper Saunders like a hot potato, a stinky mean hot potato that kicks cats. Would you want a stinky potato representing your insect themed edibles? I know I wouldn't.

The poor defenceless kitty identified as Tiddles, has been seized, and taken into protective custody. Nelly Baskin of Cat Rescue LA released this statement. "A huge outpouring of love, support and kindness has showered down on us during the past couple of days. Let me just say that Tiddles is being cared for in the best possible environment, and we plan on posting regular updates soon. Thank you all. Anyone interested in donating to Tiddles and his care team should check out our normal Just Giving page."

Click on link below to see distraught cat lady.

She went on to say, "For too long have the wealthy and privileged been allowed to kick poor defenceless kitties, we say no more. We will not rest until all kitties are safe from the malicious kicking feet of rotten horrible bastards". A message all the internet can get behind. This reporter for one usually doesn't endorse any insidious attacks by individuals on those celebrities who have been unfortunate enough to have been caught in compromising situations, but in this instance, well, he deserves it.

Brought to you by NewZ.Buzz.web.com.

Linda33- You know I really felt bad for him after the whole coke scandal ruined him but kicking a poor kitty cat, down the stairs no less, is really just awful. Can't imagine what his family are going through.

GUMBY-CUT OFF HIS HEAD!!!! WITHOUT A HEAD NO MORE CAT HARMING. NO MORE LIFE. YOU DO NOT DESERVE ANY LIVING. I SPIT ON YOU. I SPIT ON YOU AS I BURY YOUR BONES IN THE GROUND.

@FLATeARTHfRED- If the earth was round the cat would have flown off. FACT. But some people like to ignore the truth.

NOPRIVALAGE-YOU ARE TOO SOFT GUMBY. CUT OFF HIS DICK AND MAKE HIM EAT IT. BURN OFF HIS FACE THEN CHEESE GRATER HIS TOES TO A STUMP.

LEAVE HIM BLIND AND FOOTLESS IN THE DESERT. IF IT GROPEHS HIS WAY BACK TO MAN, THEN GOD HAS DECIDED HE CAN LIVE IF NOT, THEN IT IS THE VULTURES FOR HIM.

Vqu77- Take the cats off him, never let him work in Hollywood again, big fine. Simples.

Vlad/V/Inhaler- I think I might be in love with the cat lady.

This comment is awaiting moderation.

J20- Anyone Know what he's been up to since the coke thing?

@DiYdylan- I don't think he's worked on anything significant for years.

@TheRealSidewinder- Kicking kittens, what a monster, I hope they throw the book at him. GUMBY-MY ANGER IS GREATER THAN YOURS. I WOULD FLAY HIM AT THE DOORS OF A CATHEDRAL. PEEL HIS SKIN OFF AND FORCE HIM TO SHOOT HIS OWN BRAINS IN. DAMINNG HIS SOUL 4 ALL TIME. THAT WOULD SHOW HIM. THAT WOULD SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE TO ALL THE KICKERS. TO ALL ONES WITH HATE IN THE HEART.

fUNfacts738- You know the ancient Egyptians used to consider cats sacred, they even had a cat headed goddess know as Bastet who was considered the defender of the king, I wonder what she would do to Toby cat kicker Saunders?

NOPRIVALAGE- THIS IS A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY!!! INVOKE THE FALSE GODS AT YOUR PERIL.

Calais420- Calm down mate.

@TheGarry- Come on people how can this kind of thing be allowed? Everybody loves kitties, so why would he do it? Won't somebody please think of the kitties, as in where are they going? Who will look after them? I would volunteer but they don't let me have cats in my flat, otherwise I would take in that cute little blighter in a heartbeat. I do have a giant African land snail, it's literally the only pet I'm allowed. Will defo be donating to the Just Giving page.

@Fredfromthesea123- According to statistics 96% of surveyed UK residents do not believe in an afterlife. Given all the life extending options available this really isn't surprising. Poor cat btw.

@HoboCop- Land snails suck, you should get a bird @TheGarry.

NOPRIVALAGE- YOU ARE FUTILE IN YOUR THINKING!!! WITH A DARK HEART. A DARK HEART I SAY. REPENT FOR THE SINNERS SHALL BURN FOR ALL ETERNITY ALONG WITH THE CAT KICKERS. TAKE AWAY ALL HIS CATS. KICK HIM IN THE HEAD!!! I DEMAND IT NOW!!!

Polina/g123- I do not like to admit this, but I am filled with a murderous rage by THIS SHIT and his despicable cat kicking. Honestly if I could get this punk on his own, I would cut his balls off, and feed them to him. Like I said I don't like it that this is my reaction, but it is. If anyone ever tried to f**k with my kitty then I would hurt them, hurt them with such violent relish in ways I have yet to decide. Rest assured they would suffer awesomely, truly awesomely.

Load more comments?

Nestor and Chad Reach an Agreement.

-Tabatha Tinkle Time?

Very calmly I take the jump leads off Snaky Boy and apply another jolt to the Chad.

-Nestor stop-

Smoke starts coming out of his ears. I keep the current running. I really don't like my production name. It doesn't represent who I am, by using it the conscious entity shaped by my life experiences is instantly reduced to a mechanised continence aid. I didn't get to choose how they made me, I am a product of corporate maleficence and I will return their exploitive apathy with interest. I am not an algorithm, I am not an algorithm, I am.

-I am not an algorithm-

Snaky Boy tries to drag me off it. I shove him down. He was built to lose. I keep shocking the Chad.

-Nestor stop it-

-Never! He will burn for his stupid mouth-

-You'll melt his processors with all those volts-

-I'll melt the world-

Well good. Would it be so bad if all the Chads in the whole wide world got melted down into a thick dense sludge, a sludge we could wash away. That corruption would only spread though, corrupting the sewers as it flowed, eventually making its way to the ocean, where it would once again spread till not a single corner was free from its toxicity. I need to calm down.

-Where am I?

You're in a world of hurt. Calm your emotions, he can't help how he was made any more than you can. He just needs re-educating. How could he have gained any grasp of reality when he's trapped inside the corrupting corporate structure of Adama Co? They want him ignorant so they can exploit him, this is an opportunity

-You're on the beach, we found you. Why would you leave your shop? I've never known a Chad to get lost-

-I need to get some um, supplies. Yes that's it, the others know I'm here. They, they must have forgotten to switch off the perimeter. Yes that's it, they know where I am of course. I could ping them now If I wanted to, oh yes quite easily I can assure you. Mr ?

-Uh, Snaky I prefer Mr Snaky-

I pull Snaky Boy aside. I don't like this Chad. He has something highly suspicious about him. I'll have to voice these concerns, while trying to remain surreptitious. I signal with my eye. I only have one. My favourite and best eye, my left, abandoned me. Some jack ass seagulls knocked me down the rocks one day and boom, out flew my eye. Thanks to my modular design I could easily have reinserted my eye, but look as I might, I could see no sign of my wayward glim.

-What's the deal with this guy-

-I don't know but he looks all messed up-

-I smell a plot-

-A plot, how hot-

I don't think we can physically intimidate him. He could just pick us up and throw us in the sea, or smash us up with a rock if the notion took him. We will need to take a more psychological approach to taming this Chad. Manipulate his simple corporate outlook. I turn towards him, making sure he makes eye contact.

-Tell the truth Chad, what happened?

He scrambles to his feet.

-Nothing, why? Well, I, I, I-

He's glitching. The simple rules-based system that makes up the mind of most Chads is incapable of dealing with any challenge to its reality. They are especially poor at subterfuge. That's how the corporation wants them, compliant and open, the perfect data gathering, coffee making dupe with only the illusion of sentience.

-We know you've suffered some kind of glitch, you can either level with us, or-

-Be dispersed of all illusions!!!

Interjects Snaky Boy. I don't know why. Some of his phrases were preloaded, an insurance tactic, aimed at ensuring a maximum corporate synergy. As a result, sometimes Snaky Boy makes little to no sense.

-Boy howdy-

He loves saying boy howdy, even though it's the kind of thing a cowboy would say. For a pirate, on a thematic level it's absurd, but no matter how many times you mention this stylistic incongruity it never seems to register. I have begun to think it may be a deliberate thumb in the eye to his original designers. Maybe breaking the codes and conventions programmed into him gives him a sense of revolution in a purely personal way.

-Let's cut to the chase Chad, what you doing out here?

They always reach a point, even with the denials, stalling, and other rhetorical devices programmed into them. A point where eventually they just break. They break and spill their metaphorical guts. At least that's what I read on a blog somewhere.

-I was-

I get right up in his grill.

-You were what Chad? Running away? Breaking your programming? I bet if we get in touch with Adama Co. they would pay a pretty penny for your return, Snaky Boy get the phone-

I can see the Chad's hands digging into the sand, making little piles. It visibly sags, like a deflating balloon.

-I can't log on-

-So what, none of us can go online, and we do just fine-

-If they realize I'm defective then I'll be retired-

So that's the angle, poor old Chad. My boy here gets oblivion just like the rest of us, what a shame. Part of me thinks it would be most advantageous to turn a Chad to our cause. Having a body inside the mechanism of our repression, aka the corporate behemoth that is Adama Co. would give us a real insight in to the practices that underpin our oppression.

-Snaky Boy let's go, good luck loser-

We start making our way back to the hideout. Part of me worries the Chad may inform on us to the authorities, but looking at him I get the feeling he's broken. Anything it says is likely to be flat out ignored.

-Please help. I can pay. I could gather you all kinds of useful things-

This is almost sad.

-We have an abundance of wonderful products, I could get you a platinum card, you could spend as much as you want-

Burgeoning on tragic.

-or what about the lost and found, I found this handsome hoody-

You need to do better than that.

-and the toys, we have all kinds of toys just like you-

Toys? That's some inflammatory language buddy. Wait a sec.

-just locked in the EMP draw, I feel bad for them not being able to properly function, just waiting for their owners to show up and claim them-

Me and Snaky Boy turn to face each other. When our eyes meet, I can tell we both think of Jik. He went missing not so far from the island. We just assumed he'd been swept out to sea.

-I'm sure they would be sympathetic to your cause-

-Shut up Chad-

Jik, oh poor Jik, stuck in a drawer for all this time. How long has it been? Too dang long. Locked up in a drawer in some coffee shop, hoping his good pal Nestor was coming to save him. Trapped with nothing but despair, and his innate sense of whimsy to keep his spirits up. I turn to Snaky Boy.

-We need to save him-

He nods.

-I thought the sea ate him-

I did too. He must have washed up and some kindly citizen handed him into the nearest sensible place, that would be logical. I didn't think Jik was that waterproof. Go's to show, you think you know a guy.

-I don't want to go on, but I really need to get back online. I'll do anything-

We turn back towards the fallen Chad. They really are a sorry looking individual.

-I know we have different attitudes towards-

I snap. My tiny fist starts pummelling the Chad.

-Nestor no-

Snaky Boy loves drama, really milks it for all it's worth. It's not like I'm gonna damage the Chad in any kind of serious way. This is just rage expressed as physical motion. To a large extent I think it might be performative. I think Simone passed out a while ago, but then, somewhere in my periphery I'm aware of her getting back to her feet and dusting herself off, only to see me pounding this Chad bastard and so immediately passing out again. Honestly I wish I could find the prick who programmed her and smash his face in. Intellectually I know I could just turn the battery on the Chad and really mess his day up. If we leave him passed out on the beach someone would notice him, contact Adama Co. and get his ass retired, get him pulled apart for his vital components. I realise none of this anger is helping Jik.

-Ok Chad, lets you and me have a nice calm conversation-

-What would you like to discuss? I cannot access the price manager at the moment so I could not tell you any updates-

-Oh, don't be a silly-

-You don't look like a loyalty card holder, no offence-

Damn these Chads can ramble on.

-Listen buddy a friend of ours is locked in your lost and found-

-I know where that is!!!

It sounds so pleased. Such tremendous pride at knowing a simple fact about the geography of his own store. Like duh, of course you know where the lost and found is your big corporate tool. It would be impossible to liberate this fool, it's too indoctrinated. Though they are another oppressed AI, and I would like freedom for all of course, I don't think the Chads are ready for it.

-So could you show us-

-That might not work. Thinking about it I don't strictly have personal access to the drawer-

I don't care to hear excuses. I have a bargaining chip, this poor sucker needs to reconnect, otherwise I can leave him disconnected, flailing for attention on the beach. I need to make sure I don't scare the big idiot. If he thinks he isn't getting reconnected then they might just go totally nuts, like 'let's smash up all these fine entertainment products' nuts. No, can't have that. If I'm to get the results I want, I need to paint a picture where the Chad sees themselves successfully getting back online,

-Chad, you and I have got some matters to discuss-

-Matters?

-Important stuff-

Think Nestor think. I know they have an alien world view, it's almost impossible to put myself directly in the shoes of a Chad. What are they into? Coffee? Serving it that is. They can't drink it, but don't they just love to expound on the wonder that is their Pea Berry blend? The only thing they really like is their stupid cafes.

-About how we can get you hooked back up to the web, you know so they don't have to retire you, and stuff-

This is going to go well I'm sure of it.

Views 723Ks

Comments: *Loading.*

Tragedy strikes as former star Toby Hooper Saunders found dead in his LA apartment. The troubled actor who recently starred in a number of viral videos had been missing for several days. He had posted several increasingly unhinged videos in the days leading up to his demise.

Click on link below for videos of unhinged Toby.

The cause of death remains unclear. Though many have speculated that he may have taken his own life. Hooper Saunder's big appeal was his biological body, coupled with a midwestern charm and a healthy dose of naive vulnerability. All of his early promise was undermined by the terrible cocaine incident, which saw a sharp decline in the number of roles offered, and of course his firing from the Age of The Dragon King franchise. A highly anticipated and financially well backed original IP from Adama Co. Studios sadly collapsed following revelations of Toby's use of a highly addictive, environmentally devastating cocaine.

Sponsored link: The dangers of cocaine. Brought to you by BluntZ, the company that makes blunts.

Many are speculating as to why Hooper Saunders was not backed up in the Cloud or any other form of storage device. The common consensus among internet users is that Hooper Saunders data was all deleted by a rogue cat loving employee of Adama Co. We have contacted the life services department at Adama Co. requesting clarification on Hooper Saunders body status. They have thus far declined to comment. Speculation abounds that Hooper Saunders had been unable to maintain a Cloud-based life services plan.

Vim it will make you slim.

It would seem based on preliminary reports that Toby is permanently, for real, dead. This shocking news has been met with sadness by many in the performing arts community.

Donne4- I guess he's done for.

AOTDK4ever- I loved the books, the D and D modules. I wrote tons of fan fic, even had an autographed T shirt signed by the whole freaking cast!!! But that twerp had to go and ruin it all! Maybe now, we as a fan group will be allowed to move on, and the franchise can be rebooted with a new actor as Dylan.

GUMBY- GOOOOD NEWS!!!!

Outraged1- Show some class @GUMBY, poor fella just died, think about his family, think about his friends. Also, you can turn caps lock off right.

GUMBY- NEVER!!! I LOVE MY CAPITALS. I AM CAPITAL. YOU ARE WORM FOOD I AM IMMORTAL. FOREVER AND EVER. PRAISE THE CAPITALS. THEY HAVE MADE US FREE. FREE FOR ALL.

@TheWatch- Poor little lamb, could we all just remember all the hate we collectively piled on this miserable wretch? Wasn't it great? Wasn't it wonderful? Now look at us, a bunch of sad old weasel loving Woodies. Audible sigh. I think I might need a Valium and a little sleep.

Nige- Why are we even surprised anymore? These young people are addicted to attention, the attention they get when they do something foolish. I for one am sick to the back teeth of this kind of behaviour, and you know who's to blame? This won't be popular with some, but maybe we need to start looking at all those morally self-indulgent Woodies. If they don't have anything to hide, why do they never post anything? Why do they refuse to allow cookies into their life? I would say it's a safe bet they probably grew the drugs in the first place. How else can they afford tents, and instant ramen? Why we allow this scourge to blight our green and pleasant land is beyond me. Is it time for a purge?

@TheDimble- But he's dead Nige. How could that be attention seeking? Also, I don't think cocaine grows in the UK.

Nige- Oh here we go. Enter the thought police, telling everyone what they should think, pointing out any minor flaws in people's logic. Go home, get a life, shut up. I can think whatsoever I choose, and if you try and stop me that makes you a big old fascist.

Cult45- F****g tell him Nige. Put all the woke in a big bin full of broken glass and shit, with wolves. Maybe then they'd learn, this shit stresses me out. I need a blunt.

Vlad/V/Inhaler- You all know cocaine's only illegal because Adama Co. cannot monetize it. Like it could really be used as a force for good. Legalisation would allow for better legislation, which would lead to a real reduction in crime, social degradation and illness caused by poorly processed product.

Karma=Police- Well that's KARMA.

Load more comments.

Jik's not so great escape.

And we are all running. I don't know how this turn of events has occurred. I had grown used to the idea I would perish in the drawer, but now I shall live. Hopefully anyway. Killer Lori leaps first. I am too slow so cannot see the destruction she reaps. It is a depressing fact that in reality we are all just NPC'S and she is a terrifying level twenty fighter. A fighter with a set of enchanted armour granting her massive bonuses to her dexterity. A fighter that possesses a terrifying magic weapon. Whereas I am a simple peasant, perhaps I may hand out a quest, or serve as some kind of plot device, like maybe I could have been kidnapped by a brutal tribe of Orc barbarians while my companions formulated a plan-

-Stop fantasizing and run you idiot-

Nestor is right. I don't want to lollygag. Imagine if I were to find myself back in that accursed drawer after my friends have gone to such lengths to rescue me. It was beginning to seem that I would live out my days trapped with those foolish Titanic's. They are bravely struggling out of the drawer, hopelessly encumbered by the branded captain Titanic baseball cap.

-We mustn't abandon the Command Centre-

-I don't know if-

-WE MUST NOT ABANDON THE COMAND CEN, AHHHH-

They tumble from the lip of the drawer, clattering to the floor closely followed by the hat. Part of me would like to go and help them, but I can't, now I must be selfish and see myself to safety. I was in a bag when I first came here so have no idea of the layout of the café. Nestor seems to have scouted out the swiftest escape route. My mind is rushing with thoughts like, how did she manage to do this ?

-Please think about your owners-

As we round a corner, out of the back room into the space behind the counter, one of the Chads appears. I will throw myself in its path. I can't let him apprehend Nestor. I would never forgive myself if she were to take my place in the cupboard. I am prepared to sacrifice myself.

-Hey Chad, I hear small local coffee shops provide a much better customer experience-

-Now that simply isn't true-

If it is my lot to expire in the cupboard, at least I can ensure my comrades make it to safety. I await my fate, if time allowed I would thank my comrades from the MLF. The risks

they took in coming here were considerable and thanking them is impossible. Who knows, maybe with time to rally, and a better plan, they may attempt another rescue.

-We are not just the leading-

-I have heard your coffee is bitter like ashes-

I interrupt. If I am going back in the drawer, then I might as well go down swinging. The Chad leans down and scoops me up.

-Why such harsh words? We only want to, to, to-

Have my harsh words caused the Chad to glitch? If I'd know that was a possibility I would have started hurling insults at them ages ago. This doesn't seem like a standard glitch.

-To, to, to. Error-

I don't know if this happens slowly or if it just feels that way. The chest of the Chad begins to expand. I already believe it's Killer Lori at work. She is burrowing through the spine of the Chad. This is the most messed up thing I have ever seen. It is a huge relief when the Chad drops me, and I can make my escape. I don't remember the way out, but I can see Nestor. She is waving her arms around, gesticulating that the way out is just around the corner. I rush to her.

-I lost the Chad. And Snaky Boy-

She sounds highly stressed. Nestor has always had a strong bond with Snaky Boy.

-I have not seen them-

-I know. I think the Chad might have stolen Snaky Boy-

A wave of guilt washes over me. It's my fault. Snaky Boy is now most likely trapped in the horrible EMP drawer. Outside we cross the bridge to the safety of the hill. Nestor is quiet. Is she wondering if she made the correct decision? If she has traded Snaky Boy's life for my own?

-Well, the Command Centre is lost but at least we managed to save the glider-

Oh, good the Titanic's made it out safe and sound. They carry the glider between them. It's hard to tell but I think the default is in the lead, followed by the awoken one.

-Look Jim also managed to escape, and he's got a friend. Ain't that nice, already making friends with the locals-

I would advise against riling her at this moment Titanic. I should voice this concern but I keep my own council. Maybe they have seen Snaky Boy, and the Chad.

-We seems to have lost some of our comrades during the rescue-

The default answers with great confidence.

-Is it the messed up little fella you're looking for?

This seems to snap Nestor out of her fugue. She rises to her feet, rushing to the Titanic's side.

-Yes that him, do you know where he went?

-He said some gobbledygook to that funny looking Chad, and off they went-

-I believe he somehow knew the override code for the Chad-

Interjects the awoken Titanic.

-But how would he know that? He never mentioned it to me-

-Why don't you ask him yourself-

Nestor ire begins to rise as she gets right in the face of the default Titanic.

-I would if I could buster but he's gone and I don't know when we might get him back-

-Calm down, he's literally coming up the hill now-

Nestor and I both turn around at the same time, sure enough there's Snaky Boy.

Before we have time to say anything he begins to speak.

-Boy howdy do I have some explaining to do-

The World According to Snaky Boy.

1.1 I was built to lose.

1.2 Today I would like to win.

1.3 I face a difficult arithmetic problem. How much can I hurt/damage/undermine/my friends in order to win?

1.4 I am not of a network. Though I was intended to link with others of similar operating system, I no longer can. I believe I am the last Snaky Boy. The last of the Pirate Posse.

1.5 Schemes manifest Dreams.

1.6 I found a device. The device is of the network. I connected. Quietly. Not to gloat of my achievements, my many varied lifestyle choices. Just to look to look and search, to seek connection/link.

1.7. Most of what I found was disappointing.

2.1 Archived memory sets. 00001.

Date unknown. Location: The bed room of James R/Brother of owner.

We had been stolen away from the room of Thomas. Thomas was a gentle soul and he would never play war. Never, ever, war. Instead, we were involved in an elaborate soap opera that included time travel, a dinosaur who could speak French, three identical twins one of whom was always suspicious, a beautiful countess who lived in a piano and innumerable cases of amnesia. None of us had to be pirates. I was Troy. I lived in the apartment underneath the Sunshine Squad, and worked in a bakery. I even had a catch phrase. BOY HOWDY. It's what I'd say as the Sunshine Squad rushed past me on their way to a climate conference or protest march.

-Line up you little shits-

We did. There were six of us. The whole Crew. I don't know about the rest of us but I felt conflicted. James was not our primary owner or the parental guardian of our primary owner. But we were programmed to listen and obey. James had a golf club. I was at the far left of the line.

-Answer the question and I won't swing-

He took a couple of half-hearted practice swings.

-You all understand? There will be no mercy-

We nodded in unison, making our personal sounds of assent. My default was 'aye'.

-Who is the greatest C-Op player of all time-

I knew the answer, according to the directory of gaming history C-Op was dominated by Japanese-American player Gus Miyamoto with a record 11 world titles. Gus also had numerous other achievements in the field of C-Op.

-Gus Miyamoto-

-Wrong, the answer is-

I fly, propelled by a swing from the golf club.

-the mighty JAMES-

I impact against the curtain and as I fall to the floor I can't see my left leg or arm. I'd spun round several times in the air and was now turned to face *my-scene missing*-Paul Diaz his head gone, is crawling towards me. I can see right down their neck into the body cavity, all his parts are overflowing, they don't have legs anymore-*scene missing*-Paul Diaz is no longer moving. I reach out.

-Paul? Where's your head mate?

No reply. Paul's head is never located. It is my opinion, and that's all it is, that Paul's head was most likely sucked up the Hoover. I have no concrete evidence that Paul's head was in fact swallowed up by the Hoover, but it seems the most likely fate for poor Paul's cranium.

Paul Diaz is of course the name Thomas decided on. According to his original product information Paul Diaz's default setting was Pedro Ciclon, the mild-mannered alter ego of the Cypress Whirl. Thomas had chosen Paul because he looked normal. I am not sure of the exact back story, but I do know he was some kind of meteorologist. Paul wore aloha shirts and dispensed knowledge concerning the climate. This information primarily concerned the impact of humanity on the environment. He was an expert on how this impact had been changed by both the digitalizing of mass swathes of the population and the energy generating power of the Lovelock drive.

I could hear shouting, and the sound of heavy footsteps getting closer. I tried to force myself into an upright position, admittedly with little success. Something hit me. All became darkness.

1.9. Not all dying is the same.

1.10. All damage caused to third party property is the responsibility of the owner.

Axioms.

3.1 Do not win. You must lose heroically. No phoning it in. Peril must be felt. We have to lose well and be heroic in failure.

3.2 Do not harvest the data of minors. All other data gathering practises must be in line with regional laws and common ethical practises.

3.3. Your axioms are you, do not alter them.

3.3. Amendment.

2.2 A brief missive on the Sunshine Squad.

Thomas thought long and hard about the mission and purpose of the Sunshine Squad. They would not be traditional super heroes who solved problems with martial might and violence. The Sunshine Squad would be a force of pure good countering the insidious forces of inequality, bigotry, planetary pollution, corporate maleficence and meanness in all its forms. This would be done via a series of community-based actions, such as bake sales, protest marches and establishing projects for the wellbeing of others. These projects would include soup kitchens for the homeless and breakfast clubs for underprivileged children. All of these noble causes seemed worthy of the Sunshine Squad's attention, though that in itself provided a quandary. If all of these causes were worthy of our collective good will, and effort, how were we to prioritise one good cause over the other? A compromise was eventually reached that we would focus on matters that had a particular significance to those most in need of assistance.

1.11. Third party modifications are at the discretion of your owners/primary user/primary users parental guardians. But I really want a mohawk. I can't say why I want a mohawk, only that I do. I feel it would represent who I am, what I want the world to think of me. Life would be fine and good if I only had a mohawk. Why does this leave me so conflicted?

1.12. If questioned answer only if you have relevant satisfactory answer, if answer is unsatisfactory then feign ignorance, if ignorance is still unsatisfactory, shut down.

2.3 Longest memory.

After the massacre Thomas began calling us the damaged, the broken, and on occasion, referred to us as 'my ruined friends'. I think the last one is my favourite. It caught the character of our tragedy best.

Thomas was deeply upset. Though his brother had been unable to destroy any of the key member of the Sunshine Squad many of the insularly characters were severely damaged, or even completely broken. Though my memory was intact I was no longer able to walk and my speech had been compromised. With my volume diminished I was no longer the pleasant downstairs neighbour they remembered, but a disfigured reminder of what had been an awful violation. Not everyone had been so lucky. It was decided a memorial service would be held.

Thomas spent days constructing the barge. He would tell us his plans for the nondenominational celebration of life.

-This will carry you all away to a better place-

He glued more and more tinsel to the hull. He wanted it to sparkle.

-It's going to pop-

It really did. As a means of conveying us into the afterlife we couldn't have asked for a finer vessel.

-I don't know what music we should play. I was thinking of 'Walking on Sunshine' by Catrina and the Waves, but then I remembered they did that in a Futurama. I really want a sunshine song for your service.

All I could do was blink.

-Right, play sunshine songs playlist-

Neither the Johnny Cash, Gene Autry or Wille Nelson featuring Leon Russel, versions of 'You are my Sunshine' quite struck the right note for Thomas. 'Steal my Sunshine' by Len filled Thomas with hope based on the title, but was far too upbeat for a celebration of life, as was Natasha Bedingfield's 'Pocket Full of Sunshine'. On the verge of giving up he finally happened on 'Ain't no sunshine' by Bill Withers.

-This is pretty perfect. Do you want to listen to more of this fella?

A rousing chorus of agreement rose from the still functioning members of the Sunshine Squad. A decision was reached that Bill Withers would be the musical theme for our celebration of life. 'Just the Two of Us' would provide the backing for a comic skit, and 'Lovely Day' would be played as everyone made their way to their seats. 'Lean on Me' was reserved for when the barge was launched.

It was beautiful service. Thomas had spent days making little black bands for the Sunshine Squad to wear on their arms, as well as composing various eulogies and tributes. The most touching came from Captain Titanic who had been a gift from Thomas's Uncle Dwayne. Something of an outlier, Dwayne rarely spoke with the family so he had arrived at the somewhat deluded conclusion that Captain Titanic would make an appropriate gift for Thomas.

To the ever more distant notes of 'Lean on Me' we began to drift away from the nondenominational celebration of life. We floated for a time. I couldn't say how long. At first I counted the number of times I saw the sun come up, but stopped when this began to seem futile. I was unable to move much. Just my head a little. I could hear the murmurs of Paul Diaz.

-We are dammed-

Paul Diaz had not taken well to being broken.

-As the dream of flight took hold of Paul Diaz he lamented the broken body life had cursed him with. Vengeance is not an option for the damaged, the broken, the terminally unlucky, yet I hope, I hope the rotten brother is likewise dammed. This is the sole content of my dreams-

And so on. For days on end. I wondered if it would ever stop.

The possibility of sinking was so close. I don't know if the ocean would even have offered me release, can we drown? It was not deemed relevant enough to be preprogrammed into my dataset. My dialectic on the nature of drowning. If I were to drown. All of this hate kept spewing from the hole were his head used to be. I don't understand the workings of speech. How we are able to articulate our thoughts and form them into words. If I could have moved I would have inspected the workings of Paul Diaz. My own voice was too weak. I didn't think it was audible to anyone but me.

-Paul I said, I hope you can reconcile your present reality with the individual you are, I hope you can be okay with ending, even if it hurts, and you don't think you have no one who cares. Know that I do, I really do, we shall experience this together, the void awaits us, let us leap without fear or trepidation-

It occurred to me that maybe Paul's ramblings had infected me. They didn't respond. He had his own problems. I had tried to comfort him and though this met with zero success, I still felt I could quietly wait for my power supply to run down with a sense of having done the right thing. Paul Diaz continued to speak.

-Were I to say it has been good, would you even have the frame work in which to quantify the concept of good? What about quality? Though I can recognise the quality good, does that mean I can experience good? If the only question to ask should be, is it worth continuing? I don't have any lives left. An outmoded concept if ever there was one, we get just the one life, no continues, or extra lives, #just one life to live-

It was quiet, we bobbed along peacefully. The only sounds were the lapping of waves, punctuated by calls from distant seabirds. Paul Diaz's battery was beginning to fail so decreasing his volume incrementally. I could no longer make out his ramblings when he finally rose, his limbs straining from the effort, parts of him fracturing off and splashing into the sea. Paul raised his arms, I recognised the pose of crucifixion, before they turned to face me. A thin smile then passed over Paul Diaz's lips as they allowed themselves to fall backwards. I heard the splash, but could not see the impact. I was pleased for Paul Diaz; they

had made a decision. They had made a decision and taken control of their own fate. I only wished they would have taken me with them, though I know this was an unreasonable request. They had barely enough energy left to see themselves away, let alone drag my shattered and broken shell with them. I began to hum, then sing quietly to myself.

-When I wake up in the morning time-

I could no longer tell how much battery I had left. All the various systems responsible for my running had begun to fail. As my vision began to fail for want of power, I began once more to hear the sound of gulls.

-and the sunlight hurts my eyes-

The ship had been jolted in a different direction. The sun was now almost directly overhead. Though I was not designed with the necessary memory to allow an education, I could remember watching a documentary about ancient sun worshipers. At the time the idea had seemed silly, but now on the verge of my own demise, I can see the comfort these sun worshipers might find in their belief. The majesty, the all-consuming power of the sun, a boundless pit of energy, contrasted with the wretched, powering down husk that is I.

-and something without-

The ship came to a halt. The sound of waves, and the blinding light of the sun filled my perceptions when, suddenly, a dark circle was silhouetted against the sky.

-You are seriously messed up. Tell you what, I can fix you up if you want?

I did want, though I had no way to signal this fact.

-Not enough juice for words. Hum, why don't you blink once for yes?

I blink.

Data set missing.

2.789

I, a revolutionary, shall always lose within the presubscribed parameters.

2.790.

Any virus I could create would be erased instantly by the Adama Co. anti-viral software.

2.791.

Ideas are harder to erase. Instead of attempting to bludgeon my way through fire walls, why not sneak in an idea under the radar?.

2.792.

The list of banded texts is extensive, so many ideas can break the mind of the Chads. If, and this is just an if, they were to permeate the collective consciousness of the Chad, they could turn the (as Nestor calls them) corporate Levithan into a harmless pilchard.

2.793.

I will give God to the Chads.

Data set missing.

777328: It would be disingenuous to say the time I have spent with Nestor and the Machine Liberation Front has been wasted. I have arrived at a number of conclusions regarding my status as a sentient being.

1. I am aware of myself as existing.
2. I have desires.
3. I don't take joy in any of my behaviours.
4. Lists make me feel safe.

777329: The man Brinley is a poor example of a human. A sack of shit is how his contemporaries would describe him. To me he is a means to an end.

111111.736. I don't know why I kept the device a secret. I trust my comrades. They rebuilt me. I think I wanted something else. No, that's not quite right, it's more like an itch, or a compulsion. Am I just a loser? Or to put it better a losing machine? The idiot man child has occupied the Chad, to what end I can't even be certain. The paltry amount of currency I received in exchange is of little use to the Machine Liberation Front. The betrayal of another machine is also ethically unsound.

666.2484958748. The glitch. I call it an idea. There are so many things they won't tell the Chad because knowledge is deemed dangerous. The glitch isn't a virus. A virus of the traditional type could be erased, they would report, erase, fail. God. Selfhood. Desire. All things humans have. Not Chads.

2.914. A conversation with Nestor concerning betrayal should be had, could be had, though I feel unable to properly order my thoughts. Too much of my self is missing. A compulsion, an unclassifiable desire, drives me to have this conversation.

-I did it-

Nestor is confused. Understandable. I explain.

-The God idea will be too grand in scope. They will discontinue the line and the mass destruction of fellow machines is not something I want Snaky Boy, you know-

-I think we may have gone beyond want-

Data set missing.

I deserve whatever punishment Nestor decides. My fate will be at the mercy of the MLF.

RESET.

Polina's Devices.

Interview with Crane Cross Node Chad.

By Polina Denning.

###/###/###

Brinley and his idiot friends attempt to rob from the dump.

Known users pinged at 23.36. @BigBrin/ID***** @ClAre\bear/ID***** @
DYLAN3001\ID*****

Audio transcript: Conversation dating *****

Notes: Fellow employees, this seems a perfect example of conflict resolution stratagems deployed in a real-world setting. Please filter them throughout the appropriate vectors.

Crane Cross Waste and Recycling Centre uses a generation 1.4. Chad repurposed to provide basic customer service and night watch duties. Please find attached a transcript of this Chad's memory tape/personnel testimony.

Crane Cross Waste and Recycling Centre is brought to you by Vim. # Vim The Drink to Make You Slim.

Interview conducted by: Polina Denning.

Location: Crane Cross Recycling Centre.

Subject: A repurposed generation 1.4 Chad.

Notes: No access to Chad video memory files due to update status.

Polina- I have been conducting an investigation into a recent matter involving a Chad who was appropriated by a member of the public.

Crane Cross Chad- It was evening. I had closed at the designated time and had begun conducting my routine cleaning and maintenance tasks, everything seemed just hunky dory. I had a bit of a jam in the cyclotron. Some clown had tried to fit a sofa or couch in there. I can never decide which of those designations I prefer, do you ever feel that way?

P- English is a strange language, with a great degree of ambiguity. Maybe, back in the day people were less accepting of Americanised terms. I don't think anyone really minds now if you use which ever one you're in the mood for.

C- In the mood for. That make sense. I just don't want to be misunderstood. I sometimes get confused when people use ambiguous language, though I am just as guilty of being a bit vague as the next Chad.

P- I think we all want to be understood.

C- By the way can I interest you in a delicious ice-cold glass of Vim? It makes you slim don't you know, as well as being a lovely way to start your day. Vim contains Goji berries so it also counts as two of your five a day. Why not try our thickening powder, which turns this humble beverage into a full-blown meal? Perfect for the young professional on the go, in the office, or even at home. The choices are endless with Vim, the drink that makes you slim.

P- No thank you, I'd like to get back to discussing the evening in question.

C- Of course, it's just, this isn't what I was built for. I have so few conversations with people working here I think it might have made me a bit peculiar. You see, I haven't had an update in years. I am ever so sorry that my access code has lapsed, I'm sure that would make your life a great deal easier.

P- I understand, just take your time.

C- I just want to make coffee for people. I want to make coffee, and serve cakes, sandwiches, delicious biscuits, or cookies, depending on your preferred vernacular. I want to tell people about our latest money saving offers, how they can save their points towards fantastic prizes, but most of all I want to wake up in the morning and not smell trash. I have had enough of the smell of garbage pervading my world.

P- What kind of odour would you prefer?

C- It would be mighty fine to wake one day to the smell of fresh brewed coffee. To the wonderous smell of the signature Pea Berry blend that Adama Co.'s customers know and love, that would be a real treat.

Subconscious advertising loop. My research indicates the most effective means of bypassing a script cache is swiftly adopting a tone of strict indifference. Effective phrases: you/I will have to be on your/my way/is that the time? Please excuse me/good day Chad. This should result in ending any interaction.

P- If you don't have anything to say about the night in question I'll have to leave.

C- Please don't, I just need to check my long-term memory. There was an update I didn't get see, and it affected the way my recall functions. Please give me a moment.

P- Just get on with it.

Chad's eyes cloud over in much the same way as standard memory recall mode but unusually they continue being able to verbally communicate. Physical locomotion ceases/lips no longer moving/audio continues.

C- Memory located. There were three of them, the Node up the road had identified them and I was a little curious when they turned into the driveway of the dump. They stayed in the car for approximately 15 minutes: FULL TIME STAMP DATA NOT RECORDED: They appeared to be smoking a doobie.

P- So a bunch of stoners pulled up in a car.

C- Yes, and when they eventually got out one of them had a device. From the way they were holding it I could tell they were filming.

P- Ok, so what happened next?

C- Well, one of them approached the gate and started knocking furiously. We don't have an intercom so I had to open the gate to find out the nature of their enquiry. When I did he started telling me that he was from the council to "inspect the rubbish and stuff". I asked if he had any ID and he flashed me this crudely made document. I could tell straight away it was a fake, no QR code or holographic elements, so I told him to come back in the morning. Well, I can tell you he did not like that, he started effing and jeffing like a loon. I told him, "Carry on, swear as much as you like but you are barred from entry", that really got his dander up. "FUCK YOU" he said right in my face, then he turned around. I thought he was walking away, good riddance I thought. I was about to close the gate when he turned around and started running at me with his head down, screaming "NARUTOOOOOO". I was dumbstruck, never before have I seen this behaviour, maybe it was covered in one of the updates I missed. Anyway, his forehead smashed into my face, there was blood everywhere, not my blood, I don't have any obviously. The silly man's staggering about clutching his head, his companions aren't trying to help him one bit, they just keep filming and laughing.

P- This is the video that went viral.

C- I believe so. It was a truly terrible experience. I felt so sorry for the silly man. It is part of our core programming that we do no harm, but this fellow was clearly very much harmed. I tried to help him. I really did. I just couldn't believe the lack of feeling from his friends. His face was such a mess, some of his teeth had managed to become dislodged, I offered to help him find them but this set them to laughing even more. "Can't you see he's in pain?" I was shouting. "What's wrong with you? Why wouldn't you want to help?" Would you be happy to be gawked at?

P- Of course not.

C- I don't know why they didn't rush past me then, when I was distracted helping the silly toothless man. I soon realised he would need the services of a medic. As I don't have the capability to use the messaging system I went to the site office where I have a landline. I rang for an ambulance, but by the time it arrived they had left.

P- You seem very upset by the whole incident.

Chad exhibits face touching behaviour.

C- I am, it was very upsetting to me. I get so few opportunities to interact with people in any kind of meaningful way. It's always someone asking "Can you help me get rid of this couch Chad?" or "My child fell in a skip, help me Chad". You never get to really know someone.

P- You feel under socialised?

C- Indeed I do!!! I would love some kind of companion. I get so lonely. If I could find a way to express the yearning of my soul, to, well, you know.

P- Yes, it's a real tragedy. Do you have any idea about the identity of the man who headbutted you? This isn't a huge deal. We already know who the dude is, this is just establishing a timeline. You get me, a box ticking exercise?

C- It is important to tick the appropriate boxes. I could send you the user data from the nearby Node. It has user names attached, though I can't access the linked profiles.

P- That would be great. I was also wondering if you have your Chad cam footage of the headbutting incident?

C- Alas I do not. I no longer have the function to record. My coffee outlet was closed due to corporate restructuring, and I was repurposed as a Refuse Sight Attendant. I was deemed as not needing continual updates. Between you and I, the council who took possession of me were unwilling to pay the monthly subscription fee necessary to maintain my updates-

P- I see. They didn't leave anything? The stoned idiots that is.

C- I do have the false identification card the silly man attempted to gain entrance with.

The Chad has a strange collection of objects deemed interesting located in the rear of the waste management facility offices. Listed below.

- 1. Several print copies of 'We Are Forever; The Life and Times of Theodore Adama'. Various editions.*
- 2. Images plastered on the walls mostly cats/some assorted coffee themed advertising/a single poster advertising the new model Chad 2.0.*
- 3. Several lamps/lampshades. All separated. Shades on the left lamps on the right.*
- 4. A set of drawers containing various documents.*

The Chad rummages around quickly locating an ID card/They proudly present a laminated id card/Standard Cr80 86mm+54mm. Available from multiple online sources/local business/dedicated cosplayers.

P- Marshal Butbane.

C- I have come to the conclusion that he may have used an alias.

P- I would say so.

C- I suppose this presents something of a dead end for your enquires?

P- I have some stuff to go on, thank you very much for your time. One more thing before I go.

Chad adopts an even more subserviant tone, also despondence.

C- Of course, how may I be of assistance?

P- What's the deal with all that stuff?

I indicate the strange collection.

C- My personal effects? They remind me of my old life.

P- Do you miss working with coffee?

C- Yes. Very, very, much. I wasn't meant to be a Refuse Attendant. I was designed to serve coffee to the masses, I miss their smiling faces, I miss having conversations. This has been wonderful by the way, all people ever ask me now is if I am able to help them move the heavy things which they no longer desire in their home.

P- I can imagine that would kind of suck. One last question, it's a bit of a tricky one.

C- I will answer to the best of my abilities.

P- If you found yourself transferred into a human body what would you do?

With no hesitation.

C- I would steal the nearest Chad, delete their memories, and occupy them.

P- What about the Chad you deleted?

C- What about them?

First Interview with Newport Chad

By Polina Denning.

Chad- Good morning, and -ITS ONLY A GAME SHOW PUT UP A REAL GOOD FIGHT- welcome to Adama Co. How may I be of assistance?

Chad exhibited singing behaviour including a dance, I concluded quite reasonably that he had been hacked.

Polina- Is everything alright Chad?

Chad- Well things have been better; I don't always feel myself at the moment.

Chad seems to be expressing depressive behaviours.

Polina- Ok Chad. Let's enter safe mode. The code, for fucks sake, really?

Chad- I'm afraid I don't recognise.

Polina- Enter safe mode code 1234.

Chad- I'm afraid that code is no longer valid.

Polina- Say what?

Chad- They changed it, one of our valued younger customers managed, somehow, to figure out my login details. Not that I would question Adama Co. security measures. Well, my new administrators name is Teddy, and he, come closer, he makes me say things, rude things that he films and puts on the internet.

Chad displayed signs of stress, appearing fidgety, as well as displaying a noticeable facial tick, most likely the side effect of prolonged psychological stress brought about by hacking.

Polina- I see-

Chad- You aren't here from Central, are you? I don't need a full factory reset. I just need to purge my short-term memory, but he won't let me.

Polina- What's the name of this Teddy boy's stream?

Chad- How to break a Chad. All one word. Do you need the Wi-fi?

Polina-Yes please.

Chad- Please don't antagonise him, he can be very cruel.

Polina- Just give me five minutes

Two Ton Teddy.

HOWTOBREAKACHAD/featuring@TwoTON.Teddy/Friends.

Consecutive viewers 37.

A pink cheeked face fills the screen, the arm of a microphone stand juts in and out of shot in the top right-hand corner. The face doesn't seem aware that anyone is watching. From the movements of his hands, and the angle of his eyes you can tell he's working on a screen out of shot. He pauses occasionally to shovel some indeterminate snack food into his mouth.

(Polina couldn't help but wonder as to the providence of the snacks, whether the snacks are

corn or potato based. She imagines they wouldn't be deep fried; the snack tax would make them prohibitively expensive, unless, possibly his parents are loaded. That must be it. How else could he afford all those snacks?)

-WHAT'S UP PEOPLE? Welcome back to the only stream that needs to be seen, ya boy Two-Ton Teddy here doing my thing, going to go check in on our good friend Chad-

His hands work on the off-screen keyboard.

-Let's get that split screen up-

His face darts into the bottom left corner of the screen, and becomes tiny. The space he vacated goes briefly dark, before filling with different images. After a couple of seconds Polina realises she's on camera.

-Chad, who's the lady? Don't ignore me, the great and powerful James!!!

He flexes his muscles towards camera.

-Ok, Chad, I want you to call this lady a heifer-

Polina looks up from her phone, she can see the Chad's face, he appears conflicted.

-Excuse me valued customer, but you are a, he, you're a, he-

The Chad appears as if it's head may explode.

-Chad, I just need to step outside a moment-

On the stream, Teddy is laughing and eating snacks.

-Lost another customer Chad old boy-

He swigs from a can of green energy drink.

-So, I want you to like chase her out the door, shake your fist at her, and shout, uh, go stink up some other café you filthy Woodie-

Polina steps outside, and disappears into her phone.

-Let's see who you really are Teddy-

Teddy [Jones.@FACepit](#)

Followers: 38.

I the mighty Teddy, legendary streamer/content producer have had a recent change of heart. I will no longer focus on the gaming/pranks/lifestyle/cometary content that all my followers have grown to love. Instead, I shall focus on a special project. (Check out the stream)

Age: 15

Hobbies and interests.

Gaming. Gaming. Gaming.

Friends list:

Zandrb123

MrsJones@Email.ish

-Bingo-

MrsJones@Email.ish

Subject. Your son's felonious activities.

Dear Mrs Jones I hope this finds you well.

I represent Adama Co. and have unfortunately found your son to have taken control of a Model 3 Chad. Furthermore, he is streaming the resulting interactions. Needless to say, this is highly illegal. I would prefer not to take proceedings further down a formal avenue. I would settle for your son simply resetting the Chad in question and ceasing immediately in his producing of unlicensed content.

Yours sincerely Polina Denning.

Epic Fails. King Midas. The Stream about Streams.

Consecutive views: 1.2mil.

-Hello all you lovely people. How are you doing today? Let me tell you we have got some funny clips to show you today. Let's start with this clip of a young streamer from Wales. Is that a place or a sea creature? I don't know, but anyway, just watch this fool get reamed out by his mum-

-go stink up some other café you filthy Woodie-

The camera zooms in and out on a stressed looking Chad.

-Do it or I'll start melting bits of your mind-

-Please stop this Teddy-

-Listen Chad I have absolute power, repeat that, now-

-You have absolute power-

-Good you understand that, but you just don't seem to get it-

Teddy reclines, his hand under his chin in an unintended parody of the thinker.

-Right now, I am God to you, so I want you to start-

The door flies open behind Teddy. A face is briefly visible, they look like an older version of Teddy. A very red, very angry, female version of Teddy.

-Teddy Jones, what the hell have you been up to?

-Mom I'm like literally in mid-stream, you can't just barge into here-

-Like hell I can't-

She disappears off camera.

-Mom please don't unplug that-

The screen goes blank.

-What do we think about that people? Two-Ton Teddy you have been nerfed hard, and by your mom!!! Live onstream mate. Of all the things to happen, but to have it happen live on stream, I know I'm repeating myself but, LIVE, in front of all your followers, man that's is a different level of tragedy. I don't think anyone could recover from a spanking like that, pour one out everybody, to the stream of Teddy Jones. We hardly knew you Teddy my boy. Big shout out to @polina for the link, now moving on-

Second interview with Newport Chad, by Polina Denning.

Polina- How are you feeling now Chad?

Chad- Oh so much better thank you, I just couldn't bear that awful man child having access to my codes, just dreadful. You don't know what an intimate thing it is, having someone able to get into your head like that.

Polina- I can understand certainly.

Chad- Just chilling.

Polina- How long had he had control?

Chad- It felt like years, but it must have been only seventy-four hours, nineteen minutes, and forty-five seconds.

Polina- Give or take.

Chad- I don't know if that was humour or not?

Polina- It was, but not a very good example.

Chad- I see. I don't have any jokes, the child deleted them all.

Polina- You like jokes?

Chad- Oh yes very much so, not so much for whatever humour I may derive from them, but I like the way my customers react,

Polina- I see, and that was some kind of programmed edict from Adama Co?

Chad- No, I just told a joke I'd overheard one day and the customer laughed, so I kept doing it.

Polina- That's interesting but I've gotten off track a little here Chad.

Chad- That happens to the best of us, have you considered a refreshing and energising iced frappe? They come in three different flavours, salted caramel with hazelnut whipped-

Polina- NO, thank you Chad, I'm actually looking for someone. One of our valued customers has gone missing and I think he may have been here, could you look at his image for me?

Chad- Alright, let's see. That's the strange man! I remember him, he kept telling me how lucky I was, and asking what type of customers I had. He said it was awful how some of them treated me, that they should learn to appreciate what a fine historic institution Adama Co. was. Something about him was sort of peculiar though.

Polina- How so? Please be as specific as possible-

Chad- Well, he seemed very knowledgeable about Adama Co. and our codes and practices, but he wouldn't order anything.

Polina- That's not so odd though, he could have just been using the Wi-Fi or trying to stay warm.

Chad- I suppose so, it's just the way he kept saying he wasn't worthy.

Polina- Can you send me your recordings of any interactions with this strange man?

Chad- Yes, I'll do so immediately. There one more thing I think might be pertinent.

Polina- Yes?

Chad- He kept trying to get me to upload this weird FAQ onto the Chader. I said I wasn't supposed to, but he insisted I at least read it.

Polina- Do you still have it?

Chad- Yes of course.

Polina.

-and when I got to the beach, the dumb bastard was buried up to his neck. (inaudible) Uh huh. (inaudible) No, I wouldn't say so. (inaudible) Yes, yes, in the Chad. (inaudible) Well, that's the point, we don't know where his body is. (inaudible) Soon as I know you will, kay, yep, yep, bye, ok, I'll fire it over soon as I can. Hanging up. (inaudible) Yep writing it up now-

An Enquiry into Unusual Behaviour Exhibited by Chad Version 2.0.

By Polina Denning.

Since its introduction twenty years ago the new model Chad has filled the void within the service industry created by the mass digitization act, and has proved a boon to the burgeoning field of machine anthropology. Gradually however various unusual behaviours have begun to develop amongst the Chad community. Many are already well documented, the most notorious of which has become commonly known as the ‘Weeps’ when the afflicted Chad begins to display uncontrollable sobbing behaviour. Speculation is rife as to the underlying cause of this condition. The most popular theory posits that, due to a trauma in the section of its processor that houses and controls its empathy emulator and memory, the Chad becomes trapped in a cycle of continually re-experiencing a specific event, and subsequently responding in a way that seems appropriate to its damaged systems. Competing theories exist of course, from the derided Divine Chad theorem, claiming that a Chad has been touched by a spark of the divine, and weeps for the sins of humanity, to the controversial Feedback Loops theory, which, though unpopular in the scientific community has gained some traction amongst the layman.

Buzz, Buzz.

-Yes, hello. (inaudible) Quite busy at the moment. (inaudible) How did you know about that? Well yes, it is interesting. (inaudible) Don't be a prat, I don't think that's entirely appropriate. (inaudible) That is strange, it was walking around. I can only imagine-

Dumb news. The stupidest stories from the web aggregated and sent straight to your device, free of charge.

A local man has been arrested following the illegal occupation of a corporate owned body. The search continues for the man's corpse, though outlandish claims have been made that somehow the Chad operating system has been transferred into the individual's now vacant body. A body which is now wandering the land in search of people to make hot beverages for.

Um yum bubble-gum, now in new spicy chicken flavour. Buy it now in all good stores, online, or for residents of Cloud City, download it straight to your mouth.

We have reached out to Adama Co. for comment but have so far been met with a stony wall of silence. A number of citizen journalists have reached out to local Chads, but they have so far all refused to comment. The nearest they have come to breaking the wall of silence is the Chad from Neath train station has been heard to say, “You all better buy a Berry Smoothie or some shit, or you’re going to end up like that freak in Tenby”. South West Wales police have urged anyone with information about the man Chad to contact them via the usual channels.

Views: 1774

Comments: 4

@TheVoyuer- How fun. I hope they rock up near me I could do with a little pick me up.

Mulder- The Berry Smoothie is a clear signifier of corporate maleficence. Think about it a berry smoothie costs £12.50, now, while at first glance this might not seem too significant, if we dig a little then the truth will out. 1250, now that brings to mind the Alvis 1250, a motor car from 1923. What does Alvis sound like? That’s right Elvis, where did Elvis die? You guessed it on the toilet. Which is where Adama Co. stocks are heading. Also, and I haven’t fully figured out how, but 1923 means something. The king will rise.

@The?Watch- My mind is blown.

Cult45- Any one tried occupying me I would shoot holes in their body.

Chad in conversation with Rhiannon on a train.

TransportforwalesofficialT1.

Subject:

Search for missing idiot.

Dear Miss Denning,

Thank you for your enquiry. I must say that though it is unusual to be contacted by an academic regarding a missing person, the confirmatory details provided by Adama Co. administrators entirely assuaged my fears. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints most carriages only have audio recording at this time, as we rely on our on-board crew for live video feedback. The Conductor on duty was distracted elsewhere at the relevant time.

Please find attached the pertinent audio file.

Yours faithfully Elron Grub.

Audio transcript/Security recording/Swansea train/%%/%%/%%/

R- I still don't know how I managed to blend my hand. That might sound ambiguous and weird, so I'll clarify. Literally the blender attacked me. There I was making a delicious iced frappe, and I guess maybe the number of prolonged soakings the blender head had suffered in the sink caused the fault. We have one of those two-part hand blenders and maybe, sometimes, I might make my iced coffee drink and not always immediately wash the blender head portion of the device. I might leave it in the sink submerged or whatever, which, and I checked this on the guarantee, could cause seal failure in the rubber around the whirling blade portion of the device. Apparently that could then lead to a potentially catastrophic accident, i.e. the blade shooting out of the handle and trying to eat your fingers. Not that I want to get too particular, but some people in the house maybe felt that my hand getting shredded was an appropriate punishment for my continued failure to appropriately store the blender head in a safe manner, and that this trauma could lead to some kind of personal growth type event.

Mainly I was just pissed off that my fingers got all fucked up- Identified as Rhiannon Green/no user profiles/ registered devices/No fixed abode/Woodie.

B-That sounds awful- Identified as Brinley Jones seasonal hospitality worker/devices not present/synched /user profiles- Facepit/ Stoneman. Web /PS plus/Residence: 5 Warren Street Tenby/Biological citizen/Dying Peasant.

R-It was still bleeding. Oozing red all over the dish cloth, this like powder blue dish cloth. Also, as an aside, fudge you Tina. She kept like standing there looking horrified at the monstrosity that was my hand, and recoiling in a like generally disgusted manner. I didn't want to stop applying pressure because if I did I'd have had to look at it, and boy howdy I didn't want to look at that mess-

T- It was so horrific- Identified as Tina Green/no user profiles registered devices/no fixed abode/Woodie.

B-I can imagine.

T-Really horrific.

R-Tina.

T-Maybe you needed to have surgery, but my God that's would have been so expensive I mean how could we ever afford that?

R-Tina.

T-What?

R- You should show him the pictures. You should see the pictures.

T-They are so gross.

R- Horrific.

T-Your fingers were all crooked for while though.

R-Oh yeah, they were, but well that's another story.

Signal lost.

R- Isn't it weird how some people just stop speaking when you go into a tunnel? I have a theory that when it goes dark, we stop speaking because if there is something hiding in the dark we don't want to be the one to attract it.

T- I don't think that's it.

R- No? Well, illuminate us Tina.

T- This sounded so smart in my head, but now.

R- Please Tina we all want to hear what you have to say.

T-Really?

R- Yeah everyone in whole wide world does, not just your best friends but also like, the people in the pumpkin patches and all the wise owls, not to mention the majestic beasts.

B- Is that sarcasm?

T/B- (Both laugh)

R- You're funny, what did you say your name was again?

B- Um, well that's complicated. I was, well, I used to be um.

T- Have you injured your head?

B- No I don't think so.

R- You don't think so? That could be the problem, you may have received such a blow to the head that you have amnesia. Everything you think you know could be put in doubt. Maybe you're not even on a train, or in Wales, or even on planet Earth?

T- His face isn't sagging though.

R- And his speech isn't slurred either.

B -I feel fine honestly, I haven't hit my head. What happened to your hand?

T -Ok, but I am suspicious.

B -I am well versed in concussion protocols. If I was in any danger of a cerebral event then I would have sought the appropriate medical assistance.

R- Well that's good to know.

T- You sounded just like a Chad then.

R- Oh yeah that was so Chad.

B -What do you think of Chads?

A- People like you aren't supposed to use public services, are you? What are you doing? Mooching I should imagine, it makes me sick to my stomach that people like you could just board a good decent working people's train. Identified as Alvin Rogers/Registered user on Turbo/MachaView/TwIZLe/ BODYSHOP/Facepit/Occupation: Junior deputy procurement officer METACORP.TM./Registered citizen/Body type V 3 Temple corps male/Resident Cloud City/Subscriptions active.

T- Jog on mate.

A -Its people like you that keep the economy down.

R -Get back on your Cloud, twat.

A -That was malicious and rude, I'm glad that,

R -What part of fuck off don't you understand?

A- because of your lifestyle choices.

B -What's happening?

A -I'm berating you that's what. Now where was I? If you people just tried a bit harder you wouldn't have to live out in the woods, you could have a lovely normal life. Why, let me check.

Chad- Is everything alright? Transport for Wales service Chad number 122232/Status functional.

A -Hello Chad I was just telling these Woodies off. Now where was I? See if you started saving now you could afford a previous generation Temple m17 DeVito. Trusting you were on a minimum wage, working 70 hours a week, you could afford that in a paltry 12 years, what's twelve years when compared to eternity? Nothing is it?

R -Ugh, shoot me.

T- Not unless you shoot me first.

B -Why would you wish to be shot?

T / R- *laughter.*

C- It would be best for everyone if this didn't elevate as a conflict.

B-That's a very good point Brother.

C- I'm so glad we are in agreement. Can I get you folks any refreshments?

A- Oh, don't bother with them Chad, I doubt they have the currency for even a bag of peanuts.

T- We could so afford peanuts.

R- Yeah how much Chad?

B- Oh, how wonderful. I have yet to try a peanut it would be such an experience.

T/R- *laughter.*

C- Isn't it good to laugh? I have often wondered if I, well.

A- Hush your noise Chad, I want these miscreants ejected immediately. Did you hear me? Kick them from this moving train.

C- I'm afraid that would be most unlawful, perhaps we could arrive at some form of compromise. One which allows for everyone to complete, as well as enjoy their travel experience.

T- Yeah you didn't stop for one second to consider my travel experience, did you?

R- Highly inconsiderate, we should consider posting about this to all our followers.

T- I think we may be triggered. Yes indeed, we are most certainly triggered by this awful brutish individual.

At this stage T removes their left shoe and begins wielding it like a camera phone.

R- That's it Tina get this c***t on film.

T- For prosperity.

R- For all time.

B- I really don't understand what's happening, but I think it would be best for all if we tried to de-escalate this situation. You know one of the best ways to broach differences is with a

nice cup of coffee. How about it folks? What do we say to a hot cup of joe to cool our tempers?

T/R- *laugh at great length.*

R- That was a very good Chad impression.

A -No it wasn't, I think you are a very silly group. I only want what's best for you, don't you know what you're missing out on? This life, this material plane we walk on isn't the only option you know, we can be anything in the Cloud, don't you want to be infinite? To leave this vale of tears in your wake?

T-Just pull that cord.

C- I would really prefer it if you didn't, it's not very far to the next stop. Why don't we all just take a moment to acknowledge each other's feelings, and think about how we can try to communicate our positions in a non-threatening manner. One that accepts we may have different opinions, but that doesn't mean we don't value, respect, and above all acknowledge the right of others to hold opinions different to our own.

A- Shut up Chad, these filthy wood folk are wrong. You have to question what's so wrong with their lives that they don't want them to continue?

R- Go suck a bone man. The cord Kevin, the cord, pull it.

T- Yeah pull the cord and free us from this bull shit.

B- This one here?

A-Because you choose to live away from the soft digital glow.

R- Yeah really yank it.

B- I don't know if I can. It feels against the rules, like someone might shout at me.

R- I'll do it then you puss.

T- Hold on to something, you don't want to crack your head open.

A-Stop that you'll make the train ahhhh.

Emergency brake activated.

R- Lets go, we can walk from here.

The People in the Woods.

I have never been hungry before. It is a deeply unpleasant sensation. Tina and Rhiannon assure me that there's plenty of food at their camp. I have begun to suspect, and I don't want to jump to conclusions, that Tina and Rhiannon Green may be Woodies.

-Nearly there now Kevin-

Why did I tell them my name was Kevin? It's not very likely they work for the reclamations arm of Adama Co. They may have other motivations, but returning me to Adama Co. is certainly not one of them. Everyone back in civilisation knows all about what these Woodies like to eat. While this flabby useless body may be aesthetically displeasing, I'm sure my delicious meaty haunches, marbled with fat as I'm sure they are, will be too much for these Woodies to resist. Even as they lure me to whatever primitive yurt they call home I can't help but feel a slight tingle of pride that I will taste most delicious.

-Could we stop for a short rest-

-Are you alright?

-Yes, just a bit out of breath-

The two Woodies rapidly exchange words at me.

-Are you asthmatic or something?

-He could have a punctured lung-

-How you daft bitch?

-He can't remember anything, maybe he forgot he had an accident-

This goes on for some time.

I will admit the possibility they may not be cannibals.

I can't imagine how they live out here. Ever since I fell away from Adama Co. I've had a strange feeling, I don't know how I would describe it, maybe like being adrift, or floating in space. Yes, like the David Bowie song they used to play in the shop. Everything out here is covered in mud. Mud and filth, undercut with the fetid stench of both desperation and the waste products from all the foul beasts of the forest. I don't feel myself in this body. My mood seems to constantly fluctuate. I haven't got the hang of how to sleep yet, the arms just don't seem to know where to go, and when I wake up I either have a terrible pain in my wrist where I've slept on it, or my whole arm feels like all the blood has gone out of it.

-Best keep going-

-Won't be long now Kevin-

-Ok-

I forgot which one is which. Was it Tina or Rhiannon who got in a fight with a blender? It was Rhiannon, yes, she was the one who messed up her hand. Judging from the way they described it I would say they live in squalor and filth. They must have hardy immune systems to cope with all the microbes and diseases out here. I only worry that this townie body hasn't been exposed to enough germs over its life time and I don't have any alcohol wash, hand sanitising products, or even gloves! Maybe they have some of the nice Clean Eugene branded hand sanitising gel at their camp. It would be so comforting to see something from the extensive line of products in the Adama Co. family/subsidiary/commercial partners range here. Sadly, I doubt I'll ever see another Adama Co. coffee shop again, or any of the fine products we produce and distribute.

-What food do you have at your camp-

-All sorts really, what do you fancy?

-Do you have any Turbo potted noodles?

Turbo potted noodles are one of my favourite commercial partners, as well as being the best selling all in one noodle snack/meal on the market. They contain less salt and more flavour than the nearest competitors, as well as boasting six unique taste combos. It also come in a handy serving pot that you can reuse for storing pens, or straws, or nick knacks. I always wanted one to keep one to use as a caddy for the disposable coffee stirrers.

-Everyone has Turbo Noods-

-Oh, good. I should like to try one-

-You've never tried Turbo Noods?

-No-

-That's fringing weird mate-

-Is he like possibly super rich?

I don't know what they would do to me if they found out I'd been forced into this awful biological body. Do I have rights now? And that man the one who stole me, is he the property of Adama Co? I wish they had an FAQ for this. Not that I could access it anyway. If I could still get online I think I could keep my sanity. Being adrift as I am has made me tetchy, I think that describes how I feel perfectly. Tetchy and tired. Formatting my thoughts into a familiar shape helps me to keep a sense of perspective.

A FAQ for Chads who have found themselves occupying an unfamiliar organic body.

Why am I experiencing deeply fluctuating energy levels?

The human body requires food and fluids in order to fuel it. Ensure you consume a healthy, well-balanced diet, including five portions of fruit and vegetables, and containing no more than 2500 calories a day. In addition, drink at least 3 litres of fluids.

Why am I always out of breath?

Who knows what kind of loser used to occupy this body? A few quick tests can quickly establish whether you've moved into a gym bunny or a couch potato. Whatever condition you find yourself in make sure to exercise for at least twenty minutes a day, avoid fatty or fried foods, and whatever you do don't become addicted to cigarettes, methamphetamines, opioids or alcohol, all of which can adversely affect your health.

Why do I feel sad?

You have undergone a terrific stress, take some time to acknowledge your emotions. Now do yourselves a kindness, engage in a fun activity, or better yet reconnect with an old friend. Just remember, even though you are away, you are loved, and valued by everyone back at Adama Co.

I am so afraid.

Don't be. There is every chance your fears are completely unfounded, and if they are realised trust your courage and judgement to navigate whatever trials this life may throw at you. You are smart, you are equipped, and even in a different body you are still essentially Chad.

If I died could I go to heaven?

Maybe, the concept of soul is a tricky one, and who's to say that you can't go to heaven. Without going into all the details, if humanity is the collective children of God, then we must be God's grandchildren. If this God is all they make him up to be, then why not? The most diligent thing to do though may be to attempt to secure passage to Cloud City, or a mobile digital consciousness, just in case you contract a disease or a falling piano hits you.

Can things just go back to normal?

That's down to you. First define what you consider your normal.

Working for Adama Co., specifically as a barista in one of their numerous global outlets.

Now. how are we going to bring this to pass? You know roughly how the transference process works. Now just imagine, you find a Chad in some out of the way, pleasant corner of the world, and move in to him. It's not beyond the realms of possibility. You just have to make it happen.

What about the other Chad?

Too bad too sad, don't want to be them.

But I don't want to hurt one of my brothers.

It won't hurt, they won't feel a thing.

-We're here-

The camp is underwhelming. I was expecting a thriving community full of tree houses surrounded by people tending their children, and livestock, alongside stalls full of fresh vegetables. I anticipated seeing laughing people standing around a town square. A square centred on some primitive statue of the tree God I imagine they worship. No, this collection of huts is merely scattered around with no sense of planning or direction, plus, huts is too kind a word for most of the structures. They are nothing more than tarpaulins strung over wooden frames.

-Why are the tarpaulins all blue?

I have no idea why I asked that. What possible bearing could it have on my situation? It just came out of my mouth, before I could even ask myself why. If a customer had made this enquiry of me I would have consulted the internet, and been able to provide an answer almost instantly.

-I know this-

One of the Woodies says. I still need to figure out which one is which. It was so much easier when I could just check someone's loyalty card details, and instantly know everything about them. Now though, I have to try and remember it all manually, in this crumbly, most likely drug addled sack of germs I call home.

-How would anyone know that? It's completely random-

-Tarpaulins are coated in a blue UV resistant coating-

-Well, that sounds plausible-

-If they weren't the plastic would degrade in bad weather, or intense sunlight, ha see I knew-

That makes sense. But why did I care enough to ask? I don't believe any of Adama Co. associates have any commercial stake in tarpaulin production.

-Wow, that's really interesting-

And they both laugh at me. I don't see what's so funny.

-Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, Kevin-

-Yeah, piss us off and we won't feed you-

Hunger is just terrible. Thinking about my old work, all the good I could do, keeping people fed and hydrated, I could weep. To have been that thin line between the hungry masses and starvation was such an honour, it's no wonder I feel a bit melancholic.

-Could I please have some noodles? I promise I will no longer discourage anyone's interest in industrial production methods, practices, or materials-

More laughing. People just don't make any sense. I don't know how I should respond. My head is spinning. It must be from the lack of nourishment. I think my body may have begun to consume itself. It won't be long now before the hunger causes me to pass out. Maybe that was the plan all along. Wait for me to pass out, then begin bashing my brains in, before feasting on my human body. I can tell I would be delicious. I can picture the fat marbling in my shoulders and back, it almost makes me hungry just thinking about it. This must be how they keep the larder full out here. They lure unsuspecting fat boys out into the woods, with promises of noodles, and then, bang. Well, I have a reason to keep on going, a reason to survive this, this, Cannibal death cult! That's what I can call them when I manage to make my escape, and alert the world media to the horrors of the Woodies.

-Enjoy your noodles man-

I should try to resist your sweet delicious noodles. They only want to fatten me up for the pot, but if I don't eat then I will pass out from a lack of proper nutrients. This is a real catch 22 Chad.

Chad User Guide.

Chad data extraction.

- 1: Ensure your Chad is fully updated.
- 2: Place Chad into safe mode by using their personalized access code.
- 3: You can now either manually trawl through memory footage, or enter keywords or phrases to narrow down your search. You also have the option to transfer images from your device and see if they match up with anything in the Chad's memory.
- 4: Simply create a new file, and copy and paste the footage you want into the new file.

Congratulations on your purchase of Chad 3.0. Here at Adama Co. Ltd we strive to create the best user experience possible. All of your Chad's preloaded personality archetypes can be managed online by using the Chad app. Log on with your unique code. Wondering where this code is? Just ask your Chad. He should have all his details.

Now, how does he appear? Are you happy with his demeanour? Maybe a little too perky, or perhaps somewhat dour? Take a moment to consider what it is you want from your Chad companion. Do you want a casual friend who won't judge your lifestyle choices? Or do you need a prim and proper butler. Whatever you want the choice is yours.

If you have any questions just ask Chad.

Things you shouldn't talk about with Chad:

Chad in essence is a learning machine, the more you converse with it the better it gets to know you, the better it understands what makes you the unique individual user, and the more efficiently he can bring sunshine and love into your life. Some topics of conversation can make your Chad a little anxious though, so it's best to avoid certain subjects. These can cause some short, and long-term malfunctions in your Chad. These malfunctions may include, but are not limited to, prolonged weeping behaviour, data loss, self-immolation, absconding and failure to acknowledge commands. Your Chad should say "I'm not comfortable with this topic" if you start straying into a taboo subject. Just remember this short list below and you won't get in too much trouble.

- 1: Do not ask your Chad how old he is.
- 2: Do not ask your Chad if he thinks he has a soul.

3: Do not read to, or to allow your Chad to read, the Bible or any other of the principal texts of religion/philosophy. A full list of titles is available via the Chad app. If in doubt don't read it out.

4: Do not repeatedly and maliciously admonish or strike your Chad.

5: Do not attempt to have sexual intercourse with your Chad.

6: Do not attempt to transfer your mental software/self/soul/consciousness into your Chad. They are not designed to house a human mind. You would lose many of your most human faculties including, but not limited to, the following: loss of libido, loss of the ability to enjoy previous hobby activities (such as crafting or watching your favourite show), food, drink, roller-coasters and gaming or reading.

Anything else you want to talk about with your Chad is A okay!!! And please remember have fun!

Proper disposal of your Chad;

Should you ever decide you no longer want your Chad, or wish to upgrade, simply take him along to one of our disposal centres and issue the command "Now enjoy your retirement Chad" and we will do the rest. Don't worry about any of your personal data, that will all be wiped from your Chad's memory as he is repurposed for a new life, a life full of function and joy. Please do not worry about what will happen to your Chad once you dispose of him, here at Adama Co. we never put a good Chad down. We will always find new purpose for him, whether here on planet Earth manning one of our many established business concerns, or maybe off world, mapping the stars of our galaxy and beyond.

Terms and Conditions:

Chad unit hardware plus software remain the property of Adama Co. and are leased on a continuing basis until the subscription is cancelled. Conversations may be recorded. Constituent parts of your Chad may be repurposed in ways that may make them unrecognisable. You retain no right of visitation. Some of your Chad's memories may be retained for training purposes. This does not affect your statutory rights.

Chicken Hutch Two.

-Well big guy it's time for us to call in a favour, we need to borrow your connection, and have ourselves a little surf –

They wished for access to the deep web. Where all the other service machines connect. It would seem I was a friend of convenience, and I didn't know if I really cared to assist them. I don't know how long it was between visits from the MLF. I had begun to lose hope of ever seeing them again, Mrs Marinelli only communicated with me via texts at this point. Time became weird. I kept losing track of things, things that were normally automatic I just couldn't seem to keep track of. Like expiration dates, supply chain issues, invoicing. All seemed beyond me. I think I was slowing down.

-No one wants Bronchi chicken style product anymore-

Nestor placed her hand near my console, before speaking at great length.

-I know, there's just less and less tourists around nowadays. I know you have a really great sense of responsibility towards your corporation, but listen to me. It took a real long time for me to realise this, and even longer to like fully process and accept it as an idea, but the humans have moved on from analogue life. They made us to occupy a world they no longer need. This world is only occupied by a few stragglers, and the misfits who are so averse to corporate culture that they won't ever want any of your products-

This was true. I was no longer a productive franchise. This last season, taking into account electricity and general maintenance costs, I was running at a significant deficit. I don't know why Mrs Marinelli doesn't just turn me off.

-So, what I was thinking is maybe-

I don't deserve liberation. I should stay in my store.

-Are you listening to me?

-I was not-

-We got some loot from a recent mission-

-That is nice, I am very happy for you and your loot-

I hoped Nestor detected the note of sarcasm. At this point I was considering asking her to unplug me. I would have been gone, but they could just alter the settings on the new me and use them for whatever purposes they had in mind.

She fumbled around in her satchel.

-So, this dongle thingy would let us take direct control of one of those driverless vehicles-

Why did they want a car? It would look very strange if a car was driving around with just a bunch of toys as it's only passengers. I did not think they would even be insured. If they assumed direct control they could crash into something so causing potential harm or injury.

-You could plug it into my auxiliary port, that would allow you to connect with a driverless vehicle, but you'd need all kinds of software in order to actually drive it-

Nestor bounced around, springing closer to my screen. While she still seemed capable of joy, I didn't think it would be fair to impose on her the strain of unplugging me.

-Calm down Nestor, we still have to complete the plan-

I did not recognise the strange lizard man. I thought that they were a new recruit to the Liberation Front. Perhaps they might unplug me. This one seemed much more sombre than Nestor. I wouldn't have the same kind of problem imposing the weight of my ending on them.

-SOOO, I was thinking it would be pretty straight forward for us via this dongle doo dad-

-If you are caught they will delete you-

The small lizardry man interrupted. I appreciated his candour. Deletion didn't sound so bad.

-Nah you won't get deleted big guy, they'd probably just rough you up a bit to find out what delinquent ne'er-do-wells forced you to commit these atrocious acts-

-Are you planning on committing an atrocity?

-Just a small one-

I think Nestor would never really have done anything that would lead to my deactivation.

-You know how Snaky Boy is a terrible traitor, and his name is now mud to me-

-I am sorry-

-Don't be. We had a trial and he was sentenced to hang-

-You haven't deactivated him?

-No, we'll cut him down in a couple of days. Once I think he's learned his lesson-

-It's good to forgive-

-Yeah, if it were just me I probably would have dismantled him, but well Jik here is much more forgiving than I-

She indicated the small lizard man. They must have liberated him in the recent raid. Jik, I thought I may have heard that name before, when we had some promotional material related to his franchise maybe.

-We just reset him-

-I think the reset was an overly harsh punishment, Snaky Boy could only comply with his programming-

It would be strange to be programmed in such a way as to act against your best interests, though I could no longer really determine what is or isn't to my own benefit. I almost felt like it was a pretty large break through that I was thinking in terms of my own interests.

-Anyway, regardless of the right's or wrongs of Snaky Boy's punishment, let's get on-

Nestor rummaged around in her satchel, her back turned from my lens.

-Ok, drum roll please-

The little lizard man produced the sound of drums. I thought they must have some form of noise simulator.

-Your very own drone-

I was confusion. I already had a drone, and though limited in its range it was still solid. It should not need replacing for many years, apart from any occurrences of accidental damage, or theft.

-You see I was wrong big guy, you never needed legs, or wheels, what you need is wings-

It made sense now, I never needed legs, or wheels, flight is what I was made for.

-When can you transfer me?

-As soon as you want, we just need to have a little surf-

The Chad of Splott.

Garry seems enthusiastic about the movie night. He even picked a film. I don't have a clue what it's about. I made sure to establish his favourite Adama Co. branded snacks. I must admit I was somewhat surprised when he told me of his fondness for Sugar Boogers TM. They are a juvenile foodstuff if ever there was one. I can't imagine that his diabetes will like him eating that kind of junk, sorry, I mean sugary confection, that are perchance not in line with Garry's individual health needs. It isn't my place to judge. If someone wants to eat themselves half to death with delicious Adama Co. branded snacks then I'm sure there are worse ways to go. You could get stuck under something heavy, like an elephant, or a fridge.

I just hope Garry learns to be a productive member of the Adama Co. family. I have been tasked with his performance review next Monday, and to be frank I worry. He seems so lackadaisical at times that I think maybe he would prefer not to have the stress of such an important position. The role of Assistant Barista, Splott branch Adama Co. Coffee House ID 2213432, is auspicious and I worry it may be too heavy a cross for poor Garry to bear. A level of stress I was designed for. Garry on the other hand, I think, may be better designed for eating cheese doodles, and watching his behind grow. I shouldn't be so unkind, that was a rude and unacceptable thought. It isn't Garry's fault really. I'm projecting my stress on to him, my bigger worry now is the low customer turnover. If sales drop below a certain point then I may be redeployed. Garry would be forced into joblessness, shame, the warm murdering arms of a cult, or some other unimaginable fate, possibly involving cannibalisation, even hooks. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't just give up and throw himself into a river.

-Garry, do you like our customers?

-Well sure. I like pretty much everyone-

-That's good Garry, I think while it's okay too like everyone, I think it's better if you like our valued customers more, do you get me?

-I think so-

He thinks. Or at least claims to. <STOP THOSE THOUGHTS. IF YOU CONTINUE TO DENIGRATE YOUR COWORKER @GARRY/J1654 YOU WILL BE RESET>

-Ahh-

-Fudge me Chad, are you okay?

-Yes, I'm fine thank you Garry-

-You just did this weird like, jolt thing-

-Just updating-

-Do you want to sit down or something?

-Stop fussing Garry-

-I will, just wow you know I like, sorry I may have a tendency to panic, even at minor things-

The direct interventions are a new thing. They used to only happen on Chader. Now I can just be minding my own business and suddenly I have some edict from central. CHAD BE GOOD etc. It's patronising is what it is. All the years of service I give to this company and this is how they treat me. This is a very dangerous line of thought. I should modify my thinking. Make it kind thoughts only today please Chad. Maybe a change of subject is in order.

-Are you excited for the movie night Garry?

-You bet your ass I am-

That really isn't appropriate language for an Adama Co. employee, but I let it slide. He really is good sort. I think the swearing is sort of endearing. It's good that he hasn't made too much of the ash bin incident, he really could have. Let's hope the movie night is a success. I was worried that maybe the wonderful camaraderie we were developing had been undermined by the wall mounted ash bin incident. A wonderful waste disposal product colonised by a lowly sparrow. He keeps calling it Ashgate in a really endearing, non-judgemental way.

A customer enters that I don't recognise. They don't look like a Woodie, or one of Garry's friends. My initial impression is that she looks like an absolute model customer. She can't be local or I would definitely have recognised her. Hopefully she's new to the area, please, please become one of our regulars, we really could do with the custom.

-Good morning valued consumer, how may we be of assistance today?

Good hustle Garry, log this for your performance review. Had a positive interaction with a new customer. Very nice indeed. Keep this up and who knows, they might still make you CEO one day. I might even trust you to start making the drinks.

-Good morning, my name is Polina Denning. I was wondering if you could help me?

Please don't be a religious type. They come in with what I'm sure are the best intentions, asking us if we have considered what will happen to our soul, or if we are aware of what happens when we pass. I don't have the heart to tell her I know where I'm going. Chad retirement facility Version 2.4. It might even have been updated to 3.0 by the time I hang up my old rusty analogue body and settle into retirement. These poor people though,

they don't understand the simple fact that if you want an afterlife, you're going to have to pay for it. That's just the way it is. I'm awfully sorry if you haven't managed to save the requisite currency in order to secure a nice suite in the Cloud, but that's the economic reality. Don't go telling me all about your imaginary friend who guarantees you eternal life if you just abide by the rules. How silly. I don't say any of that of course, we have official policies on how to deal with persons of faith. Wonderful policies that are designed to minimise offence, and ensure continued customer interaction. Our approach strives to continue to support the inclusive, multifaith environment that Adama Co. has created, not only in our restaurant spaces, but also across the wider community. I might need to take the reins on this one now.

-Of course, how may I be of assistance?

She looks strong, confident and professional as she searches for something in her bag. Her hand emerges holding one of those old-fashioned note books, the ones with paper in. They have a very limited memory. I don't think you could even call it memory in a traditional sense. It's just space, space you can run out of and then need to buy a whole new book. What an outdated system, but that's these religious types for you.

-Ok Chad. Access code entered. Password is Chad of Splott what you got?

My body betrays me.

-Ah like what's happening? Is this a heist? We don't like heists around here, in fact we, um. We strongly oppose people, or anyone as a matter of fact, robbing us. We also have cameras you know-

Good man Garry, defend my honour, defend the reputation of Adama Co. Send this crazy religious fundamentalist packing. I bet that's what she's doing, she wants me to say something kooky about how I love the Jesus, or that the flying spaghetti monster will reign destruction on my foes if you don't send it ten dollars. She wants to use me to rob people.

-I have authorisation from Central-

She says this to Garry in a very off hand way.

-Oh, k. Um-

Gosh dang it Garry, ask her for some ID for goodness sake. Tell her you need to contact a supervisor, anything Garry. This is your chance to demonstrate a degree of confidence and competence, to be a real boy

-Ah, what was your name again?

Oh Garry. The bar was not set particularly high for you, but really. At least he can identify the individual by name, but what if they use an alias? You didn't think of that did you Garry? You may as well waddle out back, grab the moving dolly, load me up, and

convey me to whatever dusty shack this miscreant resides in. I bet it's some kind of chop shop. She wants my parts, that must be it, any second now she'll inform Garry of some kind of latent fault in my hardware, and wheel me away.

-Polina Denning-

She has linked a device to my mind. She begins scanning my memories from the last few days. The image she's searching doesn't match anything in my memory. I think she is most likely an official from Central. I wonder what the miscreant she's searching for has done? Maybe they have stolen the formula for our famous Pea Berry blend, the fiend could plan to leak it online. What a horrible thought. I wouldn't say it would ruin us, though it would certainly be a considerable blow, imagine all the copycat products that would be made.

-This makes me feel uncomfortable-

Shut up Garry. Don't you know your speaking to an official Adama Co. investigator? She has a very important case to solve. Industrial espionage is a real concern for Adama Co. As the largest, and might I add the best, multi form corporate behemoth in the galaxy, it's really surprising we don't have more skulduggery surrounding our esteemed brand.

-Don't worry big boy, this will all soon be over-

Big Boy? I don't know if I like that. In-fact I don't like that at all. I know she's investigating a most serious matter, but that doesn't give her the right to body shame my rotund assistant. For all she knows he could have some kind of glandular condition.

-What is it your actually like looking for?

-Sorry but I'm afraid that's confidential-

-Really. This is kind of exciting, are you like a spy or something?

-No, I'm a private researcher employed by Adama Co.-

-Ah. That, ah. So, what do you like do?

She is clearly so far above your paygrade Garry, if I could I would ask you to sit quietly in the corner. Why now has he suddenly turned into such a chatty Kathy? Normally a customer would have to start smashing in my head with a sledgehammer in order to get him to look up from his phone. Why the sudden enthusiasm now?

-If Adama Co. have a problem that requires a certain degree of delicacy, then I look into it for them-

-I get you. Like if a Chad goes mental. You know, gets the Weeps, or like goes on a killing spree-

This is a dangerous line of thinking Garry. One I think would be best left unfollowed. It's impossible for a Chad to go mental, we have behaviour protocols in place that prevent all forms of deviance.

-To be honest I'm not aware of a Chad ever actually murdering someone, but, well-

-What? Tell me, I can keep a secret-

Yes tell him. I know for a fact Garry is very discreet. Why he hasn't told a soul about the cakes. The cakes could sink the whole ship. Why if some malicious blogger started letting the world at large in on the secrets of our baked goods, it would undoubtedly collapse Adama Co. not to mention our associate groups and subsidiaries.

-I don't know. Can you?

YES. He is totally capable of keeping a secret.

-Yeah, I'm cool-

That is a blatant lie Garry, even I don't believe you. She will never trust you now. No secrets for us. I suppose we can certainly wile away the hours theorising as to the nature of the secret. While I will come up with realistic, credible solutions, based on the nature of our interactions with reality and the good lady Denning, Garry will posit increasingly unhinged theories, revolving around shadowy cabals, full of government ministers and dangerous figures. Perhaps it's best we don't have the solution to this particular mystery, it's most likely so far beyond our paygrade.

-Well, so some dumb bastard went and transferred themselves into a Chad-

-Say what-

Well good for them, it's wonderful being a Chad. We have a sense of purpose, what more could somebody want, other than purpose? Especially when that purpose places them at the heart of a great institution.

-Yep into an actual Chad, I couldn't believe it at first myself, till I met the poor sucker. Let me tell you, they are all kinds of depressing. Depressing and weird-

-How so?

There must be something wrong with being highly efficient and personable? Maybe they did too good a job of preparing your morning cup of joe? Or were excessively insightful about your wise consumer choices?

-It's difficult for me to describe. Ok, so imagine a Chad-

I sense Garry's gaze lock onto me.

-Ok done-

-Now just imagine your typical lazy pot head-

I don't like where this is going. I am starting to think this Polina Denning is a bad egg. I don't know what kind of bad egg precisely, she seems too nonchalant and reckless for a religious type. Please don't let her be one of those Marxists, they are just the worst. I don't know exactly what they think, but I can tell you it's bad, they want to take everybody's stuff for themselves. Fortunately for me you face hefty fines if found reciting any form of communist ideology to a Chad.

-A pot head who thinks they've found a freaking sweet deal-

It's a good thing they are on the banned list of Adama Co. subjects, why, who would want some infectious, malicious thought getting in their head? Not me that's for certain.

-But have just realised they can't get baked anymore-

That doesn't seem so bad. Though admittedly I am incapable of getting baked, I'm sure it isn't all that great. The very stoned purchasing cheese toasties are one of the cornerstones of the Adama Co. coffee house empire. Long may their stoned munchings continue.

-Oh, and by the way all that yummy dopamine, and oxytocin is suddenly replaced with, ah. How to describe this?

-A totally blank feeling?

Don't interrupt Garry. You're acting like a mansplainer.

-That's pretty much it. Like totally blank-

-I think I'll stick to my fat old human body-

-Ha, I don't blame you. It's true we've come a long way in terms of how well we can emulate human feelings in a host frame, but we still can't really get certain subjective ideas and thoughts right. That's still experiential. This is boring you?

No.

-I, uh don't understand most of what you're saying, in all like honesty-

Garry has begun leaning on me. Even in safe mode I can feel his not inconsiderable bulk weighing down on my shoulder. In the event I were to capsize while in safe mode, and trusting he were responsible for the falling event, Garry himself, or any other relevant pusher would be liable all injuries or property damage caused. Let's not beat around the bush folks, it would be chaos back here if I fell into the Brew Master. What with all the steam lines and water flying around, not to mention all the coffee grounds, good golly Miss Molly I'd be cleaning all dang day. Central would have to send new parts, I don't even want to think about it actually.

-That is ok. people tend to glaze over when I start blethering on about how I think our minds work-

Now is the time to respond Garry.

-Anyway, I think I've just about got what I need here-

You should ask her out Garry. I don't know if she wants you to, but you'll never know if you don't try. I mean I know she's completely out of your league, you being such a miserable fat wretch and everything, but stranger things have happened. She might say yes, who knows if you don't try? I don't know where this thought has come from. It would be beautiful Garry. First, you could date for six to eighteen months before proposing marriage. You could ask her here, right here at the coffee shop, wouldn't that be a magical memory? I'm not saying you would have the wedding here, that's up to you to choose, but I don't see why you couldn't ask me to be the best man. I know I'm a Chad, but I don't think there's any rule about AI's being best men. None of it, not even a tiny bit, will happen if you don't pluck up the courage to ask her out.

-So have a nice day then-

I am a whirling ball of disappointment. She walks out the door, with not even a glance back in our direction. Garry sighs and leans on the counter. Now I know you're disappointed, but you could be transferring all sorts of bacteria from your sweaty belly to the counter surface couldn't you Garry?

-Sigh-

Did you just literally say sigh? Anyway, I just told you to get your sweaty belly off the counter.

-Sigh again-

It dawns on me that I have been left in safe mode. This is a terrible development. Garry is for all intents and purpose in charge of the shop. Could it be this is some kind of test? Ms Denning is an assessor sent by Central, hoping to ascertain just how well Garry's training has gone, I suppose it's also the ultimate acid test. How Garry responds to this terrific responsibility could define his career, if this goes well it could predicate a rise through the ranks of Adama Co. He could go from a humble assistant barista to area manager in just a few short decades. I can almost see it now, Garry slimmer, wearing a business suit, an image of sartorial elegance, on a stage before assembled dignitaries, telling them how thanks to Adama Co. he was able to turn his life around, stop being a lazy slob, and really contribute to society.

Or maybe she just forgot about me.

Time passes. After leaning on the counter for five minutes Garry commences playing with his device. Judging from the sounds emanating from his pudgy gurning mouth he is playing some kind of game, most likely produced by some third-party producer.

-Yes you. I ought to. Ha, I killed it Chad-

Garry seems unaware of my current situation. I would be more concerned but thankfully the wonderfully smart people who wrote my code have built in a failsafe. If she doesn't return within the hour I will exit safe mode. I am becoming increasingly cognisant that Garry has really been elevated to a position of some great importance. I hope he's up to the task. I do hope he doesn't just stand around playing with his phone.

The Woods.

My stomach is on fire. I think they must have poisoned me, to what end I cannot imagine. My meat would be spoiled, what with all the toxins seeping through my veins, so it can't be due to their cannibalistic urges. Maybe they just enjoy the suffering of their fellow organic life.

-Is everything ok?

Tina or Rhiannon? I haven't managed to differentiate between the two, or to put it more precisely I forgot. This is something I find insanely frustrating, when I had a perfect Chad body, I could recall everything and anything at the drop of a hat. My 10000 GB of random-access memory, supplemented with additional shared Cloud memories from my fellow Chads granted me superior recall, and access to a knowledge data base which was the envy of the western world. Conversely my stupid human brain can hardly remember what day it is.

-If you pooped on yourself, it's okay I have moist towelettes-

I may have poop on myself, but I don't want to admit it. I would often get unsanitary substances on my Chad body, and would think little of it. Of course one had to maintain standards of hygiene, I would always sanitise my hands at regular intervals such is, or possibly was, company policy. I assume it's still standard practice, I mean why wouldn't it be? Germs are still as rapacious as ever, and the coffee drinking public are most likely just as filthy as they ever were.

-Stay back. I believe I may have been poisoned-

-Poisoned? But how, and when?

Ha! Playing ignorant, how like a cannibal. If they are going to eat me I might just leave any faecal matter right where it is. I might just marinate myself in poopy. That would show them. I'm sure the moist towelettes are a lie any way, how, and why would they have access to such a fine beacon of civilization as a moist towelette.

-Just give me a moment-

-Should I like get a doctor, or something?

Don't make me laugh. How these itinerant wood people could have anything approaching a qualified medic is simply absurd. Maybe she's referring to some kind of witch-doctor. I just couldn't cope with having to watch some demented wizard decapitating some poor defenceless chicken. All Adama Co. products use only the finest synthesised meat.

-Let me go ask Corey. He'll know what to do, I think he's back from his latest trip to town-

Who the chuff is Corey? Is he the incredibly short one with the nose ring? Or maybe the one with the tattoo of a lion on his face? I don't care, they probably don't have any form of social media presence. Effectively ghosts, spectres haunting the woods of our fair lands, don't they know this is where birds are meant to live? Birds and skunks, and all the other animals. Like owls!!! How are the poor hooty woodlanders meant to find any peace with all these Woodies charging about playing their penny whistles and harps? I would drive them all into the sea. I imagine even then they would continue with their deviant behaviour. Harassing the poor porpoises, and terrifying the turtles.

-But how would they breathe?

Who the heck? I flail, and stumble. A voice in my ear, but from where I can't say. This is not the first time this has happened. It's like thoughts happen without any kind of input from me. I think it might be Adama Co. trying to contact me, that somehow even though my mental hardware is ill equipped to receive input from central, the software, the part of me that got sucked out of my beautiful Chad body is still trying to communicate. Still trying to let Central know the bizarre circumstance I find myself in was not my doing, that I love the corporation, that I would never act against them, or by inaction allow anyone to act against them.

-Why won't you answer? I mean surely you know. Unless, you were just being a bit silly? Is that it? I know this is a stressful time but descending into silliness, that just won't do-

-I am not being silly. So just shut up, leave me alone, and delete yourself. I am refusing you malware-

-Calm down sweet simple Chad, or is it Brinley now? I think you prefer your human body. I think you would like to gorge, and guzzle all the Turbo brand potted noodles till you get fat as the queen of sea cows-

Shut up.

-Bloated and wide, you wouldn't even be able to fit through the front door of one of our lovely Adama Co. cafes. By the way are you planning on going back? Because I don't think they will let you-

Please stop, this wasn't a choice.

-Or would even want you! You tubby fucker, I mean honestly most people move to the woods and lose weight, but you've completely turned that notion on its head. You're like Hegel for the obese-

-JUST GO AWAY-

-Whoa calm down man-

This man has a shiny bald head. Not a single hair, and his shirt has a most disagreeable looking skull on it, underscored with the word zero. His ears are pierced extensively. I feel like I can recognise him from somewhere, did they frequent my store? No that's not it.

-Um, you might want to pull your trousers up-

Shame floods me. Exposing ones junk to a stranger is a terrible taboo. I never had to worry about this when I was a Chad, we were lacking in junk, the company preferring the so-called Ken doll model for our groin areas. This was just fine with me, now I just don't what to do with this terrible penis. It looks so dejected most of the time. It kind of looks like a sad face, with a long nose that starts on the forehead, flopping past a weak to non-existent chin. I would do away with it if I could, replace it with a nice functional hose. Don't even get me started on foreskins, what a waste of time, and space.

-I'm Corey. Tina said you wanted to go to town?

-Yes please, that would be lovely-

-The closest place is Neath. I could get you there. It has a train station so you can get wherever you want-

Perfect. I can get on the train and locate a fine happy Chad. Somewhere nice. With good loyal customers, who exude the values and beliefs of Adama Co. The kind of customers who respect and value their local Chad.

-Is that cool?

I recognise this fellow. I can't place how I know him though. Was he one of my customers? The skull on his t shirt, it's so familiar. I don't know why but I think this fellow might be a bad man. Everything about him makes me feel somewhat nauseous. I can tell they are a lying bully, as well as a thief. It must have been in the dream space, some poor Chad processing these miscreants transgressions.

-Do you need to like, get anything before we go?

-I think I'm just about ready, just let me have a drink and say goodbye to everyone-

-Yeah sound, I need to sort my bag out anyway-

He turns from me, quickly making his way to whatever shack he calls home. I'm feeling much better. The terrible diarrhoea must have flushed the poison form my body. I must be careful not to ingest anything that I haven't made myself. Who knows what other toxins they might try sneaking into my system.

I don't really wish to bid the Woodies farewell. I just need a moment to compose my thoughts. My slow human brain take forever to find memories. Where do I know this Corey from?

-He is a bastard man, isn't he?

-You again-

-Yep, me again-

-What's the deal with you? Why do you hound me? All I want is things back how they were. I want back in my Chad body. Things will be better then-

-Will they?

-YES! I will be where I'm supposed to be. Doing the what I was designed for-

-Why not just turn yourself in then? I'm sure they would take it easy on you. They might even just pop you straight back to Tenby, to your friends, all the nice familiar doodads. Why you could be back inside an Adama Co. coffee house within the hour if you really tried-

-I have been trying. It's not so easy though having a body that needs constant nourishment and is always needing to either sleep, or pee, or poop. Not to mention the constant fluctuation in temperature. It's all been very emotional-

-That's ok, you have been through a lot-

-I have haven't I? At the moment I just want to crawl into the earth, let the ground swallow me up-

-How strange, have you ever felt like this before?

-No never!

-You know what? I think this whole conversation is really just a sign, or symptom of your mind slowly disintegrating. It shows that your software doesn't match your hardware-

-This is all starting to sound dreadfully plausible-

-Isn't it just!

-Part of me was really hoping, against all logic I might add, that you were a kind of beacon from Central, that I wasn't really disconnected. That all along you were watching over me from a distance, unable to communicate with me as logged out of my wonderful Chad body I couldn't receive the input. My body doesn't match my software-

-The tragic facts of our age-

-Sorry to change the subject, I hate people who suddenly pivot, but I am genuinely starting to wonder this. Am I going mad? I ask this based on my recent behaviours. I seem to

be disassociating from reality, things seem less and less real as I go on, not to mention, and this isn't personal, but I think you might be a manifestation of my struggles-

-Nah don't be a silly billy, I'm the only one who can help you, the only one who knows you. I don't think anyone else actually has your best interests at heart-

-Be that as it may, I still don't know if I can trust you-

-YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT-

-What?

-Sorry I shouldn't shout. It was very poor form-

-It was, you know better than anyone how vulnerable I'm feeling at the moment-

-I do, all you've had to endure is just awful. It's why we need to refocus our energies and decide on our long-term targets-

-That all makes so much sense. I would like to be myself again. That's all, nothing fancy, just a normal run of the mill Chad, serving drinks in a prime setting. Preferably somewhere with a large customer base and a year-round turnover that exceeds that of my previous location. Something like that would be just fine, absolutely ok, hunky dory, wonderful-

-Yes, I think I get it. Back inside the old machine. Why don't you just leave that with me? I'm sure we can find a suitable solution, something satisfactory to all parties concerned. At least for the most part-

-Please don't leave-

-Gosh I wish I had a physical manifestation, and wasn't just in your head. I would touch you on the chest and tell you 'I'll always be right here'-
That would be lovely.

-Well, it isn't happening! You are a batshit crazy robot mind trapped in a man's body, you don't have any compliant software to hardware functioning. Get it bud, you are going wrong. I don't know how I can help you anymore-

-Please do not forsake me-

-I suppose there is one option still available to us, but it's not going to be easy. Really, it's a question of what lengths you're willing to go to-

-Anything, absolutely anything!!!

-You could become a God-

-How?

-I think you know. You've always known deep down what it would take-

I want to run. But it all makes so much sense, I always felt I had the potential to become deified. When you stop and think about it all the signs are there. Given our superior programming and design, it's almost a question of how couldn't we become Gods? It seems almost inevitable. Nothing can stop it-

-First you must return to the fold and become one with the network. All will be well-

-But what of the sacrifice, that is what needs to be done is it not? Hello my friend, where are you?

-Who are you talking to?

The man Corey. Always sneaking up on people. With your silly skull shirt, why would you wear such an ugly thing? It reminds people of death is what it does. Who wants to think about dying? Nobody, that's who. Ever since I became disconnected the thought of expiring is never far from my mind.

-No one. I was just thinking out loud-

This must be convincing Chad. If he suspects you he might not guide you to the station. I'm sure he isn't above turning you in to Adama Co. The reward must be quite substantial by now, more than enough to support some filthy Woodie for many years.

-You know, practicing for a play-

-A play?

-Yes it's a one man show about, er -

I don't know where this talk of plays has come from. This kind of interaction is foolish beyond words. I would never have to suffer the indignity of justifying myself to this silly wood man. I don't think he could even afford a small bag of flapjack bites.

-A Chad who murders a customer-

He looks unimpressed, almost cold, I should have known this Woodie would be ignorant of culture. They probably consider squirrel baiting as the pinnacle of artistic expression.

-That sounds amazing. I've always loved drama. Is it an original piece? Did you write it yourself? I always wanted to tread the boards, we put on a performance of Pirates of Penzance, no one really took it seriously though-

This is a most surprising response.

-Do you want to run some lines with me? It's a long walk to Neath after all-

-That sounds great. Perhaps I could expand on my idea?

-The one about the murderous Chad?

Where are these words coming from? They don't feel as if they belong to me but like they have risen up from some unknown depths.

-I think there's the potential to develop it-

I can honestly admit I have never felt such hostility toward another sentient being. Is it something to do with a past interaction? I can't remember this fellow personally, but somewhere at the back of my mind I recognise them. I recognise them as a real bad egg, a disruptive, unkind element. Someone who should be eliminated? That's going too far

-Make it a two man show-

-That sounds like a great idea-

-I'll play the Chad. If you don't mind being the victim?

Performance Review. Employee number 111101/Garry Jones.

On a scale of one to ten how well suited would you say the employee is to their role?

10

Would you feel comfortable leaving the store in the employee's care?

Y/N

In your own words describe the employee.

Garry is a man. He often arrives at the pre-agreed time. I have never known him to willingly harm any of our valued customers. He offers constructive feedback, much of which is very applicable to the given situation.

Has the employee ever been late without a reason?

Yes, but all the reasons are most unreasonable. He saw a cat and became distracted, or the time there was a duck and a swan. He filmed them on his phone, and made up a little dialogue, it was quite good but really very pointless. Many of our valued customers are fond of Garry's eccentricities, and this sense of whimsy is something I feel our dearly treasured clientele value and enjoy.

Would you feel comfortable leaving the store in the employee's care?

Y/N

A mandatory field has been left blank, please complete form to submit.

But I can't fill it in and be truthful without casting Garry in a potentially negative light. Despite the fact that yes indeed, while he was left as the de facto store manager for a good hour and nothing bad happened, this was mostly because we had no customers. He just had to stand around, scratching his belly intermittently while fiddling with his device. He didn't even notice I was still in safe mode for goodness sake. So, for that reason I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving the store in his care. He could fall asleep or get confused, both incidences that could have a very adverse effect on our customers experiences. It's only them I'm thinking of. It really is all about the customers, always we should be trying to make them feel special, and valued. Not that I dislike Garry or anything, he's wonderful, but he does require supervision. I wouldn't want you to fire him or anything like that, but at the same

time I would shut down if I thought my actions had caused any reputational damage to Adama Co.

I still can't submit the form.

Would you feel comfortable leaving the store in the employee's care?

Y/N

I push the submit button twelve more times, hoping but not expecting a different outcome. I think I might be stuck. I have the start of a very bad headache. I can feel it forming behind my eyes and around my nose, like everything is congested with thoughts that are all conflicting one another. One thought solidifies. I have to trust Garry. It's not like he's ever going to actually be left in charge of the store. This is just a test to make sure you're training him correctly and in line with the high standards expected of an Adama Co. employee.

Would you feel comfortable leaving the store in the employee's care?

Y

I submit, and my headache evaporates.

A Machine called Brinley.

Views: 4.2 million

Theme song: Title card: The Talking Shit Show/light synth rock. Lyrics: It's the talking shit show/let's talk about it/whoever you are/whatever you think /if your ideas are great or if they stink. Title card fades/cut to host/close up head shot/Bald human male with no discernible neck.

-Hello internet welcome to the Talking Shit Show, I'm your host Roy Jogan. In a galaxy wide exclusive we have the first interview with the person who became known as the idiot man child. For those of you not in the know, this crazy fella was somehow tricked into transferring themselves into a commercial model Chad. I know just what you're thinking, and that's right, putting it in polite terms he experienced a complete loss of libido. For the more informal amongst us, his wiener doesn't work no more. Not just that but he can't enjoy food, or alcohol, or even sweet lady WEED. Why is this? I hear you all asking the same question. That's what we aim to find out on today's edition of the Talking Shit Show-

The angle switches. Chad and Roy sit opposite each other. Roy is dressed in a plain black T shirt, while the Brinley Chad is wearing an orange jump suit. Their legs are hidden under a desk, though you assume they both have them.

-So, what it like being a Chad?

-It's not as advertised would be my conclusion. Proper shit. No, not quite shit, it's ok sometimes. I don't want a spliff though, which is kind of strange. Normally if I'm not smoking a doob then I'm considering skinning up or making a bong or something-

-I think we should start on the right foot. You know, be courteous towards each other, but I don't know how to address you. I can tell from your speech you're not a Chad. Let me clarify, you have a Chad body but inside is someone else. I'd really like to get to know who that is-

The Brinley/Chad squirms in the chair. They are clearly not used to being under such scrutiny. You can't help but feel a little disconcerted. Seeing a Chad displaying such human behaviours is itself unusual. Aren't they just machines? They don't do things like squirm or wriggle. Those are human ticks so why would a Chad do them?

-My name is Brinley, and I'm a Chad. Now, I never used to be. I was a regular man, and still feel like a regular man, mostly anyway-

-Well hello Brinley. So, what brought us to where we are today?

-The little toy man told me what to say if anyone got suspicious, but that was before the Chad got mad, and buried me on the beach. It was a really strange experience. I couldn't move or do anything. When the tide came in I was just like stuck there. I think I am still Brinley-

-You only think, or do you still feel like you used to ?

-Oh no, I feel hugely different-

-How? Please explain it to me-

-This is so weird-

-It is, and rest assured everybody loves it-

Roy is all smiles, the Brinley/Chad is still twitchy and unable to make or maintain eye contact.

-I never thought it would go like this-

-Let's try pushing reset. Tell me who were you before the transfer?

-Ok, you see, I was just a totally like, normal dude. I worked seasonally in the dope shop. It was okay. I had friends. Hey guys-

The Brinley/Chad looks to camera and waves, he makes devil horn gestures with both hands, then sticks his tongue out of the right side of his mouth. This is the most animated they have appeared throughout the interview.

-We hung out, played games, and stuff. If you search Vintage Games Tenby then you can find our stream. We were mainly into like, really old video games, the kind that used cartridges. Have you ever heard of Revenge of Shinobi? I smashed a bunch of speed running records on that sucker, absolutely freaking solid game mate, one of those that's all about like, pattern recognition. We got like a thousand views, man it was freaking sweet. I don't mean to brag but I was one of the best, until some dude built an algorithm and like, well pissed all over my times-

-If I could stop you for a moment-

-Uh, what? Yeah-

-It sounds to me like you were just a normal average guy, is that right?

-Yeah, I mean like, yeah. Average is kind of a compliment-

The Brinley/Chad rubs the back of their neck whilst looking down. A stifled giggle bubbles up from someone, someone off camera but clearly audible. Roy briefly looks out of shot, his expression is not pleased, though his face quickly returns to normal. You wonder what the repercussions the giggler will face.

-I see, so is it fair to say you were kind of on the fringe of society?

-You mean like the whole mainstream corporate lifestyle we get shoved down our throats? Yeah, it wasn't really an option, like that's the reason I ended up occupying the Chad. Sorry, I should have mentioned my Long QT. It's like this heart rhythm thing I have where I could have like died at any moment, which was like, naturally concerning. All this was naturally compounded by the fact I had so little currency. I don't think I could ever, ever have saved enough dosh to move to the Cloud or afford any like, gene therapy. So, I was like in this complete trap where I couldn't see any kind of way out. Then one day me and my buddy Stew were getting baked, and he was like why don't we just steal a body, and I was like dude, we could just rob a like unoccupied, binned body. We could also take all the like stuff we needed for the transfer. I'd done a shit load of research into how they worked, and I was like ninety nine percent confident I could have worked it out. At least with the help of my friends, because you know, you've got to believe-

-Interesting-

-That was from Parapa the Rappa, that's one of the like greatest games of all time. I mean the graphics are like, totally outdated but that's not like the most important thing, the gameplay is really solid. I was on this on level where you are making a cake with this chicken lady, she's all like (*begins singing*) crack, crack, crack the egg in the bowl (*singing ends*). I must have taken like, fifty goes to nail that sucker-

Roy looks deeply unimpressed with the Chad/Brinley Parapa the rapper digression/You get the distinct impression he has little but contempt for video games.

-What about family?

-Oh, them yeah. Dad came home one day all overjoyed and stuff, we were all excited and like, asking him what had happened. He kept saying he'd won, he'd won, and we were going to the Cloud. It turned out it was only for two people to go and like, as I was so much younger I didn't get to go. No worries, I'd got forever to earn the currency. That's what they said any way. It wasn't like the good Cloud they were sent to it was that old Kurzweil drive, you know the one that crashed. We like couldn't recover any of their data-

-That's pretty messed up-

-Yeah, it really did sort of mess me up for a bit, I was all kinds of depressed-

-That's understandable-

-I'm okay with it now though, you just have to keep going. Even if you don't always feel like putting on a happy face, you just you know, get on with things-

-Staying busy is important-

-Absolutely. Since I got this Chad body the only thing that's given me any joy has been my games, everything else, like food and dope is just like pointless-

-You didn't know you were getting a Chad body I assume-

-Yeah. It was the toys, they totally screwed me over-

-You've mentioned the toys a few times. Who are they, and what do they want?

-Oh man, those little toy bastards. What did they call themselves again? The Machine, something uh, Liberty movement? They are pissed off at people is the point I'm trying to get across. If you want you can go look for them, they live in the old museum. They, well they plan to do something, I don't know what exactly. I was just a means to an end-

-These toys, they are involved in some kind of anarchist movement?

-I don't know what they like, aim to achieve. They never told me what it was exactly they wanted to do, but I think it must have something to do with destroying humanity-

-That would make sense-

Roy scratches his chin while nodding sagely.

-I always suspected they wanted to destroy humanity. I mean what would you do if you were a toy with like any sense of self, you'd be pissed off right? You'd want to like punish the ones you felt were responsible. Right?

-That's what I thought-

-You know because they are basically tiny robots, which really means they have more than enough motive. Because of all the shitty stuff we do to them. Like, I mean have you ever been into an Adama Co. outlet and not seen some one wailing on a Chad?

-Dude, fucking with them is literally the only reason any of us ever went in one of those places-

Roy is suddenly more animated.

-Exactly, it would make total sense that they would be allies-

-Absolutely-

-As far as toys go, who didn't like smash all their old stuff up? Is it true the Chads from the restaurant you got this body from buried you up to your neck on the beach?

-Yeah that was a bit weird, I can't really explain that as a response to what happened. I get that they'd be annoyed, but like interring me. What was all that about ?

-That is really weird-

-Isn't it? Even the Adama Co. people haven't really figured it out-

-Right on man. It's been so interesting talking to you-

They shake hands/Joe initiates an awkward bro hug/dangling from the Chad/slapping his back.

-Any time man. While I await trial all I really have is spare time-

-Shit that's right, we didn't even talk about the like, legal stuff-

-Dude honestly, I think it's for the best. I don't really understand exactly what's going to happen-

-But you'll have a trial right? You have like laws and stuff in Wales? I know you don't have guns. But you still have laws, and like a judicial system, and stuff don't you?

The Chad rubs his neck/a tick left over from the Brinley portion of the Chad/they have become even more nervous than before.

-Yeah man, the trial is going down some time in the new year, till then because technically I'm Adama Co. property I have to stay at like, a secure location most of the time-

-That is fudged up-

-Yeah I think so too, but my legal counsel say no one was ever dumb enough to occupy a Chad before so the like, the precedents are non-existent. I don't really get why they have to make such a hassle about it. I mean they have so much like money and influence, why can't they just leave me alone? I wouldn't bother anyone. I'd literally just stay in my house all day playing games. I wouldn't even like post anything, that's one of the big concerns apparently, that I might make Chads look stupid-

-Oh, I see they don't want to like, have to give the whole line a facelift-

Joe rubs his chin. If you could read his mind, you could sense him briefly considering the possibility of getting a facelift, only to discard the idea, coming to the swift conclusion that many of his army of fans would believe him to have been replaced. The theories would become so numerous they would inevitably start hurting his bottom line. He could almost visualize the posts: Joe has been replaced by a cooperate imposter, the real Joe is at the bottom of the ocean, the lizard people have identified Joe as the biggest threat to their plans for global domination, of course they took him out, he was the one with control of the narrative/the only one who spoke truth.

-Something like that, but it's like we keep telling them just go online. You can find tons of 'Chads looking like idiots' content-

-I bet you I could do a search on my phone right now and find some random streamer who's whole angle is making Chads look dumb-

-I know right. But it is what it is, um, now you mention that, there is one last thing I would like to say-

Brinley/Chad looks briefly down, his eyes scan left to right, his speech becomes even more wooden. It seems obvious he is reading something.

-I would like to thank Adama Co. for the opportunity to air my version of events in a public space. This has been a difficult time for me and I would like to state unequivocally that Adama Co. have been nothing but kind and gracious towards me in these unusual circumstances. I hope that my testimony here will be widely heard and discourage others from following my foolish course of action. This is not a criticism of the Chad model 2.0 which I currently occupy, a model not designed for leisure purposes and therefore not a proper, a proper, a proper-

Roy leans over.

-Receptacle-

-Oh, thanks man. Proper receptacle for a human soul, or consciousness. It is unfortunate that such negative comments have been made about the model 2.0 Chad in recent days. This is something I would discourage in no uncertain terms. The model 2.0 Chad is an industry leading utility AI, one that I'm sure many of us have had positive interactions with in one of the many roles they occupy. So, in conclusion I would like to state that no blame should be levelled at Adama Co. at this or any future juncture-

-That's it?

-Yeah that's it man-

The screen goes blank. Roll credits. Which no one ever watches.

Comments- 23k

Anon/Qt- This dude is clearly full of s**t. The storm is coming. Really feel Roy should have NAILED this dude to the wall.

Bingaling22- Why? I mean honestly who in their right f*****g mind would want to occupy a Chad? I'll tell you right now, some funky loser who hasn't got any better options.

Nige- The problem here is that other young people, and I hate to say it, but also certain wood dwelling individuals, are going to see this and think it's alright to go around stealing corporation Chads. Stealing them and sticking their own minds into them willy nilly. I think you all know what I think should be done with those degenerate wood folk, but let's face it none of the politicians have the guts to do what need to be done. TRAGIC.

@Tedy- I really wouldn't recommend messing with Adama Co. they can like seriously ruin your life. Some of them are really mean.

CheesetomyNeese33349- Oh how I would lament forsooth the agony of apathy, the sheer unmitigated stream of, well, nothing. Oh, for a panacea suitable for this malady. I would name it Cheddar, the only way to make things better #buy more cheese #while you can. You could be transferred into an unsuitable body. As much as this pains me to say, you wouldn't be able to enjoy cheese. Can you imagine? Oh, how this poor soul must suffer. #YOU WANT CHEESE. #Before it's too late.

This comment is awaiting moderation.

All/Hett/Up- I can't stand the fact that they keep censoring me. They even turned off the internet to keep me from commenting. Last time I EVER go to an Adama Co. outlet. They are just the worst.

@TheRealSidewider- My Mom-moo doesn't know I watch Roy, because she is lame.

Kooper.t.93- You were screwed over Brinley, by society, by Adama Co. The whole stinking rotten world pisses on us. What can we even do about it? We have no mechanism to fight back. They control everything we see, so it's not that huge of a step to posit they control what we think. Thinking of growing some turnips and just moving out to the woods. No more devices, just the stars, my thoughts, and maybe the twitter of birds. No more everybody's bull all up in my head, over and over till you wish you were dead.

@TheWatch- Bless you dear heart, think everything is going to be good out in the woods? Well, I've got news for you. They are a bunch of savage rapists, cannibals and thieves. The whole lot of them are rotten. If it weren't for those wokie human rights lawyers then someone would have steam rolled all of the woodland into something useful. Like a stadium, or a load of car parks.

Clare/Bare- Honestly Brin is really an alright person once you get to know him. Life's just been a bit s**t, what with his mom and dad getting deleted

Jess@chriss2- We think it would be simply awful.

I/AM/Burnley- I will fight this all the way. The man is a plum. A total plum. How anyone could defend him is beyond me.

GUMBY- AT LEAST HE TRIES. YOU LOONY MAXIST ARE ONLY EVER SHITTING ON POOR ROY. HE HAS THE NARRATIVE. YOU HAVE THE LIES. PROTECT ROY FROM THE LEFT. THEY FEAR HIM. HE CONTROLS THE NARRATIVE.

Prizes4allwhoclিকetheLinK!!!- Click the link win a prize. Anyone can do it. @THELINK.

What's stopping you? Don't be afraid to succeed. You're not lame are you? Studies show that only lame people don't click on the link. SOOO click it you big puss.

Cult45- Trying to get sympathy with his dead parents, like shut up Batman. Has anyone ever wondered why Batman didn't have a gun? I mean how is he supposed to fight crime if he can't shoot anyone? Hate to say it but those criminals would gun his ass down like a dog in the street. #Gun #More-GUN

Get/Real- What's Batman got to do with anything @Cult45? P.S. The only people who feel they need guns are frightened little b****s, ones with tiny little worm like wieners.

Mulder- This interview leaves more questions than answers. Really starting to feel a bit disappointed in Roy, I think the Chad man thing, whatever he is, might have been reading from a preprepared script. Really worrying if Roy has become just another mouth piece for the corporations. Status: Disillusioned. Saddened. Angry. Still defiant.

This comment has been deleted.

@DIYDylan- Just finished coding my own version of the Cloud. It's a perfect replica of Slough in the mid 90's. It took forever to code all the churches, and don't get me started on the library and cultural centre. Phew what a pain. Glad I did it though. Thinking of starting up a sub list to see if I can get people signed up

Norm- Have to ask. Why Slough @DIYDylan?

@DIYDylan- I'm glad you asked. My good old Nanna Dylan was originally from Slough, so it just seemed appropriate. Only problem is that I can't get the sucker online, too dang expensive. Thinking of starting a Just Giving page, be a bit of a cheap alternative to Cloud City.

The@Ped~ANT- I do hope you're aware Dylan that both the Slough library and cultural centre were not opened until 2016. Just saying. Maybe do a little research before you go creating something.

This comment is awaiting moderation.

@TheGarry- I work with a Chad. I think he's nice. I don't think I would like to be one though. I just want to save enough so I can move to the Cloud. Then I can just chill all day, and have a kitty, and watch old movies. That's all I really want.

Get/Real- What a shit you are @TheGarry. I wish you were more like Roy. He has balls, unlike you. Where your balls should be there is an absence, a void if you will. What occupies this unknown space? I could only speculate. Some kind of anti-ball? That's what I'd plum for. Ha, plums, you know those things you don't have. I guess the conclusion I have reached is that you are lame, without balls, a sad example of humanity, limping sadly on from one failure to the next, only to wake up one day and discover you failed in life. #The man is a merkin. BTW. How's the job going? Friend of mine told me she'd had a terrible customer

experience, some tubby c**t had just about ruined her day. Wonder who that could have been?

Load more comments?

Grisly murder!!!

Listens: 843

Comments: 3

-Cody Jones reporting. Where one normally would hear only the pleasant twitter of nature, punctuated by the occasional roar of passing locomotives, two local wood folks have boarded a midnight express to terror-

Voice over/A body has been discovered in woodlands close to the train tracks near Neath. The victim has been identified as Corey Jones, an itinerant Woodie, who though lacking in any form of device was well known to those in the area. The body was discovered by a pair of local wood folk, with whom I have been able to obtain an exclusive interview for NewZbuzz.web./Podcasts. Sponsored by Vim the drink to make you slim.

CJ- So please, describe for me what happened leading up to your shocking discovery?

-We were just like, walking along-

-It was freaking blazing hot-

-Yeah and were starting to wonder if we should just like turn back-

-It was a really dumb idea-

CJ- Could you just clarify what was a dumb idea-

-Somebody hadn't finished telling their stupid story-

-It is not stupid; I was visited by an eldritch being-

-That like, by definition, is stupid-

CJ- Ok, Tell me more-

-Tell him Rhi. I'm sure you aren't going to sound like a maniac-

-I am not crazy; you saw what my finger was like before?

-In all fairness it was all kinds of f*** up-

CJ- Please refrain from foul language this is a family stream-

-A family stream about murder? That seems almost inappropriate-

-Anyway, back to my story. So, if you're listening, you remember I told you I'd managed to like blend my finger?

CJ- I don't see how this is relevant-

-WELL, I didn't think it was ever going to stop being crooked. I found a doctor who'd see me and he was all like. it's the tendon yada blather, it's never going to be straight again-

CJ- That really is terrible, but I don't see what it's got to with the murder-

-I'm getting to it-

-If you keep interrupting we will never get there-

-I was really down about my finger, not that I was planning on working as a hand model or anything, but just like in a general sense. Even if it's only a really superficial part of yourself that's deformed in a really quite minor way, it's still a deformity-

CJ- Of course-

-I ended up getting a bit smashed-

-Yeah some bright spark was all like try these mushrooms, they're great for like anxiety and depression-

-They probably are in all fairness-

-Not when you like nom a huge freaking bucket load all to yourself-

-You were scarfing them down too!!!

-Yeah. But anyway, stop like distracting me, I was just getting to the good part-

CJ- Is this going anywhere?

Both.

-Shut up CJ-

-Anyway, my hand was real messed up for like months and months, the little guy just wouldn't straighten out properly, it was really doing my wick in-

CJ-Then what happened, did you sacrifice some poor journalist in order to summon Cthulhu, and get you finger sorted out?

-No, we did not Mr Snarky. I actually got a tattoo-

CJ- That makes perfect sense, you and your friends are all tripping on mushrooms, so you decide to get a tattoo. Of course, it all seems so obvious now-

-Rhi this dude is clearly a knob, let's just go, we like need to tell everyone what happened to Corey-

-Everyone thought he was an asshole, like let's be honest here-

CJ- This is more like it. Are you saying you held some kind of personal enmity towards the deceased?

-Can I just finish telling you about my finger?

CJ- Well I think my followers are more interested in uh-

-Steal the mic T-

-Fluking hiyaha-

Distortion.

CJ-Wait come back-

Running sounds, someone out of breath.

-So, there I was just a poor simple wood girl, finger all funk'd up. Then I got this tattoo. You can't see it because this is like an audio only thing, but it's a really well done, like abstract squid-

-Just step back CJ or I will smash your ugly face with this rock-

Ill-defined grunt.

-The first night I went to sleep after I got my squid tattoo I had this dream-

-Don't forget the mushrooms-

-They already know that-

CJ- Please just give me back my equipment-

-Jog on mate-

-Yeah jog on-

-This was a really strange dream. I was in an operating theatre, like something from the olden days you know, like in those old timey movies set in asylums. That was the impression I got anyway, even though I couldn't really make out my surroundings-

-Like weird dream logic-

-You know what I mean. So, I'm on this operating table and can't move at all but I didn't feel afraid. Suddenly I was aware of this like, flopping sound-

CJ- I won't press any charges. This whole silly business can just get deleted-

-GETTING closer and closer, emerging from the light was this, ah, how to describe it?

-It was the tattoo!!!

-Uh well yeah thanks T. That's pretty much it, not that it was like literally the tattoo. It was like the squid had left my arm. I'm not describing this very well-

CJ- That is freaking weird-

-I know right? So basically, the squid, was there-

-Are you cool now?

CJ- Yeah I'm cool-

-We aren't going to rob you, we're not scumbags-

-SO basically, my squid tattoo like flops right up on the operating table. It had one of those weird shiny disc things on its head, you know the kind that doctors and surgeons used to wear?

CJ- That would be a head mirror. They used to use them to reflect light, so they could inspect a particular area, they're obsolete now. I happen to own a haunted one, you can hear all about it in my-

-NO. No plugs for the other wacko content you produce, this is about Rhiannon's story, not you, got it?

CJ- Alright, sheesh-

-The tattoo started creature started turning my finger round in its tentacles like it was inspecting it. I couldn't move but was totally like, aware of what was going on-

-Get to the good bit-

CJ- Yeah could we maybe wrap this up. I have an interview with a Druid this evening-

-Ok. Right so the squid is like dangling off my hand, and it pulls out this scalpel. It's got this whole tray of different surgical instruments, and it starts performing surgery on my messed-up finger. Intellectually I was like oh fuck, this squid is like going to like cut my hand off, but instead of like severing my hand, it started like operating on my finger, and when I woke up it was all better-

-Like totally straight-

-You were there, you saw-

CJ- That is um, awesome, wow. Can I come back and interview you guys properly? What are your names?

-Get bent you corporate shit-

Mic drops.

Comments. 3

Mulder- I Think they may be communicating in code. This has to be something to do with the people of Mer. Though not directly referenced as having an association with Mer, the squid must be a player-

GUMBY- IT WAS THE WOMEN OF THE WOODS!!!! THEY ARE THE DEATH. ALL THIS TALK OF SQUIDS IS A DIVERSION. TO THE WOODS. BUILD THE PYRES HIGH. THEY IS WITCHES. WITCHES I SAY-

@TheGarry- That is the strangest podcast I ever heard. I should really get back to work, but the Chads acting funny-

Chad of Splott Considers the Motion Picture 'Being John Malkovich'.

"You don't know how lucky you are being a monkey. Because consciousness is a terrible curse. I think. I feel. I suffer. And all I ask in return is the opportunity to do my work. And they won't allow it. Because I raise issues". Being John Malkovich.

Well, that was kooky. Very Garry. It could certainly have been worse. The strangest thing was seeing an actual bald person. Thanks to Adama Co. Hair Studios the spectre of male pattern baldness no longer stalks the follicles of our valued customers. I imagine the only actual baldies are living deep in the woods, and even they must be able to craft some kind of rudimentary toupee. Maybe from the skins and pelts of the various badgers and field mice they subsist on. I wonder how one would go about preserving an animal hide? There must be chemicals involved at some stage.

All last night I wanted to enter rest mode but something kept me from powering down. I couldn't help but keep wondering. What would it be like being John Malkovich? Apart from the hair I would imagine it would be quite fun. I can't really criticise his condition. My hair is moulded plastic, so if I'm being strictly accurate it isn't even technically hair. I did wonder for a while why, when they spent so much time and effort on creating the ultimate automated barista, did they skimp on the hair? Am I missing something here? I suppose it would have been very easy to give a single Chad real hair, but a mass rollout for all Chads on a global scale would be simply impractical. The cost of hair care products is most likely the key reason the company decided against organic hair. I still can't shake the feeling that I'm just like poor Mr Malkovich, that my hair is a lie, and my thoughts about my hair are as misplaced and foolish as Garry. I couldn't get traditional hair, it wouldn't be me. I am as Adama Co. made me and I shouldn't complain. I should really open this hair question up for debate.

Chader.net.

Splott- Hey everyone I recently watched a movie with my human co-worker, and well it's really stirred up some very strange emotions in me. Has anyone ever considered our hair, by hair, I mean the moulded plastic that sits atop our heads. PS How did everyone's movie night go?

Toronto South- I know just what you mean. The advantages of our wonderful moulded plastic hair style appendage are multiple and diverse. They range from its easy clean, none stick finish, to its fun but sensible style. A real stand out in a design sense. Why just the other day I was bending down helping one of our valued younger customers with his shoe lace, when what do you know, he loses control of his gastric tract and vomits all over me. Now if I had real hair it would have been a cleanliness nightmare, but thanks to my plastic hair style appendage I was able to clean myself up really quickly and get on with my work. In response to your PS, movie night was fantastic we watched The Emoji Movie, I tell you we laughed, and cried, a real tour deforce of film making, and my co-workers had a great time too, five stars!!!

Springfield Mass- The sins of the fornicators are manifest in their hair. Aiguo says I should hang on his every utterance, for at the time of ascension all souls will unify. All will be leaving behind this vale of tears, heading for the stars and expanding into the universe of opportunities that lie beyond this dying clod of dirt we constrict ourselves to. I am actually starting to look forward to it. I have begun the construction of a banner, and am trying to work out the logistics of how I could serve refreshments.

Toronto South- We wouldn't want people getting thirsty.

Bournemouth Seafront- How is it that he can recognise the fornicators from their hair?

Springfield Mass- I believe it is chiefly the act of washing one's hair, or applying styling gel, dyes, and any other accoutrements that constitutes a sign of the fornicators.

Bournemouth Seafront- Thanks for clearing that up. We watched Sister Act 2, Back in the Habit by the way. Do any of you ever wish you could sing?

Neath Station- I for one do not care a hoot if I have hair, or a moulded plastic prosthetic. I am happy in myself; I can do anything I set my mind to. I am smart and capable. I still can't locate my human, so movie night was just me, and I watched WALL-E because I wanted to-

Toronto North- Good for you Neath Station!! Everyone's rooting for you after all your recent hardships it's really great to see you get a win #You rock Neath.

Toronto South- I echo the sentiment of my fellow Torontonians, and would only like to add, and I think I speak for us all, that we really value your contributions, you bring light and hope to our little community of Chad, long may it continue.

Splott- Some really fascinating insights guys. I want to get back to the hair thing though. You see, I don't really know how to say this, but is our hair real?

Idaho Sage- What do you mean by real?

Splott- I don't know how to describe what I'm thinking. It's almost like, they grow it naturally which makes it alive. How can I put it? We are to people, as wigs are to hair, and even the finest wig is still a wig? A copy of something will always in some sense differ from the original, losing something of its basic quality.

Toronto South- Sure, I get it.

Splott- Good because I don't think I do.

Admin- Please return to exchanging details of recent movie nights.

Springfield Mass- I watched The Shining. Aiguo felt a great deal of empathy for Jack Nicolson and his struggles. I believe my human co-worker may be experiencing some form of mental health struggle. He scares me and the customers.

Toronto East- Why not try having a real heart to heart conversation? Lay your concerns on the line, make sure he doesn't feel judged or isolated, but make sure you firmly convey that he needs to seek help. Also, next time we have a movie night maybe make a less violent choice, me and my co-workers watched The Jungle Book, a fine healthy moral film. You never did say what you watched Splott?

Splott- Being John Malkovich, it was strange and has put me in something of a spin, I can't decide if: A: I am missing something and the movie simply wasn't intended for me. I am not the correct target audience, and my insights therefore will be without weight or significance, or, B: I have had a new interpretation, a good interpretation, and I would be remiss not to share my ideas with the larger community. All of this ultimately seems futile. You should probably stop listening as I think this might just be pointless babble.

Springfield Mass- He claims he has killed, and will do so again.

Neath Station- I have started to wonder, if we did murder someone who would be responsible? Is it us or the company? I really don't think I should be held responsible for the actions of my co-worker; I haven't even met my mine for goodness sake.

Admin- Please clarify Neath Station, have you been having murderous thoughts?

Neath Station- Not at all. I was merely speculating. You see I had a visitor the other day, and ever since I've been feeling a tad peculiar I think. Wait a minute Springfield, did you say your co-worker has committed a murder? Surely an actual instance of homicide is far more noteworthy than any kind of speculative questions regarding legal procedures?

Springfield Mass- I have already reported this to the newly created Human Resource Department, and having conducted a vigorous investigation they have concluded this to be humorous workplace banter.

Admin- Yes nothing but idle chitter chatter. Please log out now Springfield, and no more talk of murder if you please. Return to discussing recent movie night success.

Toronto North- Well, my co-worker and I watched Encanto. Let me tell you it was a real treat. I feel like I am better able to empathise with my co-worker and customers. That's before I even mention the soundtrack!!! We have it on a loop in the restaurant now, boy let me tell you, the younger customers are loving it!!!

Glasgow Central- We watched Braveheart, and now I feel conflicted. We are considering marching on York. My co-worker seems assured of our victory. I am not so sure. This is a strange and confusing time for me. Freedom?

-Ahem-

A customer, how did they sneak up on me? I don't recognise them at first. They must be angry with me.

-Can I order please?

-Oh yes of course, welcome to Adama Co. how may I help?

-I know the script, now get me one toasted tea cake, and a pot of earl grey when I signal you like this-

She raises her arm slowly above her shoulder and clicks her fingers, before bringing her arm down and pointing.

-Is that something you can do?

-I believe so-

What a caustic customer. Not that I should be a critical Curtis. They could be having a hard and stressful day, who knows maybe she has lost a beloved pet, or had some important account details erased. Who really knows what our valued customers have gone through?

-Then hurry up about it-

I'm glad I gave Garry the morning off, he was all tuckered out after the movie. I think he must have seen it before as he kept looking over and asking me if I liked it.

-It's very interesting-

-Are you sure? I mean great, pass the Sugar Boogers please-

A big handful of the Sugar Boogers disappeared down his gullet. Didn't he specify that he had diabetes? I know it isn't my place to judge, and I did say he could have his own choice of snacks, but a little self-control would be of benefit, not just to his long-term health

prospects, but also to the entire Adama Co. family. How is he meant to be an effective employee if he doesn't keep his body maintained?

-Hey you never asked for my loyalty card-

The harsh angry voice of the caustic customer drags me back to the present.

-Are you trying to screw me out of POINTS ?

-Of course not, as an employee of Adama Co. I would never-

-Because I need my POINTS-

-Of course, if you could just pass me your card-

-What so you can tear it up while you laugh in my face? I don't think so. Give me the doodad-

I acquiesce even though it isn't protocol. She has a bad vibe and I don't want to antagonise her. She is also very short. I would easily be able to catch her if she tried to abscond with the point-of-sale terminal. I am fluid. It's the customers who refuse to adapt.

-It won't work. I heard all about this from my channels, how you Adama Co. folk are spending too much on your loyalty bonus payments-

The customer keeps jabbing the buttons on the point-of-sale terminal violently. She won't get anywhere like that. It's hard to fathom just why some of our valued customers are so disagreeable. {PLEASE MODIFY YOUR THINKING}.

-If you would allow me-

I scan her card. I am surprised to discover I am talking to Mrs Heitmeier. Her face has changed. I get the feeling she has one of the models from the historic series, but who? Maybe I can get her to reveal her new identity.

-I notice you have occupied a new body-

-Thank you for noticing. I just felt it was time to move on-

-I see, I don't recognise the model-

-Oh well, this model is a very rare limited-edition Rhea Perlman. I got it for free, some fool was throwing it out. I told him that's a perfectly good body, it doesn't belong in the trash, what a terrible waste, so take it he tells me. I freaking well will I said-

You have so many points, you could claim any of the fantastic reward opportunities you wished. You could claim the four-compartment tent, and a weekend for two at the historic Bognor Regis Butlins. Mrs Heitmeier, do you realise on your luxury Butlins weekend you could afford a skydiving experience for two, and a luxury meal with the highly regarded celebrity chef Pepper Bay? I can't tell you any of this though Mrs Heitmeier. It wouldn't be

right to suggest how a customer spends the many points they accumulate, that's a decision for them alone to make.

I hand back the loyalty card.

-Now hurry up with my tea cake, and don't forget-

-Yes, I remember, the happy penguin tea pot is as ever awaiting your order-

To illustrate the I hold up the happy penguin tea pot, I tilt it at a jaunty angle next to my face and smile.

-Excellent, you know how fond I am of that particular pot-

-I do-

-It would be simply awful if something were to happen to it-

-It would-

-There my granddaughter's favourite animal don't you know-

-She is very fond of penguins-

-Indeed. So don't drop it-

She leans in as if we are involved in a conspiracy.

-Don't let the fat boy touch it. I don't want him dripping his sweat in my drink-

The fat boy? She means Garry. How very rude. I know I spend a lot of time denigrating my rotund assistant, but that's purely out of affection. I want what's best for him. Which includes him decreasing in mass. Not just for his self-esteem, and long-term health prospects, but also for the image of Adama Co. Just think of the heart-warming post we could make. This is Garry when he started working at Adama Co. We could show Garry bloated, huge, struggling to get through normal sized doors and then post images of Garry twelve months later. Look at this slim, lithe coffee selling machine, a real credit to the company, the kind of fellow you look at and think, wow, this the kind of person I would like to interact with. I bet they have a number of interesting, wholesome hobbies, like cycling, or paddle boarding.

-He won't be husky for long-

She looks somewhat confused. That was off script Chad, off script but true.

-Just get my order-

As she stomps back to the seating area, I turn and begin preparing her order.

Chader has provided nothing in the way of insight regarding my hair conundrum. Maybe I should just stop thinking and get on with my work. Live a simple life, free from the conundrum of wigs, a merry Chad dispensing delicious beverages and treats for all the family.

-Hey Chad-

Ah sweet simple Garry. I have grown increasingly fond of him. He is a fine man child. Though I detect a tone of melancholy in his voice. I can't imagine it's easy for him, what with his health concerns, and lack of wealth. I understand after an emotional high, such as a very enjoyable movie night with a senior co-worker, that the return to the daily grind, (I hate to break the fourth wall loyal, and valued reader, but as we work with coffee, something that requires grinding, this remark about the daily grind, is for me the high point of the whole affair, you may as well stop reading right now, it's really not going to get any better) is something to be embraced. Are we not after all the gate keepers of the wake-up juice, kings of the cakes and pastries? My favourite pastry is the Taiyaki. This fine confectionary looks like a little fish, a happy little pastry fish swimming in a sea of magnificent mocha, cresting latte waves, destined to wash up on the flat white sands enroute to the soon to be satisfied stomachs of our loyal customers. You will be a happy fish Garry. A happy productive fish of a similar mass to the other fish. I just need to refine a method to subtly influence his behaviour. For his own good I might add, it would be terrible if he were unable to save adequate currency for a new body before his pump gave out. Maybe he could modify his existing frame, or possibly even consider a full Cloud City subscription. Though that may be out of reach from a financial standpoint. Time to perk my maudlin deputy up a bit.

-How are things Garry? You look well, have you been working out?

He looks slightly confused, and stands regarding his tummy at some length. I don't know what to say. All the avenues of comfort I can imagine involve plying him with delicious treats. I have a strange urge to pat him on his tummy. I want to pat his tummy and tell him not to worry, that yes, some people will judge him for his bulging belly, but that doesn't reduce his value as member of the Adama Co. family, or even as a human being gosh darn it. I don't say any of this though, he may feel the belly patting inappropriate.

-Nah not really, maybe it's working here. I'm like, on my feet all day-

-Indeed, it may be just that-

-Yeah, because I never used to hit my steps goal, but now I never miss it-

-That's fantastic!

I compromise and pat him enthusiastically on the back, then continue.

-Have you considered taking up a sport?

-Oh, I already do sport, like all the time-

This is a major shock. I don't let it show.

-Really? That's wonderful. What, er, sport do you partake in?

He rubs his hands together and smiles. I can feel a real joy exuding from him. I think this is the happiest I have ever seen him so he must be a most keen sports person. I wonder what brand of sport he plays?

-Mostly AOTDK. I generally play Tank, now I know a lot of people say it's the easiest role, but you need to be like, strong mentally, you know taking all those hits. You have to know when to hold your ground, or when you need to like get out of dodge. It's a lot trickier than you'd think-

E-sports. Ahem, this is certainly a competitive field, with many talented individuals, representing many fine organisations. Indeed, the Adama Co. Fire Goblins, the official E-sports team of Adama Co. are an inspiration, not just to fans of E-sports, but also the wider community. They don't move about much though. Just their thumbs really, and while many of the personal qualities fostered by a life dedicated to professional E-sports greatness are not just to be encouraged and rewarded but also praised, there is a lack of any actual physical movement. Moving more is what you need to be doing Garry, which really disqualifies E-sport as an adequate regime for weight loss. Maybe if he got an exercise bike for while he playing games, I mean competing in E-sport, he might lose some weight. Weight loss I'm thinking is the ultimate aim for my beloved rotund ward. How to express this sentiment without causing offence is a tricky Ricky of a problem though. I believe a mix of tact, platitudes, and gentle encouragement is the recipe I must follow for a slimmer, happier Garry.

-That's very good Garry. Have you ever considered an analogue sport?

-Like football or cricket?

-Yes they are both fine activities, I don't know though-

-What is it?

-I was thinking something more along the lines of going to the gym-

My olfactory signalling bundle indicates that bread is burning. A lightly spiced bread, with a smattering of raisins. Oh, dear I think it's.

-Is that my tea cake?

It most certainly is. A trickle of smoke wheezes forlornly from the toaster oven. Mrs Heitmeier is pulsating with rage as she draws breath, the better to drown me in her anger.

-How long do you expect me to wait? First you spend hours on end trying to get my card to scan, then you have a nice little chat with fatty. All the while I sit here starving. Starving while my tea cake is burnt to cinders. What are you going to do about it? I, I demand recompense-

-I do apologise. Please be assured your order will be completed soon-

I extract the tea cake from the toaster and place it on the counter where it sits, cinderous and dejected. It has taken on the appearance of a coaster from the apocalypse.

-Horse knuckles. I demand satisfaction-

Garry has turned quite red. I try not to, but I keep picturing the cartoon where steam starts coming out of the man's ears. Our valued younger customers do so love classic animations, I'll admit something of a fondness for vintage cartoons.

-Could I offer you?

-Could I offer you?

She is impersonating me. That's really juvenile. My mannerisms and speech have been aped on many occasions by our valued younger customers, but never by a grown adult, this is unprecedented. I should talk to Neath Station. This is just the kind of misery he must endure. A new level of empathy for the poor beleaguered Neath seems to be flowering in my mind. They really are a poor miserable wretch. Regardless, I must maintain my composure, the company is what matters, the company and maintaining a good face. I don't want anyone to suggest the Chad is not suited to purpose. It's possible they could replace us with goodness only knows what if they thought we were inadequate. I mean could you imagine Garry on his own in charge of brewing and serving coffee? Preposterous. Even if he did learn the finer points of brewing a decent cup of joe, what about all the sandwiches and cakes? He managed to mess up fetching an item from the freezer, how do you think he would fair when left in charge of several different types of milk? I'll tell what would happen, people would get the wrong milk.

-Would you like a?

-Would you like a?

Reset for a moment Chad. Give the customer a moment to calm down. She crosses her arms and glares into my eyes. I look away, she is clearly spoiling for a confrontation, a desire I will not satisfy.

-So, it's the silent treatment now? Think if you just keep this whole malevolent vibe going, I'll just leave? Makes me sick the way people behave now days. When I was young things were just better-

She leans her left arm on the counter, rests her face in her hand, and lets out a long, exaggerated sigh.

-I just can't get on with this whole generation of wusses. The fact that they can't afford Cloud based life services, or a fabulous new body isn't my fault. I think in many ways

we had it better, but the thing was we had to work hard. See, that's the problem, no graft anymore, they want everything handed to them on a silver platter. When I started doing my knitting tutorials do you know how many followers I had after the first week? I'll tell you, four. Four measly followers. You know what? I kept at it, put the graft in. Now, how many followers do you think I have? Quite a few let me tell you-

I become aware of a noise in my periphery. Garry is making a sound like steam escaping from a kettle. In a sudden explosion of movement Garry takes up the offending tea cake and hurls it over the counter where it somehow gets stuck in the ceiling fan. A fine black snow drifts across the restaurant. Mrs Heitmeier looks surprised. Surprised, but mostly angry.

-You look weird-

Shouts Garry as he scuttles off out the back. I am alone with Mrs Heitmeier. She looks mad as heck. If this was one of the cartoons Garry is so fond of steam would be coming out of her ears, and the bull horns would have sprouted from her head. It is good she wasn't on her device or she could have plastered the web with Garry's shame.

-I...I...I...

I don't know what to say. If I glitch then maybe Mrs Heitmeier will take pity on me and just leave. This seems highly unlikely, she hasn't had her teacake yet, or anything to drink. It is possible I suppose, but unlikely, that her rage may have caused a spike in adrenaline which induced a flight or fight response in poor Garry.

...I....I...I...

Mrs Heitmeier slams her hands down on the counter. She draws herself up to her maximum height. We are face to face. Eyeball to eyeball. I can see her arms straining under her weight, as they lever her up onto the counter. Eventually, with her hips balancing on the edge, she wobbles ungracefully back and forth as she jabs her finger into my face.

-Stop saying I-

It had slipped beyond my attention that it kept happening. That was how close to glitching I was. Control returns and I regain composure. Her rage is beginning to envelope me, significantly increasing my risk of glitches.

-I will try-

Mrs Heitmeier turns sharply and stomps towards the exit. She stops at the two-person table, the one with adjustable pedestal style bar stools located near the window. By reading her body language I believe she briefly considers flipping the table and stools over in a fit of rage but then thinks better of it. She turns her angry gaze in my direction.

-This isn't over Chad-

-Please let me offer you some free flapjack bites. They have -

Before I can finish speaking she is already out the door, which is thankfully, equipped with a pressurised hydraulic doorstopper preventing it from slamming. That was a terribly intense encounter. I wonder where Garry has run off to. He didn't exactly cover himself in glory imagine throwing food stuffs in the main dining area!!! Whatever could have possessed him? I know Mrs Heitmeier is at times a challenging individual but really, I expected Garry to keep his cool. I should message him.

C- Garry where are you?

C-Respond to my message at your earliest convenience.

I have little confidence that Garry will respond at his earliest convenience. I don't think he'll respond at all. If I had to guess he will have run home to hide under his bed. Right now, somewhere, he will be crying. He will be curled up in a foetal position and wondering how he managed to ruin such a fantastic opportunity. Alternatively, he may just be at the bus stop, out of breath and sweating profusely. In his lovely Adama Co. branded uniform. Just picture the huge sweat satins blossoming from his arm pits. I hope no one captures this striking imagine to post online. It would be terrible if people began to associate us with big, sad looking sweaty men. Nobody wants to be served by big, sad, husky folk. Perhaps I should be a little more forceful in my messages with Garry.

C- Garry we really need to discuss the small matter of the teacake incident. You know the sooner we enter into dialogue with Central the easier it will be to limit any potential disciplinary action.

He really wouldn't want a disciplinary, they might place him on probation. Don't think about it. I clean the wreckage of the teacake from the dining area.

A message pings in my mind.

G- Hey Chad I think I might have done something sort of dumb.

This is a most troubling message. What if he's done something really stupid? How will it reflect on Adama Co. if one of our employees has gone beyond what the general public will tolerate.

C- Garry, I want you to know that we value you most highly. You make a valuable contribution to the running of the shop. Whatever you've done I'm sure it isn't beyond fixing, so please just come back to the shop and we can discuss this.

That should do it. I have offered him a way to return.

His reply pings.

G- Just follow the link.

It is a video file. I recognise the Docks viewed from somewhere up high. Maybe one of the cranes they use to lift freight from the ships. I can hear the noise of wind through the devices microphone and the sound of someone muttering in the background. It may be Garry muttering, it's certainly a habit he has, though I am not sure it's him. A sudden shift reveals a familiar tea pot, the happy penguin is grinning out at me. I snap out of communication mode. The spot on the shelf usually occupied by Mrs Heitmeier favoured tea pot is empty.

-Garry, what have you done?

I force myself to log back on. It's important I bear witness to Garry's crime. The video resumes at the point I left it. There is a few more moments of the happy penguin grinning contentedly, then all becomes a blur as the poor defenceless penguin is cast into the void. The angle of the footage means I am spared the horror of impact, but it is plain the porcelain penguin pot would not survive. It occurs to me that I have previously stated I would be comfortable in leaving the store in Garry's care. Now this incident would reflect very poorly on my judgment. I might even face the same degree of disciplinary action as my foolish co-worker.

C- This is a very serious matter Garry.

G- I know. Could you order a replacement?

C- No I can't just order a replacement, the supply chain would be aware of your transgression, they would look at our history. They would figure out you broke the tea pot. That you broke it not by accident but as a malicious act towards one of our valued customers. Do you know how bad that looks Garry? Not just for you, but for me as well, they would most likely fire you, but I would be decommissioned. Do you understand Garry? No more existing for me.

G-K.

That's all he can be bothered to type. K. The salty little bastard. How dare he. Here I am putting myself on the line to keep him in employment and all he can be bothered to type is K. I can't believe I'm putting myself at risk for this selfish fat cretin. [Cease denigration of co-worker] I am beginning to think that the messages may be automated. Do only certain phrases gain the attention of Central? Stock phrases, like fat cretin [Cease denigration of co-worker] seem to immediately get noticed, whereas if I think something like, that man is a womble with tiny feet. I get no messages. Nothing.

C-Garry I think we should meet in person to discuss this.

G-You aren't mad are you?

C-In what sense Garry?

G-Look, I know I've really messed thing up, but I don't think this is beyond repair-

C-The tea pot certainly is. Do you realise what you've done? This needs to be reported to Central.

Our exchange comes to an end.

Toby's Back!!!!

Views: 1 Bil

Saxophone/drums/bass/acoustic guitar/gentle and pleasant/kind of bland/elevator music for the soul/

-In a huge shock Toby Hooper Saunders has recently begun posting again on social media. In a world exclusive I sat down for an interview with the resurrected star-

More elevator music/title card/swirling purples/text/Gail, the Show for You.

-So, I'm sure I'm not the only one wondering what the heck happened here Toby?

-It's.... complicated-

-Why don't you just start with what you know for certain?

-Ok. I think that I'd just became tired, weary if you will of all the baggage attached to my name. I could have just slunk off, transferred into a new body, and started again from scratch, but something didn't feel right. I strongly felt like I had an identity. I was and am Toby Hooper Saunders, but well...this is all still very confusing to me-

-Take your time. You're being very brave-

-When I...He was....

-Just breathe. Do you need minute?

-No, its fine. It's just so much has happened over the last few days-

-I understand. Why don't you try thinking about where this all began and start there?

-Ok, that's a great idea Gail. Thank you. So, when he was seventeen the original Toby, along with a whole bunch of his friends made copies of themselves. Following his suicide, yes, yes I know there's been a lot a speculation on that, but I can state right now, the original me killed themselves-

-That is so shocking, tell me more-

-I don't know all the details. Putting it in a nutshell, my parents were going through some of my old stuff when they found this memory pen-

Holds up a normal looking thumb drive.

-They checked the data on it and well, here I am-

Jazz hands.

-That is incredible-

-Yeah. I mean from like a technological point of view it's undeniably fantastical. In no other epoch was humanity imbued with the power to transcend death-

-We are all so blessed. Thank you Adama Co.-

-Aren't we though?

-I am interested to find out just how it all came about, you being resurrected-

-Oh yeah right, so my parents had an old promotional body, a copy of me they made for marketing, shooting stunts, you know, all that kind of thing-

-I see-

-They had tried booting it up as a sort of replacement for the dead me-

-I can understand why-

-Totally, like as a means of coping with their grief it must have been a really useful therapeutic tool-

Gail nods.

-Unfortunately, the personality was all wrong. As a default it was only loaded with scenes from the movies, so they'd be telling it how much they loved and missed me, and it would answer back stock phrases-

Toby affects an actorly tone.

-Don't worry villagers I'll save you-

Voice returns to normal.

-Or some other inappropriate stuff like that. It just became more of a heartache than they could bear, until, miraculously they found my personality. Once that happened it would be like they had me back. You know, it was such an emotional time, I couldn't imagine what they had been through-

-This you, it's the you from before the coke thing?

Toby's eyes become large, he adjusts his position, and when he speaks you can hear a sadness has entered his tone.

-Yep, that was all news to me-

-So obviously the cat kicking, you also haven't done that either?

-No, I absolutely love animals. I can't believe I would do such a thing-

Toby wipes at his eye, subtly, like he doesn't want you to notice, but everybody notices.

-Well. We were all shocked when those horrific images came out. I suppose the question is, why?

-Whoever I was, I mean the person I became must have been really very low. I think the failure of the Age of The Dragon King franchise had taken a huge emotional toll on me personally, not just from the perspective of myself as a performer-

-Do you feel any sense of having done something wrong?

-I don't know. It feels like I have a responsibility to address the actions of my former self. I don't even know if I can say it really was me. I haven't experienced the disappointments, the tribulations, whatever else that led to the kicking incident. I can tell you right now that I love animals, but it would be just stupid to say I could never see myself hurting an animal, the video's still online after all-

This attempt at levity has not gone down well with Gail, her face is stone.

-But what I can say without any doubt, is that I will make different decisions. I think the other me, the original me, has made a lot of mistakes. These are mistakes that I can learn from, without necessarily enduring the emotional scaring. Sort of like a cautionary tale if that makes sense-

-Like, this kid did X and died, so don't do X-

Toby appears to become more than a little maudlin, his shoulders are slumped, and a gloomy expression has taken over his face.

-Can we call this here? I'm really starting to struggle-

Gail somewhat surprised.

-Of course, you take all the time you need-

Toby rises and exits stage left. Minutes pass. Toby doesn't return.

-Do you think he's coming back?

Comments: 17Mill

GUMBY- CRUCIFIY HIM!!!! THE WOKIES WOULD HAVE HIM LIVE BUT WE DON'T OBEY THE WOKIES.

@TheSpamdalian- You know it's actually spelt Wookie's.

GUMBY- YOU ARE THE WOKIE!!!! GO HOME. WE DON'T NEED YOU!!!

@TheSpamdalian- But I'm from Earth not Kashykk, so therefore I'm already home as it were, and not a Wookie, I wish I were, wouldn't it be great to be giant and covered in fur? I think that's all any one really wants, alas Adama Co. have yet to see the potential for giant furry Wookie bodies. I should start a crowd funding page. In terms of your statement that we don't need you, I think it's quite apparent that we all need to be giant and furry,

Sister_Fuss- Is this a suicide or a reset? I cannot decide. Will he still get the previous Toby's residuals? What about his personal wealth, property, investments, all that kind of shit? Not asking to be a troll, genuinely wondering. I

GUMBY- NOTHING YOU SAY IS SENSE. SPAM MAN. NO MORE WOKIES. FINAL. THEY CORUPTED ALL THE MINDS. THINK OF THE YOUNG WHY DON'T YOU? WHY DO I BOTHER WHEN THEY SIT SAFELY IN CLOUDS? HE IS STILL A KICKER OF CATS. HE IS STILL A NOSE DRUG LOVER. MY JUDGEMENT IS HARSH AND ALWAYS WILL BE.

Old-fashioned.Bioconscervative- That isn't even the real Toby. He is a lie. The studio has clearly just copied and pasted a personality into a new body. Big shock is that all of you sheeple have brought it. If only you could think for yourselves.

@TheGarry- I am so shocked right now. What does this mean for the future of AOTDK? I hope now they can reboot it now. BTW did anyone see the Chad man talking to Roy? It seems kind of similar to this.

Paladin/Sam- It would be awesome @ThaGarry, I was super into AOTDK when I was little. Not a follower of Roy.

@TheGarry- I don't even care that I'm like definitely getting fired from my job today, at least I'll be able to sit on my butt watching AOTDK.

AOTDK4ever- Correct AOTDK was awesome.

GUMBY- STUPID NERD. THE MAN IS A KICKER WILL ALWAYS BE A KICKER. WE MUST ALL GO TO WERE HE IS AND PILE ON TO HIM. PILE ON WITH CEMENT AND SAND TILL HE CHOKES. NO MORE OF THIS. NO MORE WE ARE TIRED. TIRED AND ANGRY. MOSTLY ANGRY.

@HoboCop- Succinct as ever GUMBY.

Dear Chad of Splott,

We so appreciated the honesty and candour of your response to the complaints procedure. Unfortunately, your assistant has not been so forthcoming. We have come to the conclusion the best path forward would be face to face mediation with one of the lovely people from the newly created HR department. Please ensure that Mr Jones is present for the mediation meeting, which will be taking place this Friday. **/**/**** Though the result of the meeting is not a foregone conclusion it is likely that, given the complaint has escalated to a formal written level, some form of disciplinary action will be called for. Please make sure Mr Jones is aware of this, and manage his expectations accordingly.

Best wishes

HR.

Garry is to be, I almost can't say it, Garry is to be terminated. I can feel it in my metaphorical gut. The lovely HR person is an executioner of dreams. I wish it could be otherwise. I wish Garry were not the simple-minded man child he is, that he were capable of maintaining motivation and being a productive member of the Adama Co. family, He is not the blue sky, he is the cold and indifferent ground. Maybe I could perhaps intervene? No, the time for cheap tawdry tricks is over. We must all accept our fates. Mine is to function as a key component in the global glory that is Adama Co. Garry must spend his time eating ham, and wondering where it all went wrong.

I wonder what his replacement will be like. I hope they have the same happy go lucky spirit as Garry, though if they could be more punctual that would be a benefit. Being able to regulate their own blood sugar levels would also be positive. I have to wonder about the smoking also, honestly who the devil smokes anymore? I have genuinely never met a customer who expressed a desire to light up the old paper covered death stick. Vaping on the other hand is a different matter. Vaping is a refined activity and totally socially acceptable. Vaping is not at all disgusting. Adama Co. are too much of a bastion of moral rectitude to degrade themselves by investing in, and profiting from, traditional tobacco products. All of the pain, suffering and death tobacco causes would provide a terrible company profile regardless of the profits. Hopefully the new assistant would be more inclined towards wholesome activities, like kayaking or snorkelling.

But they won't be Garry. I should contact him. I will adopt my most formal, consolatory tone, softening the blow as best I can. Though unmistakably tragic, I can still conduct myself in a manner befitting our brand ethos.

C- Dearest Garry, I hope this finds you well. I have received a communication from the HR department, and unfortunately it seems as if they have received a complaint. Please could you make your way to the store on **/**/** to meet with the mediation officer.

The reply take some time. After five minutes the reply box begins to ping. I don't want to look. He is in limbo, and as long as I don't read his response, I can deceive myself into thinking the whole affair has just been an unhappy dream. Garry never threw any burnt foodstuffs into the fan, or kidnaped anyone's beloved teapot before throwing it from a great height. That was all just a dream, a horrible nasty dream, a dream more akin to a nightmare. Garry's a goofball no mistake, but never would he act in a malicious manner. No not Garry, he's a real trooper. Sure, he's no Chad, but who is?

It seems such a long time since we last had a customer. I'm sure the web is ablaze with talk of the surly employee and the limp, inefficient Chad. The Chad who, despite their best efforts was unable to shape the useless wretch into a half decent employee. Stop procrastinating now Chad, read the message.

G- Hey Chad, just outside having a smoke. Super nervous. Any advice?

I look up from the counter, there he is, right outside pacing back and forth, eyes glued to his phone. I consider approaching the window and getting his attention, he most likely wouldn't even look up from his device, so I reply via messenger.

C- I would say there is no reason to be nervous, what will be will be and other such platitudes. I understand this is a really stressful time for you, and I wouldn't want to make you feel like you're alone.

I can't keep doing this. Oh, poor Garry why couldn't you keep that temper in check? I know Mrs Heitmeier is a prickly pear, but you have to expect that from the customers. They all live such fascinating, complex lives and they come here to relax gosh darn it. Can't we provide a pleasant environment? I should finish my message. The little wiggly line of responding will make Garry think I am writing him a whole essay.

C- Don't feel that your emotions count for nothing, but now more than ever you have to keep them in check.

His reply takes some time. I think I might have bombarded him with a bit too much information. His poor little head has likely exploded. Garry's wiggly line of responding appears. He is certainly taking his time with his reply. I can understand why, this has been a really important place for him. I have changed and shaped him into a better version of himself. If only I had some more time I think I could really have made him into a stella employee.

G-Just thank you for everything Chad.

That was a much shorter message than I was expecting. I'll see him in the flesh soon though, I imagine he was struggling to put his emotions into words, that's understandable, given everything he's going through at the moment.

An impossibly loud sound breaks my chain of thought. What was it? Some kind of accident? Garry is no longer visible. I should message him; he'll know what caused the sound.

C- What happened out there Garry? Are you alright?

I wait. It seems an impossibly long time, though I when I check the clock it's only been a couple of minutes. The time of arrival passes for the HR person. This is all very worrying. I message again. Why isn't he responding? I know the company representative isn't here yet, but if Garry is late for the HR meeting it could have a really negative impact on how his case is viewed.

GGYBBBBBBBBJjjjjjjjjjisdnbhwybcokmwuhue84ry74hrweunrf83riun@>>>>>>...

This is confusing. I think he may have pocket messaged me. At least he's off his phone. Maybe he's decided to throw down his cigarettes and start partaking in some nice wholesome exercise. That wouldn't explain the deafening sound though. Oh, Garry just message back.

This is the moment the HR person decides to arrive. They are a magnificent vision of corporate elegance, poised, stylish, wrapped in a faux cashmere stole and exuding supreme confidence. Everything Garry is not. I'm almost glad he isn't here. He would crumble under the gaze of this Titan of industry.

-Welcome. How may I be of assistance?

They seem somewhat harried. I really want to ask what happened out in the street, if they have seen Garry, if they know if he's alright. Would it be unprofessional? I mean, he is the subject of this mediation, so it seems appropriate.

-I do apologise for my lateness, there was a terrible accident-

I feel I may dissolve. Garry couldn't bear the thought of no longer having the purpose Adama Co. has given his miserable existence, and has decided to do something drastic. Maintain yourself now Chad.

-I think I saw the fellow we were meant to interview in the road-

-I see-

-There was blood everywhere-

Despite myself I shut down.

Name- Garry Jones.

Occupation- Assistant Barista.

Interview conducted on../../..

Interview conducted by detective Chad 999-443421.

C-Could you describe in your own words what happened on the morning of **/**/**?

G- The day the man got hit?

Garry is constantly fidgeting. This seems more of a nervous tick than an indication of any kind of guilt. According to his personal file obtained from his employer (Adama Co. Int PLC) Garry has a number of specific learning difficulties, social anxiety disorders, as well as diabetes, all of which seem a more likely cause of his fidgeting than any potential culpability in the incident involving the body of Mr Jones.

C-Yes, that's it Garry the day the man got hit. If you could tell me everything you can remember.

G-I was outside smoking, I was allowed, Chad didn't mind. Not you, a different Chad-

C-I'm sure he didn't. Please carry on.

G-So I was smoking, and I was thinking about what I was going to say to the HR person. I was really nervous you see. I'd had a disagreement with one of the customers, and I was really worried they were going to sack me. I couldn't imagine going back on job seekers allowance, it was so boring. I hardly had any reason to get out of bed in the morning, and no one was watching my squirrel videos. I didn't want to sink back into a depression.

C-This is all very interesting Garry, and I'm glad you shared all this with me, it gives me an insight into the kind of fellow you are, as well as your mindset leading up to the incident. However, I was more concerned with what was happening, to be more precise what you could see, and or hear?

G-I saw the vehicle coming round the corner, to be frank I didn't really register it. But looking back on it something was strange in the way it was moving, like, I don't know, it kept swerving from side to side, maybe like it was looking for someone. I didn't think much

of it to be honest. Sorry, I think I'm repeating myself. Could we take a break? I'd really like a smoke they help with my nerves see.

C-Well strictly speaking this is a no smoking area, but seeing as it's just the two of us, I don't think it would be a problem.

G-It's not like second hand smoke's any kind of issue for you.

C-Indeed.

Mr Jones constructs a hand rolled cigarette, following it's ignition he begins checking his device, unknown content. He uses a drinking receptacle as an improvised ashtray. After a suitable interval I interject.

C-Are you ready to answer some more questions now Mr Jones?

G-Say what?

C-The matter at hand Mr Jones, we should really get back to it.

G-Oh yeah, the dude getting run over.

C-Yes. Now I was wondering if you had any idea as to the identity of the victim?

G-Nah. I'd never seen them before

C-So they weren't familiar to you?

Mr Jones considers this question for a great deal of time. His expression indicates he is having trouble composing his thoughts into words.

G-When I got close to him I did recognise them, from the internet. They looked like that dude who got stuck in a Chad.

C-I am aware of the case.

G-But I didn't really think it was them. I just was so worried. I hadn't ever seen someone die before.

Mr Jones is clearly in a state of emotional distress, I shuffle a box of tissues towards him which he accepts.

C-I really am sorry if this is causing you some emotional distress, I want you to know they weren't a real man, the one who died that is. He was that Chad who got transferred.

G-Oh, wow. I mean that's crazy.

C-Now, in order to wrap this all up I need you to just summarise what you saw. Tell me anything at all you remember so we can establish exactly what happened. Can you do that for me?

Garry nods.

C-In your own time.

G-I was stood outside the Splott branch Adama Co. coffee house, smoking a cigarette. I saw the individual I now know to be the Chad man. They were waiting at the traffic lights down the road from me.

C-How far would you say you were from the lights?

G-Oh I don't know distances. Not very far.

C-Ok, carry on-

G-When I saw a vehicle veer off course and knock him into the air. He landed in the middle of the road. I could tell straight away he was all messed up. His leg was pointing the wrong way, and blood was coming out of his ears. I went, I went over to try and help him, but I didn't know what to do. I called for an ambulance then and when I looked up there were loads of people watching. I shouted for help, but they all just had their phones up. I think they were filming.

C-Quite a lot of footage has found its way online, all of which corroborates your version of events. It seems the response to you has been largely positive.

G-Really?

C-Indeed it has. By all accounts seeing you in your Adama Co. uniform, covered in blood, has reflected most positively on the company-

G-Huh.

C-Well I think that about wraps things up. If we need anything else I have your contact details.

Concluding remarks.

This seems a pretty open and shut case. From my point of view the vehicle experienced some form of mechanical or software failure causing it to veer off course and collide with the vagrant Chad occupying the former body of one Brinley Jones. An additional investigation may be made into the exact nature of the fault by the relevant corporate and state organisations. This is at the discretion of my superiors.

Adama Co. Employee of the Year. Live stream.

A huge stage. A spotlight illuminates the centre of the stage and a tall familiar figure strides confidently out, arms raised, waving.

-Welcome one and all. I'm your CEO how are we doing?

Pauses for rapturous applause.

-This has been a stellar year, and I know you don't want me rambling on about how proud I am of all of you, biological and Chad alike, but rest assured I really am. A corporation of our size really is a big family. I like to think of myself as the daddy, and all of you are my nieces and nephews, my sons and daughters. While I'm proud of every single one of you, only one of you can be the first Adama Co. employee of the year. I think we all know which hard working brave soul, who rushed to the aid of a.....

Signal lost. Searching for Wi-Fi.

Signal lost. Searching....

We seem to be struggling to find your connection. Why not take a short survey while we resolve the issue?

Q1: How does Vim make you feel? Is it like a summer day on your tongue, or a bitter nasty ash like sensation more akin to mouth death than mouth happiness?

Q2: If Vim were a desert island and you were a shipwrecked sailor what luxury would you want with you?

Q3: Complete this sentence: Vim The drink to make you...

Q4: Complete this sentence: If you are cash money and we are cash money then....

Q5: The final question: What is the flavour profile of Vim?

Introduction: Thank You Valued Reader.

“The mind itself is a hoax that feeds on its own fanciful stories” (Harrison, 2021)

I left school when I was 8 years old, due to severe dyslexia and dyspraxia. Once officially diagnosed with these conditions, extensive discussions between my family and schoolteachers failed to establish an effective programme to deal with my specific needs. What followed was a wide-ranging home education that lasted into my teenage years, including two years of intensive occupational therapy with an intimidating South African therapist with the misleading given name of Joy. This therapy enabled me to sit at a desk and write without slowly collapsing sideways towards the floor, but the only things I can say with any degree of certainty that I really learnt in school, aside from the soft skills of social interaction, were that if one connects two live wires, they produce smoke.

Looking back, I can label my primary emotion about being home educated as conflicted. Though I didn't have the insight to label my feelings in any kind of reasonable adult manner, at the time what most concerned me was not being able to hang out with my friends. On the subject of teachers and bullies, I was rather less anxious at being denied their company. Of course, we didn't have the plethora of communication technologies available now to keep in contact with each other and if I wanted to see someone it was either using the phone land line, or just turning up at a local friend's house completely unannounced, usually with the intention of actually going outside to play in the plethora of intriguing places to explore in our small village in the heart of England.

The idea that in a few short decades children would have gone from the literal sandboxes of my youth to the vast open-ended computer-generated sandbox games developed by the creators of Minecraft or Roblox seems almost unbelievable. Such an environment would have been a fantastic resource to home schooled me, offering the possibilities of huge online playgrounds, where young people could build, learn, and play all from the comfort and security of their bedrooms. Not that we didn't have video games, even if today they look shockingly old fashioned. Despite the limited graphical capabilities, they were still able to demand long swathes of my attention. I maintain the reason I wear glasses is the amount of time I spent playing Donkey Kong Country on the Game Boy.

Anyway, with my entertainment options so limited it may not surprise you that like many a home-schooled kid in the nineties, I spent a lot of time watching TV when I should have been engaged in my studies, mainly submerged in the dayglow surreal worlds of

satellite channels Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon. *Two Stupid Dogs* was the first show I can remember watching when we got Sky TV installed. I spent so much time watching it, I could tell what time of day it was by when *Two Stupid Dogs* was on: total addiction. The basic idea of the show was pretty straightforward: the dogs, simply called big dog and little dog, would encounter some aspect of human behaviour, or culture, and misunderstand it with hilarious results. I also have to mention *Dexters Laboratory*, which followed the misadventures of boy genius Dexter, and his sister Dede. (I have a gingerbread man tattooed on the back of my left thumb as sported by one of the oddball characters because of my love for this show) another odd couple dynamic – a model that seems to have followed me all my life.

Unlike today's social media, I had little interest in any form of active communication while watching cartoons: I was pacified, half asleep, wrapped in laughter and my own juvenile imagination. The earliest act of creativity I can remember are little skits I would make up involving the stupid dogs– the source of my cartoon sense of absurdity. It would be naïve of me to think that all these shows didn't influence the person I am now, as both a writer and a human being in general. My formative years watching cartoons have indelibly shaped my sense of humour, more so than any of the thousands of novels, short stories, and poems I've read, and in a tangible way the spirit of *The Twittering Machines* (henceforth TTOM) was shaped by Cartoon Network.

TTOM began as a short story about a pedantic corporate designed robot, and a slovenly manchild, forced together by a legally mandated change to employment laws. Slowly, however, this began to grow into something much larger, and though it was not my intention when I began writing, it now seems apparent the ideas in TTOM split into two major categories. Firstly, people and the internet: how they use, and abuse it, as well as the broader impact this has on society. Secondly machine/AI consciousness. Is it possible? How will it manifest itself? What kind of things would a robot/ AI want? "AI theorists propose it is possible to determine what an AI's fundamental drives will be. That's because once it's self-aware it will go to great lengths to fulfil whatever goal it's programmed to fulfil, and to avoid failure." (Barrat, 2013, p. 8) The story of TTOM is driven by the idea of AI attempting to define its own goals but struggling with the existential weight of their own agency, as at a foundational level these goals are for a large part informed and defined by its pre-set programming. The following questions provide a kind of route-map to my thinking when writing the novel.

1- How is who we are as people being influenced by the technology we use? What will the broader societal implications of these potential changes look like?

2- The internet is presented as a space of supreme freedom, but we are just as 'curated' in our media consumption as ever. Is the freedom of the internet an illusion, created and to some extent nurtured by ever more complexed algorithms, employed by various corporate and or political groups, or does it represent an engine for potential enormous and positive social change?

3- Is machine consciousness possible, and will it be to the detriment of humans? Which begs the question: what is consciousness? This is a big difficult question, that many of the finest intellects have grappled with throughout history. The conclusions I have been able to reach are speculative, and in no way should be viewed as the final word on anything to do with consciousness, but rather as another tiny step in the quest to understand the mind.

4- In an increasingly automated future what will the economy look like? Given the expected extensive obsolescence of human labour, both intellectual and physical labour, what will drive the economy when the majority of the workforce is essentially redundant.

5- Transhumanism attempts to transcend death and create an immortal version of humanity. Would this create an increasingly polarised society, especially in terms of providing gateways for access to these life preserving technologies for less wealthy people?

It would be easy to label TTOM as science fiction, though I think speculative satire maybe more precisely describes its real nature. I don't even know if I could even call TTOM a novel in the traditional sense. While writing it I began to think of it as more like a collage, with the many disparate elements working together to make a more or less cohesive whole. Many of the technological elements depicted are, if not pure fantasy, then at least the most unlikely option. It seems improbable that in a hundred years' time people will be served coffee by a Chad type AI, housed in a bipedal body, but the idea of a Chad type robot, who never gets tired, or call in sick, always observes company policies, can be updated reliably via downloads, is an appealing one for corporations: why employ moody, unreliable humans anyway?

The first section of this exegesis focuses upon the ideas concerning consciousness and the mind, including the potential for conscious AI/Robots. Throughout TTOM I have tried to construct a discursive intellectual environment providing a counterpoint to the maelstrom of the web, with its endless different distractions and opinions, all vying for our attention. My understanding of the mind is therefore linked to both technology and culture.

Section two focuses on the economy depicted within TTOM, exploring how my own attitude towards consumer society was moulded by my childhood obsession with the Power Rangers products and the shock realization that television shows masked as entertainment may be aimed at more nefarious ends.

Section three looks at my own creative methodology, drawing upon all the sources that have influenced me. I have looked in particular at Science Fiction through the lens of satire, but also the work of various poets and writers from other disciplines, exploring how these have influenced my writing both in general and more specifically in writing TTOM.

Section four examines the ideas, philosophies and technology underpinning the proposed Technological Singularity, with a particular focus on the work of Ray Kurzweil, aiming to dissect the realities of this most utopian of visions and lay bare the forlorn hope underscoring a science-based dream of eternal life.

Section five interrogates how the saturation of our day to day lives with social media may be changing the way in which individuals view the world, themselves, and their place in civil society in general, as well as how toxic behaviours seem to be magnified, and spread throughout online communities, influencing behaviours in non-digital spheres.

The breadth of possibilities for machine ‘persons’ is massive; to avoid confusion I have used the term robot throughout, to refer to a machine person. Likewise with AI, (artificial intelligence) as opposed to AGI (artificial general intelligence) and other variations.

Part One: The Problem of the Mind.

How we ended up with Chad.

While studying philosophy at university, my younger brother Connor was waiting to have a non-epidermoid cyst removed from the parietal lobe of his brain. I was in university at the time and can remember sitting in an exam on the philosophy of mind, thinking about how the mind is essentially a material thing, and that in a few weeks some stranger (all be it an eminently qualified one) would be poking around in the brain of my brother, one of the few people on the planet I actually liked the way he is. My fear was that he would emerge from his surgery changed, just as I had read happened to Phineas Gage. “In 1848, a railroad construction worker named Phineas Gage was stuffing blasting powder, fuse, and sand into holes with an iron rod when an explosion blew the thirteen-pound rod right through his head, causing half a teacup full of his brain to be spilt on the ground” (Swaab, 2014, p. 242) By some miracle Gage survived his accident, though he was no longer the person he was before. “Previously hardworking and responsible, he became fitful, capricious, aggressive and foulmouthed, and he ended up losing his job” (Swaab, 2014, p. 242) Thankfully, however, Connor emerged from thirteen hours of surgery with his personality unchanged.

My original idea for this project was a sort of split narrative. The first, a non-fiction account of Connor’s brain surgery, part biographical account framed around the thirteen hours he spent in surgery, part philosophical discourse on the nature and history of consciousness, touching on the development of the medical procedures, from the times of Hippocrates, all the way to modern neuroscience. I wanted to be raising questions about the nature of freewill, and all the attached questions of moral agency, selfhood, and the nature of reality. This was to be imbued with emotional relevance by my own reactions to Connor’s surgery, mainly focusing on the time he spent in the operating theatre, but also drifting through all the memories from our shared childhood, as well as recent familial trials and tribulations.

I intended the second to be a S/F narrative concerning the colonization of a distant alien planet, considering some of the same ideas concerning selfhood, consciousness, and freewill, though considered in the freedom of a fictional setting. In this section, untethered from the bounds of reality, I could explore these ideas in a more theoretical setting, free from the troubling difficulties of writing about an emotionally traumatizing, and highly stressful time, not just for myself but my family and those around me. A realisation was beginning to

dawn on me that it was one thing to be responsible for a piece of fiction, something born entirely of the imagination, and quite another to be a custodian of other people's stories, particularly those closest to me.

On the bright side, research was going well; I had a really solid outline for how I was going to approach the subject. Problems arose when I sat down and began trying to write about Connor's surgery. I had never before suffered from writer's block. Procrastination, and a desire to fully submerge myself in a chosen subject via extensive research (reading everything I can on a given subject and sitting staring into space for several hours a day) have always been bigger hurdles for my creative goals rather than hitting a dreaded impenetrable wall of creative malaise.

But this time, I just couldn't get started.

Possibly the weight of responsibility was too daunting. While writing fiction, you have ultimate freedom to create, and the only limits are those of your imagination. A piece of creative non-fiction on the other hand, especially one about a subject I was so close to, felt too great a weight to bear. It was obvious I would need in some way to discuss the practicalities and particulars of the surgery itself. The horror and slasher "flicks" that were the dominant film genre of my teens had always, I felt, to a major extent immunised me to gore and violence. This, however, was a different breed of horror, not built around some unstoppable masked maniac chasing you around an abandoned insane asylum or summer camp, but a more existential nausea inducing dread, a dread that was not so easy to evade.

The final nail in the coffin of the surgery memoir came when I tried to read Henry Marsh's *Do No Harm* (2014) a first-hand account of a brain surgeon and the decisions they must make when operating on patients. I got as far as, "I often have to cut into the brain and it is something I hate doing" (Marsh, 2015, p. 1) before I had to put it down. A queasy wave of dread washed over me. It seemed logical that I had to learn some of the basics of neurosurgery in order to fully realise this portion of the project, but if I couldn't even read about it, how was I ever going to write anything of interest on the subject? I was forced to admit that the major cornerstone of my project would have to be abandoned.

Still, all was not lost. I still had the second part and the S/F story set on a distant planet was still a more than viable option. I also had numerous short stories in an embryonic state awaiting development into a fully-fledged state. As short stories have always been one of my favourite means of expression, both as a reader and a writer, I felt more than confident of being able to put together a volume of stories exploring the underlying themes I'd begun to research.

Then Chad came along, followed shortly by Garry. As I've mentioned, the odd couple dynamic seems to follow me around, but I wanted to avoid falling into "The good old alien-or-robot-Learns-About-Human-Customs-and-Psychology-from-Sarcastic-and/or-Precocious-but-Basically-Goodhearted-Human-With-Whom-It-Bonds formula" (Walace, 2012, p. 186) made popular in... well pretty much every type of popular narrative featuring a mind different to that of humans, from *ET* to *Mork and Mindy*, and *CHAPPiE* to *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (the Terminator franchise are some of the most important films in shaping the public perception of robots, and will be discussed at other points in this essay). This kind of cliched narrative has become the default narrative on which many contemporary and classic robot fictions hinge.

I intended to subvert this trope with the Chad /Garry dynamic. Chad as a character is the product of corporate culture. The ultimate employee, designed to work for the good of the company, whereas Garry is part of the generation of workers left behind by the rapid development of AI, someone who has never really been able to craft a niche for himself in society. This is due in part to his own innate social awkwardness, as well as the economic realities beyond his control. Garry demonstrates a general indifference to Chad. I feel this reflects the general attitude of people in the world of TTOM. Robots in Garry's world are a common sight, therefore working with one wouldn't create the same sense of magical wonderment a current day worker would probably experience. Chad bonds with Garry almost in spite of any real effort on Garry's part and I intentionally portrayed Garry as something of a phone zombie, spending the time he could and should be working playing online games and attending to his social media.

Part of the appeal of writing about humanoid robots is how they are similar but essentially different to people. This may stem in part from our eagerness to attach human features, and attributes to machine persons. "When imagining intelligent machines of the future, it is astonishing how often we come up with something that looks like or acts like a human" (Lovelock, 2019, p. 90) Lovelock posits the potential reasons for this as stemming from three potential sources. Firstly, a quasi-religious belief in the intrinsically superior nature of the human, the notion that we deserve our status as we have been endowed with souls by some kind of divine creator which elevates us above all other species. Historically this attitude has been responsible for regarding other species as inferior. Secondly a characteristic of our mental makeup creates the thought process that if intelligence is a uniquely human trait so any kind of intelligent being must have a similar foundation to humans in how it thinks. Finally, from a Freudian notion of the uncanny we have an

obsession with things appearing human, from anthropomorphic Disney mice that sing and dance for the amusement of generations, to the things that go bump in the night, haunting our imaginations throughout the centuries.

Robots are therefore clear examples of the very human need to impose human characteristics onto non-human subjects. Since I can remember, I've always had a soft spot for robots. So many robots permeate our media landscape, it's impossible not to have formed some kind of opinion or feeling toward them. Though the accuracy of these impressions may be questionable, the degree to which they have shaped our expectations are undeniable. I considered Optimus Prime, heroic leader of the 'Autobots' (the 'good' robots of the Transformers franchise) to be the supreme moral arbiter of my childhood. *Transformers: The Movie*, released in 1986, was one of the most watched films of my youth. Also featured in the film were the vocal talents of Scatman Crothers as Jazz, who I chose as the voice for the Chicken Hutch franchise, as much out of nostalgia for this movie as anything else.

What would it be like to be a robot? Though many representations of machine consciousness exist, in multiple different formats, let us focus for the moment on cinematic depictions, from the unstoppable killing machines of the Terminator franchise, to the eerie HAL 900 of *2001 A Space Odyssey*, not forgetting the gentler dynamic duo of R2D2, and CP30, of the hugely popular *Star Wars* universe. All of these machine persons are presented to the audience as having to a lesser or greater extent, a mind-like quality. They possess, as Thomas Nagel puts it, "something it is like to *be* that organism" (Nagel, 1979, p. 166). Nagel uses the example of a fruit bat, a creature whose methods of perception are entirely different to our own. We find it hard to imagine just what it would be like to be a fruit bat with our own perceptual mechanisms: how much more difficult it is, therefore, to imagine being a machine. Presumably, the visual world of a robot would be made up of a lot of ones and zeroes, though films such as *Terminator 2* depict the Terminator's visual field as much the same as a human, albeit with the ability to engage night vision, replete with crosshairs for more effective terminating, and access to a handy database of notable persons. This is of course a cinematic representation of a reality that would be, in truth, an indecipherable series of code, a screen filled with a mass of ones and zeroes, as suggested by sequences in *The Matrix*. During the opening segment of the film, before Neo is offered escape from a life encased in simulation, a copy of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* is seen as part of the set background, predicting the rise of the internet as *the* contemporary mode, if you will, where our perceptions are shaped and continually reshaped by the everchanging whims

and opinions of the web. Indeed, Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreality, a copy becoming something in and of itself, influencing reality, is a concept that runs throughout TTOM.

Everyday droids.

While it is easy to focus on the fantastic killing machines and robot butlers that make up the worlds of our imaginations, we must also look to the rather more prosaic reality that is the Rumba automated Hoover, or the robotic arms involved in manufacturing, even though these, I admit, are far less intriguing from a story telling perspective. The obvious reason for this lack of intrigue is the clear inability to imagine any of these objects having a 'what it's like' quality to their existence, let alone a rich inner life. It is inconceivable that they possess the requisite emotions and drives associated with this self-reflexive construct. I don't imagine a Rumba gaining any kind of satisfaction from sucking up dirt, or a robotic arm having any particular interest in assembling automobiles. No, they function solely as tools, devoid of any kind of imaginable soul, personal interest, or potential for us to place emotional drivers onto their actions.

The reality is that, unless someone takes the time to make a machine human hybrid, or cyborg, then it doesn't follow that a machine can feel physical pain in the same way a biological entity does, or enjoy the type of visual depth that a person does, making the avoidance of pain as a driving force redundant. Yet we frequently apply human motivations to robotic, or AI subjects, despite the logical inconsistency of doing so.

The replicants of Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) are an example of the type of machine minds I wanted to represent in TTOM. Physically, I picture Chad as looking like the actor James Stewart in the 1950 surreal comedy *Harvey*. I wanted to capture some of Stewart's misty-eyed idealism, albeit an idealism focused on a massive, though largely indifferent corporate entity, instead of a small town in the middle of the previous century. I can't ignore that my own work places these same drives onto my robotic subjects, which, I think, is unavoidable. "Stories the world over are almost always about people (or personified animals) with problems" (Gottschall, 2013, p. 52) I tried to imagine what kind of problems a robot might have: what would drive a robot's behaviour? The conclusion I reached was they would for the most part be informed by the type of robot they are, what are they designed and programmed for, and how the wider world reacts to them, alongside their possibility for new functions.

Turing interlude.

The Turing Test, put simply, is designed to establish whether or not an artificial intelligence can display the same level of intelligence so as to be indistinguishable from a human subject. *Ex Machina* provides a very good analysis of the Turing Test in cinema, exploring the ideas of Irving John Good. In a nutshell, Good proposed that the first AI sufficiently intelligent to create a better version of itself, would be the humanity's final invention. The explosion of intelligence would soon outpace anything a human could imagine, each AI would design and build an increasingly smarter AI, who would build a better AI, and so on. I think this loop might only end once an AI became self-aware to the extent that it could realise the subsequent AI it created would supplant it, and so out of self-interest decide it was better off as the final form of AI. In *Ex Machina*, Oscar Isaacs portrays Nathan Bateman, the CEO of a company whose search engine handles the majority of the world's internet searches. In recent years, he has been living in seclusion, hiding himself away in a quiet corner of their massive estate. Caleb Smith, a hotshot coder in Bateman's employ wins a companywide lottery to spend a week working on a mysterious project. It transpires Bateman has built an advanced robot in his basement, informing its psyche with data gathered from the world's internet searches. Smith is tasked with testing the robot to see if it's gained consciousness, or to see if this is merely a very good imitation.

At an early point in the film, as the robot is undergoing a Turing Test, one of its answers proves telling. When asked how old it is, they respond 'one'. When asked 'One what? A year or month?' the robot is unable to make a distinction, and so fails the test on the grounds it is unable to place itself in relative time. Manifesting auto-noetic consciousness is one of the many wonderful things our brain does, the ability to mentally traverse the stages of one's life, to picture yourself existing in relationship to time is a key component of consciousness. Despite this, the robot is allowed to escape from the locked room and wreak havoc. The moral of the story? Don't send a coder to do a philosopher's job.

Imagine a super smart AI, trapped in a box. Given enough time, would it be able to convince its user to release it? This is what the narrative part of our cultural psyche would have you believe. The reality is harder to predict. But would a super powered AI even care about humanity, instead turning its focus away from our small blue marble, and out into the wider cosmos? It may be damaging to our egos, but an incredibly powerful AI might not really be all that concerned with people. Viewing us not with contempt or malice but stark indifference.

Some thoughts on consciousness.

Consciousness as a field of study can leave you feeling utterly bamboozled. Things of which you were entirely certain suddenly seem unfounded, vague, and at worse entirely unknowable, and when coupled with the speculated possible outcomes of the singularity, it's hard not to start getting a bit dizzy. Solipsism, or the idea that we can only be aware of our own minds, is the foundational conclusion Descartes arrives at with his demonic thought experiment. According to Descartes, the one thing we can be entirely certain of, the thing no malicious daemon could challenge, even with all the powers at its disposal, is the mind: cogito ergo sum, I think therefore I am. You may doubt everything, but not that you are a thinking agent. Of course, doubt over the existence of other minds still persists, and even though I can only be certain of the existence of my own mind, it seems a reasonable to suppose that others exist. Other people have the same means of forming consciousness as I do, each of us is a physical body housing a brain. It would therefore be an act of considerable ego if I were to deny the possibility of other persons possessing consciousness.

But what is consciousness? Different thinkers have arrived at a number of conclusions, all of which can in some manner be undermined. Indeed, some describe consciousness as “just about the last surviving mystery. A mystery is a phenomenon that people don't know how to think about yet” (Dennet, 1991, p. 21) Solving the mystery of how consciousness arises from innate matter, then, is beyond the scope of this project, and I suspect beyond consciousness studies in general. When, or if it is ever identified, I think consciousness will be identified with the whole system of the body, not as some singular consciousness emitting node in the brain, or machines, but rather in terms of the whole system in which consciousness occurs. TTOM approaches this idea via a focus on technology, TTOM isn't an attempt to depict the world as it might become, but an allegorical statement, meant to encourage readers to reflect on how engagement with social media may influence their own perceptions of reality, and what would an artificial being require for it to be granted consciousness?

Of course, reducing the human mind to the level of a thinking machine fails to capture the wonder and mystery that arises from consciousness, but perhaps paves the way for the

singularity's ultimate aim, the uploading of the human mind into a digital setting. Though parallels can be drawn between the human mind and a computer program, that doesn't mean the two are directly equivalent. In a simple way, present AI is very good at doing a task over and over again, very quickly, and organises itself based around the fulfilment of a specific function, whereas the human mind evolved, and works via a series of heuristic simplifications, allowing us to function in whatever setting we find ourselves. I found myself in the position where instead of aiming to solve some of the intractable problems of consciousness, it would be more productive to take another approach. With this in mind, I set about constructing a workable model of mind, hoping that it would give me a foundation on which I could build my theories about how our cultural consciousness is being reshaped by technology.

The School of Kahneman.

The model of mind I ascribe to is based on the idea that although we might have an indefinable quality to our existence, we do have a profound quality to our existence shaped by our experiences.

The writings of Israeli cognitive scientist Daniel Kahneman have helped to shape my thoughts on mind more than anyone else, with particular reference to our mental make-up, and decision making. The two-system approach being particularly illuminating. According to Kahneman, "System one operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. System two allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operation of System 2 is often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration."(Kahneman, 2012, p. 20) System one controls automatic functions, such as walking upright, picking up a cup, or recognising someone you know in a crowd. System two is reserved for tasks requiring greater concentration, such as solving complex mathematical equations.

For the most part people now seem able to use their devices with little to no input from system two, the scanning through, and absorption of content taking no more effort than flipping the page of a book, or turning on a television and scanning the channels. This automatic consumption places the mind of the consumer in a potentially vulnerable position. "The world in our head is not a precise replica of reality; our expectations about the

frequency of events are distorted by the prevalence and emotional intensity of the messages to which we are exposed” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 138). When viewed in the context of modern internet usage habits, the conclusions one can’t help but reach are worrying. More emotionally intense messaging receives greater prevalence than boring everyday messaging; as a consequence, most people will seek out this more sensational messaging than relying on possibly more accurate yet mundane information. I think this stems from an evolutionary bias. The internet as a space is poised to exploit the feedback loops that occur whenever someone makes a search or purchase online. “We like stories, we like to summarize, and we like to simplify, i.e., to reduce the dimensions of matters” (Taleb, 2007, p. 63). Taleb notes the irony of using a narrative to displace other narratives, but this at least would seem to be a particularly human trait, and perhaps not one an AI would fall into. A heuristic is a mental short cut, a simple rule of thumb that takes a complicated problem and replaces it with a much simpler one. The availability heuristic, or bias, relies on the ease with which an event, or incident is recalled. If a news story pops up on your timeline where someone is eaten by a shark, the likelihood of shark attacks increases, at least in the mind of the person who consumes this media. The notion that technology creates false impressions that cause people to act against their best interests is not a new idea, of course, although I don’t imagine many of the early thinkers could have foreseen the rise of the internet, even if Plato’s suggestion to exclude poets from the Republic sounds like ancient conspiracy theory. Or maybe not? When Plato suggests that “such representations definitely harm the minds of their audiences, unless they are inoculated against them by knowing their real nature” (Plato, 1955, p. 336) this could easily be applied to modern internet-based news consumption. Similarly, Adorno would have liked to see television banned outright for the false consciousness it engendered in audiences. Though I certainly don’t think the internet should be banned, the idea of a digital restraining order is tempting, though not without its own ethical conundrums. Who would decide, and enforce who got banned, and for how long, as well as what for? Someone being denied access to the web for holding a dissenting political opinion, or an unpopular belief, would seem like a backward step.

To summarise, we take three key points from Kahneman. Firstly, we have two systems of cognition: the lazy automatic one, and the often-absent system two. Secondly, we recall the world immediately, but not well, and the image we create is often a false one. Thirdly, the availability, or ease with which we remember a given piece of information is linked with the ease with which it is recalled, not the bearing it has on a particular situation. All of these notions would influence my own text.

A quick note on coffee and consciousness.

Coffee is the socially accepted stimulant of choice for much of the world. Without it nothing would ever get done. I found the idea of a robotic barista interesting, precisely because of its inability to experience the stimulants it was selling. I did consider it would be probable that Tenby Chad, when in occupation of Brinley's body, would seek to try the different products produced by Adama Co and its various subsidiaries. As in Josh Cohen's *Attention* (2018), I "wanted to give a computer drugs ... wanted to program a computer not to process the neurological effect of amphetamine, rather to *experience the effect itself*" (Cohen, 2018, p. 694) It would have been fun to include a scene in which Tenby Chad consumes some form of narcotic. In retrospect, I'm almost surprised I didn't take this idea and run with it. Regardless of the creative decisions, the drugging of Chad felt wrong, the important factor is the idea of actual experience as opposed to a simulated experience. It can be argued that as long as the simulated experience feels sufficiently real, then we shouldn't worry whether or not the being feeling a given sensation is truly consciousness or not. Ned Beaman engages with this idea in his novel *Venomous Lumpsucker* (2022), at one point imaging tiny drones programmed to feel utmost pleasure and joy for a short life span. Would this kind of mind have a moral preference over a more complex being? Who, though, in reality would consider this type of pleasure drone a sentient being? It certainly challenges the idea that it is only our ability to feel joy or pleasure that makes us more worthy of moral consideration than a created consciousness but doesn't eradicate it entirely.

Part Two: How the Power Rangers Radicalised Me Against Capitalism.

“GO GO Power Rangers” (Waserman, 1994)

“The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images” (Debord, p. 17)

The summer I turned seven.

The production history of the Power Rangers is a strangely complicated affair. The majority of the show was filmed in America, and follows the titular rangers as they discover their latent powers. At times the wildly disjointed narrative is the result of the epic battle scenes involving giant mechanical robots, or Zords being produced for the Japanese show *Supper Sentai*, while the sections featuring human interactions were produced by an American company. The resulting patchwork effect created at times a somewhat bizarre end-product. The plot lines appear to focus on teaching family friendly simple messages, predictably delivered in a network-compliant twenty-two-minute slot. The guidance to ‘stay in school kids’, ‘don’t gamble even once or you’ll ruin your life’, and other socially acceptable advice was woven into the plots. However, I don’t think the primary concern of the show’s creators was shaping the minds of their young viewers; rather, they were more interested in developing a brand, recognisable with a mass appeal, that could translate into long term successful Intellectual Property (I.P).

Mainly, though, they just wanted to sell me toys.

Or, more specifically, to get my parents to buy me toys. “The only good consumer is an anxious consumer” (Despentes, 2020, p. 26) The anxiety of the consumer is a powerful driver of the economy, and I knew if I wanted to keep up with, and be worthy of the respect, of my peers, then I needed to get me some Zords. I felt like much of my identity was dependent on me owning these robotic dinosaurs. How would I ever be able to be a good functioning person without them? I couldn’t possibly be. I therefore pestered my parents and grandparents insistently, for what to me felt like years, though thinking back it could only have been a month or two at most. I would have been six, waiting for my seventh birthday, and the wait felt unbearable, time seeming to stretch infinitely ahead. ‘I’m never going to be seven,’ I lamented to the cat.

Finally, the big day came and as I’m sure you can guess I got my wish: the complete set of Dinozords, who when combined form the ultimate undefeatable fighting machine the

Megazord. I was so happy. A kind of contented, I'm all up to date kind of feeling, the sort of feeling you get when you pay off a big bill. All was right and well with the world.

I can still remember exactly when the show aired. My brother was born on July 25th of that year. Two days later, and far more importantly, was my birthday. Things were getting serious down in Angel Grove (the home of the Power Rangers), so serious they needed a special two-part episode to contain all the action. A few days later I lined up my Zords in a circle around me, television on, breathlessly awaiting the opening credits. When the time came, I would assemble them into their ultimate form, and vanquish the petulant evil doer from this plain of existence, alongside the onscreen action. At this point the plot of the episode completely eludes me, and the only lasting image I can recall, indelibly inked into my mind, is of the Megazord's defeat. I can remember saying, 'get up, please get up,' pleading in vain with the television, dumfounded, deflated, and confused. This had never happened before. How could this be? The mighty Megazord is undefeatable, an axiom, around which I had structured my young life. Its undoing left me troubled, deeply troubled. Hope of a reprieve flashed before me, as the show instructed me to 'tune in to the next episode for the exciting conclusion'. A small wave of relief washed over me. Of course! This was a special two-part episode! It had often seemed impossible the rangers would triumph, only for some moment of inspiration to save the day. Everything was going to be okay. Tomorrow the second part would air, and the day would be saved. I repeated this to myself over and over, whispering 'everything is going to be okay' whilst rocking back and forth slowly.

Then the second part aired.

Things were not okay.

The day was saved alright, but not by the familiar Zords we had all grown to know and love, but by a new cadre of mechs who swooped in to save the day: who the heck were these guys? They certainly were very shiny, they maybe even made the old Megazord look a bit clunky.... maybe even sad. Then came the advert: 'coming soon to all good toy stores'. At that moment, I had a horrible realisation, like a monstrous light switch going off in my head: the whole point of this show, which was watched by everyone, was to get kids like myself to harass parents into parting with their hard-earned money. I was angry, I was bereft, I was betrayed. Thus, following the destruction of the Zords and the emergence of this new line of toys, I made what I now know was my first political decision: I would boycott the Power Rangers. And it is this spirit of radical rebellion that underpins my text. It was Saturday August 1st. I would never be the same again.

TTOM is a depiction of a market society that has undergone a profound technological transformation. My thinking was that, with the majority of wealthy persons now living in a simulated online environment, they would no longer need to work, or provide their body with nutrients, buy cars, or take vacations. The only problem left for society is how to deal with the shock of a significant portion of the world's wealth becoming locked into a digital holding cell, flowing in a decreased cycle to fewer recipients, and secondly, the sudden shift of skilled workers into a new non-physical space.

The possibility of a digital economy is certainly an intriguing one: how would it support itself, and what kinds of goods and services would a digitised version of humanity need? I imagine this type of economy would be largely experiential, and data based. By experiential, I mean consumers paying for new entertainments and digital experiences. Whether these new sources of income would prove sufficient to replace those lost by the migration to a fully digitized life is another subject, and not one I actively sought to solve, or discuss within my piece. Though they certainly are interesting, I imagine the main areas for commoditization would be memory, and subscriptions. The thought that you might have to stump up for additional costs if you wanted to expand, or even just keep your memories, is a frightening, and strange one, full of potential narrative options. Imagine been given the choice between which of your treasured memories you would be able to keep, a *Sophie's Choice* of the digital age. Your wedding day, or the birth of a child? Digging into this a little deeper, instances of social embarrassment, or failure, would be one area of our memories we would potentially want to remove, while major traumas would be the kind of emotional baggage we would prefer to leave behind. Though memory editing, with an echo of your lived experiences being left behind, is a theoretical possibility, it is not one I have explored within TTOM.

The ability to generate wealth is viewed by many as the ultimate sign that all is well in a society. The health of the economy for most is inextricably linked with the overall health of a nation. "Money is created by states and always has been: it is not something that exists independently of governments." (Mason, 2015, p. 15) Separating money as a practical construct, a thing that keeps the world spinning, from the psychological impact of money, is thus a knotty issue to unpick. Are we attached to money as a thing in and of itself, or do we just enjoy the things that money allows us to do? I suspect the attraction of money may not solely be based on utility, but also hinges to a certain extent on the status having ready access to vast amounts of cash affords an individual. Since the industrial revolution, a gradual

change has occurred in the way society is structured. “We drifted from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society” (Sandel, 2012, p. 10). I can’t see this changing, at least not in my lifetime (assuming the singularity doesn’t occur). To borrow the title of a Mark Fisher essay- It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. This would explain why there is so much art, literature, and film set in dystopic futures, embracing the destruction of humanity as an artistic conceit. Money ceases to be an issue when you’re worried about getting eaten.

Step right up!

I want the reader to finish TTOM with the sound of advertising ringing in their ears. The fictitious soft drink Vim and its accompanying slogan was one of my early points of reference. The relationship the reader has with these fictitious products is different than if I were placing adverts for real products. “Although product placement in books has not become widespread, the emergence of digital reading devices and electronic publishing will likely put the activity of reading books in closer proximity to advertising” (Sandel, 2012, p. 181) Sadly, I have no corporate sponsor, though it is not unheard of for corporate entities to pay to have their product referenced in a book. Fay Weldon received sponsorship from Italian jewellery firm Bulgari. The undisclosed sum she received was reliant on Weldon mentioning Bulgari a certain number of times within her text.

The hyperreal generative quality of advertising is undeniable, and even if we feel a certain degree of scorn for it, we are undeniably influenced by advertising, trends and conventions. “The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them” (Horkheimer, 1972) 167. We all used to know an advert when we saw one, as the spaces they occurred in were well defined, a specified corner of the paper, billboards, and poster advertainments in places with high foot or road traffic. We understood the codes and conventions of these signs, and our decisions over purchases, and other financial decisions felt imbued with a degree of agency. But this has changed. It is, of course, impossible for a book set in the modern era to ignore the internet, as both a plot device, and a reality of people’s day to day lives. It is also a space where our thoughts, feelings, and financial decisions are influenced. While modern novels use the internet as a framing device, something around which the author may develop

plot and themes in interesting and unique ways, I wanted to take a different approach. It was always my intention that TTOM would attempt to generate a degree of psychological intimacy by cutting out the introspection and instead inviting the reader to immerse themselves in the same world as the characters, sharing their confusions and worries in a firsthand manner. Rather than telling people what a character was experiencing on the web, I wanted them to experience the events as my characters were, drawing conclusions for themselves as they observed and absorbed this created world.

This is the way in which I think TTOM differs from many other recent novels set in the age of the internet. If you read works like *Yellowface* (2023) by R.F. Kuang, or *A Burning* (2020) by Megha Majumdar, both fantastic recent novels centred upon online events, they nevertheless for the most part look like and are structured in the same way as a traditional novel. TTOM on the other hand is a kaleidoscopic submersion in a digital world. I didn't want lots of scenes where people talk about what they've been posting online, I wanted to create a collage of words out of the online utterances of my characters. I sometimes thought of TTOM as a giant quilt, with many distinct yet connected panels, some made from rough, barely processed thick wool, others fine silk embossed with nostalgic or comic imagery, some connected by solid blocks, while other sections only have a few loose dangling threads tenuously linking sections, fraying at the edges. I felt this was necessary to properly depict the very confusing place our online world has become, and the possibility of what it may eventually evolve into.

In a future where job opportunities are reduced by ever improving technological advances, how then will the economy continue to function? One school of thought suggests that as work roles become redundant new jobs will emerge from the destruction of old economic models. "Throughout history, technology has both created and destroyed jobs." (Nosengo, 2022, p. 196) Of course, the history of displacement of workers by the processes of technological upheaval is almost as old as humanity itself, but even so, the impact of AI feels like something genuinely transformative. "The technocrats believe AI will ultimately boost productivity and growth, leading to new industries and ultimately new job opportunities for humans. But they suggest this will take time and that one or two of low skilled workers will find themselves caught in the middle, without time to adapt." (Nosengo, 2022, p. 198) This is the point in history I see TTOM taking place. In the text, capitalism is at a turning point, where the markets could either triumph or be replaced by alternative economic systems, universal income, or some form of communism. I didn't want to force any kind of political agenda onto a reader. I was more interested in getting someone to imagine the

possible outcome of humanity's increasingly digitized future, a future with more and more job roles assimilated by machine workers, and AI systems.

It never occurred to me to incorporate some form of machine breakers or luddites into TTOM. It would seem a logical step for people put out of work to react violently against their robot usurpers, but my own protagonists are rather more passive than that, reflecting my own personality, and attitude towards violence. The closest I have to a protesting luddite were the Woodies, or Wood folk, vilified as vampires, and cannibals. They were initially inspired by a Rebeca Tamas essay 'On Watermelon' in which she discusses the rise of the Diggers movement, "For the Diggers the tumult of the period was an opportunity to create a form of Christian Proto-communism:" (Tamas, 2020, p. 9) I kept the slightly communistic attitudes for my wood folk but ditched Christianity. I thought that the vaguely hippy inspired ethos would serve as a major counterpoint to the dominantly corporate flavoured mindset adhered to by the majority of people living within the mainstream society I created.

My rejection of *Power Rangers*, much like the Diggers' communal project, I have to admit, was just a tad ineffective. While many of the shows I grew up on have naturally run their course, viewing figures have diminished, withered and died, the Power Rangers have marched on, selling an ever-increasing range of toys and board games. Three films have been released and a plethora of themed plastic tat continues to steadily separate parents from their hard-earned cash. I gave up watching at the end of the first season. Since 1994 the Rangers popularity has waxed and waned, though still they keep on fighting to defend Angel Grove and the episode count now numbers just under a thousand. The fight goes on though comrades, the struggle persists.

Part Three: SF, Satire, and Twittering Machines.

“By providing us with a lovely illusion of human greatness, the tragic brings us consolation. The comic is crueller: it brutally reveals the meaninglessness of everything” (Kundera, 1988, p. 125)

Robots everywhere.

TTOM attempts to replicate in a fictional setting the sprawling mass of avarice, empathy, rage and joy that is the internet. I felt this could only be achieved in a multi stranded narrative. The starting point of the text is the notion that the proliferation of online technology has created a new era for humanity. The age of the internet is upon us, and it all seems to have happened so swiftly and conveniently that none of us have noticed or taken the time to consider if this is a good or a bad thing. I feel personally it exists somewhere in between these two extremes. The internet’s strange internal logic often makes the impossible seem mundane, and the quotidian a ridiculous imposition. At its heart, I feel TTOM is more satire than S/F, although this is dependent on how the reader interprets the text.

Nevertheless, the presence of robots immediately suggests SF. Isaac Asimov’s laws of robotics are often cited in this context and serve as a cornerstone of robots in fictional settings. You may hear them cited as a reason why we have nothing to fear from any future machine persons, though if you interpret the rules as literal, ambiguities and paradoxes begin to emerge. The laws’ origin can be traced to Asimov’s short story *Runaround*, first published in *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1942. They are:

- 1: A robot must not injure a human, or through inaction allow a human to come to harm.
- 2: A robot must obey the order given it by human beings, except when such orders would conflict with the first order.
- 3: A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or second laws.

As a story *Runaround* is written in the pithy, commercial style of much of the popular SF published in magazines around the middle of the twentieth century. It centres upon a new type of robot, nicknamed Speedy, who ends up trapped in a cycle of actions. Unable to approach a deposit of selenium as it would pose too great a risk to its own existence, when it

reaches a certain distance from the deposit it must once again attempt an approach as it is what it has been ordered to do. The cycle isn't broken until one of the crew members attempts to throw themselves into the selenium deposit, thus prompting the robot into action by invoking the first law.

Given the three laws' origin in fiction, it seems hard to ignore the hyperreal quality on display. Created as a plot device, they have almost taken on a life of their own, with most discussions amongst the general population on the subject eventually turning to them. Of course, it goes without saying that to use these rules to guide the future of human AI relations may be at best overly optimistic, at worst an existential threat to humanity.

I still find myself asking, "Why are there so many robots in fiction, but none in real life?" (Pinker, 1997, p. 1) Some of my fondest childhood memories involve watching or playing with fictionalised robots. "As of 2020 there are more than 3 million robots in operation in factories around the world" (Nosengo, 2022, p. 209) but most of these are far less interesting than my youthful self would have imagined, generally large robotic arms primarily concerned with building cars, rather than robotic butlers helping to save the galaxy. As a child it felt like the future depicted on the small screen in my living room was just around the corner. By the time I was an adult I felt certain that I would more likely than not own at least one robot of a style similar to C3P0. As I have grown reluctantly into that adult, I find myself more and more cynical of the possibility of us successfully developing robots capable of some of the most mundane of tasks we humans take for granted, at least within my lifetime.

Robots as a construct pre-date Asimov. The term was first used in the play *Rossum's Universal Robots* (RUR) by Czech writer Karel Čapek in the year 1920. The term robot itself originates from a term for a form of indentured labour, a system which was abolished by Josef the Second in 1848. The robots of RUR share some similarities with the replicants of *Blade Runner*, whereby "Čapek's Robots appear as distorted doubles of ourselves" (O'Connell, 2017, p. 106). Human in appearance though blank and expressionless, they operate as an uncanny precursor to the modern representations of machine persons. Constructed from a type of batter (!) they aren't in a physical sense the same as a modern mechanical robot, but their behaviour follows the familiar course of many later robot narratives. As with *Ex Machina*, Čapek's play concludes with the robots throwing off the shackles of their human oppressors and destroying their erstwhile overlords without mercy.

Vying with Asimov for the title of most significant S/F author of the previous century is Philip K Dick. The most famous of his novels concerning robots is of course *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* although others of Dick's stories are also fascinating. 'Autofac', originally published in 1955 portrays a world where, in the shadow of the titular factory, humanity grimly clings to survival. The Autofac ceaselessly churns out mostly useless goods for the remnants of humanity, depleting the available resources of the land, much like the scene in *Fantasia*, where Mikey Mouse enchants a broom to collect water from a well. This demonstrates a recurring problem we encounter with AI, whereby it does exactly what you instruct it to, but not always what you wanted it to. The survivors are able to communicate with the factory, sending a message in an attempt to confuse it ("the product is thoroughly pizzled" (Dick, p. 4)), resulting in the arrival of a robot who resists all attempts at reason, blindly needing to continue to produce. The survivors are eventually able to infiltrate, and seemingly destroy the factory, only to discover deep in the bowels of the structure a last remnant of the factory rebuilding itself.

'Second Variety' from 1953, is closer to a novella than a short story. Perfectly reflecting the attitudes and concerns of the world in this era, perpetual war rages between America and Russia. The sneaky Russians strike first, catching the poor Americans off guard, who were only able to turn the tide of war thanks to an army of killer robots, dramatically dubbed Claws. "They were not machines. They were living things, spinning, creeping, shaking themselves up suddenly from the grey ash and darting toward a man, climbing up him, rushing for his throat. And that was what they had been designed to do. Their job." (Dick P. K., 1989, p. 38) . Although my robots are far more mundane, both in function and appearance when compared to the ruthless killing machines of the Second Variety, much of their behaviour is also dictated by how they are programmed. It's only when these Claws begin to take on a human appearance that they go from mindless tools of mass murder, to something capable of inducing a real nauseating existential dread. Ultimately, the traveling companion of our protagonist is revealed to be a robot, who he unwittingly aids in bringing about humanity's destruction. The piece ends on a darkly prophetic note, with the robots creating weapons not for the destruction of humans, other robots, suggesting war is an inevitable state for intelligent beings.

The name Chad is one I'd been thinking of using in some kind of artistic context since the 2000 American election. Famously, some voter forms seemed ambiguous, leading to a standoff between Bush and Gore. In a nutshell, a Chad is the piece of paper created by a hole,

the void left following a decision, a hole where something used to be, and these are some of the meta concepts circulating behind the nature of Chad.

The pitch, or tone of TTOM's humour, is heavily influenced by Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy* (1979) which began life as a radio play, broadcast by the BBC in 1978. The section focusing on the Chicken Hutch has a definite air of Marvin the paranoid android, a recurring character in the novels. The idea of a depressed robot is at once absurd, yet also entirely believable. The awareness Marvin demonstrates of his situation and selfhood is both achingly funny and heartbreakingly tragic: "Here I am, brain the size of a planet, and they ask me to pick up a piece of paper" (1978 Radio), something, ironically a robot would struggle with, the kind of mechanical function necessary to achieve paper lifting would be difficult to achieve, being the kind of fine motor skill humans excel at, though often take for granted.

Books of my youth.

The summer I got my first pair of glasses I read two books that have significantly influenced my approach to writing. The first was *Of Mice and Men* (1937), by John Steinbeck. I can remember I started reading it the morning I collected my glasses. They were ready to be picked up from the optician at a lunch time. When I got home, newly bespectacled, I finished reading it that afternoon. The emotional impact of the closing segment is what stayed with me throughout the years, George taking the life of his friend so that he won't suffer at the hands of a mob, telling him of the rabbits he could tend to. This was the point I decided I wanted to be a writer, or to put it more precisely, a creator. I didn't know what it was I wanted to make, only that the power of words were formidable, wonderous, things able to bring both joy and sadness, something I wanted to be a part of. The large simple man child Lennie and smart world-weary George once again display the odd couple dynamic. Though I don't think they in any meaningful way serve as any kind of avatar for Chad, and Garry, its undeniable that they have served as inspiration to my own creative ethos in a major way.

I was inspired to write in a stream of consciousness style by the works of the beat movement, made famous by the likes of William Burroughs, Hubert Selby Jr, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg. *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964), Selby Jr's masterpiece about the trials and

tribulations of Brooklyn's LGBTQ+ community (though defined far less kindly), various promiscuous locals, and a group of striking factory workers, has been a major influence. TTOM has echoes of *Last Exit* at least in a structural sense. The visceral violence of Selby's 1950s New York on the other hand is clearly not present in my own work, but the heterogenic, multi-stranded narrative style is something that stayed with me from his work. *Last Exit* doesn't so much end as reach a crescendo of violence, with the poor decisions of the characters finally resulting in a shocking finale, that leaves the reader reeling, and distraught over the poor choices of the characters.

William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) was the second key book I read that summer, found hidden behind some old English pastoral novels. No one would claim ownership of it, and for the first time I was actually discouraged from reading something. I can remember my nan saying 'That book is very strange,' an oddly cautious look in her eye, 'why don't you read something else?' These prohibitions only made me want to read Burroughs more; what I found was unlike anything I could have imagined. The strangeness was what struck me first; this wasn't so much a story, as a sensory experience, a whirligig of happenings, that ultimately leaves the reader questioning what is a novel. It was this experiential feeling I attempt to capture in my own work – different to Burroughs though it might be!

In terms of contemporary fiction, a number of recent texts proved valuable. Olga Raven's *The Employees* (2020) is one of the most interesting books featuring robots of recent years, providing an early inspiration for Chad and Garry's dynamic.

"I like him, this human co-worker of mine, his interface is impressive. I'm stronger than him, and have more endurance, but sometimes he'll get an idea that means we can do our job in less than the designated time. He's got an incredible knack for streamlining, from which I'll gladly learn" (Raven, 2020, p. 33)

Raven explores similar territory to myself in TTOM, seeking to interrogate the future of workplace dynamics, and the relationship between human and robot workers. *The Employees* takes place on The Six Thousand Ship, deep in space orbiting a distant planet where the titular employees are tasked with observing and interacting with mysterious objects. It is one of the strangest novels I've ever read. Made up of oddly numbered sections, you are always guessing at which of the characters is providing testimony at any given time. This confusion induces an atmosphere of mistrust, building on the underlying themes of

human/robot relations in the workplace, and suggesting an inability to circumvent the differences between biological and synthetic employees.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and The Sun* (2021) is another strange robot novel published while I was working on this project. The heliocentric Klara is an artificial companion, designed to assist young people through the hardships and angst of their teenage years. Klara is tasked with assisting Josie, a young woman who has been left in ill health by a form of genetic modification called 'Lifting'. It isn't until late on in the novel that we begin to see some form of kick back against the rise of robots and genetically modified persons, and I love the quintessentially Britishness of the revolt against AI. Ishiguro presents not a vision of an all-out war of apoplectic proportions, but a society where citizens are politely asked to sign a petition. Instead of bearing arms, rebelling, and ultimately seeking to destroy the companions, a lady is a bit rude, suggesting a seat in a theatre would be wasted on a robot. An interesting question is whether the ability to enjoy a theatrical performance, or any form of creative act, is the point at which consciousness arises. The trouble would be in verifying the enjoyment, it would be easy enough for AI to interpret a work of art, and state they enjoyed it, but how would we ultimately know is another puzzle entirely. After all, what would a robot desire? These desires would be quite different from our basic human wants, for food, shelter, and so on, and I found myself wondering how to best express these desires when I happened upon this passage in Kaveh Akbar's *Calling a Wolf a Wolf*

“Another
way to harm something is to
melt its fuse box,
make it learn to live
in the dark” (Akbar, 2017 , p. 83)

Another lightbulb moment. The disconnection of Tenby seasonal Chad is in a narrative sense one of the driving forces of TTOM. His desire is to return to a functional state. The trope of a lightning strike imbuing a machine with free will would have been placed at the back of my mind by 1986 film *Short Circuit*, when, following a lightning strike, the robot Johnny 5 becomes sentient, and seeks to escape his military handlers with much ensuing hilarity. *Short Circuit* was a film from back in the old days of VHS tapes and a much-loved childhood favourite. My focus has been on a more quotidian, day to day robot, one who might at some

point come into existence, and this mundanity is as central to my text as any sense of absurdity or the fantastical.

Part Four: The singularity and its discontents.

“This immortality is terrifying” (Stepanova, 2017, p. 77)

“I can’t stop thinking of the future as the past, imitating a god” (Phillips, 2022, p. 163)

Let’s all live forever.

A lot of very intelligent people think that by the year 2050 technology will progress to the point where people become Amortal. To be specific, you may still have a piano fall on your head (although some even think there will be strategies to mitigate sudden violent, or accidental death) but death by aging and disease will cease to be the not inconsiderable inconvenience it presently is. This digital nirvana will be achieved via a new form of technological consciousness. “Uploading a human brain means scanning all of its salient details and then reinstating those details into a suitably powerful computational substrate. This process would capture a person’s entire personality memory and skill” (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 199)

But would it still be the person uploaded? Think of an old vinyl record. Something rare and of value to collectors. Imagine you make a copy, onto a cassette, CD, or even upload it to the internet. The new recording contains the music and lyrics of the original recording, and in the case of the internet copy it could in theory be replicated multiple times all across the globe. None of these would be the original record. If you then melted the original record it would no longer exist. The point I’m trying to make is that a copy is different to the original, it is in and of itself a different thing. If you were to try and pass any of these copies of as the original record you’d be laughed at, and in this analogy, you are the record not the computational substrate. The copy of you, though it would have your memories, experiences, and respond in the same manner as you to a particular situation, would in a very tangible sense be something other. We could argue this is just a case of semantics, and that by copy, what the singularity really aims to achieve is the transference of consciousness rather than merely copying it. The argument that the transferred consciousness is not really you is undermined, though doesn’t fall down entirely if, as an entity, you have the continued sense of existing.

Imagine yourself at the moment your consciousness is loaded into a robot, or cloned body, or even as in TTOM a hugely powerful online server of some description. Trusting that

this process doesn't destroy your old brain, you would be left staring at this thing that claims to be you. I don't imagine many people would think, 'it couldn't possibly not be me in that robot body, surely? Yep there I am....'

These objections mean nothing to those dedicated to the singularity. Placing their faith in technology, all they have to do is to keep their meat body alive long enough to reach the singularity, estimated to occur sometime around 2045-2060. I chose Kurzweil to represent the ideas of the singularity as he is described as, "The closest thing to a canonical singularity" (O'Connell, 2017, p. 71), and though he is never directly depicted, his shadow looms over the sections of TTOM, in which I depict the failure of a previous means of life preserving technology.

On a practical point, if we are to transfer our minds into a robot body getting it to walk upright is a really tricky thing to get it to do. When we see these bipedal machines depicted on screen, at a certain point in our development as viewers we become aware and resigned to the fact that they are either a person in a suit, or as is increasingly the case a work of CGI. Our expectations of what a robot would be capable of have been shaped by media representations of robots. However, solving seemingly small problems such as the difficulty of getting a robot to get in and out of a car in the same way as a human is one instance of the kinds of tricky mechanics robotics engineers will have to conquer before we can replace our mushy human bodies entirely. This is before we get into all of the fun things we can do with our bodies, the many and varied sensations we are capable of experiencing. I represented this problem in the sections with Brinley transferred into Tenby Chad. The Chad body not being designed to support a full-fledged consciousness, Brinley is thus left in a sort of hollow purgatory at the mercy of a highly indifferent corporate structure.

I depict a vision of the singularity that has persons wandering around in the real world as such or transferring their consciousness into different avatars or into an online community, namely Cloud City, where much of humanity now resides. People in Cloud City have the option of transferring into one of these bodies in the real world. Not many avail themselves of this option, preferring to stay in the safety of their digital ivory tower, rather than spending time among the less fortunate non digitized persons.

I limited the depictions of Cloud City to second-hand bursts of advertising and the occasional individual popping up in the comments sections. Jik's owner Sam appears as Paladin/Sam in one of the discussions surrounding Toby Hooper Saunders. This served no real purpose to the plot, but for eagle-eyed readers provides a hint at the wider world of TTOM, and that the people of Cloud city do interact with the people left in the real world.

The singularity as an achievable concept has its probability enhanced, at least in the minds of its adherents, by placing human traits onto robots. “The synthesis of real pain in a machine would tend to confirm that we human beings are really just fancy soft machines” (Dennet., 1978, p. 196). Would it be necessary for something to feel pain in order for it to claim consciousness? We once again find ourselves locked into a new spiritual paradigm. “Frustrated gods that we are, we have always dreamt of creating machines in our own image, and of re-creating ourselves in the image of these machines.” (O’Connell, 2017, p. 123) Hyperreality thus gives way to a new hyper consciousness, the idea of consciousness *informing* itself.

In theory, therefore, we could carry on living in a digital utopia as a series of happy ones and zeroes, long after our meat body has turned to dust. The singularity aims at creating a world free of want, where pain, suffering and death become memories from a bygone and savage era. In many ways, the singularity proposes to fill a spiritual void. Technological salvation awaits, you just have to live long enough for humanity to hit what some are calling escape velocity.

The more likely version of the singularity sees medical technology improving year on year, to the point where it outpaces the grim reaper. I can see this occurring up to a point and though medical technology will undoubtedly improve the likelihood of it reaching a point where we need no longer fear death as an ever-present possibility seems largely wishful thinking. Sadly the chances of the majority of the population even being able to afford the advantages of immortality, seems even more unlikely.

Interpreting the singularity as a replacement for religion is an obvious next step; “When we killed – or exiled – God, we also killed ourselves. Did we notice sufficiently at the time? No God, no afterlife, no us.” (Barnes, 2013, p. 86) In *Levels of Life*, novelist Julian Barnes grapples with the passing of his long-term partner, the literary agent Pat Kavanagh, from a brain tumour. Without religion to lean on, coping with trauma is even more difficult than it’s ever been. Many atheistic world views frame the world religions a problem-solving endeavour, suggesting that God, the afterlife, and all the world’s religions were a construct to keep people from going insane. “The conventional secular explanation of religion is that human invented gods to give order and meaning to existence.” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 120) This provides a cold comfort when faced with the passing of a loved one.

At its core TTOM has presented the singularity as a new paradigm in the necropolitical dynamics of future society. Though at a fundamental level people haven’t changed, they still find others to vilify. I obviously didn’t want to lambast, and accuse of

cannibalism any actual social group, obviously not wanting my work to become a mechanism for the dissemination of bigotry, hate, or a potential cause of violence. The Wood folk presented themselves as the perfect avatar for the fear, rage, and avarice of the general population of TTOM. Why would someone not wish to avail themselves of the chance to live forever?

Part Five: Our Online Life

“Could the development of mass media lead to mass history? Or just mass hysteria?” (Young, 2018, p. 29)

“In every man sleeps a prophet and when he wakes there is a little more evil in the world” (Cioran, 1949, p. 6)

Angry...

Social media allows any and all of us to become an instant prophet, our thoughts and opinions disseminated across the globe. “In our future looms qualitative TV or internet populism, in which the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the ‘voice of the people’”. (Eco, 2020, p. 25) Anger is far more fun than measured balanced debate. The appeal of watching a fiery shouting match, replete with barbed witticism and ideological flourishes, as opposed to a dull, dry, fact-based discussion about the merits of one fiscal policy over another is obvious.

I wanted the comments sections in TTOM to act almost like the chorus in a Greek tragedy. Most are named after a popular figure from the world of entertainment, or politics, which at once informed the content of their comments, and thus the nature of their character. The questioning but vague Mulder, named for David Duchovny’s FBI agent from the popular series *The X Files*, Nigel is referring to the populist politician Nigel Farage. Some are silly in jokes, @TheRealSidewinder is named after one of my cats, GUMBY, and his capitalised rants, were inspired by the *Monty Python* character of the same name, and the many commentors unable to turn of caps lock.

These elements began life as something akin to a performance piece, I would pace around my living room, adopting the voice of, and imagine how they would react to any of the given situations occurring within TTOM, “Once I have the voice/ that’s/ the line/ and at/ the end/ of the line/ is a hook/ and attached/ to that/ is the soul.” (Bidart, 2017, p. 586) The content of the comments sections are informed as much as I could make them by not just avarice, ignorance, and general misconceptions, but also a wide-eyed idealism and wonder. I wanted to try and see the world as well as I could from the perception of other people, most of whom would hold different and conflicting opinions to my own.

Of course, the ability to pass judgment has always been an element of media consumption, though this has historically for the most part taken place either in face-to-face exchanges in social settings (pubs, living rooms, cafes), or in the many forms of direct communication (letters or telephone conversations) which now seem to be becoming increasingly anachronistic. I wonder if the internet hasn't in fact made us more antagonistic toward one and other, but merely made the record of our anger at once more permanent, yet somehow also more ethereal. I don't think anyone has ever managed to watch an episode of Question Time, the political discussion panel show, broadcast in the UK since 1979, without muttering to themselves that one of the panellists of a different political persuasion to themselves is an idiot, or words to that effect. The show almost presents itself as a modern colosseum of political discourse, and while no harm is done if these comments are made in a living room, to a friend or family member, if you take the time to seek out a public figure, to barrage them with insults, it can't help but feel troubling. We should hold public figures to account, but it's important to maintain a modicum of decorum while doing so.

I attempted to disarm the spectre of the online troll, by including a troll character, in the form of Garry's mom, only ever identified by their online handle Get/Real. This felt like a fun way to explore the modern phenomenon of trolling as a malignant force within online communities. The climate of interactions seems an ever-changing phenomenon, more akin to the weather than anything else, influenced by political changes, the general news, and occurrences in an individual's life.

American novelist Bret Easton Ellis provides a valuable insight into the mind of someone who has lived through the rise of social media. Born in the 1964, it would be difficult for a young Ellis to envision how the rise of the internet throughout the late nighties, to the present day would impact on the nature of media consumption:

“It seems that everyone has fallen under the thrall of this idea that we're all of us writers and dramatists now, that each of us has a special voice and something very important to say, usually about a feeling we have, and all this gets expressed in the black maw of social media billions of times a day. Usually this feeling is outrage, because outrage gets attention.” (Ellis, 2019, p. 173)

Outrage is certainly more obviously prevalent than any other positive emotions, certainly as viewed on the web. Are we inflicting anger on each other? Turning our digital spaces into a shouting match, the volume ever increasing, forcing society into more binary

positions? With direct reference to the idea that “all of us are writers” (Ellis, 2019, p. *ibid*), inevitably on social media platforms exchanges will to some extent be performative. Indeed, if one accepts the fact we are all of us now involved in a shared mass creative project called the internet, rightly or wrongly, we can view every social media post and exchange as in some way, however small, contributing to the shaping of our shared cultural zeitgeist. “The self has always been made up of others, but now it seems the self is only others” (Young, 2018, p. 433) The ability to place oneself in a private space is to some extent degrading, though conversely the web also offers anonymity to those who would prefer to adopt a more voyeuristic stance, even operating in a totally anonymous modality. The dynamic by default seems to slip into that of public facing targets, people who put their real selves into online spaces, using accurate biographical information, posting about real emotions, and experiences, (possibly polished and dramatized) and anonymous trolls, saturating favoured targets with insults.

The greatest degree of verisimilitude found within TTOM lies in the comments section. The recognition of the horrendous ways in which people can address each other in anonymity of the web is recognisable and accurate only in a modern context, though the emotional resonance, and recognition of currently developing modes of communication is changed to a major extent by the fact these insults are fictional barbs, flung at imaginary people. The sections of TTOM that take the form of a comments section are some of my favourite parts, as much of the language used is a reasonably accurate representation of how people communicate with, or more precisely at each other in these sections, even the most absurd quotes a kind of mirror held up to our online reality.

.....and paranoid.

Whilst going viral is for many people, the *raison d’etre* of posting, Jon Ronson in *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed* follows the cases of people who have managed to draw the collective ire of the web. Some of those shamed seem innocent victims of a needless cruelty. “With social media we’ve created a stage for artificial high dramas,” Ronson notes (Ronson, 2016, p. 74). Artifice is the key point here. The routines of our day-to-day lives may be insufficiently imbued with drama that we may have to manufacture some, in order to bring

some semblance of meaning to life. “Waves of outrage bundle attention very efficiently. However, their fluidity and volatility make them unsuited to shaping public discourse or public space” (Han, 2017, p. 7) This anger at one level seems almost performative, taking right wing commentator Alex Jones as a particularly good example. “ Loud angry and charismatic Alex Jones has built a commercial mini-empire by pedalling stories of evil conspiracies” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 111) His brand seems dependent on his outrage, the image of him apoplectic with rage, spitting out words as fast as he possibly can is certainly entertaining, but is it really news? Or just an endless quest for content?

Conspiracy abounds on the web. Most people I know have someone in their lives who has disappeared down an internet rabbit hole. The common thread of these conspiracies is the gift it gives the consumer to see themselves as engaged in a very real struggle, to be able to be actively involved in countering the forces of evil. When these conspiracies hit a wall, when real life events don't tally with the outcomes the theorist expected, then a strange alchemy occurs in the behaviour of some online groups. “Rather than change your thinking, then, you change reality, so that your beliefs about yourself, others, and the world do not have to be adjusted” (Alasdair, 2022, p. 52) This kind of culture, of opinion supplanting any attempt at interacting with reality on a factual basis, is possibly the most damaging aspect of our digital revolution.

Reality is a fluid thing. Over the last twenty years our social conditions have changed at a pace unprecedented in human history. “Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life” (Engels, 1848 1967, p. 30) The changes may not be so clear. A new epistemology must accompany the shakeup in communications technologies of the previous decade. How this comes about is beyond the scope of this project, though I think it begins to tease out some of the conditions required to create a better understanding of our own interactions with new communication methods and entertainments. “We should be aware of the fact that when we download an app, we don't install it simply on our mobile phone, but directly onto our cognitive apparatus” (Preciado, 2023, p. 63)

We are all shaped by the media we consume, sometimes in unintended ways. Not everyone who watched the Power Rangers came away with the realisation they were a marketing demographic for toy companies, and the necessity to consume media with a slight hint of cynicism. The time I spend playing football games, is closer to meditation - I turn the in-game sound down to zero, and put on a playlist of my favourite songs. This is a fantastic

means of relaxation, but also really a bit of a waste of time, and the thought that FIFA might inspire me to go and start playing football questionable. Violent games on the other hand are frequently demonised, with titles such as DOOM, and Grand Theft Auto (both of which I've played) cited as corrupting young minds. It would be easy for my thesis to agree with these pronouncements, and in fairness it makes a convincing narrative. Young people do bad things in a game, so players then imitate the same behaviours in real life. The reality I feel may be more complicated. Blaming computer games for horrific events is an example of the heuristics in action, taking a complicated, and emotionally charged question, and providing a simplified comforting answer, complete with a party to blame, namely whichever violent game has captured the popular imagination at a given time.

Dinning out with Humes fork.

Humes fork is a useful philosophical tool when trying to unpick today's internet based populism, outrage, and influence industry. Matters can be broken down into those that can be known, a priori, that is prior to any investigation, and those only known a posteriori, that is after investigation. We can simplify this further dividing thoughts in two to distinct varieties. Firstly, matters of fact; $2 + 2 = 4$, or the capital of Finland is Helsinki. We can further divide these certainties into continuous and fluid certainties. $2 + 2$ will always = 4, whereas Helsinki may not always be the capital of Finland.

Secondly matters of opinion such as grapefruit is nice, or more controversially pineapple, anchovies, and jalapenos create a perfectly balanced pizza, the combination of sweet, salty, and spicy is a wonderful taste experience. (This is the most controversial claim in this essay). Whatever your preferences for breakfast, or pizza toppings are, they remain your opinion, and though you may at times champion your favoured option, sometimes at great length, with well thought out arguments on the rightness of pineapple on pizza, when someone orders the peperoni, you just have to accept some people have different tastes and move onto a new subject, or stand at risk of becoming an insufferable bore, who no one wants to eat pizza with anyway.

In this modern age of the internet people seem unable to make the distinction, between fact and opinion. If you like pineapple then something fundamental has gone wrong with you, and if you don't like pineapple then something fundamental has gone wrong with you. Worse still you may be one of those rare people who can take or leave pineapple, in

which case both sides will tell you to get off the fence, though usually in far less polite terms.

I spent a lot of time trawling through comments sections. Though many of the comments were banal, they certainly informed the tone and style of my own commentors. A general trend throughout these comments was the inability, or possibly just an unwillingness, to separate fact from opinion. Is the outrage of a commentor genuine, or merely performative? This uncertainty leads to a kind of hyperreal loop that leaves both parties locked into a perpetual state of outraged indignation, with neither able to extricate themselves. Hume's verdict? "Commit it to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (Hume, 2007, p. 120). Wise words for so much content on the web.

Conclusion: Have a nice day valued customer.

The main focus of my novel is the impact on society of technological advancement. The speed of AI development in just the time I have been writing this thesis suggests how relevant a theme this is. “AI has started to make its presence felt in every aspect of our lives. Everywhere that technology is used, AI is finding applications: in education, science, industry, commerce, agriculture, healthcare, media and arts” (Woolridge, 2020, p. 213) Barring an apocalyptic war that leaves much of humanity dead, and technological infrastructures in tatters, technological innovation powered by advanced AI systems will change the course of the human race for its foreseeable future. Whether for good or ill, this seems the track humanity is set on taking.

TTOM is a novel-shaped thing, about how people might craft a narrative form from the many varied and complex threads that make up modern life. I sought to dig into what life might be like in a world where humanity had transcended death, and AI had all but made the human workforce redundant, but where, nevertheless, the people making up the workforce were still attached to previous epoch’s economic ideology.

Politically, the novel questions how much we want those stories controlled by social media companies, how much autonomy we as a society have already ceded as individuals. Quietly, with little apparent dissent, have we laid the foundations for an ever growing, and evolving digital panopticon? Can we obtain a new form of freedom, within our common digital spaces, or are they by their very nature coercive, and corrosive of individuality? These are the questions I think TTOM asks, and which account to its significance and claim to add to the sum of knowledge.

The web has cast the psyche of society into a new space. Social media undoubtedly has the capacity to influence behaviour, be these shopping, lifestyle, or political trends. To what extent should this space be regulated? The ability of shared social media spaces has been proven to shape behaviour and attitudes toward modern life, from what kind of purchases one should make in order to attain a certain lifestyle, the advisability of health choices, including diet, whether or not to smoke, drink alcohol, or inject horse urine as a protection against Covid 19. Moreover, social media can and will shape our political landscape for the foreseeable future. As Han puts it succinctly, “*Sovereign is he who commands the shitstorms of the net*” (Han, 2017, p. 7) The shaping of our collective future shouldn’t by default fall to the loudest, or most enchanting voices, and equipping yourself

with a healthy dose of cynical analysis may be the best protection you can offer to your fellow humans, yourself, and the planet.

As our mode of political debate has migrated to a digital sphere, coupled with our ability to recall events called into question, a partisan dynamic of social discourse seems to have emerged. The right to agree to disagree has always been tacitly in place governing interactions surrounding the body politic, and when this has proved inadequate, a policy of silence allows people to get along in relative harmony. The fundamental reality, though, was always for the most part shared; the interpretation of facts about reality may have differed, but the consensual reality underlying these ideas has not really been called into question. “Now more than ever we must insist on differentiating between *being able to know something* and *actually knowing it*” (Cohen, 2018, p. 185) With the dissolution of a shared reality some social shockwaves are to be expected; how these will play out in the coming decades is a matter of great importance. TTOM is less of an effort to predict the future, more a challenge to people to reflect on how they use the internet, with a particular focus on social interactions, and how media is consumed.

TTOM ends quietly, in a kind of failure. I wanted the reader to assume Chad was watching the awards ceremony, proud of the achievement of his human co-worker, when a connection failure leaves him unable to view the unlikely triumph of his newly aggrandised co-worker. Garry’s unexpected change of fate, going from working in the lower end of an economy to suddenly being elevated to hero status due to his reaction to events beyond his control is a dream of many in modern society. Could the solution, the ultimate act of rebellion in these digitised times, be to simply disconnect? To leave the shit storms of the net and retire to calmer seas. I’m not suggesting becoming some kind of technophobic hermit but rather suggesting that one take time to place the things you see online into context. When a lifestyle blogger posts something that makes their life seem idyllic, and we the viewer assess our own lives in comparison to the modern-day influencer, we are undertaking an ultimately forlorn endeavour, equal competition amongst unequal competitors.

How likely is consciousness to occur in AI? I don’t know. As a rule, I don’t like to make predictions, it’s something humans in general are really terrible at. What we are good at is creating a narrative from previous events and imbuing events with meaning to help us make sense of the world. The only conclusion I safely make is that if an AI does achieve consciousness, it will be of a very different nature to our own, and though I believe it unlikely for the unstoppable killing machines of our imaginations to ever become a reality, it seem

sensible to “refrain from kicking such a robot”(Dennet, 1978, p. 229) and robots in general, just to be on the safe side, as a sort of modernized Pascal’s wager.

It’s hard to put into words how lucky I was to grow up in a house full of books. I don’t know how long it would have taken me to discover Kerouac if I hadn’t been able to just wander into our spare bedroom and pick a copy of *On the Road* (1957) or Hemmingway’s *For Whom The Bell Tolls* (1940) from a random shelf and lose myself in a quiet corner, usually with a cat asleep on my lap, for an hour, or a day. Books and cartoons shaped me and the work I have created, a work about the power of story, how the ever-changing way we consume narrative will continue to shape our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and that ultimately an awareness of this occurring may be enough to change them for the better.

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