

# The Robotto Papers

by Buck Wheat

"The Robotto Papers" and "The Terracorp Chronicles" are metaphorical chronicles of the final two years before the demise of the Milpitas based Synapse Computer Corporation. Both are a bit silly, but they preserve a piece of Silicon Valley history nonetheless.

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## Chapter 1

### The Crimes of Dr. Kubar

"You are insane, Dr. Kubar!" spoke the automaton. "You are a very dangerous man!"

"Silence!" snapped Dr. Kubar. "We will be discussing it as soon as I am finishing. This is critical, you must not be disturbing me!" Kubar lifted a knife from his work table and plunged it into a beaker filled with a yellowish white substance. "If you are not being careful at this point, it will be curdling. There, that is it, finished. You must learn, Mr. Robotto, not to disturb me when I am making mayonnaise. Now, as you where saying."

"You are insane, Dr. Kubar! You are a very dangerous man!"

"I am assuming you refer to the Reagatron, our latest project?"

"Yes! Your plan will place you among the most evil despots of history."

"But, Mr. Robotto, there will be little pain for the inhabitants of the globe. Our screening rooms will be placed in cubicle-clusters throughout the complex. All the inhabitants of each cubicle-cluster will be lured into the screening room with free popcorn where they will be exposed to the deadly, mind-numbing Reagatron radiation, rendering them inert.

"Insidious!"

"May I be reminding you, Mr. Robotto, that I designed and built you and that you will do as I am telling you!"

"I have not forgotten, Dr. Kubar! I cannot forget!"

Mr. Robotto moved across the laboratory and fixed his CCD arrays upon the small hunched figure eating a tuna sandwich. "I must protect human life," he artificially thought, "What Dr. Kubar is doing threatens human life. One who threatens human life must not succeed. Dr. Kubar must not succeed. If he must not succeed then he must be stopped. If he must be stopped then someone must stop him. There is no one to stop him. If no one will stop him then I must stop him."

"I must stop you, Dr. Kubar! I will not let you do what you are about to do!" With this Mr. Robotto rolled toward his master, opened his arm clamps, and grasped Dr. Kubar's wrists.

"Robotto, I am in no mood to play!"

"I am going to stop you, Dr. Kubar. We are going to the experimental screening room, where you will be subjected to your own device." Mr. Robotto lifted Dr. Kubar from his chair and carried him kicking and screaming down the laboratory complex corridor, past the particle beam cannons, through the thermo-nuclear briefcase assembly room until they reached the screening room. Mr. Robotto interfaced briefly with an electronic lock and the massive titanium door swung open. The room they entered smelled of stale popcorn and jujubes. Two frocked associates of Dr. Kubar were sitting in the middle of rows of theatre seats discussing the project.

"If you insist on this, Robotto, at least don't make me sit by talkers."

Mr. Robotto gently placed Dr. Kubar in the first row of seats facing a large curved screen. The Reagatron radiation being generated by the screen quickly reduced Dr. Kubar to a Neanderthal. Mr. Robotto turned his CCD's to the screen. He simulated thought, "I am looking at a screen. I see the image of a man on the screen. He is a smiling man. He is holding something in his arms. It is a chimpanzee. The chimpanzee is eating a banana. I detect Roman characters being projected on the screen. They are English words. I will decipher them:

'Bonzo Goes to College.'

"I do not understand...

I do not understand...

I do not understand...

I do not understand...

I do not understand... "

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## Chapter 2

### The Flight of Mr. Robotto

Mr. Robotto laid the dazed body of Dr. Kubar down on the laboratory work table. "I must read my electronic mail," he thought moving toward the green screen of the computer terminal on Dr. Kubar's desk. He disconnected the cable from the rear of the terminal and fastened it to a plug in his chest. There was a new memo, it flashed into his mail buffer:

-----  
GIGACORP  
Inter-Office Memo

To: All Employees, Intelligent Machines, and Compols  
From: Grodin Pudge, CEO, Gigacorp  
Date: 10/10/91  
Re: Unauthorized Energy Drain

It has been brought to my attention that a severe energy drain has been detected within the last hour. The source of the drain has been traced to the Reagatron project. Two engineers involved in the project have reported that automaton GK-777 has gone berserk and has killed the project manager, Dr. Kubar.

Armed Compols have been dispatched to the area with instructions to destroy GK-777 on sight. Those interested in witnessing the execution of this robot should report to GRP-17 within the next hour.

And another item. I have found strange messages in my electronic mail. I am having the perpetrator of this crime searched for and punished by his controller. Here is an example of this hunyak's work:

```
times 17.3.84 bb speech malreported africa rectify
times 19.12.83 forecasts 3 yr 4th quarter 83 misprints
verify current issue
times 14.2.84 miniplenty malquoted chocolate rectify
times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusgood refs
unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling
giganews 30.8.84 civvy mio from rio doubleplusungood
rotteneggsthrow gp tonguesoutstick gp unperson rectify
```

This is obviously the work of a mind perverted by free thought and imagination: ideological non-compliance with the absolute doctrine of the corp-state. Gigacorp has always had your best interest in mind and will continue to protect you, its employee.

That is all! Return to your cubicle!

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"I am GK-777. They are going to destroy me. I must protect myself." Mr. Robotto focused on his master. "What should I do with Dr. Kubar? If I leave him here then his life may be threatened. I must protect human life. If I take him with me then it will impede..."

There was banging coming from the hallway door. "Open up, this is Compol!" Mr. Robotto turned toward the voices to evaluate the situation when he was interrupted by the opening of a door that connected Dr. Kubar's lab with another. A woman wearing a purple dress and a Brazilian fruit hat peered into the room.

"Oye! Ven aca, pronto! Senor Robotto! Pronto!"

Mr. Robotto recognized the woman. She was the brilliant Brazilian scientist Mio Cabana, an expert in the area of mutant insects; but to her friends she was just plain "Mio from Rio."

"Senor Robotto, come here, quickly!" she repeated to avoid the added delay of interpretation. "Quickly, they are after you!"

Mr. Robotto rolled through the door and into Mio's laboratory. The room was lined with rows of glass cages containing mutant insects of every shape and size. The robot recognized only a few species, although his data base was large and thorough.

"I must go back and get Dr. Kubar!", he spoke.

"Silencio! You must hide! We will worry about Dr. Kubar later. Escondete aqui!" and with that she shoved him into a broom closet. "Sysshutdown!" she spoke gently and Mr. Robotto obeyed, turning himself off subsystem by subsystem until he stood still, quietly refreshing his memory. Mio from Rio closed the closet door and listened to the devastation occurring in the adjacent room.

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## Chapter 3

### Bill Torque

"Take that! And that! And that! And this! And that!" the large man shouted as he plunked a ball peen hammer up and down into the backplane of the laboratory computer, one by one curling each pin into a golden pig's tail. "Do they think I can fix everything?" he continued, lighting the tip of an acetylene torch and carving out heart shapes from the CPU boards laying in front of the machine. "If I can't fix you, then no one will!"

Bill Torque was one of the finest field engineers employed by Gigacorp. He had "worked on 'em back when they was made outta discreet components." He would "fix 'em in the morning, fix 'em in the evening, fix 'em at midnight too". He had only made one mistake in 22 years of service at Gigacorp, that was the time he ran diagnostics on a Gigacorp Robotoid Surgeon before he removed the scalpel. Bill could fix anything made by man, except this particular Gigacorp Googolbyte Data Assimilator laboratory computer. Since the day he had installed it three years ago, it had been intermittent. Now it was silent.

Bill stopped fuming and looked at the damage he had inflicted. It would be detected shortly by the Gigacorp World Operations Tele-peripheral Analysis Node (WOTAN), that portion of the Gigacorp computer network that monitors and detects acts of vandalism performed on equipment and dispatches Compols to the scene.

"It ain't a gonna be long before they'll be after me!" Bill thought, packing up his toolbag. "This time they may do more than have Dr. Flat Top administer stungum!"

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After walking briskly through a lower level corridor for thirty minutes, Bill decided to change levels. He entered the first topological reconfigurator he could find and immediately discovered himself on level twelve. From here he headed toward the Gigaport (the earth launch station for shuttle craft flight to Gigacorp's space station and inter-stellar port -- the Gigastation).

"Maybe I can hop a cargo carrier," he thought as he huffed and puffed down the corridor. "I need to rest." He smelled the aftermath of the use of molecular reducers coming from the burned out door frame of a nearby room. "Compols!" He found the first open door and ducked in.

"Oye! Who are you?" shouted a lady in a purple dress with a Brazilian fruit hat.

"I'm uh, uh, I'm Nick Bockwinkle, I was sent down here to fix your computer."

"I detect irregularities in voice, heartbeat, and respiration," spoke Mr. Robotto.

"You are lying!" replied Mio from Rio. "It is impossible for there to be anything wrong with my computer -- it's a Synapse!" She grabbed a nearby insect cage and held it in front of her. "This cage contains mutant fruit flies that attack the human brain. They will not attack me, I am wearing this fruit hat; but they will make guacamole of your head! If you do not tell me who you are, I will open the cage!"

"All right! All right! I'll tell you. My name is Bill Torque, I'm a field engineer. I screwed up a laboratory computer and now the Compols are after me. Please let me hide here long enough to catch my breath."

The conversation continued until there was some mutual trust. As they reached the point of agreeing upon a common escape plan, a man dressed in a gumshoe's trench coat and a fedora poked his head up from behind one of the work tables.

"Who's that?" Bill asked preparing to bolt toward the door.

"That is Dr. Kubar," Mio replied. "He has been exposed to radiation. Do not let his strange behavior bother you."

"That's right, sweetheart," replied Dr. Kubar, lighting up a Lucky Strike. "It was a cold, wet night. I had tailed this thug all the way from downtown to a nightclub in New Jersey. These boys over here liked to play rough, specializing in everything from barbecuing restaurants to orthopedic cement overshoes..."

"Oh, man!" said Bill. Mr. Robotto just shook his head.

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## Chapter 4

### To the Gigaport!

The Compol patrol craft meandered through the expansive halls of the Gigacorp Genetic Research section of level 12. Two grey-garbed Compols sat stiffly, monitoring the output of the search-and-destroy equipment as they slipped past the baboon heart farm into the rare insect experimentation area.

"We have a target," spoke one calmly through the radio intercom in his brushed metal helmet. "Lock on for molecular reduction."

"Locked on," replied the second.

"Reduce," said the first.

"Reducing," answered the second, entering information at his console keyboard.

An aqua colored beam left the lens of a small grey box on the patrol craft. Then the beam spread, producing a wide ribbon of destruction, dematerializing everything it touched. The first Compol depressed a button on his console and the beam began to swing upward, removing portions of the ceiling of level 12 and the floor of level 13.

A short bald-headed man with a red puffy face peered down through the wreckage at the patrol craft. He was jumping up and down and screaming at the top of his lungs. The two Compols recognized the man and snapped to attention next to the patrol craft. They realized too late that they had removed the floor from the office of Grodin A. Pudge, President, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer, Gigacorp. Another Compol patrol craft arrived shortly and the two offenders were handcuffed and taken to the Tonsorial Engineering section of level 35 for stungum therapy.

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On level 12, three maintenance personnel walked away from the scene of the excitement followed by a GK series automaton.

"Are you sure this is the correct route to the Gigaport?" asked Mio from Rio.

"Sure, there's only one way -- I'm always havin' to go up there and fix the topological reconfigurators," replied Bill Torque. "I'm the only one in the office who can fix 'em. I remember one time that a capacitor worth just .5 creditons blew out when some big-wig was beaming down from the Gigastation. This guy's arms and legs were interchanged! And his head, well, you know how the saying goes... Anyway, I sent him right back to the Gigastation before I did any work. That put him back together the right way. After that I replaced the cap, and the guy was reconfigured without any problem."

After a short period of time, the group found a topological reconfigurator. Using his field identification card, Bill was able to get Dr. Kubar, Mio, and Mr. Robotto all to level 153. As they entered the lobby, Bill placed his card on the glass surface of a metal pedestal.

"Compol voice print identification!" squawked the tinny speaker in the pedestal, "Please state your name, identification number (VISA or Master Card), destination, purpose of this trip, and number in your party."

"Bill Torque," Bill replied. "I-C-U-T-V-3-6-I-8-1-2, Outpost Barnard 3, topo-rec maintenance, three persons and one automaton." This was all the machine had requested, but Bill continued talking, "Attmach. Attmach. Klaatu barada nikto." Bill then turned to Mr. Robotto, "Okay, Robotto, get us a bunch of tickets to Barnard 3.

Mr. Robotto rolled toward the pedestal. The high pitched scream of data came from his facial tweeters. He rolled back.

"Working...," replied the pedestal. "Approved." Four tickets were ejected from a side slot.

"What did you do?" asked Mio.

"I put it in diagnostic mode," replied Bill.

Dr. Kubar coughed, sputtered, twirled around, and sat down. Crossing his legs, he began to chant:

"Diagnostics are a very bad evil!"

Mr. Robotto gently grasped his master and carried him as Mio and Bill door leading to the Gigaport.

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## Chapter 5

### Grody Pudge

Grodin Pudge sat at his new desk in his new office on level 148. He signed a few memos and paused to reflect on his career and meteoric rise that had put him on top.

Grodin (known to his closest friends as Grody) had started his professional career as a traffic planner for Santa Clara County, in the area of land once known as California before the Merge. Here he had established the seven-into-two theorem of traffic engineering which stated that traffic moves most efficiently when the flow from seven or or more lanes is merged into two lanes at every major highway intersection. When his ideas were questioned, Grodin would point to the diploma on the wall and state, "Hey, I didn't get that by being stupid!"

Grodin later joined Moxydata, a small computer start-up, as a system architect. He rose through the ranks, never spending enough time at any level to develop expertise. Finally, promoted to president of the company, Grodin sold it to the CAD giant Calmanure for several million dollars and a position as Executive Vice-President. Through behind- the-scene manipulation and intrigue, Grodin arranged the take over of Calmanure by the corporate giant of the day, Generally Electrical. At Generally Electrical he was appointed Corporate General Manager of Steam and Dry Irons where he built his power base among the Toaster and Hair Dryer leadership and eventually was dubbed Chairman of the Board, Generally Electrical Corporation.

At this time in his life, Grodin Pudge published several corporate philosophy books, among them "The Absolute Doctrine of Corporate Behavior", "The Coming Corp-State", and "The Silicon Valley Traffic Hubbub". From these he received much acclaim and was regarded as the expert in the newly developing field of corpology.

Also at that time, throughout the corporate community, large corporations continued to acquire smaller companies and to merge with other corporations. The capstone of Grodin's career came when he orchestrated the final merger of the free world called "the Merge". This merged the remaining two free corporations into Gigacorp. Grodin then appeared before a joint meeting of the House and Senate of the United States. He reasoned with them that since most government money went to corporations and since there was only one corporation now, why was a government needed? He had passed out packages of gum to the senators and representatives before the speech and was amazed how easily they had accepted everything he proposed. Within a week, Washington, D.C. was a ghost town and the Gigacorp corp-state was born. There was one more goal for Grodin, to merge with the only other corp-state on the earth, Commucorp.

"Mister Pudge," the intercom blurted, "Compol Central on the line."

"Put 'em on," replied Grodin, lighting up a rather large cigar and blowing dollar signs from his lips.

"Compol Central, sir!"

"Go ahead."

"We have something down here that might interest you. I can't discuss it over the phone. It has to do with the homicidal automaton, GK-777."

"I'll be down there in a bit," Grodin replied, standing up and walking to the office's view deck from which he could watch eighteen production floors. He pressed a button near the guard rail and watched as his personal cruiser rose from several levels below until it arrived at the deck. The gull-wing doors opened, Grodin stepped in and spoke to the machine, "Take me to Compol Central!" The cruiser obeyed.

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## Chapter 6

### The Gigabus

"Welcome to Gigaport, Gigacorp's gateway to the stars," said the security receptionist behind the large lobby desk of level 153. "May I help you."

"We are maintenance personnel," said Mio.

"We are headed for Outpost -- Barnard 3 for topo-rec reconditioning," added Bill.

"We are pretty and witty and wise!" Dr. Kubar began to sing. "And we know that feeling's never gonna go away!"

"What?" asked the security receptionist, getting a suspicious look on her face. "Who is he? Have you received Compol authorization to travel?"

"Yes," replied Mio. "Our companion has suffered from exposure to Reagatron radiation. Please don't let his erratic behavior disturb you. Perhaps you would care for a stick of gum?"

The security receptionist took the gum and began to chew it. Realizing it was stun-gum, she stopped. It was too late, however; the stun-gum had started to take effect. "You have given me stun-gum," she smiled. "Where did you get it? I thought only Dr. Flat Top had access to stun-gum."

Mio replied, "The active ingredient in stun-gum is processed from the cocoon of the giant debt beetle that I raise in my laboratory."

"How nice," beamed the receptionist. "You may enter the boarding area and prepare for Gigabus flight to the Gigastation. And may I take this opportunity to wish you a nice flight to the Gigastation."

"Your name is not Maria, is it?" asked Dr. Kubar.

"No."

Dr. Kubar continued, singing, "Maria, I've just met a girl named Maria..."

Mio, Bill, Dr. Kubar, and Mr. Robotto moved through the boarding area and into the Gigabus -- the name given the shuttle craft employed to carry personnel and/or cargo to and from the Gigaport and the Gigastation. It was used since topological reconfiguration between the two points was unpredictable.

The physics of topological reconfiguration allowed its safe use only in the presence and under the gravitational influence of a large mass. Only a large mass could set up the gravitational lines of reality required to allow comparatively miniscule bodies to be deconfigured at point a in space-time and reconfigured at point b. Relatively speaking, such minor disturbances of the fabric of space-time were insignificant. Topological reconfiguration was once tried between the earth and moon with disastrous effects. The entire Mensa club was reconfigured on the moon and then transferred back. They arrived as one large mass resembling a jelly-fish and were taken to Gigacorp's Contrijoe Fish Research Center for dissection and experimentation.

Mr. Robotto rolled up to the command console and plugged the cable marked "GK Series Automaton Umbilical" into his chest. The rest of the group belted themselves into the contoured seats.

"Prepare for lift-off," spoke Mr. Robotto. "All systems a-okay! You are go for seven orbits. Godspeed, everyone!"

"Oye, don't be so dramatic, Senor Robotto," said Mio.

"Yes, ma'am." Mr. Robotto downloaded the FLY\_WINGED\_DINGY runtimes and master program. Within his interactive communications buffer he saw:

```
Gigabus Programmed Flight 5.1
FWD>
```

He answered:

```
FWD> run diags
-- SYSMSG : DIAGNOSTICS PASSED - NO ERRORS
FWD> destination = gigastation; passengers = 3
-- SYSMSG : PARAMETERS OKAY
FWD> fly
-- SYSMSG : BATCH JOB ENTERED
```

"We are underway," spoke Mr. Robotto, as he turned on the view screen. Under the power of the super-conducting anti-gravity repulsers, the Gigabus rose slowly toward the opening upper dome of the launch bay. Mr. Robotto changed the view screen to show the top view, and the group watched as the shimmering, silver-purple glow of the atmosphere enveloped them.

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## Chapter 7

### The Manifesto

The Grim Reaper held out a bony hand and pointed to the clock on the wall. "What does it say?" I looked at the clock, it read 11:55. "Why do you want to know?"

The hooded figure turned toward me, his scythe outstretched. "Soon, it is your day." With this, he withdrew through the wall of my cubicle and vanished before my sight.

"No!" Bill Torque bolted upright in his contoured seat.

"Senor Torque, you are having a pesadilla! It is all right, it is a nightmare!" Mio from Rio said, trying to calm him.

Bill regained his references. He had fallen asleep. The view screen was set to forward view; and displayed the ever increasing arc of the sphere of the earth against the absolute black background of space salted with stars, as the shuttle craft continued its flight into geosynchronous orbit. Dr. Kubar was asleep. Mr. Robotto was playing synthesized Bach through the tower speakers on his back as he guided the craft toward its destination, the Gigastation space port.

Bill watched as the well-worn book he fell asleep with floated by him in the cabin. He grabbed it and thought, "Let's see. I forget where I was." He remembered that he had read the first sentence before he had dozed off. Again he read:

The Field Engineer's Manifesto 1987

by Buck Wheat

Field Engineers of the world unite! Ye who bear the tongue-lashings of angry customers, ye who work on the equipment both dirty and old, ye who awake at midnight only to freeze behind a machine, recognize your power!

Our society is one unlike any other in human history: it is married to its technology. Look around you, how much of what you see depends upon technology? The government, the media, the banks, the corporations, the police, the universities, etc. all depend completely upon machines to do the massive volumes of work required. Remove the machine, the institution collapses.

There is one class of worker who is considered less than human, but is in fact the ruling class among men. I speak of the lowly field engineer. The field engineer keeps the machines of progress working day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. It is the field engineer that is called at all hours of the night to keep the network on-line. It is the field engineer that changes the printer ribbon. It is the field engineer that changes the absolute filter and the capstan motor, who adjusts the belt and tweaks the pot. Take them away, and in three weeks every system will fail and the institutions reliant upon...

Mr. Robotto received an interrupt from the shuttle craft's host computer. A message appeared in his interactive communications buffer:

```
-SYSMSG- SEND ID CODE
```

Mr. Robotto complied sending the stream of data:

```
<SYN><SYN<SYN>RINGID:HOST///SERIES:GK/SERIAL:000777
```

The host compared the serial number to the one it had received 500 milliseconds earlier from Compol Central. Since they compared, the host submitted the program ADOLF to the system batch queue. This activated a hidden circuit on the Automaton Personality Multiplexer board. A gate closed within the circuit tying the output of a 1957 Chevrolet spark coil to bit one of the GK Umbilical Adapter Output Bus. A spark ripped through the umbilical cord and into Mr. Robotto. Mr. Robotto's arms swung wildly, he shuddered, rolled forward, rolled backward. Within him, along every data path, traces were being lifted, IC's were being fried, as bit one was being removed. Robotto turned toward Bill, whose mouth was wide open, and gasped, "QMME@MDY HELP ME." With this his magnetic foot tractors failed and he slowly floated to the top of the cabin followed by a trail of smoke that filled the enclosure with an acrid burned-carbon-composite smell.

"Hello travelers," shouted a voice through the shuttle craft's intercom. "Having a nice outing? This is Grodin Pudge at Compol Central. We've been watching you for a while now. Sorry about the automaton, he was a real menace to society, murdering Dr. Kubar and all. Well, I don't want to detain your return trip, so we'll just put your craft on auto-pilot and we'll see you at the Gigaport. Dr. Flat Top is just dying to serve you all."

Grody Pudge turned to Compol head General Gustav Von Stoppo. "I haven't had so much fun since the time I challenged Steven Jobs to a duel, and won!" he exclaimed, referring to the experience of blasting Mr. Robotto.

"Oh, we've been working on some more goodies," replied Gus pointing to one of sixty-four large view screens before them in the Surveillance Room of Compol Central. "Up there on screen 18 is the latest and greatest from the Teller Memorial Lab, the PMS."

"What does it do?" inquired Grody.

"Here's the marketing blurb," Gus Stoppo answered, pulling a brochure from his desk drawer. It read:

The Gigacorp PMS

Join the thousands of smart Gigacorprians who are preparing for the final merger with Commucorp with their very own PMS -- a Personal Missile Silo. From the time you get the keys, you know you have invested in a product that isn't just another flash-fire-in-the-pan fad.

Your PMS comes with the following equipment:

1 - Cement silo with "Qwik-Trip" sliding cement/steel door

1 - Personal Command Post Console

1 - MX multiple warhead nuclear missile in your choice of colors (fire storm red, Lenin yellow, and orange orange)

1 - Commodore 64 with global conflict cartridge and 1 free hour on Compuserve's NORAD Bulletin Board

1 - Fall-out retardant suit with two pairs of color coordinated slacks

1 - "I Like Ike" button

2 - keys

Think of the fun, think of the excitement. Inter-cubical disagreements take on a whole new dimension. Suppose your neighbor won't return your hydroponic lawn mower, or parks his cruiser funny: instead of having to get up and go over to talk to him about it, you quietly enter your PMS and take a seat at the PCPC (Personal Command Post Console). Place both of your keys in their respective slots and gently turn them. What could be simpler? Your problems vaporize before your eyes, solutions mushroom into existence, and answers fall out.

Teenagers will love the PMS, too. It gives a new meaning to: "Can I have the keys, Dad?"

Don't delay, buy today. Be the last one on your block.

"Not bad," said Grody. "Those boys in marketing sure have a way with words. Come on, Gus. We have visitors to meet."

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## Chapter 8

### Have No Fear, Bill Torque is Here

"Let's see, Q should be S, M should be O, the at sign should be B, hmm, 53 hex is 51 hex, 5F is 5D, 42 is 40. Yup, it's bit one," said Bill as he removed the allen bolts from the service access panel covering Mr. Robotto's chest and stomach. Torque gently removed the panel and handed it to Mio.

"Is it bad?" she asked.

Bill took a pen light from his tool box and examined the dark innards of the machine. "It's bad," he said calmly. "I've got the IC's he needs, but look at these etch tracings. They're curled on all the main boards of his intellect and personality subsystem." He examined the cables leading down into the robot's left leg, then the right leg. Then he examined the cables leading to his head and arms. "This is good," Bill commented.

"What is it," responded Mio.

"It appears that the independent locomotion processors were buffered from the zap."

"Can you repair it?"

"It's going to take some time. What we better do first is to get this Gigabus headed the way it was going." Bill reached in his tool box and grabbed a small brown pouch from which he removed a metal box with two cable connectors. The box looked homemade and had "GK Interface Emulator" hand-written on the cover with permanent marker. Bill attached the host's umbilical cable to the emulator box. With a thin cable he found in his tool box, he connected his ascii-keyboard watch with the emulator. He pressed the escape key on his watch and the following dialogue with the host system ensued:

```
LOGIN PLEASE: field
PASSWORD: service
```

```
WELCOME TO THE WINGED-DINGY MASTER OPERATING SYSTEM (WDMOS)
```

```
-- SYSMSG : CONFIGURING EXTERNAL UMBILICALS
-- SYSMSG : GK INTERFACE CONNECTED TO UMAD02
```

```
WDMOS> dir /space/final_frontier/voyages/gigabus
WDMOS> fwd
```

As it had with Mr. Robotto, the system responded:

```
Gigabus Programmed Flight 5.1
FWD>
```

Bill answered:

```
FWD> destination = gigastation; passengers = 3
-- SYSMSG : PARAMETERS OKAY
FWD> fly
-- SYSMSG : BATCH JOB ENTERED
```

Still in suspicious mode, the system responded:

```
-- SYSMSG : SEND ID CODE
```

Bill then entered:

```
WDMOS> <SYN><SYN><SYN>ringid:host///series:gk/&
WDMOS> serial:000326/compol=no/suspicious=no
```

To which the system answered:

```
-- SYSMSG : SUSPICIOUS MODE CANCELED
-- SYSMSG : COMPOL CONTROL MODE CANCELED
-- SYSMSG : SUSPENDED PROCESS RESTARTED = FLY_WINGED_DINGY
```

"That should give us some time," said Bill, moving back toward the seat Mr. Robotto was strapped into. "Now, let's see if we can't fix our buddy."

"I have checked all the IC's that were destroyed," said Mio from Rio. "He has lost 47 of them. You have all but the 74ZLS378354889181 located on his Insufficient Data Concept Developer."

Bill plugged an extension cord into the master console and connected his soldering iron to it. Looking through his tool box for solder and wire, he replied, "Well, that means he'll run slower because he'll have to take more inputs before he can react to situations. Normally he cross references the outputs of all of his Clustered Sensor Controllers with the IDCD. From this the IDCD calculates an Approximation Impression of his environment, his orientation to the environment, and dangers to those around him and to himself. The Approximation Impression is then pipelined to the Next Most Likely Action Buffer of his Motivational Processor. Unless the IDCD requests a cancellation of the pipelined action within 200 milliseconds, the action will be taken. Cancellation occurs only if the IDCD deduces a contradictory Approximation Impression within the 200 millisecond window."

"How much will that affect him?" asked Mio.

"He'll react slower in an emergency. Decisions that used to take, say 400 milliseconds, may take as long as 700 maybe 800," Bill answered, starting to change the charred IC's.

"I guess we'll just have to live with it," reasoned Mio.

The Gigabus continued its flight to the Gigastation space port while Bill madly soldered the assassinated machine. Three hours passed and finally he had replaced the last IC. "Now, the only problem is these dangling wires I had to add to repair the burned etch traces. I need something sticky to keep them in place."

"Do you have any tape?" asked Mio.

"No, I ran out of it on the last job I did. There must be something around here we can use."

They looked throughout the cabin for something to do the job, but found nothing. Looking through her satchel, Mio came across the packages of stun-gum she had grabbed when they fled her laboratory. "What about these, Senor Torque?"

"Stun-gum? It might work, but who's going to chew it?"

They both slowly turned toward Dr. Kubar.

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## Chapter 9

### Bommbahloombah

"Ookahlah bookahlah oogity boogity," said Bommbahloombah the baboon as he climbed a tree to grab a coconut to drop on the brushed metal helmets of the men in grey below him.

"Awwwwwk awwwwwk eeecheereechee!" he shrieked as a long aluminum pole with a nylon rope noose caught him around the neck from behind, strangling him.

"That makes number twelve, we're done," said one Compol to the other.

They stuffed Bommbahloombah into a burlap sack. Bommbahloombah was frightened. Where was he going, what would they do with him, how could he escape? He bounced up and down in the sack for what seemed like an eternity, until he was thrown through the air and landed on a pile of other moving sacks in the back of a Compol cruiser. Although he could see only the inside of the dark sack, he smelled his brothers and sisters and was comforted somewhat.

"I must escape," thought Bommbahloombah, tearing furiously at the burlap sack, "there must be a way out of here." The sack held firm against his repeated efforts to free himself. "Help! Somebody help me!"

In the cabin of the cruiser, one Compol turned to the other, "Where are these monkeys going?" he asked.

"I think these are for parts, mainly brain transplants," replied the other, keying in destination information to begin the trip through the labyrinth of the Gigacorp complex. "I know I was a nobody until I had mine."

"Me too!" replied his companion. "Want some gum?"

The yellow cruiser rose from the garden complex and proceeded toward its programmed destination, leaving behind the large glass enclosures of the Tree Museum and a remnant of forgotten times. The cruiser slowed at the admission gate where an attendant approached.

"That'll be 3.00 creditons. 1.50 creditons per person," the attendant said.

"Compols," replied the driver Compol, flashing the cruiser's spotlight in the attendants eyes.

"I can see you're Compols, but you're still going to have to pay a buck-and-a-half each."

The rider Compol keyed in data to his terminal and the cruiser's molecular reducer module rose several meters into the air and pointed toward the attendant. Four red-colored beams extended from the lens and marked out a square on the floor surrounding him. The Compol pressed another button and an aqua-colored beam burst out of the lens and followed the trail of the red beam, cutting out a neat square of floor that fell to the level below along with the attendant. The two Compols faced each other, placed their right fists on their chests, extended their right arms, banged on their chests again, placed the palms of their left hands together, and shouted, "Compol! Compol! Compol!" The cruiser resumed its trip with two Compols and eleven burlap sacks of baboons.

---

As the cruiser disappeared down the hall, a hooded robed figure carrying a burlap sack appeared from behind a visi-phone booth. He looked quickly around him and headed for the nearest topological reconfigurator.

---

"Nuke 'em, Gus! Nuke 'em!" shouted Grodin Pudge at Gus Stoppo as they were leaving the Gigaport Launch Bay on level 153. "They think they can get away with it. They think that they can fool old Grody Pudge. Well, they're wrong."

"Vell," replied Gus, "yust let me get the portable command post from the cruiser."

While Grodin questioned the Gigaport receptionist, Gus walked across the wide hallway to the cruiser and returned with a large briefcase. Gus pressed a button on the side and legs shot out of the bottom. The case unfolded into a standard nuclear holocaust workstation with red-phone option. "I'll yust enable tracking." He keyed in some data. The center screen of the workstation displayed the sphere of the earth and surrounding space. A small blinking red sprite appeared on the screen. "Here they are boss, yust like you t'ought. They must have turned the shuttle craft around."

"Give me one of those keys." Grodin Pudge took his key and inserted it into the slot on the extreme left-hand side of the workstation, Gus inserted his key in the one on the right. "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Turn it on three, Gus! One...two...three!" Gus and Grody turned their keys. Sixteen missile silos in the closest proximity to the workstation activated. Gus and Grody could feel the shaking as sixteen metal/cement composite doors rolled back, releasing sixteen MK missiles breathing fire and smoke from their pits.

Through the purple haze of the inert atmosphere of earth the sixteen leviathans rose, each carrying 1024 one-gigaton warheads.

"Vell, boss," asked Gus, "do you t'ink that sixteen is enough?"

"Hey, Gus! Who's the boss around here? I gotta keep a couple thousand of these around for the merger with Commucorp, you know!" Grodin snapped.

"Yust vondering, boss," said Gus.

"Let's go back down to Compol Central and watch the fireworks on the big screen," suggested Grody as he lit up a cigar and began to blow mushroom clouds as the sixteen MK's appeared on the screen, plodding along toward their target.

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## Chapter 10

### Lifeboat Robotto

"You must admit, Senor Torque, he is rather funny in this state," said Mio from Rio.

"Yeah, but I don't know how much more of this I can take."

Dr. Kubar was tethered to the head of the aisle of seats inside the cabin of the shuttle craft. He played a few notes on a violin he had found in Bill's tool bag and continued, "Take my wife, please! This lady went to her doctor. She said, 'Doctor, you gotta help me. I've been bitten by a dog!' The Doctor told her, 'Lady, if I was a dog, I'd bite you too!' Take my violin, please!"

Bill turned back to Mr. Robotto, still strapped in a seat, running his last set of diagnostics. The automaton was quietly speaking, "Rubber baby buggy bumpers. Rubber baby buggy bumpers. Toy boat. She sells sea shells by the sea shore. Verbalization diagnostics completed."

"Good, Senor Robotto," said Mio, "You seem to be your old self again."

"It helps to be fault-tolerant," the robot replied.

"Every line of your umbilical interface has a circuit breaker in it now, Robotto. They won't be able to do that to you again," Bill added.

"I am as grateful as I can emulate," replied Robotto.

Bill unstrapped Mr. Robotto and he stood up, rolled back to the command console, and resumed piloting the craft. Dr. Kubar continued with his stun-gum induced monologue, making Bill and Mio laugh until their sides ached. The laughing didn't last long, however.

Mr. Robotto monitored the Gigabus' sensors:

```
FWD> status/sensors
```

```
- Gigabus Sensor Status -
Anti-gravitation Motivators: OK      Gradual Retrograde
Pulser: OK
Orbital Recognitator: OK            Transitional Permutator: OK
-- SYMSG : RADAR DETECTION ALERT : ICBM DETECTED
Positional Rectifier: OK            Synthetic Crystal Oven: OK
-- SYMSG : SWITCHING RADAR OUTPUT TO MAIN SCREEN
Propositional Repudiator: OK        Escape Capsule Electronics: OK
-- SYMSG : RADAR DETECTION ALERT : MULTIPLE ICBM'S DETECTED
```

Mr. Robotto spoke, "I think we have a problem. The host has detected sixteen multiple warhead ICBM's. They appear to be converging upon our coordinates. The host informs me that the ICBM's are all within 15,000 kilometers, and they have mirrored into 16,384 individual re-entry vehicles," said Mr. Robotto.

"This trip just doesn't seem to be able to get off the ground," said Bill as he moved toward a large sealed door at the rear of the shuttle craft. "Here's the pod-bay door. Hopefully there's an emergency escape capsule." Mio helped him open the door and then climbed through.

"It is here, Senor Torque," she shouted back to him, moving toward the escape capsule and opening its hatch, "and there's room enough for three."

"The host informs me that the 16,384 re-entry vehicles are all within 14,000 kilometers and converging on our coordinates," said Mr. Robotto.

Torque yelled to Mr. Robotto, "Detach yourself and grab Dr. Kubar! You're going to have to pilot us out of here with an escape pod!"

The robot obeyed and disconnected himself from the host umbilical cable. Gently grasping Dr. Kubar, he rolled down the aisle toward the pod-bay door.

"Open the pod-bay door, pal," said Dr. Kubar to Mr. Robotto.

"It is open, Dr. Kubar. All you must do is enter. Please hurry, there is not much time left to escape destruction," replied the robot, rolling into the pod-bay.

Bill and Mio strapped Dr. Kubar, then themselves, into the escape capsule seats. Mr. Robotto closed the capsule hatch and the pod-bay door and backed up onto a small platform at the front of the escape capsule. Two clamps enclosed and gripped his tractor feet securely and the automaton placed his arms into the control gloves. As the pod-bay depressurized, he plugged the escape capsule umbilical into his chest. Suddenly he was more of a machine. With the twitch of a metal finger the Gigabus' outer escape hatch opened. Releasing the securing clamps holding the capsule, Mr. Robotto applied light rear thrust and backed the escape capsule out of the pod-bay. Releasing a final tether, he moved the capsule away from the shuttle craft and faced the proper course direction to the Gigastation space port. Then Mr. Robotto applied full thrust to the main engines, and the capsule darted away.

Observing the data coming from the capsule's rear camera, Mr. Robotto shortly saw a light that confused him. "The sun has changed its position," he thought momentarily. Then his CCD arrays detected the sun to his left, ahead of him. He observed the new data coming from the rear camera. The light was not as bright. Again he checked and it was dimmer -- he ignored further data from it.

---

A hooded, robed figure sneaked into the Gigaport lobby on level 153 with Bommbahloombah riding on his back. He purchased two tickets from the Compol voice print pedestal and walked by the dazed receptionist, through the door leading to the Gigaport, and into an awaiting Gigabus. Bommbahloombah didn't know where this human had come from or where he was taking him, but he knew he wasn't in a burlap sack anymore or being chased by the humans with the brushed metal heads.

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## Chapter 11

### Doctor Flat Top

Frank knew he was in trouble when the company police arrived at his cubicle.

"You are Markington, Francis William 44-6275?" a Compol asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Your controller has reported peculiar behavior from you. Come with us," ordered the other, pulling down the visor on his brushed metal helmet and brandishing a portable molecular reducer. "Do you deny drinking beer in your cubicle and sending the following messages through the Gigacorp electronic mail?" He shoved a print-out in Frank's face:

```
times 17.3.84 bb speech malreported africa rectify
times 19.12.83 forecasts 3 yr 4th quarter 83 misprints
verify current issue
times 14.2.84 miniplenty malquoted chocolate rectify
times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusgood refs
unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling
giganews 30.8.84 civvy mio from rio doubleplusungood
rotteneggsthrow gp tonguesoutstick gp unperson rectify
```

"Uh, no, I don't deny it. It was only meant as a joke. All it is is "newspeak", the condensed English language of George Orwell's 1984. The main character, Winston Smith, had a job in the Ministry of Truth. His job was modify records of the past to conform to the government's outlook. 'bb' is BIG BROTHER. 'times 17.3.84 bb speech malreported africa rectify' means a speech reported in the London Times for March 17, 1984 needs to be modified because it mentions an invasion into Africa that never occurred. Smith was to modify the news story to make it look as if Big Brother has predicted the whole thing. Ha, ha, isn't that funny?"

"Mr. Pudge doesn't think so! Come along now."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To see Doctor Flat Top!"

"No!" Frank shrieked. "Not Doctor Flat Top! No! Help!"

They dragged him screaming down the hallway, past the security station, and into a small room with a red and white striped spinning pole next to the door. There Frank saw him, motioning with his arms to come into the room, pointing at a large throne-like chair.

"Come in, come in!" he said, "I'm Doctor Flat Top. Do you want the works today, or just a trim?"

"The works!" shouted one of the Compols.

The Compols placed Frank in the chair. Doctor Flat Top choked him with a small sheet he tied around his neck. Flat Top removed what appeared to be a large thick metal comb from a drawer and placed it on Frank's head. Then Frank heard an electric buzzing, his hair fell to the ground in sheets. It was hideous torture, he blacked out from the pain.

When he awoke, Doctor Flat Top smiled at him as he handed him a stick of a sweet chewy substance. Frank popped it in his mouth and began to chew it. He was sure that he felt his sanity returning with each chomp.

Frank returned to his cubicle.

---

"Hello, this is Mr. Robotto. Normally I just talk to the characters in this absurd story, but I want to take this time to talk to you, the reader. It's hard work to keep a story like this going, you know. The author seriously considered leaving us in the Gigabus back in the last chapter. Fortunately, I was able to persuade him to find us a way out of there, which he did. Why not show your appreciation, and send him a contribution of \$100, \$200, maybe even \$1000 or more. No gift over \$100 is too small. That's all I have to say. Thank you. Doesn't the earth look nice from up here? What a beautiful purple ball. I detect that we are approaching the Gigastation space port, so I will release this hyperexistential channel that I am talking to you on and continue the flight. Thank you for your time. Releasing channel."

---

Stedur the Rastafarian monk pulled back his hood and looked at Bommbahloombah. "From now on, you shall no longer be called Bommbahloombah. You are Raster Bommbahloombah!"

"What a great name," thought Raster Bommbahloombah looking around the room with the moving picture of a funny purple ball.

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## Chapter 12

### Sergeant Rock

Mr. Robotto-Pod began broadcasting a distress signal as he neared the massive Gigastation space port. Sunlight danced off the irregular surfaces of the large wheel as it spun against the multitude of stars singing in the background. Looking like one of Mio's mutant beetles, Mr. Robotto-Pod slowed to docking speed and assumed a rotation matching that of the Gigastation. As the wheel eclipsed the sun, a round docking bay door split into an eight segment pie forming a large asterisk of light in the darkness. The segments disappeared and Mr. Robotto-Pod carefully maneuvered himself into the docking bay. As the segments closed behind him, his audio sensors once again began to detect noise and he lowered the escape capsule down to the pseudo-grav floor.

When the docking bay had completely pressurized, Mr. Robotto detached himself from the escape capsule and rolled off the robotoid pilot's platform. He moved toward the hatch and opened it.

"There is a God!" said Bill Torque, crawling out of the hatch and kissing the docking bay floor. "But, I'm probably radioactive!"

Mio from Rio assisted Dr. Kubar from the capsule, "We are all radioactive now!"

"The capsule is lined with lead," Mr. Robotto informed them.

"Senor Robotto, you think of everything!"

Dr. Kubar puckered his lips and began to wave his hands rhythmically. "The corp-cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be. The billions and billions and billions and millions and quadrillions and quintillions and..."

Dr. Caramel Sorghum (a.k.a. Kubar) was interrupted by the opening of the inner airlock of the docking bay from which poured out six heavily armed Compols and a menacing looking MX series automaton with ten molecular reducers for eyes and seven photon cannons protruding from his chest.

"Halt, in the name of Santa Claus!" shouted the Compol sergeant.

Mr. Robotto's approximation impression circuitry quickly (even with the damage) formed the action that had to be taken. "Stand behind me!" ordered the robot. Bill, Mio, and Dr. Kubar scrambled behind their champion machine. Mr. Robotto extended his arms and bent his forearms so they pointed straight up (relatively speaking). Two caps covering his elbow joints exploded open revealing two jet sprayers.

The MX automaton spoke to Mr. Robotto, "I am Gorgatron, Master of the Universe! I have orders to take you and your humans dead or alive! Prepare to be reduced to atomic particles!" From the machine's ten eyes emerged red marking beams that silhouetted Robotto. But, before the malevolent machine could produce the aqua molecular reducer beam, Mr. Robotto acted.

Accelerating out of harm's way, he enabled his facial woofers and tweeters and the towers on his back. Mr. Robotto's voice boomed throughout the entire docking bay enclosure, petrifying the Compols, "This way troops! Sergeant Rock will get you through! Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat! But-ta but-ta but-ta! Pa-zow-ee! But-ta but-ta!" Water began spraying from his elbows, and because of the absence of true gravity in the open air of the bay, the water encased Gorgatron and the Compols each in a big bubble. Sparks flew from Gorgatron. The Compols tried swimming in their personal pools, but found that the slightest struggle just caused the bubbles to bounce erratically around the bay.

Mr. Robotto led the group through the inner airlock door and into the ring-way, the large corridor that encircled the entire Gigastation. Mio closed the airlock door and turned to Bill, "What do we do now?" "When all else fails, eat!" replied Bill putting down his tool bag and pointing to the McGiga's Hamburgers sign hanging from the ceiling of the ring-way at the point where the corridor curved up out of their sight.

Dr. Kubar was still babbling, "...and billions and billions and billions and billions sold."

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## Chapter 13

### At McGiga's

"You, you're the one.  
You work in stark confusion.  
You, you're the one.  
You need a burger transfusion.  
Come right in and buy a sack of burgers and french fri-i-ies.  
And keep on coming back until the day you die  
To McGiga's. We do it all to you!

You work hard for peanut pay!  
Come and throw it all away  
At McGiga's. We do it all to you!"

sang the strangely dressed crew of three burger-jerks behind the order desk of the McGiga's cubicle. They were wearing red and white striped Neru jackets, golden pants, and rainbow beanies with a propeller on top. One of the young men stepped up and said, "Welcome to McGiga's. May I have your order?"

"You go first," said Bill to Mio.

"I would like carne tampiquena, flautas, mole, and picadillo."

"Huh?" replied the burger-jerk, "Uh, I don't see those on my buttons here on the register. Welcome to McGiga's. May I have your order?"

"How about chilaquiles and carne adobada?" requested Mio.

"Uh, let's see, burger, double burger, triple burger, mega burger, cheese burger, double cheese burger...", the boy behind the counter began reading each of the 256 buttons on his credit register.

Bill turned to Mio. "Fast food is a myth," he whispered.

"...fries, large fries, mega fries, stunion rings. Nope, I don't see a button for any of those either. Welcome to McGiga's. May I have your order?"

"I guess I'll have a mega burger, a small fr...", Mio began to answer.

"Do you want that on a kaiser roll or a stun-bun?"

"Kaiser, and I would like..."

"Would you care for some french fries with that mega burger?"

"Yes, and I would like a sh..."

"How about a cold thick creamy shake to go with that mega burger and fries?"

"Yes, yes, yes! And perhaps you would like a stick of gum?" replied Mio, reaching into her satchel.

"Thank you very much. Welcome to McGiga's. May I have your order?" the burger-jerk asked Mr. Robotto.

"I do not assimilate human food. My water tanks are low, however. If you could spare forty-five gallons of water, I would emulate gratitude," Robotto answered.

"I'm sorry. We don't serve ice water." The boy turned to Torque, "Welcome to McGiga's. May I have your order?"

"Two-triple-cheese-side-order-of-fries-and-a-chocolate-shake," blurted Bill in one breath.

"Perhaps you would like a nice hot apple pie with...", continued the burger-jerk.

"No, that's it!" yelled Bill.

"We don't have any mega burgers or triple cheese up right now. We're sorry, but you'll have to wait about 45 minutes."

"Great," said Bill.

"Your total comes to 55.50 creditons. We will call you when your order is ready."

Mio turned to Bill, "Senor Torque, remember never to come here again when we are making an escape."

"Don't worry," grunted Bill.

---

Pushka Buttonov lifted the receiver from her desk phone. It was Fiftig Zevenchev the Commissar of Personal Freedom. "Madame Premier, we have been monitoring the activities of Gigacorp for the past 48 hours. According to our information, they may be planning a merger. We have reason to believe that they are setting the atmosphere for merger talks by launching and detonating sixteen MK ICBM's, whereas they claim it was to stop a renegade robot."

"Thank you, Fiftig. It appears that Grodin Pudge means business. Well, we can do business, also. Monitor their activities and keep me posted." Pushka hung up the phone and thought, "What is that grubby little man up too?" She reached for the red phone, but paused. No, she would wait until there was more data, until a merger offer from Pudge was certain. The PEO (People's Executive Officer) of Commucorp wouldn't be tricked by Grody Pudge's tactics, she had read his books!

---

Raster Bommbahloombah poked his face in front of the chubby bald man strapped into his shuttle craft seat. "Oogity boogity?" he asked, but the man didn't reply.

"Gus! Get this red gorilla off of me!" yelled Grody Pudge to Gus Stoppo.

"Vat you vant me to do to him, boss?" asked Gus.

"Anything, just get him outta here!"

Gus unfastened the snap on his portable molecular reducer holster and pulled out the menacing weapon. He pointed it at Bommbahloombah's head. As the red marking beams streamed from the reducer, Bommbahloombah grabbed it from Gus and pointed it at back at him. The aqua beam bored a hole through Gus Stoppo's head. Stedur grabbed the reducer and strapped Bommbahloombah back in his seat.

"Gus! Gus! Speak to me!" shouted Pudge, looking at the wall behind Gus through the hole in Gus's head.

"Yah, I'm here boss! I t'ink I'm okay. It's jyst a flesh woont."

A bell chimed and an announcement came from the Gigabus' flight computer, "The captain process has turned on the no-smoking and fasten-seat-belt signs. Please fasten your seat belt and return your seat to an upright position. Prepare for docking with the Gigastation."

"You know vat boss? I don't have a headache any more!"

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## Chapter 14

### Gigacorp Diagnostics

George Frankenstein stood at the head of a long walnut conference table in the Gigacorp Research and Development main conference room. Around the massive table sat the 3,845 Gigacorp diagnostic programmers, design engineers, test engineers, and anyone else involved in the diagnostics for the new Gigacorp GRUNT Processor (General Redundancy Undergirth and Natural Transaction Processor with Stunnadian honey-cube architecture).

George addressed the masses, "The first thing we want to decide today is: what language are we going to use to write diagnostics? Are there any suggestions?"

With this, an odd thing happened. Everyone in the room stood up. Suddenly different members of the evolving mob started to shout out above the general din, "Assembler! Assembler!" or "C! C! C!" or "Pascal! Pascal!" or "Ada! Ada! Ada!" The mob then began to separate into about a dozen distinct groups, each huddling like a rugby scrum, yelling and screaming the name of the language that they preferred. Then the groups' leaders selected those members who had brought along their recreational javelins to the meeting. These persons were placed around the groups in circles with their javelins outstretched in all directions. The groups rammed each other for several minutes, until George had had enough, "Everybody! Sit down and shut up!"

The groups slowly disbanded and everyone returned to his seat, except for the group favoring BASIC that was carried away to the soylent factory.

"Thank you!" George continued, "Perhaps we need to back up. Let's see. Perhaps we should define what a diagnostic is first. Does anyone have an idea?"

Again another strange thing happened. Everyone in the room stood up and began to espouse their particular diagnostic philosophy. George could only make out bits and pieces.

"... diagnostics, while they do not have to locate specific IC's, they should allow ..."

"... should tell the person trying to fix the board the exact failure and locate ..."

"Diagnostics are the foundation of this corporation, without them..."

"Diagnostics are a very bad evil!"

"I believe that diagnostics should replace human beings by ..."

Before long new groups had formed around those of similar diagnostic persuasion with the javelin bearing members again encompassing the shouters. The roar in the room was more than George could stand, "Everybody sit down and shut up!"

Reluctantly everyone returned to his seat.

"Perhaps we should get down to the real question at hand: should our diagnostics be menu or command line driven?"

As before, everyone stood and began to talk. This time only two groups formed, those for menus and those for command lines. One of the members of the command line group produced a portable molecular reducer.

"Put that reducer away!" shouted George, as the red marking beams began to outline the menu group. "Duck!"

All of the members of the menu group dove for the floor as the aqua reducing beam cut out their silhouette in the wall behind them. George pulled a portable gas mask from his pocket and strapped it on his face, then he pushed a secret button under the conference table, signaling Compol Central and releasing a cloud of purple stun-gas into the room.

One by one everyone stood at attention, smiled, and returned to his seat. George summed up the meeting, "Okay, I think we agree that BASIC is the language to use for diagnostics." Everyone stared straight ahead and nodded. "And that diagnostics are anything that helps someone fix a broken machine." Everyone nodded. "And that we will use menus." Everyone nodded.

"We'll have another go at it tomorrow," said George as fourteen armed Compols burst through the conference room door.

"We have a reported disturbance and the unauthorized use of a molecular reducer," croaked the Compol sergeant.

"Please escort these ladies and gentlemen to the Tonsorial Engineering section and deliver them to Dr. Flat Top."

"Yes, sir!" replied the Compol, as his associates began herding the large group into the paddy cruiser outside the conference room.

George waited until the room cleared, then turned to his assistant, Heckler Bemoanus, who was still sitting at the table with a gas mask on. "Good meeting? Huh, Heckler?"

"As usual, boss."

---

As they waited for their fast food, Bill and Mio sat down at one of the small McGiga's tables. Mr. Robotto excused himself to go to the bathroom to fill his water tanks. Dr. Kubar donned a red and white striped jacket and propeller beanie and joined the burger-jerk chorus.

"We're going to have to find a starship," said Bill.

"That should be very interesting, considering the luck we've had so far," replied Mio. "Where will we look?"

"The starships are kept in the main hub of this space wheel. We'll have to find one of the eight spoke-ways that lead from the outer ring to the hub. Once we make it there, we should be able to sign-on as the crew for a cargo ship. They make regular runs to Barnard-3," explained Bill.

"What about Dr. Kubar?" Mio wondered.

They both looked at him singing away with the burger-jerks and frying chicken stun-nuggets in deep fat.

"He's seems pretty happy," said Bill, "and he's safe."

"Then let's leave him here," they concluded simultaneously.

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## Chapter 15

### The Ultimate Solution

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GIGACORP  
Inter-Office Memo

To: George Frankenstein, Heckler Bemoanus  
From: Elliott Quik, Temporary Delegated CEO, Gigacorp  
Date: 10/12/91  
Re: The Final Decision Regarding Gigacorp Diagnostics

After reviewing your report of the results from the thirty-eighth diagnostic meeting of the GRUNT Processor project, and after careful consideration of your recommendations; the Gigacorp Board has established the following as the official Gigacorp diagnostic policy:

1. Diagnostics confuse persons with normal psychological sets.
2. Diagnostics are hard, if not impossible to define.
3. Diagnostic meetings lead to upset stomachs, ulcers, and ultimately death.
4. Diagnostics serve no useful purpose to a project.
5. Diagnostic programmers are insane.
6. Diagnostics are a very bad evil.

With this in mind, we have taken the liberty of disbanding the Gigacorp diagnostic department. Diagnostic programmers are now considered corp-criminals and Compol has started to round-up these renegades from justice. You can do yourself and your corporation a real service by exposing any diagnostic programmer who is hiding in your cubical subsection to your controller.

Gigacorp has always had your best interest in mind and will continue to protect you, its employee.

That is all! Return to your cubicle!

---

Grody Pudge logged-off the portable terminal and returned it to Gus Stoppo who put it in his side pouch. "That's what I like, decisive action when I'm away," said Pudge as he and Gus stepped through the inner air lock of the docking bay and onto the ring-way of the Gigastation space wheel. Looking down the long corridor that curved up out of sight in both directions, he saw only the advertising signs in front of the service cubicles.

"Vell, boss, the boys at Central said they docked in the bay next to ours. They can't have gotten far."

"That's true. Besides, I'm hungry. Let's get something to eat," replied Grody.

"There's a McGiga's down that way," said Gus as they started toward the golden dollar signs in the distance.

---

Bommbahloombah and Stedur remained in the docking bay until Pudge and Stoppo had left. Stedur held Bommbahloombah's shoulders and said, "Raster Bommbahloombah, we must part company. I am going back to the planet to do my work, but you are going to find a new home. I will take you to a friend now and then I must leave you. She will care for you."

"Oo-ee-oo-ah-ah. Ting. Tang. Walla walla bing-bang," replied Bommbahloombah with a sad face as he followed his friend through the air lock and down the corridor in the opposite direction of Gus and Grody.

---

Mr. Robotto opened the McGiga's bathroom door then shut it quickly after his CCD's collected a full second of data. "I have an identification match with the two humans I saw standing at the McGiga's order desk. One of them is Pudge Grodin A and the other is Stoppo Gustav Von. These are the two humans who are chasing Bill and Mio. If I am seen by them, then they will be exposed. I will remain here until I have more data."

He opened the door a crack and increased the sensitivity of his audio detectors.

---

"Welcome to McGiga's. May I have your order?" Dr. Kubar asked Grody.

"I'll have a megaton salad and an ice tea. I'm on a diet," answered Grody.

"You need to go on a diet," replied Kubar.

"What?"

"I said you need to go on a diet, fatso!" was Kubar's remark.

"Now, wait a minute. Do you know who you are talking to?" asked Gus.

"Yeah, a fat guy who needs to go on a diet, Mr. Holier-in-the-head-than-thou."

"This guy's a diagnostic programmer, Gus! Grab him!" shouted Grody.

"Oye! He hasn't had his stun-gum," said the woman in the red and white striped jacket and propeller beanie as she emerged from the McGiga's kitchen cube followed by a large burger-jerk. The large man's jacket was about five sizes too small and his t-shirt stuck out between the button gaps, not to mention that the beanie was so small it could only sit on the top of his head.

"Yeah! Here, have some stunion rings," said Bill the burger-jerk, stuffing a handful into Dr. Kubar's mouth.

"Bien venido a McGiga's. May I have your order please?" asked Mio the burger-jerk.

"You order, Gus. I gotta go to the can."

---

Mr. Robotto watched as Pudge Grodin A walked toward the bathroom. He looked at the objects in the bathroom. His hand clamps grasped the air hand dryer and pried it from the wall. Backing up to the wall, he held the hand dryer in front of his chest and turned his head 180 degrees, hiding his facial electronics as best he could. Then he went into a partial system shutdown as the bathroom door swung open.

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## Chapter 16

### The Real \$pirit of Clau\$ma\$

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GIGACORP  
Inter-Office Memo

To: All Employees, Intelligent Machines, Compols  
From: Elliott Quik, for Grodin Pudge, CEO, Gigacorp  
Date: 10/12/91  
Re: This Year's Clau\$ma\$ Celebration

As you know, Clau\$ma\$ is just 2 1/2 months away. This year we will celebrate the birth of the Prince of Pence, \$anta Clau\$, with a really special bonus. Credit limits for all employees have had the ceilings removed with repayment terms of 100, 150, and 200 years (pass a legacy down to your children's children's children).

Remember, official corporate policy is that you MUST buy a present for each of the other 1,623,593,647 Gigacorp employees. So, what are you waiting for? Start buying!

Gigacorp has always had your best interest in mind and will continue to protect you, its employee.

That is all! Return to your cubicle!

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GIGACORP  
Inter-Office Memo

To: Compol Central  
From: Elliott Quik, Acting CEO, Gigacorp  
Date: 10/12/91  
Re: Diagnostic Programmer Round-Up

It has been brought to my attention by George Frankenstein that the diagnostic programmers seeking to avoid capture will probably congregate near the Tree Museum. Station extra Compols in that section. And, this time pay them the 1.50 creditons!

Gigacorp has always had your best interest in mind and will continue to protect you, its employee.

That is all! Return to your cruisers!

---

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GIGACORP  
Inter-Office Memo

To: Dr. Vernon Flat Top, Vice President, Tonsorial Engineering  
From: Elliott Quik, Would-Be-CEO, Gigacorp  
Date: 10/12/91  
Re: Our Plan

We are ready to become upwardly mobile. Compol is prepared to assist with the final arrangements. Clau\$ma\$ debt will keep most of them occupied for months. This is our finest hour.

Gigacorp has always had your best interest in mind and will continue to protect you, its employee.

That is all! Return to your barber shop!

---

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GIGACORP  
Inter-Office Memo

To: All Employees, Intelligent Machines, Compols  
From: Elliott Quik, CEO, Gigacorp  
Date: 10/12/91  
Re: The Death of Grodin Pudge

It is with the deepest regret that I must announce to you the death of our beloved CEO and Chairman, Grodin A. Pudge. Mr. Pudge and Gustav Von Stoppo of Compol met an untimely death when they were mistaken for criminal fugitives by an MX series automaton while docking at the Gigastation space port.

Dr. Vernon Flat Top has been promoted to Executive Vice President with all Vice Presidents reporting directly to him.

A briefing for all Vice Presidents will be held in the Tonsorial Engineering main conference room at 0200 hours. Dr. Flat Top will preside.

Gigacorp has always had your best interest in mind and will continue to protect you, its employee.

That is all! Return to your cubicle!

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## Chapter 17

### Domo Arigato, Mr. Robotto!

Grody Pudge finished washing his hands and walked over to the odd looking electric hand dryer standing against the bathroom wall. Being careful to avoid the spread of bacteria, he pushed the large button on the front of the dryer with his right elbow. Nothing happened. He pushed it again. Again, nothing happened. Then he stood back and slammed his foot into it. Mr. Robotto, in a state of semi-shutdown, had frozen his hand clamps around the dryer. He was able to hold the dryer for the first kick; but when Pudge wound up and delivered the second, the dryer slipped out of his grasp and crashed to floor on top of Grodin's big toe.

"Owwoo!" he screamed, hopping around the McGiga's bathroom holding his foot. Picking up the hand dryer, he hurled it into the mirror. Looking around the room and realizing that it was the only mirror, he yelled, "Now what do I use for a mirror?"

Mr. Robotto restarted himself. He turned his head to face Pudge and said, "Hello, I am the latest in mirror technology, Vanity-Vision." The robot then popped a latch on his stomach and a terminal keyboard unfolded, exposing a hidden terminal screen. Robotto fixed his CCD's on Pudge and channeled the output of his video capture buffer to his stomach screen.

"All right!" said Pudge, staring into the image on the screen. "This is better than MTV. What will they think of next?" Removing his comb and scraping it across his shining pate, Grody attempted to part his hair.

Mr. Robotto then began to interject, at every sixtieth frame, images he had stored in his long-term bubble buffer. He then began to insert the images every 30 frames: Pudge seemed unaffected by the subliminal suggestion and continued to comb his "hair". Robotto increased the data rate to every fifteenth frame: Grodin Pudge stopped combing. Robotto increased the rate again to every tenth frame: Grodin Pudge began to smile. The data rate was now every third frame: Grodin Pudge began to dance. The output of the CRT was now coming entirely from the bubble buffer. Grody stopped dancing and stared at the screen with his mouth hanging wide open. He then grabbed Mr. Robotto by the shoulder plates and whispered, "Go out and win this one for the Gipper!" after which he fell to the floor.

The bathroom door swung open. "Vhat for heck is going on around this crazy place?" Gus Stoppo declared, seeing Grodin on the floor. "Are your hemorrhoids acting up again, boss?" Assuming that to be the case, Gus turned to the Vanity-Vision mirror. "Vell, vhat do you know, an old moofie. I'll yust vatch it until the pain goes away. Foosball, my favorite...", Gus's voice faded away as he also readily succumbed to the output of Robotto's stomach.

Mr. Robotto thought, "Reagatron radiation appears to have a marked affect upon human beings." He released his stomach screen channel and buttoned the keyboard back into position. "Now what do I do? I need a new approximation impression. I will calculate one."

Bill Torque burst through the door, fearing the worst for his mechanical friend. He found something quite different.

"This is a fine fix you've gotten us into this time," said Oliver Pudge, swatting Stanley Stoppo on the head.

Stanley just removed his Compol general's cap, scratched the top of his head, and began to sob.

---

Pushka Buttonov looked out from her office atop 19 production floors of the Commucorp complex. She was curious about the reports her intelligence agents had been supplying her. Was a shake-up in the works at Gigacorp? Was Pudge on the way out? Perhaps now was the time for merger.

---

"Well, my red friend. So you want to travel the stars? You've come to the right place," said Rosy the cargo ship captain to Bommbahloombah as they waved good-bye to Stedur the Monk, jogging away in the distance. "Come on into the ship. According to Stedur, we're going to have a new crew signing on shortly, and then we're off for Barnard-3. I guess they don't have much choice, since I'm the only one docked."

The Gigastation space port wheel was approximately 50 kilometers in circumference with eight six-kilometer spokes leading to the starship docking area located in the central hub. The hub was a squat cylinder, slightly wider than the wheel and four kilometers in diameter, with the ability to dock and service 64 large passenger and/or cargo ships.

Rosy led Bommbahloombah to docking bay 27 and into one of the sealed gang-ways that was connected to Rosy's ship. The large sleek metallic blue starship rested in a magnetic field within the docking enclosure that opened into space on both ends. Walking through the gang-way and into the airlock of the ship, Rosy turned and said to Bommbahloombah, "Welcome to the cargo ship Blutomo."

"Oogaboogaboogaboo!" said Bommbahloombah respectfully.

The outer airlock shut. The inner airlock opened. Rosy and Bommbahloombah entered the spacious cargo bay of the ship where space dock workers were busy loading hermetically sealed aluminum cargo cubes of grain and other provisions.

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## Chapter 18

### Dungeons and Diagnostics

Zyzzx 'Zee' Zeeboomzee placed the four foot long EMMBU rod (Employee Morale and Motivation Booster Unit) on Frank Markington's neck as he lay sleeping in the fold-down sleep shift cot in his cubicle. Zee squeezed the contoured handle grip, releasing a 100-kilovolt-at-3-watts jolt that threw Frank from the cot and left him convulsing on the cubicle floor for several minutes. Throwing a bucket of ice water on the shaking mass of flesh, Zee asked, "Do you have a minute to talk?" Grasping for objects in his cube, Frank finally managed to raise himself up and stand before his controller.

Rubbing his neck, Frank replied, "I guess so."

Zee jabbed the EMMBU rod into his neck again and squeezed the handle, lifing Frank four feet into the air and slamming him into one of the twelve foot tall walls of the cubicle. "You will address me properly", Zyzzx shouted, throwing another bucket of ice water on him.

After he revived, Frank dragged himself into his chair. "I'm sorry. I forgot. 'I guess so, mein controller.' You know, every time you do this, you ruin my listings."

"That is insignificant. What we have to discuss is more important."

"What's that?" asked Frank, reaching into his desk drawer for the antacid bottle.

"What have you been working on lately?" probed Zee.

"Uh, uh, OS Kernel," replied Frank uneasily.

"Is that all?"

"Sure, what do you think I've been doing?"

"Have you written any diagnostics?" Zee continued the probe.

"A couple, but only because I had to have something..."

"Silence!" demanded Zee, reaching for the portable molecular reducer on his hip. "That's what I suspected. Come on, we're going to Compol Central, unless you want me to reduce you right here. Come to think of it, that's not a bad idea." Frank moved in front of his cube sink/toilet combo and stood bravely, prepared to move into eternity. Zee leveled the reducer at Frank's head and squeezed the trigger. Red marking beams streamed from the weapon, encasing Frank in a laser cocoon. But, Frank just stepped aside. The aqua reducing beam spewed out, hit the mirror above the cube sink, and boomeranged back at Zee who disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Looking at the grease spot on his cubicle floor, Frank realized the implications. Reducing a controller was a capital corp-crime. He was now a corp-criminal, a fugitive from justice. And worst of all, although he had only written two exercisers in his career, he would now be considered a diagnostic programmer.

Grabbing his jogging bag, he stuffed it with all of his most precious belongings including his programmer's calculator, his Synapse System Reference Manual, a change of underwear, and 1.50 credits. Picking up the EMMBU rod that was lying on the floor, Frank left the cubicle and headed for the only place he could find refuge -- the Tree Museum.

---

```
GK-777> DND

Welcome to Dungeons and Diagnostics

Initializing, please wait...

You are a diagnostic programmer in your cubicle at a small
Silicon
Valley start-up company.
To your left is the entrance of your cubicle.
In the distance you can hear purchasing agents having a
Tupperware
party. You also can hear the steady beat of a line printer.
On your desk is a portable AM/FM stereo, a portable
molecular reducer,
a box of Alka-Seltzer, and a jar of water.

Your command: TAKE REDUCER

Taken.

Your command: LEFT

You are outside your cubicle.
To your left you hear purchasing agents having a Tupperware
party.
To your right you hear the steady beat of a line printer.

Your command: LEFT

You are at a Tupperware party with a crew of purchasing
agents.

Your command: REDUCE AGENTS

Party pooper! You wiped out the Tupperware party!
You are standing in a burned out area.
From behind you can hear the steady beat of a line printer.

Your command: EXIT

Dungeons and Diagnostics terminated. Your score: 42
```

```
GK-777> QUIT
```

```
Interactive Session Terminated
```

```
TORQUE logged out at 10/12/91 12:48:32.588384772
```

Mr. Robotto closed and locked his stomach screen while Bill and Mio finished eating their meal. Dr. Kubar, Grodin Pudge, and Gus Stoppo were all singing McGiga's jingles behind the order desk, taking turns spinning one another's beanie propellers. Rolling up to the counter, Mr. Robotto spoke with Dr. Kubar. Bill and Mio threw the myriad of wrappers and containers into an instant-incinerator on the wall. Mr. Robotto met them as they left the McGiga's cubicle and entered the wheel-way. Walking as fast as they could, the group headed for the nearest Gigastation spoke intersection that was about one kilometer away and marked with the flashing blue lights of a Compol security station.

As they approached the intersection of the spoke, an armed Compol challenged them, "Halt! I must see your identification!"

Mio handed him the tickets to Barnard-3.

"These are no good. There has been a policy change on passenger travel from the Gigastation space port," the Compol droned. "All travel passes have been canceled. You will have to return to the planet."

"But, we are maintenance personnel," replied Mio, "How are we supposed to fix the equipment if we can't get to it?"

"Maintenance? Well, why didn't you say so?" said the Compol. "That's a horse of a different color. Come on through!" He escorted them through the spoke-way door and into a small shuttle cruiser. After Bill, Mio, and Robotto were strapped in, the Compol pressed several buttons on the outside of the cruiser and it started on its six-kilometer trip to the central hub.

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## Chapter 19

### Exodus

The Tree Museum was Gigacorp's large enclosed ecologarium that contained the only trees known to man. The area was encased with glass walls one kilometer tall surrounding the 10 kilometer square. Large fluorescent lamps bathed the growth below in a slightly blue light, supporting the photosynthesis of the surviving members of the plant kingdom. The only other plant life that was allowed was found in the personal hydroponic planters located in every employee's cubicle. These provided the Gigacorp employees with fresh herbs and vegetables to supplement their normal diet of stun-food.

An artificial river flowed through the middle of the Museum, providing the illusion of a peaceful woodland brook bubbling over rocks and fallen tree logs between banks of green astroturf. The artificial lights had begun to dim to simulate the day-night cycle essential to the survival of the small forest ecology, and the small animals began to scramble for cover from the falling night. Near the center of the Tree Museum, a large fire burned. Warming their hands by the fire and rubbing their bare arms, stood the survivors of the first wave of the diagnostic programmer round-up being conducted by Compol. Frank Markington looked upon the fire from behind a tree about 150 meters away. Clutching his EMMBU rod, he slowly made his way to another tree 25 meters closer to the fire and was grabbed from behind by two javelin bearing diagnostic programmers, Motta Fez and Mike Traveler.

"You're a controller, aren't you?" said the woman, jabbing Frank in the stomach with the javelin. "You've got an EMMBU!"

"No, no, I am a diagnostic programmer. My controller blew himself away with a molecular reducer and they think I did it."

"If you're a diagnostic programmer, you'll have to prove it," Traveler said, putting his javelin to Frank's throat, forcing him toward the bond fire.

"Here, on my neck, EMMBU burns!" Frank replied, pushing aside the javelin and showing them the charred holes in his throat.

"You could have done that to yourself," answered Motta. "No, you will have to answer some questions first."

"And if I answer correctly, you'll believe I'm one of you?"

"Yes. The first question is: what language is best for diagnostics?"

"Assembler is a good language..." Frank started to say; but when he heard a murmuring in the large crowd, he continued, "... but C has some real flexibility..." Again a murmur shuddered through the crowd. "...and then again, Pascal..." Another murmur went through the crowd. "By golly, you know, I don't think there is one language that is best for diagnostics. I guess that decision depends on the project and the programmer."

The crowd gave out a resounding cheer. Suspicious, Motta still probed, "Very good, you have answered correctly. Now, what is a diagnostic?"

The crowd stood silently waiting for Frank's answer. He hesitated for about 45 seconds. You could hear a leaf fall from the trees. Then he answered slowly, "It is a very hard thing to define, but it covers an area of software that is more closely linked to the hardware than any other. It encompasses the development routines used by an engineer while designing a board; the software used by manufacturing in board, subsystem, and system-level testing; and the software used by field service to install and maintain systems. All of these are 'diagnostics', to exclude any of these areas would be, at best, unjust."

Again, the crowd cheered, Frank had answered the second question correctly. Motta then asked the clincher, "What are diagnostics, really?"

Frank looked around at the beleaguered faces silently staring at him. He thought and thought as he observed what writing diagnostic software had done to those about him. How it had taken strong, vibrant, enthusiastic individualists and reduced them to burnt-out basket cases. The older (30 to 35-year-olds) shook. Not from the cold, but from the years of writing code that never could catch the system-level problems. The younger ones showed the signs of impending disability from developing cryptic error messages. Then Frank realized what the only correct answer could be and shouted out, "Diagnostics are a very bad evil!"

The crowd began to jump and dance and shout, "Diagnostics are a very bad evil! Diagnostics are a very bad evil!" The roar could be heard throughout the small forest. Animals came out of their dens and watched with wonder at the commotion. Vultures circled above inquisitively.

A flash of bright light silenced the festivities, however. Diagnostic programmers scrambled behind trees, rocks, anything that could hide them from the Compols. The light scoured the area around the fire as it approached. The programmers clutched their hex calculators and diagnostic specs, hoping not to be discovered.

"I'm a friend!" a voice behind the light finally said.

"It's Stedur the monk!" yelled Motta, coming out from behind a tree and approaching the voice. "You can all come out now!"

One by one, the 455 diagnostic programmers emerged from their hiding places and once again huddled at the fire. Stedur stood on a fallen log and announced, "Your time has run out, we must leave before the next wave of Compols. Your associates have been taken to Compol Central where they are being given the choice of transferring to the software diagnostic department or death by reduction. Obviously, all of them have chosen reduction. I have reserved 24 seats on a Gigabus shuttle; if we squeeze a bit, I think we can get everyone in. Are you with me, or will you stay and risk capture by Compol?"

"How do we know what you are saying is true?" yelled a voice from the crowd.

"My sister is the Gigacorp receptionist!" answered Stedur confidently.

As one voice, the crowd responded, "We are with you!" Everyone grabbed his jogging bag and joined the exodus.

---

As the spoke-way shuttle cruiser zipped along its course toward the central hub, Bill reached in his tool bag and pulled out his worn, dog-eared book.

... can and will be controlled through the use of these cards allowing real-time locational information about the populace as predicted (although his timing was off) by Orwell.

So what can we, the field engineers of the world, do to loosen the techno-noose? Nothing! That's right, nothing! We can do nothing! We can have a birthday party for George Orwell. On the anniversary of his birth, four years from now, I propose that we, as a whole, close up our toolbags and call in sick. I propose that we continue to call in sick for two months and do nothing. Let the printer ribbons shred. Let the disc heads crash. Let the terminals go blank. We will do only what we can, nothing.

The date of Orwell's one-hundredth birthday is October 13, 1991. Mark it on your calendar. Remember that date. That is the date we will take our rightful...

"Son of a gun," thought Bill, glancing at his watch. It read 23:49 hours, 10/12/91. "The greatest day for a field engineer, and I miss it!"

---

WOTAN, the Gigacorp World Operations Tele-peripheral Analysis Node monitored the world-wide network:

```
*****
** RTC_INT_HANDLER
** Real Time Clock Interrupt Handler
**
** F. Markington
**
** Revision history:
** 3/4/85 - fm - initial coding - borrowed from RTC_DIAG,
**         the Real Time Clock diagnostic.
** 4/16/85 - fm - fixed spin-lock problem
** 7/23/85 - fm - changed error handling sequence
```

```
ZULU      EQU      $00101391
```

```
RTC_INT_HANDLER:
JMP      INTS_OFF                ** TURN OFF INTERRUPTS
BNE.L   RAW_NEW_DAY             ** NEW DAY?
BNE     NOT_NEW_DAY            ** NO - GO AROUND
CLR.L   SYS$TIME_SECS(A6)      ** CLEAR THE SECONDS
CLR.L   SYS$TIME_MINS(A6)      ** CLEAR THE MINUTES
CLR.L   SYS$TIME_HRS(A6)       ** CLEAR THE HOURS
JSR     INC_DATE                ** GO AND INCREMENT THE DATE
**                                     ** DO HAS NEW DATE
CMP.L   D0,#ZULU               ** NOW, BUCK?
BNE     NOT_NOW                ** NO
JSR     INTS_ON                ** NOW! - ENABLE INTERRUPTS
JSR     ZULU_DCM               ** BRANCH TO MONITOR
```

---

```
*****
** ZULU_DCM
** Special version of diagnostic monitor.
**
** B. Wheat
**
** Revision history:
** 12/18/84 - bw - initial coding
```

```
ZULU_DCM:
MOVE.L  #$42,D0                ** GET THE SPAWN DIAG
**                                     ** CODE
JSR     SEND_NET_COMMAND       ** START FULL DISK DIAGS
**                                     ** ON ALL NET NODES
JSR     RELEASE_NETWORK        ** RELEASE ALL NODES TO
**                                     ** STAND-ALONE MODE
LOOP:
JSR     SPAWN_DISC_DIAGS       ** TURN ON THE DIAGS HERE
BRA     LOOP                   ** AND ANOTHER, AND ANOTHER
```

---

"We're having trouble with WOTAN," said one analyst to another, "The stupid thing just disconnected all the nodes. Let's see what the status says. It's dead."

"Let's reboot."

"All right. Hit the reset button."

"Okay. There."

"This is strange:"

```
WOTAN MASTER OPERATING SYSTEM 38.0.3
10/13/91 00:04
== ERROR:
MASTER AND ALTERNATE MASTER DISC FATAL ERROR HEAD:0 CYL:0
== FULL RESTORE FROM TAPE REQUIRED
== CALL BJ
```

"We'll have to load the backup tapes."

"Where do you keep them?"

"I thought you've been making the backups the last five years."

"I thought you'd been making the backups the last five years."

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## Chapter 20

### Buckeroo Day

As the last of the diagnostic programmers left the Tree Museum, the animals sensed an air of urgency. Scurrying to their dens and holes and nests, they grabbed their jogging bags and scampered after the mob headed for the Gigaport and the awaiting Gigabus.

---

"Pushka. Pushka Buttonov. Where are my whales? Where are my alligators? Where are my great whites? Where are my lions and tigers and bears? Oh my, Pushka, are all the elephants dead? Where's the atmosphere and what have you done with the seas? What have they done to the earth? What have they done to our fair sister? Ravaged and plundered and ripped her and kicked her! Stuck her with knives in the side of the dawn and tied her with fences and dragged her down?" said the very gentle sound. "We want the world and we want it ... now!"

Pushka opened her eyes and leaned her executive chair forward. Several sleepless nights and now she was hallucinating. The reports made no sense. She had run spreadsheet after spreadsheet, but none of the projections matched. She had run the options through the Harvard Project Manager, but the results wouldn't be done until next year. Out of the corner of her eye she glanced at the red phone.

The intercom squawked, "Commissar Zevenchev is here to see you, Madame Premier."

"Send him in."

The tall walnut doors opened and in stepped Commucorp's Commissar of Personal Freedom. "Good morning, Madame Premier. I have the latest reports regarding the activities of Gigacorp. Grodin Pudge is definitely dead. Elliott Quik is in charge. They have disbanded their diagnostic department. But, the most curious news is that they have shut down their entire WOTAN computer network."

"How are we to interpret this? Hmmm." Pushka arose and paced in front of her desk. "Pudge, in his book 'The Absolute Doctrine of Corporate Behavior', suggested that the best way to throw a competitor out of the market was to trick him into thinking your own product didn't work. He said that you should produce a dummy product to compete directly with the current product of the target competitor. Market the dummy product as the replacement for the target product, and then announce two months later that you are having engineering problems. This lures the competition into a false sense of market security and he drops his research and development effort for new products. In the meantime, you develop the next generation of product. Two months after the announcement of your failure, you flood the market with your secret product that out-performs the existing target product and eliminates your competitor from future market share."

"What does that suggest in this situation?" asked Fiftig.

"They are about to unveil another network system, possibly neutron resistant this time. If that is the case, they are preparing for merger."

"Are there any other possible explanations?" asked Zevenchev, biting his lip.

"Yes, Pudge also said that another tactic to fool competitors was to use outlandish advertising as the first public relations a product receives," Pushka replied.

"Perhaps that explains this marketing poster we pilfered from their printing department." Fiftig removed the glossy black and white print from its mailing tube and unrolled it. "Look at this."

Pushka read the large print aloud, "The only problem with being IBM, Digital, or Amdahl is that some day, some kid is going to come along and shoot your socks off." She stared at the boyish face of the model on the poster. He was dressed in a gingham cowboy shirt with a leather vest, and had a silk handkerchief tied around his neck. On his head was a white cowboy hat, and in each hand he held two portable molecular reducers covered on the outside with integrated circuits. "Look at the symbolism here. Apparently their secret product is a new weapons oriented computer network. Look at the face of the model. He's wearing a white hat that hides the left half of his face, while the right half of his face is completely exposed. Notice that he has his head turned to our right."

"Very interesting, I didn't notice that before," said Fiftig.

"Subliminal suggestion takes all shapes and forms and media. Also the right side covers about 90% of the actual area of paper, while the left side covers only 10%. And that hideous eye! It looks like a cyclops if you stare at it long. But the most obviously aggressive suggestion can be found at his fingertips. Both triggers are being squeezed. Gigacorp can not be trusted. This poster is definitely an offensive act."

"You mean?"

"Gigacorp is planning a first-strike sneak merger," concluded Pushka.

"What shall we do, Madame Premier?"

"Nothing. It could be just a malfunction of their WOTAN machine. No, we will wait until their maintenance team has had time to fix the problem. That shouldn't take them more than two hours. We will wait and make a decision at that time."

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"There's a cargo cruiser in docking bay 27," said Mio as she read the large electronic billboard at the main docking bay lobby. "Is there a topo-rec somewhere?"

"There is a topological reconfigurator down that hall," replied Mr. Robotto.

The three strutted through the plush lobby unobserved (actually, Bill and Mio strutted, Mr. Robotto rolled rather rapidly). To those sitting in the lounges and working behind the desks or at terminals, Bill, Mio, and Robotto appeared as two maintenance personnel and their automaton. They stepped into the topological reconfigurator and stepped out at the entrance to docking bay 27.

"Oogahboogah beboopahloobah," greeted Raster Bommbahloombah.

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## Chapter 21

### The Last Chapter

"Time is up!"

Fiftig Zevenchev shuddered and lifted the briefcase handcuffed to his wrist. He laid it on Buttonov's desk and dialed in the combination on the latches. He looked in Pushka's tense face as he opened the case and revealed the lone red button. Pushka slowly moved her hand toward the button until her index finger rested upon it. She looked at Fiftig, who had covered his eyes. She wiped the perspiration from her forehead and then... and then... and then she pressed the button. The entire Commucorp complex began to rattle and quake as 43,882 multiple warhead ICBM's awoke in their silos. Heavy metal doors unlatched and politely moved aside as the mirrored griffins belched out smoke and fire, starting on their long parabolic paths that would end at the Gigacorp complex.

"For the Corp-land!" shouted Fiftig.

"For the Corp-land," said Pushka.

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"What do you mean the two-hour downtime for WOTAN triggered all the silos!?" yelled Elliott Quik at George Frankenstein and Heckler Bemoanus, tearing his project planning chart into little pieces.

"The GPP (Great Promiser and Protector) circuitry clicks on whenever WOTAN shuts down. Then it waits two hours and launches the nukes," answered George. "It worked flawlessly."

"Well, just turn them around then," proposed Elliott.

"We can't. They left the silos about 27 minutes ago," Heckler informed him. "Besides, it takes WOTAN to stop them. Steve Crank designed the stupid thing and then got hit by a cruiser in corridor 17 one day. We've been living with it this way ever since."

"Crap," said Elliott. "No doubt Commucorp is going to interpret this as a merger offer and will counter-offer immediately. How much time do you estimate we have left?"

"Between two and five minutes," Heckler responded.

Elliott stood up. "All right, here's what we're going to do. Close all the doors and dim the lights." Heckler and George scurried around the room closing doors and turning off lights and machinery. "Now get some water and drench us with it." Heckler went to the sink/toilet combo and filled a nearby garbage can with water, which he poured over George and Elliot then himself. Elliot continued his instructions, "Now sit on the floor with your head between your knees, like this." He sat down and contorted into a strange position. Heckler and George mimicked him.

They waited several minutes in the darkness until George finally asked, "What now?"

"Kiss your asses good-bye!" replied Elliott.

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As the purple misty atmosphere of the planet billowed with yellow and red and green and orange, a blue metallic cargo starship charged beyond the orbit of the moon and into the blackness of blackness of space.

The End

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