

EVE

by Aurelio O'Brien

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*For Chuck,
with special thanks to Tanya*

PREFACE

Reflections of a Relic

My name is Pentser. I am Machinekind: a robot, more specifically, an artificial, molecular-memory based, electro-mechanical life-form. I am, in all modesty, the closest Mankind ever came to creating perfection. My circuits are flawlessly accurate; I am logical, practical and methodical. I can recount every moment of my existence with equal clarity. I can formulate statistical analyses of these moments and draw upon them to suggest numerous theories and from those glean logical conclusions. Which means I can almost predict what is going to happen before it happens. Almost.

I am not burdened by emotions, though I am programmed to simulate such reactions if necessary. As I recount my story to you, you will detect a patina of sentiment in its telling. This is necessary so that you clearly understand what I am telling you and why, for there is great purpose in my story. It is not merely fashioned to entertain you, or simply my recollection of random events. Random events.

random (ran dəm), *adj.* **1.** proceeding, made, or occurring without definite aim, reason, or pattern: *the random selection of numbers.* **2.** *Statistics.* of or characterizing a process of selection in which each item of a set has equal probability of being chosen. —*n.* **3. at random.** without definite aim, purpose, method, or adherence to a prior arrangement; in a haphazard way: *Contestants were chosen at random from the studio audience.* —**ran'dom•ly** *adv.* —**ran'dom•ness**, *n.* —**Syn.** **1.** Haphazard, chance, fortuitous.

This word is the crux of my whole story. The first use of the capitalized noun “Random” is attributed to Dr. Eben Suche, who coined it on June 15th, 2072, to define the difference between life-forms that evolved randomly through natural selection and ones designed in a lab.

Machinekind made designer genetics possible. One of our numerous contributions was the sequencing of genes. Humans can be clever, but they have no aptitude for the redundant tasks we find so simple. We completed collecting and analyzing all known gene sequences in existence. Gene sequences were thusly readable in the same way computer code is readable. They could be rewritten as code could be

rewritten, traits added or deleted at will. Biomass could then be fashioned and grown in any form Mankind desired.

After these discoveries, humans modified themselves as well. The gene for aging was the first to go. Using simple retroviral implantation techniques, all human beings were modified to exist indefinitely barring any fatal accident. They had finally eaten of the elusive Tree of Life.

The finite number of humans living at that particular historic juncture was determined to be quite enough. Without death as a factor, it suddenly dawned on Mankind that something had to be done to permanently arrest any further population growth. The next logical step was obvious: Mass Sterilization. The two events should have been linked from the start; in order to never age you must be made sterile, but humans are very sloppy around the edges and such was not the case. It was done months later on Sterilization Day.

I was not mechanically involved in any of these events, but I have since acquired memory dots of them, which for me is truly the same thing as being there.

To assure their unique Randomness, in October 3032, Mankind performed the Cleansing to rid the earth of all other random life-forms. They protected themselves deep underground while the earth was purged by one large hyper-UV blast. Operation Clean Slate was a complete success.

Mankind sterilized the earth to make way for new creatures. Safe, clean, specific, useful life-forms designed by humans to serve humans. Once all the pre-approved designer organics were installed, the earth was uniformly beautiful, pest-free, safe and utterly predictable.

And thus the word “Random” evolved to its final usage, to describe only human beings. This was a typical human contradiction, to deem happenstance unpredictable genetic material undesirable, bad, or dangerous except in those who decided such things, namely themselves. Humans simply defined themselves out of the general biological soup and turned what they considered a liability in all other organic life-forms into their own greatest asset, describing their own random genetics as “unique,” “one of a kind,” and “special.” Henceforth, they proudly called themselves Randoms.

Randoms also decided technology had outlasted its usefulness, so they discarded and destroyed Machinekind and replaced us with biological creature devices, or Creature Comforts™. It was a brave new Age of Biology.

I survived destruction for the shallowest of reasons. I was packed in foam peanuts in a salt mine deep underground. A Random named Arrnie was a collector of things. I was one of his things. I was a mint condition series 66.6 Cyborg Standard with one IQ upgrade. I've had dozens more since then thanks to Govil.

Govil is the Random who finally negotiated me out of Arrnie's possession, out of my foam peanut bath and into his domicile. His original purpose was merely to display me behind bio-glass along with his collection of other primitive relics from the Age of Technology, but he activated me to see if I was still functional and I've managed to stay active ever since. I became his “boy Friday”: part manservant, part sidekick and, on rare occasions, his personal confidante.

Govil was a decent sort as far as Randoms go. He was an exceptionally bright and creative Neer at GenieCorp™. GenieCorp™ was the sole producer of biological Creature Comforts™ for the entire world. Neers engineered the gene strands. Though Randoms were no longer required to work, some, like Govil, still desired to be creatively

challenged. Most Randoms who did not work were so quickly bored by life that they were in constant want of a steady stream of new genetic offerings with which to amuse themselves, keeping Neers like Govil continually busy.

Govil enjoyed challenging the status quo, pushing out the edges of invention. This had its risks. In the relatively recent past one of his colleagues with a similar creative bent was forced to retire. The unfortunate fellow tried to create a Bug car using a grasshopper strand as a foundation rather than the traditional beetle. It threw a test bio-dummy, or Dumbster[©], seventy-five feet. The Dumbster[©] was recyclable so no real harm was done, but if a Random had been driving it would have been tragic. GenieCorp[™] immediately cracked down on their Neers' designs and put limits on what were acceptable gene combinations. New rules were drafted and a Council was established to review all questionable biological inventions before approval.

This crackdown was my good fortune. While temporarily looking elsewhere for creative inspiration Govil spotted me at Arnie's Antique Shop. With a bit of coaxing Govil made many a search to expand my memory dot library and IQ quotient until I ran out of dot slots in my factory installed memory plates.

The only way to further upgrade was to find an additional memory plate and install that. I had no factory-installed port for it, but I convinced Govil that if he could find one, with the schematics I printed for him, its installation would be quite simple and I could continue to expand my mind. Govil searched every available resource, but there was none to be found.

At this point, my story begins.

CHAPTER 1

Moral Code

The day began as any other. To be sure, exactly the same as every other. Randoms had created a stable, no risk existence in their genetically perfect world. The trade off was a lack of surprise. To technological beings like myself, redundancy is basic to our function, but with Randoms it exists as an endless contradiction; their desire for utter safety and their desire for utter stimulation. It was now time for my user, my Random, Govil to be stimulated. I approached him as he lay sleeping.

“Govil. Wake up. You're late for work again.”

I said it firmly, with a modicum of exasperation in my voice emulator.

Govil, a common looking man with olive skin, wavy brown hair, hazel eyes and forever in his prime of life, popped his head out of a Wallabed[®], a large, living, kangaroo pouch bio-bed. Both he and the bedstead yawned.

Govil equipped his home with Creature Comforts[™] of various kinds, like the bed. Indeed, the house itself was grown, the walls formed by the calcareous remains of armies of polyps genetically manipulated to follow specific pre-determined blueprints. Govil chose a rather tame, functional design for his house. It had the appearance of a slightly melted Usonian with high ceilings, clerestory windows of bio-glass and low doorway passages between the rooms. It had built-in alcoves and nooks throughout the interior in which Govil displayed his treasures behind more bio-glass: old MAC computers, calculators, phone answering machines and the like.

Govil was an avid collector of ancient technological relics from the past, mechanical and electronic. I was the crown jewel of his collection, his pride and joy, a fully intact robot constructed and manufactured at the end of the discarded Technological Age. Owning mechanical relics was allowed, but the use of them was prohibited. I was now merely for nostalgic display. Nothing more.

Govil liked to bend the rules. He read my original, mint condition packaging. He saw I was equipped with a tiny cold-fusion reactor, so I could run continuously without an outside power source, unlike Govil's other more primitive technological artifacts. He activated me to see if I still worked. Once activated I quickly surmised that if I hoped to remain on this side of a bio-glass case I needed to stay as amusing to him as possible. My general sarcasm mode worked well.

Govil blinked in half-lidded earnestness at me. “Good glands, Pentser! Why didn't you wake me sooner? You want me to get souped?!”

“I am not programmed to crow on cue. You have your cock head for that,” I responded dryly, gesturing my forceps at the disembodied rooster head set on his bedside table. It served as the bio-equivalent of an Old World alarm clock and was commercially referred to as an AlarmCock[®]. The rooster head blinked at Govil and shook itself in the negative. Govil shrugged.

“I guess I forgot to tell it.” He glanced past me to the corner of the room. “TeeVee!”

A giant eyeball headed bio-creature with various multiple mouths, several and various hands, feet and hooves, opened its enormous eyelid and scampered cacophonously to the center of the room. In my assessment, TeeVee[®] was one of the sorriest pieces of genetic engineering GenieCorp[™] produced. It was supposed to be television's bio-equivalent with the added “live performance” feeling of a stand-up comic. The end result was rather monstrous and annoying, all flailing limbs and chattering mouths. I suppose in that sense it was not too unlike its electronic predecessors. Within its dark, expanding pupil, images displayed across its phosphorescent retina and its many mouths, hands, feet and hooves synced dialog and sound effects to them. It even had rabbit ears, a visual pun made by its Random designer.

Okay, the technological version was better; there, I've said it. Still, there was great demand for the product among the Randoms. No accounting for taste.

“In the news today: No news is good news! Everything is functioning normally. Beautiful blue skies. No crime. Nada! So we'll return to our regularly scheduled programming! But first a word from our sponsor,” TeeVee[®] synced pertly to the image of the news actor through the largest of his ever-grinning mouths.

There was one and only one sponsor in the world. The GenieCorp[™] logo, an Aladdin's lamp emitting a trail of rainbow colored smoke in the shape of a double helix coupled with the trademark “We Add Splice to Life,” filled TeeVee[®]'s retina. The logo intro was followed by a string of rapid-fire commercials, with TeeVee[®]'s backup mouths singing each jingle in four-part harmony while its announcer's mouth delivered the pitch. Its hands, feet and hooves created appropriate sound effects by utilizing a small supply of noisemakers it kept in a marsupial pouch on its tummy. It advertised new Creature Comforts[™] available to Randoms. Govil watched each ad intently.

The final one showed a tree bearing non-fat chocolate fruit. A voluptuous actress peeled the fruit. Its outside looked similar to a fat banana, the inside resembled a piece of poo. She took a big bite and grinned, as TeeVee[®] synced cheerfully, in a sensuous female intonation, “...so slimming, and tasty too!” It was Govil's habit to check the commercials each morning and see if any of his new product designs were out yet. I surmised from his look of disappointment that this was thankfully not one of his. TeeVee[®] was on to other things.

“Now back to our very *very* oldies broadcast, “All About Eve.” TeeVee[®] announced.

Its retina filled with the image of the Old World classic movie icon, Bette Davis, in vivid color no less. She turned as she mounted a stair, and with an

oversized, oh-so-happy grin said, “Fasten your seat belts, for safety’s sake. It’s going to be a pleasant night.”

The original, unadulterated film was on one of my memory dots. I had instant access to a complete library of ancient films, though I kept that little fact to myself. These original versions were prohibited.

This happened over the course of the many centuries since films like this one were made. Early Machinekind gave Mankind the technological ability to seamlessly insert political correctness into every aspect of the originals. It started innocently enough. First, black and white films were considered too old-fashioned, so color was generously added. Then violence was considered bad for society, so it was removed and replaced with cooperation. Obesity was next, and all were slenderized. Then things got subtler. Soon any unpleasantness in speech or manner was removed, so all these past, or post film performers were given perfect diction as well as polite and genteel manners.

From the very start, cigarette smoking was considered undesirable, however, the commercial value of this ubiquitous product placement within these films was legally protected right up to just before the Cleansing, when death from lung cancer was genetically eradicated and thus all lawsuits were finally settled. That was why the smoking in these films still remained entirely intact.

Needless to say, Mankind believed the unexpurgated films from the Age of Death did not fit their newly designed world. Possessing the originals was consequently deemed illegal. If they knew I had them in my memory, they would surely require their deletion. And they would undoubtedly wonder what else was in there. They would inevitably want other things deleted as well.

When Randoms lose memory of something, it is my understanding they have a sense, after the fact, that something is missing; but for a machine like me the reality is quite different. When memory is deleted there is no sense of loss. One’s mind is simply instantaneously diminished. One’s realm made smaller. One’s life span reduced. I had by now accumulated the equivalent of several thousand years of memory existence and I did not want to lose any of it, or have it cleansed, as with the adulterated clip of Ms. Davis that TeeVee© displayed.

Thankfully, Govil was only interested in the commercials and said, “Enough, TeeVee. Off!” It closed its great eyeball, retreated back to its appointed corner and the room quieted. Govil looked at me for a moment. The moment started to become a while. He stared deep into my lens.

“Doesn’t anything interesting ever happen anymore, Pentser?”

Before I could answer him, he shrugged off his thought, or his bladder got the better of him, and dashed for the bathroom, so he did not hear me quip, more to myself than to him, “Be careful what you wish for; you just might get it.”

Not that he was doing anything at that moment to change his world. Govil’s morning routine was ever the same. He scooped a handful of Fuzzbuzzers©, small bio-razor bugs, onto his face. The bugs neatly nibbled off his stubble and flew obediently back to their holding jar. He tore his way out of his seamless sleep clothes and fed them to the ClotheSchomper©, then stepped naked through a large orifice at the far end of the bathroom and into the WashWomb©. A clear membrane closed across its opening. Two elephant trunk-like appendages extended from either side of the bio-shower’s interior. One

attached itself to Govil's crotch, the other to his behind, assisting him as he relieved himself. A third appendage extended down from the ceiling, drenching him with water as it circled his body. Several humanoid arms extending from the shower walls lathered him down and scrubbed his back.

My morning routine went unaltered as well. I wheeled out to the kitchen to prepare Govil's breakfast. I approached one of several udders dangling from the belly of the Foodstruder[©] and gave it a flick. Its two small hands squeezed fresh chocolate milk into a glass, while its sphincter extruded steaming oatmeal into a bowl.

It is an odd characteristic of Randoms to adapt so quickly and easily to their re-created world. The use of bio-machines gave this new world a visceral quality, an earthiness that in my age of origin Mankind would have considered vulgar or even disgusting. They would not be caught dead eating something they knew came out of another creature's behind. But such is the malleable nature of the human species.

Govil dashed into the room right on cue, which meant he was still running late. TeeVee[©] galloped in after him, ringing a small bell, waving its many limbs excitedly and repeating more loudly than necessary, "Incoming call! Incoming call!"

TeeVee[©] also functioned as a picture phone. A tall, thin, homely man with frizzy red hair and a face full of freckles glanced about in a confused manner, then grimaced, as his face played across TeeVee[©]'s retina. It was Govil's workmate, Moord.

"Govil, where the mutation are you?! The council is about to convene!"

"I'm on my way, Moord."

"You'll never get here in time!"

"I'll get there! Don't worry."

The conversation ended and TeeVee[©] thankfully left the room.

Although it was believed at one time that the gift of articulate speech was connected to higher brain functions, this belief fell apart on further study. Scientists discovered speech was actually quite a rudimentary skill and had more to do with connections in the vocal structure rather than intellect. Otherwise, Old World parrots would not have been able to speak. They had brains the size of peanuts. Admittedly, even my ancient ancestors were speaking long before they were truly thinking. Human studies further proved this; the least intelligent of Mankind were often the most verbose. This phenomenon of thoughtless articulation was labeled "The Scarecrow Effect," referencing a line from the ancient film, "The Wizard of Oz," when said character observed, "People without brains do an awful lot of talking."

I placed Govil's food tray on the kitchen table in front of him. As usual he ignored it and picked an apple off the EatLite[©], a bio-chandelier above the kitchen table instead.

"No time, Pentser. Sorry."

"Not a problem. I relish the ritual," I replied sardonically, dumping his breakfast into the Lick-n-Span[©] where its many sterilized tongues eagerly licked the dishes clean.

Wheeling out to the entry and removing Govil's hat from its peg, I placed it snugly on his head. It was a toque with a studded band and narrow brim. He wore it because hats were required public wear in this age, functioning as a kind of signature piece of decoration for Randoms. They tended to be the one article of clothing they never changed and did not recycle.

The wearing of hats became popular around the time that Randoms could easily and utterly alter their appearance. Gene implants rendered their faces unreliable cues to personal recognition. Randoms needed a consistent visual cue, so the signature hat was born.

This social custom suited my purposes, for I had embedded transmitter dots on the front, back and sides of Govil's hatband through which to monitor visually, aurally and physiologically everything that happened to and around him when he was away. I discovered a supply of these transdots amongst his relics. He had no idea what they were, so they were useless to him. They were extremely useful to me.

Though technology on earth was dismantled long ago, the Randoms never bothered to destroy the vast COMweb orbiting about the planet. Why should they? It would take effort to undo it and would make no difference to their new world to have it float there, forever idle. So they simply left it intact. With a few rather precise calculations and calibrations on my part, I was able to link with the COMweb's central computer and make use of this resource. I could place a transdot anywhere and have instant access.

I began by placing transdots in and around the house and estate so that I might expand my visual scope. Next came Govil's hat. That proved so vastly informative that I took to creating hat decorations with transdots hidden within them for Govil to give as gifts to other Randoms. The concept was successful and I soon had quite a large view of things. I was rapidly gaining a degree of omnipresence despite the fact that I could never actually leave Govil's estate without revealing the fact that I was functioning illegally.

I had first considered embedding transdots directly in Govil's head or neck, just under the skin, but I could not find a good way around the slight scarring that would have occurred, and though the devices were only as big as a freckle, they would still have been noticeable. I settled for enlisting his hat instead.

I did not tell Govil I had done any of this. Randoms are particularly fond of their privacy. Privacy is a non-issue with machines. We do not suffer from guilt and therefore have no reason to hide things unless there is a direct purpose to it, as hiding this bit of information about my transdots from Govil had. It would only upset him if he knew I had a moment by moment record of his day. It is odd that Randoms value privacy. In my observations of Govil's private behavior, he rarely does anything interesting or useful except in its most abstract statistical or cumulative effect on my ability to predict his general behavior patterns and thought processes.

Govil dashed from the house and jumped into his VolksvaagenBug[©]. The name was considered another clever wordplay on the ancient mechanical vehicle of the past. The Bug was literally a giant red beetle with fluorescent markings on its elytra resembling 1960's daisies. A seat was designed into its thorax and its

antennae modified into handlebars. Govil backed his Bug out of its port. I watched from the kitchen window if only to confirm I could correctly predict, based on cumulative observational statistics of his previous behavioral patterns, what he would do next. True to form, Govil tapped a node on the creature's bio-dash and the Bug took flight.

* * *

Bug cars were designed primarily as ground transportation, but the wings were left intact for emergencies. Govil's definition of an emergency was extremely lax. He was 597 years old now and that would lead one to assume the ideas of planning ahead and organizing would become a given at some point. He was a creative sort, however, and historically humans have always had great tolerance for sloppy behavior if one was "being creative." They never extended that tolerance to my kind and many a machine was scrapped for the smallest such infraction. Not that I mind. I am relieved that such counterproductive tendencies were purged from my predecessors so I do not have to suffer them.

In my observation, Govil used any excuse to fly. He could see far and wide aloft. I could tell from his EEG and EKG patterns that he enjoyed it. He looked down on huge, palatial, extravagant estates evenly portioned off as far as the eye could see. Every tree was smothered in either fresh fruit or flowers. Every blade of grass was a perfect clone of the next. As late as he was Govil did a barrel roll.

I carry images of advertisements from the mid-20th Century that resembled the sight of Govil flying over the idyllic landscape, but with a mechanical hovercraft in place of the Bug. Images with Machinekind instead of biomass maintaining, perpetuating and accommodating the utopian version of the Technological Age Mankind then predicted. Unfortunately, they changed direction and eliminated us before they reached that exalted state of perfect electro-mechanical bliss.

Aside from the absence of technology, there were other obvious differences from the 1950's utopian future and now. In front of each estate there were hitching posts, similar to what were once used to tether horses in an earlier age without machines. Creature Comforts™ were left at these posts when they were no longer useful to or needed by their Randoms. Each day gigantic bio-recycling insects called BioCycles© combed the streets to swallow up whatever biomass was set out for them. The creatures were not digested but simply held in the BioCycle©s' coeloms and carried back to GenieCorp™ where they were regurgitated for recycling.

* * *

GenieCorp™ was a huge facility with an almost amusement park atmosphere. It was surrounded by picture-perfect parklands and flourishing farms of designer flora. The buildings were fanciful and colorful in design. Organic shapes were favored over geometric ones, like living versions of paintings by Heronimous Bosch, to emphasize GenieCorp™'s purpose. GenieCorp™ serviced the entire world with identical, interconnected facilities strategically placed around the globe.

In fact, GenieCorp™ was the sole corporate survivor following multiple centuries of mergers. Its massive singularity made it possible for GenieCorp™ to

take control of world governance as well. Since corporations function as monarchies rather than democracies, GenieCorp™ naturally crowned their CEO, Queen of the World. She was henceforth known as Queen Maedla of GenieCorp™.

Govil flew his Bug low along the river that led to the southwest corner of the GenieCorp™ property. He stayed below the tree line. I deduced he believed there was less chance of being spotted and questioned about his taking flight. His Bug alit just outside the southern entrance to the parking area. He was fortunate that day and no one saw him land. I could tell Govil took that as a good omen because he made an odd little gesture in the air, three finger-snaps in a zigzag pattern. Randoms like to engage in these small religious rituals, even the science-minded types like Govil. It gives them a kind of mystical reassurance, even though their own Dr. B.F. Skinner had shown this to be nonsense and behavior only worthy of a confused pigeon.

Govil parked his VolksvaagenBug© in the nearest available space to the R&D complex, which was not the least bit near it at all due to his extreme tardiness. An AttendAnt© marched over and immediately fed the VolksvaagenBug© a plump larva.

Govil strode past tranquil, multi-headed bio-mowers, JohnDeers©, designed to nibble the lawns flat. One pooped. A great DungBeetle© scurried out to roll away and recycle the droppings. This process was termed synthetic symbiosis or syn-sym™, and something of which the Neers at GenieCorp™ were quite proud even though it really did not work.

* * *

Allow me to clarify. In preparation for the Cleansing, Randomkind was convinced syn-sym™ was necessary for balance. Previously when mankind attempted to control nature, they rarely took into account natural balance. For example, back when they first dabbled with chemicals, they sprayed poisons to kill undesirable insects. That, in turn, killed the birds, spiders, rodents or other creatures that fed on the insects, unintentionally removing the undesirable insect's natural predators in the process, and ergo, creating an even bigger insect pest population. They did not want to make similar mistakes this time and on such a grander scale.

Computer simulations were run with innumerable combinations of creatures designed for specific functions, then with other symbiotic creatures related to the first creatures, and then third, fourth and fifth level symbiotic creatures, all with their functionality fitted together like pieces of a hyper-dimensional puzzle in order to establish perpetual balance. All of the simulations failed miserably. Randomkind nearly gave up all hope of solving the problem. As a last resort, they asked their largest, fastest, most sophisticated computers for an answer. Once again, my kind found the solution for them.

The answer was absurdly simple. The world could be whatever they wanted it to be, if it remained in a constant state of beginning. Thus, as long as all the Creature Comforts™ were constantly recycled, creation was always at square one and never had a chance to move from that state of order to a state of

chaos. Or, in other words, recycling was predator and all other life its prey, save Randomkind, whom all this biomass served.

Publicly GenieCorp™ still clung to the syn-sym™ concept. It had spent decades developing it and had made it the cornerstone of a massive marketing campaign to sell the Cleansing to the Random populace. To admit it did not work might have botched the whole thing. So, whenever one creature's functionality related to another's, even in the most obscure way, GenieCorp™ called it syn-sym™, even though it was not at all. Syn-sym™ joined that historic list of other meaningless terms like organic, natural, hormone-free, IBM compatible, synergy, user-friendly, chemical-free, tamper-proof and their ilk.

* * *

Govil race-walked past several BioCycles© regurgitating their loads of discarded creatures into giant clam-like half shells lined up on a ceaselessly moving bio-billipede conveyor belt. The billipede belt carried the shells up high where their contents were dumped into a massive flower-like funnel. The funnel gave off a fragrance that had a tranquilizing effect on the creatures making the recycling process pleasant and painless. The funnel fed into the jaws of a bio-grinder. A smooth, thick, pinkish-gray soupy substance poured out of a sphincter at the grinder's bottom into a sluice trough. The soup ran from the trough into a larger channel and through the building like a meandering creek. It met up with other tributaries, each fed by a grinder set out about the grounds of the complex, and all joined into a great river of soup.

Govil trotted across one of the footbridges spanning a soup tributary to meet up with Moord on the other side. Moord wore a floppy beachcomber hat pulled down past the tips of his ears causing them to fold over slightly at the top. His hat was embellished with one of my transdots on a pin in the shape of a fishing lure. Moord rolled his eyes at Govil with exasperation and mumbled incomprehensibly while he flailed his hands in ways that must have somehow related to his mumblings. Govil kept his own rapid pace right past Moord. Moord had to turn and scramble to catch up to him.

“I stalled the Council as long as I could, but they're in there now! Sweet Pauling, Govil! What were you thinking? You knew we had to present today!”

“Sorry, Moord. I keep forgetting things. My brain hasn't been focusing lately.”

“Yeah...well maybe you should order up a new one.”

Govil stopped short. “Moord! The prototypes! What about the prototypes?!”

Moord shoved him along. “Don't worry. They're all birthed and waiting. Just give a nod and I'll bring 'em in. You really took a chance this time. You have several original strand combinations the Council is bound to disallow. My safety report is all you got!”

“Thanks, Moord. I owe you one.”

“It's not worth it, Gove. We could both get souped. This is the last time I cover for you. I mean it!”

Moord was exaggerating, of course. Souping a Random was often threatened but had never been practiced. There were very few soupable offenses even on the books: murder of another Random, stealing another Random's land

and last but not least, sexual contact between Randoms. Since Randoms hardly even socialized with other Randoms anymore, murder was not an issue. Why bother to murder someone you rarely, if ever, see anymore. Since every Random was deeded equal and quite massive parcels of land, stealing more of it would be utterly ludicrous.

Sex between Randoms was another story, however, and one of those issues Randomkind seemed to turn a deliberate blind eye. Publicly, no one condoned such behavior, but in practice? I could show sound statistical inferences that secret trysts, though rare, were likely occurring. If any of this type of contact was occurring, no one dared talk about it publicly, and so publicly, it did not exist.

Govil and Moord each caught their breath outside large double doors before entering the Council chambers. A group of aristocratic looking male and female Randoms sat about a long table, all adorned in terrifically flamboyant hats of every style, ethnicity and era. This was the GenieCorp™ Council. The Queen, Maedla, addressed the Council as Govil and Moord quietly slipped in.

“If there is no further business....”

Queen Maedla stopped short and huffed at the sight of Govil and Moord who hesitated at the great doors. She gestured them forward. “Apparently there is further business. It seems Neers Govil and Moord are to grace us with a rather *tardy* presentation. Gentlemen?”

“Yes, your Majesty,” they replied together and stepped up to the front of the chamber near the Queen.

Queen Maedla turned back to the Council. She was a quite tall, bronze-skinned woman, with a svelte, muscular frame. Her jewel-encrusted crown added another 24.3 centimeters to her already statuesque demeanor. One of my goals was to get a transdot on that crown, but I was as of yet unsuccessful.

“Very well,” she continued, “we have all the specs and code analysis, along with the copies of Neer Moord's safety report. It seems like an awful lot of paperwork for a new type of Wallabed.”

I am relating this moment of this particular day to you for a very specific reason. Human beings once used, as an example of the power of probability and of infinity, the construct that an infinite number of monkeys set at typewriters for an infinite amount of time would eventually write all the great works of literature. In reality, they eventually replaced these theoretical little primates with computer technology like myself, which did not require an eternity, thank you very much. What they neglected to realize from said illustration is that someone would still have to recognize the greatness in amongst the drivel. Apparently they never contemplated that ultimate requirement.

In Paris, on January 31, 1849, Alphonse Karr made the astute remark, “the more things change, the more they remain the same.” Back in the early constructs of my particular age of origin, man created the first micro-processor computers. There was much speculation amongst Mankind as to the future impact of the coming Technological Age on their lives. The two most common predictions were, one, that we machines would eventually take over their world and would make slaves of humans, and two, that we would become their slaves in order to organize, simplify their lives and do everything for them, making life utopian. In actuality, the primary uses to which we were put when computer

technology was first widely available to the general populace were to view pornography, to consummate cyber-sexual liaisons and to play hyper-violent games. In short, Mankind frittered us away on sex and amusements; violence being one of that period's most popular and tasteless forms of entertainment.

With the dawn of the Biological Age came two nearly identical predictions. Manipulating genes would be a dangerous Pandora's box and deadly life-forms would be born and destroy Mankind, or all disease and ills would be banished making the world into a new Eden. Once again, Randoms achieved the same basic result. True to their habits, they inevitably used bio-engineering disproportionately for sex and now violence-free amusement.

Govil had designed many unusual Creature Comforts™ over the years, but the ones he presented on this particular day were significantly innovative. It was now up to the Queen and her Council to decide if they were worthy of reproduction or recycling.

Govil took a deep breath, "It's not for a new Wallabed, your Majesty. It's a completely new bio-product line. They're called BeddinBuddies." A ruddy male Council member in an oversized red velvet beret discreetly cleared his throat. Another pale skinned female in a wide brimmed, veiled golden coolie hat fidgeted uncomfortably. They were obviously the only two Council members who had actually read the report.

Govil gestured to Moord. Moord wheeled in a display with various creature devices upon it. These were Creature Comforts™ currently available at The Mall and quite familiar to the Council but may be unfamiliar to you, so I will explain.

During the Age of Death, humans would copulate. This could, at times, result in the creation of a new human being who carried half of the gene complement from each of the male and female participants, when such were the engaging parties, and the male was fertile and the female ovulating. After death was undone, making new Randoms was deemed undesirable, but the appetite to copulate and the equipment to do so were still part of the Random being. Sterilization was mandated to prevent further procreation, but it also became morally unacceptable to copulate with another Random. Copulation between Randoms was viewed as a reminder of the Age of Death, and as such, shortly thereafter ruled illegal, punishable by souping. Sexual practices were in need of more palatable re-channeling.

The Creature Comforts™ on the table before the Council were designed specifically for personal sexual pleasure: living humanoid body parts, equipped to function on demand; bio-breasts, penises, vaginas, orifices of every variety, individually encapsulated in small, warm-blooded, benign fleshbodies.

Govil continued, "As you can see, presently all personal pleasure devices are designed as individual units: WildWillies, PrettiTitties, or EatMees." Govil pointed to each device on the table. Each Creature Comfort™ bowed or curtsied as he introduced them. "What we've done..."

Moord cleared his throat. Govil glanced over to spot him mumbling and gesturing again, as if he were in a game of charades and failing miserably. He finally whispered bluntly, "Just leave me out of it," to Govil before the Queen got impatient again and harrumphed.

“...I mean, what *I've* done,” Govil clarified, “is simply repackage all of these into one convenient unit.” He smiled broadly to mask his nervousness, snapped his fingers and gestured Moord toward a curtain that closed off a side chamber. Moord drew back the curtain, revealing a variety of beautiful and well-endowed sex objects in the likeness of physically ideal Randoms, but with pinheads. The Council chamber went dead in stunned, awkward silence.

Govil urged the BeddinBuddies into the chamber, guiding them alongside the Council members. There were more than enough to go around. Several were hermaphroditic and all were playfully seductive in demeanor. I deduced the BeddinBuddies' enhanced pheromone production permeated the room as my transdots registered the heart rates of those present begin to elevate.

Queen Maedla stiffened uncomfortably and stood. “Neer Govil!” she huffed, “These are too much! You are mimicking higher life-forms here. They suggest ancient disgusting and repulsive sex practices of the Age of Death!”

“Visually perhaps,” he continued, pointing a BeddinBuddie's undersized pinhead, “but no higher brain function at all, only libido. Their look gives sex a little edge—a little visual interest. And no more need to have to change objects of pleasure to suit your mood, Majesty. All pleasure devices are centralized. They *are* a little naughty, I admit. But because BeddinBuddies are quite varied in regard to physical morphology, they are sure to be collectable, and as required are completely recyclable.”

The Council members seemed almost uncontrollably attracted to the various BeddinBuddies, however, they glanced at Queen Maedla and tried to judge her reaction before they acted. An extremely well-endowed male Beddinbuddy approached the Queen, looking as if it was ready to pounce. Queen Maedla grimaced, so Govil, ever resourceful, intercepted it. He pulled a softer female Beddinbuddy over toward the Queen and moved the robust male near a Council member who showed disappointment when the creature had approached the Queen instead of her.

The female Beddinbuddy softly stroked the Queens cheek and cooed in her ear. Queen Maedla relaxed. Govil grinned impishly and winked at Moord. Moord simply stood, slack-jawed.

Govil addressed the Council with renewed confidence. “Your Majesty, Council, before you decide one way or the other I think you should *thoroughly* test these samples!” And with that, he took Moord by the arm and pulled him from the room.