

CREATION MYTH

A SPARK
AT THE END
OF SUMMER

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***In the near future
of an alternate past...***

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Stars blinked and twinkled
and out wriggled teeny wee mushrooms...

White stems slender and snaking, round
caps turning reddish brown...

Weaving toyfully they grew...
each tip projecting
a new variable,
a new cell,
a new node
in a grand
and wonderful pattern.

The vibrant infants multiplied into an
avalanche, exuding waves of cheerful gratitude
for life, giggling as they mingled and
intertwined in braids,
up,
up,
out
towards the day light...

...bzzt!

...bzzt...

and another

Bzzt...

follow me

...bzzt!

...bzzt...

we need you

Bzzt...

wake up

Bzzt... bzzt... bzzt!

Michael opened his eyes. Cozy beneath his blankets, he rolled onto his chest, stretching out, smiling from the dizzy dream. Warm in bed, his large thick covers disguised - for a moment - the fact that he slept on nothing more than a mattress on the floor. Cloudy weather cast a grey light through thin curtains. Laundry littered his room, garbage was overflowing, the sparse furniture covered in random junk. A glass aquarium sat in the corner, fuzzy white chunks of fungus living inside.

Bzzt... bzzt... bzzt!!

"Ahhh!"

Michael rolled over and kicked about in his blankets.

"Be quiet, please!"

The buzzer turned off, giving Michael an adrenaline rush. He peered at the ceiling, deep thought washing over him. "Hmm". He sat upright and rubbed his face with both hands. He leaned around to look out his bedroom doorway. His machine sat at the other end of the common room: three monitors blanked out in screen saver mode, silent save for the whirring of the cooling fan. A sleek blue box spewed forth an impenetrable tangle of wires; simultaneously a boy's technological wet dream and a mother's worst nightmare to clean. It was, by far, the most (and only) expensive possession in Michael's apartment.

Wrapping himself in one of his blankets, Michael stood up and hobbled over to his desk chair, slumping down into it comfortably. The rest of his abode was rather meagre, a bachelor pad with two rooms and a bathroom. The main living room had an old couch, a dirty kitchen, and a desk - liberally sprinkled with unkempt note pads and left-open books. Twigs of dried mushrooms were scattered over piles of paper in front of him. He stared at them wild-eyed, then brushed aside the mess to expose his keyboard.

"Is it actually aware?"

He jiggled the mouse about until the flat monitors warmed up and pixels began glowing. He scrunched his eyes and flexed his exhausted pupils, trying to get them in focus. He put on his glasses and pulled up a complex series of windows filled with jargon and code, then began to search. Typing "quiet" into a search tool, it came up with a list of results, including:


```
BE . 1 -> 72 : reference=audio, source=voice  
QUIET . 72 -> 54 => 108 : audio.silence()  
PLEASE . 25920 : mood=pleading, manner=demanding
```

Surrounding this, a series of logical decodings, symbols, and numbers that looked to the layman like gibberish. Since Michael had spent years creating it, he knew intimately what all of it meant.

"Top priority. Cool."

This is extraordinary!

His project had finally shown a measure of success. All the hard work, pushing his mind past its limits, running to empty. A huge wave of satisfaction and relief washed over him. He clenched both fists together and shook them vigorously in silent celebration.

"Dein, you better be awake for this."

Clicking on a messenger window, he virtually nudged his cousin Dein, who virtually nudged him back.

Mike: You are not gonna believe this.

Dein: Oh?

Mike: It turned off my alarm clock this morning
when I shouted 'be quiet' at it.

Dein: Isn't that easy to do? Voice recognition.

Michael felt flummoxed by Dein's dénouement.

Mike: Yeah it's easy to do it that way.
but I didn't tell it to do that.
It figured it out. on its own.

Dein: Cool!
Send me a copy?

Mike: You know I will. When it's ready.
BTW, i had a really vivid dream
this morning...

Dein: I gotta go to work. Tell me about it
when I get back from the office.

Mike: Sure... have fun

What should have been a celebration of a major technical accomplishment had turned into little more than a pathetic run-of-the-mill water-cooler conversation. Michael's gut sank from a mixture of hunger, disappointment, and a self-awareness of deluded grandeur. *But... huh?*

This is a breakthrough! How could he not be excited? Dein had been following Michael's progress for years. It must be his boring job. Wearing him down.

What Michael had made wasn't truly exhilarating to watch, nor entertaining. To a dedicated computer programmer, it might be fascinating. To a scientist, it may be spellbinding. All sorts of drab technical people could be entertained by what Michael was up to: artificial life. A naturally arising simulated consciousness, heuristically picked out of a sea of evolving genetic phenotypes. Yet all it looked like was a sequence of gobbledygook. Codes, moving, too fast to comprehend, too slow to entertain. Text messages on the screen, terminals of streaming letters, parsers and interpreters plugging away. Boring.

"I've got to make this more exciting. More useful."

Like HAL 9000... or GERTY.

Michael turned on some uplifting music and sat nodding, still bundled in his blanket, pondering his next plan. The sensation of a bug running across his tailbone made him scratch. He casually watched the stream of techno-babble being churned out by his program with all-knowing eyes.

HAL... I can't use that. It's been done. Everyone has tried to make a HAL. Everyone would expect a HAL.

A great idea dawned on Michael, and Daisy was conceived.

--

"Look, Steph, I need your help." Michael begged on the phone. "I need your artistic skills. Please!" It was later in the day. He had finished cloning out a branch of his project, rebranding it: 'daisy'; plus he had made himself coffee and gotten himself dressed. He even tidied up a bit and bought a tad of groceries from the local supermart. While everyone else was busy working, Michael was struggling with the most basic of tasks needed to make himself civilized.

"Could you please come over here. Yeah, I know you're in class. Come after. Alright, thanks. See you soon."

Walking out onto his balcony, he stared at the slowly shuffling mass of traffic below. Over fifteen stories in the air, his home was but a dot in an

enormous array of downtown skyscrapers and condominium complexes. The odd skycar zipped by, a new luxury of the stinking-rich upper class, but the common residents of Vannibja were predominantly confined to ground travel. All these nameless people, their hopes and dreams crushed by the daily grind, gave Michael a sense of duty to fulfill his own goals.

Daisy will be your helper, your friend, your digital partner. Play with her, ask her questions, rely on her to do the technical weight lifting. Michael expected Daisy to be a great way for elderly people to use their computers. Daisy would hide and obfuscate away the complexity of arduous computing tasks. Tell Daisy you need a recipe, she'll find it on the net. Poke Daisy with your mouse cursor and she'll react. Tell Daisy to develop a program, she'll get coding. Ask her for a story, she'll write one to entertain you. Want to research something or find out some information? She'll go around the censors! She'll go right into the darknets without the user having to figure out tunneling or encryption. But more important than any of that, she'll be alive. She'll live and change and grow. When you leave her and come back, she'll be different, better than before, ready to share something new with you, and you'll be amazed just by the fact that she lives independently of you. On and on his ideas went. They all made perfect sense and seemed feasible to Michael. It was the right thing to do, but would Stephanie buy it?

- -

"You could try to squish her with your windows, and she'll push them off. It'll be like a real person, but she's so cute you won't want to squish her anyways!"

Michael rambled on and on about his idea, pacing around the room making wild arm gestures as Stephanie sat on his crumbling couch. At twenty, she was five years his junior, and normally awed by his prowess. She didn't look impressed now or even interested. She was fuming, staring at the ground.

She twirled a lock of her long curly brown hair along her forefinger while candy beads clicked and clacked about her slim body in a tiny symphony. Decked out in brightly colored necklaces, wrist bands, and neon hair scrunchies, Stephanie looked like a rainbow in a pair of running

shoes. She bounced one of her crossed legs up and down while chewing rhythmically on some gum. Not a genuine nor fake smile crossed her face; her decorated tail hung limply off the couch.

"People will love her, and they'll all want a copy!" Michael stopped raving, finally noticing that Stephanie was acting cold. "Steph?"

"Yeah?"

"What do you think?" Michael asked innocently.

Stephanie spat out her gum. Bouncing across his carpet, picking up hairs and lint, it disappeared behind a book shelf to join a pack of dust bunnies. Michael watched it incredulously, his mind not completely registering what he was seeing.

"I think you're a jerk."

"What?" Michael froze. He had not considered that he was a jerk, nor that he might be acting like one. This was absurd - he was a nice guy! A realization jolted him, like a cold slap across his face: girls have emotions. "Why?"

"What do you mean, why? Are you crazy?" Stephanie stood up to cross her arms menacingly in front of him, causing a brief storm of bead sounds. "I don't see you for over three weeks! Now you want me back all of a sudden?"

"Well, I don't want you *back*..." Michael said without thinking twice.

"So what the flak do you want then?" she asked venomously.

"I want you to draw Daisy..."

"I'm not doing *anything* until you tell me what has been going on for the last *three weeks*!" Stephanie threw her arms up, red in the face, almost in tears.

"Nothin, I've just been here, in my apartment," Michael said coyly.

"You've been doing nothing?"

"Well... I mean I wasn't doing *nothing*, I've done a lot actually! I just mean... I never went out, and partied, or got drunk, or anything like that. I've been working."

"Working? You have a job?"

"Well. This is my job." Michael looked to the floor. Having no employment was a sore spot for him. Years of being rejected by the working sector, and by the countless universities he had applied to, had left him bitter and pessimistic. It had damaged him with a streak of defeatism.

He survived now on a small trust fund left by his deceased parents.

"So... you get paid?"

"No."

"Then it's not a *job*." Stephanie was calming down a bit, her sympathetic side beginning to show. "Dammit, Mike. You can't just sit around for weeks, not call me, ignoring all my calls, eating manna and playing games on your computer."

"I'm not playing games... or even making them anymore... look.... I'm sorry Steph, I just..." Michael stared at the floor, feeling guilty. "I lost track of time, I was so busy, so wrapped up in my project, that I forgot."

"You are ruining your life doing this. You need *money*. You could be making lots of money, have a nice car, a nice apartment." Her crescendo rose. "That's why I am going to university now, so I can get a *job* when I'm done, and when I graduate, I won't want some *bum* for a boyfriend!"

"No, look, I've made a disc. It's a portfolio disc." Michael picked up a paper/plastic sleeve from his desk and handed it to her. "See?" She stared appalled at the amateur look of it. Her calm was fading fast. Michael continued: "It's got my resumé and some essays and code I wrote. I can show it to people... I'll use it to get a job."

"You'll give your code to people? The code you spent so long and worked so hard on? Have you lost your marbles?"

"No... I won't give it to them, just show it to them. I can show them my code, to prove I can do it, and impress them with my games."

"*No one can pay you to do this for a living!*" Stephanie shrieked, tossing the disc out the balcony window with one swift reflexive motion.

"Steph! No!" Michael ran out on his balcony to grab it, but it was too late: the disc was over the railing and they were so high up it would be suicidal to reach for it. Peering over, he helplessly watched the disc flutter down the side of the building, paper sleeve flapping audibly from air resistance, disappearing into the dark street. "That had my stuff on it!"

"Who cares! You don't. You don't care about your life! You don't care about money, or a career, or school. You don't care about me..." Stephanie broke down in tears and collapsed on the couch, her back turned to Michael. He walked slowly in from the balcony.

"Why did you do that? Someone might steal my code..."

"I don't care." Stephanie choked on her disappointments. She

slumped and curled into a fetal position. She sniffed and stared off. Her beads ticked quietly as her movements became soft to wipe away tears. Michael sat down beside her and put a hand on her shoulder. Her smooth skin gave a him a comforting feeling.

"Look Steph. I... I care..." He struggled to get the words out, lumps in his throat. "I care about you."

She wiped away her tears to look back at him.

"You do?"

"I just need time to myself sometimes, you know? I didn't mean to ignore you or hurt you."

"But you did."

"I'm sorry." He paused. "I'll be right back."

- - -

Jeremy groaned. His legs were sore, his back ached, and he had a wicked headache. That wasn't out of the ordinary, at least not at this point in his life. Wrecked and homeless, he was adorned in dirty, stinky clothes. The smell of piss and stale beer reeked from him, yet he couldn't tell if it was him or just the smell of the city. He'd been soaked in the stench for many months.

Who the blazes threw this at me?

What bothered him now was a piece of trash thrown violently at him. His thick clothes and blankets hadn't completely absorbed the sound of the loud whack. It had knocked him out of his catatonic state.

Just cause I'm homeless...

"...doesn't give anyone the right to throw stuff at me," he mumbled coarsely, half choking on drool from his hangover. A string of spit hung out of his mouth as he leaned forward to investigate, and he unintentionally slurped it back in. Cans and bottles clattered all around from his movement. He picked up the item. "Hehe."

It was a disc, neatly packaged, words scribbled on it with a thick blue marker:

Michael Twion:

Portfolio and Resume

Was this Jeremy's lucky break?

Or is someone applying for a job?

"Hahahha!!!" Jeremy howled at his joke; shortly, until his nose clogged up from a thick bubble of snot. He had to abruptly stop laughing to prevent sucking the mucus down his throat. He held the newly found disc close and put it inside one of his 'important' inner pockets. Looking about wildly, a sudden gush of paranoia sprung up in him and he decided to move from his spot.

Location was everything downtown. For Jeremy, he had to be *here*, nowhere else compared. It was the nexus of despair. Depressed, downtrodden, and hopeless people came here to suffer. All sorts of badly manufactured narcotics littered these streets, causing physical havoc to the addicted. Relying only on the charity of others meant they had little to live on. Instead of being sheltered by permanent structures, they created their own makeshift huts.

Jeremy didn't have his own turf, yet. He had collapsed here in a haze of forgotten delusion. Now he got to one knee, fought off a wave of queasiness, and used his nearby shopping cart to pull himself upright. Leaning over the cart, he rested for a moment until his sense of balance returned. Using the palm of his hand, he closed off a nostril and blew his nose clear with a farmer's sneeze. He wiped the remaining splatter from his mouth and beard with an end of his grimy scarf. A ringing chorus returned to haunt his mind, repeating endlessly:

Crrrack crack crack meth. Gotta lay off the rocks. It's wrecking me. My mind shattering. Crack, bad. Meth, bad. Crack, meth. Heroin, good. Stick to smack, I'll be all right. From now on, only juice up. This was something Jeremy had told himself dozens of times in the past years. If only he could quit. Everything would be back to normal, he'd be in control of himself. Crack and meth was destroying him, his personality, *eventually my soul*. It didn't stop when he said it was over. Given the wrong situation, presented with the choice to smoke up again or not, he always caved in. Convinced, tragically, to try it again. *Never again! Not EVER doing that again.*

He began pushing his sty of belongings away from The Plaza - a low-end apartment complex over forty stories tall. It was one of the older buildings from before Jeremy was even born. He had never been inside, not even in the lobby. Going into the lobby would land him into a scuffle

with the security guards. Balconies dotted the brown brick sides, hundreds of windows randomly lit up, people smoking and talking. A night at The Plaza looked like a dream vacation compared to how Jeremy slept now.

The streets seethed with homeless here on Chastity Street. Long an attraction for the poor, Chastity had drawn people here for well over fifty years. There was a whole economy revolving around cigarettes, crack, smack, amphetamines, needles, pop cans, bottles, used clothing, and expired food. Theft and assaults were rampant as no one had shelter to protect themselves. Groups coalesced under makeshift tents, pitched from the sides of buildings. Some had inflated dwellings attached to ventilation shafts, using the air flow to create pressurized plastic walls.

Looks warm in there, Jeremy thought as he passed by a balloon tent. *Those things are a waste of time. One madman with a knife could wreck it.* Jeremy had abandoned technology, based on principle, in his adolescence. He came to live as 'God had intended'. His beliefs led him here. Now, in his early twenties, he was but a shell of his former self, clinging to what he could remember of his self-proclaimed principles. Only when he shot up heroin now, did he have any semblance of a religious feeling, as if basking in God's warmth. It was heroin he tried first when he arrived, but he needed to know more, needed to try other things. That's what led him to crack. *Only juice from now on.*

Snow was beginning to fall; a rarity in Vannibja. Watching it, Jeremy felt serene. He paused in the street and put his hand out to catch a flake.

"Hey!" a young man's voice shouted from behind. Jeremy looked towards him. The man was standing outside the entrance to The Plaza. Half a dozen other bums turned to look too. "Anyone seen a disc? I just lost a disc, it fell down here from my balcony. Anyone?" The man was young, of medium build, with jet black hair. He looked smart. Like he would see right through Jeremy.

Jeremy panicked. He quickly turned away and started scurrying off. His breathing intensified. The nervous clang and clatter of the items in his shopping cart made for a curious sight. Filled with fear, Jeremy kept going, not looking back. Heavy with clothes, and already warm when he started running, he was now hot and sweaty. He tired and slowed down. Finally, he rounded a corner.

Safe. No one was there. He waited for a moment, then peeked his

head around the corner. Still no one. *Crack crack crack meth.* Back at The Plaza there was no one standing in the doorway. Jeremy relaxed, and leaned against the wall. A crazy look in his eyes, he slumped down onto the pavement, and took out the disc to look at it. He wondered what to do. Above and around him, graffiti covered everything. A phrase stood out in white chalk:

viTaMin D

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:)

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