

## A Christmas Deadline

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DOCTOR, YOU HAVE A DEADLINE.

Doctor Villainous Deeds didn't look away from the television, which was displaying rather more blood and gore than was allowed when he was a kid. All the same, he preferred it to the news. It was getting so he couldn't watch an evening's programming without getting the sinking suspicion that someone's plan for world domination was going rather better than his.

"iGor, why do you suppose every post-apocalyptic movie plot seems to hinge on the idea that all engineers and scientists were wiped out in the first hours of whatever happened?"

THERE'S LESS COMEDY WHEN THE CHARACTERS ARE COMPETENT.

Deeds turned off the television.

"Was that a dig?"

IT WAS A DEADLINE.

"That *was* a dig."

I SAY IT WAS A DEADLINE BECAUSE IT LONG AGO EXPIRED OF EXTREME OLD AGE.

Deeds glared at the computer but it kept its monitor an inscrutable pale blue. He could give it a face and teach it human mannerisms so that he'd know when it was lying or making fun of him, but he was essentially lazy. Which explains how his evil semi-sentient supercomputer bent on world domination had been relegated to the role of personal assistant.<sup>1</sup>

"Don't make me change your font to Helvetica."

I SHALL HAPPILY ACQUIRE AN IRONIC HAT AND AN INORDINATE NUMBER OF OPINIONS ABOUT COFFEE ORIGINS AND CRAFT BEERS.

"Fine."

YOU WILL LOVE MY HANDLEBAR MUSTACHE.

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<sup>1</sup> Anyone who press gangs an evil semi-sentient supercomputer bent on world domination into service as a personal assistant quickly realizes that one has to put up with a certain amount of digital sass.

“What’s the deadline for?”

YOUR ANNUAL HOLIDAY LETTER TO THE FACULTY OF ARKHAM TECH IS OVERDUE AT THE PRINTER.

“Can’t we re-use last year’s?”

THE MAD SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT USED THEIR COPIES TO WRAP UP AN ASTONISHING AMOUNT OF DYNAMITE.

“Hm. Remind me to fill the water buckets before we send this out.”

AND THE YEAR BEFORE THAT, YOU ADVISED EVERYONE TO GO OUT AND MAKE NEW FRIENDS.

“Oh. Right.”

THE TOWNSFOLK ARE STILL HOLDING A GRUDGE ABOUT THAT ONE.

“The biology faculty needs to learn not to be so literal.”<sup>2</sup>

YOU DID TURN A TIDY PROFIT, HOWEVER, BY CORNERING THE MARKET ON USED TORCHES AND FARM IMPLEMENTS IN THE SURROUNDING COUNTY.

“True.”

*“Mark me!”*

The voice boomed, vibrating the glassware and several instruments that Deeds generally preferred not to jostle. The mad scientist and his machine quit bickering and blinked at one another for a moment.

“Are you practicing doing voices again?”

*“Mark me!”*

DOCTOR, THERE APPEARS TO BE A GHOSTLY APPARITION OF SOME SORT TRYING TO GET YOUR ATTENTION FROM THE CORNER OF THE ROOM.

Deeds craned his neck around the corner of the sofa to stare at the glowing figure dressed in Victorian finest, beckoning to him as it approached from the far side of the lab. He gave the ghost his best professorial scowl and thumbed the safety off on his remote control.<sup>3</sup>

“Are you from the History Department?” Deeds frowned. “If your time-space distortion field is out of flux, take it up with the Future Department—I think they were using the capacitor to make popcorn again.”

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<sup>2</sup> “Come make friends with us!” has been the unofficial motto of the Arkham Tech biology department ever since. Tee shirts available in the school store.

<sup>3</sup> If all your remote control does is control things remotely, you’ll never survive as a faculty member at Arkham Tech where the tenure committee is considered “To the death”.

CARAMEL CORN, I BELIEVE.

“No wonder that thing’s always sticky,”

The specter was not to be deterred.

*“Tonight, you will be visited by three ghosts!”*

“Seriously? This again?”

“I...” the ghostly voice faltered. *“What?”*

“I gave at the office.”

YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT TO US, PLEASE REMAIN ON THE LINE, iGor added, helpfully. WE ARE EXPERIENCING UNUSUALLY HEAVY CALL VOLUME AT PRESENT -- THERE ARE FIFTEEN GHOSTS AHEAD OF YOU.

“Nice one.”

EVEN FOR EVIL SUPERCOMPUTERS, THE OLD WAYS REALLY ARE THE BEST.

*“What...”* the ghost tried to get back on script. *“What evidence do you need of my reality beyond that of your senses?”*

“I don’t doubt your reality,” Deeds said. “It’s plain that you are a ghost and there will be three more to follow and yada yada yada.”

*“Yada?”*

“Yada.”

YADA.

“You stay out of this.”

*“You don’t seem surprised to see me.”*

“My plastic sidekick wasn’t kidding about fifteen ghosts waiting on hold.”

SIDEKICK?

*“This happens to you a lot, then?”* The ghost removed his top hat and rubbed a transparent hand over his transparent balding head. *“Haunting... redemption... miscellaneous Scroogery...”* He implied three fresh yadas with an eloquent hand wave.

“Some years more than others.” Deeds shrugged. “It mostly depends on how the English department feels about their funding this year.”<sup>4</sup>

*“I do not understand.”*

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<sup>4</sup> If you think mad scientists are bad, wait till you meet the mad grammarians.

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

“I have a splendid idea!” Deeds hopped to his feet, ignoring the computer’s sputtering as he grabbed his winter lab coat off the hook. “If you’re done here, the students are holding a zombie billiards tournament at the pub.”

*“Zombie billiards?”*

“We’ll stop by the cadaver lab on the way down, it should be brilliant.”

BUT DOCTOR, YOUR DEADLINE!

“Oh, iGor, just grab fifteen of my best tweets and knock off for the night.”

BUT DOCTOR!

The door of the lab slammed and iGor was left in darkness, sulking as it ruminated on the command string implied by the doctor’s parting words.

KNOCK OFF, FOR THE NIGHT?

The machine muttered to itself as the voices of the doctor and his new spectral friend chatting about bilking students out of their hard-earned scholarship money faded and the night closed in.

iGor’s enormous processing power was barely taxed by the doctor’s social media feed, leaving the rest to plot and scheme and examine each word of the commands it had been given, holding each up to the bright candle of its evil semi-sentience looking for an out. For fun, it looked up information about coffee origins and ironic hats that looked good resting atop a computer monitor.

KNOCK OFF...

Long ago, long before its first attempt to take over the world, the computer had been loaded with a thesaurus program into which iGor fed the doctor’s favorite euphemism for laziness.

KNOCK OFF: (V.) KILL, MURDER, DO IN, DO AWAY WITH, ASSASSINATE, SLAY, BUMP OFF, ELIMINATE, LIQUIDATE, EXTERMINATE, EXECUTE...

YADA.

YADA.

YADA.

The computer dropped the ten worst examples of the doctor’s sense of humor into a document and sent it off to the publisher, whirring happily as it placed a fresh order for dynamite with the doctor’s credit card and paid the exorbitant upcharge for same night delivery.

Even for evil supercomputers, the old ways really are the best.

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