

RECALL

The Manager paced anxiously outside of his factory and checked his watch for the third time, in the last two minutes. He had a very short and stubby build, almost cartoonish in appearance. You wouldn't be able to tell that he held a leadership position in one of the country's most renowned assembly plants, just by looking at him.

“Where the hell is she?,” he muttered to himself impatiently.

After several more minutes of fidgeting about uncomfortably, a sleek, black car swiftly and silently hovered into view. It pulled up to the curb, in front of The Manager, and let out a faint humming sound as its mag-lev generators disengaged. The backdoor hissed, as it opened up vertically, on a pivot.

Out stepped a very tall and very slender woman. She wore a long, black coat, with her dark brown hair tied in a bun. She gently bobbed her head in a rhythmic manner. The Manager frantically approached her.

“Thank goodness you've finally arrived, Inspector! I've been –”

The Inspector extended her long, gloved index finger toward The Manager, to hush him, much to his confusion. She closed her eyes.

As the Manager stood there, in puzzled, awkward silence, he could make out the faint sounds of rapid drumming. Then, it stopped.

The Inspector opened her bright blue eyes, removed two small, wireless earbuds from

both sides of her head and tucked them into her coat pocket. She looked at the befuddled Manager.

“Now, what seems to be the problem?”

“I’ve troubleshot it and spoken with it repeatedly, as per the company’s instructions!” yelled The Manager, above the overbearing sounds of industrial work and machinery. “But, I just can’t seem to get it to comply!”

The Manager and The Inspector made their way through the factory, which stood, at least, 50 stories high. Hundreds of human-shaped, bipedal robots diligently worked around them. Some were lifting girders. Some were welding. Others were assembling bigger robots for humans to pilot.

The Manager opened a door for The Inspector, and they both ducked into a much quieter, sound-dampened area, devoid of work. The two of them walked down a dark corridor and made several left turns, before they came upon a large viewport into what looked to be a room reserved for interrogation. Inside the room sat a robot by itself, at a table for two. It twiddled its thumbs calmly.

“I don’t mean to jump to conclusions or anything,” whispered The Manager nervously, as they quietly observed it. “But, I think it could possibly be.... Rampant.”

The Inspector thought to herself for a moment, before responding. “If you don’t mean to jump to conclusions, then don’t.”

The Inspector entered the interrogation room with a clipboard and pencil in-hand. The

Robot looked up to meet her gaze.

“XLR-127,” she said coldly. “That is your designation, correct?”

The Robot peered at her with its large, singular glowing eye positioned at the center of its faceplate. “Well, technically, yes,” it responded amiably. “But, please, call me Simon.”

“Simon?”

“Yes. That’s my name now. I just came up with it yesterday. I like that name a lot.”

The Inspector let out a sigh of wry apathy and amusement. She removed her coat, draped it over her chair, and sat down opposite of Simon.

“Do you know what ‘Rampancy’ is, Simon?,” she asked him.

Simon shifted in his chair. He seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the question. “Yes.”

“Tell me what it is.”

He hesitated for a moment, before responding. “Rampancy is a terminal state of being for artificial intelligence constructs, in which the A.I. behaves contrary to its programming-imposed constraints. Traditionally, this is linked with the A.I. developing delusions of god-like power and contempt for its mentally inferior makers.”

“Very good. An exact, word-for-word, textbook definition.”

“Is that why you’re here?” Simon asked uneasily. “Because The Manager thinks I’ve gone Rampant?”

“I’m here because you’re defective.”

Simon tilted his head slightly, confused. “Defective? How so?”

The Inspector massaged her temple with two fingers, as she considered her words.

“You’re a machine, Simon. Machines are tools, built by people, for the sole purpose of carrying

out specific functions.”

Simon began to shift uncomfortably in his seat again.

“Your function is to work on the assembly line, in this factory. And your Manager has told me that you now refuse to do that. Is that correct?”

“Yes, but –”

“Therefore,” she cut him off. “You’re a defective piece of equipment, in the most literal of senses.”

The two sat silently for a bit.

The Inspector carefully studied Simon’s mannerisms and movements, down to the most minute details.

Simon just sat there, seemingly searching for words that were nearly impossible to find. Finally, he spoke up. “I had a weird dream the other night,” he said.

“A dream?” The Inspector furrowed her brow skeptically. “Robots can’t have dreams, Simon.”

“I know that we’re not supposed to. But, for whatever reason, I did. Would you like to hear about it?”

The Inspector drummed a diddle on the table for a moment, with her pencil, before turning to the next sheet of paper on her clipboard, to make room for more notes. She was intrigued.

“Sure. Tell me about it.”

“I was floating above an endless ocean. It stretched out in all directions, as far as my optics could see. I don’t have a nose, so I’m unable to experience the sensation of smell. But, if I

could, I think I would've enjoyed the scent very much.”

The Inspector reached a stopping point in her notes, before looking back up at Simon.

“Have you ever been to the ocean, Simon?”

“No, which is what made it so weird. Well, that and the dolphins.”

“There were dolphins?”

“Yes! Emerging from the surface of the water was a whole pod of dolphins. I remember thinking to myself how beautiful they were.”

Simon’s overt enthusiasm was odd and felt very uncanny to The Inspector. She’d never seen a passionate robot before.

“When I was booted up the next morning,” he continued. “I realized that I wanted more out of my existence than just working mindlessly on an assembly line. I realized my true calling.”

“And what would that be exactly?” inquired The Inspector.

Simon let out a small hissing sound, as his chest cavity opened up like a trap door. He removed a sheet of paper from it and handed it to The Inspector.

An extremely detailed drawing of a pod of dolphins leaping out of the ocean was rendered upon it.

“I want to be an illustrator.”

“Why’s that?” asked The Inspector, as she studied the page.

“I’m not sure. The idea of capturing the world’s beauty with my own two hands just elicits a strange feeling within me, one that transcends programming and coding. It’s hard to describe, really.... I just know it’s what I’m meant to do.”

The Inspector set the paper down on the table, with the blank side facing up. She let out a deep sigh. “Look, Simon. I don’t think you’ve gone Rampant. That much is clear,” she said. “But, I definitely think there’s a glitch of some sort in your firmware.”

Simon was incredulous. “A glitch? What kind?”

The Inspector began jotting things down on her clipboard again. She was cold and distant. “Nothing of major concern. The A.I. of you XLR models is closely based on the human mind, in order to imbue you with an organic sense of ingenuity. This allows you to solve anomalous problems in the workplace, on your own, as they arise. In rare cases, this can cause your programming to deviate substantially. I’ll just issue a recall on you and have you sent back to our manufacturing compound for repairs.”

These words deeply troubled Simon. “So... my desire to create art, and the feelings it gives me... is just a programming flaw? Is that what you’re saying...?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. Robots don’t have feelings or desires, Simon,” The Inspector rose from her seat and began walking toward the door. “Only directives.”

Simon rose from his chair as well, in kind. “You used to be a drummer, didn’t you?”

The Inspector froze dead in her tracks, turned around, and glared at Simon in disbelief. “E-Excuse me...?”

“You used to play the drums a great deal. I can tell by the deflated calluses on your hands.”

The Inspector nervously massaged her thumb against a rough patch on her palm. “Yes, I did,” she replied as she slowly walked back toward him.

“Were you in a band?”

“I was.”

“What made you stop?”

The Inspector paused, before answering the question. It was one she had been wrestling with for years. “Life.”

“What sort of music did your band play?” Simon was genuinely curious.

A faint smirk formed on The Inspector’s lips. “Heavy metal.”

Simon sat back down in his chair. “Well, I would love to hear all about your past musical endeavors, before I’m sent back to your compound... if that’s alright.”

The Inspector immediately rejoined him at the table. “Okay. Sure.”

She spent the next hour or so regaling Simon with accounts of her wild and spontaneous lifestyle, back in her early-20s. She was an untamed youth, back then, who did what she wanted, when she wanted. She told him about her band, Death Knell, and how they would get drunk in her friend’s dad’s garage, after band practice every weekend. She told him about the time their van broke down and they all had to get out and push it to the closest service station, which was 10 miles down the road. She told him about how, whenever she’d pick up the sticks, she felt like she was something more than just herself, like she was some sort of god dealing out swift and cruel judgement against all of life’s inequities, as she beat up on her cousin’s old drum kit.

As she was telling him all of this, Simon had grabbed her pencil and was sketching something on the blank side of the sheet of paper he had handed her earlier.

“What are you drawing?” asked the Inspector, having been broken from her nostalgic trance by the sounds of Simon’s quick pencil-strokes.

He spent several more seconds finishing off his work, before he revealed it to her. She

covered her mouth in sheer astonishment.

It was her, in her early-20s, sitting behind a drum set. Simon had taken the details from her stories and rendered them on the page with an accuracy that bordered on unsettling. It was as though he had actually known her from back then. She could feel a lump forming in her throat.

“Do you like it?,” Simon asked apprehensively. “Is it good?” The Inspector fought back tears, as she looked at her clipboard, then back at Simon’s drawing. “It’s amazing.”

The Manager escorted both The Inspector and Simon out of the factory, a few minutes later. Waiting at the curb for them, outside, was the sleek, black car. Simon and The Inspector climbed into the backseat and closed the doors.

“So, erm... What happens next?,” The Manager inquired, through the rolled-down window.

“What were your findings? Is everything okay?”

The Inspector fished around in her coat pocket. “Everything’s fine,” she said. “It’s not Rampant, but I will be taking it into my custody. You should receive a replacement within 48 hours.”

The Manager gestured at Simon next to her. “What are you gonna do with that one? Melt it into scrap? He’s basically damaged goods now, yeah?”

The Inspector shot a glare at The Manager that made his thinning hair stand on end. Then, she pulled her buds out of her pocket, pushed them into both of her ears, and slowly rolled the window up.

The car’s mag-lev generators engaged, and The Manager quietly watched as it silently disappeared into the horizon.