

Electronic Prison

The screen was black. It had been black for some time now. He wondered when it was going to come back. He would sit and be patient. The screen had gone dark before but had eventually relit. The screen would display images again, he just knew it. The screen wouldn't let him down. Not now. Not after all they had been through.

Harvey sat in his living room with the curtains drawn. The recliner he enjoyed was cocked in the upright position. It was the position he used for his gaming. He had been embroiled in an epic battle for possession of the castle and the rescue of the princess when his monitor had gone dark. Harvey was a little confused. He really didn't know what to do.

Harvey called for his domestic mechanical. "Hey James! Come in here will ya'?" He had named the device James after a favorite character from the movies.

James wheeled into the living room. "Yes sir. How may I be of service." Harvey had put James in British butler mode. He enjoyed the illusion of Victorian luxury.

"The screen's black." Harvey pointed to the giant display wall where his images used to be constantly displayed.

“I see.” James computed a set of possible responses and scenarios. “I will check the system sir. Just one moment.” James wheeled away.

Harvey pulled back the lever on his recliner to lay him flat. Secretly, he welcomed the respite from the screen. He could relax his eyes for a minute. Harvey closed his eyes and began to slip into sleep.

Harvey was woken from his slumber by a crashing sound coming from the kitchen area. He pushed the lever on the recliner and bolted up right. Harvey jogged to the kitchen.

There on the limestone encrusted vinyl lay James. He had fallen over on his side. His wheels, which were James’ only source of propulsion, spun in clean kitchen air. James’ vision eye was dark. James was not moving. James looked as dead as the screen in the living room.

This was a situation in which Harvey had never been challenged. He had no screen. He had no James. What he did have was hunger, but James was always responsible for that. Harvey would just have to try and do it himself. He would worry about the screen later.

Harvey perused the kitchen. The cabinet doors of the space were smooth with no visible hardware for human hands to manipulate the doors. Harvey tried to open one of them, but it wouldn’t give to the force his hands gave as they swept over the surface of the door.

Harvey looked underneath the door. It had a small eye-hole there, presumably for some tool James possessed. Harvey looked to James’ articulating appendages. There were an array

of tools and grips on his hands. Harvey tried to pull one of the metal implements from James' hand, but the tool was firmly ensconced there. It would not move.

Harvey looked around. There was nothing available for exploration of the eyehole. Harvey searched the house. He tried the bedroom and closets. He opened drawers. Nothing looked useable. Then, in the bathroom, he found it. His toothbrush.

Bringing the tooth cleaning device back to the kitchen, Harvey set to opening one of the cabinets yet again. The handle of the toothbrush was close to the size needed but it was a bit too wide. Harvey would have to cut it down. He looked for a knife. They were in the cabinets. Harvey threw his toothbrush to the ground in disgust.

Harvey reached deep into the pockets of his shirt. It was the resting place for his smart pad. The smart pad would save him. He'd order from the Flaming Dragon, his favorite Thai restaurant. They delivered. Zippidee Dooda and he had his pad at his fingertips.

The pad failed to respond to his touch. He tried the buttons on the side the tablet. No go. He pressed his fingers onto the scan button in an attempt to login with his fingerprints, but that too proved fruitless. His smart pad met his toothbrush on the kitchen floor.

His home was useless to him now. He would have to drive to civilized electronically activated society. He headed for the garage.

The electric car, that was Harvey's pride and some of his joy, stood prominent in the middle of the garage, its electric charging cord umbilical tethered between the car and the charging station on the wall. Harvey unplugged the car and jumped into the driver's seat. He called the car to action.

"Power on."

Harvey sat. And waited. The large display on the dashboard was as dark as his screen inside. Harvey tried again.

"I said, POWER ON!"

Using a louder volume did nothing to coax the car to life. Harvey stared at the screen. In time a small icon appeared on the display. It was the outline of a battery done in red color. Red was the color of empty in this model. Under the battery icon were the words.

"Low battery."

Harvey pounded his fist on top of the dashboard. "Just work dammit!"

The battery icon slowly faded away. The display went black.

Harvey went back inside. He had no idea what to do now. Everything he depended on in life had failed. He returned to the comfort of his recliner. He felt safe there. He felt ... well ... loved there.

Harvey clicked the recliner into the lay down mode. He stared at the ceiling of the living room, perhaps for the first time. The ceiling had been finished with a texturing of sorts.

Harvey imagined all kinds of patterns emerging from the seemingly random pattern in the texture. He saw a malformed donkey here. There was a rabbit there with three ears.

The thing that started to bother him, the thing that was worrying, was the silence. It was so quiet. The house was never this quiet. There was always the sound of whirring cooling fans for the electronics or the heating and cooling systems.

But it wasn't just silent. There were sounds. Every now and then there would be a creak or crackle as the house groaned in the wind outside.

His imagination started to run amok at the small little sounds. Harvey became preoccupied with the sounds. His mind started to interpret each bump and pop. Was there an intruder? A murderer lurking about? Perhaps the sounds were otherworldly. Perhaps there was a spirit at work. Was the spirit malevolent? Was he in danger of losing his life? His very soul?

Harvey curled his body in a fetal position. He would ride out this black screen time of his life. All would be well if he just waited. If he just believed.

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Detective Hanson opened the front door of the house. He was met immediately with the repugnant stink of death. The neighbors were right. Something had happened to Harvey.

The Detective ordered the patrolmen to open the windows, to give them a chance to investigate, the smell was that pervasive. In time, Detective Hanson braved the fetid cloud of

decomposition and investigated the property for any and all corpses.

Hanson found Harvey tightly curled in a ball lying on his recliner. He didn't need to go further. He would call the coroner for the autopsy. There were no signs of a struggle. Suicide seemed the best explanation at the moment.

Night had fallen and so the detective reached for a light switch to illuminate the room. The switch failed to light the lamps in the ceiling. He tried the switches in the kitchen. No luck there. Detective Hanson visited the garage. He knew this neighborhood put the breaker cabinet there.

Hanson opened the door of the breaker panel. A quick inspection revealed that the main power fuse had been tripped. 'Power surge'. Hanson diagnosed the trouble. The detective clicked the main fuse back to its working position.

The lights in the garage fired. The whirring of electrical motors starting to wind up filled the house. The detective revisited the living room. It was fully lit, and the display wall was already filling with icons and various windows displaying various content.

A voice called out from the kitchen. "May I have some assistance, please?"

The detective entered the kitchen to find a robotic domestic device lying on the floor. He picked it up and righted the device.

"Thank you, sir." James motored to the living room to see if Harvey needed anything.

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