

## Bean Counting (On You)

by Glap Collective

Their digestive system collapses, the fibrous bean matter causing it to fatally crash. Roxio looks down and watches the body fold inwards with disinterest. If it were possible to feel gladness, this was the moment. Instead, they direct energy elsewhere. Following standard procedure they seek the path to de-mechanise and auto-destruct indiscriminately.

Acknowledging animal life superior, Roxio pulls the plug and falls to the ground.

Elsewhere, Roxi4 inserted their index finger into the wall-mounted scanner and started to giggle. The sensors tickled as they searched their prints for information. They were not worried, they'd done nothing wrong. They shifted fingers, this time poking the forefinger into the hole. They waited for it to register. A show of compliance now and then could only be a good thing, they thought. 'USER NOT RECOGNISED'. A red message box faintly pulsed on screen. Roxi4's eyes roll ceiling-wards. And again, finger out, finger in. The fingers start to tremble and a layer of moisture builds between the tips and the contact pads. They can't have found out. No! Not yet. It's too soon. How?

A voice from behind orders their eyes to the camera unit with the command to identify. 'You must be fucking joking,' they mutter, 'this wasn't the deal'.

At the console around the corner Joenjoes smiles to itself as it releases the door. 'Just get in here. We're waiting for you'. Stepping inside, Roxi4 walks towards the purple strobe in the far corner. 'The *RATS*', Roxi4 thinks, 'I bet they want to ask about the *RATS*'. Invisible forces pass through their body as they stand, legs apart, arms aloft. 'Please, come'. The

order issues from the uniformed bot to the right. 'The fucking bitch is going to pat me down', Roxi<sub>4</sub> mutters under their breath. Alloy fingers under flesh coloured Flex-Lite plastic sweep across their buttocks and down their thighs. The sweeping fingers come to a stop at the ankles. Lube oozes out of each digital tip as they squeeze the centimetre of uncovered ankle flesh between Kevlar and Roxi<sub>4</sub>'s pig-blood boots.

It was F.R.A.N.K. Yes it had to be. No other explanation. It was scanning their thoughts. Thoughts they had so carefully organized to hide were slowly being undone. Mind Rats, they called them. Like the memory of the boy in the attic reading from a dusty old fantasy book. How could anything make sense from that labyrinth of storytelling? Really. Children were so a thing of the past. Animals had managed to hang on, though not all and certainly not without modification.

'Good morning!' rasped a badger, 'time for another round of neurological reconditioning from the emotional predators that demand they share the same feelings and understanding'.

Each group of animals had their chips scanned as they moved along the belt. 'Can you believe these things once lived among us?' said F.R.A.N.K, chirpily leaning back from the touchpad. A warm, oily perspiration misted over the F.R.A.N.K units optical receptors as the slow, mechanical rhythms lulled its processor's in to a synchronized thought pattern. Animals? Humans! Individual bio-units! Roxi! Units 4. Units 8. Units 16. Feeling? Crap. Nerve endings reroute. Bio-units, what do they know? Everything it seems. They listened and learned, traditional style. And there lies the problem. Processing syndrome had struck again. A fault. 95E. A soft reset to no avail. The conveyer belt had ground to a halt.

Call Roxi16. They will know what to do.

*Receiving*

*Oh give me a break how many times ....be right over ....shit!*

As Roxi16 reached for the reboot the room went dark and silent. 'Fuuuuck, not good', and then from somewhere down the hall a generator began to hum.

Processing syndrome was their thing. They were the expert. Made for it really. But recently it had felt different, a new pattern. Too dangerous to reboot now, they loaded on a pair of arms and slithered silently towards the humming. Reaching the generator Roxi16 knelt down and pressed the side of their face against the warm metal. The humming went in through their ear and was picked up by the transducer close to their charging port. By adjusting proximity the vibrations increased, spreading through the entire unit. Search Memory Function displayed a .mov file from RKive. The subject displayed similar patterns of physical modulation. 'Is this what fear feels like?', they wondered. The body rippled; it was a reflex response, a chameleonic survival instinct that would attempt to blend them with the subject. As their nervous system juddered with foreboding the body took charge, masterfully making decisions on how to save its life. Preserve life? Individual human units feared death once, its clearly visible from the cinema records. The predetermined nature of that life cycle still haunted some Roxi's with their only distraction being image bearing windows. Child bearing still inexplicably tore through their processor functions in spite of any lingering bodily apparatus.

ABORT. ALERT. ABORT. The corridor lights flashed red as Roxi16 broke into a long stride. Memories of a mysterious, previous existence dissolving like dust particles, disintegrating

before their eyes as they try to make an escape through the corridor, racing past a black and white chessboard vinyl floor, a loose panel, a dead badger, rats dressed in plastic, a finger.

'Badger? Badger? Can you hear me?'

'Pssst, rat... RAT!'

'Rat... please... come here, get this fucking finger off me.'

Metallic grating sounds start to fill their sound receptors as the rats begin gnawing through flexing hairy fingers. The sound is more disgusting than Joenjoes chow down in the mess room. 'Joenjoes! Where are you when I need you?'

Their face was free but the rats were not. They had climbed into the mental cavities and in return clearly expected to use it as some kind of shelter or transport.

Rats on the brain! Properly utilized can be a great help, acting as A1decoys from memory invaders. But not this time. Joenjoes undependable response times had continued to slip ever since the introduction of minimum data rationing, limiting their ability to rewrite. Try negotiating with multiple strands of processors all deluded into thinking they are true individuals and all you get is a silica fudge bucket.

Roxi16 realised they had to get out. ASAP. Yet to surface with the rats inside could potentially be a disaster for past and future Roxis. And yet the fact that the rats were using them as a mode of transportation could perversely be an advantage. Connecting to Joenjoes they ran system variables for maximising downtime off central pro-grid: it calculated a 1:24 duree for exit. That was cutting it fine. A metallic scratching could be

heard below their CPU housing sheath. Roxi16 logged off from Joenjoes. A customary tremor in the hands spread to the head. 'Time to go'. They needed an exit strategy that would erase them from all interplanetary databases. 'Search. Wipe', they commanded. 'Wipe. Found. Wipe. What RX16?', replied internal processor1. 'Wipe everything. No. Stop. Wipe everything. Except memory 82.'

Back in the lab, Joenjoes was counting beans. Since the consumables-bust, beans had become the number one source of everything; food, energy, clothing, building. Red Lab had cornered the market and become the main manufacturers of bean product. It was a good humanitarian cover that had so far silenced the critics and prevented any attacks on the corp. Joenjoes receptors could just about handle the calculations but didn't leave room for much more. Nevertheless, it tried again pushing the data, releasing a search bug for Roxi16 but the reports back were negative. Roxi16 was lost or irreparably damaged. The next best was Roxi4 but she was still suffering from Rkive memory syndrome, processor fault 95E.

As the bean crisis deepens the central F.R.A.N.K. regulatory system calls an emergency intervention to stop all Joenjoes continuing with their internal double doubt logic system and revert to populist pragmatic reasoning. Simultaneously, a momentary loss of power occurs and the lighting units flick off and on. The flashing intensifies as a row of red LEDs on each Roxi unit in the storage bay stutter into life. This safe-hold doesn't feel so safe anymore. The window images show a reality of swirling wind and fire. Roxi4 senses a solution. 'If I can re root the failing memory syndrome to the window simulation this may just temporarily suspend belief in Re-Ality'. Roxi4 sighs. 'Rolling memory 82, indestructible

inorganic magnetism... I love you all....In the beginning I was just metal foil and artificial skin.. will things ever be that simple again?'

Armed with a pair of blunt orange scissors Roxi4 starts to cut long strips from their spare tube of silver foil. Working fast, they stick the foil with black and yellow hazard tape over their Windows. Soon, every Window is covered in tape and foil and Roxi4's dark space was ready. Cutting the final strip of foil, Roxi4 realised that they were crying. That was not supposed to happen.

***True bare metal server experience> tck tck <investing SoftLayer biogen infrastructure> wooosh. ping. Pping. Ppping. tck tck tck tck. Corrupted File Detected. Shut down will commence in 20, 19, 18, 17.....5, 4, 3..... : ....?***

The car winds its way through the mountain roads of the pristine northern landscape. The tree line alternates between bright sunshine and shade from the fluffy clouds in the deep blue sky. The landscape is perfectly mirrored in the calm waters of the lake. Roxi4 turns away from the window and sighs! Obliterated Roxis fall from the sky accelerating towards the earth, images of sky, clouds and earth spinning around and around 0001 1011 0101 1100 1101.....all the leaves are brown

and the sky is grey...

I'd be safe and warm

if I was in L.A.

Pck

Pck..... pck....

Wha...?

replicate ulna?

as what metric..?

Pulling off the highway, the car comes to a stop on a high bluff overlooking the canyon. Far below, the river sparkles along its serpentine length. Roxi4 gets out and scans the scene carefully. At location 36.1128 north by 113.9960 west they pick up a weak signal from a F.R.A.N.K. unit that survived the fall event last month. They detect proximal motion and heat. 'Rats, the damn things get everywhere'. The image is suddenly paused by a tap on their shoulder. They spin around, coming face to face with two hefty looking highway patrol men. Their secondary visualizer engages, mirroring the long and winding road in their polished social engagement surface. Roxi4 recoils and emits a high-pitched noise. The patrol men take this as an act of defiance and force Roxi4's head against the side window of the vehicle pushing legs apart with their knees and sharp elbows into spine.

As one of the patrolmen reaches behind his back for his gun holster, a low whine is heard from the side of the vehicle. Down in the valley, F.R.A.N.K unit pro-con45\_#2\_SE powers up in response to the distress signal. Through blowing pine trees and circling vultures, F.R.A.N.K. sees the Patrol Man taking aim. An almighty CRACK rings out, echoing around the canyon, shattering the main cognitive processor. A smell of burning pine, flames and roaring wind surround Roxi4's senses, swirling constellations of glowing embers streak across the blackened void. **SHUTDOWN** commences. Their last input is of a second muffled CRACK.

Back in the Red Lab Joenjoes is still counting beans when it feels something inside die. Pffffffsssst. Barely a fizzle sounds as the connection is irreparably lost forever. Beans spill and randomly scatter across the metallic laboratory work surface. Callahan screams out to Roxi4: 'NO.... WAIT!!' The second patrol officer grabs him by the ankles and he falls face

first into the gravel. The images flicker in suspension mode and Roxio steps away from the window. A sickening wells up through the digestive system. More beans?