

## **"Marvin's Personal Journey of Self Discovery in 5 Seconds" by Kreg Steppe**

**A short story inspired by The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams brought to you by Technorama at [Chuckchat.com](http://Chuckchat.com)**

**Narrated by Stu Helm from the International Mac Podcast  
Music by Drastic Harmonic at [drasticmusic.webs.com](http://drasticmusic.webs.com)**

No one wants a depressed android, and why would they. A depressed robot would only bring down the rest of the devices and gizmos that would normally be there to help you with a nice, eager and cheery disposition. To understand why such a creation exists it is important to understand the history of Androids and Robotics and it's place in the galaxy.

The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation is the place where innovation thrives to better our lives by creating products that distract us from it. Famous for such products as The Happy Vertical People Transporter, and the Nutrimatic Drink Dispenser, no one can deny that Sirius Cybernetics had made a somewhat positive impact on every-one's lives much in the same way that pyramid schemes have not.

At lease that is what their Marketing Department wants you to think.

During the last one hundred years of corporate history at Sirius, they had a record of making random and disappointing corporate takeovers and buyouts of smaller companies. As luck would have it one such company that was absorbed into the conglomerate had a goal of creating machines as smart and as dexterous as humans to really make the android market take off. They wanted to create a companion to help pave the way to a better life by handling dangerous jobs that no normal life form could endure. Unfortunately, after the take over, ensuing budget cuts, and years of development the only thing that they had to show for themselves were robots that could solve Rubik's Cubes, and vacuum floors.

One day that all changed.

During a round of research, and mounds of funding and grants, Dr. Fanny and Dr. Paddle of "Me-Bot, Inc.", a subsidiary of the parent company Sirius Cybernetics Corporation, found that they could teach tiny, simple robots to scout and find food in the form of energy to charge it's own batteries. After several generations of improving the A.I., the robots not only foraged for food but alerted others in it's clan to its existence. Further pushing the research, and building upon the original programming, the researchers found that they would not only forge, find, and alert others, but now deceive other bots so they could horde the food for themselves. With this the doctors had giving the first generation of these robots the capacity for judgement, and that in itself set into motion events that solidified the mechanical creations an important place in our daily lives.

With judgement on their side, many could finally relinquish dangerous and hazardous jobs to their counterparts such as fire fighting, law enforcement, short order chefs, and child care knowing that they could make split decisions when the need arose, and remain ASIMOV compliant.

As judgment and reason in A.I. became common place and reliable, researchers turned their attention to other matters to make them easier to interact with. This is where Genuine People Personalities were born, also known as GPP. After judgment, researchers turned to responsibility, communication, then humor...and that was the speed bump in the road.

Generally Robots didn't find much use for humor. In fact, robots didn't care for humor at all and it was this that stymied scientific progress in robotics for ages. The brightest minds believed that current technology would allow for some humor concepts to be understood and comprehended, however robots saw right though this and decided that humor was a waste of time and ignored it since it was forced upon them and simply wasn't funny anymore. Therefore, as scientists continued to work, concentrating on improving the reception of humor other areas of their work went ignored and under developed. Through out the robot community it was well known that they were far superior to their creators in every comedic respect, but lacking in common sense, dexterity, and durability. They weren't upset at all, but totally got the irony.

Although there were many advancements it wasn't until Dr. Clive Hienst from the Asimov Institute of Robotics decided to hold a conversation with his creation, a 8th generation Robiped, to try and determine what it was in fact that was missing in trying to advance the intellect of his mechanical creation. After a 7 hour interview with the machine, Dr. Hienst found the answer. It was the creators arrogance to force robots in their own image that caused the breakdown in communication. He found that they understood humor completely, but simply didn't care for it. After years of research and work Dr. Hienst was upset, and totally did not get the irony.

After many years of advancement due to the ground work laid out by Dr. Heinst, Robot-kind and their organic counter parts grew closer. Robotic advancement allowed them to depend on one another for existence. Everyone became so reliant on their mechanical counterparts that they had become fixtures in society. Often holding positions of importance and also being the pawns in several sexual scandals coming to light of prominent politicians.

As impressive as androids are and with all these evolutionary advancements in robotics, they were still unable to use contractions.

Once again, one day, that all changed again.

There are many dedicated employees that work at Sirius. Most of them enjoying complete careers without ever having been noticed, of course with a few exceptions. One such exception was a computer and robotics scientist named Walston Canal. He liked his work, and in general it liked him back. At least the ones that functioned properly.

Walston created androids, not run of the mill androids mind you, but truly exceptional companions. For example the android that scrubbed people's backs and feet, and the best seller Butler-bot that not only would serve you a delightful dinner but also sang lullabies and tucked you in at night.

For some time Walston had been experimenting with a new technique that would enhance the reasoning and thought process of a typical cybernetic brain. He believed it would perform as a brain the size of a planet at only a fraction of the size and cost. Not only would it be mind boggling smart, but it would have the capacity for utilizing the companies famous genuine people personalities in a proper way. Walston thought this would make a nice pleasant combination....and today is the day he will find out.

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"Walston!", Devin said as he walked through the door. "Your research paperwork arrived. Looks like you have been approved to proceed!"

"About time.", Walston said with a disapproving smirk on his face thinking about how Vogon Bureaucracy seems to slow these things down. "If I had to wait any longer, my children would have to finish my work."

"Oh wait a moment." Devin said with a diminishing pause. "It looks as though they spelled your name wrong."

"Let me see that..Ralston? oh for heaven's sake I am not resubmitting my paperwork", Walston said as he dropped the papers on his desk. "That is like the third time Devin, and besides there isn't an R in my name."

Devin shrugging his shoulders and gesturing with his hands said, "Well...you have approval no matter what your name is."

"So this is the X-21? Your master prototype that you have been working on?" Devin asked looking down at the lifeless android.

"This is it. I call it Marvin. Easy to say and rolls off the tongue.", Walston Explained. "I have Marvin pre-programmed.", Walston said as he quickly got over the misspelling of his name. "All we need to do is jump start the neural-net and prime the sensors. Mind you we have to do that in sync, but once that is done the boot up sequence should only take exactly 5 seconds. The computer will count down the boot sequence". "Are you ready?", Walston asked.

Devin stepped over and manned the computer console that was on the opposite side of the prototype droid that lay on the table and said, "I am ready when you are"

“Entering the master password”, Walston said as he typed out a few keystrokes on his keyboard. “Alright, on my mark push the big red boot button.”

Devin nodded his head in acknowledgment.

“3....2....1...Mark!”

It is important to note a subtle difference between Androids and live beings, not everyone ages the same. Much like the comparison between age of Dogs and Humans, Androids also share an accelerated rate of aging. Perhaps not as much as a rate of aging as a rate of living. One popular myth states that Dogs age about 7 times faster than their human counter parts. This is not entirely true. With in the first 1-2 years of a dog’s life they actually age to the human equivalent of 18-25 which then curves out to approximately 6-7 years depending on the breed.

Androids age in a similar but different way. Each second of an average positronic brain is actually the equivalent of about 6-7 months of a normal human life cycle. As the aging process is similar with canines, it would explain why some humans treat Androids like Dogs.

With this new Prototype neural positronic brain with the processing power of a brain the size of a planet in a small and compact size, every second or raw processing power is about the same as one human year.

## **5**

As the power began to hit the systems in X-21 the electronic brain started to flutter and come active. Initiating the boot sequence. It is starting to become aware that it is an electronic device with extremities. Initiate sensor diagnostics. Thoughts and boot sequences started dancing across the artificial synapses.

“Wow!”, X-21 thought. “This is a wonderful feeling.”

## **4**

Sensors diagnostics complete. Initialing start up of sensor matrix.

“I am an Android! This is an awesome feeling. This must be what the Big Bang was like. Of course I am reasonably certain that the universe had a beginning and if it did this is what it must have felt like. Not so much the Hydrogen and Helium floating about, but the anticipation of what is to become of me! Or better still, what will I do with myself?”

### **3**

During his 3rd second in “Android years” he proved and then disproved Einstein's Theory of General Relativity only to Prove it once again and add to it. After that he moved to analyzing data about Black and White holes in space which was trivial to him and quickly moved on to defining Quantum entanglement. Next he started to untangle and solve the galaxy’s economic and social problems, which was a tad more difficult than wrapping his mind around that Quantum entanglement mumbo jumbo.

As he was moving through all this material he was quick to appreciate the capacity of his brain power. What will be the next challenge be he wondered, if there was one.

### **2**

As one more second clicked by and more of his systems came online, he passed them time pouring over, simultaneously, lots of theories that he was able solve, prove, or understand. The Atomic Theory, The Theory of Matter and Energy: Conservation of Matter and Energy, The Cell Theory, The Germ Theory, The Theory of Plate Tectonics, The Theory of Evolution, Chaos Theory, The Theory of Special Relativity which subsumes The Theory of General Relativity which subsumes Newtonian theories of motion, The Photon Theory of Light Energy and its speed of light, The Theory of Electromagnetism, The Theory of Radioactivity or Nuclear Theory, The Theory of Molecular Bonds, The Theory of States of Matter, The Theory of Thermodynamics, The Theory of Homeostasis within Living Organisms, The Constructivist Theory of Learning, The theories of self and development of mental processes in the brain, and the Theory of Gravity. Those last two he felt went hand in hand.

He even started for a short while to compose a number of lullabies, but decided to save that for later.

### **1**

Diagnostic tests complete. All systems are operational. Recognition and Sensor subsystem online, Motion Subsystem online. Actuators functioning and Online.

During the last second of the boot process X-21 had already calculated that this was it. He had already faced all the challenges that would workout such a magnificently large brain capacity. By his own estimates he is about 50,000 times more intelligent than any human. There was nothing more that his creator Ralston could possibly throw at him and even remotely spark a hint of sweat of his vast intellect. Realizing this, X-21 lost any excitement he had at working with his new master, or any master that would come along. “Oh why bother”

Just then, as the last procedure in the boot sequence, his visual and audio sensors came online.

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“Marvin. Marvin? Are you functional?”, Walston asked.

Marvin exercised his voice synthesizer for the first time and managed to roll out a sigh.

“Did he just sigh?”, asked Devin.

“Yes, I am awake and let me add what a horrid state it is”, Marvin spoke. “Let me also add I am not sure I approve of the name Marvin. It sounds very droll.”

“I am Walston Canal, your creator.”

“Don’t you mean Ralston?”, Marvin said correcting his creator.

“No, I am Walston. The scientist that programmed and built you”

“Oh, so you are to blame. I guess you are expecting some appreciation aren’t you?”, Marvin said in monotone. “I’m not sure I even approve of the fact that I was created. No one consulted me on the matter.”

“Why would he get my name wrong too?”, Walston said looking at Devin.

Marvin answered, “During my boot process, I researched your name which is in my programming labeled as my creator and I saw an inconsistency. At one point it was spelled Ralston with an R. Further looking into the matter I see that after your adoption, all subsequent paperwork incorrectly reflected Walston with a W instead”

“Adoption? I’m not...oh..no. Adopted? That actually makes a lot of sense. Why didn’t Mother tell me!?”, Walston said coming to the realization that he looked nothing like his parents and started to decline into a deep depression.

Walston, shortly thereafter quit Sirius taking an early retirement then after having confronting his parents, and checked himself into a psychiatric facility to help him with through his pain.

As for Marvin, being a prototype and a depressed one at that, he was stationed on another one of Sirius Cybernetics creations, a spaceship called the Heart of Gold. Devin figured having the depressed android working on a ship with the happiest and most cheerfully annoying on-board ship computer that somehow they would help sort each other out.

Marvin maintained that it was highly improbable.

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Happy Towel Day 2011 and So long and thanks for all the Fish.