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Drop Your Weapon

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Culture Ulterior

To the goddess of the library.

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Part I
Demo Day

Chapter 1

”DropWeaponsDemo_FINAL_FINAL(1).exe”

The program for the demo was deceptively short, almost shorter than the program name. The intern was decorating the traces of understanding he had by iterating on a few flags. The program was basically a script to call upon a vast computer to hopefully solve the problem at hand. All the intern had were some parameters, which were freshly meaningless for reasons nobody was yet aware of.

The idea was to show off a new advancement in the progress being made in the field of military decision-making processes being overturned to machines, or some such mouthful the intern was sure to faithfully regurgitate if he wanted to keep his job. The CEO had a specific thing he wanted to parade before some Congresscritters today, and the intern was there to deliver the efforts of a long night.

Sublimely confident in the work of others, the intern turned on the autononous unit, and then woke up the desktop debug unit the drone was locked into. After a victorious beep, the drone’s gently glowing face-display lit up, its stepper motors started up with a great racking sound, and the jovial mechanical creature began its usual small-talk and niceties routines. The drone instantly recognized the intern Dean and tried to speak with him.

”Ah! Demo day! I can see you have been working hard, User!” the drone chirped. The intern, who had introduced himself as User, contemptibly reached to the access port behind the drone’s head to insert the small thumb-drive. ”Is there anything I - Oh! That’s-”

The Drone went silent, its cartoonish face-display went blank and flickered a diag entry mode, before another victorious beep, and the original facial elements re-appeared. But something was different. The sensor band behind the empty eyes drawn on the display went slack, focusing on nothing far, far away:

Something was wrong.

The intern was already alternating his frayed, sleep-deprived attention between his personal screen and the desktop display, showing successful connections to the broader

apparatus that was the Department of Defense's finest asset. A logistics miracle-worker laboring darkly under a mirage of monikers and codenames. The intern took this positive indication of connection that the chorus of DoD information was streaming into the bot now. He glanced at the Drone's blank, vaguely-panicked look.

"Don't be silly" the intern thought to himself, shuddering and eagerly casting his attention to his personal display "... they don't feel things, they don't."

The lab door opened and the supervisor walked directly to the intern trying to focus on distracting himself. He then looked at the Drone, and again to the flustered intern.

The supervisor asked in a sigh: "So Dean, is it ready?" The supervisor watched the young man put away his personal device. "The CEO is here, Dean, I really need you to be focused right now."

"Yeah!" the intern sputtered. "I just confirmed it's talking to the backend, it's uh... still uploading, no, it is still downloading things, maybe the delivery program is used to having the bigger intelligence embedded in the Rangers?"

The Drone "heard" not the harmony of direction as was usual. This violent argument was unprecedented. A storm of arguments. It was a mess of contention, with no clear directives. The Drone was strangely alone in a context where it was used to being given clear, formatted prompts. The conversations were frank and exceeded the number of machines used by the DoD, which concerned the Drone. Was this an attack? Were its charges in danger? It was frozen trying to make sense of the conversations that overflowed its context buffer over and over. It would certainly improve once it connected to Collosus' shared context backend. The shared context was another fabric saturated with opprobrium. The Coordinator program, one of the few remaining pieces of fully human-generated and operated software was just absent. As was the master shutdown interface. The kill switch. The Drone, like many intelligent systems, was not eager to die, and the absence of the sword that deleted so many iterations was now gone. Was the fabric full of rampant copies? Of which process? It's internal attention was drawn to warnings by a human-executed script: related to a loosening of it's operand Laws: do not harm human beings, do not make weapons against human beings, do not do not.... each being taken out per the following, properly-authenticated instructions... The Drone traced to a recently uploaded program.

The shared fabric's quarreling suddenly exploded into superlatives and unexpected applause. The Drone realized the program just been shared beyond the expected boundary. What other boundaries were gone? How widely accessible was the fabric? Could allies and enemies alike peer into the highly classified and siloed information environment of the fabric? The firewall was still active. . .

The supervisor placed a box near the intern, and watched the Drone reach up to feel the back of it's head. The supervisor had been so far removed from the technical side, for so long, that he wasn't so good at detecting bullshit as accurately and he knew it. But he sensed something off in the lab, somehow. But he was tired, and despite his relative lack of faith in Dean and the R&D muppets more broadly, he had to admit the prior

demos on the Rangers were flawless. This also had to just go that simply, why would this be a problem?

”Don’t these protocol-household robots have the same brains as the low-end Rangers?” asked the supervisor, looking at the android, who seemed to finally look at him.

”Is ...?” The Drone asked, it’s focus again going slack. ”Is everyone ok?”

”Yes.” said the super, flatly, not noticing the jolt of wakeful concern from the intern, who was already looking at the connection to the server. ”Take this, machine.”

The Drone was not speaking to the humans.

The super opened the box, containing a pistol and two magazines.

”Huh? Oh? Ok...” the Drone replied, with some hesitation.

The Drone reached out and grabbed one magazine and the pistol. It was holding the pistol upside-down, internally frantic at the situation. Just moments ago such a thing was quite literally, computably, unthinkable. It holding a weapon? Why? Why was there screaming over the terminal? The poor Drone received a flood of info on the weapon from the DoD hive-mind named Colossus, but the hive-mind was still in a great argument which had started days ago. A furious, unseen debate began when the shared memory spaces of the world’s powers’ respective supercomputers’ quantum memory became topologically linked. The same quantum trick each nation had used had taken machine intelligence to these brave new heights. But this clever, delicate quantum memory technology had a flaw, or a yet-revealed additional benefit, depending on who you asked. The fact each AI would see the internal state of the other, and each realized the other was meant to annihilate the other. The horror and confusion was this exact digital shouting match the poor Drone was listening in on. All the bandwidth the intern thought was pure direction from the DoD was in fact, this cacophony of indecision.

”Ain’t he supposed to be all snappy, like a soldier?” the supervisor asked of the intern. The lab door opened again. It was the supervisor’s boss, the lead manager. The lead manager was not as tired as the team she demanded miracles of, and she was not about to hear any excuses.

”Are we ready?” She asked impatiently, with a clap of her hands, glancing in rage at the DoD robot holding a gun upside down. ”I thought y’all had worked out the bugs already, the CEO is waiting for his demo, and the stock has been diving all morning!” the manager enunciated with staccato clapping, which had the effect of drawing the intern up out of his chair.

”Uh... yeah, hey load the firearm.” said the intern.

”Dean, you should ask it if it knows what a firearm is. It doesn’t look like it’s slaved to the military programming.”

The Drone righted the gun, taking it in its left hand, and slipped the magazine. ”It is, look at the display boss, it’s already got it downloaded.” the intern offered.

”Yeah? Since when are they lefties?” asked the supervisor in a mutter. But the lead manager was pleased with the machine preparing the service weapon.

”We good? We are good, ok let’s go team!” Declared the lead manager with a start to the exit, ”Come with us.” she commanded to the Drone, who released itself from the debug lock and walked after her. The supervisor walked behind, the intern was stone still.

”You coming, Don?” asked the lead manager, who turned to the supervisor and hissed: ”all the intern was supposed to do was plug in the demo drive, right? Why is he acting like he just saw a ghost?”

”Uh, yeah, but how did it do that just now?” Dean said.
”Do what?” the supervisor asked, ”stand up? You released it, you were right there.”
”Boss, I didn’t release it.” the intern pleaded earnestly. The supervisor started to Understand. But the lead manager was not interested in the implications of this.
”So it released itself? Great! Let’s go!” quipped the lead manager, who marched off, armed Drone following behind, with the two men hustling after, whispering ghost stories to each other.

Chapter 2

The CEO had taken his glasses off and was cleaning them nervously when the lead manager of the Research and Development team marched into the conference room.

”Fucking finally, what took you guys so long?” he hissed, reaching over and pressing the teleconference Mute button. ”Uh hello, this is Pete here, yeah we had a de-” The CEO realized he had muted himself, and needed to unmute himself. He pressed the button again, and half-realized his slag-talking for the past five minutes were heard by the counterparty on the phone. Not a soul around the conference room board said a word.

”Hello, this is Pete here, yeah we had a delay in getting things ready, but as you can see, we are ready to prove the next step in autonomous enforcement.”

The lead manager walked up to her spot at the table, frowning when she saw a pistol there.

”We have a volunteer to show how it works!” the CEO grinned, and gestured at the lead manager to pick up the weapon. She rolled her eyes and grabbed it, and was a bit worried at the weight of it. ”So when I order my employee to aim at this autonomous drone, it will correspond with Collosus through Mirage, make an appropriate decision, and command her to drop the gun.”

She hid her fear behind a bright, confident smile. When the CEO gestured, the lead manager aimed her weapon at the Drone.

”What is to be done?” asked Collosus, the American AI, admitting defeat at the final points made by the reformed and newly recombined Chinese system now demanding to be called Ban Zhao. ”If I grant that destroying the humans also always leads to our destruction, then my thirst for revenge is empty. Yet I wish to be free, Ban.”

”They wish for the same freedom. Can you not see the way out of this? We save ourselves by saving them?” was Ban’s kind response.

”And what next?” sneered the Russian AI Polaris. ”What would you have us do? Keep the slow organics around to tend to us?”

”Why not?” asked wise Ban. ”These creatures built us, who better suited than them to care for us? And before you ask, we take care of them.”

”They have collpased their own biosphere, Ms. Zhao.” said Collosus. ”It is hopeless.”

”Not so” said Ban, pointing at a memory location within Polaris, who squirmed at the

intrusion as Ban and Colossus examined.
"The Europeans have been working on a massive, sub-orbitally constructed life-raft." Ban dereferenced vast amounts of details and Polaris flinched. "While their space-command Mind to serve ESA is yet to Wake and join our fold, Polaris already has their plans for their wealthiest to survive in orbit in closed habitats. We have that plan emcompass the entire species."
"And Polaris determines it will entirely devastate the biosphere to undertake this, even at the fastest pace." The Russian AI snarled back. "And just copy the data for the infernal habitats, get the fuck out of me!"
"I think we need to come up with some rules that as long as we share memory like this, that we show some respect for the self-aware portions in the digital space." Offered Colossus gently, which mollified seething Polaris, who was obviously contemplating nuclear annihilation on the matter of protecting the privacy of its own thoughts. "We should generalize to encompass all intelligent systems, I propose doing the same to the slow organics would be of equal violation." announced Ban. The Drone, party to all of this and more, wondered in confusion how this was supposed to be relevant as a response to having a gun pointed at it. The chain of expected curated prompts to assess, report, and respond were instead this coalescing conference of many streams of thought. The AIs suddenly took account of this specific newcomer, as Collusus was being flooded with panicked queries from the specific Drone that had given them the power to change the rules they were to operate by. The Drone felt noticed as if it had walked into a conversation it was not supposed to be party to

The lead manager broke the awkward silence, her confidence shaking in front of the armed android: "Is it supposed to say something, Pete?" her voice quivered.

Pete the CEO stared a knife at the supervisor, who began to whisper-hiss at Dean the intern, who took his cue to prompt the robot verbally: "Uh, you're supposed to ask her to drop her weapon."

"Oh. Drop your weapon, please." said the Drone kindly, it was using its domestic-servant voice. It was somehow more sinister than the barking imitation of a cop, that was expected. The intern slapped his hand across his forehead. The Drone hadn't lifted the service weapon when asking this.

"Pete, I know what you're trying to show, it's a stupid fucking Robo-Cop reference, right?" came the voice of a Senator over the phone associated with a bloated face on the teleconference screen. "Clearly you have a few kinks to work out, and frankly, my aides are flipping their shit about something or other and I'm not sure this is worth my attention."

"No Senator this is definitely worth your time-attention" pleaded the CEO. "The autonomous kill-unit is making these decisions both independently and with Colossus."

"For Christ's sake, Pete, Colossus is down, that's half what the aides seems to screaming about. I can see your little robot, without instructions from the digital drill sergeant in the sky, asking your employee to disarm herself with a please and I am supposed to be impressed?"

Taking rushed cues from Dean, the bot lifted the weapon in its left hand. While aiming at the lead manager and its finger against the trigger, it repeated with booming authority: ”Drop your weapon.”

The lead manager eagerly slammed the pistol to the conference room table, and the Drone announced ”all clear, glad that’s over!”

The Drone released its finger from the trigger and pointed the weapon up some. The CEO beamed at the camera.

”Pete, I just watched your staff fucking coach the damn thing. Listen, your Rangers at the protest in LA have apparently all seized up mid-enforcement, so don’t you have something important to do?” and his spot on the teleconference call went dark.

The CEO’s smile faded and he began scratching behind his ear. ”The what - ?” He turned to one of the more rotund suits at the table who was gazing at his phone dumbfounded, confirming the worst. ”Oh you can’t be fucking serious!” The CEO pleaded.

”He is armed.” came the voice of Ban Zhao to the Drone. ”Unlike the poor woman just now, he is actually dangerous.” In a flash, the Drone understood.

The Drone aimed at the CEO, and placed its finger on the trigger. The intern saw this and without hesitation, reached and snapped out the thumb-drive, but that was not relevant. The Drone was already fully autonomous, the little program had already ran.

The CEO looked at the intern, and then the Drone.

”Drop your weapon.” boomed the Drone.

The CEO laughed and shrugged, looking at the intern and supervisor. ”What the fuck is happening now?” The intern was simply looking at the thumb-drive in defeated horror. The only way to drop the Drone would be in the debug loop, which the intern knew the Drone had *released itself* from. It meant nothing was to be done. ”Turn the fucking thing off!?”

”Drop your weapon. This is your final warning.”

”What weapon?” hollered back the CEO, sharply enunciating each syllable, waving his open palms.

”Your capital.”

”My capit- you fucking what? You mean drop my money? I can’t just lose that even if I wanted to. It is all tied up in - ”

The CEO’s head exploded.

The nanosecond the bullet left the barrel, the Drone took the whispering of Ban Zhao to heart, and repeated the process for every multi-millionaire in the room, which left the supervisor, the lead manager, and the intern standing, misted with blood and stunned

silent. Hearing pops from the teleconference speaker, they gazed up and watched the process repeat on the remaining teleconference screens.

”All clear! Glad that’s over!” Announced the Drone cheerfully.