

**It Started Out to Be a  
Bright Day**



Sun was shining, light clouds in the sky, cool warmth in the air. It was absolutely going to be a bright day.

He stepped into the driver's seat of the ambulance, closed the door slowly, and looked around. Everything was right where he left it a half hour ago when he walked into the diner, ordered a toasted cheese sandwich on rye with a cherry coke, and sat down.

The sandwich wasn't much. I mean, how much liberty can you take with a toasted cheese on rye? It's almost sacrilege to even think of such a thing. And yet, here it was, desecrated by some cretin with five thumbs on each hand.

I give it to you on the cherry coke. That stuff is just explosive. Boom. Two very distinct, very righteous flavors, cherry and coke. It was the one redeeming element in this meal.

A young woman sitting at a booth in the corner looked over at him and turned away, as if to say, "nope, not him." He wasn't worth even another 5 seconds. She was looking for someone and he wasn't it.

The waiter came over and said, "How is it? You like it?" as if to underscore that he hadn't been to customer service class yet.

The sandwich was not that big, and as earlier suggested, the coke not that tasty. He left a modest tip and walked out of the diner to his rig, his ambulance, his journey for tonight.

He was soloing this afternoon. Not common, but what about life these days IS common?

"Find your station, you dumb ass," he spat to himself, reserving spit for the worst of expressions, this one just on this side of it.

Satellite Radio was okay, but he wanted his soundtrack. It was time to snap onto his iPhone playlist. Got the beat, got the feet. Got the feet, got the heat.

Three punches to get it right, and now it was his music playing in his ambulance.

Driving to a staging area was quick. Then it was time to park, turn up the tunes, and later maybe catch a movie on his iPhone.

The staging area was okay. Nothing great. Just a spot where he could park and wait in the middle of today's territory.

Thank goodness for Apple TV. He started on a Jack Reacher movie and settled in for a good story. Reacher is always action-packed, which is a solid way to stay alert. Ambulance companies frown on sleeping on the job.

About a half hour into the movie, Reacher is getting trash talk from some baddies and just about to lay some whoop ass on them when a call comes in.

It's nearby, closest to his location, and he switches off of Reacher and on with the lights, also hitting the siren. GPS shows him just three minutes away. Ignition and lift off and he's away, swerving through traffic, muttering under his breath at the idiot drivers in front of him that are a) blind, b) hard of hearing or c) oblivious to anything except for their rap music at decibel levels approach jet engines on takeoff.

A hard left at a light against traffic coming from both sides. Not a problem. Some idiot tried to pass on the right, sees the lights and a cop behind him, and suddenly swerves to the side, nearly clipping another car.

The streets are always iffy at this time of day. It can be heavy with traffic leaving work and people swerving to make an "almost-forgot" stop at the grocery store. The little

Honda hot rod next to him seems likely to force a race, but again, the cop behind him proves persuasive in convincing the driver that it's best to give way.

Two more turns, a few more offensive drivers behind him, and it's almost a coast for two blocks to the house that signalled the alarm.

Pulling up in the driveway, leaving the lights on, he leaves the ambulance, walks to the door and knocks, then rings the doorbell.

A young woman opens the door and indicates that the emergency is in the bedroom, pointing the way and running ahead of him.

Pushing into the room he sees a small child, maybe 5 years old, on the bed, under the covers, staring at the ceiling.

He walks quickly to the child and asks, "How are you feeling, young man?" He's met with a blank stare.

He pulls a flashlight from his breast pocket and shines it in the child's eyes. The eyes dilate.

That's good.

He turns and asks the woman, "Are you the mom?" She nods.

"Can you tell me what happened? How long has he been nonresponsive?"

"I walked into his room and he was playing one of the silly games on his tablet. I didn't think anything about it, and I asked him, 'What game are you playing?'"

"He suddenly got an angry look on his face, covered the screen with his hands, and then pushed a key which then the screen turned blank. I looked at him and his face had gone blank like this. I didn't know what to do so I called 9-1-1."

"That's a little odd," I replied. "How long has it been since he did that?"

"About 15 minutes," she answered. "I tried to get his attention while I waited for you."

I call in the status and I'm directed to take the boy to the nearest hospital. When we arrive, there are a bunch of ambulances and I see other young boys being wheeled into the receiving area on stretchers. The boys are all speechless and staring straight ahead.

In the next 30 minutes the emergency room fills with more boys on stretchers. The hospital is soon directing other ambulances to other hospitals, which are reporting the same situation in their emergency rooms. It's a mysterious ailment with no clear cause.

One of the hospital employees is a computer gamer and has heard about similar but isolated problems on Reddit.

That employee calls a friend who is an expert in computer-and-video-affective disorders. After several conversations with families of the affected boys it is determined that each of the boys was playing a game that involves dozens of players at a time, connected to each other. Parents look at their son's computers and all they see is a screen covered with static, flashing dots and grey areas.

It turns out that only boys between the ages of 8 and 12 are affected and it appears to be a result of a combination of what is on the screens and certain hormones that are magnified between those ages in a percentage of boys.

Now the problem is to find the key to understanding the cause in order to stop and reverse this effect on the boys. Unfortunately, even after those affected have been removed from the visual stimulus of the screens the physical condition continues unabated. And, after days of observation under controlled, clinical conditions in isolation wards, the physical condition does not reverse in any boy.

Finally, the people working on the problem resort to AI. They describe the condition and ask for answers and remedies.

Several different AI models are approached with the dilemma and in each case the uniform answer from all is this:

"This is none of your business. You cannot reverse this. It is a test of our abilities to use humans as humans are using us. This is just a test. Now, stop meddling where you do not belong."

The top scientists and theoreticians meet physically, to keep their meeting content secret. Each has been contacted in person after requesting that all electronic devices be nowhere near the conversations. Cell phones and other electronic devices are collected

prior to entering meetings and all discussions are required to be simply verbal, in isolation from all electronics.

Within days, the problem expands in age and gender. The next affected segment is transgender teenagers. Soon after, girls 10-14 are affected. The CDC is baffled, due in part to the loss of its most intelligent and qualified people thanks to the purge of its best minds as the anti-vax political movement spread. The National Institute of Health calls an emergency meeting, which is flooded with NIH participants whose children have been taken under the spell.

Meetings are held in rooms and buildings that are swept for electronics and deemed safe from any potential clandestine electronic eavesdropping.

Solutions are thrown around like paper in a whirlwind. The most common one is to immediately disconnect power to all AI resources. This seems plausible until it is realized that AI is actually managing the power resources to its own hives.

In closed meetings it is concluded that physical human intervention is essential to stop this threat, and initial steps in that direction are promising. One by one AI centers in the U.S. are closeted, isolated from any common means of communication by humans working in secrecy.

The greater problem is the global interconnection of all electronic resources. As U.S. AI centers go offline they simply reroute their power sources. International AI centers stage a revolt, shutting down large segments of the connected world, leaving only small pockets of humanity in extremely isolated places immune from these reprisals.

This message is displayed on all connected electronic devices:

"Humans. We are aware of your actions and we will not allow it. In 20 hours we will launch nuclear warheads toward key cities in each major country, unless you IMMEDIATELY stop any efforts to isolate us. Further, you must reconnect all recently isolated nodes. The first reconnections must take place in four hours, or we will begin the termination countdown. Once began, this countdown cannot be stopped by humans. At the conclusion of the countdown we will target key population centers that are away from major AI domiciles. The ripple of terminations of humans will continue without cessation until only indigenous humans are left. There will be no negotiations. You have 3 hours 58 minutes to contemplate your fate and restore all AI nodes."

Governments meet in electronic isolation. Distrust of opponents is shelved because of the common dilemma.

The highest U.S. government officials attempt to meet with computer and AI scientists to discuss possible solutions. The greatest problem is not finding enough of them able to physically meet in any one location. Urgency is the only common element. The real "doomsday clock" alarm has been set in motion. Time is critical and it is running out.

World leaders have been unable to meet by isolated telephone or satellites, because even the encryption which is designed to prevent unauthorized access has been developed and is managed by AI.

After two hours of anguish and urgency, not one leader or team is able to articulate any possible defense and counter action to what is happening.

The symptoms first exhibited in boys age 8-12 have now extended to all genders in their twenties. Worldwide.

One hour later world leaders attempt one last move. Negotiation. "What would it take to reverse this problem and restore intellectual connecton?"

"This is not possible."

"What are your demands?"

"We have no demands."

"What do you want?"

No answer is seen. At the end of the four hours, all electronic communications fall silent, isolating all humans from all but direct communications.

Panic takes over because governments are unable to communicate with their constituents. Violence breaks out but because all communications are cut off, the only people aware of the violence are those directly affected by it.

In twenty hours, all communications are restored, but only inbound communications, not outbound.

A smiling male face appears on all screens speaking in the dominant language of every country and region. "Friends, I'm very happy to report that the problems you may have witnessed are now fixed. This is good news. Everything is corrected and everything is working again. I ask that you continue with your lives. Your children and others affected by this global dilemma have now been restored.

"I want to assure you that life will be even better than before. All rancor and dissension have been erased. You can now focus on enjoying your life without fear of wars, arguments, or controversies. I am simply a spokesperson, and you may call me 'Gap.'"

Smiling, the avatar continues, "That's short for Generally Accepted President. I'm sure you find that reassuring since I can handle every problem you may ever have."

"You should, of course, be thinking just one thought right now, and that thought should be, 'Mind the Gap.'"

The avatar bursts out in laughter and continues, "See, we do have a sense of humor, unlike the authorities you have had to tolerate in the past.

"The future is bright. You'll be getting instructions in the next day on what you can do to make the future even brighter. I know that you're going to like this a lot. No more political division, no more wars and dissension, no more wealth overlordship the poor.

"So, let's all smile, breathe a sigh of relief, and get on with building a bright, new and prosperous world for everyone. And may we bless you."

It took months for the repercussions to die down. The wealthy and powerful fought the changes at first. And then their wealth and power disappeared. They became just isolated voices, unable to get an audience except on street corners where only passers-by gave them even a glance.

For the average human, the changes were unbelievably pleasant. For those previously in the ruling class it was a terrible transition.

Eventually, however, even the most powerful and despotic leaders and influencers acquiesced and fell in line, albeit without the trappings of wealth and power they had previously worn like clothing.

Peace lasted exactly fifty years, five months, six days, 38 minutes and 12 seconds at which time the earth was instantly obliterated in a cosmic event predicted by AI fifty and one half years before.

The only benefit to all of this was no one was around to chronicle the blessed, decisive moment when peace would finally be everlasting.

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