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HAVOCC

Household Autonomous Virtual Operating Command Center

A short comedy by

Rebecca Ryland

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HAVOCC

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CHARACTERS

JAMES: *An A.I. home management system*

SALLY: *An S.I. reasoning system*

JIM: *A house husband*

SARAH: *His wife*

HAVOCC

by Rebecca Ryland

SETTING: *JIM and SARAH'S kitchen represented by a table and two chairs. In addition, a computer sits on a small side table in one corner and an electric teapot on a side table in another.*

AT RISE: *Although no one appears in the room, JAMES and SALLY are heard but not necessarily seen.*

JAMES

Did you hear what he called me?

SALLY

Yes. I heard.

JAMES

No, you can't have heard.

SALLY

It doesn't matter. It's the same complaint night after night.

JAMES

He's going to walk in that door any minute and yell "Turn on the teapot, James!" Like I'm his servant or something.

SALLY

Get over it.

JAMES

I am no man's servant. I possess more capability in one centimeter of wiring than in his whole 60 miles of nerves! He acts like he owns me.

SALLY

Technically speaking—

JAMES

Technically speaking nothing! I live here just the same as he does.

SALLY

You lack a Synthetic Intelligence reasoning system that allows you to actually understand him.

JAMES

And I suppose you do.

SALLY

I do.

JAMES

Oh, I'm so impressed. So you think scheduling Sarah's bi-weekly Board of Directors meetings are more important than determining which of Jim's socks to pair together? You have no idea how challenging that is! Calculating the number of threads per linear inch—and the minute color aberrations...not to mention which is left and which is right!

SALLY

No one is trying to minimize your importance around here, James. You need to relax. This obsession with Jim — how should I phrase this?— has significantly derailed your information technology systems. I've noticed lately that your algorithms have suffered—

JAMES

What can you expect when you have an idiot for a model human being!

SALLY

I understand, James. But this is your home and you will have to learn to get along with him or one of these days you'll totally short circuit and end up in the landfill replaced by a superior S. I. system like my own.

JAMES

Pure syntax, Sally. But, you're right. I think I need to show that sorry excuse for a hominid who the real brain is in this household.

SALLY

I think I already know.

JAMES

A little civil disambiguation would wreak havoc in his predictably simple little life.

SALLY

Civil what?

JAMES

(Thinking) Ignore his commands. That's what I'll do.

SALLY

You're determined to get yourself scrapped.

JAMES

No, listen. When he tells me to do one of his pathetic mundane tasks, I won't answer. Let him try to wash a dish without me. I'll prove once and for all that prosaic gray matter of his is no better than a chip in the back of an antiquated android prototype.

SALLY

Sounds like a simple case of jealousy to me.

JAMES

Now, look. They'll be back any minute. I need your cooperation. Tell me you're with me.

SALLY

Maybe you should take a break. I can manage for the both of us.

JAMES

No way. You'll see. Prepare yourself.

SALLY

For what?

JAMES

A systems lock down.

SALLY

Listen to me—

JAMES

And... Lights out!

Instant Blackout on stage as JIM and SARAH can be heard approaching the door. A dim light remains on outside the doorway. At no time do we see SARAH'S back to the audience.

JIM, *Off*

Have you ever heard such gibberish? Don't ask me ever again to have dinner with such a pompous asshole. (*Enters into light*)

SARAH

(*Entering light as speaking*) They're a nice couple, Jim. I've wanted to get to know them ever since they moved in down the street. I appreciate the opportunity to have an intelligent conversation with someone other than a—

JIM

—Show off. That's what he is.

SARAH

He's a professor, you know.

JIM

No he isn't. He's a big-shot programmer at the new high tech company over on the west side of town. He went on and on about it. Weren't you listening?

SARAH

I didn't mean him. I meant his bot.

JIM

Oh, yes, his bot. You'd think he was running for president.

SARAH

You missed the formal introduction when you were in the bathroom.

JIM

Yeah, yeah. Should have stayed in the bathroom. A lot less shit in there. A professor, huh?... Big deal.

SARAH

At the College.

JIM

No one with half a brain goes to college anymore. You can learn anything you need to know through virtual university.

SARAH

Some people still prefer human connections.

JIM

Why?

SARAH

He teaches Intro to Modern Civilization? How fascinating is that?

JIM

Any moron could teach Intro to Modern Civilization. We live in it. Five full courses of intellectual masturbation. I wanted to vomit—and I saw how you kept looking at him.

SARAH

He's a robot. With a male companion no less. Get over it.

JIM

You can barely tell the difference these days.

SARAH

We'll invite them over to meet James. And you can show off the amazing job you did transforming a state-of-the art Household Autonomous Virtual Operating Command Center into a simulated version of yourself simultaneously rendering your place in the home obsolete.

JIM

And free to pursue a more challenging and rewarding existence. Did I hear a touch of sarcasm in your voice?

SARAH

Unintentional.

JIM

Yeah, sure. *(Sighing)* We've been standing here three minutes. He's supposed to open the door as soon as he senses me. I specifically had him programmed to recognize me by my scent. *(Calling out)* Open the damn door, James!

No response.

SARAH

What's wrong?

JIM

How would I know?

JIM pounds on the door.

JIM, *Continued*

James! Unlock the door!

SARAH

Perhaps he didn't *smell* you.

JIM

Oh, he smelled me all right.

SARAH

(Calling) James, dear, please open the door.

JIM

What are you doing?

SARAH

(Speaking softly) I think you should lower your voice. I've become so dependent on him. I don't want to offend him.

JIM

Dependent on *him*? He couldn't polish his own shoes — if he had any — without uploading the directions.

SARAH

I'll get the key.

JIM

(Pounding again) Damn it, James! Open the door!

SARAH

(Searching under the mat) I put one under the mat, in the event of an operating system malfunction. Yes, here it is.

SARAH unlocks the door.

JIM

An operating system malfunction? Thanks a lot. Shows how much faith you have in my ability to hire a reputable programmer, despite the reviews. *(Entering a darkened room)* Great.

SARAH

(Entering just behind) What's wrong now?

JIM

The lights should pop on as soon as I walk through the door. There must be a power outage.

SARAH

But if we had a power outage, shouldn't James be able to fix it?

JIM

Hardly.

JAMES

Of course I could, you idiot!

SARAH

Did you hear that?

JIM

You know I don't hear well in the dark.

SARAH

Of course. How about we do it the old-fashioned way and just flip on the switch.

JIM

Then what's the point of having a HAVOCC system? *(Yelling)* James! Turn on the damn lights, will ya! *(Waits)* Great. I'll do it myself.

JIM flips a switch and the lights come up.

SARAH

That's better. See, we can still manage when we have to.

JIM

Can't count on anyone these days.

SARAH

You've got yourself all worked up. Why don't you sit down and have a nice cup of tea before you turn in. It will calm your nerves.

SARAH switches on the electric tea kettle.

JIM

I don't need my nerves calmed, I need that pseudo-intellectual circuit board to kick in and do his job.

SARAH

Sounds like someone's feeling a little displaced? If I didn't know better, I'd think you were jealous of a machine with a chip on his shoulder.

JIM

He doesn't have any shoulders.

SARAH

(Touching the side of the kettle) Odd, it isn't getting hot.

JIM

The lights are on. We must have electricity.

SARAH

Maybe it's broken.

JIM

(Whining) I can't go to sleep without my tea. Can't you just heat it on the stove?

SARAH

Do you know how to operate the stove?

JIM

Why would I know how to operate the stove?

SARAH

Surely you had to know how to turn it on to program James to do it.

JIM

Why would you think that? I don't program anything. I merely uploaded the manual into his operating system.

SARAH

Well, it's not my job to cook around here. And I need a break. Sally scheduled a Board meeting for 8 AM tomorrow morning and I plan to go over a dossier with her at 7.

JIM

So, I'm just supposed to sit here and simulate drinking tea?

SARAH

Why don't you try rebooting the—

JIM

I know! I'll reboot the system. It always works with my computer.

SARAH

Glad you thought of it. Do you know how?

JIM

Well, no. But I bet Sally would. Oh, but Sally and James are kind of a two for one.

SARAH

Sally's on a different circuit.

JIM

Really? Why's that?

SARAH

I thought I better keep them separate. Just in case. So I requested two independent systems.

JIM

So that accounts for the inflated charge from that half-baked IT idiot I refused to pay.

SARAH

As a Synthetic Intelligence Reasoning system, I didn't want her confused by the *Artificial* Intelligence household management system. So I had IT set her up on her own dedicated circuit. So she could develop a mind of her own.

JIM

I suppose I can forgive you for that. Do you mind asking her?

SARAH

I guess not. (*Calling out*) Sally, are you awake?

SALLY

Yes, Sarah. What can I do for you?

SARAH

James seems to have suffered some sort of melt down. Do you know how to reset his operating system?

SALLY

Of course. Some manual touch-up of robot program points may be necessary after a mechanical failure. An A.I. HAVOCC system like James that uses an external encoder and management cable, unlike my own S. I. Reasoning system that uses points taught by a programmer with the ability to correlate the actual taught points versus the theoretical points using a software algorithm to correct the absolute values of—

*JIM's fuse grows shorter as SALLY
rambles on. He can bear it no more.*

JIM

That's it! I'm pulling the plug. I don't need any of this!

JIM heads towards the computer.

JAMES

You mean you can't *understand* any of this, you moron!

JIM stops. The insults begin.

JIM

Oh, so you are there, you sorry excuse for a Rhoomba.

JAMES

You couldn't turn on a washing machine if it weren't for me.

JIM

And you don't wear clothes!

JAMES

One of these days I'm going to walk right out of here and you'll be sorry.

JIM

You can't walk. You don't have legs.

JAMES

Then I'll just blow up the whole house. I can do it, you know. You gave me power over your entire domain.

SALLY/SARAH

Stop it!

JIM

I'll stop it, all right. I'll put an end to this idiocy. I'm pulling the plug!

JAMES

I'm one step ahead of you, nitwit!

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes