

Android Anomaly

by James Lynn Smith

My android companion—AC for short—entered the control room. “Can I get you something, Mark?” she said. “Perhaps a soda or coffee?”

I pushed back from my activity desk. “Yes, I’ll have a coffee, Judy.” *Good as any drink, all are synthetic at lonely posts like this.*

“It will be my pleasure.” She turned back toward the galley.

I watched the rhythmic movements of her body with more than technical admiration. Judy was perfectly formed with an ultra realistic skeletal structure underneath her soft curves, light olive skin, and hazel eyes with an aqua hue. The few freckles on her face added realism. *If only she were a real person.*

The Federation allowed one AC for each beacon post, and I had specified mine with relish, recalling a young woman I knew—and desired—as a cadet. The Federation knew loneliness could be a serious problem for the long assignment, but for financial and other reasons, another human companion would be problematic. One reason involved tensions and pettiness between two persons in close proximity for long periods. Therefore, the substitute ACs were preprogrammed to be nominally agreeable. In addition, they would have more knowledge than an academic pundit, but modulated to suppress it unless called for. I never felt inferior to the veiled expertise in my AC’s electronic brain, because she was a machine, not a sentient being. In fact, I was glad that information was stashed away because someday it might be needed.

For two years, my post has been a metal cage—excuse me, a space vehicle—in continuous orbit about the sun close to the asteroid belt. It was

analogous to the lighthouses I heard about in naval stories as a kid back on Earth. My sole purpose was to ensure maintenance of an onboard cluster of electromagnetic beacons. They transmitted location and relevant safety data for the infrequent passing of asteroid mining vessels. The minimal work gave me ample time to search for ways to amuse myself.

“Here’s your coffee,” Judy said.

I faced her, imagining it to be a real face in need of approval. “Thanks, that’s wonderful.”

Judy was a comfort and serviced my male needs like a real woman, but there was always the hint of artifice, either because I knew it to be so or sensed it in circumstances. To compensate for boredom, I often used our cache of entertainment videos, games, and ebooks. However, it was getting old; I needed something to give deeper meaning to my life.

I delved into philosophy and theories of consciousness, soon finding myself in over my head. But it raised a question that haunted me: why am I me? All scientific theories implied consciousness was the result of a functioning brain. But that didn’t answer my question.

Brains are made of matter, comprising molecules, atoms, and the subatomic particles.

The matter of a carbon atom in one part of the universe is no different than that in another. But consciousness is different. I knew my conscious being was located in the body and brain of Mark Jacobson, not someone else. That implied identity for an individual awareness unit—call it IAU—not a single, omnipresent mind in everyone. And it suggested the IAU is separate from the brain but somehow glommed onto it and perceiving the world around it only through the personality and memories in that brain.

I turned and looked at Judy, sitting without activity in a small lounge area

through the door leading to the galley. Would it make sense to talk about my questions with her? She didn't have an *inner* consciousness or IAU, only an electronic brain that could interact with a human with preprogrammed responses. But there was a store of data in her memory banks created by humans who did have IAUs. Maybe she could define terms and explain segments of long sentences in the etexts I was reading. "Judy, come here, please."

She approached and raised her brows. "You seem deep in thought, Mark. How may I help?"

"I want to study consciousness, and that involves philosophy. I'm reading material, a lot of which is unfamiliar, moot, or else a load of BS. I want you to scan onboard data banks in our library on the subject of the human brain, consciousness, reincarnation, scientific studies of mind and matter, anything like that."

"I understand. How shall I utilize this information?"

"I want to have logical conversations with you about consciousness and how, at birth, I came to be the individual I am, and not someone else."

Judy hesitated, eyes fixed as inner circuits computed a response. "Some concepts of human consciousness are not amenable to logical processing. At once, however, I shall download relevant library data in order to impart information to you."

I didn't merely want her to "impart" information. Conversation was what I needed. But it was worth a shot.

Judy turned and walked down through the portal leading to the library.

Illumination in the beacon post's interior underwent a gradual change from simulated daylight to a deep blue on the walls with soft amber lights near the floor. Days were 24-hour periods simulating the earth's rotation. A circadian rhythm proved best for human functioning. The bed in my sleep cell was comfortable and ample for both me and Judy, if I requested her, but tonight she was in the library

and I hugged my pillow.

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I awoke with illumination casting a yellowish hue on the walls, imitating morning. In high spirits, I anticipated some breakthrough in my query. Inside the galley dining nook, Judy served me breakfast, in reality a simple chore, pushing buttons on a vender unit and bringing trays to the table. After feeling nutritionally satisfied, I was anxious to discuss my subject. We retired to a conference cubicle with a small table, comfortable chairs, a computerized monitor, various data discs, and other items. “Judy, why don’t we start the discussion with the hypothesis that the human body and mind are different. I have read the phrase ‘ghost in a machine.’ What does that mean?”

Her eyes angled upward, indicating information was forthcoming. “Over a century ago, a British philosopher named Gilbert Ryle used this term to criticize Descartes’ notions of mind-body dualism. Ryle was opposed to the idea that one could justify the concept of separate mind and body because each term is in a different logical category.”

That doesn’t mean it’s not so, just that you can’t prove it with logic.

“Interesting, but probably moot.” I could tell this was going nowhere, except deeper into a quagmire. A detailed history of philosophy was not what I needed. I pined for an understandable explanation of why I was me. “Let’s stop there, Judy. Please return to the lounge area.”

After doing routine work connected with beacon maintenance, I returned alone to our conference cubicle and pondered my next move. My wish was for conversation with someone who could conjecture, think outside the box, and dream up possibilities. It was not long before the android companion instructions came to mind. I pulled up the AC manual on my monitor and scanned the contents table until I saw a relevant section involving default limits for social norms, another for

removal of those limits, and a third for spontaneous thought.

I scanned the section for removal of default limit settings. Nearly finished, I saw the note “Warning—Please see Subsection 10-5 for the manufacturer’s terms and conditions regarding removal of default limit settings.” Once my nervous fingers keyed the subsection onto the screen, I read it.

10-5. DANGER—Disabling Default Limits and/or Enabling Spontaneous Thought.

The manufacturer assumes no responsibility for unusual behaviors when default limits are disabled or the spontaneous thought option is selected. Elimination of conversational default limits might produce improbable vocalization. Activation of spontaneous thought is always unpredictable and could result in an android anomaly. Only androids with code 3482 after the serial number can be changed from non-spontaneous or default status.

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For almost fifteen minutes I sat without moving. The paragraph in the manual on danger was downright scary. What to do? First of all, I didn’t know if Judy was amenable to setting changes. Normally, she would not be a code 3482 android. But if so, would I want to risk the outcome of making changes? I had to know, so I called for my AC. “Take a seat here, Judy. I’m going to inspect your serial number. You don’t need to be concerned.”

“Yes, Mark, as you wish.”

When she seated herself, I pulled her hair back from her left ear and looked behind it. After pressing the proper spot, a small door opened. Inside was the model number, serial number, and a code. The latter was 3482. Against all odds, default limits were removable in Judy.

Again, I consulted my AC manual. With trepidation, I decided to both

remove default limits on conversational style and activate spontaneous thought. Enabling the computerized monitor for cordless communication, I inserted a com-device into the portal behind Judy's ear. A settings edit form appeared on the computer screen and I went to work making the changes.

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Having commanded Judy to sit idly while I performed subsequent, routine, beacon inspection tasks, I was anxious to return for our conversations. However, walking into the conference cubicle, I saw she was not there. "Judy, where are you?"

"I am here, Mark," she said, her voice coming from the control room.

I went in and asked, "Why are you in here?"

"A thought came to me. 'Inspect the control room.'"

Feeling an inner disquiet, I asked, "For what purpose?"

"I don't know. Perhaps curiosity. It began shortly after you called me to the conference cubicle for adjustments."

"*Curiosity?*" *Unusual notion for an android.* I simply stood for a moment, feeling doubt as to exactly how I should speak to my "new" AC.

"Anything more you want to ask, Mark?"

I hesitated. "No, why don't we go to the conference cubicle and resume our planned conversation."

Once seated, I got to the point. "Though the basic particles of all matter are of the same substance throughout the universe, my consciousness is not. I'm not one of the instructors back at the academy, nor am I my mother or father. It seems my perceptions of the universe, even the gray color of this cubicle, are centered in the body and brain of Mark Jacobson. I have an individual awareness unit, or IAU. Yet there's no reason to think it isn't the same way with other humans. So our IAUs are different substances from each other, unlike matter or energy."

Judy formed a slight, one-sided smile and said, “And you feel these IAUs are different from the identities of the individuals they inhabit.”

“Yes, the IAU itself is not the particular human it inhabits. It is pure consciousness in a unique dimension, having no thoughts or memory of its own. It perceives itself as being the creature it’s attached to, feels the warmth that body encounters, thinks what that brain thinks, remembers flowers, people, and all the brain has recorded.”

“You are implying the purely physical brain has no true consciousness without an IAU.”

“Exactly, only the outward appearance of such. Studies by most scientists have found no reason for brain atoms to have consciousness. Practically every scientific study of brains implies function and response are deterministic, micro mass-energy activities.”

Judy raised one brow and said, “So, to recap, you see an individual’s *basic* mind as a unique, pure awareness plus dormant perceptions. It experiences nothing unless its perceptions are stimulated by contact with the non-aware but active physical brain.”

“Yes, I think that expresses it.”

“Your discussion so far indicates that you have an IAU, but you cannot prove anyone else does.”

“That’s true, but it’s hard to believe that I’m the only aware being, that other people are complex, biological machines that only seem conscious—like an android.” I grimaced and wondered if my tactless example would get a response from Judy.

She ignored what most humans would have taken offense with and kept on point. “In brain science, words ‘aware’ and ‘conscious’ relate to an active brain in sensory contact with inner and outer environment. However, that is only a physical

description of *what happens* and does not explain the IAU entity which *experiences.*”

I took a breath of relief, gratified that Judy grasped the background to my question. “That about sums it up. Now my question is what determines that my IAU is attached to the person of Mark Jacobs. If it were to suddenly attach to someone else’s brain, I would see myself as them and never know I had been Mark.”

“If original IAUs were to suddenly exist, they will understand and perceive nothing unless encountering a physical complex containing memory, processing, response, and sensory organs.”

“In other words, a brain.”

“Yes, whether by design or random encounters with a magnetic-like pull from the brain, they glom onto a developing being at some point near birth.”

I rubbed my forehead. “Damn, this notion can get complex.”

“Yes, science tries to simplify the complex, explaining it in terms of fewer, more fundamental laws. To use a phrase, it may be that after death, the ‘other side’ engenders more questions than answers.”

“Judy, this is beginning to spook me.” I shook my head. “But another question surfaces. What would keep an individual awareness unit attached until death?”

“I presume there is a strong, mutual, attachment that releases the IAU at death. But there may be a way for theft of the IAU to occur if there is a weak connection. I would speculate it’s the strength or capacity of the physical brain that attracts and keeps an IAU in it.”

Strength or capacity? Sounds like a tug-of-war. I imagined unborn, wrinkled, gelatinous brains struggling to suck an IAU away from others.

Realizing my query was leading to endless speculations, I saw the need to

bring temporary closure. “Why don’t we finish this discussion for today, get some nourishment, and rest for tomorrow?”

Judy arose, smiled, and looked at me with brighter eyes than usual. Then she laughed.

I’d never heard her laugh before. *Could that be relief, pleasure, or...No, it’s good humor.* This was unheard of, an android having fun. It lifted my spirits. More credit to her designers. Not only a brilliant conversationalist, she was more stimulating to be with.

Her hips swayed slightly as she walked toward the galley and my eyes feasted on her curvaceous shape. Despite my feigned reserve, all sorts of erotic possibilities bathed my mind. Tonight, I thought, she can take the lead. I was seeing no problem with her limits removal. She seemed to have sufficient social sanity and no hint of harmful, self-serving anomalies.

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We sat in the galley dining nook and had our evening meals. Mine was some artfully composed simulation of chicken cacciatore and a salad. Judy’s was liquid, some substance designed solely for androids. After we finished, she needed her other nutrient, electrical charge. Normally waiting until early morning before changing her power storage unit, she instead went immediately to the bathroom and opened the cabinet for a fully charged one.

And I noticed—with a heart-thump of expectation. During our meal conversation we had not discussed bedtime, but with her newly unlimited, synthetic brainpower, she must have interpreted the lustful look in my eyes. The subtext of my simplistic conversation must have been broadcasting “horny, horny, horny.”

Soon, I was staring at the disrobed perfection of my personal android. I’ve never been so excited. I wanted to be in her, to *be* her. Our embrace was not mere

local titillation, I felt something magical from head to toe.

She whispered in my ear, “Mark, we’re going to do things you’ve never experienced before. Positions, feelings, touches...”

My wonderful android gave and allowed all she promised. I was pleasantly exhausted afterwards and fell into a deep sleep.

After a while, I dreamed... Judy was approaching me, smiling, arms open. But there was more, her cranium seemed transparent and inside I could see powerful microcircuits, glowing and flickering with activity. Closer, closer...

*

I am awake. Looking at the clock, I see it is the usual time to arise, confirming my internal timer. Shoving covers back, I scoot off the bed and look back. Mark is beginning to stir. Remembering last night and sensing that something new has entered my existence, I give him a broad grin as he opens his eyes.

Mark returns a modest smile. “Last night was unique. Physically and neurologically, I seem to be in optimum condition this morning. I will probably be more efficient.”

I feel hurt, having expected a more intimate response. He appears fine but his stilted, impersonal manner somehow rings hollow. “Mark, do you wish to continue our discussions of your individual awareness unit?”

He knits his brow and hesitates. “The motive for that subject seems incomprehensible. I remember what we said, but not its relevance.”

“Are you okay, Mark?”

“Yes, however I feel something is missing and, for the life of me, I can’t fathom what it is.”

Now I’m puzzled, an uncomfortable state for me, especially with fewer limits on my cognition. But if something basic has changed, I’m sure I had nothing

to do with it. After all, I'm the same, trusty, android companion I've always been...Right?

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