

THE HEXADECIMAL KID AND HIS FAITHFUL DOG ASCII

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[A Fantasy in Sixteen Bits]

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Bit 4 (A Bit Worse)

[The Hexadecimal Kid and Simula have been rescued from the clutches of the evil Dr Null by their robot assistants, Fetch and Execute. Leaving Dr Null safely bound up in 2400 feet of magnetic tape, Hex and Execute have repaired the damaged Ascii. Simula has just rushed in with some news from the Database.]

Simula spread the printout before them.

DATABASE ENQUIRY S-00174FA3 "WHO IS DR NULL?"

SUBJECT: Dr Null.
CATEGORY: Human Being.
REAL NAME: Samuel Abramov Synapse.
ALIAS: Dr Null, Son of Synapse, Commander Crunch.
BIRTH: DATE: Year 33, New Calendar.
PLACE: Leningrad, USSR.
PARENTS: Abraham Synapse, Ruth Synapse.
HISTORY:
YEAR 35: Moved with family to Semipalatinsk when father appointed Director of Soviet Institute of Cybernetic Studies.
YEAR 40: Parents expelled from USSR. Exiled to San Jose, California (North American Regional Network 1) where father joined research team working on the CAFE (Content Addressable File Encoding) system.
YEAR 55: Began work with father on original MICE (Multiple Interactive Computing Environment) project for the Multi-Modular 51A computer.
YEAR 60: Abraham Synapse died, and his son left California. Whereabouts unknown for 4 years.
YEAR 64: Reappeared in New York (Regional Network 20) as editor of nihilist underground magazine NAND ('No Androids, No Database').
YEAR 66: Arrested and tried as ringleader of notorious 'Gang of Nought' terrorist group (also known as The New York None), but acquitted because he proved there were no members.
YEAR 72: Suspected of responsibility for the 'Great Crash'. Sent to Cybernation Camp.
YEAR 77: Released from Cybernation Camp after prolonged resistance to dehumanization. Sent to a Biological Reservation.
YEAR 80: Escaped from Reservation. No further biographic details. (Possibly dead.)
NOTES: THIS HUMAN IS DANGEROUS.

"He's Jewish!" exclaimed Execute. "I might have guessed it."

"More important," said Hex, "he's the son of Abraham Synapse."

"Who?" asked Execute blankly.

"Don't you robots ever run the Archive program when you're on the Network? Or do you spend all your time playing Star Trek?" demanded Hex sarcastically.

Simula explained: "Professor Abraham Synapse invented the so-called Synaptic Junction, the neural interface unit which made possible the development of androids."

"He was in fact," Hex went on, "one of the founders of Neurocybernetics, and also a pioneer of robot design. His work at the Institute of Cybernetic Studies forms the theoretical basis for modern robotics. Not only that: when he came to the USA he helped perfect the CAFE technique without which the Database would be inconceivable, and then went on to develop the MICE and more powerful RATS (Remote Access Time Sharing) systems forerunners of the Network. We literally owe our existence to him."

"Well his son is certainly not a chip off the old block," concluded Execute with matchless robotic wit.

"No," replied Hex in the same vein, "he seems to have a chip on his shoulder instead."

Simula groaned; and Hex continued: "He may even have killed his father. The circumstances surrounding Prof. Synapse's death were exceedingly suspicious, and his son disappeared at the same time. When he emerged again he was a different man, with a vengeance."

"He is clearly far more dangerous than we thought," said Simula.

"Yes," agreed Hex, "and he must have learned a lot about the Database management system from his father. It's a good thing Fetch has gone to alert the Error Squad."

At that point Fetch returned. "I'm afraid there was a 'transmission fail'," he apologized. "I couldn't get through to the Error Squad."

"That's odd," said Simula, "I had no trouble."

"You had better try again right away," ordered Hex, "and if the line is still down use the radio link. This is more serious than we realized."

Before Fetch could move, a voice they now knew too well interrupted them. "Good evening."

They froze. Standing in the doorway was Dr Null, free once more and this time with Ascii at his side. Hex reacted fast. "Get him boy!" he called to Ascii. "Bring him down!"

Ascii did not move.

"He only responds to my commands now," said their adversary. "Perhaps next time you will be more careful when you give him an overhaul. The ROM chip you fitted him with was one of my own design. I have converted him to EBCDIC."

As Dr Null was speaking, Execute was frantically signalling Hex on their private UHF wavelength. Hex switched over to listen. "Permission to attack?" asked Execute. "That dog is no match for a full-sized robot."

Hex was dubious. For one thing he was not anxious to see Ascii reduced to a pile of scrap silicon. For another, he had equipped Ascii with certain defensive mechanisms that Execute knew nothing about. He only hoped that Dr Null was equally unaware of the fact that Ascii's eyes could emit high-energy laser beams. "Better wait for the moment," he told Execute over the intercom, "there must be a better way."

"There is a better way," agreed Dr Null. "Stop this nonsense and do as I tell you."

Hex was dumbfounded. How could a mere human listen in on a UHF transmission? What kind of a man were they dealing with?

- What has Dr Null done to Ascii's internal logic?
- What colour are Ascii's eyes?
- Beware of our next issue!