

# THE HEXADECIMAL KID AND HIS FAITHFUL DOG ASCII

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[A Fantasy in Sixteen Bits]

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## Bit 10 (Bits And Pieces)

[Lost in the wilderness on their journey to the Silicon Valley reservation, Hex and Execute have luckily stumbled upon a virtual store run by two androids where they have replenished their memory banks. When they sit down with their hosts they are astounded to see they have 'gone native' to the extent of smoking pot and employing a female human servant.]

Hex learned from Davy Sprocket during the course of the conversation that he and his partner had once formed the Sprocket Bootstrap Corporation of America but that when that folded, soon after the Great Crash, they had become plain Davy Sprocket and Bill Bootstrap again and had been forced to seek their prospects in the outback. According to Davy Sprocket the tourist business had formerly boomed, but with the advent of wide-band full-modality sensory transmission demand had now slumped.

Hex told him something of the purpose of their trip, but omitted to mention Dr Null, saying only that his bionic dog had got out of control and that they wanted to retrieve him before he did any damage. There was something about Bill Bootstrap that made him wary of revealing their plans. He also enquired whether they knew of Old Ma Synapse, adding that they would like to pay her a visit and discuss Professor Synapse's life -- out of historical curiosity. Sheriff Sprocket said that she was well known as a respected elder of the tribe and suggested that he personally should lead them to her the following day. Hex gratefully accepted this offer of a guide with some local knowledge and, after a convivial evening during which he tasted Bourbon whiskey again for the first time in over twenty years, he and Execute retired to the smaller of the two log cabins bidding a cheerful goodnight to their hosts.

"How human can you get?" asked Execute as they prepared to sleep. "Those two ought to be reported to the Database Administrator."

"I know," replied Hex in a benevolent haze, "but we are their guests. After all, what would you do if you were stuck out here?"

In the middle of the night Hex awoke with a start, not because of the bugs crawling around the bed but because his information retrieval system DREAM (Dynamically Reorganizing Express Access Method) had stumbled across a highly relevant fact as it filed away the day's experiences for future reference.

"Wake up!" he cried excitedly, shaking Execute.

"What's going on?" asked Execute groggily.

"I've remembered something important," said Hex. "Bill Bootstrap is a fraud: that android is in reality 'Wild' Bill Bootleg, manufacturer of the moonshine minicomputer. Those two were

banished out here for selling home-brew computer kits to humans. I wouldn't mind betting they've set up a business for supplying illicit processors to the people here. Pack up everything we've got. I think we had better make an early departure. If they realize we're on to their little game, it won't be safe for us to stay around."

Hurriedly they packed their few belongings. As they were about to leave, there came a barely audible tap-tap-tap on the front door of the hut. In a flash, Execute rammed his bed against it and pointed to the window.

"You first," he whispered to Hex, and Hex began to scramble out of the tiny opening.

"I'm stuck," called Hex through clenched teeth as he struggled to squeeze through the narrow window frame. "Get me out of this!"

"Incompetent android," growled Execute, and gave him a huge push.

Hex tumbled head first onto the sandy ground. As he was picking himself up he could hear the muffled footfalls of the intruder coming round from the door of the hut, then the kit bag that Execute had flung out after him struck him on the back and he slumped forward again. He rose shakily and dusted himself off.

Standing in front of him, lit up by the moonlight, was their midnight caller, the servant girl they had seen briefly the previous evening.

Execute landed beside them with a loud crunch.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you," said the girl.

Hex and Execute just gaped at her.

"I want you to take me away from here," she said.

They looked at each other blankly.

- Should they take the girl?
- How green was my valley?
- All will be revealed next week.