

1,000 words (or less) into the future

THE FLASH FUTURE REVIEW

Smiles form the channels of a future tear.

- Lord Byron

SPACE CADET

By Iulian Ionescu

The International Space Academy was a place of order, a place of perfection, effectiveness, and absolute cleanliness. A place where even donuts and bagels were square to optimize the baking tray's space, and butter came in precut thin slices to prevent waste.

The general population would often refer to the cadets as machines, most likely due to their signature haircut, blend uniform, and similarly sculpted faces and thinned lips.

And then there was Dennis.

I met Dennis on my first visit on the Space Station, during its maiden warp-speed voyage around the galaxy. Honestly, it was not on my agenda to be disconnected from the world for four years, and mingle with the machines, but who would decline something like that in exchange for a good bullet point on their resume?

Dennis was born to a family of regulars, in some deep hole of Arkansas. He was conceived during the Martian war, and that took a toll on his childhood, no question. His mom, Arlene, used to buy his lightsabers at Home Depot, can you even picture that? A young kid running around with a saber designed to cut through ivory tiles and metal pipes? I can't tell you how many cats lost their heads that summer, or so he claims, with deep sadness and remorse.

His father was an overly-traditional robot cow farmer. He only used disposable materials, all recyclable, and his robots had five acres of pristine fields to run through. He would even go as far as put on a cow costume and mingle among them, just to hear what they say.

Dennis told me that one time he joined his father inside the cow costume and they both heard the cows talk about the takeover. He didn't pay much attention then. That was 20 years ago.

When his father started to chat with him and tell him about the developments of the robo-cows, Dennis, in his infinite wisdom, shared this information with his superiors. And that's when I came into the picture.

"So, Dennis," I said, stretching my legs over an ottoman that crawled closer to my recliner, "when did you start dreaming that the cows will take over the Earth?"

He looked quite uncomfortable on the inclined stretcher. "Is it necessary to keep me tied up?" he asked.

"The doctor said you jumped at him, holding your fingers above your head like horns, mooing loudly."

"I just wanted to give them a glimpse of what will happen when the cows take over the Earth."

I took a deep breath.

Oh, I forgot to mention, all cadets on the Space Station are created artificially on the station. They never get to see Earth, unless there's a war or something. Everything I mentioned above is what we programmed deep into Dennis' memory, something that he can relate to and forget that he was bred for war.

The cow program was also my idea— it's just so difficult to get real material for a PhD these days. I figured that "Delusions of an artificial mind," would get me a good grade. I was wrong.

There was one tiny aspect I forgot to take into account. Dennis loved those cows we put in his head. He really did. So much so that he started to feel that the world would actually be better off if ruled by cows. This was about two years into his treatment.

When the Space Station returned home, four years later, all attempts to contact Earth failed. The Space Station itself was self-contained and couldn't establish any contact during its warp speed voyage. But when we got back, not being able to contact the main land made everyone extremely uncomfortable. Everyone, except Dennis. He just stood there, smiling and giggling. Every now and then I would hear him mumble something like 'you'll see.' I blamed it on his insanity, instead of his genius mind, like I should have.

After our failed attempts to connect to the Earth station, we all boarded a ship and went down. When the gate opened we were greeted by an army of robo-cows, armed with lasers and lightsabers.

Apparently, Dennis found a way to communicate with Earth during the warp speed and cooked up a plan that involved hacking into the Earth's mainframe and have the system design a new type of mass-produced, self-replicating robo-cows, and programmed them to take over the world.

When we got there he leaped out of the ship raised his hands up and screamed: "Finally, we won!" A robo-cow stepped forward, pointed its laser gun to Dennis and shot him dead.

"Why did you do that for?" I screamed.

The cow turned toward me. "He knew too much."

Needless to say, I never got my PhD.