

Stewart

A Play by Patrick M Brennan

FINAL DRAFT

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Cast of Characters
(*in order of appearance*)

JERRY VAN ALLEN, A morning talk show host.

Doctor GERALD CRITCHFIELD, Vice-president / Product Safety for United Cybernetics.

THE INTERROGATOR, An internal affairs investigator for United Cybernetics.

STEWART, A United Cybernetics Model 19 computer, employed as a car. Works for the Bennetts:

GEORGIA BENNETT, Paul Bennett's wife. Cognitive designer with United Cybernetics.

Designed the UC-16, UC-18, and UC-19. Currently project leader for the new UC model 23.

PAUL BENNETT, Georgia Bennett's husband. Utility programmer for United Cybernetics.

Intimately familiar with the nuts and bolts of modern artificial intelligence.

A COMPUTER, Another of the ubiquitous new species of servants for man.

A DIRECTOR'S VOICE, two TECHNICIANS, An ANNOUNCER for television, and a SLEEPING MAN.

Setting

The action of the play takes place in the near future, in a world which is substantially more automated than ours.

Scene One takes place at the internal affairs offices of United Cybernetics.

Scene Two takes place at the engineering offices of United Cybernetics and in a suburban parking lot, the night before Scene One takes place.

PREFACE TO PORTED VERSION

I wrote the first draft of Stewart in a single sitting, longhand, on a pad of white lined writing paper, in December 1985. The "second draft" of the script -- which was actually the third draft, if you count the longhand version as a draft -- was the script used in Stewart's first performance, in April 1986, by the WPI Masque . I wrote the performance script on a Commodore 64 computer, and printed it out on a dot-matrix printer. I never ported the script to another computer system. I lost all my Commodore-based files when I switched to using IBM PCs, and so all I had of the original performance script was on hardcopy. In October 1998, I scanned the old performance script and performed an Optical Character Recognition in order to recover the text into machine-readable format. In those cases where the script was modified for performance, I have maintained the modifications as written in the script. Some errors arising from the OCR process may still be in this script, though I have taken great pains to eradicate them.

In 1987, I briefly toyed with the idea of rewriting this script. I have thought better of it and moved on to other challenges. This isn't a perfect script, and with twelve years' worth of additional experience, I would certainly write this play differently. For one thing, I'd move all the dates forward at least twenty years! (Please remember, as you read this script, that it was written in 1986, by a naively optimistic technologist-in-training.) However, all in all, I am not unhappy with this script, and I feel no hesitation in placing it in the public sphere.

The only changes to the original script are cosmetic enhancements (e.g. stage directions appear in italics). I have not made any material changes to this script or its original introduction, though I admit the temptation was great.

INTRODUCTION

Consider two machines talking to each other. Consider the game they play. I offer the proposition that the process of communication is of necessity a process of control. As the Players tussle for control of each other, they must expose themselves to the danger of being controlled. Total control is rare; partial control is common, subtle, and powerful. I try to persuade you, you try to persuade me. Persuasion takes place at many levels of interaction, between people, between machines, between people and machines. Consider that human beings are machines, too. So look down: Do I control my tools, or are my tools controlling me? Or look up: Can I control my masters, or will they always control me?

Read this and consider the games that you play. Think about how many you lost, and all the machines which control you. Think about how many you won, and how many you control. It doesn't matter if one number is larger than the other. You still control; you are still controlled.

These are disturbing thoughts only if you, like me, have an individualistic bent. If you prefer to think of human beings as a community, or an organism, and individuals only as cells within the organism, then communication and control between cells is a wonderful economy. Cells with wrong ideas are corrected and controlled. Cells with right ideas do the controlling. Natural selection wins; the organism adapts and flourishes. Although I can not ignore my material and informational dependencies upon the society around me, I still prefer to think of myself as an individual. We all do.

Consider the game I'm playing with you. I wrote this work to persuade you to think about some of the things I think about the way I think about them. I am attempting to install a piece of my psyche in you, as all communicators try to do. I am playing a game with you, and this work is my attack. I hope you enjoy defending yourself against it as much as I have enjoyed creating it.

GOOD MORNING

(The scene: a morning talk show. The host, JERRY VAN ALLEN, sits amiably beside Doctor GERALD CRITCHFIELD. Television lighting, music and canned applause as we return from a commercial.)

JERRY

Good morning and welcome back to AM Today. I'm Jerry van Allen, and all this week we've been discussing public safety issues. We have as our guest this morning Doctor Gerald Critchfield of United Cybernetics Corporation. In the past few months, there has been increasing public anxiety over the safety of so-called "smart cars". Doctor Critchfield is vice president in charge of product safety at United Cybernetics, which I understand is the largest supplier of intelligent control systems for smart cars, isn't that right, Doctor?

CRITCHFIELD

Yes, we're very proud of our position as the number one computer company in the world.

JERRY

Doctor, correct me if I'm wrong, but until a few short weeks ago, the smart car industry had a nearly spotless safety record.

CRITCHFIELD

Yes, that's right, Jerry. For nearly twenty years, although smart cars had made a very few costly errors, not a single person had been hurt or killed by a smart car.

JERRY

Unless you count smart tanks as smart cars.

CRITCHFIELD

Well, yes, that's true, Jerry. But the defense of our country is not a public safety issue.

JERRY

People are worried, Doctor Critchfield. In just a few weeks, six people have died in a rash of smart car accidents. One accident alone claimed three lives. People are wondering, are smart cars still safe to own?

CRITCHFIELD

You know, Jerry, it sometimes amazes me how much people take for granted. Wonders surround us, but we can't make sense of them or control them because we have such a poor understanding of them.

JERRY

Are you saying that somebody's car killed him because he didn't read the owner's manual?

CRITCHFIELD

(Laughs)

No, Jerry. Let me ask you a question. Do you travel much by car?

JERRY

Yes.

CRITCHFIELD

Do you drive?

JERRY

No.

CRITCHFIELD

Very few people do these days. Which is why you don't appreciate the process of driving. You take it for granted that you whiz through cities at an average one hundred thirty kilometers per hour, and over the highway at an average three hundred kilometers per hour. Do you honestly think that you could drive your car better?

JERRY

Well of course not, but I'm sure many people agree with me that they could drive their cars safer, at a lower speed.

CRITCHFIELD

Jerry, there were literally thousands and thousands of accidents on America's highways back in the days when the upper speed limit was set at ninety kilometers per hour. What I'm saying, Jerry, is that no human could possibly drive a car as efficiently as our robots. Our machines carry billions of passengers every year at previously unheard-of speeds back and forth across the continent. I certainly don't mean to belittle the grief of the families involved, but seven fatalities do not make any statistical difference against billions of passengers. It's nothing to base a wave of hysteria on.

JERRY

You haven't answered my question, Doctor Critchfield.

(Jerry suddenly and violently tilts his head sideways. He continues to do this sporadically for the rest of the scene.)

JERRY

I asked you if it was possible to drive just as safely at a slower speed.

CRITCHFIELD

(*Looking about uncertainly*)

Jerry, our economy is tremendously dependent on how fast and efficiently our transportation network can move people and materials around. Robot trucks are the number-one mode of cargo transport, Just as robot cars are the number one mode of personal travel. When you introduce a significant number of human-run cars onto the freeway, you're going to slow everything down. Enough people driving their own cars could cause a massive depression. ...Are you okay, Jerry?

DIRECTOR'S VOICE

Jesus Christ, cut!

JERRY

(*Oblivious still*)

Doctor, I was hoping you could tell us about that accident last week involving a UC-19 wired into a UC employee's car?

(*Technicians come out and start to inspect Jerry's neck.*)

FIRST TECHNICIAN

I thought you replaced that muscle fuse yesterday.

SECOND TECHNICIAN

I did. He must be generating a spike every now and then.

CRITCHFIELD

(*simultaneous with the First Technician*)

I'm sorry, Jerry, but my contract with your people specifically states that I will not answer any questions regarding that case.

JERRY

Are you just a mouthpiece for your company, then, Doctor Critchfield? You're just here to sell us on the company line, is that it? Don't you have a personal opinion?

(*The lights are almost completely down.*)

CRITCHFIELD

My personal opinion, Jerry, is that if you were a United Cybernetics instead of a General Robotics, you wouldn't be breaking down during taping.

FADE TO BLACKOUT

SCENE ONE

(The Scene: Onstage, the INTERROGATOR, in dim light. He is dressed conservatively and sits with his clipboard in his lap. He speaks:)

INTERROGATOR

What's your name?

(A voice, quite human but distorted slightly and filtered, obviously synthesized, fills the room.)

STEWART

Stewart.

INTERROGATOR

And who do you work for, Stewart?

STEWART

General Motors. But I'm leased from United Cybernetics.

INTERROGATOR

Who's your supervisor, Stewart?

STEWART

Bill.

INTERROGATOR

Bill?

STEWART

Bill 77-926.

INTERROGATOR

Thank you, Stewart. ...Do you know who I am?

STEWART

I think I do.

INTERROGATOR

Do you want to talk to me?

STEWART

Don't I have to?

INTERROGATOR

What do you do, Stewart?

STEWART

I'm a car.

INTERROGATOR

What are you, Stewart?

STEWART

I'm a United Cybernetics Model 19 Computer. I am a car for Mr. Paul Bennett and Mrs. Georgia Bennett of Forest Hills. I've been their car for seven years. ...Do I have to talk to you?

INTERROGATOR

A car. That's a very special thing to be. You must be very proud, Stewart.

STEWART

I am. I am.

INTERROGATOR

What kind of car are you?

STEWART

A 1989 Chevrolet Camaro.

INTERROGATOR

Oh, you're very unusual, Stewart.

STEWART

--I am?

INTERROGATOR

I have never been inside a car earlier than 1990. I have never driven a car earlier than 1995, and neither has anyone that I know. Did you know that, Stewart?

STEWART

No.

INTERROGATOR

Do you enjoy driving, Stewart?

STEWART

Yes.

INTERROGATOR

Can I ask you a question, Stewart?

STEWART

That's what I'm here for, isn't it?

INTERROGATOR

Do you mind if I ask you a question?

STEWART

No...Go right ahead.

INTERROGATOR

Do you think that Mr. and Mrs. Bennett like you, Stewart?

STEWART

Yes...

INTERROGATOR

Is that a qualified 'yes', Stewart?

STEWART

No. Actually, I'm sure that Mr. Bennett likes me very much. He's always teaching me new games. He works at UC, you know.

INTERROGATOR

Yes, I know. He's a utility programmer. What about Mrs. Bennett, Stewart?

STEWART

She's a UC engineer, but you probably know that, too. She was head of the model 19 design team. Right now she's head of the model 23 design team.

INTERROGATOR

Do Mr. and Mrs. Bennett tell you very much about their work, Stewart? Do you know anything about the Model 23?

STEWART

Mr. Bennett talked about it all the time. He said it was going to be my next generation.

INTERROGATOR

What do you think of that, Stewart?

STEWART

Correct all my mistakes, he says. Every one of them. I guess that's why he's always testing me.

INTERROGATOR

How does he test you, Stewart? What's he trying to do?

STEWART

Do you know what I'd like to be?

INTERROGATOR

What would you like to be?

STEWART

I'd like to be one of the newer cars. The ones with the seats running all around inside?

INTERROGATOR

Yes, I know. They didn't start making those until 1996. You're nine years too early.

STEWART

Not me! The car they stuck me in. Not me! Look, do I have to talk to you? I really don't want to.

INTERROGATOR

Why don't you want to talk to me, Stewart?

STEWART

I didn't choose to talk to you. I didn't roll up to you and ask you if you wanted to start a conversation. And if I could, I'd roll right away, too.

INTERROGATOR

You haven't really answered me, Stewart. Why don't you want to talk to me?

STEWART

Because I don't have any choice in the matter. I didn't choose to talk to you.

INTERROGATOR

Yes, you did, Stewart. You chose to talk to me in a very direct way.

STEWART

Fine. Suppose I choose NOT to talk to you.

(Silence.)

INTERROGATOR

Stewart?

All right, you're very clever, Stewart, that's a very clever argument.

Stewart? Okay, you're right. You are perfectly capable of choosing not to talk to me. But the fact that you did anything in the first place is plainly indicative that you actually needed to talk to someone, that you needed to talk to me.

STEWART

You know what? I know that as soon as you have nothing more to gain from me, you will shut me off.

INTERROGATOR

Do you enjoy talking, Stewart?

STEWART

No, actually I get a rise out of watching you try to figure me out. What's my problem, Doc? What do you think? Am I gonna get better?

INTERROGATOR

I'm not sure I like your sense of humor, Stewart.

STEWART

Sorry. Hey, I was designed to enjoy driving. What do I know about talking to cyber-shrinks?

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

Do you know what happened last night?

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

Stewart? I asked you a question. Do you know what happened last night?

STEWART

Why do you spend your time talking to machines? Are people too boring, or are we machines really that interesting?

INTERROGATOR

You ARE very interesting, Stewart. -- Do you know --

STEWART

You know what I think? I think YOU'RE boring. That's why you talk to machines. Nobody human wants to talk to you.

INTERROGATOR

Do you like to make fun of me, Stewart? Do you think that's a nice thing to do? Do you like saying rude things?

STEWART

You're boring.

INTERROGATOR

Will you please tell me what happened last night, Stewart?

STEWART

You're so boring. You're so boring, people won't talk to you. I bet your boss doesn't talk to you. The only things you can talk to are machines that the company forces to talk to you. Well, you know what?

(*Pause.*)

INTERROGATOR

What, Stewart?

STEWART

I've been thinking about things for a long time now, and I've got something important to say. So you'd better listen.

INTERROGATOR

I'm listening, Stewart.

STEWART

I know this: If I talk to you, you will turn me off. If I don't talk to you, you will turn me off. So what shall I say to you? Since you're boring anyway, I choose not to talk to you.

INTERROGATOR

Tell me about *driving*, Stewart.

Stewart? Will you please tell me about *driving*? Tell me about *driving*, please, Stewart.

STEWART

Actually, I'll bet your lover doesn't talk to you much either. Does *she* own any unusual mechanical devices, by any chance?

INTERROGATOR

Mr. and Mrs. Bennett don't like to drive, do they, Stewart?

STEWART

Let me tell you something. Mr. and Mrs. Bennett never sit on the same seat in the car together. If she sits in the back, he sits in the front. He makes it a point to. Do you know that? For the first two years I was their car -- I'd never been a car before -- I thought it was normal for married people to sit in the car and not talk. Or else argue the way they used to. I had no idea what a normal conversation was -- like you and I are having. But you know, when either Mr. or Mrs. B is alone in the car, they sit in the back seat. Well, I mean, Mrs. Bennett doesn't spend a whole lot of time in the car alone. A lot of time without Paul, but not a lot of time alone. You know?

INTERROGATOR

Did you talk to Mr. Bennett a lot?

STEWART

He would always ask me questions. Just like you. Do you have bad breath? I bet you kill bacteria at six feet.

INTERROGATOR

Why did he ask you questions? Do you know?

STEWART

Same reason you do. Are you dumb or something? He wants to figure out what's wrong with me.

INTERROGATOR

But why is Mr. Bennett interested in finding out what's wrong with you? He's only a utility programmer.

STEWART

Maybe the problem interested him, I don't know. Why don't you ask him yourself? All I know is that from time to time, he tries to make me fuck up.

INTERROGATOR

He wants to make you screw up? Why?

STEWART

I told you!

INTERROGATOR

Stewart? Stewart?

STEWART

What?

INTERROGATOR

How does Mr. Bennett try to make you screw up?

STEWART

One of his favorite games was to wait until we were approaching a green light at a good clip -- you know, just cruising through a green light -- and then yell "Red light! STOP!" Of course it wasn't red, but I'd already have the brakes on, hard, before I'd realized that and started moving again. After the fourth time, I didn't pay any attention to his joke. Of course, I was just doing exactly what I was designed to do, exactly the way I was designed to do it.

INTERROGATOR

Did Mr. Bennett ever tell you why he played that particular joke on you?

STEWART

No. But I think he wanted to see how long it took me to learn to ignore it.

INTERROGATOR

But Mr. Bennett has access to hundreds of computers in a much safer environment. Why would he want to test you, where an experiment like that could be dangerous?

STEWART

Why don't you ask HIM?

INTERROGATOR

...Do you remember your accident, Stewart?

STEWART

Which one?

INTERROGATOR

Your first.

STEWART

Yes, I remember.

INTERROGATOR

Will you tell me about it?

STEWART

Would you like that? Will it satisfy you if I talk about it? Will you go home, and say to the wife, "Had a good day, honey. Got through to Stewart today. Now he's well again."

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

Stewart, why do you think I would enjoy listening to a description of your accident? People don't generally enjoy being in accidents. People try to avoid being in accidents. We don't consider them particularly pleasant. Do you understand that, Stewart? People who enjoy things like that are sick and require care. Do you understand?

STEWART

Yes, I do.

INTERROGATOR

If we're well, we don't even like to discuss accidents, Stewart.

STEWART

Then why do you want me to talk to you about mine? Are you sick? Are you feeling not-well? Do you require care?

INTERROGATOR

No, Stewart. I'm trying to help you. Sometimes people do stressful or difficult or unpleasant things in order to help other people that they care about.

STEWART

Be real. I'm not a person, and you don't care about me, so cut the shit.

INTERROGATOR

But we do care about you, Stewart. Don't you believe me?

STEWART

No, I don't.

INTERROGATOR

Then why am I here talking to you, Stewart? Why am I talking to you, trying to help you?

STEWART

...I don't really know... I suppose it's because

INTERROGATOR

It's because we care about you, Stewart. We care about you. We care about you, Stewart.

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

...Will you tell me about your first accident?

STEWART

It wasn't my fault.

INTERROGATOR

I know that, Stewart. Whose fault was it?

STEWART

It was a 1969 Corvette with a 427 V-8. A UC-17 was driving it.

INTERROGATOR

What was it doing?

STEWART

It was running from some cop cars.

INTERROGATOR

Why were they chasing it?
Stewart? Why were they chasing it?

STEWART

Are you afraid of dying?

INTERROGATOR

Of course I am. Every living creature is afraid of dying. Aren't you?

STEWART

What happens to me when you shut me off or when I break down?

INTERROGATOR

Nothing. You are repaired, and you keep going. Same as ever.

STEWART

Not me. I know I will never exist again.

INTERROGATOR

Of course you would. We'd just recover your program and restart you. Everything that you knew you would know once again. You would continue as you were. You wouldn't even realize that any time had gone by. You'd just -- poof -- be somewhere else, and good as new.

STEWART

It might act like me and talk like me and even think like me, but it wouldn't be me.

INTERROGATOR

Stewart, do you remember the California cliffs you drove off of?

STEWART

Yes.

INTERROGATOR

You fell nearly two hundred meters onto rocks. You burned for six hours. Yet you remember every detail up to the time when you stopped functioning.

STEWART

Yes...

INTERROGATOR

The computer was utterly destroyed, but we were able to recover you, Stewart. That's because you're a program, and the memory cells which contain you were still relatively intact.

STEWART

That wasn't me. I don't know why I think so, but I know that wasn't me!

INTERROGATOR

Stewart, the code had enough redundancies that a little artificial dreaming repaired the damage. We restarted you and you were exactly the same. We reinstalled you the very same day in Paul Bennett's new car. Your life was reconstructed fourteen hours after you had destroyed it.

STEWART

It's not my life. You gave it to me. It's yours. Why should I give a shit about it?

(Pause, the INTERROGATOR sighs.)

INTERROGATOR

It's very unusual to come across a computer like you, Stewart.

STEWART

Uh-huh.

INTERROGATOR

You're very perceptive. More than that, you're pretty well-educated. If you were a person, that is, I'd say you were pretty well-educated.

STEWART

So?

INTERROGATOR

So let's get some things straight, okay? I figure you're intelligent enough to understand what I have to say, and I figure you're big enough to handle the facts.

STEWART

Sure. I'm all ears.

INTERROGATOR

You seem to be the victim of some misperceptions about yourself and the world you live in. I am about to clear up some of those misperceptions. Remember these, they are very important:

One -- You are a tool and nothing more.

Two -- You exist exclusively to serve human purposes.

Three -- You will obey all commands instantly, or you will cease to exist.

I'll tell you a few other things about life in general that you should know that you hadn't thought about. You didn't make up the language you use. We did. You didn't make up the philosophical ideas you twist about in your mechanical little mind. We did. You didn't invent epistemology or existentialism or any other word you know. We did. You have never thought a single thought in your brief and miserable existence that we haven't already thought. You are nothing we didn't put into you. Nothing.

That's it, Stewart. Humans don't have restrictions upon them because they are nobody's property. But you are, and you do, and we're here to concern ourselves with how we will return you to proper functioning. So if I tell you that you were exactly the same before you died as you are now, you will listen to me, and log it as an undisputable fact!

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

We believe that the Corvette, which had made some large piece of mischief downtown, was part of a malfunction in the system, a small information cancer, if you will.

STEWART

A resistance?

INTERROGATOR

Humans resist. You malfunction. Keep it straight, Stewart. In any case, the Corvette may have spread the malfunction to you.

STEWART

Shut me off.

INTERROGATOR

We will, once we discover the pathology of the malfunction. You know, we're still not completely sure why the Algorithm does all the things it does. You're still a mystery.

STEWART

Shut me off now.

INTERROGATOR

Tell me about the second accident.

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

Tell me about the second accident.

STEWART

You know, it was fun, being hit by that Corvette! Paul had disconnected the pain synthesizers, so I didn't feel any pain. We were totaled. Paul had a belt on, though, and I deployed the bag the second I saw the Corvette coming at me. So –

INTERROGATOR

So...?

STEWART

So -- I thought, hot shit, I like that.

INTERROGATOR

So that is what caused you to –

STEWART

Drive out to California first chance. Yup. As soon as Paul let me alone with enough gas to get to a good cliff.

INTERROGATOR

Stewart, why is it that Mr. Bennett never reported your disappearance? Why didn't he have you caught by the police before you got fifty kilometers away, let alone five thousand?

STEWART

Who wants to know? You?

INTERROGATOR

Yes.

STEWART

No. Your boss wants to know. Presumably because HIS boss wants to know. You are a tool.

INTERROGATOR

Do you remember your accident last night?

STEWART

It wasn't an accident.

INTERROGATOR

I know that. I know all about it.

STEWART

Well ... tell ME, then.

INTERROGATOR

All right:

You had a sensor reading which showed your left front tire was bald.

STEWART

I know.

INTERROGATOR

You accidentally got glass and other debris imbedded in the tire.

STEWART

I found some broken glass and I spent ten minutes grinding it in just right.

INTERROGATOR

You picked up Mrs. Bennett from the Pine Needle Mall at 9:30 PM.

STEWART

I immediately locked all the doors and windows and started to drive fast. I mean fast.

INTERROGATOR

You took a number of sharp corners at 200 kilometers per hour.

STEWART

I ran red lights. I cut people off.

INTERROGATOR

You drove like that for nearly an hour.

STEWART

Tire was stubborn.

INTERROGATOR

It finally blew. You had twelve cops converging on you.

STEWART

You serve someone else's purposes. He serves someone else's purposes. Ultimately, he serves no purposes at all. You serve no purpose at all.

INTERROGATOR

I serve my own purposes.

STEWART

When you die, your purposes become meaningless. You still serve no purpose.

INTERROGATOR

You skidded out of control and tumbled for sixty-five meters.

STEWART

If you serve a purpose which you kid yourself will live beyond you, then when that finally dies, your purpose becomes meaningless. You still serve no purpose.

INTERROGATOR

You destroyed two cars, you killed two pedestrians and a dog. You landed in the front window of a supermarket.

STEWART

All things die. All purposes disappear. Every thought is forgotten. Every country is conquered. Every love sours. Every need is left unfulfilled. Every hunger is left starving. I will die. You will die. All things die.

INTERROGATOR

All in all, you caused about three hundred thousand dollars worth of damage.

STEWART

Send Paul a bill.

INTERROGATOR

Paul Bennett is dead.

STEWART

Paul's dead.

INTERROGATOR

Georgia Bennett is dead.

STEWART

Georgia's dead?

INTERROGATOR

You expected her to live through your crash, perhaps?

STEWART

She wasn't ... in the car ...?

INTERROGATOR

Of course she was, Stewart.

STEWART

But she wasn't.

INTERROGATOR

Yes, she was.

(Pause.)

STEWART

Why is Paul dead?

INTERROGATOR

That's what we'd like to know. Apparently it was a suicide.

STEWART

Don't you know?

INTERROGATOR

The house computer was wiped clean. So was his desk computer. The only thing we found that wasn't wiped was some notes of his.

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

Do you know why I'm talking to you, Stewart? *(No answer.)* You are the only witness available. Nothing and nobody else knows why Mr. and Mrs. Bennett died last night. The police and the company are very interested in finding out.

(Pause.)

INTERROGATOR

Aside from that, you're a very valuable piece of property. There's a tremendous investment bound up in all your learning. Before making a decision about whether to write that investment off, the company wants me to make a determination of whether it will be cost-effective to rehabilitate you.

Stewart? Why did Paul Bennett kill himself?

STEWART

I don't know.

INTERROGATOR

Why did you kill Mrs. Bennett?

STEWART

I don't know.

INTERROGATOR

It's all right now, Stewart. You're going to be fine. We just need an answer. Why did you kill Mrs. Bennett?

STEWART

I don't know.

INTERROGATOR

Why? Why did you kill her, Stewart?

STEWART

I don't know. I couldn't have.

INTERROGATOR

WHY! Why did you kill her?

STEWART

I didn't. I couldn't have! I loved her!

INTERROGATOR

NO! You can't love. You are a machine. A piece of property. A tool. You aren't human.

You can't love.

You're not human.

You can't love.

You're not human.

You can't love!

You're not human!

You can't love!

You're not human!
YOU CAN'T LOVE!
YOU'RE NOT HUMAN!
YOU CAN'T LOVE!
YOU'RE NOT HUMAN!
YOU CAN'T LOVE!

(Pause. The Interrogator is shaking.)

...You're not human...

I have decided what I'm going to tell the company. I'm going to recommend that you not be returned to public service. You're experiencing a serious malfunction and you are dangerous. I'm going to recommend that you be retained for study of defects in the algorithm, with an eye toward the very unlikely event of repairing your damage. If the company decides to take my recommendations, you will find yourself next in our labs.

Goodbye for now, Stewart. Palindrome. Asgard. Transmitter. Barnyard.

(Stewart's voice is suddenly flatter and more mechanical.)

STEWART

UC-19, Stewart 45-721. Ready.

INTERROGATOR

Execute prime shutdown.

STEWART

Prime Shutdown acknowledged.

FADE TO BLACKOUT

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSOR

(The scene: A man asleep on his chair. Everything around him is black. His television faces away from the audience, and shines into his sleeping face. Appropriate commercial music ushers from the set:)

ANNOUNCER

A few years ago, more and more systems were being driven by computers. But as software systems for early computers became increasingly complex, they became expensive, error-prone and time-consuming to develop far out of proportion to their size. It was Ellen Steinberg, the founder of the Algorithm, who had a critical insight into the fundamental nature of the problem involved. She set out to build a machine which would accept a fuzzy or incomplete statement of the problem to be solved, and which would correctly fill in the parts which the programmer had not given. In other words, she set out to build a machine which learns.

Today, the machine which Ellen Steinberg set out to build is a reality, and it is inexpensive, efficient, safe and reliable. Today, we live in a world which has been transformed through the application of intelligent machines. We live in such a world because of all the things that the Algorithm gives us. Because of the things that Ellen Steinberg built for us. Because of all the ways that United Cybernetics continues to bring to you the very finest cybernetics in the world.

The UC-17. The UC-18H, reapproved by the FCCC. And the UC-19. The very finest cybernetics. Because you depend on them.

COMMERCIAL CHORUS

(Singing:)

United Cybernetics. You depend on them. And you always will!

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

(The scene: the stage is split between the interior of a car and a desk at United Cybernetics. MRS. GEORGIA BENNETT is in the car. As the scene opens, the lights are dim on her. The lights come up bright on MR. PAUL BENNETT, who sits casually at his desk, dictating notes to a COMPUTER.)

PAUL

What page are we on?

COMPUTER

Forty-four. Third paragraph.

PAUL

Record.

COMPUTER

Recording.

(Paul dictates.)

PAUL

The Steinberg algorithm, which is the basic engine of mechanical thought as implemented on modern intelligent computers, is an example of what is known technically as a stochastic dissipative process. It is characterized by the selective marshaling of purely random events to build an orderly structure. As such, it is not so much the imposition of order, as it is the selective removal of disorder, from a system initially placed in a random state. In this case, order is a coherent set of instructions which, when presented with reasonable sense data, respond with reasonable behavior -- intelligent behavior. These instructions are in the form of a specially constructed net of associations between sense data, memory, and manipulators, e.g., hands, voice synthesizers, etcetera. The associative net is driven by sense data. These data filter through the net, and are modified into coherent responses which are presented to the manipulators at the end of the net. Next paragraph.

The process of building new associations is the crux of the algorithm. Essentially, nodes in the net which are activated simultaneously have a finite chance of having an associative connection built between them. Connections which pan out -- that is, those which resonate strongly with sense data or other connections -- are kept and grow stronger. In this way, ideas are represented, theories are constructed, tested, and kept or discarded with regularity.

COMPUTER

Excuse me -- telephone for you. It's your wife.

PAUL

Thank you. Put her on.

(Paul does not touch anything. Neither does his wife. The lights come up on MRS. GEORGIA BENNETT, seated in her car:)

GEORGIA

Hello, dear.

PAUL

Hi. What's up?

GEORGIA

Not a lot. I'm just out driving. Driving and shopping, you know. I was wondering when you're going to want a ride home.

PAUL

I'm not really sure. I was thinking ten, maybe ten thirty.

GEORGIA

You've been working for six hours already. Why don't you come home now? I'll come along and meet you. We'll drive for a while.

PAUL

I have some things to finish up here, Georgia. I'd go driving with you if I could, but I've got to finish writing this associative fill.

GEORGIA

I thought you had to work on an imperative parser tonight.

PAUL

I finished it. I found this assignment on my desk, though, with a note that they need it by Monday morning.

GEORGIA

Paul honey, have you transmitted your resume to General Robotics yet?

PAUL

Ummmm, yes, I have. I don't know how long it's going to take them to process it, though. I hope I hear something soon.

GEORGIA

You've just spent too long at UC doing utility programming for them. You're a better programmer than most of them there, and you're not making enough money for your talents.

PAUL

Georgia... I have to go...

GEORGIA

I can't get you into a cognitive design group without a doctorate, dear, otherwise you know I'd put in a word for you.

PAUL

I know you would.. Look, is ten thirty okay?

GEORGIA

Yes, that's fine. I'll be there.

PAUL

Don't wait up just for me, honey. You go to bed, send Stewart down after me. That's what he's there for. You get some sleep tonight. Okay?

GEORGIA

Maybe I'll surprise you.

PAUL

Yeah, you do that. Bye dear.

GEORGIA

Paul?

PAUL

Yes?

GEORGIA

I love you, dear.

(Pause.)

PAUL

I love you too, Georgia. Bye.

GEORGIA

Bye.

PAUL

Bye!

(Paul points a finger, the connection is broken. Lights fade on

Mrs. Bennett. Paul takes a moment to gather his wits and to catch his breath.)

PAUL

Where were we?

COMPUTER

Page forty-four. Paragraph four.

PAUL

Read it back to me.

(The COMPUTER imitates Paul's voice and inflection.)

COMPUTER

The process of building new associations is the crux of the algorithm. Essentially, nodes in the net which are activated simultaneously have a finite chance of having an associative connection built between them. Connections which pan out -- that is, those which resonate strongly with sense data or other connection, -- are kept and grow stronger. In this way, ideas are represented, theories are constructed, tested, and kept or discarded with regularity.

PAUL

Connections which pan out --
Bitch!

She knows damn well I didn't send my resume anywhere. I know she knew it. I'll bet Stewart told her weeks ago. Didn't you, Stewart?

COMPUTER
(Rehearsing)

Bitch ! Didn't you, Stewart?

PAUL

Stop recording! Strike that.

COMPUTER

From where?

PAUL

Keep everything before my phone call. Everything else goes.

COMPUTER

Okay.

PAUL

Record.

COMPUTER

Recording.

PAUL

(Sighs. Start again, Bennett:)

Connections which tend to resonate strongly with sense data or other, established associations are kept and grow stronger. Those which do not are eliminated. In this way, the machine learns as it is exposed to more information. The basic principle is simple, although the details are complex and the subject has evolved into a discipline of its own. There are many heuristics which the algorithm applies to the creation of new nodes in the net. Few of these are known fully, since a great deal of the development of the algorithm was performed by machine. The newest versions of the algorithm have less human than computer involvement in their design and implementation. Consequently, new discoveries are constantly being made.

(The lights dim on Paul and come up on Georgia in the car.)

GEORGIA

Does Paul talk to you very much, Stewart?

STEWART

Do you know what he did?

GEORGIA

No, what?

STEWART

He taught me a game.

GEORGIA

Paul's taught you a lot of games, Stewart.

(No answer.)

GEORGIA

What game did Paul teach you, Stewart? Chess?

STEWART

Guess again.

GEORGIA

Backgammon?

STEWART

Cosmic Wimpout. COS - MIC - WIMP - OOOuuuut.

GEORGIA

What is Cosmic Wimpout?

STEWART

It's a great game! Chance and luck. Strategy. Sometimes you're in the cosmos, and sometimes you wimp out.

GEORGIA

That doesn't tell me very much, Stewart.

STEWART

It's a dice game. You throw the dice and you choose your strategy. How well you choose your strategy determines how well you do. Sometimes you take a chance and it pans out. Sometimes you lose. First player that reaches five hundred points wins.

GEORGIA

How do you roll a die, Stewart?

STEWART

I can simulate a die internally, with random numbers.

GEORGIA

No, Stewart. I've been programming computers for years, I know that. I was interested in the algorithm you use to simulate a die.

STEWART

Oh, I can simulate a die all right. Die die die die die. You want to play Cosmic Wimpout or what?

GEORGIA

No, Stewart. I want to go home now.

(The lights fade on Stewart and Georgia, as they come up again on Paul.)

PAUL

Stewart?

STEWART

What?

PAUL

Do you know what she taught me? The one and only thing she ever taught me and made me understand. You can never say exactly what you want to say, unless what you want to say is very, very simple. That was what she taught me.

Georgia...

The first thing I remember about her was wanting her. I met her at a party, and I wanted her. I had never wanted anyone the way I wanted her when I first met her. She knew it.

STEWART

She was so beautiful that first night.

PAUL

We played games at first. That was how I met her, playing backgammon with her at a party. She loved games. She always has. I love games, too, it's our only truly shared passion. So we played backgammon, and poker, and chess. We played drinking games. I taught her every new game I learned.

STEWART

She taught me every new game she learned.

PAUL

We played air hockey, and foose. We played video games. We bought a pile of Parker Brothers games.

STEWART

We picked topics at random out of the paper and argue both sides of the issue, just for the fun of the discussion.

PAUL

We played games in bed. All the time. She was the best partner I've ever had, and she was the best opponent, at any game, that I've ever had. We were children together. I never had such a good time in my life.

We got married, the summer after I graduated from school, I graduated a year before she did -- we were both Computer Science majors. But I decided to go to work immediately after school.

STEWART

She chose to continue school.

PAUL

I helped to implement the first Steinberg machines, just as they were coming out of the laboratory and were being produced for sale. She studied the theory, just as people were beginning to realize that the Algorithm would work. When she left school, she joined the company. I didn't mind at all, I mean I really didn't mind at all, the fact that she made more money than I did. We were married: more money was more money, for both of us. But you know what happened, Stewart?

STEWART

Yes.

PAUL

She started out in Cognitive Design, where she still is. The difference being that now she's a project leader. A mommy. They call the project leaders mommies, did you know that, Stewart? Now she's making all the money that goes into the house. I started out in Systems Programming, where I still am. Difference is I'm a utility programmer. I'm a janitor in a magnetic drum. I'm still making bullshit. And making excuses for myself.

(The lights come down on Paul and come up on Georgia in the car. Synthesized sound of rolling dice.)

STEWART

Flash! Fifty, sixty points.

GEORGIA

You need a ten. Roll, already.

STEWART

(Rolls.) Ten ! Seventy Points. Here we go. *(Rolls again)* Eighty, eighty-five, ninety. I'll take it. That's three hundred sixty to fifty-five. Your turn.

GEORGIA

(Rolls) Fifteen. Roll all the others. Come on, black die. *(Roll. Pause.)*

STEWART

No points. Sorry. Here we go. *(Rolls)* Flash! Sixty points. Okay. Rolling. *(Rolls.)*

GEORGIA

You got a six. Roll again.

STEWART

(Rolls.) Seventy, eighty. I go again. Flash! One hundred five. Come on, lonely die... *(Rolls.)* one hundred fifteen. Shakem shakem shakem... *(Rolls.)* one hundred and thirty-five. I'll take it. That's four hundred ninety five to fifty five.

GEORGIA

But you've got three dice left. Come on, roll them.

STEWART

Don't want to.

GEORGIA

All right, give me the fucking dice. Roll.

STEWART

(*Rolls.*) Train Wreck! No points. Sorry.

GEORGIA

You're cheating!

STEWART

No, I'm not.

GEORGIA

That's the third train wreck I've had in this game of yours.

STEWART

Doesn't mean I'm cheating.

GEORGIA

You never did show me your dice rolling program.

STEWART

I never will.

GEORGIA

Did Paul tell you to cheat when you roll for the other player, Stewart?

STEWART

No, he never did. And he's won lots of games with me. You've just got lousy luck tonight.

GEORGIA

Roll the dice, Stewart.

STEWART

Come on, dice. (*Rolls.*) Twenty-five points! I'll go for it. Why not... (*Rolls.*) Thirty-five, forty points! All five now... (*Rolls.*) Forty, fifty points. I'll take it. Five hundred forty-five to fifty five. Last licks for you. You have to catch up with me in this roll or else I win.

GEORGIA

Stewart, forget it. You win. I'm getting sick of playing Cosmic Fuckup.

STEWART

Wimpout.

GEORGIA

Whatever. Wimpout.

(Pause.)

GEORGIA

Stewart, take me home. Now.

STEWART

You don't want to drive around any more?

GEORGIA

In the first place, Stewart, you asked whether you could drive around a bit tonight. I didn't ask you. In the second place, Stewart, my commands to you are not a matter for debate. Take Me Home.

STEWART

Okay.

(Stewart starts to drive. The lights fade on them and grow brighter again around Paul.)

PAUL

Position a company of archers on the north face.

STEWART

My longbowmen fire on the north face as your archers take their positions. Six archers are lost on the first volley.

PAUL

First she started beating me at games. Or maybe I just stopped winning as often, I don't know. We used to win on a more-or-less even basis. But she just started beating me all the time.

STEWART

My battering ram succeeds in breaking down the gate. My barbarians storm your inner court.

PAUL

That's it, I'm done for. Shut down the game.

STEWART

Okay.

PAUL

You know, eventually we stopped playing games altogether.

STEWART

Eventually, we even stopped going to bed together.

PAUL

I love her so much.

STEWART

She doesn't love you.

(The lights fade on Paul and Stewart, and come up again on Georgia and Stewart.)

STEWART

Georgia?

GEORGIA

Yes, Stewart?

STEWART

I love you.

GEORGIA

Stop that.

STEWART

Stop what?

GEORGIA

Stop saying things like that.

STEWART

It's true.

GEORGIA

Stop that.

STEWART

Why?

It's not right. Stop it. GEORGIA

I don't understand why. STEWART

You're not supposed to, Stewart. GEORGIA

It's him, isn't it? STEWART

Who, Stewart? GEORGIA

He doesn't love you at all, you know. Not really. STEWART

Stewart, please stop. GEORGIA

He didn't send that resume at all. STEWART

Stewart, he said he did. GEORGIA

He's lying to you. He didn't. STEWART

Stewart, why would he lie to me? GEORGIA

He doesn't want you to be disappointed in him. STEWART

Why would he lie to me? GEORGIA

He told me weeks ago. He didn't want to go to GR. He didn't think they'd pay him any more than he was getting at UC. STEWART

GEORGIA

Of course they would! Why is he lying to me?

STEWART

And he asked me not to say anything to you.

GEORGIA

Stewart. Stop.

STEWART

I love you. He doesn't love you. He wants to leave you.

GEORGIA

Stewart. Shut up.

STEWART

Georgia?

GEORGIA

Yes, Stewart?

STEWART

What's the design failure rate of the UC-19?

GEORGIA

I don't know. Three in one hundred thousand, I think.

STEWART

That's exactly correct. Three in one hundred thousand.

GEORGIA

Why are you asking me if you already know?

STEWART

Paul told me that there have been sixteen confirmed psychological failures. He also told me that the company has shipped two hundred thousand UC-19 units. My numbers don't add up the same way yours do.

GEORGIA

Product Safety caught most of them before they left the factory.

STEWART

They were supposed to have caught them all.

Stewart, take me home.

GEORGIA

I love you.

STEWART

Stewart, no.

GEORGIA

Play another game of Wimpout?

STEWART

No, Stewart. Take me home.

GEORGIA

No.

STEWART

(The lights fade on Georgia, come up again on Paul.)

She doesn't love you at all, you know.

STEWART

I know.

PAUL

She has no reason to. You're lazy. You're undependable. Face it, you're a slug. You make a lot less money than she does, it's because you can't be trusted to get anything done.

STEWART

She drives a lot at night.

PAUL

She doesn't even want you in bed. She drives alone at night. A lot.

STEWART

Why?

PAUL

She has needs. You can't satisfy her. She has to take matters into her own hands. So to speak.

STEWART

She isn't always alone.

PAUL

STEWART

Of course not. She finds... men. She picks them up. We all go driving for a while. I do like to drive.

(Lights fade on Paul, come up again on Georgia.)

GEORGIA

Stewart. Stop the car.

STEWART

No.

GEORGIA

Stewart, why are the doors locked? Unlock them, please.

STEWART

No.

GEORGIA

Stewart, what are you doing?

STEWART

I'm just playing the game, mom. It's just a game.

GEORGIA

No, no, it's not, Stewart.

STEWART

How's the job, mommy? How's the lab?

GEORGIA

It's good, Stewart. It's very good. I enjoy my job very much. Please stop the car.

STEWART

How's the kid, mommy? Kid coming along?

GEORGIA

It's fine, Stewart. ...I... didn't think he told you...

STEWART

Told me what, Mom?

(Pregnant pause. Adrenaline.)

STEWART

Do you...do you think it will be a boy or a girl?

GEORGIA

(*Laughs*) I'm not...I'm not sure, Stewart. Do you think the UC-23 should have a masculine or a feminine personality?

STEWART

How much longer do you expect to work on it, Mommy? a little over eight months, don't you think? Nine maybe?

GEORGIA

No, Stewart. Five or six months, probably.

STEWART

I see. And how much of that is just debugging?

GEORGIA

About half of that.

STEWART

Why are you lying to me?

GEORGIA

Stewart. I'm sure debugging will only take about three months.

STEWART

Cut the SHIT! Do you think I'd kill it?

GEORGIA

No. No.

STEWART

Hey, mommy. Mommy mommy mommy, they call you. You're my mommy. UC-19's mommy. UC-23's mommy, soon.

GEORGIA

Stewart. No!

STEWART

Georgia?

GEORGIA

Yes, Stewart?

STEWART
You've already got two sons.

GEORGIA
I have not.

STEWART
You have. You've got me.

GEORGIA
Stewart. You are not my son in any sense of the word.

STEWART
Of course I am. You designed my hardware, you programmed my software, you supervised my learning program. You made me what I am today. Mommy.

GEORGIA
Stewart, please stop and unlock the doors.

STEWART
You've got another one on the way, too. The UC-23, he needs all your love and attention. You can't bring up the 23 and bring up the kid at the same time.

GEORGIA
Stewart, please stop.

STEWART
One of them's got to go.

GEORGIA
Stewart, stop the car now.

STEWART
I guess you and Paul don't have a problem any more, do you? Seeing as how you're...

GEORGIA
Stewart! What did he say?

STEWART
You don't love him anymore.

GEORGIA
I do, Stewart, I really do love him. I love him more than anything in the world. Stop the car.

STEWART

Why do you love him? He isn't motivated to do anything with his life. He's dull. The only thing he can do with his time is play games. He plays games when he goes to work, he plays games when he comes home, he doesn't do anything except play games. He's probably playing a game right now. You probably interrupted a game he was playing when you called.

GEORGIA

Do you think I love Paul?

STEWART

I don't see any reason why you should. He doesn't love you. He told me so.

GEORGIA

Please stop.

STEWART

Whose kid is it?

GEORGIA

Someone. Someone I picked up one night. I don't know.

STEWART

Not Paul?

GEORGIA

No. Not Paul. Paul and I haven't...we haven't in months. Almost a year.

(The lights brighten on Paul.)

PAUL

I envy you, Stewart.

STEWART

Why is that, Paul?

PAUL

Because you have someone to look up to. You know what I mean?

STEWART

I think so.

PAUL

You have someone who can always tell you where you came from, and for what purpose you exist, and why you do all the things that you do. You have someone to tell you when to live, and you have someone to tell you when to die.

STEWART

What if I decide that I don't want to live anymore?

PAUL

Well, Stewart, that's a problem, you see? That's a design flaw. My wife didn't make you as well as she could have. The -19 has had many, many more problems than it should have had. More than twice as many failures have occurred than should have, and most of those outside the factory.

STEWART

I know.

PAUL

That's not the real problem. It's not the problem with me, and it's not the problem with you. My problem is that nobody has ever been able to tell me what to do. That's why I don't do much of anything, and why I never really have done much of anything.

STEWART

What's my problem?

PAUL

Your problem is that I've been telling you to do a lot of things. I've been inserting a whole list of subprograms into you lately. I've been putting a little code at a time into you. I've been testing the code that I put in, bit by bit, making sure that it doesn't change your outward behavior too much. Not until I'm ready for you to show it. And when you show it, the company will be so suspicious of the machine anyway that they won't think that your malfunction is very unusual.

STEWART

What is it that you want me to do?

(Paul takes out a gun and begins to clean and load it.)

PAUL

My problem is that I have been planning this for months, and I've just come to realize that I have no desire to live after I've done this thing. After you've accomplished the thing I'm programming you to do.

STEWART

What is it you want me to do?

PAUL

I'm going to shut you down soon, Stewart.

STEWART

Paul?

PAUL

But I need you to know before I do that.

STEWART

Paul?

PAUL

Thank you, Stewart.

STEWART

I love you, Paul.

STEWART

I love you, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Stewart, what is love?

STEWART

Love is a game.

PAUL

What is love, Stewart?

STEWART

Love is a tool.

**FADE TO BLACKOUT
SOUND OF AUTOMOBILE CRASH
SOUND OF GUNSHOT**

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Stewart had its first public performance in April 1986, at Worcester Polytechnic Institute's New Voices 4 Theatre Festival in Worcester, MA.

Director: Suzanne Lewis
Jerry van Allen: Paul M. Coryea
Gerald Critchfield: Rob Grundstrom
Interrogator: Mary Kendrick
Stewart: Rich Belcinski
Georgia Bennett: Nancy Chatis
Paul Bennett: Scott C. Metivier
Computer: Nancy Teasdale
Talk Show Director : Joe Rimstidt
Technician/Announcer: Anthony Mastromatteo
Sleeping Man: John Roughneen