

The Fork Management Call Center

by Alex Diaz

DATE - 9/15/2034

TIME – 12:55 PM

“Attention. Attention. Designated lunch break for the Fork Management Call Center is now over; please report to assigned stations in 5 minutes or...” -

Albert really didn't care about the message; it repeated every day for the last 9 years that he had been working at the FMCC. Luckily, this day was going much better than most others. You see, he had been able to sneak in a bacon sandwich from his house (this typically was considered unhealthy food, but the supervisor was out sick today). The juicy, homecooked bacon tasted vibrant and so divinely delicious that Albert actually felt satisfied when he got up from his lunch table to head to his office.

“Hey! Mr. Facias!”, one of his co-workers shouted as Albert was leaving the cafeteria;

“Y-yeah? Need anything?”, he quietly replied;

“Nah, I don't. But did you hear that White's out?”;

“Christopher White?”, Albert inquired. White was a fellow co-worker in his little 4-cubicle office, so they talked frequently.

“Yeah, apparently he never clocked out yesterday and hasn't shown up today.”

“Shoot. That's two people gone from our center today, hopefully I don't get asked to cover for any of their work”. Covering for someone else's shift was almost a surefire way to add at least 4 hours to the workday, without any extra pay.

The co-worker shrugged, “Meh. Even if I myself have to cover for both shifts, at least they’ll owe me a drink, eh?”

Albert laughed and began to walk away, as long as he didn’t have to cover, then he was perfectly content. He was a simple man, as long as the routine was the same and there were no surprises, then was ok. Now, he was almost to his office on the 5th floor of the management center when he stopped for a brief moment to listen to the nearby holo-board outside:

“Here in the great city of Fork, we, as a community, are able to foster your talents and skills. We look towards the future and I will be the one leading you. And with our new oversight board, we will ensure that you have all the necessary supplies to -”

That was Ms. Coleen Pragg, otherwise known as the new superintendent of the Fork Managerial Oversight Committee. She had been giving speeches all day since she got elected, but Albert didn’t care about all of that. All he was concerned about was that the Committee would be expanding the Fork Management Call Center and thus increase his pay raise. Ever since the AI Revolution of ’23, society had taken off. With new cars, new programs, new colonies on the moon, you name it. But, apparently unknown to the Committee, this meant a loss of jobs and livelihoods. So, they founded the Fork Management Call—

“Worker #38921”, a nearby machine said aloud, “It is now 1:00 PM, please clock in immediately or face consequences.”

He nodded, then headed into his cubicle which was lightly decorated, and picked up one of the already ringing phones;

“Fork Call Center, where we help you answer your burning life questions and help get everyone motivated to aim for the stars. This is Facias, how may I help you today?”

A feeble voice began speaking on the other end, “Hi, um, hello, I just need some help and someone told me to call here...”

“Yep, what’s the problem you have?”, he replied indifferently;

“My son just passed away today and-and -”, the line suddenly disconnected.

Albert looked down for a minute, concluded that the problem was not on his end, and moved on to the person.

He did this every hour of every day (excluding Sundays), for the last 6 years. It was a boring job, but it paid. Plus, the Committee really didn’t provide much encouragement, empowerment, or enjoyment of human achievement as they promised. The 3 E’s, they called them. So when they began to crackdown on everyone who was unemployed, he scrambled to find this job, where at least he’d get some money added to his bank account every day. But the Committee really didn’t like the fact that so many people suddenly rushed to the Call Center, so they ensured that it was as boring as possible, they wanted you instead to focus on being ‘creative with your talents’, whatever that meant. This meant that every day, the schedule would be the exact same, every day the food would be the exact same, and every day the faces would be the exact same.

He also really didn’t have any time for relationships of any sort. See, he woke up at 6:00 AM, got ready by 6:15 AM, got on the tram by 6:30 AM, and then got to work by 7:00 AM. After getting to work with everyone else wearing the exact same face, he worked until 12:15 PM, when the lunch break began. Everyone kept their heads down and didn’t speak to each other, so there was not much opportunity for relationship there. Then, at 1:00 PM he had to be back in his office where he worked until 6:00 taking calls. He gets home by 6:30, got in bed by 7:00, and

then all the city lights turn off by 8:00 PM. Why so? The city lights turned off because of a regulation proposed and passed *4 years ago* that read, in part:

The city deems that in order to ensure the maximum efficiency of the populace in achieving their dreams, all city and government-owned and subsidized properties must have all lighting appliances turned off by 8:00 PM (Universal Standard Time). This will hopefully increase the health of the population. Failure to comply with this standard will result in immediate termination of employment for the next 3-months and a reduction by 25% in governmental pension. Exceptions will be made by the FMOC, but only with written consent.

The law continues on, but that's all the relevant information. He was quite fond of viewing laws, bylaws, regulations, and the like. It made surviving much easier. And, since the supervisor was out today, he didn't have to answer more than 1 call (that was the minimum that he was allowed to do before getting marked in the system). *Ah*, he thought, *you know, today might actually be good-*

“Yoo, Albert!”, someone shouted at him;

Ugh, he thought, *it was the co-worker from earlier, hopefully I don't have to take up the extra shift.*

“Yeah?”, Albert responded tentatively.

“Why ain't you picking up any calls?”, the co-worker laughed, “I've already helped 11 people. Imagine, *11 people.*”

Albert scrambled for an answer, “Ahh, I was, um, looking for this law. A client asked about it, so I decided to look it up in case I need for future calls.”

The co-worker (who Albert still didn't know his name) squinted, "Well, I won't tell the supervisor. But it has only been 23 minutes since break was over – "

Only 23 minutes?? Thought it would have been at least an hour...

"- so you better not have been getting bored already", the co-worker laughed and then proceeded to walk away.

"I have no idea how *you* always remain so positive", Albert muttered.

He looked down at the ringing phone. It was so loud all the time; it could really drive one crazy. Truth be told, he really didn't have to be negative all of the time, many people in the last 10 years since the Revolution have prospered. There was the Brogsy Complex, the Alman Complex, etc. that each held thousands of people. He watched the news every day of people finding out about their talents, and then using those talents to help people. But that didn't really help him. While humanity was the happiest it had ever been, while it was united and strong, there were still people like him. Living day-by-day through daily wages with no real hope for the future. In fact, he had only encountered two people in his life after the AI revolution that were happy. The first, who he remembered as Divisional Co-worker #598, met him one day at a restaurant. These days, they don't have restaurants anymore as you can just deliver food to your house, but that's a story for another time. There, at the restaurant Ch-----, they began talking, and Albert found out that Divisional Co-worker #598 was working in a space program that aimed to take humans to the moon.

He distinctly remembered that #598 said:

"I really am excited about all this. It's an exciting frontier, don't you agree? I mean, sure, some people aren't getting the best out of it, but that doesn't matter, you're doing fine right?"

Anyways, the Pi----- program gets the best of us and gives us just the tools we need to figure this out. We have access to every single document written, we have AI helping out (which has been a life-saver) and together with my AI partner Jeremiah, I know we can make a change. Do you want to join? The test to join is quite easy, they even have programs to help you pass the test! What d'ya think of that? Why aren't you talking? I'm not one to ramble on, I need a conversation, a lively conversation yes!"

So, they talked about the moon, and history, and philosophy. But after a while, Albert had to go, and he never had the time to ask for #598's phone number or the directions to take the test. Alas, that's just how life is -

- "Ah!!", he quietly shouted. The ringing phone was getting to him, "Fine, I'll pick it up."

So he did.

"Fork Call Center, where we help you answer your burning life questions and help get everyone motivated to aim for the stars. This is Facias, how may I help you today?"

"Hi, yes, my name is R----- and I have some information that's really important."

"I'm listening", Albert responded (though he really wasn't);

"I just recently heard from a friend of a friend that someone who works for the Fork Call Center was missing. I believe his name was Bight...?", *there was some talking in the background*, "...ah, no, Chris White or something. I heard from a friend that he was spotted last -
"

Albert interrupted him, “Let me stop you there, unfortunately this isn’t a task that I am able to handle, so let me transfer you to our HR department. Does that sound good? I can get a live representative in 10 or so minutes.”

“No, no, I need to speak with someone right now, they said -”

“Alright, have a nice day.”, Albert then transferred the call. *If it was really important then they would have called the AIIRA (Artificial Intelligence International Resource Assistance). They are the ones that deal with all of the emergency calls.*

The phone was still ringing, but he was able to ignore it this time. He had to print out some files (they were supposed to be printed out yesterday, but he never got to it). As he got up from his squeaky little chair, he noticed that none of the other phones from his co-workers were ringing, all the calls must have been directed at him for some reason; glitches like that in the system occasionally happen.

Oh, look, Albert thought. The speech by Mrs. Pragg was still going on, they really drew out their speeches nowadays. He decided to listen in for a bit, *I believe she’s talking about the Fork Management Call Center now...*

“-because of this new policy, we are now able to incorporate the model VI AI Robots into each and every business-”

Ah, he thought, *that’s good*. The VIAI robots, as everyone called them, were the most up-to-date, advanced AI to have ever been created. The Winners of the Dyren Robotics contest on policy and AI were able to create the ‘next-generation of intelligence and ingenuity’. These VIAI robots were especially adept at talking to a real live person. They passed all of the Turing tests

and they seemed to actually connect with empathy to 'less-fortunate members of society'. He listened back into the speech,

“-so I proudly declare that in 3 days, we will be able to reduce 60% of all current Fork Management Call Centers. Around 87% of all current workers will be replaced with VI-generation AI and we will ensure that everyone who is now unemployed will receive a job! Here at the Committee, we-”

“What?!” he verbally said aloud;

His exclamation drew the attention of a nearby sanitation worker in the hall, “Ha, what heppened Facia? Lose yer mind again?”

Albert stared at the worker for a brief moment before answering, “Did you just hear what she just said? We’re all losing our jobs!!”

“Did ya not know that? Memos have been getting sent out from the FMOC all week. U tellin’ me yer don’t have a darn job lined up, yet?”

The worker had an accent, Albert suddenly realized he was from the Southern Gr---- Division. They always spoke with odd phrases and words. Anyways, he responded,

“Do you? Because I sure don’t. I plan to work here the Center for the good next 20 years of my life”, Albert replied defiantly.

“Hey, it ain’t my problem, don’t shoot the messenger, heh. Look, I’ve been alive fer nearly 73 years now, and nows as good a time as life has ever been. Poverty’s an all-time low, everyone’s employed, and this Fork Managerial Committee Call Center Corp, or whatever we’re called, is jus a steppin’ stone. Don’t tell me you achsually planned on stayin’ here all your life?”

We're here at this job to try 'n help people and motivate them. But if you yourself isn't motivated then why are you even here? Everyone's happy, eh? You should join one a those meetings we always have, you never show up. Life is good, take advantage of that! Me personally, I'm going to join a program where I teach some youngsters about *ancient meditation practises* of the world, I suggest you join somethin' too. It'll be good for the mind." The sanitation worker finished his brief rant with a heavy breath and sigh, "Well, I ought to finish up my job here, eh?".

Albert stared with a blank expression at the worker who promptly began to clean the windows. Having nothing to say to him, or perhaps not knowing what to say, he slowly began walking down the hall into the printing room. Down the bare, grey halls he went; all whilst reflecting on what was just said. Finally, he reached the room and opened up the double doors. Here, an automated machine would print everything out and have a VAI robot (5th-gen) deliver the papers, all Albert needed to do was enter his code and request.

"Wow, just wow", he began talking aloud to himself, "that guy really thinks that he knows everything. Ha! I know what it was like living back in the old world. It was only ten or so years ago, but I remember how life used to be. There was actual genuine happiness and appreciation for this world, and everyone in it.", he shook his head smiling at all the memories.

"But I suppose that the world wasn't the best that it could have been.", his smile faded away as he started to reflect, "I remember a global pandemic, then wildfires and hurricanes. Riots began, and people looted the country. The election was almost overthrown and no one could afford any food or gas anymore. But then again, at least back then people understood me, no one does now..."

He finished entering his request and then began to walk (a different route, of course) back to his office. On this side, there were windows again, showing the busy market street down below. He saw kids, families, teens, and elders all laughing and enjoying the daily market festivities. *What jobs do they have? That they can just take every day off to buy food endlessly without a single care?* While he could detect the presence of some VIAI robots and phones, they were largely off to the side and put away. *Huh, that's a first.* The market down below had a festival every day, with a major celebration occurring every month. It was a never-ending party that drew in people from all around the world to Fork. The streamers from last month's celebration could still be seen and the crowds were hardly any quieter or toned down. While his office had fairly good sound insulation, the celebration's always provided a distraction.

Just as Albert was about to enter the door to head into his cubicle, he noticed a sign that one of the booths said,

'Enlist Now! Do YOU have technical experience working with computers? Do YOU have empathetic abilities to help others? Join the Committee's new program AivenShine that allows YOU to help program and test VIAI's abilities to communicate effectively! Join today, at no cost!'

He paused for a brief moment and tilted his head, "Huh, no cost?". In fact, it seemed very interesting. As a child he had always wanted to pursue psychology to help people. He wanted to become a therapist, or something related, and it was what he had gotten his bachelors in. This was one of the few things that he actually enjoyed about his current job, he was able to talk to and help people (let's ignore the fact of him hanging up the calls). Once the Robot Revolution began, he figured that psychology and therapy would still be needed, as robots can't possibly connect with humans on an emotional level. But I guess he was wrong, they were in fact able to

do that, and people would pay good money to receive treatment from VAI robots. While real-live therapists and psychologists still had jobs (many of his friends occupied these positions), he lost passion in the field, stopped his education, and began scavenging for any job he could find. He still had his friends' phone numbers in his phone, but what would be the point of calling them? They were successful, and he was just... Albert.

He stared a bit more at the scene and sign below before eventually sighing and murmured, "Well, no cost probably means that the pay is bad...", Albert then walked inside.

Inside his little cubicle, he saw all of the other co-workers answering their calls. *Guess I should probably get back, huh?* So, he sat down, organized his little office area before focusing on his computer in front of him. He looked down at the time, it was 1:55 PM. *Just a few more hours to go, you can do this*, he thought. He then looked down with scorn and discontent at the still ringing phone, put on a smile, and picked it up;

"Fork Call Center, where we help you answer your burning life questions and help get everyone motivated to aim for the stars. This is Facias, how may I help you today?"
