

tried very hard to oversleep this morning. My bedroom console, however, would have none of it. Its constant yammering kept repeating the day's agenda.

"You have a meeting with Eric Verspoor at 11:00. You are expected at the general meeting at 2:00. You are to pick up your niece from the dental office at 4:20 and return her to your sister's home. Your mother has left you a video message. Would you like to see it?"

Tearing myself from the blissful depths of slumber, I managed to yawn an incomprehensible "Fine."

"I'm sorry, sir," the ever-cheerful console chirped. "I was expecting a 'Yes' or 'No'."

"Yes."

A video window flashed up on the display. "Hi Chris," my mom began, with a coy grin on her face. "Muffet wants to talk to you." The picture suddenly changed to that of my aged dog, which my mother proceeded to treat as live puppet. "I just wanted to tell you that I'm very excited you're coming home for a visit," mom said in her best dog voice, wiggling Muffet's front paws front for effect. "I really miss you, and I want you to bring me some treats. Okay, bye." The window disappeared.

"Would you like to save the video message, sir?" the console prompted.

"Yes. And can you forward that to Lisa?" I replied, still grinning from my mother's theatrics.

"Certainly. Would you like to annotate it, sir?"

"No, I don't think so. This one needs no explanation."

"Message Forwarded."

The sun shone brightly through the black slats of my blinds. With a final yawn, I lifted myself out of bed and hauled on a housecoat. Before heading to the washroom, I asked the console a final question: "Is my tea ready?"

"Yes. Your tea was made for 8:30. It is now 9:18," the console answered, with what I could swear was sarcasm. "It has been kept hot."

hough I'd settled into the new house, evidence of my recent move could be found everywhere. Boxes still lay about, many shelved dishes remained wrapped in tissue paper and the guest room had yet to be furnished.

I'd looked at many older units when shopping for my first home, but I decided to opt for a newly built split-level dwelling that had been wired for information appliances. Data connections, of course, are now as essential infrastructure as plumbing and electricity. The cost of rewiring an older home with data connections is exorbitant, as is the separate purchase of a central computer unit.

The new house had it all preinstalled. Every electrical outlet had two FireWire-4 connectors, allowing the hook up of any compatible information appliance. The appliance could then be controlled by the central unit. Unfortunately, with each device now having two cords instead of one, things tended get a bit messy. Most manufacturers were accommodating for this by offering combined electrical and data cords that went their separate ways about 8 inches from the connectors.

Bounding down to the kitchen at 9:35, I headed straight for the Mrs. Tea Deluxe. A smart appliance, it had compartments for three different types of tea and could be controlled by the central unit.

"Mmmm. Tea. Earl Grey. And hot!" I marvelled at the parallel.

The kitchen console suddenly rang. "Excuse me" the console started, "you have an incoming video call from Lisa."

"I'll take it in the living room."

I walked down three steps to the sunken dining room and proceeded to the couch, where I stared impatiently at my new 33" flat-panel, high resolution LED entertainment and communications console. (I'm still inclined to call it a fancy television, but I suppose that's a rather significant misnomer given its capabilities.)

"Hello?" I said, sitting down.

"I see you're up early, as usual," my sister grinned as her image appeared onscreen.

"Yeah, well... I would have slept in later if the central unit hadn't woke me up!"

"You know, you can ask it to wake you up at a later time. Or you could just go to bed at a reasonable hour, like most of us. Oh, and by the way, Mom is insane."

"I get videomail like that all the time," I said with a chuckle. "She's certainly got a lot of free time on her hands."

"She'll call Michaela all the time and talk for what seems like hours. Michaela keeps wandering away from the console, though, and I'll hear mom shouting for her to come back.

But it's not Michaela's fault, though—the poor kid just wants to go outside and play with her friends...I mean, she's seven! Speaking of Michaela...you can pick her up at 4:20? Dean's stuck at work until 5:00 and I have to get this proposal finished before we head to Mom's next week."

"Yeah, I can. No problem. So I'll see you late this afternoon then?"

"Yep. Talk to you then!"

"Later...!"

The video window folded up and disappeared. I glanced at time on the top left of the display —10:00 AM, June 12, 2004.

"Is The Price is Right on right now?" I asked the console.

"Yes sir. A first-time broadcast is currently showing on CBS 4, CBS 6, CTV and TGSN in English. CBS 7 has a Spanish edition. Additionally, archives are available for viewing."

"Turn on CBS 4, please."

"Yes sir."

Bob Barker materialized onscreen, clasping an ancient microphone and surrounded by the familiar technicolor set dating back to the 1970's.

How nice it is that some things never change.

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