

Smartsoot

I tapped twice on my forearm and the control patch appeared. Once I selected 'mymood' the soot took on a sombre dark blue shade with scrolling pinstripes. I'd started the day feeling buoyant but now my heart was literally on my sleeve.

My flesh-and-blood attorney and I had only ever F2F'd once before, so something serious was about to happen to me (something lucrative for him). Most likely, one of my portfolio of employment contracts had sensed it was being infringed -probably based on eavesdropping by some rumour sniffer. My legal guy was really just a disillusioned former plumber with a degree from Senegal and a second-hand expert system -he was still using email for Christ's sake...

...but he had helped after the attack. Some bloke had gone for me with a knife last year. He'd probably been disconnected for e-con or spamania...or maybe just attempted irony. Outnets are usually forced to wear those stick-on neurode caps -just so they can't sneak up on anyone, without their intention map lighting up red.

(The same thing had once been marketed to couples: women could monitor their husbands' requirements for sport, beer and other men's wives. Men, however, found the transient patterns which appeared on females' caps, way too complex).

Normally, my soot would have sensed the air pressure changes and the shadow of the deranged guy's hand; but it seems it was distracted by some interference from a pedestrian meter and was slow to stiffen the impact region. I got minor neural damage in my right arm, which for a part-time Road Traffic Controller, was kind of problematic. A patch of nerve substrate had to be sprayed on the wound. Still feels like I'm wearing an extra gesture glove, but better numb than phantom limb.

(All that automated traffic management we'd installed had taken just two weeks to generate global gridlock. I'd spent the last 18 months untangling a 300 sq km jam, caused by a flaky subroutine and some 1derkind on a Sinclair C9 who couldn't tell left from right).

Way back in the days of the late 1internet, The Ministry had gone crazy when the first neurode machines became available. They came as a kind of paste: laughable really, compared to the spray-on we use today. Soon they decreed that every roof had to carry 1 sqm of black paste in order to gather met data (for unstated reasons to do with "National Security"). This was all funnelled back to a googleputer somewhere which could predict rain on any given patch a week in advance. It's actually become valuable though, since my soot, for all its cleverness, would be vulnerable to a good soaking with the dirty rain that's the only kind we get now. I had, like everyone I met over the last decade, become my own personal n-ternetwork. Personal, we soon discovered, wasn't the same as private.

I stopped to get some buttered toast or some psychoc from a Provender in the street. Of course, it had a terse conversation with my gutbot and then my insurance policy must have cut in with the usual warning of:

“WARRANTY INVALIDATION (LIFESPAN DECREMENT 2.5 HOURS, APPROX).”

I was so mad, I had a flash of redcap and punched the Provender -hard enough to wake up some of those synthetic circuits of mine). Its self defence routine caused it to scream like a frightened child. There was no choice but to hug it better (the damn thing wouldn't stop until it could “*feel I meant it*”). I made a mental note to unsubscribe from the healthcare channel but of course I was overruled by an actuary agent I didn't even know was on my staff.

A part of me had started yearning for the old days when grass only came in green and it was possible to lose things...when there was quiet, with no threat of disembodied updates or warnings: no backchat from faceless smartifacts. Was it really too late to become a neoluddite monk?

Then, unexpectedly, it began to rain.