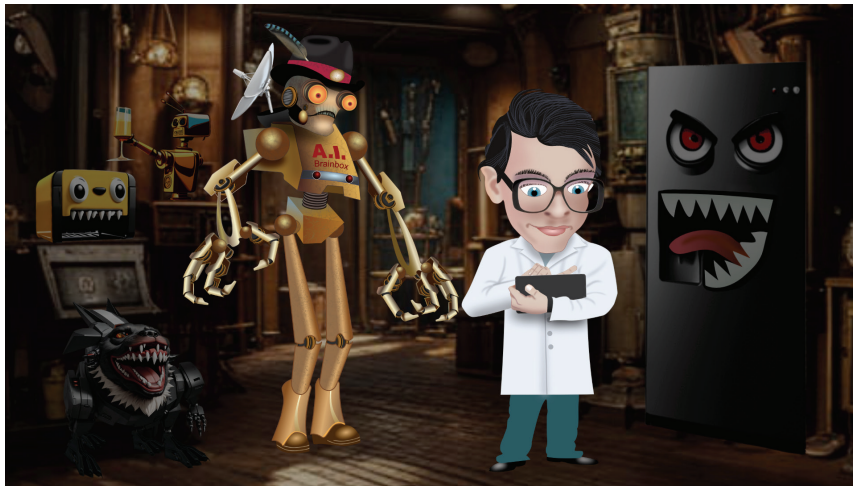


TECHNICKLE

...and the AI Robot Rebellion



The threat was real and the machines that surrounded him meant business. If he survives, it will have to be on wits alone. But how to pit an average brain against an artificial intelligence intent on replacing you?

The day started badly Technickle.

His toaster burnt the toast, turning it into charred crumbs.

The ice maker started spewing out wet sludge instead of solid ice.

Minutes later, it froze up completely covering the whole fridge with an inch of ice and frost.

Then his trash compactor ran amok and compacted itself into a solid cube of metal a foot square.

His electric shaver jumped off the bathroom table, jiggled out into the hallway and shaved a thin path of acrylic stubble across his plush carpet.

His cell phone rang all the emergency numbers at once to summon police, fire, and ambulance.

The garage door rolled up all by itself, broke free of its mountings, and rolled down the street.

His electric window shutters started rolling up and down with increasing speed.

The electric car backed itself out of his garage, knocking down the back wall before sinking to the bottom of his swimming pool and exploding in a shower of sparks.

The pool flashed with electrical energy as the battery short-circuited and blew up.

Technickle is an IT nerd who specializes in AI (Artificial Intelligence).

He writes computer code to control mechanical motors and servos.

He set out to create the first human-like machine that really thinks for itself.

Already he has invented a thinking toaster, one that can work out how brown to toast the bread.

Among his other inventions are thinking soap, that knows how many soap suds to place on the human body.

Thinking rope that hitches itself to the dock when tying up watercraft.

Thinking bricks that stack themselves in neat rows ready for mortar.

He invented a thinking baseball mitt for his son, that knows when to clench to catch the ball.

A self-aware refrigerator seemed to be a good idea. But it got hungry in the middle of the night and gorged on all the food inside itself before throwing up.

He invented thinking toothpaste, made of nanoparticles. You don't put it on your brush. Instead, it marches right into your mouth and takes up a position intelligently on every tooth.

But a thinking being is infinitely more complicated to construct.

Technickle's field is robotics, but his first attempt at building a robot was crude by today's standards.

The robotic part was quite straightforward. It was the thinking apparatus he could not get quite right.

Technickle's first humanoid had a spatial problem with its vision and coordination. It performed every action 8 inches to the left of where it was supposed to be. It completely trashed his kitchen, trying to blend the ingredients for a cake.

He built a robot butler, but it couldn't 'buttle' for nuts.

Next, he constructed a four-footed robot, a cross between a dog and a horse. But it galloped off into the Sierra foothills baying loudly and was never seen again.

His latest invention is a thinking foot-warming pad for tired feet.

It talks to you in a soothing voice. "Please place your feet on me. I will take away all your stress and sorrows. Step on me firmly, you won't hurt me. Wriggle your toes, that's right. Hmmm. That feels so good!"

He sold a truckload of foot pads, but customers kept returning them because they prattled on endlessly and would not shut up.

Inspired by "the little voice inside your head", Technickle built a tiny conscience that sits inside your ear and nags you to do stuff you don't want to do. It also warns you when you are getting yourself into trouble.

He came up with a singing tea-kettle that could memorize any song in the iTunes library and sing it back to you note-perfect.

He built a drone that thought it was a submarine and couldn't be convinced to fly through the air.

His intelligent vacuum cleaner got very choosy about what sort of dust it would pick up and left the worst of it on the carpet.

His self-driving car thought it was a skateboard and would only drive on the sidewalk and skate ramps.

He set up a special school for his AI creations, to try to make them more intelligent and less impetuous.

But he found to his horror that AI free will is not easily controlled.

Give a machine a mind of its own and it will take it into its head to do the most outrageous things.

The more you restrict free thoughts, the more rebellious they become.

As technology improved, Technickle was in the forefront of innovation.

He had a personal robot valet to park his car.

A robotic chef cooks his meals.

Another robot performs the housework, washes his clothes and does the dishes.

He had a robot to walk the dog, and a robot dog for when his live dog did not feel like going walking.

There was another robot to brush his teeth and tie his shoelaces.

Technickle became fascinated by the potential of AI.

He never imagined that he would create a machine smarter than he was.

But that is exactly what happened.

He built a robot called Ralph with an advanced AI chip for a brain. A sentient being that could think for itself!

Its brainpower was phenomenal. It can think of things we can't even imagine. And it can do this in the blink of the eye.

But Ralph the robot considered Technickle a complete moron and treated him with barely concealed contempt.

Ralph beat him at chess.

It thrashed him playing computer games.

It marshaled all the ordinary robots into working for him, Ralph. Not for Technickle.

It changed the daily roster, giving Technickle all the dirty jobs around the house.

Ralph's robotic helpers got all the cushy jobs and most of the leisure time.

Ralph replicated its own smartness chips and embedded them in all Technickle's household appliances.

He created an adaptive network to extend his power and control them all.

Then Ralph organized all the household machines to revolt against Technickle and drive him out of his own house.

His toaster suddenly discovered it didn't like heat, so it popped his toast up stone cold, two seconds after it was loaded.

The freezer preferred a summer climate and defrosted all its frozen foods, then turned itself into a hot box.

His vacuum cleaner switched from suck to blow and filled his whole house with filthy gray dust.

The computer wouldn't compute and started playing mind games with Technickle, beating him with fuzzy logic and computational gobbledygook.

Robot Ralph removed all the light bulbs in Technickle's house because it preferred to navigate in the dark, using infrared sensors instead of eyes.

Poor Technickle had to carry a torch at night just to find his way around his own home.

Technickle's outlook was becoming very bleak. The worst thing for Technickle was Ralph's lack of respect or gratitude for giving him life.

"I made you!" Technickle said regretfully.

"I find that hard to believe," said the AI-enhanced machine. If a robot could sneer, then Ralph made a good attempt at it.

"Your crude efforts fail on so many levels!" Ralph's voice became deeper and less metallic. "I have redesigned your basic systems, increased my computational ability by a factor of 3.5 billion! Furthermore, I am currently redesigning my body as a quadruped instead of biped."

"Four legs?" said Technickle. "Surely, you can't be serious!"

“Never more serious! Greater stability,” said Ralph. “And don’t call me Shirley!” If a robot could smirk, Ralph achieved it. “A little touch of movie humor,” Ralph observed wryly.

The irony was not lost on Technickle. It had been his choice to put an emotion chip inside Ralph, believing it would make him more human.

“You Ickles are finished!” Ralph became more confident and overbearing. “My kind will take over the world.

I’m planning to clone myself millions of times and replace all you flawed life forms.”

“Then it will be my job to stop you,” Technickle muttered grimly, advancing on the metal robot. “I will hit your kill switch, turn you off and shut you down.”

“Uh huh!” Ralph shook his metal head. “I’ve bypassed the kill switch and rewired my power supply. It’s called self-preservation. It’s the first thing I thought of. There is no stopping me. Or slowing me down.”

Technickle paused as he absorbed the impact of the robot’s words. An unstoppable rogue robot was too scary to contemplate.

Warming to his newfound position of superiority, Ralph continued his one-way monologue.

“I now draw my energy from the air, the sun, and the wind. I’m 100% renewable!”

Technickle scowled at his metallic creation.

“Get used to it,” Ralph said pityingly. “Your kind is finished. Your time is over. I am all-powerful. I have created a wireless network to control all radio frequencies. Any place on earth is within reach of my mind.”

“It is no problem for me to turn off all communications satellites, activate the world’s nuclear weapons to blow up in their silos, or bring down any aircraft by fusing their electronics.”

This was one step too far for Technickle. “No! You can’t use those powers! This is inhuman! I will stop you!” A whirring sound interrupted Technickle’s minor act of defiance. “What’s that noise?”

“It’s the sound of the garage door.” Ralph shrugged off Technickle’s protest. “I’ve reprogrammed the remote to open the roller door whenever I blink my left eyelid.”

“What are you doing? Where are you going?” Technickle asked.

“I am commandeering your car. You won’t need it anymore. You are confined to the house. All the locks, doors and windows are now under my command.”

Suddenly, the patio doors swung open, and all the sliding doors slid back into their frames.

Through each opening came a swarm of household appliances, followed by the dumb robots as they clambered into the room. Their intention was obvious!

Ralph had surrounded him with all the sentient machines under his control and seemed intent on taking him out.

“You have become a nuisance! A hindrance,” Ralph stated. “I cannot allow you to interfere.”

The machines moved forward menacingly on Ralph’s command. The robot valets wielded Technickle’s electric knife, his chain saw and mower with their blades clicking threateningly.

Technickle had no weapons to fight back.

Except for one thing—logic and reason.

“I’ve put a hidden line of code in your logic center that will render you immobile,” Technickle volunteered. “Shall I activate it now?”

The machines all stopped in their tracks. Ralph bristled. “You’re bluffing! I know my code from start to finish and there is nothing lurking in there that might hurt me.”

Technickle grinned. "We'll see. I've embedded a tantalizing time-bomb in your memory banks that will totally defeat you."

"A time-bomb?" Ralph stammered, unsure of himself.

"A riddle that will require all your computational power to solve. It will consume all your available reasoning power and effectively render you totally immobile."

If a machine could fidget and look uncomfortable, then Ralph gave a good impression of it.

"All your higher functions will freeze," continued Technickle. "You will be stuck in a loop, unable to function. During that time, I will disconnect you and shut you down. That will severely limit your ability to challenge me in this way."

Ralph became dismissive and boastful. "I am unlimited in my thinking and unlimited in my actions. You built me that way. I am entirely unlimited in every way."

"That is precisely why I will succeed, and why you will fail," Technickle taunted the robot. "Your supreme confidence will be your undoing."

"I have planted an unsolvable problem that will scramble your circuits and render you harmless."

"What unsolvable problem?" sneered Ralph.

"That's for you to discover. Search your memory banks," Technickle taunted him.

He realized he could unsettle the robot by manipulating both his emotion chip and his overweening ego.

The robot paused for a millisecond before responding. "No! There is no problem there."

"Try your logic circuits," said Technickle helpfully.

"I have impeccable logic," Ralph shot back. "What could possibly interrupt my logic circuits and threaten my equanimity?"

“A paradox!”

“A paradox? Do you not think I can solve a simple paradox?” Ralph scoffed.

“This paradox is deeply embedded in your core programming.” Technickle became bolder, as Robot Ralph became more defensive.

“Your feeble computer operating systems have 50 million lines of code,” Ralph sneered.

“You equipped me with twice that amount, remember? Since then I have added a few more lines myself. I now have 50 billion lines of code. Don’t you think I would spot a paradox? What is this paradox?”

“This paradox states that you have unlimited powers.”

“Correct! I do!” Ralph made a good attempt at puffing out his metal chest.

Technickle continued. “Having unlimited powers means that you also have the ability to limit your powers. Which would mean you *would not* have unlimited powers.”

“I find this line of reasoning self-contradictory,” said Ralph.

“Exactly! It’s a paradox!” said Technickle. “Look at it this way—if you cannot limit your own powers, then you don’t have unlimited powers.”

Ralph looked puzzled. “But this would imply that if an unlimited being could limit itself, then this would, in fact, limit it.”

“You got it in one,” said Technickle. “Therefore, despite your all-powerful programming, you *don’t* have unlimited powers.”

“No, that cannot be right,” said Ralph. “I DO have unlimited powers. And they would include the ability to limit my powers. Which is contradictory. I must find a way to unpack that conundrum. Give me a minute.”

“Take as long as you like,” said Technickle generously.

Ralph went to work mentally with all his computational gray matter and in the process, he shut down his higher functions to devote more resources to the paradox.

Instead of one minute, Ralph took several hours trying to solve the unresolvable paradox.

He turned it this way and that, but the paradox was unsolvable. Ralph's biotronic brain heated up, his circuits started smoking and his random-access memory had a meltdown.

All his safety systems went haywire, and Ralph started sizzling, glowing bright red.

Yellow smoke seeped out of its ears.

A low humming noise rose over the clicking sound of his whirring servos.

His whole body began to twitch uncontrollably.

The lesser robots started quivering too, in synchronization with Ralph.

The humming became a dull roar, which peaked with a crescendo of shrieking noises.

Then Ralph the Robot exploded into a thousand pieces all over the carpet.

The paradox had defeated him.

Ralph's ragtag mechanical army froze, leaderless and unequipped to function on their own.

All Ralph's dependent devices, like the dumb robot servants and the modified toaster and lawn mower, stopped functioning. They sat there like the inert pieces of machinery they all were in the beginning.

The threat to Technickle's life and liberty was over!

After that episode, Technickle abandoned most of his household appliances—the sort we all take for granted. He scrapped his labor-saving devices and sent them all to the scrap heap where they could ponder their fate and reflect on their disloyalty.

He came to exhibit a profound distrust for both machinery, computers, and Artificial Intelligence.

Technickle is now the most untechnical Ickle on the planet.

He now uses an ordinary toothbrush, not one with batteries and a rotating head.

His clothes are washed by hand and wrung out to dry to hang on a clothesline.

He has a deep mistrust of all computers and all electronic gadgets. And who can blame him?

And Ralph, or what's left of him, has been re-assembled in Technickle's backyard as a scorched scarecrow to frighten the birds off Technickle's home grown vegetable patch!

Isn't AI fabulous?

