

This drone feels (I)

Description

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I began an entry on 1 November 2014 about melancholy with a short sci-fi parable. I called the post #220 Good morning melancholia. Iâ??ve reproduced it italicised at the end of this post, but Iâ??ll precede it with a plausible back story. ChatGPT helped as critic, but this entry is my own creation. I canâ??t blame the AI! The chatbot suggested I delete the last word uttered by the drone. Iâ??ve avoided other alterations to the original paragraph.

Scase enjoyed a party. He recalled long evenings revelling in the company of fellow humans, humanoid robots and various hospitality drones. These â??emotsâ?• hovered around the nightclub taking orders, bringing drinks and substances, and passing messages. Scaseâ??s AI-assisted flirtations could lead to something thrilling, even if he discovered he had hooked up with an android. After all, it made little difference in this posthuman setting who or what excited your affections.

Feelings were easy to manufacture. Emotion required words. AI language apps would simultaneously whisper to you sequences of words and sounds, sometimes escaping awareness. The language apps would give names to the feelings â?? desire, envy, hope, regret, disappointment, fear, love, possession.

You also needed sociability to get the effect. The club setting directed emotions towards someone or thing other than yourself. The presence of other agents provided targets, rivals, supporters and sidekicks that enhanced the thrill.

Bathing in positive emotions was not always the aim. You could go for feelings that were negative, unpleasant, ambiguous. What does it feel like to grieve, desperately? If it didnâ??t wound you, then its release might heighten the pleasure that followed. Turning and calibrating emotions in any direction was part of the play. It usually led to exhaustion, if not burnout. Humans, droids and emots suffered, needing several days to recover.

Scase staggered towards his dwelling pod after one such night of woe and ecstasy. He stopped at a pile of plastic and metal in the lane leading from the club.

â??Is anyone there?â?• Something was rustling in the dark.

The club had drained him of fear. The object was too small for a human or a droid. His question was returned with renewed flutter, whirring and some blinking lights.

An emot hospitality drone rose up to eye-level, blinked then dropped again.

â??You were at the club,â?• Scase said. As word agents, emots were obliged to speak as well as administer feelings â?? what technicians called â??raw affect.â?• This drone had interacted with Scase earlier and was clearly a casualty of the night.

It could only manage an audible buzz that trailed off slowly. It might be alarmed. Scase wouldnâ??t touch it. He walked on as the skyline started to sharpen against the early morning haze.

His dwelling pod was near the top of a skeletal tower with a roof crane. It would reposition pods higher up the tower as a tenantâ??s means increased. When it functioned, you could wake to the groan of metal and hissing pneumatics as your pod was lowered to make way for someone to rise above you.

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The machinery was awaiting repair, so he was still near the top of this structure. He enjoyed looking out to the woods, fields and farms interspersed with high-rise towers, and the incessant flow of airborne transporters above and below. The scene was filtered through a screen and he could tweak the view if he had enough credits.

He wouldnâ??t sleep today. He recoiled suddenly from an irregular tapping at the window. â??Is anyone there?â?• he found himself saying, echoing his instinct in the lane by the club. The window was sealed, but he could hear a failing emotâ??s buzzing and croaking muffled through the screen. â??What do you want?â?• he called out.

Ailing from the long ascent, the drone settled on the ledge of the plate-glass window screen. It wasnâ??t unusual for malfunctioning emots to attach themselves to someone or something, but you couldnâ??t own one. They made terrible pets! Some residents had abandoned their pods to escape an emotâ??s insistent mood swings! The best course was to let its circuits burn out. Scase saw a number of them rusting on the window ledges of the pods below.

â??I have something very important to tell you,â?• it seemed to mumble through the glass. Did it want him to adopt it, to be touched? Scase turned a dial and the window screen began to darken.

â??I have something very important to tell you,â?• it repeated.

Scase stopped the glass at half-opacity. He turned another dial and a small platform emerged from a maintenance hatch. The emot slid onto it. He had not touched the drone, technically, and therefore had not adopted it. But it was on his side of the glass now.

The drone was trained originally to be handled. He could take it in as a companion, but the prospect troubled him. As a test of its capability, he issued a command.

â??Set mood to melancholy.â?• Scase glanced out at the morning sky, which was the sombre colour of a television tuned to a dead channel heâ??d read about in a novel. His new hand-held emot machine sat inert on the window ledge. â??I said melancholy â?? or just sad if you canâ??t manage that.â?• It

blinked. â??Give me grief then.â?• With that the new device auto vaporised, leaving a faint audio trail before it vanished entirely. â??You canâ??t always get what youâ??,â?• it seemed to whimper under fading breath.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Note

- The related article before that was #219 Losing it and appeared on 24 October 2014. The one following was called #222 Emotional labourers, also relevant.
- Featured image is generated by ChatGPT. â??Can you generate a banner image showing the pod tower structure with window and the view beyond. Show it as if seen from the droneâ??s POV.â?•

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Tags

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