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Premiered at SOAP Short Play Festival, West of Lenin Theatre, Seattle.

CAST

Tom - (late 20's, early 30's) a concepteer/programmer (idea-man) in the tech industry, wanna-be entrepreneur, advertising type without the smarm.

Mark - (20's) a code junky (programmer) right out of grad school, socially inept, emotionally sensitive yet scrappy.

Joe - (20's, 30's) a designer/ animator, graphic novel/comic artist, crass, swims in the finer art of insults.

SETTING

A small programmers room at CODE JNKY HACKATHON 2014.
4:30 am.

There is a desk/table with three chairs, three computers -- one desktop and two laptops -- monitors facing upstage. The computers are hard-wired networked to each other, the desktop computer has a fat-internet cable running out the back. Strewn about are cans of spent energy drinks and beers, empty and full snack food wrappers, pizza boxes, etc. (Possibly a fridge with an endless supply of yummies.) A sign behind them reads: CODE JNKY HACKATHON 2014, TEAM 38. The 38 is crossed out in sharpie and ZEEZN written in the margin.

The three are busy typing into their computers, showing wear and tear.

JOE: I'm almost done with the character designs.

TOM: Send me what you have.

MARK: Are the magnitude and projection vectors ready?

JOE: Just need to put the scalar dots on the eyebrows.

MARK: When you're done we can plug them into the quadratic facial expression estimator.

TOM: I thought you were coding in Ruby?

MARK: I wrote a few subroutines in VPython for quicker runtime in animation mode. (To Joe) That's what you're coding in, right?

JOE: At this hour I could be coding in finger paints for all I know. Break time for Bonzo.

Joe stretches, then curls up on the floor under the table, using his hoodie for a pillow. Tom pats Mark on the shoulder, and paces upstage.

TOM: Bang up, Mate. Finally, after 36 hours, the pieces come together. This is just the tip of the iceberg, gentlemen. Every game on the market will be vying for our non-player characters that respond to real human players in real time, with dynamic reactions and interactions. No more pre-recorded avatars with programmed scripts, no more human virtual players...

JOE: We're going to put a lot of slave-wage-earning outsourcers in Bangladesh out of business.

TOM: We could sell this to Apple. Replace Siri.

JOE: Apple's not at this conference. Oh, and for god's sake you two: when I wake up, speak English.

Mark continues typing intensely on the computer.

Tom is still pacing behind him, lost in planning-thought, clutching a Red Bull -- bedraggled but juiced.

Joe falls asleep on the floor.

Mark's typing slows to a few deliberate plucks, then stops altogether. His hands slowly rise off the keyboard. He stares at the screen, eyes agape.

MARK: Oh. (Flashing colored patterns reflect on his face from the screen.) Oh! (Pause. He laughs. Pause.) Oh. (Pause) Holy... Oh God. Oh God.

He bolts around the desk, feels the cords until he finds the network fat-pipe.

TOM: Woah woah, what the hell are you doing, Mark?

MARK: I have to stop it.

Tom goes to him.

TOM: Stop what? Mark. Woah there.

MARK: Stop it!

Mark finds the correct cord and makes to yank it out. Tom physically holds him back.

TOM: Hold on, buddy. Woah. Woah!

MARK: I did it.

TOM: You finished the app?

MARK: No. (He trails off, focusing all energy on the struggle to pull the cord.)

TOM: Getting a little punchy?

Tom holds onto Mark.

TOM: You're doing the lion's share, Mr. Code Monkey. Why don't you take a little siesta, clear the head. We still have eleven hours.

MARK: It has to be STOPPED!

Mark lunges for the cable again. The yelling startles Joe awake.

JOE: (Mumbling.) Mugwump.

Mark and Tom wrestle. Tom shoves Mark into the wall.

TOM: Woah woah, woah. Woah!

JOE: What's going on, guys?

TOM: Mark wants to unplug the intranet fat pipe.

JOE: (groggy.) If he unplugs fatty, we automatically lose.

TOM: I know.

JOE: They'll think we're cheating. It's the rules.

TOM: I know.

JOE: I know you know.

TOM: He knows.

JOE: Then why is he... (realizing he can talk to Mark directly, but can't remember his name.) What's your name again?

MARK: Mark.

JOE: Mark, right. Sorry. What the fuck is wrong with you Mark!?

MARK: I have to stop it from spreading.

Tom and Joe look at each other. Simultaneously they have the same thought.

TOM & JOE: Virus!

Tom and Joe run to the computer screen.

TOM: (together) What in Sam Hill are you're doing, writing a virus, Mark?

JOE: (together) If you pooched us, Mark, I swear I'll email bomb you cat videos until your eyes bleed.

TOM: (together) We can probably contain it if we cold start...

They look into the screen.

JOE: What are we looking at?

TOM: Is this VPython code?

MARK: I wrote a subroutine in IPL. Wanted to swap code from Spore.

TOM: Will Wright is the man.

MARK: Yeah, his wrap routines are genius.

TOM: It's kind of bulky code though.

MARK: Yea, like huge.

TOM: Right?

MARK: Right.

JOE: Sims is a better game.

TOM & MARK: True.

Mark starts to make his way over to the computer.

TOM: Did you alter the code enough?

MARK: I didn't steal anything, just wanted to see his evolution algorithm. I also wrote a pocket with Lisp, and one instance of Prolog that I developed last year at college that I connected to your Poplog game engine.

TOM: Bang-up, mate.

Mark is now next to them.

JOE: What is going on?

TOM: He wrote subroutines in A.I. languages.

JOE: Oh. What does it do? Non Player Character stuff?

MARK: Of a kind.

JOE: Is it ready for my skins? I've been working on some sweet character designs. I got this sexy elf and this mysterious steampunk dude and this crazy mad albino berserker. Eighteen emotional veneers. I can easily get it up to thirty once the dialogue tree is ready.

Mark lunges for the fat pipe. Joe and Tom grasp his arms, but he wriggles free. Mark runs around the table, and Tom and Joe cut him off on either side. A chase ensues. Mark ends up going under the table and Joe tackles him. Tom pulls his legs, dragging both Mark and Joe away from the table. Mark rolls over, causing Tom to fall. They all end up steam-rolling each other over and over. More of the melee continues until eventually Mark gets an arm free, grabs the cable, and yanks it out.

TOM & JOE: NO! Fuck! NO! Jesus! God! NO! (etc.)

JOE: Mark, you shit nozzle! You putrid deformed flesh hogie!

Joe pushes Mark away, crawls under the table to find the cord.

TOM: Well that's just great!

JOE: That was my ticket, man!

TOM: You had no right to pull fatty, Mark!

Joe makes to plug the cord back in.

TOM: It's too late, Joe!

JOE: It's 3:30 am, maybe everyone's asleep...

TOM: It's automated.

JOE: Facebook is out there.

TOM: We're cut.

JOE: Microsoft is out there!

The cold breath of reality sinks in, Joe and Tom throw in the towel.

TOM: It's over. Done. Zeezn is toast. No venture capitalists. No frisky little start up frothing to the top. No cover of Wired magazine.

JOE: I could have worked for Google. Mark, you... you eunuch!

Mark walks to the computer. He sits and watches the screen.

JOE: You leprous ass. You're a leprous ass.

TOM: What the fuck, Mark?

MARK: (Starring dreamily into the screen.) It's alive.

JOE: It's alive?

MARK: It's alive.

TOM: It's alive?

MARK: IT'S ALIVE! (pause) I designed an interactive character algorithm for your game engine Tom, but it's not a Non Player Character, it's... I was writing a high-level symbol-system, sort of a looping paradox in the code. I figured what we needed wasn't just reasonable reactions to situations, but random... independent... unreasonable... I don't know. Since the 80s, everyone's been focused on logic programming, but take out the logic, it's not about logic. It's about connections. It's simple really. Artificial intelligence has been stuck on the whole expanse of information processing -- the zetabytes of info storage you'd need to keep information, enough for a brain to process. But it has nothing to do with Big Data. Think about it: a baby doesn't have a big brain. She develops a big brain. Right?

JOE: I have no idea what you're talking about.