

## It's Almost Over

Written by Garry Lee Wright  
Tuesday, 31 October 2000 18:00

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“Vargon, the Imperial Council is ready to hear your report on the progress of intergalactic colonization project HMX-2528.” “Thank you, Comrade Expletivos. Good morning, distinguished members of the Imperial Council. I am happy to say that our plan to annex planet LAN/44 is proceeding successfully. In fact, our work is almost done.”

“Is that the one inhabited by the giant octopuses?”

“No, Comrade Zoloft. This one’s a couple of galaxies over. Bluish green, lots of carbon particles in the atmosphere, big hole in the ozone layer.”

“Ah, yes. I have seen the holograms. But what do we want with that sorry asteroid?”

“The planet is rich in mercury vapor.”

“Mercury! The essence of life! Is there much to be mined?”

“Tons. And plenty of plutonium waste, too.”

“But how difficult will this planet be to annex? Can the population be enslaved to do our bidding?”

“We are in luck. Fortunately, it is inhabited by a primitive race of homo sapiens — who are proving quite easy to manipulate.”

“Vargon, explain your plan to the council.”

“Gladly, Comrade Buttox. In a couple of weeks, one of the major population control centers on the planet will hold an elaborate ceremony to crown a new leader. We have infiltrated the populace and secretly replaced the two main candidates for the post with voice-activated, charisma-simulating automatons. They are totally under our control.”

“Robots, eh? Very ingenious.”

“Yes, and we are now training the populace to respond to their commands through the planet’s primary communications system.”

“Cosmological telepathy?”

“Cable television.”

“This is a primitive planet.”

“Indeed.”

“Just a minute, Vargon.”

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“Yes, Lord Askalot?”

“I am told that your clever plan hasn't gone quite as smoothly as you suggest. In fact, my information is that both robots have proven quite defective.”

“There have been some minor malfunctions.”

“Minor? What about the XCV-18u36 robot, the one they call ‘Al Gore’? Members of the council, this device's memory is so faulty that its technicians must constantly correct its inaccurate readings the very next day!”

“Vargon, is this true?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“And what about RIBJ-347f?”

“The ‘George Bush’ model, series two.”

“Exactly. The glitches in this one are apparently even worse.”

“We've tried to increase the thing's artificial intelligence, but it keeps defaulting.”

“And members of the council, because of broken microprocessors in both these automatons, their math is completely inaccurate! Neither of them can add a column of figures or comprehend the concept of ‘percent’! It is only because this mercury mine's inhabitants are so slow-witted that they haven't already noticed.”

“Vargon, can this be? And with such unreliable components, how can you be sure which one will be chosen?”

“It doesn't matter, comrade. We control them both and — let me assure you — the models are quite similar.”

“These are the only ones who can become leader?”

“We have spread the necessary disinformation. Only the two ‘major’ candidates can win. That is why they are the major candidates. It is an old tradition based on an Earthling book called Catch-22.”

“And we control the news-reporting media, too?”

“Yes. We have released powerful hallucinogens into their coffee and breakfast cereals.”

“Vargon's plan is insidious.”

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“Thank you, Comrade Sycophantus.”

“Red alert! Red alert! Attention, members of the Imperial Council! We are under attack by the Anhedonians!”

“Quickly, everyone! To the neutrino cannons!”

“But what about the robots?”

“Don’t worry. They are programmed to self-destruct in two weeks.”

TO BE CONTINUED

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