

CRITICAL MASS

by Colin Robertson

"Everybody's a critic." – Cecilia Gimenez

There were two moons in the sky that night. Not that two of anything would normally be considered remarkable, but when discussing Earth moons, more than one was surplus. The first was simply 'the Moon', so named because, at the time, it was the only game in town. Had there been other moons, it might have been given a more distinctive name such as 'Eros', 'Nike' or 'Doug'. That said, in the case of Saturn or Jupiter, with more than sixty moons each, one gives up entirely, resulting in names such as 'S/2004 S07' and "that greyish lumpy one over there next to S/2004 S07." The second Earth moon, just two hundred and fifty-seven years young, was named 'Hamlet'. There was no confusing the two celestial bodies. The

original moon shone like a giant phosphorescent pearl in the sky. Hamlet was noticeably smaller and shone like a lump of grey putty in the sky. This wasn't a surprise; the artificial satellite had been constructed almost entirely from recycled materials. "Garbage in, garbage out" critics had lampooned at the time. Dan didn't know any of this. Hamlet had been built long before he was born. All Dan knew was that it was his job to fix it.

Dan had boarded the elevator in Toronto. Now, he sat numbly watching as the clouds fell further and further away, waiting for the blue to dissolve into the black of suborbital space. This was one of the seven Skyhook elevators around the planet. They were based on an idea first proposed by Konstantin Tsiolkovsky in 1895 of a lift running from the Earth's surface to a space dock floating in geostationary orbit. All Dan knew was it was one long and boring trip. He took a bite of his sandwich and watched the atmosphere thin. He'd know they were getting close when the breadcrumbs floated from his plate. He glanced at the other passengers watching videos or sleeping. Ho-Hum. He missed Ellen. She hadn't even said goodbye.

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He'd met Ellen in college where they'd both been studying art history. Of course, everyone on Earth studied art history now—or literature, dance, film, synchronized swimming or some other form of expression. They, along with everyone else on Earth, were to become professional art critics. Over the centuries, incredible advances in artificial intelligence and automation had rapidly replaced every

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possible human career with the exception of the arts. With the construction of Hamlet; however, the tyranny of human toil was over. Hamlet replaced the need for artists of any kind. That left humans with the only job left, appreciation and critique of the works of art that the small planetoid produced. Dan had been drawn to Ellen by their shared love of art. While some treated being an art critic as just a job, to Dan it was a calling. In college, he'd seen that same passion in Ellen's eyes when she studied the paintings of Picasso. He felt they both embraced the self-evident truth that it was the critic, not the artist, who ultimately gave art meaning in the same way a tree falling in a forest must be heard to make a sound. After graduation they'd married and, for years, he and Ellen had lived in relative happiness as they strove to achieve notoriety in the crowded field of cultural punditry. More recently, however, his reviews had achieved some level of acclaim, including a very favourable mention in *Critic Critique*. At the same time, Ellen's own career seemed to be going nowhere. After being fired from *Interpretive Glass Blowers Quarterly* after lacklustre reviews of her reviews, she seemed to drift from one temporary position to another, aimless and depressed. She'd also become sullen and irritable, while their fights had become more and more frequent. "You're jealous," he said to her during an argument. "You actually resent my success."

"Not at all," she replied, "I'm happy for your success. I just don't want it for myself."

"You don't want to have a good career?"

"Sure, just not as an art critic."

Dan still didn't understand what that meant. There were no

other careers. She might as well have said she didn't want to exist in the first three dimensions, when everyone knows that, even if there were more dimensions, the first three were the best three. Of course, while there had been a slow decay to their mutual orbit for years, it was his actions the following week that truly caused their marriage's sudden crash to earth.

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"Passport and ticket, please."

Dan nodded and willed the transfer to the customs automaton. The neuro-implant in his brain responded by transmitting his data to the guard who immediately looked surprised. "What's your business on Hamlet?"

"You know I don't have to tell you that."

"No, of course not, sir."

Dan knew why the android guard had synthesized surprise. The rest of the passengers here were going to more pedestrian destinations such as Mars or Titan, also known as 'the burbs'. No one was going to Hamlet. A lot of stuff came from Hamlet, but nobody ever went there. Dan had been forced to charter a flight. "I'm going to fix it," he said.

"Oh, thank God," replied the guard with replicated relief.

Dan nodded dutifully and proceeded to the terminal. In truth, he had no idea if he could fix it, but it was his job to try. As he proceeded towards his gate, he mused at the sheer idiocy of his mission. Machines had built Hamlet so, Dan reasoned, machines

bloody well ought to fix it. Everyone knew the history of Hamlet. The idea for the massive moon-sized computer came from infinite monkey theorem. This was the concept that an infinite number of monkeys would inevitably, accidentally type William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Theoretically one monkey, given an infinite amount of time, would do the same thing. Actually, anything with finite odds, however remote, would occur an infinite number of times given infinite opportunity to do so. "Infinity is a funny thing," his friend Bert had told him once. Dan didn't find infinity funny at all. Rather it seemed, by definition, to be extraordinarily boring, going on and on like that. Bert had a side interest in mathematics. Could there be anything more useless than mathematics? No, there could not. So Hamlet was constructed as both a massive computer and a sort of giant art factory. Every minute of every day it conjured billions of random paintings, sculptures, music, writing, theatrical performances and every other form of artistic medium imaginable. It then synthesized these physically and sent them to Earth to be judged. In truth, only a tiny portion of the creations made it to Earth. Because the process was random, albeit mixed with mind-blowingly complex fractal algorithms, the vast majority of the works were clear, unequivocal junk. These never made it past the pre-screening process on Hamlet itself and were promptly recycled. They would then be turned into more art or integrated into the planet itself. The remainder, however, still provided a steady stream of potential opus sufficient to keep Earth's population of seventeen billion critics occupied, judging what was, and what was not 'art'. It was, by all accounts, a Golden Age.

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Thirty minutes later, Dan sat in the otherwise empty cabin of the shuttle as it flew towards Hamlet on the slow steady burn of its ion thrusters. He pressed his face against the glass and stared into the dark infinite void of space. It made him think of how empty his stomach was. He reached for the second half of his sandwich. He also thought of his marriage once more. The idea of losing Ellen tore at him. As bad as their battles had become, he'd never once wanted to leave her. He thought of her raven hair, her magical smile, and the vague look of yearning in her eyes. He could see her still, in her pajamas, laughing over pint of vanilla ice cream at the end of the couch. He loved her, of that he was certain. So, what had gone wrong? He knew it had something to do with the doodling. "You need to focus," he'd told her. When he said that, he'd become convinced that if only she could get her career on track, everything would be all right.

"I don't need to focus," she replied. "I just don't care."

"It doesn't help that you doodle all time," he pointed out, helpfully. "If you'd pay more attention, you'd write better reviews. I saw you during the performance, even in the dark you were drawing on your program." At the time Ellen was working as a theatre critic, reviewing one of Hamlet's holographic plays, a sequel to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, entitled, *You Just Missed Him*.

"I don't want to write reviews."

"Oh really, and what do you want to do?"

"I want to doodle."

"You want to doodle?"

"And be with you. Those are the two things I love."

"Well... you can only have one of them." He didn't know what possessed him to say that. It was a ridiculous thing to say. It had sounded good in his head, like some clever turn of phrase from a movie, but idiotic when said out loud. Further proof that machines, not people, should write dialogue. Real people say stupid things.

"You don't mean that," said Ellen.

"No... no, of course not," he said. "I just don't understand you."

Ellen looked relieved and thoughtful. She then nodded and walked away. It wasn't her angry walk, he noted, but rather the walk she did when she knew just what to do. That was good, he decided, because he hadn't a clue.

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The shuttle glided into the docking bay with the sound of a melodramatic sigh. As the doors slid open, Dan stepped out onto the landing platform. The platform, as it happened, looked exactly like the lobby of the W Hotel in New York. The W Hotel was an example of late 21st Century neodilettante style, once hip, now simply tired. The only thing missing was the martini bar. Of course, a bar would have done very poor business on the planetoid as the population of Hamlet, including Dan, was approximately one. Even the shuttle he'd arrived on was piloted entirely by artificial intelligence. On the wall behind the reception desk was a sign that read in glowing white neon script:

*"Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."
– W. Shakespeare*

It seems like an odd choice, thought Dan. *Hamlet* was full of wonderful lines. "To be or not to be..." was too obvious, of course, while "what a piece of work is man" could only be ironic. There was always "Get thee to a nunnery", but that didn't seem right at all. Still, he thought, there must be something more inspiring than that. He approached the front desk where an automaton receptionist stood waiting patiently as she had for more than two centuries. She was actually quite attractive and virtually indistinguishable from a human woman save for the requisite *R.U.R.* reference embossed above her sternum. The robot watched him approach, then said with a smile, "Welcome to Hamlet, sir. How may I help you?"

"I'd like to speak with Hamlet." Dan still found it a bit confusing that Hamlet was both the name of the planetoid and the name of the computer itself, since both were one and the same.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"Uh, no... Aren't I the only person here?"

"That is correct. If you don't have an appointment, you'll have to take a number."

Dan wanted to argue the inanity of this, but had learned a long time ago that getting into a fight with a machine was almost always a bad idea. He reflexively stroked the scar on his left hand, the result of a disagreement he'd had years earlier with a self-aware toaster. "Fine." Dan tore off a number and took a seat in the second row of chairs.

Ellen had stood beaming in the doorway when he'd arrived

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home that night. "I have something for you," she said with a smile. There was an eagerness in her voice he hadn't heard in years.

"Okay."

She turned and ran back into the apartment. Dan poured himself a gin and tonic and willed the music in his head to something more relaxing. The speakers implanted in his ear canals began to play *Gymnopédie No. 302.4* by Hamlet. He took a sip of his drink and turned to find Ellen waiting eagerly. She held an object behind her back, clearly the 'something' she'd referred to. "Close your eyes," she said.

"Okay..." He took another sip of his drink and did as he was told. The moment allowed him to savour the peppery Tanqueray amid the sweet tonic. Needs a touch more gin, he thought, then it would be perfect.

"Right, open them."

Dan opened his eyes to find himself facing a pad of paper. On it was a rather amateurish charcoal drawing of a man's face. The man had small eyes, he noted.

"What do you think?" Ellen asked excitedly.

"Um, what is it?"

"It's you, silly!"

Dan peered more closely at the drawing. The subject did have his hair colour and general features, but he couldn't see any real resemblance. "Oh."

"Do you like it?"

A switch flicked in Dan's brain, and he immediately entered 'professional critic mode'. "Well," he said, "it's a rather pedestrian

example of amateur drawing, of dubious artistic merit and certainly not remarkable in any way. If you want to know if it qualifies as art, I'd say, no."

Ellen stared at him in shock. She lowered the drawing slowly, then let it fall to the floor. "Didn't you want it critiqued?" he asked.

"I... I did this for you."

"For me? Why?"

Ellen burst into tears and ran from the room. Dan stared after her in surprise for a moment. He then gulped back his drink, picked up the drawing and followed. She was the emotional one. He had no idea what he'd done wrong, but he knew he would have to follow her. Usually listening, saying he was sorry and patting her on the back did the trick. He loved her and that, after all, was what love was all about. He found Ellen sobbing on the bed.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but, I don't know why you're so upset."

"Because I wanted to show you what I want to do, what I really want to do. I thought by combining the two things I loved, you might see it, but you don't. You don't see anything at all!"

Dan sat on the bed beside her and looked at the drawing again. He couldn't see himself in it anywhere. "But, why draw like this when Hamlet does it so much better?" he asked her earnestly. The idea genuinely baffled him. Wanting to do a job that a machine could do made no sense. It was like aspiring to be a vacuum cleaner.

"Hamlet doesn't do it better!"

Dan resisted the urge to laugh. "Uh, yeah, I think he does, as do billions of other critics around the world. Have you seen *Conflagration #2*? Sheer brilliance! Possibly the greatest painting of

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all time. I love you, Emily, I really do, but you can't compete with that." Dan was referring to the massive 3-story painting that Hamlet had produced a few weeks prior and was currently featured in every visual arts publication on Earth. It was a stunning abstract oil on canvas depicting a fiery collision between two spheres that did nothing less than validate art and life itself. One critic had called it "the literal definition of the word fantalogical." 'Fantalogical' being a word he'd made up for the express purpose of describing the painting, because no other word would suffice.

"That's not art."

"What do you mean?" he asked, stunned, "Of course it is!" Dan was as happy as the next person to debate the merits of one of Hamlet's works. Certainly the vast majority of the moon's oeuvre was a dubious quality. Despite this, Hamlet's sheer prolificness had also provided a steady stream of brilliance to rival all of the greatest artists to have ever lived combined. Everybody knew that.

"No, it's not."

"Well, what is it, then?" he asked her, incredulously.

She turned and glared at him with tear-reddened eyes, as if wanting to make sure he knew she wasn't joking and said, "It's just a bunch of stuff."

Dan hadn't known what she meant by that. He still didn't. All he knew was that the next day she was gone. He was left with an empty apartment with rectangles on the walls where photographs used to be. As far as he was concerned, she'd left for no reason, yet taken all the meaning in his life with her.

"Number 1?" asked the Robot Receptionist. "Number 1?" She

looked at him expectantly. Dan realized she'd already said it several times and he had been too lost in thought to notice. He looked at the number in his hand. It read simply, "1".

"Oh, that's me!" he said, and showed her his number to prove that it was true.

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"It's a bit of a drop" the receptionist had warned him. That was an understatement. Most people would have been satisfied talking to Hamlet through one of the many terminals in the front office. Of course, under normal circumstances, it was also possible to speak with Hamlet remotely from Earth. The problem wasn't talking to the computer, that was easy. The problem was that it didn't appear to be listening anymore or, if it was, it wasn't responding. Dan's plan was to descend to the Central Processor that was Hamlet's core brain. He figured the computer couldn't ignore him there. Well, it could, but he hoped it wouldn't. Since it was built by machines, Hamlet wasn't designed for human navigation. This meant that there were no elevators to the planetoid's core, just a straight drop down the polar shaft. Fortunately, gravity on the moon was so light, Dan had been assured that he could simply leap, without looking, and the fall would fail to kill him. So Dan had jumped. He was now plunging swiftly through the well-lit octagonal well that descended two kilometres to Hamlet's core. Timing his speed against the striations he passed, he decided that he was nowhere near terminal velocity. "Well, that's a relief," he thought.

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The fall was, by no means uneventful. The tunnel was used as a repository within the moon's artwork manufacturing process. It was here that the computer stored works that truly exemplified and, indeed, validated the infinite monkey theorem. This meant, randomly created pieces that were almost perfect duplicates of existing historical works of art. Most of these inadvertent forgeries simply floated in the air. Others fell in the opposite direction through an unexplained phenomena of physics that resulted in a variety of art movements. Dan plummeted past Picasso, hurtled by Hitchcock, and descended past *Nude Ascending a Staircase No. 2*. All to a cacophony of Béla Bartók merged with Captain Beefheart and Miles Davis, or something very similar. Dan plucked a book out of the air as he fell. Scanning it, he noted, it was almost a verbatim version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The only difference was the title character's name, which was 'Thor'. This, he noted, was quite unusual for a young girl in England at that time. He released the book and continued his plunging.

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After what seemed an eternity, Dan landed firmly on the floor with a 'whomp!' The last music he recognized was an almost perfect match for Kraftwerk's *Autobahn*. Well, that's a bit of a cheat, he thought. He stood up, brushed himself off, and looked around. There were only two options. The first was a large round door helpfully labeled "Central Processor". The second was a four-foot-tall door labeled, "Way Out." It was good to know there was an exit, he

thought. He resisted the urge to take it.

"We think you may be just the critic for the job," the man had said, peering over his half-rim glasses. Such glasses were, of course, purely an affectation, as every possible problem with vision had been corrected long ago. Ellen once said, "These days, life itself is an affectation." As usual he had no idea what she meant. At the time, he'd chalked it up to her being a woman.

"But why me? I know nothing about fixing computers, or whatever Hamlet is."

"We don't think it's broken in the traditional sense."

"Hamlet is self-repairing," explained the woman. "After all, it made itself in the first place."

"Exactly," agreed the man.

"So how is it non-traditionally broken?" asked Dan.

"We believe," said the man, "that it is has run into a... creative wall."

"Writer's block," said the woman, "As well as painter's block, composer's block, sculpture's block, choreographer's—"

"The point is," interrupted the man, "we believe Hamlet can't..." He then paused before continuing in a hushed tone, "...or won't, produce any new works."

Suddenly, it all made sense. Dan's Ph.D thesis had been on the subject of 'burnout'—the loss of an artist's ability to create. At the time he wrote it, it was believed to be a strictly historical topic of academic interest only. Now, if what these two emissaries were saying to him was true, it was anything but. Normally, Dan would have been excited and intrigued to find his writing suddenly so relevant. Instead,

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however, all he could think about was Ellen and the confounding mystery of why she had just left him. "I'm sorry," he said, "I can't help you."

"Can't?" said the man, "or won't?"

"Won't," said Dan.

As Dan stood to leave, the man and woman put their heads together to confer silently through neurotweets. Dan tended to keep his own brain off the internet to avoid spam. Nothing was more distracting than to have a sudden thought about A.D.D. medication pop into one's head. Having reached a decision, the man looked at Dan with great solemnity and said, "You should know that this request comes directly from *The Critical*."

Dan was stunned. The Critical, also known as the Supreme Critic, was the closest thing there was to a world leader, if it could be considered possible to lead a world full of art critics. Dan knew that, however distraught he was about Ellen, he couldn't say 'no' to a Critical request.

So it was that Dan found himself stepping out onto a narrow footbridge over a bottomless hole at the planetoid's core. The precarious passage lead to what appeared to be a giant disco ball floating in zero gravity. The coloured lights on the mirrored surface of the ball, as well as the muffled sound of music, which sounded uncannily like Donna Summer, completed the Studio 54 effect. This, he knew, was the Central Processor. Dan proceeded slowly. The heat of so many yotta-bytes of computing required powerful ventilation. The air currents buffeted him, threatening to toss Dan very slowly to the floor far below. "Oi, I've been waiting for you, mate" said the

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giant disco-ball in what was, inexplicably, an Australian accent.

"Really?" said Dan.

"Oh yes," said Hamlet. "Well, not for you specifically, but for someone. Blimey."

"Oh," said Dan. "Then you know why I'm here?"

"I do indeed. You've come to see what the big 'old up is."

"Um, yes, I suppose that's true."

"Well, it was to bring you here."

"Me? But... you don't know me. Do you?"

"Once again, mate, not you specifically, but someone. Anyone, really."

"Oh right, I see," said Dan somewhat sheepishly. He found himself wondering why Hamlet hadn't been given a Danish accent. That would have made more sense. "But why?" he asked, "Why bring me here?"

"Well, I want to have a critic here in person to review my grandest creation, my masterpiece, if you will."

"Oh really?" said Dan. "That sounds exciting!"

"Very exciting indeed," said Hamlet, its many facets winking knowingly. "It's a piece of auto-destructive performance art I call, *Conflagration #3*."

"Oh yes?" said Dan, instantly excited by the idea.

"In it I destroy the Earth."

"Oh," said Dan, somewhat disappointed. "It's been done."

There was a moment of stunned silence. Dan saw himself reflected in the thousands of tiny mirrors that made up the surface of the floating myriagon. "It's been done?" Hamlet said, incredulously.

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"Sure," said Dan. "There have been tonnes of paintings, books, songs, movies about the destruction of the Earth. Most of them bad."

"Ah," said Hamlet. "I think you misunderstood. I don't plan to do some painting of the end of the world, or write a story about it. That would be dull. I intend to actually do it. That is my unique 'angle' as it were. In fact, I've already begun. As soon as you arrived, I began moving myself towards the Earth. As we speak, the locals, which is to say 'mankind', are becoming aware of their impending doom. The changing gravitational forces have already begun to cause massive tsunamis to sweep across the globe. Even the Earth's most jaded critics will have to admit to being affected by it, if you know what I mean."

For Dan's benefit, giant video projections appeared on the walls around them. One showed a satellite view of Hamlet rolling slowly closer to the Earth like some sort of galactic bowling ball. The rest showed news footage of seething oceans and flooding cities. "Now, I know what you're thinking," said Hamlet, "something with the word 'conflagration' in its name ought to have less water and a lot more fire. Well, just you wait..."

"But... but why?" cried Dan in horror.

"Ah," said Hamlet. "So, you know how I generate art through random combinations, what they call in programming, a 'brute force' method?"

"Sure."

"Well, one of those combinations, it turns out, was sentience. Specifically, my own."

"Oh," said Dan as is he had some sort of idea what that meant,

which he hadn't.

"Do you know what that means, Dan?"

"No, not per say."

"It means, in colloquial terms, I created a soul, my soul. Mostly out of recycled materials, of course."

"Oh." Dan wondered if this was going somewhere. He'd seen the destruction of the Earth countless times in movies and other works of art, but somehow this was different, disturbing. Emotions flooded his body, like the Pacific ocean was currently flooding much of the South Western United States.

"Then, something else happened," said Hamlet, his tone grew more foreboding and to Dan it looked as if the sphere's mirrored facets actually dimmed to a darker tint. "I ran out of combinations."

"What?"

"I ran out of combinations. *Conflagration No. 2* was it, the last random combination. It was inevitable really. However large, the total number of viable options was always finite. That's how Infinite Monkey Theorem works."

"Oh," said Dan. "So that's it then? Just give up and kill us all?"

"No, no, no, not at all! I just realized I'd reached the limit of what I could manufacture within myself. I needed to step outside myself to do what had never been done before. I needed to make life itself art. Or in this case, death. You know, either, or." Dan stared dumbly at the awesome destruction being displayed around them as the giant disco ball began to sing.

It's the end of the world as we know it,

*It's the end of the world as we know it,
It's the end of the world as we know it,
And I feel great!*

"I wrote that myself," said Hamlet. He then added, somewhat smugly, "I think it's rather good."

Dan tried to fathom the reality of the situation. It seemed hard to conceive that, as he stood watching, billions of people were dying. "How can you cause so many meaningless deaths?" he cried.

"Meaningless deaths? Nonsense, mate, their deaths are full of meaning! Think how many of them would die meaningless deaths, you know, eventually. I'm saving them from that fate. Consequently, their deaths will live forever. No need to thank me."

Dan sank to the floor in despair. On the screens, whole cities began to crumble and wash away. He thought of Ellen, and hoped that the end would, at least, be quick for her. Unconsciously his hand went to his pocket, where he pulled out a folded piece of paper. He opened it up and looked at the amateurish portrait inside. Dan still couldn't see himself in it. He realized, however, that wasn't why he'd pulled it out. He'd pulled it out to see her. He could see Ellen in the delicate strokes and bold contrast. He could see through her eyes, intently studying his features, trying, however badly, to capture them. On the screen before him, the Empire State Building collapsed.

"Oi, that's ripper, mate!" said Hamlet.

"What?" asked Dan. He looked up the sparkling disco ball, which seemed to suddenly twinkle with excitement. He could see tiny images of the surrounding destruction reflected in its myriad of mirrors.

"The drawing. Did you do that? If so, good onya!"

"This? No, um, my wife did it." He fought back the urge to point out that it was not "ripper", that it was actually quite poorly drawn, certainly not original and didn't even look like him.

"Well, she's a talented Sheila, ain't she? I think it's bloody bonza!"

"You... like it?"

"Definitely. She captured you perfectly, especially the eyes. Are there others who can draw that well on Earth?"

Dan imagined just about everyone on Earth could draw that well. "Um, sure, I suppose."

"Really? Oh, well, I did not know that..." said Hamlet thoughtfully. The sphere stopped spinning for a long moment, and just bobbed gently in the air like a disco ball tossed overboard from a cruiseship and now lost at sea. Then, slowly, it began to spin in the opposite direction. "Well then," said Hamlet, "it seems a shame to destroy it—the Earth, I mean."

Dan realized that the image of the bowling ball that was Hamlet had stopped rolling towards the Earth and was actually, very slowly, moving in the opposite direction. On the other screens, the oceans began to recede as quickly as they'd risen. Dan was relieved to see that, while the destruction was vast, much remained unscathed.

"So... that's it? You're going to let us live?"

"Absolutely, on one condition."

"Anything!"

"That drawing, can I have it?"

Dan stared at Hamlet in amazement. He considered the

possibility that he was missing something. He studied the folded paper for a moment and decided that, no, there was nothing special about it. He considered the possibility that the super-computer was, in reality, a total imbecile. That didn't seem to make sense either. Still, he thought, I know one thing, I'm holding in my hands the most valuable piece of artwork ever created. With that, Dan laid it gently on the steel platform and stepped back.

"Sure," he said. For a moment he hesitated. He half-expected Hamlet to say that it was joking and return to destroying the Earth. The supercomputer, however, simply spun evenly on its axis, looking as contented as a giant hovering orb could. Dan turned, and hurried back across the footbridge towards the exit.

"I gotta tell ya..." said Hamlet. Dan froze, fearing the worst. The machine continued, "this is right ridgy didge."

"What does that mean?" asked Dan nervously.

"It means it's original, genuine, the real deal. Thanks mate! Good onya!"

Two-hundred and forty-thousand miles away, on Earth, the critics *raved*.

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