Goodwill Hunting

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Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. —*Bernard Suits*

The burrito contained sour cream and almost nothing else. This was not an accident at the counter, nor the consequence of a language barrier, nor the final stage of a normal order after the ingredients had been removed one by one. A man had requested it deliberately. He stood on the customer side of the glass and asked the woman making it to add another scoop.

She added one.

He looked at the result and asked for another.

She added another.

The exchange continued past the point at which either participant could reasonably have believed that a

burrito was being made. The tortilla remained present beneath the sour cream, but its presence had become ceremonial. It marked the historical origin of the order rather than its current category. What lay on the counter was dairy with paperwork.

The woman was named Jenny. She understood before the order was complete that she had not encountered an ordinary customer with an unusually strong preference. She was smiling in the way a person smiles when she has discovered that an interaction is a joke but has not yet decided whether acknowledging the joke would improve it. She did not acknowledge it. She added the sour cream.

Eventually the man said he was satisfied. Jenny began to fold the tortilla. The sour cream moved outward under the pressure of her hands and escaped from both sides. There was nowhere else for it to go. She asked whether he wanted another tortilla.

"No, bro," he said. "That's too many carbs."

This objection preserved the dietary theory under which the burrito had apparently been ordered. Sour cream in industrial quantities was acceptable. A second tortilla would be reckless. Jenny continued with the one she had. More sour cream came out onto the counter.

"Yo, what you doing to my burrito, dog?" he said. "That's a full scoop of sour cream right there. I'm gonna need another one."

He had created a physically impossible wrapping problem and was now auditing her losses. Jenny kept folding. The burrito acquired a shape by surrendering a substantial part of its contents to the workspace.

"Nah, I'll let it slide this time," he said. "You're good, man."

Jenny had been forgiven.

Before she completed the final fold, she looked at the object and asked, entirely deadpan, "You want one more scoop before I wrap it up?"

The offer changed the scene. Until that moment Jenny had been complying with a ridiculous order. Now she was producing it. She had inferred the local rules and generated a valid move of her own.

"Nah, I'm good, but thank you for asking," he said. "You're a good friend, bro. That was really sweet of you guys. But no, I think I'm good for now."

The burrito was wrapped. Enough of it remained inside to permit transfer. He paid for it and left.

He calls what he does "free will maxing." The videos are short, often a minute or two, occasionally long enough for a small social order to form and collapse. He

enters a convenience store, a burrito shop, a warehouse, a street crossing, and selects the action that is available but not advertised. He does not usually break the machine. He submits an input the interface did not expect.

At the burrito shop he has ordered bean juice with microscopic traces of other ingredients. The employee tried to give him fewer beans. He objected that there were still too many beans. The employee removed more. He asked for additional bean juice. The distinction mattered. He did not want the beans, which are food. He wanted the liquid surrounding the beans, which is an incidental condition of their storage and does not normally appear as a selectable ingredient.

He requested a little cheese. The employee added a little. It was too much. He wanted an amount small enough that the operation of adding cheese remained visible while the cheese itself approached the status of evidence. He accepted a little hot sauce, a little sour cream, perhaps one jalapeño. By the end the tortilla was full of brown liquid and structurally dependent upon the goodwill of the person trying to fold it.

When the employee finished, the man looked pleased.

"I call it the dirty diaper," he said.

The employee laughed despite himself. This was the moment at which the name of the object confirmed what both men had already seen. The customer had not accidentally arrived at a burrito resembling a dirty diaper. He had engineered one and reserved the right to be proud of it.

On the way out he found somebody entering the restaurant.

"They're handing out free burritos," he said. "You want one?"

The stranger accepted. Ownership changed. The dirty diaper, which had begun as a private dietary emergency between a customer and an employee, entered the world as lunch.

In another episode he ordered only red sauce. There was no rice, no meat, no beans, no cheese, no decorative jalapeño to preserve a claim on the category. The employee scooped red sauce onto the tortilla. The man requested one more scoop, then another, then another. The container ran low.

"You're gonna need a new one," he said.

The employee looked at the depleted container and agreed. He called toward the back.

"Jenny, another red, please."

The customer joined him.

"Yeah, Jenny, get us another red, please."

The word *us* promoted him temporarily into restaurant operations. Jenny looked over. She had survived the sour-cream episode and understood at once why the restaurant's supply of red sauce had become an institutional concern. Her coworker was still discovering the situation. Jenny had persistent memory.

The sauce burrito was eventually folded and given to another group of strangers. Outside, the man recruited several more people as an audience.

"I gave them a burrito full of only hot sauce," he said. "Look, they're eating it."

They watched through the window. The recipients not only ate it but shared it. The joke had been built upon the certainty that a tortilla full of red sauce was not a real meal. Reality declined to certify the premise. Perhaps the burrito was good. Perhaps the unused region of burrito space contained recipes.

The normal menu had never said that red sauce could not be the filling. It had merely arranged the ingredients in an order that made some combinations feel like food and others feel like mistakes. The man selected the mistake and discovered customers for it.

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A free-speech auditor enters a post office with a camera. The camera is visible. The employees object. Somebody calls the police. The police arrive and ask whether the auditor has done anything unlawful. If the answer is no, the auditor remains. The exercise is irritating by design. A right written in law is brought into contact with people who have become accustomed to treating their discomfort as authority. The audit asks whether the freedom exists only in principle or whether the surrounding system will implement it under pressure.

Free will can be audited in the same way.

The relevant border is not usually legal. It lies between what cannot be done and what nobody does. The two territories look similar from inside ordinary life because convention is an efficient cartographer. It draws a border around the common route, removes the unused roads, and labels the remainder wilderness. After enough repetition, "people don't do that" acquires the grammar of "you can't do that."

The burrito shop presents an interface. Choose beans, rice, meat, vegetables, sauce. The interface encourages a narrow family of recognizable meals, but the underlying system accepts quantities and combinations

the interface does not advertise. Bean juice is available. Microscopic cheese is available. A tortilla full of red sauce is available. An employee willing to wrap sour cream until the tortilla loses jurisdiction is available. None of these options are displayed because almost nobody requests them, and almost nobody requests them because they are not displayed.

The auditor interrupts this loop by treating social instructions as hypotheses. A burrito is supposed to contain ingredients in certain proportions. Supposed by whom, implemented where, and what occurs if the next expected instruction is not executed?

Sometimes the answer is that the tortilla fails. This is useful information. Physics has passed the audit.

Sometimes the answer is that Jenny offers another scoop.

The distinction matters. Free-will auditing is not the belief that every boundary is imaginary. An audit that knows the answer in advance is only a performance of certainty. Some rules are load-bearing. Some protect other people. Some are laws. Some are the accumulated result of many people discovering, at cost, that a second tortilla is structurally advisable. The point is not that every instruction should be violated. The point is that

instructions belong to different ontological classes and arrive in the same voice.

"You have to" may mean the police will arrest you. It may mean the building will fall down. It may mean somebody will be hurt. It may mean the software refuses the input. It may mean your mother would be disappointed. It may mean the employee has never seen anybody order this before. Ordinary speech flattens these conditions into one phrase and leaves the listener to determine which world he occupies.

The free-will auditor determines it experimentally.

This is what "maxing" adds to the joke. Free will becomes a stat, and ordinary people are revealed to be leaving enormous quantities of it unused. A normal customer enters, selects a drink, pays, and leaves. He has exercised choice, but only inside the menu presented to him. The free-will maxer looks at the same encounter and notices that the system contains far more states than the menu admits.

He is not necessarily more free in the metaphysical sense. The universe may remain deterministic. Every atom in the sour cream may have been moving toward Jenny since the beginning of time. The comedy survives. The practical difference between an action being impos-

sible and an action being merely absent from the local imagination is large enough to occupy a life.

Social scripts are compression. Without them, every purchase would require the parties to negotiate the meaning of money, ownership, waiting, sequence, distance, eye contact, gratitude, and departure. The script stores the answers. Enter, order, pay, leave. It is one of the reasons strangers can cooperate without first becoming philosophers.

Compression is useful. The problem begins when compression masquerades as ontology.

The restaurant script is not the restaurant. The dialogue tree is not the set of possible sentences. The fact that the button is not displayed does not prove that the function is unavailable. A great deal of adulthood consists of learning the interface so well that one forgets the machine beneath it.

The auditor presses where there is no button.

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In the convenience store the object is a can of Red Bull. The man places it on the counter and asks the owner whether he can taste it first.

"No testing," the owner says.

The answer is complete. A sealed retail drink is not sampled before purchase. The can is on the counter. The transaction has reached the point at which the customer either pays or declines. Every participant knows the available branches.

The man opens the can and drinks.

He considers the flavor.

"I don't want it," he says.

The owner explains that the can has been opened.

"I can close it again," the man says.

The owner looks at him. The man looks back. Between them stands the can, which can in one sense be closed again and in the relevant sense cannot. The metal tab will remain open, but the object can still be placed upright, abandoned, and treated by the customer as a problem that has ended. The owner is trying to preserve the commercial meaning of *closed*. The customer is offering geometry.

The owner becomes angry. This has happened before. The man returns to the same store often enough that the encounter has acquired continuity. The owner is no longer an interchangeable employee generated for a single clip. He has a broom, a memory, and a catchphrase.

"One, two, three, you go," he says. "You no go, I calling."

He begins trying to call 119, which is not the emergency number he intends. Under pressure he enters the digits into a screen that appears to be asking for a password. The phone does not cooperate. The man becomes suddenly conciliatory.

"No, please don't call 119," he says. "I'm sorry. I thought we were friends."

He produces money. The owner calms enough to accept payment. The man offers one dollar at a time. When the owner reaches for the first bill, the man retracts it just before contact. The owner becomes angry again. The man apologizes and offers the bill again. This time he allows the owner to grasp it but does not release his own end. The payment becomes a tug-of-war.

The broom returns.

The scene resembles Tom and Jerry because every resolution contains the mechanism of the next conflict. The man apologizes, which lowers the broom. He offers payment, which restores the transaction. He modifies the handoff by one variable, which restarts the chase. First the owner cannot touch the dollar. Then he can touch it but cannot possess it. The free-will maxer is exploring the state space of giving somebody money incorrectly.

The owner keeps trying to terminate the process.

"One, two, three, you go."

The man does not go.

"You no go, I calling."

"Please don't call 119."

The wrong number becomes canon. Correcting it would damage the world. The store now contains a private emergency service called 119, a broom-based enforcement system, and a friendship that exists primarily when the man is begging not to be expelled.

In a later episode he returns with flowers. He has been banned, but the ban has become part of the relationship rather than its conclusion. The flowers are an apology and a threat. The owner knows who has entered. The audience knows what has happened before.

Any ordinary purchase now carries the accumulated possibility of the broom.

Repetition changes the nature of the prank. The first visit bothers a stranger. The fifth visit creates a character. The owner develops lines. Jenny recognizes the customer across the restaurant. A store becomes a set not because it is artificial but because reality has been required to maintain state.

This is where the simulation begins to consume memory.

A normal interaction can be cached. Customer buys Red Bull. Owner takes money. Customer leaves. The same assets and animations can be reused indefinitely. The free-will maxer forces the engine to resolve conditions that have not been optimized: customer opens Red Bull, rejects it, proposes resealing; customer pays but prevents payment; customer is banned but returns with flowers; owner attempts to contact the authorities through a password field while announcing an incorrect number.

The simulation must remember the broom.

It must remember 119.

It must remember that these two men are enemies who repeatedly describe themselves as friends.

Most people encounter thousands of strangers without producing a recurring role in any of their lives. This man walks into a convenience store, refuses the next expected action, and comes out with a sitcom.

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The street-crossing videos remove almost everything. There is no prop, no employee, no purchase, no elaborate fiction. The man walks slowly in front of a car and says one sentence.

"Yo, I'm walking hea."

The missing *r* matters. The phrase belongs to the New York pedestrian who has nearly been struck and is asserting a right so obvious that the assertion must be shouted. Here the man manufactures the obstruction himself. He walks strangely, sometimes backward, while a driver waits. The driver lowers his window.

"What you say?"

"I'm walking hea."

The driver studies the remaining distance.

"You're almost there, bro. You're almost there. Keep going."

This is a generous response. The driver has converted irritation into encouragement. The pedestrian

is near the far side. The interaction appears to contain only a few more seconds.

The man begins walking backward.

"I'm walking hea."

"What are you doing?"

"What you talking about? I'm walking hea. I'm walking hea."

The driver has made the mistake of assuming that walking across a street has a purpose. The verb has been subordinated to its normal destination. Once a pedestrian reaches ninety percent, the remaining ten percent appears compulsory because the action is understood as a project and projects possess endings.

The free-will maxer preserves the verb and discards the destination. He is walking. He is here. Both claims remain true while he reverses direction. The driver asks what he is doing and receives the name of the action rather than its purpose.

"I'm walking hea."

The clip is a miniature audit of final causes. Why must crossing continue toward the opposite side? Because traffic is waiting, because streets are dangerous, because other people have somewhere to go, because that is what crossing means. These are good answers.

The auditor does not defeat them. He forces them to appear.

Most scripts operate by concealing their reasons. The next step feels inevitable because the purpose of the previous step has already selected it. The cup is at the register, therefore pay. The pedestrian is near the curb, therefore finish crossing. The employee has explained where the bathroom is, therefore thank him and leave. The tortilla has failed, therefore use another one.

"Too many carbs."

A free-will audit begins when a purpose stops issuing commands for long enough that another branch becomes visible. The branch may be stupid. Stupidity is useful here because it prevents the new action from disguising itself as a superior plan. Walking backward does not improve the crossing. It simply proves that the forward direction was not encoded in the legs.

The driver says, "You're almost there," as though speaking to a man completing a difficult pilgrimage. The man retreats. The destination remains available. He is not ready to cash it in.

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The acetone bottle begins outside the store. The man empties it, fills it with water, shakes it, empties it again, and replaces the contents with clean water. The preparation is shown because the audience must know what every other person in the clip does not. To the viewer he is carrying water in a theatrical container. To the cashier he is carrying nail-polish remover.

At the register he asks whether she recommends the product. The question is reasonable. He does not appear to need acetone himself. He might be buying it for a girlfriend or a sister. The cashier says yes. She uses that one.

"Oh yeah? Right on," he says. "Let me just try it real quick."

He opens the bottle and drinks.

The cashier's face changes. Her recommendation, which had been routine customer service one second earlier, now appears to have caused a poisoning. She tells him to stop. Another customer joins her. The bottle says acetone. The man continues drinking.

"No, I like it," he says. "You're right. This one's good."

The cashier is trying to communicate the category of the object. He responds as though she is disputing his review.

They tell him that acetone cannot be consumed.

"No, no, it's okay," he says. "It's a TikTok trend. Everybody's doing it."

This explanation is plausible enough to increase the alarm. He is no longer merely confused. He may belong to a network of people who knowingly drink solvents under algorithmic instruction.

"It's a detox," he says. "It gets all the nail polish out."

The bystanders stop trying to establish that acetone is dangerous and begin investigating the hidden premise.

"You eat nail polish?"

"Yeah, bro. Of course."

Every answer enlarges the problem. Drinking acetone has been explained by a prior habit of eating nail polish. The man's theory of health now has at least two stages and a social-media provenance. The people around him have become anthropologists because intervention has failed and the culture requires description.

He is eventually removed from the store. Outside he continues offering the bottle to strangers.

"You guys want some? It's alcohol, bro."

He points to a man who does not look as though he has requested inclusion in the scene.

"This guy looks like he could go for a beer right now."

He explains that the acetone is stronger than beer. A woman nearby looks at the label and tells him, with the authority of somebody unwilling to enter a false ontology, that he is a dumbass and the bottle is nail-polish remover.

The prop creates an asymmetry of knowledge. The man knows the action is safe. The audience knows it is safe. Everyone physically present believes they are watching him injure himself. Their reactions are not foolish. Given their evidence, refusing to intervene would be irresponsible.

The free-will audit is therefore not taking place only in the man's behavior. It occurs inside the spectators' models. How quickly does an impossible action force them to reconstruct the person performing it? Does he misunderstand the label? Is he doing a trend? Does he eat nail polish? Is there a kind of acetone that is "the good one"? Each explanation is generated under pressure from a bottle full of water.

The rat bucket uses the same asymmetry with greater leverage. The bucket contains toy mice or rats—the man alternates between the terms—and a speaker that pro-

duces squeaking. He carries it into a warehouse store and announces that he would like to let them out.

"I got all these mice, bro. Can I just let them out right here?"

The employees tell him not to open the bucket.

"You want to see my rats?" he asks.

No one wants to see the rats. Seeing the rats requires opening the container, and opening the container is the event they are trying to prevent.

The speaker continues.

"Look, they're fighting, bro. Listen. They're fighting in there."

This supplies an animal-welfare argument for immediate release. The employees regard the conflict among the rats as a problem appropriately contained by the bucket. The man treats containment as the cause of the conflict. Both sides want the fighting to end. They differ on whether the solution is sixty rats entering the store.

A tug-of-war begins over the lid. The employee tries to hold it closed. The man insists that he must let them out. For a moment he wins. The lid opens far enough for her to see a dense layer of rat-shaped bodies while the speaker squeaks. She does not conduct a material inspection. She recoils and runs. Her brain has already rendered the animals.

"Oh, sorry," he says. "I didn't mean to scare you. I'll let them out over here instead."

The apology is responsive to the wrong proposition. She has attempted to communicate a global rule: do not release a bucket of rats inside this building. He interprets a local preference: this particular woman would rather not be present at the release point.

He relocates and asks another person.

"Can I let them out here? I found them on the street. I just want to let out my rats."

The first employee has been disarmed by the glimpse. The bucket has acquired an exclusion radius. To interfere physically is to risk the very event she believes would be catastrophic.

The actual stakes are a few minutes of confusion. The perceived stakes are a warehouse infestation. One loose rat would be difficult. Five dozen would distribute themselves beneath shelves, pallets, counters, and whatever private architecture the building uses to remain larger than the people inside it. They would be nearly impossible to recover immediately. They might reach food. They might reproduce. The store might require extermination, cleaning, closure, reports, and a meeting in which somebody had to explain why a

customer was permitted to release a bucket of street rats near the bulk merchandise.

No rat exists. The catastrophe is entirely represented.

The man has spent a small amount on toys and a speaker and caused the surrounding system to instantiate an emergency protocol. He supplies low-resolution evidence. Everyone else performs the expensive rendering.

If the universe is a simulation maintained by Elon Musk in the future, this is the point at which more equipment must be ordered. Ordinary users reuse cached scenarios. They commute, purchase standard burritos, cross streets in one direction, receive directions without diplomatic incidents, and keep rodents outside wholesale stores. Their afternoons are computationally cheap.

This man submits adversarial prompts to reality.

"Sir, a user has entered Costco with sixty rats."

"Don't let him release them."

"We told him."

"And?"

"He says they're fighting."

"Allocate another GPU."

"He's moving to a different aisle."

"Build the data center."

The simulation cannot reuse the scene because nobody has done this scene. It must generate employees who disagree over the bucket, security procedures for fictitious animals, a frightened woman who has seen exactly enough, and a man moving politely to another location because he did not mean to scare her. Free will is measured here not by escaping the simulation but by forcing it to render you.

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The air-freshener episode begins with an ontological dispute. The man approaches an employee in the automotive or cleaning section of a large store and asks for help choosing an air freshener. He is standing in front of products that are not air fresheners but are close enough to the concept to delay correction. Cleaning chemicals can make a room smell cleaner. Automotive products may produce odors. Something that removes the source of a smell can be said, indirectly, to freshen the air.

The employee asks whether he means the product that makes the air smell pleasant.

Yes. That one.

The employee takes him to the air-freshener section.

"So this is all the air fresheners, right?" the man asks. "There's no other section? This is it?"

The questions establish jurisdiction. An authorized representative of the store has identified these objects as substances intended to improve the air. The man asks which one is best. The employee recommends a scent.

"Oh yeah? Let's smell it."

He sprays the product into the air and toward the employee.

"Smell it, bro."

The employee becomes angry. An object intended to be dispersed into human environments has become threatening because the vector has changed. The ontology of the product remains benign. The pragmatics approach assault.

The man moves a short distance.

"I'm just trying to see if it smells good, man. I'll spray it over here."

The relocation solves the coordinates and preserves the act. The employee calls security. When security arrives, the man explains that he was testing an air freshener before buying it. This is technically true and emotionally incomplete.

Security sees a customer holding merchandise. The employee has lived through the entire accumulation:

the wrong aisle, the category dispute, the recommendation, the spray, the pursuit, the refusal to stop. Security arrives at the final frame and attempts to interpret it locally. The employee has context. Context has made him furious.

The man says, "My friend, my friend, calm down, my friend."

This is the worst available intervention. The person who generated the conflict adopts the role of de-escalator. The employee is not his friend and becomes increasingly committed to establishing the fact. He orders the man out, swears at him, and threatens him. Security, now concerned about the employee's aggression, stands between them.

The man notices that the employee is bald and gives him an improvised nickname.

"Okay, bald head. I'm leaving."

The employee objects to the nickname. The objection supplies more material. What began as product testing becomes a war over baldness while security protects the alleged aggressor from the person he has been spraying and naming.

On the way out the man encounters a bald woman.

"Hey, what's up, bald head?" he says.

She smiles.

"I'm bald head?"

"Yeah. What's up, bald head?"

They fist-bump. She invents a name for him in return—something like hair face—and he accepts it.

"You want to try my new air freshener?" he asks.

He sprays a little into the air. They smell it together.

"Yeah, that's really good," she says. She may buy one herself.

The same nickname and the same aerosol produce two different worlds within a short walk. The employee experiences an escalating violation. The woman experiences a stranger being funny. She does not merely tolerate the offered reality. She adds a line.

This is the experiment beneath the nuisance. The creator supplies a perturbation and reality supplies the writing. He cannot know whether the stranger will become a broom-wielding enemy, a deadpan collaborator, a frightened custodian of a rat bucket, an accidental customer for a red-sauce burrito, or a woman who answers "bald head" with "hair face." The clip is not complete until another person chooses a branch.

The word *NPC* is often used as an accusation that other people are not fully real. That is too cheap for what happens here. The employees, drivers, customers, and strangers are real precisely because their responses

cannot be selected in advance. The free-will maxer is not proving that he is a player while everyone else is scenery. He is testing whether another player can be found.

The test is not fair in every case. Workers cannot always leave. Their time is being borrowed without prior agreement. Spraying something toward a person is not transformed into courtesy because the product smells pleasant. A prank has an account, and irritation belongs on it. The debt is usually small, but it exists.

His best encounters repay it by producing something neither person possessed beforehand. Jenny gets a scene. The bald woman gets a nickname and perhaps a preferred air freshener. The man at the convenience store gets a recurring enemy, flowers, 119, and a broom-based mythology. The cost is not erased. It becomes part of an exchange whose value cannot be known until the stranger answers.

The title of the practice says only that the creator is maximizing his own will. The videos show something more interesting. He is hunting for goodwill.

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The man with Google Translate appears to speak no English except when English is required by the joke. He approaches a customer in a large store and says "excuse me" badly enough to establish difficulty. He holds a phone to the man's ear. A synthetic voice asks where the bathroom is.

The customer begins answering in English. The bathroom is over there; take a left. The directions could be communicated by pointing, but the man with the phone interrupts.

"No English, no English. Only Arabic."

He holds out Google Translate so the customer can speak into it. The customer repeats the directions. The man secretly disables or ignores the input and pastes another sentence. The phone reads it aloud.

"Get out of here, you mother trucker."

The customer looks at the phone.

"What the fuck? I didn't say that."

The alleged Arabic speaker cannot adjudicate the dispute because he has declared himself unable to understand English. Google Translate is the neutral intermediary and has apparently framed an innocent man.

"No English," he says. "No English. Only Arabic."

The customer tries again. The translation returns to the insult. The man begins recognizing exactly the fragments of English required to deepen the misunderstanding.

"You call me what? What mean mother trucker? You call me this one?"

The customer denies it. The man does not understand the denial. He attempts to recruit other shoppers by asking whether anyone speaks Arabic. Nobody resolves the treaty.

The customer could leave. He has already answered the question. He points again. The bathroom remains elsewhere, and the stranger remains linguistically injured. Finally the customer offers a different protocol.

"You want me to walk you over there? I'll show you."

The offer changes the scale of the encounter. Directions become a journey. The bathroom is far enough away to require an escalator. The two men begin walking through the store together while the accusation follows them.

"Mother trucker," the auditor says on the escalator. "What it mean? You call me this one."

The customer continues explaining that he did not say it. Explanation has lost its original object. He is

no longer helping a stranger locate a bathroom. He is defending his character during a pilgrimage to one.

The auditor asks whether they are friends.

"We friend, yes?"

The customer, who has already donated several minutes to the relationship, agrees.

"Sure. We can be friends."

"No English."

Language disappears immediately after delivering the desired answer. Comprehension is allocated dynamically. The friendship nevertheless remains.

They reach the bathroom. The customer has completed the side quest. The auditor asks for a hug. The customer gives him the ordinary horizontal bro hug, shoulder against shoulder, one arm, a pat. The gesture is sufficient to confirm that there is no lasting diplomatic damage.

"Okay, you're good, man," the customer says.

"Okay, thank you, my friend."

They separate. The customer begins walking away. The encounter has ended more warmly than it began.

The auditor runs after him.

"You give me other hug. You give me real hug."

The customer looks at him. His face contains the calculation of a man who has already crossed several

unnecessary branches and has been offered one more. The bathroom has been found. The insult has been denied. Friendship has been declared. A hug has been delivered. Nothing remains unresolved except the alleged quality of the hug.

He accepts.

The second hug is frontal and complete. For a moment the two strangers stand in a store embracing because a translation application falsely accused one of them of saying "mother trucker."

This is the most complete form of the audit. The creator does not merely refuse the standard dialogue tree. He offers an exit to somebody else.

The original script is short:

Where is the bathroom?

Over there.

Thank you.

The customer knows all his lines before the encounter begins. The auditor introduces a corruption. The translator lies. The customer can respond by becoming angry, walking away, calling security, or pointing more forcefully. Instead he chooses to escort the source of the problem across the building.

He accepts the side quest.

A side quest is not defined by importance. It is defined by deviation. Its value comes from the fact that the player could have remained on the main route and did not. Nothing grand occurs here. No life is saved. No fortune changes hands. A man spends several minutes explaining that he is not a mother trucker, rides an escalator with a stranger, agrees to a friendship, and gives two hugs instead of zero.

For those minutes neither participant knows the next line.

That uncertainty is one of the ordinary forms of freedom. It requires no exemption from causality. It requires only that the socially cached continuation fail to load.

Jenny accepts the side quest when she offers another scoop. The bald woman accepts when she returns the nickname. The customer accepts when he says he will walk the stranger to the bathroom. They do not become free because the auditor has bestowed freedom upon them. They reveal freedom by contributing something he did not request and could not predict.

The new order propagates.

The auditor says the burrito should contain sour cream. Jenny learns the law and asks whether it requires one more scoop. He says the stranger has called

him a mother trucker. The stranger rejects the accusation but accepts the friendship. He says "real hug." The man turns around.

The happiest clips are not those in which the auditor defeats an NPC. They are those in which another person notices the hidden exit and walks through it with him.

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Most of life must remain scripted. A civilization in which every customer renegotiated the ontology of every product would stop moving before lunch. Scripts are not evidence of enslavement. They are shared tools. They allow attention to be spent where novelty matters instead of on the protocol for receiving change.

The mistake is to confuse the tool with the world.

A script describes the overwhelmingly probable continuation of a situation. It does not exhaust the situation. Enter a shop, buy. Enter a restaurant, order. Approach a crosswalk, cross. Ask for a bathroom, receive directions. Meet a stranger, minimize the interaction until both parties can return to what they were already doing.

These continuations are so reliable that they acquire the atmosphere of natural law. People begin enforcing them without knowing which consequence they are

protecting. A second tortilla is too many carbs. A dollar can be offered without being released. A pedestrian can reverse. A customer can request the liquid around the beans. A person can ask for another hug after the authorized hug has concluded.

The first result of an audit is often irritation because irritation is the sensation of a script failing while its purpose remains active. The employee still needs the line to move. The driver still needs the road. The cashier still needs the customer not to drink poison. The store still needs to contain no rats. The owner still needs the Red Bull paid for. Their anger is not proof that they are machines. It is evidence that the interrupted script was doing work.

This gives the practice a limit. Free-will auditing is not valuable in proportion to the amount of chaos it produces. A person can always create novelty by causing real damage. That does not reveal unused possibility; it spends somebody else's possibilities as fuel. The impressive trick is leverage: a harmless or nearly harmless deviation that causes a large amount of reality to become newly visible.

Toy rats reveal the store's catastrophe model without releasing rats. Water in an acetone bottle reveals how strangers respond to apparent self-destruction without

poison. An impossible burrito reveals the discretion, humor, and physical technique of the employee without refusing to pay. The bathroom lie reveals a stranger willing to accompany a confused man through a building. The best audit returns the environment intact and leaves behind a story.

It may also leave behind a relationship. Repetition turns anonymous workers into recurring people. The convenience-store owner remembers. Jenny remembers. Memory changes the next clip before anyone speaks. The creator is no longer entering a generic shop. He is returning to somebody with whom a local history exists.

The simulation metaphor can therefore be read backward. The goal is not simply to consume compute by behaving randomly. Randomness is cheap. A random action has no demand upon the world except cleanup. The expensive act is to create a coherent local order that other people can learn.

The man declares that 119 is the authority. The owner repeats the catchphrase. The number enters memory. He declares that the sour-cream order is governed by carbohydrate restraint. Jenny offers another scoop without offering another tortilla. He declares

that he and the bathroom guide are friends. The guide performs friendship twice.

A small world has formed.

The world is not put in order only once. People produce local orders continuously: the order of a queue, a friendship, a restaurant, a joke, a family, a feud, a language game. Most are inherited. Some are improvised. The free-will auditor creates a strange order and watches to see whether anybody will put herself in unison with it.

Resistance is one answer. Participation is another. Both reveal the person.

This is why the videos become warmer as their lore accumulates. The creator begins by bothering somebody. The repeated bother develops a rhythm. The rhythm becomes recognition. Recognition creates the possibility of an apology, a flower, a callback, a glance from Jenny across the counter. The nuisance acquires a past.

He is not escaping the simulation. He is making it maintain state.

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In the famous bar scene from *Good Will Hunting*, Will humiliates a student who is using borrowed scholarship to dominate a conversation. The important move is not simply that Will knows more. He knows the sequence. He recognizes the source, the objection, and the reply. He can tell the man what he is going to say before he says it because the performance has been cached in a reading list.

The humiliation is: I can see your dialogue tree.

A script becomes most visible when somebody predicts it. The intellectual bully believes he is generating thought in real time. Will hears the next paragraph loading. The content may be sophisticated, but the continuation is automatic.

Free-will maxing begins at the same recognition and moves in the opposite direction. The auditor sees the next line and declines it.

Can I taste the Red Bull?

No testing.

The expected continuation is to pay or leave. He opens it.

You're almost across the street.

The expected continuation is forward. He walks backward.

Another tortilla?

The expected continuation is yes. Too many carbs.

Where is the bathroom?

The expected continuation is a point and a thank-you. Google Translate accuses the guide of being a mother trucker.

The pause after the failed continuation is the territory he hunts. For a second the other person has no cached line. The scene has to be generated.

The collapsed title carries three kinds of will. There is free will: the unused branch selected against the default. There is good will: the spirit in which a stranger may tolerate a nuisance long enough to discover a game. And there is goodwill: the social surplus that allows two people with no obligations to one another to construct a tiny relationship anyway.

The hunting matters because goodwill cannot be assumed. The same air freshener produces rage in one person and a fist bump in another. The same nonsense produces a broom at the convenience store and a second hug near the bathroom. The auditor does not know which person is present until he makes the offer.

This uncertainty protects the encounters from becoming demonstrations of a theory. He can propose the world but cannot control admission. Jenny may refuse. The driver may accelerate his anger. Security may remove him. The woman may call him a dumbass. The customer may walk away. The other person's freedom appears as the possibility that the clip will fail.

The phrase "NPC" therefore belongs to the setup, not the verdict. An NPC is what a person looks like while the interaction remains inside the default tree. The moment she produces an unrequested line, the category breaks. Jenny is making burritos until she asks whether the catastrophe needs another scoop. The bald woman is passing through the store until she becomes Bald Head and names him back. The customer is giving directions until he decides to accompany the stranger.

Player detected.

The result is not rebellion in the grand sense. No government falls. No social class is abolished. The deviations are deliberately trivial because triviality isolates the variable. The person is not accepting the side quest for money, duty, ideology, or survival. She is accepting because, for a minute, it might be more alive than continuing straight.

The great scripts of a life—career, marriage, citizenship, property, adulthood, respectability—are composed from the same material as the little ones. They differ in consequence, not in kind. Each presents a sequence whose familiarity can be mistaken for necessity. The burrito proves nothing about marriage. It demonstrates a method of attention: locate the next instruction, ask what enforces it, and distinguish the force of law, physics, care, habit, embarrassment, and imagination.

An audit may confirm the script. It may discover that the conventional route is efficient, kind, and structurally sound. It may also discover a painted door where everyone had reported a wall.

The important question is not "Why follow any rule?" It is smaller and more dangerous.

What happens if I don't execute this one?

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The convenience-store owner lifts the broom because the Red Bull is open. Jenny looks across the burrito shop because another container of red sauce is needed. The warehouse employee holds a bucket closed because she has seen enough rats to believe the rest. The cashier tries to stop a stranger from drinking acetone. The driver

says, with unexpected tenderness, "You're almost there, bro."

Each person is trying to preserve a world. The free-will auditor introduces another one beside it.

His world is not automatically better. It is slower, less efficient, more annoying, and difficult to insure. It produces terrible burritos, false emergencies, confused security guards, and customers who must explain that they have not called anybody a mother trucker. It also produces things the standard world has no field for recording: Jenny's offer, the wrong number 119, the children sharing red sauce, the woman who accepts Bald Head, the man who takes the escalator.

These are not outcomes of optimization. They are what optimization removes.

A main quest minimizes uncertainty between the player and the objective. A side quest introduces a person. The bathroom is reached less efficiently, but the route now contains a friendship. The burrito is made less efficiently, but the counter now contains Jenny. The Red Bull is purchased less efficiently, but the store now contains a recurring war with flowers.

The creator's genius, if that word can be applied to a man asking permission to release fighting rats in Costco, is not that he possesses more will than everybody else.

It is that he recognizes unused will as a social resource. He spends some of his own to create a gap and waits to see whether another person will spend hers.

Sometimes the answer is no. The employee wants him gone. The broom is real. The audit has found a boundary, even if the boundary is only patience.

Sometimes the answer is one more scoop.

Sometimes the answer is an escort through the store.

The first hug near the bathroom would have completed the interaction. He had answered the question, defended himself against the translator, walked the full distance, accepted a friendship, and delivered the customary physical confirmation.

The auditor let him leave.

Then he ran after him.

"You give me other hug," he said. "You give me real hug."

There was no rule requiring the man to turn around.

He turned around and hugged him again.

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