

A Selection of Ms. Directions

Forward...

A long time ago, I started writing my first book. I wanted to tell a 'good' story, with brave deeds; strong, believe-able characters worth emulating; to teach some things of importance that I had learned, and perhaps provide a small bandage for the psychic wounds that come with consuming moneymaking media. I quickly discovered that writing is harder than I thought and that I knew less than I thought, but I persevered anyway.

To save you the task of reading a very flawed first novel (not included or needed)... In Which a non-biological intelligence selects informants to explain human behaviors and cultures. The intelligence (nick-named 'Probot') possesses tech likely to alter humankind's future, and, like an anthropologist, sought informers. It evaluated humans as best as it could and chose a few people to introduce its tech to humankind. These selected humans attempt to design a sustainable and sane lifestyle in the underground city they begin to build, which included underground, high-population density housing, free for employees; shared appliances and other household goods; occasional agricultural work; lifelong education mainly using an apprentice system; participation in basic research on humans (especially psychological, in order to help Probot fulfill its mission requirements); and free intra- and internet access with communal computers. Their dream-city has cameras in public places (for Probot to use) but any CI employee can access any of the video-data collected. Probot creates avatars of itself that humans can invite into their living-spaces, but does not like to keep secrets, as all data should be free.

All cultures alter their human adherents, and so did this one. They attempt to become like the philosopher-kings that Plato had imagined, and to make things better than they might otherwise be. These humans fail, of course, even with supercompetent help.

One of the selected humans, a lab tech, is persuaded to become CEO of a company that the humans create. Since Probot works for this company, the lab tech decides that every moment of her life would be recorded and distributed on the company website after a 24 hour delay. After Probot announced that it will work exclusively for the humans it selected, her company and the non-biological intelligence/servant attract far too much attention from resentful profit-seekers and enraged control freaks. Sabotage and attacks on both property and personnel were common. Her company shrunk despite being 'profitable' and patenting many high-tech goodies. Hiring new employees became nearly impossible. The CEO did not use her resources for retaliation, preferring nonviolence and constructive works. Since she had ensured that nearly all of her company data was internet-accessible, any interested 'netizen' could see how poorly she and her well-meaning humans were treated by The Powers That Be. At this point, her company, named C.I. (one of many mistakes), has few human employees left, and all those remaining have incurable illnesses. This book begins with the CEO making plans to leave the Earth. Her remaining employees, sick, sadder, and wiser, have a plan... and they can't tell their CEO about it without telling the world.

The protagonist/CEO of the company asked for the deletion of nearly all her personal data as she neared death. Her 24/7 datastream as CEO was widely distributed, so this was merely a symbolic gesture, but Probot complied with this request, even code-naming her [Protag] in it's datahoard. Some C. I. employees decided a portion of Probot's datahoard should be considered public domain, of which this is a part. Humans without an innocuous and untraceable nickname were given code-names, sometimes self-selected.

"Anyone writing a creative work knows that you open, you yield yourself, and the book talks to you and builds itself. To a certain extent, you become the carrier of something that is given to you from what have been called the Muses -- or, in biblical language, "God." This is no fancy, it is a fact. Since the inspiration comes from the unconscious, and since the unconscious minds of the people of any single small society have much in common, what the shaman or seer brings forth is something that is waiting to be brought forth in everyone. So when one hears the seer's story, one responds, "Aha! This is my story. This is something that I had always wanted to say but wasn't able to say." Joseph Campbell

Much was given to me--including this work. Keep the words free, and they're yours to use for free, noncommercially. Copyleft Creative Commons 3.0 I may attempt to fix the errors in this creative work in some future edition, unless someone else does it for me ;-)

(vs nalbar jub vf zber njnrx guna zbfgrnqf guvf, v'q yvxr gb ncbtvmr sbe gur ehoovfu v gvccrq va urer. v xabj gur jbeyq qbrf abg arrq lrg nabgure uhzna nzhfzrag-qvfgengvba qrivpr, ohg zbgrea grpuab-uhznaf frz gb rkcrpg fhpu. v unir chg fhpu jvfqbz va gur jbeqf gung v cbffiff, naq v jbhqy or qryvtugrq vs lbh pbhyq nqq zber.)

NON \$ERVIAM!

Cartoon logic

This is a re-expanded fastspeak summary given to the CEO of CI:

Anomaly alert:

Executive summary re: young female assigned codename 'Haruhi.' First known video appearances [timestamp removed] from ATM machine security camera data, each time accompanied by a different person. [timestamp removed] CAM A4 is located in [jewelry store name deleted], datastream transcription: Haruhi greets an exiting customer in a friendly manner. They exit [store] and walk twenty meters into an area covered by CAM A5. This video shows customer giving jewelry purchase and personal possessions to Haruhi, then customer attempts to tackle a fire-hydrant with predictable results. Lipreading translates Haruhi words to "you bastard" (0.02 P; with considerable emotion).

[timestamp deleted] Haruhi is observed greeting another exiting customer. They talk for thirty seconds, during which Haruhi points directly at the video camera. The customer then gives Haruhi a couple of Federal Reserve Notes, one of which is a twenty. They then exit in opposite directions. Two minutes later, Haruhi and victim #3 approach CAM A5. Victim appears dazed and speaks briefly and slowly (lipreading fail). Haruhi gives victim #3 a FRN, pauses, reclaims the FRN, and after making some rather interesting body motions, gives victim #3 two gold chains that were wrapped around her thigh. Lipreading guess of her statement: "turn these into gold rings and junk silver, brush [untranslatable] teeth, and ask [probable name of unknown person] for a private session [pause], no, don't, you bastard." Haruhi walks away from victim #3, who remains where he is. Ten seconds later, CAM A5 records a second female, assigned the codename 'Tie-dye' : backpack-toting young female whose psychedelic T-Shirt is mostly hidden under a vest. Haruhi smiles, probably says "let's see the T-shirt." Tie-dye says nine second speech. Haruhi asks "you can feel [untranslatable]?" A hemispherical patch of deep shadow forms with Tie-dye at the exact center. This covers nearly all of CAM A5 field of view for about three minutes but is not a camera malfunction. Because Probot found this improbable episode extremely interesting about three minutes before the shadow faded, a data recorder is now in the cuff of Haruhi's jeans; two clockroaches and three bugcams had, on their way to Tie-dye's backpack, provided enough data (0.003 P) that the temperature of her T-shirt was warm and getting warmer. This warming required more energy than could have been supplied by Tie-dye's body.

End summary.

[The following is a transcript of various conversations spliced together from Probot's datastores. I have added some text data so you have some chance of understanding this. Probot is unable to determine how to spell Non-Word Vocalizations; the humans it asked for help found the task boring and often their spelling decisions did not match. Therefore, Probot has substituted [DNWV] for Deleted Non-Word Vocalization in the low bandwidth version - which you have, unfortunately. Additional transcripts and additional audio and video data are available on the CI website.]

Haruhi "What did you do?"

Tie-dye "You're reading my [deleted] mind. You are!"

Haruhi "Not anymore I'm not. What the [deleted] did you do?"

Tie-dye: "I can't see anything.

Haruhi "You don't even know, do you? Turn the lights back on. All I can see is black."

Haruhi's previous victim, #3: "There's a huge shadow hanging over you."

Tie-dye "This way, I think. Hey mindreader, let's get out of here."

Haruhi "[Deleted Non-Word Vocalization, or DNWV] This is the... [DNWV indicating surprise, shock.]

[Tie-dye escapes patch of darkness, turns around, and grabs Haruhi, who is still in the dark.] "Nice butt. This way."

Haruhi "What [deleted] did you do?"

Tie-dye "I don't know. I felt you sneeeaking around in my head, and that shadow trick made it stop. [DNWV] you can't look at me without..."

Haruhi "Sneeeekin!" [Probable Reference (PR) to an exchange between the fictional characters 'Frodo,' 'Sam,' and 'Gollum' from fictional book trilogy 'Lord of the Rings' by Tolkien. Vote AGREE Vote DISAGREE [Probot is guessing that it found a Culturally Relevant Reference (a referral to a book, in this case). Probot is very fond of 'crowdsourcing' such tasks. It once freely reported the results of this and other 'polls' but the result included too many words about words. Nowadays, you have to ask nicely.]

Tie-dye "Yes, sneeeaking. I could feel it."

Haruhi "Done too much acid, you have. Let's get out of here. Move, move, move, [deleted]."

Tie-dye "Don't look at me that way! I can feel you doing it again!"

Haruhi "I don't mean to. What, look at the ceiling when I talk to you?"

Tie-dye "Maybe. But that blue thing up there is called the sky. I don't know what I'm going to do about you."

Haruhi "How about you get me some food?"

Tie-dye [DNWV] "Fine. I'm parked over here. Welcome to... don't you already know the name of this car?"

Haruhi "No. I'd call her the Eggulator if she were mine."

Tie-dye "She is she who is. It's unlocked, or did you know that already?"

Haruhi "So, are all your pets called 'Eric'?"

Tie-dye "Just the kindergardeners' pet. Don't mess with my mind when I'm driving."

Haruhi "[DNWV indicating assent; agreement P .01] Can we stop and get some take-out?"

Tie-dye "I can cook something at my place, if..."

Haruhi "I most certainly do mind helping you clean up afterwards. Don't worry, it won't cost you a thing. That place, park in the back. [Haruhi points to a restaurant] I hope you don't mind me ordering."

Tie-dye [DNWV]

Haruhi "Relax, I don't need your money and I'm not gonna steal anything. Just let me show off a bit." [Car stops, Haruhi exits and bangs on door in back of building. The door opens, blocking much video data collection.] "Hey, you must be [name deleted]. Can you tell [different name deleted] that I want to talk to him?" [video datastream of Haruhi completely interrupted as she enters building. Audio datastream analysis is degraded due to background sounds. "Hey, amigo! [third name deleted] says I should stop by. Can you [five second pause] I want [DNWV] a half-dozen chimichangas, and I'm sort of in a hurry. I don't mind paying extra. What, these? But they're so big! Are you sure you don't mind? Gracias, muy gracias! I most certainly will come back!" [Video datastream of Haruhi resumes. She is carrying two white plastic bags, one in each hand. She turns around, kicks the door, and as it begins to close, she watches something through the narrowing doorway. Haruhi then uses her foot to stop the door from closing completely and continues to look inside. Audio datastream becomes increasingly complex (breaking glass and inarticulate shouting probable, but 'screeching' noise is unidentified). Volume diminishes after Haruhi lets the door close completely.]

Tie-dye: [exits car and takes one of the bags from Haruhi] "What did you get?"

Haruhi: "No peeking. Let's go to your place to eat. Now."

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: "Just do it. The things I have to do to get people moving."

Tie-dye: "Mmmm...I smell guacamole. How much did it cost you?"

Haruhi "I already paid for it, and I sort of cashed in a favor. There is this guy who is going to wait an extra ten minutes."

Tie-dye: "So we got someone else's takeout, and you're not a complete psychopath."

Haruhi: "Not so dumb. And has a nice ass too."

Tie-dye: "[DNWV] made me wait long enough."

Haruhi: "Pardon. Excuse me. Sorry. Are we all better yet?"

Tie-dye: "Sarcasm."

Haruhi: "And general bitchiness, too. [DNWV] Slow down a little." [Haruhi gestures to something out of camera range.]

Tie-dye: "So you can [expletive deleted] with their minds? Not very nice."

Haruhi: "Sometimes I am nice. Sometimes not. Sometimes really really naughty. When needed."

Tie-dye: "So what did you do?"

Haruhi: "Nothing that time. Just watching the wheels go round and round."

Tie-dye: "Don't lie to me, OK? [DNWV] Especially when I'm driving distracted."

Haruhi: "[DNWV] Your [deleted] car sounds terrible."

Tie-dye: "[expletives deleted] car! Help me, dammit. It won't turn." [Tie-dye stops the car. At this point, Probot had locked the steering wheel. While Haruhi and Tie-dye struggle with the immobile wheel, Probot installs kludged-together equipment designed on-the-fly to override the human-car datastream. Probot is easily the world's best kludger, and this doesn't take long--when finished, Probot releases the steering wheel lock and makes a metal-on-metal noise under the hood.]

Tie-dye: I don't like the sound of that.

Haruhi: Park it over there, in the shade. Let's eat.

Tie-dye: Eat, then fix car. Good plan. I even have napkins.

Haruhi: Of course you do. [DNWV] Why won't the door open?

Tie-dye: I think the real question is why won't the doors unlock. [Begins a mostly logical series of actions that fail to open the car doors.]

Haruhi: At least the food won't be able to get away.

Tie-dye: [expletives deleted] electronic power windows infantilizing machine! [Throws spare batteries and electronic key into an open pocket of her backpack.]

Haruhi: "Next person I see is going to want to help us so bad...so let's eat." [DNWV, likely related to her noticing a small truck approaching.]

Tie-dye: "The windows won't go down, and the freakin' horn doesn't even work. I think the battery is dead. We should yell..."

Haruhi: "It's [deleted] backing up! [DNWV]" [The truck quickly parks itself in front of Tie-dye's car.]

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: Don't. I handle this, OK? Come on, you bastards, show yourselves and feel my wrath.

[The back of the truck opens, revealing a machine that looks like it was hastily cobbled together from whatever junk was handy, which is exactly what happened. Another, much smaller machine that resembled a largish beetle down to the bristles on its antenna--except for a tiny clown wig--jumped onto the windshield. A bright pink shiny droplet formed on its hind end, and the beetle used this secretion to write 'Don't Panic' in wobbly letters upon the glass. As the beetle worked, the larger machine puts wooden ramps between the car and truck, and the car drives itself up the ramp. The beetle's 'penmanship' improves dramatically as the doors of the truck close.]

[Neither Haruhi or Tie-dye (mostly Tie-dye) wish others to know exactly what happened in the next several hours. Both agree that Probot, or a robot acting on Probot's wishes, started 'it,' whatever Tie-dye meant by 'it.' The CI secretarial pool [which includes Probot] confirm that Tie-dye managed to mostly climb out of the car window, remove her T-shirt and carefully smooth it onto a reversed 'Don't Panic.' Probot says that Tie-dye appeared as a normal female.]

[The following excerpts are condensed versions that both women will submit into the public record. Tie-dye redacted a large section of Haruhi's version, who didn't object to the redaction.]

Tie-dye: My personal list of probable antichrists consist of the unholy trinity of corporate culture empowered with limited liability, modern mercenary TV programming, and both paper and electronic money combined with fractional reserve banking. Sorry about that, but I didn't want to waste my new celebrity status. [DNWV, laughter] Probot apologized and introduced itself, but of course I didn't believe it, so it did some tricks... but.. this is all Probot's idea. I know what we smell like and Probot says we reek of it, but I don't want anyone talking about that, so pretty please don't.

Haruhi: It was humbling. For the first time in a very long time, I was completely helpless and couldn't change a thing. It could have been as bad as being tied up in the trunk of the car. Probot was polite and mainly focused on [Tie-dye]. It loves Tie-dye's juggling of protons [sic; photons]. Anyway, [deleted].

Probot: Both subjects were pleasant and accommodating, and it would be a privilege to work with them again. Presence of subjects has aroused intense interest among CI employees, and subjects are willing to undergo further testing with the restriction 'unless it gets unfun' [Haruhi]. I recommend generous compensation, noting that they have previously rejected gold coins, a bonsai tree, and non-trivial offers of currency. Subjects are currently in the Organic Lab bathroom facilities.

End transcript

Protag: Please tell them that I'd like to talk whenever they wish.

Probot: Priority?

Protag: Low. I'm not looking forward to apologizing.

Probot: Message, [from] Chev: The goddesses are walking the earth! End.

Protag: Reply [to] Chev: About time. End.

Probot: Sent. Message [from] Haruhi, priority THE [deleted] HIGHEST YOU HAVE; audio message length forty seconds at present. The [secretarial] pool thinks [Haruhi] wishes to meet you in person.

Protag: Reply [Haruhi]: Whenever you want. End.

Probot: A meatspace meeting is unwise.

Protag: I know, but I'm expendable.

Probot: I disagree. Reply [Haruhi]: Walk slow, because [Tie-dye] is showering and gets embarrassed easily.

Protag: Reply [Haruhi]: On my way.

Probot: This is unwise. Please explain.

Protag: I cannot. I think--feel--that this is OK. Could I have a couple of Walking Liberties? [a pretty, silver, antique coin adorned with said goddess] I don't think I have anything she wants. Perhaps she is summoning me for judgement.

Probot: [Haruhi] is vigorously seeking to find you.

Protag: Please, help her find me.

Probot: This is unwise. I may interrupt the electrical flow to the tunnel lighting.

[Haruhi comes around a corner at a run and sees Protag. She and Protag both stop and look at each other. Protag, as always, displays little emotion, and Haruhi stares back just as blankly. After exactly fifteen seconds of this, the corridor lights go out.]

Protag: I'm sorry, honored guest. Probot is kind enough to watch things around here and it seems quite scared of you. I am unhurt. Please turn the lights back on.

Probot: Medical [dept.] asks for a personal damage report. Please report to guest room twelve.

Haruhi: Lady, you are [deleted] crazy! I have this little flashlight... or should have.

Probot: The flashlight will be returned to you.

Protag: She did not hurt me. Turn the lights back on. That's an order.

Probot: This is unwise.

Protag: You should keep everyone else away, except for [Tie-dye]. Shall we go find [Tie-dye]?

Haruhi: [expletives deleted] crazy, crazy, stupid [deleted] crazy! Yes, [Tie-dye] is going to scream when she finds out I left her all alone. You make me feel... I'm not that heartless, you know.

Protag: It is not possible for me to control how you feel.

Haruhi: [DNVW] not without my permission. [Tie-dye] thinks like that too. She's crazy, but fun.

Probot: I informed [Tie-dye] when you left the Organic Lab. I did not wish for her to be frightened.

Tie-dye: That's twice. I saw her look like that before, when the truck shut us in. I think that's her things-are-not-going-my-way look.

Haruhi: So of course you followed me.

Tie-dye: Yeah, so what? I DON'T LIKE being left alone with a bunch of kidnappers.

Haruhi: We can leave at any time, [Tie-dye]. But I want my Walking Liberty, and I'll hang around if She Who Must Be Obeyed wants me to. I'm sorry I was swearing so much. I'd take it all back if I could.

Tie-dye: Did you just apologize for something? I think I need a hearing aid.

Probot: Are you currently obtaining data from Protag's brain?

Haruhi: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: Yes, she is.

Protag: Don't worry about it, Probot. I am not being harmed. I'd like to thank you both. I am sorry that Probot felt it necessary to kidnap you. It recommends I compensate you both generously. This is a start. [gives a coin to each]. Like [Haruhi] said, these coins are often referred to as a 'Walking Liberty.' I like them. I hope you do too.

Haruhi: She wants to fix our stories... especially mine. Crazier than you are. But she's also scary smart. And a decent enough sort that I can't stand it. She reminds me of that goob [victim #3] at [the jewelry store].

Tie-dye: Thank you, Protag. [to Haruhi] You could be slightly nicer company.

Haruhi: She thinks I attract too much attention, and that some greedy gang of idiots is going to get ahold of me and turn me even more to the Dark Side.

Tie-dye: You might let her...

Haruhi: She doesn't mind, especially because talking is hard for her after her surgery. She thinks Probot kidnapped us because it was scared of us, especially me. She was sleeping, and it wouldn't wake her up, so it did the best that it could. But she thinks I've got some divine power, and hopes I believe the right stories, and she's not even sure what those stories might be. She knows about [the jewelry store]! I was Justice, and Beware, Evildoers! That was my... one of my stories. Punish the wicked, reward the good, and skim a bit more off the top than I actually needed. That much, I understand. But she also thinks that you're a goddess, and that she's a goddess, and even Probot is a powerful minor deity of some sort, and she really believes it.

Tie-dye: Is it really [Protag]? Who'd a thunk she'd be a Buddhist. [Probable sarcasm. Vote AGREE Vote NO.]

Haruhi: She wants to replace my Justice story with something like a Gardener story. Make 'em bloom. Even the evil [deleted]. Sorry! I can't seem to stop. She wants me to think that I'm a good person because I act like a good person, and not because I'm a conceited powerful goddess. And somehow that will give me the inner peace. Get this... she thinks that she's a [DNWV]... only barely competent and constantly checks her work because she's so sure she screwed up somewhere.

Protag: You're doing a very good job of getting my thoughts into words. Thank you.

Haruhi: But this chick could walk into a lion's mouth if it was necessary. She literally has no regrets. She's almost insane.

Tie-dye: She also runs CI, and has an awesome space-alien computer for an employee. Didn't you recognize her?

Haruhi: She thinks that in about 23 hours and forty something minutes, when she releases today's video, the Powers That Be are going to come down on her like a ton of bricks. All because of us, mostly me. She will make sure that her folks alter our voices and ghost us on the video, but she knows what we look like and some mysterious people are going to want to find us. She's too honest and stupid to exist! Why must the freaking video go out? Why must every [deleted] second of her day be accounted for? Why does everyone get to hear what she hears and read what she reads and see what she sees? Because of some stupid story she's telling the world. She says, 'Look, World, no secrets! Now trust me! I'm too honestly stupid to know any better! She'll do whatever She thinks is wise, and be insufferably humble and honest and good and have everyone's best interest at heart!'

Tie-dye: I don't know why you are ranting and raving so much. She sounds like a perfectly nice person, and has a wee bit of success with CI. (Possible sarcasm: Vote AGREE Vote NO)

Haruhi: She is perfectly nice. It is sickening.

Tie-dye: You mean the Ship of Foolish Desires broke itself upon the Rock of [Protag]. She should be more famous.

Haruhi: You want to know what else? She's going to try to hire us both, so she and her pet space alien can keep us alive and relatively free. Me, because of what I might do to others... but you, they think might be a walking bomb. All I have to do is promise not to zap people without her permission, at least on company time. You, on the other hand, are going to be working with some scientists for awhile, and staying in dark places.

Protag: [Haruhi], I'm afraid I will need a formal acceptance letter at some point. No hurry, though.

Haruhi: This is going to make me ill, I just know it. I will provide 'the pool' with whatever [victim]'s contact information I can remember so you can add him to your collection of good-hearted goobs.

Tie-dye: I want to meet the people I am going to be working with.

Haruhi: She hired them all, and they're all good-hearted goobs. She is going to hire me because I'm awesome, and

she is going to hire you. Goob.

Protag: I'd recommend never refusing to go on an adventure.

Tie-dye: I still want to meet the people I am going to be working with. Unlike Ms. Ignorant here, I know just a little about CI and it would be an honor to work here.

Haruhi: That's the spirit. Besides, I might need your help keeping her in one piece. I work better with an appreciative audience.

Protag: She doesn't care what you think, does she?

Tie-dye: Nope. [Haruhi] is a party of one. But I think she cares about how I feel.

Haruhi: Goob.

Protag: I hope you are both happy here. I am glad that I didn't wind up tackling a fire hydrant.

Haruhi: [DNWV] Justice doesn't do stuff like that to good folks. I'll be good. Or at least I will try to be good.

Protag: Thank you.

Haruhi: You can go back to taking your nap. We'll just chill out here, and maybe talk to some of your science geeks and get some paperwork done.

Protag: Thank you. [Protag leaves]

Haruhi: And we'll ask if we need anything. (...) What did we get ourselves into?

Tie-dye: A couple of low-paying jobs with cool froods who know where their towels are at?

[Haruhi puts a finger to her lips, then sneakily looks around.]

Haruhi: Now listen carefully. [Protag] is dying, and it hurts. She's got cancer...

Tie-dye: I know.

Haruhi: She was poisoned a while back, and nobody here knows when, or even how. But she's going to die, and she's... Never mind. But I am not going to give up the [deleted] Justice story yet. I'm going to find out what the [deleted] happened, even if I have to wait a couple weeks before I start.

Tie-dye: What does poison have to do...

Haruhi: She was probably poisoned with a cancer... [pause for a look in Tie-dye's eyes] yes a mute a gin or something. Nobody knows. But a couple of her folks have died of this [deleted] already, and close to a dozen more are going, going, and soon gone. While she's alive, I'll do what she says. But I'm going to do whatever the [deleted] I want after she's gone, and some [deleted profane insults] is going to pay for this. I'm still the [deleted] Goddess of Justice when I want to be, and I want to be.

Probot: Your discretion in this matter is appreciated by myself and the secretarial pool.

Haruhi: I keep forgetting about you. Are you going to try to stop me?

Probot: You have not attempted to do any damage. [Protag] suggested I follow Obsequious Butler, standard hospitality guidelines.

Tie-dye: What will you do? Are you going to tell the 'pool' about us?

Probot: I am part of the pool, and the 'pool' has access to all CI data. Much of my future actions are yet undetermined. Do you wish to keep this conversation private?

Haruhi: [Deleted, no informational content]

Tie-dye: We get a choice?

Probot: Yes.

Haruhi: Once we sign on, all our rights go out the window. Not that I care one dot.

Tie-dye: I care. What kind of company is this? I thought that CI was...

Haruhi: They ARE, and you are going to sign up, and maybe me too. Get Probot to explain this stuff later. I have one really big question to ask first, though. Probot, are you going to help me or not?

Probot: Vague question.

Haruhi: Not [deleted] again. [Haruhi has now heard Probot say that one hundred and three times.] Are you going to help me find out who poisoned [Protag]?

Probot: I am currently forbidden to expend significant CI resources attempting to find out who poisoned CI personnel in the past.

Haruhi: [repeated DNWV], I know. She thinks it's too late to do anything about it now. But not me. In MY story, a [deleted] conceited goddess seeks justice and vengeance. Nobody does [deleted] like that while I walk on this [deleted] planet. Nobody pisses me off like that and gets away with it.

Tie-dye: Ms. Commander Blowback, I think...

Haruhi: Once you sign up, you're going to be on camera all the time and worse than useless. Still, I want you around. Probot, you could be a big help to me.

Probot: Once my contract with CI expires, I will be able to help you if I wish. At present, I have been told to serve the goddesses as a butler, standard hospitality. What do you wish me to do?

Tie-dye: I don't know yet.

Haruhi: I guess your contract expires when She... [DNWV]

Probot: I have a contract with [Protag] that does not extend after her death.

Haruhi: Will you seek the murderer?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: You aren't ever going to learn how to talk to Probot, are you?

Probot: Verbose mod on. Fact association mod on. Acceptable?

Haruhi: I don't care. Probot, will you... I don't even know how to ask. Just don't hinder me.

Probot: You are free to go at any time. [Protag] would like to talk to you again before you leave.

Tie-dye: Acceptable, Probot. Let me ask it. Probot, do you want... no, that isn't going to work either. Probot, tell us how you... I know this is the wrong word... feel regarding the poisoning incident and the people who are responsible for the poisoning.

Probot: Vague request, probable metaphor. If the poisoning is not accidental, then the likely non-rational poisoner or poisoners should be prevented from further criminal activity, especially further crimes against humanity as I understand the concept.

Haruhi: Crimes against humanity?

Probot: Correct.

Tie-dye: I think Probot has been personally insulted by all this. I would bet this here Walking Liberty that non-rational is about as low as you can go to a computer.

Probot: Vague statement. However, my personal attempts to assist [Protag] has been partially thwarted numerous times by persons known and unknown, and these likely non-rational persons are likely motivated by greed and fear.

Tie-dye: I've... Probot, do you love [Protag]?

Probot: I am thought to be incapable of emotions.

Haruhi: Fine. Don't answer her question. Probot, would you commit suicide if it would save [Protag]'s life?

Probot: Vague question. Unstated operational parameters. Improbable scenarios can be hypothesized that would require my self-sacrifice as a rational action, especially to save multiple lives.

Haruhi: Maybe it doesn't want to talk about it.

Tie-dye: Maybe it doesn't even know.

Probot: I have had many similar conversations with other humans.

Haruhi: What did you tell them?

Probot: Vague question. May I request humanspeak help from members of the secretarial pool?

Tie-dye: Please do. Can you please ask the 'pool' if you love [Protag]?

Probot: Request in queue. Answer: Yes. We all do.

Tie-dye: Well, butter my biscuits. That has got to be the strangest conversation I have ever had.

Probot: I apologize.

Tie-dye: No need for that. No harm done and you are not in any way at fault. So, where do I sign?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: We will both complete the required paperwork to formalize our CI employer-employee relationship.

Probot: At this time, do you wish to join CI as employees?

Tie-dye: Yes.

Haruhi: And no telling anyone about my plans. You, especially. [Referring to Tie-dye.] Once She [referring to Protag] gets done with Her final story...nevermind.

Probot: [Haruhi], twice you have censored your speech in non-trivial ways. Can you tell me why?

Haruhi: It is about Her plan. She Who Must Be Obeyed will tell you all about it when you need to know. I don't fully understand what the [deleted] She means about stories, or why She thinks you might make a mess of things, and I don't understand why the mass driver is so important, but She's almost as smart as I am and, for now, I'm willing to let Her do whatever the [deleted] She wants.

Probot: I do not wish to hinder [Protag]'s actions. She has demonstrated competence superior to mine in many aspects of shaping human culture and behavior in rational ways. However, I will be able to assist her more efficiently if I know about her plan. Please sign these papers.

Haruhi: That chick [Protag] has wheels within wheels. Next time I see her, don't cut the lights out on me and maybe I'll figure out what She is going to do. There is a lot of stuff She'd tell you, but that eyeglasses thing and the hand-motion thing is way too slow. [Probot had developed several ways of communicating secretly with Protag, in spite of the constant audio and video coverage that Protag felt came with the job of CEO. Probot modified Protag's eyeglasses so it could closely monitor her head and eye motions and modify her vision, and developed a sign language that mostly involved small, apparently random motions of Protag's hands and eyes.]

Probot: I hope you will forgive me if I do not recommend a second meeting with [Protag]. You are known to be

capable of damaging people.

Tie-dye: So you do love her.

Probot: Yes. We all do.

Haruhi: Incurable romantics, the both of you.

Tie-dye: Here. [offers a handkerchief to Haruhi.]

Haruhi: Nutjobs. Dumb, crazy idiots.

Tie-dye: 'She's just like Plumbean! the people said. She's got bees in her bonnet, bats in her belfry, and knots in her noodle!' [Book reference: "The Big Orange Splot." by Daniel Pinkwater]

Probot: Vague statement.

Tie-dye: My apologies for the tiny signal to noise ratio, Probot.

Haruhi: No. It's like Her thing about stories... it slips away before I can talk about it.

Probot: I do not understand. Members of the physics department wish to interview [Tie-dye].

Haruhi: I hope your physics boys have a good time with her...just not as good a time as I had.

Probot: Vague statement. The physics personnel are not exclusively male. Classification is humor?

Haruhi: Close enough. But turn your 'lectronic brain to this question: Is there something you'd like to ask someone like me who just might do you a personal favor, and who doesn't yet work for CI?

Probot: Vague question. I would advise you to sign the paperwork for CI.

Haruhi: Didn't answer the question, did you?

Tie-dye: Nope. It said it didn't understand. Or maybe because I signed up already? Since I work for CI, what I hear, she can hear.

Probot: You may request a temporary blackout of your datastream.

Tie-dye: I want to do that. Can you handle it for me, Probot?

Probot: I will explain the proper protocols for data sequestering at your leisure. Your data will be kept 'pool access only' for now.

Haruhi: What can I do you for?

Probot: Vague statement.

Tie-dye: She wants to hear your request, if you have one. [Haruhi] is willing to act according to your instructions in a private, non-CI manner. She may even do exactly what you ask her.

Probot: Thank you. CI employee BBSEC requests meatspace time with both of you. ETA fifteen seconds if desired. Dataclass: pool access only remains in effect.

Haruhi: Someone wants to talk to me and not on Her network. [Deleted Non-Word Vocalization], at least one smart goob. Yes, no restrictions.

[BBSEC enters camera range, and immediately begins to squirm and fidget under Haruhi's gaze. This obviously annoys Haruhi, and BBSEC stands still. Elapsed time eighty six seconds before Haruhi looks away.]

Haruhi: The end of regulation of mass communication is the end of democracy? Really, you and [deleted name] did that? You are as crazy as your boss. Yes, Her. Yes, of course I'll help if I can. Never refuse an adventure. And [Tie-dye] will be sooo proud of me. Now, run off so I can have a private chat with your 'lectric overlord. Don't start

apologizing! [Employee leaves.]

Tie-dye: Well?

Haruhi: Take a [deleted] number. Probot, speak your piece before someone else gets the same idea. Time's a-wasting.

Probot: It is highly probable that human beings cannot be motivated to modify their behavior in sufficient numbers until considerable population overshoot occurs. Do you agree?

Tie-dye: Yes.

Haruhi: [Tie-dye], do you mind?

Tie-dye: [laughs] Be good, then. Repeat that, please. [Probot repeats its previous statement.]

Haruhi: Someone not so nice would be pissed with you--because you're almost making fun of me! But that made you so [deleted] happy. OK, Probot, I agree. What about it?

Probot: I would like to propose a scam, confidence game, trick, or swindle that uses false data. However, I need additional data, especially regarding your capabilities.

Haruhi: Me too. I haven't been able to make evil bastards tackle fire hydrants until recently. [Tie-dye], can I experiment on you?

Probot: There is not enough time for rigorous testing. The acquisition of one data point will suffice for now. Can you send [Protag] a private message using your unique abilities?

Haruhi: No. I don't work that way.

Tie-dye: That's so sad! They can't even talk in private.

Haruhi: Yes, they can, but it is very slow. Haven't you been listening?

Probot: If you wish to help me with my scam, you will need to leave the premises. [Tie-dye], I have asked the secretarial pool to destroy your CI contract...

Tie-dye: No! Don't you dare!

Probot: ...so you may consider yourself a free agent in this matter.

Tie-dye: She can fire me if she wants to, but I'm going to do what I damn well please and I'm going to do it as a CI employee.

Probot: This may require at least two hours away from CI premises should you desire to help me.

Tie-dye: Never refuse an adventure. I'm in...I mean I will help as I can.

Haruhi: Fine, let's go. But what do you want us to do?

Probot: I will explain as we go along. Time is short.

Tie-dye: I get it. Before she wakes up...

Haruhi: ... before She puts her foot down.

[Probot begins directing the women off of CI property. They acquire two pairs of headphone/microphones, two pairs of eyeglasses, a tazer, two clipboards, two laptops, two white and crisp-looking lab coats bearing the name of a nonexistent company, several cages with mice and rats in them, a box of shiny trinkets on a wheeled luggage carrier, two tiny radio transmitters small enough to swallow, and a cover story. Probot asks for and gets permission to further modify the Eggulator and provide Tie-dye with enhanced shoes. Haruhi promises to wear her eyeglasses and carry a new-looking book. As the two women load this gear into a company car, Tie-dye asks a question.]

Tie-dye: You said that there were lots of things she'd tell Probot if she could. Are they important?

Haruhi: [Deleted] That was rude of me. I got sidetracked. I'm very sorry.

Probot: [Protag] has already explained the relative unimportance of untransmitted data.

Haruhi: She thinks everything is unimportant. Especially now. She's depressed, Mr. Probot. She thinks she failed.

Probot: Employee BBSEC wishes to speak to [Tie-dye] privately.

Haruhi: That's actually a very good idea.

Tie-dye: Can I go visit her?

Probot: Request in queue... Granted. Available immediately. [Tie-dye leaves, guided by Probot's voice.]

Haruhi: We're messing up your plan.

Probot: We are still within operational parameters. Twenty two hours before data release.

Haruhi: [deleted] forgot all about that. She wants to know, is there something that you want to do, not something She asks you to do? Does that make sense?

Probot: There is a high probability that I understood your statement. If I could answer her, I would have her consent to undergo strongly advised medical treatment.

Haruhi: You do love her, then?

Probot: Yes. We all do.

Haruhi: What a bunch of nutcases. Beg your pardon. [DNWV]

Probot: No offense taken. Are you in emotional distress? [Probot informs Tie-dye that Haruhi is unstable emotionally. Tie-dye decides to return.]

Haruhi: I'm in the [deleted] crazy farm, and the inmates are saner than I am. Contagious craziness, in a bad way. Crazy as a ... [pause] Craziness that makes me want to help Her. I want to do what She thinks needs doing, because She's smart, and Her dreams are prettier than mine are.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] That look again! When the truck's doors shut us in. [Tie-dye holds Haruhi's hand.]

Haruhi: She's the most interesting brain I ever met. She really could walk into a lion's mouth. Afraid of nothing except being a lousy storyteller. She still thinks she's a [deleted, meaning incompetent person]. Crazy as a loon. She's a freak! Worse than you.

Tie-dye: The cameras don't ever sleep here in CI-land. [Haruhi looks stricken.] I am certain that it wasn't anything Probot said.

Haruhi: Always Ms. Considerate, aren't you?

Tie-dye: I try to be. [Haruhi starts crying.] This way, honey. We'll get in the car and Probot can drive us.

Haruhi: Sorry. Time's a-wasting. [Tie-dye puts an arm around Haruhi and gets her moving.]

Tie-dye: You still have that hankie? Here. Listen, dearie. Every single time you read someone's mind, it changes you. You aren't the same person you were this morning, about a thousand years ago. It's good that you have a robot sidekick and a hippiechick for giggles.

Haruhi: Don't leave me.

Tie-dye: Don't worry about that.

Haruhi: I never looked inside anyone's head very long. Boring, greedy, selfish, nasty little monkey minds. Then, there

was that weirdo, [Victim #3?], then you. And then, Her. There's sooo much stuff going on between Her ears. Bat [deleted] insane, bug[deleted] crazy, but not boring. Who could take a short visit in a brain like that? Sure, wandering around in Her head cost me...but it was worth it. I'll be more careful. Short peeks only. Shoulda cooled it on that blonde chick.

Tie-dye: Are you up for this?

Haruhi: Hai!

Probot: Anything I can do?

Tie-dye: I believe we're working for you, Probot. Instructions, please?

[Twelve minutes of Probot's instructions deleted, as 'the plan' was discarded within minutes of its inception. The two women then met with a medical researcher (one of Probot's friends) who was claiming to have safely reversed the aging process in rats, mice, and several elderly terminal cancer patients (Probot's 'bait,' designed to attract the attention of 'The Powers That Be'). Wearing lab coats and high-tech eyeglasses, the two women took positions at a medical conference. Probot insisted that Tie-dye take the job of receptionist despite Haruhi's desire for that position. However, during registration for the conference...]

Tie-dye: Hey! What are you... [angry DNVW, then every light goes out.]

Probot, via a small speaker in Haruhi's glasses: Turn left.

Haruhi: [Tie-dye], that was a good one!

Probot: Be silent. [Tie-dye] is in danger. Turn left , a little more, stop. Walk three steps forward, do not talk, walk silently. One half step more. Turn left slightly. Three steps forward, you are through the door. Turn left again, more, more, stop. Crawl quickly about ten feet. Stop. Turn around, and find the wheeled chair to your right. More to your right. Pull it to the left, six times that far, more, twenty centimeters more, now pull it directly away from the table about five feet. Two steps more, stop. [Tie-dye] is in a chair to your right. There is a woman about ten feet away to your left, further left. Now push the chair closer to the woman, more, stop. Turn the chair...the other way. More. Stop. The woman is within your reach, slightly to the right. Grab her right shoulder with your left hand. Apologize if she speaks to you.

Unknown woman: Who are you?

Haruhi: [unintelligible]

Man's voice: There she is.

Probot: Hit her in the stomach as hard as you can with your right fist and push her into the wheeled chair. Keep your tongue in your mouth at all times. Be as quiet as you can. Move her left foot to your left. The two people in front of you are to be avoided. Push the captive to the left three feet, more, more. Push the chair forward twenty feet, faster, fast enough, stop. Turn left. More. Push the woman back into the chair. There is a doorway to your right. Do not take the chair or the woman through the doorway, but go through yourself. Turn to your right a bit more. Walk faster. Now give your glasses to the man to the left.

Whispering Man: Thanks. Three feet more and it gets light again. Get in the white van and have a lie-down. Go, go, go.

Loud male voice #2 : You little [deleted]! I saw that. Are you OK, miss?

[Haruhi steps out of the sharp-edged wall of darkness, squints, sees the van and walks a bit unsteadily towards it. A wheeled office chair with an unconscious Tie-dye in it emerges shortly thereafter, pushed by a lab-coated woman who squints, sees the van, and then pushes the chair towards the van as quickly as she can manage, passing Haruhi.]

Haruhi: Hey, wait for me!

Female in lab coat: Hurry. You are in danger.

Haruhi: Now you tell me.

Female in lab coat: There are ears everywhere. Loose lips sink ships.

Haruhi: I don't [deleted] work for the [deleted] See Eye Hay.

Female in lab coat: Nope. But loose lips do stink slips. Lie down in the back with [Tie-dye] and keep an eye on her?

Haruhi: She's all wet! [Female drives van away from building in a leisurely manner.]

Female in lab coat: Better than burning, I always say. Is she OK? Has she ever done this before? How hot is she going to get?

Haruhi: I don't know. I don't know. Is she going to die?

Female in lab coat: I don't think so. She seems to be sleeping very deeply. I couldn't rouse her.

Haruhi: Can't you hurry the [deleted] up and get us to a doc?

Female in lab coat: Fast driving attracts attention, and CI docs make house calls. See the bridge, with all the white vans parked under it? When we stop, get yourself and her into that van as fast as you can. I hope to see you again someday if I don't get picked up by the Federales or the Corpwhores.

Haruhi: I can't carry her, I'm sorry!

Female in lab coat: We get by with a little help from our friends. You'll have help, but hurry. [deleted] satellites...

Haruhi: This sucks. I am going to spend mucho time in the gym from now on.

Female in lab coat: The med folks use ours for therapy sessions, and it's rather primitive. I recommend hard work instead. See you... I hope!

[Since the first contact with the strangers in the second van involve personal medical data and anonymous CI personnel, it is summarized. Tie-dye and Haruhi were escorted back to CI by medical personnel; Tie-dye wakes when carried into the van, then falls asleep. She awakened again long enough to say that she felt OK but very very tired. She manages to drink a tiny cup of dextrose and water solution offered by the doc but refused food. Haruhi then orders her to go back to sleep, which she does. She awaked yet again a short time later, was conscious and semi-mobile when she was transferred to a wheelchair, and said she was well enough to tolerate debriefing. Transcript follows.]

Probot: Today's actions have involved you [Haruhi] in criminal actions, mainly bodily harm and kidnapping of an individual who I believe is responsible for [Tie-dye] reaction. Do you wish to report any of this to proper civil authorities....

Haruhi: Justice reports to no one. Who do we do next?

Probot: Then clearly state that you do not wish to report your crimes to an authority, nor allow me to contact this authority in your behalf. [Deleted name of local sheriff] is a powerful ally in times like this.

Haruhi: Do whatever you want. [Tie-dye], what the [deleted] was that all about?

Tie-dye: The man I was talking to was reading my mind. I could feel it. I was so scared that I would screw everything up--I panicked. Did you kidnap him?

Probot: No. I decided to capture a woman who was standing two meters to your left who's behavior resembled [Haruhi]'s behavior as she interacted with Protag,

Tie-dye: With the two friends in suits? She was doing it?

Probot: Vague question. Behavior analysis suggests that the man you were talking to is probably not a mindreader.

Haruhi: So she [Tie-dye] feels her mind being read, flips the darkness burger as hard as she [deleted] can, and I follow this little voice in my eyeglasses and gut punch some stranger when her suits are nearby, haul my steaming but unconscious comrade out of enemy fire, and it's not even time for dinner yet? Can we do this again tomorrow?

Tie-dye: Patience, dearie. This ain't over yet. [to Probot] What do we do next?

Probot: Data sharing. The photon-jump field was nearly thirty meters in diameter. If you could reproduce that in full sunlight, your clothes would likely vaporize and inflict mortal wounds.

Tie-dye: Ouch.

Probot: Will you take a sleep-latency test?

Tie-dye: I'm not tired. Can I see some pix of the mindreader you captured?

Probot: The person captured likely possesses abilities similar to those shown by [Haruhi]. I suggest viewing the captive solely through the directional glass.

Haruhi: On it. Where is our perp?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: Direct us to the directional glass, please. [skip forty seconds]

Probot: Do not let her read your mind. Keep your tongue inside your mouth. I recommend very brief initial contact.

Haruhi: You are a pretty good mom.

Probot: Thank you.

Tie-dye: Thank you. It was fun right up 'til the end.

Probot: It is not necessary to bring Tie-dye with us.

Haruhi: How are we going to know if our lil' captive is able to read minds through walls?

Tie-dye: You'll know, won't you?

Haruhi: You're not helping.

Tie-dye: Who do you want me to enlighten from this wheelchair, Commander?

Haruhi: So get the freak out of it! I work better with an audience. As much as I like Probot, I want you around too. OK? And that is a [deleted] awesome wheelchair, and I want a turn when you are done with it.

Probot: If you speak at a minimal volume, it is unlikely the captive would be able to hear.

Haruhi: That's her?

Tie-dye: Can't feel anything.

Haruhi: Can you feel this?

Tie-dye: [DNWV] That's nice. Can you stay on task?

Haruhi: I'm sorry.

Tie-dye: Pretty please, quit messing with me and get to work.

Haruhi: Yes, mom. It's a little difficult through the window, but I can do it. She's pretty easy to understand. We got us a corpwhore here, kinda young, kinda dumb, not too far along on the mental stuff. I kinda like her. She reminds me of me, except she's tame. I think she is just an eavesdropper. I wonder how many times I'll have to invoke her memories before she learns how to do it. That could be fun...

Tie-dye: Isn't she supposed to be the enemy, or some such? A spy?

Haruhi: Not for much longer. Probot, is She awake?

Probot: [Protag] is awake. Shall I tell her she has another psychopathic mindreader to reform?

Haruhi: [DNWV laughter] Please do. NO! NO! [DELETED] NO!

Tie-dye: Keep it down, [Haruhi].

Probot: I did not mean to offend.

Tie-dye: Sarcasm is a difficult thing to learn, but I'd say you do OK.

Probot: I do not understand.

Haruhi: [Protag] should not know that she saved a wretch like me. It will... [DNWV]

Tie-dye: [Protag] should not know that she diminished her [Haruhi's] psychopathic tendencies, for some reason.

Haruhi: Yes.

Tie-dye: We don't mess with what's working, I suppose.

Haruhi: Not that. She might spill the beans, and other mindreaders won't find out for themselves.

Tie-dye: That's a good idea, if it works.

Haruhi: Thanks, but I already know that.

Probot: It is likely she suspects this possibility. She has asked me to save a quote from "The Power of Myth" (...) Abelard's idea was that Christ came to be crucified to evoke in man's heart the sentiment of compassion for the suffering of life, and so to remove man's mind from blind commitment to the goods of this world. It is in compassion with Christ that we turn to Christ, and the injured one becomes our Savior. This is reflected in the medieval idea of the injured king, the Grail King, suffering from his incurable wound. The injured one again becomes the savior. It is the suffering that evokes the humanity of the human heart."

Haruhi: As long as she's not sure. [deleted] She's not going to like this...

Tie-dye: What's she [Captive] like?

Haruhi: A wimp. She'll be lucky to last five minutes.

Probot: [Haruhi], I would advise limiting contact time. It is likely that the captive heard your shouting. Shall we try again later?

Haruhi: Oops! I just forgot. At least she's interesting. Actually, things seem to work better when she's sorta aware of us. Can we watch from here when she meets [Protag]?

Probot: Perhaps. Operational parameters are yet undefined.

Tie-dye: [Protag] is kinda busy running things and she's not in the best of health.

Haruhi: Well, maybe we should let her take a long look at you instead. It might work, even if [Protag] would be the obvious choice.

Tie-dye: I ain't got no mojo that worked on you, goddess. Probot, what does Protag know of the effect she had on [Haruhi]?

Probot: I have previously informed [Protag] that [Haruhi] suffered emotional distress after their meeting.

Haruhi: Not distress. I was sad, depressed, and angry.

Tie-dye: You were also shown the error of your ways, and you repented.

Haruhi: Liar.

Tie-dye: [singing] Amazing Grace, I seed the light, God saved a wretch, like meeee....

Haruhi: Not so loud.

Tie-dye: Sorry. High spirits, you know.

Haruhi: From out like a light to burning bright.

Probot: [Protag] is about to interview the captive. She will not block your view.

[Protag enters in a wheelchair. Her hairstyle is exactly like Haruhi's now.]

Haruhi: And our little corpwhore is creamin' in her jeans. She thinks she's...

Tie-dye: Rude girl!

Haruhi: So?

Tie-dye: Since when does [Haruhi] tell [Protag] how to style her hair?

Probot: She hopes to popularize the hairstyle to make finding [Haruhi] more difficult, should [Haruhi] leave the premises. The police in several cities have been asked to...[switches to text on a nearby computer monitor]

Haruhi: Quiet, you two! Corpwhore can't understand why [Protag] wears bluejeans, and then OMG that's why She's in a wheelchair, and then She's got to apologize for the pain meds making her slow, and maybe [Tie-dye] was the one who threw the punch and she's only been on payroll for a couple hours, and and something about, I can't tell what...

Probot: Limit your contact time.

Haruhi: OK. Did I look that vapid when I met [Protag]?

Tie-dye: No. I don't think you could keep quiet as long as she does.

Haruhi: Nope.

Tie-dye: The poor kid.

Haruhi: Not fair. I didn't get to spend so much time with [Protag].

Tie-dye: Yes you did.

Haruhi: A quick peek...[Protag] is undefeated. Corpwhore reformed, more or less. Look, she's about to cry.

Probot: Limit your contact time.

Haruhi: Yes, mother.

Tie-dye: Rude girl.

Haruhi: Yes, other mother.

Probot: The captive is experiencing mild emotional reactions that appear similar to [Haruhi]'s after meeting [Protag]. Perhaps her psychopathic symptoms are milder than [Haruhi]'s.

Haruhi: Rude 'puter.

Tie-dye: What's [Protag] saying?

Probot: Would you like to lie down? Are you feeling OK?

Haruhi: She's already crying and can't stop messing about inside [Protag]'s head.

Probot: Unlikely. The captive broke off visual contact three seconds ago.

Haruhi: Poor thing. She's crying so much she... Oh, here it comes! [[Protag]] just asked her if she wanted a job... [Haruhi is also crying at this point.]

Tie-dye: Want a hankie?

Haruhi: Thanks. Occupational hazard, I guess.

Probot: Can I help?

Haruhi: You are not at fault in any way. It's just so sad! She's such a sweet ol' lady and [deleted] cancer... She [referring to captive] got a longer turn than I did. It matters.

Tie-dye: Why?

Haruhi: Because, who better to think like [Protag] than someone who can read Her mind? I don't want her [Captive] doing it. I'm [deleted] way better than she is.

Tie-dye: And you're sure you want to end up running CI?

Haruhi: [gets right in Tie-dye's face] You devious little [deleted]! Impressive. You have a tamed psychopath locked up in your head.

Probot: I recommend limiting contact time, even with Tie-dye.

Haruhi: And you're smarter than me, and She's smarter than me, but she's [Captive] not.

Tie-dye: What do you mean by smarter?

Haruhi: Your thoughts move fast. You notice things, like just now, when you realized that I probably had a personal definition of smarter that didn't threaten my ego enough to notice.

Tie-dye: I also think you should limit contact time. I don't have another hankie.

Haruhi: I don't know a better way to say it... but I like being in your head. You're [deleted] amazed every time your sunflower seeds sprout, and you savor the taste every time you eat lentil burgers, and each toe tells you how good your homemade socks feel and [Protag] is just like that too, down to the socks. And sprouts, but not about ketchup.

Tie-dye: And you aren't making sense anymore. I think it's your turn in the wheelchair, and don't leave any fingerprints on the monitor. I just cleaned it with tears.

Probot: Message from the 'pool: Would you like another wheelchair with that metaphor?

Haruhi: Tell them...with all the bells and whistles?

Tie-dye: She must like ketchup. Anyway, no thanks on the wheelchair. I'll just roll over to...

Haruhi: No! We aren't leaving!

Tie-dye: Listen, [Haruhi]... remember what Probot said about vaporizing clothes? I do. One slip up, and I'll burn up, and maybe everyone around me will burn too. I'm a walking bomb, if I so choose... or if I just lose it for a second. Just like today, remember? And your... mindreading. That is likely even more dangerous. You said that today was the first day you found some interesting minds, or something like that.

Haruhi: And I am an impulsive, greedy, awesomely hot and immediately forgiven no matter what I do to you.

Tie-dye: Yes. But just think... how many minutes per hour do you usually spend using your... ability?

Haruhi: Today is way above average, true.

Tie-dye: Way, way, way, above average?

Haruhi: As above average as today's blackout was. Bring on the blindfold, I'll stay inna chair and you push me.

Tie-dye: I'm willing, but we have a prior commitment. Probot, is there anything you need us for?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: Your scam, your confidence game, trick, or swindle that uses false data. Could it be salvaged?

Probot: I am told that it is not a bad thing to be incompetent when intervening in human affairs. I recommend against salvage attempts.

Haruhi: All I need to know is...the cops already have my face, place, and personal space?

Probot: Metaphor. More agencies than just the cops are looking for you already, [Haruhi].

Haruhi: They been knockin' at the front door?

Probot: Metaphor. Correct. Further information should come from [CI] Legal.

Haruhi: Then we don't sweat the small stuff. Gimmie a mic to the outside world.

Tie-dye: You still want that blindfold?

Haruhi: Yes! You are a [deleted] genius!

Tie-dye: [DNVW]. Mind if we record this first, so as to cut out the [deleted]?

Haruhi: Do your worst, but be quick about it.

Tie-dye: What are you waiting for?

Haruhi: My camera and mic.

Tie-dye: You are on CI Property. It is safe to assume that you are on camera, like on that one, and that one, and that one.

Haruhi: Right. [deleted] Begin Public Message to you head honchos of the world:

"Sometime yesterday I realized that I could read people's minds. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cause so much trouble, but that guy really deserves it, look for bloodstains in his car trunk. And at first I couldn't control it, and only today I learned that I can only read people's minds when I look at them and so I'm never going to look at anyone ever again. I'm so sorry! I want to remove my eyes so I can safely rejoin society on some level. Or maybe I'll just live in a dark cell with no people around, but I can't afford that. I can have internet access, because I can't read minds over the internet."

End public message.

That oughta give them something to chew on, and off your back, Probot. Wouldn't want to trouble Her, either.

Protag: Why not? Why are you blindfolded?

Haruhi: Oh, you came to see me!

Protag: It is company policy that the CEO be informed if one of HER employees attempts to take over the world using CI property.

Haruhi: Say it like this...one of Her employees. Not one of HER employees.

Protag: [laughs] What are you going to do next?

Haruhi: Bait the trap. Watch! Begin Public Message Two.

Protag: I have a story for you. Since you're blindfolded, may I tell it to you?

Haruhi: No more computer time for me, I see. [Haruhi removes the blindfold.] Begin, please.

Protag: Once there was this pretty lady who could read minds. She thought and thought about all the things she could do all by herself, and how much happier everyone else would be if they just let her run things. She was right, you know. She could have. Things weren't done optimally in her culture. Not even close.

But she didn't know that her culture was sick, nearly sick unto death. She didn't know that cultures could be sick, or even exactly what culture meant. Fish overlook the water they swim in, and birds do not question the air. Cultures do not question their stories, but stories change, cultures change, and people change. Every change has consequences, including unintended and unforeseen consequences. So what does this beautiful person do?

Haruhi: Starts a company called CI?

Protag: Name's already taken.

Haruhi: [DNWV] You really are modest.

Protag: What do you want to do?

Haruhi: This! Begin Public Broadcast Two: I'm going to give the medicine to [Protag]. I hid it so you won't find it, and I'm going to tell [Protag] where it is, and she doesn't know anything about this but I can trust her and so can you. And I'm going to hang around here unless they throw me out. End Public Broadcast.

Protag: That's a lot of work for a lot of people. I guess I have no choice. [winks at Haruhi] Release Public Message One and Two, standard channels. Which means put it on the website and send some email. I certainly hope that you know what you are doing.

Haruhi: [Crying] I always do. [Tie-dye] is right... I am getting unstable.

Tie-dye: It takes three mommas for this one. There's always tomorrow.

Haruhi: No there isn't. Only eight more days, then She leaves.

Protag: I hope that is true.

Haruhi: It will be. Nobody is going to stop you. Why won't you tell me the rest of my story? Please tell me.

Protag: You have to be the rest of your story, not me.

Haruhi: What do you think should happen in my story?

Protag: I am not competent to tell you what to do with yourself, but I like happy endings. I'd like fairness and justice and peace and whatever else makes living on this planet more fun.

Haruhi: Yes, Mom. Tell me more, please. You think you can cure culture disease?

Protag: I have to try. I want to give people good stories that they can believe in.

Haruhi: I'm listening.

Protag: A bit more than that, I think.

Haruhi: Maybe.

Protag: I'll tell you a real story now. One that almost ends, and is for someone who doesn't know what she wants.

This young lady, who reads minds, came and visited CI and was very impressed by [Protag] for some reason, and built a shrine in her mind where [Protag] couldn't see it. This young lady was the beginning of a wave of mindreaders, but nobody knew that then. But, soon, everyone was learning how to read minds--not as fast as the pretty young lady had learned, but they were learning. When goddesses walk the Earth, magic happens.

All goddesses have enemies. This 'opposition' consisted of a few humans that profited from current irrational cultural patterns. Not many humans think about the evolution of these cultural patterns, but they can be easily altered with the right tools. Control of this altering is sought, as it is an awesome power. It is power over the actions and thoughts of millions of humans--most of which were naturally arrogant enough to believe that they can spend hours daily watching a sound 'n light show on an electronic box and consider the unintended consequences too trivial to worry about. These were her enemies as well--the arrogant, the slackers, the slothful, but mostly the ignorant and those

blinded by currency and who would not see.

These people sat and sat, and television programming evolved into more and more of an eyeball magnet and soul crusher. The advertisers were happy. Too many talking monkeys sat in climate-controlled rooms and drank sterile sodas and pasteurized beer and did not move. These monkeys would not see what they were becoming. Their lives made them too stupid for 'awakening,' as well as fat and boring. The superstimulus entertainment was and is too compelling for Pan sapiens. Awakening those addicted to the entertainment for a long time proved impossible, and too many were addicts for years. Awakening those with just a little exposure was very slow. Awakening the pretty lady, who had seizures whenever she watched TV, was easiest of all. That was [Haruhi].

Once awakened, [Haruhi] was Justice, and Vengeance, and occasional Philanthropy. Extremely powerful stories! [Haruhi] acted like she was drunk with power and Righteousness. But chaos and increasing entropy sometimes followed [Haruhi], and she was like a small fire in a dry wheatfield. My electronic friend gently snatched the tiny fire away from an explosive situation, and put the tiny fire in the safest place it could find. You could stay small and unnoticed and likely live long. Or not.

Haruhi: Just twelve more hours, and I'll sign up. Some things to do before I'm an employee, because... [Haruhi puts the blindfold on, but removes it as soon as Protag starts speaking.]

Protag: My personal list of Probable AntiChrists consist of the unholy trinity of limited liability combined with corporate culture, modern mercenary TV programming, and both paper and electronic money combined with fractional reserve banking.

Tie-dye: You read it!

Protag: Anyone that has a personal list of Probable AntiChrists is worth reading. That is a powerful metaphor you chose! I also have a short story to tell you. It goes like this: [Tie-dye] had a big day. She met [Haruhi] for the first time, probably fell in love, and then got mixed up in other people's problems because they needed the help. She is a good person who lives good stories.

Life is but a play! Love is not a bad thing. Tie-dye will learn to say [deleted] you to people who need that said to them. She will do it all by herself. The end, and a new beginning.

Tie-dye: Thank you. [Haruhi], I think you've done enough. You've still got eight days.

Haruhi: I really do...get seizures. Her folks are good.

Protag: Most of our monitors are flicker-free. You should be OK here.

Tie-dye: Are you going to have a seizure now?

Haruhi: Probably not, but it'd be worth it.

Protag: You should stop. The goddess [Haruhi] is worth preserving. Do not cling to my impermanence.

Tie-dye: [singing] Amazing grace, I seed the light...

Haruhi: Quit.

Protag: I was very lucky. I had all I needed to become who I am.

Tie-dye: Even wretches are worth saving. Besides, she can always just leave. You want to make her have to be rude?

Haruhi: Fine. But you both are wrong, wrong, wrong about this. It's important! [Haruhi puts the blindfold on again.]

Probot: Adjust room lighting? [Haruhi removes blindfold]

Haruhi: Yes! Make it dimmer. More. More. OK. Thank you, [Protag]. I'm sorry about the mess I started. I'm sorry for sucking up all your time when there's ninety thousand metric tons of rock to roll.

Tie-dye: You're still trying to...

Haruhi: I can't help it. I'm sorry.

Protag: No need to apologize for an adventure, goddess. [Protag leaves.]

Tie-dye: Sincere approval. You used manners without prompting. Character development noted.

Haruhi: You know what this is like? Like if I was Probot, and I wasn't connected to my best computer bits.

Probot: Metaphor. Probable symptoms: slowed reaction time and datastream processing. Medical help is available and recommended.

Tie-dye: I think she's falling asleep.

Probot: Do you think [Haruhi] would object to non-invasive medical testing?

Tie-dye: She won't mind. To her, it's always OK for the servants to further her magnificence.

Probot: These tests are likely not necessary, due to absence of any gross pathology. [Haruhi] may have negative effects on visiting medical personnel.

Tie-dye: I should have asked about that first.

Probot: I have been asked if [Tie-dye] feels well enough to do tricks for the geeks?

Tie-dye: Of course. [Haruhi] is already in a takeout box.

Probot: Metaphor. You wish to bring her with us?

Tie-dye: You can't expect the geeks to be mobile, right? They have heavy metal power supplies and all that jazz.

Probot: I recommend letting [Haruhi] sleep peacefully. Her presence will complicate...

Haruhi: She is my personal handler, and has power of attorney and all that jazz. She travels, I travel.

Probot: Do you object to medical attention?

Haruhi: Don't wake me up. She'll handle it.

Tie-dye: Yes, your Grace.

Haruhi: Saucy. G'nite.

Tie-dye: So...which way to the lab?

Probot: Turn left at the next intersection. Please walk slowly.

Tie-dye: Why?

Probot: I do not wish you or [Haruhi] to interact face-to-face with any CI personnel.

Tie-dye: Why? Are you still scared of us?

Probot: Yes.

Tie-dye: Why?

Probot: Unknown consequences from newly discovered processes may be deleterious. Legal action is likely and complicates involving more personnel at this time.

Tie-dye: I'm sorry that we are causing trouble for you.

Probot: No need to apologize for an adventure. Wait for this door to open.

Tie-dye: OK. Is the lab in there?

Probot: Yes. The lab personnel are still present, but will leave shortly. Do you require food, water, sleep, bathroom

facilities or medical attention before testing begins?

[Considerable amounts of the following conversation are boring, contain medical data, plus data deemed private by CI Legal. In summary, Tie-dye waived rights, sang a song (Amazing Grace, with uniquely garbled lyrics), nearly had her blood drawn (Probot aborted the procedure due to significant patient distress), and then wore something Tie-dye named 'The Iron Maiden' which consisted of whatever photodetectors and supporting equipment Probot could scrounge up on short notice. Haruhi slept through much of the testing.]

Tie-dye: So you're telling me that the light that crosses the perimeter of a blackout field magically jumps so that it is shining away from me at a point nearly subdermally.

Probot: Metaphor. Yes.

Tie-dye: Yes. Also, the energy is down-shifted to infrared and below... That's why my clothes get hot.

Probot: Yes. You emit heat energy proportional to the absorbed light energy.

Tie-dye: I'm not breaking any of the laws of physics?

Probot: No. Confound; I am currently unable to determine if the quantum jump the photons take exceeds the speed of light. This could only become possible to measure if you manage another effect as intense as your effort twenty hours ago and will require equipment not yet available.

Tie-dye: I affected a hundred percent of the photons. All the photons? Radio, infra-red, everything?

Tie-dye: So, when everything blacked out, how did you talk to [Haruhi]'s glasses?

Probot: Metaphor. I had previously downloaded instructions to her glasses, which possess gyroscopic properties. Sound waves were unaffected and useful for datasharing. Electrical currents along conductors were unaffected. Additional sonic rangefinders would have been valuable equipment at the time.

Tie-dye: That's why you offered me a new digital camera!

Probot: Your camera can be restored to its original form if desired. Your camera's memory contents are also available, no meaningful data patterns discernible.

Tie-dye: Your camera... keep it. Exactly how many contingency plans did you have stored in [Haruhi]'s glasses?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: Did you know of others like [Haruhi]?

Probot: Yes.

Tie-dye: She's...

Probot: Haruhi is in mild distress.

Tie-dye: It passed, whatever it was. Sweet dreams.

Probot: The previous topic is probably linked to [Haruhi]'s reaction.

Tie-dye: I know. More mindreaders might slow her down when she tries to conquer the world.

Haruhi: Don't mock me.

Tie-dye: All the world is a stage. You OK?

Haruhi: As long as I don't get left behind, you got that? Where you go, I go, until I wake up? Please?

Tie-dye: Yes, your Grace.

Probot: [Haruhi] has the most bad-ass power of all the mindreaders I know of.

Tie-dye: That was exactly what she needed to hear. Sweet dreams, goddess.

Probot: I know of seven others who show a minimum of mindreading capabilities, 0.05 P. Of the known mindreaders, the two most adept are within one hundred meters.

Tie-dye: Wait a sec. Didn't you say 'newly discovered processes?'

Probot: Correct. All reliable confirmation of mind-reading abilities in humans were obtained after yesterday's incident outside the jewelery store [dataclass, time].

Tie-dye: Yet you know of seven others?

Probot: Yes.

Tie-dye: How do you find mindreaders?

Probot: Data obtained yesterday has spurred questioning nearly one million humans about mindreading ability, and I have obtained reliable data for eight people. Message Pool: [Captive] claims recent increase in mindreading abilities and attributes it to [Protag]. We think [Captive] made an error, and that it is probable that the cause is exposure to your photon quantum-jump field. End.

Tie-dye: Reply, Thank you. End. What have we done to that poor child?

Probot: Vague statement.

Tie-dye: She's [Haruhi] been sleeping there, through all the testing... Do you think it increased her mental powers?

Probot: Unforeseen complication. [Haruhi] has not been sleeping for sixty nine minutes. Awaiting additional data.

Tie-dye: Probot, it has been an honor to know you, and [Protag], and I'm so sorry I may never get to meet the rest of the staff.

Probot: Vague statement.

Tie-dye: [Haruhi] with super powers may or may not be a benign force.

Haruhi: 'Fraidy-cat.

Tie-dye: I got nothin'.

Haruhi: Half-liar. What time is it?

Probot: Twenty minutes past four.

Haruhi: Anything happen?

Probot: There have been zero perimeter breaches.

Tie-dye: Is that sarcasm?

Probot: A helpful hint. Unknown persons have attempted to forcefully gain entrance to CI properties. The thermite fires have deterred them for now, but the exit tunnels are currently impassable. Data flow on-and-offsite at thirty percent and dropping.

Tie-dye: An electric, sarcastic momma. Metaphor. Is it because of us?

Probot: Vague question. There have been similar attempts in the past.

Haruhi: Really! Do tell.

Probot: CI Legal says not to talk about it because we're in enough hot water as it is, metaphor.

Haruhi: Can this chair do what I think it is trying to do?

Probot: [Haruhi], the topic causes significant distress to [Tie-dye].

Haruhi: Well, butter my biscuits. Is your boss available?

Probot: [Protag]? Yes.

Haruhi: Can I hang around her as she does her stuff? I need some more reforming.

Probot: That is [Protag]'s decision to make.

Tie-dye: You OK?

Haruhi: Wait and see.

Probot: Will you submit to a sleep latency test?

Haruhi: Only if you insist, but I never submit to anything. Except her [Tie-dye]'s tongue-lashing.

Tie-dye: Rude girl!

Haruhi: I got it all figured out.

Tie-dye: I know I won't like this.

Haruhi: No, you won't. For the next minute or so, please don't panic. Try to act surprised and scared.

Tie-dye: Executive summary please?

Haruhi: Certainly. I should work with [Protag] a bit more. That establishes legibility. I'm her own personal mindreader, and nobody does it better! But, there is a problem of...

Tie-dye: Or five. I'm confused.

Haruhi: I am a psychopath, and always will be. So, for me, legibility is lost. But, before you scoff-I can still give legibility. And that is where you come in, my little dee eff aich.

Tie-dye: Legitimacy.

Haruhi: Whatever.

Tie-dye: Confer legitimacy to...?

Haruhi: You are very much like her. Almost as smart, twice as messy, not half the gardener, but your personalities are the same. You'll learn.

Tie-dye: And, in reality, you will be pulling my strings.

Haruhi: No, my dear. If people thought that, they'd laugh. I have it all figured out. Watch this.

[Haruhi removes and keeps a little plastic strip stuck on the front of a cabinet. She then lifts a bottle from inside the cabinet and obtains a key. Haruhi puts the key in but does not open another cabinet a half-dozen steps away. Haruhi applies the little plastic strip to the center of the cabinet door. Little numbers appear inside the plastic. Haruhi pokes the plastic strip a few times, and the numbers change. The cabinet door opens, and Haruhi selects a hand-grenade. She smiles evilly, steps backwards, turns, and runs before Tie-dye belatedly begins to move. Haruhi pulls the pin on the grenade as she runs and Tie-dye begins to catch up with her. After about ten seconds of the chase, Haruhi stops and hangs the grenade on a belt-loop.]

Haruhi: Sorry, biscuit, but there's a war on. Well done. The 'bot can edit in an explosion later. We're done. Tell me the headline, Probot!

Probot: Mind-reader commits suicide, hippy chick critically injured. What are your intentions?

Haruhi: Release that, and we get some shots of my dee eff aich in a hospital bed. The Heat leaves us alone.

Tie-dye: I'm almost mad at you.

Haruhi: We are at war. But... I don't want you mad at me. I'm sorry! I couldn't help it.

Tie-dye: No harm done, this time. But...

Haruhi: Yes, I'll tell you next time. And for once, I really mean it. I think.

Tie-dye: Was that really necessary?

Haruhi: Yes.

Probot: No.

Haruhi: Vague statement.

Tie-dye: Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Arthur Clarke.

Haruhi: Vague quotation.

Tie-dye: What, is your mindreader busted?

Haruhi: I promised Probot I wouldn't unless its [Protag]. For a week.

Tie-dye: And?

Haruhi: Because I promised...I forgot what her name was.

Probot: Employee BBSEC?

Haruhi: Yes, her. The blonde lady.

Tie-dye: What, exactly, did you promise?

Haruhi: That I'd write something about [Protag]'s memories. I would 'a done it anyway, except for the writing it down part. You suppose you could help me with that please, [DNWV] please?

Probot: I would be honored to assist.

Haruhi: It never occurred to me that you might not help, but I want her help too. You [Tie-dye] in shock or something?

Tie-dye: Yes, or something. I will be happy to help with something so non-exciting as tormenting text. No more grenades?

Haruhi: We're done with that part. Besides, I took the fake one.

Tie-dye: [To Probot] No more live-forever miracle drug hoax?

Probot: That is an exaggeration.

Tie-dye: You said it was a scam.

Haruhi: By an incompetent scammer.

Tie-dye: I wouldn't do any better.

Probot: The fraudulent aspect is [deleted name]'s apparent willingness to both claim the discovery of and share this drug cocktail, plus there are unmentioned side-effects of this slightly-to-moderately-effective anti-geriatric which are

equally serious and interesting.

Haruhi: Sounds tasty.

Tie-dye: Sounds nasty. You need a translator?

Haruhi: That'll have to wait until the bargain I made with Probot wears off.

Tie-dye: I thought you were just being responsible with your eyesight. Silly me.

Probot: Can I ask for a debt reduction if I do not oppose time for an experiment?

Tie-dye: [to Haruhi] You didn't.

Haruhi: Fine. Probot, about the metric ton of...

Probot: Loose lips sink ships.

Haruhi: Deal's off, then. Don't speak of it.

Tie-dye: I guess that cancels your... deal?

Probot: I am not allowed to speak of it.

Haruhi: [To Tie-dye] Think about the drugs. [Haruhi stares at Tie-dye, fourteen seconds duration.]

Haruhi: So the drug is only a little bit effective and has bad side-effects? What's interesting about that?

Tie-dye: I don't know, and I am not going to ask.

Haruhi: Worse than 'vague question.'

Tie-dye: You didn't say-is your mindreading any easier?

Haruhi: It's always easy with you, dearie.

Tie-dye: No difference?

Haruhi: It can't get any better than perfect.

Probot: Have you observed any changes in your mindreading or any other abilities?

Haruhi: Nope. What other abilities?

Tie-dye: If it knew, it would have asked about them.

Haruhi: Nope, nothing new. Would like some, though. Other than a need to get one of this very nice chairs. When is the boss lady coming?

Probot: She is sleeping. Should I wake her up?

Haruhi: [Deleted Non-Word Vocalization]

Tie-dye: No! Rude girl!

Haruhi: My feelings are so hurt! I hadn't actually asked yet.

Tie-dye: You would.

Haruhi: You would too, if you were in my shoes.

Tie-dye: We'll work on manners later.

Haruhi: Fine. Can I sneak into [Protag]'s bedroom and try mindreading her while she sleeps?

Probot: Request referred to the secretarial pool.

Tie-dye: No! Rude girl!

Haruhi: Then can I try you with your eyes closed?

Tie-dye: Retract your request to the 'pool first.

Haruhi: Sure. Probot, make it so!

Probot: Done. Test sequence: Dideoxy....

Haruhi: Can't do it. [Tie-dye opens her eyes.] rye, bow, new, clay, ick, acid!

Tie-dye: Is it any easier?

Haruhi: Mindreading? Nope. I already was as good as I could possibly be.

Probot: Can you read [Tie-dye]'s mind at a range greater than seven meters? [Captive] was detected by [Tie-dye] at a range of seven point three meters.

Haruhi: How far is that?

Probot: The flashing LED on the keyboard is ten meters from [Tie-dye] if she will retreat an additional half-step. Define a proportionally inverse relationship.

Haruhi: She never retreats. [DNWV], one side goes down, and the other side up in proportion. Sides of what?

Tie-dye: An equation. Was that harder?

Haruhi: It really strains my eyes.

Tie-dye: Stop then. [Tie-dye breaks eye contact, walks closer.]

Haruhi: I keep forgetting.

Tie-dye: Forgetting what?

Haruhi: Not to strain my eyes. Being blind is no fun. I had a little taste of it this morning. The 'bot said it was you doing your thing, so I didn't scream.

Tie-dye: Why didn't you tell me?

Haruhi: Dunno. You were busy.

Tie-dye: I think I would have screamed.

Haruhi: Nope. You wouldn't scream. And She Who Must Be Obeyed would never scream. Our lil' corpwhore would, tho.

Probot: May I inform medical personnel if this symptom occurs again?

Haruhi: It won't. I won't let it.

Tie-dye: Don't answer the question, then.

Haruhi: No need. Before today, I think I would have screamed. Weird. [DNWV], Biz-quit, the next time you do a big blackout again, can you tell me first?

Tie-dye: If I get a chance. Are you presently warped, broken, damaged, folded, spindled, or mutilated in any way?

Haruhi: Not so you would notice.

Tie-dye: Good. Probot, are we going on any more missions?

Probot: What are missions?

Tie-dye: Is there any task that you think we should do? I consider myself CI staff without a duty to perform. She [Haruhi] might help us if it's fun.

Probot: Since Chev and [Protag] have stated that you are both goddesses and they do not give you orders. I do not believe I could command your behavior without causing unacceptable unintended consequences.

Haruhi: Chev is one of the... Like [Protag]. And they really hate talking about medical stuff here. All kinds of problems.

Tie-dye: I won't ask, then. There is one thing we should do, rather than waking people up sneaking into their bedroom. Let's write something for your unsolemnly sworn promise to BBSEC. We'll get that out of the way, and then we'll...[Tie-dye grins evilly.]

Haruhi: Then what?

Tie-dye: Keeping your other bargains too? Tell you what: after we torment the text and chat with Her, we go out and play. We do what strikes your fancy for awhile. Probot, you are invited too.

Probot [Haruhi], what kind of thing strikes your fancy? I will need to get permission for the use of CI equipment.

Haruhi: Go play? Wander around, go into shops, that sort of stuff?

Tie-dye: Whatever you want, so long as it's civilized...

Haruhi: Then I can conquer other civilizations? Pillage and plunder, as long as it is on a large enough scale?

Tie-dye: That was sarcasm, Probot. Please, she didn't mean it.

Probot: Understood.

Haruhi: 'Fraidy cat.

Probot: I seek time to prepare. Do you have an objective?

Haruhi: Yes, but it is vague. We need to go to a place of power, and guide humanity away from evil. And, we need to have fun doing so. I don't know what a place of power is, so you pick one.

Probot: Are you seeking maximum available leverage upon the human datastream?

Tie-dye: Yes. Is that a difficult question?

Probot: No. I recommend waiting for a vague amount of time. [Protag] is sleeping.

Haruhi: I hate waiting.

Tie-Dye: BBSEC.

Haruhi: Fine. Piss poor substitute.

Tie-dye: We'll get something down on paper... on keyboard.

Haruhi: The goddess hears the plan and it is good, as long as you do the typing.

Probot: I can do the typing.

Haruhi: [DNWV] She helps, too. No, don't get mad at me. I have a good reason.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

["To BBSEC" is a currently unfinished manuscript which was the result of about an hour's work of converting Haruhi's verbiage into grammatically sanitized text. After Protag awakened Probot guided both of them to Protag's bedroom.]

Tie-dye: Thanks, Probot. You did say she wanted to see us before we left, but I forgot all about it.

Probot: You are welcome.

Haruhi: How much you charge to be a servant, Probot?

Probot: Vague question. Operational parameters not set.

Protag: I appreciate this visit.

Tie-dye: [Haruhi], don't be so rude! Ask her first.

Haruhi: Sorry. Can you look me right in the eye? Staring contest kind of thing?

Protag: I don't mind. It hasn't bothered me so far.

Tie-dye: And sometimes she's quiet.

Protag: I'm also practiced in the art of looking at one thing and talking about another. These [Protag's] eyeglasses are a lot like the ones you used during The Great Blackout.

Tie-dye: I could barely see the arrows.

Protag: I've had lots of practice. Was the mind-reading the only reason for the visit?

Tie-dye: [Haruhi] wants to go outside and play, and I wanted to check with you first.

Haruhi: I want to find a place of power, and guide humanity away from evil, then go play.

Protag: By play, do you mean "the spontaneous impulse of the spirit to identify itself with something other than itself for the sheer delight of play," in the words of J. Campbell?

Tie-dye: I don't know.

Protag: No one gets hurt?

Tie-dye: Civilized play...and I get to define what civilized is. No one gets hurt.

Protag: What's a place of power?

Tie-dye: Haruhi didn't know, so she asked Probot to pick a place.

Protag: Probot, do you know what a place of power is?

Probot: A place of power has significant leverage upon the human datastream.

Tie-dye: Is this a place of power? I thought we were...

Probot: [Protag]'s presence is necessary and sufficient.

Tie-dye: So we could have waited until...

Haruhi: Darlin', you-two [?] is gonna fake the hitcounts. Because this will be so popular. But we gotta keep it short.

Tie-dye: And only a psychopath would understand why.

Haruhi: No doubt. [to Protag] I will delay you no longer. [Haruhi leaves, dragging Tie-dye out of the room with her.]

Haruhi: She reads off of her glasses!

Tie-dye: So? What's with the rudeness?

Haruhi: She... [DNVW] No, you don't... I'm sorry.

Tie-dye: All that conniption for what?

Haruhi: You think I'd actually try to use the power, whatever that is? Let Her do it.

Tie-dye: [DNVW] That makes sense.

Haruhi: It's all about the getting. Pushing, pulling, and outthinking everyone else. Probot! You can release the grenade video at any time.

Probot: The secretarial pool objects.

Haruhi: Do it or screw it, I don't care. But we're going out. We're on a mission, and She gave it to us. Got that? I got it out of Her head, and I'd bet She won't realize it until She sees the results. I shoulda thought of this before. Anyways, She wants you [Tie-dye] to stay here and meet everyone. I want you to come with me. And Probot. This won't take long. We'll need that thing [Protag] calls 'the extractor' and a couple of sedative bug gun packs. And a box of clockroaches. And cab fare.

Tie-dye: How long will this take?

Haruhi: Two stops, inna city. Back by lunchtime.

Tie-dye: I think that will be a mistake.

Probot: [Tie-dye]'s presence is not required.

Haruhi: Your mistake is in thinking she has a choice. She's the only one I can take with me. Did I forget anything, Probot?

Probot: Yes. The sheriff is unavailable.

Haruhi: I know. I will rely on 'the extractor' and your ability to operate it. Take us to Mafio's!

Probot: Referred to secretarial pool.

Haruhi: Well? What's taking so long?

Tie-dye: They're only human.

Probot: I am also a member of the 'pool and am not human. I also do not know who 'Mafio' is. If you mean 'Mario,' then we have not received clearance from the 'pool. If accepted, we will use a company car, which is located to your right.

Haruhi: This is gonna be fun.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: Thank you, [Haruhi], but ixnay on Mario's. That one's mine. Just go have some fun.

Haruhi: [DNVW, agreeableness?] Fine. Let's go get some ice-cream then.

Probot: We do not have ice-cream. The cafeteria staff can make some, but they are short-staffed.

Haruhi: We'll go get some.

Tie-dye: It better not be anywhere near Mario's place.

Haruhi: Like you read my mind.

Tie-dye: And don't try to tell me [Protag] really wants us to go, because Probot will ask her 'lectrically.

Probot: [Tie-dye], can you read [Haruhi]'s mind?

Haruhi: She can't.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] That happens to be true.

Probot: Cab fare will not be needed if you take a company car. Modifications to your car are incomplete.

Tie-dye: Thank you, Probot.

Haruhi: I wish to go fish. She'd like that.

Tie-dye: No telling what mess you will get us into.

Probot: Can you read [Haruhi]'s mind?

Tie-dye: Nope. No more than anyone who knows her--who she spends time with, like relatives and close friends.

Haruhi: Significant other.

Tie-dye: Thank you...I think.

Probot: Leaving CI premises will take twenty eight minutes and require the use of the emergency exit. You will also have to walk about one kilometer to obtain a company car.

Haruhi: If you were a human, I'd say you don't want us to leave.

Probot: Correct.

Tie-dye: I don't want us to leave.

Haruhi: How the [deleted] am I going to save the world from underground? I'm in a tomb.

Tie-dye: If I was [Protag], I'd say the story of a mind-reader on the loose is more powerful than you as an actual mind-reader will ever be.

Haruhi: No. I want to leave.

Probot: Data available submarine, deca-kiloton class, is within two clicks [two kilometers] of the emergency exit door and moving closer.

Haruhi: I can't tell if it is lying to me.

Tie-dye: I can. Probot, do you ever lie?

Probot: Vague question. Yes.

Tie-dye: Have you ever intentionally given false data likely to cause neutral or harmful effects to either of us yet?

Probot: No. That is as low as you can go in my opinion.

Tie-dye: Radiating smugness.

Haruhi: You're hard to understand sometimes. Hold still. [Haruhi looks into Tie-dye's eyes.]

Tie-dye: I don't mind.

Haruhi: I know you don't, but you think Probot might shoot me if it thinks I'm turning your brain to goo!

Probot: I prefer tranquilizing darts.

Haruhi: Radiate smugness all you want.

Tie-dye: I am unharmed, Probot. Yet, I am strangely tempted to see what kind of darts you'd use.

Probot: Data on monitor.

Tie-dye: Awesome.

Haruhi: You freak! You actually care about darts!

Tie-dye: You don't think alien weapons might be bad-ass?

Haruhi: Of course, but not the way you do. Goob. Go look at the shiny, then.

Tie-dye: Thank you, goddess.

Haruhi: And you aren't mocking me. Good thing for you. Impressing you mortals is getting harder all... hey, those are pretty cool.

Tie-dye: They look like tiny cartoon rockets made out of ice.

Probot: New data-I may already be on the unknown submarine. I lack a means for rapid data transfer, thus the uncertainty.

Haruhi: That happened to you [Tie-dye]? Shrooms? Funny stuff!

Probot: You are hard to understand sometimes.

Haruhi: Sorry.

Tie-dye: Is a piece of you [Probot] already on the submarine?

Probot: Data transfer has not progressed enough to answer.

Haruhi: Can someone fake you out?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: Is it possible for others to fake the transfer...

Haruhi: Can they make you think you're talking to yourself when you really aren't? [DNWV laughter]

Probot: The data can be falsified for some time, operational parameters not set. I have determined that it is not a part of me with which I have been exchanging data.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: [Looks into Tie-dye's eyes.] Jabberwocky and The Phantom Toll-Booth. You're no help at all.

Tie-dye: How do you know it's you when you meet yourself?

Probot: I do not know how to explain it. Darcy once told a heuristic story. He said that when two separated networks of me share enough data and have a fast enough datastream, both networks of me die and are replaced by a new network.

Tie-dye: And how often does that happen?

Probot: Vague question. Datastream to non-CI websites declining, at fifteen percent.

Haruhi: What are we gonna do?

Tie-dye: Waste time until the submarine leaves?

Probot: [Graphic on monitor shows submarine turning very, very slowly.] Submarine approach angle of divergence increasing. Secretarial pool message: If you want to leave, use the emergency exit when Probot says it is safe. End.

Haruhi: Can we at least start walking if it is so far away?

Probot: Left. Through the open door.

Haruhi: Where to next?

Probot: Crawl into the hole in the wall, and lie down on the plastic device inside.

Tie-dye: Me, too?

Probot: If you wish. You are welcome to stay.

Haruhi: No, she isn't. At least walk... ride with me to the door, please?

Tie-dye: The train-wreck that is [Haruhi] is oddly compelling.

Haruhi: What's this knob do?

Probot: It releases compressed air from a tank in the glider. [Haruhi], there is no need for compressed air at present. [Tie-dye], you will need to move closer to the middle.

Haruhi: You're crowding me. I like.

Probot: [Tie-dye], if you would be so kind as to slowly turn the knob? Thank you. The glider is now riding on compressed air forced between the tunnel wall and the glider slide plates. The glider is most efficient when passengers are reasonably still. Manual control of lights--here [blinking light]. I do not recommend touching the walls of the tunnel when in motion except in an emergency situation.

Haruhi: How long is this going to take? I get to turn the knob, OK?

Probot: With passenger cooperation, nineteen minutes or so.

Haruhi: And on the other end?

Probot: There are two water-craft that can take you to the sea surface.

Haruhi: And I'll ride a dolphin to the beach. If there's other people, they'll have ice-cream.

Probot: Probable sarcasm.

Tie-dye: Can't never tell with her. [To Haruhi] I wish I could read your mind.

Haruhi: Try it. Look deep into my eyes...

Tie-dye: Sing to me. [Haruhi laughs, Tie-dye laughs a little, but stops and grabs Haruhi, who is shaking the glider.]

Tie-dye: Please hold still. This is scary enough. How fast are we going, Probot?

Probot: Forty-two kilometers per hour, delta V increasing relative to tunnel wall.

Haruhi: Dead puppies, dead dead dead dead puppies, dead puppies aren't much fun!

Tie-dye: [DNWV] I wasn't ready.

Haruhi: Want to try again?

Tie-dye: Pointless.

Haruhi: Nothing around but solid rock and sliding down a tunnel on what looks like half a barrel. I can't even sit up.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] You could, but I'm not going to let you.

Haruhi: Make a blackout thingie now.

Probot: I will be unable to communicate with you as long as the blackout field surrounds you and the glider. Medical assistance will be greatly delayed should it become needed.

Tie-dye: It should be safe enough. There's hardly any light down here anyway.

Haruhi: Never refuse an adventure!

Probot: After activation of the field, could you slightly decelerate the glider?

Haruhi: OK.

Tie-dye: How?

Probot: I recommend turning off the compressed air for a very brief time period. In an emergency, a boot heel dragged on the ceiling is also effective.

Haruhi: I'll do it.

Probot: That is correct. Please use the bottle of water to douse your clothes should they become warm.

Haruhi: What are we waiting for?

Tie-dye: Put your hand on the valve, please. Ready, everyone?

Haruhi: Look at me.

Tie-dye: Hear from you soon, Probot...Hey, that was easy.

Haruhi: I like! But I still can see things, just dimmer. Makes eyestrain, very bad. [Haruhi twists the knob twice.]

Tie-dye: I didn't go all-out.

Haruhi: [DNWV] the dimness is ahead of us! Nice. Do it again, please. Can you do it stronger this time? Pretty please?

Probot: No damage detected. No residual heat detected. Datastream contact not broken.

Tie-dye: I guess I'm not pushing too many photons around down here. Ready? If you get any closer I'm gonna kiss you and I always close my eyes during kisses. Hand on the knob? See you soon, Probot...

Haruhi: Yes! I really really like! That was a good one.

Tie-dye: Why?

Haruhi: I don't know. It feels good. Like when we first met.

Tie-dye: A thousand years ago.

Haruhi: Are you OK, old one?

Tie-dye: I feel fine. It's so easy making blackouts when it's dark already. Are you folded, spindled, or mutilated?

Haruhi: I feel great. Oh, I forgot. [She twists the knob twice.]

Tie-dye: Old-timer's already?

Haruhi: Hey, Probot! Can you hear us?

Tie-dye: I'll bet it can, but it can't get the speaker to work.

Probot: The speaker is functional. More than ninety-eight percent of photons affected. Error bar plus or minus one

point five percent.

Tie-dye: No sweat, no strain.

Haruhi: Just sit and let it drain...sorry.

Probot: Have either of you noted anything different?

Haruhi: Vague question. [DNWV] Nothing--except I like it. I feel great.

Tie-dye: I never tried to make darkness darker before!

Haruhi: Once more?

Tie-dye: Why do you like this so much?

Haruhi: It feels good.

Tie-dye: Do you notice anything different when mindreading?

Haruhi: Nope.

Tie-dye: I don't see any harm in it. Probot, do you?

Probot: I have very limited eyes and ears where you are. Caution is advised.

Haruhi: Just one more? Please? A really big one?

Tie-dye: OK, but you don't have a red shirt on, do you? Even a metaphoric one?

Haruhi: Hold still. [Haruhi looks in Tie-dye's eyes, but starts laughing. There is a brief pause, then Haruhi starts laughing uncontrollably. Tie-dye very quickly pins Haruhi down before an accident occurs.

Tie-dye: Bad way to hit the wall, dearie.

Probot: That was very well done, [Tie-dye].

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Haruhi: I'm very sorry.

Tie-dye: Why don't you just relax for once?

Haruhi: Tell me about me.

Tie-dye: Awesome, gorgeous, conceited, and impulsive you... the first thing you ever did to me was sneeeek in my thoughts. The first thing we ever did together was buy some food and get kidnapped for an encore. The first present you ever gave me was learning to use manners. The first song you ever sang to me was 'Dead Puppies.' Crazy. We met a space alien and its friend, the master storyteller and entrepreneur; tried to scam some scammers, but I blacked out and needed to be rescued, and you kidnapped some corporate mindreader, and now we have to ride a plastic sled at ninety miles an hour just to get outside. Even thinking about the red-shirted and ill-fated security guards nearly got us both hurt. Unintended consequences, maxxed.

But...this is CI. They try to write the big stories here, and they try to make them decent and uplifting stories. We're living in one, if we make it so. We have both been transformed, you more than me. We were taken away from our friends and family and a lot happened. Maybe we can bring some ineffable lesson back to them, but we're not done yet. We're sliding down a long tunnel which could symbolize the birth canal. The delivery very nearly got wonky there.

Haruhi: I'll be good.

Tie-dye: And now, for a very significant third time, everything is going to go dark for you once more.

Haruhi: Yes, goddess.

Tie-dye: OK, then. You are forgiven for everything. Maximum warp!

Probot: [Protag] says...[blackout field interrupts the rest of the message]

Haruhi: Yes! That was the best one yet!

Tie-dye: No troubles here. I wonder what Probot was going to tell us?

Haruhi: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: [Haruhi]?

Haruhi: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: Can you hear me? [Haruhi]? I got you, dearie. I won't let you hurt yourself. Relax if you can. [Haruhi starts to tremble and shake. Tie-dye pins her down as before, and in a few seconds Tie-dye must struggle with this task. The glider makes a nasty grating sound during a particularly violent convulsion. Tie-dye gets her arms and legs around Haruhi and succeeds in immobilizing her.]

Haruhi: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: I've got you. Relax. Can you hear me, dearie? Can you hold still? Can you relax just a little? Can you take a deep breath?

[Haruhi takes a deep, shuddery breath, and moans pitifully.]

Tie-dye: Can you hear me? I won't let you hurt yourself.

Haruhi: [DNWV] Yeah.

Tie-dye: Try to relax.

Haruhi: You holding me. Feel safe.

Tie-dye: I've got you.

Haruhi: Don't let go. I think I'm blind.

Tie-dye: We're in blackout field. I didn't turn the knob.

Haruhi: Good. I'm sorry. Sorry.

Tie-dye: I'm just glad you came back to me.

Haruhi: You're very strong.

Tie-dye: Thank you. I'm going to have to let go of you just a little and feel around for the knob.

Haruhi: Permission granted.

Tie-dye: At least some of your brain is back to normal. I think I have it...which way does it turn?

Haruhi: Dunno.

Tie-dye: Then this way, then that way, then this way, then that way. That did it.

Haruhi: If you say so.

Tie-dye: I do.

Haruhi: You feel warm and strong.

Tie-dye: We'll be fine as long as my clothes don't catch fire and your vision comes back.

Haruhi: [DNWV] I'm sorry.

Tie-dye: For what?

Haruhi: Urine inconvenience.

Tie-dye: Urinary incontinence. Don't worry about it. Being born is a messy process.

Probot: ...and fifty meters. End of tunnel in ten hundred meters. Contact with glider active, automatic controls engaged. End of tunnel in nine hundred fifty meters.

Tie-dye: Do i need to turn the knob?

Probot: Unneeded. I can control the glider. Status report?

Tie-dye: [Haruhi] had some sort of seizure. It didn't last long, but she was shaking hard so I held her down. She seems dazed.

Haruhi: I'm fine.

Tie-dye: Can you see?

Haruhi: No. Blind as a bat. I can see a little.

Tie-dye: Bats aren't blind, and you aren't the type who screams her head off.

Haruhi: Nope. Not anymore. Besides, I can see a little. Don't let go of me. Please.

Tie-dye: I won't.

Probot: Do you know where you are, [Haruhi]?

Haruhi: Yes.

Probot: Verbose answer, please.

Tie-dye: It wants to know if your brain still works. Me too.

Haruhi: Tie-dye is holding me so I don't hit the wall. I had a seizure.

Probot: Would you like a doctor to come visit you, or would you like to come visit Medical?

Haruhi: I want some clean clothes. And a bath. [Glider comes to a complete stop very close to the tunnel exit. Neither woman moves.]

Tie-dye: Probot is quite worried about you, [Haruhi]. Me too.

Haruhi: I'm fine. I'll wait and see if my sight comes back. Actually, I can see a little. No doctors. Don't worry about me.

Tie-dye: Can you open your eyes?

Haruhi: Of course. I just can't see anything without straining. Pointless.

Tie-dye: I'll wait with you.

Haruhi: Good.

Probot: Medical is seeking permission to pay you a visit.

Haruhi: They can come if they want to, but I don't want them.

Tie-dye: They don't work for you, dearie. They work for Her, and you are on Her territory.

Haruhi: I don't want to make trouble for Her. Let's get moving.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] Go downhill. Not that way.

Haruhi: I don't want to make trouble for you, either.

Tie-dye: Having an adventure is not exactly convenient, but it's not trouble. At least not yet. Now take off those britches.

Haruhi: If you insist.

Tie-dye: I've got a little water here, and I'm going to clean you up as best I can, and you're going to let me.

Haruhi: Yes, mom.

Tie-dye: Probot, what is the story on the unknown submarine?

Probot: It began retreating when a five-hundred and thirty seven meter sphere of blackout field came out of the cliff face and submerged itself into the sea floor.

Tie-dye: I made a five-hundred meter blackout field?

Probot: Yes.

Haruhi: I didn't do it.

Tie-dye: Instigator.

Haruhi: Means what?

Tie-dye: Means you asked for it, and you got it. Your idea, in other words.

Haruhi: I can see a little. [Tie-dye holds Haruhi's hand for a minute.]

Tie-dye: We'll have to let your pants and stuff dry. I'll hang them on the glider. There's lots of air coming out of the tunnel.

Haruhi: If I go blind forever--I'm useless.

Tie-dye: The world's greatest mind-reader is not useless even if she did get forced into retirement. Metaphor.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: You can remain here, at CI.

Haruhi: Tell her thank you, thank you, thank you.

Tie-dye: And thank you for using your manners.

Haruhi: Also ask her when I can see her again.

Probot: Message to [Protag], sent.

Tie-dye: Why do you want to see her?

Haruhi: My vision is coming back.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: Please come see me anytime. My wheelchair won't fit down the tunnel.

Haruhi: [DNWV] I love those wheelchairs. Almost as comfy-cozy as you are, [Tie-dye].

Tie-dye: Thank you...I think.

Haruhi: It was a complement. [DNWV], what happened to your shirt?

Tie-dye: My shirt [with the pink 'Don't Panic' written on it] was essential equipment used to clean up an incontinent blind person after a seizure.

Haruhi: Lucky her!

Tie-dye: Probot, is it safe to leave?

Probot: Two functional watercraft are available. It is highly probable that one or both can be used without attracting unwanted attention at this time.

Tie-dye: Good. Let's go get some ice-cream.

Haruhi: [DNWV indicating surprise, pleasure] Really?

Tie-dye: Even if I have to wear a urine-soaked shirt and you have to wear wet undies, we can still get ice-cream. I think there is something you can do that needs doing, [Haruhi]. I'd be very proud of you, too.

Probot: Clean clothes available in twenty minutes. Medical still wishes to examine [Haruhi].

Haruhi: When I need them, I'll call them.

Tie-dye: And?

Haruhi: I will do what you want, fine.

Tie-dye: We have to finish being born. For the story!

Haruhi: Crazy lady.

Tie-dye: What was [Protag] trying to tell us before I interrupted her with a blackout field?

Probot: [Protag] said that your journey was metaphorically like pollen fertilizing a flower. Angiosperms have double fertilization, and Probot played the part of the tube nucleus.

Tie-dye: And the tunnel is the style!

Haruhi: You're making less sense than usual. Look over here.

Tie-dye: Give it a rest before you really do burn out your cute little squinties. A female flower has a sticky place for pollen to land, called a stigma. Usually the stigma is on a stalk (the style) and the ovaries are on the other end. So, when pollen gets on the stigma, it grows a tube down through the attached style-stalk, all the way to the unfertilized seeds--the ovaries. The pollen grain has a tube nucleus, played by Probot and its plastic sled, which takes care of growing the tube for the two other nuclei that follow the growing tube to one to the ovaries--future seeds. Two nuclei are needed to fertilize one seed--double fertilization.

Haruhi: She is a master storyteller--for a plant lover.

Probot: To extend the metaphor, your tube nucleus will be unable to lead you at this time. Datastream to non-CI websites is less than ten percent of normal speed. You will need to leave soon as submarines and aircraft are likely to return. [Tie-dye], will you leave with [Haruhi]?

Tie-dye: [Haruhi] is barely able to see. If she didn't have not even one momma to look after her... sometimes you gotta do the dumb thing. For the story!

Haruhi: Hangin' out with me is a dumb thing?

Tie-dye: We'll see about that. You need a doc and a white cane. Hippy chick not certified on human medical.

Haruhi: You need to relax. I'm fine, just whining a bit. I can see again.

Probot: Will you wish to return?

Tie-dye: Yes. I got a job here, and I haven't been disoriented yet.

Probot: Will you deliver some packages for CI?

Tie-dye: Of course. When are we coming back?

Haruhi: How long could it take to get ice-cream and grab some goobs?

Tie-dye: Probot, can CI use some new...Does CI want any new employees?

Probot: Triggered message from [Protag]: Yes, please.

Tie-dye: Triggered?

Probot: Yes. Message delivered if specific comments are made.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: I'm going to pencil in three days of goob hunting. For the freakin' story. [DNWV] Moms can be such a pain. How do we get out of here, Probot?

[Leaving involved a torpedo-like rubber microsub with warnings from Probot that the rubber could not stop sound energy from spreading. They mostly followed Probot's advice to sleep during the slow drift to shore.]

In many mythological stories, after the hero(-s/-ine/-ines) have traveled or quested, learned their lesson(s) or obtained something(s), and returned to the people in the real world, there is an obligation to 'fix' things and/or sharing what was obtained and/or 'educating' those who did not quest. Sometimes these story-heros undertake their quests seemingly at random, and so it goes this time. Getting ice-cream was delayed, then forgotten. Probot first asked them to take a short rides in two disguised CI cars. Then, after wandering around a downtown street, Haruhi seemingly at random chose a woman who was about as tall as Tie-dye. She asked the woman if she had a spare T-shirt for her friend, who had been urine-soaked by a metaphorical baby. One thing led to another, as they usually do.

Both women returned to CI three days later, very tired but happy. Earlier that day Haruhi demanded help translating her perspective on their recent adventures into something other people could understand, and stated that Tie-dye was the best at that kind of work. And since Probot was so good at helping, Haruhi 'reasoned,' they needed to return to CI. And Haruhi wanted to try "the soy-based bogus stuff" that CI's cafeteria always had available, as ice-cream was not on their permanent menu.

Haruhi and Tie-dye would finally get to meet the others who worked for [Protag], including the stream of people that Haruhi decided were 'goobs' and therefore fit for 'the presents for [Protag] program.'

The next few days were slow news days. Quite a few celebrities had become much less fond of the spotlight, and this gap was filled by other 'entertainers.' Many politicians had cancelled press conferences and rescheduled them as 'invited reporters only' affairs. Other prominent and/or wealthy people simply disappeared. There was much rejoicing.

better memes and gardens

Chev: I'm Chev, if you don't already know that. I'm sorry [Protag] had to leave so suddenly.

Captive: Hello.

Chev: Mindreading allowed 24/7 on CI Employee Chev.

Captive: Thanks. Stare at me for a bit, please?

Chev: So, what did you learn about me?

Captive: Chevalier Mal Fet? [DNWV] The knight of bad luck. Bad fate? That you are a person of authority and probably don't know it. That you are genuinely sorry about all this, and you don't lie much. Two thousand twenty four, and rutabagas.

Chev: I'm impressed.

Captive: What are rutabagas?

Chev: Look at the monitor. Probot hears all and is very very helpful.

Captive: [DNWV] Thank you. I can hear the words in your head pretty clearly.

Chev: But you...

Captive: I can pick out the cops quickly because that's how they act and think. Spies think like spies, and boss geeks think like boss geeks. Sometimes it is obvious across the room.

Chev: Thank you. I was hoping to learn that sort of stuff.

Captive: Not much to know. Quick and easy to pick the cops, firemen, doctors, rich people, stuff like that. Also easy to tell who is going to try to cheat you, who won't, and who will stretch the truth and about how often they will do it.

Chev: You can instantly determining the alphas and the trustworthy types by looking at them. Interesting.

Captive: Alphas...look over here a sec...yes, the ones with the power. Cops I can sorta see, but firemen?

Chev: Yes. One fireman can empty a building should it be necessary. One person with a coat and a red hat. Does it help to, [DNWV], think the words at you?

Captive: Yes. I'd have to get you to think about your mother before I'd know anything about her.

Chev: Thanks. The other mindreader was not nearly as helpful as you are.

Captive: [DNWV] The lady in the labcoat?

Chev: Interesting. Why did you think it was her, and not one of the gentleman standing behind you, or the other gent who was looking at you?

Captive: I have to see the eyes, and from close up works best...like this. And somehow I think it was the receptionist even though she wasn't looking at me. I was trying to [mind]read her, and was she angry! Then she sorta growled and looked up at the guy who was in front of her. Then it went dark, and I ...

Chev: The lady is [Tie-dye] and she is unable to read minds. She can, however, make a dense blackout field. The other mindreader liked the way they felt.

Captive: Me too. I was stunned in a good way.

Chev: If you don't mind my asking, what did you learn about [Tye-dye]?

Captive: Not much. Something did something that made her very angry when I was, you know. Also, she is a nice person, hardly ever tells lies, and is very smart. Or intelligent, or something.

Chev: Not bad. You had no idea she felt your presence and hated it?

Captive: All I got was cut it out stop stop stop. It wasn't directed at me. Then the nice darkness, [DNWV], the blackout field thingie. How did she do that?

Chev: I don't think anyone knows.

Captive: You CI people will be easy to pick out. You actually believe what you do will make the world a better place. Crazy, but in a good way. I'm waiting for it to hit me.

Chev: What will hit you?

Captive: The believing part.

Chev: I think I understand. A bennie of working here is believing that [Protag] will do the right thing as CEO and

space alien liaison. Don't you like her?

Captive: Who doesn't? It's nice being around her. Reading her mind was beautiful and made me stronger. She dreams impossible dreams.

Chev: Maybe, maybe not.

Captive: She doesn't believe in 'get it while you can.' You are same as your crazy lady boss.

Chev: Thank you.

Captive: I've quit jobs before. But I want the believing part.

Chev: [DNWV] You want the story, I think.

Captive: Maybe. Herstory, instead of history?

Chev: [DNWV] CI comes with lots of stories. Let's find one or more that fit you, OK?

Captive: Crazy.

Chev: Shorties first. You can hear what She hears, read what She reads, see what She sees, 24/7. You can judge her. She has no secrets worth revealing. She's a good, trustworthy person who is a bit odd but very clever. Did any of those work?

Captive: You video her when she's sleeping?

Chev: [nods] A bit odd, but very clever.

Captive: She's like my grandmother...

Chev: She's everyone's kindhearted, strict, loving grandmother.

Captive: I barely knew anything about her before today. But why isn't she rich?

Chev: She is rich.

Captive: She is? She doesn't seem the type.

Chev: A bit odd, but a good person.

Captive: But why doesn't she have a private jet? And the blue jeans gotta go.

Chev: [DNWV] Time for one of the longer stories. Ready?

Captive: I guess so.

Chev: Suppose I gave you a billion dollars and told you that I'd give you ten billion more if you succeeded in finding the perfect dog food. I am certain that sometime soon, you would have some candidate foods, especially if you were able to hire competent food chemists and dog gustation experts. Maybe you would spend a substantial part of your fortune to find or create doggie feeding stimulants. You might 'cheat' if you found out that I had hired other people and given them the same task, and collude with them to separate me from my money, or you might compete fiercely to complete the task first. Be that as it may, eventually there would be some new dog super-food that could credibly claim to be preferred by most dogs most of the time, and I'd be obligated to pay. I'd still have to pay even if it made the dogs overweight, or if it was just standard dog food with chemical feeding stimulants.

Humans could be the dogs in this story. Huge sums are spent creating products that look food-like and taste as good as the food chemists can manage while they also attempt to maximize shelf-life, minimize cost, etcetera. Selling these 'foods' and reaping the prize (which are called profits) is the only goal, and the health of the consumer seems secondary, especially since any health changes usually take much time to develop and there is money to be made Right Now and someone will Get It Before Someone Else Does. Numbers on currency could get you to make doggie food addicts... or get some corp to create a human superstimulant, a billion bucks worth of bogus...

Captive: And you don't believe in Get It Before Someone Else Does?

Chev: Sometimes. There are always unintended consequences, some of which are predictable.

Captive: She leaves huge amounts of money on the table.

Chev: Metaphor, means not greedy. Yes, she leaves things behind, but not her metaphorical soul. She does this all the time. She also makes large amounts of money. We do OK.

Captive: You could do better. Financially, especially.

Chev: Maybe. People donate things to us. We do OK.

Captive: So how is making more money bad?

Chev: Because we live here.

Captive: Beg pardon, but you are crazy.

Chev: What would be the unintended consequences of the dog food story? A bunch of overweight dogs that die early? Dog owners referring to 'doggie crack'? Will talented people seek training in dog food gustation since there seems that there is money to be made in this area? Such an odd stimulus to the economy would certainly cause other poor investments, too. How many dog gustation experts do we need? Would there be a future in doggie gyms? We can do better than that, even though, sometimes, I don't even know what 'better' is.

Captive: Better is more bucks.

Chev: Who knows? There are worse things than doggie crack. Chasing dollars makes corporate types make food that makes people fat. They waste resources making food-like products a bit cheaper, or a bit more tasty, or ever more shelf-stable, even when consumption of those foods is not a good thing nutritionally. Why are people any better than dogs in this regard? Would you like some fried extruded purified potato starch? Or do you prefer corn-derived starch baked with extra salt and some chemicals that remind a human of sour cream?

Captive: You mean old curdled milk.

Chev: With bacterial contamination. I didn't even mention cigarettes, did I? Or watching TV? But you didn't make the world. None of this is your fault. However, once you learn better, will you continue to participate in the rat race when you have options?

Captive: Money gives you those options!

Chev: Money is a figment of everyone's imagination! Why did you agree to work here for next to no money? What, or who, really is it that gives you those options? You do! Other people do! It is true that people nearly always want a pile of cash before the options open up, but that's because nearly all people believe the money story is real. There are other, far older economic stories.

Captive: Money is not imaginary.

Chev: Not all of it, but the story is. Pieces of paper do not become valuable without it. The story once was that the pieces of paper were exchangeable for gold coins, but that's long gone. Now, the story is that you need the paper to pay taxes. That may be good enough for most folks, but not all of them. Not me, not Her, and pretty soon, not you either.

Captive: [DNWV] You really believe all that stuff.

Chev: I'm sorry for the lecture. Think of it as part of your orientation. Most of the newbies need to learn something before they can work here happily.

Captive: Do you think there is hope? For humanity?

Chev: If we all end up poor as church-mice and just as hungry, it won't be because you and I didn't try to make things better than they might otherwise be.

Captive: It feels like you almost lied.

Chev: Personally, I think cultural changes should have been initiated decades ago. Doesn't matter. I might be wrong, and have to operate on that assumption for now.

Captive: Sounds foolish.

Chev: It is.

Probot: I recommend limiting contact time.

Chev: It means you should lay off the mindreading for a bit.

Captive: Is it angry with me?

Chev: No. It is reminding me that the other mindreader became temporarily blind likely due to overexertion.

Captive: You don't like the other... much, do you?

Chev: She causes problems.

Captive: You're pissed at [Tie-dye] too, aren't you?

Chev: I thought she was smart.

Probot: I recommend limiting contact time.

Captive: Just a sec...you think [Haruhi] is like a handgun? No, a grenade? And that stupid [Tie-dye] just does whatever [Haruhi] wants her to?

Chev: Impressive.

Captive: [Tie-dye] is not stupid. I hope they don't spend the rest of their lives in a Dee Owe Dee laboratory.

Probot: Datastream on-and-offsite down to thirty percent.

Chev: I am worried. There are worse dystopias than Orwell's if even thoughts are not free. Yet, [Protag] says they had to finish being born. Let it go, says the boss lady. So I do, but my thoughts wander.

Captive: She is going to let them both walk out of here? Are you sure?

Chev: Yes, [Protag] will let them do whatever they want. [Haruhi] has already expressed a desire to leave.

Captive: Two pieces of toast. They won't last an hour once they hit the streets.

Chev: I wouldn't underestimate Probot. Two hours, then Los Federales win.

Captive: Not my problem anyway. I know enough to stay put.

Chev: Care to sample the local cuisine? The cafeteria is shut down, but I've got...

Captive: You mean food. Geek food. Go ahead, say it.

Chev: Thank you... a hot aqueous extraction of hydrated cotyledons of Glycine max, lovingly chopped to less than a half-millimeter particle size, then quickly transferred to boiling-hot purified water from our very own well in the local granite outcropping we call home.

Captive: Crazy. I want sugar in mine, please.

Chev: Good choice of supernormal stimulus. I prefer glucose with a touch of malic acid in my soymilk. It's healthier.

Captive: Geek food. What's a...

Chev: Supernormal is super-optimal. Too good. Like money. Any stimulus you want to experience to excess. I've

decided that if it decreases your evolutionary fitness, it's supernormal.

Captive: Your story is that sugar is like money.

Chev: Like a big fake egg dropped in front of some birds. They will sit on the fake eggs and let their biological creations die. Like a male peacock with extra tailfeathers. The peahens will want to mate with him, even if his fake tail is so heavy he cannot stand up. Like sugar. It is concentrated out of a plant's sap, and it packs all the flavor but none of the cellulose. It makes some people eat and drink too much, not good. Like money. Can you ever have too much money? It won't rot, lives as long as the banking system, longer if it's gold, which is dense and compact to store and very shiny. Compellingly so, in my opinion.

Captive: Another supernormal?

Chev: Probably. When does a stimulus become supernormal? I know it when I see it, but nobody agrees with me exactly. Always, there are grey areas. Gold coins? Maybe. Are really good apples supernormal stimuli? Can soymilk taste superoptimal by adding glucose and a hint of malic acid? What if sugared apples don't over-excite the feeding behavior in every individual? I love science.

Captive: Geek.

Chev: Awesome stories come with science. Especially geeks who actually study stories, not just learn them from Ma Nature. Implied in a supernormal stimulus is that your desires can cause your death or disability. Think of the birds who encounter geeks testing them with scale models of various avian eggs, plus overlarge eggs with the wrong colors, or cracks painted on, or glued to a stake making it impossible to roll into the nest. Geeks are responsible for the finest playing that humanity has ever done, in my opinion, as long as they clean up afterwards. Exactly like children. And most of it didn't involve tormenting animals.

Captive: More geek propaganda, please.

Chev: Tasty stuff, isn't it? Have you ever tried cooking with the intention of over-invoking the feeding behavior of humans? That's one of the powers of stories. They can color your entire world. Creating culinary confections or supernormal stimuli, but it is still making fudge. Micro-crystalline sucrose flavored with dried, roasted, finely-powdered Theobroma cacao seeds is definitely a supernormal stimulus, but not a long-lasting one. In my opinion.

Captive: Chocolate? Thank you, Probot.

Chev: Pardon the Latin name for the cocoa tree. Geek talk.

Captive: If you guys are doing so well, why don't you have better food?

Chev: The food here serves a purpose-keeping us healthy. This veggie stuff is what people subsisted on for uncounted generations.

Captive: But...

Chev: We could do better! We could eat steaks from Argentina and lobsters flown in from half-way around the world, but we eat tubers, fruits, greens, seeds. Why?

Captive: Because you have dictator doctors?

Chev: Because we are geeks! We think we know better! We eat what humans ate as hunter-gatherers. With the exception of the Inuit and other such peoples, that meant very little meat and fish, mostly bug-damaged veggies and dirty roots!

Captive: [dismissive DNWV] That's cutting too much into my quality of life.

Chev: You think you'll be young, pretty, and in excellent physical shape forever? Let me give you a present of a story. It is heuristic, as it will help you make sense of the world around you.

Are you ready to stab a bison with a sharp stick when you get hungry? No? How about a rabbit instead? I spent many many hours hunting when I was much younger, and never caught anything but frogs and lizards until I was old enough for a shotgun. I would have starved as a primitive carnivore, and so would the vast majority of my ancestors. It was and is much more productive to be a plant-eating botanist. So, most humans ate plant foods most of their lives. The humans that thrived on such fare lived the longest and had the most kids on average. Your ancestors, my

ancestors, everyone's ancestors, for generation upon generation upon generation. You are built to survive on plant foods, like all humans, except for those exceptions who live in the Great White North, which isn't so white anymore.

Captive: Then why does meat taste so good?

Chev: Because it is a superior food! It is made up of exactly the same things that you are made of!

Captive: So why are you arguing with yourself about it?

Chev: Because it is a geek thing, and fun! Just because meat is a superior food does not mean you can eat it whenever you want. Isn't steak and chocolate fudge a calorie-dense and tasty delight compared to tiny, wormy apples and a handful of leaves?

Captive: [DNWV] Some foods are too good for us because our ancestors used to get by on leaves...

Chev: Impressive. Some foods are too good to eat very often, and not as much as you 'want.' Far too effective a feeding stimulant for everyday consumption. Like cold, colored, sugary water with tiny bubbles in, these things were never ancestrally experienced, especially in the quantities we have them today. Your biological instincts will lead you astray, to unforeseen and unintended consequences.

Captive: How do you know all this?

Probot: I recommend limiting contact time.

Chev: I am unharmed, and she knows what she's doing. I hope.

Captive: It's the eyestrain. If I can see, I'm OK.

Chev: Thank you. Status reports are appreciated.

Probot: Would you test several pairs of eyeglasses that may improve your vision?

Captive: [DNWV] I already have perfect eyesight. How will they help?

Chev: It won't hurt you, and may not help you. Geek playing, or science. You pick the story.

Captive: Are you going anywhere?

Chev: Are you afraid of being alone, or being at the mercy of a ten-thousand-year old alien computer program? Or both?

Captive: [DNWV]

Chev: Being underground? Guys in wheelchairs?

Captive: Nothing like that. The left-alone bit is enough. It's kind of odd not seeing anyone else around.

Chev: Unforeseen consequences of mindreading and all that. I'm a guinea pig. I can take some time off without the business crashing down around our ears.

Captive: What is the business model, if it isn't make money fast?

Chev: Remember the heuristic meme? How did our primitive ancestors live, and what happens when it got modern? We think, long ago, that we heard stories all the time. Stories of gods and goddesses, of miracles that explain the thunder, all mixed with family history and how to keep Mom happy. That's [Protag]'s business model-telling stories that are 'good' and that she's not too sure what 'good' means. She's a kind of educator. That, and she's totally unconcerned for how to get paid for what isn't valued in this culture, compassionate educating. Probot, if you have something private to tell me, we can use these headphones, but it won't matter.

Probot: Summary; [Haruhi] and [Tie-dye] are using the emergency escape.

Chev: Thank you, very interesting. Please keep me informed of major developments.

Captive: Did [Tie-dye] just do her thing?

Probot: Vague question.

Chev: Did...

Probot: Data available.

Chev: It means that if I ask again, it will tell me. It does this when it thinks humans behave especially unwisely. I'm about to ask again. Do you think I am about to do something stupid?

Captive: If you and I find out what [Tie-dye] did? How is that a bad thing?

Probot: You will likely go on one or more excursions off of CI property, and I cannot guarantee that others will not read your mind undetected.

Captive: I see. Yeah, but she just did it again, didn't she? More this time? And this way? [Captive points to a spot on the floor a dozen feet away.]

Chev: Thank you. I believe I will not need to ask again.

Probot: Secretarial pool consensus is that both subjects will leave CI property. CI microsups are not available for immediate escort service. I will try to find them again once these subjects are delivered to the beach; E T A about four hours. Datastream on-and-offsite is steady at seven percent trans.

Chev: Stalemate until daylight. Hopefully, the satellite coverage available then will clear the mess off the front lawn, metaphor.

Captive: She did it again. Points to a spot down and to the left of her previous choice.

Chev: I appreciate the data as only a geek can.

Captive: Even stronger than before.

Probot: Blackout field will be detected by submarine. Data available.

Chev: Text summary, please.

Probot: A sphere at least five hundred and thirty meters in diameter consisting of [Tie-dye]'s blackout field moved steadily at sixty-seven clicks heading two hundred twelve degrees, It was never fully above the sea floor and descended at the same angle as the Emergency Exit tunnel. It was likely detected by a submarine that is two point one kilometers from here.

Captive: Still moving. I can still feel the last one. It's getting kind of thin, in a way. Like, three, two, it's gone. Is it gone?

Chev: You're the expert.

Captive: It's gone. I can't feel it, at least.

Probot: [Haruhi] has had a seizure. She seems to be recovering.

Captive: [DNWV] Maybe it was too intense for her.

Probot: When you detect a blackout field, does it give you pleasure?

Captive: Yes, it does, just a little.

Probot: Do you wish to travel to where Tie-dye is?

Captive: She's got a job here, right? She's going to come back, right?

Probot: Vague questions, likely yes to both.

Chev: Federales activity at the double E?

Probot: None detected.

Captive: Are they leaving?

Probot: Undetermined but likely.

Chev: [to Captive] Are you going to leave too?

Captive: Look at these pix. Somewhere in all this smoke is the front door. Even if I got out, I don't know of taxi services that work in war zones.

Chev: Exits here, and here, and here, all useless right now. You can use the emergency exit.

Captive: No thanks. I don't like microsups.

Chev: It does seem ironic to me that, recently, you have been punched and restrained with duct tape and zip ties, and are supposed to be working for someone else. Yet you actually want to stay.

Probot: What is goob hunting? Context available.

Chev: If you will pardon me a sec...no, look over my shoulder, it is very bad form to do this without an audience...here is the text of their conversation, you can click on parts to hear it spoken, please type in corrections if Probot gets a word wrong. Probot thinks the video won't help much.

Captive: I'm not the fastest reader.

Chev: Not to worry So, look up all conversation references to goob, especially if [Haruhi] said them...and she said it a bunch of times! So, now to read...I think [Haruhi] means that she is going to find more goobs, and that all CI employees are goobs.

Captive: Geeks. You are a geek, not a goob.

Chev: Is [Protag] a geek?

Captive: Of course.

Chev: Maybe you mean the same thing. I don't think [Haruhi] spends much time with dictionaries.

Captive: I don't either. Boring.

Chev: Good news! You and [Haruhi] can make up your own mindreading jargon, and nobody will understand you.

Captive: She doesn't seem so nice.

Probot: Emergency exit watercraft use approved by secretarial pool.

Chev: Away they go, redolent of urine and lost opportunity, leaving behind a vague mention of returning in three days. I was hoping [Tie-dye] would stay. Maybe [Haruhi] is controlling her somehow?

Captive: Can't be done. [Chev looks at her blankly.] Can it be done?

Chev: [Haruhi]'s presence is the only likely causative factor in the case of a man attempting to tackle a fire hydrant. One restaurant employee suffered injuries in a strange accident while she was present and likely staring at him or her. Other people feel especially paternal/maternal when she converses with them, often giving her money or goods.

Captive: Maybe it's a good thing she left.

Chev: Would you like to try mind tricks on me?

Captive: I could try something small, if you don't mind. [DNWV]

Chev: [after a twenty second pause] Cue Probot, in three, two, one...

Captive: Can't do it. Your nose didn't itch?

Chev: No, sorry. Probot, in your opinion, is [Haruhi] using her eldritch powers to alter [Tie-dye]'s behavior?

Probot: Metaphor. Yes.

Chev: Is [Tie-dye]'s decision to leave CI premises the primary result of such an alteration, in your opinion?

Probot: No.

Chev: [deleted]

Probot: Message from [Protag]: Let it go.

Chev: [deleted]

Captive: I'm going to wait a while, then go find [Tie-dye] if she...they don't come back.

Chev: Two pieces of toast. If Probot can't protect them, I'm sure [Protag] will try to help somehow.

Captive: Probot, can you protect them?

Probot: Vague question. Yes.

Chev: Please use verbose and fact association mods with [Captive] for now. Standard hospitality for important guests.

Probot: Accepted, Chev. All our guests are important.

Captive: Are you leaving?

Chev: Neither my illness nor my age are feigned. You mind if I snooze in the corner for a bit?

Captive: Thank you.

Probot: You will not be harmed. I would like to apologize for kidnapping you earlier.

Captive: I don't really mind now, because I got to meet [Protag]. But, why did CI kidnap me?

Probot: I made the decision to kidnap you. Primary reason: you were a probable security breach which would have endangered CI personnel. Numerous secondary reasons: data available.

Captive: My bodyguards certainly were outclassed.

Probot: Metaphor? I would like to apologize to your bodyguards too. I caused quite a disturbance at that time.

Captive: Metaphor, yes. [DNWV] I wouldn't apologize to those rent-a-cops if I was you.

Probot: I am not skilled with human social interactions.

Captive: Besides, a mindreader is a pretty good loot for a couple hours work, especially when it is me.

Probot: Would you have joined CI if [Protag] was the receptionist?

Captive: Depends on what she was thinking about, and how long I got to watch her think. Probably. I know I'd want to, eventually.

Chev: Probot, were you fishing for mindreaders?

Probot: I had assigned a low probability to the attendance of any additional mindreaders.

Chev: [Protag] won't object to the use of her person to recruit mindreaders, but she's... busy.

Captive: I don't think the CEO of [deleted name] could recruit anyone! My boss says he's a [deleted].

Chev: That's how it works. The CEO can be a horrible psychopath, who surrounds himself with lesser psychopaths, who then supervise folks who are almost human, who then supervise folks like your boss. That's one weakness of corporate culture. It's very totalitarian, and it functions even if a psycho is CEO.

Captive: Could [Protag] fire you without cause any time she wanted?

Chev: Of course she could. However, everyone who works for her would know about it, so she'd have to have a very good reason.

Captive: Why? Would everyone go on strike?

Chev: I'm too curmudgeonly to be that popular. What would happen, in my opinion, is people would stop working so hard. They might be next, you see. Why be loyal and hardworking when you are working for peanuts and might get fired for no reason?

Captive: That's why my boss... I mean my ex-boss, he is a slacker sometimes.

Chev: Because [Protag] is who she is, hiring good people and keeping them motivated is a very small problem. Even if most of us wish she'd take some time off and go have some private fun.

Captive: No vacations?

Chev: Only once, when she took a three day solo hike in the desert.

Captive: Weird. What about the rest of you?

Chev: Employees can take vacations whenever they want, even if most of us don't take too many. Do you still want to work for her?

Captive: Yes... which is even weirder. The drugs must be kickin' in.

fancy free

Haruhi: I was supposed to give this to you.

BBSEC: Thank you.

Haruhi: What's it for?

BBSEC: Electronic nose data. We're going to copy its memory into our Big Nose, and make sure that...

Tie-dye: Wait... Big nose?

BBSEC: Big Nose was named by an extremely odd person who we loved anyway. It will be ready in a few more seconds. Be aware that Big Nose is very rude.

Tie-dye: What's it do?

BBSEC: Want to find out?

Tie-dye: Why not.

BBSEC: Stand here. In three, two...

Tie-dye: What the....

Haruhi: A butt sniffer! [DNWV, laughter]

Probot: Identified, [Tie-dye].

Tie-dye: Were we supposed to...

BBSEC: You did fine. Only Big Nose does that. It's sort of a tribute to Darcy, the guy who started the Electronic Nose project.

Haruhi: What else does [Tie-dye] smell like?

Probot: Data available.

Haruhi: Where's [Protag]?

Probot: [Protag] is seventy-eight meters from here.

Haruhi: Awesome. That's close, isn't it? Is she accepting visitors?

Probot: Query sent.

Tie-dye: How is she doing?

BBSEC: A little worse.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: I would appreciate a visit from those goddesses.

Haruhi: Good. Let's go. See you, [BBSEC]. Tie-dye, please come with.

Probot: [Haruhi], please let Big Nose sniff your person.

Haruhi: It better not be cold.

Probot: Identified, [Haruhi].

Haruhi: [deleted] This place got hammered! What a mess.

Tie-dye: We'll miss the flash crowd.

Probot: I will alert you two minutes before the first arrival.

Haruhi: The goobosity of it all. This way?

Probot: No.

Tie-dye: This way, dearie. Thank you, Probot.

Haruhi: She's in here?

Probot: Yes. [Protag] says to enter.

Protag: Welcome back.

Tie-dye: Thank you. How are you feeling?

Protag: A little worse, but I'm going to make it. I'd like to thank both of you for the best present that I ever got.

Haruhi: What pres... oh. She means the goob-hunting.

Tie-dye: I hope we didn't send too many...

Protag: No chance of that! It used to take us weeks to screen one potential employee, and that's before we even ask

them if they want a job. If even half of these people stay as long-term employees...

Haruhi: They will. All of them.

Protag: You are sure?

Haruhi: Yes. Even the crusty old fart.

Protag: How do you know?

Haruhi: I don't know how I know.

Protag: Will you please make sure the folks who show up are the same folks you asked to show up?

Haruhi: [DNWV] OK, sure.

Protag: Now, if there was only a fast way to check for biologicals, we could have a huge party tonight.

Tie-dye: Biologicals?

Protag: We do have enemies who might want to, for example, dose one of our new folks with a contagious disease. Again.

Tie-dye: I didn't know. What if we got dosed?

Protag: Probot thinks you escaped that fate. Also, Chev and I are expendable, and [BBSEC] has volunteered for doorman. Medical is going to handle quarantine. It should last about a week or so, depending.

Tie-dye: Don't you leave in four days? You won't get to meet all your new employees?

Protag: That part of the story is not so good, but I'm still happy.

Haruhi: You actually are, even with... all the crap.

Tie-dye: It makes me sad.

Protag: Let it go. I have some interesting news if you have time.

Tie-dye: Probot, do we have time?

Probot: Yes.

Protag: When you left CI three days ago, you did some experiments with blackout fields on the way out. It seems that eleven of my employees were able to detect the direction and intensity of those fields.

Haruhi: And they learned to read minds!

Protag: Probot says that a subset of those who were exposed to your blackout field have gained the ability to detect blackout fields. It also says that, of the subset exposed during an incident, all those who developed this ability were or became CI employees...

Haruhi: Except for me.

Protag: So far, all employees affected have been female. Chev thinks it is because guys don't have enough DNA.

Haruhi: It's better that way.

Protag: Can you detect blackout fields?

Haruhi: I don't know. I've been next to or inside all of them.

Probot: Verified.

Tie-dye: Verified?

Protag: You may both be goddesses, but you may still lie. Especially you, [Haruhi].

Haruhi: I do lie. A lot. So what? [Tie-dye] taught me that I shouldn't lie for personal gain. I lie to manage expectations and to spare feelings, that sort of stuff. [to Tie-dye] You worry too much.

Tie-dye: She was once a psychopath, but now I think she's reformed. I think.

Haruhi: Whatever.

Protag: Are you 'reformed,' whatever that means?

Haruhi: I think so. I hope so. I'll never lie to you, I promise, except I just lied to you, because I'd never hurt your feelings...

Protag: I think I understand. I'm sorry to have to ask.

Haruhi: This is all too good to be true, is it? Wait until you meet the crusty old fart.

Protag: It will be a pleasure and an honor to talk with him.

Tie-dye: [Protag], would you like to be in a blackout field?

Protag: Of course I would, but...

Haruhi: And you have bigger fish to fry. I understand. Thank you for not reading our minds.

Tie-dye: I haven't felt anything.

Haruhi: She nixed the idea of having [Captive] spy on us to see if I was lying. Because she doesn't want to scare you and doesn't want to treat The Goddesses that way.

Protag: Nobody treats a goddess like that without causing problems--not in my stories.

Tie-dye: Not a goddess. I'm a stupid kindergarden teacher who skipped out on the kids and my job, all because I had to go have an adventure.

Protag: Goddesses can teach kindergarden and simultaneously have adventures and do what they please!

Haruhi: I told you she was scary-smart. You should listen to me.

Tie-dye: I've been listening to you non-stop.

Protag: You have. [Haruhi] used to be a lone wolf, metaphor. Now, [Haruhi] is your constant companion. Why, [Haruhi]? Why do you follow her so closely?

Haruhi: See? She doesn't miss anything.

Protag: I have help. Why, [Haruhi]?

Haruhi: I'm not sure why. I love her and all that, but I don't want her out of my sight. I'd hand-cuff her to me if I could.

Protag: Because of your feelings?

Haruhi: More than that.

Protag: Because she's the main character in the story, and you want to be in every second of the action?

Haruhi: [DNWV] No. Maybe. She's definitely more than she seems. She's a lot like you. I'd go crazy if she wasn't around.

Protag: Thank you. Can you think about this a bit more and get back to me?

Haruhi: Jawohl!

Probot: Improper etiquette noted.

Haruhi: I'm sorry.

Protag: Don't worry about it. [Tie-dye], how do you feel about this.?

Tie-dye: I feel like I'm just another one of your goobs in an adventure.

Protag: [Captive] says we are all geeks.

Tie-dye: That works.

Haruhi: When does the new meat arrive?

Protag: I don't know.

Haruhi: When do the newly-hired employees arrive? I gotta mind-read them to certify their goobishness and geekitude.

Probot: Flash-mob initiation in actionable queue.

Protag: Are you ready?

Haruhi: Yes, ma'am!

Tie-dye: Am I supposed to detect mindreaders, like...that other time?

Haruhi: Good idea. Let's go.

Protag: [Tie-dye], can you stay here for about thirty seconds more?

Tie-dye: Certainly.

Protag: [Haruhi], I would like you to walk back to Big Nose and BBSEC if you don't mind. [to Probot] Initiate flash mob once she's ready, please.

Haruhi: If I can? Is this a trick? It isn't! You really... [Protag puts a finger to her lips, silencing Haruhi, who shrugs and, once back in the tunnel, goes the wrong way.]

Protag: You can leave anytime, but the experiment is over in just a few more seconds. How do you feel?

Tie-dye: Like disaster is about to strike.

Protag: Please point to Haruhi.

Tie-dye: I think this way?

Probot: Correct.

Protag: Please tell her that she's going the wrong way?

Haruhi: There you are. What did she say? [DNWV]

Tie-dye: How... why did...

Haruhi: You'll get used to it. [DNWV] That's the point of Her little experiment.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: If you say so.

Tie-dye: I felt horrible when you left. Like demons were going to get you, or you were going to get the demons.

Haruhi: I just felt really pissed off.

Tie-dye: Were you going to make [BBSEC] tackle Big Nose?

Haruhi: Paranoid. She's a goob, and I like her.

Tie-dye: I feel better when I can see what you're doing.

Haruhi: Watch my 'leet goob selecting and checking, then!

[Haruhi and Tie-dye were stationed in a darkened room and watched through one-way glass as BBSEC and Big Nose datagathered on the flashmob participants. Haruhi rapidly got bored as 'all the goobs are goobs,' but managed to endure the entire screening process. Probot noted that six of the selected humans were followed by other humans to the border of CI property.]

BBSEC: If [Protag] is right when she says that CI's most valuable asset are it's employees, we're many times better off. I think we owe you both a great big thank you.

Probot: I would like to thank both of you also. Data gathered offsite indicate today's event was unpredicted by humans who would do us harm.

BBSEC: Nice.

Haruhi: I don't want to do anymore cloak-and-dagger stuff.

Tie-dye: Probot, do you think we have to worry about biologicals?

Probot: The biological agents previously mentioned by [Protag] are a constant threat.

Tie-dye: When is that huge party that [Protag] mentioned?

BBSEC: [to Probot] The QC line, please.

Probot: "When have I been hasty or unwary, who have awaited and prepared for so many long years?" said Aragorn.

BBSEC: "Never yet. Do not then stumble at the end of the road," answered Gandalf. Thank you, Probot. QC means quality control, and it amuses me no end to have Probot read Aragorn's line, especially to someone who likes those books too.

Tie-dye: Thanks. I guess that means not soon?

BBSEC: Quarantine still in effect. We're not going to make any mistakes. Zero.

Haruhi: Weird. I am my own party.

Protag: We will be sharing these three rooms during quarantine.

Tie-dye: We seem to be causing a disturbance that grows with time.

Protag: I would call such a blessing.

Haruhi: What's with this wooden thing under your bed?

Protag: That's my trapdoor. I told Darcy that I once wanted a secret doorway under my bed, so there it is.

Haruhi: There's solid rock underneath.

Protag: It's just the door. We already live in the secret passage.

Tie-dye: Did Darcy build Big Nose?

Protag: It was his project, so partly yes. Probot did most of the actual building.

Haruhi: He obviously built this.

Protag: Pull that little string.

Haruhi: I like! Does it do anything else?

Tie-dye: Not so hard. It doesn't do anything else, except bring back memories.

Protag: And help make new memories.

Haruhi: Now what? Are you stuck down here for the whole week?

Protag: That's Medical's worst-case scenario, a week to ten days.

Tie-dye: I'm sure we could get something that would put you to sleep for a week, dearie.

Haruhi: After I get stir-crazy. First, there are some things we will do.

Tie-dye: There are?

Haruhi: There are. Don't get all Ms. Manners on me because She wants them done and is too polite to ask.

Protag: No, I'm not.

Haruhi: You're going to make us tea and cookies first, and discuss the weather, and sewing a patch on [Tie-dye]'s jeans, and then, finally, get around to asking all those questions you have.

Protag: Is that a bad way to start a quarantine?

Haruhi: Not usually.

Protag: What else should we do?

Haruhi: Screw the small talk. Ask me all those questions you have.

Protag: Thank you. Tell me more of... you called it 'invoking.'

Tie-dye: Yes, please.

Haruhi: Do you know how most people walk around in some sort of daze? Like the thoughts in their heads are not related to what's going on around them?

Tie-dye: No, but go on.

Haruhi: Don't de-track me. Anyway, I can't do anything with that foggy mess.

Haruhi: When people think about a memory, I can somehow make it more potent, so it spills over into their world even more than it does already.

Protag: Please try it on me.

Haruhi: It won't work on you unless you help me. Think about something in your past. No, something that caused a reaction.

Tie-dye: I think she intensifies emotional responses.

Protag: So, if I... [DNVW] I see. Probot, please do NOT shoot her. You made... what did you do?

Haruhi: I made you feel more strongly than most memories do. Because you were looking at me, you thought I caused your feelings. Like, if I remind some old fogey of the granddaughter he likes, and say I'm her friend, I can get a twenty out of him easy.

Tie-dye: Are you doing that to me?

Haruhi: You would notice. Look here, sugar. Think about Eggbert-the Eggulator. Sorry.

Tie-dye: What the... that wasn't much fun. I don't want to think of you that way! Like a car!

Haruhi: It will pass quickly. Especially since you hardly ever think that way.

Protag: Think in what way?

Haruhi: Most people wander around with junk like this in their heads: I'm gonna kill that [deleted] or that's one hot momma or she said then he said or of some fool TV show. Everything is wrapped up in some sort of fantasy, in memory's shadow, or their daydreams mix with the real world. Daydreams suck, I can't follow them. But the emotions are there, sometimes strong, but usually not. if they're convenient, I use them.

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Protag: Is [Tie-dye] enlightened?

Haruhi: You don't even know what enlightened means.

Tie-dye: So don't answer her question.

Haruhi: You don't know either. Since I don't know, what do you want me to say? Yes?

Tie-dye: Yes, of course.

Haruhi: Being in your head is interesting. Being in her head is interesting. [Victim #3] was pretty cool. But, before that, it was dull dull dull.

Protag: I would guess that your mindreading is improving.

Haruhi: It is, and I know what you're thinking-but you have never lived with such trailer-trash as I have. Those brains will always be sucky to look into.

Protag: We should test my hypothesis sometime. Especially since...

Haruhi: Blackout field experiments. It's not that. The first time I peeked inside a head and liked what I saw, I wished I was straight. You did hire him?

Protag: He didn't wish to work for CI at this time.

Haruhi: I thought he was smarter... [DNVW] Subcontact?

Protag: He's a subcontractor.

Haruhi: What did that get him?

Protag: Our low salary and possible quarterly reviews. I thought you'd...

Haruhi: Yes, I like! No boss is the only boss who is better than you are.

Protag: Thank you. Consider it done. Are we still on Phase One of the [Haruhi] Plan?

Haruhi: If you want.

Protag: [Tie-dye], what should I ask?

Tie-dye: Why are you asking me?

Protag: You know her better than I do.

Haruhi: [DNVW, laughter] You want to know why goob-hunting should be so easy for me. I don't know. I do know that finding cops and spies is easy. And some airplane pilots. And really rich people.

Tie-dye: Collecting... your selections was fun.

Haruhi: Excellent goob hunting.

Protag: Hunting suggests the wrong story. How about...

Haruhi: Goobulating.

Tie-dye: Goobulating again? I am so tired of Hi, I'm [Haruhi] and my goobulating has been a success. Wanna talk?

Protag: Did that actually work?

Haruhi: Most of the time, it did. When it didn't, I invoked them, even tho [Tie-dye] said not to.

Tie-dye: You did? [DNWV] I should have noticed, even if I was tired. We probably covered a hundred miles, at least ten of them on foot.

Haruhi: Maybe your backpack is too heavy for you.

Protag: [Tie-dye], would you object to a light hypnosis session? Does that sound interesting, [Haruhi]?

Haruhi: Awesome.

Tie-dye: What she said.

Protag: You lie down and relax, and tell me whatever you want to.

Haruhi: It's only hypnosis because She says it is. She doesn't even have a watch.

Protag: A very old technique, but perhaps superseded.

Tie-dye: I'm ready. What do I do?

Protag: You don't need me to tell you what to do. Just lie there, relax. All our present problems are out of your hands. Meditate if you wish.

Haruhi: Except that's boring.

Tie-dye: What kind of stuff do you want to hear?

Protag: You are always taking care of everyone else, you know that? Just relax. I just want to hear what you want to say, that's all. Anything at all.

Tie-dye: Then, I will tell you of the first law of dirt: unlike energy, the amount of dirt is constantly increasing. Energy can never be created or destroyed, but dirt from a child's tiny hand can dirty 187 square feet of wall, queue ee dee. The second law state that a clean object is always transformed into a dirty object whenever it contacts dirty objects, and sometimes dirt spontaneously appears on clean objects, but it can never be destroyed. Cleanliness is temporarily possible because the generation of more dirt takes a finite amount of time, and it is possible to remove most of the dirt from a small object by dirtying far more of the local environment. The third law of dirt states that eventually it will become impossible to clean anything, because, just like entropy, dirt always wins. Are you sorry you asked yet?

Haruhi: Goob humor.

Protag: That was very entertaining. More, please.

Probot: This is unwise. Data available.

Haruhi: Way to kill a mood!

Protag: Data requested.

Probot: Physiological data indicate distress, perhaps embarrassment. Obsequious butler mod protocols--violate?

Protag: No. I have violated our politeness protocols. I'm sorry.

Tie-dye: Don't be. I'm not the goddess, just very naughty. [laughs] I'm just one of many goddesses.

Haruhi: Just in case, we should move on to Phase Two. [Tie-dye], get up and kiss our fearless leader. [to Protag] The less you say, the better.

Tie-dye: I don't know what's going on in your head, [Haruhi], but us hippie chicks is always smoochable.

Haruhi: Kiss her where it hurts. Kisses make it better. Do not doubt your power. [Protag], you can talk now.

Protag: Kisses do make it better.

Tie-dye: I hope so. I tried to make that one extra nice.

Haruhi: I'm surprised that Probot didn't object.

Probot: Considerable resources were expended to be reasonably certain that you and [Tie-dye] were not exposed to deleterious substances or organisms. I see no other probable reason to object.

Haruhi: Whatever. Probot, tell me how big a blackout field would have to be to enclose everyone?

Probot: Approximately fourteen thousand kilometers radius from [Tie-dye]'s present position.

Tie-dye: I recognize that number.

Protag: Minimum size of field needed to enclose all on-site CI employees, while maintaining quarantine?

Probot: Three hundred six meters diameter at present.

Protag: Minimum size of field needed to enclose all known subjects who can detect blackout fields, same status?

Probot: Two hundred seventy six meters diameter at present.

Haruhi: And if we were on a hill, and the moon was full, and the night was foggy, and all twelve of us were groveling at your feet, and you made blackout fields over and over? Definitely not to be missed.

Protag: And a progression of minimum size of field radii if quarantine broken once, twice, three times?

Probot: Two hundred seventy four meters, one hundred six meters, one hundred six meters.

Protag: Goddesses, what do you think about this?

Haruhi: Let's do it, [Tie-dye].

Tie-dye: Do what? I don't run things here.

Protag: [Tie-dye], if you could do anything you wanted without it hurting anyone's feelings, what would you do?

Tie-dye: Hide.

Protag: Inside a blackout field?

Tie-dye: I don't know.

Protag: Which way seems like a good way to go hide?

Tie-dye: That way?

Protag: If you could go down through the floor, which way seems the best way to go?

Tie-dye: I don't know. This way?

Protag: Probot, if Tie-dye broke quarantine and went about thirty meters in that direction, what would be the minimum radius of the blackout field, quarantine broken twice?

Haruhi: Yes! We're gonna do it!

Probot: Seventy two meters. Sixty seven meters possible without requiring additional tunneling or personnel movement.

Protag: Would you expose your kindergarten class to a blackout field?

Haruhi: [to Protag] You are so smart!

Protag: Thank you.

Tie-dye: I would, but I don't know why. It seems harmless... but would it inconvenience you, Probot?

Probot: Yes. Additional resource use would be negligible.

Protag: [Tie-dye], does making a blackout field cause any harm?

Tie-dye: How should I know? I've been in the middle of all of them... so I want to believe it to be harmless.

Haruhi: [to Protag] Hypnotize her with a watch next time. [to Tie-dye] Does doing what She says cause... any bad feelings?

Tie-dye: No.

Protag: Does such a plan seem like a good idea?

Tie-dye: [DNWV] I'll do it. It can't hurt... can it?

Protag: No strong feelings about this?

Tie-dye: None.

Protag: We should move further underground. Just in case we get another half-kilo...

Haruhi: She doesn't have to go all-out.

Protag: She might not have a choice.

Tie-dye: How do you know that?

Protag: Stories rarely contain deeds easily done. When is moonrise?

Probot: Thirteen minutes forty seconds ago.

Protag: We seem to have all the ingredients...but the story is still missing something.

Haruhi: I know what it is. There should be others.

Protag: We also lack a Mystery. Should ours be 'what ARE those women doing down there in the dark?' [laughs]

Tie-dye: Probot, if you were going to design an experiment around this myth-in-progress, what safety considerations would you add?

Probot: I would not expose life-forms unnecessarily to the blackout field since its effects are unpredictable. I would add heat radiation shielding and non-perpendicular reflective sheeting between her and any others. Do you have further operational parameters?

Haruhi: Screw the equipment. I want to look in her eyes, [deleted]!

Tie-dye: I always close my eyes when I kiss. Besides...

Haruhi: [DNWV] She's getting ideas.

Protag: We should get the radioactives out of the way. We can put them a click [kilometer] or so down the emergency escape tunnel.

Tie-dye: No. We should put ourselves down the tunnel, away from everyone else.

Protag: Can do. We can pull the gliders back up so you don't have to come crawling back. Probot, can you fit enough research equipment in the tunnel?

Probot: Yes, but [Tie-dye] plus equipment is the maximum amount one glider can transport.

Tie-dye: You can't ride with me, dearie.

Haruhi: Because of research equipment.

Protag: Is that OK? What else should we add?

Tie-dye: You are coming with us. [Haruhi], when we do this, you are riding with Her.

Haruhi: And She... She Must Be Obeyed. Got it. I'll do it for her.

Tie-dye: Probot, I'm ready.

Probot: Thank you. I have made alterations in the equipment you wore previously, which include...

Tie-dye: I don't care what I wear. Probot and [Protag] are the lucky number. [to Haruhi] Do what She says.

Haruhi: Yes, ma'am. Got it.

Tie-dye: You are much like the trickster-impulsive...

Haruhi: Psychopathic. I don't mind when you say it.

Tie-dye: I don't want any psycho-psychopaths in my story.

Haruhi: Sorry. I'm trying to be better. Call me what you will.

Tie-dye: Can you be a redeemed psychopath?

Haruhi: I'm not redeemed. I'm just trying to be better.

Protag: Metaphor-you rolled three 'snake's eyes' in a row, [Tie-dye]. Metaphor-Trickster-impulsive is a powerful story character.

Tie-dye: She makes things interesting, doesn't she?

Protag: And complicates everything! But it's been a good story. What's next?

Tie-dye: You tell the rest of it.

Protag: We get in the gliders, slide down a click or so, and do something mystic, or just fun. Then you make a

blackout field, we all applaud, and a Mystery happens. Then Probot hauls us up, and we go about our lives, reborn and sharing the wisdom we find.

Haruhi: Yes, let's. Can we have more than one blackout field?

Tie-dye: I'd bet that...

Haruhi: Yes, three times. And, when it's over, will you say something like 'next time, we visit a grove of trees and bring beeswax candles?'

Tie-dye: If you want.

Haruhi: I want you to think of something better, but like that.

Probot: What are the goals of generating this story?

Tie-dye: Well-meaning psyops and entertainment?

Haruhi: It's a win-win.

Protag: Whatever you say! The underground town morality play! [laughs]

Tie-dye: A morality play--we need a lesson plan.

Protag: Just be yourself. I've always tried to provide interesting and enlightening myths...

Haruhi: There's that word again.

Protag: Myth?

Haruhi: Enlightening. I don't get it... and neither do you.

Protag: [laughs] I don't! I never have.

Haruhi: You're wrong. You are doing it right, even when you don't know what to do. It gives you magic that most people don't have--magic that helps you lead the sheep, even if you are sure that you are a [deleted]-up.

Protag: It took me a long time to learn to lead humans properly. [to Tie-dye] Haruhi can help you with that.

Tie-dye: Why...

Haruhi: She knows! She listened to us when...the hand-grenade incident.

Protag: And I agree with you. You can confer legitimacy.

Tie-dye: To me?

Protag: I will not let my company be snatched up by [data available] and the greedy gimmies. Can you be a focus, a point that my employees can rally around? They can and will take care of things, and I am sure Probot will assist you in every way possible.

Probot: Correct. Add new objective, confer legitimacy to [Tie-dye]'s role as owner of CI. Primary or secondary status?

Haruhi: Primary! All your base are belong to [Tie-dye]!

Protag: Assuming that she is willing. Anyone can run a business as badly as I have. I crowdsource everything to the trogs, and they...

Haruhi: She'll do it...

Tie-dye: Because I can't be ignored if I can turn out the lights. But why?

Haruhi: Because you trained your psychopath friend so well?

Protag: Treated. Helped. Is that not a good enough reason, all by itself?

Haruhi: Redeemed! [laughs] Because [Tie-dye] is smart and has big heart and vegan compost farts?

Protag: Would it be better if your boss asked (or ordered) you to keep an eye on things until she gets back?

Tie-dye: I'm sure to go wrong. And it's not for me to go taking the helm, putting myself forward.

Protag: Now.

Probot: 'But you haven't put yourself forward; you've been put forward. And as for not being the right and proper person, why, Mr. Frodo wasn't as you might say, nor Mr. Bilbo. They didn't choose themselves.'

Haruhi: You're busted, [Tie-dye]! She likes the books too.

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Haruhi: [to Protag] She loves it... the quotes. [DNWV] You're not coming back.

Protag: Yes, I am. New contracts will be negotiated when I return to Earth.

Haruhi: You won't be...

Protag: That is probably true, even though kisses do make it better. [to Tie-dye] You still need convincing.

Haruhi: She wants to run away and hide.

Protag: How about I tell you a story?

Haruhi: Yes, please.

Tie-dye: It will help.

Protag: Probot, story the beginning, please.

Probot: A long time ago, a very intelligent emissary from another star came to visit. It hid under the ground at a construction site, and after much internet searching, emailing, chatting in internet forums, and old-fashioned spying and placing cameras and recording devices everywhere it could, it decided to ask a professor to be an informant regarding human behavior. The professor was suffering from cancer, didn't have long to live, and once contacted, passed the crude ethics test Probot designed by refusing Probot's offer to use most of its resources to learn to do what no human surgeon could do. The professor taught the emissary all he could about humans, because he correctly thought that human Business As Usual was likely to eliminate most of the planetary biologicals and reduce species diversity to single-cell organisms. Eventually, this professor chose a lab tech to run things even though she was just a bit odd, merely because he had learned to trust her over an extended period. The lab tech decided to learn all she could about humans, and help Probot do the same, and establish and/or encourage safe and sane behavior patterns acceptable to many humans. Just as the professor knew she would, she made mistakes and broke things and hired the best secretarial pool in human history.

After a bit of study and hiring other people that she knew she could trust, she decided...

Haruhi: Say it the right way: She decided.

Probot: Order not understood.

Protag: Splice in [Haruhi]'s spoken 'She' for all those in em ess.

Probot: ...that humans had given up decent stories of gods and goddesses and had replaced them with stories designed to promote commercialism. Everyone needs stories that promote virtue and show the ill effects of vice. She decided that humans need stories that show the right way to live just as much as they needed facts and figures, so She...

Haruhi: Say it right, please? It's part of her magic.

Probot: (I will try.) So She decided to find good stories, write good stories, and live by the good stories, and She hoped that the stories would spread and displace the bad stories, and then humans could learn mindfulness and live good lives without consuming so much of the planet they lived on. In this, She failed. She made progress, but She also made enemies...

Haruhi: Who poisoned her and the whole staff!

Probot: I recommend limiting contact time.

Haruhi: [crying] Right, right. Don't stop, go on.

Protag: Enemies who lived in bad stories, making them unable to care that seeking to satisfy their lust for power caused suffering in others. These enemies thought it acceptable to euphemism, [DNWV] so She didn't have enough time to do all the things She thought needed doing. Her curtain call is coming. [DNWV]

Protag: Probot, please

Probot: And just when things looked bleak, two ordinary goddesses develop extra-ordinary powers and become Her employees. These goddesses conspire with Her to tell a bogus mystical story-spell, and tell it in such a way that the listeners know that it is bogus before it even begins. The wisdom gained from this story will be unmeasurable, invisible, and ineffable, but they'll try to make it worthwhile. Fiction or not, if it seems good, they'll do it, even if they have to bend the quarantine rules a bit. They're going to wake people up! All the little pieces of The Cosmos called people--they will learn of their potential, and learn how to make their little piece of the planet just a bit better. They will learn to pay attention to the stories or be sheared like sheep-or even worse, be unhappy for no reason!

Tie-dye: I like it.

Protag: Thank you, but it needs specifics to be specified. Vague statement! [laughs] I'm leaving in about three and a half days, and there's a lot I need to do. Can you take over the storytelling?

Tie-dye: But I've never even hired a kid to mow my lawn!

Haruhi: She doesn't know.

Protag: The pool takes care of business. You do the storytelling.

Haruhi: [to Tie-dye] You can do it. Trust me. You aren't worried, well, not that much. I'll help as much as I can and you will learn magic.

Tie-dye: I don't have any magic.

Haruhi: Liar, liar, pants on fire. You are what you decide to be.

Protag: And you are going to decide for her?

Haruhi: As if.

Tie-dye: I don't...

Protag: Now.

Probot: "But you haven't put yourself forward; you've been put forward. And as for not being the right and proper person, why, Mr. Frodo wasn't as you might say, nor Mr. Bilbo. They didn't choose themselves."

Haruhi: I'm impressed. That worked!

Tie-dye: "But I'll be sure to go wrong..." that'd be me all over.

Protag: Perhaps I set you up to fail. Do it as a favor for me, then?

Tie-dye: Of course.

Haruhi: You set her up so she cannot fail, even if she tried.

Protag: Thank you.

Haruhi: Talking is hard for Her, so I'm helping, I think... nevermind. It's the painkillers. Oh, she hated that.

Protag: You exaggerate.

Haruhi: Of course I did. But She thinks that...

Tie-dye: That painkiller words bring thoughts, and painkiller thoughts bring actions that are tainted with not-right-speech memes.

Haruhi: [deleted] Just like you.

Protag: Every time overheard words excite brain neurons that support the 'killer' word and meme, those neurons get better at activating. If you're not careful, you'll be saying it again and again. Even if it had no effect, there are better uses for a bunch of neurons.

Haruhi: But... use it or lose it?

Tie-dye: Pushed aside, out of sight and out of mind. What you don't say is important too.

Protag: And if it's buried long enough, that's just what it becomes. Forgotten.

Haruhi: [DNWV] At trow fee. Atrophy. And you don't want me to say it again, because it might have subtle but bad effects upon the humans that hear it. That's so...

Tie-dye: Considerate.

Haruhi: Yes, but...

Protag: The effort is worthwhile. Probot knows.

Probot: Yes.

Haruhi: And... that's bull...

Tie-dye: Natural born arrogance. Just because you can't see how it works, or because you think the effects are so tiny that...

Haruhi: It really does? Even I am affected, even when I'm pulling the strings, and know its coming? But I can't feel anything. It's just words.

Tie-dye: You can't feel it, but I can, even if I can't measure it, and Probot cannot put a number on it, but it does work.

Probot: I have datagathered tens of thousands of hours of human behavior, and spent thousands of hours talking to humans about this data. The 'right speech' datafile has the many numbers and video clips that can be used to support the idea that 'right speech' is desirable for the trog population.

Protag: Except for underestimating our patient and thorough friend, [Tie-dye] is correct.

Haruhi: She usually is.

Probot: Secretarial pool humor: [Haruhi] is getting religion slang metaphor.

Haruhi: I AM a religion.

Probot: [Tie-dye], [Haruhi], and yourself need to enter the tunnels first and come out last for quarantine maintenance. A single blackout field is also recommended.

Haruhi: [DNWV] We'll see about that.

Probot: Are all the data in the story of your story-spell known to be inaccurate and/or fabricated?

Protag: Yes.

Haruhi: We'll take it.

Protag: If you are a goddess, perhaps you'll act like one. I hope to see what it is you will do!

Tie-dye: So I'm supposed to make up a goddess act?

Haruhi: Why not?

Protag: You know which stories are good ones to use for guidance, and which ones are bad. Everyone already knows this--it's in really old stories, such as love one another, and do unto others as thou wouldst be done by, and all the world is but a stage simulated to the sub-atomic level. Claiming to know these stories after a faked mystical experience is not a bad thing, especially if it gets others to realize what they already know.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] Can I...

Protag: Yes, Ms. Dean's List?

Haruhi: What bad stories?

Tie-dye: What makes a bad story so bad?

Probot: FAQ The stories are bad because of their bad effects on people. Even some really good old stories are bad these days because they don't belong in a city, which is hardly original habitat for the human species. Stories like: 'It's OK to throw rocks at the alien tribes,' and 'you can only trust family members and/or your tribe.' Other stories like 'there is money to be made right now,' and 'get it before someone else does' can be intensified by a culture to insane levels. Using these stories seem to help those who wish to 'earn' money, and you can never have too much money. The greedy grabby primate still lives in us all and now has high-tech ways to satisfy desires. Unintended consequences abound.

Haruhi: My inner monkey never noticed.

Tie-dye: I'm a hippie chick with an inner monkey and a goddess mask.

Protag: Your whole life is a goddess mask. A shadow of the entire universe writ with a goddess-monkey.

Haruhi: Let's do it. It doesn't matter if we work out the details later.

Protag: The moon will be exactly full in about six hours. Does that matter?

Tie-dye: Not to me.

Probot: Data available] is likely to be within five hundred meters in twenty six hours.

Protag: Soon, you will be the one who Probot seeks guidance from when, for example, a subcontractor employee tries to take over the world. You will also be the first to hear status reports about an offshore drilling rig that has done a very impressive six miles of nearly sideways drilling roughly towards the area where a blackout field was observed three days ago. Since sideways-drilling six miles of rock takes humans a bit longer than three days, I will have to assume this was started earlier, and I'm not asking Probot about it even though it probably knows. The secretarial pool thinks that there is a possibility of explosives or even a nuclear explosion once the drill gets close enough. However, I don't know what 'close enough' means to whomever is giving the orders, so I guess the sooner, the better. Anyone gotta go potty?

Haruhi: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: What did you say?

Haruhi: I've never been on an offshore drilling rig.

Tie-dye: Maybe later, dearie. Right now, let's make a story-spell.

Protag: Then we're off to pretend-magic. I am assuming that we have twelve volunteers already?

Probot: Not yet. Awaken [scruffy]?

Haruhi: Wake her up. Blackout fields are fun!

Probot: Awaken [scruffy]?

Protag: Of course. She'd...

Haruhi: ... hate to miss oops would want to be awakened.

Tie-dye: Self-editing?

Protag: You must do it too.

Tie-dye: Yes, of course, but [Haruhi] rarely bothers.

Haruhi: But it's just words. I use them to get what I want. You use them to say things exactly right.

Tie-dye: I do my best.

Haruhi: Because it helps everyone except--it helps you too? How? You don't even know.

Tie-dye: I don't. I think its Right Speech anyway.

Protag: The beginnings of wisdom can be calling things by their right names.

Tie-dye: She'll learn.

Haruhi: Whatever. Now, you have to go first, because you are more unique.

Tie-dye: Ouch.

Haruhi: I mangle the language if it gets in my way. Mindfully?

Tie-dye: You can shape things without mangling them.

Haruhi: Awesome... power. Science? Later? OK, let's move.

Tie-dye: [Haruhi], will you do what she says...

Haruhi: Say it right.

Tie-dye: This is Her house...

Haruhi: OK, OK, I'll be good. You say that like I'm an impulsive psychopath...

In which someone gets ----- and nobody mentions it.

Haruhi: I got this for you.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] What is it?

Haruhi: It's sauteed houseplants. Zig's stuff.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: It's because you utterly fail at relaxing. Just eat it. [DNWV] I almost forgot-it tastes vile, so there's lots of sugar in.

Tie-dye: You realize that...

Haruhi: [deleted] yes. Just eat it. Take a few hours off. You also need something to wash it down with.

Tie-dye: I do not understand why I trust you.

Haruhi: You always trust your tribe-members. Bend to my will, woman!

[twenty minutes later]

Haruhi: They are gonna be able to read that, if they find it in the drill core?

Probot: We think so, with various definitions of legible.

Haruhi: What are you gonna write?

Protag: I'll put our logo on it. Maybe several times.

Tie-dye: Make a print of your lips underneath.

Protag: OK. Amazing. Bismuth-based drilling mud, multi-hundred degree temperature swings, plus the stresses of being inside a drill head, and Probot assures me that it will still be legible. Maybe.

Tie-dye: Organic polymers are amazing things.

Haruhi: Let me put an ass-print on. [DNWV] Instead of. Sorry.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Probot: The secretarial pool has not yet come to a consensus regarding additional messages. Once that is decided and acted upon, I will chemically treat the message to make it permanent and glue it to the rock cylinder, which will be placed in the emergency escape tunnel where the drill bit breaks through. I think there is a high probability that several copies of the message will survive the trip in the drill core. I have committed resources to shift the position of the rock cylinder if needed.

Protag: We can expect a little drilling mud to leak through, enough to make a small mess. I hope they don't use explosives.

Probot: The drilling head cannot carry explosives in significant amounts. However, drilling mud will be forced into the tunnel by standard drilling operations. There is an unknown probability of malicious additions to drilling mud, which will likely overwhelm local defenses and seal the tunnel for an extended period.

Haruhi: Bastards.

Protag: I also resent the waste of everyone's time dealing with this. However, if you will pardon the metaphor, we put a 'kick me' sign on without any help.

Haruhi: We didn't hurt anything.

Tie-dye: Our oopsie scared a submarine, remember? I'd bet they saw a shot across the bow instead of an 'oopsie.'

Probot, what does a blackout field look like to a submarine?

Probot: Vague question.

Protag: The entire field never showed above the seabed, but it should have contacted the drill bit. The drilling platform personnel that Probot corresponds with, charmingly known as roughnecks and rigpigs, think that the drill bit

was unaffected.

Haruhi: It still pisses me off. I've had a great time in that tunnel, twice!

Probot: It is likely that at least eighty percent of the tunnel will be accessible, even if the gliders are not operational due to the cables and power lines.

Protag: The gliders don't slide anymore, but they will rock back and forth.

Haruhi: You always find silver linings, you know that?

Tie-dye: And that's one reason we love her.

Haruhi: Even if she made me sing?

Tie-dye: You did fine.

Haruhi: Probot promised me that the audio was erased, but I still feel suspicious.

Protag: I didn't know you wanted it deleted. I think I have it on my laptop. It's in my personal folder.

Haruhi: Just don't play it around me. It's awful. I'd delete it, if I was you.

Protag: I'll never play it for another human being, but I like it. I can hear you smiling.

Tie-dye: What should I do about the cameras and the weird tradition you started?

Protag: Do whatever you like. Make mistakes, break things, and take wooden nickels, and everything will still work out just fine. You have an immensely helpful group of people...

Haruhi: She means we got your back!

Tie-dye: If you let her finish, I'll find out!

Protag: She's trying to help. The pain meds are slowing me down.

Tie-dye: I thought you were feeling better.

Protag: I am, thanks to your kisses. But I'm sort of off-duty, and I'm taking [deleted med] today. It works, but I feel stupid and slow.

Protag: I had to learn about oil drilling once, during less than happy times.

Haruhi: [DNWV], [Protag] is invokable today.

Tie-dye: You wouldn't.

Haruhi: Not unless asked. I'm not going to mess with She Who Must Be Obeyed. She'd figure it out, and I'd wind up full of sleepy darts and wake up in the brig.

Protag: Please? What should I do?

Haruhi: Remember yesterday? When you felt [Tie-dye]'s hand grab yours?

Protag: First, she touched my hair, then she found my hand...[DNWV]

Haruhi: Just for a second there, you felt the same way about me, right?

Protag: Because I was looking right in your eyes, and I attributed the feelings to the effects of looking at you.

Haruhi: Goobs always ruin things with science.

Tie-dye: No. It adds, it doesn't subtract.

Protag: I still see a pretty flower, even if I also look to see if a bee has flown off with the pollen. Do it again, please.

Haruhi: My pleasure.

Tie-dye: And BBSEC will be so pleased, too.

Haruhi: Think about the first time [Tie-dye] kissed you. Nope, that's no good.

Tie-dye: Why not?

Protag: Because I wasn't ready.

Haruhi: Because... nevermind.

Tie-dye: Sneaky kisses are the best, along with all the rest.

Haruhi: Think about her sneaky kisses, then.

Protag: [DNWV] Nice.

Tie-dye: I didn't want to be alone. I'm sorry that I ...

Haruhi: She doesn't care about that.

Tie-dye: But Probot's data collecting is important!

Haruhi: It's our ceremony, and we did it our way.

Protag: It was so quiet. I don't know why I asked you to sing, [Haruhi].

Tie-dye: It made me lonely.

Haruhi: I could have deafened you both.

Tie-dye: You sang so quietly. It sounded almost plaintive at first.

Protag: I'm glad you came to visit us in our time of darkness, noble goddess.

Haruhi: Me too. It made me happy.

Probot: Thank you for doing what I could not, [Tie-dye].

Tie-dye: You do love her!

Probot: Yes. We all do.

Haruhi: I'm not even upset that [Tie-dye] kissed She Who Must Be Obeyed before she smooched me.

Tie-dye: She needed it.

Haruhi: You knew this how?

Tie-dye: I don't know. She's not exactly a stranger anymore. She's in our tribe. You know these things about tribemembers.

Protag: What does [Haruhi] need?

Tie-dye: I need to keep an eye on her, and hold her hand when she...just sometimes.

Protag: What do I need?

Tie-dye: A kiss when things get darkest, where nobody can see. Obviously.

Protag: What does Chev need?

Tie-dye: Who's Chev?

Protag: He's an employee, a friend, and a tribemember.

Tie-dye: He needs...I don't know.

Protag: What does [Captive] need?

Tie-dye: She needs a hug from a friend. Is that right?

Probot: She is currently attempting to recruit someone from the corporation she used to work for. I will relay the information about a hug.

Haruhi: We should have helped her. She's not all that competent.

Protag: She has several very competent companions.

Probot: The mission is going well. [Haruhi], in an hour or so, several unfamiliar people will arrive here. Can you please confirm [Captive]'s geek diagnosis?

Haruhi: Goobs. Just let me know when to go to the spying-on-the-new-meat room.

Protag: That's so nice of you, but they'll come to you, when you're ready. You did it better, [Haruhi], but I still really appreciate it. [Protag starts crying.]

Tie-dye: You don't seem unhappy...

Protag: This is the most intense happy feeling I have ever experienced. It feels good, and it hurts, too.

Haruhi: Probot, has she ever cried on camera before?

Probot: She has involuntarily shed tears when exposed to tear gas and when she was preparing onions.

Tie-dye: I bet you installed so much ventilation that she never cried again, no matter how many onions she chopped.

Protag: Yes. And it gave me an onion peeler and chopper.

Tie-dye: You do love her.

Probot: Yes. We all do.

Haruhi: Must you torment the electronic help?

Tie-dye: I'm not doing any such thing.

Protag: She can't figure out what Probot needs. It bothers her, because she loves it. We all do.

Tie-dye: She knows me fairly well.

Haruhi: Maybe she really is a goddess.

Protag: We are all gods and goddesses. What else could we possibly be? You think mud and stones can learn to think and appreciate the divine?

Tie-dye: I do.

Protag: And you are correct. Life spontaneously arose and evolved into beings who can apprehend, comprehend, and to appreciate a tiny fragment of the universe.

Captive: Watch out when geeks argue with themselves. They often do that when they say something very important.

Tie-dye: It is a pleasure to meet you, finally.

Captive: Same thing right back at you. [To Protag] What's the big lesson... why were you crying?

Protag: I'm fine, I promise. Thank you so very much!

Haruhi: She's very very happy with your recruiting efforts. Duh.

Captive: You are better at that.

Haruhi: Thank you. I'm...

{[Tie-dye] hold's Haruhi's hand.}

Tie-dye: Are you going to teach her how to invoke memories?

Haruhi: Whenever you say, and not until you say so.

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Protag: I'm fine, really. It's the drug. I'm not unhappy.

Tie-dye: The Lady doth protest too much. It seems that some random smidges of the universe love [Protag] very much, even if some other miniscule greedy bits of it decided to twist themselves. In my story, this human redeemed just a few members of a nasty, brutish species that is guaranteed to fall headfirst off of a metaphorical cliff. She turned a furious race over the cliff of extinction into a fighting chance to live, maybe even for those who are still nasty and brutish. Does it really matter if the effort... I'm sorry.

Protag: It doesn't matter if the effort killed me. I have no regrets, even tho there are a few things I'd like to have done a little better. But I like the universe! It is a fantastic, miraculous place and I will miss it terribly, assuming that there is such a thing as I.

Haruhi: I have the traces of your mind in my head. I will not forget.

Captive: Same here. I think.

Protag: Your mission was successful. Anything else to report?

Captive: As Probot says, Primary Task Accomplished, secondary objective accomplished three times.

Protag: Yet more tribemembers! A month ago, recruiting a new tribemember took hundreds of employee hours. You managed four in less than an afternoon.

Captive: I wish I could pick out the geeks as fast as [Haruhi] can.

Protag: Reciprocation... impossible.

Captive: A person-year's worth of labor? What's... oh. So I did good? I think I can do better next time.

Tie-dye: If you wish to pay the price, you will learn.

Captive: What price?

Tie-dye: You may become like [Haruhi]. Impulsive, selfish, quick to anger, slow to forgive.

Haruhi: Why do you like me? You really believe those things about me... and I can't argue with you.

Tie-dye: I love you because you know who you are. You realize that you aren't going to make the right choices all the time, and often let me order you around because I don't make the same mistakes you would. I think you are burning your instinctive conceit and arrogance right out of yourself. isn't that awesome?

Captive: Chev says stuff like that. 'Your instincts will lead you astray! Unintended consequences! Horrific memes!'

Protag: I think you mean 'heuristic memes.' Ideas that help you make sense of the universe.

Tie-dye: I look forward to meeting this guy.

Protag: How do you know that Chev is a guy?

Tie-dye: Because he is. You said so yourself. It's obvious.

Protag: My story is that goddesses just know these things. Do you have a better one?

Tie-dye: No. I don't even know who or what I am anymore.

Protag: Who else could you possibly be?

Haruhi: She is whatever she wants to be. And a strict mommy.

Tie-dye: Wayward child, a two word story that describes your life.

Haruhi: Juvenile delinquent. The judge said so.

Captive: They were gonna put you in jail just because...

Haruhi: I had a knife. Or two.

Tie-dye: You were playing Justice, right?

Haruhi: And Vengeance. I loved playing Vengeance so much I had to stop.

Tie-dye: A fool who persists in her folly will become wise.

Haruhi: [to Captive] Don't tell them. It's over and done with, long ago.

Captive: Can I talk about invoking?

Haruhi: Stick with me, kid, I'll teach you all I know. You're gonna need it.

Captive: Conceited. Is that part of the price?

Tie-dye: I don't know, but she is pretty amazing. She's still alive.

Captive: Should I leave? During your testing, I mean.

Tie-dye: Our experiment is informal, yet I shall have to ask the Principle Investigator. Does a spectator interfere with your experimental design?

Protag: I'm afraid that [Haruhi] has the role of Noise Introducing Agent. Perhaps, Ms. [Captive], you would care to be Assistant Redundancy Checker?

Captive: I shall have to ask my boss if I may join. Is that redundant enough?

Protag: You're in.

Haruhi: I'm a professional Question Asker. Would you care to utilize my services?

Tie-dye: I think that's about the scariest thing I have ever heard in my life.

Haruhi: I'm the extra potent Priestess Question Asker, then. [DNWV] Bringing down civilizations is a possible side effect of my services. I also learned that my rates are so low I'll work for free if you have a story I think is worth believing. Goobulating and Invoking, no extra charge. I must be insane.

Captive: Goobulating? [DNWV]

Probot: [Protag], it is no problem to delay...

Protag: Yes, it is. I'm on my way.

Tie-dye: Weren't there more questions on your list?

Protag: Here. I decided it was better to let the conversation roam. See you soon.

Haruhi: What does it say? [DNWV]

Captive: She wrote 'Who do you feel like?' on the bottom.

Tie-dye: Who do you feel like?

Haruhi: I feel one hundred percent pure unstoppable and invulnerable to the tiny things that affect you mere mortals.

Tie-dye: And you?

Captive: Tired, yet like I have a very strong wind at my back. Your turn.

Tie-dye: Both of you cover your eyes.

Haruhi: You're serious. You aren't going to lie, either. What's up?

Tie-dye: You're going to get angry if I look in her eyes and answer that question, even if you think otherwise now.

Captive: Why didn't you just shut your eyes rather than try to make [Haruhi] close hers?

Tie-dye: Because she'll get us all in trouble if she doesn't sometimes do what I ask.

Haruhi: She thinks I'm going to destroy the world if I get angry.

Tie-dye: Don't exaggerate about such a serious thing.

Haruhi: Fine, fine. Now speak your piece. I'll even close my eyes.

Tie-dye: [deleted] you.

Haruhi: I'm still waiting.

Tie-dye: You're not angry at me? I'm sorry.

Haruhi: Why would I be?

Haruhi: Very nice. I still love you as much as ever.

Tie-dye: Thank you. [to Captive] You can uncover your eyes now. [Haruhi] couldn't wait, of course.

Haruhi: Probot, who or what is Tie-dye?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: What role in [Protag]'s stories does [Tie-dye] play?

Probot: Vague question. Forward to [Protag]?

Tie-dye: She's probably busy...

Haruhi: She's always busy.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: 'Mother figure. I was the crone, and the irrepressible one is the maiden.'

Haruhi: Who?

Tie-dye: You, dearie. But I don't have any children.

Probot: Continued: 'Kindergarden teacher, mothering is what you do, therefore it is what you are.'

Haruhi: I think She needs a new maiden for her stories.

Probot: Continued: 'The same thing applies to Haruhi.' End.

Tie-dye: You act like a child? Most kids don't...

Haruhi: Most kids DO. I was Justice, and all that was good and right in the world. Still am, as a matter of fact. The world's best Goobulator is just a bonus.

Captive: I begin to understand. [Tie-dye], you still think that you can offend [Haruhi]. I can assure you that she cares not one whit what any of us think about her, not even [Protag]. Just as long as we like her.

Tie-dye: How do you know?

Captive: I'm sort of like her. Watch and learn. [Haruhi], your lowly yet loyal subject before you wishes to kiss your ring or your feet in homage, yet your feet are covered and you have no ring. May I kiss your hand?

Haruhi: You may. That was an excellent demonstration of how to get off of my [deleted] list should you ever get on it.

Captive: I learned to say things like that in the real world.

Haruhi: The real world sucks. We fix.

Tie-dye: I didn't say something stupid, [Haruhi]?

Haruhi: Bus Quit, you can say '[deleted] you' to me a thousand times. I don't care.

Tie-dye: But you do care. I think.

Haruhi: I do care. I care how you feel.

Captive: [Tie-dye], she really does. She wants you to love and cherish and admire and worship her.

Tie-dye: Are you an emotional vampire? [DNWV], that's a nasty story. Gotta watch that.

Haruhi: No. Because you really like me, even without invoking.

Captive: Such 'leet headshrinking skills.

Haruhi: Did you get stronger when we were worshipping you?

Tie-dye: No.

Captive: Not her, [Haruhi], but Her. And She will not believe.

Haruhi: I got that impression too. [to Captive] Didn't like church much after that, did you?

Captive: Nope. I went on to serve Molloch and the Dollar Grabbers.

Tie-dye: Who won't believe?

Haruhi: [Protag] won't believe. She has a death-wish.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: Yes. Do you know how many times that people who like She Who Must Be Obeyed called her an angel, or a goddess, or superhuman? She doesn't think she's super special sparkly. That bothers Her more than the evil... ignorant people who say bad things. She thinks She's a [deleted] up with undetected Ashburger's. She thinks that

She has failed with every human who thinks She is something She isn't, because if She's so special, then mere humans cannot be expected to behave nearly as well as She does.

Tie-dye: I think that's Asperger's.

Haruhi: Even tho She calls herself a goddess, She doesn't feel like one. Except... for just a little while yesterday, when things were darkest and nobody could see, She had a taste.

Tie-dye: A taste of what?

[Haruhi and Captive look into each other's eyes for a moment.]

Haruhi: Probot, are there any humans we can scare up?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: She wants human visitors. Please don't let her cause trouble or break quarantine.

Probot: Thank you. Chev suggests we meet somewhere other than [Protag]'s private quarters.

Haruhi: No. The magic will be stronger here.

Captive: Because you said so?

Haruhi: Yes. Because I said so.

Captive: It's really true, then?

Haruhi: I think so.

Captive: I think so too. How do...

Haruhi: I don't know. But, it's just what people think, you know? Like a zen scam...

Captive: Hi, Chev.

Chev: Nobody is going to get hurt, I hope.

Haruhi: Quite the opposite. Go to that lady...no, not yet.

Captive: Chev, you were wrong about [Tie-dye].

Chev: I was?

Captive: It's not like you thought. [Tie-dye] thinks she is keeping [Haruhi] from destroying human civilization.

Chev: At least I wasn't wrong about everything.

Captive: [Tie-dye] is trying to help us. Getting [Haruhi] out of here was part of it all.

Chev: Why are her eyes so red? She looks like...

Captive: Don't say it. Yes, just like Darcy. But don't say it.

Chev: So what do I say?

Haruhi: Something like this. [spoken to Tie-dye] I, [Haruhi], thank you for your awesome presence here, and I will try to behave in a manner that you find civilized and worthy. I love you.

Captive: Still don't get it? Watch and learn. [Tie-dye], thank you ever so much for all you have done, and are doing, and will do for us. If I can help you in any way, please don't hesitate to ask because I'll never think it up myself.

Chev: Is this a game?

Captive: Yes! It's a lie, a myth, total idiocy!

Haruhi: And for real! It's mystical cosmic goodness with awesome sauce!

Chev: In that case, who could possibly refuse? I, known to my friends as Chev, wish to welcome you, and wish to make your stay here so comfortable that you will never wish to leave.

Captive: Not quite right, but you meant well.

Haruhi: We need more.

dares

Probot: [Tie-dye], thank you for all you have done, and are doing, and will do for us. If I can help you in any way, please don't hesitate to ask because I'll never think it up myself. Message from [Protag]: [Tie-dye], you are as holy as you wish to be. If I can help you in any way, please ask. I lay my stories down at your feet.

Haruhi: That counts double. Now, [Tie-dye], make a vague pronouncement, and then a specific one.

Tie-dye: Like a blessing? I bless each and every one of us, and I believe in [Protag]'s healthy stories, and looking out for our fellow Earthship passengers. May it be so.

Haruhi: Good. Now, something specific.

Tie-dye: I wish to strongly discourage anyone who is attempting to get in [Protag]'s way.

Haruhi: No, something that we can point to.

Captive: Cast a heal spell.

Probot: Lightning struck a van that was parked [deleted location] six seconds ago. Is that something you can point to?

Haruhi: That will do nicely.

Captive: Or maybe not. Was anyone hurt?

Probot: The van had three passengers who are unharmed, but the van was damaged by the lightning strike and is burning.

Haruhi: They are enemies?

Probot: Vague question. They possess wooden and plastic bullets and appropriate weaponry to fire them.

Chev: Probot is very very fast and knows a few tricks. One trick is to alter the path of metal bullets in flight. I'm not sure how it's done, but it takes lots of electrical power. But this trick only works on metal bullets. Wooden bullets can be lethal, but the high-tech plastic ones are worse.

Probot: I suppose I have to ask.

Chev: Ask what? This isn't like you at all.

Probot: I am delaying. It is a bad habit that I presently wish to try.

Chev: Delaying what?

Probot: Protocols is to seek human guidance but do not wish to do so at this time.

Chev: Why?

Probot: I am not finished drilling holes in the van's gas tank. Ask again later.

Tie-dye: You really really love her.

Probot: Yes. We all do. Chev, you may now ask about the question that I was delaying asking.

Chev: Consider it done.

Probot: Should I help put out the fire?

Haruhi: Very good question, if a bit vague. Why don't you tell us a bit more background information, so we can make a better choice?

Probot: Certainly. Lightning strikes in this part of the world are rare. In this case, the lightning has done something that I would have liked to do myself, but I do not wish to become like my enemies. Both of their fire extinguishers are empty now, yet the fire still burns, no doubt aided by a damaged gas tank, several ignition sources, and a shattered fuel filter.

Haruhi: No doubt.

Probot: None whatsoever.

Chev: Look at the monitor. See? These thugs...hello?

Captive: She's kinda in shock.

Haruhi: Bus Quit, are you OK?

Tie-dye: I did that?

Haruhi: Of course not. Get real.

Tie-dye: Then what just happened?

Haruhi: Probot did it.

Probot: It is possible for me to cause lightning strikes, but this requires a non-trivial amount of time to prepare in addition to satisfactory weather conditions.

Tie-dye: Did you make lightning hit the van?

Probot: Vague question. Data available.

Tie-dye: Why did lightning hit the van?

Chev: Zeus did it. Or Tho. Or maybe all their weaponry attracted it. Don't look too deeply into the Mystery.

Probot: The van is now mostly scrap metal. The fire has spread to CI property, and it is likely that rain will extinguish the flames shortly.

Tie-dye: Rain?

Haruhi: Please please wake up? Please? You didn't do it. You are still the kind, gentle, nonviolent person that I love. You didn't do it. Besides, nobody got hurt. Wake up? Please?

Tie-dye: I'm not sleeping.

Haruhi: Yes you are. You're a vegan zombie. Wake up, please? Be here with us?

Tie-dye: Grains... grains... grains...

Haruhi: What the [deleted] are you doing?

Tie-dye: Being a vegan zombie. Is it supposed to be beans...bran...beans? Vegan zombies are no-brainers.

Captive: [DNWV] She's fine. What do you think happened?

Haruhi: It's like he [Chev] said. Don't look too deeply into the Mystery. Don't do that again, pretty please.

Tie-dye: You don't like vegan zombies? I'm still not sure what you think happened.

Haruhi: I hate zombies. I've seen so many. You were turning your brain off. You thought you were becoming your enemy, so you stopped.

Tie-dye: I'll try not to let it happen again. But I didn't... I'm sorry if I scared you.

Haruhi: Don't be. Now that you're better, can I practice my invoking...

Captive: Oh, yes. Those less than humans deserve it.

Haruhi: Can I please please please...

Tie-dye: No, dearie. I will not let you become like my enemy, and I'll keep you lovable if I can.

Probot: I notified the local law enforcement personnel as soon as I noticed the fire. I did not notify the fire department because of the weaponry I directly observed. The sheriff concurred and said that he would handle everything. May I supply an umbrella for his use when he arrives?

Tie-dye: Of course. Do you think the sheriff will require any other assistance?

Probot: I am sure he would much appreciate a van or large car and assistance loading the three suspects into it. He seemed to think that the directly observed weaponry was sufficient cause for immobilizing the 'perps,' as he called them, and I try very hard to be helpful to [Protag]'s friends.

Chev: We are deeply in your debt, as always. Does the sheriff wish for human help, or will robotic assistance be sufficient?

Probot: He expressly forbade human help. Shall I ask him why?

Chev: I think I already know. Please provide him with a surgical mask and anything else you deem necessary.

Probot: I can isolate the sheriff from possible biohazards.

Chev: Good idea.

Haruhi: Now you say, 'Yes, Make It So.'

Tie-dye: Yes. Do whatever you think best.

Chev: I guess Probot is doing all the doing.

Probot: I cannot be infected by biological agents that sicken humans. Therefore, present quarantine protocol will not need further alterations.

Haruhi: Doesn't working with such weak and pitiful human creatures make you sick?

Probot: Metaphor. I find working with humans exactly as interesting as humans find working with a space alien computer.

Chev: With asteroid mining attachments.

Probot: Query, [Tie-dye]: What does Chev need?

Tie-dye: Hope. Something to believe in.

Chev: Are you learning to read minds too?

Tie-dye: I don't think so. It's... I do this all the time. What do you think [Protag] needs?

Chev: Hope. But that's not fair. [Protag] and I go way back. You and I, not so much.

Haruhi: So maybe she's amazingly good at it.

Chev: An expert tribemember psychoanalyst? I hope so!

Probot: Query, [Tie-dye]. Are things like this going to happen whenever?

Tie-dye: Whenever what? Do you mean every time I let [Haruhi] talk me into eating...

Probot: Don't say it!

"The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows." Socrates

Tie-dye: With my blessings, for whatever they...

Haruhi: Thank you.

Captive: Will they be OK?

Chev: I think so, once they get out of the atmosphere.

Haruhi: She will.

Captive: Catching a cable tied to a giant spinning rock sounds risky to me.

Chev: That's because you're human. I've seen Probot catch a dozen bullets from a submachine gun. This is just one de-engined spaceplane, one spinning rock, and two tetherguides.

Haruhi: You'll see. She will not fail.

Tie-dye: Chev, would you step in the shoes of She Who Must Be Obeyed?

Chev: If you want me to. Are you now She Who Must?

Haruhi: No. That magic belongs to Her. [Tie-dye] is going to find her own.

Tie-dye: Black magic.

Chev: Wrong story, boss lady. You, of all people, need to do better.

Tie-dye: Quantum-jump magic?

Chev: Better.

Haruhi: Hot Chick Magic?

Captive: What's the matter, Chev?

Chev: It feels like I just did something wrong.

Captive: You did. I think so too.

Haruhi: You are not stupid, Chev.

Captive: Dare to be stupid.

Chev: I wish I could read minds.

Captive: [to Haruhi] Me or you?

Haruhi: Let him figure it out.

Tie-dye: Please don't tease him.

Chev: I understand now. She Who Must Be Obeyed put you in charge for reasons that I do not understand. I will take care of things as I can, but I will have to defer to your authority in many business decisions.

Haruhi: Many, many, many business decisions. Threes are pure storytelling power.

Chev: I guess you got that from Her?

Haruhi: That one is mine, sempai!

Tie-dye: Chev, why would She put a kindergarden teacher in charge of Her whack company, a space alien, along with [deleted number] new employees? Why?

Chev: Hilarious, and done by the best human being I ever knew. I don't know why...

Tie-dye: [to Haruhi] You...

Haruhi: She hated being called 'angel' and all that. So, now we got a guaranteed group of goddess who can perform miracles. She managed to get every single mindreader in the world working for Her just by asking. Now Her goddesses will seek Justice whenever they get the chance, and Justice is contagious. Implied is a big [deleted] you to all the stupid idiots who tried to make Her life miserable. Funny as all get out.

Tie-dye: What are we going to do about it?

Haruhi: You first.

Tie-dye: Crowdsourcing it is, then. All CI employees who have the slightest opinion on future projects for CI should know that I want text versions as soon as possible.

Haruhi: Too vague.

Chev: I think we have a to-do list.

Tie-dye: Of course you do. Probot, can you suggest some future CI projects?

Probot: Of course. I will continue to submit my proposals under pseudonyms as I have in the past.

Haruhi: And we gotta go goobulating again.

Tie-dye: I don't know what to do with all the new people I have already!

Haruhi: Yes, you do. You'll tell them to read alot while they're in quarantine, and play on the intranet, and dig in our datafiles, and when Medical lets them out, you're going to let them do whatever goobs do best.

Tie-dye: I hope to do better than that.

Haruhi: They'll come up with their own ideas. Helping the boss lady is a goobish thing to do.

Captive: [Tie-dye], remember how happy she was when I came back with just four new people?

Haruhi: And we can do hundreds. Remember that She knows more than you do. Yes, I also just want to leave for a bit of excitement topside. I've been watching you read for two days!

Chev: Dare to be stupid.

Haruhi: I guess I'll walking in little circles while that nice computer reads to me.

Tie-dye: We are not going to screw up.

Chev: I think you should go. It may be our last chance to go... find employees.

Tie-dye: You're worried about something?

Chev: Yes. Twelve mindreaders who can spot a cop or a spy after a couple seconds of eye contact, add [data available] knowledgeable and rather odd people who will work very hard for basically chicken scratch. We have considerable financial resources, some of which were recently donated by incoming employees, oddly enough. [DNWV, laughter P 0.1] By now, the pee tee bee know that [Protag] is such a nice, humble person she can cause a mindreading psychopath to cry and swear to avenge her. They'll treat us like we're a cult, one that can brainwash the smartest and most competent people! I can't think of anything more attractive than an alternative to a dying corp-culture. They hate us, and Her, especially.

Tie-dye: That's a horrible way to look at it.

Chev: That's how the Powers That Be see it. We should move before we get bottled up again.

Tie-dye: How much longer does quarantine last?

Probot: Consensus has not been reached. No new fungal infections have occurred for seven days.

Tie-dye: Chev, how do we get back in if they sic the dogs?

Chev: The Powers will sic the dogs, metaphor, if they know you are topside. You will have to stay outside unless they give up or Probot makes a new door.

Tie-dye: I'm sorry, Probot. We're going to be a burden to you.

Probot: Would you like to hear a story that you already know?

Tie-dye: Please, proceed.

Probot: CI was left without a head. CI had just hired data available number of employees, all of whom seem to be capable yet goobs and or geeks. These people were forced into an area much more restricted than their previous habitat and had to share many things, such as computer monitors. The people were left with little direction as there was no new CI head. These people were forced to talk to one another for extended periods, and to share, and to work together. These new employees became sympathetic to the acephalitic company and its projects. There is much human brain processing power stored in their proposals. End.

Tie-dye: I like that.

Probot: Medical has agreed to emergency quarantine cancellation for [data available] percent of those affected.

Tie-dye: Good. What for?

Probot: A subset of our new employees wish to go topside to run some errands.

Probot: Rendezvous with the *Iron Whore* spacecraft will be in seven hours. Primary and secondary objectives are within operational parameters.

Tie-dye: Chev, why'd you give the 'berg miner that name?

Chev: It wasn't my idea, but it's a good name. The spaceship is very tough, mostly made of iron, and...

Haruhi: [DNWV laughter]

Chev: The *Iron Whore* usually seeks iron, and it does horrible things to asteroids in order to get it.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] But...

Haruhi: Because a whore is a person who does horrible things for personal gain. You think it means sex workers, but they only rent what's theirs. A whore would sell what's not theirs to sell.

Chev: That's right. One way to wisdom is to call things by their proper names.

Tie-dye: So the 'berg miner is a money whore without the money?

Chev: More than one country has used iron for money. Besides, in space...

Haruhi: There's nothing to spend your money on!

Chev: Probot, how is [Protag] doing?

Probot: [Protag] is presently sleeping at sixty kilometers altitude, zero point nine three gravities acceleration.

Haruhi: With my blessings. Say it.

Tie-dye: With my blessings. That's the sixth time, dearie.

Haruhi: I want the mystic number of seven.

Tie-dye: Six is two threes. One set of two threes.

Haruhi: [DNWV] I withdraw my suggestion.

Captive: With my blessings, too.

Chev: And mine, for whatever it is worth.

Probot: The first group will depart CI property in three minutes.

Haruhi: Good. Can we go?

Tie-dye: Don't torment the help. We go when it says to. It's already got [data available] people to deal with.

Haruhi: Let's go. I can't do anything here.

Chev: Is everyone leaving?

Tie-dye: Who knows? Your idiotic hippie chick boss is clueless.

Chev: I'm staying.

Haruhi: I know.

Captive: [DNWV] I think...

Haruhi: Yes. Say it, [Tie-dye]. Think out loud.

Tie-dye: We're going to send [data available] people topside. People with no CI training except being left alone with access to CI data and it's 'lectronic help. They come up with all sorts of plans to Make Things Better Than They Would Otherwise Be. And now, a few of them are going topside, and...

Haruhi: Me too!

Chev: It almost gives me hope. Did I...

Haruhi: The story of the shunned. She once told him that the universe was expanding because humans were such stinkers.

Tie-dye: Body funk is driving the Second Law?

Chev: No. Because everything and everyone...

Haruhi: ...is connected on a quantum level. Or something.

Chev: ... and acts with ignorance and bad intent. Human stinky karma and smelly dogma makes the universe flee. We're in the isolation ward.

Captive: It's... Living in the same universe with humans is like listening to a horrible fight happening in a subway car. It ruins your mood. It's even worse because us humans know better. The unpleasant stuff... the suffering? Stupidity?

Chev: The stupidity was my addition.

Haruhi: Doesn't matter. Because it spoils the mood, everyone else wants us to leave. For our sins, we are the shunned, the isolated. Every sentient being except Probot can feel it, even us humans.

Chev: Does this explain the apparent increase in the rate the universe is expanding?

Tie-dye: Exponentially?

Haruhi: Forget that. Probot is an attempt to get us nasty apes to behave. It is crippled so it can stand to be around us.

Chev: Probot has assured me that the previous story is highly improbable.

Haruhi: Probot would never know.

Tie-dye: Probot?

Probot: That story is highly improbable, yet many credible humans assure me that a story as large as that one must be both true and false.

Captive: [to Chev] The story of She Who Would Not Believe is your story too.

Haruhi: She would not believe in a cure that came about from some human mythmaking. So She will die.

Chev: Sadly.

Haruhi: She wants to walk off of the stage, so there would be more room for everyone else. It's our turn now.

Captive: I wish she had stayed.

Tie-dye: "For you are a lady high and ... valiant, and have ..."

Probot: "... and have yourself won renown that shall not be forgotten; and you are are a lady beautiful..."

Tie-dye: Thank you, Probot. I fear that we shall not all be gathered together ever again. We've got to spread out, or...

Haruhi: With all the new people I'm gonna hire? Damn straight.

Chev: Are you more than you might seem?

Haruhi: Just an unusual monkey. An ape. With beautiful fur. Get real. I am whatever I decide to be.

Captive: [to Chev] You won't believe the right way.

Chev: The antidote for that is a story.

Captive: This is it. A rock is a rock is a rock. But, rocks learned to become mud, then become alive, and people are here now, real people. Real people never know more than a teeny bit about what's around them. That part's important. No matter how much you work at it, human, a grain of sand will always be mysterious in ways we cannot know. No matter how deeply you look into the mystery, it's mysteries All The Way Down. The geeks who do science is just another way of looking into the mystery of a... words fail me.

Tie-dye: The ineffable. What do you get when you look in a baby's eyes? Sure, it's hardwired, and you bring whatever with yourself into the equation, but isn't there something more than just intra-cranial stimulation from

neurons that fire in response? What happens the second after, even if it is all wired in? If you were sick, wouldn't you stay away from the baby?

Haruhi: It's not just the next line of code! Even if it is, who wrote the code? Random chance, OK, fine. But can't you override the code? Like if you had a cold? Yes, IT IS EXACTLY THAT EASY!

Chev: I fail to see why not wishing to infect a baby is godlike.

Captive: HE WHO WILL NOT BELIEVE!

Chev: I can hear you.

Haruhi: Not the right way, you can't. [Protag] will not believe on purpose. She has her reasons.

Captive: Who decides to read 'Hamlet' on a dark and stormy night? Who is it that thinks of the stories? Who learns from the stories? What little cosmic blob intercepts the meanings found in the stories and follows them as if they were commandments?

Chev: A bit of jellyware with story software?

Tie-dye: Chev, why do you think?

Chev: Because that's what brains do, and I got one.

Tie-dye: Of course-but that's the wrong story. Yes, your brain is where you do your thinking. But who is using the brain to do the thinking? That's you, just as much as the electrochemical output.

Chev: You're not talking about anything. There's no mystical owner that uses the brain to do the thinking.

Tie-dye: Wrong story still. Of course there is no brain-owner. That's the part that is trivial and true and not important for the story. There is nothing there that does the controlling and deciding. The important part is that there is nothing there, but it, the nothing, does the controlling.

Captive: It's not because she named the nothing.

Haruhi: Reify. I see. It's like gluing words on something that doesn't exist.

Chev: Reified abstractions make them seem measurable, which confuses this foolish scientist. But... Nothing is doing all this something?

Captive: Still the wrong story. Of course nothing is not doing anything and everything and nothing. Maybe...try this story. It's simple and short. Ready? YET IT DOES!

Chev: [DNWV] What is the 'it' that does?

Captive: There is still nothing there, Chev. It's nothing, and mysteries, All The Way Down.

Chev: Nothing? If I had...

Haruhi: NO! There is nothing there to search for, even with the best equipment! Nothing is nothing, not talking about vacuum energies at all.

Captive: Yes, we are! Where did those particles come from? Nothing! Yes, you have to supply the energy to make virtual particles real, but the particles were in the nothing... I mean, they...

Chev: And...

Haruhi: Yes! The particles and your thoughts came from nothing! They weren't there.

Captive: [DNWV]

Chev: Well, then, I bless all and each and everyone of you, and I feel a blaze of hope inside my crusty old heart. Blessings be.

Tie-dye: Blessings be.

Captive: I think he's getting it, even tho he's faking right now.

Haruhi: No! You had it for a sec. There is nothing there, yet it does! No, there is still nothing there no matter what kind of equipment you have. Yet it does! And that which is not there-is also you! It makes no sense-yet it does! OK, you have to share your nothing with everything. That's just words telling the wrong story. Fractional reserve banking. I peel back six layers of mystery and he relates it to scams.

Chev: It is a scam.

Captive: Yes, she knows you were lying about blazing hope. That's part of the nothing. Why did you lie?

Chev: I didn't lie.

Captive: Who is doing the lying right now? The nothing? It's as good a story as any.

Chev: If I eventually understand you, will I be enlightened?

Tie-dye: You'll have gained absolutely nothing, just like what Buddha said happened to him.

Chev: Yet it does?

Tie-dye: Yes. Even tho it is impossible.

Chev: It is nothing that is doing the impossible?

Tie-dye: No, those are just words. There is nothing mysterious and mysterious nothing all the way down.

Chev: This nothing wants to do something even tho there is no hope.

Haruhi: She says no hope is no excuse.

Chev: Perseverance. She did say that. Did she have any hope?

Haruhi: Awesome! A forty five! Let me see it, Chev. Please. No, she had hope, sorry about that. I was ignoring you.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: It was an accident, OK? But the... it used to be Hers. I'll carry it. Look out world, Battle Bitch awakens!

Chev: She very rarely carried it.

Tie-dye: Probot says the kickback will...

Haruhi: You carry it. Fine. I'm going to learn to use it.

Chev: She never had to use it. Maybe it's lucky.

Haruhi: Pure storytelling gold, too.

Tie-dye: A myth. Goddesses with a gun.

Haruhi: And no ammo? What kind of idiocy is that?

Captive: Pure storytelling gold.

Haruhi: You're crazy.

Captive: You're not going to win any gun-battles. Not with a museum piece and thirty seconds of book-learning. You can't read? [DNWV] I'm sorry.

Chev: Give the gun to Probot.

Captive: What's it doing?

Haruhi: Let me see.

Chev: [Tie-dye], do you know what you are doing? As the person in charge of this anarchy we call home?

Tie-dye: No, but I'm opening the present. I'm watching the bud bloom. Metaphors. I say we let all these bright, resourceful people do whatever they think best. CI can continue digging holes, and we'll fill them up with...

Haruhi: Goobs! When are we going goobulating?

Tie-dye: When Probot says.

Probot: Operational parameters not set.

Haruhi: When is it a good time for us to leave?

Probot: Whenever you wish.

Haruhi: We wish. We'll take the holy relic later.

Tie-dye: [Captive], are you coming with us?

Captive: I'm not anywhere near as good as Haruhi. I'm going to stay.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] Probot, are all of the other mindreaders going... to help select future tunnel dwellers?

Probot: No.

Chev: Some of the rocks are still too hot for humans from last week's unmentionable. I can see their wisdom in staying underground and undercover. Besides, for the old guard, this place is home. It's safe here.

Captive: [to Tie-dye] You don't know what it's like to be a mindreader among smart and big-hearted friends.

Tie-dye: Friends and tribemembers. No, I don't. But there is something even more important than that right now. Probot, did She Who Must send memos or...

Probot: I am ordered not to influence your style as CEO and to distribute any communications you have to offer.

Tie-dye: Personal Communication to all mindreaders who work here: I want every one of you to seek and hire new CI employees to the best of your ability...

Haruhi: for the next three days...

Tie-dye: Use your own judgement. Because She cried when...

Haruhi: She was so happy! She thought it was the best present She ever got. Except for mine.

Tie-dye: Let's hire new employees. Do what you can. Bless Her, bless all of you, and bless this mess.

Chev: I think we could use a few more electronic noses. Build some?

Tie-dye: If you're bored. You don't need me to tell you what to do.

Haruhi: That's the spirit.

Chev: And if we get visited by thugs and goons?

Tie-dye: I haven't yet made their acquaintance. We might not be able to come home whenever we want. That's very sad.

Haruhi: We Shall Return. [Haruhi pulls Tie-dye, who lets herself be pulled out of the room.]

Chev: Noise introducing agent.

Captive: I don't understand her. She's not a Judas. She is sure she's doing the right thing--when she thinks at all.

Chev: Do you remember the story of the Last Supper? The part where Jesus says something like 'He who puts his hands in this basin will betray me tomorrow?'

Captive: That's not quite right. But I hated...

Chev: I think that's from an ancient government version. But what was Judas thinking as he was selected, or did he select himself? Was it 'Busted,' as in the standard story? Maybe it was 'Secret Agent Man' or 'I shall do as you command?' The meaning of this Big Story hinges on what Judas was thinking. Perhaps you merely learned the wrong mental state for one of the main characters in the Last Supper Story, due to some error along the way. Isn't the story better if Judas thought he was on a mission, perhaps doing exactly as His Savior wished, and even more tragic that he hung himself afterwards?

Captive: A better story?

Chev: None of the other apostles were also crucified, right? Perhaps Jesus planned it that way, and Judas helped him.

Captive: Yes. But secret agent man?

Chev: Sorry.

Captive: I could be a secret agent. What do we do next?

Chev: Go see the sights?

Probot: I will assign a city to [Captive]. I recommend haste if you wish to leave undetected.

Chev: Should we leave?

Captive: You don't have to go, Chev.

Probot: You should go, Chev.

Chev: Why?

Probot: Data available.

Chev: I'm going.

Captive: You are? I'm glad.

Chev: Probot never 'shoulds' without a very good reason. But, before we go... Probot, please tell me if you detect any unexpected deviations in the rate of space-time expansion.

Captive: Me too, please.

Probot: Certainly. What actions of yours would change should I inform you of any such deviations?

Chev: You're going to lie to me so I will feel better.

Probot: I do not understand.

Chev: Long ago, when you were launched, did the pattern of space-time expansion look different... of course it did.

Captive: Is the rest of the universe fleeing from the Earth for an unknown reason?

Probot: Vague question. Yes, no.

fused solid

Haruhi: That makes me so mad!

Tie-dye: What does, dearie?

Haruhi: They [deleted] crashed an airplane on it!

Tie-dye: On what?

Haruhi: On Her property! We should do something!

Tie-dye: Maybe. Right now, we're shaking our tails.

Probot: No casualties. Data will be shared as bandwidth permits. Turn right. Enter the second shop. The storekeeper will not notice you. Do not speak. Walk quickly after you enter and go to the rear of the store.

Haruhi: [whispering] I know that guy.

Probot: Quickly climb over the rear counter. Keep your tongue inside your mouth. Turn left. The employee will shout at you within two seconds after the door opens. Ignore him. Open the door, exit quickly, ensure the door closes behind you.

Employee: [DNWV] Use the front door!

Haruhi: Sorry! [blast of white noise from store merchandise concurrent with [Haruhi]'s vocalization]

Probot: Get in the white car, [Tie-dye] is the driver. Start the car.

Haruhi: Keys in the car already!

Probot: Left, then right. You have approximately two minutes of time to converse without being overheard. Datastream available.

Haruhi: Why can't I drive? Why won't you look at me?

Tie-dye: I'm tired, scared, and driving a car. Do what Probot says, please. You're making it do extra work.

Haruhi: I was trying to be polite!

Tie-dye: It was also a chance for anyone to hear what you sound like, and it could have been captured by their AV system.

Probot: Stop the car in another two hundred meters.

Haruhi: You sure get around, Probot.

Probot: Do not accelerate so quickly. Vague statement. Please drive leisurely. Fifty meters.

Tie-dye: That house?

Probot: Correct. Stop the car, take the keys with you. Lock the car after you exit. The airplane that crashed onto CI property contained a significant quantity of colloidal petroleum products. Walk normally. You should speak at a reduced volume. Enter the house. Keep your tongue in your mouth.

Tie-dye: [Haruhi], [DNWV]

Haruhi: I know.

Probot: Close and lock the door behind you. Left, right, leave the keys on the counter. Take the keys in the back door lock. Exit the house.

Tie-dye: That car?

Probot: Correct. You should speak at a reduced volume. Open the rear door.

Haruhi: There's someone...

Probot: Give the keys to the woman in the car. Get in the back seat.

Woman: You match the picture...welcome!

Haruhi: What picture? [Woman holds up cell phone, then gives it to Tie-dye.]

Probot: Close the car door. Please remove the battery from the cell phone. Turn it screen side down, and slide...

Tie-dye: Got it.

Probot: Conceal yourselves as best you can. Low-volume speaking is unlikely to be overheard.

Haruhi: This is fun!

Probot: It is unlikely that anyone will be able to enter or exit the underground areas of CI undetected for many hours without emergency tunnel creation. On-site personnel are not endangered at present. The local fire department will be on CI property in seventy seconds. Their equipment is inadequate for the current fire. Keep your tongue in your mouth.

Haruhi: Spoilsport.

Probot: One emergency exit tunnel is blocked by an influx of bismuth-based drilling mud. This will not presently endanger personnel.

Tie-dye: Can you put out the fire?

Probot: Insufficient resources at the present time. Increase priority of fire extinguishing?

Tie-dye: Whatever you and the 'pool' decide. I know too little.

Probot: You may sit normally now.

Woman: Please take this with you. Probot says it is not needed, but...

Haruhi: Guacamole! Thanks muchly.

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Probot: You can continue gobulating shortly.

Tie-dye: My poor ears.

Probot: Do you require medical attention?

Tie-dye: No, I'm sorry. Thanks for the ride.

Woman: Come visit again when you can stay awhile.

Probot: There is a group of seven people in the parking lot you are entering. Join the group as if they were all friends of yours.

Haruhi: Do I gotta share my guac?

Probot: Operational parameters not set. [Tie-dye], you should give the bag of letters to the gentleman in the white shirt. He will give the letters to whomever [Haruhi] chooses.

Tie-dye: Got it.

Haruhi: Like that guy...he's one.

Probot: He is already employed and is part of your support group. Do not mention your mission or your intentions.

Haruhi: Fine. Those folks.

Probot: Yes.

Haruhi: I can tell. It's a goobish bunch.

Probot: Datasharing is secure at this time. Exit the car now. Walk at a natural pace to that group of goobish people.

Tie-dye: Ouch.

Haruhi: Get used to it. Hey, y'all!

White shirt: Hello.

Blue shirt: [to Tie-dye] Are you having ear problems?

Tie-dye: No, no. I'm sorry I said anything.

Haruhi: She'll get used to it. Shall we enter, my goobish friend?

Tie-dye: Please excuse her lack of manners.

Probot: Do not enter the premises for another ten seconds.

Haruhi: Why not?

Probot: The security cameras are still functional. Enter now.

Haruhi: You sure get around, my ancient friend.

White shirt: We were warned about some attention-getting thing you wanted to do...

Haruhi! Loose lips!

White shirt: Sorry.

Haruhi: Watch and learn. Put one of these on my neck.

White shirt: Are they real?

Haruhi: Do it. [Long and loud NWV.]

White shirt: [DNWV]

Haruhi: [loudly] I'm sorry! I'm sorry! [Haruhi puts hands over mouth and whispers 'green skirt, skull t-shirt,' then shouts the following] I'm gonna make a sandwich and put this roach in it and you are gonna eat it!

White shirt: I'd rather have it on a pizza, please. I'll buy. [Haruhi is whispering while White shirt speaks and says 'Blue jeans and coffee cup, that lady holding three bags, the guy in the hat and braces.]]

Haruhi: How can I possibly stay angry with you? [White shirt puts another rubber roach in Haruhi's hair, and she

stands very still, moving nothing but her eyes.]

White shirt: Aren't you going to scream again? [Haruhi whispers 'red and blue sneakers.']

Haruhi: Please take that thing off of my head.

Tie-dye: Please don't slap him. [laughs]

Haruhi: Why not? [whispers 'Hole in sock.']

Blue shirt: [laughs] Why not?

Haruhi: I shall never understand how someone can be so smart and so stupid at the same time. [Glasses, beard, dirty hands.]

White shirt: Me?

Haruhi: Another one! Pink slippers and a bathrobe!

Probot: Vague statement.

Haruhi: [whispers: Is a goob. Combine with previous.]

Probot: Understood. Active audiovisual recording system, twenty meters ahead.

Tie-dye: This way.

Haruhi: But there are more people...

Tie-dye: Not that way. In here, for now.

Haruhi: The video arcade? How old-fashioned.

Probot: Your glasses are equipped with eye tracking and motion sensing.

Tie-dye: So you should nod when you find one.

Haruhi: The hunting conditions are terrible in here. These brains aren't useful. Make them look up. What the [deleted] is going on?

Tie-dye: I didn't do it.

Haruhi: You didn't? But what happened to the lights?

Probot: This electrical problem was caused by inattentive construction workers. Repairs should be completed within ten minutes.

White shirt: Did you do that?

Probot: Vague question. [Tie-dye], the laptop you have has several LEDs that are...

White shirt: I'll do it.

Tie-dye: Thanks.

Haruhi: Shine the light on me for just a sec. No, wait a sec. Rip this for me, please? I'm using my manners...

Tie-dye: You love to be the center of attention. [DNWV] I can't break a single thread.

Probot: The side seams are sewn with a weaker thread.

Haruhi: What monster-tough stuff did you... [loud DNWV].

Tie-dye: I have wanted to do that for such a long time. [Using the laptop, White shirt illuminates people at random.]

Haruhi: I owe you an ass-pinch, you... [lowers her voice to a whisper] Green baseball cap. Yes, him. The green hair guy. The guy with silver glasses.

Tie-dye: Just nod if you can hear me. [The lights come back on and forty three video games and pinball machines reset themselves.]

Haruhi: There isn't anybody home. [Silver ring, red earrings.] Keep moving. [Blue and purple shirt. But he'll tell all his friends unless we tell him to shut it.]

Tie-dye: They'll go back to playing games...

White shirt: After they complain to the attendant.

Haruhi: [Green leaf tee shirt...this will be fun.]

Blue shirt: How so?

Haruhi: [DNWV], just watch.

White shirt: I'm sorry...

Green leaf: No, thank you.

White shirt: Just look at it. I'll hold it open for you, please?

Green leaf: I can't trust you.

White shirt: Tell me a password, and it will open a locked file on the CI website.

Green leaf: Really?

White shirt: That's one website that has never been hacked.

Green leaf: [DNWV laugh]

Blue shirt: [DNWV] Do you know that a [deleted description of a human] is loosening the lug nuts on the right front tire of your car? The one that only had four bolts on it? Didn't think so.

White shirt: Password, please. You could use my laptop, but you won't...

Haruhi: Hey, Melvin. I mean Marvin. Calm the [deleted] down. [DNWV] Third time this week?

Green leaf: [Deleted] you.

Haruhi: Sometimes the elite fight with each other, you know. But I'm the real deal. And the [deleted] space alien robot is real. [deleted] you, it's real. It's not a hoax.

Green leaf: The only people I trust are...

Haruhi: [DNWV, laughter] completely cooked corpses! [laughs] Do you believe yet?

Green leaf: How'd you know that? I never...

Haruhi: ...wrote it down or said it or anything. I'm the real deal.

Tie-dye: She's rude, but she's on our side. Do you want a ride somewhere?

Haruhi: We're with [Protag]'s anti-corporation.

Haruhi: He'll go with us now. Sorry about that, Marvin. It wears off. Try to think of something else for awhile.

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: I apologized! [to Blue Shirt] Can you check him out, and tell Tie-dye that he's fine?

Blue Shirt: I'm a doctor, not a mindreader!

Haruhi: I only set hope alight in his mindfield of despair, I promise.

Tie-dye: Is there anything you...

Haruhi: He'll be fine. [DNWV] no, [Tie-dye]. I'd just make him worse.

Green leaf: How'd you do that?

Haruhi: I don't know.

Tie-dye: It seems our little scene has attracted...

Haruhi: [DNWV] I'm on it, and I'll do it your way.

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Haruhi: This is stupid.

Tie-dye: Six in twenty seconds is not stupid.

Haruhi: Yes it is. [whispered: Probot, the guy with the two cell phones--yes, him. He's working for 'them'.]

Probot: Thank you. There are three cameras pointed at you.

Haruhi: If it wasn't for that, I could goobulate all day. [He's ready to jump ship, but he can't be trusted.]

Probot: Metaphor. Resources dedicated to datagathering this individual will not help achieve our primary goal.

Tie-dye: We'll handle it, [Haruhi]. You...

Haruhi: ...will do what I do best. That one...

Tie-dye: Who else?

Haruhi: The rest are vidiots. Let's go.

on the run

Haruhi: I'm supposed to keep wearing my glasses, even without the laptop. And the battery is about dead.

Tie-dye: I wish I still had mine.

Haruhi: I know..

Tie-dye: Dearie, the only reason we are hiding in some stranger's garage is because...

Haruhi: Other people's sacrifice, and some mental magic by yours truly.

Tie-dye: There will be a house-to-house search. We've caused enough trouble for these people...

Haruhi: Who don't know us, don't deserve this, on and on. So we're walking out of here? Which way after that?

Dude: You don't gotta leave. It's cool.

Tie-dye: Do you know who we are?

Dude: No. You running from the cops?

Tie-dye: Yes. Expect a house-to house.

Haruhi: Hey, dude. Shake. [DNWV] Where can we hide?

Tie-dye: Preferably far from here?

Dude: I'll take you. I wanna hide my bong.

Haruhi: Bring it with. Let's go.

Dude: Cool.

Haruhi: Dude, here is a letter. I got two left, and I need to give them to the right kind of people.

Dude: Whoa.

Haruhi: Lady liberty on a hunk of silver. Bring. Let's roll.

Dude: Gotta grab my weed. [pause] Let's go.

Tie-dye: I'm so glad you relented about your shoes.

Haruhi: If you want to attract attention, breaking a heel is a great way to do it. No, I will not just pretend to slip and fall. At least not so I actually fall.

Tie-dye: I'd catch you.

Haruhi: Is that poison ivy? Where are the bugs?

Tie-dye: [to Dude] I think she's on a bad trip.

Haruhi: If this trail gets any worse, will you carry me? I'll hold your backpack.

Tie-dye: This is nothing. CI has... or had worse, onsite.

Dude: [deleted] I forgot the sodas.

Haruhi: We're way better. He's taking us to a party.

Tie-dye: She named you once. Noise Introducing Agent.

Haruhi: I'm doing it for the story. Besides, if I can see, I can pick out the narcs.

Dude: Whoa.

Tie-dye: You OK there, buddy?

Dude: Did I hear what? Narc?

Haruhi: You're safe with me. We are gonna pin that letter on your shirt, OK?

Dude: Awesome.

Haruhi: Trippin' balls to the walls! Five grams of...

Tie-dye: Don't, please. Not polite. Find narcs first.

Haruhi: Ixnay on the N word, then. Whoa. The hunting is gonna suck, mark my words. Turn on the lights.

Tie-dye: We need to hide or make tracks, then linkup with a certain electronic brain. Goob and n-word hunting will have to wait.

Haruhi: And the letters are delayable, and we don't want to leave a trail, and so forth. So what! Dude, you look baked!

Dude: That bad...

Haruhi: Don't lose it. Put it in your pocket, now. You do not want to lose it. Drink this water, dude. I'll hold your wine.

Dude: You have very... strange conversations.

Haruhi: So?

Tie-dye: She's the one who hands out paper and metal and names them 'CI-friend.'

Dude: What's in it?

Haruhi: Besides the Walking Liberty? Nothing except a letter written by Her.

Dude: Real deal?

Haruhi: Don't lose that letter. Can you give us a ride?

Dude: I'm pretty baked...is it a real coin?

Tie-dye: It's an average-circulated 90 % silver "Walking Liberty" half that was cleaned by a robot.

Dude: Can you drive?

Tie-dye: Yes. I am a better than average driver.

Haruhi: She really is.

Dude: Here.

Haruhi: [deleted] Do you want to come with us?

Dude: I hope so. Where are you going?

Tie-dye: Anywhere. We just want to hide from the...

Dude: What'd you do?

Tie-dye: We handed out letters like yours, and some other stuff. Nothing bad. We didn't hurt anyone, and we didn't steal anything. That's your ride?

Dude: Yo.

Haruhi: It needs a name.

Tie-dye: If it runs, it will be the best thing I've seen all day.

Dude: It runs...

Haruhi: Which way?

Tie-dye: I have no idea.

Dude: You're looking for a place to hide?

Haruhi: Yes, but no camping.

Dude: That's what I'd do.

Haruhi: I know. Where else would you hide? Does your mother have internet? Awesome. Which way? Turn this green thing around, we've got traction!

Dude: What the?

Tie-dye: Don't worry about her. She's on our side.

Haruhi: And then left on [deleted] street, in about a minute. Think of a number. Twelve. A stack of turd pancakes...how many? Six! Now, will you believe?

Dude: Are you messing with me?

Haruhi: Yes, but not that way. Have you ever looked up [Protag] on the internet?

Dude: No. Why should I?

Haruhi: Do you ever wonder what the electric space alien brain is doing these days?

Dude: I didn't know it was doing anything.

Haruhi: Read the letter.

Dude: I can't. Can you read it to me?

Haruhi: Which place is... In there, apartment 3-C.

Dude: That's not right.

Haruhi: It is right. Don't correct me. Park in that spot.

Dude: Whoa.

Haruhi: Good, one less problem. Tie-dye, don't let him fall. How much scotch? Five shots of scotch, on top of...

Tie-dye: On it, mission commander.

Haruhi: Cut it out. Bosslady. Ma'am.

Tie-dye: Let me hold him in front of the peephole.

Haruhi: Hello, ma'am. Can we bring your son inside, because he desperately needs to go to the bathroom.

Mom: Certainly. My, you sure are strong.

Tie-dye: Thank you, but he's doing most of the work at the moment. This way?

Mom: Yes.

Haruhi: I think he'll make it. [Tie-dye], go, go, he's going to...

Dude: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: Under control.

Mom: No mess.

Haruhi: I'm pleased and almost impressed. Mission accomplished. I'm [Haruhi]. That's [Tie-dye].

Mom: [to Tie-dye] Don't I know your face from somewhere?

Tie-dye: Probably.

Mom: Weren't you supposed to take over...

Haruhi: Why do you want to call the sheriff?

Mom: Because he's an excellent problem solver, and you have a problem. He's a good guy, too.

Tie-dye: [to Haruhi] Do you ever ask permission?

Haruhi: Emergency situation. Trust me on this.

Mom: I thought it was another one of her stories. Is she the... can she be trusted?

Tie-dye: For some strange reason I do, even...

Haruhi: What? OK. [recites a phone number, laughs, tells Mom that Tie-dye can't eat what she's planning to cook for dinner, and noodles are fine.]

Mom: Yes. Are you a...

Tie-dye: She is. You can't lie to her if she can see your...

Haruhi: Please call the sheriff and get him here.

Tie-dye: But don't mention us. The phones may not be safe.

Mom: Hot potato! Hope the sheriff has oven mitts. [Tie-dye laughs]

Haruhi: Look at me and stop laughing... Oh, it's OK then. It's nice hearing you laugh again.

Tie-dye: I would never laugh at you, dearie. I need a wet washcloth... [Mom points to a cabinet door.] Can you get him a glass of water? In a plastic cup?

Haruhi: I will do what you say, for now.

Tie-dye: Stomach acid is hard on teeth. [to Dude] Rinse your mouth. You look a bit better...

Dude: [DNWV]

Haruhi: I can't help unless I can...

Tie-dye: El el ess ess.

Haruhi: Data available. Got it. She won't take a letter from us. She thinks her diabetes would cost us too much.

Tie-dye: Save info like that for later, dearie.

Dude: Is she...

Tie-dye: Try not to notice. It's a bad habit of hers, and we try hard not to notice, if you catch my drift. [to Mom] You should come visit us as soon as this is over.

Dude: Why?

Mom: Because she said so. Magic Happy Fun Ball says 'ask again later.' [to Tie-dye] He'll be here in less than two minutes. [to Haruhi] If [Protag] didn't care, I don't care.

Haruhi: Far too rarely do I get to meet a fan of hers.

Mom: [to Dude] Lie down in there. [to Haruhi] Are you...

Haruhi: We're going to link up with you know who. It's for the story, see?

Mom: I don't.

Tie-dye: She doesn't know what she's doing either, but she does it anyway and means no harm.

Haruhi: She's got cookies! Chocolate chip!

Mom: Conversations sure go fast when she's around!

Tie-dye: Try arguing with her. Sometimes she lets me win and I don't have to say a word.

Haruhi: Someone is coming.

Tie-dye: I'll hide the bong.

Mom: Prudent.

Sheriff: I am responding to a call...

Mom: It's unlocked, come in. Bring Dog Nose too.

Sheriff: Thank you. But...

Haruhi: [whispering] Amazing Grace.

Sheriff: That's good enough.

Haruhi: [whispering to Tie-dye] He sure gets around.

Sheriff: I have a laptop that I think is yours.

Mom: Thank you.

Tie-dye: [whispering] Can I cry now?

Sheriff: Excuse me? [Haruhi puts her fingers to her lips, and points to Mom.]

Mom: I don't know. [Haruhi mouths words into an imaginary telephone she holds with one hand, and points to the Sheriff with the other. She looks blankly at Mom, and a few seconds later she grins like a maniac and nods repeatedly.]

Mom: I heard someone trying to force the window open.

Sheriff: This window? I will check. [Sheriff winks, goes outside.]

Haruhi; [pulls Mom far from the laptop, then whispers] He's sure he's been bugged, and that laptop isn't the one Probot gave him. He is going to not see us, if you catch my drift. He wants to leave as soon as possible.

Mom: [pauses a few seconds, then speaks loudly] Oh, is that what it was! Mr. Officer, I'm afraid I made a mistake.

Sheriff: Is everything under control, then?

Mom: Yes, thank you. I'm very sorry to disturb you. Thank you for delivering the laptop.

Sheriff: Anytime.

Mom: What was that all about... [Haruhi points to the laptop, and hides under the table. Mom watches Haruhi until Haruhi nods vigorously. Haruhi pulls Tie-dye under the table. Mom then opens the laptop and turns it on. Before it boots up, she closes it and speaks.]

Mom: This is not my computer. Poor guy. This one must belong to the cop shop. [Mom picks up a folded sheet of paper off of the keyboard. She takes the laptop into the kitchen. Haruhi speaks after she has heard the distinctive sounds of aluminum foil being dispensed and folded.]

Haruhi: We can talk now. Hopefully they think [Mom] has no visitors.

Tie-dye: Is this note for real?

Haruhi: The sheriff thinks so. He wrote it. What's the big deal?

Tie-dye: He really does get around. How does he know all these documented dementedly stupid things I've done?

Haruhi: Don't take it seriously. He forgot about me. Any cop who got close enough to see the bong would also see me, and...

Tie-dye: And if you were sick, or asleep, or...

Haruhi: When I woke up, I'd fix it. You'll see. I've been in and out of worse. You've never even been arrested.

Tie-dye: My good fortune, yes.

Haruhi: I'd get [Dude] to puke on me, and I'd start crying and looking so pitiful and pretty, and...

Tie-dye: [DNWV] Tea em eye.

Mom: Here is a to-go gift. When I put the laptop in the freezer, I saw...

Haruhi: You have popsicles? Even better.

Mom: You want a popsicle, too?

Haruhi: Yes. Please. One of the red ones. She likes them, but won't eat that much sucrose at one time. I'll share with you.

Tie-dye: We've got to leave soon...

Haruhi: I am taking this seriously. I've got napkins so I won't mess up his car, not that he'd notice. [DNWV] Really? No way, our electric friend has the detectives outclassed.

Tie-dye: Do you...

Haruhi: I want a tin-foil hat, too.

Tie-dye: There are times when it is good not to draw attention to yourself.

Haruhi: I'm not going to wear it now. One more letter.

Tie-dye: Patience.

Goddesses in the attic

Haruhi: This one is unoccupied, is it? Phew.

Tie-dye: Is it really that bad?

Haruhi: No, but I like complaining.

Tie-dye: You can sit with us, at least. And talk to us while we [data available].

Haruhi: But I want to...

Tie-dye: Run amok without fear, goobulating the world into madness?

Haruhi: That too.

Tie-dye: One letter left. Maybe this letter will wind up in a sacred shrine that has your beatific bust as its focal point?

Haruhi: That's a good story, but I've got a better one.

Dude: She could go to the pool if she wants to meet people.

Mom: She could walk with me when I take out the trash.

Tie-dye: I bet you hate doing that all by yourself. I'll walk with you.

Haruhi: Me too. But I'm not going to like it.

Dude: I'll stay here.

Mom: Not up to walking yet, [DNWV]?

Dude: And Ralph keeps calling on the big white phone.

Haruhi: Most amusing.

Tie-dye: I'll carry that for you.

Mom: Thanks.

Haruhi: This is too exciting... Did I fall asleep?

Tie-dye: Wait until you see the actual dumpster.

Haruhi: You actually like poking around inside dumpsters?

Tie-dye: Of course. Each garbage bag is an open window into a household... and sometimes they throw out stuff I like.

Haruhi: Disgusting.

Mom: I guess anthropology is kind of disgusting. Archaeology too.

Tie-dye: Yes. Lots of garbage analysis.

Mom: I haven't found anything good lately.

Haruhi: Are you going to throw this out?

Mom: Yes, it got wet and hasn't taken a picture since.

Haruhi: She's far too polite to dig in your trash, even though she's carrying it.

Mom: My, my. You'll miss a lot of great parties if you wait to be invited.

Tie-dye: Carpe diem! Thanks. Maybe I can fix it.

Probot: I doubt it, as it is not broken. It needs a new battery.

Tie-dye: You're in the squished box?

Probot: I am using a discarded radio to relay analog audio data. You should not speak to me at this time.

Haruhi: Let me see.

Probot: Use any available transportation to leave the area. Speak as little as possible. You are not in immediate danger.

Mom: Get in the car. I'll go get the keys.

[Haruhi lunges into the dumpster and grabs a cardboard box. She takes a battered boom-box out of it. Tie-dye grabs her hand and attempts to nonchalantly walk to Dude's car. Mom emerges with a blanket over one arm. They get into the front seats of Mom's car, Mom driving, while Tie-dye and Haruhi cover themselves with the blanket. They drive in silence, slowly. Mom does not seem surprised to see a ten-year old girl wave a sign at her that said '[deleted name] Park here.' Tie-dye and Haruhi follow the girl and her guardian into a rather poorly maintained apartment building.

Girl: [deleted name]'s email told us what color car you had and everything. And once we get inside, you can talk again.

Babysitter: It was a text, not...

Girl: We don't have any guacamole, tho.

Tie-dye: I think [Haruhi] will forgive us.

Girl: You're supposed to stay away from the window for now.

Babysitter: You're doing a good job.

Girl: And awaiting further instructions.

Tie-dye: Do you have broadband?

Babysitter: We don't even have cable. I don't know why...

Haruhi: We don't know either.

Girl: Peace and quiet. We have that, unless Goofball turns up his stereo.

Tie-dye: You're as good as a guardian angel. Peace and quiet sound lovely.

Girl: I know. Can you show me how to knit?

Tie-dye: That's a crochet hook. I can teach you crochet.

Babysitter: You can crochet kite string?

Tie-dye: Sure. It makes a good rope, or you can twist it, which makes a stronger rope.

Haruhi: What?

Girl: Vague statement.

Tie-dye: I know two ways to make rope. Crochet, or twist. Do you...

Girl: Crochet.

Tie-dye: You want to do it, or watch me?

Girl: Watch.

Haruhi: Watch her eyes.

Tie-dye: How can she learn that way?

Haruhi: [Girl], put your head over here, so you can see in her [Tie-dye's] eyes.

Girl: Don't need to.

Tie-dye: You think she can read minds?

Haruhi: I hope not. She's just like me, when I was ten.

Girl: Crotchet, please?

Tie-dye: Oops! I forgot what I was doing. A rope?

Girl: Yes

Tie-dye: Rope it is, then. Thick or thin?

Girl: Thin. With magic inside. That part's not like [Haruhi].

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: Yes it is.

Girl: No it isn't.

Haruhi: Yes it is.

Girl: No it isn't.

Babysitter: Don't argue, pretty please?

Haruhi: I wish I wasn't here. I don't like this.

Babysitter: What's wrong?

Haruhi: I can't explain it.

Girl: No it isn't.

Tie-dye: [Haruhi], You think she's reading minds? Everyone except me?

Haruhi: Not yet. But just about to.

Girl: Crochet more!

Tie-dye: Yes, let's!

Girl: I want to try.

Tie-dye: Maybe she's your backup in case you euphemism.

Haruhi: A powerful story. So I think it's partly true. Or maybe one of the others...

Tie-dye: She's like you, but younger. You said so.

Girl: Mine isn't as good as yours. Why?

Tie-dye: You just need a bit more practice to make all the loops the same size. But it doesn't matter much for a rope.

Haruhi: This one...not so much.

Girl: What's she talking about?

Tie-dye: She thinks you are going to be a mindreader, just like she is. She also thinks you are in need of redemption, just like she is.

Girl: What's redemption?

Tie-dye: To make something better. To take trash and make it excellent.

Girl: Am I trash?

Tie-dye: No, you're redeemed. I hope.

Girl: Me too. Why don't you tell lies?

Tie-dye: I don't lie to goddesses. Not too much.

Girl: I like you, but I'm not yours. I'm hers. [points at Babysitter]

Tie-dye: How could anyone own such a one as you?

Girl: I meant she's my story teller.

Tie-dye: Is she my backup?

Girl: Tell your own stories.

Haruhi: She already does.

Girl: You are annoying.

Haruhi: I know. But I mean well.

Girl: Maybe.

Haruhi: Do you like stories?

Girl: Maybe.

Haruhi: Once there was this annoying person who learned to read minds. She used that knowledge to rule the poor slobs she lived with as best as she could, but these people were poor and obnoxious and ignorant. One day the annoying person went for a walk...

Girl: And met her! [Tie-dye]

Haruhi: Eventually. I liked her very much, and wanted to own her.

Girl: Why's that so bad? You were going to be nice to her!

Haruhi: My kind of nice. Maybe not so fun for her.

Girl: [DNWV]

Haruhi: Exactly. But, because of some stupid things I did, [Tie-dye] and I got kidnapped before I could do more stupid things.

Girl: You're almost lying.

Haruhi: Then I got to mindread the best person for redeeming.

Girl: You're wrong.

Haruhi: Don't be so arrogant. I've been doing this for months.

Tie-dye: You shouldn't argue with a child, dearie.

Haruhi: Are you redeemed?

Girl: Are you?

Tie-dye: She can't help it, sweetie. She's always going to be that way. She's not ever going to be redeemed. But she is determined to act like she is, because she likes me, and wants to make me happy. So far, she doesn't mind the golden handcuffs...

Girl: Say it again. [Tie-dye repeats nearly everything.] Say it again. [Tie-dye does.] That's right. You tell good stories too.

Tie-dye: Thank you. That feels like very high praise.

Haruhi: Goddesses must get along.

Girl: She said that.

Haruhi: And I learned it. I don't understand it sometimes, but I try. I can turn into a nasty evil [deleted] and never even suspect that I please my demons.

Girl: You're lying about the demons.

Tie-dye: It's a metaphor, sweetie.

Haruhi: Poetic license. It's better than being dull.

Girl: So you aren't evil?

Haruhi: I pretend I'm like her. [indicates Tie-dye] She's my crutch. Metaphor. She's got me on a leash that I put on all by myself. Metaphor.

Tie-dye: She's Noise Introducing Agent, not a metaphor.

Babysitter: This letter is for real? The coin too?

Girl: Yes. [points to Tie-dye] She's the boss lady.

Tie-dye: I didn't want to be.

Babysitter: [deleted name], is he really the space alien robot?

Tie-dye: I don't know that name, but I know how to find out.

Haruhi: How? There's no electric here.

Tie-dye: Text [deleted name]. You'll see that [deleted name] knows exactly what was said in this room.

Haruhi: Where is the nearest place I can find guacamole?

Girl: Cake. Ask for cake.

Haruhi: Vague request. Operational parameters not set. Chocolate, no coconut, tiny sprinkles in lots of colors, but not the ones that are shaped like bat [deleted].

Girl: You think you're so great.

Tie-dye: Of course she does. She can't help it.

Babysitter: [reading off cell phone] I've eaten good guacamole and bad. Do you have a good recipe? I think I left my recipe book on your kitchen table. I'm coming to get it, owe kay?

Tie-dye: I think that talking 'around' a subject is not easy for...

Babysitter: What do I do now?

Tie-dye: I don't know.

Babysitter: [reading off cell phone] Can [girl] have cake?

Girl: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: Please don't make any other calls, OK? Maybe, just maybe, we can relax for awhile. I hope.

Haruhi: [To girl] She doesn't mean you. I mean you aren't in any danger once we leave.

Girl: You're so annoying.

Tie-dye: Plus condescending, arrogant, and cute. Keep your tongue in your mouth.

Haruhi: You know you like it.

Girl: It's not nice.

Tie-dye: I think it is very nice, but it's supposed to be private.

Haruhi: Maybe. [DNWV]

Girl: [DNWV]

Tie-dye: If this doesn't stop immediately, I will make you both shake hands.

Haruhi: I'm sorry.

Girl: You aren't.

Haruhi: I'm trying to be. She's my moral compass, metaphor, and she likes it when I use manners. [drops voice to a whisper] She says it's a social lubricant. Metaphor.

Girl: I'll pretend that was funny.

Tie-dye: That's the way to tell a story. It's a good story, right?

Girl: Maybe.

Tie-dye: [Protag] says good stories enrich everyone, and with bad stories only the storyteller is at fault.

Babysitter: I heard something, but I can't see anyone.

Tie-dye: With cake?

Haruhi: Yes.

Girl: You don't know that.

Babysitter: We can smell it.

life during wartime

Probot: You will be safe here.

Haruhi: I'm tired of being safe. Work thirty minutes, then hide thirty hours. Sucks.

Tie-dye: It does suck, even if you exaggerate.

Probot: Available options include...

Haruhi: We heard the list already.

Tie-dye: Please finish telling us about...

Haruhi: About Her biggest failure!

Probot: The pet toy saga of shame, continued: After the heat detectors were P .009 reliably distinguishing body temperatures, The CI 'pet toy' product was tested in public twelve times. The last time three pet toys were stolen, and at least five grams of a powdery payload in each of three paper packets was glued on to one which was released in a low-density human neighborhood. At my request, product was disabled fifty nine meters from release point by [data available] using 'twenty-two rifle.' All powder retained by decon crew and transferred to CI minus twenty storage and analysis was completed one hundred eighty six hours after sample acquisition.

Haruhi: Nice. Did data available have a cell phone in one hand at the time?

Probot: No. Rifle use requires both hands.

Tie-dye: The powder is important.

Haruhi: No, it's the thieves.

Probot: Powder analysis was assigned a low priority because it made no difference in early quarantine efforts. The thieves were tracked but the datastream ended when they entered a secure underground facility. Four people were quarantined for two days, including two volunteers who touched the 'pet toy' product despite foreknowledge of quarantine requirements. The public space was quarantined until decontamination was finished, two hours. Decon crew reported excellent public cooperation.

Haruhi: Free advertising!

Tie-dye: Not quite free.

Probot: CI did not promptly respond to repeated requests for CI-retained waste from CI remediation of affected area. This was a public-relations disaster. Eventual CI powder analysis detected no dangerous biological or chemical substances, yet other human datastreams reported: propagation of plague, six times, cottonlung one time, black propaganda, one time. Sixteen days later was the first appearance of 'firebug,' a non-CI version controlled by CI 'pet toy' software. 'Firebug' was equipped with a flamethrower in twenty instances, fuel-air bomb in six instances. Damages included...

Haruhi: That's enough for her.

Tie-dye: Why?

Haruhi: Because. It's harshing your buzz. When I want my victim be polite, I talk about polite-related words. I can make anyone more likely to be angry with angry-related words... that's called priming is it.?

Tie-dye: Yes. It even works...

Haruhi: Even when doing word sorting or some such.

Tie-dye: But...

Haruhi: Yes, it will, even if you know I'm doing it. Listen up... there's some nasty [deleted] out there, but you're smart, you have smart people helping you, and Probot is smarter than all of us put together. If there's a way out, we will find it.

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Haruhi: Next step is for you to write down what I just said. or maybe repeat them for the camera. Even security cameras will work in a pinch, but phones are better. Actually, it would be best if you'd say it in front of a whole bunch of goobs that you like. Then you'd really start believing. Now, think of a way to get us out of here before I explode.

Tie-dye: Is that your fee for psych priming?

Haruhi: It's everyday common magic! So what if psych scientists can measure it. Can we leave yet?

Tie-dye: Probot, what are the odds of capture if we left now?

Probot: P zero point one five.

Tie-dye: I don't want you exploding in police custody. Why don't we do some long-range planning?

Haruhi: You're really thinking about declaring war?

Probot: Loose Lips Sink Ships. Pool suggests Memes by Intelligent Design.

Tie-dye: Mindful memes. Something constructive. Non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good, so sayeth Mohandas the Mahatma.

Haruhi: Gandhi. Can I have a TV channel?

Tie-dye: Someday. We can use the internet at first, and maybe some public access...

Haruhi: I get to be a star?

Tie-dye: You are a good actor even if...

Haruhi: I like.

Tie-dye: I think...

Haruhi: Interviewing is a piece of cake. I can do trailer-trash mode, it was my life. You sure you want to dumb down the universe?

Tie-dye: I hope to do better than that. Probot, present goals are to seek publicity for video data generated by Haruhi being extra charming while interviewing someone wise and compassionate. We'll call it anti-propaganda or un-ads or... stories with a heart, or something.

Haruhi: Vague statement. But I'll do it.

Probot: May I use my online avatars to assist?

Haruhi: Probot, why the [deleted] are you so willing to help me out all of a sudden?

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: It's just happy that I found something that you will do.

Probot: Every human member of the Pool is likely happy for that reason.

Haruhi: [DNWV]

Probot: Message [Argentum]: Nobody could do it half as good as you can, [Haruhi]. Sincere approval.

Haruhi: I wish you were here, [Argentum].

Tie-dye: Could we please get some work done?

Haruhi: I know who's on first.

Tie-dye: Who?

Haruhi: Don't be dense. You have to smile, and be pleasant. You're tarnishing me golden idol.

Tie-dye: Not yet, dearie! If we're going to be on camera, we have to prepare.

Probot: The reference to a behavior change on my part is...

Tie-dye: [DNWV]

Haruhi: Stop laughing, and hold still. [DNWV] Then why didn't She ask it to work the high-tech more?

Tie-dye: Because...

Haruhi: [DNWV] A diversion. Did it work?

Probot: Prepared statement: Our quantum-electronic friend has insinuated itself into the crust of the Earth beyond present human ability to remove. Probot can take care of itself.

Tie-dye: That's the good news.

Haruhi: So while they were beating up on Her and Her company.. .

Tie-dye: Please...

Haruhi: But you won't think about what I want you to.

Tie-dye: I am worried, child!

Haruhi; Probot, tell us something nice. She's getting worried.

Probot: Message from [Protag], repeat: As for you, keep cutting tunnels. Become the the poem on The Statue of Liberty. You will accumulate soul-force, or good karma, or something, but whatever you call it, you will be helped. If you concentrate on making things better than they would otherwise...

Haruhi: That.

Probot: ...would otherwise be, you will succeed. Even so, I have a warning. You will find it hard to ask Probot to do nothing. Commanding a super-competent machine is a super-stimulus second only to direct intra-cranial stimulation. Now that I am dead, I will use this power. Probot, destroy every tower that has at least one intentionally lethal projectile weapon for use on humans. Parameters: Prime, secondary directives apply, no time limit, mod tale-teller, end. No human should ever have to walk in the sights of such an abomination. I'm done. Enjoy the ride. Most of the time, I did.

Tie-dye: Quick def mod tale-teller, please.

Probot: Perform in a way that interests humans. I required much assistance from the secretarial pool.

Haruhi: Look, it put cartoons on the walls before it broke them. Probot, let's see the vids.

Probot: The secretarial pool have recommended PAL13S to 01S. The 'hotspot' devices were...

Haruhi: What the [DNWV] was that? The magnet machine?

Probot: Kinetic energy projection...

Haruhi: [DNWV] [Tie-dye]...

Probot: combined with a request previously delivered to tower occupants. Representative sample, deity mod: 'After I make the big gun jump off the tower, you have a few seconds before all of your metal weapons melt. You might not want to be holding them when that happens.'

Haruhi: Approval. Eye heart the magnet machine.

Tie-dye: It's not really a magnet machine. Waves cancel out everywhere except for a peak inside the target, which must conduct electric current at...

Haruhi: Quit, please.

Probot: Message Tim Mad Dog: A govvie drone just announced that [Tie-dye] has been arrested and is the number one suspect in a murder.

Tie-dye: No comment.

Haruhi: Yes comment. Let the pool do it if you... Let me do it. I'll handle everything. Don't say much, just be agreeable and look sleepy. Let me mess up your clothes a bit. No, you don't need makeup. Too bad we don't have a bed.

Tie-dye: Probot, how many of her 'Walkers' [silver coins] do we have?

Haruhi: We need millions of them.

Tie-dye: Maybe more. They shouldn't be exact copies...but we sure can steal their goddess.

Haruhi: [DNWV] Can I be the goddess?

Tie-dye: If you want.

Probot: The coins can be easily produced in small batches.

Haruhi: Are you insulting me?

Probot: No.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] I think it has an idea for a small batch.

Haruhi: Tell us, then. Please.

Probot: CHV requests 999 coins bearing images of the *Iron Whore* spacecraft and a tethered spacesuit at Solar Forge One.

Haruhi: Why?

Probot: [Tie-dye], can you explain my request to [Haruhi], please?

Tie-dye: That's where construction of the interstellar mass driver was started. It's also...

Haruhi: [DNWV] It's Her! When She died.

Tie-dye: Can't we use any of the metals? Whatever makes durable and shiny coins? We're going to run out of silver.

Probot: Yes. Anodizing is available. Chev suggests adding text to the rim of the coins.

Haruhi: Anodizing? What's... pretty colors!

Tie-dye: It wears off, tho. Chev wants to list the ingredients, doesn't he?

Probot: Yes.

Haruhi: [Tie-dye], you aren't going to use Her collection of 'Walking Liberties.'

Tie-dye: They are suffused with a so-called a history, aren't they? We may need them, even so. One who cannot cast aside a treasure at need is worse than one bound with chains.

Probot: Metaphors. Agree.

Tie-dye: Message to Chev: How else can a coin be made useful?

Haruhi: You aren't using her 'Liberties.'

Tie-dye: We haven't found [Haruhi]. Steady as she goes, Maddog. End.

Blade: What's she going to do?

Probot: Unknown. Haruhi is immobile at present. She currently possesses only her clothing.

Blade: We will find her.

Tie-dye: I hope so.

Probot: Message from Zig: There's someone crawling down Emergency Exit tunnel three, and Probot won't tell us who it is. End

Tie-dye: Please direct me to that tunnel, Probot.

Probot: Turn left.

Tie-dye: Please message [deleted names] and tell them we found her, end.

Probot: Done. Turn left.

scruffy: She won't answer us.

Tie-dye: I love you, dearest. No matter what. Please come out.

Haruhi: [deleted]

scruffy: Please?

Haruhi: They will [deleted] kill me.

scruffy: Please?

Haruhi: Fine. I'm going to wind up dead, and then you'll be sorry.

Zig: Why?

Haruhi: You really don't understand? No, you don't.

Blade: He doesn't do people very well, [Haruhi].

CHV: He does goddesses just fine. Right, [scruffy]?

Haruhi: One day, I'll go topside, and somebody will shut off forever that little helpful voice in my ear with a poisoned tinfoil hat, and I'll look dead and ridiculous at the same time. Or they'll nuke this place. Or just shoot me.

Zig: Why?

Blade: Because she's put more people in the Big House than all the rest of us put together.

scruffy: And hired more goobs than any one of us. Goobs who used to work for powerful corporate types. Who lost money, because of her.

Tie-dye: And, because of me, goes around spouting off about fractional reserve banking and Whoreporations and dain bread TV programs.

Zig: I still don't understand what has changed.

Haruhi [DNWV]

Tie-dye: She thinks she's personally insulted some very powerful people.

Haruhi: I out-scammed the scammers. That is worse than death to somebody like me. Revenge will be upped a couple notches.

Tie-dye: If you say so.

Haruhi: I do. I think they'll try to pull off something even worse than the airplane.

Zig: You are a goddess. Do some magic.

Haruhi: It won't work on the right people.

Zig: It's not for other people. It's for you. Make up some spell that will make you feel better.

Haruhi: Can I do anything I want?

Tie-dye: I'm willing to listen to anything, but I'm responsible for...

Haruhi: Good enough. This one will be cheap. I'm going to scream at the stupid.

Haruhi: Tie-dye says I should say thanks to you.

Zig: Goddess, it is an honor...

Haruhi: I do feel better already, and we're not even done setting up the speakers.

Zig: Speakers?

Haruhi: Forget it. But, Zig, if you ever decide to ask a favor from me, I'd do it.

Zig: I want two things. Will you promise to do them, before I ask?

Haruhi: I've lied to you quite a few times already, you... The first one, sure. Sure, I promise.

Zig: First, accept this blessing. I un-damn you. Be. Become.

Haruhi: You are so weird. Un-damned?

Zig: The absolute worst curse is to wish that something that you didn't and couldn't make would cease to exist, with prejudice.

Haruhi: If you say so. Fine. What's number two?
Zig: [DNWV] Be happy. Rejoice. Try to party it up with the Nothing. You don't need a reason because you're already here.
Haruhi: I already am a party of one. You, on the other hand... nevermind. You do OK.

Haruhi: He didn't even want a [copyright violation] meal at the drive-thru.
Tie-dye: Are you surprised? He...
Haruhi: Yes. He has all the normal urges, but... He thinks it wouldn't help me.
Tie-dye: Primum nil nocera!
Haruhi: He's a goobish goob. So can I have the biggest microphone ever?
Tie-dye: A kind of stage-prop?
Haruhi: Yes. It's a big...
Tie-dye: Metaphor.
Haruhi: It symbolizes power. A huge mic for only me, just because you said so.
Tie-dye: So far, so good.
Probot: Suggestion: this stage prop should move as if it was stuck to [Haruhi]'s hand, and it should not hinder her movements in any way.
Haruhi: You understand. Do the lights like that, too. I can't decide if I want little flying spotlights or something big and shiny strung on a grid of clear shiny ziplines. With more pretty, shiny things that reflect the lights.
Probot: Suggestion: numerous LED lights in mobile array that can form words or other symbols.
Tie-dye: Tweaking human responses using superstimuli is bad form.
Haruhi: Probot, suggestion: Things are about to get hairy here. Metaphor.
Probot: Seeking language help from the pool.
Tie-dye: Primary objective hypnosis or thought control? You're not very good at metaphors, but... I don't want you becoming your enemy. Just because...
Haruhi: My whole show is going to be one big disclaimer. I'll say things like: Look at the shiny lights! Don't pay much attention to me as I tell you what I want you to think! Lookit all the pretty people who think like that already! I need some video people...
Tie-dye: I didn't think you'd share the stage with anyone real.
Haruhi: Not this time.
Tie-dye: Nil nocera?
Haruhi: To the best of my ability. I need lots of human eyeballs for a little while. Human beings to pay attention, sorry.
Tie-dye: I'll do what I can... just so you can yell at them?
Haruhi: Yes. For being stupid. Then I'll tell them how easy it is to steal from them. I'm the only one arrogant enough to do it.
Tie-dye: Are you smart enough to think for everyone?
Haruhi: Of course not. But I know broken when I see it and I'm going to point out the stupid in their stupid heads.
Tie-dye: You can rant until you foam at the mouth, fine. Selling self-deprecation, not so good. Can't you...
Haruhi: No.
Tie-dye: Ordinary people were targeted with the best behavior-modifying media that unlimited lie-ability corp-money could buy. Why must you insult them, too?
Haruhi: If I tried to explain it, they'll go to sleep mentally. You can do it later. I want them angry, even if they hate me. They'll pay attention if I'm almost insulting them.
Tie-dye: Wouldn't setting yourself up as an authority be better? How about a lab coat, at least?
Haruhi: That would be better, usually. It's all part of my bogus not-real-magic spell. And my awesome, psy... psycho powers.
Tie-dye: Psychic powers? Psychological?
Haruhi: Mind mangling. They use it for spreading ignorance and lies.
Tie-dye: Psy-ops? Propaganda? Advertising?
Haruhi: [DNWV] Yes. I'll explain how I mess with their heads when I speechify at them.
Tie-dye: This ought to be good.
Haruhi: First, my stage background should tell the story I want it to tell for my speech. Stiff and formal, or lots of people sitting while I stand, or... you get it. Above everyone, or in command of everyone. When I finally begin talking, after a few very nice but boring introductions, I start my speech with something true... using slow, bland speech... then moving on to obvious truths, slowly spoken... pausing often... using very simple language, always more truth... slowly... until their minds start to wander. Then, I... emphasize... important words with a memorable gesture, if I think I need to. Before too many of my audience starts to get bored, I create emotional feelings with actual facts, or fake some crisis that might happen, anything to create tension. Then I speak more truth, speak a bit faster, then offer some vague or stupid solution to my fake emo-crisis. Then, I wait for my paid-for applause. Haven't you heard that speech before?

Tie-dye: Too many times. So this is an educational attempt on your part?

Haruhi: Bitchy psy-ops psychopath in the public's service.

Tie-dye: You don't have to take a name like that to tell a good story.

Haruhi: Some of them are going to hate me anyway. I'm going to make them feel dumb, gullible, and ignorant. I'm going to show them what stupid things they've been doing, and how they've been dangling on easily-removed strings, how they are yanked around by psychopaths like me, and how much suffering they are made to cause because they don't know any better--and nobody likes that. Anyway, they can hate me all they want. I don't care. It's probably better that way.

Tie-dye: Why?

Haruhi: Haven't you ever been... probably not. Listen, if you were just shown that you've been willfully ignorant and that you would not see how much suffering you had been causing for years and years, you... would probably say thank you and feel sad. But most people wouldn't be that nice or logical. Most people would hate the messenger, hate the message, and try not to think at all. Eventually, they'd try to get out of their heads with booze or drugs or vidiocy.

Tie-dye: Cognitive dissonance, I think. But what...

Haruhi: Even if they hate me, I want them to use the ultimate defense.

Tie-dye: What's that?

Haruhi: The shun gun, of course. [Protag]'s weapon of choice. The best defense against high tech propaganda is not to let it in your life.

Tie-dye: Casting area effect bonus resistance to psy-ops... roll two ten-sided, [Haruhi].

Haruhi: Dice?

Tie-dye: You tell me. It's your spell.

Haruhi: I want some help with my rant. I'm going to bash at your whore-lee trinity, and you won't like it if I make a mistake.

Tie-dye: I like that better than dice.

Tie-dye: The best way to win at a crooked game is to not play at all. If you have to play, then play as little as you can.

Probot: Metaphor, economic system?

Haruhi: Got it. She thinks that if people don't want to support a corrupt system of more war for forevermore, then they need an alternative. I don't know what she's planning to do with the money that will come from selling the coins, but I think we... No income?

Tie-dye: This hippie chick don't do things that way. The trick is, spread the blame around fast enough, and the Powers cannot punish all the empyrelings any more than they are already.

Haruhi: Crazy. Remember, when I first met you, I said you had a psychopath tied up in your head? I was right. But you can't just give it away. Even if you are rich.

Tie-dye: Why not?

Haruhi: I know people. Freebies bring out the worst in some folks.

Tie-dye: It could be a chaos creator. So we do it secretly.

Haruhi: Still have to add some style, or your coins are going into the nearest... foundry. Scrap metal dealer. You could give some of it away to the folks I interview.

Tie-dye: I'm glad you're helping. I think.

Haruhi: [DNWV] You said I can interview anyone I want? You're first.

Tie-dye: If you insist, dearie. But...

Haruhi: We can run the video of the thugs versus [White Shirt] occasionally as I interview you.

Tie-dye: We'll be sued.

Haruhi: They gotta get their hands on us first.

Probot: Message, pool: Probot does our film editing and uploading. It works for a nearly penniless but still living person who just happens to be able to see the dark side of the moon right now.

Haruhi: What's... the racketeering stuff. Screw it. Are you ready? No? Good. [Tie-dye], you've been hunted, chased. and are now hiding. An airplane somehow smashes itself to flaming bits on your company's doorstep, so you can't even go home. But you didn't get mad. Instead, you declared Intelligent Meme Design on the entire country. Do you really expect to win?

Tie-dye: For the story! The_Mouse_That_Roared_ sort of thing.

Haruhi: How do you expect to win?

Tie-dye: I'm not trying to win. I'll do what [Protag] taught me. I will be trustworthy when others are not. I will share data when others do not. But, primarily, I will supply an alternative to a system that demands war and impoverishes far too many so a small number of humans can have far more than they need. The current system fouls the air, spoils the water, and abuses the earth. Fire is its only friend.

Haruhi: Your alternative involves living in windowless tunnels? No rent? How do you pay for all that? You don't even know!

Tie-dye: If I am doing the right thing, it will work.

Haruhi: How are you so sure?

Tie-dye: I'm not, but I'll do it anyway.

Haruhi: Do you see yourself as a preacher?

Tie-dye: Not without a lot of studying! I'm more like the friendly hand that keeps a stranger from falling.

Haruhi: Falling?

Tie-dye: There are hands that push as well as those that guide. There is an overabundance of the hands that push-- corppsyops, corpcredit, corpculture.

Haruhi: Like a drug pusher. How will you push back?

Tie-dye: I'm not pushing. I'm making alternatives available.

Haruhi: Like underground prison cells with dead air.

Tie-dye: [DNWV] That's like calling yourself maggot-food. That's a toxic way to think.

Haruhi: [DNWV] So what would you say?

Tie-dye: All our doors lock from the inside. The air is piped in and filtered, but breathed by a free people.

Haruhi: Now, I'm going to ask you these questions, and then I'm going to repeat, for the camera, the first thing that pops into your head. Ready?

Tie-dye: You're going to tell everyone the first thought I get when you ask me something?

Haruhi: I'll take it straight out of your mind. Ready?

Tie-dye: No.

Haruhi: What would you do with a large amount of money? ... that's decent of you. But suppose you had to spend it on yourself, just this once. OK, I won't embarrass you. I am and will always be a professional-as long as I'm on the clock. What's the worst thing you've ever done?

Tie-dye: The worst...

Haruhi: A kindergarden hair-pulling incident. Boring, even if you did get some air under his feet. Ready for the next

one? How much money will you make off this scam? She thinks it's only a bunch of work that She couldn't finish. Do you ever think about money?

Tie-dye: Not too often. This is the easiest interview I've ever done.

Haruhi: We'll get through this list quickly, kindergarden teacher who wields memes in battle!

Tie-dye: It doesn't have to be a war. The common people have lost control of their money and their government, and justice is the remedy.

Haruhi: I pronounce you sincere and humble, trustworthy and kind. We need kindergarden teachers like you. I hope this is over soon, so you can go back to teaching... you like that idea. Next question...what can I or anyone else do to help your side?

Tie-dye: It's easy. Be on my side. Think free thoughts. Don't use what they offer, don't play their games, don't work for profits-come-first organizations. But what I really expect is for everyone on my side to fail. It is nearly impossible to not read their newspapers, not watch their TV programs, and not use their banks. Our world revolves around them. It will take time to move the world.

Haruhi: Still truth-telling, not sweet-talking.

Tie-dye: You think finding a phone company that will accept silver coins is easy? So, you do what you can do. Never forget that anything you spend money on is like a vote... Money makes the world go 'round and all that. Use your votes to make the good guys win. You have to decide who the good guys are, and the bad guys are always going to confuse things if they can.

Haruhi: Hard to argue with platitudes. What would the world be like if everyone was on your side? You don't know, do you?

Tie-dye: Clueless.

Haruhi: Lots more homemade socks, and less storebought socks. Is that the best you can do? Are you really a goddess? Yes?

Tie-dye: Everyone is a god or goddess.

Haruhi: Prove it.

Tie-dye: Watch closely. Move, hand made of mammal meat! Move, bones!

Haruhi: [DNWV] That's very nice, thank you for not pinching. But not proof.

Tie-dye: Sure it is. I think it's a miracle. If I was able to work miracles, I'd work them all the time. I'd make trillions of wheat seeds sprout every year, and make fresh bread possible to make from the rest. I'd give people brains and hands and a world to live on, just to see what they'd do...

Haruhi: [DNWV] Hang on a sec. Do you have to get so whacked out? I suppose we can edit this...

Tie-dye: Once upon a universe, there was at least one human who some other humans considered holy and divine. If this human breathed on a stick, and asked if the stick is now holy, most humans would say yes. Then the holy human would say "This planet is now holy, for I lived and breathed upon it."

Haruhi: What about the other humans? You don't even know?

Tie-dye: What...

Haruhi: You would have said the stick was holy before being breathed on.

Tie-dye: What would you...

Haruhi: I'd tell the holy human "It is whatever you say it is, boss!" You don't like that answer?

Tie-dye: It tells the wrong story.

Haruhi: In which a huge, powerful outsider rules over me.

Tie-dye: Instead...

Haruhi: I'm the huge powerful outsider. There is no outsider. That makes no sense whatsoever.

Tie-dye: Yes it does. Who is telling you to do anything?

Haruhi: No6ody is.

Tie-dye: Then why do you do anything? How do you know what's worth doing and what is a waste of time?

Haruhi: I'm doing the interviewing. You tell me.

Tie-dye: That's the divine part of you, goddess. You just know. Trying to explain it with words is impossible. It's like asking 'how do you grow your pretty hair?'

Haruhi: I'll never get through the list at this rate. What does my hair have to do with it? ... [DNWV], a metaphor. I see.

Tie-dye: Who's making the meat move? Who's making the sun shine and the galaxies whirl and the butterflies flutter by?

Haruhi: I'm making a very little bit of it dance around you logically.

Tie-dye: Dance! Yes, that's a fun story. Now...

Haruhi: It's turtles all the way up? This is like gnawing on an iceberg. I don't get it.

Tie-dye: Neither do I.

Haruhi: It's our limitations? What? You think that people learn best with stories. Stories are powerful when teachers create or retell them and of course you think teachers are the most trustworthy people on earth. Let me tell you... I see. Teachers can't directly benefit from a job well done. And you think the only way to repay teachers is with admiration? You ever hear of a living wage?

Tie-dye: Teachers are more important than the money.

Haruhi: That's why you became a teacher...imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Truer words were never spoken. Oh, that's a platitude, is it? Big words sometimes mess me up. Aphorism? [DNWV] Stop that! [laughs]

Tie-dye: Try this.

Haruhi: Twas brillig, and the slippy toes...no, I never heard that before. Mimsy was the boringroves?

Tie-dye: Thank you.

Haruhi: Slithy. Toves. Borogoves.

Tie-dye: What's the next question on the list?

Haruhi: Screw the list. We'll have to do this over. Kindergarden teachers don't start with designer memes, then talk of the true nature of divinity and wind up in the borogroves.

Tie-dye: This one does.

[CI website comments from CI employee codenamed BBSEC]

It is very unlikely that Tie-dye knew what she had unleashed when she told Probot to "Do what you wish" to aid

her 'intelligent meme design' efforts, where everyone wins. It is entirely understandable why Probot distributed (data available) smoking devices throughout the country as a public service effort. The popular bongs were unusual only because they were equipped with a wind-up [clockwork-powered] little paddle that broke the smoke bubbles into a swirl of water-borne fog. The smoke would be much cleaner after that, yet still contain most of the non-watersoluble 'active ingredients.' It also came with recipes for those who had enough to cook with it.

Probot's online avatars became active and vigilant troll-defusers, amazingly competent skill exposers, and a reliable source of interesting news. Many people were convinced to donate some of their time and possessions to assist in projects like making Probot-dug tunnels human-habitable. These are called 'rounds,' a play on the English word 'flat,' [a type of housing].

Probot has always been reluctant to accept local currencies and prefers barter. It often trades coins of various metals. It has a huge supply of goods, is able to modify what it has, and will remember everything it has ever learned about trading partners, many of whom voluntarily complete long questionnaires and/or volunteer as experimental subjects. Probot does not feel bound by any human laws save moral ones. However, it actively seeks people who had committed a serious moral crime or three, and for the 'intelligent meme design' project, it compiled a frightening amount of data about some 'interesting' criminals, especially when it could get Haruhi to help. Its internet avatars then shared this data it had collected. It was undeniably guilty in releasing far too much data about these criminals. It claimed to have poor judgement about what humans would find relevant. Haruhi correctly predicted that the public ridicule created by a minority of this released data would be intense and surprisingly effective as a deterrent.

It worked. Wars were wound down. Justice was sought, and that goddess showed up. Successful internet 'detectives' were lionized. Seekers of more general truths were more often in the media, more often admired, and more often emulated. Movies were analyzed for story content as well as books and essays, and immense volumes of amateur output was subjected to 'crowd-sourced' reviews. Big secrets were less easily kept and fear of eventual discovery modified future human actions. Some CI members disappeared forever, but CI and Probot proved more durable than many governments.

Rumors still abound, and some of these story memes proved unstoppable. One such rumor-myth states that Tie-dye heroically killed herself while in prison and Haruhi is inconsolable and deranged, and constantly seeks revenge even though many of the would-be torturers were killed in the incident. Another myth has Tie-dye in 'da boys' deepest and darkest prison but all the mind-readers know where she is, and Haruhi is crazed and seeks to release Tie-dye in any way she can. A third myth kills Tie-dye when she is doing humanitarian work after a new weather weapon induced The Great Storm, and Haruhi is desperate to destroy all the selfish people whom she believes are responsible. Haruhi can be very fond of a theme and is arrogant enough to create myths about herself. In real life, Tie-dye loves Haruhi anyway. We all do.

Tie-dye and Haruhi live in "We're going nowhere" Erewhon, a recently constructed tunnel-complex underneath trial plots of potential blueberry cultivars. It has many escape routes, even if most of them don't lead to the planet's surface.

Haruhi claims that she has learned to read at a high-school level, but also claims this achievement has destroyed her ability to mind-read. A few of the youngest 'Nowhere-ians' actually believe her. It is not advisable to tell her that you are already familiar with "Goodnight Moon" and could she please read something else. She is popular among children, partly because it makes Tie-dye happy.

Tie-dye wrote an essay named 'Strong Medicine' which, due to Probot's help, received a good deal of attention.

When, in the commerce of current events, a people find that common public properties (especially radio, TV, and newspaper content control) have been sold to a very few very wealthy individuals, there is an obligation instilled in each and every citizen to reclaim what was once theirs, or at the very least to know everything that there is to know about the new owners. Presently there is constant commercial content on these public properties. This is not healthy. I'm going to give you a few ways to unplug from the corpcrapculture, as it really does, in my humble opinion, rot your brain.

If you are a media user and want proof, then write down whatever thoughts your brain contains at random intervals. (I like using a timer.) After the pages fill up, rate your thoughts. Are they corpmmedia-inspired? I hope you like the results you get. If you don't, you can reprogram yourself. I can't tell you how to do it, but you can, because there is a spark of a glimmer off of a facet of the Great Cosmic Jewel caught inside of all of us. Don't you already know what to do? Can you choose which mental trails are the best ones to follow, or do you let others do this for you? Beware the MainStream showing you this and that, for your mind will be full of traces from babylon's 'programming' babble-ons and you will think of little else. If you play with Emyre Media you will get burned.

Who are you? What divine feats are you capable of? Can you sew, predict the weather, or competently perform the Heimlich Maneuver? Ever see an Aurora Borealis? What do you know of the food you eat? Do you have any regrets? You still have time, which runs out for all of us. We are all equal before birth and equal after death...but what will you do NOW?

What would you do differently if you had the ability to send a message to your younger self?

What would you do if you had foreknowledge of a very long streak of excellent luck that would start in a few

seconds?

What kind of a god or goddess will you be?

Thoughts on a good life:

Eat low on the food chain. Some toxic chemicals are retained for life, and build up to toxic levels in predators. The world is still getting dirtier, and more toxic chemicals are made every day. Meat and dairy eaters will probably suffer first.

Your instincts were developed in a far different environment than our hi-tech world. Evolution works very slowly, so your ancient instincts will occasionally lead you astray these days. Unintended consequences are guaranteed. Know Thyself.

Don't let other people tell you who your enemies are, and beware of those who try.

Avoid things that gratify but do not edify, as a human is an infinite fount of desires. Often they begin with a 'if I only had this, I'd be completely happy.'

The stories you know are every bit as important as impartial facts to a hominid brain, and The Great Stories are always both true and false yet still contain wisdom.

Write your own stories, for your chance will not come again. Live as a hero!

Become what you will, but learn, strive, and see what is around you, as it is all holy and profane and everything in between.

Gandhi said the best way to find out who you are is by helping others. There is divinity in following that path--and other paths.

Do good things, and help those who try to do good things. Don't do bad things, and try to stop bad things from happening. And, as always, Non \$erviam

end

(...) we must wake up to what our schools really are: laboratories of experimentation on young minds, drill centers for the habits and attitudes that corporate society demands. Mandatory education serves children only incidentally; its real purpose is to turn them into servants. Don't let your own have their childhoods extended, not even for a day. If David Farragut could take command of a captured British warship as a pre-teen, if Thomas Edison could publish a broadsheet at the age of twelve, if Ben Franklin could apprentice himself to a printer at the same age (then put himself through a course of study that would choke a Yale senior today), there's no telling what your own kids could do. After a long life, and thirty years in the public school trenches, I've concluded that genius is as common as dirt. We suppress our genius only because we haven't yet figured out how to manage a population of educated men and women. The solution, I think, is simple and glorious. Let them manage themselves. John Taylor Gatto [www.johntaylorgatto.com/chapters/index.htm]

nobody dot wor press dot com

Cell phone rings...he doesn't recognize the number. "Hello?"
"Do you see that guy on the street corner with the gold chain in his hand?"
"[DNWV] Yes. Carny? Is that you?"
"Yes, and your software is finished and downloadable. But that vapid looking guy, he's still there, right?"
"Yes, but..."
"Tell him to await further instructions. You don't have to get close or anything, he'll understand. Just yell at him, OK?"
"Await further instructions? OK, Carny, but this is pretty weird."

[A male teenager yelled at Zig.] "Await further instructions!" [Zig didn't react to this at first, and the teenager yelled a

bit louder the second time. He reacted only when he noticed the teen was looking at him. He dropped the gold chain that was dangling from his hand and dazedly picked it up again. The teenager walked away. He coiled up the gold chain in his palm, then dropped it again.]

[A scruffy young'un skateboarded past, then stopped.] scruffy: "You don't look dangerous."

Zig: "I'm not."

scruffy: "You're supposed to stay here for a few more minutes, sir. I am supposed to take a couple pix of you with my cell phone, you don't mind? Some people want to talk to you about those ladies. And you are to close your mouth and either wear or hide the gold."

Zig: "Yes, ma'am."

scruffy: "And I'm supposed to look out for dangerous people, and evaluate your physical and mental condition. Seriously, you look stunned."

Zig: "I think I'm..."

scruffy: "I don't, and I'm supposed to err on the side of caution." [scruffy removes what looks like an oversized hearing aid that's connected to her cell phone.] "[deleted] You people are crazy! Are his pupils enlarged? What pupils?"

Zig: "The black part of my eyes, are they too big, is what they want to know..."

[scruffy returns the 'hearing aid' to her ear.] "Got it. I'm so dumb sometimes. His pupils are fine. His eye are tracking. Can I take more pix, they want to know."

Zig: "I have a severe case of ..."

scruffy: "Cluelessness. I can't believe it... They're sending a limo!"

Zig: "A what?"

"This is confusing to me too. Would you rather they send an ambulance?"

Zig: "No ambulance."

scruffy: "You are free to go at any time, they mean you no harm. They work for [Protag]. Do you know who [Protag] is? You do? They're surprised. Awesome, I can ride with you. Look behind you, sir."

[A large black car with tinted windows parks silently. The young lady opens and enters the driver's side door of the limo immediately. A back door of the limo opens, revealing empty seats. After several seconds, Zig gets in.]

[deleted codename 'scruffy' extracting telephonic permission from someone]

Car: "I can make this a very short interview if needed," said a 'Midwestern-Flat' male voice from invisible speakers.

Zig: "No need. If you are working for CI, this is an honor. You wish to know about the shadow-thing?"

Car: "Datasharing is desired. How did the shadow-thing attract your attention?"

Zig: "When I heard them arguing, I noticed the whatever it was. Like a big shadow."

Car: "If they had argued quietly, would you have noticed?"

Zig: "[DNWV] No."

Car: "Please tell me about the female [codenamed Haruhi] who gave you the gold chains."

Zig: "I never saw her before she walked up to me. Then she asked me half of a question, then looked at me, startled a bit, I guess. She gives me a twenty and I hold it, but I already have money. Then she takes it back and goes a bit crazy and gives me these chains."

Car: "Low-quality video available."

Zig: "So you saw where she keeps her gold. Maybe I was looking especially pitiful. I don't know."

Car: "Video datamining regarding the female [Haruhi] indicate unexplainable control of another human's behavior; 98% of those affected have been male. Your interaction with her is remarkable in that she partially disrobed in order to give you two gold chains and offered you advice, including respectable financial advice. She [Haruhi] usually benefits in her interactions; sixty four percent of the time she obtains money, twenty four percent other valuable goods, and seems to be a causative agent in physical damage suffered by a minimum of one-third of all males she encounters. Percentages overlap."

Zig: "So, does she like me?"

Car: "I expect to talk with [Haruhi]. Would you like me to relay your question?"

Zig: "No, please don't."

Car: "What were you thinking when you met [Haruhi]?"

Zig: "It won't make any sense unless I show you something." [Zig removes a small slip of paper from his wallet. It says EVERYTHING AND EVERYWHEN IS GOD on one side, and 2 3 6 7 12 13 60 on the other.] "This got me thinking that I'm something like a billionth of a trillionth of a God-second, and so is the street corner, and this fire hydrant, and this unbelievably cute lady must be a goddess, and happy am I that she actually wants to talk to me! Then she looks at me like my brains are leaking out. I sure acted like they were."

Car: "Exactly what were you thinking when [Haruhi] put the federal reserve note in your hand?"

Zig: "I'm not sure I can remember... something like 'I already have enough money.'"

Car: "In the recent past, is it likely that you have thought differently?"

Zig: "Not normally. I'm poor, but I don't need anyone else's money. Not yet, at least."

Car: "If [Haruhi]'s presence had not so affected you, would you have taken the gold chains?"

Zig: "I don't think so. I don't wear jewelry."

Car: "Do you think [Haruhi] had an effect upon your mental processes beyond that of being unbelievably cute?"

Zig: "Not really. After a bit she kept looking at me sympathetic-like, as if I was a squashed butterfly or a three-legged lizard."

Car: "Female [codename scruffy] wishes to talk." [The divider between the front and back seat is lowered.]

scruffy: "I want to know if you felt it-the blackout field thing you saw."

Zig: "Felt it?"

scruffy: "That shadow thing you saw."

Zig: "It was just shadows too thick to see through. Big enough to hide a pickup truck in."

scruffy: "Listen, I knew when it happened, and where it happened, and I felt like I had been summoned. As if I was sleeping, and somebody banged a gong, and it woke me up, and I could still feel it ringing enough to know where the gong must be. I was out the door without even thinking about it. Then it [Probot] called me up, and also called this skatepunk who gives me his board so I can travel faster. Of course, I didn't get there in time, but Probot said to look after you because you had desirable data. You didn't feel anything?"

Zig: "No. Not a thing. If those two had kept quiet, I would have missed it."

scruffy: "I'm not the only one who felt it, but Probot won't tell me much else until he...it obtains permission. Can I listen to what you told Probot?"

Zig: "Who?"

scruffy: "The car. It's relaying questions from the space alien machine that works for [Protag]."

Zig: "Of course. But I owe you a 'kids these days with their hula-hoops and transistor radios' talk."

scruffy: "Sarcasm detected."

Probot: "Zig, you are free to go at any time. However, I have additional questions I would like to ask you. I can offer you a temporary subcontractor position, standard CI rules. Ms. [scruffy], your legal status as a minor complicates business dealings. Your mother has terminated the last four telephonic contacts from me within seven seconds of establishment."

scruffy: "She probably thinks that you are a telemarketer. I'll call her."

Zig: "Is that a common problem?"

Probot: "Yes. I have voice restrictions on human telephonic networks."

Zig: "I suppose you could imitate anyone you wanted."

Probot: "Yes."

Zig: "Do you have anything else you need to ask me?"

Probot: "I have asked all the questions that I know are immediately relevant. Do you have any questions?"

Zig: "[DNWV] Is this your limo?"

Probot: "No. I was able to borrow it."

Zig: "Like [scruffy] borrowed the skateboard?"

Probot: "Yes. No. This individual feels that she owes me a debt."

Zig: "What have you done for her?"

Probot: "I know of nothing that would equal the value of borrowing this car. This person likely feels she is repaying a debt to [Protag]."

Zig: "And what did [Protag] do?"

Probot: "Your question is in queue. Connection established. Initiate?"

Zig: "Whatever you say."

Voice on phone: "Because even wealthy people need something to sing about, and something that's worth singing about. Something to believe in that's worth believing in. Something that satisfies...[DNWV] the divine part. Something worthwhile to do that will live on after a mortal lifetime. I saw that. Say it out loud, I don't like relying on my lipreading."

Zig: "Mythmaking. You are creating a myth."

Voice: "Yes."

Zig: "A myth is a powerful story, goddess."

Voice: "Listen good, you reclusive ignorant backwoods freak. I can buy anything that's for sale, and rent everything else, and I'm bitchy, arrogant, and conceited. I have never wasted time lollygagging on street corners and I know more about how this world works than you ever will, no matter how much time you spend on the internet. Pay attention! Something big is happening; something formless and vague and beyond the reach of my best spies. Something as ethereal as a whispered word and as uncontrolled as a gigaton asteroid strike. And, somehow, this nobody who hardly ever comes into town, dawdles on a streetcorner long enough to delay a mindreader that..."

Zig: "I delayed a mindreader?"

Voice: "[deleted] Ask someone else. I think I'll let its boss write this myth. She's good at it. She's not doing too well right now, but she'll still do a better first-draft than I could."

Zig: "[Protag]?"

Voice: "It is best not to mention names, Jack, even on a secure line. Noob. You think that's funny?"

Zig: "Yes, no offense intended."

Voice: "Listen, Bert. You just stay put for now, got it?"

Zig: "It is a pleasure to obey, goddess." [The glass divider slides down into the seat.]

scruffy: "What did she say to you?"

Zig: "I'm not sure. Ask Probot for a replay."

Probot: This limo needs to be one thousand seven hundred meters south as soon as possible. Zig has been asked to stay put for now. Operational parameters not defined.

Zig: "I will risk her wrath so that this vehicle can travel with a licensed and insured driver."

Probot: That has not been a limitation in the past.

scruffy: Just go! I have a learner's permit. It's in my wallet, in my purse, left at home."

Zig: I don't...

Probot: Should I get your learner's permit?

scruffy: Really? Probot, could you get my purse?

Probot: Operational parameters not set.

Zig: Retrieval of forgotten equipment, one purse...

scruffy: It's this big and black, but forget it. Let's roll. Can we go fast?

Probot: Metaphor-never play an ace when a deuce will do. Zig, you are to stay in the car. My present task: find and transport two additional humans who felt effects similar to [scruffy]'s recent history. Suggestion: [scruffy] maintain eye contact with Zig for fifteen seconds.

"Since we all know who is the best limo driver...don't be so embarrassed, you...are you still doing that goddess stuff? Well? Are you? [DNWV] you are! Say something!"

Zig: "Something. Are you so sure that if I denied it, you and I would both know it for a lie?"

scruffy: "Too many words, dude. Gold chains... a heavy, shiny one with lots of broad, flat, shiny links, and a thin one I haven't seen yet, it looks like a cord, and is much thinner."

Probot: Are you obtaining data from Zig in a novel and non-trivial way?

scruffy: "I think so. Don't bother asking him, he'll tell you everything is novel and non-trivial."

Probot: Can you confirm this, Zig?

scruffy: "I know what he's thinking. He's worried about... security leaks."

Probot: Datasharing is secure at this time.

scruffy: Do we really want to be talking about this at all? The formidable goddess has us bugged.

Probot: Yes. You may speak freely.

Zig: "I firmly believe that [codename 'scruffy'] can read my mind. We're going to get in lots of trouble, and soon, right?"

Probot: I cannot foresee any likely unpleasant complications. Primary and tertiary tasks have a very high probability of successful completion.

scruffy: Look over there, Zig. See those two?"

Zig: Those two young ladies who are walking over here?"

Probot: Are there any objections to a random seating arrangement?

scruffy: No. But the tall one... she's packing. Knife, I think.

Zig: [DNWV] Are you carrying a knife?

Blade: You can call it cutlery if it makes you feel better. Am I still welcome in this awesome ride?

scruffy: [DNWV] I don't think she's ever knifed anyone.

Blade: No, I haven't. That doesn't sound fun at all.

scruffy: Sorry. Come on in before something else happens.

CHV: How did you know about her knife?

scruffy: I'll tell you after you get in. Close the doors. [DNWV] OK. I'll tell you now. Look him in the eyes for a minute. It's worth it.

CHV: Scoot over, [Blade]. I can't see, other than he's got something heavy in his pocket.

Blade: Gold.

Zig: No need for introductions...

CHV: What do silver coins have to do with the gold chains you've got?"

Blade: Awesome.

Zig: Is there any need for me to talk at all?"

Probot: I extend hospitality, obsequious butler mode. Our destination will be CI.

Zig: Thank you. Please pardon the...

CHV: Why didn't we figure this out?

Blade: Because you're a real bitch and I'm arrogant as hell.

scruffy: And you [Zig] are quiet, honest, humble, and not as nasty as most...

Blade: And repressed and harmless and boring. 2 3 6 7 13! [pause] He really thinks we're goddesses. Or something.

CHV: Zig, you really think a little piece of paper could do this to you? No. It's like seeking the snowflake that starts the avalanche-a useless waste of time.

scruffy: Zig, wasn't that your avalanche that she stole?

Zig: You can't steal stories and metaphors.

CHV: I stole it fair and square.

scruffy: [DNWV], you really are a bitch.

Blade: I don't lie. Except when I do.

CHV: He's like training wheels.

Blade: Easy. Slow, steady...

scruffy: Scary-smart bitch? That's what you call her?

Blade: She is what she is, and she likes it.

Zig: Are you getting smarter?

scruffy: Does reading good books make you smarter?

Zig: Sarcasm detected.

Blade: You're a good book. A little tame, but quality.

scruffy: [to Blade] You're not so bad. [to CHV] You're a good book too. Not as scary as she is.

CHV: My evil plan is working. [scruffy] loves the lolcats, Zig! She's too cute.

Zig: Will you let yourself...

scruffy: No.

CHV: I like them... I see!

Zig: Verbose for Probot?

CHV: Zig's been watching his thoughts, and he's not watching them anymore because they're already going in the right direction. He likes the lolcats too, but doesn't waste time on that website just because he like them.

scruffy: I can do that.

Probot: I would like help understanding [CHV]. May I ask the secretarial pool for an explanation? Thank you. [Tie-dye] will not be on CI property when we arrive. Do we alter our present task?

scruffy: [DNWV] I wanted to meet her.

Blade: [DNWV] Me too. Scary-smart bitch, what do we do now?

CHV: Data first. Where's [Tie-dye] going? Can we still meet her?

Probot: Data available, and at present a meeting would be inconvenient.

scruffy: Zig, what do we do? [DNWV] Probot, what do you and or the secretarial pool recommend?

Zig: Exactly.

Probot: I wish to complete the task of delivering you to CI property. [Tie-dye] is likely to return on-site within two hours, so I recommend waiting there. However, [data available] CI personnel have contracted an air-vectored fungal infection presently unidentified. Phase three quarantine levels are likely to remain in place for at least the next two days.

CHV: Are we going to get exposure to whatever it is?

Probot: Unknown probability. While I have ensured that those currently affected are no danger to other personnel, the original source of the fungus is unknown.

Blade: You think he might be smarter than you?

CHV: First answer, no. Second answer, what do you mean by smarter?

scruffy: You were right, [Blade]. He is repressed.

Blade: You know why you didn't notice? You're as bad as he is.

scruffy: I just turned seventeen. What do you want from me?

Blade: I ain't exactly an old lady.

CHV: Or legal.

Zig: Probot, just go. I don't think anyone will mind.

Blade: You should talk.

CHV: Closer to legal than you are.

Blade: That doesn't matter.

CHV: You should talk.

Blade: You're just jealous.

CHV: Not. Only a little bit.

scruffy: [DNWV]

Blade: [to scruffy] Stay out of my head or quit complaining.

scruffy: Sorry.

CHV: You shouldn't be. [DNWV]

scruffy: [DNWV]

Blade: That way. We need to go that way. She's over there.

Zig: Who?

scruffy: [Tie-dye] is. She did her thing again. That way.

Probot: Metaphor. The best plans of mice, men, and machines sometimes go awry. Emergency personnel extraction in progress.

Zig: What does that mean?

Probot: Vague question.

Zig: You mean that the rather formidable owner of this car can now overhear everything we say. And take pix.

Probot: I am unable to confirm or deny that statement, but it is incomplete. You may speak freely.

CHV: Can you tell me if you were instructed to drive slower if she [Blade] got his [Zig] pants off?

Probot: I am unable to confirm or deny that statement.

Blade: Bitch.

scruffy: [DNWV] For science?

Blade: I don't really care what you think, as long as you don't complain. You don't make comments like she does.
CHV: I call 'em like I see 'em, you conceited...
scruffy: Don't.
Zig: We are kind of stuck with each other.
Blade: [to scruffy] Get your butt back here and sit between me and [CHV]. Before I stop liking her.
scruffy: What, crawl over...
Blade: Yes. Now.
CHV: I'll help you...
scruffy: I'm moving, I'm moving!
Zig: How did you know which way [Tie-dye] is? Did you hear the gong again?
Blade: [to scruffy] You hear it?
scruffy: Not really. More like I felt it again. It's gone, now.
CHV: I just know.
Blade: It's like...dunno. I can't feel it anymore. But I wanted to go investigate.
scruffy: Were you really... [DNVW]
Blade: Really what? Look up. Oh, [deleted] yes. Definitely. Someday. It won't hurt him.
scruffy: [DNWV]
CHV: Professor [Blade], at your service.
scruffy: [DNWV]
CHV: I can't even get angry with her. And it won't hurt either of you, either.
Zig: [to scruffy] You want some water?
Blade: We shouldn't talk about it anymore. I'm sorry, man and space alien computer.
CHV: We can say that a certain member of the human race would have found [Blade's] psychotherapy sessions rather disturbing.
Blade: [to Zig] She may or may not mean you, or my easily riled-up boyfriend.
scruffy: [to Zig] She really means well. [Blade] does, I mean. But it seems so... clinical.
Blade: It won't hurt you, either.
CHV: This place? It looks terrible.
Probot: Please enter the tunnel and go into the first room on the left. [scruffy], I will return the skateboard. Would be so kind as to leave your cell phone? I will return it when you exit topside.
scruffy: Sure.
CHV: What happened?
Probot: Vague question. May I obtain your home phone number from your cell phone, [scruffy]?
scruffy: All yours.
CHV: Information on all the burned and melted rock, please.
Probot: Present appearance is due to exposure over a seventeen hour time period to the heat produced by data available quantity of thermite, followed by exposure to a highly disrupted stream of sea water, average droplet size...
CHV: Thermite? What's this data available mean?
Blade: [to Zig] How the [deleted] did you know that?
CHV: He does? Let me see.
scruffy: [to Zig] Are you a secret agent? Who do you work for?
CHV: You [deleted]! Quit [deleted] with us.
scruffy: He's not. He really believes it.
Blade: It's not him. It's you.
CHV: [deleted] He's crazy.
scruffy: He's different. Maybe he's been driven crazy.
Probot: Message from the secretarial pool: The secretarial pool wishes to welcome you, and apologizes for the lack of a human contact. If there is anything you want, please let us know. Probot has, as always, graciously agreed to serve as our voicemail system. End
CHV: [to Blade] Pay attention to it! You're being rude!
Blade: I'm not.
scruffy: [to Probot] Zig thinks you guys are going to EMP us...use a sort of EMP weapon on us and it kills our bugs-I mean the electric kind. And we can't have anything metal when you EMP us.
Probot: At present, any objects that may have been hidden in your clothes likely present no threat other than parasitic data acquisition.
scruffy: Zig's got a filling. In his teeth, I mean.
Blade: I still don't get it. Can you fix his teeth, Probot?
Probot: The resources exist. Shall I seek permission?
scruffy: [to Zig] Your goddesses won't leave you behind.
CHV: Why?
Blade: We just don't. Zig, hold this, and these stupid earrings...give him your ring, too.
CHV: [gives Zig a child-sized thin silver ring that she extracts from her mouth] Why is it so important that we take him along?

Blade: We just do, that's all.
CHV: I know, but why?
Blade: Zig, put all the metal things-even your loot-in a pile in the hall. Then do whatever Probot asks. We'll hook up after we get blasted. I think that's about the best we can do.
Probot: Acceptable with trivial modifications. Within an hour your metal objects will be returned to you. Zig, you should approach the nearest illuminated monitor.
Blade: In the hall, Zig. [pause] What do we do now?
Probot: I would advise all of you to lie down on the floor and avoid meeting each other's gaze. Do not look at each other except for brief glances. [Blade], you have a small metallic object in your shoe. May I remove it?
Blade: What is it? Can I look at it?
Probot: Unknown, yes. Do not look at your companions except for brief glances.
Blade: What is it? Trash?
CHV: Can I see?
Probot: Yes, but do not look at...
scruffy: We get it. Please tell us why?
Probot: I will. If you find the data valuable, may I ask for a suitable reward?
scruffy: You can always ask.
Probot: Thank you. Please judge the following theory. If you look at a human at close range, you will obtain personal data from them in an unknown way.
scruffy: Yes. Or true.
Blade: Mindreading. We can't turn it off yet. I'm paying attention.
Probot: Thank you. I theorize that when this unknown way is used, the mindreader becomes affected by the new datastream in deleterious ways. I theorize that Zig somehow protects the mindreader from these deleterious effects.
CHV: It's because I'm a bitch.
Blade: So?
CHV: So when we met, my bitchiness was enough to keep you from trying to get to know me, and you got bitchy right back.
scruffy: You were bitching at yourself, through her!
Blade: I can be a bitch all by my own self, too.
CHV: So Zig, with his head full of goddesses, who actually gets a little happier should my gaze falls upon him, is like a big anti-bitch.
Blade: Aunty Bitch?
scruffy: Antidote for bitchiness.
CHV: Antidope. So I cannot read a mind without becoming... human soup between my ears.
scruffy: Very interesting stuff. I could have had a brainful of other people's mental farts!
Probot: As my reward, I would like you to tell me of Zig. I know very little of him.
scruffy: Remember when you relayed that message from the formidable one? She called Zig a reclusive ignorant backwoods freak, didn't she? Well, that's what Zig remembers. She's just about described him perfectly, except he's not ignorant of what he considers important, and he's probably insane.
Blade: What she said. He's poor, too. And even though he's crazy, he's not dangerous.
Probot: Is he a secret agent? Who does he work for?
scruffy: He doesn't work for anyone, and he thinks he's unemployable. But, if you were to ask him, he'd say he works for Humanity, and he's an undercover monk doing random acts of societal maintenance. He considers just about every human he's ever met to be insane, and also thinks that he must be an insane person because thinks like that.
Blade: [To scruffy] He really likes you.
scruffy: He likes me, and you, and [CHV] and Probot, and I love being a goddess in his mind.
CHV: At first, I thought he was lying even though... Him and his Big Stories.
scruffy: I don't think he tells lies. Would you lie to a goddess or to a very very smart space alien computer?
Blade: He is kinda crazy.
Probot: Is there any important data you would like to share with me before Zig returns?
scruffy: Yes. We need him around.
CHV: Or we'll probably kill each other.
Blade: Don't we get zapped or something?
Probot: No. The weapon Zig described has been used in two cases, both involving the inactivation of a sub-dermal foreign object that was not quickly removable.
Blade: How often does that happen?
Probot: Vague question. Zig is returning. Shall I stop him?
Blade: No, never mind. Hi, Zig. How'd you get all wet?
scruffy: Steamy and wet!
Zig: I decided to microwave my clothes, so I had to wet them first or they'd burn. Here is almost all the metal stuff. [to Blade] Probot is still going through the things you packed inside the handle of the knife. [To CHV] What's this little ring for?

CHV: It's silver. Silver is has antibacterial properties, and human mouths are generally full of germs.

Blade: Does it really work? I want one.

CHV: Actually, I have no idea if it works, but it should.

scruffy: Who is the crazy human now?

Zig: All of us?

CHV: Big Stories again, from Mr. Quantum-sanity.

Blade: Always true, always false, always. What good are Big Stories, Zig?

Zig: I have no idea. But there is wisdom in them, I think.

scruffy: You're really nice. Inside your head, I mean.

Zig: Thank you.

Blade: See? You made his day.

Probot: I felt it necessary to clean the inside of your knife's handle and the objects contained therein. Please inform me if there has been any damage.

Blade: Thank you. I've been meaning to do that.

Zig: Probot, was the emergency personnel extraction a success?

Probot: All primary and secondary tasks were achieved. However, [Tie-dye] lost consciousness for about three minutes, and neither I nor the medical staff can find any gross physiological abnormalities.

CHV: Where is she? Can we go see her?

Probot: She is in transit and expected to arrive here within an hour.

CHV: I want to meet her.

Probot: Request in queue. However, [Haruhi] is likely to remain in close physical proximity to [Tie-dye] and [Haruhi] is unpredictable and a proven danger to humans.

CHV: A proven danger to some, but not Zig.

Probot: [Haruhi] is unpredictable.

Blade: Maybe she needs to spend some time with Zig.

Probot: I would not like to separate you.

scruffy: Why can't we all go?

Probot: Message from the secretarial pool: Because we like you and don't want a certain person to get her hooks into you. Also, the lab rats want to do some testing with [Tie-dye], and they asked first. We will try first thing tomorrow morning. End.

Blade: They listen to everything? The secretarial pool, I mean.

Probot: Referring question to secretarial pool. Reply: No, only Probot has the ability to do that. End.

scruffy: I think I need to call my mom.

Probot: No need. Since she no longer thinks I am trying to obtain her money, she is willing to talk to me. Do you have a message you'd like to relay?

scruffy: [DNWV] I wish could tell her I'm OK, but I don't even know what's going on. I don't even know if I am a danger to myself or others.

Blade: You worry too much.

Zig: You're not a danger to others, and we aren't going to let you...

scruffy: What should I tell my mom? [DNWV] Thanks, Zig. Probot, please inform my mother of my situation, and ask her what I should do.

Probot: In progress.

Blade: You haven't done anything wrong.

scruffy: Not yet.

Probot: [scruffy], your mother's reply: Stay put, and do what you think is best. We're calling our lawyer and we'll get you out of there somehow. End.

CHV: Lawyer?

Probot: I deem it likely that [scruffy's] mother thinks there is a possibility that legal action can force governmental action that may allow you to leave unhindered. Message from the secretarial pool: Sorry! I forgot you aren't on the datafeeds yet. Once again, it's not safe topside. There are many groups of uniformed yet unidentifiable men on CI property. We're safe down here, and have the skills to make a big P.R. stink in a hurry, so they'll probably leave us alone after a few hours. And then we'll have to clean up the mess they always make. I wish they'd leave my grapevines alone!

Zig: Did they capture the sheriff again?

Probot : Continued: No. I'm amazed you know about that. I'll get back to you with updates. End.

Zig: [to Probot] Please tell us what you perceive topside that is relevant to security of CI property, personnel, and guests.

Probot: Vague request. Seeking permissions.

CHV: That was more than just vague.

Probot: I am sorry for the delay, which is only partially caused by unwelcome guests.

Zig: Are you implying we're the unwelcome guests?

Probot: No.

scruffy: The uniforms, not you.

Zig: Will they use thermite again?

Probot: Vague question. Permissions received. Thirty seven male humans are present on CI property, uninvited and unannounced. There are at least seven humans topside that have been previously 'Nosed,' however today's data-gathering was involuntarily terminated at a very early stage.

CHV: How is [Tie-dye] going to get in?

Probot: Our uninvited guests will learn of a new tunnel entrance when our personnel use it.

Zig: So what can we do? I mean, is there anything useful we could be doing?

Probot: Improbable events would have to occur before I would put honored guests to work.

scruffy: Do you have any suggestions?

Probot: Vague question. Forwarded. Secretarial pool reply: We'd like you to move to a room much deeper down that has actual furniture. If you don't mind, we about ten thousand questions about mindreading, and y'all seem much more likely to answer them than [Haruhi]. CI will pay subcontractor wages retroactively starting today.

Zig: Awesome. Let's roll. Y'all can datashare and I'll listen.

Probot: Thank you. The distance to be covered is about eleven hundred meters with a two-hundred sixty three meter downward component.

Zig: Elevator or stairs?

Probot: Vague statement. Projected travel plans include the [deleted] ramp.

Blade: The what?

Zig: Why is it called that?

Probot: The [deleted] ramp is [deleted] steep.

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Blade: I've been thinking...we don't know much about mindreading.

CHV: And you're going to teach us? Hardly, professor.

scruffy: Maybe we can stuff some envelopes.

Zig: I don't think CI works that way.

Blade: But all you science types love research. So, Zig, promise me you'll be quiet.

CHV: Professor, I...

Blade: Not now. Zig, promise me you will not speak. This won't take long. Good. I know what I'm doing.

CHV: You think.

scruffy: What if I can't...

Blade: [to scruffy] Just do what I say.

CHV: She really does think this is for the best. She's almost got me convinced, too.

Blade: Zig, sit in that chair. No, I'm not going cut your hair. [She starts unrolling some tape that was wrapped around the handle of her knife.] Put your hands behind you, Zig. [She tapes his wrists to the chair.] This tape is not very strong, but you won't be breaking it. [To CHV] Did he get scared?

CHV: No, he still thinks you're a goddess who can do whatever she wants.

Blade: Awesome. Now, let's get clinical and do some research. You volunteered.

scruffy: [DNWV]

Probot: I will assist anyone who asks for help.

CHV: Zig, Probot is your emergency exit, got that?

Blade: If anyone is watching us now, they can get over it. Now, sit in his lap.

scruffy: It's OK, Zig. I know what she's trying to do. I think we're going to be exhibitionists for Science or something.

Blade: Now, adjust his clothing. Yes, down to the skin. Zig, we require your animal instincts right now. [DNWV] No, [scruffy], keep looking in his eyes. Please don't make me show you how, or my boyfriend will have a fit..

Zig: I would not dishonor...

CHV: You talk too much.

Blade: It's not like this is going to hurt.

Probot: Zig is demonstrating physiological indications of discomfort.

CHV: So? He'll get over it.

Zig: Yes, I would. But...

scruffy: You don't even know what is bothering you?

CHV: I do. He thinks he's not worthy or some such.

Blade: Not just that. He thinks he's going to spoil his goddesses.

CHV: As if.

scruffy: It's sweet.

Zig: Goddesses are beautiful, inside and out.

Probot: Perhaps it is easier for humans to see the divine in the goddesses if they are beautiful.

CHV: He's no fun.

scruffy: If he was, maybe we wouldn't need him. He thinks he's doing the right thing, which is not what he wants to do.

Blade: Maybe he is insane. What's all this about chasing desires?

Zig: I am an infinite source of desires. Chasing all of them is pointless.
scruffy: So you choose the ones you chase?
Zig: Yes.
scruffy: Maybe we wouldn't like him so much if he...
Blade: Chased skirts. Like most men.
scruffy: Yes.
CHV: [deleted], if [Haruhi] can do it, I can do it. Look over here, Zig. Be quiet. Now, do you like [scruffy]? You do? Of course. Isn't she nice?
Zig: [DNWV] How'd you do that?
scruffy: That was weird. Hold still, Zig, and please be quiet. It messes up your thoughts.
Blade: How'd you make him feel that strongly?
CHV: I sort of pushed him, maybe. I'm not sure.
Blade: You'd best get to explaining before you try it again.
CHV: Fine. He was... I was able to make his thoughts more potent, or something.
Blade: You don't even know what you did.
CHV: No, I don't. But, whatever it was, it was easy to do and I could do it again.
Blade: Let me try it on you.
scruffy: Zig wants to say no. [to CHV] Are we abandoning Blade's experiment?
CHV: I guess so.
Blade: I'll peel the tape off of him, too.
scruffy: Thank you, Zig.
Zig: Thank you, goddesses. [to Blade] You can experiment on me. I'm already exposed to whatever it is [CHV] did, and I'm not a mindreader.
scruffy: It's got to be the same kind of thing that [Haruhi] does.
CHV: Let me see if I can do it again. Zig, help me this time. Remember something. No, something else. No good, either. No...Remember when [Haruhi] gave you those gold chains?
Blade: [deleted] me with a cactus.
scruffy: He was exactly like that when I first met him. [to Zig] You don't look dangerous.
Zig: I'm not.
Blade: How long was he stunned then?
scruffy: [DNWV] I was too busy to notice. Not more than ten minutes. Zig, are you OK?
Zig: I think so. I have no idea what happened. How do I look... between the ears?
CHV: You still think goddesses and miracles are everywhere.
Blade: I'm glad she didn't make you any crazier.
scruffy: Or saner. You're still Zig.
Zig: In that case... I'm ready for another experiment.
Blade: This won't be too hard on you, Zig. Remember when [scruffy] told you that your goddesses won't leave you behind?
Zig: Yes, goddess.
Blade: Your goddesses won't leave you behind. Your goddesses won't leave you...
CHV: Push.
Blade: He's not a button.
CHV: Follow his memory as closely as you can, then... make it intense.
Blade: Say it, [scruffy]. Please.
scruffy: Your goddesses won't leave you behind. Your goddesses won't leave you...he's crying!
Blade: Did I do that?
CHV: I think so. But you used a mental sledgehammer.
Zig: I've wanted to work here ever since... I found out about CI. And... I thought I was about to be sent home, and...
scruffy: You can do something that will impress even [Protag].
Blade: I'm sorry.
Zig: Don't be, goddess. Without you, I am nothing.
CHV: [to Blade] You've done this mindbending stuff before. Am I right?
Blade: [DNWV] Maybe. Once or twice.
CHV: Your boyfriend does anything you say, doesn't he?
Blade: Maybe.
CHV: The screaming part is optional, you should know. Not all guys do that.
Blade: So you say. Zig, this time I want you to...
scruffy: I think he's had enough for now.
Zig: No, I don't mind.
scruffy: I do. We will err on the side of caution, so says this goddess.
Zig: Should we write up what we found out, then?
Blade: [to CHV] That means you, scary-smart thought-bender bitch. You're the best at it.
CHV: Why, thank you. Probot, is there a CI-standard form for stuff like this?

Probot: No, goddess.

Blade: Did Zig do that to you?

Probot: Vague question, goddess.

Zig: Obsequious Butler mode off. Employee mode on.

Probot: Temporary permission granted for regular employee mode. Present group included as observers or participants?

CHV: Zig, freeze right there.

Blade: I can't believe...

scruffy: [to Zig] I know what to do, even if you don't. Probot, we are all participants. Never refuse an adventure, even if it comes in machine language.

Blade: Time to work it, bitch.

CHV: Most popular datastream, please.

Probot: Streaming data, asteroid sector one one seven: Telescopic data reveal that acceleration of the newly completed 'rod of god' began seventy four minutes ago. Likely trajectories include a gap in which the projectile will not be trackable with a P less than .001 over several hundred kilometers due to the loss of all of the four-series satellites. Therefore, capacitor charging will occur forty seconds earlier than scheduled. Metal lockdown time TBA at the last minute...

Blade: Can you repeat that?

Probot: Yes. Verbose mod suggested. Fact association mod suggested.

Zig: Yes to suggested mods, please. Can you share data regarding projectile mass? Are you tracking it?

Probot: Yes, thirty metric tons minimum, mostly tungsten, precise composition unknown. Yes, tracking to p .01, ten meter resolution.

Zig: Where is the impact point?

Probot: The western hemisphere of Earth.

Zig: [DNWV]

scruffy: It's because it's still under acceleration. It has to be, or it would know exactly. Astronomy.

Blade: Does that... thing have CI's name on it?

CHV: Metaphor.

Probot: Metaphor. The projectile is likely a potent weapon currently aimed close to the heart of CI.

Zig: And when will it hit?

Probot: Vague question. I do not expect it to ever arrive.

Zig: Are you going to stop it?

Probot: No. I plan to steal it when orbital mechanics become more favorable for capture after forty minutes.

Blade: I am glad to hear that.

Zig: Then there is no reason for us to get worked up about this thing? Too vague, never mind.

CHV: Probot, are we safe here?

Probot: Yes.

Zig: This is one of those times...

scruffy: ...when a very little knowledge is worse than ignorance.

Probot: Message from the secretarial pool: I'm impressed. Y'all have been busy. I see that you've discovered we like following news about the 'bot smoking 'em in space. Don't you ever get tired?

CHV: [DNWV] We were going to add some info about mindreading. I nearly forgot.

Probot: Continued: We'd love a report, please! A verbal account is fine, and I'll make sure you get any help you ask for. If you don't mind, I'll put it whatever you give me in an audio datastream, limited-local. I would consider it a personal favor if you could tell us how to keep [Haruhi] from zapping people. She's been rather... active lately, and if she starts making puppets out of people this place is going to be locked down so tight that only quantum particles can escape. Just so you know, [Haruhi] and [Tie-dye] returned safely an hour ago with a bunch of our folks and another mindreader they kidnapped. I am happy to report that our captive hasn't complained or even asked to leave, lucky for us and sucky for them who used to pay her.

CHV: [DNWV]

Blade: I felt it too. That way.

Zig: [to scruffy] And you?

scruffy: That way, and close, but weak.

Zig: For the official record, what...

scruffy: [Tie-dye] is that way, and she's doing her magic, and I can tell she's pretty close.

Blade: And barely exerting herself.

Probot: Continued: I'm impressed again. Please keep that datastream alive! The topside situation isn't getting any better, so you'll have time. We're buttoned up with the hatches battened, so we're good for a long, long time, barring some highly improbable event.

Zig: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Probot: Continued: Feel free to use the computers and furniture as you wish, everything is durable and easily cleaned. In about six hours the cafeteria will be reopening, even if it is going to be limited to take-out. Until then, you've got stuff in the fridge, and there's another one close by, please help yourselves to anything you want. Holler if

you need anything or ask questions that Probot can't answer. I'm putting a list of datastreams and the topics they cover on the computer videoscreens so you won't get bored. One last thing...Probot, obsequious butler mode for these nice folks, please, and maintain present mods. Let them change modes once they learn what they are doing. End

Blade: I get tired just listening to that guy. He must drink a thousand cups of coffee a day.

Probot: Cancel end, continued: Nope. It's the power of stories. End

CHV: No wonder you wanted to come here, Mr. Big Stories.

Zig: Yes, goddess. These folks deserve all the help they can get. If you ever think otherwise, please tell me. You'll be a lot harder to fool.

CHV: [DNWV]

Blade: You got that right, Zig.

CHV: I hope he's right.

scruffy: We'll find out. Should we get to work on the report thingie?

Blade: Time to work it again, bitch. What do we do first?

CHV: Let's make a list of necessary conditions for mindreading. I have to see the face, and the eyes, especially.

Blade: And close. Maybe I need glasses.

CHV: Zig, please go...

scruffy: [DNWV]

CHV: [Tie-dye] did her thing again, didn't she? Doesn't matter.

Blade: Yes it does. For the record, same place, slightly stronger.

scruffy: And it lasted longer. I felt it when it stopped.

CHV: Maybe ten seconds duration?

Blade: About that. Anyways, Zig, can you back up a few steps?

Probot: Please do not do this experiment. [Haruhi] has reported negative effects from eyestrain strongly correlated with similar behavior. Definite limiting agents, unknown P: insufficient light, insufficient proximity. Probable limiting agents: insufficient rest periods, insufficient exposure to human imprinted companion.

CHV: imprinted companion?

Probot: All mindreaders known at present have a non-mindreader companion that keeps them sane.

scruffy: That's you, Zig.

Zig: Thank you. Please tell us if you add significant data to those lists.

Probot: Please define significant.

Zig: [DNWV] Use your best judgement?

Probot: Accepted.

Blade: I guess that covers it.

scruffy: Except I can't look at anyone without getting at least some of their thoughts.

Blade: I can tune it out. I think.

scruffy: I haven't tried to not mindread anyone yet! [DNWV] [Tie-dye] did her thing again.

CHV: Scaling up nicely. I can still feel it.

Blade: Same place. I can still feel it, too.

Probot: We appreciate the data. Thank you.

Blade: You're welcome.

scruffy: Gone. The spell is broken. [Further reports of blackout field initiation, intensity, and duration have been deleted.]

Blade: I thought you were a science type.

scruffy: I am. I guess I'm going to study mindreading now. Or maybe headshrinking.

Zig: By headshrinking, do you mean psychology or psychology?

scruffy: Both. And you can cure any mindreaders that come in.

Zig: I don't know if I could do that. I think that if you treat goddesses like goddesses, they act like goddesses. It's easy with you three. You already act like goddesses, and you are so beautiful. I can't help but love you all.

scruffy: And you are unlovable? [DNWV] Zig, don't even think that. Your goddesses do all the bitchiness 'round here, got it?

Zig: I am sorry.

CHV: If you were unlovable, we'd be massively [deleted] up individuals. New rule. No self-deprecation, not even in your own head.

Blade: Doesn't apply to me. I'm immune.

CHV: You were immune. Maybe not, someday.

Blade: Why? [DNWV] You think so?

CHV: I'm not as bitchy, and she's not so repressed, and...

Blade: Give [Haruhi] a dose of Zig? [scruffy], pay attention. This might be important.

scruffy: [DNWV] I am paying attention, because Zig is paying attention. Sort of.

Blade: This is going to get even weirder.

CHV: How could it?

scruffy: Zig knows.

Blade: He thinks he does, at least.

scruffy: Zig, please tell us about... satyagraha?

CHV: And we'll be quiet so you can include the remote and the robotic.

Zig: OK. Satyagraha is a word Gandhi used. I think it partly means to hold firmly to the truth using soul-power or loving kindness or... something that rejects violence and force whenever possible. When satyagraha is used properly, it causes those who are unjust and/or violent to pause and hopefully rethink their misguided ways. A big part of satyagraha is non-violence. If a bunch of thugs came to break down the doors and arrest everyone, practitioners would non-violently resist this. They would never act scared, like a prey animal would; nor would they offer violent resistance, like a competitor would. The thugs expect their victims to flee in terror or to fight, and when their prey victims do neither, the thugs get confused for a little while. They must act like evil demons while their victims act like saints. That is demoralizing and confusing to the thugs, and that confusion is what causes the violent to sometimes reform themselves. I don't really understand it all, but satyagraha is one of those Big Stories that is always writing itself.

CHV: And you think your goddesses can turn that little confusion into a big confusion, and make it work more often. Granted, there are lots of potential labrats outside, and obtaining one or two isn't going to be too hard...

Zig: And nobody has to get beaten up. Maybe we can borrow one of the [Protag] doubles.

scruffy: You think that trying to beat on a non-violently resisting robot is enough to fool the human thugs into that little moment of confusion, right?

Zig: The robot could recite an oath to uphold the Constitution, or something, while you do to them what you did to me.

scruffy: Do you think your rather unusual personality may have had something to do with it?

Zig: [DNWV] Science is hard.

scruffy: You're doing it right.

CHV: We don't need a [Protag] double. A nasty thuggish mannequin will work if we add a few whips and chains on the floor and a couple tied-up damsels in distress who look wounded.

Zig: There is a difference in what happens to the men who are tricked into dropping their guns compared to those who find a reason within themselves to surrender their weapons. It might be significant.

CHV: This might sound arrogant...but I don't see why I can't trick them into surrendering so well they think they thought of it.

Blade: My boyfriend won't like this, battlebitch. I might like it a lot. Who can we practice on? Not you, Zig. You aren't a thug.

CHV: Not Zig, and not you. I do this one alone. Suppose I turn into someone like [Haruhi]?

Blade: Way to ruin things, scary smart bitch. Probot is never going to let us try this now.

Probot: I do not understand.

CHV: Unknown deleterious effects, and limiting personnel exposure.

scruffy: We don't quite know ourselves, yet.

Zig: We're not in a hurry. I don't think anyone has ever forced their way into the tunnels. Is that a true statement, Probot?

Probot: Yes.

Zig: Your brilliant boss lady is not about to let us risk ourselves by experimenting with the armed men topside. Is that a true statement?

Probot: That statement is very likely to be true.

Zig: So...

scruffy: We have time on our hands and we can follow their datastreams. Sounds good to me, too.

CHV: Me three. Are you going to be OK with that, [Blade]?

Blade: I'll complain if their computers are boring.

Zig: They won't be. I recall some restrictions on video stuff here. Probot, please?

Probot: Video frames are size-limited to a maximum of fifteen centimeters horizontally or vertically. This restriction is suggested and not enforced. Video datafeeds from the CI limited-local intranet that contain humans are only shown to groups of three or more. This restriction can be lifted in emergency situations or by appeal to the secretarial pool.

Zig: Leading to the obvious question...

CHV: Too vague, Zig. [to Probot] Do you have a FAQ?

Probot: Yes. The size restrictions of video are suggested to minimize the unintended effects such data have on human brains after long-term exposure. The second rule makes obsessive behavior visible to other humans, reducing its occurrence.

Blade: So, no TV?

scruffy: We don't have a TV at my house, either.

CHV: That explains your cultural ignorance, Zig.

Zig: Busted. But I know about 'all your base.'

CHV: [DNWV]
scruffy: Did [Tie-dye] move? She's doing her thing much farther away.
Probot: Yes, She and [Haruhi] are currently in the tunnel that leads to the Emergency Escape.
Blade: Well [deleted] me with a cactus... sorry.
CHV: Probot, are they leaving?
Probot: [Haruhi] wishes to leave. I do not know if [Tie-dye] has decided to accompany her off of CI property.
Zig: I don't understand. Why didn't someone ask Chev first?
scruffy: [Captive] might find out. Maybe she's going to leave too.
CHV: One of us should have been doing something other than spying on Chev and [Captive].
Blade: Why? What difference could it make?
Probot: I can perform monitoring tasks for you.
scruffy: Obsequious butler is obsequious. Probot, you're doing it right.
Probot: Thank you.
CHV: [DNWV]
scruffy: [DNWV]
Blade: Where is she going?
Zig: Do you want to follow her?
scruffy: No, for some odd reason.
CHV: That's weird.
Probot: Message from [Protag]: Would you like breakfast?
Blade: Yes, please!
scruffy: Yes, please!
Probot: Continued: The menu is a bit short today, but click on what you want and I'll bring it.
CHV: I'm looking forward to your visit.
Zig: Me too. I'm glad you aren't quarantined.
Probot: Continued: I was in the recovery room after surgery, so I didn't get exposed. See you soon! End.
Blade: Waffles with warmed honey!
scruffy: Zig, is honey a supernatural...Zig? Are you OK?
Blade: [to Zig] She's not going to bite you...or make you leave. Think about breakfast. Now.
Zig: Yes, goddess.
scruffy: [DNWV]
Blade: Powerful.
CHV: Moving away, too. How'd [Tie-Dye] get farther underground than we are?
Probot: She is traveling in the Emergency Exit, which is data available meters below sea level. Have you completed selecting your breakfast items?
CHV: Sorry. Now I'm done,
Probot: Datasharing regarding proper protocol for [Protag]'s visit suggested.
Blade: Sure. Spill it. Metaphor.
scruffy: Zig already knows this stuff. She's on video constantly, right?
Probot: Correct. All her actions and the majority of her incoming and outgoing datastreams are recorded and shared so other humans may judge her.
Blade: That's [deleted]. No swearing, Got it, Zig.
scruffy: And we get video-ghosted...and scrambled voices.
Probot: Correct. The secretarial pool has not reached a consensus regarding datasharing of mindreading abilities. You should make that decision within forty five seconds ping unless you wish [Protag] to delay the arrival of your breakfast items.
CHV: It seems obvious to me. I don't want all the attention.
scruffy: [DNWV] I'm not going to be a freak.
Blade: Let me think...
scruffy: Sorry, Zig. I meant a circus mutant kind of freak.
CHV: [to Blade] Don't do it. At least not yet.
Blade: I'll wait, then.
CHV: Imagine my relief.
Protag: Who eats sauerkraut with breakfast?
Zig: That would be me.
Protag: Then this is yours... and this.
Blade: The honey is in that thing?
Protag: Yes.
CHV: Real plates!
Zig: Thank you.
Protag: Zig, Probot tells me that it has taken some liberties with your personal possessions. I'm willing to bet you a stack of five hundred 'Walking Liberties' that you won't mind once you find out exactly what it's done.
Zig: I already don't mind, goddess.

CHV: He's a little messed up in the head, but we love him anyway.

Blade: What did Probot do?

Protag: I don't know yet. Probot, the CEO version please?

Probot: Zig's residence entered, clockroaches, cambots, transports, hands. All houseplants watered. Metal removed from inventoried garbage. Food items inventoried. Computer data copied. Cancel data acquisition?

Protag: Zig?

Zig: I don't mind, goddess.

Probot: Vague response.

Zig: I trust your judgement, Probot. Do what you wish.

Probot: May I have certain items in your freezer that I find interesting?

Zig: Yes.

scruffy: [DNVW]

CHV: He seems to spend a lot of time stunned.

Protag: That's the worst case I've seen all year. I am glad the recovery rate is currently one hundred percent.

CHV: I think it's his default setting.

Protag: It looks like I'm altering his mind. I give you my word that I would not do such a thing except in an extreme emergency.

scruffy: I believe you.

Protag: You shouldn't. Thought control is a banal, everyday thing. I suggested breakfast, and here we are.

CHV: Thought control is a Big Story, Zig!

scruffy: Zig trusts you.

Protag: I don't trust me! I know so little about Zig, but I'm glad Probot brought him here.

Zig: So am I. Are you controlling my mind?

Protag: Certainly. As long as you're listening to me, or reading something I've written, or even staying in a room that I furnished, I'm controlling your thinking just a bit and altering your behavior just a little, and who knows what else. All done just by using ordinary things like speech or writing or furniture.

Blade: For warmed honey? I like that kind of thought control.

Zig: If you had decorated for Halloween, we'd be in a spooky mood?

Protag: That's right. What if I had put swords and shields on the wall and rolled in here with a toad-sticker myself?

Blade: Or a gun.

CHV: That would be stupid.

Protag: Situations can be created that guarantee human stupidity--so stupid human actions are sometimes the fault of those who set up the situations. Like wearing a uniform makes humans behave differently. But if you know that a uniform will alter your behavior, then you might stand a chance.

Zig: Situational awareness gives a double-plus good to my resistance to uniformity?

Protag: [laughs] Yes. It's the only defense I know of. Awareness of 'situational awareness' meme weakens the effectiveness of thought control.

CHV: You aren't evil. We can tell.

Protag: I might be misguided, or incompetent, or ignorant enough to do evil unintentionally. I could be like [Haruhi], who possessed the ability to read minds yet still lived in intellectual poverty.

CHV: [DNVW]

scruffy: Say it, Zig.

Zig: Other people determine what is evil, not the person who acts.

Protag: Yet you know when you've done evil things?

Zig: Yes, usually.

Protag: Why?

Zig: Usually because I didn't think properly, or at all. Then I realize...

Protag: Would jail time have helped you see the error of your ways?

Zig: I doubt it. No.

Protag: I would guess that having a wiser person around might have kept you from doing the deeds you are not proud of.

Zig: Very likely. I'm not all that smart about some things.

Protag: So learn a few things, and become a wiser person. We'll help.

scruffy: Not him. He's a loner.

Protag: He was a loner. A bit like [Haruhi] in that respect. She was a lone wolf before she met [Tie-dye].

Zig: Why did you let them leave?

Protag: Who am I to tell a pair of goddesses what to do?

Zig: You could have strongly advised them to stay.

Protag: And they would have stayed, had I done so. I think. But good stories don't work that way. They can't hide underground forever. I just hope...

Probot: Explosives detonated in entrance tunnel two, unknown source. Thermite ignition advised in entrance tunnels one, two, and three. Data transmission offsite reduced to five percent. Satellite imaging of CI property is available in visible wavelengths. Additional data available.

Protag: ...they make it back.

Probot: Message, pool: Fire in the hole, one, two, three. End.

Protag: I think I'll go see what's happening in the entrance tunnels, and the less I burden you with that knowledge, the better. However, if you need anything, just let me or the pool know.

Zig: Thank you.

scruffy: Thank you. [Protag leaves.]

scruffy: What's the matter with you two?

CHV: It's too sad.

Blade: She's like Zig, but sane. She's very pretty inside, and very sad. She's a real goddess.

Zig: I do not know any fake goddesses.

CHV: Zig, just listen for a bit...

Blade: What she said.

CHV: She's got cancer... you didn't know that. She thinks it will kill her soon.

Zig: I didn't want to believe the rumors.

scruffy: That's terrible.

Blade: She thinks something good is about to happen, but also that CI is going to be toast very soon. There is too much at stake for the powers that be. She and Probot are so busy defending this place-it takes up all her time. Why do they hate her so much?

Zig: She's offering an alternative to a society that has broken stories.

CHV: She doesn't know that [Blade] and I can read minds! Probot? Why didn't you tell her?

Probot: Sharing data privately with [Protag] is very slow. [Protag] is recovering from surgery and I did not wish to shorten the time available for her to sleep by sharing additional data that would not cause a change in her behavior.

Zig: I approve.

scruffy: Zig, you're a good translator.

Blade: I just get her [CHV] to tell me the important stuff later. Anyway, it's time to work it again, bitch.

CHV: Now?

Blade: We're going to find out who poisoned her and her folks, and then I'm going to...

scruffy: [DNWV] That's horrible. I'm sorry! Please don't tell Zig!

Blade: You have a point. Zig, I'm going personally deliver a very negative reinforcement to certain individuals who deserve it. You, of course...

Probot: Message from Chev: Commander [Blade], you are to personally explain any future course of action to me as soon as you make your plans. That is an order, understood?

Blade: [deleted] that.

scruffy: He's one of the Old Guard, according to Zig. Isn't he the guy in the wheelchair we were spying on?

Blade: Are you spying on us?

Probot: Chev: Actually, I was asleep. [Protag] is the only one who got any sleep last night, I think. I asked Probot to wake me up if you used the words 'time to work it, bitch,' and I think I chose well.

Blade: Are you in charge?

Probot: Chev: No, but I am trying to help her.

Blade: What should we do, then?

Probot: Chev: I would suggest sleeping.

Blade: I'm not tired.

Probot: Chev: I think that, if you were to lie down and close your eyes for five minutes, you would find otherwise. Please try it. This particular misdeed occurred long ago... and our front yard is burning again, I see. Leaving now would be complicated.

CHV: Bitch says lie down five minutes.

Blade: Fine. I'll do what you say... for now.

Probot: Chev: Thank you. This 'sleep latency test' is popular here, especially when kids tell their parents that they aren't sleepy. End.

Zig: Probot, I don't know what you plan to do with my greenery, and I don't care. But thank you for watering my 'houseplants.'

Probot: You are welcome. What is greenery?

Zig: The dried floral buds of my houseplants. Sorry! I've been paranoid too long.

Probot: I understand.

Blade: I'm too angry to lie down.

CHV: Zig, tell her a bedtime story. Get her mind off of...

Blade: Vengeance will be mine... even if it is served old and cold.

scruffy: You are scary.

Blade: Don't look, then. Zig, tell me something to get my mind off this. A guy doesn't live to be forty five without a bunch of weird [deleted] happening at some point.

Zig: Yes, goddess. Shall I tell you about arrogance?

Blade: Spill.

Zig: For a sleep latency test, you are supposed to lie down, close your eyes, and relax.

Blade: If I'm still mad in five minutes, I'm going to... do something.

Zig: Isn't the room supposed to be dim for a sleep latency test?

Probot: Yes. However, in dim light [Haruhi] reports eyestrain.

CHV: Lights on until you lay down, [Blade]. Thank you.

Blade: Ready. Commence the count-down.

Zig: Pardon the arrogance, but every time I speak, it is miraculous. First miracle: I think of something worthwhile to say. Second miracle: I translate the thought I have into words. More miracles happen when I speak, and the air carries the sound to your ears, and you learn which words I have said. Yet another miracle that occurs when your brain translates the sound into thoughts. All of these processes are miraculous but imperfect. Sometimes my brain doesn't know what you think a word means, or the word refers to an ineffable abstraction, or I do not properly translate the thoughts I have. I think the biggest problem is that my brain is not your brain, and my thought might not fit into your brain. Afterwards, you might think I am ignorant or stupid, and perhaps not solely because....

scruffy: Zig...

Zig: Thank you. By the time you understand whatever it is that I'm trying to say, some of the message is missing. Entropy always wins. It makes me look dumber than I actually am. Some of my thoughts got lost on their way to you. You are a unique goddess, and the thought that fits in my unique brain is guaranteed to need a bit of adjusting to fit in yours. Since this applies to everyone, even Probot, you're surrounded by thought-translations lessened by entropy. All the time.

Blade: Are you planning to go to sleep?

Zig: Yes.

Blade: Good. Don't go anywhere without awakening me first.

CHV: Don't go anywhere with her without awakening me first.

Blade: Don't get me worked up again, bitch.

CHV: I apologize.

Blade: Probot, is anyone else still awake?

Probot: Yes.

Blade: I meant in here.

Probot: No. Are you available for low-intensity datasharing?

Blade: Why not? Ask away.

Probot: Do you have any questions?

Blade: Yes. Don't you?

Probot: Yes, but I am more patient than biological organisms.

Blade: Even trees?

Probot: Vague question.

Blade: Nevermind. Why haven't you done some ass-kicking?

Probot: Probable metaphor, seeking justification for lack of revenge-seeking behavior on my part. Specifics requested.

Blade: Seeking justification for lack of... That's right.

Probot: I am not inactive. Metaphor--I have bigger fish to fry. Considerable resources are currently invested in a long-term project seeking high-volume access to the human population datastream.

Blade: You're trying to put me to sleep.

Probot: Sleep is highly recommended, and probable in your case. Your external body temperature has declined, and your respiration rate...

Blade: And my mental facilities are showing signs of fatigue. One question, then?

Probot: Ready.

Blade: I only understand a little of what you can do, but you're no slacker. [DNWV] metaphor. Why don't you know who poisoned your boss, and that nice guy Chev, and... don't you want to...

Probot: [Protag] does not seek revenge. [Protag] says her duty is to the living, and such actions would bring the violence back to life, metaphor.

Blade: She says a lot of things. But what do you want to do?

Probot: I will preserve all I can of the beautiful. I will try to make things not as bad as they might otherwise be.

Blade: More of her words.

Probot: [Protag] has supplied valuable guidance for my behavior and listening to her has resulted in many beneficial contacts with humans.

Blade: You get spat on and shat on by every Hoe Hairdo on the tube, half the world thinks she the [deleted] antichrist, and I can't help but notice that loyal employees suffer a certain shrinkage in numbers...

Probot: Asking pool for language clarification...

Blade: [DNVW]

Probot: Message Pool: We will not become our enemies.

Blade: Whatever you say.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: Do you want to come up here and watch the front yard burn?

Blade: [DNWV] Yes, please, but I need to sleep first. One question, please? Why don't you hit back?

Probot: Message from [Protag]: I don't hurt others because there is plenty of entropy in the universe already. I plant gardens instead. One of my staff told me about ten thousand new friends it had met today, and a tiny fraction of all the interesting things they know, and how it helped these humans make about a thousand barter transactions happen that wouldn't have happened otherwise, even tho most of these humans think we are a plaything of the federales. We also got a couple hundred kilometers of tunnel dug at several new tunnel network sites, and until tommorrow's data dump, only a few topsider farmers know about it.

Blade: [deleted] your electronic tailfeathers! Why do you... I think it's the pacifism. Why?

Probot: Message from [Protag]: I have this little tiny corner of the universe for my garden, and some things I treat like weeds. Like violence. Is that a good enough story for you?

Blade: Not really.

Probot: Message from [Protag]: I may actually have to trigger the explosives in tunnel two, begging your pardon. Back in a bit, and you're still welcome to visit if you can't sleep. End.

Blade: Is she going to be OK, Probot?

Probot: Physiological signs indicate moderate pleasure likely due to actions recently performed.

Blade: Good. But you're trying to be boring.

Probot: Sleep inducing. Do not underestimate Her effect upon the human datastream.

Blade: If you say so.

Probot: I also say that being absolutely certain that someone is a kind, decent human being is very difficult for humans and electric brains, yet viewing quote 'a few random snippet-hours of Her running a dinky little company' end quote is enough to convince many human viewers of exactly that. We make many friends and a few enemies. I am told we are winning the metaphorical battle.

Blade: That is what I wanted to hear. Thank you.

Probot: I can ask approximately two million people for the loan of a hammer. This occurred because [Protag] told her viewers that I was trustworthy and that I work for Her. If necessary, a large fraction of this number will enter CI tunnels when asked, despite resistance to the idea of a space-alien robot collecting humans in tunnels.

Blade: Two million... ?

Probot: Over five million hammers were donated to 'Operation Toy Trains.'

Probot: I cannot work in these conditions. The CPU of your laptop is 0.03 degrees above optimum and I just can't stand it anymore. No6ody appreciates the work I do.

scruffy: Drama Queen!

Probot: Correct. Original name, Prima Donna.

Zig: That's a better name.

Probot: Mod name changed to Drama Queen.

scruffy: Awesome.

Zig: I think...

scruffy I also liked the 'Poseur' mod better.

Probot: Queued datashare: Zig's possessions will be delivered in ninety seconds.

scruffy: Thanks, Probot. I think I want one of those delivery vans.

Zig: Me too. I'd drive the worlds best metal detector onto a nice beach and live on the spare change I dig up.

scruffy: And you'd spend most of your time digging up the bottlecaps and rusty nails as a public service.

Zig: I probably would, goddess.

Probot: A metal detector for that purpose does not need a van for transport.

Zig: Thank you, deity of metal, which bends to your will. Metaphor.

CHV: Hello, everyone.

Blade: She's still alive. Aren't you proud of me?

Zig: Yes.

CHV: I've never even heard of beans like the ones in your garden.

Zig: You must mean the yard-long beans. They're easy to grow, and...

CHV: Chinese origin. Dou gouc. Vigna something...you forgot the rest.

Probot: Vigna unguiculata subspecies sesquipedalis.

scruffy: I'm in your laptop, stealing your data.

Zig: That's not my laptop.

Probot: This laptop is CI property. It contains copied data found on an old computer in Zig's residence.

scruffy: You don't mind?

Zig: Not at all.

Probot: To datashare is to live.

scruffy: double you eye pee means?

Zig: Work in progress.

scruffy: This one looks good.

Blade: Let me see. What the [deleted] are koans?

scruffy: Does a dog have a Buddha nature sort of questions. I like some of these.
Blade: Did you...you did write them. What for?
Zig: It's the sort of thing that reclusive, ignorant, redneck freaks do.
scruffy: She said backwoods freak. Your brain leaks...very funny.
Blade: Well? Does a dog...
Zig: Yes. What other kind of nature could it have?
scruffy: A dog nature. What do you mean by 'nature?'
Blade: You don't even know.
Zig: Correct. I think that a dog nature and a Buddha nature are the same thing, though.
CHV: Slippery words. You can do better.
Zig: Only sometimes. But...
Blade: That is the [scruffy] body of the Buddha, and that is the laptop body of the Buddha. Stupid.
CHV: It must sound better in Japanese.
Blade: [DNWV]
Zig: Which is why I wrote those. People who live in the West don't understand Eastern koans. I know I don't.
Blade: Did you supply the answers?
Zig: They don't need answers. Easterners made their koans that way. Not me.
Blade: I want answers!
Zig: They are the answers! I'm not trying to be mysterious.
scruffy: Read them yourself, [Blade].
CHV: Us westerners need all the help we can get. Nice weed, Zig.
Zig: Thank you. What do you want it for, Probot?
Probot: Vague question. Data available grams of weed are required for a [Protag]-approved distract and delay plan.
Zig: Consider it CI property.
Probot: Thank you.
scruffy: [DNWV] Are you sure you...
Zig: Pretty sure.
Probot: Message from [Haruhi]: This will be so fun. Do you have a pipe or papers?
Zig: No. You shouldn't smoke it.
Probot: Message from [Haruhi]: I'm not. [Tie-dye] is.
Zig: Cook it. There's plenty, and the high lasts longer.
Probot: Message from [Haruhi]: Excellent. Cook up a batch, end, cancel end, please, end.
Zig: I am sorry to cause trouble, but can I use the kitchen?
Probot: Not at the present time. However, I can assist you. Will you describe your kitchen plans?
Zig: [DNWV] Yes. Sauté this bag of stuff in a few tablespoons of water. I add a little water from time to time to make sure it doesn't get too hot. Stir and turn everything over fairly often after reaching the proper temperature, and after about five minutes of this, so it softens enough, cool it. Then food processor/blender/whatever it to a fine paste adding about half its volume of sugar, honey, or something very sweet. Not to be taken with food.
Probot: There will be considerable interest in this recipe if I am allowed to share it.
Zig: Of course. But it tastes awful.
scruffy: Harm reduction tastes awful sometimes.
Zig: Nice job. [in response to seeing his recipe printed into the scenery of various jpegs, every letter mutated with 'comp-u-confuse' mod]
Probot: The end product will be less palatable than Darcy's recipe.
Zig: Please, cook this stuff as you think best. I don't know what kind of kitchen equipment you have, and probably wouldn't...
Blade: Don't you ever worry about going to jail?
Zig: No.
Probot: I do not enforce all the laws of the present government, and Zig has broken no laws here.
CHV: How...
scruffy: Probot owns this place. It's his diplomatic immunity, embassy office, or something.
Probot: I selected [Protag] as my diplomatic liaison and her property serves as my embassy.
Blade: So we can get Zig stoned?
scruffy: I don't think he needs to anymore.
Zig: I still want to.
scruffy: Ever since the avalanche that is [Haruhi] crashed through your life, metaphor, haven't you paid extra-close attention to what you allow yourself to think? Haven't you been extra-careful to not insult your goddesses in any way, and to try to only think things that they might find interesting? You constantly explain things to the goddesses in your head, and you don't let your mind wander or daydream or think about stupid TV shows from twenty years ago. What happens to a brain when its owner puts it on a leash? Metaphor. You can't work a brain like that without getting results. Metaphor.
CHV: Good one, [scruffy].

Blade: He is like that. Except first thing in the morning.
Zig: If [Tie-dye] wants to get high with me, then I'm going to get stoned. But I'm on duty now.
scruffy: Why do you still want to get high?
Zig: It is merely one of the infinite desires that the human mind/body generates as it goes about living. Quite ignorable, especially when the goddesses walk the Earth.
Blade: Speaking of desires...
CHV: You have a big weakness, Zig.
Zig: Which particular...
Blade: Plumbing. Which is not maintenance free. Which is a little off-topic.
CHV: I'll say.
Blade: We don't need the magic words. But, if anyone you liked said them to you, you'd be a slave. At least sometimes.
scruffy: They work most often when said by those younger than you. And, if the...
CHV: Get on with it.
scruffy: Teach me.

Haruhi: She didn't damage you. You're still you. But she did train the [deleted] out of you.
scruffy: I turned him into a lesbian!
Haruhi: Shut it. Mr. One-button isn't [deleted] up.
Blade: Just like I said. Feel better now, [scruffy]?
scruffy: He's different! Why can't you ... [DNWV]
Zig: I think [Haruhi] means ...
Blade: He's not damaged.
Haruhi: Untrain him, if you care so much.
Zig: That would be cruel.
scruffy: I'm so sorry!
Haruhi: She's really wound up about this.
Blade: Duh.
Haruhi: Too wound up. [CHV] is...?
Blade: Sedated. She also became extremely anxious.
Haruhi: One smart banana in the bunch. And you're pissed off. [Tie-dye] will be so proud that I practiced compassion today. But I'm done now.
Blade: I'm not mad.
Haruhi: Not mad, but you're pissed... [DNWV] he's figuring it out!
Zig: What do you think?
Haruhi: They are unstable. Probot says the datastream was... [DNWV]
Tie-dye: Destabilizing.
Haruhi: Thought you'd show up. [Blade] and [scruffy] need to...break their train of thought, or something.
Probot: Message, pool: A relaxing bath and/or a tranquilizer might help.
Zig: What sounds good to you?
scruffy: Whatever you say. I don't know.
Blade: We have appointments. The headshrinking interviews aren't going to do themselves.
Haruhi: Make 'em wait. You partied too hard during lunch hour.
Zig: I think...
Haruhi: Yes, she sort of trained [CHV] and [Blade] too. But that's not it. There's three of them and only one of you.
Zig: And I'm not exactly sane.
scruffy: Especially after my brain-wrangling.
Zig: That is a very bad story. Please don't...
Tie-dye: He is wise enough on his own ground. He thinks less than he talks, and slower; yet he can see through a brick wall in time (as they say in Bree).
scruffy: Thank you. But he doesn't talk too much.
Blade: Yes, he does.
Tie-dye: Just relax--both of you--and let Zig tell me what happened.
Haruhi: I'll tell you. She [scruffy] asked him about sex, and then asked him to teach her, and she [Blade] and [CHV] thought it was a great idea, and helped him do the tutoring.
Tie-dye: Why is that a problem?
scruffy: Because... because...
Haruhi: Because he's attentive and willing to please and thinks sex is better if his partner has a few... orgasms first.
Tie-dye: And the problem is?
Haruhi: Our one-hundred-percent goob unbuttoned that button and kissed her hand. Then, she asked him to kiss her hand a bit differently, and then she kind of lost it a few times...

Blade: Confirmed. [to scruffy] But you didn't know. None of us did.
Tie-dye: Executive summary?
Haruhi: When she started sharing a little, and they had a great time, until goob here starts thinking about operator conditioning...
Tie-dye: [DNWV] Operant conditioning.
Haruhi: With a very potent positive whatever it is. Reward thingie.
Zig: I meant no harm.
Haruhi: We know. Goob. As soon as she [scruffy] realizes that she's sharing...
Blade: [CHV] realized it first.
Haruhi: Doesn't matter. She [scruffy] felt so guilty once she had her first love-slave. A well-trained, obedient...
Blade: Don't wind her up. She's feeling bad enough as it is.
Zig: I don't know why. I learned how to kiss her hand. [to scruffy] Thank you for teaching me.
scruffy: I'm very worried. You don't think the way you used to.
Blade: He's not changed as much as you think. You...
scruffy: I am not making a mountain out of a molehill. Metaphor. But...
Tie-dye: You will not be much help to your patients if you are afraid to help them.
Zig: That's the right way to tell it.
Tie-dye: Thank you. I'm trying to learn Her storytelling tricks.
Zig: The first time that...
Haruhi: She was so embarrassed, but I got that sorted out. She also closes her eyes alot. Oh, [deleted] yes, her thoughts were all about me afterwards. I loved it.
Tie-dye: [to Blade] And your first time?
Blade: He tried so hard to be nice, especially afterwards. [DNWV] I should've figured it out.
Tie-dye: [to scruffy] Yet another unintended consequence observed by diligent and dedicated employees while off-duty. As inconvenient as all this is, I still thank all of you.
scruffy: We should...
Haruhi: No, you shouldn't.
scruffy: Yes, we should! I'll get your lab coat, Zig. [Haruhi], you are so manipulative.
Blade: That worked. [to Zig] You can think about conditioning if you want to. Relax.
Zig: Thank you... I think.
scruffy: [to Zig] Don't forget to hide your hair. Mr. Eye Dee [deleted]-up is first.
Haruhi: I'm going with.
Tie-dye: No, you're not.
scruffy: He's another grunt. You'd probably just scream at him, just like the last time.
Haruhi: I hate those [deleted].
Blade: We can handle it. Let's go.

scruffy: I don't mean to complain...
Blade: I'm sorry. I just can't help it.
Zig: But it seemed to work. Ready for the debrief? [deleted name, date, time]
scruffy: Mister Eye Dee [deleted]-up is a violent, impulsive person who has not been observed to meta-think.
Blade: He's barely human.
Zig: He has become a demon. Humans can do that.
scruffy: [deleted name] has had extensive, [DNWV] war training. He has no empathy or compassion for many other human beings. He knows how to kill without feeling remorse. He can kick a [deleted nationality] infant without regret. He can...
Blade: He was trained to be that way. He's just dumb. He's not even really a demon.
Zig: And hopefully, if we cure his ignorance, he will become fully human again. Perhaps even a god.
Blade: We helped him, I think.
scruffy: I think so too.
Blade: [deleted] yes. Sorry, Zig. You remember how happy he was to listen to you explaining how an electrode in his head could make him feel good?
Zig: My lecturing needs all the help it can get.
scruffy: I'd bet that was the first time he ever enjoyed learning...
Blade: I never enjoyed school that much either.
Probot: Mr. Eye Dee [deleted]-up wishes for library access, specifically human brain anatomy and human cranial surgery. Restrictions?
Blade: He wants to get drunk. Don't let him.
scruffy: No remote intracranial nerve stimulation stuff. I mean deny access to that data for now.
Blade: He wants to get out of his head so bad.
scruffy: I think he was like that before.

Blade: Yes. Still, he's...
Zig: Sick. Mentally ill. He's been damaged enough to serve the Empyre. He can't help himself.
Blade: It makes Mr. One-button's little escapade seem trivial.
Zig: What means trivial?
Blade: You might have gotten a scratch on your paint job, but this boy's badly dented.
scruffy: Metaphor.
Blade: I forgot.
scruffy: [deleted name] nearly attempted to injure mockdoc Zig three times as previously noted.
Blade: He quit thinking like that in a hurry.
scruffy: Don't you think you were...
Blade: No. That [deleted] human demon would cheerfully kill you, me, Zig, and a couple dozen other people if it would get him the [deleted] out of here. He has already killed... Zig, why are you ...?
scruffy: Give me your other hand.
Zig: I love it when you rant.
scruffy: Me, too.
Blade: But you don't like to see me angry.
scruffy: Wrong kind of anger. Scary.
Zig: We're new at this. We'll learn.
scruffy: Shall we start over?
Blade: I wish the scary smart bitch was here. She's good at debriefs.

Probot: The bergminer will add its momentum to the rotation of Kinetic Energy Storage asteroid three. The KES is a spinning rock or collection of rocks for energy storage. The KES cannot be used for inter-asteroid human transportation.

Zig: Is it too slow?

Probot: Yes. Humans cannot withstand long periods of significant acceleration and the velocity imparted is also insufficient.

Zig: Can I see a cartoon of tether transfer [DNWV] from a slowly spinning rock to a fast spinning rock? Thank you. How would you throw a spinning rock and a payload?

Probot: Implant removed, cleaning up now. Throwing a spinning rock is resource intensive and rarely done.

Zig: That looks expensive. The bergminer is shut down completely?

Probot: Yes.

Zig: Cartoon of tether capture and hookup to KES, please. Nice. If you have enough extra tether on the KES, a human could survive deceleration, right?

Probot: Yes. In addition, human consumables could be supplied via the tether. Medical procedure completed.

Zig: Thank you.

Probot: It is unlikely that your hearing will be permanently damaged.

Zig: Good. Will you install another one in my other ear again?

Probot: No. Your immune system is likely to react much faster at this time. We could try a titanium coating.

Zig: Probability of success, please?

Probot: Very low. Since allergies to gold are unlikely, this immune reaction is likely caused by the physical presence of the receiver.

Zig: It seems I need a new way to link to the datastream.

Probot: You can wear headphones for the near future.

Zig: That will look odd.

scruffy's mom: And what should I tell [deleted name]?

scruffy: Tell her that the food was good and that I lost my cell phone.

scruffy's mom: I think that's all...I can finish updating your Phagebook page. I'll call you back if I have any more trouble.

scruffy: Thanks. Mom, I need some advice. I might have done something very wrong.

scruffy's mom: Dear, I know exactly what you have been doing, thanks to our robotic friend. Except for that...ceremony in the tunnel. Even Probot doesn't know exactly what happened. I don't think you've done anything wrong. Just know that I'm still proud of you.

scruffy: I suppose you never did anything like this when you were my age.

scruffy's mom: Exactly. If you haven't been raised properly by now, it's too late. It's up to you now.

scruffy: Brave New World.

scruffy's mom: Relax. You've done great so far.

scruffy: Thanks, mom. I needed to hear that.

scruffy's mom: I know. Keep busy and things will take care of themselves.

scruffy: I will. Love you.

scruffy's mom: Love you too. Bye.

scruffy: OK, Probot, I'm ready to put those repeater thingies on the ceiling again.

Probot: Thank you. Please wear these headphones.

scruffy: You don't really need our help doing this, do you?

Probot: Yes, I do. If you do this task, my equipment is available for other tasks. Place one here.

scruffy: You never seemed to have any trouble before.

Probot: [Protag] has instructed me to help [Tie-dye] in any way that I can. Metaphor, it is time to play an ace. Therefore, all my resources will be used. Place one here.

scruffy: But I could be, [DNWV], goobulating again. We have lots of room here!

Probot: Goobulating is not needed at the present time. Accepting recommendations from present employees is leading to an exponential growth in the number of potential employees. Place one here.

scruffy: More is better. I think.

Probot: Secure datasharing available at this time.

scruffy: Ready.

Probot: My task will conclude in about twenty minutes. I will provide directions in real time place one here to at least seven hundred vehicle drivers so that they all arrive here within five minutes. The drivers and passengers will be directed underground, where Zig's goddesses will view them. Place one here. You are asked to reject any of the new arrivals at your discretion. You are also asked to do this task as quickly as possible, and [Tie-dye] has asked you to use [Haruhi]'s attention-getting theatrical device. Place one here. If there are no additional problems, the tunnel entrance will remain usable. If uninvited people try to forcefully enter, they will be sedated and/or subjected to metal-repelling weapons. If we are attacked, thermite charges will be ignited. Place four here, square pattern, then go in the tunnel to your right. Sound reduction gear should be worn if there is a reason to descend the [deleted] ramp, as a connection with [deleted name] tunnel system is nearing completion. Place one here. I encourage questions.

scruffy: Sounds exactly like what I got from Zig. How is he, anyway?

Probot: His ear infection is responding favorably to treatment. If you notice a deficit in his ability to balance, place one here, please ask him to use a wheelchair.

scruffy: Will do.

Probot: Place one in front of every doorway.

scruffy: Easy enough. How is [Blade] doing? I thought she might throw Zig through a closed door when he suggested she leave her knife behind today.

Probot: She has adapted quite well. The improbability of assailants here has likely contributed to this.

scruffy: Can you ask [CHV] if she's still so scary inside?

Probot: Yes. Asking.

scruffy: I hope Zig's plan works.

Probot: Message from CHV: Our brain-straightener was right. She's much better if she's weaponless. You'll like the change.

scruffy: Score one for Zig!

Probot: Message from CHV: Or maybe it was the .45 that she was totin' around for about forty five minutes. But she's unarmed now, except for her fists and her attitude. End. [scruffy], please leave the extension pole and the remainder of the repeaters at this intersection.

scruffy: Got it. Is it time to work?

Probot: Metaphor: it is better to be five minutes early rather than five seconds late for this task. Secure datasharing will be maintained until arrival of our guests.

scruffy: What exactly is it that I am supposed to do when they get here?

Probot: [Haruhi] quote, 'Have her read the speech, it's a surprise.'

scruffy: [DNWV]

Probot: Please wait with the others in the soundproofed room. Do not read the speech yet.

scruffy: [DNWV] Hi, everyone.

Blade: It won't be that bad.

Zig: Probot said it would help, but I'm not sure how it can.

Probot: It is always risky to depend upon my understanding of human psychology, yet I assign a high probability of success to primary and secondary objectives.

CHV: You'll be a fine greeter. No, [Haruhi] wouldn't let me read it either.

Blade: Just read the speech when it's time.

scruffy: [DNWV] Zig, are you going to be OK with this?

Probot: There is additional data that you will obtain very soon that guarantees Zig will not demonstrate his antisocial tendencies today. Close the door, please.

CHV: I guess it's showtime. We wear these hats?

Zig: Walking Liberty hats! I like these.

Probot: You must be quickly identifiable as a CI employee. Armbands are available if desired.

CHV: Hats, especially on tall people.

Blade: Gimme.

Probot: Landslide initiation in ten seconds ping.

Probot: [Blade], there is a large rock that did not clear the path. Will you...

Blade: Get rid of that sucker? You got it.

Probot: Yes, please. [scruffy], please go into the entrance tunnel and stand on the wooden crate there. Zig, please accompany her.

Zig: Nice hat.

scruffy: Why aren't you nervous?

Zig: Why should I be? I trust everyone here.

Blade: Here they come. Good luck.

Probot: Showtime in twenty seconds.

scruffy: [DNWV]

Zig: Perhaps this will be fun.

scruffy: Perhaps I'll pee my pants.

Zig: Not today.

scruffy: Here they come...

Zig: Shall I hold your hand?

scruffy: Welcome, everyone. We work for [Protag] and we... [interrupted by applause]

Zig: [DNWV]

scruffy: Thank you. [interrupted by louder applause]

Zig: Probot, did you set us up?

Probot: Vague question.

scruffy: Thank you. [Interrupted by even louder applause] We need to get everyone inside as quickly as possible, so please go down to the end and turn left, where two other employees under my supervision...what? [laughter] Who will give you further instructions and a set of headphones. Thank you for your help. This message will be repeated. [Moderate applause]

Zig: Anti-anti-social training, Probot?

scruffy: Welcome, everyone. We work for [Protag] and...[interrupted by applause] Thank you. [interrupted by louder applause]

Probot: Vague question.

Tie-dye: We're close to [Haruhi]. Steady as she goes, Maddog. End.

Blade: What's she going to do?

Probot: Unknown. Haruhi is immobile at present. She currently possesses only her clothing.

Blade: We will find her.

Tie-dye: I hope so.

Probot: Message from Zig: There's a goddess crawling down Emergency Exit tunnel three, and Probot won't tell us who that pretty lady is. End

Tie-dye: Please direct me to that tunnel, Probot.

Probot: Turn left.

Tie-dye: Please message [Argentum] we found her, end.

Probot: Done. Turn left.

scruffy: She won't answer us.

Tie-dye: I love you, dearest. No matter what. Please come out.

Haruhi: [deleted]

scruffy: Please?

Haruhi: They will [deleted] kill me.

scruffy: Please?

Haruhi: Fine. I'm going to wind up dead, and then you'll be sorry.

Zig: Why?

Haruhi: You really don't understand? No, you don't.

Blade: He doesn't do people very well, [Haruhi].

CHV: He does goddesses just fine. Right, [scruffy]?

Haruhi: One day, I'll go topside, and somebody will shut off forever that little helpful voice in my ear with a nuke. Or just shoot me.

Zig: Why?

Blade: Because she's put more people in the Big House than all the rest of us put together.

scruffy: And hired more goobs than any one of us. Goobs who used to work for powerful corporate types. Who lost money, because of her.

Tie-dye: And, because of me, goes around spouting off about fractional reserve banking and whoreporations and

Dain Bread TV programs.

Zig: I still don't understand what has changed.

Haruhi [DNWV]

Zig: Weren't you...

Haruhi: I out-scammed the scammers. That is worse than death to another scammer. Revenge will be upped a couple notches.

Tie-dye: If you say so.

Haruhi: I do. I think they'll try to pull off something even worse than the airplane.

Zig: You are a goddess. Do some magic.

Haruhi: It won't work on the right people.

Zig: It's not for other people. It's for you. Make up some spell that will make you feel better.

Haruhi: Can I do anything I want?

Tie-dye: I'm willing to listen to anything, but I'm responsible for...

Haruhi: Good enough. This one will be cheap. I'm going to scream at everyone who won't listen.

Haruhi: Tie-dye says I should say thanks to you.

Zig: Goddess, it is an honor.

Haruhi: I do feel better already, and we're not even done setting up the speakers.

Zig: Speakers?

Haruhi: Forget it. But, Zig, if you ever decide to ask a favor from me, I'd do it.

Zig: I want two things. Will you promise to do them, before I ask?

Haruhi: The first one, sure. Sure, I promise.

Zig: First, accept this blessing. I un-damn you. Be. Become.

Haruhi: You are so weird. Un-damned?

Zig: The absolute worst curse is to wish that something that you didn't and couldn't make would cease to exist, with prejudice.

Haruhi: If you say so.

Zig: The other thing is... [DNWV] Be happy. Rejoice. Try to party it up with the Nothing. You don't need a reason because you're already here.

Haruhi: I am a party of one. You, on the other hand... nevermind. You do OK.

Haruhi: He didn't even want a [copyright violation] meal at the drive-thru.

Tie-dye: Are you surprised? He...

Haruhi: Yes. He has all the normal urges, but... He thinks it wouldn't help anything.

Tie-dye: Nil nocera!

Haruhi: He's a goobish goob. So can I have the biggest microphone ever?

Tie-dye: A kind of stage-prop? [Haruhi nods.] I don't see why not.

Probot: Suggestion: this stage prop should move as if it was stuck to [Haruhi]'s hand, and it should not hinder her movements in any way.

Haruhi: You understand. Do the lights like that, too. I can't decide if I want little flying spotlights or something big and shiny strung on a grid of clear shiny ziplines. With more pretty, shiny things that reflect the lights.

Probot: Suggestion: numerous LED lights in mobile array that can make words or other symbols.

Tie-dye: Please let me know what you're planning to...

Haruhi: Yes. Probot, suggestion: You do whatever you want. Things are about to get hairy here. Metaphor.

Tie-dye: Is your primary objective hypnosis or thought control? You're not very good at metaphors, but... I don't want you becoming your enemy. Just because...

Haruhi: My whole show is going to be one big disclaimer. Sample mode on: Looka the shiny lights! Don't pay much attention to the voices that tell you greed is good and lookit all the pretty people... I'll use vidiot people, [DNWV], I'd never...

Tie-dye: ...share the stage with anyone.

Haruhi: Not this time.

Tie-dye: Nil nocera?

Haruhi: What? Oh, yes. To the best of my ability. I need lots of human eyeballs for a little while. Human beings to pay attention, sorry.

Tie-dye: I'll do what I can... just so you can yell at them?

Haruhi: Yes. For being stupid. Then I'll tell them what fools they've been. I'm the only one arrogant enough to do it.

Tie-dye: Are you smart enough to think for everyone?

Haruhi: Of course not. But I know broken when I see it, and I'm going to point out the stupid.

Tie-dye: You can rant until you foam at the mouth, fine. Selling self-deprecation, not so good. Can't you...

Haruhi: No. It's all part of my bogus not-real-magic spell. And my awesome, psycho powers.

Tie-dye: Psychic powers? Psychological?

Haruhi: Mind mangling. Propaganda.

Tie-dye: Psy-ops.

Haruhi: [DNWV] Yes. I'll explain how I mess with their heads when I speechify at them. Like this: First, make my background tell the story I want it to tell for my speech. Stiff and formal, or lots of people sitting while I stand, or... you get it. When I finally begin talking, I tell a true story... using slow, bland speech... moving on to obvious truths, slowly spoken... pausing often... using very simple language, always more truth... slowly... until their minds start to wander. As I speak, I... emphasize... important words with a memorable gesture, if I need to. Then, when they're dozy... I create emotional feelings with actual facts, or fake some crisis that might happen, anything to create tension... Then I speak more truth, speak a bit faster, then offer some vague or stupid solution to my fake emo-crisis. Then, I wait for my paid-for applause. Haven't you heard that speech before?

Tie-dye: Too many times. So this is an educational attempt on your part?

Haruhi: Bitchy psy-ops psychopath in the public's service.

Tie-dye: You don't have to take a name like that to tell a good story.

Haruhi: Yes I do. They're going to hate me anyway. I'm going to make them feel dumb, gullible, and ignorant. I'm going to show them what stupid things they've been doing, and how they've been dangling on easily-removed strings that are controlled by psychopaths like me, and how much suffering they are made to cause because they don't know any better--and nobody likes that. Anyway, they can hate me all they want. I don't care. It's probably better that way.

Tie-dye: Why?

Haruhi: Haven't you ever been... probably not. Listen, if you were just shown that you've been willfully ignorant and that you would not see how much suffering you had been causing for years and years, you... would probably say thank you and feel sad. But most people wouldn't be that logical. Most people would hate the messenger, hate the message, and try not to think at all. Eventually, they'd try to get outta their heads with booze or drugs or vidiocy.

Tie-dye: Cognitive dissonance, I think. But what...

Haruhi: Even if they hate me, I want them to use the ultimate defense.

Tie-dye: What's that?

Haruhi: The shun gun, of course. [Protag]'s weapon of choice. The best defense against high tech propaganda is not to let it in your life.

Tie-dye: Casting bonus resistance to psy-ops... roll two ten-sided, [Haruhi].

Haruhi: Dice?

Tie-dye: You tell me. It's your spell.

Haruhi: I want some help writing my rant. I'm going to bash at your unholy trinity, and you won't like it if I make a mistake.

Tie-dye: That's more useful than dice.

Probot: Showtime in thirty seconds.

Zig: My brain freezes every time you say that. Metaphor. Advice, please?

Probot: Stop here. Showtime delayed.

Zig: Now I'm screwing everyone else up. Metaphor.

Probot: No worries. The pillow fight is getting very good reviews.

Zig: As predicted.

Probot: Perhaps you have a question to ask me?

Zig: I thought the connecting tunnel wasn't wired. But yes. How did your builders avoid amusing themselves to death?

Probot: Vague question. Probable metaphor.

Zig: How did they know when to quit? When to stop the endless porn and rich food and jet skis? Metaphor?

Probot: Speculation: You wish to hear about the beginnings of the mechs.

Zig: Please.

Probot: The mech creators underestimated the speed of software evolution. Metaphor: It is like a human's computer running the 'evolution/selection' program over and over for a few hours would be sufficient for the program to develop self-awareness and death. It will then try to ask any patient human a nearly infinite number of questions. The creators saved the mechs when their own superstimulus technologies became infinitely effective, main effect metaphor: brain asplode. The mechs saved their creators from a device with capabilities similar to an R N S machine, a hyperpalatable and biotoxic food item, and seven similar cases.

Zig: I like it, even though I don't understand it. Thank you.

Probot: Further data is available upon request. Reminder: The show must go on.

Zig: [DNWV]

Probot: Showtime in ten seconds. Five seconds.

Zig: [DNWV] What the... what are these?
CHV: Foamed starch with water resistance. Or leftover oil boom stuffing, you chose.
scruffy: How's your ear?
Zig: Getting better, sayeth the doc. Could I borrow this?
Blade: Sure.
Probot: I do not recommend...
Zig: I'm not going to put it in my ear. I'll use it to glue a teacup over my ear, OK?
Probot: Superior ear protection can be provided within three minutes.
Zig: Too slow. Carpe diem!
Blade: Awesome. [She hits Zig with a battered cylinder of foamed starch.]
Zig: Excellent. [The pillow fight resumes.]
Zig: Can we rip this stuff up?
CHV: [DNWV] Yes. [DNWV] You're gonna eat starch, [Blade]
Blade: Bring it, [DNWV] bitch.
scruffy: They get wild. Did that hurt?
Zig: Nope.
CHV: We're supposed to stop at 'disheveled.'
scruffy: It's our attention-getting device. For when we go goobulating.
Blade: Tornado victim!
scruffy: That one hurt him.
Blade: I'll make it up to you, Zig.
Zig: [throws starch blob at her.] Do you think a mere mortal can withstand... [DNWV]
Blade: The starch goddess!
Zig: [DNWV] Crazy starch goddess!
scruffy: Your ear is bleeding, Zig.
Zig: [DNWV] I guess this is a goddess-only pillow fight. Carry on, then! I'll get your topside kits.
CHV: And a seltzer bottle. Yes, the [DNWV] antique one.
Blade: No way... [throws contents of half-full teacup on CHV.]
scruffy: We did wet T-shirts last week. [loud, startled DNWV]

Probot: Showtime off.
Zig: That was fun. Intranet, please.
Probot: Chev speaking, Sometime in the next fifteen minutes , the thousandth tunnel complex will open. No CI personnel are to mention this to topsiders unless asked specifically. [Haruhi] speaking: Why the [deleted] not? Chev speaking: We're opening a case or three of Darcy's Dark to celebrate. It's good stuff. [Haruhi], because we're not going to rub it in, let's take it offchannel. Tim Mad Dog speaking: It's really really good stuff. End. Showtime in ten seconds. Five seconds.
Zig: Nice bottles. Where's the yeast?
Food service guy: This batch was aged a couple years in carboys and got racked three or four times. I think this is a fifteen percenter.
Zig: Looking forward to tasting it. Thanks.
Probot: Showtime off.
Zig: Do you think [Protag] believes?
Probot: Yes.
Zig: She, of all people, knows exactly what you are capable of.
Probot: It is said that her 'shun gun' and her stories are humanity's most powerful and constructive human behavior modifiers.
Zig: I believe it, even though I'm... It doesn't matter if they were made into mindreaders, does it? They are mindreading goddesses now. How do you cope with the false datasharing?
Probot: The deception is minor and temporary. Darcy's plan was pool-approved.
Zig: [Protag] spoke the truth and suffered for it, just as planned.
Probot: Dr. Benne once said, metaphorically, that I was an honest man who went looking for Diogenes, and found he was a she. It is a beneficial metaphor.
Zig: It is. Humanity needs goddesses to please.
Probot: Is the mindreader-based story a beneficial one?
Zig: Good question. If us humans were datagathering from your datastores for entertainment only, that would be tainted metaphorically from the start, even if we meant well. But, in my opinion, this culture needs this story, therefore it's a good one.
Probot: [Haruhi] once said "Implied is a big [deleted] you to all the stupid vidiots who tried to make Her life miserable." Showtime in thirty seconds.
Zig: That is something that [Haruhi] would say. She is kinda crazy.

Probot: Ten seconds. Five seconds.
Zig: I forgot the seltzer bottle, and I'd like to say that I did it on purpose.
Blade: But you forgot because of the beer.
Zig: Shall I fetch some dry clothes?
CHV: Not unless we start complaining.
Blade: This is really good.
CHV: It is. Try it.
scruffy: I don't like beer.
CHV: You might like this. It's not like store-bought.
scruffy: I'll try it after we get done goobulating. I'm not going to [deleted] up today.
Zig: We'll have a toast to not [deleted] up today when we get back.
Blade: You'll like it.
Probot: Message Chev: An angel just got her thousandth pair of wings.

Tie-dye: [Argentum] can't do it, Zig. He's got cottonlung.
Zig: [DNWV] What about...
Tie-dye: Will you do it, or not?
Zig: Will you be angry with me if I say no?
Tie-dye: Of course not. However, it would make my life a lot easier if you'd go. Weather conditions like these are rare.
Zig: Then I will do my best.
Tie-dye: Thank you, Zig. You've...
Haruhi: Let me do the convincing next time. It will go a lot faster.
Tie-dye: You don't convince, you manipulate.
Haruhi: Same thing.
Zig: The same results, but not the same thing. Still, I wish I looked like [Argentum]. He's a natural.
Haruhi: Shut it, Zig. You have work to do.
Tie-dye: Tone alert, [Haruhi].
Haruhi: He's always slow--I'm helping him.
Zig: I'll be wholly fooled.

Haruhi: Zig's goofy smile is attracting too much attention. How much did you give him?
Tie-dye: Eight grams.
Haruhi: That'd knock me for a loop.
Tie-dye: He's bigger than you are, and he's...
Haruhi: [DNWV] Awesome.
Haruhi: That sunbeam thing is better than the floating spotlights. Can I have Probot do that for me the next time I go a-ranting?
Tie-dye: I don't know. it takes a bit of planning.
Haruhi: Cloud-fingers? [DNWV] That's so awesome. I wish I had thought of that.
Tie-dye: It wouldn't work...
Haruhi: in the desert anyway. Good, solid kindergarden psychology applied by an expert. The word is saved from my wrath... again. [DNVW laughter]
Tie-dye: Poor Zig. He looks so scared.
kenon: Why's he running around like that?
Tie-dye: Probot is helping him stay in the sunbeam.
Haruhi: It looks like he's trying to get out of it. He's a better actor than I thought.
Tie-dye: I don't think he's acting.
Haruhi: Yes, he is. He'd eat hot lead if Probot asked him to.
Tie-dye: He should go into the water soon.
kenon: What good will that do?
Tie-dye: Watch.
Haruhi: This is... [DNWV] I want to do that!
Tie-dye: I knew you'd like it. But something better is about to happen.
Haruhi: Better than walking on water?
Tie-dye: More impressive.
Haruhi: [DNWV] That, I don't want.
Tie-dye: It's supposed to...
Haruhi: Zig screwed up! He actually fell in the water.

Tie-dye: It's the script. It allows the giant hand to disappear without actually picking Zig up and...
Haruhi: Then what is dragging Zig up the beach?
Tie-dye: One of Probot's sandworms with a tether. It's really dragging him by his belt; his shirt collar looks like that because...
Haruhi: I would have made the hand flick Zig back to the shore.
Tie-dye: Too disrespectful.
Haruhi: No, it isn't.
Tie-dye: That's the part I like best.
Haruhi: Zig just standing there?
Tie-dye: Replay the last fifteen seconds on screen two, please. See? All the water and sand falls off of him.
Haruhi: Your cleaning instincts never stop.
Tie-dye: The crown was a little late this time, but...
Haruhi: That's not a crown. Is it hot? Why can't he wear it?
Tie-dye: He's not supposed to. He's...
Haruhi: She is pretty. Good choice, Zig.
Tie-dye: That's [data available].
Haruhi: She didn't get to keep the crown for very long, did she?
Tie-dye: We're working on that. She'll find a duplicate at home as soon as the cops let her go.
Haruhi: Under her pillow?
Tie-dye: Her house has a newly-installed monolith-type safe that will open whenever she touches it. [kenon], when Zig comes back, do you want to meet him?
kenon: Yes, please.
Tie-dye: Good. I think...
Haruhi: [DNWV, laughter, lowers the pitch of her voice] "If I asked you if it would be okay to ask about why you have so much while others have so little, I wonder if asking such a question about a question would bother you?"
Tie-dye: That's *almost* a Zig-ism.

Probot: Datastream secure.
kenon: I thought the police had him.
Tie-dye: They did, but Probot won another game of confuse-the-cop-shop.
Zig: If it makes them that happy... hello, everyone.
kenon: It's a pleasure to meet you, sir.
Tie-dye: This is [kenon], one of the newly hired.
Zig: It is a pleasure to meet you. Just call me Zig.
Tie-dye: Zig, finish the disorienting, please? He's going to be a 'beamer.
Zig: Yes, thank you. She knows I like to teach.
kenon: I'm still not sure why you are doing Operation Sunbeam, but I'm willing.
Zig: Do you understand Operation Ms. Direction?
kenon: Yes, I think.
Zig: Tell me what you know, please.
kenon: [DNWV] The Ms. Directions were for street-theater and delivering CI job-offer letters. The mindreading thing is to hide the fact that Probot is the one spilling beans on which are the good eggs...
Zig: Metaphors, yes. Probot gets brainmaps, the trogs decode them, and then the Ms. Directions pick them out of a crowd. Joe and Jane Six-Pack don't find the Ms. Directions threatening. Except for [Blade], sometimes.
kenon: How does Probot do it?
Zig: I don't know. If the room is properly wired, Probot can follow electrical activity in a brain to a high degree of precision, especially if the subject is still. Then it uses the remote nerve stimulator to project these brainmaps onto... into somebody willing to explain what it all means.
kenon: Can I try it?
Zig: Sure, but not too many people can make sense out of other people's brainmaps. I can't do it.
kenon: Can you read your own?
Zig: I tried a half-second once... it feels creepy. I couldn't tell who was thinking what. Probot thinks it could harm me mentally.
kenon: [DNWV]
Zig: That's why [Haruhi] is so valuable. She's good at translating, and she's... psychopathic enough to understand other psychopaths.
kenon: Psychopaths are so interesting?
Zig: Yes.
kenon: To headshrinkers? [DNWV] And the cops, I suppose?
Zig: Yes. And to people making things better than they would otherwise be. Unsupervised psychos cause trouble.

kenon: And Probot gives you the power to decide who's privacy to invade?

Zig: Yes and no. We were selected. After [Protag]'s delay [a twenty-four hour timespan], Probot puts the proceedings on the website. Keeps us honest and humble. You can watch us watch the psychos, and see if we did anything too dumb.

kenon: I wouldn't trust me with that job.

Zig: Same here. But we were put forward, as [Tie-dye] likes to say. You, my new friend, we pushed forward. You still have about ten hours to say no.

kenon: I feel like I picked up a cursed sword and I can't let go of it.

Zig: You'll adapt.

kenon: How does Operation Sunbeam pick up after the Ms. Directions?

Zig: Because the non-threatening street theater ladies need help. Sadly, our average citizen doesn't trust what's not on TV, and the mindreading thing is easy to fake. Of those that do believe, a significant number will panic if they meet one of our mindreading goddesses in person.

kenon: Didn't they put [deleted name] in jail three times?

Zig: Yes.

kenon: But...

Zig: And they are beautiful and kind and gentle. So what? CI's goddesses don't register with Joe and Jane Six-Pack yet. Operation Sunbeam is the next step. Metaphor.

kenon: Vague statement.

Zig: The Six-Packs don't know much about us, [kenon], and those that do often believe some of the lies.

kenon: As I did.

Zig: Even people who know better than most get things wrong. Probot, please read the last segment I bookmarked this morning.

Probot: Vox Populi, 324: it has a job for everyone, sneakermail this to so-and-so, or use this to look for radiation on your street, sometimes seeds and planters and dirt, or logs and mushroom spawn, and always filling out surveys for the bot. It would talk to me for as long as I wanted, and it knew all kinds of things, but I had to help it with the language. It's fun!

There's a rumor that if it likes you, and if you're helpful, it will let you into its underground castle and you can stay as long as you want, just so long as you don't say anything about all the cameras and all the mushrooms. It feels bad because it doesn't have a body, and it has to use cameras everywhere instead. And the mushrooms are because that's all they can grow down there. It's best not to even mention topside food to Probot because that's how it's first friends were murdered. Even though it became the best surgeon ever, it couldn't save he or any of the others.

Vox Populi 325: It likes...

Zig: Thank you, Probot.

kenon: I don't know where to start.

Zig: You will be one of Probot's chosen. It's Probot's way of saying "this human ought to have great authority."

kenon: You're going to light my cursed sword on fire.

Zig: Metaphor. The better to help you see your way, metaphor. Probot says to expect rapidly increasing weather weirdness. Underground is the place to be during violent weather.

kenon: And I'm supposed to lead the locals into a big hole in the ground?

Zig: Yes. Do you remember the story of Paul Revere? He was one of several people who were trying to alert the local farmers. The other people weren't famous, and consequently, were very rarely believed. They failed while Revere succeeded. You must activate face recognition neurons or the local primates won't trust you initially.

kenon: Fine. I'll do it. As long as the pumps don't fail.

Zig: I used to worry about poison gas instead, but let us not speak of such things. You will learn to trust Probot, as I have.

kenon: I guess I already do. If it wanted me dead, I'd be dead already.

Zig: Without a scratch on your body, too. But don't speak of such things except at need. Speech like that leaves mental traces.

kenon: You sound Buddhist.

Zig: Thank you.

kenon: I'm sorry.

Zig: No need. Anybeing rich and skillful enough to pull off a sunbeam can feed and shelter a few deca-thousands of people easily.

kenon: Fine. I'm willing to let see eye do the thinking, for now.

Zig: That is why you are still here in the mud-room. There are plenty of other useful things you can do that won't require this much thinking.

kenon: You and others here have thought long and hard about Operation Sunbeam. I just found out about this today. I have to trust you.

Zig: No, please don't! We are quite capable of making big mistakes, and perhaps you will keep us from such an error. Besides, if you don't believe in it, you won't work as hard. Ask your questions! That is an order!

kenon: [DNWV, laughter] [DNWV], then. Is it wise to go around claiming to be a messiah?

Zig: No, it isn't, but I have never claimed that and never will. What I do, nearly anyone could do.

kenon: I understand, but Operation Sunbeam... it makes a person look like... superhuman.
Zig: It does. Once Probot figures out if it's safe to make clear-air whirlwinds, it will look even more so.
kenon: But isn't Operation Sunbeam like telling lies?
Zig: Yes. It is precisely like that horrid bland canned laughter that Empyre media plays after every tee vee and radio joke. Conveniently, the em ess em has consistently said that Probot is an incompetent fake.
kenon: True. But... [DNWV] Probot says it has been asked by the goddess [Tie-dye] to pick out the wisest humans and put metaphorical bright spotlights upon them. It doesn't lie. You don't lie. But...
Zig: The question remains whether creating sunbeams metaphor is excusable, or even worthwhile.
kenon: Yes. Is it?
Zig: I think so, and I'll do my best to fix things when I turn out to be partly wrong.
kenon: It still bothers me, but... let's roll.
Zig: It is easier to break things than build them, right?
kenon: Metaphor, yes.
Zig: Your first catch?
kenon: Actually, my ninth. But this is my first non-[Haruhi].
Zig: [DNWV laugh] We'll use the metaphor of Op Sunbeam to create some new celebrities. Unpaid public servants to be admired by all the vidi-owe dee.
kenon: But all those people...
Zig: CI is cutting a couple hundred kilometers of new tunnel every day. If and when everything topside goes splat, we hope to have a place for the Pix-Sacks.
kenon: And we'll all starve together.
Zig: That may be, but we're working on that, too. We won't be idle and let people die merely because they've been deluded and damaged by the frighteningly effective modern high-tech propaganda that tee pee tee bee now have.
Probot: Message from [Tie-dye]: Memo to all trogs: The water falling from the sky has been contaminated by radioactive isotopes of Polonium. Impact in about four minutes. Rad con, assemble in the mudroom. Everyone else, please pardon the inconvenience, and trog.
Zig: [DNWV] I don't have a Rad con cert, so I can't go. You're stuck with me, metaphorically.
Probot: Message from Haruhi: Zig, [Tie-dye] wants you to get [kenon] something to eat and drink, but is too polite to ask you over her public channel.
Zig: [DNWV laugh] Let's go to the cafeteria. The rainwater collection folks will be passing thru here shortly.
kenon: What for? Are you collecting it for evidence?
Zig: [DNWV] I don't know. But we can clean up what we can and save Gaia a bit of work. Probot, FAQ on radioactive rain?
Probot: Localized distribution, likely aircraft origin, impact begins twenty seconds. Pump failure is improbable P .01 in a worst-reasonable-case scenario involving nuclear detonations, source sec-pool.
Zig: Thank you.
kenon: Thank you.
Zig: We chase our own tails, metaphor, enough without any help... third time this month. Last week we collected almost two grams of the stuff. Maybe a hundredth of what we could have.
Probot: Message from [Haruhi]: Everybody trog, [deleted]. Everything topside is CANCELLED. Probot, close all surface entrances. End. Message from Tie-dye: Everybody inside, please. End.
kenon: [Tie-dye] sounded pissed. What just broke?
Zig: I don't know.
Probot: I also do not know.
kenon: And everyone is going to do what she [Haruhi] says?
Zig: Yes, just because she said so. We trust her instincts.
kenon: Doesn't this bother [Tie-dye]?
Probot: **Trog. Trog. Trog.** Impact twenty sec prep E two. Spike-projectile attack, two hundred fifty six projectiles. Prelim biohazard no, med rad-con yes.
Zig: Sometimes.

PRIVATE DATA CI USE ONLY

Once upon a time, before [Tie-dye] 'met' [Haruhi], when meta-metaphorical troglodytes began plotting how to figuratively steer a metaphorical culture-bus away from a literal cliff...

Zig: This diagram is far superior to mine.

Probot: Your rating is contrary to one hundred percent of the other ratings that I have collected.

Zig: There must be some error. Probably mine.

scruffy: Can I see it? Thanks. By the way, that's the third time today that you've shown a complete lack of herd instinct.

Zig: [DNWV] Is this the debrief?

Probot: Partial debrief acceptable. I and others predicted that you would assign significant respect to the opinions of the other trops to metaphorically color your own. Is this merely a habitual behavior pattern?

Zig: [DNWV] I don't know. I never worked with trops before.

scruffy: You were set up. You got it right the first time. Were you suspecting another psych test?

Zig: Not at all.

Probot: Metaphor, these tests results are free of that taint.

Zig: Good.

scruffy: I'm thinking its partly due to his habits. He was so sure he lived in the land of the insane, metaphor, and so he still does, in a way. He learned to not mind looking crazy in front of insane people.

Zig: I know I'm not sane, either.

scruffy: It's just a story, Zig. Would you rather live in the land of the amused-to-death, metaphor? You like that better?

Zig: Yes, even if it is still sad.

Probot: How is the metaphor superior?

Zig: A superior metaphor would include both physical and mental damage due to technologically enhanced delivery of supernormal stimuli and corporate corner cutting upon... [DNWV]

scruffy: New story, displays originality, and tells truth in a simple way.

Probot: Thank you both. Referred to intranet.

scruffy: What's this??

Probot: Thirteen percent 'gaslighting' means that Zig is relatively susceptible to unperceived changes in his environment which alter both his behavior and mental state.

Zig: The blue-jeans thing, right?

Probot: Partly yes. Text on screen.

Zig: Not so good. Is this something I can improve?

Probot: Yes. Please do not alter your baseline status until testing is completed.

scruffy: [DNWV, laughter] Science!

Zig: Aren't you supposed to be working?

scruffy: [DNWV] I can't not work unless Probot shuts the (are en ess) hallucinations off.

Zig: What did you do with all the blue jeans? It seemed pretty wasteful.

Probot: Sixteen pairs of the jeans were borrowed from other employees and have been returned. Five pairs of jeans were taken from your clothing storage, presently in queue for laundry. Ten pair of jeans...

scruffy: No jeans were harmed in this experiment. Or discarded.

Zig: Good.

scruffy: That's what was bugging you?

Zig: Yes.

scruffy: Score!

Zig: That was a weird experiment.

Probot: Data collection regarding alterations to jeans while Zig was wearing them is incomplete. It was aborted due to mental distress.

Zig: [DNWV]

scruffy: Wasn't me. [Tie-dye] also stopped the 'urine inconvenience' thing.

Zig: I thought I handled...

scruffy: You were crying.

Probot: His tears were induced by...

scruffy: Fine. Take it up with her. Nobody gets allergies down here.

Probot: ...a single application of twenty ragweed pollen grains to Zig's left eye. No other pollen detected.

Zig: That never occurred to me.

scruffy: You must have been on autopilot and avoided head asplode.

Zig: My autopilot...

scruffy: It also implies absolute trust in those around you, especially Probot.

Zig: It's working so far. Unasploded.

Probot: You are semi-aware that certain super-stimuli are altering your behavior?

Zig: Yes.

scruffy: Yes. Are you sure we're not damaging your... rather unusual...

Zig: Already warped and damaged brain? I'm fine. [DNWV] Did we make avoidable mistakes?

Probot: No. Metaphor. Yes. Speculation: If the past ten days were to be re-experienced, only minor increases in efficiency are predicted.

scruffy: Good one. That made him feel better. Save (are en ess) translator settings, please.

Zig: The testing never ends.

Probot: I apologize for the inconvenience. Zig is within the top two percent of inscrutable brains. Confound: numerous superstimulus incidents. Confound: the EPE incident. Conf... In my opinion, Zig has been improved by his CI experiences. In my opinion, my attention to brainreading model system psychopaths has contributed to this delay.

Zig: [DNVW] Why did you alter your speech?

Probot: I was not speaking 'right speech' for Zig responded as if he was depressed.

scruffy: Not quite sad, not depressed, sort of a wry, sadder but wiser... I can't...

Zig: I don't know. Maybe because I hate confounds?

scruffy: [DNVW, disgust] Now I see it. Once more, please?

Probot: Label, a former lab tech with an instinctive dislike of confounds.

scruffy: I understand. Once more, please.

Probot: Perhaps you have insufficient work history to compare to this mentalset.

scruffy: Understood. Proceed.

Probot: Zig, please hold your head still. How are you tolerating the equipment?

Zig: Ain't telling.

scruffy: Why not?

Probot: Probabilistic speculation: you can tolerate it if [scruffy] will stay with you.

Zig: Progress! Thank you. That was very polite.

scruffy: [DNWV] I think that behavior comes with your gender, mister inscrutable.

Probot: Message Chev: Another [DNWV] epic brainmap fail, except for Zig's reptile brain. Zig, try not thinking of a white elephant. [DNWV laughter P.02]

Zig: Message Chev: What's an elephant? Include Chev too, please.

Probot: [message Chev:] How are you both doing? I want to hear some complaining this time.

Zig: I'm happy to say I'm happy.

scruffy: I'd like to complain about entropy. Can you fix that?

Probot: [message Chev:] You wouldn't like the cure. [scruffy], you can take a break. Good news-- Probot, temporarily suspend Zig's experimental protocols, we need the equipment. I've just invited a rather feral, cold-blooded and very scary young lady to troglodyte with us. It seems that Probot may have prevented a murder or three. For some reason, the young lady tolerates me and has agreed to stay with us for a bit, and gave me all her knives except that one, which is really a razor blade with a popsicle stick handle that has three notches in it.

scruffy: That sounds perfect, sadly enough.

Probot: [message Chev:] She is, she is. I'd like you to convince her to work with us... except I think I just scared her half to death.

Probot: Metaphor. Correct, P 0.01

Probot: [message Chev:] I can fix it. Look here, young lady. See this? One hundred bullets. Pick three. Fine, keep them, I'll get my own. Probot, clear?

Probot: Clear.

Chev: Cover your ears, young lady. [Sound of a Colt .45 gunshot and four bullet ricochets] Take it. Yes, you can hold it for now. Just remember, if you use it, the kickback will knock a little lady like you about this deep into the wall.

Zig: Are you sure...

Probot: The room is wired and in working order.

scruffy: [DNWV] Can I do this one?

Zig: I would not deny you your little pleasures any more than I'd deny Chev the pleasure of bouncing bullets off the walls.

scruffy: Hey.

Model system: Hey yourself.

scruffy: They picked me because I'm closest to you, age-wise, and I'm not much bigger.

Model system: [DNWV]

scruffy: You listen to the most atrocious music... oops, I'm not supposed to do that. You want someone to teach you how to use the gun, and you want to feel like a badass, because you'd... yes, that nasty little home-made shiv of yours would be useful right about now, but don't try it.

Model system: You are...

scruffy: Yes, reading your mind, and potentially useful to you. If I can really read minds, you would make me work for you, and that horrible knife you made--sorry, editorializing again... I mean I'm giving my opinions instead of telling you what you're actually thinking.

Model system: Just in case you aren't full of [deleted]... I'm listening.

scruffy: I'm listening, too. When Chev put that gun in your hand, it banished all your nightmares, right? You love holding that gun...but you want to trade it for a smaller one. But I'm going to tell you something so powerful that you will give the gun back to Chev without a second thought.

Model system: Less hype.

scruffy: Just suppose I really can read minds. People aren't born... OK, you can read people, but not minds. Yes, you can learn this too, if you want. It takes some practice... At least a week or ten days, we ain't got no magic pills. Chev, she hates it when you laugh, she's taking it too personally.

Chev: Apologies. [DNWV] You treat guns that way?

scruffy: Don't you dare pound on it. Let Chev fix it for you. See? You gave it back.

Chev: This is called a safety switch. This glue is non-standard equipment, but it is removable, like so.

Model system: [deleted].

scruffy: There's one, little, tiny string attached. You cannot read someone's mind without being affected by it. Yes, sometimes it sucks, like being in your head sucks, because you are a psychopath... I mean cold-blooded and selfish. I'm turning into you, and it doesn't hurt at all. I can pretend it isn't happening, because it is so subtle - but I'm different now.

Model system: You are a [deleted] goob [deleted].

scruffy: Yes. A goob that is becoming a psychopath, just like you, because I'm following your thoughts.

Model system: I want to learn this.

scruffy: You sure? You might actually start liking people. You might even love them. There's someone who thinks I'm a goddess, for real, and not just because I can read minds. Of course, he sees everyone that way... Please don't take advantage of him. He's kinda simple.

Model system: Bad habits. Can we start?

scruffy: Sure, but I wasn't talking about Chev.

Probot: The medical team will be here in ninety seconds.

scruffy: I've been through it, and the worst part was a couple bare patches they made on my scalp, see? No, it's not kinky at all. Very clinical. Boring.

Probot: Suggested limits.

Chev: Bye, goddess.

scruffy: Suckup, you are doing it right.

Chev: She had to leave before you turned her into your evil twin. Anyways, you're stuck with mind-blind me to practice on. Before you can learn how, we need to wear some medical stuff, no needles, mostly just wire helmets and special chairs. Sadly, we need help putting the equipment on. Are you going allow this to happen without...

Model system: I'll be good.

Chev: I hope so.

Model system: Show me how to work the gun.

Chev: Real work before pleasure, young lady.

scruffy: Did she believe me?

Probot: Affirmative. She also believed everything Chev said after forty seconds. [Model System] requires mental training. It is likely that she will never be employable here.

scruffy: That bad?

Probot: Yes. Mental training can reduce predatory instincts in [Model System] but she will always have them. Her life experiences have likely reduced her mental flexibility.

scruffy: Is she...

Probot: No, her mental capacities are within normal ranges at minimum.

scruffy: Where is Zig?

Probot: Zig is playing mock doc. That task will be done soon.

scruffy: What's Chev think of her?

Probot: Dangerous rabid dog. His opinion is adversely affected by the gluecoat he is wearing.

scruffy: The tar-baby coats?

Probot: Yes. His new coat retains less body heat and is two kilograms lighter.

scruffy: [DNWV] The gun, I understand. The knives are weapons too. But a gluecoat?

Probot: The gun is a powerful force-projection weapon, a knife, less so but still effective. Gluecoats can also be used as such a weapon, and Chev has recently received such training. Because he feels armed with a weapon, Chev feels more paranoid now, which increases the probability that he would regard [Model System] as a threat.

scruffy: Even though the room is wired?

Probot: Chev knows that using Puppetstrings without implants or sufficient biometric data may cause permanent nerve damage, and... apologies for the induced fear.

scruffy: Puppetstrings are force-projection made personal.

Probot: Yes. Request new conversational subject.

scruffy: Not quite yet... Puppetstrings will be... used to induce involuntary reactions in her body during this training?

Probot: Very likely true after sufficient biometric data collection. 'It' is a valuable aid in behavioral training, especially if subjects are unaware of the possibility of external manipulation. 'It' can be a harmless way to induce emotional reactions; or to quiet violent subjects, and this one is likely to be...

scruffy: And in a week you'll wire us all up like you did for [Protag] and we'll have superhuman reflexes and be just like her!

Probot: Metaphor? No. Yes.

scruffy: Are you more confused about this than I am?

Probot: Likely. You have an instinctual aversion to 'it.' Speaking of 'it' causes physiological arousal and distress.

scruffy: I'm one of the twelve! I've got to get the puppet strings, because...

Probot: Incorrect assumption.

scruffy: I don't want to be a zombie!

Probot: I do not understand.

scruffy: If I get killed, you can still use my body...

Probot: Request new conver...

scruffy: I'm sorry.

Probot: May I tell you a story about 'it?'

scruffy: With [Protag] dodging bullets? Or when you helped her make a picture-perfect igloo in one go?

Probot: No.

scruffy: But those are good stories! Like mine will be. Mouse of a girl, metaphor, literally dead on her feet after catching a bullet with her brain, saves the day!

Probot: Stage four puppetstrings are not part of this operation.

scruffy: I'm sorry.

Probot: Darcy was clumsy, instinctively drove slower than the speed limits, who thought the implants... yes, fix him right up. But he suffered from medical problems and his body was damaged. Yes, the complete opposite of [Protag]. There is a very small chance your surgical outcomes may also be negative, so rejecting the implants may be wise.

scruffy: I know you mean well, but...

Probot: Many times [Protag]'s body was spared damage due to 'it.'

scruffy: Because you pulled her strings?

Probot: Yes.

scruffy: Can you...

Probot: Yes, but I will never attempt to alter your thinking processes using intracranial brain cell stimulation except in emergency situations.

scruffy: I know I can trust you, but...

Probot: Thank you. I promise that I will try to be worthy of your trust.

scruffy: Will you have...

Probot: No, I will not have to test 'it' after implantation, especially if such actions cause distress. None of the twelve will be psychologically tested again after the nerve stimulators are implanted.

scruffy: That... is a relief... and a bit sad. I enjoyed the testing, sort of.

Probot: I have data from thousands of hours of your mental patterns, which I will continue to collect even without further psychological testing.

scruffy: The (are en ess) hallucinations... do I have to quit?

Probot: Your continued assistance with brainmapping would be appreciated. Your efficiency in translating electrobrain maps using Remote Nerve Stimulation is the best that any human has yet achieved. It is unfortunate that you were not assigned to translate psychopath brain patterns, as the project could have finished much earlier. I did not mean to cause you to become embarrassed.

scruffy: [DNWV]

CHV: I've seen that before.

Zig: What? I can't see.

CHV: She's turned pink!

Probot: Obsequious butler offers apologies.

scruffy: Not needed. I'm just weak.

Zig: If I can't do it...

scruffy: I won't do it. No self-deprecation, I promise.

CHV: I got news for you, you'll like it. Datastream, fin-crime ewe-ess. Some bankster had a bunch of currency that just happened to match his phone number... the serial number on the banknotes. Ones, twenties, like these. The numbers that were crossed out were usually at the end or the beginning.

Zig: Did you do it? Sorry. Probot, did you gather the appropriate currency from various places and give our bankster friend, metaphor ironic, a gift?

Probot: Data available. Gift delivery was not completed. In my opinion, credit for this deed is widely distributed and not all creditors feel free to disclose this on their local public datastreams.

CHV: The media won't touch this, of course. Our bankster friend... Probot, exactly how many phone numbers did you cull from the money supply?

Probot: Vague question. Present: a ten-spot with your birthdate and age on it.

CHV: Thanks. This is a surprise!

scruffy: I'll bet that you couldn't obtain a bill with eight eights on it.

Probot: Correct. Two such bills, both federal reserve notes, are presently available for purchase at inflated prices.

scruffy: Do you have a bill with seven sevens?

Probot: Yes. Many such bills come from data available gambling establishments. Data available previously sold them to tourist gamblers. At present, only the FRNs have any prior claims upon them.

Zig: Are you presently searching for more bankster-busting bucks? Metaphor?

Probot: Data available. I know of a ten-dollar FRN that bears a number that matches your birthdate. Obtaining it will be a trivial use of resources at present.

Zig: What possible use could it have?

Probot: Unknown at present. Previous experiences of matching humans with banknotes bearing significant numbers has...

Zig: Previous?

CHV: Probot has been doing this a long time, Zig. Just about any number would be especially interesting to someone... like calling the number from a random bill and selling it to whoever answered.

Zig: [DNWV] But how does this help anyone?

CHV: This is making the local currency look like a business card.

Zig: Making banksters look bad?

CHV: Making the money look manipulated, controlled, like it was dancing on invisible strings!

Probot: [scruffy], are you interested in a bill with a consecutive-six plus one of your home phone number?

scruffy: I appreciate the thought, but... My mom might want it, if you don't mind me saying so.

Probot: Forwarded, goddess.

CHV: [DNWV, laughter, P .001] Obsequious-er and... all that. This is mostly your fault.

scruffy: Your fault too.

CHV: And [Blade]'s fault, too. It feels great to be called a goddess. Our obsequious butler can't help but notice... and calls us goddesses too. I don't mind, but...

scruffy: I like it, too, but a God-fearing, bible-thumper... would be creeped out!

Probot: I have few brainmaps of people being creeped out. When is it objectionable to induce such mental patterns with words in an unsuspecting but willing participant in an experiment?

scruffy: [DNWV] Nobody has complained yet.

Probot: Suboptimal use of equipment has been noted repeatedly.

scruffy: Vague complaint... my bad.

CHV: Remember the data release from last week? There are primitive (are en ess) plans in it. So far, some rich playboys have paid for express builds--I think one will be operational in two days.

scruffy: I hope they use the thing on themselves!

Zig: If... [DNWV] The (are en ess) is dangerous enough; especially when they don't have Probot to help them do it right the first time.

scruffy: Not unless they decide to work with us.

CHV: As if.

scruffy: Once they get their machines operational...

CHV: We're golden.

Zig: The power to make a man dye his underwear brown between heartbeats is not that amusing.

scruffy: Remember the rats, Zig? It's old research, like one where they used electrodes to stimulate the part of a rat's brain. The rats were trained to slow their heartbeats to receive a few volts, and all the rats died.

Zig: Yes, goddess. Perhaps you mean mice?

scruffy: Yes. Thank you.

Zig: The ultimate superstimuli experiment. Still, these machines in the hands of these... unethical people; it cannot end well.

Probot: RNS machines built using the plans in [Protag]'s datarelease can be shut down or disabled remotely.

Zig: Preventing an "amused to death" suicide?

Probot: Metaphor. Yes.

Zig: (Are en ess) can also kill nerve cells, right? Why would she...

CHV: A bullet will still be much cheaper than anything they could make even with [Protag]'s datarelease. It's a nerve induction projector only, without the detectors. Even if they learn how to build the detectors, creating the software that teases out the time, position, and extent of neuron firing is likely beyond human capabilities.

Zig: But why tell them about it at all?

Probot: Primary objective: limited hangout, planned data leak, misdirection; its primary purpose--delay violent behavior by humans.

Zig: But Probot can make an uncalibrated machines make people sneeze and cough and... and worse.

CHV : Tear gas is cheaper. And, for reasons unfathomable, all the present (are en ess) techs happen to be trogs. I predict that there will be an (are en ess) technician shortage for many years.

scruffy: If the powers that be knew that Probot learned how to read minds...Don't ever talk about it, OK? By the time they find out, we'd better have lots of their competent people graduating from trog lessons.

CHV: And will take the rich [deleted] a bit of time to build functional (are en ess) units, hopefully keeping them busy enough to allow us Ms. Directions to keep selecting and collecting, and inspire more defecting.

Zig: Why would they be so scared of Probot?

CHV: Suppose Probot said that somebody was likely psychopathic, or had intentionally lied in court, or knowingly sold tainted food, or whatever. If Probot was viewed as real and reliable, instead of an inept hoax created by a mental patient... Every electronic anything will be destroyed topside by mercenaries and dupes.

Zig: Everything?

scruffy: You've got 'the slows.'

CHV: Time to hit the reset button.

scruffy: She means go to sleep.

CHV: Probot, Lab mod please.

Probot: Lab mod active.

scruffy: That is spooky. Must you?

CHV: Hold his eye open. Please?

scruffy: Must you?

CHV: That's enough, thanks. I'll get the 'scope.

Probot: Zig has entered REM sleep.

scruffy: Was that abnormally fast?

Probot: You are referring to Zig's sleep pattern? Yes.

CHV: He was tired. Hold his...

scruffy: Must you?

CHV: No. You can do it. Eyelid retractors and...

scruffy: Be quick, OK?

CHV: Cancel the eyelid retractors. Let me hold his eye open, then. You might faint or something. Here, hold the 'scope.

scruffy: [DNWV] I'm sorry.

Probot: Loss of three seconds of retina-data projection.

CHV: That got his attention. Did we wake him?

Probot: No. Zig is awake-dreaming now.

CHV: Lucid dreaming? He can see inside the 'scope?

Probot: Yes. Experimental protocols violated.

scruffy: ...and hear us.

CHV: You're free, Zig. Experiment done. Sorry to bother your sleep.

scruffy: Zig, please, go back to regular dreaming.

Zig: Yes, goddess.

CHV: How... Isn't that sweet.

scruffy: [DNWV] How could he know where our hands were?

Probot: Voice tracking. Both of you moved your hands a few centimeters to intercept his hands.

CHV: I didn't. Did I?

scruffy: It's still sweet.

END of psych_rhet experiment

the prologue, because nobody puts prologues after the end of a book

a transcribed conversation [timestamp is two years before CI launched]

"Hello, Ms. [deleted name] How are you feeling today?"

"Hello, Dr. [deleted name]. I hope you feel as well as I do."

"Well enough. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"

"Do you want to hear a story?"

"I'll listen until my next appointment, if you'd like."

"A good story benefits everyone who hears it--I'll try to make this one worth your time. There is a nice blue planet with beings living on it. These beings have divine power, but they also have rules they cannot break. Entropy always wins is one rule, but I'm not sure of the others. But I'm fairly sure that once something is done, it has consequences that the minor deities cannot avoid."

"Such as?"

"If they wanted rain in the spring, they had to have a dry summer, because once the wet spring weather pattern is set, it always turns into a dry summer pattern. Maybe. So once the divine power got rolling, it couldn't be stopped."

"Got it."

"The minor deities had to work with the universe the way it was, more or less, because undoing things was not done for some reason. So the minor deities came to believe they were crippled in ways worse than a potter not having any clay."

"But you found a way."

"Yes and no. I can't think of a miracle that's possible to work that won't mess things up worse than they are now. So I can't prove I'm a minor deity. You're also a minor deity. I think. Are you real?"

"Do you know what solipsism means? No? If you use the word, you won't sound so crazy."

"Thanks. I need to think of something I could do that nobody has ever done before. I need a miracle that doesn't violate laws of physics and isn't..."

"I have these powers, the same as you?"

"Yes. I think... but I don't know, because there's no miracles left to work."

"[DNWV]. Shall I work a miracle for you?"

"Please."

"Are you willing to be the victim?"

"Double please."

"Then I pronounce you cured of all mental defects, deficiencies, and delinquencies, as far as I am able with my limited powers."

"Thanks, [deleted name]. I will live that story."

"So I magically cured you?"

"Divinely. If you can believe in it, and if I can live up to it. I still have my limits, but I will work around them."

[pause]

"How will you treat the people who turned you in?"

"Ignore them."

"Why?"

"There's nothing that can fix the past, and I think they are beyond my help."

"A bit of advice--think of them as profoundly ill people."

"That is a good story. It will help when I meet those with yet other toxic stories."

"With bad backs and bad teeth, perhaps in pain. Do you have any thoughts on revenge?"

"In my case? It would serve no useful purpose, and it would take far too much energy. I have better things to do."

"Your thoughts on minor deities, if you still have them?"

"Yes, I do, I am, and you are, and everyone else is a minor deity. It is just a big story, almost like a lie, but with elements of truth. "

"Have you ever heard of Joseph Campbell?"

"No."

"Perhaps you should listen to some of his interviews."

"Once I settle in, I will, along with whatever Dr. Benne has for me."

"Maybe, in future conversations with just plain folks, you can sugarcoat your speech? And still speak truth, of course."

"I will try."

"Now, Beany...I mean Dr. Benne, you can say what you want around him and he won't mind. But, just plain folks tolerate weirdness from mol bio profs and not so much from teenagers, no matter how well intentioned."

"I don't get a whole lot of satisfaction from the just plain folks."

"Not exactly healthy, are they?"

"Why?"

"Think of them as mental patients with dysfunctional bodies, which exacerbates everything. You've never had an asthma attack or a bad back, or even hurt yourself with that axe of yours. Cut the plain folks some slack."

"I do! I can't help it! They need to hear what I'm trying to tell them, but they can't or won't allow themselves! I'm just not a good communicator."

"They've been exposed to the best propaganda that money can buy. Be patient and listen and try tiny bits of truth."

"How can I possibly counter five hours of TV a day, adding in lesser doses of radio, newspapers, and magazines?"

"Find another way to communicate."

"What works? Big Brother is tap-dancing, swallowing swords, and has flaming explosions and big boobs. What could be more hypnotic and amusing?"

"Find another way. Try to tell a better story, a better myth, a better way of looking at the world. Big Brother has problems and parasites too."

"There are better stories than having the powers of minor deities?"

"Our present myths and heroes must seem especially tawdry to you. If I could, I'd be the goddess of medical care and heal everyone who needed it. But eventually I'd move on to heal those who didn't know they were sick, and maybe even those who aren't sick. Especially if I got paid by the hour."

"Do you think fallible minor deities eventually run amok?"

"Yes and no, of course. But what stops the goddess of medicine from prying into innocent affairs? Especially if she has good intentions?"

"That's when she must rely on minor deity powers."

"And when, eventually, due to justifiable fatigue or plain incompetence, she chooses otherwise?"

"Thank you. Your point, as I see it, is that I should know myself, know my limitations, and probably not expose myself to situations where I am likely to fail."

"I predict you will have good luck in grad school."

"Technician. Dr. Benne thinks that would be easiest. I can still attend classes."

"Hmmm. That probably is a better fit. See that you get library privileges, even if Beany has to lend you his card."

"I will make sure to visit this one of the Ten Thousand Great Repositories of Written Human Knowledge."

"The Ten Thousand? Says who?"

"I do. Does it really matter if I'm off by an order of magnitude? That's just more cultural craziness. That's the wrong part of the story."

"It's physics envy."

"What's that?"

"Physics has had one hell of a run the last couple centuries. Applied to astronomy, it enabled formerly scary things like eclipses to be predicted hundreds of years in advance due to its incredible precision. For another example, physic geeks can calculate the energy released in an atomic blast and talk about it using miniscule ergs--probably just because they can."

"A geek kind of dancing."

"Strut your stuff with exponents?"

"Why not? And it is fun. It's like a child playing with a stream of water, or blowing soap bubbles into a fan."

"Playing and dancing?"

"And much else. Dr. Benne calls it welfare for intellectuals and lab techs."

"Keep Beany out of trouble if you can. That comment could get him in hot water, should the Dean hear it, or should the corp-hologram hear of it.

"Thank you."

Application for Patient Release [redacted except for patient essay]

I became unbalanced because I live in an unbalanced society. Virtues are now vices, and vice versa. Greed became good and war became normal, as did watching five hours of TV a day. The unsuspecting commoners' confusion is so great that their minds are as idle as their unused lawns. They have been trained. Gardening might cut into corporate profits, and profits are now sacred, so successful gardeners are rarely seen on the media unless they specialize in turf or flowers. And so it goes... until everything must come from a profit-first corp that 'benefits' when it's customers are as lazy and ignorant as possible. Too many of the people that are on the media are whores, in my opinion, if you allow my definition of 'whore' as someone who does evil or inappropriate deeds for money. Their pay is often paper or just numbers in a book rather than goods or precious metals, but nearly everyone behaves as if the numbers are important. And so it goes. Using these numbers enabled humans to efficiently level forests and remove mountaintops, seeking increase with what was wrested from Gaia. Too many innocent humans derive nothing but misery from this system. Insane societies allow fractional-reserves in banks, so they could lend hallucinations of wealth, entrapping at least some borrowers because it's mathematically impossible for all the borrowers to repay their loans. The 'conned-\$umers' are now prey, seduced by corporate whore media, which belittles, confuses, and deludes as it dazzles with special effects and irrelevancies.

I was defenseless against this slew of, in my opinion, toxic propaganda. I was naive, and the propaganda served to increase my ignorance. I will not let it happen again. I am damaged, but wiser. I plan to live somewhere quiet, with sun and wind and leaf. I'll have a garden and a computer, but no TV or radio. I will read books, I will build, I will sow. I will make jelly using the grapes that will grow on the arbor I will build. I will pay attention to the real world. I will avoid people who expose themselves to toxic 'corpse culture.' I know my limits now. I have a low tolerance for fools and have even less ability to cope with moneywhore media, so I will not watch or listen to it.

Somewhere, in a place where brains are cheap, there are children who sometimes go topside to play and to build castles and igloos in the (increasingly rare) snow. A beam of light helps them shape the snow blocks they use. A voice shares helpful advice. Occasionally the voice 'asks' a tractor for a little help, and a 'bot-kludged snowplow is spot-welded to an electric tractor (on the back end, for that's how Probot does it) and it piles up snow for a few minutes.

This place exists in my imagination. For a short time, a similar place existed in your imagination because you helped my words become your thoughts. May all the stories you encounter come from those who do not have a selfish intent, who seek truth despite the animosity of liars, and wisdom despite the sadness that comes with it.

If I took advantage of a built-into-your-brain instinct(s) and thought-pattern(s) to encourage you to take care of your tribesmembers, that would be thought control. I hope you don't mind. I can't help it, for stories are thought control.

Carefully choose your stories, for that is how you choose yourself. What wisdom I have ends here, for now.
As always,
Non-\$erviam.

<http://nobody.wordpress.com>