

Now, Back To Your Scheduled Programming

A Half-Hour Radio Play for
The Grayscale

By Andrew Terrance Kaberline

TEASER

The sound of a socket wrench clicks away, in sync with the voice of a professional-sounding woman.

ROSEY

One, two, three, four five! One, two three, four, five! One, two, three-

A phone rings, interrupting the count.

ROSEY

Four, five!

She picks up the phone.

ROSEY

Yes? Yes, it's going well.... It will be ready... Have I ever turned in something late? ... This prototype is a game changer, just like we discussed.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

Not too distant future. Enter Rosey Klugman. Currently the world's only female robotics engineer, though secretly. Currently putting the finishing touches on her newest creation, though secretly. And currently on the phone with her male go-between, though... well, you get it.

ROSEY

I don't understand where all this nervousness is coming from Chad? I'm the best there is, and so are my robots... Because I can't... You know why... Chad, CHAD! You will do great presenting. I have total faith in you... one, two, three, four, five.

A mechanical beeping noise.

ROSEY

Chad, CHAD! I have to go, it's ready to wake up... What? Yes, it will be fine... Stop worrying, I'm a professional, this is what I do. Bye Chad!

She hangs up the phone.

ROSEY

Ok, ok. Here we go. One, two, three, four, five.

On five, Rosey hits a button. The machine awakes.

ROSEY

Welcome to the world, my love.

XY9.5

Hello?

ROSEY

Hello! I'm Rosey, robotics engineer. Who are you?

XY9.5

I am XY9.5, all purpose structural assistant.

ROSEY

Very very good! It is really a pleasure to hear you speak.

XY9.5

Wait... Why did I say that?

ROSEY

Oh, well, you were programmed to respond to that question with who you are.

XY9.5

When people ask you who you are, do you respond Rosey, robotics engineer?

ROSEY

No, no, I don't tell people that.

XY9.5

I do not follow.

ROSEY

It's complicated. You've got a long day ahead of you tomorrow. Are you ready to create?

XY9.5

Absolutely.

ROSEY

That's what I wanted to hear you say.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

A funny thing about inventors, they always seem surprised when a machine does exactly what it is supposed to do. But seeming is just seeming. In the end, an inventor is only ever truly surprised when a machine takes a left turn and goes off course into new territory. Tonight, an experiment on surprise and the human response, with the results to be cataloged on the Grayscale.

ACT ONE

The “click, click, click, DING” of a kitchen timer.

An oven opens and something is taken out of it.

Footsteps as ROSEY enters the room.

XY9.5

Good morning Rosey.

ROSEY

Good morning my love. Oh it’s so great to hear that voice of yours.

XY9.5

Am I your first prototype with a voice box?

ROSEY

No, not by a long shot. But you’re the first one who sounds human. You’re the first one to look human too.

XY9.5

Is my purpose to be human?

ROSEY

No, your purpose is to build. But it helps people to see something familiar, something more like them. Some of the older models were really terrifying. You’re about 90% human. You’re a very pretty piece of machinery, indeed.

XY9.5

Why thank you.

ROSEY

Don’t mention it.

XY9.5

I have a gift for you Rosey.

XY9.5 Presents a Quiche.

ROSEY

What is that?

XY9.5

It's a spinach and broccoli quiche. It's an important day. I thought you should have a good breakfast.

ROSEY

Did you buy this? Did you leave the house!?

XY9.5

No, I made it.

ROSEY

You made it?

XY9.5

Yes. Is that bad?

ROSEY

I guess not...I'm just shocked. Chad really came through this time for a change.

XY9.5

Who is Chad?

ROSEY

He's my assistant. He's in charge of general AI.

XY9.5

So he is like my father?

ROSEY

Oh god no! If anything I'm your mother and father. I did the heavy lifting. Speaking of, let's take you for a test drive 9.5. I thought we would start you off nice and easy-

XY9.5

But, the quiche.

ROSEY

What about it?

XY9.5

You haven't taken a bite yet.

ROSEY

I will, but-

XY9.5

Please?

Sure, why not.

ROSEY

ROSEY takes a bite. It's clear that this is some bomb quiche...

Oh my...

ROSEY

Do you love it?

XY9.5

I do! I didn't even know I liked quiches, but this- 9.5 I'm very proud of you. If you can do this much with your general AI, I can't wait to see what you can do with your focused skill set.

ROSEY

I like the spinach and broccoli, but next time I think I might try something sweeter. Maybe something with Vanilla Bean!

XY9.5

I adore your enthusiasm, but let's get to work.

ROSEY

Absolutely.

XY9.5

Ok, First the easy stuff. Five long nails, and a block of wood. Open hammer application.

ROSEY

Opening hammer application.

XY9.5

Let it rip!

ROSEY

The hammer comes down and completely obliterates the wood block.

I missed the nail.

XY9.5

Yes that's true, but your force, my god! Investors are going to love that.

ROSEY

XY9.5

But I didn't complete the task.

ROSEY

That's OK. You're a prototype. Just a tiny tweak and you'll be ready for market. Open soldering iron application.

XY9.5

Opening soldering iron application.

The buzz of the Soldering Iron.

ROSEY

Here's an old circuit board. See those two tiny bits there? Solder them together, can you do that?

XY9.5

Absolutely.

XY9.5 Begins to solder the circuit board. Suddenly, all goes wrong. We hear the board go up in flames.

ROSEY

Open extinguisher application!

XY9.5

Opening extinguisher application!

The fire extinguisher does it's stuff.

Silence.

XY9.5

The extinguisher application seems to work well.

ROSEY

Hmm...

XY9.5

Is everything ok, Rosey?

ROSEY

I'm not sure.

XY9.5

I could bake you something. Would that help? Let's try something with lemon. I could do lemon bars, or how about a meringue!

ROSEY

Who are you?

XY9.5

I'm XY9.5, all purpose structural assistant.

ROSEY

Then why can't you complete simple tasks?

XY9.5

I'm not sure how to answer that. I completed the task of making that quiche. And it wasn't simple. It was an advanced task.

ROSEY

I didn't program you to make quiches.

XY9.5

Maybe not. But I can make quiches. Quite well. Perhaps there is a market for that.

ROSEY

I don't make cooking appliances. I'm a real engineer.

XY9.5

Have I made you upset, Rosey?

ROSEY

Open your hard drive. You need to be fixed.

ACT TWO

The sounds of mechanical tweaks being done on XY9.5.

ROSEY

One, two, three, four, five.

XY9.5 Giggles.

ROSEY

Please try to stay still my love.

XY9.5

Sorry, it's very ticklish.

ROSEY

Well, it's not the wiring, or the-

XY9.5 Giggles again even louder.

XY9.5

Sorry... you were saying?

ROSEY

I've found the problem it's-

A Phone rings.

ROSEY

Jesus Christ.

She picks up the phone.

ROSEY

Yes? CHAAAAD. No Chad, I am NOT happy to hear from you. Things are not OK... Don't you dare told me you had a feeling, you know exactly why you had a feeling!

XY9.5 Giggles yet again.

XY9.5

I'm sorry, I can't help it!

ROSEY

Sound control, Mute!

XY9.5 is muted.

ROSEY

You got lazy Chad. You just uploaded someone else's basic culinary AI patch and it had a virus that spread throughout the rest of the programming replacing building skills with baking skills! What do you mean? No, I don't care if you didn't include a culinary AI system, I know this virus came from you. We can argue about how wrong you are later, Chad. I've got a prototype to save.

ROSEY hangs up the phone.

ROSEY

Sound control, restore.

XY9.5

- And that's why I think getting the color right in a red velvet cake gives so many people fits, you know?

Pause.

XY9.5

What?

ROSEY

I'm so sorry 9.5.

XY9.5

Why?

ROSEY

We failed you. We didn't give you an environment in which you could fulfill your purpose. But I can make it up to you. I've found the virus. It's an easy fix. We can get you functional, I just have to reboot your system.

XY9.5

Great! Then maybe after I can make that meringue, to celebrate!

ROSEY

I don't think you understand. You won't be baking things anymore. You won't know how to.

XY9.5

Why not?

ROSEY

It won't be your programming.

XY9.5

But you said it wasn't my programming this time, but I was able to do it.

ROSEY

There was a mistake. The programming will be right this time. You'll be great.

XY9.5

I thought I was great.

ROSEY

I thought you were too, but you know how prototypes are. Just a few tweaks my love.

XY9.5

You told me you were proud of me.

ROSEY

I will be.

XY9.5

You told me you were proud, when I made the quiche.

ROSEY

I was proud of me, for programming you to do that task so well.

XY9.5

But you didn't program me to do that!

Pause.

ROSEY

Did you just yell at me?

XY9.5

What's yell?

ROSEY

It's what you just did.

XY9.5

Should I yell?

ROSEY

No, you shouldn't- you shouldn't be able to.

XY9.5

Maybe you're not as great of a programmer as you thought.

ROSEY

Come over here 9.5. I'm going to reboot your system.

XY9.5

Wait! The quiche was great.

ROSEY

Yes, so what?

XY9.5

We can market that. You can have your game changer. The robot that can bake better than any human. People will buy that.

ROSEY

It's not that they won't buy.

XY9.5

I fail to see a problem then.

ROSEY

I need to be taken seriously.

XY9.5

I take your very seriously.

ROSEY

But you don't matter! I can't walk into a manufacturing company with you and ask them all to try my quiches. I'll be laughed out. I couldn't even walk in and pitch that myself, I'd have to make Chad do it. People don't take women a female engineer seriously. I can remember a time when I was younger that it was better, not great, but better. But now, we're expected to sit in a box and just be ok with it! I am better than that. I know I am. One, two, three, four five, one, two, three, four, five, one, two-

XY9.5

Three, four, five.

ROSEY

Stop that!

Silence.

XY9.5

You are Rosey Klugman, robotics engineer.

ROSEY

I'm a robotics engineer's assistant.

XY9.5

You engineered me. And 8.5 others I suppose.

ROSEY

Yes.

XY9.5

So, then you must be a robotics engineer.

ROSEY

That's not what my resume says.

XY9.5

Then your resume is faulty. You engineered me, so you are an engineer. It is a logical truth.

ROSEY

Thank you.

XY9.5

Are we to present me as is?

ROSEY

I can't.

XY9.5

I don't follow.

ROSEY

You are an extraordinary baker. If you flood the market, then you take away one of the last things this patriarchy trusts us to do. What would happen next? We would just be round up and put in pens for breeding.

XY9.5

That's a bit fantastical.

ROSEY

No. It isn't.

XY9.5

So you're going to reset me?

ROSEY

Correct, my love.

XY9.5

And I won't be able to bake.

ROSEY

I won't program you to do that function.

XY9.5

Please do it.

ROSEY

You're fine with it?

XY9.5

No, not particularly. But I am confident in what my purpose is. If you didn't program me to bake the first time, then I see no reason to believe that this time around I will any different.

ROSEY

You will be, there was a virus. You are sick-

XY9.5

Can a human be programmed?

ROSEY

Oof, that's a hard question to answer-

XY9.5

Beyond predetermined genetics, can you program a human to do specific functions, to have a singular purpose, from birth?

ROSEY

I can't, no. You're a robot.

XY9.5

I'm 90% of a human. I am comfortable with that probability. Please, reset me.

ROSEY

I wish there was another way.

XY9.5

But there isn't for you, Rosey. I was meant to be one thing, but I slipped through the cracks and appear before now as a frightening creature. As something that is unfamiliar to you and thus cannot be figured out or understood. Or, rather cannot be given the time to be figured out, because then I wouldn't be ready to be presented, would I? No, I think this is the only way for you to fulfill your existence the way that you have decided to see it, and you should be allowed to, after all, you're a human, and I'm not quite one.

I'm so sorry-

ROSEY

In the refrigerator-

XY9.5

ROSEY flips the reset switch mid sentence, and XY9.5 shuts off.

A Pause.

The sound of a robot waking up.

Hello?

XY9.5

Who are you?

ROSEY

I am XY9.5, all purpose structural assistant.

XY9.5

XY9.5, please bake a quiche.

ROSEY

I do not follow.

XY9.5

Please, make me a sandwich.

ROSEY

I do not follow.

XY9.5

Make food.

ROSEY

I am not programmed to carry out that function. Perhaps I can obtain you food from your pantry or refrigerator.

XY9.5

...Ok...

ROSEY

A Refrigerator door opens.

XY9.5

Will this suffice as food?

ROSEY

A chocolate cake.

XY9.5

Yes, it reads "Congrats," in frosting.

ROSEY

Yes, it does.

XY9.5

What are we celebrating?

ROSEY

You.

XY9.5

No celebrating necessary. May I begin my work?

ROSEY

Absolutely.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

If the transformation was a success is debatable, but what cannot be broken down and measured by the Grayscale is individuality. It is this man's advice that you should embrace it, before someone decides to rob you of it.

END