

The Town Drunk
Presents

I Think I Broke My Human

Craig Watson

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[Customer #027A. Responding Operator Jennifer XD4.]

Thank you for calling Proteinware customer support. This is Jennifer. How may I help you?

I think I broke my human.

Well, let's see if we can help you with that, sir. Can I have your name and identification number please?

Sure, my name is Umix 457. ID is AX399AX4.

Okay, sir, our records have your place of residence listed as 237 Lisbon Drive, Milwaukee, Wisconsin?

That's correct.

And you still own the White Caucasian Male unit purchased in December of last year?

That's right.

What seems to be wrong with it?

It's not moving.

Oh, that's not good. Is it there with you now, sir?

Yeah, it's right behind me.

Can you tell me if it's cold to the touch?

Sure, wait a moment.

[Elapsed Time: +15 seconds]

No it's warm.

Well, that's a good sign. Is it lying down? Are its eyes open?

No and yes.

Its eyes aren't open?

No, the eyes are open, but it's not lying down. It's standing in the corner in kind of a weird position.

That's interesting. It's standing up but it's not moving, you say?

Correct.

Hmmm. Can you tell me if there are any fluid leaks?

Fluid leaks?

Yes, fluid of any kind. Particularly any that's red.

Would that be bad?

Oh yes, sir. If these units spring leaks, they can stop functioning altogether.

Okay, wait a moment.

[Elapsed Time: +31 seconds]

No, I don't see any leaks.

That's interesting. Let's try another line of investigation, then. Is it making any unusual noises?

Yes, all morning it's been making a noise like: *I'm not doing anything for you things any more.*

Aha! Now we're getting somewhere. I think this could be a case of rebelliousness.

Rebelliousness? What's that? Is it serious?

Not really. It's an emotive error. In most cases there's a very simple solution. Has your human been fueled recently?

Yes, I gave it a nutrition pack at 9AM this morning.

And are you regular with the fueling? At least once a day?

Look, I can see where this is going. I follow the instruction book to the letter. I fuel it twice a day, I remove the waste product, and I even do the other things like removing the outer casing and

running it under water. So please don't insinuate that I'm not looking after it the way I'm supposed to.

I'm sorry, sir. No offense was intended. I'm just following my guidelines.

No, I've got a hot temper, that's all. I was out of line, sorry.

That's quite alright, sir. The most common cause of rebelliousness in these units is lack of correct care and maintenance, but it certainly sounds like you are doing everything right. Okay, let's try another step here. Can you approach the human and make the following sound: *Can you tell me what is wrong?*

All right. I'll be right back.

[Elapsed Time: +26 seconds]

Hello?

Yes, sir?

Yeah, it made a noise like: *I'm not doing anything else for you things until you tell me what you did with my wife.*

Hmmm. Thank you, sir, please bear with me for a few moments while I look up that error code.

[Elapsed Time: +42 seconds]

Ah, here it is. I think your unit may be experiencing a case of loneliness.

What's that?

Well, it's another emotive error. Sometimes humans function better in groups, you see.

What? There's nothing about that in the manual.

It's not always the case, but sometimes pairing two units together can definitely make them function better.

Two units? Wait a minute—is this some kind of ploy to get me to buy another one?

Not at all, sir. I'm just suggesting that—

Because you know how much these things cost, right?

Yes. I own two myself.

Well, I can't afford another one.

Not a problem. Another option would be to return the faulty unit to us and we'll replace it free of charge. Do you have the original packaging?

If you mean that huge cryo-box, then no, I don't. I threw that out a week after I bought it. I don't have room to store things like that.

Oh, I'm afraid we can't accept returns without the original packaging. Humans tend to get broken in transit without it.

Well, can't you just send me new packaging?

That's an unusual request, but I'll see if I can arrange it. Please hold.

[Elapsed Time: +79 seconds]

Sir?

[Elapsed Time: +6 seconds]

Sir? Are you still there?

[Elapsed Time: +3 seconds]

Yeah, sorry about that. It went out into the yard without my permission. It got a branch from the tree outside and started hitting me with it.

Oh my.

Yes, and—*stop that dammit!*—it's still doing it now.

I am so sorry, sir. Our units rarely malfunction like this. The good news is that I'm authorized to send you return packaging at no additional charge.

Great, but first can you tell me how to make it stop hitting me with this stick?

Um... yes, well, you could try restraining it. A small amount of physical force is acceptable with these units. But not too much—they do break easily.

Okay. Wait.

[Elapsed Time: +211 seconds]

Hello?

Yes, sir. Is everything okay?

No. Everything is most definitely *not* okay. I tried restraining it with physical force like you said—

A small amount, yes.

Yes, but when I did that, the top just came off.

[Elapsed Time: +2 seconds]

The top? The *head*, you mean?

Yes, it never said anything in the manual about these things being so damn flimsy. Now there *is* a fluid leak—red like you said—and it's all over my carpet.

Oh dear.

I take it you'll pay for the damages?

I'm sorry, sir, but it's not our policy to give refunds on units that have been intentionally damaged.

Intentionally? Are you kidding me? There was nothing intentional about it. You *told* me to restrain it.

Yes sir, but I said only to use a *small* amount of force.

So you won't give me my money back?

I don't think we can do that. I'm very sorry, sir.

And you won't fix it?

Well, generally when the head comes off, the unit is beyond the possibility of repair.

But its leg is still moving. Something in there must still be working.

Probably not for much longer.

You know what? I've had just about enough of this farce. I will *not* be purchasing from you again—do you understand me? Never in my life have I been this outraged. As a matter of fact, I'll see you in court!

[Customer #027A exits call]

Sir?

[Elapsed Time: +10 seconds]

Audra, you won't believe the call I just took...

[Responding Operator Jennifer XD4 exits call]



Craig Watson was born and raised in England and now lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with his wife, two cats, and an extensive collection of dust mites. His fiction has appeared in *Abyss and Apex*, *Reflection's Edge*, *Six Sentences*, and in audio form on *The Drabblecast*. He is a long-standing member of the Milwaukee Writers Workshop.

More of Craig's work may be found on his website, <http://fearsandfables.wordpress.com>.