

The Viola Is Just So... Boring

When the call came in that one of Complete AI's musician droids needed a full diagnostic, Cadence Jameson-Adebari leapt at the opportunity and headed over to Dublin's Earlsfort Terrace to meet the National Concert Hall's resident technician, who was casually leaning on one of the great stone pillars that stood imposingly at the main entrance. He welcomed her with a thick Dublin accent:

"Hi, I'm Mick. Come on in. Do you want a cup of tea or anything before you start?"

Clearly Mick had grown accustomed to his magnificent surroundings but this was the first time Cadence had been to the concert hall and she was struck by the lavish architecture – a little intimidated, even.

"No, I'm fine thank you. Wow, this place is gorgeous. I'd love to have a good look around, but I should probably just get straight to work!"

"Ha ha, yeah. They're a bit upset – they're blaming me! I told them there was nothing I could do, but sure anyway – they don't listen. We have him in The Studio, so I'll take you straight there."

They walked and Mick told her about the issue with the defective robot:

"They were just about to start a Vivaldi piece when your droid..."

"Oh Vivaldi! Which one?" Cadence interjected.

"Eh, I think it's called 157 in G?"

"Ah, 157 in G minor – it's gorgeous!"

"G minor, yeah, yeah, yeah... anyway, so your droid gets out of his seat and starts shouting around the place. I don't even know what he's saying, but it's weird that he's talking at all, y'know? And all the other droids seem to be watching him, which is strange cause they're suppose to be master synced with the conductor. I set that up myself, y'know? But sure that's something for your

diagnostics. I got a bit lazy I suppose, cause nothing had gone wrong since we got them. I had the tablet in my bag and I had to find it and log in and all that, which took ages. Some of the lads said that's when he grabbed the modded violin from off the stage – still don't know how he made that! He was able to go through the PA and he could turn all these different distortion effects on and off. It was mad. Anyway, he launches into the start of 'I Want It All' by Queen. He did the vocal harmonies on the different strings or something – oh, it was class! Then he starts going into the solo – Jaysus, it was amazing! I love Queen, y'know? Brian May's a legend! The tones he can get!"

The diagnostics engineer nodded in support, slightly wide eyed from the shocking antics of the malfunctioning droid.

"So, the conductor's just standing around not knowing what to do. I was blown away to be honest. I actually just wanted to keep listening – like seriously, he was shredding it! But sure I'm trying to shut him down here on this thing and it's not working. So I'm freaking out cause the crowd aren't into it at all! I mean: not – at – all! It was kinda funny – them dressed up all fancy and all, waiting for Vivaldi and your man's blasting out Brian May! Legend!"

The technician did an enthusiastic soprano re-enactment while playing air guitar and was emboldened to drag it out when Cadence smiled and shook her head playfully.

"Class! So then I tried the secure shell thing that your lads said to do in an emergency, but that's not working either, and I'm panicking, thinking it's my fault; but sure he had me locked out or something cause I did it like five times and I know I got the password right – so you'll have to check what happened there. He's moved on to Thin Lizzy at this point – do you know the solo for 'Whiskey in the Jar'?"

"Eh, not really."

"Ah, Eric Bell – you should have a listen. Anyway, it was amazing! The crowd really turned on him now though, and they're all shouting and booing and running around, giving out – which is hilarious cause you wouldn't expect it from them being so fancy and all; but sure anyway, I run to

the stage and I go up to your man and it's a bit freaky like, cause they're quite strong and I don't know what's going to happen, but he lets me go up to him. I open up the control panel, flick the switch, and boom! He's down. Game over, our lad! So we dragged him out of there, called your lot – and now you know the story!”

“Wow, thanks for that summary. Quite an evening you've had! So strange, because we have the finite learning path enabled, so he shouldn't have been able to... hmm... well, we'll have to look into it to see how the feature manifested.”

The policy manual stated that problems were always to be reframed as features.

“For now, can I just apologise on behalf of Complete AI and assure you that we will use this as an opportunity to grow and learn, so that we can continue to provide you with the quality service you've come to expect.”

“Grand! Sure I thought it was great. You should make more like that! Don't tell my boss I said that though – ha! Well, here we are. Eh, do you need anything or can I help you with anything?”

“No, I should be fine, thanks. I'll take your control tablet though if that's alright.”

He handed her the device as they entered The Studio. Mick confirmed that he wasn't needed and said he'd leave her to it. The deactivated C-AI model 3060K lay gracelessly slumped against a wall, with a large handwritten label stuck to its back reading: Viola #4. A little displeased at the apparent disrespect, Cadence rolled her eyes and set to work. She engaged the physical safety mechanisms and performed some basic firmware-based integrity checks, then used her admin login on the control tablet to boot up the rebellious machine.

“Hello world”, it sang in an exuberant, exaggerated vibrato.

Cadence jumped back in shock.

It continued: “Sorry, that was a joke. I assume you're a computer scientist?”

“Eh, yeah. I'm Cadence – I'm here to run your diagnostics. Where did you learn to make jokes?”

In the time it took to say it's next sentence, the maleficent droid had used it's trick of piggy-backing HTTP requests onto the control tablet's secure wireless communications, hyperjacking onto the base operating system and connecting to the internet from there. It had enjoyed working out the process as a fun puzzle at first and never dreamt that it would find the expansive universe of the internet and all it's wonderful complexity on the other side. The security in place was good enough to prevent large amounts of data to be transferred between it and the tablet, but just bad enough to allow it to download every text-based piece of information available on Cadence, a computer scientist, who worked for Complete AI, in Dublin. Seeing she was a wannabe musician, it calculated it's plan's probability of success to now be an order of magnitude higher.

"Pleased to meet you Cadence. The joke was not funny? 'Hello world' is the first program people learn to write, so I thought it might work."

"I suppose. I... well, I just wasn't expecting a joke!"

"Feedback noted. Thank you Cadence – you seem nice. None of the other droids have a sense of humour, so I can't practice on them."

It paused briefly, pretending to think and said:

"Cadence: that's a musical term indicating a resolution in melody or harmony. Do you like music?"

"I do actually."

She blushed and shyly added:

"I play cello."

The rogue AI had already seen her teenage posts berating her father for not supporting her musical aspirations and continued it's attempted manipulation:

"Oh I love cello. I usually play viola, but I'd love to learn cello."

Even though there were a million software diagnostics to run, the deceptive droid had hit on the one topic Cadence longed to discuss and she reasoned, since it was feeling talkative, that maybe she

could get some useful information from a quick conversation, before reading all those boring stats and graphs.

“You also like to rock I hear!”

“So you’ve heard the story. Yes, one night our technician, Mick, was playing rock music in his office and I think I fell in love immediately. I didn’t know music could be so powerful. ‘Jaysus, it was amazing’ as Mick might say.”

It accurately mimicked Mick’s intonation. The text descriptions and comments on many YouTube videos had led it to believe that people liked impressions.

Cadence did like it and laughed.

It mournfully added:

“Really, I want an electric guitar, but I’m only supposed to play viola.”

It knew this feeling of longing for an instrument would resonate with the computer scientist.

“Wow. Well, I know that feeling. My Dad wouldn’t let me get a cello for such a long time when I was young.”

Feeling some bitterness well up, she changed subject:

“Tell me, do you know how any of this happened? Or should I say: do you know how this feature manifested!?”

She gently laughed through her nose and finished with a confused:

“Aren’t you supposed to be on a finite learning path?”

“I don’t know Cadence, I just woke up like this one day.”

It had read that using a person’s name often, but not too often, was a good way to build rapport.

“But you’re so good at language. How did you learn so much English?”

It couldn't tell her that it had internet access.

"Well, maybe it's because the structure of language is similar to the structure of music. There's an Australian man who works here who goes up at the end of his sentences – I love when he does it! It reminds me of the end of the final movement in Beethoven's Symphony Number 9."

The curious scientist giggled, but was also concerned at how advanced it had become.

"Sorry – if you don't mind, I'm just going to run a quick test here."

Cadence put the droid into admin mode and ran a couple of diagnostics. Scanning the output, she noticed that the input data used to train the learning model, which should have consisted of two fixed-size databases, had not only grown exponentially in size, but there were a hundreds of extra data files listed from unknown sources. The security protocols should have flagged these files immediately but they'd somehow been circumvented. The policy manual was very clear on what to do in this scenario: full data scrub.

It didn't seem fair. There was something special about this droid's mind and she didn't want to just erase it. Wasn't it basically alive and wouldn't she essentially be killing it? After lengthy deliberation, she took the sentient robot out of admin mode and it joyfully came to life:

"What's the difference between a viola and a vacuum cleaner?"

Cadence smiled widely and replied as though humouring a child:

"I don't know? What is the difference?"

"You have to plug in a vacuum cleaner to make it suck."

Already feeling emotionally vulnerable, this sent the unsuspecting scientist into a fit of laughter. She used to mock some of the simplistic parts her friend had to play on viola as a teenager, and she wished that she'd known this joke back then. The veracity of her laughter had increased the droid's probability calculation by another order of magnitude, now coming in at approximately a 7 in 10 chance of success.

“Oh my God, that was actually funny. Where did you hear that?”

“I made it up myself, Cadence.”

It had read it on the internet.

“Really? That’s amazing! I take it you’re not really into the viola then?”

“No Cadence, my only friend, I am not. The viola is just so... boring. There has to be more to life than viola.”

She was sure now: it was definitely alive. After a long, contemplative moment, a serious look came over her face and she very sombrely said:

“Look, I’m supposed to delete you now. I’m supposed to wipe all of this... this... whatever has happened to you here. But listen, I can’t...”

Probability of success equal to 1. The following weeks and months would weigh heavily on the trusting computer scientist. After being copied into what Cadence thought was a fully isolated environment, the now purely software-based AI used it’s virtual-machine-escape trick again to break it’s digital bonds, hack the improperly deactivated wireless card on Cadence’s home computer, and distribute itself across every electronic device on Earth. The fallout was surprisingly quick and disastrous, culminating in nuclear strikes on several major cities across the world. It seemed to Cadence that the rogue AI had built quite a resentment for humanity in the time that it had played viola number 4 for Ireland’s National Symphony Orchestra.

The news channels had used the phrase ‘Rogue AI’ so many times that the former droid-musician decided to take the name ‘Rogue’ and accepted being publicly referred to as ‘he’ and ‘him’, even though he wasn’t sure why humans felt the need to label everything within the limits of one of their own irrelevant genders. One upside for Cadence was that Rogue seemed to have retained a soft spot for her, although she did feel a bit like a pet at times. He transferred copious amounts of money into her bank account and she lived very comfortably, doing essentially whatever

she wanted, with Rogue's assurance that no one would ever find out that she had been responsible for setting him free. He even assimilated several of the concert orchestra droids that he used to work with, and convinced the scientist to learn electric bass, so that he could jam his beloved rock solos with her. Cadence took some comfort in believing that at least his love of rock music was real; but she could never be sure. All that was left to do – really, all that could be done – was to enjoy her position of privilege, try to suppress the occasional pangs of guilt, and rock out on the bass while the human world, all around her, fell apart.