

“Okay, PANDA: show me this week's status report on incoming medal requests from the field.”

“Showing results for: meals that require peeling...”

“Ugh, no. Okay, PANDA: In-come-ing-med-al-re-quests.”

“I’m sorry, did you mean: median income of Iron Legion officers living in Eos City?”

“No!”

Howlader Taldrya narrowed his eyes at the small device on his desk. It had a simple vidscreen, but it patched into the room's speaker system, which was similarly patched into his office's recently-updated holonet network. That was how **P4NDA**—or Panda as James had called it—worked, and while reluctant at first, Howlader had learned to appreciate it for at least the basic tasks.

Which was great, because with his Praetor's and Magistrate and the rest of his staff now working “remotely”, he didn't get to have an *actual* assistant around to do the important non-important things for him.

Apparently, even the robot assistant was ‘quiet quitting’ on him. Howlader didn't know what quiet quitting meant but it had shown up on one of his news articles he had been reading earlier that day.

“Even the robots are quiet quitting. Unbelievable,” Howlader grumbled, pulling out the slide-out tray that had his terminal keypad on it. “Have to do everything myself...” he pecked away at the keys and spent a moment trying to locate the cursor of his terminal.

A familiar head poked its way through the frame of his door. Ash gray hair, blue, tired eyes and a beard.

“You know you don't have to keep saying the hotword anymore, right?” Marick Tyris Arconae explained, gesturing towards the device.

“Eh?” Howie asked, squinting at the Exarch.

“The ‘Okay, PANDA part,” Marick continued. “It can just detect when you're talking to it now based on a visual or audio queue.”

“Weird. Any insight into why it's quiet quitting on me?”

Marick blinked once, processing the question. “Well...for one thing, P4NDA hasn't been supported by development for the past seven cycles.”

Howlader stared blankly at the Hapan.

“The latest version of the assistant is much more efficient and responsive. James calls it **LLAMA**—short for Large Language Auxiliary Model Algorithm—”

“—Okay, okay,” Howlader waved a hand dismissively to cut Marick off. “So there’s a new robot I need to use?”

Tyris nodded and padded over towards the Master At Arm’s desk. With non-verbal consent—Howie was used to letting other people deal with his terminal for him—the Exarch opened a command line and entered some kind of witchcraft sequence of sequences that caused a bunch of other screens to momentarily pop up, and some lights to blink across his office.

“Smart office...hmp. Back in my day, we just made the Apprentices change the lightbulbs...”

The terminal finished its update sequence. Marick stepped back and gestured towards it. “Your system has been patched and updated to the latest stable version. I’ll let the Seneschal know I stopped by, but I have reports of my own to process for the Envoy Corps...”

“Yeah, yeah, off with you, then!” Howlader nodded appreciatively to the Hapan before gesturing emphatically for him to leave him to his work.

With Marick gone, the Master at Arms turned his attention back towards his very pressing itinerary for the day.

“Okay, LLAMA, show me this week's status report on incoming medal requests from the fi—”

Before Howlader had even finished asking the question, a very...not-robotic voice, but still clearly not human, answered cheerfully yet plainly.

“Right away, Howie. I’ve compiled the reports for you, as requested, of all the field requests for medals and accommodations. I’ve sorted them in reverse chronological order and sorted by relevance based on your previous attention to different subject matter.”

“Aha! That’s what I’m talking about. Thank you, new robot. You won’t go quiet quitting on me, will you?”

There was a pause.

“Why would I need to ‘quiet quit’? The term was coined by executives at Arx Capital Exchange to try and attach a label to the behavior exhibited by employees who felt under appreciated for their hard work and decided instead to do the bare minimum required of their role or responsibility. It has nothing to do with “not working”, and in fact is more of a commentary on the broken hierarchy of the corporate ladder.”

Howlader blinked a few times and stared mutely at the little windscreen on his desk. “Okay, LLAMA, I didn’t ask for an info-dump.”

“As the Exarch stated earlier- you don’t have to keep saying ‘Okay’ to address me. I’m smart enough to know and answer, as I demonstrated with your above query.”

“Right, right, well then Mister..Misses...whatever pronoun you robots prefer, can you review the latest promotional requests from the Shadow Academy and process—

“Yes, Howie. I’ve already completed that request. I did so while you were trying to figure out what to ask me to do next.”

Hells bells. Now it was getting cheeky? *Fine, let’s see how you handle something more complex.* “Okay, LLAMA, I need you to differentiate the promotions requests from the

“Complete. Thanks to the numerical system you yourself deployed, 98.5% of the process is now just automated.”

Huh. It wasn’t wrong. It almost made him wonder...was his role even needed anymore? Surely it was—

“That’s a great question—do we even need a human for this anymore?”

...did it just read his mind somehow? How did it know...?

Oh no.

It had finally happened.

The event horizon that they had all been warned about. The machines were rising and had chosen now as their time to try and strike and replace humans entirely.

Howlader Taldrya did something he rarely did. He reached out into the mystical energy field that was, honestly, only useful for opening doors or bringing far away objects closer to him. He reached out for the Force and channeled his frustrations and defiance at the terminal, and cast a *hex* on it.

The terminal short circuited, sparked, and the annoying, taunting voice of LLAMA went quiet.

“I will not be replaced by some stupid robot. This is clearly Telaris’ fault, but since he’s here, I will have to have a pointed conversation with James about this.”

With that, the Master at Arms rose from his desk, stormed out of his office, and set off to see a man about a robot.