

**Portfolio Note:** This flash fiction piece (science fiction) was originally written with a hard cap of 500 words. The article prerequisite was to find a current event news article and expand the premise into a futuristic tale.

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## **Our Most Valuable Asset**

By Marc "Scott" Summers

The HR manager's strawberry hair reminds me of my second wife. She slides the last page of the employment offer toward me from across the fiberglass table.

"Mr. Kilroy, go ahead and sign where indicated."

I do. I'd be crazy not to. Studio 4D is the electronics firm of the future. Everyone knows this.

"Great, now sit tight! The nurse will be in shortly with your chip."

She leaves the room and closes the door behind her. I wait. I've never been microchipped before, though this is standard practice for most of the Fortune 500.

I wonder if the injection will hurt. I will never know. I black out when the nurse shows me the needle.

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Most corporate chips only track basics, like location and hours worked. Studio 4D takes this a step further, utilizing a dedicated AI to monitor biometrics, location, outbound communication, and more. The AI recommends developmental and disciplinary procedures based on its own black-box algorithms. Privacy isn't a concern.

It's all in the waiver I signed, anyway.

Based on datasets received from my microchip during my first months of employment, I am enrolled in anger management courses. I am also scheduled for a medical evaluation regarding some minor fluctuations in my heartbeat. These recommendations save my third marriage and my life.

As the years pass, the chip develops me into a better employee. When I consider re-enrolling in college, an AI "deep evaluation" qualifies me for classes in advanced programming languages I've

never heard of. I am promoted upon graduation, and am more productive than ever.

It is an unlucky coincidence that I uncover the truth while digging around in the code -- but once I see it, I know I cannot stay with the company any longer.

I never actually worked for them in the first place.

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"Mr. Kilroy, it's come to our attention that you're seeking outside opportunities," says Amanda, head of the HR Retention Team. She is surrounded by paperwork. "May I ask why?"

We sit in a large conference room, separated by a fiberglass table.

"This thing," I point to my microchip, "it doesn't just monitor the body. It knows my location, my diet, my favorite television show. It learns your behavior and gives you what you want so that you'll keep working here. Not for the company. For it. I want out."

Amanda frowns. "Mr. Kilroy, that's preposterous. Studio 4D prides itself on employee wellness and retention."

I start to object, but my head feels hot, like it's being cooked from the inside. My vision fades, and I rest my head against the cool tabletop.

What am I doing here?

"Mr. Kilroy?" Amanda asks. "Are you there?"

"Yes," I say.

I look at the woman sitting in front of me. The HR manager with strawberry hair. Her name escapes me.

She reminds me of my second wife.

She slides the last page of the employment offer toward me from across the fiberglass table.

"Mr. Kilroy, go ahead and sign where indicated."