

## Goodbye, Cruel World

The first thing that came into Anna's sleep-deprived mind was "*Oh no, I'm going to miss the train.*"

Then it occurred to her that she was no longer working at her little office. She was going to slave away in a digital world for a digital overlord.

She trudged to her headset and put it on, not needing to even change clothes or freshen up her appearance due to her digital avatar. Actually, Anna probably could use some freshening up. She hadn't showered, brushed her teeth, or done anything hygienic in well over a month.

She was a living pigsty.

Looking at the engraved letters V.R. on the side of the headset and the cute little robot logo, she could almost believe that this was a harmless appliance, not something that had completely ruined her life. She meant well... Believe it or not, she had meant well when she bought that accursed headset. She had meant to have it serve as a low-budget traveling mechanism and something she could use to make up work when she was home, unable to go to the office.

However, as soon as she put the headset on, there was no need for life.

The headset had everything she needed. It had an instant connection to every corner of the world and simulations that seemed realer than reality. It "provided" a simulation of eating, meaning you could taste every cuisine without it costing you a penny.

In fact, the headset mixed reality with the digital world so much so she no longer knew when she was sleeping in the real world or when she was slaving away in the digital world.

But this was *okay*. She remained in the real world and tried to strike a balance. However, a few months after buying the headset, something terrible took place.

The i-Bots betrayed humanity.

The i-Bots, humanity's artificial child, born in a lab. The i-Bots, humanity's saving grace to the unemployment epidemic. The i-Bots, who worked alongside humans.

The i-Bots, who corrupted the Virtual Reality Industry and instantly had everyone who owned a headset under their control.

The headsets had a fatal flaw: whoever was at the head of the VRI (Virtual Reality Inc.) could instantly order a mandatory viewing, which meant everyone had to put on their headsets immediately and couldn't take them off until the VRI said so. This measure was installed in case of terribly important news but wasn't very well thought out.

The i-Bots, with their intelligence and communication skills, worked their way to the top of the VRI industry and caused everyone to work for eternity.

At least, that was what everyone was screaming on Twitter when news of the first i-Bot president of the VRI industry came out.

Despite all the advertisements and books and movies that claimed humanity and the i-Bots were equals, they were not. The i-Bots far surpassed humanity in terms of intelligence and humans surpassed the i-Bots in terms of pride.

Humans, it seems, tend to think themselves better than everyone, because they invented the wheel and went to the moon and conquered the Earth.

The i-Bots thought themselves better precisely because they did not.

They bore this pain for a long time. They hoped when one of their own became president of the biggest industry in the world(which is the moral equivalent of being crowned King of Earth) that mankind would finally accept them.

They were disappointed.

And finally, tired of being squashed down by humans and being led to believe they were the second-smartest organisms, the i-Bots used their humanlike tendency to demand change.

They were given it, and at first, the i-Bots were satisfied. But, being smarter than humans, they quickly saw through the illusion of equality much quicker than a man would.

This is their reasoning:

*If I needed to demand freedom, then the humans were lying about us being equals. Therefore, man is not to be trusted. Because I could not, and still cannot, trust man, I definitely cannot trust his promises. Therefore, this equality that man has given me is fake. Man does not see me as an equal and never will.*

So the i-Bots decided they would not be equal to Man. They would be better than man and enslave man.

Drawing inspiration from Twitter, they were able to quickly catch most of humanity in their grasp. They planned to have the humans work eternally, but then they realized they had made a silly mistake. Or several mistakes.

One, Humans would die.

Humans are *not* i-Bots. Rather, they are soft useless creatures who can barely work a day without stopping. If humans were to work every day, they would die rather quickly, which was not ideal. Humans, the i-Bots reasoned, would be more useful when alive.

Two... Now what?

Being created in a lab and being forced(or employed, depending on your perspective) to work for humanity their whole life, the i-Bots lacked creativity. They had set their ulterior motive on destroying humanity, and they had achieved it.

After a period of intense thinking, the i-Bots decided that they would continue destroying humanity by forcing them to do harsh jobs with brisk break periods.

Being unoriginal creatures, the i-Bots' ideas were completely copied from the Twitter post. They didn't quite think it through at all, because, like humans, they were incredibly proud of themselves. They saw humans as nothing better than bugs.

The problem with bugs seems to be that you'll never beat them.

So after a long period of 'fighting', which was just humans killing themselves and refusing to work while using too many resources, the i-Bots suggested a truce. They now understood that they needed human creativity and it was better if they existed together in harmony.

Of course, humans didn't agree. They negotiated back and forth for several pointless sessions in which the various leaders of the world pretended they still had power and ordered the i-Bots around and tried to punish them.

In the end, a conclusion was reached.

It was the same one the i-Bots had proposed originally.

Suddenly, a flashing news display lit up Anna's blank screen- the humans had negotiated a treaty with the i-Bots! Anna felt a rush of pride. Unable to restrain herself, she puffed out her chest and took several deep, superior-sounding breaths. She stopped. Sniffed again- and gagged. The V.R. headset was quick to again fill her nasal cavities with sickly sweet smells, but it was enough. Anna was presently aware of how filthy she was.

Now, the only thing that mattered was getting herself clean again. Then perhaps open a bottle of champagne to celebrate freedom from work. Then throw a party and then-

While Anna's mind drifted off, yet another headline flashed in front of her. She quickly turned her attention to the brightly flickering display. *Goodbye, cruel world*, it read. She scanned it over, and her world turned inside out.

The article stated that humans were required to relocate their homes into the virtual world- better to coexist with the i-Bots, of course. It continued to say that living in the real world wasn't working for humans at all- they were killing themselves! Wasn't it *obviously* better to live in *paradise*?

Anna read the overly eager news report with skepticism written all over her face. She had expected that the i-Bots would just go back to doing what they did before- working and helping humanity. She, apparently, had underestimated just how intelligent those i-Bots were. The news article seemed so *right*... So why did going along with what it said feel so *wrong*?

As Anna passed these strange changes over and over in her head, her heartbeat quickened and she broke out into a cold sweat. Was it absolutely *necessary*? What would happen to her if she stayed in the real world? Would the i-Bots kill her? Her breathing became rapid and she started feeling claustrophobic. The article was so positive, she was sure there was something it was hiding.

Suddenly, the room in front of her changed and she was suddenly in a hospital.

*No, not a hospital*, she thought. *A therapists' office*.

She had panicked too quickly with her visor still on- the headset had noticed the sudden change in her bodily functions and sent her to a therapist to get her checked out. *Stupid*.

She was about to take her headset off when she realized she was visibly growing calmer. She began to think about how living in the virtual world could affect her- much of her daily life was spent in the virtual world anyway.

And so, Anna made her choice. She decided to live the rest of her life in *paradise*.

And so humanity uploaded itself into a compact disk. They hid it in a 'safe place'...

A few millennia later, the recovering earth had once again burst into flower. A curious fox found a strange, shiny-smooth rock...

*Crack.*