

Edward Yorke groggily wakes. His mood dazed from the poor night's sleep he just had. He puts on his farm clothes and heads downstairs. He is small, seventy-five years old, likes his own company, retired and enjoys his life on the farm, which he likes to be perfectly well and organized. Edward looks outside to see huge planets on the horizon. The sight comforts his mood; he smiles. This is one of the delights of living on Nexus D-6; the ability to see planets thousands of miles away in the sky. A beautiful futuristic sight.

Edward puts on his Techon-Watch and heads downstairs for breakfast. His kitchen is sparse: There are no cupboards, no dishwasher, no oven and no microwave. There is a table in the middle of the room with one chair. Edward sits down as a small robot approaches him and then places a small tray onto the table with a plate of food. The robot then shifts away, out of the room. The food in front of Edward is all artificial: bacon and eggs. Animals died out years ago. However, despite the fake food, it is still delicious.

Edward finishes his breakfast and heads outside. The atmosphere breathable, clean and clear. His house hovers just slightly off the ground, overlooking his acres of fields full of crops from potatoes to carrots to tomatoes. He hops into his small green hover car and it starts automatically moves along the field. The computer in front of him beeps. The sun beams brightly above, gleaming on fields, not a building in site except his house in the middle of the field, not a person in sight. The way Edward likes it.

“Good morning, Edward,” says the computer. “How are you today? Are you ready for Section 1?”

“Yep, I can’t complain, Mary, except I had an interesting dream,” Edward replies.

“What did you dream about, Edward?” Mary asks curiously.

Edward pauses. He thinks about how to describe it.

“I dreamt I was in a place without computers, hover cars, without technology...” says Edward, confused at what he is saying. “There were things called ‘books’. It was crazy, but there was something about it that was fantasizing about it. There was a sense of control about humanity...”

“Interesting,” says Mary. “My database tells me that such a time period would have been between 1900-2000, nearly four hundred years ago...”

The hover car passes through a vineyard of bright red juicy grapes. The system checks off the quality of the fruit and vegetables. Edward checks them closely as the flies on by..

“The grapes are looking wonderful this year,” says Mary.

As the hover car passes carrots, a green light flashes up on the computer, but again, despite what the system states, Edward keeps a keen close eye on everything,

making sure the crops are well. As the hover car passes through the lettuce field, the system beeps. *What must that be?* Edward thinks.

“An error in the middle of the lettuces,” says Mary. “Please investigate, Edward.”

There hasn’t been an error in years. Edward remains cautious as he gets out of the hover car. He walks carefully among the lettuces, which are a ripe crisp green.

It takes Edward five minutes of walking to get to the dead-centre of the field to realise the problem. There is a blue lettuce. *What in the hell? This is a first...* It looks identical to the rest around except for its colour. Edward looks back at his hover car in the far distance and then back the blue lettuce. He considers what to do, and then presses a button on his watch.

Mary’s voice emits from the watch. “Can I help you, Edward?”

“There’s a problem with one of the lettuces,” he says. “There’s a blue one.”

Mary’s voice sounds intrigued and confused, “A blue one? Are the others affected, too?”

Edward analyses the other lettuces nearby the blue one. They look fresh and fine.

“No, they aren’t affected,” says Edward. He then thinks of something. He talks into his watch. “Mary, load database records and search for ‘blue lettuce’”

Mary immediately responses, "Data searching for 'blue lettuce.'"

A beeping Nosie comes out of his watch.

"Results: None. No matches found."

Edward sighs and looks at the blue lettuce among the green ones ready to be harvested. He puffs, uncertain about what he is about to do.

"Call Farming Tech Corp Ltd," says Edward with a reluctance in his voice. "Book an appointment with them."

Edward looks over at the horizon, the huge planets in the background, mixed with his crops, the odd blue lettuce, not a city nor another person for thousands of miles.

"Appointment booked," says Mary, seconds later. "Dr Miller Shore will be here at approximately 1 p.m."

Edward continues his trip around Section 1 of the fields with no further problems or disturbances.

He goes into his house and has a quick lunch and finishes it just as the buzz sounds on his watch. He looks at it. There is the face of Dr Miller Shore. He's at the front door; Edward presses a button on his watch, allowing the door to open.

Dr Shore walks into the kitchen. He is tall, handsome, wearing lab coat and glasses. He is fifty-five years old and knows plenty in his field of farming technologies. On the front of his coat, a small badge reads 'Farming Tech Corp Ltd.'

Edward feels a plunge of nerves. He hasn't seen or spoken to another human being in at least a year.

"Well, well, well," says Dr Shore enthusiastically, holding out his hand. "I haven't been here in a long, long time. What's it been? Five years?"

Edward nervously shakes his hand.

"Seven," says Edward, not exactly sure how to talk to another human and wanting to get down to business.

"Seven years! My golly!" says Dr Shore, looking at Edward, who is looking outside. "So, what's the issue, Edward?"

Edward leads Dr Shore outside and they ride on his hover car to the blue lettuce.

Dr Shore closely analyses the odd lettuce and then takes out a very small laptop from his pocket. He tabs the screen a few times, occasionally looking at the blue lettuce.

“Yes, there seems to be a problem with the code,” says Dr Shore. “A slight problem. But the vegetable should still be fine and those around it. No issues at all. In fact, your lettuces look great.”

Edward feels defensive and plunge of annoyance at the lack of understanding from Dr Shore. There is clearly a problem.

“But it’s blue,” complains Edward. “Can you can do something to fix it?”

“It doesn’t need fixing though,” responds Dr Shore. Edward goes to open his mouth, but Dr Shore beats him to it. “You know, you are still the only farm using the Version 1.0 Model. All of the other farms are on Version 5.0 now. Robots analyse the fields for them. Human errors occur...”

“I don’t think human error caused one of my lettuces to turn blue,” says Edward. “But that’s besides the point. I enjoy watching over them.”

“Very well,” says Dr Shore. “I can offer a change in code, but I must warn you. This code is old and –”

“Do it,” says Edward looking at the odd one out, the out of place crop, wanting it to be put right.

Dr Shore sighs and then pushes a few buttons on his small laptop.

“All done,” says Dr Shore. “The results should show by tomorrow morning.”

Edward lets out a huge sigh of relief.

“Thank you, Doctor,” he says graciously.

Edward and Dr Shore ride back on the hover car, and then Dr Shore leaves the farm; Edward watches as the doctor’s hover car turns into a small speck in the distance, and then turns and looks at the blue lettuce that is seemingly more present in his mind and sight than ever before.

THE NEXT MORNING.

Edward wakes with a buzz of excitement. He doesn’t bother with breakfast. He rushes outside and jumps into his hover car like a child.

“Good morning, Edward,” Mary says. “You have a spring in your step today.”

“I do! Today is a good day,” says Edward. “No more blue lettuce! I have a good feeling.”

The hover car moves towards the lettuce field. Even before the rover car reaches the field, Edward knows there is a problem. An even bigger problem. His mouth opens in surprise.

“No, no, no, no!” says Edward angrily.

“What is it?” says Mary concerned.

Edward looks at not only a blue lettuce in the middle of the field, but also at least forty *dead* lettuces surrounding it. He feels his heart racing and his body getting warmer and warmer by the second. He feels like a failure.

“They’re dead,” says Edward sadly.

“Oh, dear!” say Mary compassionately.

“Book another appointment with Dr Shore,” says Edward quickly.

“Very well,” says Mary.

Edward waits and waits and waits for Dr Shore to arrive while analysing the crops around him. The planets in the distance seem so much further away and they look like black clouds watching him. The world no longer seems so beautiful. After what only seems like a few minutes to Edward, Dr Shore arrives a few hours later in the field having spotted Edward on the way.

“This is a rare occurrence, but since you have only V1.0 and had some rather, well let’s put it, risky code, this is one of the outcomes –”

“What happened? Why did this happen?” says Edward annoyed.

“Like I said, old code is risky,” interjects Dr Shore. “They’re dead now, but the rest are still fine. I still see the blue one intact. Allow me to assist with my robot to clean up the dead ones.”

“No,” says Edward coldly. “I want it to be fixed.”

Dr Shore looks awkward. He looks at the field around him and then at the few dead ones and then at the lettuces that are fine and all of the crops as far as the eye can see that are healthy.

“I could implement some more code, but as you can, it is risky. It backfired and made it worse,” says Dr Shore. “I would suggest allowing an upgrade first...”

“An upgrade would take my freedom away,” says Edward.

“Technology has taken away our freedom already. We don’t cook, drive --”

Edward quickly interjects, “But I can at least do somethings still. Version 1.0 allows that. Don’t get me wrong, I like the new world of technology, I do. I’ve dreamt of the old days and there is something about being able to harvest crops that makes me feel like I still have control and always have had control since I was a little boy. I don’t want that taken away. When I see my crops dead, I see that as a failure. I tend to them, and when one turns blue...”

"It is not your fault," says Dr Shore. "While your V1.0 relies on some human activity, at least 75% of it is coded."

"Yes, but I will not allow that percentage to go any higher. I will still have some control over what I do, and when I see my crops fail or change, I see a little bit of that control fade away, especially when new code is offered or implemented. I don't like my crops changing or dying, I want them fixed."

Dr Shore looks even more awkward, and then says, "Well, I can attempt to change them, but I would obviously have to use code to do this."

"Of course, of course," says Edward arrogantly. "I see my crops die by code, I want them back by code. I want that power, I want control."

"Very well, but you know the risks..." says Dr Shore, pushing some buttons on his laptop. "I will be back tomorrow."

THE NEXT DAY.

Edward and Dr Shore both face looking out over the field of crops. Edward has his mouth open shell-shocked while Dr Shore has a half-sorry, half-told-you-so expression. Edward feels his insides turning and twisting. The pair continue to look at over at fields from left to right, and then they turn around and look in the other direction.

Edward stares at the fields around him; what was once colourful and joyful is now a scene of death. All but one of his crops are dead, lifeless, grey and ruined. Edward bends down and touches one of them and it immediately crumbles into nothingness. He then looks ahead to the middle of the field. The only visible crop with colour is the blue lettuce that remains and stands out as ever.

“By wanting control, you lost control,” says Dr Shore. “But, well, look on the bright side, you still got the blue lettuce.”

Edward walks to the blue lettuce, bends down on his hands and knees and harvests it, and then then walks back to his house with it in his arms and walks inside.

THE END.