A paranoia adventure

• Once Upon A Time...

There was a High Programmer named Past-U-RAL-4. An important man, of course, being a High Programmer, but then you'd worked that out for yourselves hadn't you? Why do we struggling writers bother... Back to the plot:

Past-U-RAL is still about, and a nature freak to boot. He is a former member of the Sierra Club whose first step on the ladder of success was (naturally) to turn in all the members of his cell as traitors. He did it with a tear in his eye, for he really loves the idea of the Great Outdoors. Any *normal* High Programmer with such a love of nature would probably establish a base Outside. Not Past-U-RAL, but then, this being *Paranoia,* that would be too simple by far. There's also the minor problem that Past-U-RAL is allergic to pollen, fur, feathers, real sunlight, and natural foods.

Rather than abandon his dream completely, Past-U-RAL has built his idyllic homestead-away-from-home in a disused warehouse inside the Alpha Complex. Start humming Beethoven's Sixth now. The Computer has 'forgotten' this area. Carefully and traitorously misdirected resources have produced a landscaped floor surfaced with plastic grass, a convincing hologram 'sky' and 'landscape', a thatched cottage with robot servants, and a flock of 120 robot sheep. He lives here whenever possible, sometimes with guests who generally belong to the Earth Mother secret society (See *Acute Paranoia* for details).

While Past-U-RAL would love to spend all his time in his cottage, every now and then he has to spend a few days working with his friend, and yours (and mine, of course), The Computer.

However, his tranquil existence has been shattered. Stop humming Beethoven's Sixth. When Past-U-RAL returned from work yesterday he was horrified to find his servants deactivated, and one literally torn apart. And five of his sheep had been destroyed. None of the surviving servants could give a coherent (coherent, in this game - *HA!)* account of what had happened. All said that they blacked out. The sheepbots are standard petbot mechanisms (programs Baaa-1, Pretend to Graze-1, Produce Synthetic Droppings-1), and can't answer questions.
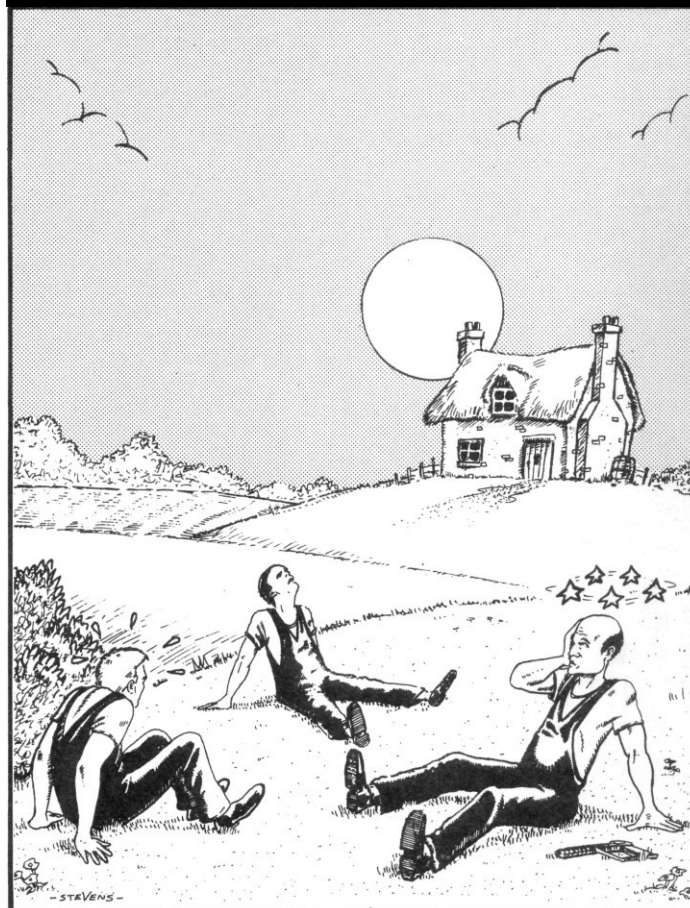
Past-U-RAL made two decisions:

1: He's leaving the cottage, and not going back until the
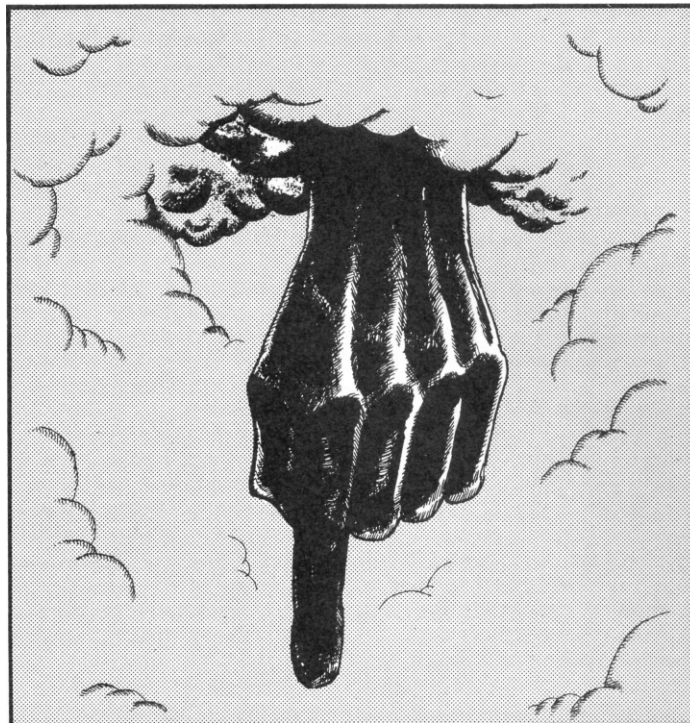
DO TROUBLESHOOTERS | DREAM OF | ELECTRIC SHEEP

Illustrated by David Stevens

mystery is solved. Something that can tear a robot apart can do unspeakably terminal things to a High Programmer. He has an ordinary (and that means very secure) apartment elsewhere in Alpha Complex.

2: Someone else can solve the mystery. Guess who...

• Lies, All Lies

Brief the team about a mission to the sewers. Make this sound as disgusting, repellent and confusing as possible. *Plumber's Helper* in *Acute Paranoia* is confusing, nauseating and repellent, but that's close enough. Equip the Troubleshooters with every possible device that might be used in a sewer, plus a few that are ludicrously inappropriate: dinner jackets and armoured spats? Jet boots? Parachutes? Automatic open-on-scream parachutes? If (that's an optional 'if') you're feeling mean some of the last lot have been sabotaged by Commie Mutant Traitor Scum, and are open-on-whisper or open-on-ppphizzzt (laser shot, stupid) parachutes. Neat, eh? Send a few Vultures to intimidate, sorry, escort, the team to the sewer entrance. Send a few Warbots and Blue Int-Sec troopers to escort the escort. Kill anyone who objects.

As the Troubleshooters are frog-marched down the final tunnel towards the sewer, it fills with white mist. Everyone collapses: escorts, escorts' escorts, any spare guards who happen to be about, Troubleshooters, and robots. Mutants go down as well, no matter what their brand of pervo-mutation.

Remember *The Prisoner?* The Troubleshooters wake up on a grassy lawn near a charming thatched cottage, under a clear blue sky. The sky and landscape seem to stretch out forever. Faint baaa-ing noises can be heard from the far side of the hill. Describe all this in terms appropriate to Troubleshooters who may have never seen the sky, grass, hills, cottages, or sheep. Remember that The Computer has forgotten about this area. At the moment the Troubleshooters aren't being monitored for traitorous utterances and behaviour. Well, not by the Computer, anyway... Internal Security agents are all around. I mean, do you trust anybody these days?

Anyone who has never been Outside should now make a sanity roll. Anyone who has been Outside before should eventually realise that there's something wrong. The air doesn't smell clean enough, the sunlight isn't as hot as it should be, and the grass is made of

plastic. The Troubleshooters will also discover that all weapons and equipment apart from laser pistols, melee weapons, and open-on-whatever parachutes have disappeared.

While the team are beginning to absorb this information, the sky is rent in twain. Remember, it's a hologram and Past-U-RAL is a High Programmer. A huge hand, fifty or so metres long, appears through a black 'tear' in the sky, swathed in clouds that cloak it as a white garment. It points down at the team. A booming voice says 'Go Thou and Guard My Sheep, My House, and My Servants. Thou Shalt Safeguard Them, Even At Risk Of Thine Own Lives, Or Thou Shalt Answer Unto Me. And Mighty Shalt Be Mine Displeasure!'. Anyone who answers back, fires weapons, or asks any questions is struck by lightning. Very traditional, but satisfying, all the same, n'est pas? Use damage column 15 and chuckle a lot. Actually, it's a plasma pulse from a ceiling mounted projector that retracts behind a thick steel plate when it isn't in use, but knowing that somehow takes the romance away.

The hand withdraws into the sky, which neatly closes again. A bot appears over the brow of the hill, says This way, please', and leads the way into the cottage.

• The Green, Green Grass of Home

The warehouse is 'only' 300x400m, with a 15m high ceiling, but it gives the impression of having limitless horizons. Anyone walking far enough in any direction will eventually walk through the 'horizon' and into a wall. The walls and ceiling are covered in acoustic tiles which deaden echoes and muffle out the faint sounds of the Alpha Complex. A 'lake' in one corner seems to be kilometres across, but only a small portion actually exists. It is only 15cm deep. You might be interested to know that you can seriously drown (yourself or someone else) in 15cm of water.

Two tunnels leave the warehouse behind the holograms. One leads deeper underground, and has been blocked by a roof fall, the other runs into a maze of tunnels, and ultimately leads into the sewers. Both tunnels are barred by huge blast doors.

At several points holograms conceal roof pillars. Anyone looking at a pillar sees a recorded image of the lawn and 'horizon' beyond it, but won't see anything which moves behind it, such as a sheepbot. It's easy to spot the pillars

themselves once you know they are there.

Past-U-RAL has built an impressive cottage on a low hill in the middle of the warehouse. A simulated-wood veneer plastic sign identifies it as 'Rose Cottage'. There are master and guest bedrooms, with bathrooms, a big lounge and recreation area, a gymnasium, a kitchen and servants quarters.

All the rooms are luxuriously furnished in white, with white-on-white decorations. All rooms are fitted with concealed cameras and microphones, linked to Past-U-RAL's desk console. Most Troubleshooters will have difficulty identifying the furnishings, since they are totally unlike normal Alpha Complex fittings. For example, the main bedroom has a water bed with satin sheets, the recreation area has a bar and a jacuzzi, and all floors are carpeted. The kitchen contains 'real' foods for Past-U-RAL's occasional guests, and treated synthetics which lack the normal sex suppressant drugs.

There's nothing of any great significance in the cottage, apart from the body of a robot at the bottom of the jacuzzi pool (its brain and left arm have been ripped from the torso) and various items of contraband.

If the Troubleshooters examine the cottage closely they will discover that the chimney stack is made of concrete while the other walls are made of lightweight foamed plastic blocks painted to look like bricks and timber beams. The thatched roof is also fragile plastic. The walls can be destroyed by a blow, and bullets and laser beams won't find them much of a barrier. Let the Troubleshooters find this out for themselves later on. They'll thank you for the pleasure that this discovery will bring.

The chimney stack conceals a lift (entered through a secret door in the lounge) and a delivery chute. The lift is Past-U-RAL's route to his office. Needless to say, (so why I am bothering to tell you?) the lift has been raised and the shaft is guarded by automatic lasers. The delivery chute is part of the Alpha complex automated supply system; if a clone is killed a unconscious replacement will eventually be delivered to the kitchen.

Right, back to the plot (again). The robot in the pool was MEL/ORS-340, the shepherd and handyman. There are three other robot servants, all standard humanoid types:

JEE/V-ES-229 is the butler. Its programming includes an Ag-

ed Retainer personality module: 'You rang, sir?' and other similar phrases are a major part of its conversation. JEE/V-ES has impressive range of domestic skills. However, it's an incredible snob, and will do its best to keep Troubleshooters off the furniture, out of the pool, etc. It can generally be found in the lounge area or kitchen, or recharging in the servants quarters. It has a tray of standard Alpha Complex foods ready to serve to the Troubleshooters in the servants' quarters.

HUD/S-ON-321 is cook and housekeeper. Its personality module is a Lovable Rustic Cook. It has a strange accent and often misuses words. Its optical sensors have been malfunctioning since the attack on MEL/O-RS-34, and it will assume that anything delivered via the service chute is food and should be put into the freezer. This includes clones. It spends its time in the kitchen and servants quarters. It won't give the Troubleshooters precious natural foods, but it believes in 'proper' helpings of synthetics.

FIF/I-FI-433 is housemaid and bodyguard. It has a French Maid personality, with an Amazon Warrior backup. Two polychrome ROYGBIV lasers are built into its torso. Its programming includes Laser-6, Melee-6, and Cleaning-3. It may be found anywhere in the cottage. FIF/I-FI will throw out anyone stealing anything from the cottage, or kill anyone doing anything that might harm Past-U-RAL.

If the Troubleshooters question the robots they'll be told nothing. All of the robots collapsed, were reactivated by The Master' and then discovered MEL/O-RS-340 in the pool. The Master noticed that sheep had been destroyed, told the robots to expect the Troubleshooters and left. The robots won't reveal any information about The Master. Anyone who makes obvious efforts to discover his identity, or does unnecessary damage, will be struck by lightning (OK, plasma pulse, but it's more fun as lightning, isn't it?) the next time they leave the cottage.

By now the 'sky' is getting dark, and JEE-V-ES-229 gets out some lanterns and strange metal poles with hooked ends. This is the equipment the Troubleshooters need them to watch the sheep. If anyone attacks the sheep or the household robots without provocation before 'nightfall' the lightning will strike again. During the 'night', however, Past-U-RAL can only see what's happening in the circle of light around each lantern.

Allow the Troubleshooters to spend a few uneventful hours

watching and counting sheep. Make Endurance rolls every so often, to avoid falling asleep on the job, then start the fun, sorry, attacks. After this, you'll never trust a lamb chop again.

• The (Mint) Sauce of the Problem

By now you should be ready to decide what's been happening. There are three main options.

• Wolfbots In Sheep's Clothing

Three killer robots built by a rival High Programmer have entered the warehouse. The killers are cunningly disguised as sheepbots, but are actually fast, extremely strong, and well-armoured warbots, with electronic jammers which affect other robots (as ECM shells). They aren't particularly clever and are programmed to attack humans. MEL/O-RS-340 was sufficiently humanoid to fool one. There's only so much brain you can stuff into a petbot-sized warbot. Grrrrr.

Make these robots as dangerous as you like. They will try to lure one Troubleshooter away from the others, then attack. Maintain ignorance and fear by refusing to describe the attackers until someone actually survives an attack. Since they'll usually go for the throat, a victim won't be able to say very much... One of the robots is malfunctioning slightly - it will attack sheepbots if it can't find a human victim.

After each attack the killers retreat to the lake, to wash off blood stains, then return to the flock. Their movements are concealed in the general roaming of the flock. Baaa.

Continue the attacks until someone works out what's happening. Then attack the clever little dicks with all three warbots. Serves them right.

• The Company of Wolfbots

Something strange has happened to the sheepbots. Their minds have somehow fused to form a group consciousness, and they have decided to eliminate all disgusting organic lifeforms. Mint sauce eaters, the lot of 'em. MEL/O-RS-340 spotted that something was up and was destroyed as a result. The five destroyed sheepbots didn't merge with the group mind, and were dealt with because the flock didn't trust them.

If this option is used the petbots will make group attacks. For example, one or two would manoeuvre behind a Troubleshooter to trip him up, then others would jump on top and start to tear him apart with their little feet and strong teeth, or crush him by sheer weight of

numbers. All that bleating and looking helpless is just a front. As in the first option, don't describe the attackers until someone survives, then make multiple attacks on the entire group.

The sheepbots are small, unarmoured and as a group they have 45% melee skill. If all the sheepbots concentrate they can generate a strong ECM field. The mental link will collapse when eighty or more sheep have been destroyed. Optionally, the group mind can increase in power to take over the other bots, as described below.

• The Butler Did It

This is a bit obvious for *Paranoia,* which means that the players will think of it first. However, because this is *Paranoia* they will dismiss the idea as too obvious which

means you can use it anyway. But then they know that the obvious is never what it seems. You know that they know. Look, just consider this alternative and damn the logic...

One of the domestic robots has Gone Frankenstein and is responsible for the attacks, which were practice for attacks on humans. An ECM jammer is concealed somewhere in the servants quarters. The killer robot is shielded and immune and has a concealed data cartridge containing Laser Pistol-7 and Melee-7 programs.

If the killer is JEE/V-ES-229 it will use a steel bowler hat as a frisbee-like weapon (*a la* Odd-job), plus karate-style melee attacks.

If the killer is HUD/S-ON-321, the preferred weapons are cooking knives and cleavers

and, for the really ghoulish, large mincing machines. 'Accidents' with clones are nothing of the sort, and the optical sensors are in perfect condition.

If the killer is FIF/I-FI-433 it will try to avoid using its lasers, preferring a strangling wire (stylish, but not terribly French) and other melee attacks.

Optionally, all the robots have Gone Frankenstein. One altered the circuits of the other domestics, and gave them copies of its secret programs. They killed MEL/O-RS-340 because it didn't want to join them. They are lying about the deactivation.

The killer or killers will put on human clothing for the attacks, and should only be described when someone has survived an attack.

• In the Bleat of the Night

Keep the identity of the attacker(s) secret for as long as possible. Start things quietly, and build towards a big end with clones dropping like flies (or even sheep ticks). You'll enjoy it more that way. So will the players, although you may not think it to look at them. Drive the Troubleshooters back towards the cottage. Let them barricade the doors and windows. Send the attackers in through those flimsy plastic walls. Reveal that the killer is already inside the building. Then give the Troubleshooters the bad news.

When Past-U-RAL has identified the killer(s) he'll take whatever action seems necessary. Necessary means sending in a few really big warbots to pacify Rose Cottage. These warbots are fairly stupid, and will probably account for several Troubleshooters during the clean-up operations. Why bother stuffing a brain into a warbot-sized warbot? Don't let the Troubleshooters escape through the entrance used by the warbots.

• We'll Bleat Again...

As the survivors survey the wreckage, the sky is rent in twain again. A huge eye stares down at the team, and a rumbling voice conducts a more or less standard debriefing. All traitors are given short but dramatic missions as lightning conductors. When Past-U-RAL is sure that he knows exactly what happened, the Troubleshooters are given the white-mist-and-wake-up treatment. This time they have been stripped naked and are floating gently downstream in a rubber raft in one of the main Alpha Complex sewers. The Computer demands a mission status report (even sewers have terminals for The Computer).

Since they won't have accomplished their official mission, the Troubleshooters should be executed as traitors. Pathetic attempts to escape by describing an imaginary cottage may make The Computer decide that the team have been driven insane and should be sent for reindoctrination and routine therapy instead. Any gibbering wrecks that survive this ordeal should be sent back to the sewers to complete the mission as they should have done in the first place. Thank you for co-operation.

Marcus Rowland

Recreation Room
Guest Room
Delivery Chute
Kitchen
Lift
Master Bedroom
Servant's Quarters
Gymnasium

Exit Tunnel
Horizion
Pillar (Invisable)
Arrival Point
1 Metre Contour
Rose Cottage
1 Metre contour
Lake
Flock
Blocked Tunnel