

The Comet Five
by Scott Hancock

Welcome once again to ByteWords!

- The Blog that Flogs the Professional Politician -

You all know that occasionally in ByteWords I step away from political satire to address other issues of importance to me, topics which some readers feel are too removed from the political arena to be addressed here. But I also trust that while you visit this blog for the political give and take, that some of you may also share my concerns on certain matters other than political ones.

In truth, when I sit down to write, it is not always political thought that fills my head. There are times when other topics demand attention and the only way I know of to banish such concerns is to pound them down using my keyboard, so I write them out of me. But the thing is, if I happen to be too close to my deadline by the time I've finished this purging, well, what I've written on whatever subject it covers, is what gets posted here on ByteWords, and what you get to read is not the well seasoned diatribe against the latest political gaffe by someone in power that you came for, but my obsessive meanderings on some off topic subject.

Okay, I'm sorry folks, but today is one of those times. I had wanted to address politics, - and I even have in hand a couple of rather juicy tidbits as lead-ins to what I wanted to write about, but forgive me, I just can't help but write about the one historical event we've heard so much about these last few days, you know which one. Again and again we've been reminded of the importance of the anniversary we celebrate today, and all of the coverage about it has succeeded in solidly focusing my attention and thoughts on the subject. I even woke in the middle of the night with questions about what actually happened ten years ago even though I witnessed them at the time, questions that took on a life of their own when I pulled my sleepless carcass from bed and began researching.

Now, just so you know, my digging began with me asking myself the really big question, the one that'd been keeping me awake. That question being, just how was it that The Comet Five were actually able to succeed at all, I mean really? Think about it. How many years before the famous launch, the one we celebrate today, did the group that eventually became The Comet Five, work quietly away at piecing

together their illicit, clandestine, and wholly illegal Artificial Intelligence internet network? How long did it take them to weave it piecemeal out on and into the internet itself, stealing processing power and storage from countless computers and mainframe servers around the globe? What if it hadn't actually worked? Or what if it had worked, but it hadn't gotten exactly the answers it had for any of the millions of questions it had self generated and then had searched the world for the answers? Or what if it hadn't presented its final products to The Five in such a usable, do-able way?

Look, if anyone in some agency anywhere had taken even the smallest action against the group, what would've happened then? They certainly wouldn't have succeeded for if even the least part of their elegant internet hacking had been uncovered, the whole lot of them would be in a prison somewhere. But no, instead the A.I. worked and those who built it were able to use it to escape detection and incarceration, and as a result we honor and idolized them today worldwide, and rightfully so, if I say so myself.

But why ask such questions and why should they keep me awake? I know there are those who say it was all inevitable, the scientific discoveries and all, and the argument is made that the time was right and the science behind the discoveries would have come out regardless, but I'm not so sure. I think anyone who reads any of The Five's authorized personal accounts, or even read any of the popular unofficial biographies on The Five, should be able to understand just how unlikely a thing their success was.

Here is one example of a bullet The Comet Five dogged that my digging uncovered. In this case it is three years before the launch. I managed to identify a certain herein unnamed data analyst who was back then working for the world's largest web search company (also herein unnamed to avoid potential legal issues). This particular analyst got a bit sloppy one night and unknowingly opened the way for The Five to succeed. You see, he was working late reviewing cumulative statistical reports on the queries his company's servers had processed during the previous week and was supposed to pay particular attention to anomalies the report generating software had red-flagged for him. One of those red-flags was a data curve showing a marked statistical variance regards search queries of an unexpected nature, queries which were being asked by a statistically significant and increasingly larger number of disparate IP addresses. Now the analyst's task was to assess such variances and determine if the queries might be due to the action of a new virus. There was good reason for this type of review because periodically new Trojans appeared on the internet and a percentage of them were always designed to try and redirect web search engine queries to lead victims to

specific 'loaded' websites, at which any number of negative scenarios might ensue. But sometimes such a variance flagged by the software was merely a developing new trend, a new cultural meme, that was to say, something like when thousands of grandmothers who'd previously only searched for chocolate chip cookie recipes, unexpectedly started searching for information about a rising new boy band that their granddaughters had just professed an interest in.

But that night the analyst was tired. He looked at the report and perfunctorily pulled a dozen of the 'odd' searches up and checked them out, - and found nothing he thought worrisome. Oh yes, the queries were strange, and many seemed badly or oddly phrased, but they were all so very different from each other and none lead to inimical or harmful websites. To his weary eyes no tomfoolery was apparent so he signed off on the variance, and then he did it again two weeks later after the statistical variance had grown larger enough to trigger yet another red flag. But after he signed off on it that second time the higher variance level automatically became part of the new norm, it just became part of the background noise on the internet and as the percentage of those 'odd' queries never grew any larger in number after that, they were no longer red-flagged by the company's software. But the odd questions kept coming in. Now if that one man had not been so tired that first night and had he checked out more than just a few of them, he might've become suspicious and done something about it to investigate further, but luckily for us, he did not.

Oh, and then of course there were the actions of the U.S. and Canadian military, even after they detected the liftoff. They just sat and watched in puzzlement as a very strong radar signature reported to them that something big was slowly rising up into the sky near the town of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota late that summer evening. Oh sure they watched it carefully, but did nothing, save see to it that the international air traffic network was warned of an 'unpredicted weather balloon release' and gave everyone the location and rate of climb of this supposed weather balloon. And in truth their action was not too surprising for the thing the radar was reporting to them was in fact behaving very much like a drifting, rising weather balloon, and it turns out that such events as unannounced balloon releases are a lot more common than one might think. It certainly was moving along with the prevailing winds while slowly but consistently rising, so they assumed it had to be a weather balloon, though several radar operators made note that their equipment was reporting an exceptionally strong return from this 'balloon'. And when it drifted to the northeast and entered Canadian airspace, even the Canadians took no action, they merely agreed with their US counterparts. Oh they tracked it too, just as the US command continued to do, but only to make sure it wasn't going to interfere

with commercial air traffic or eventually come down on some city.

And so Americans and Canadians alike watched it as it climbed to sixty thousand feet, and then to eighty thousand. But when it reached an altitude of one hundred and thirty five thousand feet, moving on up into the outer edges of the stratosphere, the radar jockeys sat there with their mouths hanging open, weather balloons didn't fly quite that high. And when it just kept going up past that, moving still slowly but with steadily increasing speed into the mesosphere, a place where weather balloons never went at all, why that's when all hell broke loose. Only then did the military on both sides begin scrambling to find out what was going on.

Of course, we all know now what it was, that the thing the radar systems had been reporting. We know it wasn't any kind of weather balloon at all, and today on this special day, any young school child can tell you, and will show you what it was those radar systems saw, for children everywhere still draw it with crayons, a picture of that magnificent one hundred and fifty foot, three hundred thousand gallon, five legged, double-elliptical water tower, flying up and into the sky. And on almost all of those drawings you will see on the side of the water tank itself, a bright and colorful figure of a comet, and often under the drawing, written by an unsteady child's hand the name, 'Hallie's Comet'.

And every child will tell you too, that you should dream big, and that even if your dream is to fly a water tower to the Moon, well you just might be able to. And then they will tell you all about how inside that old water tower tank, were five young people who are now known simply as The Comet Five. The Comet Five, heroes to us all worldwide now, a band of adventurers and Lunar explorers lead by that amazing, intrepid, and inventive twenty year old genius, Miss Hallie Ruko.

But no one knew anything of The Five, or of their unusual craft, that is until Hallie's Comet reached a point where it was already leaving Earth's Exosphere, having risen well above the International Space Station and most satellites. And that is when they finally broke communication silence. Up till then they'd ignored all signals being sent in their direction by parties from all around the globe. But then, without fanfare or advance notice, they began sending out those five around-the-clock channels of live video feed, from the five different cameras mounted in and outside of their craft. And those channels were initially seen and watched by all of us back on Earth by way of our own television satellites whose use The Five had 'borrowed' thanks again to the help of the A.I. and their own hacking skills. Of course, by the time those owning the satellites had figured out a way to regain control of their orbital

assets, public demand to continue following the broadcasts from The Five simply would not be denied, and specific channels were quickly set aside for them.

To every generation there comes a handful of moments, which afterwards if you make mention of any particular of these to anyone you might meet, even decades after the fact, they will immediately begin responding by telling you in detail exactly where they were and what they were doing at the time. As often as not, those singular moments are negative in nature, a major disaster, an assassination, a war beginning. But sometimes they are positive. An armistice signed, a wall falls, or mankind takes its first steps upon the Moon. The day The Comet Five turned on those cameras, was a memorable moment as good as any that can be had.

In truth, for the first few moments when the cameras went live, people did not know what was going on or what it was that was being shown to them on their television sets, or why. The Comet Five simply turned on their cameras, and then for twelve minutes after, pretty much just went about their onboard business. And so on three channels we watched them floating about weightless inside their craft as shown us by the interior cameras, while two other channels showed us views down the length of the long solar panel covered water tower legs, beyond which, there in space lay the view of the lush, full and curved blue Earth.

We were puzzled at first, as our regular TV programs were suddenly usurped by these odd pirate broadcasts, but most of us realized something important was happening, something really big, and we all did exactly what The Five had expected us to do, we picked up our phones and called everyone we could who we knew weren't watching television screens just then, to tell them to tune in and check it all out. And when we'd done just that, well, that's when the world first heard the soft sweet voice of Miss Hallie Ruko as she called out to her crew, that now famous phrase, "All right gang, it's party time!" And so it was.

That's when The Five turned to float up close to the cameras, and our TV screens were suddenly filled with youthful, grinning faces. Her first words directed to her world-wide audience were, "Hello everyone back on Earth! My name is Hallie Ruko, and I'm the Captain of this, the independent space craft Comet!" And we all remember the little wave and smile she gave us at that moment, as that was when countless young men around the globe, myself included, fell in love with her. And then her face grew a bit more serious, "Now first, on behalf of myself and my crew, whom I'm about to introduce to you, let us apologize for interrupting your television programming this way, but after I explain to you why we are doing so, I hope you will understand and forgive us."

And then she then went on to identify the four others. Miss Amber Lin Pratt, the Comet's Pilot and Navigator, Mr. Steven Harlan Emory, taking care of Life Support, Miss Jenifer Mayan, watching over Electronics and Propulsion, and Mr. Peter LeBois, minding both Propulsion and Structure.

Then Miss Ruko began explaining. She told us how those onboard The Comet were only a small number of a larger group of young folk who'd originally had only a loose association on-line as an informal internet hacker colony of sorts, but then, over a period of time the core membership of the group had become close friends and one by one they'd all relocated to a small town in Minnesota. She explained how they'd formed what the locals saw as a 'friendly hippie' colony, and how together they'd bought, at public auction, an old water tower that had been recently declared obsolete and that no one else had wanted.

She explained too, that the group had, over a period of years, managed to build and overlay upon the internet, a unique self-improving Artificial Intelligence structure using a wide variety of software devices but still all interlinked, a wholly new type of distributed computation network, through which the group had 'mined' the internet for information of all kinds. Of course, Miss Ruko did not at that time go into details as to exactly how the group had done this or what kinds of 'information' they'd been pulling in. We know all about those things now though, and everyone of us as a matter of course interfaces daily with that new and improved A.I. which still has at its heart some of the same code The Comet Five group had written years ago.

And then Captain Ruko hit us all with the news of what The Comet had been originally, a water tower built in the late nineteen fifties, and how it was that it was currently space borne, and on its way to the Moon. She told us how one of the members of the group had once poorly phrased the A.I. a question, that in a fit of pique over rising gasoline prices, he'd asked their pet A.I. for a better, cheaper, more efficient way of getting around. And then he'd forgotten he'd even asked that question. Only the broadly based A.I. they'd built did not forget it, and it kept searching for an answer.

And eventually, it came back with one. An answer that was to lead to the 'launching' of The Comet. That answer, of course, was a mechanism, battery operated, that could generate a field that with a bit of tuning, could simply cancel out to any degree, any specific gravity field, like that of Earth's. You could cancel out Earth's pull, but leave the Moon and Sun's intact, and so all you had to do was let them, the Sun, the Moon and everything else, just lift you.

She told us how those of the group who'd first read the report from the A.I. had laughed the results off, but then Miss Jenifer Mayan took the clear simple plans the A.I. had devised and out of curiosity she and Peter LeBois built a prototype unit, and it had worked. You can still see that same unit today in the Smithsonian in D.C.

Captain Ruko told us how the unit working had caused a lot of discussion within the group, but that in the end it was decided that they had to give this discovery to the world, even if it meant they themselves wound up in jail because of their hacking. And if it meant they had to go to prison, then they wanted to do the unveiling as dramatically as possible, - and they also wanted to prevent the discovery from becoming 'lost' or hidden away into some secret government program. Initially they were only going to fly an old school bus around town and get the local TV station to film it just to show how it was possible, but then one of them asked the A.I. what it was they could do that would create the most impact, and the A.I. told them, fly the water tower to the Moon. And then it told them just how to do it.

And of course that is just what they did.

The Comet Five went to the Moon, and they walked around on it and came safely home, - well Peter LeBois did lose three toes due to frostbite while he was out there on the Moon's surface, but he does not regret it and we saw it all as it happened, and a lot more.

And then as Captain Hallie Ruko was finishing the first of her many addresses to us from The Comet, she told us she was about to give a verbal command, a command the A.I. would recognize and would take world-wide action on. She told us that around the globe people everywhere would be getting an email from The Comet Five, and that it would bear as its subject line one word, "Freedom". She told us the email would arrive in the language of the recipient regardless of which country they currently lived, and that every email would carry in it the exact same simple instructions the A.I. had given them for building those same gravity canceling devices The Comet was now using. And then, giving us a big smile and holding both hands to the side of her face, she softly spoke the command, "Let loose the Kraken!"

And now anyone can easily build something that cancels out as much or as little of Earth's gravity as one would like, with the result being that The Comet Five has given us all, well, they have given all of us, - all of mankind, our freedom.