

# Voice Activated

*by William W Brownson*

This is my oldest write circa 1980

Seattle traffic was predictably horrible. It seemed as if it got worse every day. Rodney could hardly change lanes. He wanted to hit Circuit City if he could make the turn. Putting the turn signals and looking pleadingly over his shoulder for someone to let him in eventually paid off. Today was the day he was going to buy himself a new computer.

The Xenon machine with a 1.7 Gig Processor impressed him with its speed. Internet access was almost instantaneous. The clerk told him that was due to the store having a T1 line. Whatever that was. Rodney was afraid to ask it sounded expensive. The truth was that he had only \$500 for this computer. The price he was seeing here was going to put him in the surplus market for sure. So disappointedly he skulked out of Circuit City headed for the secondhand stores.

Rodney didn't like any of the machines he saw in the surplus stores. The Goodwill store was full of 486's with dozens of dirty monitors stacked in a rack at the back. He saw boxes full of mice, must have been a thousand of them of all sorts of sizes and shapes. None of them looked a bit like the Xenon systems slick translucent blue three-button mouse with scroll wheels on the top.

Rodney decided to give up and think about it for a day or two. His car was parked about six blocks away from the Goodwill Store because of the full parking lot. He was walking down First Avenue toward the waterfront when he saw the second hand store. It was a dingy little place with lots of antiques and trinkets hanging from the walls. Displayed in the window were Speakers, sound systems, radios and CD players and one sign. "FAST COMPUTER FOR SALE."

The clerk was a little old lady, must have been a looker once. She had tried to keep up the appearance with cosmetics. It didn't work. Rodney politely asked her, "Can I see the computer?" The little lady made a smile that looked as if it might crack the makeup, she pointed to the machine with a bright red polished long fingernail. The computer looked like a keyboard connected to a flat screen monitor about 20 inches in size. He asked her, "What kind of processor does it have?" She said, "I don't know. The man who hawked this computer said he would definitely need it back but he just never showed up again. I don't know much about computers. He told that this was a fast computer, so that was what I put on the sign."

"How do I turn it on," Rodney asked? The little lady answered, "The man just told it to come on and it did." Rodney was thinking this was a high-tech computer, voice activated and a flat screen monitor and all. The lady told him, "Give it a try sweetie." Rodney winced at the sweetie but he was hooked now, he had to check this thing out.

Rodney didn't want to just say to the computer, "Turn on computer." He was sure that if he did he would hear a room full of snickering laughter. "Ha! HA, see how he fell for that?" No doubt people would materialize out of every corner of the place having a good time because Rodney had fallen for the joke. Looking for an on switch was not productive either. It just didn't have one, nor did it have connections for mice or printers on the back. The entire thing was an attractively molded piece of some kind of plastic. Reaching down to touch the keyboard the screen snapped to life with a web page. It was Rodney's favorite site, The Black Vault. He reached out with his finger and touched the screen at a link named. "US Government Secrets Exposed." Instantly he was looking at, "Welcome to the Black Vault." The picture had amazing color and resolution. Not knowing what to think of that, he asked the woman, "You have a T1 line in here?" The woman asked, "What's a T1 line?"

Ignoring the question he replied, " What do you want for this?" The woman said that she would have to have \$500. Rodney didn't haggle. He just told her that he would take it.

Picking up the computer to take it out to the car had a strange effect. He had taken hold of the edges of the monitor screen and suddenly it started collapsing into hexagonal shapes that neatly folded into a flat plane across the top of the keyboard. The clerk lady asked, "Do they always do that?" Rodney truthfully replied, "I've never seen one that did that . . . before. I hope it isn't broken." A neat little carrying handle had popped out of one side of the keyboard and a membrane of some kind had covered the keys. Weird!

Not knowing what to think about this new acquisition, Rodney immediately started regretting the purchase. Every time he had gone out on a limb and soaked money into some cute device that had attracted him, he had bought a dud! A totally useless expensive game or toy that soon lost its allure and quickly found its way in the back of the closet. Now he was sure he had just added something new to the pile. Still, it had been a strange experience bringing up the Black Vault like that.

After entering the Apartment complex on Des Moines Way, he had held the computer up under his coat. In this apartment you didn't want anyone to know you had a new computer, stereo set, or whatever. One of the neighbors would turn it into drugs. Rodney hated living in this place but it was what he could afford right now.

Cassie was heading to the laundry with a basket full of her clothes. She saw Rodney and gave him a smile. "What do you have under your coat?" She asked. Thinking fast Rodney whispered, "It's a kitten. I don't want the manager to catch me sneaking it in." Cassie was a young black girl about fourteen very pretty and nice too. Her parents were both druggies. Cassie's dad was in jail now, that was not a bad thing, considering what a misery he was. The mom was totally wasted most of the time. She loved her mom dearly and spent a lot of time taking care of her. Cassie begged him to let her see the kitty. He said, "Not now, I want to make it a box." You had to be a quick thinker around this place to stay ahead of all the eventualities.

Cassie had shown too much interest in Rodney. He was too old to cultivate a friendship with this young girl. That could get him in big trouble. Seemed like there were many routes to destruction for a young man. He did like Cassie. She was like a beam of light in this dark place.

Safe in his room with the shades of his third story apartment properly concealing his activity, He placed the computer on his table. It must be a laptop of some sort. He didn't have a clue about how to recharge it when the batteries went down. As a matter of fact he wasn't even sure how he was going to get it open again. He placed it on the table and looked at it. Feeling like a fool, he said aloud, "Turn on computer." The computer responded immediately it unfolded the screen and removed the membrane over the keys in an instant. Wow! The old lady was right. This was voice activation at its supreme.

The screen had a definite three-dimensional effect to it. The page it was on now was a log on page. It was covered with strange symbols in many unfamiliar alphabets. Only one link displayed English. It read, "Current location translator. (Log on Mr. Ton Duc Too)," Rodney hit that link. He was face to face with an attractive blond female dressed in a form-fitting garment that fit pretty much like skin. She spoke directly to him, "What are you browsing for today Mr. Ton Duc Too?" Rodney didn't want to identify himself so he just asked, "What's available for browsing?" The Lady asked if he would like to see an English index or would he like to teleport directly to the Pleasure Zone. He responded with, "Index Please." The pretty lady blinked off and the screen was filled with text links in English. There was a strange subscript next to each of the links. It looked like Arabic. He chose the one that read Galactic travel. Surely he would be able to find the Back Vault on that page.

Clicking on history he saw a long list of obscure references to time lines. He picked a random link and

was confronted with another huge directory, this one was full of locations, and he noticed that one of them was labeled PERSONAL. The header read, "Time- lines for Mr. Ton Duc Too." The next display was a bar graph with the scale reading like this, GUT-FE0247933B14279899C21 at one end, and another long GUT number at the other end of the graph. RJ saw a link that said HELP. He clicked on it and was again looking at the pretty blond girl. She asked, "Would you like to teleport to a time line?" Rodney said, "I have a question. What does the GUT number refer to?" The blond lady paused a moment and answered have you forgotten Mr. Too?" Rodney, always able to pull a rabbit out of the hat, answered. This is a system check please reply. Her answer was, "Galactic Universal Time, of course then she volunteered, the two dates are the time line for your life in microseconds.

Rodney asked, "Can You translate the two dates to Earth time?" The pretty lady replied, "What frame of reference will you require for the correlation? He said, "Only the Year, Month, and Day please." The computer brought up a panel with two dates on it. The first was July 22, 1841; the second would have been several months ago. Rodney was hoping that the lady didn't make the connection that Mr. Ton Duc Too was deceased. He knew that computers only did what you programmed them to do and unless this one was programmed to detect the death of the previous owner it wouldn't be noticed.

At this point a panel popped up that read. "SYSTEM ANOMALY IMPROPER LOGIN DETECTED." Rodney spoke to the computer; "Shut off " The computer folded up the screen and brought up the membrane again.

Rodney didn't know what to think of this. He made himself a peanut butter sandwich with jelly and was drinking a glass of milk when the computer started to unfold all on its own. The blond lady was replaced with a man dressed in a similar tight fitting suit. He looked at Rodney and asked, "Would you like to create an account?" Rodney didn't know what to say he stammered, "Is an account necessary to log on to the Internet on this machine?" "Of course not, only to enter the Pleasure Palace," The man said. Rodney could see what was going on here and he wanted out. He spoke to the computer, "Search Engine Please."

At this point, he was looking at a middle-aged gentleman dressed in a business suit. The man asked, "What are you seeking?" Rodney said that he would like to see the Black Vault. The gentleman replied, "Would you like to teleport?" Please, Rodney replied, that was his big mistake. Instantly He found himself in a room full of what must have been millions of documents. The room stretched as far as he could see in every direction. The computer didn't go with him. Rodney wasn't sure how he was going to get out of here without it. Looking around he saw a couple of young girls reading some of the documents. He tried to ask them how to access his computer but they just went, "Sussh!" and continued reading.

He picked up one of the volumes. It was titled TIME LINES OF PLEASURE Volume 128B. Rodney opened the book and what he saw was startling. It was not printed. No text, each page was alive like his computer monitor screen. Looking into the page was a three dimensional experience. He was looking at an unclad young woman who asked him, "What would you like to see?" Rodney turned the page each page opened with a different person, some male some female. The words were in his head much like the blond woman's at the pleasure Palace. Rodney laid down the book and walked to a different table. This book was named TIMELINES FOR POLITICAL PURPOSE. Opening this was a thing he wished he had never done. He was looking at a bar graph named POLITICAL CONTROL OF EARTH. Rodney didn't know how to translate the hex code but could see that it had a definite ending.

At that point Rodney found himself back in his room. The computer was open and Cassie was looking at it. "What are you doing in my room?" Rodney asked Cassie. The girl who was obviously distressed by the situation replied. "I was going down the hallway and heard this strange noise coming from your room. I thought that you had gone to sleep and that the kitten had missed its momma and had started

crying. I knew that you would be concerned so I knocked on the door to ask if you needed any help. I never did see the kitty. Your door wasn't locked and your computer had a blinking message on it. "Return from teleport." The computer had a countdown timer running and as I watched it timed out. Now here you are. Where were you?

Rodney was surprised to see that he still had the book tucked up under his arm. Cassie was looking at it. Rodney said, "Don't even ask!"

## Part Two

Tears started to form in Cassie's eyes; she turned and started out the door. Rodney couldn't take that so he said, "Cassie I'm sorry, please let me explain." He went to the computer and sat down. "I'll show you something." Cassie still dabbing at her face with the back of her hand, while timidly approaching Rodney.

He opened the book now in his lap, "Look at this."

Cassie asked, "Where is the kitty?" "I'm sorry Cassie. I lied to you about the cat. I didn't want anyone to know that I had a computer." She said, "I would have kept it a secret too, things have been taken from me. I understand Rodney."

"Cassie something really strange is going on with this computer and I have to show someone. Can you keep a secret?" It was easy to tell that Cassie liked secrets because where once tears were now was a smile. "Sure I'll never tell anyone", Cassie almost whispered as if she was afraid of ears on the walls.

Rodney opened the book to the first page, the text looked like a solid object shimmering on the page. It read in English Timelines for the Proxima sector. Rodney turned the page and saw an index with a list of planets conspicuous in the list was Earth. Cassie said "Wow"! As she looked at the page, Rodney reached out and touched the Earth with his finger. Now they were looking at the timeline that he had seen in the vault.

"TIMELINE FOR POLITICAL CONTROL OF EARTH, what does that mean, Rodney?" I don't know but do you want to find out? "Yes", said Cassie. Rodney took up his note pad and wrote down the ending GUT number with all its code. He then ordered the computer to come on. Cassie felt like a little girl that had just walked into the twilight zone. Rodney wasn't feeling much different.

"Turn on Computer", Rodney ordered. The computer did its unfolding act and popped up the view-screen as before. "Internet please", was the next command. They were looking at the pretty girl. She said, "I see you have a friend with you." Cassie gasped, "She can see me." "Of course I can" Are you an anonymous user or do you want to use your name?"

Rodney spoke up, "We prefer anonymity." Rodney asked the girl, "I would like for you to translate a date for me." He read the girl the long GUT number. She replied with "August 31, 2003 Earth time and then asked, "Would you like to teleport to that time-line?"

On the computer the countdown popup appeared. Rodney said, "I missed that last time." He set the slider to timeout in 20 minutes and waited.

To be continued . . .