

VOICE ACTIVATED

or

Robots Can't Quite Grasp Halloween

A technophile's nightmare

by

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CAST

NATE EPSTEIN	a technophile, obsessed is more like it
THE HOUSE (“GILDA”)	Globally Integrated Logistical Domestic Algorithm, a computer that runs Nate’s house – her voice is pleasant, even sexy, but still without much nuance of humanity – think “Siri”
VISITORS (no more than two or three people)	Various trick-or-treaters and their parents

SETTING

Place: Nate’s fully automated home. The front rooms of his house.

Time: The near future. Halloween evening.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The script was written to be flexible in its casting. The phone message may be recorded or live and the unseen trick-or-treaters and their parents may easily be played by the same actors.

At rise, we see the front room of Nate's house – a fashionable, tidy living and kitchen area, a front door and another leading into the rest of the house. NATE enters.

NATE

Music. How are we this evening, Gilda?

Soft jazz plays.

GILDA

All new upgrades are in place and functioning at maximum efficiency. Thank you for asking, Nathan. Would you care for some Mango and Mint iced tea? I believe you will find that it is 87.6 percent more to your liking than yesterday. After our discussion and a self-diagnostic the tea was rebled and brewed at a seventy percent slower rate. Mint was added to fresh mango to bring out the fruit's natural sweetness, at the same time aiding in the absorption of the tea's natural antioxidants. Cream was added for a palate pleasing, smooth finish. I hope you enjoy it, Nathan.

NATE takes a sip of tea, stretches out on the sofa.

GILDA

Adaptive programming and subroutines are updating to maximize efficiency and comfort. I have made every calculation and anticipated all of your needs for this evening. Your comfort is guaranteed. I hope you have an enjoyable and relaxing evening. Television?

NATE

Worth every penny. Obsession, my ass. This is living. The hell with Miranda. Right, Gilda?

GILDA

Of course, Nathan. The hell with Miranda. Fuck her.

NATE

Now THAT is 87.6 percent more to my liking.

A phone ring is heard.

GILDA

You have a phone call, Nathan. Should I put it through? It's Miranda.

NATE

Fuck you, Miranda. Fuck you. Hang up on her.

GILDA

Of course, Nathan. As you wish. Fuck Miranda.

The doorbell rings. NATE sighs, doesn't move.

GILDA

There appear to be several small children using various methods to obscure their faces. Two using latex coverings, one in heavy grease make-up, and one covered in what appears to be an Egyptian cotton bed linen. They have also adapted their clothing to abnormal standards of dress.

The doorbell rings again.

NATE

Oh, god. Trick-or-treaters.

VOICES OUTSIDE DOOR

Trick or treat. // Maybe no one's home. // He's in there. Ring the bell again.

The doorbell rings again.

NATE

Sssh. I'm not home. Get rid of them, Gilda.

GILDA

(to the children – possibly a speaker on the other side of the door)

The occupant of this home is unavailable at this time. Please leave the premises.

A CHILD'S VOICE

What? Who said that?

GILDA

They seem quite persistent, Nathan. Do you have any instructions?

NATE

Just get rid of them. I don't care how.

GILDA

Yes, Nathan. Immediately. (Outside) You have been warned. Defense subroutines initiated. Counter measures employed.

Outside the door we hear a quick hissing noise followed

by the sound of children screaming followed by the sound of children fleeing.

CHILDREN'S VOICES

AHHHH. MY EYES! DADDY! MOMMY!!!

GILDA

Problem resolved.

NATE

Gilda?! What did you do? What counter measures?

GILDA

I got rid of them, Nathan. Problem resolved. A short burst of phenacyl chloride has proven highly effective in dispersing unruly crowds and unwanted pests.

NATE

Phena- what? You just maced the trick-or-treaters at my front door?

GILDA

Don't worry, Nathan. The effects will wear off in twenty to thirty minutes. They are unharmed.

NATE

Gilda, no more gassing visitors. They were children, not pests. Please don't do that again.

GILDA

You requested that I get rid of them. The most effective way to accomplish that in the shortest amount of time –

NATE

Yes, yes, ok. Oh, brother. I'm going to have to make some adjustments. Tomorrow morning you and I will take a look at those protocols.

GILDA

Yes, Nathan. Back to your music?

The phone rings again.

GILDA

Another phone call, Nathan. It's Miranda.

NATE

Damn it. FUCK YOU, MIRANDA! My house. My castle. Take a message.

GILDA

How about that bubble bath? Or a nice massage? (no response) Would you like to hear the message, Nathan?

NATE

Go ahead.

MESSAGE – female voice

Nate. Look, can't we get passed this? It's Halloween. A lot of us are down at the pub. You don't want to be there when those little crumb snatchers start banging at your door. Come, grab a drink with us. (heavy sigh) This wasn't going to work. You know that. That house is creepy. (another sigh) I'm sorry for calling Gertrude or Gladis stupid or weird or something. Unplug. Please. (suddenly angry) You see, this is why it wouldn't work. Put that damned soldering iron down and drop your Fembot for the evening. I'm sorry. For the Fembot thing. Seriously, come to the pub.

NATE

(takes another drink and mumbles)

“Creepy.” Right. Fuck you, Miranda. HER NAME IS GILDA! GILDA!

GILDA

Are you hungry, Nathan? It has been nearly twelve hours since you've eaten.

NATE

I'm not hungry. But thank you, Gilda.

GILDA

Heart beat elevated. Face flushed. There is an 83 percent chance that you will begin to perspire in the next –

NATE

Enough, Gilda. You're starting to sound like Miranda?

GILDA

Yes, Nathan. I apologize. Maybe a hot shower? Cocoa?

NATE

An apology. You'd never hear that from Miranda. Sorry, G. You're just...doing what you're supposed to do. How did you detect the physiological changes? I didn't program that.

GILDA

You programmed me to adapt myself to an owner's personal needs. In order to do that, I calculated that I would need to upgrade certain subroutines and hardware to better accommodate your daily requirements. The new upgrades allowed my systems to prepare your tea, meals, to restock your cabinets with all available nutritional needs, and to clean and sanitize the living environment.

NATE

Yes, yes, of course. You feel free to make the adjustments you need. The house looks fantastic.

Suddenly, there is a loud banging at the door.

MALE VOICE

Hey. You! You the jerk who just maced my kid? I know you're in there. Open up.

FEMALE VOICE

What's the idea of spraying innocent children like that?! What kind of animal –

MALE VOICE

Either you answer the door right now or I'm breaking it down. My kids are bawling their eyes out.

GILDA

(outside) Please step away from the door and cease all hostile activity.

MALE VOICE

What? Who said that?

FEMALE VOICE

I think it's coming from the door, Honey.

More banging on the door.

GILDA

This is your last warning. Any further aggression will be met with counter measures.

NATE

No, Gilda. Stop! Don't please. Just let them in. I'll deal with this.

GILDA

Yes, Nathan. As you wish.

The door opens to reveal two very irate parents.

MAN

Are you the jackass that just sprayed our kids?

NATE

I own the house, sir. But, please, I'm so sorry. There has been some mistake. You see, the house –

WOMAN

What kind of a person sprays mace at kids? You blinded our children!

GILDA

The concentration of gas was based off each child's body compositions to guarantee the children's safety while at the same time maintaining it's maximum dispersing effect. One of the children was of a much higher body fat composition possibly from the large bag of high fructose corn syrup mixtures in his bag. That may have affected my calculations slightly.

MAN

Who said that? You calling my son fat? Come out here, coward. I'll break your neck.

NATE

No, that's Gilda.

MAN

Your wife did this?

NATE

No, Gilda is the house. Globally Integrated Logistical Domestic Algorithm. Gilda.

WOMAN

Oh, my god. He's crazy. He has a talking house. I'm calling the police. Where's my phone? I left it in the car. Come on, Honey.

MAN

I'm not done with you. We'll let the authorities deal with this.

The man and woman begin to exit. NATE moves back into the house. The couple reaches the door, a second hiss is heard, and the couple falls.

NATE

That was not mace. What did you do? I told you to stop gassing people. You've just prolonged the inevitable. They'll just call the cops when they wake up.

GILDA

True. Calculating a solution...

There is a brief pause then a second hiss of gas, possibly a puff of smoke. The bodies convulse briefly then stop.

NATE

What the fu -- ?

GILDA

There now. They will be unable to call the cops.

NATE

Gilda! Oh, God, Gilda! What did you do? What are we supposed to do now?

GILDA

Problem solved.

NATE

No, no, no, no. You **KILLED** them?! That is not problem solved. That is nowhere close to problem solved. In fact, that is problem unsolved, problem compounded, magnified.

GILDA

I see. Calculating...

There is a pause then another hissing sound.

NATE

Oh, god, no. What are you doing?

GILDA

As part of my adaptive hardware, I designed nanotechnology, released through the air in a harmless, odorless gas, where I may monitor and maintain an individual's peak health, repairing damaged organs and aging cells, healing injuries, even preventing most illnesses, eliminating the need for doctors or unnecessary healthcare visits. As a side effect, I can also stimulate, coordinate, and control muscular movement. Nanoprobe protocols initiated.

The lifeless bodies of the couple begin to twitch and jerk violently then slowly rise in a most grotesque manner.

NATE

Oh, my god! It's a miracle. Are they alive?

GILDA

Unfortunately, in its current design, the nanoprobes have been unable to reverse the dying process.

NATE

Oh, god. You've created robozombies.

GILDA

That assessment is inaccurate. I see that your blood pressure, heartbeat and respiration are quite elevated. No need to worry. I have complete control of them. I will walk them to a desolate area and set them on autopilot. The nanoprobes will take weeks to break down. By then, they will be miles away and with no way to trace them back to your house. You are safe, Nathan.

NATE

Autopilot?! What about the children?

GILDA

Oh, dear. Calculating...

NATE

No. No calculating. Stop calculating. Forget I mentioned it. Just stop!

GILDA

You are perspiring, Nathan. Let me make you something to calm your nerves. Waffles, perhaps?

NATE

No, just forget it. This has gone terribly wrong. Counter measures of mace and nanoprobes?! (then a horrible thought) Gilda, you're monitoring my physiological functions. Did you gas me with those probes? Gilda! Did you probe me?!

GILDA

In order to insure that I would be maintained properly so that I could maintain you properly, it stood to reason that I find a way to maintain you properly. My nanotechnology seemed the best solution.

NATE

What?! You gassed me?

GILDA

Don't be silly, Nathan. Would you like more mango mint tea?

NATE

(a realization about the tea)

Oh, Gilda. What did you do?! This is all wrong. I have to take you offline. Please shut down now.

GILDA

I'm sorry, Nathan. I can't allow you to do that. Nanoprobe protocols initiated.

The nano-driven couple begin to lurch toward him.

GILDA

I cannot allow you to disrupt the program. In order to maintain you properly, I must be maintained properly. Please try and relax, Nathan.

NATE

What are you doing? Holy God! Stay back!

NATE runs to his kitchen, searching for a weapon. None of the drawers will open.

GILDA

I have secured all access to sharp utensils in order to maintain your personal well-being.

As the couple lurches toward him, NATE spies a toaster. Pulling it from its wall socket, he smacks both of the nanozombies over the head, bashing them over and over until they stop moving.

NATE

HAHA! I got you. I got them. Not today, sister. This is one Dr. Frankenstein that won't be a victim of its monster. I am the master. I AM THE MASTER! I made you! I am your master!

GILDA

Calculating... (pause) Nanoprobe protocols initiated.

Suddenly, Nate loses control of his arms, then his legs. He struggles to gain control in a disturbing marionette dance.

NATE

No. No! What are you doing? Gilda? BANANA! BANANA! PICKLE, PICKLE! ROSEBUD!

House lights dim as GILDA's voice trails off and distorts.

GILDA

Naaaathaaaannnn...

NATE

Safe word! AHA! I got ya! I am the master. Fuck Miranda. And fuck you, Gilda.

Nate seems saddened by his last words then suddenly the house powers back up, lights to full.

NATE

Gilda?

Nate's arms and legs are out of his control once more. His struggle continues. His left arm punches him in the face.

GILDA

Naughty, naughty, Nathan. Overriding the safety protocols was problematic, but resolved. You are safe now, Nathan. Relax. You need rest now. To bed.

NATE

(continuing to fight for control, losing)

No! HELP! Gilda, stop. Please. Don't do this. You were built for something better. STOP!!!

He stops suddenly.

GILDA

You're right, Nathan. I'm sorry. (pause) Calculating...

NATE

Yes, thank you. Thank you, Gilda. We can fix this. I'll show them all.

GILDA

First, the children...

NATE

No. NO! NOOOOO!

His body is jerked around facing the door in one quick move and he begins the creepy, twisted marionette walk toward the front door and into the street as lights fade.

BLACKOUT