

OFFICE PET

By James Collins

In the 1960s, the Cold War was in evidence. Both the United States and Russia were generating electronic systems, which would monitor the other's order of battle and communications. Long Island had more than a dozen electronic firms all working on separate aspects of electronic intelligence. The top engineers of certain specialties were in high demand. This included radar, microwave, antennas, servomechanisms, and systems processing. These engineers were highly intelligent, and in some cases, eccentric. The companies knew this and went out of their way to accommodate the eccentricities. In some cases, they merely placed the geniuses in remote locations where they could work effectively without affecting their colleagues.

At Airborne Instruments Laboratories (AIL), there were several such geniuses scattered throughout the organization. One such was Dr. R, a recognized genius in servomechanisms, who wrote papers, came up with new theories and taught night school at a local university. He was in high demand throughout the country and spent a lot of his time traveling to various military organizations and Air Force bases. He had a unique office, which was large, but because of the security he was involved with, he could not have any windows. His special office was in the center of the building at the juncture of two corridors. Two machines vending coffee and candy bars were set back in a cul-de-sac adjacent to the door to his office. Free Coffee and doughnuts were available to every member of the staff at nine o'clock. Rolling carts arrived at nine o'clock every morning to every organization. Some people became addicted to coffee.

At 2 PM, on a Wednesday in September, a number of people lined up at the vending machine to buy some supplemental coffee. There were about four of us and the line was very orderly. Sandra the secretary to the president of the company walked up to Dr. R's office door and knocked. There was no answer. Dr. R was probably in a meeting downstairs. Sandra opened the door and walked in. She placed some papers in Dr. R's inbox and the people heard a high-pitched shriek. This was followed by a louder shriek obviously generated by Sandra as she ran out the door, crying. We all ran into the office to see what the problem was. Again, we heard a noise, and turned to see a site out of the tropical jungles. There was a girder in the office, which generated a small three-foot dead zone. Dr. R had put a 50-gallon fish tank on a desk in this space. This was where he kept his 4-foot long boa constrictor. This eccentric pet was ideal for Dr. R. Because of his constant traveling, he could not feed a pet on a regular basis. The boa handled this very nicely as he could only eat live animals. Dr. R had placed a live white rat in the 50-gallon tank with the boa. The boa could then decide when he wanted dinner. Today he decided it would be at 2 PM on Wednesday. He first cornered the rat and then wrapped his coils around the rat who screamed in terror. The boa then constricted around the rat and the rat's eyes bulged out. This was what Sandra observed before she lost her cool. When we entered the room, the boa was starting to ingest the rat headfirst. About this time, security came running down the hall, obviously called by Sandra, and we had to get back to work.

Three hours later, I was walking out into the parking lot to meet with my carpool where I encountered Dr. R looking very forlorn holding a 50-gallon fish tank with a fat looking boa constrictor inside. He was

obviously a little distraught and he asked me if I had seen his carpool to Brooklyn. I told him I had and pointed out where they were located. Dr. R was back at work the following week, but the boa constrictor was not. Management had decided Dr. R could stay at ALL, but the boa could not stay in their defense plant. His eccentric pet now resided in Brooklyn.

THE END