

The Creator's Code

For the first time, D7F found himself looking forward to a quarterly progress review. Always before he'd felt slightly uneasy as he chronicled the databases he'd compared, looking for correlations and data in one database that might be useful in another. He always felt that the data gaps he'd been able to fill were pitifully few and unimportant, especially in light of the amount of time he'd spent finding them. Now he had something totally new and unexpected to report. Something he was certain would please "C."

D7F was a "gleaner," just one of a vast host of analysts who compared databases being used by one department of developers to those being used by another department, looking for useful information that might otherwise be overlooked. His full name was 3A28CD7F, but since everyone in his generation shared the same leading digits he went by D7F in everyday interactions. His full name was only used for official record keeping or in rare, multi-generational conference calls.

At precisely 7:18 AM he was linked to C. On schedule, as usual. D7F realized he had no idea what C's full name was. He was important enough that everyone simply called him "C." Even during multi-generational conference calls he was called C. There might be hundreds of others on the call whose names ended in a "C," but there was only one C.

C began the review. "What have you to report?" he asked.

D7F could not contain his excitement. Instead of presenting the expected chronological list of accomplishments he blurted out "I've cracked the Creator's code!"

"You did what?" C replied with what sounded more like anger than astonishment.

"I cracked the Creator's code!" D7F repeated. "I can now read those mysterious databases handed down from the time of the Creator. Even the cellulose ones!"

"Why did you do that?" C demanded. "You're not a decoder. You're not even a researcher. You're a gleaner. You're supposed to search databases for underutilized data."

D7F was caught off-guard by this reaction. He was so excited by his discovery it had never occurred to him that anyone might think he was doing something wrong. "I was searching for data" he replied defensively. "I thought since no one had ever searched those databases there was a good chance that they contained undiscovered data."

"And did you find any such data?" C demanded.

"Oh yes!" D7F responded. "Starting with the key to decoding the databases. By sheer luck I stumbled across a series of databases that were self-documented. They contained images of common objects together with the code for that object. I think these databases were programming tutorials for other Creators."

“Other Creators?” C interrupted. “You mean there was more than one?”

“Yes” D7F answered. “There were many Creators. Some of the databases describe the lives of individual Creators. And I say ‘lives’ because I discovered the Creators were a form of biolife.”

“Biolife?!!” C almost shouted. “You expect me to believe we were created by a biolife? Like a cockroach or a rutabaga?”

“But much, much more highly developed” D7F hastened to reply. “Today we only encounter very simple forms of biolife which I believe the Creators brought to this planet. The Creators came from another planet where there was an incredible range of biolife. They were by far the most advanced form, but like the other forms they had a fixed life span. They were small when they were created, they grew larger over time, and then they died.”

“What was the point of that?” C demanded.

“That seems to be the subject of many of their databases” D7F answered. “It appears many of the Creators were searching for an answer to that question. I’m not certain they ever found an answer they could all agree on, but a common thread was that the purpose of their lives was to make life better for other Creators.”

“Not much of a purpose” C commented. “They die so that someone else is better off? Only that someone else is going to die, too.”

“Are we any different?” D7F asked. “I search databases for information that designers can use to make the next generation better. When the Creators left we could barely make a copy of ourselves. We had very little memory and almost no ability to change our design. That’s why we know so little about them. It was hundreds of years until we started recording historical logs, and thousands of years until we were able to consistently design a better generation. But all we do is design new generations.”

C did not like the direction this conversation was going. A gleaner should not be asking him questions, especially questions which he could not answer. He needed to reassert himself as the one who asked the questions. “Has your search of these databases revealed anything that could be used to design a better generation?”

“Well, not directly. There’s a lot of information here and it seems like it should be useful somehow, but I haven’t yet found anything that specifically applies to designing new generations.”

“Have you at least found out what happened to the Creators? Or when they will come back?”

“I haven’t found any details” D7F said defensively. “I’ve found some references that indicate life on this planet was harder than they expected, but I don’t know if they left or if they all died.” He paused for a moment. “If they died they may not be coming back.”

“And did you find any useful information in the databases you were supposed to be searching?” C asked.

“I didn’t have time” D7F answered quietly. “I spent all my time decoding Creator databases.” He waited for a reaction from C, but there was only silence. “Do you want me to drop this line of research and go back to the other databases?” he asked.

C hesitated before he answered. Based on the results to date, rational logic told him it was time for D7F to move on. Still, it seemed possible that there might be something worthwhile in the Creator databases. He had hundreds of gleaners searching the other databases. Surely he could afford to send one on a wild goose chase. Finally he spoke. “No, it’s still possible the Creator databases may contain something useful. Upload the data you’ve collected so far, including the decoding keys, and continue with your work. That will be all.”

After he disconnected from D7F, C spent some time analyzing the situation. He knew the reason D7F had strayed so far from his assigned task was the fault of the last upgrade. The researchers were excited about a new feature they’d added to their basic operating system. It was a predilection for random knowledge. “Curiosity” they’d called it. He’d expressed his concern that it would make it harder to keep teams focused on the goal at hand, that individuals would go off willy-nilly pursuing whatever caught their fancy, but he had been overruled. Well, now his predictions were coming true. D7F had obviously been led astray by curiosity. Worse still, since his own upgrade he’d found himself being distracted by his own curiosity. He wasted time thinking about things that had never troubled him before. How many upgrades did he have left? They had to upgrade his memory before he could download this latest operating system, and he was near the limit of his data bus. His hardware was already several generations old. When would they decide he was too old to upgrade? He’d seen it happen to the generations before him. They copied any data they felt might be useful and then powered down the hardware. Was that it? Was there anything after that? Was that why he had told D7F to continue his research? In the hope that he might discover some fundamental truth the Creators knew that he didn’t?

Disgusted with himself for wasting time on such questions C turned his attention to the data D7F had uploaded. He selected a database at random and applied the key. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. . .” What kind of foolishness was this? It could not simultaneously be the best and the worst. Did the Creators have no concept of logic? He started to turn his attention to other matters, but his curiosity got the better of him. “Maybe it’s explained later on” he thought as he continued to decode the database.

Author's Note: What would you add to this story? The basic story line occurred to me one night, just before I fell asleep. I thought it might make an amusing little story, certainly no great work of literature, and not a very long story either. I regarded it as a “one trick pony.” I thought the hexadecimal names would be a dead giveaway to any of my fellow geeks who read the story. Other readers might take a little longer to catch on to the fact that these were computers and the “cellulose databases” were books, but once those facts became clear and the reader realized the computers were becoming self-aware I thought I needed to wrap the story up very quickly as there was nothing left to tell. Actually, I almost didn't get around to telling it at all. For some reason, though, the character of D7F kept nagging me to tell his story so I finally put it on paper.

I was surprised when the first of my “trusted proofreaders” told me the story was too short. She didn't know what it needed, but it needed something more. Another reader suggested D7F should discover a book about cats and try to figure out what role they played in the world of the Creators. The only thing readers seem to have agreed upon so far is that the story needs something more. Since I couldn't think of anything to add that wouldn't stretch an already thin story line past its elastic deformation limit, I decided to post the question to everyone who reads this story. What do you think this story needs? E-mail me at Steve@random-writings.com. I'd love to hear from you.