

Olivia's Pet Project

by blob

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Tak, tak, tak.

Olivia was furiously at work. The hum of electronics was the only sound in evidence beyond the operation of her keyboard.

Tak, tak, tak.

One couldn't really call her a workaholic. It wasn't her Function (Administrative Entry Technician) that kept her late at the data center. No, it was the bank after bank of unused workstations.

Tak, tak, tak.

The Bureau paid her to key files into her workstation. It was dull, uninvolved, thankless work. It had some advantages, though. The pay was adequate, particularly considering the mindlessness of her actual duties. There was a never-ending supply of young men shuffling through the data center. There was also, most importantly, petaflops of unused computing power after hours.

Tak, tak, tak.

Her supervisor, Mr. Borsk, had no idea what she did there at nights. He didn't *want* to know. If it was unethical or – gasp – against Bureau regs, he'd either be implicated or be forced to lose his most capable and, let's face it, most attractive minion. No, far better to maintain plausible deniability and keep his department happy and efficient.

Tak, tak, tak.

Olivia used these things to her advantage, of course. At 24, she didn't have to do a great deal to maintain her striking figure. She was perhaps a bit on the waifish side but gracefully curved. She had light blue-grey eyes and soft brown hair artificially highlighted with reddish hues which she wore shoulder length in an almost deliberately nonchalant manner. She'd been told she had the cutest nose on the planet, and she wasn't inclined to disagree. She wasn't terribly proud of it, but even in this enlightened age, an attractive woman finds certain things – and certain people – pliable.

Tak, tak, tak.

Petaflops. Several million billion mathematical operations every second. A number with fifteen zeroes behind it. The kind of computing

power that could render virtual reality so compelling that many people had stopped recreational travel altogether. Surgeons could image a person's body in such detail that they could practice a complicated surgery until they got it right, and then leave a robot to recreate their best efforts on the patient. Power that, in the wrong hands, could raze worlds.

Tak, tak, tak.

Olivia's little array of workstations was nothing compared to the awesome power of The Network. No civilian would ever have access to that monstrosity, though. She'd put her supercomputer together right under the Bureau's nose. Any other machine with that capability would be registered and regulated such that she couldn't use it for her purposes, but this one dutifully disassembled itself each night on her command.

Tak, tak, tak.

But really, setting up her subversive machine was just a lark. A diversion while she procrastinated at her true task.

*Tak, tak, tak, **TAK!** Click, roll roll, click, click.*

On Friday evening, November 30, 2012, Olivia submitted her winning entry to the National Novel Writing Month's official site. At 50,243 words, she'd only just made it, but the overwhelming sense of achievement blocked out the stinging memory of her previous seven years' efforts, all of which fell short.

Alternate (Original) Ending †

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*Tak, tak, tak, **TAK! BOOM!!***

And for good reason. Olivia had just completed her work.

The world ended. Not because of war, famine, disease, solar supernova, asteroid, or other "act of God". The world ended because one dedicated young woman was mad at her boss.

† Originally written (with pad & pen!) on October 13, 2005 at the Cleveland NaNoWriMo meeting. The inspiration was originally NaNo itself, but as I was writing, I decided it needed a "bigger" ending, thus was the end of the world theme born. However, after showing it to a colleague and further reflection, the NaNo element was probably the stronger ending, so I went with it.