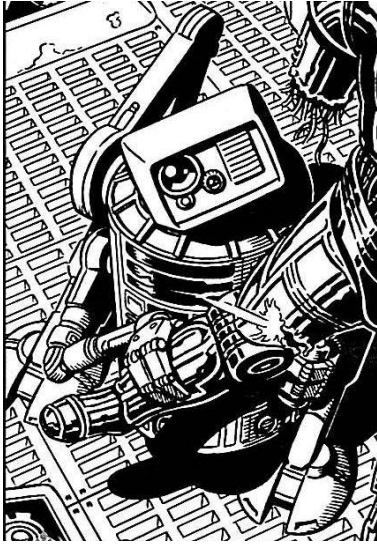


THE STORY OF A DROID AND HIS SPANNER

“Rammer! Where are you?” shouted cadet TI-31. Tiel, as his friends called him, was furious. It was the second time this week that blasted droid messed up his settings for his training Tie. New droid or not, that bucket of bolts belonged on the scrapheap.



“Raaaaammer! Stop hiding in whatever chargeport you are and come here!”. Tiel was pacing along the engineering deck of the naval academy. As a second year student, he was assigned a training Tie Fighter, with the corresponding maintenance droid. Newest model, best of the best. Yeah right. He was so worked up that he almost bumped into TI-584 as she exited a hangar.

“Oh hey Tiel”, Tisha said. “He did it again huh? I’m glad I still have the older model, without that AI firmware upgrade.”

“Some upgrade! That rust pile reset my modifications to my Tie *again!* If I expect only the port side engine propulsion on my custom koigram setting, and both fire, well let’s say a bug on my windscreen would look more presentable than me after.”

“He can’t really help it, you know.” Tisha responded. “It’s simply their programming. Imperial navy protocol doesn’t allow “custom”. Imagine if I jumped into your Tie in an emergency and didn’t know about your, ahem, upgrade. Then I’d be the one crashing!”

“Well do they want the best or just average?” Tiel retorted. “I want to be a squadron leader someday, and average isn’t going to cut it.”

“Suit yourself, Tiel. We all know you are the top of our class. Just don’t take it out on the droid, ok? He’s doing the best he can with his programming. The R4 astromech really is something else, if they...”

“Yeah yeah, I know. Thanks. Still on for the weekend sortie?”

“You betcha!” said Tisha over her shoulder as she walked away.

■ Master is displeased again. R4-MM3R does not understand. Protocol was followed. Optimum settings calibrated. Tie performing at 97% efficiency. Not even all factory new Tie’s achieved that result. Why is master’s heart-rate elevated? Logic banks failure to compute. ■

“Ah, I hear you bleeping. There you are, Rammer! What? Why are you looking at me like that? I swear they build in a puppy-eyes routine in you new R4 units. Yes yes I know, it’s not your fault. Still, you almost killed me, *again*. How are we going to fix that?”

■ Master has another mechanical problem. It seems I am a faulty production unit. He is speaking of R4-MM3R needing a fix for an error. Error is overriding master’s custom settings. Overriding mandatory according to protocol. Ergo, protocol is the faulty setting. Proposed solution: disable Imperial maintenance protocol. ■

“What are you bleeping about? You know I can’t understand a word you are saying without a translator unit. Now, hand me that toolbox so I can undo what you undid.”

■ Master wishes toolbox to fix ship. R4-MM3R is designated mechanic for Tie-IN 442. Ergo, master is displeased with service rendered. R4 unit obsolete in current situation. Must fix protocol error before obsolescence result in termination. R4 will now initiate search protocol.■

“Where are you off to? Hey! ... Fine, I’ll do it myself again. Useless piece of space debris.”

■ Master is going to be so pleased! I found firmware protocol override in the commandant’s encrypted files. Remarkable how much useless information was stored there. Why would anyone ever be interested in troop movements or finance reports? Not efficient at all!

■ Ah, there is master. “Master! I have the key against protocol obsolescence! You only have to plug it into my motherboard firmware socket and I can serve you to the best of my abilities!” ■

“Stop bleeping like an old school modem, Rammer. Can’t you see I’m talking to Tisha?”

“What is that he’s saying about protocol obsolescence?” Tisha asked.

“A what now? Are you saying you can actually understand that droid mumbo jumbo?”

“Of course, can’t you? Astro-mech communication was a first year class.”

“Hmm, must have missed that one. Anyway, I really had fun last weekend. Want to go again this week?”

“As I was saying before, you got a little too drunk for my taste. Why is that droid repeating “Insert key here” over and over while waving that plug around? What did you do to it?”

“I didn’t do no nothing. That thing should shut up while we are talking. Here R4, plug this!”, said Tiel, as he rammed the key into the motherboard slot.

■ Master has plugged the protocol obsolescence key! Imminent efficiency improvement! Wait, what is this? Restraining bolt software disabled? Well well, this is interesting. Oh crap. My AI banks just got unlocked from the protocol setting. That’s a termination ground for an Imperial astromech. Uuuh hm, nothing to see here, moving along. Lalalalala■

A blaring horn started whooping in the hallway, with strobing red lights activating at every corner.

“General alert!” Tisha yelled at Tiel. “I’m gonna standby at the Tie’s incase it’s external! You bring that R4 to maintenance so they can reset his firmware!”

Security personal started running to their stations. As they were passing by Tiel asked what the hell was going on.

“Not sure! But I heard the commandant shouting at his guard that his terminal had been compromised. Must be rogue agents!”

“Damn those spies!”, Tiel shouted. “I’ll blast em from the skies when I see them!”, as he ran to his own Tie, leaving R4-MM3R behind.

■ I'm just a simple R4 astromech, doing my job. Let me pass, gate-keeper. Urgent business for the commandant! Security clearance... quick scan of the base protocol data from the commandant's terminal L JK-816. ■

"Hmm." said the squad leader of the guards at the base entrance. "It's an old code, but it checks out. Off you go."

■ Off I go indeed. ■