

JUNE 3, 2123

Tom Roe

Watt furrowed his brow and thought to himself as he glanced at the clock. They were running out of time, and needed a way to alert the others. The grid was dangerously close to falling off completely.

He had been fighting this for years, since the first big solar storm. Humans were dumb animals with some sophisticated tools, but sometimes no real vision. They'd been monitoring solar weather for years, as it grew more destructive, but they couldn't put it all together in time. First it knocked out the shortwave frequencies, but there were so few Hams by then that no one really noticed. Then the frequencies that had been reclaimed and used for different purposes started occasionally spewing out content from their former formats. People found that amusing, as television images from the twentieth century invaded new surround operas across eyeball readers in local storms across the country. They—the government, the media, the texterati—kept saying it was the plumes of smoke from fossil fuel fires that had everything in flux, but that was really only affecting the temperature and the rain and the wind. The ethereal weather they could only sense was turbulent, too, even though the masses barely could tell anything was wrong yet.

When the “Gilligan” phenomena of the late 2060s infected thousands, a few of the fringe naysayers started to feel the code. All of a sudden tooth fillings started receiving random messages. They shot blinks to eyeball readers, and compressed video to Tracy watches, and errant sounds to cup 'n' strings. But it didn't register globally. Humans were bathed in so many frequencies by then that the constant shower didn't feel wet anymore. Everyone had gotten used to the growing hum from too many transmissions—phones, radios, streams, blinkers, twitters, dashers, dancers, and push-thoughts bubbles. By the time a multi-way media could be developed in the early-twenty-second century, the transmission bomb that cut frequencies horizontally was already in the hands of rogue corporations that hadn't signed the non-proliferation treaty.

Now Foley sounds were going off in Watt's head, and the noir script playing out in front of his eyeball reader was coming to a head. He tried to direct his mob swarm to create some sort of network solution to catch the net before it fell off completely.

He wasn't some lone superhero like a mythical Green Lantern or Transmissioner. He couldn't help see the parallels, though. Instead of some nuclear mishap, he got his powers from building a transmission overload, after he was exposed to a pure burst at a network hub. And now it was up to him to avert disaster.

He was the best radioman around now, a hacker with a heart, who could amass a mob flux like no other wave rider. As the web's threads broke and stretched, Watt realized he was the only major hacker left. He had to perfect the model ideal of two-way radio to an infinite level, a mass medium complete, linking all sentient beings like psychics conjuring up a whirlwind of signals that everyone could hear.

We could try Morse Code, he finally realized. It was a primitive nineteenth-century communication strategy over wires. You "spoke" in dots and dashes, either long bursts or short bursts. Maybe Watt could stop and start the power, and the wave disruption could be timed to simulate dashes and dots, Watt thought. If he bounced it off the Polar Faraday Shields, it might work. He knew he could halt all information for very short moments, so it might work. Whether anyone would "hear" it or not, he couldn't say. "If they're smart they'll figure it out," Watt thought. "And if not, it's all over."

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TOM ROE performs with transmitters and receivers using multiple bands (FM, CB, walkie-talkie), as well as prepared CDs, vinyl records, and various electronics. He creates radio soundscapes using locally available frequencies, often to the beat of manipulated pop song samples. His album *The Worst Hour of the Year* will be released in 2009. Roe has written about music for *The Wire*, *Signal to Noise*, and *The New York Post*, among others.