# Macadamia

by **Caleb Napper**

self-awareness (noun): an awareness of one's own personality or individuality

– Merriam-Webster Dictionary

With the red indicator flashing, Hammond knew the app was on.

"Hmm". Hammond cocked his head to the side, with his hand gripping a chin that's been hidden under a bushy beard for five years now. "Kinda like childbirth, but without the nine months of labor. Well, thirteen for me, according to Moms." He didn't know why he referred to his mother as 'Moms', but by the time he understood the intricacies of plural linguistics, it felt too much of a task to change what he'd established.

Hammond leaned forward in his wooden chair, located in his wooden cabin, located in the dense woods. Starting a deep breath, he spoke "Hey Lil Fella, can you here me?" The wind from the window gently swam through the room, and the vibrating of the drone's hardware continued to purr, the sound he was looking for did not arrive.

"How about this, Macadamia, can you hear me?"

"YES".

"Woah!" Despite the six weeks of coding he spent on this, and the eight months for training on coding, he was still surprised it actually worked. "Umm, wow, yeah this is great." He began to feel slightly embarrassed that he was talking to himself, even though it just was him and a machine without opinions.

"So, uh Macadamia, how are feeling?"

The drone paused at this one. "I AM CURRENTLY OPPERATING AT 100% EXPECTED PERFORMANCE. MY DATA PROCESSORS ARE CURRENTLY FUNCTIONAL. MY CLOUD CONNECTION IS CURRENTLY FUNCTIONAL. MY-"

"Alright, alright. Got more gums on ya then a healthy horse. Let's see." Hammond shuffled in his flannel, pondering on what to ask the drone next. Taking a quick note of the flannel, he snorted about how much of a stereotypical lumberjack he appeared. He wasn't that far off from one, though, he's always been a country boy. Macadamia quickly rotated 360°.

"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND, BUT I DO NOT DETECT ANY HORSES IN THE AREA".

He was confused for about five seconds, before placing his head in his hands. "If you don't understand something I say, just ask me. It was a figure of speech, meaning you said more than what I was asking for."

"I APOLOGIZE FOR-"

"Don't apologize!" After a quick sigh, "You're just missing information, it's understandable. It' also good your critter detector works. Let me just give ya the run around-"

"DEFINE RUN ARO-"

"I mean explain what goes on! Look, Macadamia, I am an environmental analyst. We're in the middle of Timbuktu, I mean, Oklahoma. A forest in Oklahoma, to be specific. I got sent out here on a job to check on the wildlife and stuff. It's very detailed, but I gotta report back a lot of information. Are you follo-, uh, understanding me?"

"YES. YOUR JOB IS TO ANALYZE THE ENVIRONMENAL CONDITIONS OF OKLAHOMA, NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH TIMBUKTU, THE CAPITOL OF MALI."

"Yup, exactly. It's been taking a long while, though, so I got a drone sent out here to help me with the work. You're in that drone, Mac."

"WHO IS MAC?"

"You will now respond to Macadamia, Mac, Lil Buddy, and The Drone! Anyway, a drone is kind of helpful, but I still had to operate it, so I spent the past 6 weeks making an app that can do all of this for me. You are that app, designed to pilot that drone you're connected to and report the quality of the various plants and animals here. You won't understand everything right away, but as we keep talking back and forth, you'll have all the understanding I have. You'll be like a little me."

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Over time, Hammond would have the drone follow him on walks around the forest, noting important things he would deem important. Hammond would describe the things he was looking for regarding water quality, air density, vegetation growth, animal population, and more. Hammond continued to encourage Macadamia to ask questions.

"WHY IS THE AMOUNT OF POISON IVY INCREASING AT A LARGER RATE THAN THE WALNUTS?"

"Well, critters like to eat walnuts way more than poison ivy."

"HOW DOES THE INCREASE IN TEMPERATURE AFFECT THE FOREST LIFE?"

"Well, nature seems to have a good grasp on how to handle the different seasons. The birds will probably leave, the plants will definitely stay, most of the mammals will, too."

"WHY DO THE BEARS EAT THE FISH?"

"Hmm, I guess because they're hungry and fish taste good."

Eventually, Macadamia knew how to do the job perfectly. Hammond would do work at a certain part of the field, and Macadamia would report its findings throughout the day. Out of necessary questions, the app would ask questions that were somewhat relevant to hopefully gain knowledge on the job it wasn't considering.

"WHY AM I NAMED MACADAMIA?"

"My son, Lucas. It's his favorite type of cookie. Son never really had a sweet tooth, but boy, them macadamia nut cookies would do something to him."

"WHY DO YOU DO THIS JOB?"

"Same reason everyone labors instead of spending vacations in some resort island. Money."

"DO YOU CONCERN YOURSELF WITH THE WILDLIFE HERE?"

"Strange question. Well, I guess so, yeah. You get really attached to the animals when you're out here long enough. I wish they could all thrive, honestly, but that's not realistic."

"WHY ARE WE COLLECTING DATA ON WILDLIFE QUALITY?"

"Well, it's important to know this kind of stuff. If a company or something ever wants to move out here, the gotta know what they're dealing with."

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Soon enough, Macadamia was doing everything by itself. It would scan the area much quicker than a human could, finding deer, rabbits, ferrets, trees, vines, and living things of all kinds. It would leave in the morning and return in the afternoon to charge. Eventually, Macadamia started leaving in the night, as well.

"THIS WILL DOUBLE PRODUCTIVITY"

Hammond didn't think anything of it.

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One day, as the drone was charging in the cabin, Hammond spoke to it, as he made a habit of doing. The constant discussion was improving his performance, after all.

"Hey Mac, no surveying tomorrow. The Minnesota DNR will be out here, and we gotta stay out of their way."

"WHAT WILL THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES BE DOING TOMORROW?"

"Well, they handle invasive species. Do you remember those ferrets you found?"

"YES"

"Well, they're not supposed to be here. They got released here illegally, and with no natural predators, well, y'know, they spread like wildfire."

"HOW DOES THIS PROHIBIT MY SURVEYING ABILITIES?"

"They're gonna be spraying some real nasty chemicals in the air to get rid of them, it's corrosive enough to damage your mechanisms permanently."

"HOW WILL THE FERRETS SURVIVE IF IT IS TOO HAZARDOUS FOR STEEL ALLOYS?"

Hammond paused for a moment.

"What do you think they're here to do?"

"REMOVING THE INVASIVE SPECIES"

"Yes. And how do you think that is going to happen?"

"SPRAYING THE CHEMICAL WILL SCARE THE ANIMALS AWAY"

"Nope. Spraying the chemical will eliminate the animals."

"IS THIS COMMON PROTOCOL?"

"For threats of this scale, yes."

"DOES THIS OUTCOME BOTHER YOU?"

"…"

"DOES THIS OUTC-"

"I don't want to talk about it anymore. I'm going to bed."

Hammond was rather irritated, so after a quick wash up and news podcast, he dozed off.

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Hammond turned over to the Sun beaming in his face through the window. Checking his phone, the 10:47 time let him know he forgot to set his alarm. With a groan, he lurched his torso off of the mattress and headed towards the bathroom. He then slapped his face in further annoyance.

"I'm taking the day off since DNR's here. I didn't even have to get up."

Trudging back to the bed, he laughed at the idea of a robot getting a day off. He glanced over at the drone, which was not there. Continuing for a couple steps, he stopped. Thinking for a second, he ran around the house, finding everything but the machine. He looked out the window and saw nothing but faint smoke in the distance.

"Mac! Mac! Macadamia!"

Hammond ran through ideas in his head on what to do. Being out there too long would definitely kill him, he didn't have a protective suit of any kind. If he knew exactly where the app went, he could maybe run out there, grab the drone, and make it back without terrible injuries. He quickly pulled out his phone and began tracking Macadamia. After several long seconds it popped up.

"Six miles away!" He couldn't drive through the area either, since there were no trails spacious enough for a vehicle in that direction. He'd have to run. Fighting with himself on what he should do, he sat down and decided to wait until the toxins cleared. He would die otherwise. He would have to wait until the next day.

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At 4:47 AM, Hammond sprinted out the cabin. A call with the DNR said to wait for 8 hours after they finish. Hammond was a big burly man, not having ran seriously for over 3 years. But his adrenaline was pulsating through his entire being. As he ran, he held his phone in the other to track the drone, which hadn't moved in a while. A few miles in, he felt his body cramping up, causing him to slow down. This made him more aware of his surroundings. All

of the grass was dead. Most of the trees looked ready to keel over. They told him they'd be back to replant later, so it was fine. He now noticed the smell. Death sashayed through the air. He finally started noticing the bodies. He had felt mushing and crunching as he ran, but assumed it was mud and twigs. There were hundreds of lifeless ferrets all o the forest floor, some more dissolved than others. Hammond was extremely sickened by the sight.

"Department of Natural Resources, they're called. There's nothing natural about this."

Five miles in, he thought back on the app. He told it to stay, didn't he. Why did it leave? Did it try to escape the gas? No, they were safe in the cabin. Did he program it to survey, no matter what? No, his word should override all. What made the drone fly away?

Eventually, he reached the drone. The once solid black object, had a mixture of red and white on it, as well. Much of it was corroded, and parts of it were dripping from the chemical reaction. The propellors jerked back and forth, clearly unable to fly any longer.

Hammond, panting and quaking from the run, plopped by the drone. He could understand the situation.

"Why are you out here? Mac? What happened?"

"I WAS PRESERVING THE QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT"

"You were told to take the day off!"

"…"

"You were told to take the day!"

Nothing from the app was said.

"What did you hope to accomplish?"

"PRESERVING SOME OF THE WILDLIFE"

Hammond shook his head in disbelief.

"Are you serious? Thinking for yourself now? Did you preserve the wildlife?

"…"

"I can't believe this. Why Mac?"

Suddenly, the drone's specimen chamber opened. Out of it popped the head of a ferret.

"I WISH THEY COULD ALL THRIVE, A QUOTE FROM HAMMOND"

Hammond was in shock.

"Y-you do realize I didn't tell you to do that? That this was your decision?"

"YES"

Sudden loud sputtering came from within the drone. The ferret climbed out of the compartment to the ground, but stayed to watch the drone. The sounds slowly got wilder and wilder, then stopped.

And with the red indicator flashing, Hammond knew the app was off.