

Lord Byron's Excellent Adventure

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Poor deluded fools. When those Oxford professors predicted that automation would take 47% of American jobs by 2040, they sorely undershot their target. Here it was 2035, and almost *all* white-collar jobs had been either automated or compartmentalized into machine-like programs. Bots cooking burgers at McDonalds? Sure, and bots performing heart surgery, too. Hell, most of the federal and local government was now AI algorithms.

That's when the New Luddites grew their ranks and got serious about combating the AI invasion.

It happened late one Sunday evening in Menlo Park. There was a break-in at the covert Brin-Thiel Labs; about ten unauthorized people, disguised with Guy Fawkes masks and armed with paint guns, came up through an underground air shaft and quickly secured the room where the top-secret time capsules were stationed. They locked the employees in the rec room and, removing their masks, proceeded to one of the two experimental pods. "This is it," a tattooed woman with a green crew-up said while a young man with five nose rings started typing code at a nearby console. "General Ludd wants the volunteer to step forward." A young lady with long brown braids stepped forward, adjusting a modified Glass headset. "I'm ready," she said, "to move fast – and *break* history."

With a push of an enter key, all that remained of her and the time capsule was a field of red mist.

1.

Within minutes, the capsule rematerialized into its launch-pad. The young woman stepped out – along with a strange, limping dude in a frilly black outfit, complete with opera cape. He had a stubborn, offended look and imperiously wiped his bloodied nose with a cravat. "What happened to him?" the green-haired woman asked, worriedly. "Is something wrong with the transference algorithm or the rematerialization?" The young lady replied, "Oh, *that*? That's just from him making a *pass at me* while we were in transit. He had the limp from before."

The passenger in question was none other than Lord Byron, retrieved from his gloomy rented palace in Pisa, in the year 1821.

"I *say*, I protest this rough usage! Who are you curiously-attired savages and *where the deuce* have I been involuntarily taken?" Green-hair stepped up to the regal dandy. "Ok, Byron – " He interrupted her. "My name is *Lord* Byron, thou heathen, or 'M'Lord' when addressed – " She interrupted him. "Ok, Lord Byron. Lissenup, we've only got so much time to account for. We have pulled you out of your time period to the year 2035 –" Byron took a few steps around the room, surveying the people and, more acutely, the machinery. "Did you say 2035? Well, I'll be damned and spellbound! Did any of you chaps ever get a steam-engine to the moon as I prophesied?"

It took a while to get the poet acclimated. Somebody called a Go Puff for brandy and biscuits. It was explained to Lord Byron that the woman who “apprehended” him was not a “chambermaid” sent for his “travelling pleasure.” Other details were summarily broached. “So, here’s the deal, Lord Byron,” the green-haired woman said (it was she who answered to ‘General Ludd’). “We are the New Luddites, determined to resist the terrible new technology of this age. We know from history that you alone, of all the titled English upper-class, supported the original Luddites. You gave that powerful speech in the House of Lords endorsing their struggle and opposing penalizing them – which probably was the reason your epic poem *Child Harold* became the first major literary sensation of all time. You were the first celebrity, ever.” “Yes, I awoke to find myself famous,” Lord Byron reflected, “although I *rather* like to think there was *some* literary merit in the work, aside from my heroic championing of the desperate lower orders.” He assumed a cocky posture not unlike one of his immortal oil portraits.

But it was true. While all of the English aristocracy and middle-class applauded the start-ups (and massive fortunes) of the early Industrial Revolution, decimating laborers’ skill and wages – which organized the Luddites into guerrilla action (under penalty of death) – Lord Byron insisted “We must never allow mankind to be sacrificed to improvements in mechanism.” The Luddites didn’t necessarily hate technology; they fought the greed of the emerging capitalist class determined to outsource their livelihood. Yes, as Byron addressed the House of Lords, “You may call the people a mob, but do not forget that a mob too often speaks the sentiments of the people.”

And, here we are, all over again, as Bezo’s autobots made millions of truck drivers ‘redundant,’ Google algorithms ‘disrupted’ a vast infrastructure of accountants, lawyers and doctors and Musk’s XCloud pink-slipped the entire government. And, getting back to Byron’s role in this historical imbroglio, where did this Frankensteinian evil originate?

With Lord Byron’s daughter. It was Ada Byron who invented the algorithm in 1843.

2.

The mission, as the New Luddites explained to the poet, was to send him back to his time period, some years prior to when he got picked up, with the express mission of *not* having any children with his wife, the former Annabella Milbanke. This, General Ludd knew from her studies of Romantic-era history, was not such a monstrous request. After all, Lord Byron’s infamously horrible marriage with Milbanke was the very reason he left England, forever making legend of his phrase “Fare Thee Well.” He never knew – and it was said he detested the idea of – his daughter, who was scrupulously raised to study science and mathematics lest she evince any artistic characteristics skin to her “diabolical” sire. Indeed, little Ada excelled at algebraic theory.

Annuling his ‘connubial entanglement’ he readily assented to. “What a malignant twist of fortune that Ada, my very flesh and blood, would become the very creator of

mechanized slavery for ensuing centuries! Of course, her ‘mathematical mother,’ that priggish harridan, is all to curse.” Lord Byron had his less-than-gallant side. Certainly, he had the bloody nose to show for it. But, before he would submit to be sent back, he had a few inquiries he demanded to pursue. The New Luddites gave him the bottle of brandy and handed him an iPad.

Of course, the tech befuddled and frazzled him. “How do you get glass to glow?” he demanded impatiently poking at an app. He insisted the New Luddites go back in time and retrieve one of his valets to operate the “Mephistophelian apparatus.” They explained that would be pointless since no one from his age could operate an iPad (with the possibility of his grown daughter one of the New Luddites joked). Lord Byron then asked if they would “get in that time contrivance” and “fetch my Ada as a grown lady so I can make her acquaintance. And maybe go and fetch Shakespeare, too.” That was when General Ludd decided to take away the bottle of brandy.

She operated the iPad for him. It was reasonable that Lord Byron had some questions and curiosities. He ‘surfed the net’ for an hour. His countenance darkened. “I daresay, who is this fop ‘King Harry’? I’ll concede his Queen is a lusty wench but, in all dire seriousness, in all this time passing, England *still* has a monarchy? How utterly appalling!” Other things irked his Lordship, too. “I see from this electrical stage performance that some underdeveloped intellects think that tyrannical George III’s Queen was a Negro –” There New Luddites explained to him that the word ‘Negro’ had been replaced with the word ‘Black.’ He furrowed his noble brow and asked, “Is that to make it less pejorative – or more? I can’t tell. But I *can* tell you, Queen Charlotte – for whom my sister Augusta performed lady-in-waiting duties – was white. And detestable. She was the girlhood confidant of Marie Antoinette (who was also white). Why anyone would think of making a love story out of George III’s deplorable tyranny is beyond my capabilities. He did oppose America’s independence, after all. Plus he was an abominable bedlamite.”

There was *something else* bothering his Lordship.

“Damn it all to hades. There’s some electrical stage performance of Napoleon on this glowing glass object. ‘Movies’ they’re called. But where’s any about *me*? I’m more famous than Napoleon, you philistines ought to be informed. What in bloody blazes happened to my eternal fame? It seems everyone is famous nowadays – except me; I’m all for democracy and all such bagatelle but *that* is rather taking matters too far.”

It was explained to him that the algorithms his daughter invented led to a future in which culture degenerated to a level in which Shakespeare, Goethe and Byron were supplanted by the likes of Spider Man, Baron Trump and Barbie.

“At least nobody waltzes anymore” he sneered as he hastily got back into the time pod.

3.

A minute passed. Or was it two centuries? Was anything different? The New Luddites debated that point while waiting. “Wouldn’t the change – in time lines – happen immediately since it’s already passed, whatever Byron has done ... or are we waiting in real time for his actions to occur?” Well, that *was* puzzling. And since, as far as the New Luddites knew, nobody had yet travelled back into time with one of these Brin-Thiel time pods, nobody knew how all this *time rigmarole* was supposed to go.

An hour later, as the sun was rising over Menlo Park and Silicon Valley was preparing to work, General Ludd made the deadline decision to send someone back to discern what, if any, changes occurred. Because it was a dangerous mission, she chose herself. The guy with five nose rings set the controls and typed in the code. A red mist enveloped the launching pad as security guards stormed the room, arresting all the New Luddites in a sweeping, shock action.

General Ludd cautiously emerged from the pod. “Hmm, I wish I would have thought of era-appropriate costuming,” she noted as she stepped from the capsule into Sherwood forest, some few miles away from Lord Byron’s ancestral home of Newstead Abbey in Nottingham. (Then again, dresses with Empire waists weren’t exactly her fashion statement.) The first thing she noticed was how different – how clean and healthy – the air smelled around her. And how quiet everything was. She walked until she found the crumbling estate, evaded a doddering gardener and hopped inside an open window into the library.

There sat a petulant Lord Byron fidgeting with a snuff box.

“Lord Byron,” she called, approaching him. “Is this 1813 as we planned? Have you broken off your engagement to Annabella Milbanke?” Byron took another sniff from his box (it had a portrait of Napoleon on it) and groaned. “I needn’t bother, Miss Ludd (or whatever name you answer to). I haven’t met her yet.” He sighed melodramatically.

“What’s going on?” General Ludd inquired.

“Botheration,” Lord Byron whined. “I believe it’s deucedly awkward to explain. As I travelled in your diabolical contraption, I noticed a paper under the control panel. I believe it was an instruction algorithm of some contrivance. I was suddenly seized with an inspiration – the truth of the matter is, I am very passionate when inspired – and decided to insert the diagram into a slot marked ‘Time stamp,’ thinking perhaps that an algorithm, presented with a contradictory algorithm, would negate itself. Or something. I admit, my afflatus came and went like the devil. I *am* mad, bad and dangerous to know, after all.”

“What happened?” General Ludd grimly inquired.

“Well, my dear, you will find out soon enough.” Lord Byron reached over to his massive desk, retrieved a parchment and quill, and hastily jotted down a line in his eternally-famous hand writing. With a flourish, he presented it to Ludd. She looked at it and threw it on the floor. “What’s *that* supposed to mean?”

“Oh, is the leaf already blank?” he scoffed bitterly.

Ludd squinted as she waited for him to continue. Byron sat up and kicked the paper. “That’s what I thought. I wrote a line castigating your infernal apparatus as it so happened, and, as you can see now, by the time it took for me to present the missive to you, it disappeared. Would you like to know *why* it vanished so peremptorily? Well, I’ll tell you. Time is now reversing itself, damn it to blazes.”

“What?” she stuttered.

“Oh yes, my mechanically-inclined revolutionary maid, time is now moving backward. Apparently, the algorithm which moved your metal capsule device in time has somehow shifted all time in a regressive manner. It rather is a tedious conundrum. Look here —” He stood up and walked over to his library shelving, pulling out a handsome leather edition ... of something. “This was my poem *The Giaour*. The text disintegrated a quarter hour ago, leaving only blank binding. My subsequent work *The Bride of Abydos* disappeared an hour back. What this means, my dear, is time is going backwards — and speeding up. This conversation has elapsed six months.”

Ludd gasped.

“I predict my masterpiece *Child Harold* will be wiped away from posterity before bedtime. I shall wake up and be *not* famous. Probably, in a few weeks, unless you can bloody well figure out some ingenious algorithmic solution, we both will be *not born*. That will be a *dreadful bore* I anticipate.” He took another sniff from his snuff box, showed Ludd his pocket watch (moving appallingly in reverse) and continued. “At least the damned Luddites — the Luddites here, that is, breaking frames and the factories housing them — will soon have no grievances upon them. As time rushes backwards, their vexations about getting mechanized them out of their livelihoods will be quite obviated. It’ll be the Middle Ages again in a few short years and all the Luddites can be happy as clams at full tide, the devil take the rogues.”

Ludd grabbed Lord Byron by the arm and dragged him to Sherwood Forest where she disembarked. The pod, not surprisingly, was gone. The rest of their history remains unknown to contemporaneous events.

What we do know, however, is the time discontinuum only applied to those who travelled within the algorithm of the time capsules. For everyone else in the world, time remained stationary — as Bezo’s autobots made millions of truck drivers ‘redundant,’ Google algorithms ‘disrupted’ a vast infrastructure of accountants, lawyers and doctors and Musk’s XCloud pink-slipped the entire government.

It is up to another caste of Luddites to solve the crisis. May they move fast — and *break* history.

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