

WISDOM

THE AMATEUR'S MIND

Do Pokerbots Dream of Electric Sheep?

A Tribute to Philip K. Dick

BY MICHAEL ROME & DOUG "BOXOROCKS" ROGERS



Philip K. Dick is one of the most famous and obscure science fiction writers of all time. While the general public quickly recognizes the names of H.G. Wells, Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, they usually aren't familiar with Philip K. Dick. Yet he is all around us: Blade Runner, Minority Report, Paycheck, and Total Recall are just some of the movies based on his unique, offbeat writing. Blade Runner was inspired by his book Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?... and hence, the title of this piece.

Is this a hangover or are neutron stars dancing in my head? Another all-nighter hunting for the bots; and maybe, one too many of the specialty drinks made from plants here on Mars. No use trying to grow anything on terra firma since the global shift. The irony is that Earth looks like old Mars and Mars looks like the old Earth, lush and green from human ingenuity. Not that my employer, the Interplanetary Poker Federation (IPF), could care about any of this. All they want to do is stop the bots.

I shouldn't even use the archaic slang for "pokerbots" anymore. They've evolved into biomachines indistinguishable from humans... except perhaps to me. The rebels created them hoping to bring down the IPF by undermining confidence in poker. The resistance has been active since the early days when the government agency we now call the IPF absorbed the former EPT (Earth Poker Tour) and MPT (Mars Poker Tour). Politicians finally realized how much tax revenue they were "leaving on the table." Now the only legal poker is sanctioned by the IPF.

Enough ancient history – it's time to hit the IPF café for another night of surveillance. The officers at the door run me through the plasma scan so they don't blow my cover. The scanners are used to make the public think bots are being kept out of the games, but unfortunately the scanners are no longer able to sniff them out. So once in a while, security will act like they caught one at the door and execute it on the spot. In reality the condemned are actually drugged human criminals convicted of playing poker outside of the IPF. Now that's what I call a bad beat.

I walk over to an empty seat and buy in for the most popular game: four-dimensional Hold'em. Immediately I notice a new player sitting across from me, an exotic, raven-haired beauty with deep blue eyes. She smiles and I introduce myself, "I don't think we've met before, I'm

David London."

She holds out her hand to shake mine. "I'm Deidre." Strange electricity travels up my arm. "Just Deidre, no last name?"

She smiles slightly, "Just Deidre."

I haven't been this excited about someone for, well, maybe ever. Yet, it feels like I know her. Could it be from a past vision of my future?

She's gorgeous, but I have a job to do. I watch the others for tells because bots have none. Everyone checks out; pupils dilating, nostrils flaring, and idle whistles stopped short from fear. In the meantime I've been solid, giving away nothing and winning pots. I have the table heavily out-chipped; except for Deidre. A hand develops between us and I finally spot her tell. Confident in my read, I muck, but she shows a bluff. This means Deidre is human, or a late model programmed for reverse tells. I can't rule out either one, so I flash my badge and take her to my transport.

She is the woman of my fantasies, or a program I will have to end. Deidre pleads that she is not a bot and can prove it to me if I would let her stay the night. Biomachines have no rapid eye movement (REM) when they sleep. I shouldn't even be considering it, but all I can think of is the poet Baudelaire: "*I will plunge my fingers into your mane and be a long time unremembering.*" I break every protocol in the book and bring her home.

When she finally dozes off, I spot the mother of all tells, REM sleep. Thank God she is human. With my investigation over, I close my eyes and dream of Deidre sitting at the table. I analyze the hand she won, the way she reached for chips. She is frozen, looking at me. Deidre is...

I get up and prep the nano shot while I watch the eyelids. These machines never rest; they only compute ways to improve their game. This one was unique, though. While updating information it shows patterns of REM, but patterns aren't mistakable for natural dreams. Not yet anyway. I inject the micro-bugs and the system shuts down. This David London must be a late model.

Editor's Note: In 2007 there were several pokerbot busts involving online poker.

Michael Rome can be found at his poker philosophy website: www.romepoker.net. Doug Rogers is a freelance writer who resides in Atlanta and can be contacted at: dboxorocks@gmail.com. 📧