

slowed to a stop in front of him. Its double doors slid open, a trickle of night workers stepping out on their way home from their shifts. The consumer stepped on quickly to avoid being touched by the others behind him. He took a seat and glanced at the ads posted everywhere. One was for a new kind of razor, another for a brand of soda. A third read:

"Beware of advertising! Commercialism is the end! It will only lead to the destruction of our society, and reduce our choices in life. Fight the ads! Brought to you by our Sponsor."

The transport was silent, save for the blabbering of an ad screen at the front.

After several other stops, the transport arrived at his destination.

"Harris St. terminal," a voice said over the front speaker, "Thank you for your patronage. Your fees have been automatically deducted from your accounts. And now a word from our Sponsor. Please watch your step."

Standing up, the consumer made his way out of the transport, taking care not to touch anyone. The Harris terminal had only one screen, an enormous piece of technology that took up an entire wall. Today's ad depicted a smiling priest holding a bottle of beer in his hand and his rosary in the other.

"Holy Water!" boomed a voice-over, "The only beer the Lord would've drunk! Available now in all drinking establishments, corner and liquor stores, and Catholic institutions."

Ignoring the ad, he hurried on. He arrived at his office, Product Ordering Centre #58, by 7:10 AM, which, according to the building's automatic time clock, was right on schedule. His cubicle was located in the middle of a large office. It contained a desk complete with a computer, filing center, small phone and recycling tube, and the two side walls were covered with his collection of advertising posters. Just like every other morning, a coffee rose up through a small panel in the upper corner of the desk. He gratefully accepted it.

"Thank you."

"Brought to you by the Sponsor," the desk replied in its usual monotonous voice, "Rise and shine

always."

He nodded in agreement, knowing that the visual sensor posed at the top of his cubicle would record the gesture. It was time to get to work. He glanced at the bottom corner of the monitor. The net was still jammed today. Over time, ads had begun to build up on the web but nobody had bothered to really do anything about it. Now, more often than not, the net was basically impossible to use, as simply accessing it could take hours.

He worked diligently processing phone orders throughout the morning, took half an hour for lunch, and then continued on until his computer shut off abruptly.

"Attention," droned his desk, "It is now exactly 5:00 PM. It is now time for you to leave your station and return to your personal recuperation facility. This reminder brought to you by our Sponsor."

The consumer left the building and headed back to the Harris St. terminal. He again stood with the masses, awaiting the transport that would take him home. The wall screen was displaying an older soft drink ad. A voice suddenly came over the intercom. It was deep and had a rumbling to it that filled the station.

"Attention! Attention! It is with the utmost regret that we must inform you that our Sponsor has decided it is no longer economically feasible to maintain this consumer sector. Deactivation will be initiated immediately. The Sponsor apologizes for any inconvenience. This termination has been brought to you by the Sponsor."

As soon as the voice cut out, the transport suddenly shut down a few feet from the platform. The giant screen went dead and suddenly, for the first time in memory, the terminal was completely silent. The crowd began to grow uneasy. This had never happened before. The woman standing next to the consumer looked to him, confusion on her face.

"What do we do now?" she asked, and he could only shrug, just as bewildered as she was. All he could do was stand helplessly there in the crowd as the overhead lights began to go out, one by one, plunging the terminal into total darkness.