

# MEGA MACHINE INCORPORATED

William J. Hrdina

## Morning...

"Mega Machine Incorporated invites you to wake up to a productive commodity consuming morning. Buy well."

James reached out blindly and hit the snooze button on his alarm clock. He struggled to find the tiny switch that was hidden under the very small panel. The very small panel required a code, (a five-digit code) which you had to punch in with your fingertip. The clock had come with a stylus to push the numbers with, but James lost it in less than a week. He ordered a replacement; four times, but it never came. The switch itself was almost too small to see, let alone flip. After a few minutes James finally succeeded.

Silence. But not for long.

"Every minute that you dawdle is a minute that another bird is catching your worms. Deep succulent worms, brought to you from your friends at MM Incorporated."

He hit the alarm clock this time. Hard.

"You really should get up, perhaps if you go and buy something you will feel better."

James threw the alarm clock hard enough to insure that it wouldn't mouth off again, it's cheap plastic case crumbled against the wall. The logo MM glared red at him, accusing.

"Fuck you Mega Machine bastards!" James muttered from behind sleep tussled hair. The accusation in his own voice was easily a match for the TV's. The minute that the words escaped his lips his giant wall size super TV deluxe snapped itself on without any prompting from James.

"What was that sir?" Asked a big talking head that looked like a combination of Santa Claus and Dan Rather. "Is there a problem?"

In a nation wide poll (58 people surveyed) the two names that came up most often as trustworthy were Santa Claus and Dan Rather. (23% and 37% respectively plus or minus 18%) The marketing people at MM decided that the two faces should be combined so that people would be less put off by the MM consumer attitude program which insured that MM was "Number One in everybody's heart." If it wasn't they simply "adjusted" your consumer habits. This was not the most pleasant experience as often wrenches, electrodes, and Barney were utilized.

"No problem," James replied hastily, "I-uh- was gonna go buy something you know. Love to buy stuff..." He grinned sheepishly. "Yea- I'm gonna buy some of that wonderful MM breakfast spread." He stuck a quarter into the dispenser on the wall. The machine was similar to the ones that you can find in gas station bathrooms- the taste of the products dispensed were remarkably similar as well. A small tube of goo fell out of a hole in the bottom and onto the floor.

There was a long uncomfortable silence. James felt like a fool in his underwear looking guilty at a TV head. Then "Fuck you Mega Machine Bastards" played back at him at an overly loud level.

"You seem to have some kind of consumer dissatisfaction problem. The MM CONSUMO-ATTITUDINATOR clearly shows a frowny face. A sad, unhappy frowny face. Isn't that just so sad? We at Mega Machine Industries just want you to be able to fully enjoy your status as a preferred consumer. If you would be willing to give up some of your generously allotted 20 minutes of non-consumer time we may be able to promote you to our REALLY Preferred Customer status. Surely that would increase your happiness level." The head, overjoyed at having the opportunity to further someone's consumer career looked at James with a blank smile that made him shiver.

"No thanks." He replied quietly. James turned quickly and tried to escape into the relative privacy of the bathroom. The door wouldn't open and he banged into it with a crash. James had forgotten that two days ago a technician from MM came in and placed a coin operated lock on the door to his bathroom. He had begged the man not to install the lock but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Literally. In order to save their "customer service employees" from people whining about how everything was so unfair- all MM customer service staff are subjected to the removal of their eardrums upon receipt of their first paycheck. To make matters worse, hanging from the menacing looking doorlock was a chain with a quarter attached to it. You might think that James was clever to have rigged the lock in such a manner. However, the lock was rigged this way not by James but by the Mega Machine psychological warfare division.

The idea was quite sinister in its simplicity. *For every action, there shall be enforced an equal and profitable (to Mega Machine Inc.) consumer reaction.* There is a legend that when the junior marketing executive that first formulated the theory put it down on paper his cries of orgasmic ecstasy could be heard five floors away, up or down. When the top executives of MM got wind of the theory four of the old bastards had to buy new hearts. Imagine, they thought, we could charge people 50 cents for exhaling and 75 for inhaling. Coughs for \$2.50! They started putting cash locks on bathrooms and placed a surcharge on the enjoyment of nature. It didn't take long before everybody was so broke that people were pissing out their windows onto the street below. Nobody could afford umbrellas or cars so you can imagine what a pleasure walking to work was. MM in its infinite wisdom ignored the problem. At least until another marketing executive realized what came to be known as MM's 2nd law of thermo-consumer-electro-economics. It states: When you own everything and have put a price tag on it, you can give some small things away for free. However, an act of "consumer pride" should take place when these services are received so that people understand the favor that is being done for them by the corporation that loves them. Besides, if the little stuff is free, then the suckers can afford to keep buying the medium and large stuff.

**Before the Morning...**

MM started as a shoe company. They made tennis shoes. Actually, in the beginning they were really quite nice shoes. They were so nice that after a while people stopped wearing them just for tennis. People started wearing them to work and while playing other sports like basketball and fishing. So many people bought the shoes that MM decided to start a line of clothing. Around this same time there was a mutation deep within the bowels of the business schools all around the country. The rise of the television had turned a branch of running a business into a business all on its own. ADVERTISING. It was an astonishing concept. An entire section of the population that didn't actually DO anything. Instead, they took other peoples labor and tried to come up with ways that people would think that two identical (or nearly identical) products were different. The fact that most of the time there was no recognizable difference between products had no effects on anyone in marketing. Neither did the studies which showed that if anything, advertising had negligible effect on people's buying habits. Such details were apparently irrelevant. In addition, they realized that companies could actually artificially inflate their price due to the incredible cost of this same advertising. These new creatures were called names like 'MARKETING ANALYST' and 'CONSUMER COORDINATOR' and all kinds of other creepy titles that actually didn't mean anything. One day, while studying old Nazi propaganda videos an early marketing grub designed the simple sterile MM logo and a little wave like swishsticka that was to be put under the name. He brought the design to his boss who decided to put the swishsticka on everything that the Shoe Company owned. Time passed...

Eventually, the logo was everywhere. Almost everyone in the country wore some kind of clothing or shoes that displayed the swishsticka in ever more prevalent places. Eventually all that would be on a shirt would be the small swishsticka. The price for a MM shirt? 45 dollars. The same shirt without the 2 cent swishsticka? A dollar fifty. Needless to say, the MM executives, as well as the equally rich people who invested in MM were very pleased. It didn't bother them that poor people in America were killing each other for their shoes. Instead, they used the killings as proof that advertising worked. They would have a point but in this case we're dealing with Michael Jordan. Oh wait, this is fiction, I meant that we're dealing with the greatest basketball player that ever lived, Jeff Jaronemotickonockey... or something.

To make matters worse, early on in the process MM removed all of its operations from the US. Sure, the stuff was sold here but all of the manufacturing was moved to other (even poorer) countries. This would have been OK if the foreign workers were paid a humane wage. But instead, children were extensively used, (they were sometimes chained to tables while they were being used) and they were paid so poorly it made the people who knew about it sick. These people were (of course) summarily dismissed or ignored by all of the people who wore the shoes because they were just so damn comfy. Besides, who wants to think about a little girl chained to a table all day making shoes? It didn't even matter to anybody that the shoes were made at outrageously low prices. Enormous profit margins "The American Dream."

Eventually the company took over all professional sports.

Even fishing.

There came a day that the President of MM, Dick Rook decided that he should branch out into politics. Businesses were merging all over the place and the number of really rich white males was rapidly decreasing as all of industry merged into one giant company. Dick realized he needed to get into politics in order to guarantee that his interests would be guarded. Dick was already paying off lots of politicians with "campaign contributions" but he thought it was better to go in there and do it himself.

He wanted the one big company to be MM. He bought out and paid off everybody he could afford and soon found himself as the President of the United States as well as the President of MM. In order to avoid a conflict of interest he merged the US economy into his own (by now) equally sized empire. People fled by the thousands, but nobody had any clothes or shoes because they were all made by MM. The military was thrilled with its now affordable and oh so sporty MM combat boots. Machine guns became sleeker, (and available in several colors) soldiers started to get advertising contracts, Rambo IV's catch phrase was "Show me the money." All of society was like consumer boot camp and society did its job better than even the army ever could. People chased their tails so hard they forgot they were only chasing their own tails.

Two years later the World Corporate War began with whole countries being downsized and the free-market economies of the world becoming the forced economy of MM. The whole process took only 50 years. To be honest, most people didn't know what hit them. The marketing people were just too much for anybody. They didn't sleep, they cheated incessantly and they were not outright killing people. As a result it was hard to get people to understand that their throats were being cut just the same. Once people realized the danger, it was too late. Before long the world became what it is today.

**Still Morning...**

James stared at the lock with the quarter hanging from it. The voice behind his head grew louder, more insistent, "Sir, sir, what is your status with regard to your consumer index? Shall I upgrade you, or do we need to call in some professional consumer attitude assistance coordinators to help you adjust to our wonderful system of consumer opportunity, a world where everything has a slogan and a brand-name that you have learned to love and

trust.”

With trembling fingers James picked up the quarter and dropped it into the slot. The lock was sticky and it took some fumbling before it gave allowing him to pour himself into the bathroom. The bathroom was hermetically sealed upon entry to keep the bathroom from exhibiting any “unfriendly” odors that might escape while business was taken care of. James was finally alone, both figuratively and actually.

His wife Sarah was taken away six months before. Although they loved each other deeply, over a period of months his wife fell into a deep depression. Observing her become more and more melancholy and dejected took a lot out of James. Sarah's depression also caused her to spend less time out in the world buying the products that MM insisted that they needed to survive. The insistence of the talking head on the wall grew stronger until one day the consumer attitude facilitators came. James never saw his wife again. The day before there had been a specially addressed flyer in his mail box offering him the one time opportunity to buy a coffin for his wife who had died of an incurable case of over-prohibitive cash flow instigation; a common cause of death in these prosperous times. (Or so said the flyer)

So you can see that it was natural for James to have been a little on edge this particular morning. Add to the equation the large amount of alcohol he had consumed (the wall didn't care what he said if he was drinking/consuming while he did it) and the hangover he was suffering from, and you can get an idea why James didn't have the eye of the tiger. He knew that he was in trouble. He had acted too oddly to not bring some kind of authority meddling into his life. He knew they would be watching him extra close because of his wife's passing. James was paralyzed with his inability to affect his own situation. He could not even leave his own house without a quarter. If he did something rash, like trying to run away- he wouldn't even get across town before he ran out of money. After all, you needed it for almost every action you performed, from hailing a cab to opening its door. Then you had to pay to talk to the driver, the ride, the opening and the closing of the door. Without precedents like S. Africa and Nazi Germany you wouldn't believe that people would allow themselves to be led in such a manner but for the most part everybody went along. James had heard rumors of a resistance, but any actual attempt at such an organization failed due to the starvation of its members. The leadership of MM congratulated themselves on spending the capital to fence off every bit of nature that could be fenced and placed under surveillance. Again, the ridiculous amount of security created jobs for the people. Jobs brought money, without which you died in short order. As a result no matter how many basic human rights were lost, the people thanked the leadership for jobs; those that didn't starved to death in the streets.

James plopped down on the toilet. Although the toilet seat was still down a small electronic voice asked him to please insert a nickel. Imagine if you will a camel. It is in the desert. It has been there a very long time. Periodically, a straw whips out of the sky and hits the camel on the back. The first time the camel pays no heed. But after a while the straws begin to hurt. Then they hurt a lot. Finally there comes the straw that breaks the camel's back. The consumer toilet 2000 was James' straw.

He got up, turned around and lifted a large book of poems that he left in the john for reading over his head. He brought the book down on the toilet, whose cheaply bonded porcelain cracked easily, sending water gushing out onto the bathroom floor. James started to laugh as he lifted the book and brought it down again. James turned and with another broad stroke brought his sink crashing off the wall. Water was spraying everywhere now. It quickly pooled on the floor. The room was sealed tight and soon it had nowhere to go but up, and up it went. The water rose like a virgin boy in a warehouse. James didn't realize how fast the water was rising until he had caught his breath from destroying the bathroom. It had only been a couple of minutes and already the water was up to his shins. He panicked briefly, but was soon filled with a deep calm. He sat down on the edge of the tub and turned on the faucet. He closed the tub's drain and allowed himself to drop into it. From somewhere far away he heard voices. They sounded very authoritarian and insistent. James ignored them. The tub was actually being filled just as much from outside water as from water coming from the tap. It didn't take very long for the water to rise up his now scrawny chest; muscles atrophied from years of non-physical mindless work. When the water covered his ears he was glad that the pounding on his door was fading away. When the water finally rose over his lips, they were smiling. Smiling in the manner of a man who found himself enslaved, only to once again find freedom.

### **Appendix**

James' body was cremated and placed on a shelf next to his wife. He was put to rest in a blue plastic urn with a handwritten sticker that said: James. Consumer Number 236673. It also had written in bold red letters the words:

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