

“The Cola War”
William Hrdina

Harold Pinter approached the bright neon logo and knelt down before it. His supplication was assisted by a thinly padded red plastic kneeler placed in front of the most central word in Harold’s life.

--Pepsi--

His knees were almost immediately sore. The padding mainly served as a mockery to comfort.

Although Harold couldn’t see it- he knew that behind the bright neon logo was a very sophisticated brain-scanning device. Even though he couldn’t feel it, he knew the device was examining whether or not the “creative” centers of his brain were activated. If they were, the machine would know his words weren’t true. At least that was the theory- Harold knew very well the theory had flaws.

He began to speak, “Today, I took a moment to daydream after I went to the urinal during my afternoon sabbatical.”

True. Pause.

“Today, I felt the desire to sleep in and be late for work.”

True. Pause.

“Today I let someone else go in front of me on the way into the factory.”

It was best to stick to these sort of digressions- the ones everyone was guilty of- no matter how dedicated they were to Pepsi. If you reported for 3 minutes without anything getting flagged as a lie the mind reading machine was shut off and you were checked off as having performed your supplication.

There was no reason to waste resources on people blathering on about how they had to re-do a document because they failed to format it properly the first time. The point of the supplication wasn’t to find slackers.

The point was to find the liars.

To root them out like gophers from their holes.

“The Supplication of the Individual Worker to the Great Pepsi” as described on the 1,088th page of the Pepsi Workers Manual doesn’t mention a thing about the brain-scanning device hidden behind the great logo.

Pepsi didn’t want its workers to know how they knew everything. They knew everything. That was all that mattered.

The PWM *does* mention that any employee who doesn’t supplicate at least twice a week will be subject to termination.

Termination is a very literal term when used in the Pepsi Workers Manual.

The book had a nickname. People called it ‘Pepsi’s Little Blue Book’ (or the PLBB, PL Double-B, or PLB2) even though it had over 3,000 pages and came in 2 volumes- usually weighing around 5 pounds.

And the printing was really teeny.

Font size 4.

This was why the far more popular version was “The Little Blue Book Website” It had a nifty search engine called Poogle.

Harold knew about the brain scanning device because he was on the team that invented it. He was told the device would be used as a weapon against the enemy- to

know if a captured spy was telling the truth. Instead, they were put into Supplication Stations and used to enforce an iron efficiency on the people.

The enemy of anything Pepsi was, of course, Coca-Cola.

It was possible they were using the scanner against the Coca-Cola spies- but that was beside the point.

In truth, Harold was mad at himself for inventing something without thinking about what it would be used for- like Val Kilmer in Real Genius- only without a house filled with popcorn.

Everyone person alive in Pepsi belonged to a Division within Pepsi.

Even babies belonged to the Adolescent Consumer Division.

Pepsi owned and made everything in Pepsi.

Pepsi maintained total control over use of the word Pepsi and wouldn't stand to have anyone use the word Pepsi in a negative or derogatory sense- in writing or in thought- at any time.

You had to sign many papers stating such directly on a bi-annual basis.

Everyone was an employee of Pepsi, anyone who wasn't worked for the other side- the Cokes.

Coke and Pepsi had been at war for years.

Pepsi was spread over roughly half of the planet and Coke owned the other half. Open warfare raged on two continents and a tense status quo reigned everywhere else.

The Rise of the Corporation started right on the heels of the crumbling peace between Barney the Purple Dinosaur's legions and the equally vicious Teletubbians. In a remarkably short time hundreds of companies whittled themselves down to the final five corporations, Coke, Pepsi, Microsoft, Nike, and Aunt Edna's Delicious Fudge.

There was no political ideology to speak of in any of the companies- everything was based on economics. Anyone with a political axe to grind was bought out in the first six months and promptly downsized.

The focus was on what was best for the bottom line and eventually open warfare became an economically feasible option. The two cola juggernauts eventually managed to buy out that last of their competition 15 years earlier- in spite of Aunt Edna's threats to use chemical weapons.

Your Division, and your place within your Division was the most important aspect of your life.

How far you could travel, whether or not you could have a car, where you would live, what level of quality food you were eligible for in the grocery store, how much hot water you got to take a shower- everything revolved around the typing on the ID card you wore at all times on your lapel.

It was the Marketing Division that had all the power. They were the only ones with an excuse to move around. The entire governmental structure of Pepsi worked within the marketing division.

The military did as well.

Use of military force is defined by the PLB2 as 'extreme marketing.' Military Occupation is a 'Market Realignment Zone.'

Image was everything.

We were all the Pepsi generation.

The question of what was good for people wasn't a factor in anything. All that mattered was market share.

Previous regimes had made the mistake of putting human leader's faces everywhere, plastering their image on every flat surface and coffee mug in the land.

This was a mistake because people grow old and weak.

People die.

When the people die the image is useless. A ghost. All the market viability created by the leader's visage is lost.

The logo is different.

The logo can live forever.

The logo will never grow old.

It will never die.

The logo will never get those wrinkles under its eyes people are willing to inject themselves with poison to avoid.

There can be no battle for succession to an immortal symbol without a body to attack.

Harold wasn't fond of the state of his existence. But he knew that it was, for the foreseeable future, his reality.

As he walked down the street from his job assembling Pepsi televisions to the Assembly Workers Division Meeting he practiced smiling his "I'm a believer" smile.

He practiced it at home all of the time. He almost had it to the point where it was an unconscious reaction- but it wasn't quite there yet.

The smile was important. It was a survival tool, like knowing how to build a fire in the wilderness.

This reality was life for Harold and everyone else in Pepsi.

Such an existence created two kinds of people- those that wanted to use the machine to move themselves forward and those that wanted to remain invisible and just live in as comfortable a manner as possible. Anyone who fell into a third category of any kind was weeded out by the gears of the machine.

The people who used the machine were frightening. They weren't the kind of folks you'd want to have over for dinner.

But it was hard to know who was using you and who wasn't. The best manipulators of the system were the ones that looked the most invisible until they suddenly leapt out of the shadows and sprung their trap. So everyone kept to themselves.

Pepsi sanctioned and arranged any marriages. They also mandated the number of children- child population was calculated on the basis of supply and demand.

They were people who just wanted to catapult themselves out of production and into marketing. Such a move would change their entire life- the marketing people got food that was grown in non-toxic conditions and not subjected to the genetic manipulation of the lower caste's food supply. Not to mention the nicer houses and larger salaries.

It was a fact that although there was only one single brand of anything in Pepsi, the marketing budget was the single biggest expenditure by a factor of hundreds.

Thinking about his place within the machine, and trying to remain under the radar of the machine's teeth absorbed a great deal of Harold's intellect.

He was very good at being small, but when he was a few years younger he believed in Pepsi. He was young and stupid during those years he'd revealed too much. He let Pepsi know how smart he was.

They put him into research and he and a team of others became famous in the highest circles of the Marketing Division of Pepsi. He and his cohort worked plenty of unpaid overtime working feverishly to create something to give Pepsi the edge- and they perverted his creation into a weapon against the people.

The whole thing made Harold ill.

He realized there were a number of medical uses for his device. He prepared a number of alternate scenarios and brought it to his Board of Directors.

They told him, "The Health Division could find their own goddamn Harold Pinters." They weren't about to give over an idea to a competitor- even one within his company.

Harold managed to get demoted down to production by acting out a very convincing break with reality, caused, he said, by his immense desire to provide the lynchpin to Pepsi's total market share.

Total Market Share- also known by TMS- was a pleasantly Orwellian way of describing total world domination- i.e. the total destruction of Coke and any other company that should try to arise.

TMS would be achieved when everyone in the world drank Pepsi, ate Pepsi steak, drove Pepsi cars to their Pepsi jobs, taking asphalt roads paved by Pepsi Pavers, breathing Pepsi air.

Although he was walking as slowly as he could without drawing attention to himself, in no time Harold was standing in front of the small auditorium known as Pepsi Production Meeting Hall #23a. It was an exact replica of every other Pepsi Production Meeting Hall on his level of the corporate hierarchy as laid out in the Pepsi Little Blue Book- Sec 842/zz5a- or just use the online search engine and Poogle "Meeting Halls."

Harold hated the Production Meetings more than any other aspect of his daily life. Mainly designed as a way to absorb the free time of the masses without entertainment or actual leisure- the production meetings were held so people could "out" themselves or others for various losses of work productivity.

The meetings were boring tortuous affairs, like mass meetings of Catholic penance. Harold never wanted to go, every day he looked forward to his time alone in bed- when he could just think his own thoughts and not be enslaved to the constant need to remain invisible to the meat grinder of his society.

This was Harold's life. Either working, or sleeping, or talking and/or listening about being better while at work. Harold hated it all. He would never be allowed to marry or have a family because of his mental break.

Sometimes Harold wanted to commit suicide, but he was too afraid.

He told himself that staying alive was his penance for helping design the lie detector. Harold knew he'd caused a great deal of pain.

A great deal of death.

He didn't even want to think about how many people were killed from his device- revealed as liars. They called it a team success, but that was because individuals were never recognized.

Individuals grew old. Individuals died.

Teams could live forever with different members all the time.
Harold had little doubt when he had his fake crack-up that there would be a new
Harold Pinter sitting in his chair in no time at all.
There's always another Harold Pinter.
Genius is just a commodity- another can of soda lining the supermarket of Pepsi
world.
Unless Coke got the bomb- then it would be a Coca-Cola world.
Harold sighed and walked into his meeting.