

## Glimmy Pig

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“Ta-da!” the gnome chirped, holding up the rectangular slab of pink plastic and chrome. She flicked the on switch of her multigear recordoscope and leaned over the image intake valve. A shock of damp, rose-colored hair fell over her beaming face as she spoke.

“Glimmy Bottlecog's Invention Journal, Nephember 41st, Year of the Golden Pumpkin. I've finally managed to jam together a prototype of my new automatic, autocratic, back-mounted life management system. All I've gotta do is run a few tests to work out the software bugs and I'll be able to put these babies into production! And just in case any of my colleagues are watching this later, let me just say that the AABLMS is the one-stop solution for all your absent-minded inventor needs. Tired of dying of thirst because you forgot to drink anything for a week? No more! The AABLMS has your back—literally—with a context-sensitive ingenuity that will make sure your needs are met! On sale today! I mean, not today when I'm saying it, but by the time you see this, for sure!”

She gave a big, shiny-toothed smile, flicked off the recordoscope, and turned back to the machine. “All right, girly, let's take you out for a test run and see what you can do.”

Dr. Bottlecog lived alone, in a corrugated metal lab deep in the jungle. She liked the solitude while she worked, and the chattering and whirring of the dense ecosystems all around her were enough to satisfy her gnomish need for occasional community. Plus, living ten miles from the nearest settlement meant there was nobody to complain about loud noises or toxic vapors, nobody to whine about the odd explosion or call her piles of rusting junk an eyesore.

All in all, Glimmy liked her remote lab for one, but living alone *did* make it hard to find guinea pigs for her experiments. She preferred to look on the bright side, though. If she had to test her experiments herself, well, that just meant she always had a willing test subject.

She shrugged the AABLMS over her shoulders. The straps were comfortable and didn't chafe, even through the thin fabric of her T-shirt. The device itself fitted neatly against her back, just like a proper backpack. She walked to the edge of the room and back. No problems so far. It didn't even push down on her jumpsuit, which she almost always kept half-off and tied around her waist in the eternally warm tropical weather. She would need to design a bigger AABLMS eventually, for humans inventors and such, but the current gnome-sized version was just right for her.

*Well, it's not giving me a backache anymore,* she thought, *but why isn't it working?* She frowned. Articulated metal arms should be popping out of the device to cater to her every need.

That was it. She didn't have any pressing needs right at the moment. She'd eaten lunch a couple of hours ago, she'd always been good at keeping herself hydrated, she wasn't sleep-deprived, and she didn't have to urinate. Obviously the machine wouldn't do anything if there wasn't anything for it to do. She'd just have to wait until there was.

*Like fun I'm going to sit around waiting that long!* she thought. *I'm a busy gnome!* She pulled the AABLMS off, flipped it over, and delicately pried open the childproof access panel. She punched in the manual override and entered a few quick lines of code.

*There. Now it's brute-forced into thinking I'm hungry.*

She shrugged it back on again. No sooner had she done so than a pair of white-gloved hands popped out of slots in the side. One of them snapped its fingers in front of her face. The other one snaked its way into the kitchen.

“Yes!” Glimmy crowed. “I did it!”

Two more hands popped out, curled around to her lower back, and pushed with increasing insistence.

“Whoa! Easy, girl!” Glimmy said, allowing herself to be guided to the kitchen. *These pneumatics really pack a wallop!*

The hands whirled around the room in a flurry of activity, opening cupboards and rummaging through pots, emptying the cupboard of supplies, and pouring a clattering waterfall of pasta into the big cooking pot. One of them pulled Glimmy's box of meal bars from under the sink and started shucking them from the wrappers like ears of corn.

“Bottlecog's Journal addendum: not only am I a genius, but I'm an artist as well! My creation is a symphony in motion, each part moving independently in a complex ballet of—mmph!” Glimmy cut off as the AABLMS stuffed the end of a meal bar into her mouth and nudged.

“Eyy, I'ff tryffing oo taff—offay, offay, I'ff eaffing!” Glimmy said with her mouth full. No sooner had she swallowed the bar than the machine popped another one in her mouth, like a proud new father handing out cigars. Glimmy swallowed that one too. One of the other hands held a dozen bars, fanned out like a hand of cards, and the first hand drew and dealt them into Glimmy's mouth as fast as she could eat them. She played along, not wanting the silvery dance of the arms to stop—not while her invention was working so well!

She licked her dry, crumb-covered lips. All the granola was making her thirsty. The AABLMS must have sensed it, because it followed the last bar with a liter bottle of water from the refrigerator, sticking the end into her mouth and holding it steady as she glugged it down.

The last of the cool liquid gurgled down her throat, and Glimmy spat the bottle out with a gasp. The hands dropped it neatly in the recyclobin, next to the empty meal box. *Wow—did I really finish off the whole box?*

She had. And the hands showed no sign of slowing down. A wooden seat slapped against her butt, scooping her up into a chair, and a napkin was tied around her neck. Another hand pulled her up to her small dining-room table for one. The rest of them—and there were at least a dozen of the things, because if two hands are good, four and six and eight and so on had to be better—were busy emptying her cupboards and pantries onto the table. Glimmy's lab wasn't exactly a gourmet restaurant, but she kept a variety of supplies on hand, and enough of them to last her at least of couple of weeks. Now all of them were being piled in front of her.

It was important to keep the test going for as long as possible to see how the AABLMS performed under constant use. Glimmy did her best to eat as slowly as she could, but the machine was having none of it. No sooner had she swallowed a bite than it was jamming another heaping spoonful into her mouth. She'd be stuffed like a turkey at this rate, but what was more important? Science, or her waistline?

“Science!” she decided, without a second's hesitation, and opened wide.

Her largest platter thunked down, heaped with a towering hillock of corkscrew pasta glistening with butter. Almost before it hit the table, forkfuls were snaking their way eagerly between her lips. The machine appeared to be working perfectly; there was no reason to expect it to malfunction. (Other than the fact her machines nearly always malfunctioned at first.) On the other hand, gnomes aren't light eaters. The average gnome can comfortably eat her own weight in food in a single sitting. They usually don't—a gnome who ate like that every day would quickly find herself packing on the pounds—but they *can*. So it came down to a test of endurance: the AABLMS, or her appetite—which would go kaput first?

It took nearly two hours and well over her weight in pasta alone, but finally Glimmy was ready to throw in the towel. She was bloated like a tick and practically sweating butter. Her food-addled brain couldn't concentrate on the AABLMS or her observations or really much of anything. It was time to call it a day.

“No more,” she groaned, brushing away one of the arms and knocking the dried apricot slice out of her hand. It bounced off her cleavage and wedged in the crevice between her breasts and her bulging gut. The hand slid in to retrieve it.

“H-hands off the goods!” Glimmy giggled. She was pretty ticklish, and right now, laughing hurt her stomach. The hands ignored her and stuffed the apricot slice into her mouth. She winced.

“Turn off!,” she moaned. “Deactivate! Can't you tell I'm not hungry anymore, you stupid machi-uffmph!” Another heavy spoonful of pasta cut her off.

*Oh, right, she thought as she forced it down. I overrode the sensor to think I was hungry. According to the AABLMS I'm just about on the edge of starving to death. No wonder it's being so aggressive!*

She tried to shrug the pack off, only to feel the straps tighten around her shoulders. The AABLMS wasn't letting her remove it.

*I guess that makes sense. It's supposed to keep the wearer alive, and if I absentmindedly took it off when I was hungry I could starve to death, which it's supposed to prevent. I guess I'll just have to change the settings manually.*

She twisted in her chair. The armrests creaked as her swollen body shifted against the wood. She could manage to get her arms behind her—sort of—but she couldn't reprogram the AABLMS while she was wearing it. You needed to see what you were doing!

Her design had been foolproof, but not *Glimmy*-proof. She groaned as she eyed the glistening mounds of pasta still piled on the platter, the half-eaten side dishes, even—horror of horrors—her five-pound block of emergency chocolate, *all* of which the machine was fully prepared to cram into her bursting belly.

“Can't you feel how full I am?” she groaned, snagging one of the hands and pressing it weakly to her drum-tight middle. The hand pulled away and came back bearing the last slab of jerky, which it forced into Glimmy's mouth. Obviously, it didn't care.

Even gnomes have limits, and by the time the AABLMS *finally* ran out of food to stuff her with, Glimmy was within a whisker of hers. She was so crammed the machine practically had to force the last few bites down with a tamping rod.

She worked the recordscope out of her pocket and placed in on her stomach, where it teetered at the peak of the bulge. “Dr. Bottlecog's log, addendum,” she managed weakly. “The test was...a *qualified* success. The automatic, autocratic, back-mounted life management system is...fully functional and...*exceptionally* diligent.” She winced. “It just force-fed me a month's worth of supplies in one sitting. Now I'm presented with a new engineering problem—how to get myself out of this chair.”

It wasn't a trivial problem. She'd eaten so much she was more food-balloon than woman, and her body was wedged tightly between the armrests. With a lot of effort, she was able to shimmy forward a few inches, only to encounter a new problem—her belly bumping up against the edge of the table. She was trapped.

“A problem I'm—urpp—too tired to solve right now,” she belched into the recordscope. “This is Dr. Bottlecog, signing off.”

She yawned enormously.

“For about a week.”

Her eyelids fluttered shut, and she sank deep into a food coma. Her sleep was filled with vivid dreams. She dreamed she was a vacuum cleaner with a full bag. She dreamed she was a bottle of soda being shaken up until it was ready to shatter from the pressurized fizz. She dreamed she was a pair of size-2 jeans being taken off the rack by a dwarven battlemaiden with thighs like oak trees and a rear end like a continental shelf.

“No,” she moaned in her sleep, “don't try me on. I won't fit you. My seams will rip! Stop! *Stop!*”

Glimmy jerked away, sweating. Sunlight streamed in through the window. Her guts gurgled unhappily, and she realized she needed to use the bathroom, bad.

She felt wonderfully light afterwards and a lot less bloated, although her stomach still looked like she'd swallowed a ham. In fact, she looked chubbier all over. She peered in the mirror, pinched one fuller cheek, and sighed. All those calories had to go *somewhere*. It was basic science.

She prodded her middle, hoping at least some of the bulge was undigested food. She still felt sort of stuffed. That was a good sign. She belched. That was a *very* good sign. She wasn't going to belch

those love handles away, but maybe her waistline still had a few inches left to shrink.

She tried to shower, only to discover that the AABLMS was still clinging stubbornly to her back. Apparently it was *still* active, and it *still* thought she was starving, but it didn't know where to find her more food. She doused herself with water, fully clothed, and went up to her corrugated roof to dry off in the sun.

“Glimmy Bottlecog's Invention Journal, Nepglember 42nd, Year of the—*burrrp*—Golden Pumpkin. After last night's more-or-less successful test of my latest brilliant invention, the only problem is how to get it off! *This* is why I need an assistant! I'll just have to go into town and walk someone through—*urp*—the reprogramming process. I'll have to go soon anyway, since I'm completely out of supplies and I'll probably get hungry again someday.”

When she felt mostly dry, she climbed down to the garage and lowered herself onto her hoverbike, her newly plumped posterior filling more of the seat than she was used to. At least she'd have a little extra cushioning. It was a ten-mile ride to town over a pretty terrible road—not much more than a dirt path hacked through the jungle.

She primed the ignition and peeled out, her shock of pink hair flapping in the wind. Even with the cushion of air—and the other cushioning—the bike jounced around, jiggling her like a cube of jello.

*Yikes*, she thought. *As soon as I get this thing off, I'm buying a bigger bra! I'm gonna bounce right off the road at this rate!*

But it wasn't her wayward pudge that cause the accident. It was the AABLMS, still activated and still convinced the overfed little gnome was actually teetering on the brink of starvation. As Glimmy passed under a grove of banana trees, its sensors detected *potassium—carbon—calories—nutrients—FOOD!*

One arm snaked out and snagged a bunch of bananas, jerking Glimmy right off the back of the bike. She hit the road, bounced once (thank goodness for that extra padding!) and rolled to a halt in the dirt, picking herself up just in time to see her precious bike crumple against a jungle hardwood.

“What the h—” she began, and then she almost gagged the AABLMS plugged her mouth with a banana. She looked up to see the arms busily plucking the ripe yellow fruit from the tree by the bunch.

“Wha—” *Gulp!* “What's going—” *Gulp!* “—going on—” *Gulp!* The machine fed bananas into her mouth as quickly as they could slide down her throat.

*I've got to get away!* she thought, making a break for the bike. Two of the arms latched firmly onto the trunk and hoisted into the air. She squeaked as the world turned upside down and her tender gullet lurched. The bananas kept shoot down her throat without missing a beat.

She dangled in midair, sputtering in surprise and indignation. The machine stuffed bananas into her by the dozens. Her stomach ballooned. The loose arms of her half-off jumpsuit, tied around her waist, threatened to come undone as her middle expanded. Her arms flailed, but there was nothing to grab on to and nothing to do but hang there and obliging eat herself stupid.

Two hundred and twelve bananas later, the force-feeding frenzy subsided. Glimmy hiccuped miserably. She felt like an overripe fruit, and, she reflected, she probably looked like one too.

She glanced up, wondering if the machine had actually run out of bananas or if it had finally run out of juice instead. She couldn't see what it was doing—no matter how she twisted and turned, her swollen stomach got in the way of her view. Could she dare to hope that the out-of-control device had finally broken down?

No such luck. The AABLMS lowered her gently to the forest floor and folded its arms neatly back into her pack. Still active. *Obviously, I'm too darn fantastic an engineer for my own good!*, Glimmy thought. *Hmm. That's a good title for my autobiography. Too Darn Fantastic: The Glimmy Bottlecog Story.*

She wobbled towards the bike, hoping she could still salvage it. It had only skidded a few dozen yards, and with the right know-how—

That was when she walked under the orange tree. The forest of hands shot out of the AABLMS

again and yanked her up into the branches. Before she knew what was happening, oranges were being peeled, sliced, and shoved into her mouth.

*Orange you glad it wasn't a banana tree?* she thought dizzily, and couldn't help but giggle, even with her mouth full.

When all the oranges were gone, the AABLMS laid Glimmy back down on the ground. She groaned and massaged her swollen abdomen. *Oh, muffins, I feel like a fruit salad!*

The bike was *right there*, but she was so gorged with fruit that standing up was impossible. Even rolling like a beached whale was more than she could handle right now. Instead, she scooted along the ground, pushing herself along with her pudgy legs. When she got to the tree, she scrooched herself up against the trunk, propping herself on it in a half-stand, half-slouch which was about the best that she could manage under the circumstances.

She groaned again. This time it wasn't caused by the gurgling in her guts, but by a close look at the bike. It was trashed. There was no way she'd be riding it any further.

So...should she go home, or brave the walk into town?

Home was closer. She hadn't gotten very far before the accident. The town would be a punishing walk, with countless fruit trees along the way. She'd have to eat her way across miles of jungle. It could mean swallowing literally tons of fruit.

But...what good would it do her to go home? She'd be stuck. She had no supplies there and no way to get the stupid AABLMS off her back. It could be years before anyone bothered to check on her.

The walk to town would be hard, but then it would be over.

"Glimmy Bottlecog's Invention Journal, Nephember 42nd," she said brightly into the recordoscope. "Looks like I've got a walk ahead of me! If I keep my eyes open and steer *around* the fruit trees, it shouldn't take me more than a few days."

A few days later, she'd barely munched her way half a mile. She could hardly go a step without the AABLMS triggering on some nearby tree or bush, and after each binge she needed time to recuperate. She spent most of her time either eating or snoozing, with only a sliver of her schedule devoted to actual forward progress. The days stretched out into weeks, and Glimmy stretched out right along with them.

"Glimmy Bottlecog's Invention—puff—Journal, Nephember 71st!" she wheezed as she scaled a ridge. "Boy, whoever said—huff—walking kept you in shape—whoof—I'd like to smack them one!"

She'd grown so plump that the seams of her T-shirt were frayed to the verge of giving in. Her jumpsuit was still tied around her middle, but now a soft donut of fat bulged over the arms. Her flabby torso was squashed around the shoulders, oozing out from the tight straps of the AABLMS. She was sweaty, chafed, and exhausted, and—

And there in front of her lay the town. Glimmy squealed with delight, rushing down the far side of the ridge towards the haphazard collection of buildings, hewn out of the same dark, hard wood as the jungle around them. Her thick little legs pumped, struggling to keep her upright and not rolling down the hill like a boulder.

"Addendum: squee!" Glimmy added to her journal. "I'm finally here! I'm going to take this thing off and then—and then if I never see another piece of fruit again, it'll be too soon! No more papayas, no more bananas, no more oranges, no more pineapples, no more kumquats—*oh*, am I ever tired of kumquats—no more cherries or watermelons or kiwis or—huff-cantaloupes—"

She tottered into town, panting and puffing for air. Sheer momentum made it hard for her to stop. She was much heavier than she was used to, and nearly plowed right into a plate glass shop window before she managed to drag herself to a halt.

The shiny glass was the closest thing she'd had to a mirror in weeks. She couldn't help but raise her eyebrows. Sure, she already knew she'd put on some weight, but she was practically a beach ball! She put her hands up, squashing her cheeks. Chubby. And she had a double chin, too.

"Addendum 2," she put in ruefully. "Boy, did I ever get fat!"

Movement caught her eye. The arms were extending from the AABLMS. All of them at once. And that's when she stopped looking at herself in the window and started looking at the window itself. Just one word, painted across the glass.

*BAKERY.*

“Oh, muffins,” Glimmy swore.

She tried to backpedal, but it was too late. The arms were already dragging her inside. The gnome baker behind the counter looked up as the bell tinkled to see what looked like a monster crawling in the door—a monster that was half huge, metal daddy-longlegs and half very fat gnome girl.

“I'm sorry about—mmph—I assure you'll I'll pay for every—mffph—I eat—glimmph—oh, dear!” Glimmy gasped through an avalanche of cake. She looked around the store. Every shelf was piled high with towering cakes. There were entire bins filled with cookies. The counter overflowed with pastries. And all of it glistened with butter and sparkled with sugar.

*I can't eat all this!* Glimmy realized in horror. *Even if I don't explode, I won't be able to fit back through the door!*

“Help!” she cried to the baker, who was hiding behind the counter, clutching at his handlebar mustache in terror. “You've got to—mmph!—turn it off!”

“How?” the baker shrieked.

“I'll walk you through it! Just—hurry—please!” Glimmy pleaded. “I don't think I can take much *mmfffph!*” She moaned as one of the hands cupped the back of her head while another stuffed an entire pineapple upside-down cake down her gullet. She opened her mouth to speak again, spilling crumbs, and the hands shoveled in a key lime pie.

The arms of Glimmy's jumpsuit finally gave up the ghost, bursting apart and allowing her belly to bloat outward freely. It did so with such force it also split the seams of her T-shirt. Glimmy groaned and cursed weakly through a mouthful of crust and oozing fruit.

“What do you want me to do?” asked the baker.

“Stand behind me and—mffph—offen uff the manul offerrife menu—mpph!—uff duff I wuff yuff tff—”

“I can't understand you!”

“Wff I kff—!” Glimmy paused to swallow. “I can't talk with this stupid thing stuffing food down my—*mmmph!*”

The baker crouched down behind Glimmy and poked at the AABLMS' controls. Just weaving his hand about to reach the keypad without having it taken off by a wildly flailing strip of metal was a challenge, let alone typing anything in—even if he knew what to type. “Please! I don't know how this contraption works!”

“I need you to type in—mmph! Ack!” Glimmy choked as the machine crammed her with a shelfload of cupcakes. She was so huge now she took up a good portion of the small shop's floor space. The baker could barely squeeze between her blubbery back and the counter.

“Can you repeat that?”

“I need you to—mmph! I need—”

“Just tell me what to do!”

Glimmy felt something lurch deep in her overstuffed guts. *This is it! I'm gonna pop!* she thought in desperation.

“Get behind the counter! Now!” she shouted. “I'm gonna *blow!*”

The baker hit a few last buttons, but he saw that the arms were reaching for his shelf of wedding cakes. There were a dozen of them, each richer, taller and more fattening than the last. Nothing could possibly survive that. He gave up and dove for cover behind the counter.

Glimmy's body stretched and bulged as the cakes were jammed into her, slice after slice, layer after layer, pound after pound, until—*POP!*

The straps holding the machine in place on her back gave way, and it fell off.

Instantly the feeding stopped. Glimmy was full beyond anything she'd ever imagined, but alive. She spat out of the last mouthful of cake and hiccuped. Then her poor exhausted legs gave way, and she plopped down on the floor.

*Crunch.* Her huge posterior, backed up by the enormous weight of her cake-clogged body, smashed the AABLMS flat as a little plastic pancake.

“Oh, *muffins*,” she swore, watching the fingers on one of the hands slow, then stop. Most of them were still extended, but their center was crushed beyond repair. They would never move again. The machine had been squished like a spider.

*Well*, she thought, *back to the drawing board, I guess.*

In the silence, the baker peeked cautiously out from behind the counter. “I-is it over?” he asked, voice quivering. “Did I actually manage to turn that monster off?”

“No—no, it wasn't you,” said Glimmy sadly, gazing at one white glove lying limply on the floor. “'Twas booty killed the beast.”