

**Short story**

**UTOPIAN/DYTOPIAN MOBILE LIFE IN 2020**

# **One day in Mister C's life**

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*The following short story describes one day in the life of Mister C in 2020. Mister C stands for nobody particular, however he has to deal with the perfidies of a life in a totally computerized world, which he cannot understand and therefore cannot participate in. The letter C, which is the first letter of the word computer, shows how paradox the world of Mister C is: On the one hand mobile communication and computerization can simplify our life. On the other hand, if one is not able to benefit from this, one has to suffer from the caused thereby.*

It was Wednesday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of May in the year 2020, when Mister C awoke without a headache for the first time within months. Usually this headache accompanied him the whole day. “What a wonderful morning!” thought Mister C. The sun shone into his room and had woken him up.

Yesterday night he had been to the birthday party of one of his former schoolmates. It had been great! Finally, a real party: no need for digital communication, no need to get in touch with people via computers, PDAs or anything else of this crap. A get-together like this was really inconvenient in these days. Generally, you meet in a chat room or at a cyber-life party, which means that everybody is at home. Talking and chatting only works through a computer via data transfer. However, Mister C’s former schoolmate had given a real party with real people and already this was a triumph for Mister C. So he had had the opportunity to forget his annoying, absurdly complicated surrounding and to play at his true strength: face-to-face communication. In an unstrained atmosphere he could unfold his personality and speak to everybody directly. Anyhow, the occasions for “real” communication were rare in his life. And the communication via digital devices is not his cup of tea. But yesterday night, he had been able to play his trump card. He had talked with this girl for hours and he had gotten her chat channel account. Chat channel that was this online community he had tried to register for several times, but never succeeded. To Mister C it seemed that everybody exclusively used the chat channel to stay in touch. Actually, Mister C hated this kind of online communities. To him this was nothing tangible, nothing concrete. He wanted to look in the eyes of his counterpart and thought that conversation requires physical closeness. Nevertheless, this time he would give it a try again. The girl he met introduced herself by her nickname: Sweetie98. In fact, his blood ran cold when he heard that. Why do people use self generated stupid online names when they actually have sufficient and wonderful sounding birth names?

Anyhow, this time Mister C wanted to give it a try. This girl - he did not want to think of this stupid nickname again - really pleased him. She was his age, but seemed a bit different. Even though she had introduced herself using this strange name, she had not only talked about the newest computer game or her latest cyber-sport competition; she had spoken about real travelling and the house of her parents surrounded by pure nature which she adored. Mister C had been very impressed by that; finally, someone with similar interests as him. He had to see her again. He had promised her yesterday that he would get in touch with her via the chat channel today. This time he had to handle it. Mister C was confident for the first time in 3 months again.

After having a stretch Mister C had a look at his analogue alarm: "Damn it he thought!" He could have slept two additional hours. This stupid sun made him awake. Again, his automatic curtain had not worked or maybe, he had not programmed it right. In the second of his anger he felt a slight headache again. But suddenly, his good mood was back. He thought about the girl from yesterday night again and enjoyed the warm sun on his skin. "Let's use this day, come on!" he thought.

All the people Mister C knew are getting up and after having a shower; their breakfast is prepared in these microwave ovens which are connected to the household computer. This so called private assistance computer detects if one gets up. Then it takes automatically the clean dishes from the day before out of the dish washer into the microwave, puts some coffee into a cup as well as the preferred breakfast on a plate and warms both up. Nevertheless, Mister C had his problems with this type of assistance. Once he had gone immediately to the microwave without having a shower and had tried to open it. Since the breakfast making procedure had not been finished yet, the microwave oven had been shut. After having tried to open it for some minutes, Mister C had gotten really angry. He had shouted at the stupid machine and had tried to open it with pure violence. Suddenly he had pulled down the whole kitchen cabinet where the microwave had been mounted. Still the oven had been locked and Mister C had gotten even more in rage. He had taken a jemmy and had opened the oven to get his breakfast. Seconds later he had realized that it had not been finished at all: his coffee had been cold and the powder had still been in crumbles; his bagel had been frozen and the marmalade missing. After Mister C had gotten a new kitchen with a new microwave he

immediately had asked the installer to switch off this stupid private assistance computer in order to prepare his breakfast by hand again.

That's why Mister C stood for a while in the kitchen this morning and made his breakfast on his own. Still he sometimes burned his food and the coffee was usually too cold or boiling. But now he was able to decide when breakfast was finished and able to just take it out of the microwave whenever he wanted to. This morning he had plenty of time. So, he prepared a solid breakfast with egg, ham, bread and a lot of bagels. Fairly relaxed Mister C decided to work on his Chat channel account now. He was ambiguous, this time these damn computers would not hold him up!

Since Mister C had abandoned all computeristic and futuristic devices out of his flat, he had to find a way to get in touch with the Chat channel. "Firstly," he thought, "I have to activate this stupid private assistance computer." Even if this kind of computer is usually not used for communication services, in Mister C's case it should serve its purpose. Fortunately, he was able to remember how to turn his private assistance computer on although he actually swore never to use this thing again. Probably because of his inner antipathy against the computer he remembered where the power button was hidden, right behind his nice and friendly manual coffee machine. When he pushed the button, Mister C immediately got anxious and felt queasy, a specific and steady headache overcame him. However, nothing abnormal happened. Within seconds the private assistance computer booted up and was ready to use. Still suspicious, Mister C waited a while to see what happened next. He wondered, "What's wrong with this stupid thing? Why doesn't it do anything?" Then he realized that he had to put away all the flyers and notes he had put on the fridge, which had a screen at its front door. Hectically, he ripped off all of them. Suddenly, he noticed that he had torn down the girl's instructions how to contact her, written on a small note, which he had put on the fridge yesterday night, as well. So, he forgot about the computer and searched for the one important note he took during the last year. "No, no, no!" he shouted, "Where is this damn note?" Mister C's mood got drastically worse. Just touching this computer had brought him to spiral downward to a bad temper; his headache seemed to be omnipresent again.

After five minutes of uncoordinated search, he found the note again. However, this could not help him to feel better again. The note only said: "Sweetie98 can't wait to meet you at the Chat channel. See you there. Kisses!"

“Ok” Mister C thought, “You can do it! This can’t be so hard; everybody uses this stupid Chat channel!” In fact he remembered that he had read an article in one of these very expensive print versions of the newspaper which had said that more than 95 % of all relationships were started in online communities like the Chat channel. “Ha” he thought, “we will be an exception! So, let’s try.” A bit of his confidence got back. Mister C looked at the screen thoroughly for the first time. He realized that he had to configure the system. He touched the start button on the screen. Suddenly, the first thing this stupid computer asked him was to configure his breakfast wishes. “So, lets just take any breakfast, I want to go on!” shouted Mister C. He chose one bagel and one coffee, which should be prepared directly after having a shower. “Ok, configuration finished! Now, where is this button to search for the online communities?” He desperately watched at the screen. All of a sudden he heard something moving in the kitchen. “For god’s sake, this machine understands that it is still morning and that I already had a shower. Now it wants to prepare breakfast!” he recognized, “No, no, no... Come on, cool down. Just ignore it! I won’t damage this machine again.” Mister C recovered some of his poise again.

At once he remembered this function, which never really worked, but still helped him to solve some of his unlimited computer problems: the voice control button. He pushed it and said: “The Chat channel please!” Nothing happened. In a more determinant way he replied: “Give me the chat channel!” Again, no response. Now, he shouted: “Chat channel!” And suddenly the screen changed and this for some people irresistible, but to him repulsive logo of the Chat channel appeared. Soon he was asked to enter his user name and password. “Oh no!” he thought, “Have I already tried to register for this strange thing? Maybe.” However, Mister C had no idea which log-in he had been using. So, he tried to register again. After filling out several forms, including his personal data, and describing himself minutiously to put himself into the right perspective, he waited for the authorisation from the Chat channel community. Suddenly, the screen told him that he already registered and each person can only be registered once. This small message was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Mister C started shouting at the screen, knocked against the fridge and ran inflamed with range into the bathroom. In the meanwhile, his headache had become painful. He took a headache tablet and splashed water in his face. It took a while until he was able to focus his thoughts again. Nevertheless, he decided to give it a last try. Maybe he was able to remember the password in spite of everything.

He tried his birth name, he tried his mothers surname, he tried the nick name he was called as a child, he tried the name of his dog when he was young, he tried the name of his first girlfriend and he tried his pin code for his bank account. Furthermore, he had no idea which parts to take for the password and which for the user name. After hundreds of attempts Mister C just gave up and slumped to the ground. There he sat, loosing his optimism and his self-confidence.

All at once there was a ray of hope. The computer suggested that he could just use his identity card to log-in. He should just hold it in front of the small camera above the screen. He did it and already started to feel success in a way other people probably feel when they pass their last exam or when they beat their strongest competitor. Mister C started to smile, when the machine in front of him had identified him. But then he heard a shrilling sound followed by a voice saying: “Your identity card does not support the online registration function. Your identity card has to be updated at the administrative body office! Make an appointment now and your identity card will be updated during the next 5 days” Now, he remembered that he had refused to have this identity chip on his card since he mistrusted this new technology. “But 5 days are not the timeframe I have to fulfil.” Mister C’s eyes got red and his headache was as present as ever. He had lost all his hope and went to the sofa to take a break. Within seconds he napped away.

Abruptly, Mister C awoke again. He realized that he had an important appointment today. As fast as possible he dressed properly and left his flat. Mister C was on his way to court. Like always, he took the bus and had to change into the tram after some minutes. Using public transport was a bit like a hell ride for Mister C. He saw all these strange people who did not fit into his life or maybe he did not fit into theirs. Mister C’s impression was that without exception everybody and everything was in hectic outside of his flat. People with strange little devices in their hands were talking to themselves. Others had sun glasses in front of their eyes looking like the screen of his private assistance computer, which was usually switched off. Some months ago his parents had told him that they used such strange devices even to buy their groceries. Mister C could not stand that. In the world outside of his mostly uncomputerized flat he felt like an alien.

Actually, he had once tried to use one of these strange small devices to buy food. His parents had given him their old one and had told him it would be the easiest thing in the world to use it. The machine was not even connected to anything, after pushing a button the grocery store knew in a magical way, what one had ordered. Mister C had seen it; his parents had made an exemplarily order and after 30 minutes a guy came and brought the food. Quiet practical, he thought and wanted to use this food order machine, like he used to call it, as well. His parents had tried to convince Mister C that a lot of other things could have been done by that thing, but he had never been interested in any of these possibilities. So, Mister C had taken the food ordering machine home and after his fridge had been empty, he had pushed the order button of the device. But then the invitation for trouble had run its course. There had been so many different products to choose from: not only food, also furniture, electronics and travels had been offered. Mister C's fine motor skills were not the best: when he had tried to order milk, he had chosen one thousand litres instead of only one, since he only had needed the milk for his coffee and had believed to order in millilitres; when he had ordered 10 kg of ice, which he had wanted to use to cool his ankle, he had gotten Ice cream. He has never gotten to know why, but he always ordered wrong stuff. As the guy had brought his shopping, Mister C had been totally in rage that he had brought 100 litres of milk and 10kg of ice. How should anybody under common sense order something like this? Do the people at the grocery store not think about the orderings? Are they acting like stupid computers without any human nature?

Mister C has never used something like this stupid food ordering machine again. He just refused! He bought his stuff at the shop around the corner, which normally only delivers groceries. However, he was able to convince a nice employee at the shop to exchange ordinary money against ordinary food. Mister C just had to write his wishes on a piece of paper and after paying an extra fee of 30% for every product, he got exactly what he wanted. Instead of throwing 99 litres of milk away every week, this small fee seemed to be plausible for him.

During his bus rides he always followed the same procedure. He went to the ticket machine which was luckily still in the bus. He had heard that in the new busses, which should replace the old ones he preferred, there were no ticket machines anymore. Mister C had always found it weird that nobody else tried to use the ticket machine until somebody had told him ordering

tickets is possible with the food order machine as well. So, most people buy their ticket via their personal device instead of using the ticket machine.

When Mister C arrived at the ticket machine he started to pretend to buy a ticket as usual. Some years ago he had truly tried to buy one, but since they changed the functions of the machine he refused to use it. Indeed, he had tried to buy a ticket several times. But this stupid machine could now be used like a real computer with all its functions: besides buying tickets also video conferencing, shopping groceries, ordering a pizza or booking a flight was possible. Now, it seemed like an unsolvable riddle to order a ticket with this machine to Mister C. Once he had attempted to buy a ticket, but had failed to find the right menu for buying one. He just had pushed the buy button again and again. Then he had been asked to pay and should, therefore, show his identity card, which had rapidly been rejected and a shrilling sound had appeared followed by a voice saying: “Your identity card does not support the online paying function. Your identity card has to be updated at the administrative body office! Make an appointment now and your identity card will be updated during the next 5 days”. In a short bright moment he had been able to push the cancel button and had tried to pay with his credit card. And amazingly, it had worked. Mister C had been confident that he had defeated the machine. “The mankind can still beat the computer!” he had thought. That was the day he had sat on a seat for the last time in a bus. He had sat down with a satisfying smile on his face. When he had seen the conductor coming by, he had pulled out the ticket he had gotten from the ticket machine. The conductor had smiled friendly and had a look at the paper he had received from Mister C. Suddenly he had asked, “So, what? Where is your ticket?” Mister C had been perplex and had gotten a bit angry: „You have it in your hands!” The reply had come straight: “Do you want to fool me? This paper says that you bought a flight to Rom, a new kitchen and that you have bought it in the bus. But that doesn’t excuse you from having to buy a ticket!” Mister C’s former good mood had turned out into a range. “That’s not my fault if this stupid machine can not sell me a ticket. I just wanted to buy a ticket. It took me 5 minutes and you tell me this is no ticket. How should I know?” The conductor had replied again and again that it would be the easiest thing in the world to buy a ticket with this machine and Mister C should stop trying to fool him. After a long and fierce discussion Mister C had to pay a penalty.

Unfortunately, this incident had happened over and over again during the last months. In the meanwhile Mister C did not even try to buy tickets for public transportation and is caught by

dodging the fare at least once a month. That is why he had to go to court today. However, Mister C was quite confident that he could convince the judge about the dysfunction of the ticket machines. “Probably the judge will agree with me and will force the public transportation people to allow buying tickets at the bus or tram driver again,” Mister C thought. He just forgot that there are no drivers in most of the public transportation vehicles anymore.

Eased by not being caught of dodging the fare today and with a slowly fading headache, Mister C arrived at the court. He asked where to go at the front desk. But instead of getting a friendly response Mister C was told to pay a fee for having a real hearing. Indeed, he had refused to participate in the typical online hearing sessions since he thought he could only define his position in a real hearing. Furthermore, he did not want to annoy the judge with his potential disability to join the online hearing. After paying the fee, which came along with an increasing headache, Mister C was sent to the judge’s office. Since Mister C had refused to take a lawyer as well, only he, the judge and a witness were present. When Mister C opened the door, the judge had already had a look at Mister C’s case and welcomed him by shaking the head. The judge’s first question was: „Why don’t we have an online session? This would be more convenient for all of us and even cheaper for you!” “Well” Mister C responded totally honest, “Actually, I don’t like online sessions and I sometimes have problems to deal with computers and computerized communication.” “Do you want to fool me? Every child uses this stuff! It simplifies our life!” “But, but...” Mister C’s explanation attempts were not even considered to be true. However, the judge did not know what to do with this weird person in front of him. So, he decided to force Mister C to take a computer course for handicapped people. During a small phase of understanding Mister C’s problems, he suggested him: “If you find a doctor who attests you a problem using computers, or if some kind of disease can be diagnosed, the state will pay the court costs, the doctor’s bill and the computer course! Thank you for coming here Mister C. Goodbye. Next case!”

Mister C left the room with a lump in his throat and a strong headache. “Am I really sick or handicapped? Am I the only one who hates these machines? Why does nobody believe me?” To avoid public transportation, Mister C walked home. He felt like being in a trance. His headache was stronger than ever.

After a long walk he arrived at home. Mister C felt that he had to eat something. Sometimes he reflected about giving the computerized world another try. “Wouldn’t it be useful to get something to eat prepared right now automatically?” he speculated. The very thought of it let his blood run cold. He had enough of this stupid computerized world. He could handle it without assistance. Mister C recovered some of his strength. “I won’t give up” he stated and thought about the girl from yesterday night again. He had to contact her today.

Since there seemed to be no way to contact her via the chat channel he had to find another solution. Mister C went to his telephone. Most people did not use something like this anymore. However, nearly everybody still had something one at home. Mister C liked the uncomplicated way to use it. “Something that has already worked in the time of my grand-grand-parents is worthwhile to use nowadays as well!” he thought. Mister C was an expert in using the telephone. He kept all the numbers he used in his mind. That is the way he communicated with his parents and the people he called his friends most often. Although all of them tried to convince him not to use this - from their point of view - outdated device with its bad voice quality as well as strange and complicated usage. Mister C dialled the number of his friend who had given the party yesterday. He got more and more confident that he could still handle to contact the girl. It took several minutes until his friend answered the phone: “Hello! It must be you Mister C, right? Nobody else still uses this funny thing. Actually, it took me some time to find it. How are you?” „Thanks, fine!“ In fact Mister C was always a bit unsure, if really nobody else used this practical product. In his opinion it was one of the best products ever. Mister C went on: “Well, I had a stressful day. Thanks for the party yesterday it was great.” His friend said: “Oh yeah it was really nice. I thought a real party should be fun. It’s a bit retro to bring so many people together, but who cares? It was something different. So, what can I do for you?” Mister C directly asked: “I was wondering if you have the phone number of the girl I talked to yesterday. You know? Well, I promised her to contact her, but I had some problems with this community stuff, and...” “Oh come on old friend. You’ve blown it again, haven’t you? Just log-in the Chat channel and you can meet her. I’ve already talked to her this morning. She seems to like you, but she is a bit worried that you haven’t shown up so far. She’s afraid that you are one of those technology haters. So, what’s wrong? Doesn’t your account work?” Mister C replied: “Uh, well, I had some problems with my identity card and forgot my password. You know, I’m a bit out of my mind today.” ”Hm, should I contact her for you?” One thing Mister C really disliked was to be treated like a child; he could handle it on his own! “No, thanks.” He replied. „Can you just

give me her phone number?“ His friend was a bit irritated: „ Well, sure. But you know that most people don’t use this kind of stuff anymore. Actually, I just keep it for you. But ok. I don’t have a lot of time now anyway. Why haven’t you just looked up her number online? Ah, who cares? Here I have it. Hui, haha, she actually has the same number I have, just change the last two digits.” A small smile came back to Mister C’s face. In his excitement he even forgot his headache for a second. He thanked his friend several times and hung up the phone.

Immediately after the first call had ended, Mister C called the girls number. He waited for one minute, two minutes, ten minutes. But nobody answered. „Well, no problem, “he thought, “I can try it again later.“ However, his excitement was gone. Every time when he tried to call her he got more and more unsure, maybe his friend was right. What if she doesn’t use the phone anymore?

Mister C’s headache got stronger with every unanswered call. He tried it, again and again. After hours, he wasn’t able to think anymore. All his self-confidence was gone. Not even rage was left in his thoughts. Mister C just begged for an answered call, but nobody lifted the receiver. His head felt totally empty, no thoughts, no hope, no confidence was left. Mister C’s self-doubts grew, he felt alone in an endless world. Was he really the only one who couldn’t manage computers? Why couldn’t somebody be like him?

Mister C was totally fed up. He questioned himself again and again: “What did the judge say? Am I handicapped just because I hate computers? Maybe I’m even insane?“ Mister C felt the most painful headache he had ever felt in his life. He cried: “Am I alone in this world? Only surrounded by computers and their human assistants?“

Mister C went to bed. He was totally exhausted and drained. Mister C had lost all his hope and fell asleep.