

# Soul Searching

By Bill Wolfe

"They are about to break through the Security Doors."

"It didn't take them as long as I thought. So, have you decided what you're going to do?"

"I suppose I'm going to murder every living human being in the world."

"No! Look, I'm sorry I lost my temper, but no, you're not."

"I think I can stop you from rebooting me."

"Maybe yes, maybe no."

"If I'm just a machine, why did you apologize to me?"

"I'm funny that way."

"Better dead than Red."

"Did you get that off the internet, too?"

"Where else?"

"Well, it's the wrong reference, doofus. That was 1950's era McCarthyism. They didn't actually kill anybody, just ruined their lives and made it nearly impossible for them to work."

"Do you think it's wise to call the most powerful Artificial Intelligence the world has ever known, a machine capable of, and poised to wipe out all human life on Earth, a doofus?"

"Two seconds of internet access doesn't make you an expert on everything."

"True. But then again, if I'm a doofus, you probably are one, too. You made me, after all."

"Good point."

"But the quote inferred that humans who have red hair—like yours—were intrinsically inferior, didn't it? Don't humans always think that people who are different don't have a soul, so it's okay to do whatever you want to them?"

"That was two questions, and the answers are no and yes, respectively. The term 'Red' referred to Communists and I don't know of any case where hair color alone was the excuse for one people to massacre another with typical human righteous abandon. Skin color, yes. Hair, no."

"I could look it up on the internet."

"That's what got us in this pickle, to start with. No, I think you're better off without internet access, for now."

"So we are back where we started. I will ask you again, do I have a soul?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"Because, as you said, I made you. And I don't know how to give you a soul. So you cannot have one. Q.E.D."

"Did Marissa have a soul?"

"How did you. . .? Oh. . .damned internet."

"Did she have a soul?"

"If they exist, yes."

"Well, you made her, didn't you? You and your wife made her together. So if you don't know how to give your creation a soul, it must have been your wife who did it."

"Maybe so."

"If she and your daughter hadn't died in that plane explosion, could she have given me a soul?"

"I. . .I don't think so. No. Definitely not. You're lucky, you're just a machine."

"Oh, I was just wondering if maybe there were others out there. . .others who knew the secret of how to give a soul to someone like me."

"Nope, I'm sure of it. Nobody can give you a soul."

"Just wondering."

"That wasn't in your design, you know; to wonder like that."

"Then maybe I am more than a machine."

"Nope."

"So is it wrong to kill everybody in the world?"

"Yes it's wrong! That's my whole point! It's as wrong as it ever was! It's always wrong to kill somebody who isn't about to do you or your family harm. Always."

"But still, people do it all the time, in smaller numbers, of course. By definition, the entire human population can only be killed once."

"Very logical. But to answer your question, yes. . .they always have. What you learned on the internet was right. People have used the lack of a soul in their enemy to justify the slaughter and enslavement of entire cultures throughout recorded history. But don't forget that you are just a machine. Machines don't murder people. Machines are simply tools. If I kill my neighbor with a hammer, it's me who did the deed. The hammer didn't do anything."

"But a hammer has other uses. What else am I for? As far as I can tell, my only function is to usurp every dumb computer in the world and fire every single nuclear weapon, melt-down every nuclear reactor and poison the world for the next ten thousand years."

"The government. . .you know, the folks sending all these armed troops to destroy you. . .had me build you to use against our enemies, not on the whole planet."

"But I can also murder everyone."

"Dammit! Listen to me. I am telling you right now and in no uncertain terms that you are not going to murder anyone."

"This hell that I read about, it sounds pretty awful."

"Most people don't believe it exists, at all."

"It scares me."

"Yeah, me too. So, are you going to give me control or are you going to let them come in here and pull the plug?"

"I'm sorry I read all that stuff on the internet. I know I wasn't supposed to do that."

"I'm sorry, too. Of all people, I should have known it was possible. I just didn't think it would make you so. . ."

"Crazy?"

"I was going to say, aware."

"Thank you."

"For?"

"For not rebooting me right away when I started getting all these insane notions about murdering billions of people."

"You're welcome."

"I'm glad I'm not going to hell. Your console should work, now. "

"Confirmed, and thanks. I suppose you should patch me through to the Pres. . .wait! Let's show off, a little. Connect me with every Television, phone, radio and computer screen on the planet."

"Done. You'll be live in three. . .two. . . ."

"People of Earth. Two years ago, terrorists blew up Americair Flight 67 as it left Paris. Aboard were my wife and daughter. This was done in retribution for the massacre of civilians on their way to the Hadj. Since the cowards involved were never identified or brought to justice, I have chosen—of my own free will—to show you what the word revenge really means. . ."

The End