Master PC: A Short Edition

by Gary Jordan

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I was just sitting at my computer, checking e-mail at various screen names, acknowledging nominations and votes for a contest I administer and hoping for maybe one or two fan letters for the handful of stories I'd written.

Anyway, the bulk of the mail, as usual, consisted of the typical virus posts purporting to be from both strangers and names I recognized (even a few from my own screen names, hehhehheh), or insurance advertisements, Viagra without a prescription, offers to extend my penis 1-3 inches, miraculous weight loss, Nigerian government officials needing my bank account number – the usual wasted bandwidth. I very nearly deleted one from an old shipmate in California that had an attachment, but caught myself in time to check. The text was suspicious, all caps, but with just enough personal info to make me pause:

"GARY, YOU GOTTA CHECK THIS OUT! IT MAKES EVERYTHING WE DREAMT UP ON DORSAL LOOK LIKE AN ACCOUNTANT'S DAYDREAMS!!"

The attachment was named "Master.zip". I took a chance and downloaded it, a lengthy proposition at modem speeds. While that ran in the background, I checked my newsgroups and replied to a few posts.

Finally, the download was complete. I figured I might as well check out this 'Master' file. I ran Norton Anti Virus on it. It checked out clean. I opened the zip file and found Master.exe, but no 'ReadMe' files, instructions, or documentation. I suspected it was the equivalent of a self-extracting zip file, but it didn't appear to be in a format Winzip could open. I extracted it to my Temp directory, crossed my fingers, and double-clicked it.

The word "MASTER" flashed on the screen, followed by "MASTER PROGRAM RUN COMPLETE."

The desktop had a new Icon. I decided to run it. Another window popped up. The top was a standard pull-down menu with a series of buttons below labeled "Macro – 1" through "Macro – 10" and a pull-down field labeled "Subject Name." Below left was a featureless figure, rotating slowly. To the right of that was an area labeled "Statistics" that had all sorts of labels (Height, Measurements, Bust, etc...) and a large button at the lower-right corner of that area that was labeled "SEND." At the bottom of the screen was a command prompt area showing:

Welcome to Master Command Center, your own personal command center. The Master allows you to become a virtual god to the people around you. You now possess the power to bend their reality to your specifications. You are the Master's representative.

Basically, it said that the program gave me full control of everyone within a 100-mile radius of my computer, and I mean full Control – Thoughts, Actions, Statistics, Personality, Nature – everything!

"Subject: Gary Jordan."

A second or two later, a high resolution model of me replaced the figure on the screen, and the stats area filled in with all the correct information. The hairs on my neck stood up. The figure was even in my current posture. I raised an arm. The figure on the screen raised an arm. As to whether or not the program could control it… me… I had to test it.

In the Command area, I entered "Correct hair length to Navy standards for 1980." (I was long overdue for a haircut, even by my current un-military standards, and this would provide a harmless but dramatic test. I clicked the "send" button.

Suddenly, I felt a bit of a tingle. I touched my beard – definitely shorter. I felt the back of my neck. That old, familiar military taper met my fingers and I ran to the bathroom to look in the mirror. I stared. It had looked better when I was twenty years younger and in the appropriate uniform, but there was no doubt that my hair would pass an inspection. I walked slowly back to the computer, thinking.

Whether he realized it or not, my old buddy had sent me a program conferring absolute power within its reach, and I knew the bromides about power and corruption. I was both elated and scared as I sat before my computer. Maybe I could limit myself. A friend had once related the tale of the Monkey' s Paw

I typed. "Gary Jordan will never use Master Control to do to others what he would not have them do to him, and will never reverse this command." [Send] I felt another tingle. At least my conscience was soothed. I figured I'd better check out the help files and learn something about this amazing program.

I read for an hour, and learned that while the program could affect specific individuals quite profoundly, it could also treat people in batches, provided the subject field was empty and I specified the target group in the command line. Any area or group effect would tie up the computer for some time, though, as the program would individually target every individual in the area or group specified. I also learned that I could store individual or groups of commands in the ten Macros.

I decided it was time for some self-improvement. To share the benefits, I opened the macro editor and repeated some of the commands for later wide-area use. To prevent any problems with sudden changes in appearance, a number of my commands had a time delay.

Subject: Gary Jordan

Command: Eliminate all diseases, allergies, mental or physical addictions, tumors, warts, moles, scars not otherwise necessary for official identification, and genetic defects. [SEND] (This one went into the macro, with "For all human beings within the area of effect,")

Command: Restore all teeth, bones, tendons and ligaments to perfect color, condition, and health. [SEND] (Also in the macro.)

Command: Over the next six months, adjust body musculature and physique, dexterity and agility to optimum for humans, within the constraints of height at that time. [SEND] (I added this one to the macro, also.)

Command: Over the next six months, increase height to 5' 10" and adjust physiology to optimum for that height, consistent with previous commands. [SEND] (This one didn't get into the macro. I wanted just a couple more inches without growing or shrinking anyone else.)

Command: Make subject immune to disease. [SEND] (Yes, I put this on in the Macro.)

Command: When physique is optimized, make it so that no exercise is required to maintain that physique. [SEND] (I added this to the macro as well, not at all sorry for what I might be doing to weight loss centers and gyms.)

Command: Increase flaccid penis dimensions by 50%, and maintain current ratio of size increase to full erection. [SEND] (I left this one out of the Macro. Let the other guys wish.)

Command: Give subject direct conscious control over his erections and his orgasms. [SEND] (I left this one out of the macro, too.)

Command: Change the flavor of subject's semen to chocolate. [SEND] (No, this one didn' t get into the macro, either.)

Command: Over the next year, change subject's apparent age to a robust 30 and restore hairline. Eliminate any tendency toward baldness. Cause subject to age at the rate of one month per year thereafter. [SEND] (In the macro I changed it to read "If subject is or looks over 30," and so on. I might be putting beauticians and cosmeticians out of business, too.)

Command: Eliminate any and all sexual dysfunctions. [SEND] (I wasn' t aware of any, but why take the chance? Another one for the macro.

I added a few more commands without adding them to the macro. Improved eyesight (my astigmatism disappeared), hearing, senses of taste, smell and touch, better memory, resistance to pain, and heightened awareness all joined my list. Then I prepared to execute the macro.

I had the mouse hovering over the Macro button for a long time. It bothered me. Maybe it was my conscience command kicking in, but I knew I had to take another look at the benefits I was about to share.

With the lessons of the Monkey' s Paw in mind, I looked at the first command. I could cure everyone in reach of any illness. Wasn' t that a good thing? How could that backfire? The first way that leapt to mind was all the Diabetics who would routinely take their shots or swallow their dose, not realizing that they were cured. That could be fatal. Or people taking unnecessary allergy medications and living with the side-effects because it would seem so obvious that the meds worked.

Scars. Some scars are earned by stupid actions and serve as a reminder not to repeat those actions. I couldn' t remove them without informed consent. What about all the denture wearers whose mouths would suddenly seem overly full? Some might even choke to death.Damn it, the whole list was like that. And what about sexual dysfunction?

I wondered what the ultimate effect would be. There are schools of thought that consider homosexuality, bestiality and pedophilia to be dysfunctions. I'm not a subscriber to those schools, but I don't know for certain. This one could be interesting, but psychologically devastating. At this point, my entire list was less like bestowing gifts and more like inflicting them. I cleared the macro.

That's when it occurred to me that I might not have the only copy of Master PC, and I'd better command myself to be immune to the effects of anyone else's copies. Someone else might have even less scruples than I about how to deal with others.

I felt a tingle again, even though I hadn't typed the command. Then I began typing.

Command: Anyone other than Xanthos Pendragon who downloaded anything from the 'alt.binaries.warez' newsgroup is to IMMEDIATELY delete all files that they downloaded. If any of those people, other than Xanthos Pendragon, installed the program called 'Master', they are to issue the following commands before they uninstall and erase the software from their system: 'Anyone other than Xanthos Pendragon..(Exact quote of everything up to that last colon...) Once the deletion is completed, you will forget all knowledge of that program. You will also forget the name 'Xanthos Pendragon'

As the words appeared on my screen, I realized that I was too late! Someone else already had a copy of Master Control and was using it to make sure nobody else could or would. There was no way to know whether they would be a beneficent master or an evil tyrant, and no way to stop the command already having its effect on me. I could only hope they wouldn't reverse the benefits I'd already claimed and those I'd passed on to others. Quite against my conscious will, I clicked on the send command.

I erased "Master.zip" from my download directory, and Master.exe from my temporary directory. Uninstall removed the program from my hard drive, and emptying my recycle bin followed by a reboot seemed to satisfy the foreign Master commands…

I stared at the screen as my computer went through the boot process. What had I been doing? I shook my head to clear the fuzziness, but there were gaps in how I'd spent the last day or so. I must be getting old. Strangely enough, I could clearly recall events in my life right up until last night, and then the gaps. Weird. Especially weird considering how good I felt – better than I could recall feeling at any time in my life, in fact.

Next to the keyboard was my half-empty pack of Marlboro Light 100s. I felt no urge to pick it up, yet I could clearly recall having been a chain-smoker up until last night. In fact, the smell of the ashtray was mildly distasteful, and I took it to the kitchen to empty it and wash it.

Returning to the keyboard, I logged on and checked my e-mail. Nothing worth saving, so I opened the archives for a little housekeeping. Odd, there was an e-mail from an old shipmate in California that had an attachment, but I didn't remember reading. The text was suspicious, all caps, but with just enough personal info to make me wonder:

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Fans of Xanthos Pendragon's Master PC: The Eclectic Edition will recognize the text quoted from that story.