

**B**y now, you are wondering how you are going to get through another night of this. You

scanned all the news sources and sifted through hours of irreputable algorithmic data. You've always wondered if a PocketPal® would be good for you. So, the next time you have a day off from your miserable job you go down to the corner unit to find out more information. You need details. A woman at the counter greets you. She's wearing bright colored lipstick and the skirt around her is so tight, it makes her curves pop out extraordinarily. You envy how she could hold herself together so well. In a way, this could be you—shuffling through endless amounts of sales data, cached the right way, only to find one single customer that fits the demographic for a PocketPal® that could provide years of enjoyment.

You look at the sales in a bewildered sort of way.

She asks what it is you want, and you go on and tell her. She pulls out a pad and bright lights with tinkering noises come out. Then a brighter light shifts from the pad and a hologram appears right before your eyes. It is slated in black and white with a few occasional greenish hues. You step back in surprise thinking this is not what you had in mind. However, the lovely woman knows you well. She's read your mind already via the Nifty® chip inside your brain that was scanned upon arrival. She knows your tastes, habits, fears— even your desires. You walk further down the hall, and she guides you to “The Machine”— a nomenclature of sorts akin to a vending machine except you get to choose the most exuberant models that the company pre—selects for you. This time it is only a select few models from the previous years. Tapping a few buttons while scanning your fingerprints makes way for a delicate little PocketPal®® the size of your hand. It falls through the shaft and lands delicately wrapped in cellophane inside a plastic box.

The next day you are excited about your new purchase.

You open the box it came in, unwrap the contents and set it on the kitchen counter. It says on the directions to keep the lights turned off. You turn them off. You wonder why this must be. Surprisingly, you don't care all that much. You just want to get it open. You unwrap all the foil and cellophane as you hold the flashlight in your mouth. Teeth clenching, holding on to it as much as possible— you're nervous. Yet excited. When you unwrap all the other contents, a bunch of cords fall out of a thin translucent bag. Attached to the cords is the PocketPal®®. This is unlike anything you have ever seen before. You want to hold it, but the instructions say to allow it to breath normal air and to allow its fiber optic cables to adjust to the natural light. The next day you are excited as ever. You pull the PocketPal®® from its lofty home in the plastic box it came in. You are not really sure what to do at this point so you just go to work. Upon arriving home, you find it running around your kitchen floor and jarring in a strange clinking robotic

noise. This by far is the most exciting thing you have laid eyes on— yet very strange. The little squeaks and clinking noises coming from it make you feel elated. You even love it when it talks to you in different languages. You tell it to do different things— backflips, somersaults, and handstands. It takes sheer delight in doing those said things and even in you. You are happy.

There's more though.

Your PocketPal® feels all the emotions you feel. You can even program it to sense all the myriads of feelings that you feel in that precise moment. It bonds with you perfectly. There is no real need for anything else. It is just you and your PocketPal®. You start to neglect all your other duties. On some days work seems like a chore, so you call off to spend more time at home with it. Friends near and far call to say they want to visit you. But you're too busy playing with it, taking care of it, making sure it likes you and its new home. Eventually you grow tired of the outside world and fall into a blissful state of disrepair, as you wallow your days alone with your new artificial friend. Due to government regulations, you can't take your PocketPal® outside and show him off to others. Doing that would be a federal offense. The social stigma surrounding PocketPal® s has been pervasive. Some hate them. Some love them. Nobody seems to come to agreements on what must be done with them. You want to lead a revolution and let the world know just how great this thing really is. But you can't. No one will listen. So, you just sit and home and continue tinkering around with it. Watching it closely, monitoring it and playing with it. After a few days with no sleep, you begin to wonder if this thing sleeps at all. You get up to see if it's awake. You start to imagine it doing strange things at night— looking at you from afar or making strange noises like whenever it reboots its neural drives and charges its neuro-calcitration filters. You wonder as you always do. Nothing changes. The nights drag on, and you feel lonely. You start to wonder if this was a clever idea getting one.

Bored with your life, you imagine scenarios with your PocketPal® and your newfound dream finally realized. You'd like to take it to the ocean but can't for fear that it will drown or that someone would see it crawling through the sand. Or maybe that a seagull will pick it up and carry it away. One night you have an idea— you will take it for a spin around town in a hired vehicle and show it all the sights and sounds of the city. The PocketPal® can speak over any language and fend for its life if attacked. So, if you ever feel threatened, it could potentially protect you. Not that you will ever get attacked in this big city, but you are hopeful that your PocketPal® will follow through. Somehow you still feel afraid that it might get snatched away or someone might have longing eyes for it. You decide to take it out anyway and hide it in your coat pocket. You disregard any error messages or warnings that say not to take your PocketPal® out in public. They show up in your neural pathway messages and light up before you as a hologram warning you to stop. You have seen some other citizens do it, and break the rules, but you remain skeptical until now. Given the government regulations, you wrap it in a scarf and put it in your pocket so no one can see it. You tell the PocketPal® to turn on heat mode so that it can detect any presence around you— just in case you don't get attacked. If anything

were to happen to your trusty friend, you would be devastated. Currently, it feels good to know that someone is by your side. Literally. You take off into the night. You flounder through the street; the cool breeze hits you hard and you pull your trench coat closer to you. With the ocean on your right and the stars shining above you, you feel a sense of freedom and unexpected joy. It has been a while since you've been outside somewhere leisurely. The PocketPal® is looking out the window loving every minute of your newfound glory.

You make your way to the city gardens, and you walk through the cool summer lawn of the city with its vibrant iridescent bulb glows above and below. The PocketPal® is mesmerized by the sounds and smells of the city. It's almost as if you don't need anything else in this moment. Just you and your PocketPal®. It makes a startling noise. No one is around to hear but you tap your chest pocket signaling for it to be quiet. You haven't really thought of a name for it. As you walk past billboards and street advertisements on holograms you see ads pertaining to different PocketPal® units. You wonder what a good name will be. As you walk down the 'Dark Corridor' a few advertisements pop up. The PocketPal® makes some more noise, and you wonder if it likes those names. It is as if the ads are catered to the fact that they know the shape and size of your PocketPal®. As if it had a personality all its own and it needed this or that.

You scratch your eyebrow. You want to leave and go back home. The PocketPal® starts to churn and make strange clinking noises inside your coat pocket. It's squirming and churning makes you uneasy. So, you go back home. You mumble something derogatory to it and tell it to sit down quietly. You're trying to catch some zzz's. You're tired. Alone. And wondering if this thing is what you really desire.

You find yourself waking up in the middle of the night after a bizarre dream. In the dream you are walking in the dark and there is a light in the other room. It is red and flashing on and off. You hear a few noises. This time you are awake, and the noises are coming from your living room. You walk towards them ever so steady and see a dim light go on and off followed by a strange noise similar to the dream. You find the PocketPal® on the floor rubbing its body against the carpet and making a different sort of clinking noise. You look away in shock, then the apprehensive fear stewes over you. You need to do something about it. Its red eyes light up and scan your movements as you walk towards it. The laser from its eyes are now scanning your whole body up and down. It is still making the clinking noise. It runs and hides under the sofa sleeper and pops its head out every other second. You are starting to get a little annoyed. You begin to reach under the sofa and grab it by its legs. The metal and clinking noise get louder. It begins to let out a loud shrill. You drop it on the floor and kick some blankets in anger, then come back to it and put it in its storage compartment.

The next day, as you are getting ready for work, brushing your teeth, and combing your hair you notice something off. The PocketPal® isn't making any noise. Normally it would alert you to change its decompression nodes or run a temperature gauge check. You stand there aloof.

After a few minutes of searching your place you go out to the street and begin frantically searching for it. Nowhere. You run down alleyways and sift through garbage cans. The air around you feels heavy with every gasping breath. You can't find your beloved anywhere and every minute that goes by feels like something worse is about to happen.

You turn around and see another passerby with a PocketPal® similar to your own. Except this one has one green eye and one blue eye. You wonder if they got its central wire intake changed out. Another couple is staring at you from a distance while holding their PocketPal® and swinging it in the air laughing.

This makes you angry.

You wonder around for the longest time—you don't know how long really, because you are tired and upset. You start to wonder if the thing you loved the most has left you for someone else, or worse—might be dead.

Your anger turns to rage, then back to a calm loathing, then to a sadness that penetrates your deep core. You begin to cry. As people walk past you, they stare and wonder what is going on. You sob more heavily.

Finally you get up and walk around pretending to think that everything will be ok. You look up at a shiny billboard advertising the newest PocketPal® holding a balloon while being gently held by a child smiling. You think to yourself that the child could have been you, and that all you wanted was somebody to love.

Now, the very thing you thought you loved is gone.

Weeks go by and turn into months. The PocketPal® hasn't shown up anywhere and you stare out the window remembering all the good times. You think about it all the time. Sometimes you still cry over it wishing it was there next to you. But somehow you have a deep feeling that it is gone forever.

You do some research.

You check online portals and message boards. You dig into the external files of the companies that manufacture the parts for them. You make calls. You talk to some neighbors.

Still nothing.

Eventually you give up, until you find something peculiar. It's a small bright light the size of the your fingernail emanating from under the couch beneath some boxes that you flattened and placed under it. You pull the boxes from under the couch and find the packaging that came with the PocketPal® when you first purchased it. The light is brighter now and is playing a small tune. It is a sad tune.

You click on the light and it flashes red for a few seconds then stops. The tune stops as well and a hologram shoots out from the small fingernail sized medallion. A near translucent text box pops out in mid-air and reads:

**Warning: This PocketPal® has a life of its own and may reach the age of maturation within 1 to 2 years. At that time it is the sole discretion of owner and not limited to the company to offer any reprisals or refunds for purchased unit. Upon purchasing this PocketPal® the end user agrees to such status of PocketPal® said herin in this agreement and set forth by the company and its subsidiaries.**