

THE ANSWERER

written by

Ben W.

INT. FUNTIME TOYS BUILDING - ELEVENTH FLOOR - DAY

We float through a panoramic sprawl of efficiently-sized offices, all polished mahogany and frosted glass.

Bronze letters mounted on the wall cast a long shadow:

PRODUCT ASSESSMENT DIVISION

The individual office walls don't reach the ceiling, so we see in on fastidious workers, each putting a colorful toy through its paces.

The open-air layout results in a steady hum of activity, punctuated by various BUZZES, RATTLES, and DINGS.

NICHOLAS SNELLARD'S OFFICE

Snellard, 40, balding, sits alone at his tidy desk. He peers through horn rimmed glasses at an FT-31 Toy Assessment Form.

On the page is an exploded-view diagram with staggering technical detail. So much detail that it's impossible to determine what the object even is.

He traces his finger across the page, along a particularly complex connection. Yup - everything looks up to snuff.

He signs his initials in the appropriate box.

He puts down the paperwork and looks at the actual toy, which sits in the middle of his desk.

A colorful TIN TOY grins back at him - a monkey in a clown suit. On a unicycle.

Next to the monkey sits a full-color printed box prototype:

CYCLE-MONKEY! Wind-Up-And-Away!™

Snellard takes a long look at the toy. He picks up the form again and turns to page two, filled with tiny checkboxes.

Lightning-fast, he ticks down the list: check, check, check, initials, check, check, initials, check, check, etc. Done.

One last field remains blank on the form: FINAL ASSESSMENT.

He sets the paperwork aside and leans in to inspect the monkey.

Finally, he picks it up, carefully winds it, and sets it down on his desk.

The toy staggers at first - almost falls - before righting itself into a methodical circular path around the desk top.

Then comes the JUGGLING.

Little tin balls. Only two balls, but he is essentially *juggling*. While *riding a unicycle*.

The toy winds down, grinding to a mechanical halt. It almost topples over, but the monkey's foot juts out - a kickstand.

Snellard sits and stares. Impressed. He reaches toward his chrome rubber stamp carousel, for the APPROVED stamp, but --

CLANK!

One of the tin balls has fallen out of the monkey's hand. It rolls noisily across the metal desk and

CLANK!!

onto the floor. The office hum STOPS DEAD. Silence. Except for the deafening sound of the ball rolling on the floor.

Snellard leaps from his chair and snatches up the little ball. He waits, frozen, until the hum resumes.

He slumps back in his chair and meets the monkey's gaze.

He glumly spins his stamp carousel with his finger. Back and forth between the REJECTED stamp and the PENDING stamp.

BING!

A glass sign on his wall lights up: INCOMING DELIVERY.

A shiny metal dumbwaiter slides open. A plain box sits inside, stamped PRIORITY: EXPEDITE.

Snellard jumps up and hurries over to retrieve the box. No packaging for this one, just a hand-written:

THE ANSWERER - Executive Desktop Edition™

He packs up the monkey toy with its unfinished paperwork and moves it off his desk.

He unpacks the new toy.

First, he looks over the paperwork. This diagram is much simpler. Some curved tubes are involved. And no checkboxes.

He removes from the box an elegant contraption shaped like an upside down Y. He holds it up and takes its measure.

It consists of a vertical tube with an opening at the top which FORKS halfway down into two equal tubes which empty into two trays: YES or NO. Very simple.

He places it on his desk and reaches into the box for the other component: a plastic sphere the size of a golf ball.

He POPS the sphere open to reveal a hollow inside. He consults the Instruction Manual:

STEP 1. Insert question into QueryBall.

He finds a small slip of paper clipped to the page:

My Question:?

He thinks, then picks up his mechanical pencil and fills in:

My Question:Does this thing work....?

He folds up the paper and SNAPS it into the ball. He consults the instructions:

STEP 2. Insert QueryBall into AnswerTube.

He gingerly drops the ball into the top opening. It rattles through the tube and out the bottom, into the tray labeled YES.

Snellard isn't impressed quite yet. He POPS the ball open and unfolds the paper. He adds:

My Question:Does this thing^{not}work....?

He inserts the ball into the tube, and it rattles through to NO.

He smiles. He reaches for his APPROVED stamp, presses it into the ink pad and THOCKS it down on the form.

But it remains blank.

He presses his finger into the pad. No ink.

He opens his desk drawer and grabs another ink pad. As he is closing the drawer, though, his eye catches on something.

He stops and stares, lost in faraway thought, at:

A framed WEDDING PHOTO sitting in the drawer. A young Snellard with a pretty bride, both in horn rimmed glasses.