

TEC-H_{ooo}NICAL

S-U_{PP}-OR-----T

(SURE WE'LL HELP YOU!)

By

Chris Klassen

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Chris Klassen's, "Technical Support," is an exercise in insanity – in the best way possible.*

I've lived in Illinois, Louisiana, and now Tennessee, and at each new state that I've moved to I'll still receive calls from the previous state I moved to – Illinois more so because the area code to my cell phone is still listed there. Sure, I'll have the occasional California, Ohio, Arizona, Utah. I've gotten Alaska before – don't know anyone there and don't answer. I've even been called from Brampton, Ontario quite recently, and, for a minute, I thought it was Charles calling me to check in.

A good friend of mine in Louisiana takes pleasure at tormenting robo-calls, answers every single one.

A good friend of my dad has made millions of dollars in litigation profits because he mitigates the cost of illegal robo-call companies vs. how much the people that are suing them can keep the lawsuit going – i.e. take less or nothing cause you can't last as long as they can.

They're profitable, if not cancerous – ironically enough like the medical insurance industry.

If you slammed Klassen's, "Technical Support," with Sam Beckett you would have our protagonist – a man driven to the brink by the insanity of capitalism, repetition, and no end to the worst in our world.

Hilarious, scary, and, like a fortune teller who gets it right, rolling around crying on the floor in utter disbelief in shit luck, Klassen has made a story that you'll want to read.

Nice work.

QUALITY QUOTABLE *(for the love of language...)*

My television turns on. I look at the screen and my own image is staring back at me. It speaks.

"Is this Mr. Ludd?" it asks. My own face is asking me if I'm me. The voice is different. It's electronic and choppy. A different voice is coming out of my own face. I stay silent. It asks again. "Is this Mr. Ludd?"

My house is so hot. It's so uncomfortable. The thermostat reads thirty-two. "I didn't order an upgrade. I'm turning you off." My converter is on the couch. I pick it up and press the power button. It won't turn off. My face won't leave the screen. I'm still looking at me. I get a blanket from my closet and throw it over the TV.

Technical Support

by Chris Klassen - 1,324 words

My cell phone rings. The call is from Illinois. I don't know anyone in Illinois. I answer. An electronic voice tells me it's the technical support I ordered. I didn't order any technical support. If I want to upgrade my service package, I need to press one. To maintain what I already have, I need to press two. I don't have a service package. I hang up. I try to delete the call. It won't delete.

A few minutes later, my cell phone rings again. The call is from Nevada. I don't know anyone in Nevada. I answer this call too. It's a real person. At least it sounds like a real person.

"Is this Mr. Ludd?"

"Who's calling?" I ask.

"This is the technical support you ordered. I'd like to offer you a service package upgrade."

"I didn't order technical support."

"It came with your new phone."

"I don't have a new phone."

"I'll just need some personal details, that's all. Then you'll have your new service package upgrade."

"I don't have a service package. I don't want technical support. I don't have a new phone. I'm getting uncomfortable."

"Just your credit card number. And the expiry date. And the three-digit code on the back."

"I'm hanging up now." I hang up. I try to delete the call. It won't delete. Now there are two of them. I can't make them go away.

My landline phone rings. Yes I still have a landline. I pick up. It's an electronic voice. It's from the Revenue Department. A fuzzy choppy electronic voice that's a bit hard to understand. The Revenue Department tells me my file has been temporarily frozen due to suspicious activity. To unfreeze, I need to provide my Social Insurance Number. I need to press one. If I ignore, my file will remain frozen. There's no real person to talk to. I hang up. I stand in my living room. My lips are dry.

A few minutes later, my landline rings again. I let it ring three times. The voicemail is supposed to kick in after three rings. It keeps ringing. After seven, I pick up. Maybe it's important.

"Is this Mr. Ludd?"

"Who's calling?"

"It's the Revenue Department. We've temporarily frozen your file. There's suspicious activity."

"What Revenue Department?"

"I'll just need some personal details. Your Social Insurance Number first. What's your Social Insurance Number please. So we can unfreeze your file."

"What file?"

"Your Revenue Department file. Every citizen has one."

"I'm getting uncomfortable. I'm hanging up now."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

I hang up. There's silence in my living room. Curious, I pick up my phone again. There's a message. I listen. It's the Revenue Department. They need my Social Insurance Number because my file is frozen. I try to delete the message. It won't delete.

Sweat is on my forehead and on my upper lip. I'm feeling flushed and clammy. I check the thermostat on the wall. The temperature is set for thirty-two degrees. It reads thirty-two degrees. It's supposed to be at twenty-one. I never change it. I press the button to re-set and watch the number drop until it gets to twenty-one. I release the button. It goes back up to thirty-two.

My cell phone rings. The call is from South Dakota. I don't know anyone in South Dakota. I don't answer and it keeps ringing. Ten times, twenty times. I let it ring on and on. After some minutes, the ringing stops. It answers itself.

"Is this Mr. Ludd?" I say nothing. It continues. "Mr. Ludd, this is the Justice Department. We've been advised about some questionable transactions coming from your bank account."

"What Justice Department?"

"Did you recently transfer funds to Europe?"

"Of course not," I answer. Panicking.

"Funds from your account went to Europe. To a suspicious account. In Europe."

"It's impossible."

"We just need to confirm your banking information. To clear everything up. And your Social Insurance Number. We're from the Justice Department." I throw my phone against the wall. The voice is still there. I can still hear it. "First your banking information please. Then your Social Insurance Number." I say nothing. The voice asks many more times. It keeps telling me it's from the Justice Department. I stay silent. After a few minutes of silence, I assume it has gone. I pray it has gone.

My television turns on. I look at the screen and my own image is staring back at me. It speaks.

"Is this Mr. Ludd?" it asks. My own face is asking me if I'm me. The voice is different. It's electronic and choppy. A different voice is coming out of my own face. I stay silent. It asks again. "Is this Mr. Ludd?"

"Who's calling?" I move away from the screen so I don't have to look at myself.

"This is technical support. From the cable company. I have the movie channels you ordered. You can process the order with your new phone."

"I don't have a new phone. I didn't order movie channels."

"Just enter your credit card details on your phone. Then you'll have your upgrade."

"Why are you doing this to me?" I ask.

"I have your movie channels. Your upgrade."

My house is so hot. It's so uncomfortable. The thermostat reads thirty-two. "I didn't order an upgrade. I'm turning you off." My converter is on the couch. I pick it up and press the power button. It won't turn off. My face won't leave the screen. I'm still looking at me. I get a blanket from my closet and throw it over the TV.

"All we need is your credit card information. Or your Social Insurance Number. That will work too." I press Mute on the converter. "Either will be fine," it continues. It won't mute.

I walk to the front hall. It's the farthest point from the TV. I slump down against the wall. The voice coming from my face on the TV is still talking. My cell phone rings. It's still on the floor where I threw it. In the other room. I don't know where the call is coming from. It doesn't matter. I don't answer. After ten rings it stops. My landline rings. I don't answer. After eleven rings it stops. It's still so hot.

I rest against the wall, trembling and nauseous. It's quiet again. No phones are ringing. No more voice coming from the TV. I stay seated on the floor with my back to the wall. I breathe. Minutes pass. It's still so hot but it's silent at least. I breathe some more.

A booming voice interrupts. It envelops me. It's like I'm swallowed **by** a voice.

"Is this Mr. Ludd?" I don't answer. The voice doesn't wait. "Mr. Ludd, this is technical support from your home security company." The voice booms through the wall monitors. "Your system has been compromised. We know you've recently had suspicious calls on your cell phone and your landline. Your TV and thermostat have been hijacked."

"Is this real?" I ask.

"Yes, we're here to help you. From your home security company."

I sigh. "Thank you," I say. "What's your name?"

"You are Mr. Ludd?"

"Yes. It hasn't been a very good day."

"You can relax now. We're here to help you."

"Thank you." I sigh. Sitting against the wall.

"All we need is your credit card information. And your banking details. Or your Social Insurance Number. That will work too." I say nothing. I'm dizzy. My lips are dry. I'm nauseous. "Mr. Ludd, this is technical support. From your home security company. We're here to help you. From your home security company." The voice booms. "Technical support. To help you."

I sit against the wall. I start to sob. My cellphone and my landline ring. A voice comes from my TV. It's so hot.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *"Technical Support" is an exaggeration and fictionalization of a recent computer hack that I experienced. My goal with the story was to emphasize the feelings of powerlessness that can arise when technology goes awry and how easily we can be completely manipulated by hackers. I chose to write in very short choppy sentences as I felt this would create a feeling of panic and frustration in the reader. The story conclusion is open-ended to show that the potential to be victimized is constant.*

AUTHOR BIO: Chris Klassen is a hobbyist writer and resident of Toronto, Canada. After graduating from the University of Toronto with a degree in history and living for a year in France and England, he returned home and worked the majority of his career in print media. He is now

living a semi-retired life, writing and looking for new ideas. His work has appeared in the online journals Short Circuit, Unlikely Stories and Across the Margin