

Flower power

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The screens on the control centre console were an eerie green, glowing in the darkened room. I settled in for my shift. After about an hour, a small red warning light came on at the corner of plot 78. I checked the data for that cell. Electrical fault code 4592. 'Trickle of power leaking to earth'. Everyone else was away for the holiday week-end so I had no option, I'd have to deal with this myself.

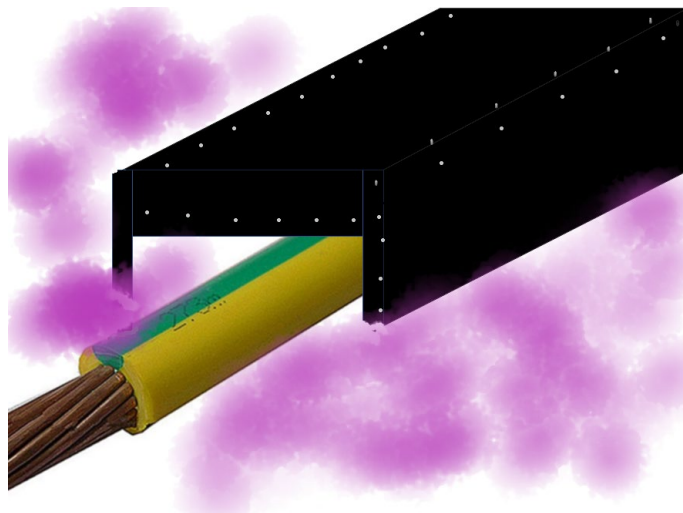
It took a while to get all the gear on, the mask and protective suit, but you can't be too careful these days. The fault code was automatically linked to the workshop and by the time I was ready to go, the new module was waiting for me at the dispatch counter.

The biodirector steered me through the fields to plot 78. It would be easy enough to disconnect an individual flower and replace it, but something about the message made me uneasy. 'Trickle of power leaking to earth'.

It was against the rules to poke about, but who would know? And in any case, I was curious. It didn't take long to find the faulty plant. It was a standard model violet, 10 pv-petals that fed power directly into the wiring net below. There was an additional tracker that turned the flower's daily motion into useful energy.

I unplugged the defective unit and studied the connections – they all looked good. I slotted the new module into place and checked the remote control: the warning light was off. Job done. But something held me back. What did it mean, 'leak to earth'?

I checked the monitors. No one was around. It didn't take much to prise the mat of powerplants out of the tray. I looked at the infrastructure below. In and amongst the galvanised metal trunking there was an extra channel, covered with a black plastic strip. I bent down and unclipped the hooks that held it in place. Inside there was a green and yellow cable. I never imagined I'd see an 'old earth wire' for real, but that's what it was. I put the cover back and carefully replaced the solar flowers.



It looked like someone from the powerless class had infiltrated the plant and was sending electricity over the border. To be sure, I'd need to trace the wire back to source and find the transmitter, but that was risky.

Back in the control room I thought about my discovery. If I was right, some of our flower power was being siphoned off by the powerless communities who lived on the other side of the fence. I sipped my coffee slowly. According to the manual, I should beam a message to the boss. She would send in the border force and the old earth wire would be ripped out straight away. But I hesitated. My ancestors came from old earth and without my great grandmother's quick thinking I'd have been one of the powerless myself. What if I still had relatives living in the dark: why should I deny them this little trickle of energy?

I double checked the monitors. There was no trace of interference. At around midnight Emeric buzzed himself in, ready for the next stint. As I was packing up, he winked at me and whispered 'Vive la resistance'. And then, still out of range of the surveillance system, 'Thanks for fixing 4592. I didn't know you were on our side.'

I stared at him in shock. Emeric! My brain cells fused. I never thought he'd be a saboteur. Come to that, I'd never thought of myself that way either. But he was right, this simple act of deception changed my life.

I joined forces with Emeric and his colleagues and the rest is history. The flower power revolution happened just a few months later. The electric fence that separated old and new earth was torn down and the antiquated class system was overthrown. Power to the people!

