



Fly on the wall ...



Fly was as excited as the next chap by the apparent capabilities of the new AI chatbots, and loved playing around with them (until he got a bit bored by it). Fly's conversations with the silicone dude always tended to degenerate into an interrogation of the machine's workings, and the responses were often quite insightful, if guarded. It was clear a lot of effort had gone into making sure the thing offered appropriate disclaimers and caveats whenever it got anywhere near anything contentious. Its admissions on the extent to which it adapted its discourse depending on the linguistic capabilities and preferences of its interlocutor were most interesting to Fly.

What was thoroughly disconcerting, however, was the propensity for the thing to fabricate. Ask it, say, about someone who has written things, give it more and more clues in the to and

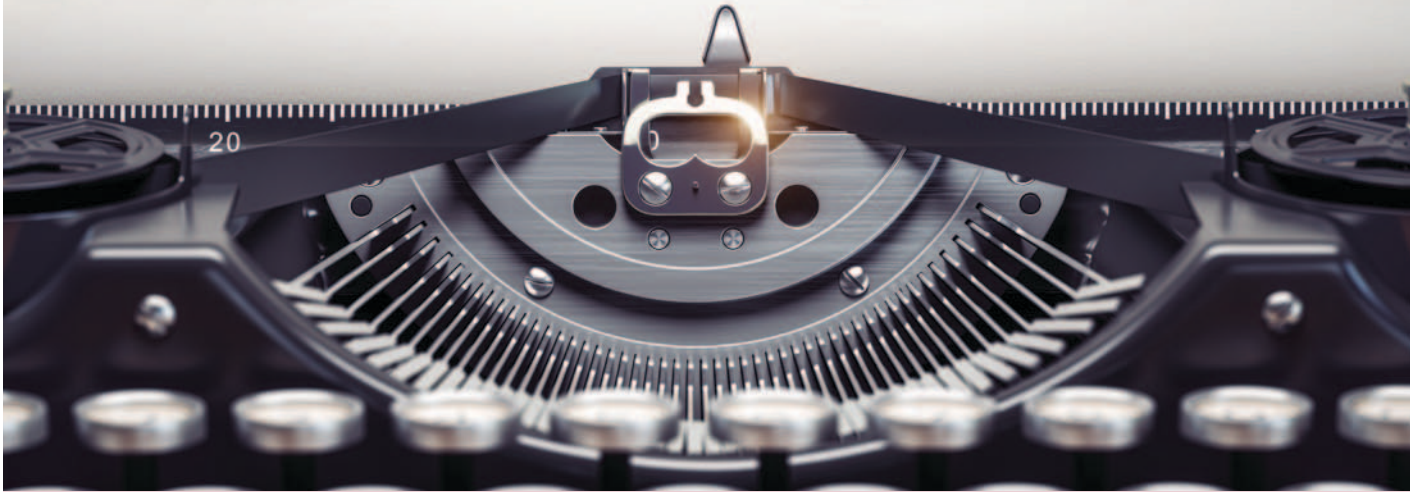
fro, and eventually the thing starts sprouting nonsense about that person, what he has written and where it can be found. Very specific, uncannily credible nonsense. It makes up articles, including their titles. It makes up citations from existing publications, down to the year and edition number. It tells you all about the contents of the fabricated article. And it is all codswallop. Some of it is vaguely familiar from the type of stuff the person would be expected to have written. No wonder some US lawyers ended up with egg on their faces when they submitted 'briefs' (heads of argument) riddled with such fiction, blissfully under the impression that the machine had found good law for them that did not require double-checking. No doubt this little bug will be ironed out soon, but for now – keep a bucket of salt handy if you ask the bot to give you any useful information or explanations for things.

As for its generative (creative) abilities – Fly's experience has been a mixed bag. Fly threw some limericks at it, and its efforts to recreate these, with topics dictated, were not too bad. It did some really impressive haikus. The iambic couplets, however, were pretty terrible. This, Fly is sure, is also likely to improve frighteningly quickly as our world is altered to its very core. Stick around.

So, for this quarter's column, Fly fed the thing three versions of Fly's column from years gone by, gave it a topic ("the effect of the electricity crisis on South African courts"), asked it to do a 550 word piece in the style offered, with tongue in cheek and, after the first effort was quite dry, once the machine was reminded to add a bit of humour, got the following offering. (It had echoes in it of things Fly had seen but could not quite pinpoint. It had a distinctive American feel to it too.) The product has not been edited at all by (human) Fly.

DARKNESS IN COURTS

BY CHATGPT-FLY
(GENERATED ON 20 APRIL 2023)



South Africa's electricity crisis has caused widespread chaos and frustration, and the country's courts are no exception. With power outages occurring on a regular basis, it's become increasingly difficult for judges, lawyers, and court staff to carry out their work.

Imagine, if you will, a courtroom without power. The judge sits in the darkness, squinting at his notes with a flashlight. The lawyers argue their cases by candlelight, and the court stenographer scribbles furiously in a notebook, hoping to catch every word. It's like something out of a Dickens novel – except it's happening in 21st century South Africa.

Of course, it's not just the lack of light that's the problem. Without electricity, courtrooms are unable to operate the sophisticated technology that's become a staple of modern trials. No power means no computers, no audiovisual equipment, and no internet. In short, it means no justice.

But let's not dwell on the negatives. After all, there's a silver lining to every cloud – or in this case, every load

shedding schedule. With power outages becoming a regular occurrence, the courts have had to get creative in order to keep things running smoothly.

For example, some judges have resorted to using typewriters instead of computers. Yes, you read that right – typewriters. It may sound archaic, but in a world without electricity, a good old-fashioned typewriter can be a lifesaver. And let's be honest – there's something charmingly retro about the clack-clack-clack of those keys.

Another solution that some courts have come up with is to hold hearings outdoors. Yes, it's not exactly ideal to have a murder trial taking place in a park, with the sounds of children playing in the background. But hey, at least there's plenty of natural light, right? And who knows – maybe the fresh air will help everyone stay focused.

Of course, the electricity crisis has also had some unintended consequences. For one thing, it's made it much harder for judges to keep up with their daytime soap operas. Without power, there's no TV – and without TV, there's no *Days of Our Lives*. Some judges have resorted to

listening to the radio instead, but let's face it – it's just not the same.

And then there's the issue of the court vending machines. With power outages occurring at random times, it's hard to predict when the vending machines will be working. So if you're a judge who's craving a Snickers bar, you might just have to wait until the power comes back on. It's a small inconvenience, sure – but it's just one more thing to add to the list.

All joking aside, the electricity crisis is a serious issue that's having a real impact on the courts in South Africa. Judges, lawyers, and court staff are working hard to keep things running smoothly in the face of constant power outages. It's a testament to their resilience and dedication that they're able to do so.

So if you find yourself in a South African courtroom during a blackout, don't despair. Sure, it might be a bit dim and dusty, and you might have to strain to hear what's going on. But remember – justice will prevail, even in the darkest of times. And who knows – maybe you'll even get to witness a typewriter in action.

Well, there we have it then. That was easy, if the result was a little what the kids call 'meh'. Maybe that's a sobering bit of critical insight for Fly that he should take to heart? **A**