Understanding the Plot

1. In what ways was EPICAC different from the computers that preceded him?
2. Why did the early publicity about EPICAC die down so quickly?
3. Why are the top military officials referred to as “the Brass”? (lines 6-7)
4. Why did EPICAC work more slowly than his designer intended?
5. Why does Pat initially refuse the narrator’s marriage proposal?
6. What makes EPICAC finally work without “sluggishness and stammering clicks”? (line 109)
7. Why does Pat allow the narrator to kiss her for the first time?
8. What does Pat expect from the narrator after she reads the poem “The Kiss”? Does he oblige her? Explain your answer.
9. How is the narrator’s second proposal different from his first?
10. Why does EPICAC self-destruct?

Writing Activities

1. Write a two-page (double spaced) essay considering the potentially dehumanizing effects posed by advanced technology. You might consider, for example, whether the “smart bombs” used in computerized warfare today help minimize people’s reactions to their destructive potential; or whether a society increasingly dominated by machinery is in danger of losing its should; or where gene cloning is leading to. In your conclusion, say what measures society should take to protect itself from the negative consequences of modern technological developments.
2. “EPICAC” is a love story with a twist. Write your own short story in which at least one of the central characters is an unlikely lover. Your protagonist(s) may be human or nonhuman – perhaps it is age, looks, social status, or extraterrestrial origin that is the barrier. Narrate your story n the first-person voice, and describe the characters and situation as vividly as possible. If appropriate, use some colloquialisms. End your story with a sense of whether this love affair might succeed.
3. Alfred Tennyson, the British Victorian poet, wrote: “’Tis better to have loved and lost/Than never to have loved at all.” Write a two-page essay commenting on the idea expressed in this couplet. Say whether you agree to disagree with the sentiment. Give reasons for your answer, drawing from real life and fiction, and include EPICAC’s ill-fated love for Pat. In your conclusion, say how personal experience has influenced your thoughts on the subject.
4. The famous French play Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rosland (1897), which has been made into two excellent movies, has elements similar to “EPICAC.” In the play the hero, Cyrano, who is brave, intelligent, and eloquent, secretly loves his beautiful cousin, Roxanne. However he feels unable to woo her because he has a disfiguringly large nose. Instead, he expresses his love for her through the notes he writes for his rival, Christian, who passes them off as his own, thus winning Roxanne for himself. Sadly, it is only on Cyrano’s deathbed that Roxanne finally discovers the truth. Choose a novel, play, or move that has a lie at its heart, and in a short essay (of two pages) summarize its plot. In your conclusion, discuss the ethics of the situation, and say how the deception affected you.