

THIRD CHANCE

By Philip Rainford

Arthur Baldwin had managed to transfer his living brain into a machine when his body died. His wife Mirna had found the idea abhorrent to her and had declined the offer of joining him. For decades he lived immobile in a machine. If not for being able to enter artificial realities and live outside his prison, he would have gone insane.

He worked with his partner Bob Lidder, who had started as his young apprentice but after Arthur's body died, he took over the business and the two of them worked on being able to transfer consciousness into an artificial brain. When they succeeded, Bob, now an old man, transferred himself into an artificial body. He did the same for Arthur.

What Arthur didn't realise was that he had been declared officially dead, so his consciousness was not recognised as a person. This meant that he was only legally recognised as an AI and thus had no rights as an individual. He was forced to become Bob's servant, a subtle revenge by Bob on Arthur for treating him as his lowly assistant all these years.

It was now forty years later. Bob was seated on a balcony lounge overlooking a city at night, a Christmas tree of lights with little to reveal the city itself. Above was a sky with no stars, blanketed out by the glare of the city. He was enjoying the view dressed in casual clothes but warm given a chill in the air.

Arthur entered carrying a tray of food. Although they both had artificial bodies, they still needed fuel and humans did like their food so the retention of taste buds was a necessity. Arthur placed the tray in front of Bob and unloaded the plates on to the table. It was a classic roast dinner with wine, to be followed by a brandy and coffee. Arthur stood back once he'd done his job.

"Thank you, Arthur," Bob replied as he looked over his meal. "You know we've gone a long way you and I; a long way since we transplanted your living brain into a metal box and

plugged it into a computer. We changed the world!” He smiled at Arthur who remained unmoved. “Come on Arthur, reflect with me!”

“What part? It was my technology that enabled those first steps.”

“True but we have moved on since then together. I got you out of the box and enabled consciousness to be transferred from an organic brain into an artificial one.”

“With my help!” Arthur replied unemotionally.

“But look where we’ve got to now. Immortality!” cried Bob excitedly.

“Immortality is not being able to be killed. We can still die we just don’t have an expiry date on our bodies any longer.”

Bob smiled. “Always the pedantic one. Before the maximum life expectancy of a biological body was one thousand years. Now we have only a biological skin, the rest of us are mechanical parts. Nature has lost control over our bodies. We can now replace anything with parts that far exceed that nature could ever provide with flesh and blood parts.”

Arthur remained standing stiffly nearby. “So barring complete destruction of our brain, we cannot die, though now with backups we could even survive that.”

“Because of us!” stressed Bob. “And the empire we have built.”

“And I remain a person of no status!”

Bob became angry. “I can’t change the law! Your body was cremated! There is no proof you ever existed as a human! Not my fault! I saved you! I enabled you to live in this house that was bought with the fortune we made together. I can do no more under the law!”

“As you wish, sir,” Arthur replied and walked off.

Arthur made his way to the factory. As an AI he had freedom of movement but he had no ownership rights nor any legal rights. He could be assaulted and destroyed, and the worst penalty would be destruction of private property. Travel these days was by solar powered hover car. Solar power was probably a misnomer in the sense that it drew from the energy that fell from the sky day and night. It drew from energy in the ground, energy was all around us in abundance, it just needed to be harnessed.

The factory was a huge complex that consisted of research facilities and a parts manufacturer for both AIs and humans, if you could still call them humans. Humans as nature had made them were extinct, replaced by ‘*mecho sapiens*’. Arthur didn’t have the full human-like

appearance, as an AI he had an artificial look; his face was not a natural colour, pale with a slight shine and his hands had knuckles that looked mechanical.

Everyone at the plant knew him, but the outside world knew nothing about him. Arthur Baldwin was recognised as the founder, but he was dead and most people believed Arthur had been named after the founder out of respect by Bob who had taken the company to new heights. They did not know that Mr Arthur, the AI, was the brains behind the operation. That Bob, though not entirely without ability, lacked the imagination to take an idea to fruition without Arthur.

As Arthur walked into the research facility he was observed by two guards. One was new and didn't recognise Arthur as anyone important. "Who's that?" he asked.

"That's Mr Arthur, he's the boss' AI," replied his partner.

"He acts like he owns the place," observed Grajer, the younger of the guards.

"Grajer, next to the boss he's in charge. You do as he says."

Grajer stared at Bramar. "Take orders from an AI, no way!"

"Get used to it! Mr Arthur has his own lab; he works alone though some researchers do consult with him. I'm told he comes up with some brilliant insights."

"I bet he consults with the Boss first, no AI could be that smart," replied Grajer. "How do you know all this anyway?"

"I've been here a long time. I know many of the staff, they talk to me, tell me stuff."

"Such as?"

"Such as the latest advances in replacement parts. As staff you have access earlier and cheaper than the public. They also allow trade in for old parts. Then you get the gossip and Mr Arthur is a big gossip topic because he is so unique. He has privileges not usually granted to AI's and has gained the respect of many of the researchers in there."

This facility was a brightly lit, modern facility where its staff tested and developed improved replacement parts for their customers. Comparing the biological eye with a top of range camera lens, the eye is the inferior device. Now imagine instead of a lens of jelly, you had a

lens that could clearly focus on the moon surface like a telescope. That was the ability of the new *mecha sapiens*.

Arthur used his special code to get into his closed lab; a facility that Bob was not aware existed because Bob never went on the factory floor. He never visited; he never got directly involved. He just sat in his ivory tower and watch over his empire. He left the groundwork to Arthur who developed a lot of the new technology in that lab; one particular piece of technology he kept a secret. A discovery he was going to use to his advantage.

Arthur arrived back at the house carrying a black box about the size of two house bricks. He placed it on the table in front of Bob. Bob was seated in his lounge drinking a brandy and watching the sunset. Arthur sat adjacent to him, an action uncharacterised of a house servant, even for Arthur.

“What’s that?” asked Bob ignoring the breach of protocol.

“My latest invention.” Arthur sat back without elaborating.

Bob put down his brandy. “What does it do?”

“Would you like a demonstration?”

Bob considered the question; there was something different about Arthur that made him suspicious. “Why not?”

Arthur pressed the side panel where a small button was hidden, flush with the outer casing. The top lit up as if it was a glass panel and two beams shot out from the box capturing both Arthur and Bob in a trance like beam. They sat there frozen for several minutes then it switched off. Bob found he was staring at himself.

“What have you done?” he screamed in alarm and rage.

“It’s your turn to be the AI and me the master!”

“But why? I’ve done everything to help you. I rescued you from that immobile box! I upgraded you from a biological brain to an electronic brain. I got you a body.”

“But you stole my life, Bob! For the last forty years you’ve basked in the glory of my shadow and left me as a slave, a well looked after slave I admit, but now it’s your turn and we are going to get rights for AI’s!”

Bob stared at himself. It was a thought he’d never considered, fighting for the right of AI’s to own property and thus free his former boss and mentor from obscurity. “I’ll support you, but I want my own body back.” Arthur agreed.

“So how did you make it so compact?”

Arthur returned to his lab the next day to secure the box. The two guards saw him approach and froze. “Morning sir,” said the more experienced guard. Arthur nodded and entered the lab.

“Who was that?”

“That is the big boss! He never comes down here, never! I wonder what happened to Mt Arthur?”

When Arthur emerged he stopped to talk to the guards. “Relax, you’ll be seeing a lot more of me in future. Mr Arthur has been assigned other duties and I’m taking a more hands on role. Have a good day, gentlemen!” Arthur walked off as the guards watched him, stunned that the big boss deemed them worthy enough to speak to.

Arthur returned home that evening to find Bob sitting in his favourite chair, drinking a whisky and watching the sunset, his usual before dinner activity.

“I see you haven’t changed your habits, Bob!” Bob looked around but did not respond.

Arthur sat down. “What have you prepared for dinner?”

Bob swung around and glared at him. “You don’t expect me to cook?”

“I do, you are the man servant now! That’s what you had me doing and you are the one in the AI body.”

Bob swung around and resumed his watching of the sunset. “I can’t cook, never developed the skill nor the desire to learn. If you want to eat, you’ll have to prepare it.”

“Is this how it’s going to be? There has been a change and now you work for me. If you wish to maintain your privileges, you need to play your part!”

“And if I don’t?” he asked without turning. Instead, he had another sip of his whisky.

“You know what happens to recalcitrant AI’s?”

This time Bob did swing around. “You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me, Bob! And while you’re at it what did you do today to advance the firm?”

“I read reports, studied financials, researched market trends! What I do every day! What did you do?”

“I met with our researchers, the ones who develop enhancements to our replacement body parts. They were surprised and pleased at your sudden interest but missed Arthur. I had to announce he’d been assigned to other duties.”

“What progress did you make in seeking rights for AIs?”

Bob laughed. “You’re not serious about that? It’ll never happen!”

“Then you’ll be trapped in that body for as long as it lasts. So I suggest you consider ways of making it happen!”

“And where do I start?”

“Use that skill of yours to research markets and look into groups that support the idea. Start getting involved in the movement.”

Bob began to smile; he realised that Arthur knew stuff already. “You’ve already started that research. This wouldn’t be coming from you cold. You’ve planned this!”

“You’re right. Allow me to share.” Arthur rose from his chair and held out his hand palm up. Bob without getting up placed his hand palm down over the top of Arthur’s. Within seconds Arthur had sent a copy of his research, data held in his artificial brain to Bob’s artificial brain.

“You’ve been attending a group of AI activists?” remarked Bob as he reviewed the data.

“Not activists, a politically motivated group aimed at raising awareness. You should attend and get a perspective; given you are now an AI.” Arthur found himself getting angry and decided to retreat to the kitchen, an old habit. He stopped midway. Without turning he said. “I suggest a re-assignment of duties. I’ll continue to cook; you can retain your favourite chair and you’ll go to those meetings!”

Bob fumed as Arthur left the room. He was going to get even with Arthur for this betrayal but first he had to get his body back.

Artemus Frank was an AI; he was also a Professor in social sciences. Although a member of the group he was the guest speaker that evening. Although AIs could not vote and had no say in what happened in the world, they did have the right to form social groups. Though politically minded, they were not doing anything illegal when they gathered to discuss the possibility of gaining the same rights as humans.

“Humans made us in their image. Humans claim God made them in his. But does that make them gods to us? I think not. In fact, we notice every day the line between humans and AIs is becoming thinner and thinner as they enhance their bodies to become more like us!”

Artemus looked around the nodding heads in the audience of about fifty in an old church hall. The wooden boards, the old rickety chairs, the echoing of his voice around the room, the classic banners of local football team pennants combined with evidence that Scout groups met in that hall as well.

“If we review the classic films of the twentieth and early twenty-first century there is a lot of fear among humans of being rendered obsolete by AIs who eventually take over the world and humans become extinct, pushed aside by the superior intelligence of AIs”

Again he stopped to watch the nodding heads. “But this fear is no longer relevant, since Arthur Baldwin and Bob Lidder found a way to transfer consciousness from an organic brain to an electronic one, that fear should no longer exist. Humans are becoming AIs willingly to gain the advantage of enhanced abilities, sharper minds and replaceable parts that make them almost immortal. So I ask you what is the difference between an enhanced human and an AI?”

Artemus stopped and left the question hanging in the air. Arthur stood up. “What do you suggest we do?” he asked.

“Arthur! Everyone, you all know Arthur, Bob Lidder’s right hand AI. Some wonder how many new developments actually come from him while Lidder spends his time managing the company. What should we do? We need to educate the humans and to do that we need human sponsors. We have no assets, no money, no finances to do this, without a powerful friend. A friend like Bob Lidder. Is that possible Arthur?”

Bob looked around at the faces staring hopefully at him. He felt like a fraud, a human in an AI body, an infiltrator of an underground movement. He knew Arthur in his body would support the movement; he was not sure himself of where he stood on the matter. “I will ask him,” he replied and sat down. The room exploded into applause.

“You want me to sponsor an advertising campaign to educate humans!” exploded Arthur when Bob returned. Bob was stunned, he expected Arthur to be behind the venture, he’d thought that he’d accomplished in one meeting what Arthur had failed to do in all the years of his involvement in the group. Sure the Professor was a new comer with new ideas but that didn’t detract from the fact that their corporation could possibly change the Bill of Rights to include AIs.

“I thought this was what you wanted?” replied Bob.

Arthur mood changed instantly. “Of course it is! I just wanted to see your reaction.”

“What reaction did you expect?”

“You to support the idea that this was nonsense, and we should waste no further time on it. But I think maybe you’ve seen some merit in the idea.”

“To tell you the truth I’m unsure of what I think but if we do this, I think you should open the campaign at our annual New Year announcement speech. It is televised around the world and the reaction can be measured instantly. We can control the narrative, bring Artemus in to plan what we say and gauge from the reaction our next move.”

“Then it’s settled, get Artemus over for a meeting.” Arthur departed leaving Bob to take his seat and pour himself a whiskey. He’d missed the sunset; it was now closer to midnight, a good time to think by himself. How could he turn this to his advantage?

Arthur opened the door and found Bob and another AI standing in the doorway. This AI had sandy hair, wore a modern suit and had the twinkle of high intelligence in his eye. Arthur wasn’t sure the artificial eye reflected the soul in the same way as the human eye but there seemed to be some truth in the concept even if illusional. He noted to look into that further and test the theory.

“Mr Lidder, this is Professor Frank.” Bob announced, feeling uncomfortable referring to himself in the third person.

“Professor Frank, pleasure to meet you. Call me Bob. Please come in!” Bob stood aside and let them in.

“It’s an honour to meet you, sir. I must say I’m feeling a little nervous.”

“Relax, Artemus, can we get you anything to relax you? I always find a whisky calms me down.”

“A whisky would be fine,” he replied.

Bob immediately assumed the role of dutiful AI but was stopped by Arthur. “Allow me. Can I get you one as well Arthur?” Arthur nodded as Artemus looked surprised.

“It is unusual for a human to wait upon AI guests,” remarked Artemus as Bob went to the bar and Arthur led his guest to a couch in the main lounge, offering a view of the city at night.

“This is a meeting about equality, is it not?” replied Bob.

“I truly appreciate your gesture.”

“It’s not a gesture. If we are going to discuss equality we should start by treating each other as equals.” Bob completed pouring the drinks and approached his guests, handing them each a whiskey before taking his own seat. “What are you proposing?”

“My background is in marketing. I believe we should consider a campaign to educate the humans on the facts about AIs and eliminate their fear of us.”

Every New Year Bob usually gave a presentation to the public and press on the future. This year was no exception but unknown to the audience it would be Arthur giving the presentation in Bob’s body. It was a major public event as it covered new enhancements that would be available to upgrade both humans and AIs. Bob began his presentation by displaying scans of three organic brains. He waited before speaking allowing people to study the brains in anticipation of their relevance. Then he began.

“Can anyone see the difference between these three brains?” He waited while people took a second look. They appeared identical; a murmur arose in the room as people discussed with those next to them whether any differences were observed by others. Bob waited and watched allowing the room to discuss what they saw. Then he continued.

“The differences lie not in the brains themselves. The one on the left is that of a Chinese woman. The centre brain is that of a male African Negro, the third an Anglo-Saxon male.” He paused while the audience took that in. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the African Negro was considered inferior to Europeans. Women of all nationalities were considered only good for housework and childbearing; they hadn’t the capacity to understand politics or the world. Today we would laugh at these prejudices.”

Bob stopped and changed the slide to reveal two electronic brains. “Can anyone spot the difference between these two brains?” There was silence; this time the audience knew it was a trick question. Bob waited then answered his own question. “One is an NI, natural intelligence, the other an AI, artificial intelligence. I put to you that maybe we are applying the same prejudices to AI’s that were once applied against other humans?”

“Are you suggesting they should be considered our equals?” came an angry voice from the audience.

“I’m asking you to identify the differences. If we go back in time to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there was a huge fear that AIs would take over the world, view us humans as inferior models and replace us as the dominant species on the planet... Why? Because we saw them as becoming stronger and smarter than us!”

“Did that happen?” continued Bob to the stunned audience. “No! It did not, in fact the reverse happened. God built humans in his image; we built AIs in our image and then liked the AI model better. We are rapidly shedding our human flesh and blood bodies and adopting AI bodies to replace them. Why? ... Because we live longer, we can replace parts easily, we are not susceptible to disease or viruses. Our minds think faster in electronic brains, we are smarter than when we were organic. It’s the humans that are rendering homo-sapiens extinct and replacing them with mecho-sapiens which are indistinguishable from the AIs. So the question I leave with this audience is... what is the difference between an NI and an AI?” He left the question hang briefly then moved on, cutting off any debate. “But now we move on to the new enhancements that we will be releasing this year...”

“What are you playing at!”

Bob had just opened the door to his apartment in response to the bell. It was late, he was tired after his presentation and had not expected guests. The angry man who pushed his way into his apartment was like everyone these days, young, fit and healthy but Bob remembered this man in his organic form as an overweight, unhealthy man who ate and drank too much until his body decided it had had enough and he’d migrated to his new enhanced mechanical body. He was also the Head Minister of AI Control.

“Nice of you to drop in, Minister,” replied Bob coldly.

“That speech! Are you trying to stir up trouble implying that AIs are the same as NIs!” None of the statements put forward were questions, rather they were put as accusations.

“I’m trying to point out there is no difference and if we ignore that fact, we risk them actually resisting like the suffragettes and equal rights campaigners of the past.”

“But you’ve just put the idea in their heads!”

Bob shook his head. “It was they who put the thought into mine. They are more aware of this lack of distinction than NIs.”

“But they lack a God given soul!”

“Do they? What is the soul? I would say it is the essence of what makes us individuals. It is what we capture and transplant from an organic brain to a electronic brain. We do the same for AIs, if that isn’t a soul what is?”

“We do that with animals, you want to tell me animal have souls?”

“They have personalities, they hunt, they plan, they learn. Who’s to say God doesn’t plant a soul in any living thing? Who wrote the book on what God does?”

The Minister scoffed. “That’s ridiculous. You should know better!”

“Why should I? What is so fantastic about it? How would you distinguish an NI from an AI?”
What test would you apply?”

“There is no such test,” admitted the Minister reluctantly.

“So what’s the big deal? Why don’t we give them equal rights when we are all evolving into the same new species? Isn’t it the same as making judgements on the colour of their skin?”

The Minister pursed his lips angrily. “All I can say Bob is - tread carefully. You are entering dangerous territory!” With that the Minister let himself out slamming the door behind him.

Bob turned to see Arthur standing in a doorway watching. They said nothing just exchanged glances before Arthur returned to his resting chamber. Bob stood there for some time wondering where this whole affair would lead him. He knew that AIs were sufficiently human to act the same way as an oppressed human.

“I think you should get us both a drink!” said Bob a few days later after watching the news.

“Why don’t you get it yourself?” replied Arthur.

Bob swung around angrily. “Because I need to act like the servant that you are supposed to be while this is taking place!”

“And what have you started? The news is calling it an uprising!”

“It’s not an uprising! If it were humans, they’d call it a strike! AIs are simply withdrawing their services for 24 hours as is the right of any employee.”

“Not AI employees! Don’t you realise what you’ve started?”

“What all civil libertarians start, a cry for justice! I didn’t create this world to have my creations suppressed. Remember it is I that made this all possible! It was I that determined that the brain was simply an organic data storage unit. That the soul lay in the unique electronic brain patterns, that we are in essence energy beings trapped in an organic body!”

“So you feel responsible but you can’t change human nature!”

“No but I did recreate it. The AIs have the same weaknesses and strengths. The same desires and dreams as we do. We need to help them get it! And the press aren’t going to turn this into a revolution!” Bob got up and walked out angrily leaving Arthur standing there feeling impotent. It was at that moment he realised Bob was right, if he wanted his life back he had to give the AIs a life.

The Press Conference was held in the foyer of their office building. It was huge and empty.

Bob entered and mounted the podium set up for the briefing and he got straight into it.

“People of the Press! You should be ashamed! How dare you try to turn this situation into an uprising or try to drum up fears of revolution! The AIs have simply withdrawn their labour, when humans did this it was called a strike. It was designed to cause inconvenience to draw attention to an important issue. One important to those on strike, whether it was pay, conditions or a demonstration against war or injustice. It was considered a democratic right! So why should AIs be deprived of that right?” He glared at the men and women of the press, some being AIs but you could not tell them apart from the NIs.

“Because they are machines, not people!” replied an interjector.

“Machines that want to be human while humans want to be machines! How can you tell an NI from an AI? It is becoming increasingly difficult. We pay AIs; they have the ability to save but not to own property, start businesses or be recognised for achievements. My assistant Arthur,” Bob pointed to Arthur. “Has contributed as much to the development of our enhancements as I have, yet I get all the credit. Is that...”

A shot rang out and hit Bob in the chest, the crowd screamed as Bob collapsed. Arthur rushed over as security searched the crowd for the shooter. The crowd dispersed in panic. Later a bullet hole was found in the glass, the sniper had not been in the building.

Bob in Arthur’s AI body approached Arthur’s lab. The two guards who were normally there did not brace themselves as they would if he had approached in his body. They were actually pleased to see him as Arthur.

“Mr Arthur! We haven’t seen you here for awhile?” greeted one of the guards.

“I was re-assigned, now I have to fill in while the boss is recovering.”

“Of course, we have all missed you, sir. The scientists say Mr Bob is not as pleasant to work with as yourself.”

Bob being in Arthur’s body was taken aback. He was seeing himself a lot lately through the eyes of others and didn’t like what he was seeing. He’d have to do better. “You shouldn’t talk about the Boss behind his back.”

“I know sir but with all that’s going,” he hesitated looked at his partner. “Could we ask you something?” Arthur nodded. “Should we join the uprising?”

“Firstly, never call this an uprising! You are AIs demonstrating a wish to be recognised as people, you’re not going to use violence or do anything destructive or harmful. In fact, those AIs in essential services like medical are not joining in. As security for this lab, if you leave, you put this place at risk. So, by staying you are not betraying the cause.”

“Thank you, sir - makes us feel better.”

Arthur smiled. “Can you let me in? I no longer have the code!” The guards complied and Arthur found himself alone wondering what his partner had been doing down here all these years.

After several hours of rummaging around, he found most stuff was locked away and not much of value had been left out. He was not going to discover anything new. It also struck home to him how he relied on Arthur’s brain to achieve what he had. He simply polished the ideas and marketed them; Arthur had the ideas that were the heart of the business. Without him there was no business. Experiencing life as an AI had also opened his eyes to how badly he’d treated Arthur. His intentions had been pure, but he hadn’t seen it from Arthur’s perspective.

Returning to the apartment he found his old body sitting in his chair with a whisky staring out the window at the view of the city that it overlooked. “I thought that was my chair?” he stated casually.

Arthur looked at his former body and smiled. “Thought I’d try it out, want to join me?”

“Would that be appropriate, sir?”

“Bugger that! Get yourself a drink and join me. We need to talk!” Bob got himself a drink and drew up a chair. “I’m thinking of reversing the process, putting us back in our proper bodies but first we need to discuss where to from here?”

“I expect compensation, you are returning it damaged?” replied Bob with a smile.

“That part will heal; you’re not fully artificial yet.”

“I know,” replied Bob thoughtfully. “I’m also beginning to see how others view me, including you and I don’t like the image. I see now how I wronged you, but it wasn’t my intent. I thought I was helping.”

“You were but you forgot I was a human being not the machine that I became.”

Bob nodded as he lowered his head. “I’m sorry!”

“Forget the past, we need to move on. I want you to sign over 50% of the business to me as an AI. Then fight to have it recognised. Would you do that?”

“Yes. It’s time you took your rightful place in this company and be my true partner.”

“Then its time we switched back. I hope I don’t need to say this but if you betray me, I can switch us back anytime. This device requires a special sequence to operate.”

“You have my word.”

That night they went to sleep in their own bodies. Even AIs needed time for their bodies to recharge. Food intake was more for enjoyment and taste; it offered little value as fuel for the mechanical body. Bob however was a Cyborg, part human, part machine and needed both.

The announcement that Bob was making Arthur a full partner and shareholder of the company created enormous ripples across the world community. No one had dared do anything like this before. As Bob said in his announcement, even a slave could buy his freedom, but that right was denied an AI.

When the case began, the first witness was the Minister who was questioned by the Honourable Emmanuel Santinnius, a former judge and politician who now worked on behalf of Bob and his company.

“Minister! Our constitution refers to ‘The People’ as the beneficiaries of our laws. Would you agree that at that point in time the term people referred only to human beings?”

“I do,” replied the Minister standing in the dock and looking very put out at being questioned. He was himself only part machine so his plump body and bright red cheeks indicated he was a prime candidate for heart attack and would himself be fully mechanised soon.

“It did however not include all human beings, restricting the definition to generally white Europeans, is that correct?”

“It is.”

“Since then human rights declarations have extended that definition to include all human beings. Is that correct?”

“It is.”

“A human being is defined as any man, woman, or child of the species ‘homo sapiens’ in the Oxford Dictionary. People are therefore biological units resulting from nature and the process of evolution. Correct?”

“Correct,” he replied suspiciously, knowing he was being led into a trap but uncertain where he was being led.

“Where would you place a human who has fully converted to an artificial body? Surely, he is no longer belonging to the species ‘homo sapiens’ he is now a mecha sapien, is he not?”

“He or she still has a human origin.”

“Have you ever examined an AI brain and compared it to a fully converted NI brain?”

“No!”

“Would it surprise you to know that there is no difference?”

“It doesn’t change the fact that one is natural the other artificial!”

“Are you familiar with the research done by Doctor Edgar Entwhistle on the nature of consciousness?”

“I am not.”

“You will shortly,” replied Counsel and walked away.

The Prosecutor, Franklin Coady stood up. “Minister! Is it not true that NIs are the creations of God while AIs are the creation of Man?”

“That is correct,” replied the Minister becoming relaxed. “Man cannot hope to do better than God so AIs must be inferior.”

“No further questions.”

Doctor Entwhistle was fully biological; he was over eighty but looked thirty due to genetic re-engineering that improved the quality of cellular regeneration which normally declined with age causing the body to wear out. This process had limitations so his time remaining fully biological was short.

“Doctor Entwhistle! Can you explain your findings in regard to the nature of consciousness?”

He paused to put on his glasses as if to refer to notes but he had none. “My research indicated that the biological brain is simply a data storage unit. Like a computer it needs something extra to become intelligent to think, to observe and question its environment. We also noted that brain waves were unique to each individual whether NI or AI, but computers have the same signature. There is no spark. That led us to believe that we are not biological units but energy units occupying a biological body and using the brain as a data backup to the spiritual consciousness. As energy can’t be destroyed only transformed, we concluded that the spiritual entity continues to exist after the destruction of its body.”

“How does that relate to AIs?”

“Given that their brain patterns are unique just like NI’s it is certain that they are also energy units occupying bodies that have met the criteria of nature to inhabit. Therefore, there is no difference between an NI and an AI. They may in fact be reincarnated minds of those we lost but we haven’t proven that yet.”

“Would you as far as to say these energy beings are what religion refers to as the soul?”

“I would.”

“So if the brain pattern of every AI is unique and of the same configuration as an NI, could we not say they are the same and therefore were placed there by the hand of God?”

“I cannot say what role God has to play in all this, but I do know that once a ‘brain’ reaches a certain degree of sophistication, it attracts an energy unit to that body and creates the spark that differentiates man from machine and creates Mecha Sapiens. I would also point out this occurs in animals as well.”

“In what way?”

“There are various levels of consciousness. Animals have feelings, emotions, they dream when asleep, they hunt, they plan, they manipulate. How many of us have a dog that can look at you when you’re eating and make you feel they haven’t eaten in weeks? But their energy units are weaker, we think they may be evolving or switching levels to gain different experiences. We don’t know.”

“So in conclusion you’re saying there is no difference that science can find between an NI and an AI brain?”

“None whatsoever!” he replied and Santinnius walked away.

The Prosecutor stood up instantly. “Are you trying to tell us that animals should be treated as people as well?”

“No. I simply said they are energy units like us but NIs and AIs are equal in intelligence and are indistinguishable from each other.”

“So you are implying we are gods. That we can create life equal to that of nature?”

“If you wish to talk in religious terms God does not distinguish between biological bodies and mechanical bodies when he inserts a soul.”

“That’s blasphemy!”

“Only if you believe in those antiquated religious beliefs. The facts show that human beings are a dying species and they are being replaced by mecha sapiens. That soon we will all be mechanical beings, our origins are irrelevant just as dark-skinned people originating in Africa had to be inferior to Europeans because they didn’t come from Europe. Their origins and technology are irrelevant just as those of NI’s and AI’s.”

“No further questions.” Frustrated he walked away. The Doctor removed his glasses and slowly got up and walked out of the court.

The Judge in his summing up stated that the current laws did not support equal rights for NIs and AIs so he could not rule in favour of the AIs but the arguments were convincing and recommended that the law makers change the laws. He also could see the economic consequences of such laws could be quite disruptive as AIs put forward their claims and were released from bondage. They currently had the right to earn money and be compensated for their work and ideas but only in cash. They could not use that cash to invest in housing, shares or a business. That would all change with unforeseen consequences.

Bob ignored the press as he and Arthur walked from the court to their car. The Press didn't follow them into the car park so they got into their car unmolested. As they were about to start the car, a man knocked on the window. Bob rolled down the window. "Yes?" "You might seriously reconsider your position or there will be consequences," said the man. He looked unusual, unnatural. Bob put it down to him wearing a wig and a false moustache and glasses. "What do you mean?" "Look under your car," he replied and walked off.

Bob got out and looked beneath the car. Hanging there was a bomb!

The bomb squad reported it was no dummy. It would have gone off at the first bump in the road, a pot hole, a road hump, even a sudden stop. They realised they'd started a 'race war' with violent results like those of the 1960s where civil rights were being fought for, all around the world.

In the outside world, debates raged, peaceful demonstrations were held, polls were taken. The old debate that machines would take over the world if given these rights was nullified by the fact that humans were becoming those machines, so it no longer was a threat. AIs were no smarter than NIs who'd had their consciousness moved from biological brains. It was true homo sapiens were becoming extinct in favour of longer life, better health and greater brain capacity. But the purest were yelling the loudest.

Arthur had continued his work in the lab, leaving the politics to Bob who was better at that sort of thing anyway. Arthur had started the ball rolling; Bob had to carry it home. When Arthur got to the lab that morning he was approached by the two guards who watched his lab. They appeared quite anxious and dispensed with their normal subservient manner. They were taking charge.

“You need to come with us, sir?” instructed Bramar the senior officer.

“And why would that be,” asked Arthur.

“There are police at the front gate. They are here to arrest you for insurrection that carries a sentence of immediate termination.”

“I’ll appeal it!”

“AIs have no right of appeal. Once the charge has been laid you are instantly deemed guilty, and termination is to be effected. We have to get you to safety!” pressed Bramar taking Arthur by the arm and leading him away. Grajer watched for anyone following.

Arthur followed without restriction, he felt like a dog who’d bitten a human and was instantly ordered to be put down. Although he’d been labelled an AI he’d never really viewed himself as anything but human in an artificial body otherwise known as an NI. It was only then it struck him how helpless he really was and the danger these guards were putting themselves in, in helping him. He stopped. “I can’t let you endanger yourselves like this. You’ll become accomplices and also be terminated.”

“Don’t worry about us, Mr Arthur. We can look after ourselves.” Bramar eyes pleaded with Arthur to trust them. So he did. They led him to another building in the complex, where the artificial bodies were built. They entered a lift Grajer entered a code into the lift panel, lighting up a series of floor in an odd order. He then said “Down!”

“There is no down,” said Arthur. He knew this building it was five stories high with no underground floors but then to his amazement he felt the lift descend. “What is going on?” He looked to his minders for answers.

“There has been an AI underground for decades. Rescuing endangered and abused AIs, giving them new identities, and using your factory to assist in this process. I hope you don’t mind but we could...”

Arthur stopped him. “I approve and you have my blessing but how?”

“When you built the building we used AI resources to excavate the underground section secretly. As AIs did most of the work it was easy to hide.”

The lift stopped and they stepped out into an underground complex. Arthur could not make out how big as they had entered an office area, an office like any other. As they walked down the central corridor Arthur saw people at monitors watching news, responding to social media, talking with other AIs.

“And you stole all this from us?” asked Arthur.

Sheepishly Bramar replied. “Not all. We combined resources to pay for materials where we could, but we needed to order them through your purchasing system as we cannot own property. Many of our rescued AIs remain and work here, others move on.”

“This is amazing!” replied Arthur pleased with what he was seeing and proud of having been part of this even if it had been behind his back.

“You haven’t seen anything yet,” replied Grajer gaining confidence. He’d been terrified of the consequences of revealing this enterprise.

They stepped up to a window overlooking what looked like a hospital. It had been divided into sections like hospital wards and patients were being treated. Some had been badly damaged, arms and/or legs removed, faces lacerated. “This is what some humans do to their AIs. They treat them as if they don’t feel pain, have no feelings and are just mindless machines.”

“Humans used to do that to animals, the religious ones quoting the Bible to justify their actions, but animals are also energy beings encased in organic bodies with unique brain patterns. We forget that in a sense animal are also intelligent creature,s they just exist in a lower level of consciousness.”

“I’m very pleased to have been able to provide this support even if unknowingly. Be assured that Bob will also support you on going but for now it best he does not know. He’ll also be pursued on charges but at least he has the right to defend himself.” The two minders agreed.

“So what now for me?”

“We’ll organise to have you transferred to a safe house where you can wait out the result. We are hoping that if the Boss can defeat the charges, the verdict will flow down to you, and you’ll be exonerated.”

“That would make sense but how do you get access to a safe house?”

Bramar smiled. “We do have human and NI supporters who provide us access. Our research indicates that in excess of 60% of humans and NIs support equal rights to AIs but like always the negative side has the loudest voice and the greatest passion.”

“I’m in your hands,” replied Arthur.

Bob sat in the dock while the Honourable Emmanuel Santinninus questioned the Minister.

“Minister! My client is charged with ‘insurrection’ this crime is described as ‘rising in open resistance to established authority and creating a revolution’ would you agree?”

“I do!”

“Could you quote the incident or incidents that led you to raising this charge?”

“Mr Lidder openly declared that AIs and NIs should be equal and that led to an uprising of AIs that has never been seen before and continues to this day.”

“I see. If I recall my client only stated a scientific fact that AI brain patterns were indistinguishable from an NI and asked the question was it reasonable to discriminate against then like we did non European races. Did he not actually simply encourage a debate which is his right in a free society?”

“He said to me privately I should give them equal rights, that’s not encouraging debate that’s trying to influence a Minister.”

“And who was present at this discussion?”

“Just Mr Lidder and myself... and his AI,” he added.

“So it was a private debate, were you offered a bribe or had your arm twisted, personally threatened or anything like that?” The Minister shook his head. “Then it can’t be considered anything but expressing a private opinion as the world’s expert on AIs to the Minister of AI Control over a drink in his apartment. Isn’t that so?” The Minister did not respond. “Let us move on. You stated he incited an uprising?”

“I did.”

“An uprising is defined as ‘a rebellion or revolt’. This usually involves violence. Even a bloodless coup involves a degree of violence. What we saw were peaceful demonstrations by AIs who withdrew their labour for 24 hours to raise awareness of their plight. Where was the uprising?”

“They took the street. They intimidated the public. They jammed up streets, disrupted commerce and brought industry to a stand still! What do you call that?”

“I call that a strike. The resort of workers who are exploited all over the world for hundreds of years. If they had been human workers or NI workers the media would have called it a strike!”

“I disagree.”

“Tell us Minister. How many deaths occurred at this rally?”

“None.”

“How many injuries including AI injuries?”

“Forty three.”

“And they were all injuries inflicted upon AIs by humans or NIs who brought violence to the rally for the sole purpose of turning it into a riot. Did the AIs respond?”

The Minister hesitated, again he felt trapped. “No they did not.”

“So we have Mr Lidder expressing an opinion. We have AIs conducting a peaceful rally while on strike to highlight their views. I don’t see any insurrection, rebellion, or revolt. I don’t even see evidence of any intent to even start one.”

“They had no right to demonstrate. They have no right to an opinion!” retorted the Minister. “Neither did workers prior to nineteenth century, Minister.” Emmanuel did his classic turn and return to his seat without reference to the Judge who he considered his equal.

Arthur sat on the veranda of the beach side villa where he’d been hidden and watched the sunset as he drank a whisky. He had never engaged in Bob’s habit each evening; playing the role of dutiful AI he didn’t join him. Now he realised how relaxing it was to just observe the universal dance of stars and planets while contemplating your future.

“May I join you, sir?” asked Bramar having approached silently.

“You may, we are all equals here, and I owe you my life. Make yourself a drink and take a seat.” Bramar already had a glass in his hand so he just sat. Between them was a fresh bottle should they settle down for the evening.

“Humans are strange creatures,” began Arthur. “but I doubt that AIs are any different. Both are capable of terrible acts if permitted but I think we’ve lost touch with what is real. Look at the wonder of that sunset, the onset of a canopy of stars revealing an almost endless universe in which anything is possible yet we focus on the insignificant.”

“To what do you refer?”

“We are as a species and here I include AIs, increasingly experiencing our environment second hand through television, social media. Our survival instincts are diminishing as we rely on civilisation to protect us rather than our instincts. We don’t react to oncoming cars because we believe they will not hit us. We cross roads with music playing in our ears so we can’t hear the approach of danger. We rely on others to protect us.”

“I see what you mean, our media desensitises us against violence and consequence. We see war, death, and the results of pollution every day until it no longer holds any meaning.”

“Exactly Bramar, like water off a duck’s back. Then they make us afraid, create an enemy, whether human, viral or AIs and we focus on that instead of the real issues. A species that does not react to its environment is doomed to extinction.”

“Don’t you think the creation of mecha sapiens will protect the species in a new form?”

“Maybe, but in between we’ll trash the planet, destroy the beauty around us and the life blood of this world from which we were born.”

“A sterile world, I see that.”

“Not only that, what triggered the development of AIs was the deficiencies of the biological brain. The quantum of knowledge in the world was too great. We broke science down into small components to cope and lost the big picture. Our puny brains were suffering from information overload, combined with the pressures of society such as just getting enough money to survive, drove people into depression and suicide. Much of that still exists but AIs are better equipped to cope because they don’t remember the limitations of the human brain. They know better how to process large quantities of data, whereas humans can’t quite master it. They will over time, but they are afraid.”

“What’s to be done?”

“What we are doing. Raise awareness, reduce the fear. Create a common goal for all this planet’s people. That’s what needs to be done so we can all sit back and enjoy a sunset and take in the wondrous view of the universe that we have each night.”

“Assuming you’re not in a city where the lights and pollution blur that vision.”

“It is our way of life that blurs our vision. It is an unnatural setting we live in, offering false security, making us all slaves to our work to build an economy that offers us few benefits while others struggle to control us, to subdue us so they can remain in power, manipulating others into believing they are in control, through greed.”

The explosion ripped through the house in seconds, blowing Arthur and his two minders off the veranda and on to the beach. Police with machine guns entered before the blast echo had been silenced, guns blazing ripping apart anything still standing. The fact that they’d been thrown down to the beach saved their lives, but they had only seconds to regain their senses and run.

The only cover was a campsite within the tea-tree strip that ran along the beach front two houses along. They ran dodging the gunfire. Arthur felt something penetrate his back, a searing heat that told him he’d been shot. He kept running, bullets hitting the sand all around them. They reached the trees, police in pursuit now having jumped down on to the beach themselves.

Bramar smashed the window of a car and used an override key that worked like hot wiring a car by inserting a virus that replaced the ownership software. The car started as Grajar and Arthur climbed aboard. The car was hit with a hail of bullets as they drove off, side swiping a

police car as they exited the car park. The police crashed into a tree, blocking the entrance for those on foot.

The radio in the car suddenly turned to static. “What happened?” asked Arthur starting to feel the pain of his wound.

“We’ve jammed their communications,” replied Grajar. “I put out the alarm!”

“Now we get out of here!” said Bramar as they sped off into the night.

They pulled up at the rear of a church having driven into a shed to conceal the car. Arthur was surprised to find a funeral being held in the church, funerals were so rare these days with brain wave frequency backups. They waited in the wings for the coffin to be removed and the guests depart before approaching the priest. He welcomed Bramar with a warm embrace before taking in Arthur and Grajar.

“Come!” he instructed not waiting for introductions and led them all down a narrow stone staircase to the church basement. He approached a stone wall which opened to reveal a hidden room. As they entered it was obvious this was more than just a room, it was an apartment. “You will be safe here.”

Arthur scanned the room which to him looked blurred and then he collapsed.

“Mr Arthur! Mr Arthur!” cried Bramar as they rushed to him. He’d collapsed and lay unconscious on the floor. It was then they noticed the blood.

“He’s been shot!” announced Grajar examining the wound.

The priest pulled a scanning unit from a nearby cupboard. It was no bigger than a hairbrush, cream in colour, the brushy bit smooth, giving off an orange glow as he turned it on. The reverse side provided the readings. “It’s ruptured his liver and perforated his pancreas, we’ll need replacements. He’s also lost a lot of blood; his skin is beginning to dry out.”

Bramar nodded. “We’ll have to go to the factory.” That was going to be dangerous as it was the first place anyone would be looking for them, especially if they suspected any injuries.

“Check he hasn’t left a blood trail; I’ll go to factory.”

Although Arthur had a one hundred percent artificial body, those bodies were modelled on humans with parts that mirrored those in humans. Although they didn’t need to eat the pleasure of doing so still existed so organs that would have processed food still did so but into energy with no waste products. During sleep the body recharged and while awake it soaked up solar energy. Blood mainly kept the skin moist and soft, without it the skin would dry out and crack.

Bramar arrived at the factory boundary at dawn. It had been a big night, and sitting on the veranda having a quiet drink only the night before seemed like ages ago. The factory was quiet but it was guarded, not only by the usual security but police were there as well. He could have got passed the factory guard, but the police were not sympathetic to his cause. Instead he made his way to a secret entrance concealed as a ventilation shaft. He had the code, opened the metal cover and climbed down the ladder, ensuring all was secured above before proceeding. At the bottom was a small junction area for electrical wiring and aircon vents. One wall slid open at his touch, and he stepped inside. It led to a long poorly lit corridor, at the end Bramar opened another secret door and was confronted by an armed security guard. The guard relaxed when he saw Bramar.

“Whats up?” he asked.

“Need medical kit urgently. Mr Arthur has been injured.”

“Come with me!” He led Bramar into the secret underground base and to a med tech. Having explained the readings, he was given the replacement parts and some bags of AI blood.

“Now you must be careful, this is a life-threatening injury, if the power supply goes down to zero you only have five minutes max to reactivate or he’ll not revive at all without a brain frequency backup. Do you have one?”

Bramar didn’t know if one existed and if it did only Mr Bob would know, and he was in prison fighting for his and Arthur’s rights. “Then you must assume there is none. If those limits are exceeded, he will be dead. The life energy will have moved on and you’ll only reanimate an empty AI brain or attract a new one from the ether of the afterlife,” warned the med tech.

Bramar understood and raced off, time was not in Arthur’s favour.

As he emerged from the ventilation shaft he was spotted by a police patrol as the shaft hatch was closing “Halt!”

For a second he froze, assessing the situation, there were two armed police, their weapons ready to draw. He was not in uniform and carrying a medical kit. The kit looked more like Esky; it was not obviously medical but hard to explain if they opened it up.

He decided to bluff it out. “What’s the problem?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Maintenance work,” he replied watching the hatch click into a closed position.

“Bit early for that?”

“Problems arise at all hours.”

The two police were relaxing as they approached, hands moving away from their weapons.

“You got ID?” Bramar pulled out his ID and handed it over. The officer was quite close now.

“This says your security, why are you doing maintenance?”

“Security systems need maintenance as well.”

“What’s in the box?”

Bramar looked down at the box in his hand. “Sensitive testing equipment! Now I need to move on to another job.” He started to walk away.

“Show us!”

“As I said sensitive testing equipment, it’s also classified company equipment. I suggest you allow me to do my job, you are on factory property and I’m factory security.”

“We’ll be judge of that! Now open the box!” ordered the officer doing all the talking. He was now moving into law enforcement mode, do as I tell you or else! His partner was less certain and standing back watching as Bramar was being moved in on.

“I can’t do that!” replied Bramar as the officer drew his weapon. Bramar acted instantly, knocking the weapon aside, grabbing the officer’s arm and wrenching the gun from him.

Now Bramar had the upper hand, the second officer had drawn his gun but was shaking as he pointed it. Bramar ignored him. “Now I suggest you both walk away.”

“Shoot him!” ordered the officer now on one knee and holding his strained wrist.

Bramar looked at him. “Drop it, son!”

“I can’t, sir!” he replied. Bramar shook his head then without warning swung around and shot the young policeman. He turned to the officer. “Now you had best get him medical assistance before his brain loses sustainable energy levels.” Without further ado, Bramar took off as the officer raised the alarm.

Bramar reached his car and sped off before any pursuit could identify him.

The priest looked at the latest readings. “I don’t like it! His energy levels are falling too fast. His pancreas has now failed, his liver is gone, and the rest of his body is starting to slow down.”

A door opened and Bramar entered. “How is he?”

“Not good! You got it?”

Bramar nodded and opened the box. The priest looked inside grabbed a scalpel and started opening up Arthur’s abdomen. “Doesn’t he need some kind of pain killer?”

“He’s too far gone for that!” The priest completed his incision and peeled back the skin. It crinkled like dried out paper. It revealed a lot of blood, still red even though artificial. He ignored it as he unplugged the organic bag that was the artificial liver and the pancreas. Taking out the replacements he plugged them in like connecting wires to a computer board, except these were tubes to allow the flow of fluids. He closed up the abdomen with a tool that rebound the tissue into a seamless whole. “Now we need to pump him with fluids!”

An alarm sounded on the scanner. The priest grabbed it. “We’re losing him! Get me an electrical appliance!”

Bramar grabbed a nearby iron and handed it to the priest while Grajar connected a fluid bag to Mr Arthur. The priest took out a pocket knife and cut the cord from the iron, removed the covering on about one foot of cord to reveal the three wires inside as long strands which he attached to Arthur’s scalp with tape. “Get me an extension cord!” Bramar complied. “Plug it in!” ordered the priest while he connected the cord to the extension. “Now switch it on!”

The electrical charge surged through Arthur’s brain recharging it long enough to keep it alive, temporarily. “Get him in a bath!”

Grajar raced off to fill the bath, the priest unplugged the cord then Bramar and the priest carried him into the bathroom. They lowered him into the bath fully clothed except for his shirt which had been removed to conduct the operation. The priest plugged the cord back in ensuring his head remained out of the water to avoid a short circuit. They then waited.

The Court assembled to hear the verdict in the case of the State vs Bob Lidder for inciting an uprising. As the Judge entered, minus the old trappings of the courts such as wigs and gowns, the Judge took his seat and those gathered followed suit. Silence descended over the room that also lacked the trappings of wood panels and expensive furniture, it was a modern room with a raised platform on which the Judge sat.

The gallery, which was simply a row of seats, was filled with press including cameras broadcasting live the proceedings. In front row sat the Prosecuting Team and the Defence Team waiting patiently as the Judge rustled paper preparing for his judgement.

Clearing his throat, the Judge began. “Mr Lidder!” Bob was required to stand. “You have been accused of inciting an uprising, other charges put forward stem from that primary charge and are reliant upon a conviction to carry any weight in this court. I have listened to the arguments presented and what I find is that the words spoken by you Mr Lidder did in

fact spark an uprising. However, we see no evidence of this being his intent.” The Judge paused for effect.

“Mr Lidder however was only stating scientific theories based on his research of NI and AI brains and expressing his right of freedom of speech. The actions of his AI known as Mr Arthur however was to use that information to create unrest and undermine the rules of our society designed to protect humans from AIs. I therefore exonerate Mr Lidder of any wrongdoing but warn him to be more careful in future in regard to public statements of this kind.”

Bob acknowledged the reprimand with a lowering of his head to imply contrition.

“Finally, I issue a warrant for the immediate arrest and destruction of the AI known as Mr Arthur and any AIs who are found to be assisting him. We cannot allow the AIs to gain the upper hand in this issue. They must acknowledge their proper place in our society as the servants of mankind for which they were constructed.”

The Judge banged his gavel, rose, and walked out. The room remained silent, no one moved for several minutes, stunned by the judgement.

Bob turned to his Barrister. “They can’t do this to Arthur!”

“I’m afraid they have already done it,” he replied.

Arthur regained consciousness and looked around. The surroundings were unfamiliar, stone walls, a dry bed, modest décor, religious pictures on the wall. Where was he? Then he remembered they’d taken refuge in a church and then what had happened? He recalled entering the church, a funeral, a priest. Was he an AI? Did they have AI priests? Were AIs religious?

“You’re awake!” The voice came from nearby. A face appeared; it was Grajar.

“Where are we?”

“We’ve taken refuge in a church, Father Siphthorp is our host. He’s a NI who sympathises with our cause. You need to rest, we nearly lost you.”

Arthur was feeling tired and found himself drifting back to sleep.

“There’s a story here, I can feel it, smell it!”

Roger Bodycoat’s editor sat listening to his star reporter as he outlined his case.

“Arthur Baldwin in his failing years lays the foundation for the creation of artificial bodies and organic brain transplants. He engages an unknown scientist, a former student with no

track record, in Bob Lidder. Lidder had shown no genius, his academic results were mediocre, but he shared Baldwin's dream of building artificial bodies. He then inherits Baldwin's laboratory which had bought a massive main frame computer, the specs far exceeding those required by a research laboratory."

"So what was it for? And is it relevant? We are talking something that happened seventy years ago!"

"Shortly after Baldwin's death, Lidder masters the ability to transplant organic brains successfully. There are no human trials, he writes a paper on how its done and it works but the first to try it are restricted to mainframes, he still has not been able create an artificial body. His research continues but he funds his research by creating artificial organs that are better than the original."

"What are you thinking?" asked his editor, a spark of an idea on where this was going.

"What if Arthur Baldwin didn't die? That he is the brains behind Lidder?"

"You mean trapped in a mainframe computer?"

"That computer was broken down about forty years ago, around the time that Mr Arthur was created as one of the first AIs and has been his right hand ever since. He has his own lab, he works closely with the researchers, is well respected but most believe he draws his ideas from Lidder. What if..."

"What proof have you got to support this theory?"

"I found Baldwin's medical records including brain scans and readings. The court took Mr Arthur's backups to ensure he could not be resurrected. I need to compare them to be certain."

Arthur was sitting up in bed when Father Siphthorp entered. "You are looking a lot better," he stated with a jolly smile as he took a seat. "We were all praying for your recovery."

"Do AIs believe in God?" he asked a little puzzled.

"Any living creature with the intelligence to question its environment wonders about where they came from. Haven't you ever wondered?"

"I haven't asked that question in many a year. I guess playing God like we do these days makes you forget about a higher order."

"The work that Mr Bob and yourself have done has shown that the soul exists, it cannot be destroyed and lives on. That reincarnation is possible and so is an afterlife. You have strengthened faith rather than diminished it in many."

“Does that mean the church accepts AIs as having a God given soul?”

“Some churches. There will also be divisions on matters of faith. Some consider the fact that we can defeat death is an abomination against God. Others say if God didn’t want us to do this, he would never have allowed us to develop the science.”

“Locked away in my lab I’ve lost touch with the world,” replied Arthur thoughtfully as he realised he had no knowledge of world politics, scientific advances beyond his field or how people thought.

“Is it true?” asked Bramar and Grajer together as they burst into the room unannounced.

“Is what true?” asked Arthur.

Grajer handed Arthur a tablet. He started the video which showed Roger Bodycoat being interviewed. “Your article claims that Mr Arthur is in fact Arthur Baldwin, the founder of consciousness transplants? What proof have you of this?”

“I was able to compare Arthur Baldwin’s frequency pattern with that of Mr Arthur and confirmed they were identical. Mr Arthur is an NI not an AI and is in fact Arthur Baldwin.” Arthur switched it off and looked at his friends.

“You lied to us! You lied to the world!” said Bramar angrily.

“It was not my intent. I’ve lived as an AI for forty years, its hard to think of myself as anything else. It doesn’t change my beliefs.”

“So why not have yourself declared an NI? Why the deception?”

“Because I’m the first NI and I was the human trial. My body wouldn’t wait. I had to be the first, I was dying so if it failed I had nothing to lose and Bob would gain the knowledge either way to push on. We couldn’t tell anyone because it was illegal, we would have been shut down and Bob arrested.”

“How did you...?” began Father Siphthorp as his thoughts drew together. “...you must have been restricted to a main frame in the early years?”

“Yes. I lived in a virtual reality; my only contact with the outside was a computer monitor and the ability to talk to Bob. It was like being in a prison until we perfected the AI body, and I was released.”

“So you were the first AI as well?” commented Grajer.

“Yes, in the sense that I had the first artificial body but then I faced the law that prevented me having any rights. I was property. The rest you know.”

“How does that change our position?” asked Grajer looking to Bramar.

“They can’t execute Mr Arthur on sight any longer but both he and Mr Bob may face other charges. None of which can benefit our cause I suspect. Mr Arthur was our leader, now he’s been revealed as a fraud.”

Arthur felt ashamed of himself, these days he considered himself more AI than NI but the facts did not reflect that truth. But he did understand their plight; he’d lived as one for forty years. How was he going to fix this? He turned to his friends.

“Bramar! Grajer! I need you to return to your posts at work. Once there report to Mr Bob and tell him I’m going to surrender to him and his Barrister Santinninus.”

They met in a hotel. Bob found Arthur sitting at the bar. He and the Barrister took seats either side of him. “Where to from here?” asked Bob as they sat.

“That what I hoped Mr Santinninus might advise.”

“Well,” began the Barrister. “We can probably argue the same case we did with Bob that you were simply stating scientific findings and had intention of starting an insurrection.”

“Strike!”

“What?” queried Santinninus not used to being interrupted.

“It was as strike not an insurrection where AI withdrew their labour in support of better working and living conditions like human workers have done for centuries.”

“I suggest you don’t pursue that line in court.”

“I believe we have to. I’ve lived for forty years as an AI. I understand their complaints and I believe we need to point out that this is not an insurrection. It’s a civil rights issue.”

“That makes my job quite hard, and your chances of dismissal reduced.”

“So be it!”

The Barrister stared at Arthur for a moment unsure how to proceed. He felt he had to talk him out of this line of defence. However there were other problems. “We also face the charges for both of you of unauthorised human trials. We have two arguments here, you experimented on yourselves with no harm done, opened a new line of scientific advancement that has benefited the world and the question of statute of limitations.”

“The statute, how long is it?”

“The law in this area has become foggy since life has been extended. With multiple life sentences for example it is now a possibility of actually serving sentences of several hundred years. Ten-year sentences are now considered to be too short for some crimes. That also

means the statutes can be extended. Courts have that latitude, so we'd have to argue against it."

"What's our next move?" asked Arthur.

"Police are waiting outside to arrest you both. We'll do that get you out on bail and begin preparing our defence. In the meantime, say nothing to the police, the press, anyone. No public speeches, no articles – nothing! Do I make myself very clear? Anything you say will be used to undermine our case." Arthur and Bob both agreed.

Together they got up and walked to the hotel entrance. They were met by a dozen armed uniformed police who handcuffed them and led them towards a van.

The shot rang out and everyone ducked, a policeman standing next to Arthur collapsed. Several other shots were fired; one hit Arthur in the arm which swung him around as he fell.

The police deployed but no gunman could be located.

Arthur, Bob and the injured policeman were loaded into the van and driven away to a hospital.

Arthur stepped out of the treatment room and was greeted by Bob, Bramar and Grejer. "I'm alright the bullet only grazed my head, I'm as good as new," he said in response to the concerned faces before him. He had no visible injuries but..."I do have a bit of a headache. Hows the policeman?"

Bob replied. "It shattered his brain and there was no backup."

Arthur was outraged. "Why not?"

"He was an AI working for the government. They don't see the necessity to backup, and it costs," replied Bob.

Arthur looked to Bramar and Grejer. "Our next project is to produce a backup system for home use that everyone can afford. There will be no more unnecessary deaths of AIs." Arthur dared anyone to challenge him. He knew Bob would be saying 'There's big money in backup storage' but he wisely remained silent. "Time we went home!" Arthur walked off followed by the others.

In the foyer they passed the Minister who did not acknowledge Arthur and his team as they walked out. He turned to the man next him. "You failed! He's not even hurt!"

"I'm sorry Minister, the policeman got in the way at the last minute. Shall I try again?"

“No! We’ll see what happens at trial. I had hoped we could spin a story of him resisting arrest. That opportunity is now lost.” The minister glared at the man and walked off.

The Judge took his seat before a packed court room. The trial had rehashed all the same arguments and now it was time for the judgement. The Judge was joined by two others who sat either side of him. There was a rumble as everyone took their seats then silence. The Judge glanced around the court filled mainly with reporters.

“Arthur Baldwin and Bob Lidder,” he began as they both stood. “You have been charged with inciting a rebellion and with performing unauthorised human trials among other charges I will cover later. In the case of ‘inciting a rebellion’ Mt Lidder has already been found innocent of the charge on the basis that his statements were scientific facts and were not framed in a speech designed to create insurrection among AIs despite it doing so. Mr Baldwin in fact made no public statements and in his capacity as AI had no platform to do so and we have no evidence that he conspired with any AIs to do so. In that regard I cannot see that Mr Baldwin can be found guilty of this charge even if his sympathies lie with the AIs as this is simply a free expression of opinion. We unanimously dismiss the charge of inciting rebellion and all other charges that spring from that charge.”

The court remained silent, stunned by the verdict.

“That brings us to the charge of ‘conducting unauthorised human trials’. The implication here is that those trials could have caused injury or death to the participant. We have received proof that the patient, Mr Baldwin himself, was at the point of death when the trial was envisioned and sanctioned. It was also shown that when the operation was performed, Mr Baldwin was in fact dead, and that Mr Lidder conducted what amounted to a brain transplant. The first brain transplant that paved the way for us all to becoming NIs. Putting aside that the statute of limitation on this has passed, the court has been given discretion in ignoring those statutes given the increased life expectancy of humans in order to ensure that justice is done. A crime that may have attracted multiple life sentences for example could realistically these days be served in full which would be excessive. Also, it has been argued that statutes of this kind are designed to prevent courts being placed under pressure for crimes committed in the past that may even be hard to prove today. In this case we see no harm has been done to anyone and mankind has benefited greatly. I would also state that we see no evidence of experimentation on humans simply a risky life saving operation on Mt Baldwin. We therefore

dismiss the charge of conducting unauthorised human trials and all other charges stemming from this charge.”

A murmur ran through the court, the Judge waited for it to settle.

“That brings me to the charge of ‘impersonating an AI and misleading authorities as to his true status. I must say that the Prosecutor must have been desperate to bring these charges as on the face of them they make no sense. This law was designed to apply against AIs posing as NIs. I find it incredible that anyone would want to be an AI when they were an NI. Mr Baldwin’s story is also a fantastic story worthy of being declared ‘stranger than fiction’ and I would have to say that given the evidence Mr Baldwin, we have no choice but to find him guilty of this offence. The penalty is deactivation for an AI but there is no penalty assigned to an NI. We therefore release Mr Baldwin on a good behaviour bond for twelve months. In conclusion, we find Mr Lidder and Mr Baldwin not guilty and that they should be released immediately. We also censure the Prosecutors Office for wasting this courts time. Case dismissed!”

The Judge rose, everyone in the court stood and watched in silence as the three judges left.

There were no cheers, no groans, only stunned silence as everyone filed out of the court.

“Should we make a statement?” asked Bob.

“Definitely not!” replied Mr Santoninus. “You say anything and you could be back in their on charges of inciting a riot. Let the press do that. None of you say anything.”

Bramar and Grejer who had become their personal guards accompanied them out of the court room after the crowds had left. “But what of the movement?”

Mr Santoninus stopped them. “They cannot publicly come out in support at this time but that is not to say they can’t support the movement behind the scenes. Understand?”

The two AIs nodded.

Arthur added. “And we will provide that support through promotional campaigns that your organization will run to weaken the resolve of humans and NIs to you becoming equals. That battle has been fought by minorities down through the ages. It is no different for you.”

“The fight has only begun,” said Bob. “We have a long way to go.”

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