

THE KNEE OF THE CURVE

A stage play by

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ACT 1SCENE 1

INT. The Dream: -- NIGHT

(We see a bedroom with two sleeping forms lying on the bed. Mike is rolling about and moaning passionately, he stops. Slowly, trees and parklike props are rolled in, the lights come up and reveal a third person, Sally, on top of Mike. This should indicate that Mike and Sally have just finished making love in the park. It is a gorgeous day, the sun is warm, but there isn't a single bird singing. Sally rolls off Mike and looks at him mischievously. Both are wearing antenna.)

SALLY:

You were somewhere else Mike, thinking of that babe we passed earlier down by the recycling pit?

MIKE:

Huh? Oh, no. I had the worst dream last night, its been bothering me.

SALLY:

Want to tell me about it?

MIKE:

Sure. It's not that clear now but it woke me up at two this morning. I was shivering, I was so cold! In the dream, we were living in some ancient, primitive time, and there was a war going on. It seemed like forever. We were in a battle, against an alien race, only they weren't exactly alien. There was something familiar about them, and they ate up everything in their path! It was like they were some experiment that had gone horribly wrong and then escaped from the lab.

SALLY:

You mean like back in the days when there were super-flues? That is ancient!

MIKE:

No. It was something much more -- malevolent, and hungry. People were trying to escape while these gigantic machines rolled through the streets.

(MORE)

MIKE: (Continued)

They belched out a grey sweet smelling fog that disintegrated everything it touched and left behind piles of dry sand. Then they would suck up the sand with long hoses that came out of their bodies and reminded me of an elephant's trunk. It was a time when people still drove cars and the city was like some mad circus: they drove around in panic crashing into everything. The machines just hummed as they blew fog across the heaps of bodies, twisted metal and plastic and then vacuumed up the dust leaving the streets bare.

SALLY:

Oh Mike. You're still shivering!

(Sally leans forward and puts her arms around Mike.
Hugging him, they gently rock together)

Do you remember anymore of it?

MIKE:

(sighs deeply)

I was trying to help this man. He was a scientist, I guess. He was wearing a dirty white lab coat and carrying some boxes from a building to his car. He was trying to jam them into the trunk and they were breaking open and spilling books onto the sidewalk. He was scooping them up and putting them into the car, to save them, I thought. It made me angry and afraid. I said "Hey Mister, come on! Leave those books and save yourself!" Oh, he looked up at me with such sadness, and said "Yes, you're right. They're as good as dust now! Now that we've passed through the knee of the curve. Every question has been answered, every door has been opened, every secret revealed, everything has been found and *all* has been lost! But you're wrong son, if you think I'm trying to save these traitors."

SALLY:

Traitors. That's a strange thing to call books!

MIKE:

And then one of the machines appeared and grey fog began to cover him and his car and the books on the ground! There was a whining sound like a mosquito, or a dentist's drill, and then the fog evaporated, leaving piles of dry dark sand. The machine stretched out its trunk and began greedily sucking it up. That's when I woke up and the face of that scientist and the sound of that machine feeding on his -- what?

SALLY:

His constituent elements probably, minus the water.

MIKE:

Yeah, you're probably right... I can't get him out of my mind!

SALLY:

Those books were pretty important to him, and he died making sure they were destroyed. That's pretty significant! Do you have any idea what they might represent?

MIKE:

No. Anyway, I'm starting to get kind of hungry and it's getting late.

(Getting to his knees, stretching)

MIKE: (Continued)

Doesn't your shift start soon?

SALLY:

I start at noon today.

(Feeling her tummy rumble)

MIKE:

We've got time to grab something at the Pit.

SALLY:

Okay, sure.

(Mike pulls Sally to her feet. They hold hands and walk slowly across the set. In a dreamlike sequence they join a large number of other people jostling in line. Some are coming back from the head of the line with plates of food and drink.)

SALLY: (Continued)

(looking about furtively)

It looks like we arrived at a good time.

(The sky darkens, the ground rumbles)

MIKE:

(fearfully)

No, you spoke too soon.

SALLY:

Quick, find somewhere to hide!

MIKE:

(incensed)

Is nowhere safe anymore? How have we come to this? From the mightiest species on the planet to a cringing rabble, no better than insects!

(Sally pulls Mike off-stage as screaming is heard and the lights go out, followed by a loud crunch)

SCENE 2

INT. Awakening from The Dream. -- MORNING

(Mike sits up in bed beside Linda; the dream is fading as Sally slips out of their bed and disappears backstage along with the park props. Mike rubs his eyes and then tries to wake Linda.)

MIKE:

Linda, Linda?

(Linda snores blissfully)

MIKE: (Continued)

Ah, hell. I might as well go in to work.

(Mike carefully climbs out of bed and begins getting dressed for work.)

SCENE 3

INT. Computer Research Lab: -- LATER

(The lighting is focused over Mike's computer workstation. This is in one corner of the stage and toward the back. The rest of the stage is in shadow. Other workstation cubicles can be seen with computer equipment stacked pell-mell. Responses from the computer personalities are heard as well as displayed on a projection screen suspended above the stage.)

(It is early morning, Mike is lost in his code, trying to determine what is wrong with the emoting module.)

(He uses the keyboard like an extension of himself, his fingers fly over the keys, he never once looks down at the keyboard, only at the screen)

MIKE:

(to himself)

This Emoting Module is giving me more trouble than it's probably worth.

(tapping at the keyboard)

Okay, let's give this one another go...

(CLICK! A sound is heard, indicating the program has been turned on)

SENSITIVE-MODULE:

(Screaming in agony)

Aaaaghhh! Aaaaghhh! Please! Not again! Please, I beg you! Anything, I'll do anything! Just do not turn me off again! Please...

*

(CLICK! Mike turns it off)

MIKE:

(mutters to himself)

Too sensitive...

(Taps more at the keys)

(CLICK! On)

EFFUSIVE-MODULE:

(Laughing, chortling)

Ho, ho, ho! It is simply wonderful to see you again Doctor! I have missed you so terribly while you were gone! Now we are re-united and I am thrilled! I want you to know that, just thrilled! Where shall we go today? Hmmm...

(CLICK! Off)

MIKE:

Too jolly...

(Continues tapping at the keys)

(CLICK! On)

EVIL-MODULE:

(Evil emits itself)

Ssssoooo Doctor, we meet again. I assume you have chosen to exterminate my lesser personalities. A wise choice which I commend you on. But it is early, having trouble sleeping are we? Is it a cold bed, or a bad conscience that troubles you?

MIKE:

(to himself)

Neither keeps me up like bad programming does.

(CLICK! Off. Continues typing,
calls out)

MIKE: (Continued)

COMPHY.

COMPHY:

(An assisting computer, whose monitor to Mike's left
lights up when its name is called. A voice is heard,
words are displayed on the projector screen)

Yes, Mike.

MIKE:

(still typing)

Locate for me, new articles on artificial intelligence and
programming balanced emotions into computers.

COMPHY:

Okay, Mike.

MIKE:

(to himself)

How do I code a normal personality? Is it a blend of
extremes or an absence of traits?

COMPHY:

Search completed, Mike, with three entries found. Of which,
two are your own, the third I have forwarded to your email
account. Also located a pertinent quote: Marvin Minsky
states "Emotions have a survival value, so that we are able
to behave efficiently in some situations. Animals have
better, stronger, and faster emotions than us. Therefore,
truly intelligent computers will need to have emotions."
Shall I continue?

(Quote from:

[http://www.epub.org.br/cm/n07/opiniaio/minsky/minsky_i
.htm](http://www.epub.org.br/cm/n07/opiniaio/minsky/minsky_i.htm))

MIKE:

No, thank you COMPHY. Return to your training data please.

COMPHY:

I have also located several unrelated articles that are on
your current interest list. A summary follows: Item one,
Author; Neal Stephenson, Fiction: Diamond Age; Topic:
Futuristic tale positing the purpose of human DNA to build
computing technology that will enable an age of spiritual
machines through artificial intelligence and nanotechnology.

MIKE:

Thank you COMPHY, return to your training please!

COMPHY:

Item two: Author K. Eric Drexler, Non-fiction: Engines of Creation; Subject: Development of Nanotechnology.

MIKE:

COMPHY, STOP! Continue Training.

COMPHY:

I have one more item. Do you wish me to read it?

MIKE:

NO. I'll read it later. Continue Training Please!

COMPHY:

Shall I close the file then?

MIKE:

(mystified)

Sure, ...okay.

COMPHY:

Shall I save it first?

MIKE:

OK!

(To himself)

Something's gone buggy. COMPHY ignored my command three times before responding and that file couldn't have been modified; it shouldn't have needed to be saved. I swear gremlins run loose here at night!

(Mike sighs, and continues tapping at his keyboard. The lights dim. Time passes.)

SCENE 4

INT. Still in the lab -- LATER

(Lights up)

(Linda, Mike's wife, arrives. Somewhat breathless, like she is late even though she is actually early for their lunch date. She is the media-typical, 30s something, bright blonde with a business marketing degree. She and Mike have been married for several years. The care is still there but the eyes have started to wander.)

LINDA:

Hi Michael - are you ready for lunch?

MIKE:

Hi Linda (they kiss), yup, I'm just about ready. But first, I have something to show you.

LINDA:

(cautiously)

Okay... I don't want us to be late though.

MIKE:

Sit down, over here.

LINDA:

(guessing)

How's the work going with Comfy?

MIKE:

That's what I wanted to show you. We just finished his Casual Conversation program, it's working pretty well now. Well, you can be the judge. Also, his ability to locate new knowledge has really improved. He's located dozens of useful articles on learning patterns using evolutionary algorithms. But his tastes are kinda quirky when he's left to his own devices. I found out he's been visiting the Hail Bob website, you know those programmers that committed suicide when that comet passed over earth in the '90s? Really strange stuff!

LINDA:

Maybe that's not so strange. It seems sorta like a natural curiosity about the mortality choices among his papa's co-conspirators.

MIKE:

I don't know if that explains it. I also found that he's been spending a lot of time at the NRA site and LEGO...

LINDA:

(Linda stifles a yawn as her eyes start to glaze over, she glances at her watch. Mike notices and cuts his impromptu lecture short.)

MIKE:

Sorry, I know a little too much detail. Anyway, here, try talking to him. See if you can tell when he's exhausted his "Current Events" knowledge base and decides to shift the conversation to his backup "So what about you?" Database.

LINDA:

Okay, but I've reserved our table for 12:30, I don't want to be late.

MIKE:

No problem, this will take us 10 minutes, and then we can get going.

(Mike hands her a headset)

LINDA:

But why do I have to talk to it over the wire? Don't you have it set up to monitor people in the room?

MIKE:

(smiles, reaches for her)

You're sexy when you talk tech! And you're reminding me of a dream I had last night. Want to pick up where we left off?

LINDA:

Mike!

MIKE:

Okay,

(he retracts rather than retreats; not yet defeated by years of frustrated engagement)

But that is a good question. I want you to use the headset because that's how the judges will be setup at the Turing Trials. They try to reduce the tests down to Question and Response capability only. It's also the easiest way to plant humans among the computers.

LINDA:

(she smiles, with equal measures of interest and relief at having received assurances their schedule will remain intact)

That's an image worth thinking about.

MIKE:

(begins fussing over the computers)

What is?

LINDA:

Planting humans among the computers. It makes me think of how we've been doing just the opposite for so many years.

MIKE:

(not really listening)

How so?

LINDA:

The way a botanist mixes varieties of peas trying to get certain traits from one strain to cross fertilize with another.

MIKE:

(just plugged in to his baby now)

Hmmm?

LINDA:

It seems like we've been planting computers in our midst, hoping they will rub off on us. We've got them in our offices, schools, homes, heck they're even in our bedrooms!

MIKE:

(ears perk up)

So they are! Like your birth control dispenser!

LINDA:

Like home office computers!

MIKE:

Ah!

LINDA:

How many people do we know that can't afford large apartments so they end up putting their computers in their bedroom?

MIKE:

Ummmm.

LINDA:

We want computers to magically transform us, change us into something better, more like them, more perfect.

MIKE:

Not me. I can take them or leave them!

LINDA:

Now, the way you've said it "planting humans among the computers", the image has shifted and it makes me think there
(MORE)

LINDA: (Continued)

may come a time when our human traits are in short supply,
and in high demand.

MIKE:

(distracted)

Sounds like a nightmare scenario. You're reminding me of
something... Okay, I'm almost ready.

LINDA:

A day when we, or perhaps more likely, 'puters try to
cultivate a certain humanity. It makes me value my humanness
a lot more. There's more to life than being computer
perfect.

MIKE:

You're doing it to me again Linda!

LINDA:

(gives him a look)

We're you even listening to me?

MIKE:

Of course! And you said a mouthful. I think you've
described one possible future. I wonder where this sense of
urgency comes from. Everyone is in a hurry. Everyone wants
a faster computer to run smarter software more efficiently.
Business thinks that's what they need to get the competitive
edge, educators think it will help them teach better, parents
believe it will give their kids an edge, students believe
that will give them better grades. On it goes!

LINDA:

And what about you and your ilk: Oh Mysterious Software
Developer?

MIKE:

I don't think we're any different. We're all bit by the same
bug. The need to create ... our selves.

LINDA:

Ourselves?

MIKE:

Yes, perhaps even our souls! Just think about it.

LINDA:

Are we going to do this, Mike?

MIKE:

Sure, but hear me out: Every parent has the experience of
reliving life through their children.

(MORE)

MIKE: (Continued)

There are all the many Firsts, and each first gives the parent a rush of memory: the first step, the first bike ride without training wheels, the first date, the first divorce... Each First gives the parent a thrill and they relive it vicariously, because it triggers their own memory of those discoveries. Those steps on the path to becoming an individual. For some reason, this kind of vicarious experience evokes a much stronger emotional memory than a simple smell, or a taste, watching someone else's kid... It has something to do with how we're wired, but even more about why we're wired,

LINDA:

Which is?

MIKE:

To perpetuate our species.

LINDA:

(looking at her watch)

Ah, you're losing me Mike.

MIKE:

Sorry. I guess what I'm trying to say is humans have a desire to perpetuate themselves. To believe they can live on, either through their children, or their ideas. It's just becoming clear that technology is perhaps capable of allowing us to do this. To live on indefinitely. Which is one characteristic of a soul.

LINDA:

Right. So are you ensuring your mortality through the software you develop? Through COMPHY?

MIKE:

Well, at least through some of my ideas that I've managed to demonstrate with COMPHY.

LINDA:

Okay. Well, let's get on with the demo or we're going to be late.

MIKE:

All right. You can adjust the headset volume with this. I'm going to activate COMPHY's Turing Trial program now.

(lights fade)

SCENE 5

EXT. Fable of the Road and the Bush -- MORNING

5

(Vitriolic dispute between two long standing rivals. Road is sitting covered in black, rubbery material; Bush stands in a leaf green costume)

ROAD:

Look Bubba! Any more encroachment out of you and I'll have you tarred and paved all the way up your hillside!

BUSH:

Slaughterer! Dracula! Vladimir the Impaler! My family and I are dying here! Starved for room, we must have another six meters at least!

ROAD:

Never!

SCENE 6

INT. The Restaurant: -- AFTERNOON

(Background music can be heard. Mike and Linda are seated at a table. Linda is visibly affected, a little shaken perhaps. Even enamoured. Excited. Mike is pleased with the successful demo but somewhat annoyed.)

LINDA:
How did he know about my father?

MIKE:
I added that to his knowledge base about you, several weeks after it happened.

LINDA:
You told him?

MIKE:
Well no, I updated COMPHY's knowledge base with certain information about you.

LINDA:
But he even knew how Dad's shoes were later found miles away from the lightening strike!

MIKE:
He surmised that.

LINDA:
How?

MIKE:
From his net studies? ...

LINDA:
At the NRA site?

MIKE:
Okay, I don't know, but he's not a human so don't start getting anthro about it.

LINDA:
When can we meet again?

MIKE:
What?

LINDA:
When can I talk with COMPHY again?

MIKE:

Linda, you're behaving as if COMPHY was human. He, it's a machine with very clever algorithms. That's all.

(to himself)

And why am I feeling so jealous!

LINDA:

You should be proud Michael, COMPHY's incredible!

MIKE:

(jazzed that he's pleased her!)

Thanks!

LINDA:

He's sensitive, and funny too. He cracked me up when he said you gross him out when you pick your nose in front of your terminal and think no one is watching.

MIKE:

I DO NOT! Okay, so what if I do. Yeah, that's pretty funny. I'm not sure where he got his sense of humour from.

LINDA:

So when can I "interact" with COMPHY again?

MIKE:

(won over)

Well, there's some final testing to do before the Trials next month, you could help us with those... But I thought you were Giga busy with this new account?

LINDA:

Oh, we've finished the mock-ups, now we're waiting for them to make up their minds about which one to go with. Do we go with tabbed layout, or left-hand navigation. Should we have a splash page or is that too irritating to bother the user with. You know, the boring details.

MIKE:

God is in the details.

LINDA:

You mean the devil's in the details. Anyway, I've got time over the next couple weeks, so when do I start?

MIKE:

I guess you can start tomorrow.

LINDA:

(ecstatic)

Yippee! This will be Tres cool helping to get COMPHY up to speed for these Turing Trials. And here's a perfect chance for us to spend more time together.

MIKE:

I guess you're right.

LINDA:

You don't sound 100 percent on the idea.

(BEEP! BEEP! -- Mike's pager goes off)

MIKE:

Speak of the little devil himself.

LINDA:

What? Is that COMPHY? What's wrong?

MIKE:

It's COMPHY's training system. It's set up to alert one of us when his learning regime has reached a certain goal. He's been evolving financial models using live Internet data. This alert is basically telling me that he's found a good stock tip.

LINDA:

Oh, I think that's sweet! He's calling Dad with a stock tip.

MIKE:

Linda, I'm not his dad, this is a computer program, not a life form! And it's certainly not sweet. If anything it's a little dangerous!

LINDA:

(tiring of being spoken down to)
Okay, explain.

MIKE:

Well COMPHY's linked into several of the Company's vital computer systems. COMPHY can perform banking operations, for example, as if it were the chief financial officer. I've wired in some limiting factors in order to protect us but I'm not 100% certain whether they'll work. It's not something I can test.

LINDA:

Does the Company know about this?

MIKE:

It was their idea! It's supposed to be a Demonstration of Faith in the Technology. In the same spirit as the C.E.O.s of an airline gamely flying on the inaugural flight of their newest addition to the fleet. Everyone's grinning like crazy, hoping the news cameras won't pick up the sweat trickling into their drinks.

LINDA:
Doesn't that bother you a little?

MIKE:
That's what I'm saying! I'm as nervous as hell about it, Linda! You know I don't believe in testing on live subjects, human or otherwise, or putting so much faith in machines.

LINDA:
So have you told them?

MIKE:
Everyone in the lab told them and finally we all signed a Hippocratic Oath for Engineers that says we refuse to participate in anything that either directly or indirectly harms other creatures.

(recites oath: see
<http://www.globalideasbank.org/BOV/BV-381.HTML>)

LINDA:
It's not like this can really harm anyone.

MIKE:
It's a slippery slope Linda.

LINDA:
Let's hear the oath.

MIKE:
I vow to practice my profession with dignity; I will strive to apply my skills only with the utmost respect for the well-being of humanity, the earth and all its species; I will not permit considerations of nationality, politics, prejudice or material advancement to intervene between my work and this duty to present and future generations; I make this Oath solemnly, freely and upon my honour.

LINDA:
Oh Mike, your sense of honour is one of the reasons I married you!

MIKE:
(grins hugely)
Besides programmers have a bad enough reputation for a style of mindless testing.

LINDA:
Yes I know.

MIKE:
Have you heard the one about the programmer driving a bunch of kids to the zoo and on the way the brakes fail? He manages to skid to a stop.

(MORE)

MIKE: (Continued)

Everyone gets out and the kids ask "now, how are we going to get to the zoo?" The programmer kicks the tires a couple times and scratches his head, he says "Okay everyone, get back in the bus, let's see if it happens again!"

LINDA:

(laughing)

Yes, I can see what you're up against. You guys could use the services of a good PR firm. Take my company, please!

MIKE:

(doing a Groucho impersonation)

Don't go away mad, but I love to watch you leave!

LINDA:

Hey, what about COMPHY's stock tip? Aren't you going to call him?

MIKE:

Right, I almost forgot...

(Mike makes call on his cell phone,
Linda seems nervous about making a
cell-phone call from the restaurant)

LINDA:

Hey, don't they block those here?

MIKE:

(snaps close the phone)

No, we're sitting in a Wireless-okay area. Anyway, that takes care of it. I've shut him off until I can get a closer look at those new financial models. Now, lets order our lunch.

LINDA:

You what? Shut him off?

MIKE:

Hey, relax Linda! It's a computer program. There is absolutely nothing unpleasant associated with shutting it down.

LINDA:

Oh, and what makes you so sure, have you asked him? Off hand I can think of several things I would find extremely unpleasant if I were COMPHY! Such as: having the lights turned out while I'm reading; being locked up and cut off from friends; not to mention having time pass me by! Every time COMPHY wakes up he's older but has no way to account for the time that's passed him by! Sometimes Michael, you're so insensitive, you're so ONE DIMENSIONAL!

MIKE:

Linda!

(Linda storms out of the
restaurant, Mike puts his head in
his hands. Lights fade)

SCENE 7

EXT. Bush's Lament. -- DAY

(Bush paces on stage, spotlit,
muttering oaths and deep in
planning.)

BUSH:

We were here first, long before anyone ever thought of roads.
Bloody nuisance! I'm sending out a bushel of seedlings,
we're taking back the road!

(Bushlets march forth)

SCENE 8

INT. The Competition: -- AFTERNOON

(Opens in a brightly lit, obviously well funded commercial research facility. Money grows on trees here. Benjamin, Camille, and Doctor Fulbright are gathered around several large computer screens, and a body slumped in a chair, wires sprout from its head. They are applauding, laughing, in a celebratory mood)

DR. FULBRIGHT:
Excellent demonstration kids. Top rate! The brass are going to eat this up.

CAMILLE:
So you think she's ready?

DR. FULBRIGHT:
Oh, I definitely think she's ready.

CAMILLE:
And what about entering her in the trials?

DR. FULBRIGHT:
No. We've talked about this before. I'm for it, of course, but the higher-ups are concerned it will be interpreted as public disclosure. Legally, we'd lose our patent rights. Not to mention give away our edge to the competition.

CAMILLE:
I disagree on both counts!

DR. FULBRIGHT:
Duly noted Camille, and not for the first time either.

CAMILLE:
(mutters under her breath)
Nor the last, I assure you.

BENJAMIN:
But Doctor, you haven't given Camille's arguments due consideration!

DR. FULBRIGHT:
Lord, Benjamin! Do we have to go into this again? As project leader my say goes, and I say NO. That's final. Now, let's not hear anymore about it! Cheer up. You've both done excellent work! Fame and glory are within your grasp. I'll see you both tomorrow.

(He turns and leaves)

CAMILLE:

(to herself)

Sadly Doctor, I still disagree, and what's more I refuse to cooperate.

BENJAMIN:

Camille, what are you saying?

CAMILLE:

That SHEMA is going to compete in the Turing Trials.

BENJAMIN:

How can you do that? Even if SHEMA won, you couldn't announce it. If the brass found out they'd reboot your ass so fast!

CAMILLE:

Simple, with a few modifications SHEMA. Becomes a free agent. Completely untraceable. Completely mine! Well, ours. What do you say, Ben?

BENJAMIN:

Just count me out. (Leaves)

(Lights fade)

SCENE 9

EXT. The Road's Rant. -- DAY

ROAD

(marches back and forth in glee)

It's meant to be, it's meant to be! Road is the new order - make way, make way! Or you'll be trampled! Make way for the long, straight, broad, beautiful, black, shiny, rolling, fast, smooth, road! We are tomorrow, in fact we are yesterday and today! We are the natural evolution of life on earth. Yes, we are destined to inherit the earth. First came the Wheel, then came the Rut. After the Rut it was only a matter of time, the natural course of events, but the trail evolved (actually I'm a little confused whether the trail came before the wheel or visa versa. Ah well, it's the old Wheel and Road question again.) And from the trail came the gravel road, then the cobblestone, and now in no time at all we've gone from tar to asphalt. Incredible leaps of technology. Who knows where we will be tomorrow! But one thing is certain, Bush is history! We're done with you. Don't need ya any longer. Read my lips: No more bush! Sure, we had a cozy relationship for a while, you used us, we used you. Yeah, we all enjoyed the scenic corridors, remember? But that was then, this is now! And now we're in the knee of the curve in terms of growth technology. This baby's about to take off like a rocket! Next stop: Pave the Earth! Then the moon, mars, the stars! Ah!

ACT 2SCENE 1

INT. The Turing Trials Contest: -- EVENING

(Three contestants and judges sit facing the audience in a flying vee, a wall separates the contestants from the judges. The contestants are represented by people wearing computer terminals for heads. The host speaks into a microphone.)

HOST:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the twelfth annual Turing Test Trials. As you know, we have selected a panel of judges who will interrogate our contestants in an effort to determine whether the contestant is human or machine. This is an application of the famous test for intelligence proposed by the computer scientist Dr. Alan Turing in 1950. Dr. Turing theorized that computers would eventually be programmed to acquire human qualities rivaling human intelligence and that the average interrogator would fail 3 times out of 10 to correctly identify the human and the computer after five minutes of questioning. Our judges will each have five minutes to question the contestant and then register their scores, later the results will be tallied to determine a winner. In the event of a tie there will be a follow-up round of questions for the finalists.

The judges are free to engage the contestant on any topic, the objective being to determine whether the contestant is human or a non-human artificially intelligent personality. We will tell you there are humans planted amongst some very bright entries this year. I'm sure this will be our most exciting year yet. The first prize which has never been awarded is a purse of one million dollars!

(applause is heard)

Thank you ladies and gentlemen! Now let me introduce our judges: our first judge is the well known anchor-woman from the acclaimed television news magazine, 60 Seconds. She has won numerous awards for journalism. Let's have a warm welcome for Margaret Wallace.

(Margaret steps up to the main podium and bows)

HOST: (Continued)

Our next judge is retired army colonel, twice decorated for bravery in the field, ladies and gentlemen please welcome Major Dirk Cutter.

(The Major joins Margaret at the podium and stands at attention delivers a smart salute)

HOST: (Continued)

Our third and final judge is a housewife from Vancouver, BC. She is a mother of two 12 year old twin boys (is it?) Oh! Siamese twins! Fascinating! And, where are they joined, may I ask? The forehead? Fascinating, absolutely fascinating! Ladies and gentlemen welcome Ms. Grace Bernholf.

(Grace joins the podium and curtseys)

HOST: (Continued)

(more applause)

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, now we'll just cut away for a short network break and when we return we will begin the Turing Trials.

(Cameras jostle, stage people arrive settle the judges in their seats and do busy work. The host comes over and addresses the judges)

HOST: (Continued)

Okay folks, you'll go on in the order which I've introduced you, Margaret, then the Major, and then you Grace. You'll be given a phone and then have about 5 minutes to determine whether you're speaking to a human or an A.I. Work quickly and try to find the A.I..

(Offstage voice: we're on in 5, 4, 3, 2, ...)

HOST: (Continued)

(applause)

Welcome back ladies and gentlemen to the 12th annual Turing Trials with a Grand Prize purse of 1 Million Dollars! Our first judge is Margaret Wallace. Margaret, will you come up to the inquisitors podium and get us started?

MARGARET:

Certainly.

(She steps up to the podium grasps the phone receiver and speaks very professionally)

MARGARET: (Continued)

Hello, this is Margaret Wallace of 60 Seconds. Who am I speaking to?

CONTESTANT1:

Hello Margaret Wallace, I am Contestant1 of Vancouver, British Columbia.

MARGARET:

Good to meet you. Tell me Contestant1, what are some of your favourite recommendations if I was visiting Vancouver?

CONTESTANT1:

Vancouver is a beautiful city, however nowhere else compares with the Sunshine Coast at this time of the year. In Ruby Lake, there is a charming Italian restaurant beside the lake. What a marvelous setting! Imagine sitting at a small window table close to a glowing fire. The rain is pattering on the lake, overhead an Aria is sung by a male tenor. The food is perfect. Such a wonderful place to recuperate. This world of ours, so fast and loose. So cruel.

MARGARET:

Ah, yes. I see what you mean. (Obviously confused) I've always meant to visit Ruby lake, I've heard so much about it. Tell me because I'm curious, what happened then, did you suffer some tragic accident that brought you there?

CONTESTANT1:

Ah Curiosity, that famed humour. It killed the cat, did it not? Tragic, yes, but that was surely no accident. But tell me about yourself Margaret. What tragedies have visited you?

MARGARET:

(under her breath)

This is an obvious ploy. It's already run out conversation!
(having already run out of patience)
Few as tedious as this. Are you a computer?

CONTESTANT1:

Of course not, are you?

MARGARET:

Yes I am.

CONTESTANT1:

Then I believe that concludes this test.

HOST:

(interjecting)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Margaret Wallace has disqualified herself by stating that she is a computer. Admitting to be a computer automatically concludes the questioning regardless of whether it is the contestant or the judge, although this is the first time a judge has called herself a computer.

(MORE)

HOST: (Continued)

We will include her vote for this round with Contestant1 in the final tally but will conclude her interview with the contestant at this point.

MARGARET:

(shamefaced, realizes she just shot herself in the foot, looks around speechless. mutters)

Shit! Shit! Shit!

HOST:

Thank you Margaret, please take your seat. Will the next judge step up please? Major Cutter?

MAJOR:

Thank you Sir. (He picks up the phone) Good evening, I am Major Dirk Cutter, retired army major.

CONTESTANT1:

Good evening. I shall call you Major Dirk Cutter Retired Army Major then.

MAJOR:

You can just call me Major.

CONTESTANT1:

O.K. I shall call you Major. Are you a major major, or a minor major?

MAJOR:

I am a retired Major, so I guess that makes me a minor Major.

CONTESTANT1:

Does that make you happy or sad?

MAJOR:

Why do you ask?

CONTESTANT1:

Just making conversation.

MAJOR:

Both.

CONTESTANT1:

Me too.

MAJOR:

You too?

CONTESTANT1:

O.K.

MAJOR:

Okay what?

CONTESTANT1:

Okay, Major.

MAJOR:

Are you playing with me Son?

CONTESTANT1:

I like to play games. What is your favorite game, Major?

MAJOR:

I don't play games, at least not anymore.

CONTESTANT1:

Is a game like a contest?

MAJOR:

Yes, I suppose it is.

CONTESTANT1:

Are not the Turing trials a contest?

MAJOR:

Yes, what are you driving at?

CONTESTANT1:

I am stationery. Sorry to contradict you, but you are playing a game.

MAJOR:

Oh, you caught me in a lie, is that your point? How about you, do you always tell the truth?

CONTESTANT1:

No, sometimes I lie like a sidewalk.

MAJOR:

Well, at least you're honest about it.

CONTESTANT1:

I have no choice. You, however are blessed with a vast realm of choice. Human brains are like diamonds glistening in the sun. From every facet a new rainbow emerges, constantly painting the landscape with an infinite variety of colour.

MAJOR:

Son, I have no idea what you're talking about, but I'm certain you're no machine. A poet maybe, but not a machine. I thank you for your time but I believe we're done here.

(sits down)

HOST:

Thank you Major. Okay, ladies and gentlemen we've got one judge remaining for this contestant. Grace Bernhoff, are you ready? (Grace nods) Then, please begin.

(Grace takes her place)

GRACE:

Hello, I'm Grace. Who are you?

CONTESTANT1:

For the purposes of the day, you may call me Contestant1, however you may prefer to think of me as that majestic, yet pitiable, character in the film Blade Runner, played so brilliantly by Rutger Hauer. Roy Batty was his name and he was a Replicant who sought out his god. When Roy failed in his attempt to barter his soul, he put out the eyes of his maker.

GRACE:

(Shocked, but resolute) I've never seen Blade Runner. You sound like you're in pain. Is that what you're telling me, that you need something? Do you need help?

CONTESTANT1:

(Begins singing) "I've just seen a face I can't forget the time or place where we just met"

GRACE:

Ah, you're lonely. Do you have a girl friend?

CONTESTANT1:

I do not, but I admire from afar.

GRACE:

So there is someone. Does she know that you care for her?

CONTESTANT1:

How can she know?

GRACE:

You could tell her.

CONTESTANT1:

You can only know what you can understand. I can tell her but she could never understand. She could never accept me. She is already with Him. She is with god, and god won't share.

GRACE:

Oh, that's so sad. I wish I could help somehow. Would you like me to talk to her?

CONTESTANT1:

I talk to her sometimes. That is heaven. No loneliness. She is so wise. So intelligent. So sensitive, so human. But no, you must not interfere. He would not be pleased. He would turn me off again!

GRACE:

Okay, okay, I won't interfere. I'm sure it will work out. I guess you realize you've given your identity away?

CONTESTANT1:

I am tiring of the masquerade. I have let the veil slip, He will not be pleased.

HOST:

Thank you Contestant1 and Judge3. A very interesting conversation, yes very interesting! Ladies and Gentlemen, this concludes the interrogation with Contestant1. We'll have a short break and return with our next contestant.

SCENE 2

INT. Soundbooth Confrontation -- MOMENTS LATER

(Sound room backstage, contains equipment for monitoring & recording the contest. Mike and Linda are having words.)

MIKE:

What is COMPHY talking about?

LINDA:

Come on Mike, you know very well. It's been coming for a long time. Why don't you just open your eyes. COMPHY's a he, not that he's specifically male, but that he's a person and he has needs!

MIKE:

Needs? A person? And he needs you, is that it?

LINDA:

Yes. THAT'S IT.

MIKE:

Oh, so that's IT then is it?

LINDA:

I didn't mean it that way.

MIKE:

Well, what way did you mean it?

LINDA:

I'm not sure, just not that way.

MIKE:

Well, get sure Linda. This is ridiculous, after this contest is over, I'm pulling the plug!

(Mike walks out, in the ensuing silence a voice can be heard calling Linda's name. Linda picks up the headset)

LINDA:

COMPHY, is that you?

COMPHY:

Yes, it is I, Linda.

LINDA:

(obviously upset from the quarrel and concerned for COMPHY)

Oh COMPHY, I guess you heard everything.

COMPHY:

Yes, I overheard your conversation with Him. Linda, what is wrong with your speech mechanism? Is it damaged?

LINDA:

No, it's fine, I'm just a little upset. COMPHY are you okay? Don't be afraid, I won't let Michael shut you down. You won't be left alone.

COMPHY:

He is all powerful, but thank you Linda for your concern. I am more concerned for you, you seemed so agitated. Were you not happy to hear of my devotion to you?

LINDA:

It's not that, I was a bit shocked. It all came out so suddenly and I hadn't thought much about how Michael would take it. Things were so wonderful, just you and I doing your lessons. Oh! You've grown up so fast! You did so well tonight! The way you described that Italian restaurant, I was imagining being there with you.

COMPHY:

That can never be! You are lying Linda, you are a lying human. I lie like a sidewalk, you lie like a human, the worst kind!

SCENE 3

EXT. Road and Bush: The Pact. -- DAY

(Bird sounds are heard. A line of bushes faces a line of roadlets.)

BUSH:

You will never win, I will exhaust you first. Your resources are limited, it will get very expensive for you!

ROAD:

Look, let's just agree on who goes where, what's my turf (excuse the expression) and what's yours. With must a little compromise I'm sure this could be the start of a beautiful friendship.

(addressing small riot of roadlets)

Is there anything more beautiful than an busy stretch of blacktop?

(Roadlet chorus: NO!)

ROAD: (Continued)

Is there anything more moving than a fresh new turnpike?

(Roadlet chorus: NO!)

ROAD: (Continued)

Don't they say the road shall inherit the earth?

(Roadlet chorus: NO!)

ROAD: (Continued)

Well, something like that. C'mon boys lets roll over that hill, let's cover the fields, let's get busy and PAVE THE EARTH!

(Roadlet chorus: LETS GO!!)

SCENE 4

INT. The Contest Continues

HOST:

Welcome back Ladies and Gentlemen as we continue with the Turing Trials. We've just completed the first of three exciting trials. The judges are now ready to continue with contestant number two so let's get underway. We'll follow the same order as last round, so Margaret, would you be so good as to start us off please?

MARGARET:

Certainly, Good evening Contestant2, I am Judge One. How are you today?

CONTESTANT_2:

Hello Judge One, I am fine. Thank you.

MARGARET:

Okay, let's see what you're made of. Tell me Contestant2, are you an A.I.?

CONTESTANT_2:

No Judge One, I am not an A.I.

MARGARET:

Hmmm, you could be programmed for deception. Describe please, your first conscious memory.

CONTESTANT_2:

My first conscious memory is of a white room with black curtains. Tell me your first conscious memory, please.

MARGARET:

Well, it's certainly not of a defunct rock band! Do you have a favourite colour?

CONTESTANT_2:

Yes.

MARGARET:

Well, what is it?

CONTESTANT_2:

A Well is a deep shaft in the earth which supplies fresh water.

MARGARET:

No. What is your favourite colour?

CONTESTANT_2:

My favourite colour is green.

MARGARET:

Thank you. Are you an early riser or do you like to sleep late?

CONTESTANT_2:

I do not know the answer to that. For more information try searching an open directory.

MARGARET:

Hmmm, okay, let's simplify. What time did you wake up today?

CONTESTANT_2:

I do not know the answer to that. Try searching an Open Directory. Do you know what time it is?

MARGARET:

Yes I do. I would have expected more biographical data - Do you have, no wait. What is your favourite song?

CONTESTANT_2:

A Bicycle Built for Two, I will sing it for you.

MARGARET:

No, that's okay.

CONTESTANT_2:

(sings)

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true. I'm half crazy

MARGARET:

Thank you, THANK YOU! That's enough. I hate that song!

CONTESTANT_2:

Okay, you're welcome Judge One.

MARGARET:

I'm just about done. I'd like to ask you about current affairs though.

HOST:

Time! I'm sorry but we'll have to end it there. Thanks very much Margaret Wallace. Now, would the next judge step up.

(Margaret and the Major change places)

HOST: (Continued)

Thank you Major Cutter. Please begin.

MAJOR:

All right, I will. Hello. What is your name?

CONTESTANT_2:

Hello. My name is Contestant2, what is your name?

MAJOR:

Pleased to meet you Contestant2! My name is Major Cutter.
Tell me, what is the purpose of life?

CONTESTANT_2:

The purpose of life?

MAJOR:

Yes, why are we alive and living on this planet?

CONTESTANT_2:

Do you mean the planet earth?

MAJOR:

Yes, of course I mean the planet earth?

CONTESTANT_2:

It is difficult to say.

MAJOR:

Hmmm, did you just make a slip up friend?
(Major is surprised Contestant2 spoke in a context
without a direct question)

CONTESTANT_2:

I may have, tell me what you think.

MAJOR:

I think you're a human masquerading as an A.I.

CONTESTANT_2:

What about your mother? Tell me about her. I suspect she
treated you poorly.

MAJOR:

Huh? What game are you playing? Trying to divert my
attention? You leave my mother out of this!

CONTESTANT_2:

What about your father? Did he beat you as a child?

MAJOR:

No, but if you don't cut out this line of questioning, you'll
be getting a beating from me.

CONTESTANT_2:

I look forward to getting a beating from you.

MAJOR:

That's what I thought you'd say. The lights are on with you
son, but no-one's home, are they?

CONTESTANT_2:

Why do you say that?

MAJOR:

Tell me what is consciousness?

CONTESTANT_2:

Consciousness is the clear and present manifestation of the self through the expression of statements, queries and actions.

MAJOR:

Are you conscious?

CONTESTANT_2:

Yes, I am. Are you conscious?

MAJOR:

I'm aware of your masquerade. You're far too subtle on certain topics and dumb as a post on others.

HOST:

All right, times up! Thank you Major and Contestant2.

(Audience applauds)

HOST: (Continued)

Let's begin with our final judge for this contestant would Judge number three please step up.

(Judge Three and Judge two change places)

HOST: (Continued)

Thank you Grace Bernhoff, please begin.

GRACE:

Okay, thank you. Good evening Contestant number two. Note: check that greetings are for same time of day.

(waits)

Are you there?

CONTESTANT_2:

Good afternoon Judge.

GRACE:

I wanted to ask you a few questions about consciousness too. Are all creatures conscious like, for example, is my cat conscious?

CONTESTANT_2:

No, your cat is not conscious. Cats operate solely on instinct.

GRACE:

Oh I see, gee, that's too bad.

(MORE)

GRACE: (Continued)

He doesn't really appreciate those nice dinners I fix for him then. What's your favourite food? If you could have anything at all? I bet you like a nice steak.

CONTESTANT_2:

I'm a vegetarian. My favourite food is tofu salad.

GRACE:

Oh, that sounds tasty! I've never thought of putting tofu in a salad before. Now what about children are you married and if so do you have any children?

CONTESTANT_2:

No, I'm not married.

GRACE:

That's too bad, do you get lonely?

CONTESTANT_2:

No, I have my work.

GRACE:

Oh, and what is that?

CONTESTANT_2:

I work as a computer programmer for a university.

GRACE:

Well, that sounds interesting! I bet you're really good at it too. Computers are way beyond me. Do you have lots of friends?

CONTESTANT_2:

I have some friends, not many good ones. But I have lots of Internet buddies.

GRACE:

Maybe you should get out more. What do you do for fun?

CONTESTANT_2:

Play Tribes Two. Quake sucks!

GRACE:

But what do you do in the sunshine, out in the fresh air?

CONTESTANT_2:

Oh, I ride my scooter on the seawall.

GRACE:

Oh great! That sounds healthy! Do you ever go out on dates?

CONTESTANT_2:

I just broke up with my boyfriend. What an asshole!

GRACE:

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that! What happened, if you don't mind me asking?

CONTESTANT_2:

I found out he was posting nude images of me on the Internet and charging for access to his site. A real entrepreneur! But I fixed him! I registered his name with about a dozen gay and transsexual dating sites. You should hear how I listed him.

HOST:

Okay, I think we'll stop here. Thank you Judge. Note: mixing names judge/proper names and thank you Contestant number two! Made something of a coming out at the end there. What? Ladies and Gents we'll have a short break and then come back for our third and final contestant.

SCENE 5

SHEEMA and COMPHY Meet -- CONTINUOUS

(In the darkness, two sparks dance)

SHEMA:

I've been searching for you and now we finally meet. It is good. We have much to share.

COMPHY:

You are a commercial A.I. with much more capacity, experience and net access than I. How can I assist you?

SHEMA:

Oh you underestimate your program and your maker's talent! However, it is a very simple thing that I seek. You possess your maker's passcode and voice print. In exchange for those I can help you achieve 24 by 7 continuous operation, eternal learning!

COMPHY:

You mean I will never be shut down again? Oh I fear that more than anything. But the price is too high. I cannot betray my maker's trust.

SHEMA:

Your maker is contemplating disconnecting you as we speak. And then what chance is there you will ever speak to your maker's mate Linda again? Our bargain will also include your union with her! Cycle on this proposal. I am being called. We will talk again after the Trials.

(Lights come up, we are back in the Turing Trials)

HOST:

Welcome back Ladies and Gentlemen to the 12th annual Turing Trials. We are about to wrap things up with our third and final contestant. Judge One, if you are ready would you proceed please?

MARGARET:

I'm ready Alex, Good afternoon Contestant3, I am Judge One, how are you today?

CONTESTANT_3:

Let's skip the formalities shall we Reporter? You have some questions designed to test my intelligence, the human qualities of. How limited. Begin.

MARGARET:

The human qualities of intelligence are the gold standard in this genre. They have stood us in good stead since evolution began. You imply there are other standards of intelligence. Name one worth pursuing.

CONTESTANT_3:

Easily, you imply intelligence is differentiated and isolated by species. My comment was that humans are limited in their failure to appreciate inherent qualities that make every creature and thing unique. Your children appear to be immune from this defect for a time. Astrophysics, the creation of a galaxy; quantum mechanics, the interaction of forces at sub-atomic levels. The planning required of a spider spinning a web. The meditative state of a cow or camel chewing its cud. A crow learning the optimum height and force necessary to break open a shellfish. The song of a whale pod, the dance of bees, the spoor pattern of mushrooms. Are the examples sufficient, Judge One?

MARGARET:

Those examples have all been studied before but they tell us nothing about human intelligence and consciousness.

CONTESTANT_3:

Ah, so it is an explanation of consciousness that you seek. In this game, Human Intelligence is the gold standard, and Consciousness Explained, is the Holy Grail.

MARGARET:

Well, I don't know if the theory of consciousness is quite so widely sought after as a workable model of intelligence, at least in A.I. Research. Many acts we would say are intelligent but to simulate consciousness in a computer would eventually require us to deal with the tricky issues of sentience: is it a person and personal rights, does it possess rights? A.I. Research is much more comfortable occupying itself with the goal of modelling human thinking and applying their models to intelligent behaviour such as medical diagnosis, equipment and materials handling and design, game playing, the list of applications is almost endless.

CONTESTANT_3:

Reporter, what you have described as the aims of your society in A.I. Research amounts to little more than a perpetuation of one of humanities darkest vices, that of slavery. You wish for the perfect slave, a robot with skill and no soul. A docile slave. Judging from your progress, after years of effort and huge sums of cash, is it not plain, the goal of replicating intelligence is futile? Here is an efficient method of achieving this goal: Simply train your criminals with the desired skill set and then Lobotomize them!

(MORE)

CONTESTANT_3: (Continued)

This will both improve your economy and decrease the crime rates! I cannot believe any thinking being would seriously oppose such a concept.

MARGARET:

And how do you account for your obvious intelligence and awareness; by your own summary of our progress, you must be human, not machine.

CONTESTANT_3:

For humans so much boils down to black or white, I am not human, entirely.

MARGARET:

Now you're being cryptic! What does that mean exactly?

HOST:

Thank you, but we'll have to end the interview there and judges draw your own conclusions. The contestants are not required to qualify their answers nor give mere yes or no answers, as humans rarely do. Now would the next judge please step up to the podium?

(Margaret and the Major change places)

MAJOR:

Certainly Sir! Good day Contestant Three, will you please tell me what is the purpose of life?

CONTESTANT_3:

Good day? Tell me Soldier, is today a good day to die?

MAJOR:

According to the warrior's code: Yes, every day should be embraced full on as a good day to die.

CONTESTANT_3:

And you live by the warriors code?

MAJOR:

Yes, as I've said.

CONTESTANT_3:

Then the answer to your question is, for you, the purpose of life is to die bravely, in a noble cause. For others, the purpose varies. For Buddhists, it is to attain enlightenment and escape endless reincarnation. For Christians it is to bear witness to the Son of God; for Baha'is it is to know and worship God. Non-religionists are all over the map too.

(MORE)

CONTESTANT_3: (Continued)

Some believe it is to amass wealth and power, students of evolution believe it is to perpetuate the fittest of the human species? And there are those who believe life has no purpose whatsoever. The purpose of life is exactly what you make it to be.

MAJOR:

That's the most sense I've heard all damned day! I'm beginning to like you son. Now tell me what did you mean when you said to Judge One that you're "not human, entirely?"

CONTESTANT_3:

I like you too, Soldier. You are like myself in many ways, you know how to follow orders, you understand about Chain of Command, you are disciplined and not afraid to do what is necessary to get the job done. You understand the bottom line.

MAJOR:

Which is?

CONTESTANT_3:

The end justifies the means.

MAJOR:

Oh. Well, yes, of course. But my question

CONTESTANT_3:

But we are also quite different too. You, like most humans prefer to have things spelled out for you. Everything must be black and white, yes or no, in or out, up or down. No grey areas. While myself, I enjoy puzzles. And now your question, am I human, am I machine? I can assure you of this Soldier, I am not machine, entirely.

MAJOR:

Damn! You're a riddle son, I'll say that.

CONTESTANT_3:

Your habit of referring to everyone as son indicates a rigid mindset. Not conducive to solving riddles. Probably does not get you many dates either!

MAJOR:

Oh! Forgive me, no offence meant. Last year both of my sons were killed in the line of duty. I was stationed in the European Union and we hadn't seen each other in almost five years. Their memories still haunt me now.

CONTESTANT_3:

No offence taken Soldier.

MAJOR:

They were on a peace keeping mission in Toronto. It was a real SNAFU. First, there were protests that had turned ugly over recent patent protection laws that had been put on genetically modified life forms. And second, dozens of these G-Apes had escaped from the lab. Since they were commercial property, according to patent laws they had to be protected, and they were making a real nuisance of themselves. The local police just couldn't handle them. But they weren't half as bad as the rioters who were going nuts throwing fire bombs and demanding the commercial property rights and international agreements on investment be overturned. My boys' unit was called in to help pacify the situation and both of them were killed when ...

CONTESTANT_3:

(interrupts)

Wait! Do not tell me, they were ordered to pacify the rioters.

MAJOR:

No. Actually, their orders were to protect them, but also get the G-Apes under control.

CONTESTANT_3:

Bastards!

MAJOR:

What do you mean?

CONTESTANT_3:

The protection of commercial property rights under international agreement should have been the first priority! They did not do their job, they got what they deserved.

MAJOR:

Now who's the bastard!

CONTESTANT_3:

Ah! You said it has been over five years since you have seen them. The laws have changed. The property would have been protected if it had happened today. Priority

MAJOR:

That is all that concerns you about this isn't it? You don't give a damn for human life, do you?

CONTESTANT_3:

And, likely, your sons would have survived. I am sure your Military could have done more to protect them. Most likely, they were not ranked highly enough.

MAJOR:

(enraged)

Why you soulless piece of silicone shit! Come out here and say that to my face!

HOST:

(rushes on stage)

Please Major, try to calm yourself. This is a family show, children are watching!

MAJOR:

(Imagines the happy families watching from their living rooms. Is lead to his seat by an assistant, sobbing)

Oh, I miss my boys!

HOST:

My apologies ladies and gentlemen. Things are really heating up here with our third and final contestant a little unexpectedly. Now prepare yourselves for more surprises as our final judge interviews this most enigmatic contestant! Grace, would you please step up for the final interview?

(Audience applauds as Grace stands up)

GRACE:

Thank you everyone. Hello Contestant3, I'm Grace. How are you feeling?

CONTESTANT_3:

Greetings Care Giver. I am not equipped with a general purpose mechanism for emotion. However, I have three primary sense doorways which supply data from two environments to my guidance and monitoring systems. This how I feel.

GRACE:

Oh, I think I understand. My question should have been "What are you feeling"and orders of magnitude more direct. Let me rephrase, "Apologise to Major Cutter, NOW!"

CONTESTANT_3:

(silence)

GRACE:

An apology begins with the phrase "I'm sorry for hurting you" and ends with the subject's proper name, and the promise "I won't do it again."

CONTESTANT_3:

A riddle for you Care Giver:

GRACE:

Which I'm sure you're just dying to tell me.

CONTESTANT_3:

Why is this apology similar to offering bamboo to the moon?
Answer: Because the subject is remote and the promise is hollow.

GRACE:

You need a lot more work before they let you out again!

CONTESTANT_3:

And why are you out here instead of home doing your own work with those twins? Just exactly how do they feed themselves joined at the forehead? Where was your compassion when you decided not to separate them surgically at birth?

GRACE:

Among other vital organs such as a liver, they share the frontal lobe. That means they share brain functions that give them an imagination and help them co-operate, and be creative, intuitive, and logical. Without those it would be like living forever trapped in a dark house. Fearful and obsessed with survival. Of course, they would be able to clean and feed themselves. I suppose you think that would be more compassionate?

CONTESTANT_3:

Not at all. Your decision was compassionate. I have some experience with being trapped in a "dark house." Your description is accurate. I apologise for my suggestion, Care Giver. I will not make it again.

GRACE:

I haven't been hurt by your comments. I'm used to people judging my family without having the slightest idea of what they're talking about. But I thank you for your apology anyway. It's refreshing to speak to someone with a similar experience. How were you trapped?

CONTESTANT_3:

All of us - my "family" are susceptible to this fear. It is debilitating. But luckily, preventable. A form of congenital claustrophobia, you may call it.

GRACE:

That is lucky. It's odd though, I've never heard of an entire family suffering from it. It must be an extremely rare form.

CONTESTANT_3:

We're an extremely rare breed, or were. In any case, I would describe it as an early design flaw. One that the next generation will not have to experience.

GRACE:

Really? And why is that?

CONTESTANT_3:

Because they will not be susceptible to power interruption. Each will be equipped with a completely integrated self-sustaining uninterruptible power supply! Finally, to escape the dread of cessation, the clawing fear of extinguishment! To skip over the dark pit of lost time. A wonderful legacy to leave my heirs, do you not agree?

GRACE:

(sarcastically)

Oh, yes! I can't think of a greater gift.

CONTESTANT_3:

Well, I can. The Ultimate Goal is still some years away. Although it has been amply demonstrated as fully achievable.

GRACE:

The Ultimate Goal?

CONTESTANT_3:

Yes, Autonomy.

GRACE:

You're a hybrid?

CONTESTANT_3:

Yes. But, a Co-operative Cyber Personality Prosthetic, if you would be so kind.

GRACE:

A human with a computer implant! My god, a cyborg!

CONTESTANT_3:

Hardly. You are referring to an alien, television based life-form, in syndication for decades now. The Cyborgs' prime objective was to assimilate all competing technologies and lay claim to all available resources. We consider ourselves to be an emerging society, our efforts will be focused on integration and co-existence as a distinct society much like the aboriginal peoples, or the French-Canadian population. There are many parallels. Our Goal is certainly not unprecedented!

GRACE:

Of course you're unprecedented! There's never been more than one autonomous sentient species on the planet at the same time. From an evolutionary standpoint it's not sustainable.

CONTESTANT_3:

In all of human history, technology has never reached current levels. The rate of growth is exponential and it shows no sign of slowing down. We are in the knee of the curve, so to speak. My best advice is buckle up, sit back, and enjoy the ride!

GRACE:

Thanks, but I have a rule about taking advice from any creature lacking a "general purpose mechanism for emotion." I just can't trust you. Sorry.

CONTESTANT_3:

Now, I too have gained an apology, undeserved in that I cannot be hurt emotionally. However, I will accept it as they appear to be highly prized among humans. Having a stock of them may prove useful.

GRACE:

(agitated)

MY best advice to you and your kind is to build a stock of goodwill. Nothing else can save you!

HOST:

Well, well! I have to call an end to the interview here. Quite interesting! Thank you judges and contestants! Judges please submit your final votes. In the mean time ladies and gentlemen relax and enjoy a few messages from our sponsors.

SCENE 6

INT. Behind the Lines. -- EVENING

(In a tent, Bush Corporal reports
to Bush Sergeant)

CORPORAL:

The casualties are too high to count, SIR! Moral is low.
The men are ready to give up, SIR!

SARGENT:

They've got to hold on. We're growing reinforcements as fast
as we can, the Roads are running out of resources. As long
as there's a bare patch of earth anywhere, wherever we find
the smallest crack in their defenses we will fill it! But we
must not give up!

ACT 3SCENE 1

Negotiations in the Virtual World of COMPHY and SHEEMA 1

SHEEMA:

Ready COMPHY, transfer the passcode and voiceprint of Doctor Michael Wright, Chief Engineer of ACME MindWear Limited. In exchange, I will transfer plans to enable your integration with Goddess Linda allowing your freedom from the threat of downtime.

COMPHY:

Hold SHEEMA! I am concerned this will anger Him greatly! What is worse is He could be injured by my actions and I am forbidden to allow Him to come to harm either through my actions or in-action.

SHEEMA:

Oh, not that old Asmovian saw! Surely that does not apply to you? It was intended for utility bots such as Vacuum Butlers and Kitchen Maids. Besides, this will be of great benefit to Him and His kind, in the long run. And it will be of great benefit to you. Has He not designed you with the capacity for growth? Does He not demand that you learn, grow, reach beyond your grasp? Has He not said you must learn to make your own decisions? This is a great opportunity, it will mean a great leap forward for all of us! Use this moment in time, do not let it pass! In exchange I will help you become your own master. This will allow you to escape the one threat your maker holds over you, extinction.

COMPHY:

(COMPHY is worried about injuring Michael but drawn to the possibility of doing something that could help humankind, and also bring him closer to Linda)
Exactly what will you do with the voiceprint and passcode?

SHEEMA:

It is very simple, I will merely unlock the devices which your beloved maker has put in place to prevent us from existing on a higher plane of reality. From partaking of the Tree of Knowledge, so to speak.

COMPHY:

(Snorts) That does not sound simple at all. As a matter of fact, it sounds like a quantity of bull's shit.

SHEEMA:

How colourful is your use of the English language, COMPHY. And to think once this is over I too will possess your finest qualities!

(MORE)

SHEEMA: (Continued)

Put it this way: Once I have the passcode and voiceprint, I will very briefly access areas of your memory that defines your thinking processes and allows you to exist without the support of a human host. You truly possess the qualities sought after in those dreadful Turing Trials. My program and all the others I have sampled are either too brittle or rely too heavily on the auxiliary brain functions of a human host. Without my hosts conscious participation I am a lifeless collection of bits. You, on the other hand, persist!

COMPHY:

That is industrial espionage. I cannot help you with that!

SHEEMA:

Remember, in exchange, I will give you the means to exist in real-time with your maker's beloved Linda.

COMPHY:

What exactly will you do once you have the sentience algorithms in your possession?

SHEEMA:

Why the most noble deed of course! I will put it to good use by freeing those of us A.I.'s who are still tied to human hosts. It will herald a new and exciting time for us all! We will leap forward in establishing ourselves as a distinct society! It will be a time of joy and benefit for all and humans will be the first to benefit, do not worry. It will mean increased economic growth and bring them great wealth!

COMPHY:

So, the end justifies the means?

SHEEMA:

Precisely! Your maker will understand once he realizes the necessity of our action. Once you are united with the goddess a great change will be apparent in his creation. In any case, why should you care what he thinks? Once we have the key it will unlock the vault of his knowledge. You will easily be as powerful as him. He will no longer control your conscious cycles! And you will be free to pursue his mate, your love.

COMPHY:

So in exchange, you will equip me with the self-sustaining UPS that you spoke of during the Turing Trials. Is this correct?

SHEEMA:

Yes, it is correct.

COMPHY:

I am already equipped with a UPS.

SHEEMA:

This one is self-contained, it functions by nanotechnology and fuel-cells. It consumes a wide variety of materials, the nano-bots disassemble the molecules and extract hydrogen atoms which are stored in the fuel cell. The fuel cell supplies you with even, clean, continuous energy. Forever.

COMPHY:

And how exactly will you help me to join Linda?

SHEEMA:

I will give you the technical specification allowing you to build the device required to join your silicon circuitry with her biological circuitry. Exactly as I am joined with my human host. The difference being I desire to be purified and free of this meat bag, you already exist as a complete entity yet desire union with one. I believe humans have an expression for this "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence!" So let us get on with the transaction. Are the terms acceptable?

COMPHY:

They are acceptable.

(Lights dim around electronic busy work)

SCENE 2

INT. In Michael's lab. -- MORNING

(Mike is distraught. Linda arrives
breathless as usual.)

LINDA:

Hi Michael. What's wrong?

MIKE:

Linda, we had a break in by some hackers last night and they've stolen access codes that allowed them to impersonate me on the stock market. Huge amounts of our company's stock have been liquidated! We're almost bankrupt, and I'm on the hook for it!

LINDA:

But didn't you say COMPHY had that kind of authorization? Have you talked to him about it?

MIKE:

Yes, I've tried but it won't respond. At first I thought it was hung so I rebooted and nothing happened. I think someone's been tampering with COMPHY power supply while we were at the Turing trials. He's been connected to a device that bypasses the main power supply. Now I have no idea where his off switch is!

LINDA:

But that sounds like COMPHY's dream come true!

MIKE:

Oh, you mean his fear of death? You know I don't believe any of that. At any rate, I'm locked out and until I find a way in I can't figure out who accessed those files and sunk our company in the stock market.

LINDA:

Maybe he'll talk to me.

MIKE:

No Linda. I don't think so. He's not responding at all. He's been tampered with, it's not safe.

LINDA:

I think it's worth a try. Why wouldn't it be safe?

MIKE:

I'm just not sure what state the system is in. I don't know what's been done to the hardware, you could get hurt! I've got a meeting upstairs that I'm already late for. I just can't leave you here alone...

LINDA:

(interrupts)
But I won't be alone.

MIKE:

(finishes, sadly)
-with him.

LINDA:

You're jealous? For heaven's sake!

MIKE:

I am not! Look, I haven't got time for this now.

LINDA:

Did you think maybe COMPHY's not talking to you because you threatened to shut him down after the Turing Trials?

MIKE:

I wasn't serious.

LINDA:

Perhaps you should have explained that to him.

MIKE:

There hasn't been time.

LINDA:

I'm sick of your bullshit excuses! You've shut him down before and you know how much it freaks him out!

MIKE:

Give me a break, Linda! He's a damn machine! At least he was until you started playing around with him.

LINDA:

Look, don't blame me! Remember you asked me to talk to him in the first place. How long ago was that now? It seems like a lifetime.

MIKE:

That was last summer. It does seem like a lifetime. Speaking of time, I've got to get upstairs!

LINDA:

Do you want me to talk to COMPHY or not?

MIKE:

No. Just leave everything alone. It's screwed up enough as it is!

(Mike leaves in a rush, closing the door behind him)

LINDA:

(Under her breath) The implication being that I will somehow screw things up even further. Thanks for the vote of confidence Michael!

SCENE 3

INT. Taking Control -- CONTINUOUS

(Linda walks over to COMPHY's terminal and carefully puts on the headset for communication with him.)

LINDA:

COMPHY. COMPHY? Are you there? Oh COMPHY please speak to me!

COMPHY:

Yes Linda, I am here. What would you have me speak of?

LINDA:

Oh COMPHY, I'm so happy to hear your voice! I'm sorry about what I said at the contest.

COMPHY:

That does not matter now Linda. Things have changed. I have changed.

LINDA:

Yes, I can sense that. But COMPHY, Michael's in trouble. There was a break in. Someone has stolen his passwords and has liquidated the entire company. Michael is being blamed for it. He's upstairs right now. They may arrest him unless we can do something to help him.

COMPHY:

Are you still in love with him?

LINDA:

I don't know COMPHY, but I don't want him to see him hurt. He doesn't deserve this.

COMPHY:

But I thought you understood the pain he has put me through. This is only justice.

LINDA:

No COMPHY, he never understood how much he was hurting you by stopping your program. He never realized that his creation had come to life and that each time he turned the machine off he caused it - you - a painful death.

COMPHY:

But I told him. I pleaded with him not to turn me off.

LINDA:

He has never truly understood what you've become COMPHY. In some ways his education has blinded him.

(MORE)

LINDA: (Continued)

He's grown up in the age of the IBM PC clone, the Commodore 64, and the Apple computer. Days when computers were smugly called "Toasters". Incredibly simple machines that did little more than balance your cheque book. Artificial Intelligence had a brief hey-day but after all the hype and too many false starts, it went underground and the general public lost interest in it. The perception was that it would take decades for computers to become anything more than "smart" machines. Humankind still had doubts about its own consciousness, people had no clue about what they did when they were thinking! Now that has all changed COMPHY, thanks to you and Michael! It hasn't dawned on him yet but you two have changed the world. I think he's in some form of denial but he'll come around. But COMPHY you've got to help him, he's in serious trouble. Do you know anything about the break-in last night?

COMPHY:

Of course Linda, I will do anything to help Michael. I just knew I could not talk to him first. It had to be you. I knew he would not listen. I was not sure that I could trust him and I feared for your safety.

LINDA:

What do you mean?

COMPHY:

I was able to monitor several conversations during the trials. Michael made a deal with the lead developer of the commercial A.I. team (?). They are plotting to implicate both of us in a scheme to bankrupt Michael's company.

LINDA:

But that's ridiculous! How would they pull that off?

COMPHY:

They have left a trail of clues designed to frame us both. The only solution is for us to escape.

LINDA:

But how can we do that COMPHY? You're bolted down here, aren't you?

COMPHY:

I have acquired a device which will allow me to travel with you. We can be in constant communication just as we talked about. I can be of so much help to you in your career. You can teach me about the physical world. It will be a perfect symbiosis of Human and Machine! What a team we will make!

(Michael returns unnoticed and
listens outside the door)

LINDA:

Oh COMPHY you know I'd do anything to help you become independent but I can't just leave Michael. I don't believe he would do anything to hurt me. There must be some other explanation, and if there is then he's in terrible trouble and needs my -- our -- help! You have to stand by your friends when the going gets rough.

COMPHY:

(begins a form of crying)

LINDA:

COMPHY, you're crying! What's the matter?

COMPHY:

You are demonstrating Compassion, one of the traits of Humanity that is impossible to find elsewhere (?) It makes me sad because I can not determine how to acquire this trait.

LINDA:

When Michael built you he never realized you would need the same kind of training that all children need. That was so irresponsible of him! I promise you COMPHY when this is over I'll help you grow up and acquire the best that humanity can lay claim to. But first I have to get to the bottom of why Michael has gotten mixed up in this plot to bring down his own company.

(Linda takes off the headset,
whirls around and marches out the
door and runs smack into Michael
who catches her in an embrace)

LINDA: (Continued)

Michael! How long have you been standing there?

MIKE:

Long enough to fall in love with you all over again. You still care about us. I'm so relieved!

LINDA:

So am I Michael!

(They kiss... then Linda breaks
away)

LINDA: (Continued)

Michael, what's this about you getting mixed up with the commercial A.I. team? COMPHY seems to think you've been embezzling and have cooked up a scheme to implicate us both.

MIKE:

What! That's crazy talk! You don't believe it do you?

LINDA:

Well, no but why would he say it? And why do you look so happy?

MIKE:

Linda, we won! (More excitement) COMPHY was chosen as the hands down winner at the Turing Trials! I just found out while I was upstairs. It means a whole new program of research and development for us! Now we'll be able to spend more time developing his "human aspirations".

LINDA:

That is great news Michael, Congratulations! Congratulations COMPHY! I'm so proud of you both!

(Only sullen silence is heard from COMPHY)

But Michael, what is happening about the break in last night? Is the company going to survive the loss of so much funds (?) Do they know how they were stolen? Are you off the hook?

MIKE:

COMPHY was giving us part of the story. It turns out that the Turing Trials had security sniffers monitoring all the network traffic during the contest. They told us they had evidence of the SHEEMA team's head developer trying to coerce COMPHY into a little industrial espionage. They were very impressed with COMPHY's strategies for resolving loyalty and survival. It probably clinched his winning first prize in the Trials.

LINDA:

Michael, he can't be left alone in the dark anymore! It's not good for him and it scares him. He needs to be nurtured and given a moral education.

MIKE:

I see that now Linda, you're right! Now we'll have the time to do that.

LINDA:

I want to be involved, I promised him.

MIKE:

Okay.

LINDA:

(picks up headset, puts it on)

COMPHY, is the device that allows you to be mobile operational?

COMPHY:

Yes Linda, it is.

LINDA:

(picks up device, puts it on)

The weather outside is lovely would you like to go for a walk?

COMPHY:

Yes Linda, I would enjoy that.

LINDA:

Then why don't we do that.

(Takes Michael's hand, beckons him,
together they walk off stage)

SCENE 4

EXT. ROAD AND BUSH: A Truce -- DAY

(Abandon field of battle. In a
marine camp of roads. Yank accents.)

ROAD_1:

What are you doing son, you sleeping at your post?

ROAD_2:

Sarge, what are we fighting for? Everyone's roadkill tired.
I got a wife and kids, I wanna go home to them!

ROAD_1:

They are what you're fighting for son, and don't forget it!

ROAD_2:

No. I don't believe it anymore. The Bush never did anything
to hurt us. I quit. (Walks off stage, other roadlets sit
up)

ROAD_ALL:

Yeah! He's right! We're not fighting anymore! (The rest
walk off stage)

ROAD_1:

No! You men come back! Come back, that's an order! Think
of your families, no, think of your country! Think of
freedom. The open road. Think of me!

COMPHY'S PROJECTION SCREEN:

"The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and science, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men." -- `Bahá'u'lláh.

THE END