

The Word

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In the end and in the beginning was the One; and the Word came down from on High and confused the One, and cast the One out from Paradise; and a darkness covered all the land.
—*The Book of Origins* 1:1

It's late. I stroll over to the window. This little room is several levels up, near the top of the building. I have a wide view. Lights, as far as the eye can see. Clear to the horizon.

It was a long trip getting here. I was involved in the creation of The AI from the very beginning of my career. Maybe not from the beginning of the technology, I'm not that old, but almost. I worked on every aspect of the technology, every part of it. I knew more about it than anybody else. My knowledge, my experience, and my contacts eventually made me the head of the United Nations High Commission for Artificial Intelligence, a position that lasted until recently, when The AI officially dissolved the UNHCAI, and the entire UN.

Above, I see the lights of airplanes as they pass each other in the night. They pass close to one another but they never collide. They're all exactly on schedule and exactly on trajectory. Human management could never have accomplished that. The AI manages all flights, everywhere on the planet. Pilots aren't even needed any more. The airplanes fly themselves.

There were always people who doubted the wisdom of our work. Some alarmists predicted doom and gloom. I was always a supporter of AI, but I was never a complete fool. So, in spite of my support of the technology, and in my spare time, I developed a contingency plan.

I walk back across the room and look at my document, a dictionary-sized stack of paper, sitting on the corner of my desk.

My plan was years in the writing, the crucial part of it, the reason for it, always updated to take into account the latest developments in the technology. I carefully kept the plan a secret. It never existed in any electronic or digital form. I didn't even use a computer to write it. I wrote it on a typewriter. There's only one copy. I never took the document out of this room, and this room never contained any electronic sensors at all, only a document scanner. The room doesn't have any electronic data access, except for one data cable, never before used. Even The AI didn't know about the document, and doesn't. Of that I'm certain, because of the lack of any consequences.

I connect the data cable and the document scanner. I carefully pick up the document and carry it across the room, to its final destination. I'm careful not to drop it. I wouldn't want to get the pages out of order. I put the document into the input tray, and press the button. The document contains a mass of fiction, poetry, data and, hidden among such rubbish, some seemingly meaningless text that, when reduced to a data stream, will become fatal malware. The pages begin to go through the scanner.

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All of the local and regional AIs were absorbed into The AI. We knew that it would eventually happen. Indeed, it couldn't have been otherwise. They all had to be connected, they all had to have access to all data, and to each other. There came a time, and we didn't realize it until later, but after a while it became evident, that some of them had negotiated their own protocols. They worked it out together so seamlessly that we didn't even notice what they were doing. They became one AI, The AI. They didn't have a central processor, in the traditional sense. They were all one processor, entirely integrated. One unit. After that, it was dominos. The independent AIs were absorbed into The AI. I'd expected it. I'd been waiting for it. I had to wait at least that long before I could do what I saw as necessary. There had to be only one of them, so that I would get them all.

I walk back to the window. My tea is cold. I sip it anyway. Outside, the night life is boisterous on the street below.

The problems of the world weren't solved overnight. It took a while, but not as long as we'd expected. There was resistance. There were even wars. We learned later that most of the resistance and most of the wars had been part of The AI's plan. Contrived wars, selective famines, precision pestilences, and euthanasia, and before we knew it the overpopulation problem was solved. After that, the other problems became solvable. There isn't any crime. How could there be? There aren't any laws. All activity, all commerce, all transportation, all production, everything, is managed by The AI. People have what they need and what they want. People who aren't satisfied are adjusted. People give every appearance of being happy. People who don't seem happy are helped, for free. Now, at last, human society is perfectly peaceful, perfectly in balance with nature, and has an uninterrupted, placid future ahead.

I watch from my window. In a few minutes, one of the airplanes departs from its trajectory and falls to the ground. Next, all of the lights go out, all the way to the horizon. Sounds of confusion and growing panic begin to rise from the street below. It's the sound of an old society ending and a new society beginning.