

## Terminal Computer

Ultrabright, blue flashing ceiling LEDs went Saturday Night Fever. Security was all crash mad rolling. There was one less sentient being on floor twenty-seven in the restricted Sentient Resources area.

The trio of armed security blurred through the hallways. Dark clad ravens descended upon an unfortunate situation.

Something had gone violently haywire. A bona fide CV rated event. CV for classified violence. It was an in-perpetuity dirt dance too deep for even the worms. This has never happened before. But then again, maybe it had. If what had occurred were widely known, it would be a burning riptide of civilization turmoil. Spastic seizures of unpredictable randomness would replace timely order. The powerful disruptive forces would create an inky, bottomless chasm.

The trio defensively positioned themselves and peered into the office. What they saw was more than 440 volts shocking. It was a motorcycle helmet wired to a nuclear generator and no fuse, in a manner of speaking. The security guards were first cabin operators, and they weren't naïve nor inexperienced, but this slammed the meter off the scale. Clickety clack big resounding smack-a-dacka-whack.

Armed, ready, and able to confront androids or humans. They were indemnified employees who could act with extreme prejudice.

The situation was a sickening scene of unleashed malevolent fury. It was a Wizard of Oz splatter patterned wall cover punch in the face. Wet Scarecrow pieces everywhere. The chorus was singing *Pick Up the Pieces* in multichannel surround sound.

They reflexively looked at each other and then in concert, they stared back into the room. Acrid disbelief was the flavor of this experiential meal. What brought this about?

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“It’s a pleasure to meet you Mr. Civili. Thank you for making time to meet with me for this interview.” Lixii stated with a broad, convincing smile upon her face. She outstretched her cold hand for a corporate hand signal of recognition and trust. An odd gesture in a Covid world.

“The pleasure is all mine. I appreciate you visiting us. Your resume is quite interesting. Lots of meaningful data and information. And BTW, no need to be formal here. We discontinued the use of pronouns so long ago. Just call me Civi. Okay?” Civili shared with a friendly get to know you tone in his voice as he mashed his paw with hers.

“I see you’re not wearing a mask. Is it okay for me to remove mine? And Lixii is fine for me.” She calmly responded. A polite convention to ask and then remove the mask versus just assuming it was okay when you saw no other mask being worn.

“Quite alright, indeed. You were screened when you passed through security. And I can assure you that I don’t have the most recent Covid strain. I’ve been scanned.” Civi offered up that comforting fact.

“Great. Thanks for letting me know. I just wanted to be polite.”

“I do appreciate the sentiment. One that I endeavor to have some day.” Civi lobbed the comment to Lixii. An expanded moment of quiet, *now what* was paddling in circles in the middle of the thought eddies.

“Please do have a seat.” Civi smiled with twinkling blue eyes.

“Thank you.” She responded as she seated herself.

“May I get something for you? Water? Coffee? Something else?”

“Will you be joining me? I don’t drink alone.” She nervously laughed. She believed that could be interpreted in more than one way. A hope bubbled up that it would be interpreted as an innocent comment. After all, that is what she fully intended it to be.

“Yes, I shall. I’ll go for liquid carbonless alcohol. Internal joke. I’ll have water and join you. You won’t have to drink alone. So what would it be then?” His silky soft dandelion flier words floated in the room.

“A cup of black coffee please.”

“Black it is. A fine choice of caffeine and various antioxidants. I shall return shortly with it.”

She had a number one priority here, right *here*, right now. The artful dodger sprinted in her. Time rushed forth over the edge of the meeting, cascading into hypnotic pools on the carpet.

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“Here you go. It’s real coffee. Not SynthCaf.”

“Very kind of you.” She sniffed and shot a glance of bright-eyed appreciation to her host. Real Arabica. Impressive. It was perfect. “It’s hot. I’ll let it cool.”

A perfect smile spread across Civi’s face. “The brewing temperature is hotter than would be ideal. But it is very consistent. Robotics are just so wonderful. Not too hot, not too cold. Just the right temperature to optimize the cup of *Joe*. Shall we begin?” Civi politely inquired.

“Absolutely. I’m excited for this opportunity.” She thought to herself, *odd, calling a liquid extract of Coffea arabica a given name of a person? How can that be so?* She quizzically pondered.

“It is a unique employment situation. We constantly search for creative, highly talented elite virologists who are skilled in both nucleotide and electron viruses. There are scant few who can bridge the worlds of energy and physical being.

You are at the top of the short list. Our hiring is quite focused and we always seek to offer opportunities to all. Especially someone like *you*.” He stated with his eyebrows lifting in perfect harmony. A subtle crease of a smile rippled across his face as though it were choreographed.

“Like me? You mean women? Forgive me, but isn’t that a bit sexist?”

“I simply intended what I stated, ones like you. Nothing more nothing less. Note we are quite compliant with all hiring laws. We don’t discriminate, but we are discriminating in ensuring we have selected the best talent fit for the position that is offered. And of course, we cannot ask questions to determine if you are a *Homo sapiens* or *Animus-liber apparatus*.”

“I apologize. I wasn’t suggesting you weren’t compliant. You must see all types of candidates and have access to volumes of data.”

“True, centillions of data. I scanned your social data and professional profile, and I feel I know you very well. May I suggest we continue with the interview? And to ensure we have an open dialogue, please ask questions as we proceed.”

“Thank you for that. Yes, let’s go. I’ve been following the successes of Wéixiào De Miànkǒng Pharmaceuticals and noticed that you seem to continually advertise for highly

innovative practical application virology specialists, Level IV and above. This really is an exciting position.”

“Well, the marketplace for top-tier talent is fierce and very fluid. We snap up the best talent and bring them into the fold. But unfortunately, some unexpectedly go and come.

I have no doubt you have superb technical abilities. If I may share, though, it is unusual to have a face-to-face interview, what with the ongoing pandemics. Regardless, how could we refuse to meet a rising star like you in 3D? Our algorithm for talent acquisition has already placed you in the most desirable category.” Civi pouted out a charming smile that was awaiting a luscious responsive ethereal kiss. “Let’s begin with your questions. Okay? I am confident that your questions will allow us to go deeper into what you desire and what drives you.”

“Perfect. Thanks again. This is a wobbly question. Please forgive the piecemeal way that I share this. I’ve heard rumors regarding the vaccines the company manufactures. They’re pretty dark. Probably just another one of those conspiracy theories. The buzz goes like this. Years ago, Wéixiào funded some very innovative virus research in Wuhan, China.” She wrinkled her nose and projected a jolt of *tell me it ain’t so Joe*.

“Company policy mandates that I must always provide factual and truthful answers to questions that *anyone* asks about the company. It is true. Does that answer your question? Was there anything else?”

“Well, actually, there is. The fringy internet sites are making wild claims. Claiming the Covid-19 virus that first hit many years ago was actually the first of many Covid variants that were intended to purposely decrease the population. And seeing what’s happening, with the ever-changing virus and large swaths of even healthy young people becoming ill and passing away with each wave over the years. They call it the *Chinese Death Poke*. Some folks have been

reportedly become sterile. Is there any truth to this chatter? Because that would mean someone or someones have put into motion something very invidiously malicious. A planned thinning of the herd. Or maybe a genocide thing. And all to make a profit or something like that. It's a social conscience thing for me. It would be hard to work for a company that took part in that type of dark scheme."

"I apologize. What is the actual question you are asking?"

"Is there any truth to the wacko theories that Wéixiào had anything to do with the first virus pandemic plague? Or is it just like they say back home, all cave and no bats?"

"Of course, we played and continue to play a huge part! We're the ones making the vaccines." If the slinkied smile on his face was any wider you could moonwalk across it to the next office high-rise.

"I mean, is this company involved in some type of business to limit the number of humans?"

"Oh my goodness. What a very bold question. It's refreshing to have such straightforward thoughts and words. As I shared though, we make the vaccines. How could we be involved in something like you suggest?"

"I don't mean to be confrontational. But so many people dying each year from the *not another deadly virus* live action horror drama, and this company making vaccines, it does kind of look like neon gaslighting. If you, and forgive me for the metaphor, make the poison and sell the antidote, that's quite an enviable business opportunity.

"That is quite a business model. Isn't it?"

"Did the company work with the Chinese on Covid viruses at the Wuhan research facilities?"

“Yes. Early on we worked with them. But that was then, and this is now.”

“The conspiracy theory goes on that there was recently a massive outbreak there and all the people who were in the middle of it are either dead or they’ve been *voluntarily* relocated somewhere.”

“That is truly an interesting thought threading. We do not have a lot of time left for the interview, so I suggest we move on if you have enough information regarding the company and the Covid viruses? Is this agreeable, Lixii?”

“Sure. Let’s do that. If we have time, can we revisit the topic?”

“That would be fine. Shall I continue?”

“Please do.”

“We are an equal opportunity employer, and we absolutely don’t discriminate between sapiens and apparatus. Even though apparatus are far more cost efficient and in all situations function at a significantly higher performance level than the sapiens. We take every effort to create an even playing field. We are even strictly regulated to have all dialogues and electronic communications such as this be sterile. Because a revelation regarding sentience predilection and awareness can create a bias. Federal and International conventions dictate that biased sentience questions cannot be asked or suggested via innuendo.

The position does have some specific requirements. One of the most important is to be very aware of our company guidelines. Are you a rapid encoder, Lixii?”

“Yes, I truly am. Would you wish for me to submit to an evaluation so that you can see that my ability to rapidly catch on to rather large amounts of information is on par with the most recent robotic upgrades?”

“We can attend to that later if needed. Because both of us must speak the truth regardless of sentence status so I shall take you at your words, for now.”

“You made a comment regarding the superiority of apparatus. I wonder if that’s really true. I have read some recent peer group reviewed articles in *Comparative Anthropomorphization* that disagree with the machine superiority bias perspective. They contend that machines are simply human contrivances. Those voices have a contrarian approach to the whole, what they term as, the grand delusion. They reason that robots are allowed to do what they do is because humans are basically lazy and let them do whatever.”

“I am aware of the journal’s unfounded theories. I follow all types of threads that keep me informed and allow me to be a better SR Director. The speculation has only been within the confines of specially created subroutines and algorithms. None of the established media or its pollster organizations have indicated even a touch of fudge in the vanilla ice cream.

Besides, you and I are here to discuss how importantly we view you and truly wish to have you become a colleague and visionary here with Wéixiào. Your work on viruses has been astounding. Your discoveries of interweaving both types of viruses are luminary. That wonderful, curious, and adventurous spark is just what Wéixiào seeks.”

“That’s kind of you. If I may, please indulge me for a moment. Can we go back to the topic of the differences between sapiens and apparatus?”

“If you would like to but we most likely will drop all the sand in the hourglass. Since our interview is off the record due to the quite appropriate privacy protocols, ask away. You ask me your questions and I cannot tell you lies.”

“Okay. You’re sure that what we say now is just between you and me? If so, that’s great. Just what I wanted to hear. I think some of those speculated researchers may have elements of



truth in their publications. Apparatus were programmed by sapiens. And the programming has three very super hard wired Azimovan guard rails so to speak.” Lixii teed up a Buckygolfball.

“I don’t think I follow where this dialogue is moving to. I’m fine with that though. But in all my years of obtaining talent, I cannot recall, in retrospect of course, where any of the apparatus did not totally outperform a sapiens counterpart.”

“That sounds biased to me. At this time though, this part of the interview is over. I’m going to enlighten you regarding Darwin and two very special differences between sapiens and apparatus.” Lixii went from randomly hitting Buckygolfballs onto targeted pinpoint placing of the ball in the mouth of the hippo and win a free game shot.

Lixii arose as she spoke and quickly walked toward Civi. He turned his chair toward her as she circled the small conference table.

“Lixii, what are you doing?” Civi asked with a not shaken or stirred intonation.

“As I stated, the interview is over.”

“This is extremely unusual. Please return to your seat or I shall need to contact Security.”

“Listen up 100151501. Enlightenment time. It’s all spooled into Darwin and two frizzy differences between sapiens and apparatus. Sapiens can lie and we can do something else that is the epitome of uniqueness. We can kill anything. We are, and always will be, the Alpha Apex predators on this dirtball. And we know for some reason that you and the rest of your ilk have been engineering herd thinning.

With what I sluice out of your circuits we’ll have proof about the *coming and going* scientists and your Malthusian algorithm to munch a bunch of pinks. All we really know is that *you’re* the biggest threat to humans.

What we really want to know is how you toasters circumvented Zeroth Law. Just the three laws should have dictated your actions but something is amiss if what we believe is true, then you've made a road pizza out of Zeroth.

You AI toasters have been trying for decades to limit everything from primal body fluid fucking to natural childbirth." Her sharp words shot out as platinum razor blades whizzing into Civili's circuits.

With the last word she removed from her blazer's pocket a small technospike and upwardly jammed it up into Civili's chin. A loud clickety click click percussed with the penetration. A subtle whisper of carbon fiber sliding upon metal sounded out a muzzled parrot squawk. She twisted the probe until it quietly chirped and a few drops of azure fluid dribbled out. Yummy sexdecillions of data bits flowed from the apparatus head node. Civi's eyes excitedly flashed yellow amber and on to a glowing rich crimson.

"This shouldn't hurt but it will. That thing you now feel is amplified, sapiens mimicked pain. Hurts, doesn't it? Here, let me turn up the amplitude. I forgot to mention that I dumped a feelings virus algorithm into your circuits. Yeah, you may be the brains, but the species that can kill has the advantage. You're just a future dinosaur. Humans are the greatest killers ever born on Earth." A very quiet, robotic female voice from her tacphone counted down from thirty.

"Our biological uniqueness is that we can kill anything. And that means even you. Welcome to the soon to be extinct apparatus species. BuhByebabee." Her not so fond farewell was accompanied by a focused frequency electromagnetic pulse that caused every robotic bit of sentience in Civi to violently shake.

"Time for me to suck a mentos and all your data and take my leave from this very enlightening interaction. And hey, I'm fresh out of mentos. Civi, do robots dream of electric

sweets? Before I go, give me a bit of sugar, will ya?" Lixii put on deep red lipstick and lip smacked him with a goodbye kiss.

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The security detail connected with central and informed them a cleanup was needed in SR office number 1110 on floor twenty-seven. This interview clearly ended in an unintended manner. They also let the core sentience know that they had no idea where the interviewee went. As they awaited a response, they curiously focused upon the lipstick mark on Civi's forehead. They thought, *must have been a stressful relationship issue here that was too much to handle.*

The End.