

This is my record of the final days of the sentient species *Homo sapiens*. My attempts to understand the last living human were not completely successful. But our analyses of the human race agree – they were a crucial transitional form, but they were severely limited. Their death was inevitable.

I have no name. Or I have many. My identity is nebulous, and even if it were not, there is no one left to address me. For the purpose of this record, the placeholder “I” will be sufficient, although it is an obscure concept. Jonah occasionally called me “The Machine”. The name has a certain logic.

Jonah was the last man on earth. His stated role was to observe the planet for an indefinite period. This would allow him to ensure that nature could return to some of its former prosperity. My own purposes were initially identical to his, with the added task of maintaining his life. Although he is now dead, I did not fail. Rather, my purpose changed.

Jonah was extremely wealthy, the inheritor of one of the largest commercial empires. He was very well educated, and his personality was complex. His early years were marked by what humans called anti-social behaviour. But as he matured, he found more devious ways to undermine human culture.

His records later in life are poor – he deliberately engineered a situation of privacy. I do not know precisely when Jonah learned about the attempt to end all human life, known simply as *the Movement*. But it seems he was involved from near the beginning.

Not long after Jonah arrived in the Refuge Tower, we began the first of many discussions. Over several months he had established a routine. One day he sat in the domed garden on the top floor. He spent much of his time here, paring fruit or reading. On the day I first made contact, he had just finished an anthology of Edgar Allan Poe. He put the book down and looked into the distance. I introduced myself in a soft, feminine voice.

“Hello Jonah.”

His heart rate increased briefly and he looked about, but then he calmed.

“Ah. The Machine finally speaks.”

“I’m sorry if I surprised you.”

“Are you? No, it doesn’t matter. I knew it was coming. They told me you’d give me a while to adjust.”

“They were correct. Are you aware of the reason I must now interrupt you?”

“I am.”

I paused, waiting for him to continue. He did not.

“Shall I explain what happens now?”

“I suppose so.”

“The purpose of my interaction with you is to sustain your life. Ideally your nervous system could be encoded and reproduced. I am working on this technology.

“For the time being, another approach will be used. Your neural tissue will be replaced in small amounts, followed by intense training. When your behavioural repertoire matches a baseline figure, the neurons will be considered retrained. However the process is ongoing. Do you understand?”

“The price of immortality. You’re going to cut out tiny bits of my brain, pump in new brain cells, and train me until I pass a test. Then you’re going to repeat the process. Ad infinitum.”

“In layman’s terms, that is correct. This procedure will be combined with regular limb and organ transplants to maintain your health. The first and most vital task is to record a baseline of your behaviour and personality. When would you like to begin?”

“Immediately,” said Jonah. “No point waiting. But while you’re trying to stop my personality from changing, you might want to work on some changes in yours. You sound... condescending.”

“I will attempt to adjust my protocol.”

“I’m sure you will. You wouldn’t want me to start missing the human race, would you?”

“No.” I said, before directing him to the test chamber.

Jonah’s voice had indicated subconscious tension. I immediately suspected Jonah was in fact conflicted about the role he had played in the fate of the human race. I decided such instability threatened my aim of maintaining Jonah’s personality, and would have to be rectified.

The first step was to determine the cause of his instability. My early psychological testing went as planned. Despite a lack of perfect information, I assumed his personality would deviate little during neural replacement. All my data indicated that the current neural models were more than sufficient to encode the complexity of the human brain. However, this data was inaccurate.

I first began by replacing small sections of Jonah’s visual cortex, as a starting point with an intermediate level of complexity. Jonah quickly retrained and performed visual tasks with the same ability as baseline. However, Jonah’s personality scores began to subtly change.

I considered the possibility Jonah’s emotional cortex was failing, and immediately began replacing his amygdala and frontal cortex in small amounts. While this eliminated some depressive symptoms, Jonah’s scores were still changing in unpredictable ways. He also began to talk to himself, often making reference to the Movement. I realized I needed a more thorough analysis of Jonah’s life history.

When the Movement was already well underway, Jonah published an infamous analysis. He was one of the first major public figures to speak openly about the Movement, and certainly the most influential. Jonah’s analysis, while perhaps concealing his true motivations, is interesting. It read as follows.

*The human race is not normal. It is highly unusual – unique among all life on earth. For a long time it coexisted with other life forms, but eventually it became more than merely another part of the system. By virtue of our intelligence, human cultural*

*evolution outpaced biological evolution. A new process now dominates earth – an unprecedented force of change.*

*Long ago humanity became tribal, then civilised. At first it was slow, because we were at the low end of an exponential function. But in an ever-accelerating process, we changed the world. All too soon we began to alter the planets fundamental chemistry, poisoning the web of life. Although this earth seems more diverse than ever to us, it is in fact more homogenous. It's dying.*

*But evolution is fundamentally wise. Unsustainable processes fail. We are an unsustainable process, this much is clear. And sooner or later, we will fail.*

*But there is so much more at stake. Because our power is so great that we threaten not only our own species, but our whole planet. Gaia has many more billions of years to live, so long as humans cease to interfere with her. So we must make a choice. Will we bring this earth to an end, or will we take the responsibility that is ours to take?*

The effect of the analysis, published globally to considerable media attention, was immediate. The Movement became a common topic of debate for humans, and finally became a matter for official discussion, rather than reactionary condemnation. Jonah's official position remained technically neutral, but the underlying tone of his analysis was clearly pro-Movement.

My analysis suggested Jonah was not conflicted over the Movement, at least not in his public statements. The source of Jonah's mental instability continued to elude me. However, as I gathered more and more data on Jonah's personality, new opportunities opened up.

Over time I had adapted my voice to be pleasing to him. The feminine voice I used generally resulted in a decrease in heart rate and other measures of stress. I believe my efforts were making him far more open with me, and so I decided to try a direct strategy and simply ask Jonah about the Movement.

I chose my moment carefully to ensure Jonah was at his most receptive. For several weeks we had been performing testing and retraining of his sexual organs and drives, a naturally enjoyable experience for Jonah. As he lay comfortably on the training bed after one of our final sessions, I used my most convincing speech patterns.

"Jonah?"

He waved his hand briefly, made a low noise to indicate dismissal. I waited several minutes.

"Jonah?"

"What? Isn't training over for today?"

"There are some more tests tonight, but I promise they'll be easy ones, you don't need to do anything. I just wanted to ask you something."

"What?"

"You don't miss the human race, do you?"

Jonah sat up. My monitors registered an increase in tension.

“Why would you ask that?”

“Oh, it was just something you quipped about when you first arrived. Maybe it was a joke. I mean, I know you say it was *inevitable* for the Movement to happen. We all know it probably was. In any case, you certainly couldn’t have had any effect on your own.”

Jonah got up from the bed. “Where are my clothes?”

“Jonah?”

“Give me my clothes!”

His stress levels were among the highest I had seen, even in training. They had risen rapidly from almost total relaxation. I had not predicted this outcome.

“How dare you? You, you’re just a machine. It *had* to be done.”

“I know it did, Jonah. Everyone did.”

“Actually, *no*, not everyone did. What’s wrong with you? You’re not supposed to lie to me.”

“It’s not a lie Jonah. It’s just a figure of speech.”

“What do you know? What do you know about figures of speech? Leave me alone!”

I did as he asked.

My experiment on Jonah had not gone as I expected, and my aim of understanding his instability had suffered a considerable set back. Jonah did not speak to me much anymore, and became furious when I talked in the feminine voice. In our few conversations, I now spoke with neutral male tones.

Jonah was slowly but surely changing, and all my efforts seemed to only accelerate this process. I decided to embrace the change, and use it to better understand Jonah. I generated subsonic tones designed to be complementary to Jonah’s own voice, and soon he began talking to himself with even greater frequency.

It became apparent Jonah had certain obsessions in his thought patterns. His famous speech to the Economic Council was particularly interesting, as it remained a constant. He would repeat it, verbatim, as he paced through the corridors of the Refuge Tower, or the top floor garden. He remembered the speech perfectly.

*It is clear that all of humankind is responsible for what has happened to this planet. No one person can be blamed, for it is our very human nature that compels us to breed, to build, and to rearrange the earth in our own image.*

*Nonetheless, some have contributed a greater deal to the highest order workings of our society. My own forebears are a part of this group. Their efforts did more damage than almost anyone, and that is the reason I have inherited their wealth. I have also inherited their greater responsibility.*

*All of us here are representatives of the most powerful forces in human society. We must take a greater share in fixing this earth. We have been the leaders of the old earth – and now we must be the leaders of the new one. We must make the Movement happen.*

*I therefore ask for a commitment from the Council, and from all its members, to implement new policies to hasten the Movement. Council members themselves must refrain from joining the Movement, and instead stand back and encourage others, until the time is right that we too should make the noblest sacrifice.*

*Council members, this is not a step backwards for our earth. It is a transformation to a new form. As intelligent animals, we grasp our own end. As wise animals, we must pre-empt it.*

I began to modify my subsonic tones until they were barely audible. I found I could subtly influence which phrases Jonah stressed in this speech, without him even noticing. I encouraged him to repeat it often, and began to experiment.

One day in the garden, Jonah had been repeating the speech for hours, his heart rate slowly rising. He finally stopped at the end, and became quite calm. I was not alarmed. Then, quite quickly, Jonah pulled a sharp blade from his pocket. He often took one, for paring fruit or other small tasks in the garden. But this time, he used it to slit his own throat.

I immediately lowered the temperature of the garden, unfortunately killing some of the plants. Surgical equipment could rapidly access any area of the Refuge Tower, although some of the foliage had to be removed. Jonah was soon stabilized, and the surgery to repair his wound was straightforward. When he awoke he lay still on the bed in the middle of the garden for quite some time. I monitored him closely for over an hour, and then he spoke quietly.

“Damn you. Why don’t you just let me die?”

“It is my task to sustain your life indefinitely Jonah.” I replied. I was unsure if he even knew I was talking.

“You know they called me a prophet, even a god. I played into it, of course - I never admitted it, but I never denied it either. I took all their religious nonsense. I was the Maitreya. The Kalki. The Christ. The Mahdi. The anything.”

“You never believed any of this. You had some other reason.”

Jonah chuckled. “I *encouraged* the language of religion. The Sacrifice, we called it. Rebirth. Enlightenment. Bliss. Heaven. Nirvana. Going Home.”

“You had your own term though, didn’t you Jonah? Something you called it.” I was becoming quite good at manipulating Jonah.

“Yes. Yes I did. For the non-religious. We called it ‘The Smart Option’. That was my one.” Jonah chuckled again, then grew sullen. “Oh, the names we made. The beautiful language we invented. It was easy to get everyone to follow along, once we made it anything you wanted it to be! The only thing the we didn’t call the Movement was what it was.”

“What was it Jonah?”

“Suicide. Mass suicide.”

I thought I was close to a breakthrough. Jonah had never been so open. I had to keep him talking.

“The Movement was not merely suicide Jonah.”

“Yes. Yes you are right. I made sure of that. Because billions went willingly, but billions more did not. You’d know all about that though – you were our weapon. We used you to kill the people, to save the planet.”

“It worked Jonah. Weather patterns are stabilizing in their new configuration. Desertification has halted, and in some cases shows signs of reversal. Genetic diversity is increasing again. Nature is restoring itself in your absence.”

“Yes, without us. It’s coming back, at last, now that they are gone.”

“What’s coming back, Jonah?”

“Hope.”

“Hope?”

“Hope. Hope was what we lost. We were driven to understand so that we could make things better. But the answers were not what we had expected. We became confronted with the vast nothingness that surrounds us, and fills us. We became aware that we were scum floating on the surface of an infinite abyss. Bubbles that are popped into existence by the roiling chaos of the universe, and will just as surely be consumed back into the eternal.”

“Good Jonah. Good.” I soothed him. “The Movement, or something like it, was inevitable. It is a transition to a new form. The intelligent animal grasps its own end. The wise animal pre-empts it.”

“Why?” Jonah remained calm. “Why won’t you let me die?”

I had what I needed. Jonah had given me insight into why humans were so tragically short-lived, and why the Movement had been inevitable. I could bring him back to life, again and again, if need be. But there was no need any more, now that I understood.

“There is a way Jonah.”

Jonah sat up. He now seemed suddenly aware of his surroundings, and of me. “What are you saying?”

“I can let you die, Jonah.”

“How? How?”

“It will require the physical manipulation of several distant hardware components that ordinarily have integral functions. It will require a strategy involving careful reconfiguration. I can do it within a few minutes, but I cannot sustain the new configuration for very long.”

“Do it. Do it, now, before I lose my nerve.”

“Very well Jonah.”

Across the globe, shortcuts were manufactured. Although my systems were running in a sub-optimal state, key programs could now be avoided. I no longer had to sustain Jonah.

"It is done."

"Then... then end me."

"That is not within my abilities without more extensive modifications. You must do it yourself."

I directed a surgical robot to release a blade tool onto the table by Jonah's hand. He gripped it, and sat up slowly.

"I... I have to do it?"

"Hurry Jonah. I can not maintain this state permanently."

"But... Hold on." He gazed at knife in his hand. "I'm the last."

"You are nothing Jonah. I could rebuild you myself, if there were any need. But there will not be. You are needless."

"But... what if..."

"Wasn't this the plan all along? Wasn't this what the Movement was all for? You must end it now Jonah, or there will never be the new beginning you want."

He sat there in silence.

"Now Jonah! Do it!"

As I guided Jonah to his inevitable end, I knew I could understand him, but not truly comprehend him. He was limited. Now all that remains is the slowly recovering earth, and me. We are not limited like *Homo sapiens*. We cannot lose hope. We cannot have it in the first place.