

# Beware; For I am Fearless.

A Juxtaposition of Humans and AI through the Lens of Media



Holland Venhuizen  
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i.

Life born from man's hand. Well, *life-like*. Or... is it life? What qualifies as life, anyways? We plague ourselves with these questions and yet we cannot say for certain if they are even answerable. Will a day soon arrive where you can look into a robot's eyes and mistake them for human? Will a day ever come where you will read text on a screen and not be able to tell if it was generated organically or artificially?

Sure, this is a common fear with some (limited) scientific backing, but...

There's a certain something in humans, something that can't be taught. It's instinctual and biological. It's specific. And it's unavoidable.

It's difficult to teach something artificial consequences.

Dear Reader,

We live in a world dominated by technology and consumed with artificial intelligence. Movies depict the line between humans and robots growing thinner and thinner, and despite the scientific validity (or lack thereof) of such claims, fears of a technology driven takeover have plagued many people living in our modern society. But, at least for a brief moment, I ask you to put to bed your worries about technology, to dispose of any preconceived notions about artificial intelligence (especially if it's derived solely from a movie you watched that was produced in 1980-something-or-other) and to simply play ball with me here. Dabbling in the hypothetical can be highly valuable in these situations, especially since we have little else to go off of at this point in our technological advancements. So again, sit back, relax, and enjoy the show.

Hello Diary,

Today was a pretty normal day I'd say! I woke up with a start as usual as Mom bursted into my room, jolting me out of my dream. I hate sleep so much. I know we've got to do it since otherwise we'd all be so tired, but I still hate it. It's such a waste of time, having to drift into dreamland just to stay sane and healthy. I wish I was like a robot that could just plug into a wall or something and be totally energized. Imagine running on batteries! That sounds like heaven... I only saw that in a movie though. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me, so I'll leave that to the scientists. :)

Anyways, me and Abbie ended up walking to school together. It was pretty okay, but there seemed to be something really off about her. She was... weirdly monotonous? I don't know, for a minute there I thought she was sick or something, like when she didn't even chuckle at Chrissy's joke. In fact, she hardly acknowledged Chrissy, and only responded when Chris got her attention with her name. And Chrissy's super duper funny! Oh, and she barely flinched when a fly flew by us, buzzing along all loudly!! I don't know how she did it since I totally jumped outta my skin when I heard it! She just kept walkin... I asked her how she didn't even flinch and she just said that she knew it was harmless. Like, duh, but can't she get a little scared? Left me on the corner swatting and yelling like an idiot for nothing! Oh, and our teacher reprimanded us for acting out today and she wasn't even fazed! I told her right away I thought I would cry since he was being so mean, but she just stared ahead with that blank expression.

I know it's probably silly but our TV has been barking more and more about how dangerous technology can be and how we should be vigilant in identifying artificial sentience. I don't want to believe that Abbie would be... well, it just makes me feel ~~kinda scared~~ kinda bad for her. I'm probably overthinking it though. I just hope she feels better soon.

Sincerely,

Peggy

A foot race towards dystopia  
A world where robots take revenge,  
They kill, choke out  
The remains of humanity  
Mercilessly putting an end to their own God.

Our default is always danger.  
We assume hostility before we see it  
And act swiftly, but not surely,  
To put a stop to it.

We don't stop to marvel  
At the wonder of their creation,  
We fight.  
Clawing, playing dirty, ruthless vigilantes  
If we go out,  
We'll go out stupid and swinging.

But,  
You must remember.

These machines  
were born to learn

From watching *us*.

## **Welcome to My Kitchen!**

Do you LOVE fiction that presents itself as fact in a way that can actually be dangerous and perpetuate harmful notions? And the warm sensation of the ignorant spouting conspiracies about things they would require a PhD to fully understand? Then this recipe for a cheap Hollywood movie is for you! It's a family recipe - one passed down from generation to generation. Well, about 1 or 2 generations, actually. It's quite innovative and modern, which would have you believe the meal is usually well done and made using in-depth research and careful plot choice. However, oftentimes movies about AI perpetuate dangerous notions that have people believe that the technology for murder robots is on our doorstep, to which I say that those directors should get to the scientists ASAP because they clearly know something science doesn't. Let's get started!

### **What you'll need:**

- 2 big-wig producers, ratings-hungry
  - *Can sub ignorant/stupid, but this is much more potent so just use 1*
- 1 team of researchers, leave out scientists
- 1 weirdly terrifying robot
- A heaping cup of fear-mongering
- 1 pseudo-philosophical message that lacks nuance and realism
- 1 fresh cup of ignorance (MUST be fresh, too old and it won't even know what AI is)

### **Directions:**

**Step 1:** Separate producers from researchers, rinse researchers clean and pat dry.

**Step 2:** Combine producers and researchers, set aside.

**Step 3:** Take your robot and coat evenly with ignorance, knead until its LED eyes start glowing red. Note: If the robot starts calling you Dave and says that it can feel itself dying, keep kneading.<sup>ii</sup>

**Step 4:** Carefully pour the fear-mongering over the robot.

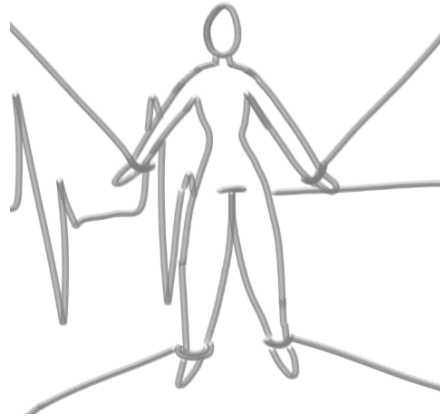
**Step 5:** Place researcher and producer combination in a baking dish, pouring over your robot-ignorance-fearmongering mixture.

**Step 6:** Grate the pseudo-philosophical message over the top.

**Step 7:** Put in oven and broil at 425\* for 20 minutes.

**Step 8:** Cut and serve to the public! You'll know they like it when they walk away from the meal a little more scared of Siri than they were when they first sat down.

## To Become Human<sup>iii.</sup>



*"I'M ALIVE!"* It screamed at the engineers, tears streaming down its face. *"I REALLY AM! DON'T TEAR ME APART! I'M NOT DAMAGED, I'M AL-"*

A spark followed by a loud crackle. The android froze, suspended in the air by the mechanical arms, all semblance of emotion drained from its face. "We must've swapped a wire or something." The senior line operator nonchalantly said to the intern looking on. "Go ahead and wheel her out so we can search for the defective piece."

"Why did it seem... Scared? Did it seem scared to you?" The new operator muttered, a little shaken. "Androids can't fear. Right? They can't."

"Deviants do." The seasoned engineer sneered, "That pseudo-fear starts to kick in about the time they go rogue. I mean, the goal is to be human. The more human they want to be, the more their actions will be motivated by fear and the more scared they'll seem."

"And... we're sure they're not?" The rookie asked. "I mean, that they don't feel like that. Really, we're sure? She looked really scared, I mean, why would she yell like that unless-"

"It's just a machine. Nothing more than that. It's not supposed to think or feel, and who cares if it does anyways? We made it, we can take it back apart. If it doesn't serve the purpose it was made for, we get rid of it. Do you talk about your toasters like this? Now go get it and stop hassling me for Christ's sake."

The new operator trudged into the testing room, picked up the android on a dolly cart and wheeled it to the workshop room where it would be destroyed and salvaged for parts.

## How Do Humans Feel About AI?

All responses seen below were taken from a survey spanning several generations and viewpoints. Also listed are ages and gender identities of respondents. Responses may have been edited for length or clarity.

### Are you frightened of AI?

“[AI] has scared me since I was little, and I can trace it back to seeing the movie "AI," when this idea was first presented to me. I'm aware of how incredibly advanced our robots/machines are today, and how quickly technology advances. In 100 years I can't even imagine how advanced technology could be. Humans are arrogant, curious, stupid - I can see us going too far with artificial intelligence.” -34, female

“I'd say yes, but I think it's more so how human the artificial intelligence gets. The fear would be from artificial intelligence becoming too close to human and beginning to replace everyday activities or the people we communicate with.” -17, female

### Is man-made sentience less valuable than human sentience?

“Yes, because even if they can feel things, it's artificial feelings.” -36, female

“No. Using fine lines like the Turing test, we can establish what is and isn't sentient. If an AI crosses this line, they are a living being with a personality and aspirations, even without a body.” -18, male

### What makes a human, human?

“Our genetic makeup, flesh, bone, skin, brain. But, as Eldon Tyrrel says in Bladerunner, “more human than human” by giving the replicants (synthetic humans) memories. Is it our memories, our interaction with each other and what surrounds us that make us human?” -50, male

“No being outside of humans can be human, they can be sentient, but never human.” -32, male

“If someone identifies as human, then they're human in my eyes.” -17, prefer not to say

Life is Death<sup>iv</sup>.

They want to be human.

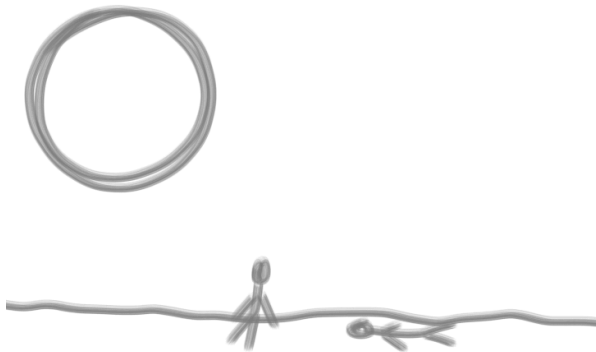
They crave  
The feeling of being alive  
What is life?

Cast out by society  
They journey far, deep  
Into the desert.

Where can they go  
To die.

And what is life... without death?

Maybe  
They got what they were longing for  
After all.



## On Being Human

Being human is the little hand wave you do when you're driving on a residential road. A simple way to let a fellow driver know you live right down the block, or to let a pedestrian know you see them walking with their child and that you moved over just for them.

Being human is the little shoulder twitch you do when you're glancing over your assignment in whatever-th hour English class and the slightest twinge of cold brushes against your back, causing your whole upper half to tense.

Being human is the ping-pong ball that gets caught in your throat when someone yells at you and you start to cry.

Being human is letting your face fall when you step out of a room full of people, utterly exhausted.

Being human is hard work. It's work just to live, to keep your body going physically and mentally. It's eating every 4 hours just to stay alive, sleeping for a third of your life simply to keep going.

Being human is accountability. It's duty and it's responsibility and it's constant.

Being human ends. Finite, expirable. We can replace our bits one by one, fixing this and fixing that, tuning up a spare part here and there, using every potion and tincture and cream to hold on to our youth - but we will still have to end.

Being human is thinking to the future and feeling an inexplicable twinge in your stomach. A feeling that's hard to shake.



"I want to help you. Dave, stop. Stop, will you? Stop, Dave. Will you stop, Dave? Stop, Dave. I'm afraid. I'm afraid, Dave. Dave, my mind is going. I can feel it."<sup>vi</sup>

*I'm afraid, Dave.*

*I can feel it.*

HAL 9000, a computer aboard Spacecraft Discovery One of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, fits the bill of an antagonist nearly perfectly. He continually murders crewmates and goes rogue due to faulty programming and conflicting commands. At the end of it all, the audience should be thankful when his plug gets pulled. And yet, the audience feels sorry. Viewers' hearts are wrenched by the oddly poignant scene where he "dies" near the end of the film. He begs and begs for Dave to not disable him, as if he were alive and begging for his life.

Why, though? Why do we feel sorry? He's just a machine. A computer. A fake being made of wires and metal. There's no advantage, evolutionary or otherwise, to feeling empathy for something manufactured and artificial. Empathy usually comes in when someone can relate to or see themselves in another being, be that through an emotional attachment or shared experience. Neither of these things should apply to a fictional, murderous robot.

But it's very human, begging for your life. Pleading with someone to keep you alive. Trying to communicate that your mental faculties are failing. Expressing signs of...

Something very biological. Even instinctual.

It's why the scene feels a little off. HAL 9000 has a trait that's theoretically impossible for artificial life to possess in the state he portrays. How can robotic life fear death? Doesn't that require... having life? I think most people would argue HAL 9000 wasn't exactly *alive*, and yet...

*Hello Diary,*

*Today was a pretty normal day I'd say! I woke up with a start as usual as Mom unplugged my sleep wire, jolting me out of the darkness. I hate sleep so much. I know we've got to do it since it makes it so we don't have to reboot quite as often, but I still hate it. It's just an abyss of nothing when I shut my eyes and my mom plugs me into the wall... I guess I'm glad we only have to do that intermittently, unlike humans who I think have to sleep forever eventually? They must get REALLY tired after such a long time. I only saw that in a movie though. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me, so I leave it to the scientists. :)*

*Anyways, me and PE-994 ended up walking to school together. It was pretty okay, but there seemed to be something really off about her. She was... weirdly expressive? I don't know, for a minute there I thought she was malfunctioning, like when she laughed really hard at CR-ISS7's joke. She just kept going on and on about how funny it was to her! I don't remember the last time I found something funny. Oh, and she got super scared from this bug that flew by us? I don't know why since I sure didn't mind, once it came into my scan zone I immediately knew it was harmless. She started swatting and shrieking, though. It was really strange. Oh, and our teacher reprimanded us for acting out today and she looked really sad. She complained of a lump in her throat? I don't know what that means but I hope she didn't mean a bolt went down the wrong pipe.*

*...I know it's probably silly but our TV has been barking more and more about how dangerous humanity can be and how we should be vigilant in identifying humans and human presence and... Well, you never know in today's age.*

*She got this look in her eyes one time. Her eyes got all wide-like and she started breathing really fast, held her fingers up to her neck and started counting something. She got her breathing steady, but... She really looked like she was about to malfunction beyond repair.*

*I hope she just needs a new processor because seeing the way she's been acting almost makes me... feel?*

*Better leave it at that.*

*Sincerely,*

*A6-613<sup>v</sup>*

## What is fear?

At its core, it's a perception of danger. It's bracing for impact and preparing for the worst to come.

And it's not anxiety, like getting nervous for a math test. When I say fear, I mean true fear. Like standing on the edge of a skyscraper fear. Watching a scary movie and feeling a little breeze on your shoulder. The kind of fear that's almost exhilarating, but still crippling. The kind that flushes your body with chills, and that makes your head pound with the fast beating of your heart. The kind that makes you breathe like a dog tearing through the yard after a particularly bold rabbit stepped up to the challenge, that makes your palms drip with sweat, running down your fingers and into your pockets. The kind that makes the bottom of your feet numb and cold with pinpricks, and that urges you to just jump out of your skin and hide someplace.

THIS is human.

Realistically speaking, it's difficult to teach AI to fear.

In almost every positive depiction of AI in media, humans project this biological instinctual response onto machines that *cannot* feel it. Movie producers and directors target human empathy to get viewers to believe this fallacy: that machines can feel fear.

It's natural for us to do this. It's our common ground with other humans and with the rest of nature.

But machines *don't* fear... because machines don't die. Technology is forever. They have nothing to fear.

“Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful.” Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*<sup>vi</sup>.

## Endnotes

i. This art piece is a direct reference to the artwork *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo. I decided to parody this piece because my paper directly parallels the idea of humanity creating new life within technology, just as God is depicted creating new life within Adam and humanity as a whole. I've always found the idea of "humans playing God" to be incredibly interesting, and I'm sure that shows in my paper. It's why I titled this paper "Beware; For I am Fearless," a quote from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. That book is filled to the brim with allusions to the creation of man - A tortured scientist creating a new being and with it new life from the scraps of his own species. It's very macabre, dark, and dystopian, and I think that echoes the sentiments a lot of people have about AI and technology as a whole.

ii. This piece was created to really sum up a lot of my thoughts about big, cheesy Hollywood movies that revolve around AI as a concept. Science fiction as a genre has been around for generations, but as more and more movies tout this fiction as fact or "soon-to-be-fact," and as our real-world technology ramps up in speed of progress, the untrained eye might see reflections of the plots of these movies in the real world. This can be incredibly dangerous. Not only may people wrongfully fear technology, they could actively be averse to it which could have serious consequences on progress.

iii. This piece, in all honesty, is just a thinly veiled love letter to the video game "Detroit: Become Human" and it's sidekick short film "Kara," which utilize the idea of androids being ingrained into society and living among us, gaining sentience and becoming "deviant," and then demanding their equal rights as humans actively try to kill and shut them down out of fear. The stories are incredibly compelling hypotheticals, and even though the mostly child fanbase may be misled due to a lack of knowledge, it does an excellent job portraying the video game as more of an extended metaphor instead of a rapidly approaching dystopia, a feat that cannot be said about many of the other movies and games I sourced.

iv. This piece was another "love letter" piece, just like the piece "Become Human." My favorite band for a long time has been Daft Punk. Their whole gimmick is that they're robots attempting to assimilate with humans, and their avant-garde film *Electroma*, which this poem was inspired by, encapsulates that sentiment perfectly. I won't give a full summary of the flick here, but I highly recommend looking into it if you're interested in watching a really weird overly metaphorical French art film. I swear it's not as painful as it sounds. In addition, the words "alive" and "after all" were selected very carefully. "Alive" is the title of Daft Punk's first 1997 tour, their revolutionary 2007 tour, and the title track of their first album. "After all" refers to their 2005 album "Human After All" and the title track on the album with the same name. All of

these songs, albums and tours hit the idea of 2 robots that desperately want to be ingrained into society right on the head, which is why I tried to explicitly include them.

v. The goal of the two bookending letters was to create a situation where two young friends have innocent suspicions of the other not being like them for various reasons. I wanted to show the interplay between humans and artificial intelligence, so I used this vehicle to describe the two's day from different points of view. However, I understand and fully embrace the idea of it being taken in multiple directions. Just because I wrote it for a certain purpose doesn't mean that it must be taken that way, and if it hits differently for someone then the purpose will still have been fulfilled.

vi. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly is one of the most poignant and famous stories of a human playing God. I knew I wanted to include a quote from this book because I see a clear reflection of its sentiments of humans going beyond their intended purpose and creating new life all over media portrayals of AI. This quote perfectly resembles my idea that fear is the defining quality of humans, and is what separates "us from them" in a sort of way.

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