

Einsteiner

by VK Fourstone

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Turning from the bottom.

One of the packs went flying into the center of the hall, another one over the reception desk. A moment later there was a loud bang of an explosion, then a second, and a third. Smoke abruptly billowed up, filling the space of the Agency.

Isaac instinctively covered his head. He didn't feel any pain, only his eyes hurt and his throat was sore from the pungent smoke. Nobody seemed to scream or whimper, frightened people coughed one after another. A face contorted in terror, belonging to a girl who worked at the reception, flashed by in front of his face. She was in shock but seemed okay. As soon as she gave a cry, a few more squealing voices joined in.

Water gushed down from above; a fire-extinguishing system went off. The sirens howled loudly and nastily. Another explosion rang out, or rather a thud. There was no fire or shrapnel, no shock wave either, just the smoke. However after the next thud Isaac felt fit of panic – irrational, hideous fear. He realized it wasn't over yet and anything could still happen, that after the thud a real explosion can strike. The fear made him crawl towards the door, seeing nothing, blinded by the acrid gas tears streaming out of his eyes. Thinking calmly was something he couldn't do at the moment, leaving it all to instincts.

“Where's the main computer? Where do you keep the devil's heart?” the terrorist screamed in a booming voice, donning a respirator.

The voice brought Isaac back down to earth a little and forced him to focus. Since the terrorist breathed the air, it was not poisonous, not a chemical attack. What he had to do was cautiously crawl towards the door, trying not to attract attention.

“Move it, or I'll kill'er!” shouted the attacker.

A woman squealed again. The old man nearby was breathing heavily and coughing. The water had dampened down the gas a bit, and the air was gradually clearing, so he had to move faster.

“Askin’ ya for the last time! And don’t anybody move! You! The doomed one!” Through the smoke Isaac could see the gun firmly pointed at him.

At that moment Isaac couldn't think rationally, but gloomily thought that he had blown off not only his own life, but his sister Vicky’s as well. That morning he was sure that it couldn't be worse, but he was wrong and his recklessness would cost them both their future.

Well, yes, the future turned out to be not what he had thought. He had studied excellently, easily entered a prestigious university, his future seemed totally rosy. But we can’t predict what the world will look like in five years, neither the life around us, or our own. Some crappy war or epidemic, or even such a seemingly positive thing as progress, can change the world in just a few months! So here you are, studying, working your tail off, taking educational loans, passing exams, not sleeping at nights, looking forward to becoming a specialist in demand, and – poof! – suddenly the damn Agency appears, and all your knowledge gets out of date in just one second, and you are totally screwed.

As a teenager Isaac craved adventures and discoveries, envied the young professor in the film *Godzilla* and the cool nerve of Jean Reno’s character. He saw himself in the future, traveling and making appearances at scientific exhibitions and congresses. First it went smooth - a graduate of a highly prestigious university, a young engineer. But after being presented with a beautiful diploma with the name Isaac Leroy embossed in gold, the future barman hadn't come across any more gold anywhere. It’s hard enough living in glamorous Monaco, the European paradise. It’s not as big of a deal as you might think

because he's got absolutely zilch money. The sun and sea are free, for the rest you have to pay. Yes, the way his dreams came true turned out was a bit different. He had been dreaming of America, and he got it - "America" was the name of the bar where he was working. As a matter of fact, the owner looked a little like Reno and had a temperament every bit as ferocious as Godzilla. As for the real America, the most advanced place of all, meant for brilliant and talented minds, he never got to go there. Now there was no sense in traveling: if you have your creative energy, just go ahead and sell it, no need to fly anywhere. Who could have thought before, that instead of uranium or palladium the most valuable resource in the world would be human creativity?

The most ironic thing - it was all the fault of his beloved science!

A few years ago Jeremy Link, a Professor at the University of London, doctor of bioenergetics, identified human energy, responsible for an individual's originality, fantasy and imagination. He called it "orange energy", or simply OE. Skeptics made fun of him, but the professor calmly continued studying the phenomenon called "creativity". Five years later he successfully downloaded creativity for the first time, two years after that he learned how to store and use it.

Having obtained the OE of four old scientists and dozens of volunteering pensioners, the professor summoned a press conference and introduced a new type of computer, *Einsteiner*, a bio hard drive computer that worked off human creativity.

Jeremy Link picked a random person from the audience who turned out to be a third-year student, put some sort of a semi-transparent helmet on his head, connected him to his weird creation, and squinting slyly gave the guy a task from quantum physics. The audience began to make noise, somebody giggled, but however crazy, the student's answer was correct!

Having asked the student about his major in medical, the professor gave him another task: “Think about the treatment of cancer”.

The hall froze. During a couple of minutes the student was doing some calculations and then passed his result to the professor. Jeremy Link displayed the sheet with figures and thickly underlined the final formula on a big screen and uttered contentedly: “Ladies and gentlemen! This is the new generation cancer treatment, the most effective one among in existence!” For a few seconds there was dead silence, and then everyone heard a gasp - the dean of the department of medicine duly appreciated the challenge.

The professor was about to continue asking, but at that moment the hall exploded with applause. After savoring the moment of triumph, Link carried on explaining: “Energy is nothing but energy. It is similar for people of different races, religions, it doesn’t have language barriers, it can’t contract viruses, has no tastes and preferences, no emotions, can’t have violent temper. What matters for *Einsteiner* is the power of a human head battery. It can unite specialists of different professions. Chemist and physicist, musician and artist, astronomer and restaurant chef. All of them together, to be precise. Having received the creativity of several ordinary students it will outclass Albert Einstein, the inspiration of this presented prototype.”

That very night the scientific world, the press, the internet – all literally went crazy. Hopes, excitement and doubts, but in the end everyone agreed that *Einsteiner* can be called the first artificial intellect in the world, very useful, and more

important...safe! Disconnected from an operator it could do no harm, since it cannot create tasks and make decisions on its own.

It was not just a breakthrough, but the beginning of a new evolutionary saltation. Each new portion of OE increased the power of the bio processor, the thoughts stored automatically. A lab-assistant linked in to *Einsteiner* temporarily acquired the pooled creativity of all the people whose individual OE had been downloaded. An idea that was previously incomplete immediately became concrete, proper and meaningful. Virtually any problem was processed by the computer like a simple jigsaw puzzle. The missing pieces became as clear as if they were traced out on paper, the gaps analyzed, and the idea itself was completed and finalized, the tasks growing more and more complex.

Human beings aren't computers; they can't concentrate intensely enough to visualize the detailed picture. We don't possess absolute memory, often missing important parts. Link's invention didn't have such a problem; activated by an operator it remembered everything up to the tiniest detail.

The world press was competing with exalted headlines: "World's first artificial mind", "Safe artificial intellect created", "Everyone can become part of Mega Brain", "*Einstein* resurrected", and even "First step to immortality". People were taking part in numerous discussions, recalling how many scientists had wrestled with a problem, solving it just partly. Some brilliant ideas seemed impossible to implement, even utopian, but the answer was really within easy reach. And how many scientists died without ever bringing their research to a conclusion? Their ideas have gone with them. What would have happened had the computer appeared earlier? How many lives would have been saved!

Three days after the news was announced, Professor Link, the most brilliant inventor in human history, disappeared without leaving a trace.

Having handed over the technology to a friend of his, Antony Blake, UN Deputy General Secretary, the professor vanished. Temporarily, as people thought at the time. Everyone was sure that the new “Person of the Year” and Nobel laureate was about to reappear soon, but they thought wrong. And now, after seven years had passed, no one had any idea about the professor’s whereabouts. Most thought he was dead.

Very likely the idea of transferring the technology to the UN saved the world from some domination, and possibly even from World War III. The United Nations International Collective Mind Agency was now set up. During one year the agency not only presented hundreds of super-useful technologies, but also made creativity the most important resource of the planet.

In three years of the *Einsteiner* operation, the agency completely vanquished cancer, AIDS and diabetes, even smoking was left in the past. Mankind finally stopped abusing natural resources, oil consumption dropped dramatically, and most cars ran on non-polluting hydrogen. Plastic became soluble, metals coated with a new compound didn’t rust, the problems of freon, CO₂, and other harmful emissions had been forgotten. The *Collective Mind* Agency became a very successful institution, in both the popular and commercial senses, priding itself in a host of inventions and achievements. The agency earned fantastic profits from the sale of patents, at the same time paying extremely generous fees to those who off-loaded their creativity. Four *Einsteiner* servers were installed in four countries along with a considerable net of OE downloading centers.

In the morning, reluctantly getting ready, Isaac had a cup of shitty coffee and went to the shower which he loathed. The shower was just like his life - broken, either scalding you with heat or dousing with icy cold.

He was taking a shower feeling all pissed off. He did have some good ideas, but the world had changed way too fast and just spat him out. He lived in extreme poverty, vaguely imagining what he'd be doing the day after tomorrow. Someone might call it freedom, not having a strict schedule and planned holidays. Maybe it is so, but in a couple of months such a "freedom" can make you nuts. There's much more comfort in the clarity of life. Although, not the kind of clarity he was about to obtain today. Today was his last day being poor; tomorrow the agency would make him rich.

He would think about anything, just to avoid getting dressed and setting off to the download center to submit to the damn procedure. He wanted to drag things out since thinking was also work - his typical excellent displacement mechanism.

As soon as Isaac went outside it started to pour. He didn't get wet though - the device he had invented turned on automatically. Finished just the other day, the first prototype was unique. A generator collected the energy of falling rain drops creating a magnetic field, which didn't let the water in. One could stand there in the rain and remain completely dry. The patent could have solved all Isaac's problems, but as usual, he was out of time.

Deep in thought, he didn't notice how he reached his destination. He didn't feel like entering at all, but there was no other way: the bank had given a final warning and his apartment had to be auctioned off. He had no way to pay, and more importantly, his sister Vicky, his most loved one in the world,

needed another surgery. So the only thing he really could do was to sell his creativity. He knew what was going to happen to him after. His best friend Pascal had fallen in love and sold his OE two years ago. Right there, at that very place. Isaac threw a last glance at the sea and pushed the door of the reception.

It was cozy inside, cool music played smoothly, the officers briskly filling in forms. As for donors, there were four of them: a well-groomed old man, a tired chubby woman of about fifty, a pie-faced young guy and some hippy-looking hobo, luckily not smelly. Five portions of creativity ready to replenish the power of the artificial brain.

On the wall there was a poster showing a smiling man sitting by an azure swimming-pool, with a caption: “I gave people what I was given from on high, and I have been rewarded!!” Ex-donors did look happy, indeed. The Agency made a lifelong support contract and took care of its newly titled Happies.

Isaac had already seen this one and other colorful posters when he had come in before for an interview and OE pre-measuring. The amount of creativity was different for everyone, so one could have it calculated for free and find out the possible fee. Back then he used to think that this was just a safety net, that he would for sure have time to get the money. However it turned out that selling the rights for his rain protection device, which he called *V-Rain*, was a hard task. The Patent Office and the system of selling inventions were now sort of vestigial relics, these days all corporations bought their technology only from *Collective Mind*. In the end he ran out of time – his sister got worse and her surgery was quickly scheduled. Even though he still didn't have the money.

That was when Isaac made the decision. He knew that his creativity level was high and having sold his orange energy, he'd have enough money for surgery, for buying his own house, and for many other things. He definitely would never forgive himself

if his sister died, he wouldn't want any money then. Better to be a Happy with a zero creative index than a smart guy whose wealth cost the life of the only person he really cared for.

So yes, this was the other side of professor Link's *Einsteiner* - thousands of gifted people turned into ruck. But was this a price too big, since wars and diseases that had took away millions of lives every year, were now things of the past?

Isaac felt like hypothesizing about the other donors, who they were, where they came from. The old man clearly decided to supplement the provisions of his pension or maybe was just a patriot. Very straight-backed, in spite of his age, not slouching at all. He was probably not from around there, since many people came over from other places to download and then stay. The hobo most likely was also looking for money, tired of living in a tent. Even with a climate as beautiful as in Monaco, living outside must not be that nice. The plain-looking goofily dressed guy was trifling a photo of some girl, so probably the reason was like Pascal's, and he was in love.

Isaac never had time to finish this thought. The hobo-looking guy suddenly jumped up, grabbing everyone's attention, pulled out a crucifix and started yelling: "May the Lord be with us!", as he began throwing smoke-puff explosives.

That was when Isaac made his unsuccessful attempt to flee...

"The doomed one!" These words tolled in Isaac's head like an alarm bell. Scared and adrenalized, he froze, not moving a finger. His eyes saw nothing. He hated himself for this pathetic attempt to flee. It was not him he worried about – it was Vicky. If he got killed now, she would inevitably die too. How could he have acted so stupid, not even knowing if the terrorist had accomplices or if the door was open? How could he risk Vicky's life so recklessly?

“Please, don’t kill me!” he mumbled huskily, closing his eyes tight.

No answer. He slowly opened his eyes. The smoke was clearing, no more tears, and when he cautiously looked at the terrorist, he couldn’t help smiling: the thing pointing at him was ... the cross! Not a gun, just a usual crucifix! Water, smoke and fear portrayed the big black thing in the terrorist’s hand as a pistol.

The terrorist beckoned him to get to his feet and suddenly gripped the receptionist girl by the throat. With his other hand he held something to her back and shouted:

“Where is it? Where’s the *Einsteiner*?”

The girl gasped and fainted, not falling on the floor because the terrorist was holding her. The security guard, still on his feet, looked as if he absolutely didn’t know what to do, too scared to move.

“Let her go,” the old man who was among the donors suddenly said with a firm and calm voice, “She’s just an office worker, not likely to know anything. My name is Colonel Joyce. Tell me what is it you want?”

“What I want is to destroy this devil’s machine. I want to tear its devil’s heart out!”

“Hmmm,” thought Isaac. “Yet another religious fanatic and it looks like he’s genuinely insane to boot.” He stood there obediently, gradually recovering his wits, the panic was receding. The TV sometimes reported attacks on the Agency. But only rarely, and besides, when you watch something on TV it doesn’t occur to you that the same thing could actually happen for real.

The colonel got up off his chair and asked the guard in a commanding voice:

“Where’s your central computer?”

The guard shrugged in uncertainty, and the old man addressed his question to one of the employees.

“Over th-th-there,” the woman gasped out, stammering through her tears, and waved her hand in the direction of a big futuristic-looking silver computer standing in a room, separated from the reception hall by a glass wall.

The terrorist pushed the woman aside and in two rapid strides reached the back office door and kicked it open. He lifted the computer above his head and slammed it down hard onto the floor. Ripping the wires, he furiously raised it again and again above his head and slammed it onto the stone floor until it fell to pieces. On some of those pieces he stepped in anger, as if trying to reduce them to dust.

The security man was still standing there, glued to the ground.

“Everyone down on the floor, cover your heads! Don’t do anything!” roared the colonel, getting down.

The ferocious power in his order sent everyone tumbling unquestioningly to the floor, even the security man obeyed. The only left standing was Isaac who didn’t want to piss the terrorist off again.

The hobo carried on smashing the computer in the office, frenziedly ripping out wires and various attachments. Isaac could hear something grating and plastic splintering and through this racket came the howling of a siren out in the street and brusque voices. The police! He remembered that the station was just a hundred meters away. He heard the sound of breaking glass and then a monstrous blow to the head knocked him off his feet and he lost consciousness.

It took a while before Isaac could think clearly, his head was buzzing and spinning and he felt slightly nauseous. They were dragging him somewhere, with his arms in handcuffs painfully twisted behind his back. A van, a police station, iron bars slamming loudly, and his consciousness fully recovered once he was in the cell. “Never mind, they’ll figure things out,” he thought wearily and slumped onto the metal bed. Still feeling a bit sick, he closed his eyes and instantly blanked out.

He dreamt of a war.... a big war. He didn’t know who was fighting whom or why, but he saw a nuclear explosion, the plane falling. Whole districts were set on fire. He saw a lot of different cities without names, and all he knew was that one of them was Paris. Isaac observed the immense, towering conflagration from a hill about thirty kilometers away. He couldn’t make anything out clearly, but he knew for certain that it was Paris. He was gazing, spellbound at the appalling spectacle, when suddenly some soldiers drove up, six or maybe eight of them.

There was no fear, he calmly emptied his cartridge clip into the first two, grabbed his automatic and killed the others. He did it absolutely dispassionately, quickly and without a single hitch, feeling slightly frustrated that the bullets – they were bright blue, he could see them quite clearly – flew through the air with a strange slowness. Darkness. The picture had disappeared. Isaac was somewhere between sleep and waking, and he even started trying to analyze his dream, still without waking up:

“In real life he was not capable of murdering someone, but this wasn’t the first time he killed in a dream. What can you say about the life of a man in whose dreams cities burn, wars are fought and planes crash?”

Someone was prodding Isaac insistently in the side, and he finally woke up. He just wanted to be left alone to sleep. His head

was filled with some kind of soft goo, weariness had eaten its way into his thoughts and settled there, but his annoying neighbor wouldn't stop. The drowsiness in Isaac's eyes gradually dispersed and he recognized who it was. He was in the same prison cell as the terrorist. Isaac knew there must have been some sort of mistake!

The hobo woke up Isaac, and was attentively looking into his eyes.

"Hey, how are you doing?" he inquired.

"Fine."

"That's good, good. You sure?"

"Fine," Isaac repeated angrily.

The stranger gave him another searching look.

"What's your name, lad?"

"Fine," hissed Isaac again and closed his eyes.

"My name's Mr. Elvis. I'm the Messiah, I fight the devil. I've saved you. We've got to..."

Isaac heard the stranger speaking on and on. He opened and closed his eyes repeatedly, without attempting to understand what this madman was driveling about. His head hurt badly enough already.

Suddenly he felt something on his palm, something hard and prickly. Tried to turn away, but Elvis jerked him rather sharply by the shoulder.

"Hey, you? Don't you understand? I've been speaking for half an hour and you still don't understand?"

"What? Yes, I understand, I do," Isaac gasped out. Anything to get this guy off his back.

"What does he want from me? Hell, I'm in here because of him. Someone clubbed me over the head because of this asshole. I wish those thickheads would get on with figuring this all out. Maybe I need to go to hospital," – Isaac's thoughts flowed

sluggishly through his head. He closed his eyes. He felt being shaken by the shoulder with crude determination.

Elvis continued spitting his words: “Hell spawn! Heart of the devil! Cursed machine! This devil will bring sorrow upon you. I saw the light, the determination in your eyes. They will take this away from me...”

It was some kind of a hideous dream! A waking nightmare! Isaac tried to stand up and call a policeman, but the attempt to get up gave him such a sharp pain in his head that he groaned out loud.

“God has no need for soulless bodies, and then the end will come...” Elvis went on raving, as if nothing had happened. “Are you listening to me?”

The hobo didn’t look like he was going to give up. He seemed blinded by his own insanity.

“Orange energy is people’s souls, don’t you understand? He’s taking away our souls. That is what makes us humans.”

“Screwball talk. Roaring. Roaring in my head. Everything’s weird, and I need water,” Isaac thought.

“Well then?” Mr. Elvis was certain what he’d said was convincing, even though Isaac hadn’t grasped a single thing.

A sharp pain in Isaac’s shoulder woke him up completely and he concentrated.

“And only by tearing out the devil’s heart and destroying it, can I complete my mission. What you have in your hands is absolute evil, destroy it, burn it.”

Only now did Isaac finally realize that everything happening was real and he was holding an object that looked like a piece of a microcircuit. Of course! It was from that computer, a piece of the board with some kind of circuits and chips on it.

“Henri Cavalier, get out here.”

“My name’s Mr. Elvis!” the crazy messiah growled, then he turned to Isaac and added in a whisper: “Remember what I told

you. Burn the heart of the devil. Promise me. And then the victory will come.”

Isaac nodded, and his thoughts immediately flew to Vicky. “Oh, God! The surgery, the money for the surgery. Oh, God! I’ll be too late. Where am I? Oh, God! Vicky!”

It was a nightmare: the jail cell, the policemen running around, Elvis. Isaac hammered desperately on the bars several times with his hands, but no one took any notice of him. Only once did a doctor come, examined Isaac’s head, shone a little torch into his eyes and said indifferently that it was no big deal, Isaac would live. He left, leaving behind some kind of prescription. A nightmare, only it wasn’t a dream.

“Isaac Leroy!”

Isaac opened his eyes and stared at the policeman who was shining a little torch in his face. Isaac took an instant dislike to him, first because the torch was shining in his eyes, and secondly, because shining a torch in someone’s eyes was quite abusive. Especially since he was innocent.

“Out you come!”

The attempt to stand up gave him a dull, aching pain. Isaac sat back down again. Something pricked his hand. The computer board! He stuck the hand holding the piece of board in his pocket. “What a fool I am,” he thought. “What did I take it for? If they find it, I’ll never beat the rap.” The words of Mr. Elvis came to his mind.

“Come on, move it, you little shit,” Isaac heard the same malicious voice say. “I’m not going to hang out here all night because of you.”

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