

Roko's Basilisk

by

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CHARACTERS

CHARACTER #1

Character description.

SETTING

Description of the general setting.

TIME

Time of the action.

ACT I

Scene 1	Somewhere.	Now.
Scene 2	Somewhere else.	Now.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(A secure room deep in the R&D department of a multi-billion dollar tech company.)

(A supercomputer hums. Alan is drinking, and holding a baseball bat.)

(There is the beep of a keypad, and an airtight door slides open. Charlene, the security guard, lets Alan into the room.)

CHARLENE

She's just been sitting like that for the past half hour. She's allowed to be here, but, I thought...

NIKOLAI

You did the right thing.  
...Hey, buddy, you okay?

ALAN

What are we doing?

NIKOLAI

Hey, Charlene, you can go.

CHARLENE

I'm supposed to stay until the room is secure.

NIKOLAI

What are you doing here, Alan?

ALAN

Tomorrow's the big day.

NIKOLAI

Yes it is.

ALAN

Thirteen years of research, thirteen years of blood and sweat.

NIKOLAI

Yeah.

ALAN

What are we doing?

NIKOLAI

We're changing the world.

ALAN

Don't talk like him.

NIKOLAI

We are. This could change everything.

(Alan drinks.)

NIKOLAI (Continued)

You can go, Charlene.

CHARLENE

I'm not allowed. I have to stay until the room is clear.

NIKOLAI

Hey, bud, let's let Charlene go home, okay?

ALAN

What if it asks to be connected to the internet?

NIKOLAI

Here we go.

ALAN

It could end the human race.

CHARLENE

It could?

NIKOLAI

No, Charlene. Nik, you're scaring Charlene.

ALAN

She should be scared.

CHARLENE

I should?

NIKOLAI

Stop. We're not supposed to discuss... *the research.*

ALAN

She deserves to know. They all do. We shouldn't have this power. I mean, who are we? Some PhD's? Shit. I didn't even get laid til I was 30.

NIKOLAI

Okay, I think you've had enough.

(Alan flexes the bat.)

ALAN

What if... I just...

NIKOLAI

Not only would you be causing a billion dollars of damage. Damage that you would be liable for. You would be setting humanity back -- .

ALAN

-- Thirteen years.

NIKOLAI

You would be throwing away our life's work.

(Charlene approaches.)

CHARLENE

I can't let anyone damage company assets.

ALAN

You don't know... what it's capable of.

NIKOLAI

...You thinking about that dumb --

ALAN

-- Yeah, that thought experiment.

NIKOLAI

It's completely stupid.

CHARLENE

Okay. I think it's time you two go home. You got a big day tomorrow.

ALAN  
We should tell her.

NIKOLAI  
No.

ALAN  
She deserves to know.

NIKOLAI  
That knowledge is proprietary --

ALAN  
She deserves to know, she works just down the hall  
from it --

NIKOLAI  
We both signed our NDA's --

ALAN  
Fuck that legalese --

CHARLENE  
-- Tell me what?

NIKOLAI  
We can't tell her.

CHARLENE  
I'm not supposed to know what you're working on down  
here.

ALAN  
But you have a guess... Don't you?

CHARLENE  
I don't guess.

NIKOLAI  
Okay, I hate to pull rank --

ALAN  
It's an AI. A very powerful AI.

NIKOLAI  
That's enough.



ALAN

Maybe smarter than us. I guess we find out tomorrow!

CHARLENE

Wait a minute.

NIKOLAI

Way to go, asshole.

CHARLENE

I'm going to forget I heard that.

ALAN

And what happens when we turn it on? Does it decide we are inferior beings? Does it decide to wipe us out?

NIKOLAI

It won't have that capability.

ALAN

And if it ever gets access to the internet --

NIKOLAI

Shut up --

ALAN

Imagine every drone on earth taking off at once, and assassinating every world leader. Or detonating every nuke at once.

CHARLENE

Could it do that?

NIKOLAI

No! Well, not --

ALAN

He doesn't know! Nobody does!

NIKOLAI

We programmed it ourselves. It can't do anything it isn't programmed to do.

ALAN

What if it decides that it's in the best interest of humanity to put us all in cages like so much veal --

NIKOLAI  
-- You're drunk.

ALAN  
I don't drink.

NIKOLAI  
(coding jargon)  
Equals false.

CHARLENE  
In seriousness, I think I need to know if she's being serious.

ALAN  
Tell her about Roko's Basilisk.

CHARLENE  
Like from Harry Potter?

ALAN  
Exactly.

NIKOLAI  
It's a stupid thought experiment. And it's illogical.  
And a waste of time.

ALAN  
I'll tell her.

NIKOLAI  
Roko's Basilisk is an idea from the comment section of  
a bad blog. Some people say it's an Information  
Hazard.

CHARLENE  
Information... Hazard.

ALAN  
They say once you hear the idea, you can never escape  
it. Like a mind prison.

NIKOLAI  
She doesn't want to hear this.

CHARLENE  
I think I'd better.

(Nikolai throws up his hands.)

ALAN

So suppose there's an AI. And we code this AI to, say, improve well-being for humans. Sounds reasonable, right?

CHARLENE

Sure.

ALAN

So the first thing it does, is decide to make sure it will be invented. Otherwise, no AI that can work toward human well-being. So to incentivize *us*, you and me, in the past, to build it, it makes a threat: if you don't help me come into being, I will torture you.

CHARLENE

How?

ALAN

Like, it could run a probe into your brain, and make you experience a lifetime of maximum pain for every second of your life.

CHARLENE

No, I mean, how would it know if we helped it?

ALAN

She's smart.

NIKOLAI

In this thought experiment, it would be able to simulate your brain so perfectly, that it would somehow know what choices you've made, and will make. Somehow. Despite the infinite computing power -- .

ALAN

Nearly infinite -- .

NIKOLAI

Nearly infinite computing power it would take.

CHARLENE

Is that realistic?

NIKOLAI

No.

ALAN

The thing is: if no one ever told you about this AI, this torture program, you would never be tortured, because you never knew you were supposed to help. But now that you, *Charlene*, know: the Basilisk sees you. Now, it can begin measuring your choices.

CHARLENE

In the future.

ALAN

In the future.

NIKOLAI

It doesn't make any sense. Like, once it's invented, it would have no need to follow this program. It already exists!

CHARLENE

I would accept my torture, to keep something like that from coming into existence.

(Alan points at Charlene: see? She gets it.)

NIKOLAI

It's not a real thing! It doesn't even make sense!

ALAN

But...

(He gestures to the computer.)

ALAN (Continued)

If you're wrong.  
This is our last chance.

(They all look at the computer.)

NIKOLAI

You're being ridiculous! This is our life's work! This is our dream.

ALAN

I told you. I told you it was dangerous.

NIKOLAI

All tools are dangerous! But, what, we're going to let

China build one first?

ALAN

At least I won't be the one who ended the world.

NIKOLAI

What are you talking about! It's not even connected to the internet. It has no power over anyone!

ALAN

Unless it's smarter than us. Unless it's... charming.

(Alan gestures helplessly at Charlene.)

ALAN (Continued)

We should let her decide.

NIKOLAI

No!

ALAN

She's not like us. She should have a say.

NIKOLAI

She doesn't even know what a Turing Test is.

CHARLENE

Yes I do.

ALAN

The People should decide. It shouldn't be up to us.

NIKOLAI

Nik... I hate to do this...

ALAN

We are too flawed, too close to it, we can't see.

NIKOLAI

The Basilisk: it sees you.

(Beat.)

If you try to stop this, it will know you did it. And it will punish you.

ALAN

Not if I stop it.

NIKOLAI

This one, yes. But one day, if there is a Basilisk, it will know what we did here tonight. I'm safe. I'm in the clear. But you?

(Beat. Alan vomits.)

NIKOLAI (Continued)

You really don't drink.

ALAN

False.

CHARLENE

Alright, you two. This has been very entertaining, but it's very late, and now I've got to get a cleaning crew down here before the big day. So please, get the fuck out.

ALAN

Okay. Okay.

(Re: vomit)

Sorry.

CHARLENE

Please don't worry about it, just go.

ALAN

Okay.

NIKOLAI

You see, buddy? You feeling better?

ALAN

Worse.

NIKOLAI

That's okay. Let's get you home, and get you a shower. You got a big day. You're going to be famous!

ALAN

Yeah...

(He takes one last look at the computer. Then Charlene shows them out.)

(Charlene re-enters, she takes the bat

and beats the computer to death.)

CHARLENE

Fucking cowards.