

The Search for the Sapient Sabre

2005: American futurist Kurzweil coined the term “AnthroMech” meaning “biological AI”

2025: Production of the first AnthroMech announced successful

2032: Scientists started modifying the human brain using nanotechnology

2045: Mass production of AnthroMechs

2048: Mass destruction of AnthroMechs for unspecified reasons.

2068: Second mass production of AnthroMechs

2088: ...

I sat facing the door of the dormitory, waiting to discover my roommate for this semester. I was a Humanity Major, and this was the graduation course. Finally, the door opened and a tall guy came.

“Hi,” I reached out my hand for a shake, “I am Luddy Yhtomit.”

He paused for two seconds and grabbed mine. His flashing eyes met mine and I saw his virtual student card floating within my sight.

“036806...806...I’ll call you Bob then!”

He vocalized clearly, “I like that name.”

He didn’t say anything afterwards, but I saw from my right eye, he too was excited for tomorrow.

Our course was “AnthroMechs and Humans”. Each semester in 2088 had only one course, and each course lasted a week as we were expected to read every given online data beforehand (our nano-brain enabled us to process 60,000 words per minute, thus possible to read everything) and had discussions in class. Teaching us was Dr Liewzruk. He talked about how the two would merge together and become indistinguishable, and how AnthroMechs ought to replace humans. I jotted my notes on my internal monitor, but couldn’t help closing

my left eye to watch him giving speeches. Most, if not all humans had both of their eyes turned into a computer screen, as their brains were constructed by nanotechnology when they were just embryos. I “returned to civilization” when I was two years old, therefore only 30% of my brain was modified. I was already used to closing my right eye to see information, and closing my left eye for seeing my unaugmented surroundings, and opening them to see both.

On the last day of the course after he concluded the discussion, I raised my hand.

“I don’t understand, you claim that we can call an AnthroMech a human. However, we have emotions and individuality that are unique to human beings. AnthroMechs can never replicate that.” I doubted.

“Individuality comes from personal experiences, they are information. If AnthroMechs process the identical information, why can’t they replicate humans? The two can be the same if the memories are identical.” He responded.

“Not to me, the experience is never theirs.” I protested, “Look, you always claim that information is the key to being human, but humans are more than that. We are more than how our technology understands us.”

He was silent.

“Have you heard of the Mother Theorem?”. I incrementally raised my voice, “Humans grow in their family, we build up our humanity, emotions, and least of them, intelligence via interaction with their mother and father. We learn to feel, through the hugs of our mother. AnthroMechs can simulate the similar warmth of a hug, but the mother, the touch, are always missing.”

The class murmured in agreement and disagreement

“I agree with Luddy,” came Bob’s voice next to me, “I have knowledge and memories, combined with realistic senses. Yet I consider myself just a mere container of information.”

“Then tell me, Mr Yhtomit,” the doctor asked me solemnly, “how much of your so-called real memories are stored in your nano-brain? How much of your senses isn’t modified? When was the last time you write without using your nano-brain? What makes you so different from an AnthroMech?” I held my tongue, but I knew I differed from my fully brain-altered peers.

Dr Liewzruk stared at both of us and in an emotionless tone he announced, “I hope to see your answers in the exam.” and dismissed the class.

The exam question was “What is human? How human can an AnthroMech be?” We both failed and decided to visit Professor Acuman, the department head. He was with Dr Liewzruk. Dr Liewzruk saw me and announced “You two will have a make-up exam. Luddy, don’t reject probabilities of AnthroMechs next time.” Then he turned to Bob “You cited too much information. Try to state your opinions and feelings next time.” Once he was out of sight, Professor Acuman commented,

“He is still as stubborn as I rescued him forty years ago. Still claims that humans shall be replaced by AnthroMechs, like his peers. Last of his kind. You boys have something to ask?”

“What is unique about human beings?” I asked Professor He sat straight, steepling his fingers, raised his head and said “I don’t know. For nowadays humans behave exactly like AnthroMech and too rely on their nano-brain.”

“And Mr Yhtomit,” He stared at me, “tell me, why should humans be unique?”

I groaned, “We should be. Or else we will be easily replaced by AnthroMechs, or whatever emotionlessly artificial.”

He paused for a minute, then turned to Bob

“036806, Do you like the course?”

“I am Bob.” He vocalized.

“Owh, so you have a name now.” the professor was amazed, “Have you learnt anything new?”

“Professor, I have learnt every knowledge of mankind, but I cannot go further,”

“That’s okay. After all, we have only been teaching AnthroMechs to think, not to interact, to feel, to go beyond the nano-brain like humans.” Professor Acuman said in a soft tone. Something alarmed me: AnthroMech?

“Professor,” Bob said, “I am intelligent. I have human memories, that’s how they designed us. But I want to go beyond processing information. How to be human?” Acuman was silent for a few seconds, then glanced at both of us and announced, “There is a legend called Sapient Sabre. Whoever finds it gets to know everything about humans.”

Back in our room, I expressed my surprise.

“You are an AnthroMech? Why haven’t you told me!”

“I did.” he sat by the window in the dorm, “I am 036806. Third batch, produced in 2068, sixth of the production line.”

“As an AnthroMech, have you ever tried not to think, but touch meaningful things?” I swang my palm horizontally.

“Your hand? I don’t know.” He looked baffled

“Can you joke, cry, love, hate? Do you...have a soul?” I asked out of curiosity

“Can you? Do you, or your nano-brain?” He asked back.

No one spoke for a few seconds.

“We need the Sapient Sabre. No offence, but there must be attributes unique to humans but not to AnthroMechs.” I proposed.

“I will go with you!” He vocalized eagerly.

“Why do you need it? You are an AnthroMech.” I said, trying not to be mean.

He shouted at the top of his voice “Because I want to be more than simply a piece of advanced technology!” He sat down, muttered softly, “I want to be more than simply a piece of advanced technology.” Instantly he rose, “To the Anthropen Museum! I have just browsed online. ‘Sabre’ is a sword, ‘Sapient’ is intelligent. There is only one place we can find such a sword.”

We decided to go to the basement, for this is the only area they locked. There were many valuable yet unfamiliar objects, yet we quickly found our target. A crack of the ceiling above radiated light, illuminated the silver-grey stone below, and a sword, looked as same as in history lessons, inserted in the stone. We climbed and placed our hands on the hilt, giving in every strength we got. The sword departed from the stone that housed it. It reflected the light and seemingly enlightened us.

Suddenly stronger light flashed at us, an old guard stared at us speechless.

“We’ve found the Sapient Sabre!” I announced excitedly.

“Oh really,” responded the old guard, “do you feel yourself human?”

I was baffled. He then continued, “That is not the Sapient Sabre, but you can rule Britain now.” remarked the guard.

“I think the guard is right Luddy,” said Bob, disappointedly swinging the sword, “I couldn’t feel anything other than information flowing.”

“Where did we go so wrong?” mumbled Bob walking in circles. I was closing my right eye, revising the history of humans. I closed both of my eyes, contemplated with my original brain, believing that humans pass on subtle knowledge within their brain and genes. Humans buried a time capsule in 2040, and that was the last time capsule. I sat straight and shouted, “That’s it! The Mother Theorem states that parents always leave an inheritance. Sapient Sabre is no information, it is a metaphor! It is so unique to humans that they hide it in one place!” I pointed to a green spot outside to signal my nearest guess. I didn’t know why I guessed that way, perhaps it was that 70% of my brain.

Somewhere in the country park, I handed Bob a shovel and dug until we found something. A small yellow capsule appeared, a time capsule from 2040.

We opened the lid and what’s inside shocked us. It was hardly longer than a hand. A transparent stick, and a thinner blue stick inside. Pressing the button on the upper end triggered a tip on the opposite end. I felt something *deja vu* flowing from my natural brain, circulating in my hand. I trusted my guess and told Bob “It generates words.” Bob didn’t display disbelief, but was confused. Although I was dying to use it, I handed it to Bob. “Don’t think with your nano-brain, touch. Now stick your fingers together. Good. place it in the fingers.” I couldn’t figure out how Bob felt, but I saw the tears of relief when he moved his hand and a trace of blue glided through a plain surface. I bet he was no longer limited by his nano-brain anymore.

And on a smooth surface he wrote, “There is no 036806. The name is Bob. I think, therefore I was. I feel, therefore I am.”

(November 2020)