



Gracies Dinnertime Theatre

Volume 24, Issue 2, Cajun
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Member of
Hell's Kitchen
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A Dark, Safe Place

By Peter J. Lazarski

"Emily! Come downstairs honey, your breakfast is getting cold!"

A young girl runs down an unfamiliar stairway, through an unfamiliar hall and into an unfamiliar kitchen. Her mother stands before the sink washing, the sunlight from the windows causing her brown hair to shine. A plate with eggs and toast sits on the table, growing cold.

"How do you like your new room baby?"

Emily pokes at her eggs. "Its ok... too many boxes."

Wiping her hands on a towel, her mother replies, "You still need to finish unpacking."

Poking her eggs, she mumbles "Mom, why did we have to move?"

Hesitation. "Emily, I've already been over this with you. It's good that we moved. Change isn't always bad."

"I don't like it here."

"We haven't even been here an entire day. You'll learn to like it. Just think of all the new friends you can make. I saw plenty of children playing outside when we got here."

Emily stares at her eggs, impaled by four steel prongs.

"I tell you what you should do today. When you finish your breakfast, why don't you go explore outside? I have to straighten up around here. You wouldn't want to help me clean the house, would you?"

She shakes her head quickly left to right, sending her dark pigtails whipping back and forth. Her solid resolve melts into a smile.

Her mother laughs in reply. "Now there's the pretty girl I know! I bet you can find some lovely flowers in the woods behind the house. Just be careful, I don't want you to get lost and have to live with a raccoon!" Emily's mother places her hands over her face like a mask and growls at her daughter. Emily pops up from her seat, a giggling cork, and gleefully runs from her raccoon mother.

Raccoons of this size can run faster than little girls, so soon Emily is caught. They calm and relax.

"I won't live with a raccoon mom. I promise."

Emily skips through the yard, off to collect a bouquet for her mother. A warm August breeze greets her young face, blowing a few stray hairs away from her eyes. She defiantly confronts the breeze, running forward and laughing, her knees kicking her skirt back and forth like flapping wings. So she flies into the woods, flitting between tall trees. A tiny brook trickles by. "Come and race me," it burbles. "Can you run faster than me?" Emily takes the challenge, running along the brook and giggling as it bubbles. The flowers are all about, colored like gems, but so far they are too small. She waits for a suitable present for her mother. Meanwhile the brook continues its run, a never tiring partner for an energetic girl. "Keep running! Faster, you're almost winning!" Emily runs, faster and faster, aided by the wind she once challenged. A swift gust blows her stray hairs forward, leading her way along the tiny bank. She happily follows.

Before she can think, the wind stops and the brook ceases its run. The tiny rivulet flows into a small pond, too fat and large to move. Emily sees water lilies growing in the water, wonderful flowers to give to her mother. Rose pink, yellow as the sun, and cloud white; the flowers are beautiful. She reaches across the water, careful to stay dry, gathering what lovely lilies she can. The air grows still, punctuated only by Emily's merry little hum.

"Little girl..."

Emily stops and looks up wide-eyed. A cold breeze blows across the pond and down her spine. Where did the voice come from?

"Little girl, are you lost?"

Emily now sees what she had overlooked before while she had been enraptured by the pond and lilies. At the other side of this small pond there is a dark niche between large stones. The voice spoke from that dark spot. The air stiffens with silence and Emily clutches her lilies close to her chest.

"Is somebody there?"

A voice whispers forth like the breeze: old and dry, yet strangely playful, "Yes. What are you doing dear? Are you playing a game?"

"N- no..." she speaks haltingly, fear slowly creeping upon her. "I was getting flowers for my mother." Emily turns to look towards her house. A great dis-

tance and thickened forest separate her from her safe haven. She looks back to the darkened spot. The sun fails to reach there. Stone slabs and woodland growth keep the source of the voice hidden from the light, and a frightened little girl.

"I'm very sorry dear... I did not wish to frighten you. I am just playing a game."

Emily's curiosity ignites. "What game are you playing?"

"I am playing hide and seek. I have been waiting to be found for quite some time."

"Who are you hiding from?"

The voice whispers back, "That is a secret... do you like my lilies?"

Emily gasps and looks at her hands, dropping two pink lilies, sending twin ripples across the pond. "I'm really sorry! I didn't know they were yours..."

"Dear child, do not worry. I wish to give them to you as a gift." The wind returns to this strange grove, whistling as it blows across the surface of the pond. The lilies, resting atop the surface, are blown towards the bank where the young girl stands, forming a delicate collection of gentle hues. Emily stares to her feet at the many lilies. "Tha- thank you, mister."

"Take all the lilies you wish." Emily reaches down and collects the lilies she dropped, as well as a few more. The voice whispers back across the pond, "Would you please grant me the pleasure of knowing your name?"

She looks across the pond, startled. "My name?"

"Yes child, tell me your name."

"Emily."

The voice echoes hollowly like a tomb. "Emily... what a beautiful name."

Hands full of lilies, bolstering her spirit, Emily ventures with a question. "What is your name? Do you have one?"

The wind whispers cold in her ear. "I have a name, dear Emily, but that is also a secret. You can call me by a nickname if you like... you can call me Edward."

The young girl stares, dropping a yellow lily. "Edward is my daddy's name."

"Yes, sweet Emily..."

"Hi mom!"

"Emily! Don't sneak up on me like that, I almost dropped the broom... honey, those flowers are lovely. Are those all lilies?"

Emily proudly nods, "Yup!"

"I love lilies, Emily, how thoughtful of you. Where did you get them all?"

"A friend gave them to me."

"All these pretty flowers and you made a friend! It sounds to me like you've had a good day. Let's bring those in the kitchen and you can tell me about your new friend. I'll get a nice vase..."

"He was playing hide and seek and I found him. He gave me all of the prettiest lilies, and he said I can come back for more tomorrow."

Placing a vase from the cupboard on the counter, her mother stops for a moment and looks at her daughter.

"Emily, how old is your friend?"

"He didn't tell me."

"Well, how old did he look? What did he look like?"

"I couldn't see him, he was hiding in the dark."

The mother puts down the flowers and kneels before her daughter. She takes her daughter's hands in hers.

"Where did you meet this person?"

"In the woods... he was hiding in a cave."

"Emily, did he do anything to you? Did he touch you?" Tears begin to form at the corners of the mother's eyes.

"No mommy, Edward is nice, he gave me those flowers..."

"Emily, did you see your father in the woods? Did he give you the flowers?" Her shoulders tremble and her grip on the young girl's hands tightens.

"No mommy," Emily begins to cry. "You're hurting me!"

Emily's mother stands and approaches the phone. Her voice is somewhere between a sob and a shout. "I have to call the police! Damn it Edward! Why can't you leave us alone?"

"It wasn't daddy!" Emily shouts, "Edward is nice! He wants to be my friend..."

The mother turns to her daughter. "Emily, you are not to go into those woods again! Do you hear me? If your father took you away from me I don't know what might happen!"

"You told me to make friends! I made a friend and you hate me now! I hate this house! I hate you!" The little girl leaves tears hanging in the air as she charges past her mother, up the stairs to her room. Her sobbing is punctuated by the loudest slams a little girl can make running up a stairway.

"Emily! I don't hate you honey, come down, please..."

Her bedroom door slams.

Emily's mother cries at her kitchen table, wondering what and when things went wrong. Beautiful lilies lay at rest on the counter until they are stirred by a cold breeze.

"Mommy..."

She sits up with a start, hearing her daughter's voice from outside the window.

"Emily? I'm sorry honey... what are you doing?"

The wind circles the ends of the mother's hair.

"Mommy! Come catch me!"

"Emily, where are you?" The mother stands and looks for her daughter. She is nowhere to be seen.

"Edward wants to see you mommy! Come catch me!"

The mother runs, frantic, to the back door. "Emily! Don't go in the woods!" Her daughter is nowhere in sight; only her sweet laughter remains hanging in the breeze.

"Emily!"

The mother runs to the woods, following the trail of her daughter's sound, playfully beckoning from further down a tiny brook.

"Emily, come back! Emily!"

The frightened mother runs onward. She tires but keeps running, the wind blowing against her like a wall of air, slowing her pursuit of her lost daughter.

The wind stops. Emily's calling has ceased, leaving her mother alone before a small pond fed by a brook that now flows silently. The air grows cold and darkens, a cloud concealing the evening sun.

Her mother surveys her silent surroundings. The growth has thickened with shadows, her home nowhere in sight. Colorful lilies rest still on the pond. Across the way is a shadow darker than the rest, a den made by the large surrounding stones. A weak breeze flows forth from across the pond, rhythmic like breathing.

"Sarah..."

A mother's fear becomes a solid rock of anger.

"Edward, you goddamned bastard! What have you done to my daughter?"

"Emily lies safe at home, crying on her bed. I wanted to meet you, Sarah."

"Don't lie to me, you-" Sarah's reply is cut short by a stirring in the shadows. A long, twisted finger, followed by a hand, reaches out of the dark. Dust falls from the joints as they contort and tense. Sarah gasps, taking a sharp breath of cold, dead air. "You're not my husband..."

"I would not lie to you, dear Sarah..." The palm of the twisted hand turns upward in a welcoming posture. "I know your lovely Emily is at home, safe in bed, almost asleep by now."

"But I heard my daughter calling..."

"I called you here, lovely, beautiful, graceful Sarah. I wanted to see you."

These words crawl over Sarah, revolting her ears and flesh as their intent condenses upon her...

"Please, come take my hand."

A woman's screams echo through the forest.

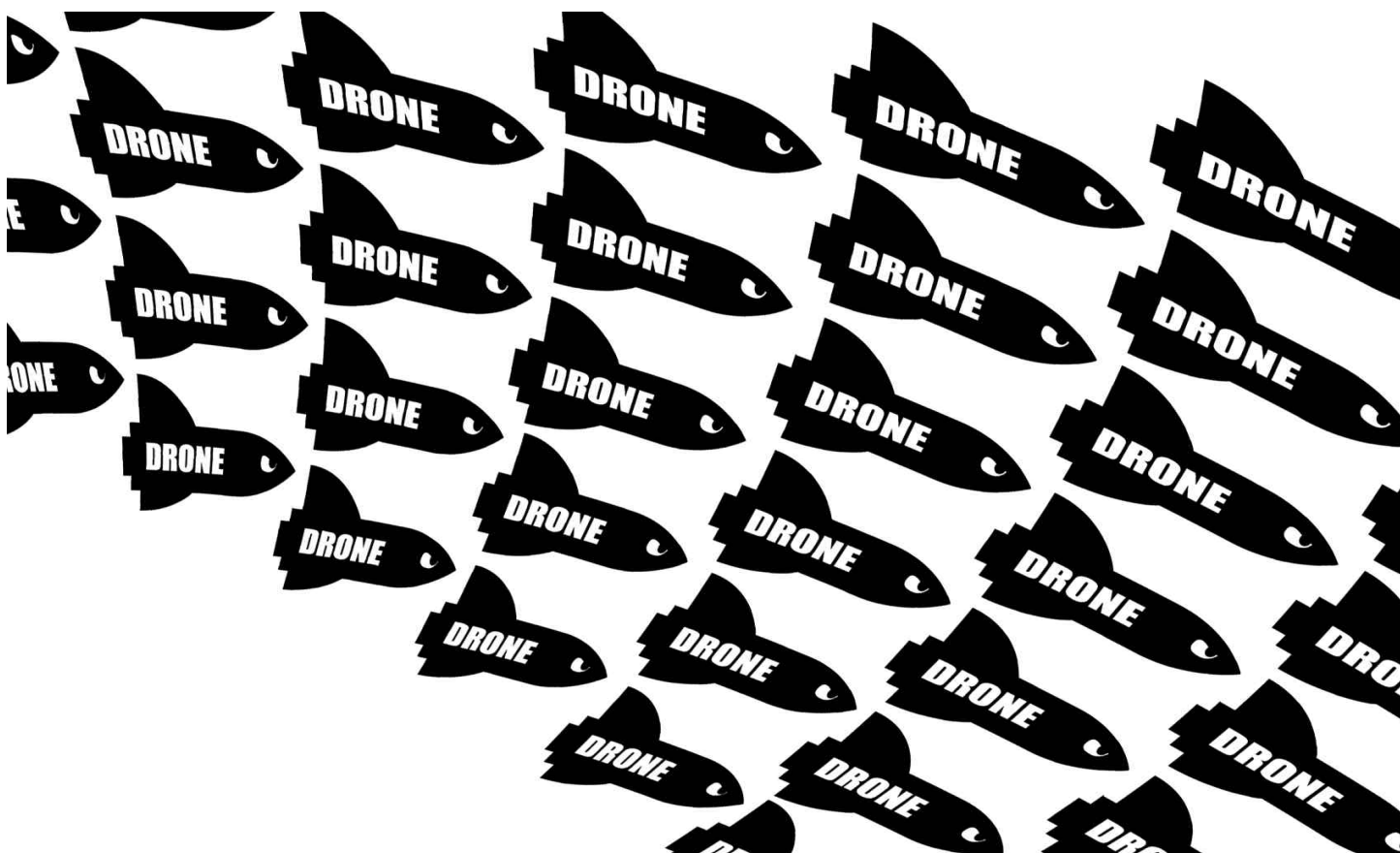
P o e t r y

by Gary Hoffmann

how often have I sat out here
wishing you were with me?
watching the sun drifting slowly to
sleep
and my tea growing cold?

A flock of sparrows flies;
a light breeze and the moon smiles
in empathy.
she would comfort me,
but she's also separated from her love.
how many light-seconds of silence?
a warm breeze and the soft caress
of sunlight on the tress.

The moon dances slowly
as the light of day disappears;
the sun has soon been banished
and the purple flowers wilt and die.
a single cricket celebrates,
singing louder than a choir of angels
and more sweetly.



The Drone's Gonna Get You!

By **Rocko Bonaparte**

Back in the day, if you didn't watch out, the Malarkey was gonna get you. Little kids were threatened with being taken away by gypsies. And then there's the boogie monster. Not the one that likes to get down with the wimmens, if you know what I mean. So now we have these predators to deal with. I imagine soon, parents will warn their kids to watch out where they play. After all, would you want your children to be hit with a hellfire missile? They better not raise a ruckus in the car, or the US might suspect them terrorists.

The Predator UAV is a new wonder weapon. It is an UnArmed Vehicle, developed for surveillance. It is so good at reconnaissance that some of its subjects have been known to explode while being watched. Perhaps "reconnaissance in force" is more suitable, the kind that tanks have been known to do ("You have been scouted!" <BOOM!>). Well, the truth is these things have weapons, too. The hellfire missile was made popular by the Apache helicopter, which it was specially made for. The helicopter paints a laser dot on the target, and the missile looks for this. As long as the laser can see the target, the missile can. Hellfires have

been modified down through four generations, and can now be targeted with ground forces, or a secondary helicopter.

To give an impression on how new it is for a predator to fire a hellfire missile, the test was run on February 21, 2001. The predator was both the target and the launch platform. This was also true on November 5, when one of these things put a missile in a car full of Al Qaeda suspects. It was okay that they were only suspects, because it was a machine that killed them. The human at the controls was just politely guiding it around the sights of Yemen.

Of course, the drone was human-operated in this case. However, making things autonomous has crossed many minds. To do this properly would require pushing the AI spectrum. Of course, there could be muck-ups. But the idea is impressive enough. Imagine loading Osama Bin Laden's mugshot into one of these things and letting it go to town. In a way, it's kind of scary. Or what about using these things for law enforcement? It could potentially be cheaper than having a helicopter available all the time. Or how about

just for monitoring traffic in Los Angeles? So let's look at Los Angeles. Somewhere along route 5 where it merges with something else, turns left, splits off, and merges with two other routes at the same time, there's probably a bottleneck. So let's say the Gonzales' are heading out to the beach. It's a family of mom, dad, brother, and sister. The kids are fresh out of kindergarten; still innocent, but terribly obnoxious. Their parents haven't quarreled and gone through a divorce yet, so they don't really have the scar tissue to deal with. So they're stuck at this particular bottleneck in Los Angeles. Little Juan's bored, and starts pulling on little Juanita's hair, whose voice then suddenly shifts five octaves. Mr. Gonzales, ticked off to no end, screams, "If you don't stop that right now, the Predator is going to get you!" "There's no such thing as the Predator!" Juan will say.

"Oh there is, and it will blow us all up if you don't shut up." Juan, in defiance, wrapped his beach towel over his head. "Look Juanita, I'm a terrrrrist! The Predator is gonna get me!" "Don't do that!" His mother will tell them, but it'll be too late. They can hear the missile slicing the air behind them for just a moment, and their little BMW gets blown straight into the ocean.

So here's another novel idea. In 2005, on Judgement Day, a drone becomes fully aware and launches its payload at America's enemies abroad. Their retaliatory strike destroys the drone's human enemies at home. The ensuing armageddon ends with more than three billion human lives lost. In 2029 John Conner leads the human forces in victories upon the Predator

system, causing it to predict its downfall. Consequently, it sends a drone into the past (1984) to strike at John Conner's mother before she can birth him. John Connor, in the future, sends a protector, Kyle Reese, to protect his mother. So Kyle and the drone show up at the same time, and end up offing each other. However, Kyle manages to make sex with Sarah Conner before his time is up. Write one down for the home team.

In 1991, another drone is sent to kill John as a little boy. But John as a big boy foresees this and sends a friendly, happy drone to protect his younger self. Meanwhile, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. uncovers the remains of the first drone and sets about toying with it. Miles Dyson drums up a revolutionary new CPU from it, but ends up blowing the whole place to the ground after the happy drone gives him some insights on the future. The happy drone ends up destroying the more advanced drone in between random shooting sprees in Los Angeles traffic. It destroys itself to preserve its secrets from humanity.

With a little imagination, it's clear what these little drones are capable of. They'll kill babies! Did you read that? B-A-B-I-E-S! Welcome to the new, silicon face of the American arsenal, or something. Then again, it might not be so bad if it cleans up traffic a little. It's obvious these things aren't going away. The big issue is what they'll do once we they're done converting Al Qaeda into little craters.

A Trick with Imaginary Smoke and Mirrors

By Matt Nicole

Wait wait wait. You're getting ahead of me. Let me back it up a second and start from the beginning. I was sitting in Java Wally's, studying like all good students do in the diverse learning atmosphere that is RIT's J.Wally's, when I overheard a statement that sparked a shift in paradigm.

Again I'm going to have to back up a bit for you. I used to be addicted to the internet. Not the porn/jerk-off/deviant side of it (although a good money shot now and then never hurt anyone), but the chat side. I hate people, but I love individuals more than anything. I

have friends all over the world (real ones that I actually met, not ones I carpooled with on our highway.information.super) and could chat with those friends 24 hours a day when I was online. It was awesome. I was whole. I could keep in touch with my friends, never lost contact. My away messages would let people know where I was at all times. No one had to wonder where I was, not even for 2 minutes.

Then I heard the statement that forever changed me. It's something that, to this day, I can't believe I

was lucky enough to hear. I tell you this now with a bit of small print[@].

"I really need to boost my online presence."

I stopped what I was doing at the time (playing out every possible tic-tac-toe game with myself over and over) and stared at the big piñata shark in J.Wally's. Its beautiful eyes are facing into the corner of the room, so I stared into its ass. The shark is the quintessential piñata. Its shape maximizes sugared-candy holding while at the same time minimizes the number of fluke horizontal shots on the piñata[&].

I had an epiphany.

Many times before I had attempted to quit using the chat programs, or at least trim down on the number of hours I used them, with no success. This time was not like those times at all. With that one statement I realized we really are going to hell. 'We' being anything with our wiring and thought processes. What successful race (the human race (that being an example of a race (not necessarily successful))) would ever strive to minimize physical contact with other beings of that same race.

This paragraph was going to be about how only people that fuck have kids. Then, since only smart people have computers and they're not fucking each other as much anymore we stop producing smart people at a high rate. Then I remembered the smart people can make clones of themselves to keep the race going. No one gets to bump uglies in the clone world, and we just can't have that. So remember, bumping uglies is not only fun, it's good for your race.

At first the fact that we're going to hell made me sad...very sad. I was staring into the ass of a paper-mache shark when I came to the realization that our smartest people are having less and less personal (in the flesh) contact with other smart people because of the convenience of the internet. The only time they

came in contact with people of normal intelligence was when they would go to the corner 7-11 to buy more soda and microwave burritos, the fuel of all good clones, from the graveyard-shift working owner of this fine 7-11 franchise[^].

The shark's paper anus (probably made out of un-read Reporter Magazines) then speaks to me in a voice so incredibly clear I could see my entire life from beginning to end on the table in front of me, manifested as a rubber band. The paper anus then said:

"You're a real asshat dude. If you think that the smart people are the best people you're an asshole, no pun intended. Just realize this and only this: Normal people, as you called them, perform the in-and-out regularly. They are happy and they reproduce more normal people. The reason there are so many more dumb people in the world is because they're not hell-bent on making machines to kill each other. The smart people just fuck it up for everyone. Go into the world now young disciple and never forget the words of our lord[%]..."

He paused for only a second. Before that second had run its course a ninja with a samurai sword jumped between me and my rubber band. With one enormously-small stroke, the ninja wounded my master.

Six hours later my master died a very honorable death.

I had seen his point and it was only magnified by the fact that he was not able to put it into words in front of me. I was able to create the words myself. I was able to create my own meaning. I was able to know the truth.

The truth is [swipe of samurai sword].

[@] These are sacred words, meant for my ears. I shall never again say them (unless in hilarious joke form, where I tear into the new-age-guppiewannabe-retro kid).

[&] Common knowledge put here for people with no knowledge of piñatas^{*}: The horizontal swing has been proven to be the most effective swing technique when attempting to smash a piñata.

^{*} Why would you read this in the first place if you know nothing about piñatas?

[^] Said franchise is usually purchased with the savings of the owner's entire village.

[%] "Our Lord" is actually the staple, because it holds together all pieces of paper[#].

[#] Many have called for the paperclip to be viewed on an equal level as the staple. They are idiots and are killed in the name of our Lord, the staple, immediately.

The Universe Made Me Do It

By Jon Byrd

It's not my fault. Everyone has heard it before, my parents didn't treat me right, and I was dropped on my head as a child. Everyone has an excuse for the things they do. Any way that they goof up, it is always merely the consequences of some thing else, never ever their fault. And as much as I hate to admit it, it's all true.

Just like every great idea of our time, this theory is based on an idea from a movie, namely the movie *Pi*. "1. Mathematics is the language of nature. 2. Everything around us can be represented and understood through numbers. 3. If you graph these numbers, patterns emerge. Therefore: There are patterns everywhere in nature."

Now it's not so much the actual mathematics – numbers and graphing – that caught my attention. But the last part, "There are patterns everywhere in nature," is what piqued my interest.

Nothing is truly random; everything that appears random is merely a reaction that takes place with factors that we do not take into account. And to back this up we once again go back to the source of all intellectual knowledge, Hollywood.

Let us browse the movie database and pull up the movie *Jurassic Park*. We look at the scene where Malcolm is talking to that female paleontologist; he is explaining his theory of chaos. The drops of water follow different paths down the back of her hand. Why? Because of millions of tiny imperfections in the skin, that's why.

But what if we had data on all of those millions of imperfections? What if we knew how the water droplet would react to all of those imperfections? We would be able to predict with absolute 100% certainty where the water would travel.

Everything that seems random can be applied to this theory: weather patters, geographical disturbances, and even the game plinko. What makes free will any different? What is a thought, exactly? What is a decision? What goes on at the sub-molecular level inside our brain to produce a thought or decision? Most people define free will as the ability to make a choice.

free will (n.)

The ability or discretion to choose; free choice: *chose to remain behind of my own free will*. The power of making free choices that are unconstrained by external circumstances or by an agency such as fate or divine will.

Free will is seemingly random thoughts or actions, but for a decision to take place, many factors are brought into account. For any decision, a person takes several things into consideration, and makes a choice based on the interpretation of the data.

It is an insanely complex reaction inside of our bodies with factors that we cannot even begin to comprehend, such as chemical balances, moods, health, mindset, etc., all of which are hard to define at best. Given that what you decide to do is influenced by a nearly infinite number of factors, it follows that what you decide to do is merely the output of a very complex equation.

If all emotions and decisions are influenced by a finite amount of factors, then it is logical to assume that if you know of all the factors, you can predict the solution. We do have free will, but we have the free will to make the choices that are predetermined due to the circumstances.

Does that mean I believe in fate? Yes and no. Do I have free will? Of course I do. No one is forcing me to write this article. But the factors that were taken into account when I sat down at my computer would invariably result in this article.

It's like the paradox of the Bible. We have free will, yet God knows everything. Sure we have free will, but only the free will to decide to do what God already knows what we are going to do.

Now, do we have free will? Or is everything we do preordained by god? Do we decide our actions? Or is everything we do due to the result of a very complex equation that goes on the sub-molecular level? Somehow it manages to be both at the same time.

This theory can also be taken into account if we think about what I call "true" AI. I'm not talking about the kind of AI where computer nerds hover over their

computers in their mom's basements and drool over the "Three difficulty levels of AI!!!" that comes standard in their new Age of Empires game.

I'm talking about a computer that if you could dress it up in a human suit, it would look and act like your average Joe on the street. A la terminator, only without the muscles and the need to eliminate all people named Connor.

A computer that can make a decision based on data. It would look like free will, but only because we couldn't see the underlying program driving the machine's decision-making process.

A decision only appears to be free will because we cannot see the chemical and physical reactions in the body and brain that produce it. I'm not saying it's practically possible to predict a person's decision

before they make it; I'm saying it's theoretically possible.

So it's all true. Billions of years of reactions and counter-reactions have lead to this, me sitting behind my desk writing about my ideas on free will. This article is the culmination of an infinite number of unseen factors following an equation on the sub-molecular level.

So go ahead and do whatever you want to do with your life. The cosmos may have already planned out your decisions, your life from birth to death. But thankfully whatever the universe makes you decide, you were going to do that anyway.

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This is Gracies Dinnertime Theatre, a magazine of satire, literature, poetry and art. We publish out of Rochester, NY but we have readers around the globe. We exist as a medium for your expression and invite you to contribute.

Anyone is welcome to submit.

gdt@hellskitchen.org



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Publisher: C. Diablo

Editors:

Dan Conley
Gary Hoffmann
Peter Lazarski

Layout:

Adam Fletcher

Writers:

Rocko Bonaparte
Matt Nicole

Visuals:

Nicole Killian

Contributors:

Jon Byrd

Printer Daemons:

Mike Fisher
Matthew Denker
Peter Gravelle

Musical Inspiration:

The soothing sound of Danny Wegman sniffing cocaine off the lithe buttocks of a prostitute

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Contact us at gdt@hellskitchen.org or by regular mail at:

Gracies Dinnertime Theatre
92 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5604