Unexpected Consequences

Ed hit the enter key for the hundredth time. He could not understand it, he had been using the same binary codes since the very first time he had switched on his own main frame. Algorithms to him were as easy as 1-2-3, and he could solve an encrypted message without so much as blinking. Why couldn't he get this to work? One thing was certain - if he couldn't find the correct dose the consequence would be death.

The lights in the lab had sprung into life, activated by the automatic sensors that detected the onset of dusk. Unaffected as he had always been by temperature, even Ed could sense that the night would be a cold one. A mist had started to form; hanging low to the ground, covering the landscape outside the laboratory windows in a damp and eerie shroud. He glanced at the clock, logging the information - 23 minutes and 3 seconds until 5pm. Ed was not aware of any other life in the building except for that of his sedentary companion.

He understood that it was customary for human employees to vacate the workplace promptly at 4pm on a Friday, although he could not make full sense of this. His inherent demand for logic was unable to process the significance of that extra hour at the end of a Friday. He calculated that tomorrow was Saturday - the first day of the weekend - but one day had the same value as any other for him.

Ed was aware that time was running out; he estimated little more than an hour before the life would drain from the inventor's body. After that, he knew that all the computer technology in the world would be redundant. He had been able to determine the cause of the problem, that had been simple - solving it on the other hand was proving much more baffling.

The clock on the wall continued to mark the passing of time, it's slow, rhythmical ticking echoing into the silence. Countless lines of figures continued to scroll at lightning speed on the monitor. Figures which to some may have been random and non-sensical, but which, to Ed, made perfect sense.

If he could just get these medicinal doses correct. He had administered exactly the appropriate levels, in precisely measured time increments, so why was there still no response? Ed was beginning to ascertain that human response was not always wholly in line with scientific predictions. The complexity of the human body could not always be fully explained, it seemed. Ed looked at the machines, bleeping to acknowledge the continuation of life - for the time being there was still a margin of probability. Some might call it a hope; but Ed was not programmed to feel hope or faith.

The stiffening in his joints signified the restricted movement that Ed's task had required. He was frozen to the spot as his digits moved diligently across the keys like a pianist performing a complex masterpiece; he had worked tirelessly and methodically as he tried to rectify the unforeseen effect of his actions.

Categorically, he had not predicted this outcome. The procedure had been a simple one; one which should have had little, or no, physical impact. Anaesthetise, insert, awaken.

Ed took a moment to internally re-compute. He had one last variable to try. One last crack at the code, before the lid was blown off the entire project and he and Professor Simpson were quite literally lost forever.

Ed entered the final code and hit 'return' with a flourish that he hadn't known he possessed. Momentarily the computer screen froze, followed by an inky blackness that lingered for an unusually long time. If Ed hadn't known better, he would have confirmed a sense of anticipation, of tension - emotions of which he had no experience. How did he know what tension felt like? How did he know what any emotion felt like? Of course, he fully understood the dictionary definition of such human responses to outside stimuli - but to have a 'feeling?'

Suddenly, the computer screen sprang into life. The black screen lit up with a myriad of colours; jade green, ruby red and sapphire blue, before the adjacent machines seemed to simultaneously spring into life, together with their attached patient. Professor Simpson drew a sharp intake of breath - more of a gasp - as he regained consciousness. The machine that had previously been so crucial to life moments before, was now rendered unnecessary. The Professor tried frantically to remove the tubes from his arm, the tubes that continued to administer the drugs that had saved his life. Ed turned to his creator and requested that he remain still, in the monotone voice with which he had been programmed. The Professor sank back onto the laboratory bench, calming slowly, as the realisation that he was alive began to register in his confused mind.

"Am I safe?" asked the Professor, in a voice that was barely a whisper.

"You are now classified as, 'threat to life removed'," responded Ed. "Although the microchip transplant was unsuccessful."

The Professor looked at his saviour, the letters E.D printed clearly on his torso in a bold, black font; the letters that stood for 'Electronic Device.' He had been so proud of Ed when he had created him. A fully functioning robot that would revolutionise the world of technology. Of course, the entire project had been top secret - he hadn't wanted to run the risk of his ideas being stolen before they were fully complete. The medical knowledge with which he had programmed Ed had been comprehensive enough to make the insertion of the microchip into his own neck a low-risk procedure. The chip that would enable man and

machine to be as one. For thoughts, feelings and data to be seamlessly transferred between the two.

Ed looked at the Professor. He knew that the transplant had failed. He understood that his human creator had been close to extinction, which would ultimately have led to his own demise. What he couldn't understand was the onset of feelings that had crept into his hard drive - feelings that had no electronic source.