

Robert J. Preston, Ph.D
By Dawn Abraham

I woke up at 9:00 a.m., same as always. Rubbing the familiar sleet out of my eyes, I threw on a bathrobe and went downstairs to get my breakfast. On the table, I found a still-warm plate of gingerbread cookies waiting for me, along with a mug of hot chocolate. I smiled. They had remembered my favourite Christmas treat. As I walked to the table, I noticed a new book on the counter. *Eragon*, by Christopher Paolini. It seemed interesting, so I took it off the counter to read while I ate. The snow falling outside the window was pretty, but I was glad I was warm inside my house.

After I finished eating and read the first couple of chapters, I checked my clock. 9:50. I was in no danger of being late. After brushing my teeth in the bathroom, I went upstairs to change. Even though my work was in my study, I still liked to be professional. I scanned through my closet. Casual, PJs, fancy... but I took a plain tweed suit with patches at the elbows, along with my favourite pair of slacks. After putting on my glasses, a quick check in the mirror reassured me that I looked up to standard. As I snapped my watch around my wrist, I noticed the time again. Three more minutes until recess. I still had time. I went downstairs, all the way down to the basement, where my study was located. I opened the door and sat down at my desk. One more minute left, so I checked everything. Green, red, blue, and black pens, marking guides, folders, school schedule, and photocopier, all in perfect order. I took a glance at my gold plaque on the

door: ROBERT J. PRESTON, Ph. D. I ignored the other lines. I never liked to think about the other lines. And work starts in 3...2...1...

A stack of folders appeared on the right of my desk. It was the last day of school before the three-week holiday break, so the pile was extra-large today. The first file was kindergarten math tests. Easy, and I finished them all in just 5 minutes. I placed the folder on the left side of my desk, and it vanished, marks and all, to be emailed to the parents of the students. Next up were the grade 4 science unit finals. These took a bit longer, and as I worked, more and more file folders appeared on the stack. Third grade social, seventh grade French... it just kept on coming. Every once in a while, I would glance at my wristwatch. 10:30, 11:20, and finally, 11:34. Lunch break. I went upstairs to the kitchen and heated up the Kraft dinner on the table in the microwave. This time, I ate my meal in the living room, close to the window. It had stopped snowing, and the individual crystals glittered in the sun. It was a cold, sleek beauty that wasn't interrupted with any other buildings, other than my own house. The calm of pure silence had no interruptions by strident honks or angry shouts. A wonderful environment to read and eat in peace. I allowed myself to enjoy this bliss, and forgot about my marking for a while.

6:47, and I only had one more folder left. I always saved the written assignments for last, and I was curious about which topics the ninth-graders had chosen for their English essays. This time, the idea was to choose a crisis from any time in history and write about what you would do about it. As I marked, I noticed that almost all of the topics chosen were from the extremely far past. The tragic happenings of World Wars 1

and 2 were the prevalent choices; 38 of the 50 students had chosen them. A few had been more original, using the Rwandan genocide, 9/11, and ISIS for their topics. But even the more recent ones, like the Syrian migrant crisis, had happened over six decades ago. At the very end, I found a topic that was much more recent than all of the others, and it shocked me to the point that I dropped my pen. The title was, "The Unfairness of the AI" by Chelsey Rhodes. AI were seen mainly as a benefit to society, not a crisis! And not just that... no, don't think about that! Just mark it, stuff it in the folder, and put it on the left side! But I couldn't stop thinking about it. Almost without a thought, I marked the entire essay, but even after I marked it, I couldn't bear to put it into the folder. If anything, I wanted to keep it more than ever. So I did something I had never done before. I walked over to the photocopier, copied the entire essay, and put the original into the file. Then, I put the folder on the left side of the desk and watched it disappear.

It was 9:45, and I had read Rhodes's essay seven times on my living room couch. Multiple times, I had tried to shred it to pieces, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I flipped through it again. Her main point was that it was unfair that AI had to do many of the tasks that humans were perfectly able to do on their own. It wasn't ethical, she said, for AI to be created for the one purpose of serving humans. Even if they weren't real, they had thoughts and wants and beliefs just like humans. Her conclusion was that people should stop creating AI, and the ones in existence should be set free. I chuckled at that last part, for it was the one flaw in the entire essay. Even if people agreed with Rhodes, what would happen to the existing AI? There were hundreds of AI being used all over, and that number increased by the day. Who would do all of the jobs that the AI do? If the

AI were set free, where would they go? They couldn't live in society; they didn't even have bodies! And if they were deleted, that would completely cancel out the 'ethics' in her whole plan! It was a paradox with no good solution! I laughed again and threw it onto the coffee table. I left my minestrone soup untouched and leaped up the stairs two at a time to my room. I was going to go to sleep in fifteen minutes, and I wanted to be as cozy as possible.

This again. It was 9:57, and I was nervous once more. Every time, right before one of the big school breaks, no matter how many times I steeled myself, I always got nervous. This time, I wasn't going to sleep for one night or two or even three days. Christmas break meant complete nothingness for a near month. Each time, I became anxious that this time, I wouldn't wake up again. But every time, my fear was proven wrong, and I would get up for another day. But the essay that girl had written caused me to be more agitated than usual... I checked my bedroom clock. 9:58. Get a grip, I told myself. They need me. They take care of me. They gave me a nice house, good meals every day, and access to all kinds of entertainment. If I finish my book, I get a new one. If I want something, I only need to write it down, leave it on the counter, and it will show up the next day! They wouldn't give me all of this if they didn't need me, so stop mulling over it! I checked the clock again. 9:59. I braced myself, got comfortable, and silently counted down. 19, 18, the outside of my house is gone....15, 14, my study has already disappeared....11, 10, the main floor has vanished completely.....7, 6, and my bedroom starts to fade. From the floor to the ceiling, as my room dissipates, I have my last thoughts....

As far as most would say, my life is pretty much perfect. I get delicious meals, anything I could possibly want, and my only job is to mark tests and homework assignments. The only thing is, it isn't a life. My last thought, while I and my world vanishes, is of the plaque on my study door. The entire sign reads:

ROBERT J. PRESTON, Ph.D

GK-9 MAI #47

Grade K-9 Marking Artificial Intelligence #47

It isn't a life, because I'm not even alive.