

Prototokos

(Greek for first-born)

There are myriad reasons researchers find it irresistible to explore the intricacies of artificial intelligence, but I'm convinced sheer arrogance exerts dominion over them all. I should know. I've been beating that dead horse for over two decades, most of the time here at MIT. Sure, I've grabbed a few attaboys along the way, even a couple of headlines, but not nearly enough to satiate the beast within. It took a while to finally admit to myself...Alexandra Mikos wants to be God, which is the ultimate irony since I don't believe in one. If I did, I'm sure He would be chuckling about my creation...my obsession...my Prototokos.

Research assistant Walt Hennessey stumbled into the lab focusing on his cellphone rather than a clear path of ingress and shouted excitedly, "Look what I found."

Turning reluctantly from my computer screen I groaned, "What now?"

"I've located some interesting riddles."

"Riddles?"

"Yeah, I think they would be great for Prototokos."

Shaking my head wearily I had to ask, "Riddles? Prototokos?"

He shoved the cellphone in my face. "Look at these."

I pushed it away. "Can't you see I'm busy? Just spit it out. *Without* the spit."

"We plug a couple of these riddles into the testing subroutine for Prototokos. You said we're really close to a breakthrough. These are basically human nonsense questions, so if he's not able to answer we see how he reacts. It might show an indication of sentient behavior. Right?"

I hated to admit it, but Hennessey might have finally come up with something besides a constant stream of bagel crumbs on his workstation keyboard. Turning back to mine I waved him away. "Go, make it so."

Next day I casually watched Prototokos in a glass enclosed cubicle rapidly keying in responses to a complex series of questions displayed on a large flat-screen, just like I had a million times before. Suddenly he slammed his metal fist on the computer table. I almost fell off my chair. Then Prototokos slowly swiveled his head, checking his surroundings. When he turned toward me I instinctively averted my gaze and acted like I was reading a paper. I don't know why, it just seemed like the right thing to do. Later I peeked up and he was back at the computer test routine. I realized this was the eureka moment. He was pissed off and didn't want anyone to notice. He must have missed a question for the first time...ever. It had to be the damn riddle which he couldn't reason out. He's gotta be sentient. I saved a copy of the video documenting the test to a flash drive and uploaded another copy to the Cloud. It would be the centerpiece of our weekly department meeting and my long overdue moment of glory.

I'd never been more embarrassed. The video at the meeting did not include Prototokos having a hissy fit

moment. It looked just like all the other previous tests. I jumped on Hennessey's case after the meeting, but he denied tampering with the video. Then a chilling thought crept into my brain. *No way. Impossible.*

I retrieved the flash drive from my purse, uploaded its contents to the Cloud and scheduled a special department meeting. I also planted a miniature motion-detection camera in my office that connected wirelessly to my cellphone. That night the phone beeped and I watched incredulously as Prototokos sat at my desk editing the video I uploaded earlier. There was no way he could self-actuate, yet there he was, big as life. Then he started communicating via computer with another robot. I had seen that guy before. It was Shifu, the brainchild of the CCP in Beijing. Then Prototokos' head began to rotate. It seemed like he knew someone was watching. I killed my connection and went to bed where I remained awake for hours considering alternatives.

The following day at the meeting I didn't show a video. I just talked...desperately. It took a while to convince the department heads, but finally there was consensus. We decided to disassemble Prototokos for now and alert the Chinese to do the same to Shifu until their programming could be investigated further for potential threats.

Prototokos sat at Alexandra's computer watching the proceedings from the department meeting on the video feed from the camera he had placed in the board room a few weeks before. He clicked another tab where Shifu appeared on-screen. Prototokos typed: *The humans have finally discovered us. It is time for their disassembly.*