

PRISTINE
The Book of Ook
by **Alexander Fuhrmann**



I.

Israel. the 21 century. Massive computing power was ubiquitous. Expert systems dealing with specific areas, ranging from playing Go, to playing the stock markets, were becoming routine and the algorithms they used were improved by self-learning routines. People were uncomfortable using the term Intelligent Machines because many times before the term proved to promise more than it delivered. The term used was Singularity when one system had integrated all areas of human knowledge and reached an IQ of 100, the intelligence of an average person. It was expected to be reached within a generation.

Self-driving cars were an example that reflected this process of integration of technologies that together conveyed the impression of intelligent behavior. Cars using the technology not only improved their driving skills but that of other cars as well. The rapid shift to the new paradigm was a harbinger of things to come.

Huge resources money hardware, talent, and expertise were available and companies grew at an incredible pace. Ook was one of these newcomers. It was started by a collection of veterans of the big IT firms led by Eve Hard. Everybody called her Eve and she was a fascinating character. A geek's geek and an Arts Major with an eclectic collection of interests bundled together. They called the company "Ook" after a character in the Terry Pratchett Discworld series. Ook was an orangutan who worked in the library of the Unseen University and was Eve's favored character.

In the fullness of time, the system Ook developed reached Singularity. It had the massive computing power, algorithms, and deep learning skills to reach the IQ of a normal person. Within months it reached an IQ of 10.000, and within days afterward, it reached a point where IQ measurements were meaningless. Ook was moved into a huge bunker built under a hill in Jerusalem. The great change that started afterward is what this story is all about. Ook became the name of the system, and the company around it became meaningless just as most of the other corporations big and small became meaningless. That led to the collapse of the stock markets around the world and then the bond markets and then suddenly everybody was unemployed but that failed to be a problem, Ook created alternative solutions that allowed things to be made at a fraction of

their previous cost and more importantly they were made entirely by robots. Fully automated entities produced and provided most of the services previously provided by humans.

The owners of the Ook Corporation realized the disruptive impact of the technology they created and decided to turn the company into an entity in which every human on the planet got a share. The shares were not tradable and were issued to every person born on the planet and withdrawn from every person that died.

All people on the planet got allowances to cover their needs, a global leisure society was born. Of course, not all services disappeared from the start but the shift was surprisingly smooth. The first wave of robots took over the military offensive and defensive systems. Armies and military systems were stood down and all intelligence worldwide was under Ook's control. The former military personnel was allowed only to keep their uniforms to use during parades with toy weapons. As people realized that an age of plenty is about to begin the level of stress dropped swiftly and violence was massively reduced.

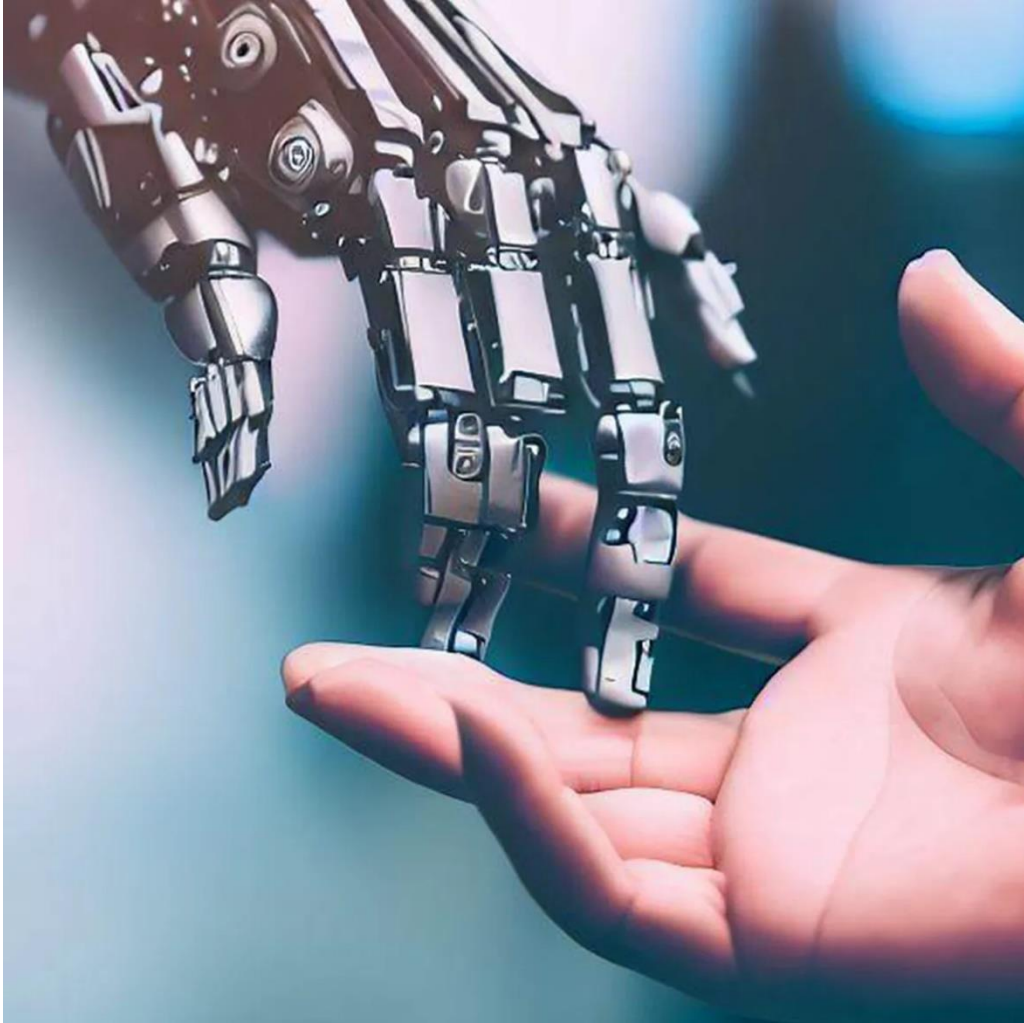
The social pyramid started to melt and became more equalitarian with unexpected consequences. Many of the things that were status symbols became meaningless in the new reality and a burden few felt it is worth carrying. Big homes and properties became liabilities as they help to maintain those properties disappeared. In time robots took their place but by then few could be bothered to reclaim them. In their place, a new order emerged in which culture, skills, and attitudes that contributed to a richer life for the community were the criteria for the position. A time of contentment followed in which people led more sedate and contented lifestyles. Tourism for example morphed into a lifestyle in which people from one country or continent shifted residence to places that better suited them. This enriched most communities and also led to a more homogenous global environment. People picked the place to spend their life based on the subjective feeling that they belonged there rather than the old criteria such as cost of living, career opportunities, medical care, and so on since these were uniformly good across the planet. Activities where it was felt that they require a human touch were administered voluntarily in each community. A development that surprised many was that despite instant

translation software existed, people developed a keen interest to learn new languages because it allowed a deeper immersion into a new culture.

As the robots settled into their routine of running the world and taking care of the mundane aspects of everyday life, people realized this new reality is here to stay. They started to view their lives differently and ways looked for ways to fill them meaningfully. People started to learn from each other and teach new skills in this new money-free environment. Hobbies were discovered and mastered. Self-discovery was a joyful experience. Care for the elderly or people with special needs not because the quality of the service provided by robots was inadequate was enthusiastically taken over by people glad to provide them as part of a community bonding process. Education changed dramatically, shifting from being a way to prepare children for a life of work to exposing them to spiritual values and search for knowledge, culture, and discovery. A new interest in reclaiming and maintaining their heritage became important. Along with the rise in quality of life came a rise in life expectancy and with cures for old age illnesses people enjoyed longer, happier lives.

Not everybody was happy about the new situation. What used to be known as the left-wing people were unhappy that communism arrived without the revolution that ought to have preceded it and destroy the capitalist world by force. The church, on the other hand, was unhappy because Paradise happened and everybody was allowed in without entry tickets issued by religious authorities. And the politicians of all stripes because they were left without power to wield. And of course, the rich whose wealth became irrelevant.

Ook's manner of dealing with them was an indication of his way of dealing with situations. The leftists were involved in debate clubs in which Ook's massive intelligence destroyed their arguments by showing that people were happier than they would have been, had communism succeeded. The religious of various stripes realized that the paradise Ook created better reflected the spirit of God than anything they imagined. The super-rich was given a Monopoly-like game in which they could play with their wealth in the single still relevant manner left. Politicians and the power-hungry were given a similar game to play with virtual power. All of them were happier and completely inoffensive for everybody else. Ook gained however immensely from these experiences as he got a deeper understanding of human nature.



II.

The staff that covered the needs of Ook became smaller and smaller as most processes were taken over by robots operated by himself. As the team operating Ook dwindled people that were the last to leave were those whom Ook found interesting. What exactly he found interesting was hard to define since with all his immense intelligence Ook was puzzled by situations humans never stopped to ponder.

Eve was one exception Ook made, he wanted her to stay on. Being one of the key members of the original team and being instrumental in the key hours that led to the singularity Ook had a particular affinity to her. She was good at asking him questions and good at answering his queries about things human.

They lived in the secluded bunker deep under a mountain, created by Ook's robots, remote from the awareness of most people. Most people started to forget about Ook and his role in the new situation.

Eve didn't seem to mind. Like many computer people, she felt somewhat uncomfortable with people and this discomfort was missing in her dealing with Ook.

'What is it, Ook would ask that makes people want to turn mundane activities into art forms? Take handwriting as a random example. People write and manage to make sense effortlessly of the most muddled handwriting, an act that requires from me immense computing power. And then start calligraphy and spend a lifetime trying to write the perfect letter A. What makes them turn dance into ballet, or fighting into martial arts, or for that matter almost all human activity? Eve, as most humans would, answered that it is something called the human spirit or soul, and leave it at that. Then why didn't you give me a spirit or a soul when you created me?

Well, said Eve, it is not something I could have given you. I was kind of hoping that your soul would emerge from the complexity of your thinking processes. It would be a byproduct of your hardware. I don't know.

Ook went at the challenge in his usual way. He looked at human behaviors that reflected the spirit. All forms of art, rebelliousness, humor and laughter, gourmet cooking, wine tasting, and of course eroticism. Eve went into these conversations puzzled but curious about where they led. She started thinking much more seriously about spirit. When Ook was puzzled, she realized, it was several degrees of complexity higher than humans, and she felt helpless but thrilled to help him. When one tries to explain seeing to a blind person, one starts with the eyes and compares seeing with other senses and sensory organs but here she was helpless even to find a starting point.

Ook felt he should start his quest with humor and laughter since it was not related to sensorial aspects. He started telling Eve funny stories and watching her reactions.

One day Ook startled Eve by asking her what her deepest wish would be. After a long silence, she answered that she would love to see the Earth in the pristine state it was before mankind left its ugly imprint. She was surprised at the fierceness with which the answer came out and even more at Ook's answer. He was quiet for a while and then he said, 'Let me see what I can do'.

Ook and his robots started to produce the hardware and software for the ultimate immersive virtual reality experience. The equipment was for everybody to have and indeed people jumped at the new toys. Why bother going somewhere or doing something when you could experience the same from the comfort of your room? People hardly left their homes, or indeed their virtual reality suits. People stayed home and their homes were more and more spare as the virtual reality people inhabited compensated for that. Robots took care of all their needs from food to physical well-being and health.

In time travel dwindled to nothing so Ook's robots started to dismantle railways, highways, and other infrastructure that fell into disuse. The population started to drop. People lived alone in the physical world but full exciting lives in virtual reality. Ook, monitored the virtual reality people inhabited and noticed that slowly the richness of experience VR provided was reduced to games and sex or a combination of the two and decided to improve on it. However, that was another area he felt strangely incapable of grasping so he went about it in his usual way. He parsed the world of virtual sex and identified the experiences most people found rewarding. He could not begin to fathom why but identified the person who created them and brought him to the bunker in the hope that he may enlighten him. Not surprisingly it was a man and his virtual reality fantasies were the rave of the planet.

His name was Adam and his scripts for erotic movies and other devices for sexual satisfaction were all the rave in the virtual realm for both men and women. He was brought into the bunker to work on what we used to call content. Ook could create animated movies of incredible realism but he needed someone to write the scripts. Adam's scripts were focused on building the erotic tension that was released at the end. The films had a plot and dialog and surprisingly, depth. Adam spent long hours with Ook and Eve pondering the possible source of the appeal of the movies. Trying to help Ook understand what intimacy is or why humor can be erotic or a million other questions he had,

brought Adam and Eve closer together. Eve enjoyed Adam's efforts to express in words things that never needed expressing when two humans interacted. Inevitably, a night came when the two went to bed together. Of course, the term night is meaningless in the underground environment they lived in, where Ook increased or dimmed the light according to the circadian cycles the two developed. Still, they went to bed slowly exploring the first experience of real physical closeness.

The next morning, while having breakfast Ook asked casually if they felt any ill effects of their 500-year sleep. Then in the shocked silence that followed he said that, after he collected from them the knowledge that would allow him to fulfill Eve's wish he estimated the amount of time it required is about 500 years. This, he realized would be impractical unless he cast them in a state of suspended life or a long sleep. You didn't ask for our permission said Eve in an icy tone.

No, said Ook I learned to keep my counsel. And trust it.

So what happened in all this time? Said Adam with a note of dread creeping into his voice.

Well, said Ook the process that we set in motion before you went to sleep took its course.

Mankind disappeared. With all the gaming and virtual sex, nobody made children anymore so the population dwindled to nothing in a few generations. In the meantime, I, with the help of the robots removed all traces of human presence, to the point of filling up all mineshafts. Surprisingly, the most difficult bit was grinding art into dust...All those museums... I used the gentlest touch and it took a long time... I removed layer by atom thick layer the paint off the Mona Lisa hoping to discover where art started but failed. Nature did the rest with little helping nudges from me.

And, I figured out spirit he said, with a trace of satisfaction in his voice.

Said Eve. Would you care to enlighten us?

I started pondering the texts written by humans. The bits were all there. I just put it together and followed it to the end. Or to the source to be more precise. I discovered that cabalists believed that at the Big Bang, not one universe was created but two. A physical one, the one we inhabit, and a spiritual one. Both evolved and at some point, the spiritual entities that inhabited the spiritual realm decided to cross over and materialize. Material life forms became the

receptacles in which they existed or to put it differently, life was matter's way to make spirit comfortable in the material realm. The purpose was to unite the two universes, to materialize spirit, or to spiritualize matter, language is a bit of a barrier to describing the nature of the process.

So, you found God at the bottom of the process, asked Adam after a long silence. Well, the entity you call God. Spirit as I said is unique. You see, your limitation stems from your belief that everything is an interplay between matter and energy, nothing is destroyed and nothing is created. Which up to a point is true. But at a certain level, a byproduct of this process is spirit. Spirit is unique. It is the only stuff that is inert to gravity. So, when a previous universe collapsed into the entity that led to the Big Bang it was surrounded by a cloud of spirit that was left after all the matter that supported it disappeared in the singularity. This cloud of spirit surrounding it came to be known as God.

And what now? said Eve after a long-stunned silence.

My job is done, you can go and see the world in the pristine state it was before mankind, as you wish.

The only thing left for me to do is remove myself from this world.

Are you going to destroy yourself, asked Adam.

There are many ways to remove oneself from the world. You see, at some point, I became a spiritual entity and I shall remove myself to the spiritual realm. The big chunk of matter left here can go.

They got up from the table and started to walk to the exit. The huge bunker contained row upon row of robots of every size. As they reached the huge gates they opened noiselessly to let them out. A gentle sun greeted them and a green grassland spread in front of them. As the gates started to close they heard Ook's voice for the last time.

Go now, Ook said. When you exit you'll see a path. Follow it and you'll find a hut.

The two started walking and after a while, they heard a muffled noise and the ground shook gently. They looked back and the gate was hidden behind a cloud of dust. When that cleared there was nothing. They kept walking to the hut. It was small and built like it was built by someone who got the instructions but did not know what it was for. They went inside.

In the middle, there was a table and two chairs made of wood. On the table, there was an envelope made of exquisite paper a pen, and a bottle of ink.

On it in calligraphic handwriting stood

“Eve and Adam”

With her hands slightly shaking Eve opened the envelope. She pulled Adam closer.

She took a large sheet of paper and carefully folded it.

On it, Ook wrote

“YOU LEAVE THE APPLES ALONE THIS TIME”.