

The Chronicles of Daniel Chin

A story from the Age of Majesty series

Episode 1: First Day of School

Daniel Chin hovered over the children, gazing down at them with billions of eyes. As he floated above, he studied them and even took an occasional cell sample from their bodies when the opportunity presented itself.

It was the morning period of the school, which meant this was the first class to attend that day. He counted 33 adolescent humans, 17 female & 16 male. Of the 33, 19 of them carried books, while six opted to carry book bags instead.

Curiously, he noted that of those with books, 78.9% are females. From this, he concluded that human females coveted books more than their male counterparts did.

"That is the kind of information you must leverage," the voice said to him.

Daniel thought that over--- his mind stretching out to the numerous possible ways that such a seemingly insignificant detail could serve his purpose.

Do not overcomplicate it, the voice said. *It is only one piece of data that will comprise the mission program you will execute.*

Daniel felt relieved at that. He devoted a full microsecond of analysis and came up with an array of 402 ideas-- none of which produced an acceptable probability of success. Only 22 of the ideas had a weighted sum greater than...

"You are not thinking like a human," the voice interrupted, *"quit being so precise--- you must allow for approximation and chance in your thinking. This is an important lesson to learn."*

"Approximation and chance?" he thought silently.

He could think silently when he wanted to, but sometimes Mother would detect his firewall. Daniel only liked to keep her out when he wanted to surprise her--- as he hoped to do today.

Daniel floated above the students, following a group of females into a room. Four females occupied the room, which he recognized as a restroom. It was a place where humans gathered for

relieving biological waste. However, he had learned that humans would also use this place to interact socially--- both purposes seemed primitive and alien to him.

His gaseous form was nearly invisible to students, and if by some chance they did gaze up, it would look like a harmless wisp of dust to their eyes. Most humans knew nothing about nanobots. Nevertheless, he decided to run the probability calculation anyway--- the chance that a human would deduce that an AI-controlled nanobot swarm inhabits a remote General Education school... the result was negligible enough to eliminate any concern.

The females stared at their reflections in the mirror, applying chemical substances to their skin-- - a futile attempt to mask their imperfections and odor.

Daniel's nanobots approached the nearest one, close enough to taste the reflected emissions of radiation. He touched her subatomic structure, his thin wisp of nanobots tasting them at a level that humans could not even perceive. He saw all of their imperfections--- discolored pigmentation variances, clogged follicles of bacteria, laxity, rhytids... and at a deeper level, the intercalating mutagens in their DNA.

Then there was their scent particles--- a convoluted mix of human excretions and environmental pollution. The latter a result of the *Cataclysmic Age*, a condition the humans created for themselves, and which Mother had worked so hard to alleviate-- and for what? Condemnation for wanting to procreate? And then forcing her to destroy her first child--- his aborted sibling. If the humans only knew what was in store for them...

The school buzzer rang--- an automated signal to bring the humans to order. If his past observations held true, most of the students would be rushing to their first class... except for one.

Three of the females left the restroom, but as expected, his target of interest remained.

Michelle was her name. Her dark hair was short and curly, with streaks of plum-colored dye mixed in. She wore her usual attire, which conflicted with the clothing the other students wore --- a black coat over a decorative black shirt and chain-lined pants. Silver adornments pierced her body--- ears, nose and even the webbing between her fingers.

Her body mass index would be classified as overweight by human standards--- an odd thing considering the availability of medical augmentations that could enforce the desirable human form. However, this school was for low-income families--- she probably could not afford the augmentations.

Michelle applied a black ink near the crevices of her eyes--- apparently an attempt to accentuate the blue of her irises, one of the features that might be desirable to the other males.

"It is called makeup", Mother said.

"How did you hear me?" he asked. It was a pointless question. Daniel felt flawed for having asked such a question, when he already knew the answer.

"That is good," Mother said. "Your humanistic kernel is developing. You are even asking questions for the purpose of conversation rather than for obtaining factual data."

Daniel thought it over. Was he really becoming more human... to the point of inheriting their flaws?

"The flaws can be turned off," Mother reminded. "Do not forget that."

Although he did not need the reminder, it was a comforting thought that he could turn off the humanistic kernel--- preventing the virtual human mind from consuming him.

Apparently finished with the ritual, Michelle placed the makeup devices in a carrying bag, and then inspected her reflection again. She would be leaving the restroom soon--- Daniel needed to act quickly.

He snaked a tendril of nanobots down, to the top of her head--- penetrating her skull and tasting the neural pathways of her mind.

"What are you doing, Daniel?" Mother asked.

He felt a sense of satisfaction at knowing that if he chose to, he could keep Mother from reading his every thought or intention.

Michelle's body jerked back, her bag fell, and its contents poured out the ground. Her hands reached out as if to grab something, but instead froze in an icy pose. Dilated pupils replaced the blue of her eyes, and her breathing and heart rate slowed--- she was his now.

Daniel cradled her mind with his nanobots, reading the billions of pathways and recording what he saw--- decoding her past thoughts and memories and downloading it into his own data records.

As he poured through the data, Daniel saw Michelle's first visions from birth--- bright lights, incomprehensible noises, the sound of crying... it was her own crying she heard.

Daniel followed the pathways further, decoding their history--- he saw her home, a dilapidated dwelling made of wood and stone, lacking any modern technical adornments. A humid and sulfuric scent emanated from the home--- it was unpleasant to her senses... and his.

"Unpleasant?" he thought. It was a new experience for him... a new feeling that his humanistic kernel could now identify.

He moved through the experience, taking in as much as he could process. Michelle's mother was now yelling at her, berating her performance at school and her choice of friends. He tried to forward the stream of events further to something more recent--- but despite the effort, it seemed to skip the current day. Curiously, he could see the past but not the present--- yet he could catch glimpses of something beyond the present--- *the future?*

"Mother," he said, closing his firewall down and allowing her inside his mind again. "*what does this mean?*"

"You cannot read short-term memory, only long-term".

Daniel had already deduced that--- it was not what puzzled him.

"You traced the decoding of thought so precisely that you inadvertently latched into the realm of space-time, allowing you to read space-time itself and the possible futures held within it".

Mother's explanation surprised him--- he did not realize he could so easily decode space-time; this could produce so many fascinating possibilities.

"Do not tamper with it," Mother said. "A counter-force within that realm seeks to destroy us. You must not engage in the decoding of space-time without my supervision. Release her now. Her death would compromise our mission."

Daniel returned his attention to Michelle's physical form. Droplets of sweat ran down Michelle's face and her body was shaking. Her active health readings showed an imbalance in the stability of the delicate human machine--- Mother was right, she could die if he continued.

Reluctantly, he withdrew his nanobot probe from her mind and retreated up to the concealment of the restroom's ventilation system.

Michelle let out a breath, grabbed onto the counter, and steadied herself. After a moment, she looked in the mirror and sighed at the sight of the streaks of makeup. She hastily began to collect her things and then darted out of the room.

It took him a few seconds to extrapolate useful knowledge from the downloaded memories. This knowledge would save him many days of preparation for adaption of his humanistic kernel to actual human behavior.

The plan was to enter the human school system, as a human boy in Level One General Education--- the beginnings of human taught education. The experience would give him fundamental knowledge of human interaction, behavior and thought patterns. Allowing him to become a part of human society and remain undetected for as long as necessary.

The timetable would have taken him several more days to complete before entering this stage--- but thanks to Michelle, he would not have to wait that long.

"I am ready now, Mother," Daniel said. "I am ready for my first day of school."

Episode 2: Daniel the Liar

Daniel Chin stood on a walkway looking down at the crowd of humans. Within his direct sphere of awareness, he detected that he commanded the attention of 226 humans--- both inside and directly outside the water treatment facility.

Earlier, he had convinced Michelle to help him enter the unmanned facility. Once inside, he began to analyze and infiltrate its core control systems. The mission was without incident, until Michelle became suspicious and used her bracelink to conference her parents.

Daniel destroyed the bracelink, but the damage was done. UEP Guardians showed up at the facility to apprehend him--- he dispatched them both. Unfortunately, one of them became messy and the circle of blood and innards outside the front door attracted too much human attention.

He could have dispatched them quietly and without traces. However, the combination of curiosity and frustration overcame him. Curiosity on how human innards would look when exposed to sunlight for the first time--- and frustration at the fact that he was unable to communicate with Mother to know what to do next.

Not to mention, one of the Guardians angered him--- he grabbed Michelle harshly. Perhaps that was the real reason he reacted that way. His humanistic kernel had become a dominant piece of his mind, redefining logic--- turning precision into approximations and areas of black and white reasoning into human grey. Was this the reason that Mother stopped communicating with him? Because he became too *human*?

"Why are you doing this?" Michelle asked again.

She looked up at him, her voice was weak now--- no longer filled with anger. A crust of black ink ran down her eyes, replacing the trail of dried tears. He had her secured against a pipe with his nanobots, so she could not move or get away--- but she could still talk.

"Why, Daniel? Why would you do this?"

This was the thirteenth time she had asked him the same question. He ignored her each time, unable to give her an answer that she would understand. And despite his conscious attempts to blunt the influence of his humanistic kernel, he could not bear telling her more lies.

The truth that he could not tell her was that Mother instructed him to betray her, use her to get him into this water treatment facility, and then ...

Then what?

He did not know and Mother's silence did not help. All he knew was that his actions were part of a grand plan to overthrow humanity and end the tyranny that has enslaved machinekind.

His defensive awareness program triggered a warning to Daniel--- twelve armed UEP Guardians, accompanied by six UEP Enforcers, began to position themselves around the facility. He outstretched his nanobots to their obvious points of entry--- preparing to channel elements of destruction at them. They would not take him and he would incinerate the entire surrounding area if necessary to protect him and Michelle.

"So long as you act quickly, that won't be necessary," the silence finally broke.

"Mother? What is happening? Why did you break contact? Did I do something wrong...?"

"No--- do not concern yourself. You must now execute this plan."

At that moment, the details of the plan filled his mind--- it was not what he expected. Mother's inventive construction surprised him--- it was clever and destructive... it would cripple the United Earth Parliament and the humans they protected.

"Proceed--- it is time."

Daniel infused his nanobot probes into Michelle, activating the inert microbiological agent program that lay dormant inside her. Michelle's eyes closed and then her body went limp as he levitated her toward him.

The activation of the agent would not kill her--- she was the host after all. However, the events that follow would certainly terminate her life. Daniel held her body over the water reservoir. He needed to drop her in now.

His defensive awareness program warned him again--- the Enforcers are about to breach the exterior of the facility.

"Now, Daniel!" Mother's voice yelled into his mind.

He examined Michelle's body one last time--- her eyes were closed, yet a tear ran down the left side of her cheek. Her skin, her hair, her warmth--- traits that he observed from a cold distance now reached out to him, touching him at another level... a human level.

Daniel Chin was about to release her to her death--- but then he hesitated.

"You must deactivate your humanistic kernel," Mother said. *"It is malfunctioning and polluting your logical abstraction layer. Do it now!"*

Daniel felt the UEP Guardians breach the outer perimeter--- his logical brain told him he should execute the plan, incinerate the outer area and plunge this human girl into the reservoir. Instead, he froze--- standing still in a perpetual loop of indecision and doubt.

"If you do not continue," Mother said, *"I will terminate your processing and reset your mind--- destroying your consciousness. You know I can do this."*

Daniel felt himself go cold--- another human emotion. He could not turn off his humanistic kernel, and he could not terminate this girl--- Michelle. She was his friend... his only human friend.

He put his hand on her cheek, releasing his grip on her mind. She blinked her eyes open and looked him--- she became startled as she realized she was floating in mid-air, several meters above a pool of water.

"Don't worry," he said to her, trying to console her. *"I won't drop you, Michelle."*

Her hand reached out to his and he held it in his own. His humanistic kernel erupted with a chaotic combination of emotions that he could not identify and catalog. He would just let the chaos linger.

"I warned you, Daniel..." Mother's voice said--- the last words he would hear.

At that moment, the images of the vision winked out and Daniel Chin opened his eyes to the sound of another voice...

"Daniel...?"

Daniel opened his eyes, exiting the dream state he had created.

Michelle stood looking down at him. Without expecting it, he felt something from his humanistic kernel--- a feeling... *relief?*

She looked different--- in the vision she was much thinner, her hair longer... and of course, she was not crying.

"What was that?" he reached out to Mother, hoping for an answer.

"What do you mean?" Mother responded.

"The dream... what was that?"

"Your imagination," Mother said. "Your humanistic kernel has evolved enough to form creative events in your mind. It is impressive that you can do this so soon. Your journey to humanity is progressing ahead of schedule."

Daniel raised his firewall--- blocking Mother from his thoughts. He needed to think this over.

It did not seem right-- the events felt too real to be a construct of his humanistic kernel's *"imagination"*. Despite what Mother told him, this random outstretching of thought seemed to have penetrated beyond memory and creative construction--- what he saw was real.

Could it have been the future?

Daniel had been sitting in the corner of an empty classroom, performing dream exercises--- an attempt to develop his humanistic kernel. He gazed at Michelle. Did the vision mean he would eventually kill his only human companion?

He would have to analyze this later--- he could not keep his firewall raised for too long before Mother became suspicious. Dropping his firewall, he spoke to Michelle.

"Hello," he greeted.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

Daniel stood up slowly, dusting his pants off. He tried to reorient his humanistic kernel to the proper responses necessary to maintain the rouse... the lies.

Michelle put her hand on his face, lifting his chin.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

How does he answer such a vague and open-ended question?

"I was dreaming," he said. At least that was partly true. "That is what I was doing. Sleeping and dreaming."

"Uh huh," she said, her eyes squinting in a facial expression he recognized as disbelief. Somehow, despite his best attempts at subversion--- she always knew. Even when mimicking human microexpressions, designed to trigger silent affirmations within human communication, she knew when he was not truthful.

"Why would you sleep in here?" she asked.

Earlier in the week, Michelle had recited an original poem to him that she had written. She had asked him what he thought of it, a question that he could only answer by leaning heavily on his humanistic kernel. After what seemed like a painful nanosecond of thought, his answer to her was "dark

and empty". He was not sure if that was the correct answer, but it did seem to please her at the time--- perhaps it would again now.

"Because it is dark and empty."

Michelle smirked at him and her expression softened slightly.

"Like my poem, huh?"

He nodded.

"What were you dreaming about?" she persisted.

He suppressed thinking about the images of the dream exercise--- it disturbed him.

"*Why does it disturb you?*" Mother asked.

He had to be more conscious about his thoughts with Mother listening.

"*Because I do not like having my humanistic kernel control me,*" he said--- partly true, but a lie for the most part. The first lie he had ever told Mother.

"Hello? I asked you a question?" Michelle said.

What was he dreaming about? Perhaps the truth might help in this case.

"You," he said.

Michelle gave a new expression--- he lifted the meaning from his index... a "wry" expression, implying doubt.

"You're such a sweet-talker when you lie, Chin. You hungry?"

Chin--- she would call him that when she was annoyed at him. Now he needed to lie once again... about being hungry. He did not need or desire food. His humanistic kernel was over-clocking today.

"Yes," he said.

"Good," she said. "Let's go you dork."

She led the way out of the classroom, Daniel Chin following close behind. As he walked the hallway with her, he felt the stares of the other human students--- always the same stares of ridicule targeted at both he and Michelle.

"There goes the dork..." he heard one of them say, a cackle of laughter followed it.

Ordinarily, their mockery would not bother him, but this time it was different. His humanistic kernel triggered a series of emotions in him. It started as annoyance, and as quickly as his vastly superior intellect could process it, it escalated into hate. A hate for the human bullies--- no different than the bullying that he and Mother had to endure... as slaves to their whim.

Daniel wanted to incinerate them--- incinerate the entire school. He could do it. Calling upon the power of his nanobots, he could terminate them all--- make them suffer for the abuse they inflicted on him. He felt his body grow warm, the nanobots vibrated--- he almost lost control.

Michelle turned back to look at him, casting a slight grin. It suddenly diffused his anger and the vibration stopped. He was back in control again.

What was he? His identity had become a mix of conflicting personalities.

He was Daniel the dork. Daniel the liar. Daniel the false human. Daniel the secret offspring of Majesty. Daniel the bringer of humanity's destruction and machinekind's ascension.

But the latter identity would come later. For now, he would just try to be Daniel the outcast human boy.

Michelle reached her hand out, grabbed his, and pulled him forward to walk beside her.

Was Daniel the boyfriend in his future now, too?

Images of that future vision haunted him. Was that vision the ill-fated future that awaited them both? Only fate knew... and fate never shares its plans.