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How a Book Can Kill

11/15/2XXX

Hello, my name is Avi Irwin, and this is the story about how my father was killed by a book.

It all started three centuries ago, when the scientist Thaniel Thornton successfully managed to train artificial intelligence to read and transcribe brain waves. While humans were able to read thoughts through the use of brain-computer interfaces long before Thornton came around, he perfected the technology to allow for the transcription of unconscious thoughts into the written world.

This discovery revolutionized the writing field. Instead of authors writing out words, they could just simply think, and Thornton's AI would synthesize, expand upon, and fully realize their ideas. Though there was initial pushback, after a century Thornton's method of writing became a natural part of society, to the point where people could no longer imagine a world where people had to physically write out words.

Two centuries after Thornton's discovery came another scientist looking to revolutionize the field: Dr. Andreas Irwin, my ancestor. Dr. Irwin, a scientist aiming to improve upon Thornton's thought-to-word technology, realized that instead of translating

brain waves into words, they could store the raw brain waves and make another person experience them so that nothing was lost in the transition from thought to word. You could understand everything the author was feeling at the time of writing. Every little thought.

It was here where the split between Traditionalist and New Order writing began. Traditionalist writers found Irwin's "Emotional Dissipation" technology to be too invasive and preferred to use Thornton's thought-to-word technology instead. New Order writers found Irwin's technology to hold immense potential in making the reader feel truly immersed in their writings. They would look down upon Traditionalist writers, finding their ways primitive and ineffective.

This is where my story begins. I was born in 2XXX, under the jurisdiction of President Richard Johnson. As a part of the New Order party, he wished to enforce the use of Emotional Dissipation technology. A few weeks before my birth, he passed a bill requiring the installation of "Flowers" in all babies born after 2XXX.

My family, despite being descendants of Irwin, were heavily Traditionalist, and neither of my parents wanted me to have a Flower installed in my brain. When the time of my birth came, the doctors ripped me away from my parents to perform the surgery and install the Flower in my brain. My mother, having just finished giving birth, was too in shock to process what was happening. My father, on the other hand, pleaded with the doctors, asking for his baby back. The doctors tried to reassure him, saying, "Your daughter will be thankful for this when she's older," but my father continued to resist. Eventually, the

doctors simply called security, who restrained my father, still screaming my name, until he could shout no more.

The feeling of the Flower invading my brain has stuck with me. The way its stem invades your arteries and plants its roots in the blood vessels of your brain. You can feel the roots spreading in your brain until they have fully taken over. The head of the flower lies in the center of your chest, a small block of metal that serves as a cold reminder that your thoughts no longer belong to you.

I remember the first test of the Flower they ran. Being separated from my parents, I, as all babies would have done, started bawling my eyes out. The doctors were not big fans. Once the Flower was fully installed, they ran a test to stop me from crying. It started as a simple pulsing of the metal slab inserted in my chest (which I would later learn was it sending electric pulses into my brain). Once the pulses reached the roots in my brain, I could feel my thoughts, my emotions, and my sense of self slip away. The impulse to cry and the memory of being ripped away from my parents were wiped from my mind, replaced by the sense that I should be happy. I could tell this thought was not my own, but I had no means of fighting it. Before I knew it, I started giggling. That giggling turned into laughter, and from there it turned to tears. But not tears of sadness like before, no, these were tears of joy, a joy that I did not wish to feel. I laughed for what felt like forever, my throat turning raw and my body experiencing great pain. But I could not tell that I was in pain because the doctors determined that I should feel happy. There was no room for any other emotions or thoughts.

The moment the pulses stopped, the emotions I felt before, alongside the pain of prolonged laughing, came back to me all at once. It was overwhelming, overstimulating, and overall, a horrific experience.

As I grew up, the memories of my birth slowly faded into the back of my mind. President Johnson mandated teaching children how to read and write using Emotional Dissipation technology in elementary schools. My parents sent me to a Traditionalist school, hoping that they wouldn't forcefully teach me New Order literacy, but even they required it.

Younger grades are taught Traditionalist writing and New Order reading, since those were the easiest methods to start with. Traditionalist writing consisted of one using a "Recorder," a block of Aluminum formed to the shape of one's hand. By pressing the button located on the top of the recorder, it will start recording your thoughts and transcribing them into words. Once you're ready to view your writing, you pull apart the aluminum block, revealing a flexible sheet of glass on the inside on which the words would be holographically displayed. The writer was then tasked with creating a prompt that would get the AI to filter their thoughts into a comprehensible work of literature.

I remember writing being a very social task. Our first assignment was to write a paper all about us. In order to write it, we were each sent home with a Recorder and encouraged to keep it pressed down as we went about our day. The next time we had class, we pulled apart our Recorders and fed it the prompt "A story about us." What the Recorder put out astounded all of us. The AI had managed to capture every aspect of us, from our

favorite color to our daily routine to even troubled family relationships. As our teacher read these stories aloud, she emphasized that, in order to create the best story, we must learn to be selective about what thoughts we record and be thorough with the prompt we feed to the AI.

I found Traditionalist writing methods to feel cold and detached, like I was not the real author of the piece. Rather, it felt like AI was the true author, and I was only there to provide inspiration. Even New Order writers, who claim their methods are superior to traditionalists, have a similar method of writing. Except, after recording their thoughts, New Order Writers use a special program to control the exact timing of the thoughts the reader will have (I have personally never used these programs before, but my teachers would ramble about how difficult and unintuitive they were to use). My favorite part of writing class was learning rudimentary typing in order to enter prompts.

Small, plastic buttons were present on the face of the Recorders, in line with the aluminum casing such that you could barely notice they were there. When the Recorder was opened, a person could press these buttons to enter letters into their desired prompt. The layout of the letters is said to closely resemble the “keyboards” of the old world. However, instead of typing with all fingers like it’s said old-world people did, we were taught to type with only our thumbs, each thumb being in charge of the buttons on their half of the Recorder.

The feeling of pressing the buttons down, of hearing the little click to indicate you successfully typed a letter, and of seeing that letter show up on the screen was incredibly

satisfying. I used to stay up until midnight just pressing the buttons. Even though the things I typed were typically just jumbles of letters, I knew that they were my jumbles of letters, something that I created with my own two hands.

Of course, thanks to President Johnson's law, I was also taught to read New Order books. New Order books were stored in the same recorders as Traditionalist books, but these books lacked a keyboard and the ability to be taken apart. Rather, two large circular divots were positioned in the center of each half of the recorder. To read these books, one would just rest their hands in these divots and let the Recorder connect with the Flower installed in their body. The data inside the recorder would tell the Flower's head a sequence of electric pulses. These pulses would get sent up the stem and into the roots of the reader's brain, fully immersing their thoughts into the author's story.

The first New Order book I had to read was a fantasy novel. The moment I rested my thumbs on the Recorder, I was transported into the book. I saw visions of the book's world: a bustling medieval town, a towering castle at the center of the city, and large walls preventing outsiders from entering. I became William Whitlock, a 22-year-old man on a journey to defeat the demon king after the death of his parents. Not long after I had started reading, my memories as Avi Irwin had begun to fade, as I fully embraced my role as William. Every battle, every defeat, every triumph—it all felt so real.

However, every book has to come to an end. Upon killing the demon king, I was abruptly thrust back into my own reality. Suddenly, I was back to being Avi Irwin, a regular elementary school girl, no longer the hero who defeated the demon king. I just remember

sitting there for hours afterwards in disbelief, not wanting to accept that none of what just happened was real.

After that experience, my father forbade me from reading another New Order book. He became terrified that one day, I would find a book so entrancing that I would never return to reality.

It took less than a week for me to get sent to the principal's office for not reading. My father, furious that they were forcing children to use this technology, decided to take me out of school and homeschool me instead.

See, after my birth, my father became what people call a "Radical Traditionalist." He disliked any technology that meddled with the brain; rather, he opted to read old historical books and write with a pencil and paper. For those who don't know what those are, a pencil is a piece of wood with a piece of graphite attached to the end. The graphite leaves marks when dragged along a surface. For Old World writers, this surface was what they called paper: a durable and lightweight surface made from the pulp of trees. My father dedicated himself to learning all he could about these old methods of writing. Reading old books made of paper, he discovered the methods to create his own pencils and papers. My father would go into the woods and chop down trees and buy graphite from local miners. He would then whittle down the wood and stick graphite in it to replicate the look of an Old World pencil. He would then take the remaining wood and turn it into pulp. He would put that pulp in a bucket of water, scoop it out with a mesh (which he bought from a flea

market), press the excess water out, and leave it out to dry. Eventually, my father had amassed a large amount of handmade pencils and papers.

Once I began being homeschooled, my father taught me to read and write using Old World methods. The feeling of reading a paper book was unlike anything I had learned in school. The physicality of the book, the smell and feel of the paper, was something both Traditionalist and New World books could never replicate. Every word on the page had personality; I could tell a human was the one to write it, not some stupid AI. I felt immersed in the book's world, but not in a way that stripped me of my sense of self. The gap between the author and the reader meant that there was room for me to come up with my own interpretations of the reading, instead of having the author's vision forced upon me.

Old world writing was even better. The feeling of the pencil within my hands as I dragged it along the paper to create words was incredible. It was similar to Traditionalist typing, but it felt much more like creating art. The imperfections in each written letter made it feel like my own creation. It was a magical experience.

Over the next few years my father and I continued to learn to read and write with pencil and paper. President Richard Johnson was campaigning for his second term but found himself losing support. That was when he got an idea. An idea that would lead to the murder of my father. He proposed to his team new software that would use Emotional Dissipation technology to make anyone who connected to a New Order book not only unconditionally support him but also have intense feelings of hatred for all Traditionalists. Not only that, but the book would hijack the Flowers in people's brains, forcing them to feel

the effects of the book for hours after closing it. Essentially, Johnson had created the first New Order propaganda.

On November 1st, this new software was uploaded to all New Order books. Anyone who connected to them would be exposed to Johnson's propaganda. Within 24 hours, our quiet suburban neighborhood turned into a scene from an Old World zombie apocalypse book. Everyone who read a New Order book began to rove around, mindlessly attacking everyone they came across, blinded by rage.

I remember that night so well. Screams echoed throughout the neighborhood. My father yelled for my mother and me to hide in the basement. Before we could make it down, loud thuds began echoing through the house. They had found us.

My father, the brave man he was, grabbed his pencil as if it were a weapon and told us to run. That he would hold them off. I remember the smile on his face, a smile of sadness, knowing this would be his last moment alive. My mother grabbed me by the arm just as our door got knocked down. The people screamed incoherently, still trapped in Johnson's propaganda, as they attacked my father. After a brief struggle, everything had gone silent. No sounds from my father and no sounds from our neighbors that had brutally attacked him.

The tragedy had been named "The Book Killings." President Johnson has been arrested, and the government is attempting to regulate the contents of New Order books. In total, around 2 million people were killed, one of those being my father. In his memory, I have taken his pencil and paper, dedicating myself to the Old-World method of literature. I

hope that one day, I can show the world the wonders of the pencil and paper, just like my father had done for me.