

Introduction

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to walk amongst robots—artificial intelligences that could mimic our every behavior...our every feat. To some, it would spell terror and fear across their very being. For others, it may be something they strive to create. Today, we'll take a look inside a place where all this can be heard... in Sector B4UC.

In today's production of Sector B4UC, the cast will be as follows in order of appearance:

Shaggy Trapolino as Narrator,
Patrick Natividad as Nate,
Tommy Evans as John, and
texttospeechrobot.com as Sculpto

All music and sounds are copyright free.

The audio drama you are about to hear was inspired by real interviews conducted on the campus of The University of Alabama in Huntsville by me: Casey Heinse. I am a Communication Arts major here on campus. During the previously mentioned interviews, I asked two participants—one a STEM major and the other a Film major—to answer four questions regarding the use of AI in their personal, professional, and academic life. The answers to these questions were then recorded and transcribed. The following audio drama uses elements from their answers to create a surrealist narrative regarding the complex nature of AI in academia and beyond. Please enjoy this production of Sector B4UC.

Body

Scene 1

NARRATOR: We begin our story in a classroom on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

[Noise of students walking up and down halls]

NARRATOR: Inside, two students—friends since freshman year—talk after class.

NATE: Hey, John. How was class?

JOHN: It was okay. Just got our essays back. I did alright, but it definitely could have been better.

NATE: I'm sure you'll do well on the next.

JOHN: We'll see...

NATE: Did you use some of those programs that help you check for grammar and punctuation and stuff?

JOHN: I did, but those things don't always work right, and honestly I'm not a big fan of using them.

NATE: Well, how are your art classes going?

JOHN: I guess they're going fine. I'm working on this project with Kim, and it's going alright. How are your engineering classes going?

NATE: They're fine. I just had to compute some theoretical models, and it was such a bore.

JOHN: I bet.

NATE: So, John, I know this is a little random, but I have this really cool project I've been working on that I really want to show you.

JOHN: Oh, really? Dope. [a brief pause] Oh, snap. I have something I could show you, too.

NATE: You down to meet up say...the same time tomorrow in this classroom?

JOHN: Sure thing. I can't wait till you see what I got.

NATE: Dude, I feel the exact same.

JOHN: Well, see ya tomorrow.

NATE: See ya.

NARRATOR: Two friends depart, two creations to be prepared. What will each think of the others' contribution? What imaginations will be made manifest come tomorrow?

Scene 2

NARRATOR: Now, we will listen in on two rooms, two workers, two people doing their best their best to create something spectacular. Let us see what's going on in their heads as they toil

away the night. First, let us visit Nate. He is inside a dark engineering lab, typing away at a computer connected to some other, far larger machine.

NATE: [thinking] I'm so excited to show John this project. His skills are so cool. I really hope he thinks this project rocks.

SCULPTO: Downloading data. Downloading schematics. Downloading data. Downloading schematics. Downloading data. Downloading schematics... [fades out]

NARRATOR: Now, let us visit John. He is inside the art studio, his hands covered with clay and his clothes messy.

JOHN: [thinking] I got this. This might be one of my coolest projects yet. I really hope that he enjoys it. Ya know what's really bugging me, though? I wonder what he's going to show me...

NARRATOR: Both using the hours of night as fuel for their creative endeavors, Nate and John eventually finish their projects and sleep, preparing for their reveals to each other.

Scene 3

[The sound of birds or something else to indicate the arrival of the morning]

NARRATOR: Now, a new day has dawned, and we find ourselves back in the classroom with the two friends.

NATE: Hey, John. How'd you sleep?

JOHN: Hey, Nate. I slept okay, I guess. Spent all night working on my project.

NATE: I feel you. So did I.

NARRATOR: In front of Nate, there are two large objects covered by a tarp. Both are almost the height of Nate and John. Next to John, there is a similarly large object, though slightly smaller than both of Nate's.

NATE: You ready?

JOHN: You bet I am!

NARRATOR: The two of them lift the tarps, revealing their creations. In front of Nate, there are two objects. The first is a large mechanical being, human-like in shape, though still obviously robotic. Next to this machine, there is a statue of a person reading made out of air-dry clay. In front of John, there is... another statue made of air-dry clay, though his statue is of a person writing.

SCULPTO: Hello, John.

NATE: Dude, isn't this so cool?

JOHN: What did you.. How did you...

NATE: Well, you see, I created this robot. I call him Sculpto. He can sculpt just about anything. I programmed him with all the methods you showed when—

JOHN: Why?

NATE: Why, what?

JOHN: Why would you do something like this?

NATE: What do you mean? I just thought you'd appreciate it cause it can—

JOHN: Do what I can?

NATE: No, no, no, that's not what I mean. I just thought that—

JOHN: Thought that what? I'd like to see how easily my role of making physical art could be taken by something so...

NATE: I...

JOHN: Think of our friends. Kim. She used to get commissions for art she did for her friends' D&D campaigns to help pay the bills and build her portfolio. Now all of her clients use art generators. And Cam, they work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the English department, and they're having to grapple with finding out what words are *human* words. *Human* words, Nate. Look at this statue. This isn't a *human* statue. It's made by...

[A robotic noise emanates from Sculpto]

JOHN:... that thing.

NATE: I... I'm sorry. I didn't think anything of it, really. I just wanted to use my skills as an engineer to create something as cool as you can.

JOHN: I get it, Nate...

NATE: All of the other people are creating AI's for art or words or other things. I mean, for my classmates, we are sometimes even told to use or create AI to solve big math problems.

JOHN: But this... my sculpture. It isn't some math problem. It isn't just a bunch of numbers.

NATE: I know. I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to... I'm sorry.

JOHN: It's fine

NATE: I'll dismantle it first thing tomorrow.

JOHN: That won't change anything.

NATE: Well, then...I mean... what *can* I do?

JOHN: Maybe teach it to do something else. Teach it to do something humans can't. Then you'll make something that hurts less and helps more. Just a thought.

NATE: Okay. I'll try that. Maybe I'll show you tomorrow, if I can reprogram it by then.

JOHN: I think I'd like that.

NARRATOR: What will Sculpto become next? Perhaps a machine capable of solving our hardest problems, rather than reiterating our previous solutions. Maybe, one day, Sculpto might even make it to our world, and leave... Sector B4UC

Conclusion

Another cautionary tale of artificial intelligence, personal in nature, academic in creation, and professional in consequence. Here, we see how many AI that generate new things will bring pain to some. Pain to those that create the things it does, work how it works. I ask you only this: consider how you will face these machinations in your life, outside of... Sector B4UC.