

The Ghost in the Machine

by Christian Angeles

Logline:

The maker of the world's first brain-to-brain neural network comes under investigation when a wealthy industrialist commits suicide while using his program.

Summary:

In a not so distant future, science has finally bridged the gap between mind and machine, creating specialized devices able to connect human minds through internet connection. Immediately, it became adapted for use at the highest levels of corporate America. As the ability to micromanage and network with individual workers on a telepathic level, streamlined a whole new industrial complex.

The efficiency of America's product development made all forms of competition obsolete. The device, redefining industry standards, had expectations to expand release into the global market.

That is, until the death of Kensei Nakamoto; Japanese business tycoon and first user of the device in Asia. His death has led to an FBI investigation of William Maven, the device's charming yet despised innovator, who now seeks to find and fix the error in his experiment.

But what William finds out about the machine is much more than he bargained for.

CAST:

Agent Emily McKenzie: An FBI agent assigned to investigate the apparent suicidal death of Kensei Nakamoto. She calls upon William Maven for questioning, seeking to get answers.

William Maven: A loner, loved by corporate America. He has a Steve Jobs 2.0 type of fashion sense and demeanor. The self-proclaimed creator of the mysterious program, we quickly learn that his only real credit to the program was selling it.

William must work with his estranged ex. fiancé and former research partner Stephanie, during this investigation into the crash of the program. A visionary tactician, what William lacks in technical knowledge he makes up for in underhanded cunning.

Stephanie Garcia: Former tertiary supervisor to the program and ex-fiancé to William. She, along with Doctor Victor Kennedy, had integrated the first human subject, Daniel Burkin, into a computer network. After having an affair with Victor, the real creator of the program, she breaks her engagement off with William and hasn't been seen since, until recently.

Victor Kennedy: The creator of the prototype. After seeing Daniel Burkin go mad after the initial trial, he decided the laws of natural reality were too complex for humans to meddle with and had gone into hiding.

Daniel Burkin: Patient Zero, the first subject to use the device.

STORY SYNOPSIS:

ACT ONE

“Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.” -Nietzsche.

1. We begin in an office building around midnight, where a Japanese man in his 50's begins uploading something from a computer. Around him, files burn in a wastebasket along with physical trails of evidence. Finally, the words: upload complete, stare blank across the monitor screen. He shuts down the computer.

In his private high-rise office, he takes a letter opener of twelve inches in length and stares down the chrome fixture, needle facing his eye, he positions it over his head, and then penetrates himself deep and straight down through his eyeball. He proceeds to scramble his brain as he screams, in a gruesome showcase of frontal lobotomy.

2. A homicide team searches the private office space the next morning, examining the mysterious suicide of executive Kensei Nakamoto. No trace of forced entry or collusion. The only noticeable clue: he logged into the network, just hours before his death. Uncertain what to do, Special Agent Emily McKenzie calls in the mysterious software's utmost expert.
3. We hear a monologue about what it means to be a man spoken by William Maven. He is questioning the moral ethics of entering the minds of others, at a lecture at a prestigious college. If the technology he helped create: to organize and exchange thought like data files, should really be allowed? He questions his reality. If anything in life is ever truly choice *or is it all pre-determined* in a world of 1s and 0s.

He then gets a call from Agent McKenzie.

4. William Maven, the programs so called 'creator' is summoned for questioning. Instead, he shows up to assist in the investigation on location without giving notice. We learn about the science of program and using a backlog of Mr. Nakamoto's log-ins, can see firsthand how the program can route a person's thoughts directly into a computer and into another person's mind. A form of technological telepathy using wireless signals and the

internet. Yet, one that's limited to one accessible device per user – as mapping a subject's neural network requires very specific brain mapping – unique, to each individual.

5. After more investigating, a background check of Nakamoto's latest logs show nothing out of the norm, though the investigation doesn't let go of the possibility of a hack. After several failures, it is apparent William has a lack of understanding of how the network truly works and the case is on the verge of being taken away from McKenzie.

Emily refuses to give up. She receives an anonymous message, pointing her into the right direction. She decides to track down William's former partner: Stephanie, to see if she has better information on the device.

ACT TWO (Part One)

6. After several failed attempts, Emily finally tracks Stephanie down, thanks to the help of a reluctant William. Stephanie has been hiding under a false alias in a distant area. Stephanie and Will reluctantly catch up and the Agent decides to add her to their unauthorized investigation of the case – once Stephanie reveals she can discover more on the scene.
7. After sneaking past the FBI guards who've placed the area on lockdown, the trio check the servers of the office building. They find something that was missed: that Mr. Nakamoto had made an outgoing connection for a brief second, to one individual who had never worked at the office: Daniel Burkin. William and Stephanie are distraught. They know exactly who Daniel is.
8. At an asylum, Emily, William, and Stephanie check on Daniel Burkin, the program's first user. He's become a living vegetable – barely able to move. He has never left the institution since being checked-in, nor has been anywhere near a computer in ages, since using the program. His mental deterioration: a horrible mistake gone wrong that Stephanie and William kept under wrap.
9. Emily gets scolded by her superiors for continuing to pursue the case. Meanwhile, Stephanie and William decide to catch up on each other's lives after all these years, especially regarding their mistakes and former romantic past.
10. In three separate, but never-the-less eerie messages, each person is told that they are being lied to by a mysterious entity: *The ghost in the machine*. They convene the next day and try to discover the identity of their mysterious ghost, but to no avail. Stephanie believes that it is Victor: the real innovator of the program. William wants to stop the investigation and go back to his perfect life before all of this.

11. A call from the asylum: Daniel Burkin has committed suicide. No one can believe it. They head back to investigate, but the FBI still see no sign of foul play. Still, one of the staff lets them in on a secret no one seems to be saying: Burkin had an off the records visitor, who arrived at the same date and time, once a year. The next meeting was due on the exact date of Burkin's suspected suicide.
12. William is unable to sleep at night. Something bothers him about this investigation, but his rekindled feelings for Stephanie, seem to be the only reason he continues to investigate. He hopes that they can rekindle their romance. The two have been spending an increasing amount of time together. She and a mysterious entity that haunts his dreams, this *ghost in the machine*, beckons him to find the truth.
13. At a stake-out at the suspected visitor's house, we get to hear the backstory of Stephanie. How she cheated on William with Doctor Kennedy. How William sold the program off to the highest bidder as a form of revenge against Stephanie's work. Later, they follow the visitor, and after a chase scene, catch him. William is hurt in the chase and his nose begins to bleed seemingly from the chase, but possibly, from something else...

ACT TWO (Part Two)

14. They interrogate the visitor in private away from the eyes of the law. They ask him about the disappearance of Daniel Burkin. Just then, Agent Emily is called back to headquarters, as William and Stephanie use the break to discuss their personal issues.

In a horrifying twist of events, William and Stephanie realize something is terribly awry. Hours pass, and no word back from McKenzie. William leaves to find her, as Stephanie stays to watch their suspect.

15. William finds Emily's been in an accident. When he gets to the hospital, the scars on her prove otherwise – this was definitely a bad fight, and no accident. William's nose begins to bleed again. He calls Stephanie but to no avail. Suddenly, Emily's vitals start to flat line. Something is terribly wrong.
16. During Emily's cardiac arrest, the staff charges the paddles. William notices that McKenzie's hand is moving – she is alive and breathing. Noticeably fine except that she cannot speak. As the staff clear the charge to revive her, William yells at them to stop but is escorted away by security. It's too late. The charge, set at a level far beyond high voltage for a human, hits Emily and she convulses. The doctors keep repeating this

despite her VERY ALIVE pleas – and then pronounce her dead. William sees her murder clear as day, though everybody seems in on the act.

Panicked, William starts checking all the staff for devices. He wants to see if they're being controlled. Everyone thinks he's gone crazy. They escort him out of there.

17. William gets to Stephanie, and in a moment of shock and vulnerability, the two realize what's going on. They start to question if the doctors were infiltrated by their program? Or for that matter, who has been infiltrated beyond their seeable control? William checks the program with Stephanie, but they can find no form of subterfuge.

They decide to get to the bottom of it and force the suspect they have captured, into a neural connection with them - forcing him to talk. He reveals that he was assigned to network with Daniel once a day, every year. That someone had hired him to be almost a walking proxy server, a bridge between Daniel and the neural network they'd created.

William and Stephanie are at a loss. Though they developed the technology, someone beyond them developed it far beyond a level they'd imagined. They learn that Daniel, being patient 0, works as the central hub. As he was the first connection, Daniel acts as the epicenter for all humans attached to the network. That people are not connecting with each other, they're all just connecting into Daniel. Worst of all: Daniel's consciousness was reformatted to be a living information highway server – the ghost in the machine.

18. William can't sleep. Stephanie realizes she can't either, and the two share an almost intimate moment together sharing their hopes and dreams. Still, they sleep in separate sides of the room – unwilling to let themselves go to old places of romance.
19. In the Morning, the witness has gone missing. They try to trace after him, but the trail goes cold. His dead body is found the next day.
20. Stephanie thinks they've gone too, but now William refuses to go back. Both are too attached to this and see themselves as the one's responsible. Using their respective Skills, they're able to track down where the man worked, and realize that he's an employee of the corporation that controls the program itself.

William is furious.

21. The two begin investigating the company they technically help founded. After many sleepless nights, the pair learn that there have been mysterious disappearances over the past few months involving those who were networked in.

22. William starts to lose himself. He hears voices and sees surrealist images dispersed throughout the day. He is haunted by the ghost in the machine in his dreams. He catches static glimpses of people who are not actually there, and has begun having nightmares of brains in jars covered in electrodes. His only grounding to reality is Stephanie.

The two realize just how important they are to each other. They sleep together.

Act Three

23. A breakthrough. Backlogging all the program's events trace one of the earliest buyers of the program back to a Mr. Nakamoto, and the suicide from the beginning. Yet, Nakamoto was using a new device. Why would a single person need dual neural networks for the same brain?

They crack down and review his private neural messages, finding a secret no one had seen: Mr. Nakamoto's final memories. There, he reveals he was set-up by a former investor of his, a Mr. Victor Kennedy, the creator of program itself. Nakamoto was programmed to download all possible information of Victor and Daniel's involvement in the network into Nakamoto's memory and subsequently, kill himself.

24. William and Stephanie attempt to track Victor down and unravel his plan: they believe, Victor has been waiting for the public release of the network, so that eventually, every important human being on the planet connecting will be his. They believe he has been manipulating things on a global scale but have no idea for what purpose.
25. In the final showdown confrontation, they trace Victor to their old lab. Where they find the message Victor desperately wanted to send out into the world once the network went globally live:

Awaken.

26. A shocking revelation of truth, as Victor breaks the fourth wall of the narrative.
27. There is no Victor Kennedy. There is no William Maven. The original, and only attempt of this neural network prototype, was a project using a computer to connect the conscious minds of Daniel Burkin to a Stephanie Garcia, two complete strangers and participants in the experiment.

Unable to handle the process, Daniel died during the procedure, and parts of his memories merged with Stephanie's. Two combined minds. A single conscious brain. A fantasy world created to compensate the strain.

Stephanie is the only real person in this program. The entire reality we've witnessed is a dream she has been living in. Its participants: people she'd met moments prior to the experiment - constructs in her mind to get her to stop hiding away in the dream.

To convince her to awaken.

28. William Maven, for all intents and purposes, realizes he is an anomaly. Driven by the mysterious ghost in the machine – whatever it may be. He can exist as an aspect of Stephanie's subconscious dream. The **only** reason we believed he was alive is because we are watching this unfold from his perspective. He is a living and breathing nightmare in this world, created to help Stephanie discover the truth, and awaken from her dream.

29. William remembers his first thought at the beginning of this story. His opening thought monologue, which quoted Nietzsche. They are his only thoughts... Ever.

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