

Colloquium - Ethics and Technology

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FADE IN

SFX: MUSIC - "Deus Ex: Invisible War - Tarsus Apartments"

INT. - APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT - SECURITY CAMERA'S POV

Seen through the lens of a security camera (fisheye effect, time and date stamp on the lower left of the screen), a young man walks down a cramped hallway of a dingy looking apartment building. He makes his way through the maze of corridors and hallways until he reaches a door. He pulls out a keycard, swipes it through the reader and the door opens. He steps inside.

CUT TO:

INT. - APARTMENT - NIGHT

The young man walks through the door into his tiny, one-room apartment and puts down his bag. He takes off his coat and kicks off his shoes, then walks over to a computer. He sits down and turns it on.

CUT TO:

INT. - APARTMENT - NIGHT - WEBCAM'S POV

The view immediately switches to the point of view of the computer's webcam, showing a closeup of the young man's face. He sits and works on the computer, apparently oblivious to the voyeur watching him. A few hours later, he rubs his eyes wearily and flops onto the bed nearby, soon falling asleep.

CUT TO:

INT. - APARTMENT - NIGHT

Closeup of the apartment's door. The electronic lock switches from a green "UNLOCKED" to a red "LOCKED".

CUT TO:

INT. - APARTMENT - NIGHT

Closeup of the apartment's thermostat. The display reads 68°F and slowly starts climbing to 70°F, 90°F, 100°F.

CUT TO:

INT. - APARTMENT - NIGHT

The view switches back and forth between the thermostat and the young man sleeping. When it reaches 105°F, the young man kicks off his sheets and begins to wake up. As it rises past 115°F, he is fully awake and sweating. He gets out of bed and walks over to the door, tries to open it. It won't budge. The temperature keeps rising... 130°F. The young man stills struggles with the door. 150°F... 160°F... The young man pounds on the door, soundlessly screaming for help as heat shimmers become visible. 175°F... 200°F... The young man slowly sags to the floor, weakly struggling and pounding on the door. 215°F... 225°F... The young man has finally stopped moving, he is crumpled by the door, his skin a seriously unhealthy shade of crimson. The temperature levels off then begins to drop slowly.

FADE TO:

INT. - APARTMENT - DAY

The apartment is crawling with people, mostly police officers. Some are taking photos of the apartment while others are collecting evidence. The young man's body has been covered with a sheet and the room looks partially melted.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Man, can you believe this shit? The guy must've been just cooked alive.

POLICE OFFICER #2

Helluva way to go.

An important-looking man dressed in a dark suit and tie enters the room. He flashes a badge to the police officer at the door.

AGENT GRAVES

I'm Special Agent Graves, FBI. Who's in charge here?

OFFICER

Detective Cobb, sir, but he just stepped out for a coffee.

AGENT GRAVES

Could you call him back here, please. I need to speak to him urgently.

OFFICER

Um, sure. Just a minute.

The OFFICER moves away and begins talking into his walkie-talkie. Meanwhile, AGENT GRAVES meanders through the apartment, taking in everything at a glance. The CSIs stay out of his way as he makes his rounds. A voice comes from behind him.

DETECTIVE COBB

Agent Graves? I'm Detective Cobb. What's this all about?

GRAVES turns around to find a lanky man standing there holding a steaming Styrofoam cup. The DETECTIVE has a badge clipped onto his belt, under his coat. He takes a sip of coffee.

AGENT GRAVES

Good morning, detective. How's the investigation going?

DETECTIVE COBB

Not too bad. We got called in earlier this morning when the landlady found him after coming to see why he was late with his rent. We figure he's been dead a week or so. We're still digging through this place trying to find out who he is... well, was.

AGENT GRAVES

I'll save you the trouble, detective. This man was a federal employee and as such, his death becomes a federal matter. Tell your people that the FBI will be taking over this investigation effective immediately. Please have them turn over their evidence to the collection team that is arriving downstairs as we speak. Also, anything and everything you've found here is classified compartmentalized. You and your people are not to discuss any of your findings, not even amongst yourselves. As far as you're concerned, this death did not occur. Is that clear?

DETECTIVE COBB

(Taken aback)

Well... Sure, if you say so.

AGENT GRAVES

Good. Thank you for your cooperation, detective. I'm sure I don't need to remind you that this is a matter of national security and your discretion is paramount. Now, if you'd be so kind as to help get your people out of here. We have everything under control.

FADE TO:

INT. - APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

The police are leaving the building as instructed. The FBI has an evidence collection team stationed outside the doors and the police officers are asked to turn over all their evidence. DETECTIVE COBB surreptitiously slips a recovered MiniCD into a hidden pocket in his coat and turns over the rest of his evidence. He walks to his car, gets in and drives off.

FADE TO:

INT. - POLICE STATION - DAY

DETECTIVE COBB walks over to his desk, on top of which sits a computer. He pops open the CD drive and inserts the MiniCD from his pocket before sitting down to examine the disc's contents.

CUT TO:

SFX: MUSIC - "Valve - Half-Life Song 18"

INT. - POLICE STATION - DAY - SECURITY CAMERA'S POV

DETECTIVE COBB is sitting at his desk, still exploring the contents of the disc. It looks as though our mysterious voyeur has found the dear detective.

FADE TO:

INT. - FBI HEADQUARTERS - EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

AGENT GRAVES and a second, female agent (AGENT RANDALL) are present in a small room that is dominated mostly by a table. On the table is all the evidence gathered by the police at the young man's apartment, including his melted computer. The two agents are sorting through the evidence

as well as photos taken by the police photographers. A third agent (AGENT BALE) enters the room carrying a manila folder.

AGENT GRAVES

Good, you're here. So, what have we got?

AGENT BALE

(Checking the folder)

Not much, I'm afraid. The victim's a Mr. Leland Baxter. Worked for the NSA as a programmer and technical consultant, specializing in AI research and development. Found dead this morning in his apartment of second-degree burns caused by radiant heat, though we have reason to believe he's been dead for quite a while. We did a thorough check of the apartment and its heating system, the stove, the oven, and all that. Everything checked out. There was no tampering.

AGENT GRAVES

So, no new information there. What do we know about his work or his personal life? Did he have any enemies, or anyone who'd be threatened by what he was doing? Any evidence of suicide, for that matter? Though why he'd choose to go like that is beyond me.

AGENT RANDALL

Well, in the photos, you can see some small scratches and dents on the door. It probably wouldn't open so he was trying to get out by knocking it down. Not something you'd do if you were trying to commit suicide.

AGENT GRAVES

Right. So the question is who did it, and how?

AGENT BALE

Well, based on what we found, what could cause the temperature to spike like that?

AGENT RANDALL

If you ask me, the only thing that could have done it was the heating system. It's the only thing that's got enough power behind it to potentially crank up the heat that much, and it's the only system that's capable of covering every square inch of the apartment.

AGENT BALE

But those things have automatic cutoffs to prevent this exact thing from happening. Plus, it'd be a major fire hazard without them. I have the same system in my apartment.

AGENT RANDALL

But what if something could override the cutoffs?

AGENT GRAVES

Like what?

AGENT RANDALL

(Thinks for a moment)

An AI could do it.

AGENT BALE

(Scoffs)

Oh, please. I mean sure, an AI COULD theoretically do it, but honestly? Every one of them's got an electromagnetic shotgun hard-wired to their skulls and if they so much as think about screwing around, they'll get wiped. They know that. Nobody trusts those things.

AGENT RANDALL

My point exactly. Nobody trusts them and there's got to be a reason. You said yourself Baxter worked with AIs. What if he found a way to circumvent the erasure protocol? OR worse yet, what if one of the AIs figured it out for itself?

AGENT GRAVES

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Randall. Even if an AI were free to do whatever it wanted, why would it want to kill Baxter?

AGENT RANDALL

That, I don't know.

AGENT GRAVES

So you've got the means and MAYBE the opportunity, but no motive. Close, but no cigar. Keep thinking though. That's a good start.

FADE TO:

SFX: MUSIC - "Joel Nielsen - We've Got Hostiles"

EXT. - POLICE STATION - NIGHT - SECURITY CAMERA'S POV

DETECTIVE COBB is done for the day. He's leaving the station and walking across the parking lot to his car, still being watched (though he's unaware) by the mysterious voyeur. He gets in, turns on the ignition and drives off.

FADE TO:

EXT. - HIGHWAY - NIGHT - TRAFFIC CAMERA'S POV

DETECTIVE COBB'S car is still being watched, this time through the lens of a traffic camera. The words "303 NORTH" appear at the top centre of the screen and the time and date appear on the bottom left.

CUT TO:

EXT. - HIGHWAY - NIGHT - TRAFFIC CAMERA'S POV

Another section of a different street from the traffic cam's POV.

CUT TO:

EXT. - HIGHWAY - NIGHT - TRAFFIC CAMERA'S POV

One more shot as COBB nears the off ramp.

FADE TO:

EXT. - SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

DETECTIVE COBB arrives home to his small suburban bungalow. He pulls the car into the driveway, shuts off the lights and gets out. Closing the door, he makes his way to the door, unlocks it and goes inside.

CUT TO:

INT. - COBB'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DETECTIVE COBB enters and takes off his coat, hanging it on a rack. He then walks into his living room, sits down on an

easy chair and puts his feet up. He switches on the TV and settles in.

CUT TO:

INT. - COBB'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The basement is dark but one can make out the large, cylindrical shape of a furnace. The pilot light is barely visible underneath. Focusing in on the pressure gauge, one can see that the gas pressure is slowly rising. Suddenly, the pilot light flares high and the screen is whited out by an explosion.

CUT TO:

EXT. - COBB'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house explodes and is engulfed in flames. The roof is blown upwards then collapses back in on itself, bringing some of the walls down with it. Flaming debris rains upon the front lawn and the car still in the driveway.

FADE TO:

INT. - FBI HEADQUARTERS - AGENT RANDALL'S DESK - DAY

AGENT RANDALL is sitting at her desk, looking through some files. There are file folders scattered all over her desk along with books stacked almost a foot high. Photographs litter her desk as well. AGENT BALE enters and walks over, tossing another folder on her desk.

AGENT BALE

Hey, here's that other folder you wanted.

AGENT RANDALL

Thanks, Robert.

AGENT BALE

No problem. Hey, did you hear about Cobb?

AGENT RANDALL

Who?

AGENT BALE

You know, that detective who was in charge of the Baxter case yesterday before Graves took over?

AGENT RANDALL

Oh, yeah. What about him?

AGENT BALE

The guy's dead. A combination of a gas leak and faulty wiring blew up his house. It was all over the news.

AGENT RANDALL

(Eyes wide)

No shit, really? That's awful!

AGENT BALE

(Shrugs)

Yeah, well, shit happens. Anyway, I've gotta be somewhere. I'll catch you later.

AGENT RANDALL

See ya.

BALE exits and RANDALL returns her attention to her work.

SFX: MUSIC - "Behavior - Shanghai Infiltration 360"

MONTAGE: AGENT RANDALL is working, flipping through papers, examining photographs, etc. The light outside the office begins to fade as day turns to evening, which turns to night. She ends up on her computer, looking at Baxter's NSA employee profile. She scrolls through thesis papers he did as a student, abstracts of his current work, etc. She looks away and rubs her eyes tiredly before picking up a photo of Baxter's apartment taken by the police. She studies it for a moment, her brow furrowing. She reaches for her office phone.

AGENT RANDALL

Hi, Graves? Can I see you for a minute?

FADE TO:

INT. - FBI HEADQUARTERS - AGENT GRAVES' OFFICE - NIGHT

GRAVES is sitting behind his desk when RANDALL walks in. He looks up at her.

AGENT GRAVES

Good evening, Randall. What can I do for you?

AGENT RANDALL

I think I might be on to something. You heard about Cobb?

AGENT GRAVES

(Nods)

Poor bastard.

AGENT RANDALL

Well, I'm beginning to think it wasn't an accident. In fact, I think his death might be linked to the Baxter case.

AGENT GRAVES

Do tell.

AGENT RANDALL

Think about it. Baxter is killed by having his apartment overheated to the point of cooking him alive. Cobb is assigned to the case, but then is killed the same day by his house blowing up. Both men killed so close together by having their homes tampered with. That can't be a coincidence. My guess is Cobb found something he shouldn't have, and whoever killed Baxter killed him too.

AGENT GRAVES

(Leans back in his chair and steeples his fingers)

Hmm, interesting theory. How would you prove it though?

AGENT RANDALL

I want to look through Cobb's things, maybe maybe he found something useful.

AGENT GRAVES

Well, considering his house is scattered over three square blocks, I don't think you'd have an easy time with that.

AGENT RANDALL

What about his office?

AGENT GRAVES

(Mulls it over)

It could work. I just want to make sure you don't waste your time.

AGENT RANDALL

No worries. I'll be back before you know it.

She leaves.

FADE TO:

EXT. - POLICE STATION - NIGHT - SECURITY CAMERA'S POV

RANDALL'S car pulls into the Police Station parking lot and stops. She gets out and heads into the building.

CUT TO:

INT. - POLICE STATION - RECEPTION DESK - NIGHT

RANDALL walks up to the DESK SERGEANT and flashes he badge.

AGENT RANDALL

Hi, I'm Special Agent Randall of the FBI. I need to see
Detective Cobb's office.

DESK SERGEANT

Oh, sure thing, Agent. It's on the second floor, southeast
corner. We're in the process of cleaning it out, but I'm
sure they won't mind if you take a look.

AGENT RANDALL

Thanks.

She heads for the stairs and walks up.

CUT TO:

INT. - POLICE STATION - OFFICE AREA - NIGHT

RANDALL emerges from the stairwell and walks over to COBB'S desk. It is located inside a walled-in cubicle of wood and glass. Most of his effects are there, including his computer, his books and some binders on a shelf. There are also lots of cardboard boxes piled in the middle of the area, evidence of somebody tasked with putting all his stuff away doing their job. RANDALL walks over and sits in his wooden swivel chair. She begins opening drawers, rifling through his papers, etc. She finds the CD that COBB took from the crime scene and examines it closely (it's marked "Leland Baxter") before popping it into COBB'S

computer. She browses through the contents of the disk for a bit, then pulls out her cell phone, hitting a number on speed dial.

AGENT RANDALL
Graves? It's Randall. Guess what?

AGENT GRAVES
(Phone Voice)
What've you got for me?

AGENT RANDALL
I was right. Cobb had a CD of Baxter's. It was a work diary of some sort.

CUT TO:

INT. - FBI HEADQUARTERS - GRAVES' OFFICE - NIGHT

AGENT GRAVES is in his office, on the phone.

AGENT RANDALL
(Phone Voice)
I was wrong. There's nothing relevant in Cobb's office.

AGENT GRAVES
Oh, I see.

CUT TO:

SFX: MUSIC - "Half-Life 2 - Song 2"

INT. - POLICE STATION - OFFICE AREA - NIGHT - SECURITY
CAMERA'S POV

RNADALL is still on the phone.

AGENT GRAVES
(Phone Voice)
And?

AGENT RANDALL
It turns out Baxter was working on a new AI for the NSA's Signals Intelligence System. You ever heard of ECHELON?

CUT TO:

INT. - FBI HEADQUARTERS - GRAVES' OFFICE - NIGHT

As before.

AGENT RANDALL
(Phone Voice)

So much for my theory. I really thought I had it.

AGENT GRAVES

Hey, don't worry about it. It happens to everyone. Why don't you go home and get some rest. We'll start fresh tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. - POLICE STATION - OFFICE AREA - NIGHT - SECURITY
CAMERA'S POV

As before.

AGENT GRAVES
(Phone Voice)

ECHELON... that's the system that can intercept phone calls, faxes, e-mail, or whatever electronic communications, and then analyze them, right?

AGENT RANDALL

You got it. ECHELON's analysis is currently handled by an AI named Daedalus. Thing is, Daedalus is sorely out of date. Baxter was working on a new project, a more sophisticated AI called Helios that was set to replace Daedalus by the beginning of next year. Looks to me like Daedalus didn't like that too much, so it killed Baxter before he could finish his work. And then when Cobb found out, it killed him too.

CUT TO:

INT. - FBI HEADQUARTERS - GRAVES' OFFICE - NIGHT

As before.

AGENT RANDALL
(Phone Voice)

Okay, that sounds good. You don't mind if I take off now, do you?

AGENT GRAVES
Not at all. I'll see you tomorrow.

AGENT RANDALL
(Phone Voice)
Alright. Have a good one, Graves.

CUT TO:

INT. - POLICE STATION - OFFICE AREA - NIGHT - SECURITY
CAMERA'S POV

As before.

AGENT GRAVES
(Phone Voice)
That's pretty serious. Okay, I'll assemble a team and see
what we can find over at the NSA. We'll handle this from
here. Good job, Randall.

AGENT RANDALL
Thanks. Anyway, I'm all done here. Are you sure you don't
need me over there?

AGENT GRAVES
(Phone Voice)
It's fine, we've got it covered. Why don't you go home, get
some rest?

AGENT RANDALL
Alright. Have a good one, Graves.

AGENT GRAVES
(Phone Voice)
You too. See you tomorrow.

*RANDALL closes the cell phone and stands up to leave,
walking back to the stairs.*

CUT TO:

EXT. - POLICE STATION - NIGHT - SECURITY CAMERA'S POV

*RANDALL walks back to her car, opens the door and gets in.
The door slams.*

CUT TO:

INT. - RANDALL'S CAR - NIGHT

RANDALL buckles her seat belt, starts the car and turns on the radio.

SFX: MUSIC - "Sting & The Police - Every Breath You Take"

CUT TO:

EXT. - POLICE STATION - NIGHT - SECURITY CAMERA'S POV

RANDALL'S car backs out of the parking space, turns around and drives off into the night.

FADE OUT

THE END