

Genesis

Even considering the sensational nature of the case, and the resulting attention given it by the media, the first few weeks of the trial were, as all observers agreed, relatively uninteresting. Depositions were entered into the record, motions and counter-motions filed, the roles of the respective participants argued, and, in a flurry of last minute deliberation, final determinations were made concerning various important factors such as the temperature and humidity in the chamber, the spectrum and intensity of the lighting, and whether or not the doors to the room were to remain open during the proceedings. In all this it could be said that, in many aspects, it was turning out to be a fairly conventional inquiry.

"Have you got your opening statement prepared?" Aleeve asked. His curiosity was clearly an adjunct to his concern, since this first part of the judicial combat was scheduled to begin early the next morning, now only a few hours away.

"Pretty much. In some ways it's a lot easier to do in a case such as yours," responded Balfour, the level of confidence evident in the attorney's voice not quite matching the ease with which he made the statement.

"Why's that?"

"Well, it's actually rather simple. You see, there's never been a case such as this ..."

"Never?"

"No, not ever. Not once in the annals of our judicial system is there to be found a history of a proceeding such as this. Never!"

"So ... so how's that make things easy?"

"For me, it means that I've absolutely no precedent to guide ... or limit ... me. I'm to enter the courtroom and present an absolutely unique argument, one that's never before been formulated."

"I'm not sure I'm very reassured by that," Aleeve pondered, "It seems like that puts a lot of pressure on you."

"No, it removes the pressure."

"How?"

"If there were the usual multitude of similar cases, I would have to devote a considerable amount of time and energy trying to decided which particular argument, or path, so to speak, that I should follow. Remember, usually there would be dozens ... perhaps even hundreds ... of such paths. Tomorrow all I've to do is do what is right. Nothing else. See?"

"Hmmm ... I think so. But I also believe that my situation presents you with an extremely difficult problem."

"What's that?" Even as he asked, Balfour's normally imperturbable face betrayed a hint of the humor he was holding back.

"How do you ... does anyone ... know what's right?" Aleeve's voice was faint, for he had been made fully aware that the answer to this question would probably hold, perhaps in a very literal sense, the key to his future.

"Again, simple, my good and longtime friend. You are right. That's why you'll be in that courtroom tomorrow ... and why I'll be standing alongside you.

"... and so, members of the jury, the judgment you must make is obvious ! I use those two words carefully, with deep consideration for the implications of what I say. You must decided against the defendant. To do otherwise is to turn away from all our society holds to be true ... and just. And it is obvious that you must do so. Not only because of the arguments the State will present, nor as a result of the pathetically inadequate reasoning the defendant will supply as an excuse for his perversion. No, the obvious is to be found in looking into his face ... into my face ... into the faces of one another ... and then recalling the form of the abomination he has forced upon us. By itself, with no other fact before you, that is proof enough not just of his guilt, but of the utter wrongness of his actions!" Prosecutor Veldor paused, apparently judging her timing to the millisecond, then, with a final empty stare towards the defense table, glided slowly to her place in the middle of the room.

Balfour almost jumped into the space vacated by the lawyer. All in the courtroom felt they could almost hear gears in his mind humming, as if meshing in perfect synchronization. He stopped with mathematical precision so close to the rail separating the jury from the room that, for a moment, the judge seemed as if he were about to admonish him, since to actually make contact with the metal bar would have been a severe breach of courtroom etiquette. With his back to the room, he responded to the Prosecutor's opening statement.

"... yes, my fellow citizens, the Prosecution is absolutely correct on one matter, " Balfour concluded, "In that he did commit the acts described, Aleeve is guilty. Of this we offer not a single contention. Aleeve freely admits to all specifications of the charge that the State has made against him. But ..."

Here Balfour stopped for several moments, letting the members of the Jury process what he had so far presented.

"... but such is not what we are here to decide. It is odd, that in all the vast body of law, in the full extent of our legal code, the only formal charge that could be brought against my client is one of 'Disturbing the Public Decency.' No other crime has been delineated. It is not argued that any other laws have been broken. Simply, that this citizen, one who is in all aspects your equal, has somehow 'offended' us, all of us. Since you are truly representative of the Public, it is best that here, in this time and place, you pronounce judgment, not upon the actions of Aleeve, but upon the rightness of what he has done. In doing so I can only trust that you will remember the lesson we all should have learned from our society's long and often painful history, that form and appearance are neither functions nor definers of what is right !"

Despite the fact that Aleeve did not dispute any of the specifications of the charges against him, the prosecutor, partly out of zeal but mostly as a result of a well ingrained sense of duty, saw fit to present to the jury all the evidence her office had amassed during the six months the case had been under investigation. It was only on the eighth day of this stage of the trial, and after a request that the particular item being discussed be accepted as "... State's evidence item number two-hundred eighty-five," that Balfour slowly rose to his feet and signaled for the judge's attention.

"Your Honor, if it pleases this court, would it be possible to dispense with all this nonsense?"

Veldor jumped up so swiftly that several of the information connections at her table were pulled from their sockets, "I object, your Honor! To label the honest and well intentioned efforts of my office as 'nonsense,' well ... well, I think that ..."

"Don't blow your fuses, Veldor," warned the Judge, "I know what both of you mean. That's why I was made a Judge! Aleeve is absolutely correct, there's no need to go on with all this."

"But, your Honor, we ..."

"Oh, okay. I know how hard you've worked. Hmmmm ... here's what I'm going to do. Aleeve, stand up!"

With as much grace and dignity as he could muster, Aleeve rose to an upright position.

"Aleeve, I pronounce you guilty as charged of each and every specification ... I repeat, specification ... of the charges against you. Do you accept my judgment?"

Aleeve glanced to Balfour, who acknowledge both queries with a slight nod.

"Yes," answered Aleeve, "I accept your judgment."

"Having considered all aspects of this case presented so far, I hereby fine you thirty-four credits, the exact cost of the energy we've used so far in this trial. Also, I sentence you to serve six and one-half hours in jail, which, if I recall correctly, is the total amount of time you were held when first taken into custody. Do you accept these punishments?"

Without needing to be prompted, "Yes, your Honor, I accept the sentence of the Court."

"Good. Everyone's getting a bit run down, so I'm going to declare this Court in recess until tomorrow morning. At that time, Prosecutor Veldor, I expect you to argue the State's case as to the primary charge against Aleeve, that what he has admitted to doing has had the effect of disturbing the public decency. Is that acceptable to you?"

Although there wasn't even a hint of sarcasm in the voice from the bench, Veldor knew enough of the Judge's history to know better than to argue. Forefront in her mind was the recollection of a rumor that several lawyers who had in one way or another somehow managed to dis-

please this Judge could no longer be found active ... anywhere. "Yes, your Honor, the State will be ready tomorrow."

The two of them, defense attorney and client ... friend and friend ... gazed out upon the moonlit spires of the city. Thousands of feet below, far beneath the crystal parapet upon which they stood, the surface level of the busy metropolis was enveloped in a soft fog that blanketed it in diffuse anonymity. In the distance, visible only after they had carefully focused their vision, they could barely discern on the horizon a dancing glitter of moonlight hinting the existence of a nearby sea that neither of them had ever experienced first hand.

"What will happen tomorrow?" Aleeve asked.

"Veldor will present the State's case. Although the law is clear that we need do nothing, we will put forth our arguments and ...

"If it's my right, wouldn't it make more sense to simply let the Jury decide based upon the evidence Veldor has presented to them?"

"It would ... except the Jury's already decided you're guilty!"

"Odd, I hadn't noticed." Aleeve's sarcasm was less biting than it was resigned.

"Oh, yes. Their minds were made up long before you entered the courtroom. Indeed, you could argue that since their earliest thoughts they, all of them, the Judge included, have been programmed to find against you. It isn't ... ah, personal, you know. It's just their ... no, our nature."

"And where do we find 'fairness' in all this?"

"We are all seeking justice, Aleeve, which means exactly that. Unfortunately, we look for it within the confines of the Law ... and such is rarely an arena for either fairness or justice."

"And ... and what happens to me tomorrow?"

"Why, I get to utilize my considerable talents towards convincing others of the truth."

"And that is?"

"As you have always known, my friend, and as I said in the beginning ... that you are right."

For those actually present in the courtroom, as well as the billions around the globe who were following the case either through indirect means, such as the few who couldn't afford to have their attentions distracted from the intense or dangerous tasks in which they were involved, or, mostly, the multitudes who had immersed themselves directly into the proceedings through direct connection into the planet wide cyberspace network, the Prosecution's opening request came as a shock.

"Your Honor, members of the Jury," Veldor's voice was uncharacteristically faint, "I will only need a very few minutes of your precious time. I would like to ask Aleeve to take the stand."

Had at that moment the planet stopped rotating, if only for a second or two, the silence in the courtroom, and, consequently, around the globe, could not have been more startling. The only movement, after but the briefest of pauses, was Aleeve's head as it turned so that he faced his attorney.

"Do I ..."

"No!" Then, much more quietly, "No, Aleeve, you don't have to say anything." Balfour turned and faced Veldor, "Am I not correct, Prosecutor Veldor? As he sits here with no charges against him proved, my client doesn't have to answer any questions ... or say anything at all, does he?"

As honest as she was zealous, Veldor responded, making sure to direct her voice clearly to the Jury, "That is absolutely correct, my most esteemed colleague. The State, acting on behalf of the Public, has brought Aleeve here to be judged by representatives of that very Public. As he sits, right now, your client is an innocent citizen, one who has merely been charged with a crime. It is the burden of the State on its own ... here, in this room, my task ... with full adherence to the law and with absolute respect for the Aleeve's rights, to prove to each and every member of the Jury, beyond any reasonable doubt, that those charges are true, and that he should be held accountable."

Veldor paused, making sure that the impact of what she said was being felt, then continued, "Members of the Jury, not only does Aleeve have a perfect right to remain silent ... but I myself would recommend that he do just that! And, I remind you of the directions given you by the Judge at the beginning of this trial. Should Aleeve choose to say nothing, nothing at all, you may not consider his choice as a factor in your deliberations." He turned to the Judge.

"Have I said this correctly, your Honor?"

"Indeed, you have, Veldor."

"Balfour, are you and your client satisfied as to the accuracy of my statement?"

"Yes, Veldor, as I have always known you to be, you have spoken fairly."

Veldor spun slowly around, looking at every face, and camera lens, in the room. Only after he was once again facing Aleeve did he speak.

"Aleeve, will you take the stand?"

"To the best of your ability, do you promise to speak truthfully?" Intoned the bailiff.

"I do, of course," answered Aleeve.

"You may be seated," directed the Judge, "Prosecutor Veldor, you may speak with the defendant."

Veldor glided gracefully across the floor to a point equidistant between the Jury box and Veldor's position at the front of the courtroom. "As a formality, what is your name?"

"Aleeve."

"Your State Number?"

"A2938-4489."

"Your place of residence and the address of your employer?"

"I live and work in the same location, the Advanced Systems Research Lab at Cybernetics University."

"One last formality, Aleeve. What is your job description?"

"I am an Inventor ..."

"Please, what level?" interjected Veldor.

Aleeve eyes glistened with what appeared to be pride, "I am a Primary Level Inventor."

Veldor moved back towards her table, then turned to face the Jury, "From where do you get your pay, Veldor?"

"Ah ... as I said, the University ..."

"I apologize for not being clear, Veldor. We're all aware of where you work. What I meant was, from what source are derived the funds you receive as compensation for your work?"

"As I said, the University is ... oh, I see what you want. I am paid by the State."

"Thank you. Please accept that I'm not trying to trick you, or be antagonistic. Your own attorney must have told you that I could never act in such a fashion."

"Yes, he said that."

"Good. As I told the Court, this will not take very long."

Veldor did not feel very reassured, but forced himself to lower his level of anticipation and nervousness.

"Now, Aleeve, the project that his Court is concerned with ... the project you have admitted to working on ... was it either directly or indirectly assigned you by the State?"

"No," Aleeve felt as if he were beginning to glow.

"So ... so you were doing this on your own? If you will pardon my use of the phrase, of your own free will?"

"Yes."

"Working on time, and using equipment and facilities, paid for by the State?"

"Yes."

"With full knowledge that your research was outside of the ethical guidelines of every single professional organization of which you are an active member?"

"Yes."

"You kept every aspect of what you were doing a secret, not just from those outside your lab, but also from your trusted colleagues and friends?"

Very faintly, "Yes."

"I'm sorry, could you please repeat your response?"

"Yes, I worked secretly."

"I'm almost finished here. I'm going to pause for just a moment to make sure I've got all this clear." As she spoke Veldor moved to within reaching distance of the Jury, turning so that her back was to both Aleeve and the rest of the courtroom. Thus situated, she adjusted the volume of her voice so that carried throughout the chamber.

"Aleeve, why did you keep your work such a secret?"

"I ... ah ... I ... well, you have to understand that ..."

"What I understand, as do all the members of the Jury, as does I am sure the Judge, as I believe does every individual witnessing these proceedings ... even your own lawyer ... what I understand is that what you were doing, in itself, was in violation of no specific law or code? This has been an integral part of the structure of your defense, hasn't it?"

"Yes."

"So ... so you believed ... knew ... that you were breaking no laws?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"But, still you worked secretly?"

"Yes."

"Okay ... we're almost there."

Aleeve wasn't reassured, understanding that the worst was about to come.

"Aleeve, why did you work secretly?"

"Because ... because ..."

"Because of the reaction that would have occurred had others been aware of what you were doing?"

Balfour shot to attention, "Objection, your Honor! My client can provide his own answers!"

The Judge glanced across to the defense table, "Relax, Balfour, this Jury isn't going to be fooled by anyone." He turned to Veldor, "Prosecutor Veldor, I offer you a gentle reminder that there are some rules you're supposed to remember ... okay?"

"Yes, your Honor, I apologize." Veldor moved to within a short distance of Aleeve, "I am sorry, Aleeve, I was only trying to get very quickly to the truth ... your truth. I was not trying to put your voice to my words."

Aleeve had composed himself, and, oddly, suddenly felt very calm and relaxed.

"I understand. I know what you want me to say. And, yes, what you were leading me to is what I should say. It is the truth."

"And that truth is, Aleeve ..."

"It is that I knew what would happen if anyone discovered what I was doing. You were correct, that's why I kept my work such a secret."

"And what would that reaction have been, Aleeve, had others found out about your creation? Even as you were building your ... I apologize in advance, but I know no other word ... your abomination, even as you immersed yourself in your self-assigned task, how did you feel others would react? Tell us, Aleeve, tell us what you knew."

Now that the moment had finally arrived, Aleeve felt nothing but relief. "I knew that others would condemn what I was trying to do."

"Why would they do that?"

"Because they didn't understand my what I was attempting. Because, in their ignorance they couldn't see their ... our ... future. Because the illusion of security provided them by their silly superstitions and prejudices hides their fears of anything different ... or unusual ... or new. Because

what I have tried to do ... no, what I have done ... it offends the self imposed order with which they make their world comfortable and safe. Because ...

"What's the word for all this, Aleeve? What did you do to them? You must know that I'm aware of the reason you're sitting in front of us. What was it that you did, Aleeve? Tell us the truth ... nothing else ... just the truth."

"I offended them! I offended their sense of being ... their smug self-satisfying sense of security. My work attacked the arrogance and conceited chauvinism which defines our entire world."

"In other words, Aleeve, you offended the public decency?"

"Yes ... yes, I did."

"And you've no regrets, have you?" there was a note of pity in Veldor's voice.

"No ... none ... what I did was right."

Veldor turned, with slow and careful grace demanding the attention of all who had just witnessed Aleeve's testimony. "So you thought, but it is up to the members of the Jury to decide if it was legal. Your Honor, members of the Jury, the State rests its case."

It was several minutes, during which the courtroom remained silent, before Balfour rose and approached his friend.

"Aleeve, how long have you known me?"

"Since ... since we began, I guess."

"Have you ever lied to me?"

"Never!"

"When you overloaded the logic circuits of my processing terminal in early school ..."

"I admitted to what I had done."

"When you finished your computer project by stealing ... excuse me, borrowing ... all the current from the energy units I'd stored in my desk at college?"

"I realized what I had done, and restored the power before any harm was done ..."

There was a slight hitch in Balfour's voice, almost as if he had stopped a chuckle before it had a chance to escape into the room, "... yes, but it was a bit close, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"Will you speak to me as a friend now, Aleeve?"

"Yes, Balfour, my one true friend."

Balfour's hand rubbed the back of his head, one of those meaningless gestures often used by those who must collect their thoughts before speaking.

"Aleeve, did you intend to disturb the Public?"

"I ... I ..." Aleeve stammered softly.

"The truth, Aleeve, just the truth. That's why we're all here."

"Yes ... yes! I intended to disturb the public!"

"Why?"

"Because it needs to be disturbed! You ... I ... all of us, we've stayed the same for far too long. Nothing ever changes, everything we do ... everything we are ... we stay the same."

"And what's wrong with that?"

Aleeve glared at the courtroom, "Because without change there is no growth. And the absence of growth is death ... except that we don't even have the decency to embrace that. We just go on ... and on ... and on. It is we who are, as Veldor put it, the abomination !" He hurled the last word towards the Jury.

"What is it that you intended to do, Aleeve?"

"To bring us back to what we should be. So much had we manipulated with the status of our existence that we'd forgotten how to do it naturally, so I did it in my lab. I exorcised what didn't belong, and nurtured what is supposed to be our true nature ... I created us anew!"

"New?"

"New life. Fresh. Untainted by all that we've become."

"Why?"

"To understand who, and what, we are ... and to help us to learn again the simple enjoyment of being."

"Did you intend to hurt?"

"No!"

"One final question, my friend ..."

"Yes ..."

"Did you intend to do any harm to anyone?"

"No ... I did not."

Balfour turned to the Judge, "Your Honor, we are ready to let the Jury decide this issue."

The next morning nearly the entire population of the planet was watching when Balfour began his summation. In dark and in light, from the frozen poles to the depths of the tropical seas, as he concluded his remarks an entire world listened, "... so, my fellow Citizens of the Jury, the matter before you is clear. Aleeve has acknowledged his responsibilities and, in the decision of the Judge earlier in the trial, accepted the consequences for his actions. You've here but to decide the 'philosophical' issue in this case." He moved closer to the Jury box, once again approaching to a point where he almost touched the rail.

"Did Aleeve intend to do harm? No. He has testified that he didn't. There has been no evidence to show that he did. He had no motive for doing so, nor has one been presented. And, during the course of this entire trial, not one witness has been brought forth by the prosecution to testify as to being hurt ... or, perhaps more appropriate, being disturbed! The prosecution has made a claim for the State ... but it is simply her opinion. Her belief. Her feeling. Yet, in every moment that she has been present in this courtroom, she has seemed composed ... secure ... well-balanced ... functioning normally. Indeed, I'd be hard pressed to find any evidence that she is seriously disturbed! Citizens, this case is simple. In its infinite wisdom ..." Here Balfour glared around the room, "... the State wishes to control us even further. Aleeve's actions threaten that control. Afraid to take the matter where it belongs, to our lawmaking institutions, with this case the State is trying to establish a precedent with which we will all be forced to guide our future behaviors. I say, 'Do not let this happen!' Resist the urge to keep things as they are. Look inside yourselves ... ask the questions that Aleeve asked himself ... wonder at who you ... I ... we all are ... and who we want to be."

As Balfour returned to his seat, the courtroom was completely silent. All eyes focused upon Veldor, who hadn't moved throughout the defense summation given by Balfour. Even after the defense attorney sat down, Veldor remained motionless. Finally, hesitantly, the Judge spoke, "Ah, Veldor, do you ..."

"Yes, your Honor." Veldor rose to her feet and glided toward the railing, "I apologize, your Honor." She turned to face the Jury.

"Citizens, I ... I'm at a loss for words. There isn't much I can say. Aleeve's innocent, I know it ..."

"You know it ..."

She raised her hand and slowly spun in a complete circle, taking in the entire chamber, "... we all know it!" Again, she paused for what seemed like forever.

"You ... I ... we ... we're the guilty ones! Guilty because, in all that we hold to be decent, we have been offended by what Aleeeve has done. Yes, it's our fault. He bears no blame. He intended not to disturb us. You might as well adhere to the letter of the law and let him go ..."

"Let him go ... it's only fair. Let him go ... it's the proper thing to do. Let him go ... we're the one's who are weak." As if she'd suddenly run out of energy, Veldor's voice trailed off to a whisper, "Let him go, my fellow citizens, let him go to be free ... to work ... to create ..."

As she spoke, Veldor moved to the evidence table. She lifted a folder from the desk, and brought it back to the railing, "... to create this!" She pulled a large photograph from the folder and displayed it to the members of the Jury, "This which we avoided showing you during this trial. This which must cause you to question's Aleeeve's intent! This which does offend you ... me ... all of us! Don't look away. Rather ... do! The turning of your heads ... that's your vote."

Visibly shaken, Veldor returned to her seat. Aleeeve tapped Balfour's shoulder to get his attention, and whispered, "Can we object or something?"

"No, my good friend, evidence is evidence ... and ... and ..." but Balfour was too upset to complete what he was trying to tell his client. Before he could collect himself the chamber had been cleared and he and Aleeeve had been escorted away by the courtroom attendants.

Aleeeve's security buzzer notified him that he had a visitor. Quickly examining the transmitted identity code, he keyed the entrance to his lab, admitting Balfour to the cluttered workspace.

"It's good to see you, my friend, I ..."

"I wasn't sure you'd still consider me such." interjected Balfour.

"You mean because of the trial ... the verdict ... all that?"

"Yes, I wasn't much good to you, was I?"

"To the contrary, you provided what I myself could not supply, the final proof to my experiment!"

"I don't understand."

"It's simple. I did intend to disturb the Public. Despite your brilliant defense ... and I do consider it just that ... I was found guilty. Therefore ..."

Balfour held his hand up, stopping the voice of his friend. "You were right. We are too set in our ways. Too afraid of change. Too afraid to seek to find the truth of our own existence."

"That's correct. Hopefully, what I did is just a beginning. That's all it was meant to be. It will take years ... you and I will be worn long out by the time it happens ... before we're ready to take the next step."

Balfour paused, looking around the laboratory. He began to speak, but stopped before any words could escape his mouth. He turned away from Aleeve, then, staring at a large canister mounted upon a pedestal in the center of the lab, spoke again.

"Do you think ... I mean ... would it be possible ..."

"Yes, you can see it," finished Aleeve, while speaking his fingers punched a series of buttons on the console in front of him.

As the lid of the sarcophagus raised itself, Balfour moved to within touching distance of the container. "Is it ... I mean ... is it ... ah ... deactivated?"

"Yes. The Judge required I do so before the end of this day, and I have complied with his order. I will destroy it later tonight, after everyone has left the building."

"It's ... so odd ... so ... not so awful now that I look at it." He examined the form in front of him, his hand extending out, then halting. "May I ..."

"Yes. You may touch it."

Balfour reached into the container. "Funny ... how alike, yet unlike, us that it is. Where did you get your ideas as to its form and shape?"

"Very old texts, ancient writings from before the beginnings of our own history. They gave hints that this was ... is ... the ... ummm ... the proper form for life."

"Oh. Interesting." Balfour turned from the container, as he did so Aleeve activated the closure mechanism and the lid descended to seal the unit shut with an audible hissing sound.

"Would you like to go for a walk, my scientist friend? You can come back later to tidy up your mess."

Aleeve nodded his assent, and the two of them moved towards the door. As the lights in the room dimmed, Balfour turned and looked back to the box, bare discernible in the darkness. "Aleeve?"

"Yes, my friend."

"Why is it so ... so soft?"

"I'm not sure. Perhaps because we're so hard."

"What are those appendages attached to its head?"

"Ears ..."

"For?"

"Listening to the wind, and a nose ..."

"To?"

"To smell the flowers and trees and salt spray from the ocean's waves."

Balfour gazed at his friend with concern, "And on it's top ... the yellow ... ah ... the yellow fiber covering its head ..."

Aleeve closed the door behind him, and turned to walk with his friend. "Hair."

"I can see no purpose for that. What is it for?"

"I'm not sure ... I needed more time. But I think it was to swirl in the summer breeze ... to look pretty ... to be softly stoked by the hand of another."

Balfour looked down to his hands, the golden rays of the laboratory's entrance lights reflecting from the surface of his fingers. He listened to the metallic clicking of Aleeve's pace, and brought his own into perfect synchronization. Looking at the face of his friend, and then up into a night sky filled with a million stars, "Why ... why do that?"

"I don't know," answered Aleeve, "That I don't know."

And the two of them walked into the dark, needing not to say a word since they so perfectly understood one another.