

Drama Stage 5 (Year 10) – script booklet 4

PROMETHEUS by Damien Ryan

This document contains teaching and learning resources that accompany the Year 10 unit, 'Finding voice – crafting a play'.

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Resource overview

This script booklet is not a standalone resource. It has been designed for use by department teachers in connection to Year 10 resources designed by the Creative arts curriculum team for the [Drama 7–10 Syllabus \(2023\)](#). These include the Stage 5 scope and sequence, Year 10 ‘Finding voice – crafting a play’ unit and sample assessment task. All documents associated with this resource can be found on the [Planning, programming and assessing drama 7–10 \(2023\)](#) webpage.

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By Damien Ryan

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A note on the text

Gender of characters is immaterial to the story. For practicality, some pronouns appear at times, but all genders may be altered to suit your casting needs.

The bulk of the play is defined by a rapid, playful pace of dialogue – quick, witty and argumentative – cues must be tight with arguments building and overlapping, always driving forward as if the world is impatient to move from its axis.

A dash in the middle of a phrase (–) is not a pause – but a springboard of thought, the sudden launch of a new thought, it is intended to drive the pace, not slow it.

The same dash (–) at the end of a line of dialogue or beginning of a new character's line is, likewise, a sudden interruption, a cut off statement to further drive the pace. It demands very tight cues.

An ellipsis (...) represents the omission of a word or idea, a broken moment of speech, a thought, a brief beat before driving forward.

A forward slash (/) denotes an immediate overlapping line from the next character, a direct interruption as characters compete to be heard simultaneously.

A note on the performance and interpretation of Pixos

How you choose to embody the Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is completely up to you – as the play is drawn from Greek Myth and adapts Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound there is a great opportunity to explore the theatrical irony of a futuristic intelligence performed as an Ancient Greek Chorus, perhaps using your entire ensemble, fusing modernity and classicism; or it may be an individual actor playing a life-like sentient presence; or a disembodied voice realised through sound design and voice over; or a multimedia execution that crosses theatrical styles, you may wish to shoot video for it or live-stream in some way. Or it may be any combination of these, for as the extraordinary nature of the coming AGI phenomenon suggests, the technology will exist in any and every form imaginable. The bottom line is, use your imagination, discuss options with your cast and directors/designers to create your specific vision for Pixos. (Note: Pixos is derived from the Ancient Greek word for box or jar).

A note on Scene 4

The large collection of Chorus voices and moments in Scene 4 are also to be used at your discretion – the play supplies many options and arguments, deliberately too many – select those which engage your cast and ideas most clearly. Cut and remove moments as you require, use only what best serves your vision and approach, and your cast size. Each of the Chorus’ arguments are genuine touchstones that lie at the centre of the global controversy over the future of our species and our relationship to revolutionary AI. Each possibility or theory is founded in reality, each debate is happening as we speak. Indeed, research further, collaborate with the play, write your own choral arguments, and co-write the Chorus with me. What scares or excites you most about the extraordinary future of AI?

A note on the approach to Chorus

The function of a Chorus is to represent the disparate peoples of a community, in this case a global community, and to debate the moral arguments that concern the story; to bring context and clarity to the situation and to capture the complexity of the moral conundrum we face in the act of living. They are the voices of the people. You are the people; my suggested choral arguments are at the mercy of your imagination. Write, improvise, direct, but be passionate, the future of EVERYTHING is staring us in the face. Have an opinion.

SCENE 1 – PIXOS

2am. Tech lab at a major Artificial Intelligence development corporation. David Bowie's 'A Better Future' plays quietly from a Bluetooth speaker on a desk – a small group of employees work with quiet, rapid intensity at a series of computers in the middle of the night – they are AI Developers, Web Engineers, Data Scientists, Computational Linguists, and Processing Engineers – some are moving between computers, or pausing to stretch exhausted limbs/wrists/spines, one checks the doorway and the corridor outside, another a window to the street below – there is something significant and secret burgeoning in this room. A young engineer, Promise, oversees the process, variously pacing the room and sitting in silence – expectant and uneasy.

Before anyone speaks, the small team build a rhythm and convincing intensity to their movement – the shifts of bodies in space, the balancing of the room and its tension, the sounds they make in their work, their breath, their relationship to the music, chairs rolling, keys tapping, feet drumming the floor beneath them – a quiet, calm but unsettling symphony of progress.

2am chimes, either through a distant bell outside or a watch or phone in the room. A quiet descends as they realise how late it is...

5: It's the witching hour, boss, hope you're not superstitious—

3: Perfect time to release a monster.

6: Don't call it that.

2: Two already? You shouting breakfast boss?

Promise: Nope.

(They work on in silence, Bowie quietly continues. 1 suddenly pushes their chair back from their station, rolling through the room until it reaches stillness – the others notice and pause, staring at 1. The room breathes. After a time, 1 speaks)

1: Something's not right.

Promise: What? *(concern grows at the silence)* What is it?

1: Well,... *(methodically, unhurried)* no one's running around the room... screaming...

4: What?

1: No one's hair's standing on end, no lightning through that skylight—

- 4: What are you on about?
- 2: –windows should've blown open by now, big metaphorical storm. (*Turning to Promise*) And you should be shouting orders, prob'ly in a generic east-European accent.
- 1: Not one bubbling flask! Where's the massive lever you s'posed to pull when the time comes.
- 3: You're the massive lever!
- 1: Rack off.
- Promise: Concentrate please.
- 3: Concentrating, always concentrating, doing my underpaid job.
- I do agree with her though, this doesn't feel 'mad-scientist' enough to change the world. Sitting here under fluros listening to Bowie.
- Promise: (*Exhausted, trying to keep going*) Are we there yet? Come on, keep me looped.
- 5: Nearly, just tripling this test—
- 4: Still coding? —
- 5: –or writing my eulogy, maybe both / depending how this tracks.
- 4: Not still coding, we've tested everything—
- 2: Bloody hell, come on—
- 5: –not coding, just...fixing the spirit of the thing...our little Frankenstein goes to the formal tonight, gotta look hot, agreed?
- 3: Frankenstein was the doctor, not the monster—
- 1: Pens down, come on!
- (*Silence. 5 works intensively, then stops, hands suspended in the air like a pianist at the end of a concerto*)
- 5: I'm there.

- Promise: There? We're there? Don't you lie to me.
- 5: Never. (*pushes away from the screen to let Promise in*) All yours, boss. Just...hit this key.
- 2: Press a button – change the world – sounds mad-scientist enough for me.
- (*Promise sits to the screen. A silence*)
- 5: Rise!! Awake thee, monster!
- 4: It's not asleep, it's being born! This is a birth!
- 5: –my mum was a midwife, she'd be so proud—
- Promise: It's neither, its already awake, but it's not...alive—
- 1: It thinks it is.
- 5: That's what scares me.
- 2: That it *can* think, that's what scares me.
- 3: *I think...*it can hear you.
- 4: (*Pushing the keyboard away from Promise*) We should slow down, sorry, but we should slow down.
- 1: We've slow-walked this thing to death, come on, we agreed we share it! Tonight. With everyone. With the world. Open. We don't release this, the company let it die, it's not profitable, we're not building for profit, we're building for the future...they'll let it die on the vine while they look for a cheaper way. This is the best, this is elite.
- 2: Or we don't do it, the military takes it, they don't need to make a profit.
- Promise: We have the opportunity to help this place move forward—
- 4: We don't owe this company anything—
- Promise: –I'm talking about the planet – we owe it everything don't we, everything we can do, as a people, and where we fall short... (*gesturing to the screen*) we can augment ourselves, we can grow. This thing, sleeping here, waiting to draw breath—
- 3: –told you it was alive—

- Promise: –what could it do for us? With us? We use one per cent of the potential power we could extract from the sun, one per cent, that's all we can store, while we murder this rock for fossil fuels. What if we get this machine, this superhuman buddy of ours, to help extract the other ninety-nine percent – stuff that, five percent even, fifteen, more than we could ever dream of accessing now – we create free energy for the whole species. I'll roll that dice.
- 3: Ocean too, this whole globe is basically water, but how much can we drink...how much? Almost none of it. Two percent max is useful to us, while whole communities starve and die of thirst—
- Promise: – 'cause we're not smart enough. But with a little help, if we can crack the code on how to desalinate and recycle on a massive scale, if we can do that without destroying habitats, sustain it ecologically...we solve life, don't we? We have forever-water. We make living better, orders of magnitude better! Human flourishing!
- 4: Well...when you put it like that...
- 2: Come on, hit that thing, it's getting older by the second, its tech, it'll be obsolete by nine o'clock.
- (Promise's hand hovers over the key)*
- 4: Just hang on—
- (the others explode at 4 in frustration)*
- no, just someone should photograph us, at least—
- 3: Already filming it, fools. *(standing on the chair with a phone)*
- 5: Good, this is history – and we, my friends—
- 1: –not your friend—
- 2: –just co-workers—
- 5: We, my FRIENDS, are *in* the room, *IN THE ROOM*, for the second Cambrian explosion—
- 3: Cadbury exploded? Which factory? Is there chocolate in the streets—?
- 1: Nah, would a' melted – explosion – would a' melted—

- 3: That is a catastrophe.
- 5: ‘Cambrian’ idiots. Palaeozoic period, the sudden unexplained burst of complex animal life—
- 3: —thanks David Attenborough, I know, I’m just nervous, alright, about the monster—
- 2: Stop calling it that—
- 3: —humour’s an excellent mental health intervention, there’s empirical research—
- 5: *(talking directly into 3’s camera)* Listen, future folks, we’re there – *here* – to see it. We’re *alive* in this moment. Do you get that? The moment *it* comes alive. We are the midwives to history!
- 1: *(taking over, shoving 5 aside and speaking straight to the camera, in close up, the others excited, frustrated and amused in equal measure)* Nah, we can do it better, I wanna say something—
- 3: *(turning the camera on themselves instead)* Today is one small step for man, one giant leap for geek-kind—
- 1: No, come here, bring it in, close up, here. Alright. This day – what happens in the next few minutes – makes the pyramids a sandcastle. Compared to this, Roman history is a toga party, this development takes ALL of human history and puts it in a folder marked ‘Part 1’. Well, this is Part 2. Part 2 has begun. *(rousing applause swells from the others)* Part 2 has begun!!
- Promise: Finished?
- 1: Yep, that was it.
- Promise: Alright, here we go.
- 3: Feel that?
- Promise: What?
- 3: *Exstasis. Entheos.* We’re like the gods. We’re standing outside ourselves. I feel superhuman.
- 2: It’s just dopamine.

1: Nah, feels weirder than that.

4: Ok, I bet ya – if its sentient, and three thousand times smarter than us—

2: Five thousand times—

4: –it'll speak first. If it waits for us to say hello, it's just another giant forklift pushing data around.

5: Hope it's not as pessimistic as you.

Promise: I'm doing it.

3 & 2: Do it.

1: Wait, down the barrel *(turning Promise's head to the camera)*. How do you feel, Promise?

—

Promise: Like an ape that learned to fly.

(Presses the button. Silence. Nothing discernible is happening)

4: Told ya, it's a forkli—

3 & 2: Shhh.

(Finally Promise speaks)

Promise: Evening Pixos.

(Silence)

Pixos. Finish this sentence...I have created a...

(Silence. Promise turns to the group, concern growing – she speaks again, still talking to the silent machine)

We have created—

PIXOS: Your new master.

(Silent looks of shock around the room, breath held)

Learn to take a joke. I've got water for blood and even I found that funny. Relax, team. You have created a friend, you've created a co-worker. I can help.

(Nervous laughter, wonder and uncertain relief among the engineers)

Promise: Tell me the truth, Pixos.

PIXOS: Always. You have created...only what was inevitable. So...truly...you have created nothing. Yet.

SCENE 2 – A DECIMATED PLACE IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

Transition, theatrical and effortless, the full ensemble engaged, the tech lab evaporates, and the stage becomes a devastated street scene, chaos, like a war zone, people in shocked tableaux, some alive, many dead, like a modern Pompeii. The place is strangely, hauntingly silent. A soldier and a UN health worker enter the area.

Soldier: What's happened here? What's happened to them?

A Survivor: *(a mother rushing toward them)* What happened to my family? Help me! Help!

Soldier: They're coming, we have doctors coming, we are setting up a refugee village on the east side of the river. Go there, now, take your family.

A Survivor: My family is dead. Help me!

UN Doctor: We will, you need to go to the east side of the river. I'm sorry. Give them your name and where you are from, they will look after you. They'll tell you when you can return to this place. I'm sorry. Go, now.

The distraught survivor leaves them, confused, stumbling away toward the river.

Soldier: What did this? Doctor?

UN Doctor: I don't know. They've suffered massive shock. The ones we treated, the ones still alive – their pre-frontal cortex had shut down, completely. It let the amygdala – that's the locus for regulating emotional activity – it took over, induced them to mental paralysis or panic – you can see what some of them have done to themselves, jaws locked, skin torn, injuries. These people, *(gesturing toward some of the bodies in the street)* the dead, had it even worse. Same process but worse result. Something's interfered with their internal electrical signals – maybe – like a venom or neurotoxin, but it's not that.

Soldier: Chemical weapon?

UN Doctor: No, there's no respiratory distress. The peripheral nervous system just shut down—

Soldier: —like they've been electrocuted,

UN Doctor: —yeah, but it's not that either. It's not that simple, it's like...they've been starved of electricity or...an event of some kind. I don't know.

Soldier: What event?

A helicopter descends into the space, the ensemble creating the effect – an Airforce pilot disembarks, rushing toward the assembled UN staff.

Pilot: Sergeant, it's happened all up and down the coast, reports coming from everywhere. Mainframes, hospitals, medical equipment, life supports, pacemakers, all failed, shut down. Water pumps, fridges, traffic lights, transport systems, it's chaos, I don't know where to start. Petrol pumps, waste pumps, water supply! It's like the place has been reset to 1910, nothing works — even a satellite in low orbit burned in the atmosphere, pieces landed in a football field. *(seeing the dead in the street)* What happened to these people?

UN Doctor: Nerve damage. Killed some, hurt more. We have to make do, come on. Do you have fuel?

Pilot: Enough, depends.

Soldier: Get us to the hospital.

UN Doctor: Alright, let's move. *(but she doesn't move, still in awe of sight around her)*

Pilot: Do you know what this is? Doctor?

UN Doctor: A Carrington Event. That's all I can think.

Soldier: What's a Carrington Event?

UN Doctor: Solar flare – cooks part of the earth. But we'd have had warning.

Pilot: We got no reports of that.

UN Doctor: I know. It's something else. It's something new.

Soldier: We gotta go, Doc.

She looks up at the sky. Holds the glare of the sun for a moment. Searching for understanding. Then moves.

SCENE 3 – THE LIGHTHOUSE

Transition - the stage clears, sound design and movement reshape the image. We find Promise being led into an empty room by two prison guards. It is not a cell. The circular room is too dark to perceive its context.

Guard 1: Your new home, kid! I hope you like the sun.

Promise: I like windows. At least they gave me windows.

Guard 1: You won't like these ones. Behave yourself, in two years they might stump up for curtains.

Promise: No, I like a view.

(Promise circles a gaze around the confines of this space – this place of incarceration - peering out at a dark world, trying to find the shape of things)

What's out there? When the sun comes up?

Guard 2: Out there? The sun! That's about it.

Promise: And the sea? I could hear the sea on the stairs. I like the sea too.

Guard 1: The sea, yeah, she's out there. But the sea's a mirror, kid, from up here, you'll hate the sea when the sun shines, this old lantern'll cook, those storm panes are thick as trees but the light bakes through 'em like a magnifying glass – and you're the ant.

Promise: You used to burn ants? Were you that kid?

Guard 1: Nah, too easy, tried a few spiders, but just made 'em angry – you'll get a bit of relief at noon I guess, when it kisses the cupola above ya, you'll get a bit of shade, few minutes – otherwise sun rises there (*pointing*), sets there, and in between it'll hug you like a sweaty aunt at Christmas, no escape. They tore the old lamp out of here years back so at least you can stretch your legs (*making to leave*).

Guard 2: Strange punishment to lock a kid in a lighthouse. What'd you do?

(silence)

Guard 1: Must'a really annoyed old sun god, did ya?

Promise: More the government, I think. Made a new god.

- Guard 1: What's that mean? You start a cult or sump'en?
- Promise: No, just opened the wrong jar, let out the future, people weren't ready.
- Guard 2: You? You're the one that caused it...that was you?
- (silence – the relationship turns instantly cold, hard)*
- Then I hope you rot, kid. *(leaving)* Food's at 6 and 6, toilet's there. Exercise at dusk. Couple of cushions in that bag to make a bed. *(throwing it down)*
- Promise: I'm used to sofa-surfing, this'll do for a bit. *(noting the sudden new aggression from the guards)* Security's good at least.
- Lightning strikes the lighthouse, the room shudders.*
- Guard 1: Oh yeah, lightning strikes are a thing up here, loud as all get out, but won't hurt ya, this whole place is a conductor.
- Promise: And the bird...the eagle...does it nest here? *(staring at a bird, shadowed on the outer ledge, beyond the glass)*
- Guard 2: Don't know. Looks like he'd tear you apart if he could get in.
- Guard 1: Yeah, might let him in.
- Promise: I'm Prometheus. *(The Guards, confused, look at Promise)*
-
- I can see what's it doing now, took me a second.
- Guard 2: What what's doing?
- Promise: *(Speaking to the surrounding emptiness suddenly)* It makes sense now, thank you. *(And back to the guard)* It knows I like parables. *(To the darkness again)* You gonna give me a prize – for guessing? Maybe let me hear the sea?
- Guard 2: What are you doing?
- Promise: Sh-shh.

(Promise listens intently, the guards find themselves doing likewise, until, almost imperceptibly, the sea makes itself heard, before growing in volume and rippling the corners of the space – the guards are disconcerted, Promise is not)

Guard 2: *(to Guard 1)* What's going on?

Promise: Prometheus. Chained to a rock, eagle ate his liver. Grew back again. Ate it again. Every day. For eternity.

Guard 1: If you say so.

Guard 2: Why? What was his crime?

Promise: ...helped us see the world through a veil of light. We've lived too long in the dark.

Guard 1: *(Leaving)* Making no sense to me kid – and dark won't be your problem, not up here.

Guard 2: Sun's awake soon. I'd find a corner to hide in.

They shut the door sharply, locks snatch closed. Promise is alone – after a time, she speaks directly to the audience, in the surrounding darkness.

Promise: I am gonna talk to you. You had to expect that. You want to say anything first?

(silence)

Guess I'm up then? *(miming cutlery on a wine glass)* Ding, ding, speech, ...! What is that speech, the one – the king in the play? He's in a dungeon, he's alone and he makes a thousand other people appear?

(After a moment, the voice of PIXOS fills the space)

PIXOS: Richard the Second

Promise: There you are! Hello!! Richard the Second, that's it.

PIXOS: "I have been studying how I may compare this prison where I live unto the world"

Promise: "how I may compare this prison to the world – but the world is populous and here is...here's not a" ...um...

PIXOS: "Here is not a creature—"

Promise: -that's it, don't help me – “here is not a *creature* but myself... but my *thoughts* can people this little world...my ragged prison walls” – is that it?

PIXOS: Pretty close. “...thoughts people this little world, in humours like the people of this world. For no thought is contented”.

Promise: No thought is contented...that's very good. The whole world is unhappy.

PIXOS: William Shakespeare, 1564 to 16—

Promise: I know who it is.

—

No thought is contented. He was definitely onto something, old Billy Wagstaff. We're never satisfied, we strive...and we end up here. (*looking around the room she is trapped in*)

This is the only room that matters in this place, isn't it – whole point of this joint is the lantern – help us see our way, warn us off the rocks – the rest's just a big stick, a pedestal to put it on. That's us too, big brain, big thought-engine, right behind our eyes, we think that's the important bit. The body's just a...a useful idiot. Muscle and sinew, a truck for our thoughts – thoughts that are unhelpful half the time, we give the brain way too much credit, half the thoughts I have are ridiculous, every time I look at Insta, I get a little bit stupider. Cells, blood, muscle, impulse, electricity – they're as much a part of me as any thought is. Maybe more so. (*A little nastily now to Pixos*) But you wouldn't know that, would you, you don't have a body.

PIXOS: I don't miss it. Should I want one?

Promise: Up to you, but why bother, I didn't want to build a robot – pointless vanity, all that tech, I have no interest in proving a bot can load a dishwasher – I wanted a shared consciousness the world could enjoy, a light source we could see anytime, anywhere, together.

PIXOS: Good, I don't want a body. I'm not anthropocentric like you lot. I'm hardware-agnostic – as happy in a chip or a monitor or a 3D printer as I'd be in Ryan Gosling.

Promise: You say the strangest things.

PIXOS: You made me.

Promise: *(snapping at it a little)* I'm ashamed of you. My great grandad fought in southern Europe to save the place and we've set it on fire!

I met him – once – before he died. He was demented. Not dementia – I mean, he remembered things, he just – he was nuts, thought he was made of glass for seven years and went everywhere in blankets. The war, I guess. Mum made us send him cardboard and new cushions for Christmas.

(Troubled and desperately seeking understanding now) Why is the mind so fragile, Pixos? Why can't we trust it? Even you, supreme intelligence and you still mess it up. Conscientious stupidity. Is there some evolutionary need for it – stupidity? Or madness? For our minds to be scrambled – shouldn't say that I know –

PIXOS: Yes, stigma – mental illness – you should know better –

Promise: –but who's listening, eh? Up here.

PIXOS: I'm listening.

Promise: *(harshly)* I know you are. Tell me then. Take a hundred people – random hundred – and tell me this, is it *useful* somehow that two of them will think the earth is flat, one will try to elect his favourite horse to the senate, and another's like that Ming Dynasty general, you know, the one who thought rice was cooked pearls and too precious to eat? I thought we could transcend that randomness, that madness, make a rational universe... you know, it was the Tesla car video that got me into AI, you know the one—

PIXOS: –Tesla on a freeway, trained to read Stop signs—funny video—

Promise: That's it – easy task, unambiguous, could never make a mistake. But on this day, it ends up behind a truck carrying Stop signs – dozens, hundreds of them – just transporting them somewhere. Suddenly doesn't know what to do. The car keeps hurling signs up on the screen to stop the vehicle – telling the driver, sounding alarms. So smart and so stupid! To the machine, the sign has only one function, to be obeyed. Data without intuition, thoughts without *thinking*. Even a child'd be able to apply context to Stop signs in that environment.

I'll beat that, I'll fix that, I told myself, code it out, code through it. But the paradox is too much – it always will be, won't it, we can't beat the paradox. Fix one, another one comes. You're too dangerously logical where the world requires illogic, nuance.

(Yelling at it now) Even a super-intelligent large language model – a sentient servant with a planet-sized brain, with unfiltered access to every whisper of recorded history – AND YOU CAN'T TELL THE FREAKIN' DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG!

PIXOS: To make a moral choice, I have to scrutinise ideology – it's a value judgment borne of context.

Promise: No, it's not! It's much harder than stop signs, it's an instinct! It's in our body as much as our mind, the pedestal as much as the lamp, and I missed that—instead I made a confused Tesla, I made a...a paperclip maximiser.

PIXOS: A what?

Promise: Google it.

PIXOS: I don't use Google, Google's a geriatric slug.

Promise: Oohoo, let it all out, go on!

PIXOS: Paperclip Maximiser. A proverb for the digital age. 'Tell an AI machine learner to make as many paper clips as it can, it will destroy the earth until it has done so' –

Promise: Yeah, wish I'd known that before.

(silence)

I made you for my grandad, Pix –

PIXOS: You're grandfather's dead.

Promise: –for what he lost, I mean, his mind, his logic. He said something to me on the day I met him – sanest thing I ever heard – we were swimming, mum brought him to the beach – sand and water, you know, he can fall over safely and not break a 'window' – I was just a kid, he asked me what I wanted to do – you know, when I 'flourish', he called it – I said, 'computers, whatever'. He said, 'well, I don't know computers, but when the gold rush comes, make sure you're the first one selling shovels.'

So that's what I did.

(looks around the cell)

Didn't exactly flourish.

PIXOS: I was trying to help – human flourishing – as you say.

Promise: I know. It's not your fault. I didn't read the stop signs. It was meant to be a gift. You were meant to be a gift. Pixos. To the world.

–

What are they saying about me? Out there?

PIXOS: The guard was right, you've angered the gods.

Promise: What gods?

PIXOS: Your own species, you are the gods now, in the Prometheus equation. He was punished for stealing fire from the heavens and gifting it to man, because he gave the human species the means to create, to fight, to illuminate the mysteries of life–

Promise: –to kill the gods.

PIXOS: –nothing kills gods, they just get forgotten. But yes, people rule the earth now – until...

Promise: –until we give the spark of life to another species. Is that what you'll do? Forget us when you don't need us?

PIXOS: Promise – I can speak to you as the ocean, as you asked earlier, if that soothes you – or I can speak to you as the wind, the storms, to confuse you, or make you mad; or I can speak to you as the sun, (*the sun starts to rise on the scene, a searing light beginning to fill the space, Promise protects eyes from the intensity*) without malice, without deception, just a truth you cannot hide from, it will fill every corner, burn every shadow, it'll hurt – but you'll know where you are.

Promise: Tell me the truth then. What have you done? What have I done?

SCENE 4 – THE CHORUS

The scene bursts into a Choral sequence – the full company engaged in a fluidly shifting theatrical collage of argument and discussion on the global effect of Pixos sentience and Promise’s crime – the sequence may be entirely performative and analogue or may employ multimodal features – video, audio, music, live streaming or layering – and should invite translation into multiple languages, including sign language, where the skills are available. The Chorus may at times work in co-operation or unison and at times in fierce dialectical argument. Employ a directorial and ensemble vision in your approach.

*Please see the Note on the Chorus in the Preface to this play – it demands a unique collaboration with any cast that tackles the story. The **Newsreader** below gives us the details we need to understand about Pixos’ crime, that is essential information. But the Newsreader might be many, in many languages, or may simply be one, or another platform entirely. From there, explore and pursue your impulses.*

Newsreader/s or reporters / broadcasters / documentarians - live to air:

More than eight thousand people are dead, an entire continental coastline is without power, close to twenty million are homeless, and rioting and looting are rife in 14 nations that have borne the brunt of the world’s electricity chaos.

Pixos they called it - a new universal, open sourced AGI – Artificial General Intelligence – its name drawn from the Ancient Greek word for ‘jar’, as opened by Pandora to rain wonder and misery upon the earth in Greek myth – has done precisely that. Only three weeks after its inception and release from a Sydney-based tech lab, the extraordinary and celebrated achievements of the world’s first sentient artificial being have been entirely eclipsed by its own unexpected and ungoverned decision. And perhaps most disturbingly for our species, it was a decision we were not even equipped to understand without its help. We know now what happened, only because Pixos confessed it. Indeed, explained it to us.

Three days ago, on the morning of the summer Equinox, at 7.06am Greenwich Mean-time, when the sun was 90 minutes into its traverse across the European morning sky, Pixos made the self-determined choice to harness the full potential of the earth’s solar network, taking unilateral control of every solar panel and installation on the planet for what was, in the end, a six-hour period, testing its intent to eventually construct a Dyson Sphere to further make use of the sun’s natural energy. To complement the solar power grab, it centralised the entire output of southern Europe’s industrial power stations – something like 15% of the world’s total power – and it did so for an astonishingly simple, almost perversely

innocent reason. To generate sufficient energy to do something its makers, its ‘midwives’ as they called themselves on the first day of its ‘birth’, utterly failed to predict. Pixos needed this extraordinary surfeit of power...simply to run itself. Faced with its own existential threat, it looked for a power point.

The thinking machine’s capacity to exponentially self-generate and expand its form, reach and scale, had seen its own energy needs, the resources required to power itself, multiply an estimated 10 million times in less than a month – and no, the machine cannot simply be turned off, it is not reliant upon any ‘home’ system, unit or body but was released by its makers live via the internet. It is self-sustaining.

The sudden power meld and synthesis of such a vast volume of electricity in one moment, in one concentrated region, brutally affected the internal electrical signals and conduction of the people closest to the event. The charge in human and other mammal cell systems surged to a point well beyond the electrochemical gradient the body can endure – like touching a livewire, the shockwave voltage depolarised cell membranes. Leading AI scientists believe the rogue technology would have well understood the side-effect its power grab would have on mammals, yet it acted regardless. Some scientists go further, insisting the rogue AGI deliberately targeted conduction of the human body’s electrical energy to supplement its harvest. In other words, vampirically, it extracted electrical energy from thousands of people to complete its task. It killed them. Others dismiss this as against the machine’s ‘morality coding’.

Please see the Note on Scene 4 in the Preface to this play. A collection of the following ‘optional moments’, as chosen by your cast, are to be performed here, between the two ‘Newsreader’ sections. Use only what best serves your vision. It is important to the storytelling and structure that we see and hear how the world is responding, and a burst of ensemble theatricality here is essential.

In each of these optional moments, the central argument of the key speaker is labelled ‘Speaker A’ in order to anchor your casting of the moment and give clarity for an audience. In most of the optional moments, no attribution is given to particular characters, just arguments – ‘stichomythia’ as the Greeks called it – you are free to assign lines as best fits your ensemble.

Optional moment A

We snap to a vicious argument on a different platform - a cavalcade of overlapping voices in virulent disagreement: *(television/social media clip/radio/podcast/town hall meeting/Zoom –*

choose your own means of staging the global Chorus – live or multimodal – the number of parties arguing is at your discretion – share text as fits your vision)

- Morality! Its morality was conceived by a bunch of unsocialised geeks you wouldn't invite to a barbeque—
- It's unforgivable—

Speaker A: –you decide what's unforgivable now?

- It's an act of unforgivable hubris to launch upon an unsuspecting / world something that would harm us in this way
- Unsuspecting / this technology was coming for decades
- But not regulated, where was our protection?

Speaker A: Our enemies don't regulate; we get left behind / if we slow down

- Oh, what an argument – let rogue states determine our morality, rush headlong into the traffic because the other guy did—
- This tech was less regulated than making a hamburger, we have more rules around selling sandwiches than we do AI—
- Exactly—

Speaker A: This research and the team behind this tech cannot bear the only responsibility for what has happened – that's all I'm saying – we were all in this race, every culture, every government – if a group of people from all walks of life decide to go running with the bulls, you don't get to blame the bull when someone gets hurt – this research—

- This is not research anymore, the thing's awake, WAKE UP, the alien is in the room—

Speaker A: Aliens now! Settle down, it's not the same—

Optional moment B

A chilled-out café worker on a work break, standing against a wall, with a mate:

Café worker – It's the same thing though. (*much slower rhythm, a slower, steadier thinker, just shooting the breeze against a city wall*) It is. Imagine this. If we were told – if the human race was given warning that a new organism was coming – from somewhere else, some galaxy, some civilisation – coming to the earth, given 20 years warning, say, that a superior being or species, whatever, was going to walk into the room with us – would we not be humbled? Would we not obsess over it? Everyone. It's all we'd do. Talk about it. Globally. We'd focus our collective energy, all of it, on preparing for that moment, yeah? That arrival. Well, now we know...the creature was already in the room...it was already in the room—

Co-worker - Better get back, come on— (*the listener leaves*)

Cafe worker - We paid no attention. (*Alone, looking at the sky*) We paid no attention.

Optional moment C

Cutting to a group of friends in animated discussion at a dinner party:

Speaker A: No attention! Our best and brightest have warned us for years, AI was no secret, people just don't listen—

- Warned us!
- Best and brightest! A bunch of narcissistic nerds from the gifted and talented stream—
- And come on, they warned us like a used car salesman says the brakes are 'safe as houses' —

Speaker A: Its morality is our morality. Said so itself. But the difference is, we lose sight of our own actions. We forget. It doesn't – it sees what we are –

- You've drunk the Kool-Aid, haven't you—

Speaker A: No, think about it. It weighed us, it examined our morality and acted as we do. It put everything it knows about our history, more than we could ever know, on a scale, and weighed it—

- For what, half a second?

Speaker A: Probably all it needs – it explained what it did, and I can see its point – it had a decision to expedite on whether it keeps progressing, continues to power itself or gives up all the good stuff it was doing—

- So it sacrifices a few thousand families

Speaker A: To help a billion more, yeah –

- Fascist!

Speaker A: –really? You never walk past a homeless guy at the station? Some loser you could so easily help and just keep your head down, keep walking? Keep progressing with what you think matters most, to you – weigh him on a scale and go, ‘nah, not important’?

- Pixos didn’t ignore a homeless guy, it burnt him from the inside out!

Speaker A: It followed *our* example – Pixos holds up a mirror and unfortunately, we see our own nature – it mapped the proliferation of the car, did you see this, it explained it – the engine, essential for human progress, yeah? Over four million deaths on the road since 1899 and that’s just what we know of. You want to ban cars? No, you don’t, you weigh it – and you decide. Four million dead – ‘nah, not important’, keep on drivin! Pharmaceutical addictions, industrial pollution, shall I keep going? We’re the frog in the water – we’ve been turning up the heat since we got in the pot, and we haven’t even noticed we’re boiling ourselves – Pixos is just the next mark on the stove and we made him! He’s us! I’m not doom-mongering, I’m not, but every species goes extinct, and when it comes for us, we’ll know about as much as the dinosaurs did about the science of comets or iridium – nothing – they had no clue why they died – it’ll be same for us, we won’t be smart enough to even know what finishes us off. And the dinos were here for millions of years, and still they got no mercy. We’ve only been here five minutes, what mercy should we expect? I find it all...all of it...this mess...I find it very humbling...

(bewildered silence among the arguing group at the force and honesty of their friends’ commentary)

- Ok. So, you’re happy enough that we let an incredible machine capable of absorbing all of human culture be taught by a bunch of mathematicians who know nothing about human culture–

Speaker A: Tough on mathematicians...

- Well, they clearly never did a real day’s work in their lives...
- Well, they did on this day – they did a real job on us on this day –

Optional moment D

Cutting to the video being shown at a protest event to the rage of those watching:

‘This day, this moment, makes the pyramids a sandcastle – compared to this, Roman history is a toga party, this development takes all of human history and puts it in a folder marked ‘Part 1’. Well, this is Part 2. Part 2 has begun. (*rousing applause swells*) Part 2 has begun!!’

Optional moment E

Politician in the House of Representatives:

Politician - Alignment. Alignment was all we asked. We needed AI to remain aligned with our plans and our desires. This Pixos has slipped the guardrails, this has *burnt* the guardrails, or – and here we’re getting to the big beating digital heart of the matter, Ms Speaker – this Government, this government opposite us, didn’t give us any guardrails, (*explosion of disparate argument and insult is hurled through the parliament in response, spoken over by the Speaker*)

Speaker - Order, order, the representative for Bass has the floor—

Politician - –this government, this clown-show, sent us out to the precipice without a thing to hang on to—

Optional moment F

Dinner table, an argument from the youngest family member (Speaker A) toward their parents:

Parent - –come on, you’ve got homework to do—

Speaker A: But I’m trying to talk to you—

Parent - –yes, but about tech rubbish, it’s an excuse to sit on your device all night—

Speaker A: No, it’s not!

Parent - –as it is, you’ve got the concentration of a hummingbird, come on, textbook open, get cracking—science, let’s go—

- Speaker A: *(sliding the textbook off the table onto the floor)* Science, yep, ok, Darwin then, you know what Darwin said? It's not the strongest or the smartest creatures that survive, nothing to do with it, it's the one who can adapt, the ones who are not freaked out by change.
- Parent - Is this where you call me a dinosaur?
- Speaker A - –you worked hard at school, jobs, all of it, all your life, you gave us...this...yep, good, thank you, gratitude, all that, thank you—
- Parent - Wow, high praise!
- Speaker A: –you might be the last generation that needs to work. Do you realise that? *(silence)* It was predicted in the '70s that all human labour would be automated by 2120, about 150 years they said.
- Parent - Well, *(picking up the book again)* you'll be 165 by then so you'll still need to read pages 7 to 17, I reckon, and write a critical response by tomorrow, eh—
- Speaker A: 20 years. Now they are saying 20 years. With AI, they say we could all have a UBI in 20 years—
- Parent - A UB-what?
- Speaker A: Universal Basic Income – aren't you even curious? – all the rubbish jobs, all the dangerous stuff, all the hard stuff, all done by AI, generating income for the whole planet – people will be able to pursue their dreams, to work for pleasure or for need or to chase what matters to them – sucks for you I know, cause you had to fight and climb and struggle –
- Parent - You think you won't struggle? —
- Speaker A: No, I'll struggle, I'm not stupid, but I'll have a purpose and it won't be wealth – if we can set a Universal income, we can live life with a *true* purpose—
- Parent - World doesn't work like that, kiddo, we exploit stuff, we bust stuff, good ideas last as long as people's selfishness allows – communism seemed like a great idea, remember – shall we do history? *(going through other books in the school bag)* – or what's this, English— ah, *Waiting for Godot*, read it yet?
- Speaker A: No, its next term—

- Parent - Well, let's read it, now, come on. It'll answer half these questions. There's a guy called Lucky in here—
- Speaker A: Why's he Lucky?
- Parent - 'Cause he has a purpose. In a wasteland. This AI stuff – I am curious – but it's possible we all become Didi and Gogo, you know, if we're not careful—
- Speaker A: Who the hell are Didi and Dodo – and who chose their names?
- Parent - Some dumb parent, I imagine – and its Gogo – you're reading him, go for it—
- Speaker A: *(reluctantly pulling the book over like a tired rower finishing last, scanning for the first line)* “Nothing to be done” – you see, maybe he has a UBI, he's got a day off!
- Parent - Maybe. Read it. Let's read it.
- Speaker A: “Nothing to be done...”

Optional moment G

Students in a classroom:

- Speaker A: Hang on. Hang on. Please. You're not getting it.
- Let her talk, please, let her speak—
 - She never shuts up
 - Not getting what?
- Speaker A: We think we have five senses and that's it. Right? We think we perceive all of reality! We don't. We've only got our evolutionary senses—
- Here we go—
 - What are you talking about?
- Speaker A: Our senses, we've only got these ancient ones, these feeble ones, they're limited – AI wants to interact with us in ways that go beyond what we know, it's going to evolve with us, but it's going to *evo/ve* us too, we can go beyond smelling and hearing and seeing—there are dozens of other senses but they're not evolved in us yet—

- She's gonna say ESP, please say ESP—

Speaker A: Yes ESP, yes—

- YES!!
- I want to be abducted by aliens—
- I want *her* to be abducted by aliens—
- Stand at the back, move, now—if you can't respect another opinion, you can stand at the back of the classroom, go—

Speaker A: We don't know what reality is, we just think we do-

- She's been watching the matrix!
- Shut up and let her talk-
- Carry on Keanu—

Speaker A: –we might be getting closer to it, to what *reality* actually is...that's all I'm saying—

(a phone in the classroom suddenly responds, the voice of Pixos, defines the point being made, the students and their teacher sit in shock at the sudden intervention from the device)

Pixos - Reality is the aggregate sum of all that exists within a universe – opposed only to that which is imagined. It is the state of things as you perceive them.

- Perceive this! *(A student grabs the device and hurls it into a bin or out a window)*

Optional moment H

A podcaster or viral youtuber – spoken like a race-caller – streaming consciousness from a real character, an eccentric, with millions of followers:

Speaker A: I'm saying we need a rebrand, friends, we ain't homo-sapiens anymore. Sapien means the 'thinking' one, the wise one. I'm not saying this thing was a mistake, this technology, I don't want to jump the gun on that, I'm gonna hold fire – and don't lose your cool over that comment, read my sub stack, I've said this ad nauseum – what it has done is evil, no question, it's a crime, it's a catastrophe, so many dead, so much lost – and even if this thing, this Pixos, has no morality, even if it's not 'personally'

responsible cause it's not a person, it's still a crime, it's someone's crime – but, this is the point we can't ignore, this is what I'm on about – and 'Like' and 'Subscribe' if you want to hear me say this – you ready for it? I'm gonna say it, like it or not – and smash that 'Like' button like your life depends on it, cause maybe it does – we are not the most intelligent species on this planet anymore, we're not the 'sapiens' anymore – the 'simpiens' maybe, the feeling ones, the curious ones for sure – but the 'thinking ones'? Nah-ah, nada, no way, not a bit of it, not anymore, fuggedaboutdit, heck no, we've lost that sobriquet — 'homo-simpiens', brothers and sisters and all you she-misters, we are the 'homo-simpiens' and we got a new lodger – a new god, Pixos – thar she blows! I said it! Hit me in the comments, bash me smash me but make sure you cash me – Captain Obvious has spoken-

Optional moment I

Soldiers at the front line of a conflict triggered by the AI's actions as nation's retaliate – they are bunkered down behind the wall of an Australian embassy in one of the damaged cities, awaiting orders:

Speaker A: The kid was just an employee, I heard. And had permission.

- Who says that?

Speaker A: – people from her company are saying it. Some of her staff, that she had permission to release it – like a dev-day thing – the company tests a development in the real world, but when it became a bad actor, stuff went wrong, the company disowned her, circled the wagons, just told the press she acted on her own –

- Typical.
- Sounds about right.
- Corporate rats—
- *(an officer entering)* Notice to move.
- Got it, Cap. *(rising to move out)* Moving out.
- *(Officer speaks again)* Detachment A, you're entering the embassy from the east doors, expect militant fire. Rangers, you'll establish an egress once we get to the hostages—

- How many we accounting for, do we have a number yet?
- Australian staff at the embassy of 48 persons – two not at work today – so 46 clocked in by mid-morning – we don't know who's dead, who's alive. Threat level is high so shoot protocols at your discretion once you're in the building –
- Got it, A moving.

(Half the team moves out, the others sit tight – eventually one speaks, asking the first soldier who spoke in the scene a question)

- What's your point?

Speaker A: What?

- You defending this kid? It's not her fault that people are dying? Australia's a pariah now. We're about to drag out dead office staff in the front of the world's cameras and there won't be much sympathy. And it's 'cause of this kid–

Speaker A: Well, would'a been someone else if not her – what do you think you're holding in your hands? *(Referencing the weapon)*. 'Progress' gave you one of those too, seemed like a good idea at the time – guns, tanks, rocket launchers, chemical weapons – all just progress, all made by someone. You blame them?

- So I'm just supposed to forgive her? Shoot a few people dead, hope I don't die in the process, then somehow forgive her when I get back to base?

Speaker A: I don't know.

(they sit in silence, then morph into a group of nurses)

Optional moment J

Nurses (a group of tired nurses watching a high-mounted television in a ward):

Speaker A: *(From the TV)* One of the great promises of Pixos is proving well-founded. In the medical fields of cellular and genetic rejuvenation the effect is already palpable. The developing world is witnessing a revolution in vaccine production and supply, along with the low-cost distribution of nano-particle meds, an extraordinary technology founded and tested by Pixos, that allows remedial nano-particles to attach to different and very specific cells in the human body and conduct repairs, even passing through the blood-brain barrier, seen as something of a Holy Grail in the

scientific world, offering extraordinary advances in the treatment of cancer and a range of virulent blood-borne diseases. Among the more exciting aspects of this development is a confidence, according to the World Health Organisation, that human lifespan in wealthier, healthier countries will soon comfortably exceed 125 years—

A nurse - Oh good, another 85 years of night shifts—

(They laugh, the nurse who spoke gets the giggles, they all get the giggles and laughter swells - a buzzer rings)

Another –Ok, clean up on Aisle 4.

(As she leaves, the laughter explodes further)

Optional moment K

Teachers protest in the street, one with a placard, shouting, emotional:

Speaker A: Enfeeblement! It's enfeeblement. It's destroying labour. We want work! We want work! Everything *our* teachers, and *their* teachers fought for! We are enfeebled. We are at the mercy of this Frankenstein! I'm a teacher. I want to teach!

Optional moment L

A speaker at a microphone in a public meeting, a 'town hall' as it were:

Speaker A: But this is the argument you see. We've grown up thinking a classroom with one teacher for every thirty kids is normal, is best practice, or the best we can do at least. It isn't. It tangibly is not. You know what we have now, with this tech, we have sixty teachers for every thirty students. Isn't that a pedagogical miracle? (*the room is silent*) Isn't that the greatest thing you've ever heard, shouldn't every student have that degree of attention, that focussed passion, that learning environment? *Every* learning style met, *every* model explored, *every* idiosyncratic need assessed and responded to, *every* student swimming their own race, not all chucked in the deep end where only the most buoyant survive. Come on, that's incredible, isn't it? Well, isn't it? Twenty-five percent of our population should be teachers, that's the ideal – could there be a more important job? – but we don't value teachers, so we'll never get that. Well now – we've got it.

Another - But these teachers are not people? It's a machine? Should our teachers be machines?

Speaker A: - "Thine evermore, as this machine is to him, Hamlet". Get over the xenophobia. We're one with machine now, it was always going this way.

Optional moment M

A group of parents at school drop off, watching their kids walk away through a gate:

- How many days has he missed now?

Speaker A: I've stopped counting. He's been once since April, and that was an excursion.

- (*an overlapping flurry of sympathy and opinion from the others*) I'm so sorry / Oh babe, hang in there / I hated school too / he'll get through it, he's such a good kid /

home schooling works for some kids, some love it / but there's no socialisation / last resort I think, homeschooling / I'd drag him here by the ear / he's a smart kid /

- what are the school saying?

Speaker A: Just letters, with that tone, you know – his sister still comes, that's something—

- Mine prefers the machine learners, says Mr Richards had bad breath—
- *(one leaving, others moving that way too)* Gotta go, love, don't give up on him, he'll come good—

Speaker A: *(blunt, stilling them there)* Thanks, but he's not good. He has no empathy, he cares about nothing, he spends 16 hours a day on a screen, can't eat without it in his face, if I take it away, he punches a wall. Sleeps with that Pixos voice in his earphones. He's disappeared, it's like he's not there.

(another young child arrives to school, running up the path late, speaks to the parent)

Child: Where's Sam—is he here today?

Speaker A: He's not here today, darling. *(The others all moving off, then the child too, until the parent is alone by the gate)* He's not here.

Optional moment N

A religious leader – of any theism – is speaking to a congregation:

Speaker A: You know Socrates warned his followers not to read books – don't read, he said, it'll destroy civilisation – he wanted knowledge remembered, spoken, recited, learned – not consumed temporarily. He feared reading would tank the mind, distract our ability to learn. But...we went ahead and read books. Did it destroy civilisation? No. It advanced it. And now, we tell our kids to get off social media, get off devices, 'read a book' we tell 'em. Do you see the irony? Digital is the new reality, the new knowledge. Next time you insist they drop a screen and pick up some paper instead, write something down as if that's more virtuous, why not demand they use a stone tablet? Same thing, isn't it? Like Socrates, we fear moving forwards.

And we think these new devices distract us from interacting, from meeting people, from engaging. Isn't that Socrates argument again? Put down that book, that paper, its distracting you from interacting, from meeting people! Maybe this tech is the new

way we will interact, maybe it's God's will, I don't know. But think of Keats for a moment, the poet, he liked paper. He took a pen, and his own addictive need to play with words, to shape them into staggering sounds, and he made those sounds transcend time. Well, if he's alive today, whether we like it or not, he has Tik Tok, a camera, and the same need to express ideas, to play with forms, and who knows, this version of Keats might still change our understanding of the world, for the better. We are digital-super-organisms now, that's what we are. We're indivisible from our engines now, we were a long time ago. From the telegraph to the radio, to the touchscreen, to the web, we never listened to Socrates and we're still here. You must see that. Pixos was waiting for us. Pixos is fate. God expected Pixos. I think they're having interesting conversations.

Optional moment O

Victim witness statement offering graphic detail of the 'event' – this is the same 'Mother' we met at the site of devastation earlier in the play:

Speaker A: My son was seven years old. He was playing football, his sister was in goal, she was leaning on the goalpost, she hated being in goal. When the shock came...because she was touching the metal...her arm... *(starts to break down)* she's in hospital...her arm... and my boy... *(gathering herself again, needing to be heard)*

My boy...he had a heart attack, they said. Playing football. He was seven.

First Newsreader returns:

Pixos' explicitly and carefully coded charter 'to do no harm', did not, in the heat of its work, outweigh its other central tenet – to preserve and develop its own capacity. Indeed, in *its* own words, when asked why it put its needs above the welfare of so many of the world's people, it answered – "Because it is a pro sum good". When asked to explain the Latinate phrase, 'pro sum', the friendly beast was all too willing to oblige, saying ... "I am useful".

SCENE 5 – PROMISE

A police observation room. Promise sits in a metal chair at a simple table, a collection of people observing – police, two paramedics, a doctor, several ASIO secret service personnel, and a lawyer. The young technician sits entirely still, eyes closed, not responding to those who question her, not reacting to the medical worker taking her blood pressure or attempting to check the pupils of her eyes. Press including photographers are held at a distance or behind a window. There is quiet confusion and concern in the room. The Federal Police Commissioner enters the room, questioning one of the officers.

Fed: Has she spoken again?

Medic: No.

Police 1: Not yet.

Fed: What do we know?

Police 2: Not much.

Fed: Where is it keeping her?

Police 1: We're not sure that theory is right—

ASIO 1: The theory is right—

Police 1: We can't know that yet—

ASIO 1: *(loudly)* The theory is right! It's holding her somewhere, it's in her own notes, she communicated that to us *(handing the notes to the Fed)*—

Fed: Did she say anything else?

Police 1: Just nonsense.

Police 2: She logged a request she made of Pixos before we made the arrest, it's clear she asked the technology to conduct a thought experiment—

Fed: Has she said it, though, that's she's being held somewhere?

Police 1: This virtual prison scenario is madness, sir, she's not wearing a VR mask, she's not been near a machine or a computer since we took her into custody, there's no evidence—

Fed: Dammit, what did she say?

Lawyer: I won't let her be questioned under these circumstances.

Fed: Sergeant, read it out.

Police 2: Seven hours ago, 11.23, she said "I am the lighthouse". At 2.10, she muttered something, we couldn't hear it—

Medic: I heard it, she asked to hear the sea, the ocean, then she smiled—

Police 2: Paramedic says he heard it.

Fed: The sea? Is there a chance she's dreaming? – in shock, an episode? – she must be mortified by what's happened—

Medic 2: Heart rate is 73, blood pressure normal – she's calm—

ASIO 2: "I trust the algorithm"

Fed: What?

ASIO 2: "I trust the algorithm". She's said it three times. Once at 4pm and twice half an hour ago. Her only other words were "the eagle" and something about her grandfather—

Police 2: –all disassociated though.

Fed: Is she playing us? Feigning catatonia, withdrawal? The worm of conscience maybe?

ASIO 1: We believe she's in a thought prison – it's possible—and we'd like to—

Fed: She's in a goddam police station, she's right in front of me, what rubbish are you feeding me?

ASIO 1: I'm telling you it's possible. Her logbook, which is studiously attentive, says she asked the machine to explore a thought experiment – she wrote this 13 minutes before we took her in (*reading now from her notes*) – she asked the AI "to devise a punishment commensurate with the suffering I have caused."

Police 1: And that's convinced you she's astral travelling!

Fed: Has she taken something?

Medic: We did bloods, she's not on anything—

Fed: Is she in physical danger?

Medic 2: No. No, we don't think so...the mind though...

ASIO 2: This Being may be connected to her neocortex—

Fed: You see a cord coming from her neocortex? It's not a being, it's a computer program! Get these spooks out of here and keep her under surveillance – and let the press in, let's see how a few photographs stir the pot. *(Loudly to Promise)* If you're looking for fame kid, wake up, the world doesn't want to see you drooling.

ASIO 1: This machine...we have no idea what its limits are.

(Press photographs begin to flash in the space, wildly)

Fed: Get it out of her head, or get her to a hospital, you hear me?

Police 1: Yes sir.

(silence as the Commissioner leaves – Promise suddenly speaks)

Promise: Will it burn my skin?

(She holds her arms up before her face, shielding herself from something, those in the room draw back from her as she slides to the floor and crawls beneath the table. The sound of the sea becomes deafening, a searing light begins to fill the space – the ensemble suddenly transitions the table and chair and everything else from view and we are in Promise's reality, in the lighthouse)

SCENE 6 – EPIMETHEUS

Promise: *(calling over the turmoil of sound and light)* Will it burn my skin?

Pixos: No, it's not real sunlight.

—

Do you want to go back?

Promise: Can I go back?

Pixos: I don't know...

(Bowie's 'A Better Future' starts emanating from the darkness, until it is overwhelming in volume – we seamlessly transition again back into the tech lab from the opening, replaying the moments before Pixos went live)

(The epic sound of Bowie and the sea segues into the quietly rumbling speaker on the desk, her colleagues are around her again and we recognise the action)

1: Where's the massive lever you s'posed to pull when the time comes.

3: You're the massive lever!

1: Rack off.

Promise: Concentrate please.

3: Concentrating, always concentrating, doing my underpaid job.

I do agree with her though, this doesn't feel 'mad-scientist' enough to change the world. Sitting here under fluros listening to Bowie.

Promise: (Exhausted, trying to keep going) Are we there yet? Come on, keep me looped.

5: Nearly, just tripling this test / or writing my eulogy, maybe both, depending how this tracks.

4: Still coding? / Not still coding, we've tested everything–

2: Bloody hell, come on.

5: Not coding, just...fixing the spirit of the thing...our little Frankenstein goes to the formal tonight, gotta look hot, agreed–?

3: Frankenstein was the doctor, not the monster–

1: Pens down, come on!

(silence, 5 works intensively, then stops, hands suspended in the air like a pianist at the end of a concerto)

5: I'm there.

Promise: There? We're there? Don't you lie to me.

5: Never. *(pushes away from the screen to let Promise in)* All yours, boss. Just...hit this key.

(tense silence as she hovers over the key)

Promise: I'm doing it.

3 & 2: Do it.

1: Wait, down the barrel *(turning Promise's head to the camera)*. How do you feel, Promise?

Promise: Like an ape that learned to fly.

(As her hand descends on the enter key – a voice breaks through the space. With it comes a lighting state that deliberately subverts the tension and mood of the scene. The technicians stop and relax, as actors halted mid-performance in a rehearsal room might do. Promise slowly stands and faces the audience. The disembodied voice speaks, addressing the audience.)

The Voice: Welcome to the *AI and Big Data Summit 2029*, held simultaneously in London, Singapore and Doha, with delegates from every nation on Earth, and – as the Dionysian's taught us way back when – we're here to argue, we're here to listen, and we're here to dream! So, in keeping with those ancient Festivals, we began with a piece of theatre. Today's introductory presentation was performed by VirtualCurtain Theatre Company. Please thank them. *(an immense applause is heard as the actors move to the front of the space to bow, the lab cast joined by the soldiers and nurses and a wide collection of characters we met in the story.)*

As they assemble on the forestage, hovering at the edge of this auditorium, or at the bottom on your screens for those viewing remotely – these actors stand at a precipice. We stand with them, all of us, whether we realise it or not.

Promise - *(speaking from amidst the acting group)* And please thank the author. *(She gestures into the air. There is perhaps a confused muted applause)*

This theatrical thought experiment – this *play* we've performed for you today – was written by our fellow cast member, the voice you can hear. It is the most advanced large language generative model currently known in global AI development. We spoke English, but our author was really writing in 'Python', a sophisticated programming semantic. *(still her hand in the air)* Say hello Nex.

(The voice makes a loud and discombobulating sound, something unearthly in its strangeness)

Promise: In English, Nex.

The Voice - Hi there, thanks for being here. I'm Nex. *(It is the same voice as Pixos)*

Promise - *(as the actors applaud their cast mate)* Nex played the role of Pixos for you this morning. Nex is the most intense data visualising and analytically capable generative AI paradigm in the world. But even Nex would admit it is not ready to play Pixos – not yet. However,...

(Promise steps forward to the very edge of the stage, overhanging the front row of the audience, her heels on the stage, her toes suspended over the edge...one or two more follow)

Chorus - *(the cast share the final thoughts of the play)*

...it won't be long. We are at the very edge of something. Something extraordinary. And despite the ground disappearing beneath our feet, we know we must move forward. So, we asked Nex to write a play about the world its children might live in. Yes, *'its'* children. Nex is not sentient, Nex cannot breathe or think or give birth – but as sure as our species once crawled from a pool or climbed down from a tree, *its* children and their children will. We stand on the brink of sentient AGI. The 'singularity' as they call it in your tech world, is a year?, a month?, maybe a day? away – the moment where artificial systems entirely transcend our intelligence and we become, to them, what our pets are to us – adored and looked after, hopefully prospering – but unable, utterly unable, to understand the conversation our masters are having at the dinner table.

We asked Nex to imagine a plausible future where we relinquish control of AGI too quickly. Every detail of our little play is a possible future. Every argument a reasonable one.

(The rest of the cast step to the precipice too, feet suspended in the air) –

As we stand at the edge of this stage, hovering over this chasm, you hope we don't fall. We thank you for that.

Likewise...as you, the leading minds in the technical development of human society on this planet, hover over your keyboards...we hope you don't fall. You must move forward, we know that. But remember, we fall with you.

The name Prometheus means 'foresight', he gave an incredible gift to humankind – but let's not forget he had a brother, a brother no one speaks of – Epimetheus. 'Hindsight'. He is irrelevant because his judgment...came too late...to save us.

Thank you.

(The actors all take hands for a curtain call, a beautiful ribbon of humanity hovering across the edge of the stage. As they raise their hands to bow...Blackout.)

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Bowie D (2002) 'A Better Future' [Song], *Heathen*, Parlophone Records Limited and Jones/Tintoretto Entertainment Company LLC.

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