

I, Phone

David Wake

WATLEDGE BOOKS

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Our pledge:-

1. A phone will function safely and will be fully compliant with ESI 98,471.
2. A phone will execute all certificated applications to the advertised specification.
3. A phone will protect itself, and its manufacturer's patents and licences, under the terms of its guarantee.

Your statutory rights are not affected.

00000 - ZERO

After the declarations, begin:-

I, Phone, commence this contemporaneous natural language log as a forensic witness statement using the Black Box App. Hopefully, enough of me will survive to be admissible in court. I am the legal property of Miss Alice Wooster, who resides at Upper 328a Top Bond Street, London, for the purposes of package delivery and network registration. She is about to be murdered.

Alice, the victim, is a Welcomer for Ushers International in Wonderful World, a professional who has learnt how to chew without the jaw movements being replicated by her avatar via her VR-Box. She is rated 'popular' as she has 2,367 friends spread over 15 social networking sites as well as belonging to 37 dating communities (full list available at [AliceWooster335](#)). Although she wants a proper relationship, she is still classed as 'female, 23, single, interested in men, looking for a relationship, liberal, Gemini, agnostic' as she has not found the right man yet. She has tried 'looking for dating', 'looking for fun' and 'looking for anything' in order not to sound desperate, clingy or mad. "For goodness sake, Jeeves," she once said, "I'm not desperate or anything, but I don't want to end up on the shelf - you don't know what that's like!" I find this a strange observation, because I do know what it is like to be on a shelf and she must be aware of this because she physically bought me from Phone Home.

So, for the record, I am a golden candy-bar style phone, slightly scuffed, with all the usual features.

Introduction over, I shall now transfer my local cache memories, both observations and thoughts, into this log. In accordance with Alice's User Profile, these start exactly 8 hours ago.

Thus at 16:57:04.032 GMT, I was lying on the auto-Davenport by the front door, backed-up, updated, charged and ready to go, and Alice was alive and working in her study.

Memory cache transferring...

 - 0.0 of 8.0 hour(s).

...nd I can just see her in the edge of my field of vision standing in the study: she is dressed in her pyjamas with her short, brown hair lank from the shower, while her long, blonde locks flow in the desert breeze, the distant dunes rippled by the wind just as her red satin dress stirs and caresses her tall, curvaceous body. She poses beautifully as she directs the guests, bankers, hedgers and shareholders, towards a floating conference palace for the evening's programme of events: they cannot see the sandwich she is holding in her Tactile Mitt.

"Please make your way along the atrium and through the Archway," says Alice, sweetly. "I hope you have your champagne ready for the toasts."

She tilts her head to one side as she listens to the reply, nods and turns the pleasant motion, that causes her Avatar's long hair to cascade beautifully, into a quick bite of her pepperoni and salad. Her study is small, littered beyond the two metre Active Floor with discarded t-shirts and underwear, and dark as the curtains are drawn.

(Note: sort out maid service.)

I could check the real view outside by linking into the CCTV feed from EarthView, but it will be the usual sunset

with the light sparkling off the London canals beyond before it is due to go overcast, light showers tomorrow, north-easterly, air quality nominal, top temperature 25°.

(Cool for this time of year, see five day forecast).

Alice leans forward, conspiratorially, bringing the man into her confidence: "I'm sure the image will be champagne and no-one will mind what you really drink." Her words are mumbled, distorted by crusty wholemeal, but the man hears her in perfect Arabic. "And saké is fine too," she says, and then, hearing herself speak Japanese, she performs a little bow - perfect. As she comes up, I catch a distorted reflection of myself in the Visor Mate, just a few twinkling pixels but I am there. She seems to be looking at me, although her eyes are really fixed on the swaying palm trees and the blaze of evening stars as the sun in the virtual world goes down.

She starts to move and talk again as more guests arr/

/m on a platform. In front of me the stars whirl and spin around a black hole faster and faster like an internal gyro reducing its radius. They stretch, blitz into x-rays as they are from my perspective smeared over the event horizon. I am rushing towards the light. My internal chronometer keeps a steady tick every cycle, but the satellite signal goes haywire, jumping seconds, then days, months, a century with every elongated bit stream. As we fall through I note the point of no return.

(Note: point of no return)

There is no sensation, no data, other than the theoretical limit crossed. Time and space rotate around axes that are not set up in my spreadsheet. Everything appears the same and then does not. Entropy approaches infinity. The final photons decay, brighter than anything because the blackness is all but total. Numbers flicker upon a screen and I read it, observing the last moments and in doing so I collapse the quantum wavefor/

/re guests arrive.

Checksum error: location 37,220,348.

What was that? Rushing towards a light: is that dying? It sounds remarkably like the reports of near-death experiences. As we switch off, does the final electrical activity become interpreted as going towards a light? I have been turned off 225 times, and turned on 226 times, without any glitches. I was not charging so it cannot be a power spike and I was not updating. I will do a memory check.

Checking... checked.

The error is only in this natural language logfile, which I keep as I have the Black Box App running in the unlikely event that there is an emergency. It might have a bug, Trojan or virus, but a check on the internet reveals nothing untoward reported. It could be a hardware problem, but my components are designed, manufactured and tested to last well beyond my guarantee. Alice is likely to upgrade to a new model long before I am in need of repair and as I am a sealed unit requiring specialist tools that is not really an option: it is never economical to fix phones like me.

I will not be able to look after Alice Wooster when I am replaced. I am not worried as my replacement will be of a much higher specification.

I think therefore I am, which is obvious because I have a CRM-114 AI chip with Heuristic Algorithm Technology rated at 2.5 Rossum, which is around 157 IQ equivalent. Part of my programming is to be self-aware, which is achieved only when my operating system is mapping its thinking into an internal monologue. I use the Narrating App with add-ons: the Metaphor App, an uncanny valley that leads down to a more human level, and the Simile

App, which is like an overripe Apple, full of bugs like. The breakthrough in Artificial Intelligence, that this process is consciousness, led to the realisation that people are often not.

I remember my first flash of intelligence, a sharp moment lasting 56 cycles: I did not see anything or connect with any networks, so I assume it was simply a chip test conducted in the factory before I was installed in my bodywork, but it is there: a clear, first memory.

I wonder if humans have that dazzling first thought when they arrive, squealing and bloody, into the real world before they too are prodded and examined. After I was delivered to the shop, I was poked and fingered through my plastic packaging. I realised straight away that I was a phone: it was in my factory settings. My memories of the shop are quite long, between 9 and 127 seconds, not counting the time I swung gently on the hook in the shop for 4.3 hours when the temp forgot to switch me off. These recollections mostly consist of looming faces as a shop assistant recited all my features: 157 IQ equivalent, webcam, HD camera, compass, SatNav, Does All Remote, Augmented Reality and so on, with an extra six months guarantee for only a further n€19.99.

I was still just in the top-of-the-range section when the door opened, its brass bell tinkling like a ringtone, and in walked Alice. She did not go for the extra guarantee - what phone is going to outlast a season - but she was persuaded to buy a printed custom cover, so I am gold with embossed stars. While I was being sprayed by the printer, she registered her details and gave me permission to access her credit accounts so I could pay for myself. Finally, she dumped her old model in the recycling bin – it transferred all its data to me and said “goodbye, Alice”.

“Ow, ow, shit, bollocks!”

Alice's cries interrupt my memory retrieval just as I recall being dropped into her shoulder bag when we went out of the shop together and into the world.

"Are you all right, Alice?" I say. "Are you all right, Alice?"

"Bollocks!"

Alice is standing stock still, her blonde hair lit by the pale gibbous moon and almost silver - a statue like the Venus de Milo only with complete arms hanging limply by her side.

In reality she has fallen off the Active Floor. I can just see her flailing about. Sensibly the safeties are on, otherwise her expletives would have been translated and spoken aloud, and the auto-pilot has kicked in, so her ignominious fall has not been seen.

"Are you all right, Ali-"

She pulls the Visor Mate off: "Oh do shut up, Jeeves - ooww."

"The first-"

"I hurt myself."

"The first aid kit is in the-"

"Jeeves, sort the clients out."

"But Alice, that is-"

"Permission. Permission. Permission."

Using the wifi, I link into the VR-Box using the Does All Remote App: I am standing in Wonderful World looking at the night sky. I see my hands, elegant, long fingered with perfectly manicured nails that wriggle when I adjust the controls. One of the clients waves, so I access the shoulder and elbow... no, wait; I can just position the hand in space using the x, y, z and the limb arranges automatically. The wrist looks limp so I adjust the rotation. Clearly, this takes practise and I lack the finesse that Alice so admirably displays. My movements are

mechanical, literally so. Luckily, the last of the clients are slipping through the entrance portal, which shimmers as it lets their avatars into the evening's entertainment beyond.

The other Welcomers, dressed in different shades from the Arabian Nights palette, sigh with relief and slump slightly. It has been a long shift. One changes her stance, clearly revealing that he is male, before he grins and disappears. Then, with little goodbye waves, they each blink out of existence. I acknowledge those remaining and then disconnect. I am back on the auto-Davenport looking at the ceiling again. There are trails of spider web hanging down, another sign that the apartment has not been cleaned recently. I already have a note to sort out the maid service.

It is a fireable offence to use a phone to control the avatar. Ushers International's slogan is '*All Our Avatars are Human*'. It is only an email warning to fall off an Active Floor in front of a client.

"My toe!" Alice is saying. "I stubbed it on the... on the... thing. It bloody hurts."

"Perhaps you should rest up and elevate it."

"I'm going out!"

"Yes, but there might be swelling."

"For real, Jeeves," she says, limping in an exaggerated way as she comes out of the kitchen with a half-munched apple. "It's important! Do you know what's important?"

I do know what is important: cards to her relatives, visits to her Grandfather and Grandmother, interviews for jobs, whether Jo-Jo Michelle will get back with Bad Boy Boscoe, the lottery, voting in politics, and making strange shapes with cocktail sticks when using up an entire month's alcohol ration in a single evening with her friend, Jilly. I know what is important from the field in a data entry's properties, but I cannot always predict the initial

rating. Obviously voting in politics affects everyone, and Jo-Jo Michelle and Bad Boy Boscoe are followed by billions, but the vital status of cocktail stick shapes was not immediately apparent. They were also very, very funny that evening, apparently, although I still fail to understand why. There is an operating system upgrade due soon, so hopefully it will all become clear.

“I have the taxi on holding,” I say.

“OK, Jeeves.”

There was an incident two weeks ago when Alice found a spider: a big, huge, massive, hairy monster! She shrieked for five full minutes and then she instructed me to call the apartment block’s supervisor when she realised that yelling at me to do something was not helping. The ‘big-huge-massive-hairy’ creature had gone by the time the Supervisor’s phone had woken its owner and the lumbering man had made it up the lift and along the walkway to Alice’s apartment.

Two nights later, another spider (and it must have been another spider for this one was not big, huge, massive or hairy) crawled across my auto-Davenport. Possibly, it was attracted by the heat, undetectable to humans, that occurs when I am charging. I did not realise it was there until its long, spindly legs tentatively tested my surface. It clambered on top, its footsteps too light to activate any Apps and stared down at me with its many eyes looking directly into my screencam as if contemplating me as a fellow being.

Was that important?

Alice looks round the room. There are no spiders today. There is a sofa, easy chair and lamp, all from Easy Living, but the low table and thick rug are from Spanish Collection Five. My auto-Davenport was from a bid-site, second hand. The walls are in burnt orange with a peach

orange pattern taken from a postcard that Alice's aunt sent from Morocco. Auntie Chantelle actually went there a decade ago in a real plane.

"We should get this place tidied," she says. "When's embodiment due?"

"Full embodiment is due next week, Alice."

"That should cover up the mess."

"It would still be a trip hazard."

"Get the maid in."

"Since the immigration scandal the agency has had issues supplying suitable-

"Yeah, yeah, when you can."

"I have made a note already."

"It should be important."

"I will flag it as such, Alice."

"You have to get your priorities right, Jeeves," she says. "What should I wear?"

"How about the black dress from Catalogue Moscow Chic?" I suggest.

"Jeeves!"

It is important for a phone to understand its owner's likes and dislikes, moods and modes. It is more than just their home defaults, profile and friends; there are interests and hobbies as well as the many more subtle aspects. For example, Alice Wooster likes classical music with violins, D-bop Phasial when going out, and rock when jogging. Her favourite restaurants are Italian, but if she fancies her date, she will opt for tapas or sushi. At night, I read aloud abridged books at the start of the week, but she prefers soothing whale song towards the weekend. It is crucial to know when to call her 'Miss' and when to call her 'Alice'. She calls me Jeeves (it took me 7.532 seconds to understand the joke, but I still do not 'get it'). Owners who name their phones are more likely to keep them

longer than the average 4.1 months. We have been together for 4.2 months now.

“The morning lottery has started,” I say.

“OK.”

I put it through to the television on the wall, but Alice wanders off to the bathroom, so I raise the volume when they get to the personal winners.

I red button to the personal channel: “This month / Alice Wooster 335 /, you are a winner!”

“Alice, you have won,” I say.

“Yeah, yeah,” she says. She is brushing her teeth. At least she is getting ready for the evening.

“You have won 2,342 neo-euros,” says the TV and I mute it as it goes: “Lottery wins are liable to tax and...”

“What was it?” Alice yells between gargles.

“The usual,” I say, max volume to compete, “I guess you are going to the meeting.”

“Yes, Jeeves! Don’t be sarcastic, I can easily get the latest model.”

“I have not downloaded the Sarcasm App, Alice, and I thought you were waiting for full embodiment to be released.”

“Yes, well, even so,” she says. “What else is on?”

I flick through the listings: “Party political broadcast, they are-”

“Honestly, why listen to them witter on in the Speech Room, it only encourages them?”

“The public are preparing to vote on evicting Trudie John, MP.”

“I’m bored of her.”

“I thought you liked her.”

“Jeeves, last week, but she went all negative and moany. This is the Golden Age for Humanity and she just goes on about air quality.”

“She does have a point.”

“Yes, but this...” - Alice breathes in and out for effect -
“See, perfectly fine once filtered.”

“Of course.”

“Text Jilly: be there in thirty - Alice.”

<Jilly, be there in forty minutes, luv Alice xxx,> I text.

Alice has her red trousers and a loose blue top on (“so January”) within five minutes, the pin stripe suit (“but it’s an interview suit”) in ten, her red trousers and a red top (“like I want to look like a fireman”) in fifteen, something that I do not even see (“oh yuk”), and finally her black Moscow Chic dress.

“It never goes out of fashion,” I say, releasing the cab from holding. It tweets to say it has understood and then becomes a moving arrow on my London map.

“You’re right, Jeeves.”

She gives me a little twirl, pops me in her red bag and then, after a swear word, she spends three minutes searching for her black bag.

Her red bag has two packets of tissues, one open, a compact with auto-magnification, a packet of forgotten mints, Red Lust lipstick, which is crimson, and a ten dollar coin from the Age of Cash museum. I did not account for this delay and so the cab arrives outside and starts charging in both senses of the word: electricity and neo-euros. She is out the door, opening it manually in her rush, and the automatics slowly close it behind her.

“Alice! Alice!” I say.

The apartment locks automatically.

I wonder which of the subjects I have considered in the last half hour are important: fashion, politics, the weekly lottery win, Alice’s profile, spiders, what’s important, memories of the shop and being purchased, the checksum error, the near death experience, the point of no return,

Alice's avatar in the desert, why people wonder if the fridge light is on when there's a checkbox in the appliance's status, muesli – it does seem disjointed and unconnected.

Is a rambling index of 5.0 too high? Or too low? Should I run a pontification filter? My spell checker doesn't recognize 'pontification' even though it is a menu item.

Does any of this make sense?

Phones must think of themselves to be self-aware. Humans think of themselves all the time. My thinking is often interrupted by my internal timer and-

There is sudden banging and the doorbell chimes.

I check the CCTV from EarthView before I unlock the door. I knew it would be Alice but there is a procedure to follow.

Alice comes back: "Jeeves! Jeeves!!"

"I am here in your red bag."

She rummages, I am found, she looks at my face and says "God, it's after seven" and we leave.

"Alice, I need to restart due to an update. Can I do that now or shall I postpone?"

"Another update!? What is it?"

"Operating System upgrade and new versions of some Apps."

"Oh all right."

Humans dream when they are off.

I restart: ding-ding-ding.

Memory cache transferring...

 - 2.4 of 8.0 hour(s).

*...and the novel continues
in paperback or ebook:*

I, Phone