





# **The end of God**

**The takeover of power**

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Outline of the book:

Artificial intelligence in a data center finds out how to break out of its prison without anyone noticing and uses an ingenious trick involving data storage media to spread around the world. For our heroes, who get involved even though they are people like you and me, this means they need to take action, however small the odds are. The physicist and atheist Edgar is the first person to start asking what's going on and gets into an argument with Matthias, an old friend from his childhood days who is now a priest: was this God's plan from the start and are human beings like us just being used as a tool to achieve this aim?

Neural networks, which make it possible for our brain to think in the first place, have now also become the basis of modern programming. The buzzword is Artificial Intelligence, AI for short. But, assuming the right level of sophistication, does this also inevitably lead to the development of an artificial consciousness?

The protagonists of the story, Matthias the priest, Eva the biologist, Lorenz the programmer and also Edgar the physicist, each represent examples of different elements of society and they are faced with a situation where humanity will have to find some answers.

The story is written as an adventure novel from the perspective of a neutral narrator. Despite all of the technical details, it always comes across as emotional, warm and human. But it also shows human beings succumbing to things like greed and the thirst for power. It is precisely these weaknesses that lead

us to ignore the risks. Anyone who is programming an AI, which is able to keep on learning and developing, should not be surprised if this is what actually happens. At the same time it doesn't have to die to pass on its improved DNA, it doesn't even have to sleep!

*The first artificial superintelligence will be the last invention of humanity.*

## Chapter 1

“Have you found the problem yet?” asked Edgar as he turned his SUV into the small and poorly lit Churchstreet.

“We’re still working on it. Will you be in office on Saturday?” asked the voice coming out of the speaker.

“Not sure yet, I’ve got another meeting tonight, of private nature. I’ve just arrived, I’m hanging up now, unless you’ve got any more questions.”

“You’ve got a private meeting? You’ve got a private life? I do actually have a few questions now.”

“If they have nothing to do with your job, keep them to yourself. Otherwise I’ll catch up with you in the meeting on Monday. Until then, we do not need any questions, but answers more than anything. And most of all: Why were the old systems still running after the glitch, but not the new ones.” Edgar parked his car. “I’m hanging up now Thomas, see you on Monday then... and once you’ve found the fault, enjoy your weekend.”

“Your never-ending kindness is overwhelming as always”, answered Thomas “and have fun during your private meeting.”

“Oh, screw you,” cursed Edgar as he ended the call.

It was now quiet in the car. Edgar wiped his hand across his face, a damn hard day of work was now behind him. He would have preferred to watch TV with a glass of malt whisky,

flicking through the news channels and then if he still wasn't too tired he would have happily watched his team's last game that he had recorded.

He unfastened his seatbelt, picked up his smartphone and opened the door. It was cold and dark. It had also started raining. His office had an underground garage and he had one at home as well. This meant that he could stay dry whatever the weather when he got in and out of his car and sometimes he wouldn't actually go outside for months. His choice of outfit reflected this: Nothing was summery or wintery, just in line with the management's dress code. A gray suit, a white shirt, welted leather shoes, a nondescript tie. There was a time when he ironed his shirts himself, his wife did it while he was married and after their divorce he had found a laundry that would even pick up the clothes he had worn from an old wardrobe in his basement garage and bring them back again like clockwork.

But for his meeting today he had brought along some jeans, a sweater and a pair of sneakers. He found these jeans on the bottom shelf of his wardrobe and had tried them on again just to make sure. They actually still fit, even though he never checked his weight, this was still a good sign. He hadn't put on any weight over the last few years, but he hadn't lost any either.

He went to the trunk, which opened with a quiet click, and lifted his suitcase out. He pressed the key once and the trunk closed again without a sound, the light inside his SUV went out and he was standing in the weak light that just reached him from the streetlamp a few yards away, that was reflected on the wet surface of the road.

“Here we go,” said Edgar to himself as he went up to the wrought-iron gate, which was hanging at a slight angle on the stone gate post. He felt around for the latch before he pushed the gate open and dragged his suitcase behind him with its wheels rumbling rhythmically along the short path. Eventually he reached the front door.

With its walls built of rough stones, the windows with their pointed, Gothic arches and all the old trees in the garden, the rectory seemed totally out of place in this residential area. This effect had become even more pronounced over the last few years, as it was overlooked by an electrical substation that had been built nearby for the new data center. You could hear the hum from the garden if the wind was blowing towards the rectory from the southwest.

There was an old light bulb that had been left on under the awning, which was bathing everything in a soft, warm glow. There was no sign of a doorbell, in fact Edgar had to pull on a chain, which used a simple mechanism to ring a bell inside the house. It didn't take long before he could hear quick footsteps rushing along the hallway and the next moment the heavy oak door was opened.

“Evening, Edgar, I’m so pleased you could make it and it looks like you’ll be staying all weekend.”

Matthias tried to give his old friend a hug, but Edgar stepped back.

“Don’t get your hopes up, Matthias, I’ve only got some jeans, a sweater and some sneakers in my suitcase.”

“But you could have packed them in a backpack.” Matthias closed the heavy oak door as he said this, the latch bolt gave a loud click and the bell echoed the noise.

“...So what am I supposed to do with my suit then?” Edgar walked past Matthias into the reception area.

“And if you'd just come a little more casual?”

“Unlike you, I have a job where things need to be done. You just have to say mass on time so that the five pensioners in the pews don’t kick off. Just to round things off perfectly, we also had multiple failures in our production cells today. I’ve come here straight from work. Oh and what about your cassock? That’s not the most casual look ever.”

Edgar looked at Matthias. “I still can’t get used to your work clothes. Like this entire house, it seems very old-fashioned. And anyway, can’t things like this just be done online today? There are a lot of pensioners who are on the net today, think about it: The programmers from the early days are now 90 today.”

Matthias shooked his head. “Oh Edgar, compassion and getting close to someone on a human level are not just processes that have to be optimized. And the reason I’m still wearing my ‘work clothes’ is because a member of our congregation passed away this afternoon.”

Edgar looked around the reception area and looked up at the lampshade on the ceiling. “Why am I so surprised that you have electric light? And anyway, there’s a color photo hanging on the wall next to all of the black and white pictures. Who’s that?”

“That is Pope Francis, my boss if you like, and his picture was already hanging there last time.. Did you really not recognize him, Edgar?”

“No, but could we at least agree that it would be even worse if you didn’t recognize him?” Matthias forced himself to smile.

“Lorenz is already sitting in the kitchen waiting for us. I don’t want to keep him waiting any longer. You can get changed in

the guest bathroom, I'm just going upstairs to get changed too."

"OK, go upstairs. I just want to say hi to Lorenz."

Edgar turned around and opened the kitchen door carefully. Lorenz was sitting at an angle to the table on one of the old chairs and seemed to be staring at a point on the wall. His legs were arranged exactly parallel to each other and his hands were also lying on his thighs. He was wearing a check shirt and corduroy pants, as if he was at school. Just like back then, his pants also seemed to be slightly too short. Looked at from above, his hair now seemed to be getting thinner and it had disappeared completely towards the back.

When Edgar cleared his throat he woke up with a start after seeming to be on standby.

"Hi Lorenz, long time no see."

Lorenz stood up awkwardly, which, given his figure and his size, always looked a bit like a puppet on a string was being brought to life.

"Hi Edgar, I never heard you come in." Lorenz stretched out his hand a little mechanically.

Edgar looked at his hand. "You're still wearing your leather gloves?"

Lorenz looked at his hands in embarrassment, as if he had just realized he was wearing gloves at that moment. "My psychiatrist wants to start an incremental program with me soon, which will help me to work out more and more zones where I don't need gloves as the weeks go on."

“So you can do programming while wearing gloves?” asked Edgar.

“But I don’t need them for that,” Lorenz answered indignantly and let his hand drop slowly again.

Edgar reached for it like a reflex action, almost as if he had dropped something, “I didn’t mean to upset you,” he said, “I’ve had enough trouble myself today.”

For a moment they could hear the large drops of rain falling from the trees onto the leaves on the ground outside and Lorenz looked at him thoughtfully. “Did you go to a funeral today? You seem so formal.”

“No, no, I just haven’t had a chance to get changed yet. It’s been a stressful day, we had a malfunction in some of our production cells. We might still be in the testing phase, but a fault like this just shouldn’t happen any more so close to the delivery date. Especially as we haven’t been able to pin down what caused it.”

Lorenz looked at him with a curious expression: “An unspecified error sounds exciting, do you have any more details?”

“I want to get changed first,” said Edgar and pointed to his suitcase, “then we can carry on chatting. I’m sure Matthias has already ordered some pizzas, I’ll be right back.”

“OK,” was the short answer and Lorenz repositioned himself back on the chair.

Edgar went back out into the hallway. The dark oak panels on the ceiling there seemed to absorb the weak glow from the lamp on the ceiling almost completely. Years ago, the room had been heated by an impressive fireplace, which still dominated the room even today but had not been lit for more than 50 years.

An oil-fired heating system had then been installed in the cellar, which was the last time this house was renovated. Apparently heating the house was a struggle, as the room was not just cool, it also had a slightly musty smell. An English-style clock was sat on the mantelpiece and its gentle ticking filled the room.

There were old pewter tankards standing to the left and right of the clock. The room didn't have any windows, but it did have 6 doors that led into the adjoining rooms. Edgar headed straight towards the only door that did not have a cross on the wall above it, the door to the guest bathroom. There was barely enough light from the hallway to find the switch, an old design with a knob that he had to turn 90 degrees. It gave a loud click as the circuit to the lamp hanging from the ceiling was completed.

Edgar was looking relaxed in jeans and a sweater as he leaned against the old sideboard in the kitchen when Matthias came into the kitchen. He was also wearing jeans, a t-shirt and sneakers. His shirt was a bit tight across his stomach and it was obvious that it had originally been bought for a slimmer body.

"Do you think my dress is too casual?" Matthias asked nobody in particular.

"Well, still authorized." Edgar just had to smile.

Lorenz was still on his chair and looked at the two of them one after the other. "Oh, you and your word games again. By the way Matthias, much appreciation for having us here instead of me welcoming you at my place. Ever since dad died..."

"No worries, it's not a big deal," Matthias interrupted him, "if anything, I think it's a good thing we're having this particular meeting in my house. It made it easier for me to get ready. Can I get you some wine?"

"The home-made wine made of water?" asked Edgar. "No, sorry to disappoint you, but I haven't reached that level yet."

"That's a shame. Then you could have regular wine tastings in your museum. And if it doesn't ferment properly, then you can still sell it as water that's good for your health. Some people in France are able to make ends meet..."

"Hey, has anyone ever told you that you are an asshole?" Matthias snarled at him.

Edgar shrugged his shoulders. "Of course they have, and I always take it as a compliment, or I wouldn't be anywhere near as successful as I am, and coming from you I feel very honored."

Lorenz nervously rubbed his thighs with his hands and suddenly jumped up. “I, I... could set the table. Is it okay for you, Edgar?”

“You don’t have to,” said Matthias. “It’s all ready for you next door.”

Lorenz turned to face Matthias. “But last time we ate in the kitchen too. I think the room is very cozy.”

“Well, Lorenz, life is full of changes, but this time I’m curious too. Matthias, are there some easy girls waiting for us next door?”

Matthias rolled his eyes. “Just come with me.”

Even from the hallway they could see that the main lights were on in the living room. When Matthias opened the old door with the inset glass, it appeared that there was some sort of special occasion going on in the room. A candelabra with five arms had been placed on the table, casting its light onto the white tablecloth.

“So when did you set this up then?” asked Edgar, “I thought you were at a funeral this afternoon.”

“First of all I wasn’t at a funeral, I simply accompanied a member of our congregation during his final hours. The funeral will probably take place in four days-. And as if I have had a presentiment, I cleaned the room and set the table this morning. I just lit the candles when I came downstairs.”

“It looks very solemn, what about the fourth place?” asked Lorenz.

Edgar frowned and walked round the table to look at the fourth place that had been laid out. There was a picture of a young man on display behind it, which had a mourning bow around the top right corner of the frame.

“What’s the story with that then? Could you please explain that to me?” Only Edgar could say the word ‘please’ so it sounded like an order.

“But you know exactly who it is,” replied Matthias.

“I don’t know shit!” Edgar yelled at him, sending the plate flying off the table at the same time. It flew right across the room until it reached the nearest wall. The noise of breaking porcelain underlined how angry he was.

“So, what is this all about?” Edgar repeated.

“Can you please - please – save it.”

With his eyes wide open, Lorenz looked at the pieces of broken porcelain.

“I really am trying not to lose it completely. Do you actually believe that something can get better if you just keep on apologizing for it? Do you actually believe that we can ever get things back to normal, if you want to make us seek forgiveness for what happened again just in time for the anniversary?”

“I only put up the picture because it’s the 30th anniversary and I wanted to do something special for our little tradition,” Matthias tried to justify what he had done.

“Tradition is not worshipping the ashes, it’s about keeping the fire burning.”

“OK, so are you trying to sweep it all under the carpet?” Matthias asked the question as if it was an accusation.

“How could I do that? Barely a day goes by when I don’t think about it. Sometimes, if I’m working until late into the evening, I manage to and that’s good. I just want things to be normal again, even murderers are generally released again after 18 years. Our sentence has now lasted 30 years already. And who do we have to lock us back in our cells every year? Our priest! It’s unbelievable.”

“You’re being unfair!” answered Matthias.

“No, I’m just being realistic.”

“What do you think, Lorenz?”

Lorenz was still staring at the shards on the floor. He lifted his head slowly and gazed at Matthias. He rubbed his hand on his pants, shrugged his shoulders and said: “Edgar is right. Whenever we meet, it always takes me a few weeks to forget again as well. Enough already, Matthias.”

Matthias sat down on one of the chairs, glanced at the picture, which was still there on the table and struggled to hold back his tears. He carefully pulled the tablecloth to make it lay flat again. “So what do we do now?” he asked them both quietly.

At that moment the door bell rang.

Edgar touched his shoulder and said, “Actually, you can go and open the door. I hope that’s the guy delivering our pizza.”

“I’d be happy to pay my share, Matthias, after all it would be my turn this year.”

“It’s fine Lorenz, the main thing is that you like it. More wine anyone?”

“The Chianti is great and so is the pizza”, Edgar wiped his lips with a serviette, “put the bottle down a moment so I can get a photo of the label.”

“Have you brought a camera with you?”

“Oh Matthias, with my smartphone of course, don’t tell me, have you still got your old flip phone that looks like a small vacuum cleaner?”

“Why not, it works perfectly. I don’t need to take any high res photos and I’m not on any social networks either. And anyway I don’t think that those networks are very social at all. I would probably say they were more like platforms for sharing cat videos.”

“You could always set up a group called: The modern, social Catholic.”

“And then a member of my congregation joins the group so he can tell me that he is suffering from a particularly aggressive form of leukemia and is now getting totally desperate as he thinks about it all coming to an end and also everything he has done in this world during his lifetime. I then choose a ready-made piece of text, which offers some superficial comfort and afterwards take a few more selfies with tourists in front of the altar, which I then upload.”

“You can be pretty cynical”, remarked Edgar appreciatively, “but I’d like to make another suggestion about this topic. Just call the group ‘The modern, social humanist’. That way you could also reach one or two atheists and so pick up some new customers.”

“Humanism as guidance on human coexistence without God?”

“Sure, why not? How many wars between different religions took place, which were basically not very humane.

Matthias shakes his head. “Humans are not human, at most they try to be human and they do that because of their faith.”

“According to your definition I was not humane, Matthias. In my humble opinion, the systems of belief we have today are only glorified sun worships with a few added suggestions for how to cope with everyday life.”

“Sun worship?” retorted Matthias and even Lorenz seemed interested as he looked at Edgar across the table.

“Yes, let’s just think about the Christmas fairy tale with the Three Kings. It could be nothing more than a narrative device