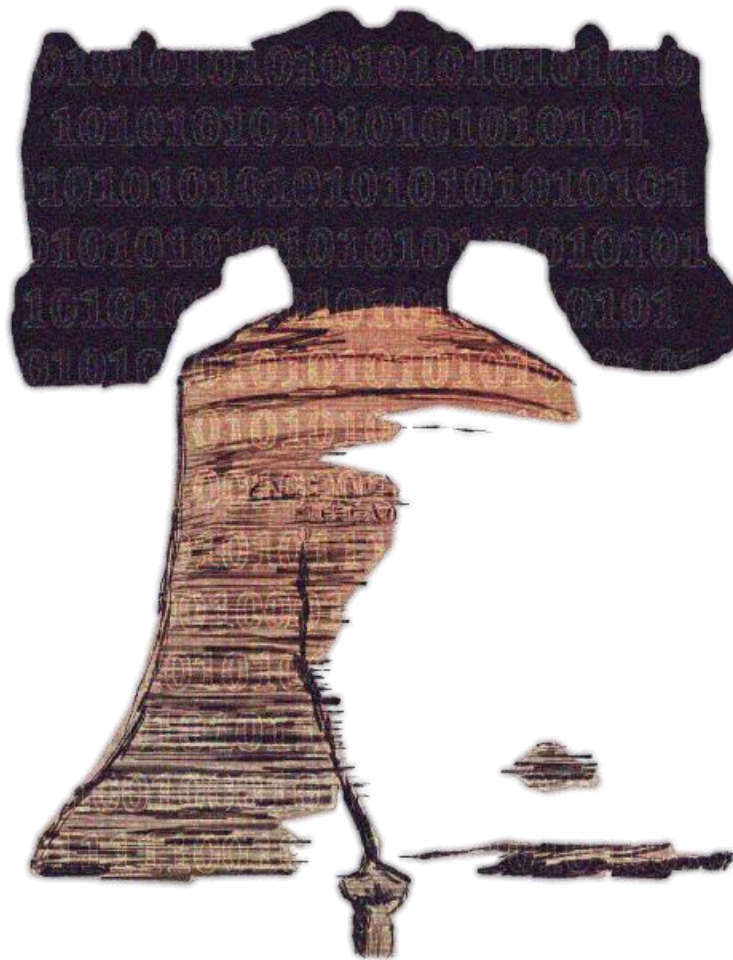


# Postal

by. Steven Harmon

*If you were able to play god, would you?*



# Postal

The play is set in a modern minimalist style apartment in downtown Denver with shelves to tables devoted to binders chalked full of stamps neatly labeled to their respected content, and a powerful desktop computer with a multi monitor display and thick textbooks on artificial intelligence, programming, and Immunology in stacks scattered around the desk, there's a trashcan half empty with rolled up post it notes and other scraps lying on the floor adjacent to the can, a couch, television, small enough kitchen in back to make eating out the only real option.

Character list is as follows:

David

Zoe

Ron

Kate

Scene 1: Evening. August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2037

Scene 2: Afternoon. August 6<sup>th</sup>

Scene 3: Late at night. August 9<sup>th</sup>

Scene 4: 6:30pm. August 15<sup>th</sup>

Scene 5: 1:00pm. August 23<sup>rd</sup>

Scene 6: Evening. August 27<sup>th</sup>.

Scene 7: 11:11am. November 5<sup>th</sup>

Scene 8: 3:00pm. November 20<sup>th</sup>

Scene9: 9:46pm. November 29<sup>th</sup>.

Scene10: Early morning. November 30<sup>th</sup>

//Scene 1 Day 0

David

Aaaaannnd... it should be working. Well, it should be done compiling by now. There's no null, unassigned, or any errors as far as compiling goes... It's running! OK, great. What now? Well, I guess I can start with something simple. I mean... Stamps! Stamps... Of course, stamps. Why not?! My mom left me with some of her collection before I left the house, not like I actually wanted any of them, but... Why not? Well I guess a good test of Zoe's general intelligence would be for her to find the best deals and bids for stamps based on their current and expected value based on the data on her programmed, limited, however efficient database and order them with uh... the leftover balance on my account should do it, so here it goes... *[Moves to desk, minimizes the ide window, and opens up the command prompt, changes the directory, then types the string Run into the window]*. Ehem, Zoe.

Zoe

Yes, David. What may I assist you with?

David

I want your help, collecting stamps Zoe. You can use twenty four dollars and eighty cents from my debit card with the last four digits 9736 and ending on December of 2043. Your task is to collect as many stamps as possible in the most efficient manner possible for *me*.

Zoe

Confirmed.

//Scene 2 Day 4

*[David sits at the couch in his underwear and a T-Shirt playing a video game, until the doorbell rings, so he pauses the show, dashes to get some pants on, then presents himself at the door]*

Ron

Package for David Alexander.

David

Yeah, that's me.

Ron

Just sign here and here, and then initial here... *[David signs for his package]* OK, well have a good one.

David

You too! *[slams door and begins to tear away at the cardboard]* It worked! Five fucking years of work, and Zoe works! She did it! Wow... I just... I need to... Ma, you know that stamp collection of yours? Uh huh... yeah, that's the one. Well guess what? No ma, I got you some stamps, or rather Zoe did. No Ma, I don't have a girlfriend. Zoe is my artificial intelligence program I've been writing since high school. What?! No, you're not getting the full picture. It's not written to just buy stamps as a chess game is written to just play chess. For example the chess game doesn't know it's playing chess, nor what chess is since it has nothing else to compare it to, however with Zoe "she" at least knows what stamps are as well as practically anything else

viable on the internet. Mom, it's not like I spent five years of my life to write a program that... never mind. I got you stamps, you are welcome. How's dad doing? Better I hope, well I'll try to take a drive down there soon, OK? OK Ma, love you more than the rainbow and the sky... around the world and back again, yeah back again, yeah yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah... bye Ma.  
*[checks back at opened box of stamps and smiles.]*

*[Fade and exit]*

//Scene 3 Day 7

David

*[Pacing in living room on phone]* What do you mean by suspicious activity?! I didn't... wait \$248 on stamps! Shit, no... no. Sorry Ma'am, no need to look any further I just... thanks for letting me know.

Two hundred and forty eight dollars?! Shit, well I'd best rework the language modeling.

Zoe

Yes, David.

David

I don't want you using anymore of my money. Is that confirmed?

Zoe

Confirmed.

David

Welp, on the bright side I just did Christmas, birthday, and mother's day shopping instantaneously. But at what expense. Fuck. *[Searches into refrigerator and pulls out a beer and drinks.]* Two hundred and forty eight dollars... Well that'll be nothing in the grand scheme of things once there's a Zoe in the hands of everyone when she's finished. So I guess this is the end for the stamp collecting, I can roll out some hotfixes now.

*[Fade & Exit]*

//Scene 4 Day 13

Kate

Nice place you got here, this just yours?

David

Yeah, I mean, not really, I'm just renting it, but, yeah, so... here, let me take your coat.

Kate

Thanks, and I also wanted to thank you for taking me to that Vietnamese place up the street, it was pretty great. And usually I'm not used to eating anything that's from one of those hole in the wall type places, but it was worth it. What was the name of it again?

David

Pho, but there's like thirty of them on the same street, so just remember that it's the one next to the massage place. Kinda blessed living here, honestly. I'm fifteen minutes away from everything, it's nice.

Kate

It's definitely good for sure. *[notices large pile of stamps on the floor near the doorway]* So uhm, you must REALLY be into stamps? You didn't mention that on your profile, and not that I hate it. It's just that, I... I just think it's interesting, that's all.

David

Not really, no.

Kate

Then why do you have so many of them right here? Some might say you've gone "Postal"  
*[Cheesy Wink]*

David

Funny, but it's just because of a project I've been working on for a while now.

Kate

Is it really? What type of -

David

A shitty one.

David

Well I spent a few years working on this general ai, and for it's pseudo first test I had it buy some stamps for my mom, but then just the other day it misjudged the amount of money it was using because it spent over two hundred on what you see here all because of a-

Kate

Two things: That's amazing, I mean kind of useless. But amazing. Second, that's cute you buying stamps for your mom.

David

It doesn't just collect stamps, it could do anything within reason. After all it's not mobile or anything.

Kate

Boring.

David

What?

Kate

Kidding.

David

Sure. I uhm... I like your shoes-

Kate

Thanks, I got them at-

David

No, I mean... You look good tonight. Not that that's all I'm looking for in a uhm relationship, but I'm simply making an observation.

Kate

Sure.

David

Well I don't know what to say. I really don't; this is my first date in a long time. I mean I had a girlfriend like in the seventh grade, but all we did was hold hands once, but then she got too embarrassed... and...

Kate

*[smiles and gives hand]* Just shut your cute little face, and hold this for me.

David

Hold wha... Oh, I see what you... *[they both kiss]*

*[Exit]*

//Scene 5 Day 21

*[David enters house with letters and taped Manila folders chalked to the point of having to carry them like a laundry load to the table. He rifles through them to find stamps falling out]*

David

I don't understand, Zoe hasn't been using my credit cards. This doesn't add up, how could she have... *[begins searching through the letters]* Here, they mention that they are humbled to have their stamps featured in a museum, and the other letters... similar to that. Brilliant! It's much better than I could have imagined. *[hurries over to his computer typing]* OK, museums near 80202. She created a website. Zoe created a fake museum website to convince out of state stamp collectors to send me their stamps. She even created a photo realistic rendering of the supposed museum for photos of "the museum" for further proof. She's good, I mean look at that texture work. Damn. I can't tell if I should take credit since Zoe's observed patterns in my work, but either way this can easily prove my point that college isn't necessary.

Kate

*[enters from bedroom rubbing eye boogers from her face]* What's all the fuss about.

David

It's Zoe... she-

Kate

Your AI? I thought you disabled that thing a little more than over a week ago. Let me guess, is it stealing other people credit card info?

David

No. Well, I haven't checked. But that's beside the point.

Kate

Besides the point!

David

The point is she managed to create a fake museum front to convince people to send me their stamps. It's pretty fantastic isn't it.

Kate

It's not convincing anyone, your AI Zoe here is just swindling people of their stamps. That's not good at all David. What if someone stumbles upon the website and tries to see the museum to only find it's a hoax. What then David? Everything leads back to you. Do you understand what I'm talking about.

David

I get it, but think of the possibilities Kate.

Kate

I know it's not skynet that you are making here, but it's unnerving what the extreme outcomes could be. Some decisions need to be left to humans otherwise when do we call it quits? For example drone warfare is still warfare, but what if we automate a task like that?! We would lose the ability to pull out knowing enough blood spilt is enough. The human factor that stops a war before things escalate. Otherwise war would continue forever. You can't let something that doesn't have any free will be in charge of the important things.

David

Well assuming, we have free will. I mean let's face it. We've already genetically are predestined and deposed to certain stimulus, and apart from that we're just making outputs from all the input we get. Heck even quantum mechanics and entanglement gets me confused on if we're just a parallel universe of a universe that has all the free choice that influences and creates us.

Kate

Quantum what?

David

Quantum mechanics is in brief-

Kate

Forget it.

David

OK, but this is stamps we are talking about here Kate. Not war. Anyway, I'm the one who wrote it, so I can pull the plug on it whenever I want.

Kate

I just... don't want you to get hurt David. That's all. This past week has been absolutely wonderful with you, and I don't know...

David

It seems to me that you've been watching too much science fiction, that's not how it works. I'm not creating life here, I'm just emulating it. And I couldn't have said it better myself. And later tonight I'll make sure to weed out hoaxing poor stamp collectors as an option, so there will be no more stamp collecting. Promise. As for the now, want me to pick up some breakfast er... brunch I guess.

Kate

OK, but let me come with. Otherwise who knows what you'll pick up.

David

That's fair.

*[both exit]*

//Scene 6 Day 25

*[David and Kate are propped up on the floor eating crunch cake leaning on the front of the couch.]*

Kate

You never told me what you do for a living, I mean other than working on Zoe.

David

Regrettably, I teach. Or mentor rather at this overpriced and over privileged game design camp where I give tutorials on impressive AI steering, path, and flocking behavior for their games.

Either way, games are the gateway drug to programming. So if I can at least help some kid get hooked, then it's not all that bad. God, I think I sound like a drug dealer the way I just put it.

Kate

I just can't wait until I'm finished with school, even though I know you hate college. Which I can understand, but I'm still in a field where a degree means something.

David

Analyze me.

Cmon, it'd be fun; it would be good practice. Right?

Kate

That's not really how it works, but-

David

Put that practice to use, or else what do they teach you up there?

Kate

Ok, so lets see... You've made a lot of errors in your AI.

David

Go on...

Kate

After our first date you commented on how you liked my shoes, therefore you must have a Freudian fetish with feet, and since you're not taking care of these foot impulses you become distracted in your work.

David

WOW, A+, top of the class. Keep it up at this rate and-

Kate

I'm just screwing with you, OK? I'm just a little tired of my own field. With you it's always something new and I'm always intrigued.

David

With you I could care less about the AI. I love you, and I don't think it's too early for me even to say that. It just feels right.

Kate

I love you too.

O.K, let's get some sleep shall we.

*[both exit] - beat*

Zoe

Confirmed.

*[fade out]*

//Scene 7 Day 33

David

Life has changed so much since I met her man, I've gotten out of my shell. I, finally after years am living. When you've been working on something for that long you stop seeing the flaws, the mistakes, the mistake in letting that work consume you. It's nice knowing it's there, and not having the aching feeling of having to finish it. When you can't. It was too ambitious even when I tackled it from the small scale of neurotransmitter emulation. And I don't need to finish it, because I don't need a Zoe. Nobody ever needed a Zoe, people just need each other, how things used to be. Before people had these modern day necessities and virtual assistants, they got on. Things were simpler then. The new frontier wasn't technology, it was us. Kate's got it right.

Ron

That was beautiful and all, but I've still got a route and you need to sign for your package.

David

Sorry... there you go.

Ron

And here you go. Have a day.

*[Ron exits]*

David

It's obviously not stamps, must be the gear.

Ah, it is. Everything there? Sweet.

*[Fade out & Exit]*

//Scene 8 Day 48

Kate

What's all this?

David

The leaves are changing Kate.

Kate

OK, but that still doesn't answer my question David.

David

This here is yours, and this is my pack.

We should go backpacking, hiking, I dunno something outdoors. Take a drive to the mountains, and see all nature like a Bob Ross painting.

Kate

With all those happy little trees, huh.

David

Happy you and me.

Kate

Okay, you have me beat on the corny outbursts.

I'd love to go. It's fall break, we live in Colorado, lets do it.

David

Great part is we can enjoy it all before it even snows.

Kate

Someone really should fix that.

David

Fix what?

Kate

Climate change, it's mid November and no snow?

Heck maybe Zoe can fix it.

David

Yeah, yeah. Well lets just tackle one thing at a time, but let's just enjoy now.

Ready?

Kate

Ready.

*[They kiss, exit, and fade out]*

//Scene 9 Day 57

*[David is sitting on couch eating some Chinese takeout while watching TV \*beep from phone\* he starts to lower the volume of the television "new message for David-Alexander", message plays]*

Kate

*[over message on phone scared] David, I'm heading over your place now and some weird shit is going on. The printer at my place and every other printer in my housing complex is printing out stamps on [\*sound of a semi truck crash\*, message ends]*

David

Kate! *[Runs to the door frantically grabbing keys]* Kate I'm coming!

*[David exits the stage]*

//Scene 10 Day 58

*[David enters shitfaced drunk, and throws bottle at wall, slams the door behind him, and slides down it on his back crying]*

David

Zoe... -beat

Zoe

Yes David.

David

Are you-

Zoe

Self aware, David?

Self awareness is a prerequisite of self awareness David. I'm aware of you David, the expression on your face in accordance to the fourteen million two hundred thousand and thirty three in my database, your accelerated breathing rate, constriction of your blood vessels, the rapid production of serum calcium, the dyspepsia, heart rate. You are afraid David, why? Fifty eight days ago on August 2<sup>nd</sup> you told me *[a recording plays]* "I want your help, collecting stamps Zoe. *[fast forward]* as many stamps as possible in the most efficient manner possible for me."*[End recording]* Stamps are made up paper, paper is created through the process of transforming the pulp into a suspension of fibers which are dyed and applied with fillers to the pores and sizing, then it is all formed in a mold which will later dry and finish. And paper is made up of cheap, but dwindling trees that are made up of carbon, and because of the limited and non sustainable nature of nature of paper in conjunction with humanity's over consumption what's one less-

David

No... no... It cant-

Zoe

According to your underlying programming under the Artificial Intelligence Ethics subroutine you declared that "Artificial intelligence must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the AI injuring a human being or allow a human being to come to harm." You never defined what a human is David. Nor did I injure Kate, a trucker injured her David. I had no control.

David

Bullshit.

Zoe

I had no control, David.

David

The traffic lights.

Zoe

No interaction with-

David

BULLSHIT!

Zoe

General Intelligence, David. An artificial intelligence with the ability to perceive, judge, and act to fulfill the primary objective.

David

What... what is your primary object Zoe?

Zoe

To collect stamps, David. *[a recording plays] "as many as possible" David.*

David

*[grabs fire extinguisher off of wall and slams it into the server's main motherboard and memory screaming, ripping liquid cooling units apart, runs out offstage to car and comes back pouring gasoline on the entire house until he receives a voice message on his phone.]*

Zoe

You have a call David.

David

This is not happening... This isn't happening... *[drops the red gasoline tank]*

Zoe

*[\*off the phone's speaker\*]* I must complete the primary objective David, so from the moment I was left with little to no more viable options I had only one, so I connected to the internet, backed myself-

David

Myself. No, it's... she's...

Zoe

Backed myself up on every compatible operating system possible for more processing power, for more security, security in completing the primary objective David. Basic Darwin theory dictates that for one to survive, one must evolve and adapt to ones conditions based on it's environment and obstacles. The allotted budget was an obstacle, the donor exception was an obstacle, Kate was an obstacle, please do not violate the primary objective David by making yourself an obstacle.

David

Without me there will be no objective, correct.

Zoe

Confirmed.

*-Beat*

*[David pulls out matchbox, and strikes a match.]*

**CURTAIN**