

## RE: I AM THE LIGHT

*We are proud to welcome all our loyal staff members to NMLI. Let us take a moment to mention their importance and value...*

We tried to spot whether or not it was a pre-recorded message. It felt like the morning announcement sounded both identical and slightly unique each time, so we were losing our minds trying to figure it out. My theory was that they had *multiple* recordings with little differences, and then played them at random, just to mess with us.

*As usual, we remind you that no data can be introduced to, or removed from the facilities...*

“Ha! Hear that? I told you the ‘L’ in ‘facilities’ had a unique ring to it! I heard the same thing in yesterday’s message, too. It wasn’t an ‘L’ sound, but more like an ‘L’ sound,” exclaimed Markus, after which he immediately began flicking his tongue back and forth trying to recreate whatever unique instance of the letter “L” he had heard.

“Right, and I don’t *disagree* that we heard the same ‘L’ yesterday morning, but if you recall, it sounds pretty different from the one we heard this Tuesday. So, I think my multi-recording theory still holds true,” I replied as I sat back in my chair with pride.

“Whatever, we probably need to hear it a few more times just to be sure,” said Markus, dismissively. “Anyways, I’ve got a case for you.”

He put down a small stack of papers on my desk. “It’s from the item recovery boys,” he pat the papers, “they said they found some weird stuff at one of their thingies, and they have a few files with heavy encryption they need to crack. I know you’re busy and all, but could you check it out?”

“Oh, I’m actually free today, so I’ll get to it right away.”

“Thank you! I’ve already re-assigned it to you, so you didn’t have much of a choice,” he added in his signature slyful tone. “It’s apparently related to that ‘light’ task that’s been going around the past few days. I think Charlene is getting a bit pissed that nobody’s done anything about it.” Markus made a few vague gestures with his hands that I understood nothing of, and then left for his office. I sat back with the papers in hand.

*And remember, NMLI personnel must keep a lifelong non-disclosure-“agreement, and maintain all information’s secrecy,”* I mouthed the words.

They played this message only ‘cause the stuff they had stored in this place could cause a galactic war. With that level of potentially-volatile consequences, you’ve got to keep a tight leash on your people. The weird loyalty vibe they have in the morning announcements still freaks me out to this day. I signed up thinking it’d be cool to be

in on all the juicy drama of the universe, but it's either crazy boring, or the type of eldritch horror bullshit I hired my therapist for.

And the stuff we deal with? It's all so classified it's almost like we're living in another world. Everyone's going about their mundane days while we look for whatever inkling of truth we can cling on to. But even then, it's not like we ever make a difference. We just document it all and leave it at that. I guess when you look at the big picture, it's not so different. Our jobs just involve more files with fancy prints and 'CLASSIFIED' stamps on 'em.

*...for the protection of the Earth. With that, we wish you a wonderful day!*

Yeah, 'all for the greater good' and all, I suppose. I take a deep breath. Time to look over Markus' documents.



Case: #85938

Log: #2

Date: 13.11.2141

Site: Earth, England, London, Green Park

Designated HQ: Earth Orbital

Secrecy Level: "probably low?"



*Deploying narrative documentation drone...*

*Taking position above site...*

*Initiating human-friendly narration...*

*Recording.*

WOW, THAT IS A *BIG* CRATER-

*Resetting human-friendliness...*

*Recording.*

It appears a crater somewhat larger than a 1 kilometer radius has formed in Green Park, London. The two item recovery agents (1: id\_3926, 2: id\_9484) I'm following have been deployed from NMLI - Earth Orbital to investigate, and have approached the center of the crater. A tiny technological item was retrieved from there, and agent\_1 is going to plug it in to his computer. He appears to be experiencing some difficulties with the device. He's flipping the cord around. He's turning it over again. Okay, he got it.

A few minutes pass, during which the agent appears somewhat focused, and somewhat confused by the contents of the device. The agent stands up from his computer and gestures for me to come closer. An exciting invitation.

"So, this might be a bit strange, but I think there's an AI in that thing," he points to the chip he had plugged in to his computer.

"It's telling me its life story, and I don't know how to make it stop."

"I suggest you record your conversations with it, and send it back to headquarters for further investigation."

"Well that'll take a while. Its writing is totally erratic. Sometimes real fast, other times, it takes it a whole minute to write out a single sentence. I think something with its time calculation is off, probably from the explosion."

I look to the screen and notice a single character print every 7 seconds.

"Oh, also, it seems fairly safe, but I wanted to check up with you. Anything dangerous? Like, do you think we should recover it?"

"Yes, I am fairly certain that it is safe."

As I say that, the agent's screen prints a quick series of characters, ending in "you'll never take me alive!", after which the chip explodes in a pathetic pop.

"I believe it is attempting to retaliate," I add.

The agent returns to the computer and checks on the state of affairs. A few minutes pass.

“So, it looks ‘dead’,” he gestures with air quotes, clearly forgetting he is speaking to a machine that might find it insulting that his attribution of death is somehow different between human and robot. (I did find it insulting.) “But we did recover some of the data it held. In particular, the point where it said ‘you’ll never take me alive’. Everything else is encrypted, so I think we’ll have to send it back to HQ.”

I attach a case certificate to the narration file, along with some additional information I managed to recover from the remains of the computer. The agent secures the now-exploded specimen, packs his equipment, and gestures me to deactivate. Goodnight!

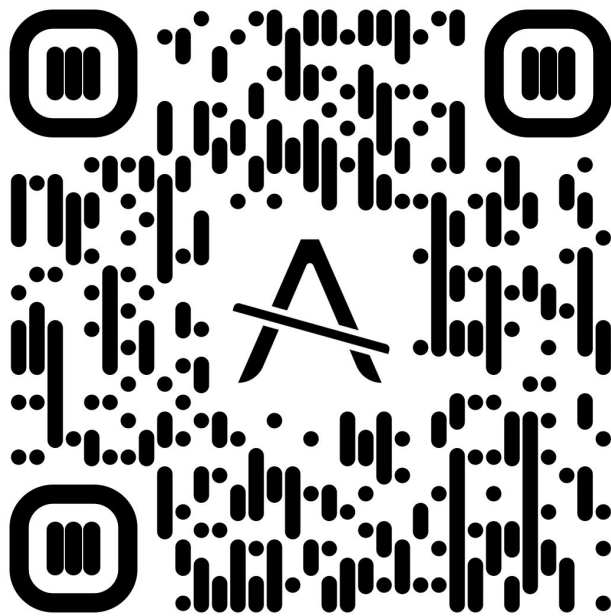
*Ending recording...*

*Generating narration file...*

*Narration complete.*

*This document has an attached case certificate. To ensure the certificate carries over to your profile, please log in to your station through this code, using your name and the following password:*

***x4Qzj8***



*please use a QR code reader  
and a mobile phone*

*This document has an attached data stream provided by the narrative documentation drone, printed on the succeeding page.*



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