



Waikato Scenarios - Science Society

Narrative Story – “A Mother’s Musing”

Mae-Ling is sitting at her office desk, taking a micro-pause to stretch, and thinking distractedly about her son Mike. She drifts off into one of those internal conversations we all constantly narrate to ourselves but often don't get around to having out loud.

“Every mother worries about her children, right? It's inevitable. How did mothers cope back in the 2000s when they only had cell-phone technology to track their kids down? Even with today's comprehensive monitoring systems where I can dial up my son's exact location on my wristwatch Sat-Comm screen, I still worry myself silly about what he's up to.

Take yesterday, for example, when Mike got himself tangled up in another of his radical flash-mob protests in down-town Hamilton. I had an idea he was up to something when Miranda, my VPA (virtual personal assistant), e-called with a midday update on Mike's movements. Even though he'd been at school all morning, he'd made a series of e-calls to unknown and unlisted numbers. Highly suspicious behaviour.



Flash Mob

Mike has inherited his great grandfather's tendency to rebel against the system. And Granddad, bless him, has been quietly fostering this by linking him up with all sorts of dodgy alternative virtual networks. What's a mother to do! Granddad and his kooky mates (and now my son!) firmly believe that today's techno-fix world has gone too far and that we're losing our humanity.

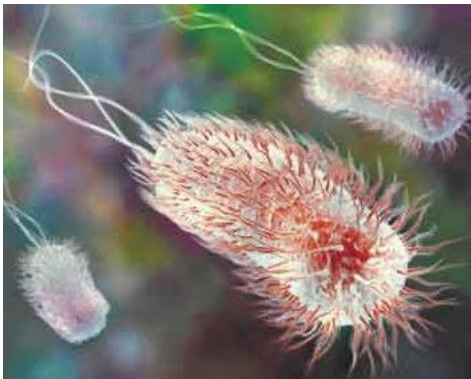
My husband Craig and I both agree that this technological world of ours is great. He's a master builder for Fletch-tech Construction and really enjoys working with a robotic apprentice. No back-chat or slacking on the site. No hangover from the night before. Just good old-fashioned focus on getting the job done and following the rules.

I work for the Government, updating the compulsory monthly NZ attitudes and opinions survey, aptly titled “What are we thinking?” But I'm only a part-timer mind you. Being a Government worker, I have to make especially sure I comply with the minimum weekly parenting requirement of 20 hours at home. And what a good policy it is too. We certainly wouldn't want to go back to the days of widespread youth gangs, teen pregnancies and petty crime that were rife in the 2020s. People were so focused on themselves back then that they lost of sight of the greater good.

Anyway, about yesterday – I get this update from Miranda and immediately e-call Granddad to see what he's put Mike up to this time. Of course the old fool just laughs and makes a pointed joke about how Hamilton is much less likely to be the focus of a bio-terrorism attack than Auckland. Honestly, of all people, my Granddad is so paranoid about bio-terrorism! He's never gotten over the shock of the “9/11” attacks at the turn of the century. I'm sure he's convinced that al-

Qaeda was behind the mysterious sleeping virus outbreak in Melbourne last year that killed hundreds of people, and he reckons Auckland might be next! Sometimes I almost wonder whether it's such a good thing that we can live so long these days – makes it a bit hard for people of Granddad's age (110) to keep a healthy perspective on things when they've seen so much change in one lifetime.

Back to my story... A bit of detective work on Miranda's part and I'm suddenly looking at a video-feed on my Sat-Comm screen showing Mike in the middle of a flash-mob protest outside Bio-Dairy's head office. There must be about 400 teenagers in front of the building all wearing digi-shirts with the flashing message "Nano-bot free kai for NZ!" According to Miranda's notes, the nano-bot cells (microscopic robots) that Bio-Dairy now uses to manufacture dairy protein appear to be escaping into the food chain. Some more radical groups even think these escapee nano-bots were the source of the Melbourne virus. Just as I start to panic about Mike getting arrested, the crowd disperses as quickly as it gathered and it's all over.



Nano-bots

I must say I don't like the idea of nano-bots in my food either but I dislike the idea of my son having a criminal record even more. He's hoping to get a place in the Psychology degree programme at the University of Waikato and any kind of police record would certainly damage his chances. They really do have the best Pysch programme in NZ here in Hamilton, with such a strong focus on the neuro-

science behind human behaviour. If we can just get Mike over this little radical phase of his, I'm sure he'll go on to achieve great things out there in the world."

A voice in her ear jolts Mae-Ling back into the real world. "Zao Mae-Ling," says a voice from the Sat-Comm ear-phone implanted inside her ear. "Zao" she replies to her colleague Martin, who is e-calling from the Wellington office to discuss additions to this month's survey. She glances down at her Sat-Comm screen to wave and smile at him, while feeling more than a little annoyed at his continued insistence on speaking Chinese.



Cell phone implants

Martin goes on to tell her how the Department of Science and Technology has requested they include a survey question this month on how people feel about the possibility of nano-bots in their food. Apparently the APSC (Asia Pacific Science Consortium), a network of internationally-renowned scientists, are looking to release new research results about the brewing 'nano-bots in food' scandal. The Government wants to get a handle on Kiwi attitudes about the issue before the news breaks, so that management plans can be developed to stop things getting blown out of proportion. And the survey update is needed in the next hour, Martin informs her smugly.

Mae-Ling sighs as she disconnects the call. She had hoped to get home earlier today to spend some quality time with Mike. But these days, it feels like you have to keep running faster and faster just to stay in the same place. It's hard to keep up with the pace, even with medical advances eliminating the fatigue and burn-out problems people had at the turn of the century. Ah well, she reminds herself, the next great technological fix will sort things out.