

A Model of You

An Interview with Dr. Elam
Professor of Philosophy at Virtual University

Note: When I was doing research for *The Day and the Hour* series I ran across this interesting man and became acquainted with his work. Perhaps you will enjoy reading this transcript of the interview. —Lynn Andrew

LA: Dr. Elam, as I understand the brief history of VU, you were the driving force behind the creation of the course in philosophy modeling.

Dr. Elam: That is true. The name is a bit unfortunate as it has turned out. We get inquiries all the time from students who are interested in another kind of modeling. I had assumed that being associated with the philosophy department would be sufficient distinction. In hindsight we should have consulted with psychologists before settling on the name. It seems obvious to me now, but at that time I did not realize there is a tendency to regard other disciplines as being subordinate to that which happens to be your major. Philosophy especially is often seen in a supporting role. So "philosophy of modeling" seems quite natural to one who is working toward a degree in somatic posturing. Of course one must insert "of" between "philosophy" and "modeling" in order to be-

come confused in that case, which those students are able to do with ease.

LA: When you speak of modeling in philosophy, I believe you are referring to the simpler images we use to represent something more complex—like the heart on a Valentine card that represents love.

Dr. Elam: You're on the right track, but that isn't quite what we mean when we use the term "model" in PM. The Valentine heart would be merely a symbol. A better example would be the use of a computer to model a brain.

LA: Oh, you mean mathematical modeling—simulating something on a computer.

Dr. Elam: No, that would be philosophical modeling. Philosophy modeling is quite different. ... I'm sorry; the way I expressed it was misleading. We are really using the term "model" as a noun, not a verb. It's easy to slip and use it as a verb as I just did. Instead of saying, "the use of a computer to model a brain," I should have said, "considering or viewing a computer as a model of a brain."

LA: So, in other words, you mean just observing the similarity between a computer and a brain, not using the computer to simulate a brain.

Dr. Elam: Yes, the focus is on similitude. But in a limited way, or you might say from a certain point of view. The mechanism underlying mentation and consciousness can be conceived of in various ways, using various models that try to match in some sense

what we seem to think we are. A man-made computer is something with which we are familiar, which we understand much better than we understand the brain. So we start by saying, "Suppose the brain is something like a computer." Then we look for similarities between what the brain does and what a computer does. And if we uncover some analogs, we just might have a useful model.

LA: It seems rather loose. You don't seem to care whether the two things are fundamentally comparable.

Dr. Elam: This is very true. Because of the vast difference between a brain and a computer it might seem that the effort is doomed to be as futile as it sounds. But whether or not any approximation to what is really going on can be conceived of by the apparatus with which we are equipped—that is our minds—there is still a possibility that an effort to refine or replace our models might prove to be beneficial. In other words, scientific perceptions may not always be the best way of looking at things.

LA: Give me another example of a philosophy model.

Dr. Elam: Any comparison you make when you try to describe something: an analogy or any sort of metaphor; even a simile or an illustration could become a philosophy model. Here is an example for you: people are like fruit trees.

LA: "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Dr. Elam: You see, from that tree model you can draw an inference about people even though a tree and a human being are

quite distant from one another.

LA: Yes, there are even examples of what is meant by evil fruit: "Beware of false prophets." And, "Not everyone who calls him Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

Dr. Elam: Don't forget: "Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire."

LA: It was on the tip of my tongue, but I decided not to say it.

Dr. Elam: I know. I have a pretty good model of your type. The aim of PM studies is to take your models and expand and refine them to make them more useful to you.

LA: Are you referring to me personally?

Dr. Elam: Yes, indeed.

LA: I'm not sure what models I have that need refining.

Dr. Elam: You have no model to refine? Let me give you an example. Do you mean distinct things by the words "soul" and "spirit?" If so, whatever you visualize when you use those words constitutes your model. Even if you have only a vague idea of what you mean by them, you have some concept of a division such as—borrowing an image from anatomy—between joints and marrow. That alone is a useful model; it gives you something to meditate upon—to chew on (another model). A good model can be expanded and refined almost without limit.

LA: I see. Do you believe there is a spirit in humans?

Dr. Elam: Not at all. I'm a strict materialist, as you must know

since it's a requirement for all teachers. Nevertheless, we can speak of these things as if they did exist. Philosophy is about ways of thinking about reality, but that does not imply that reality is really what we think it is. "However much we may toil in seeking, we will not find it out." Nevertheless, certain ways of thinking about something may prove useful. Models can help us visualize what might be going on when a person adheres to a certain school of thought. This is really the goal of philosophy modeling. To put it simply, we are making models of various philosophies of life. ... You *do* believe there is a non-material spirit in human beings, do you not?

LA: Yes, I do.

Dr. Elam: So you believe there is a mortal part and an immortal part of human consciousness, call them what you will. That is a very different model from one which denies any immortality. That there are practical results of holding to one or the other of those two broad classes of models is indisputable. So models lead to practical results. In fact, having a course in philosophy modeling at VU helps the institution meet the fifteen-percent rule that we now must comply with for accreditation—fifteen percent of the courses must be useful in some way, you know—as if this were a trade school and not a liberal arts institution.

LA: I think I'm starting to see why your work has been getting so much attention. Presumably the closer one's model approximates reality, the less perplexing life would be, and efforts in dealing with our internal and external challenges should be more fruitful with better models.

Dr. Elam: Yes, that would be presumable, but you are spilling over into psychology there, which is not my field. To be considered useful we need not go that far. Let me show you how this computer-brain model could work. As a trial model consider the brain as a computer running a program. In this model the brain is like a programmable machine, and just as your computer behaves differently depending on which software program you are running on it, it is the software program as much or more than the physical processor that makes one brain differ from another.

LA: I'm not sure how that would be a new insight.

Dr. Elam: It is true that, model or no model, biologists tell us that all brains are made up of similar components. Now isn't that surprising? Considering the great difference between a worm and a woman, wouldn't you think the stuff of their nervous systems would be vastly different?—other than the size, obviously.

LA: Well, yes. I would think so.

Dr. Elam: This computer model has the nice advantage of suggesting why the brains of all creatures have so much in common: when biologists look at what they can see, they are looking only at the computer's processor, not its program. Why do they not see the software program? Because software is invisible. Even in ordinary computers, software is invisible—invisible because it is information.

LA: So you're saying if we assume for a moment that a brain is like a computer in that there is both hardware and software, it could be the software that makes one brain differ from another—

and not to expect to find the software because it's invisible.

Dr. Elam: Yes. This demonstrates the deductive approach of philosophy models, which is opposite to the way in which science usually propounds theories. In PM we are not dealing with theory really. A theory requires tolerable agreement at all points because its purpose is to understand and possibly predict the behavior of something. A theory is a model too, often expressed in mathematical language. In a philosophy model we expect only similarity because we are dealing with two things that are only somewhat comparable—there is no need to consider details or internals. We only require that a model be useful or illuminating in some sense. And that measure of usefulness may be quite separate from the tenor of the model.

LA: You mentioned that a "nice thing" about the brain being in some way like a computer is the fact that it suggests an answer to the question about how different brains can perform differently while appearing to be physically much the same. Aren't you delving into the internal structure when you come with the knowledge that brains appear to be the same? I understood you to say that models of philosophy are not concerned with details at that level.

Dr. Elam: I'm glad you raised that point. Yes, delving into the internal structure is never necessary, but neither is it prohibited. If it happens that some detail of the target has a counterpart in the source, so much the better, and it is worthy of investigation. But congruencies in the details typically have nothing to do with the usefulness of the model because we are not attempting to use

philosophy models to predict anything at that level.

LA: It still bothers me a little. It sounds too much like hocus-pocus. How could the model be generally reliable if there is only a slight resemblance between the model to the thing it is modeling? I really don't expect morals to be exemplified by fruit-tree fertilizer, which—let's say—is what makes the tree good or bad. So why should any detail about the way a computer works tell us something about brains?—something that has never been observed?

Dr. Elam: You would be surprised: you could make something of the fertilizer if you tried. But I think you were referring back to the fact that computers run on software while there is no observable software in the brain. Well, there may be something about the way the brain works that is equivalent in a functional way to the software program in a computer. In brains it might be so different as to be unrecognizable. The software might be expressed in the arrangements of axons and synapses, the modification of synapses being caused by codes found at another level; however, we need not speculate on just how the software and hardware aspects of a brain are physically arranged; that's really beyond the scope of this kind of inquiry. It would be a distraction, and it would tend to obscure our purpose. On the other hand, a philosophic—as opposed to a scientific—investigation of the possibility of there being counterparts is quite within the scope of PM inquiry. For example, we can note that if you were to look at the stream of instructions going into a computer's processor, it would be much different from the list of instructions written by the programmer. Someone who knows about computer languages would point out that this is due to the transformation that takes place

when the program is translated into machine instructions. But it's much more than that. Almost everything is conditional: programs are full of conditional branches; the stream of instructions is constantly branching off into other areas far removed from it in the source program—depending on various conditions. But that's the easy part. Programs that most programmers write are interpreted by an additional layer of software. In other words the computer's hardware processor is running a simulation of another computer, which may be running a simulation of yet another computer, which finally runs an altered form of the programmer's application program. So by looking at the stream of instructions flowing into the computer's processor you would have a very hard time making any sense of it. Another way of saying it is that the real-time domain in which the computer is running its program is a completely different thing from the timeless domain in which the program is familiar to its author. So our inability to reconstruct or infer a program from examining brain activity should not be taken as evidence that no program exists.

LA: Very impressive. ... You said software is invisible. I'm curious about what you meant. I have seen what I thought were software programs. In fact, I wrote some of the code for my web site, and I couldn't have done that if it was invisible.

Dr. Elam: By being invisible I meant that a computer program is a series or collection of instructions, and the form in which the instructions are represented is not essentially the program. What you see is only a representation; there are many other forms that would be exactly equivalent and would look quite different. This is due to the fact that the program is essentially information, and

the same information can be represented in many different ways. A book is a repository of information represented in a series of characters. You could convert the book to braille or Morse code and then take that and convert it back to the original. The information in the book is not dependent on any particular way that it looks, though it must be in a certain form in order for it to inform the receiver. You see, information is not a material object. It may be recorded on a material object, but in itself it is non-material. A book weighs so much on a postage scale. But if it were printed with "X" in the place of every character, it would weigh the same without any information content at all. This demonstrates that the information itself is weightless. It really has no intrinsic physical existence of its own.

LA: That is interesting. I had never thought of a book as being essentially nonexistent.

Dr. Elam: I didn't say that information is nonexistent. I said that it has no intrinsic *physical* existence. Information is infinitely more robust than any physical object, for it does not depend on any one physical object. You might think of it as insubstantial, but being without mass makes it timeless. Whether or not it can exist apart from a physical representation is something that philosophers argue about. But there is no doubt that information is independent of the medium on which it is recorded. It can be copied and have multiple representations without becoming more than one thing. Books have been preserved for thousands of years by copying. The information in that case proved to be more durable than any of the materials that books are made of.

LA: If there is such a thing as software in brains, does that imply a non-material component? And if so, how do you deal with that as a materialist?

Dr. Elam: Computers have no non-material components. Software is always stored and accessed by means of some material device. So there is no implication here that brains have non-material components.

LA: Now I'm confused. I thought software was information and information was non-material.

Dr. Elam: That is true. But in a computer you will find that there are very specific arrangements for storing the information. It is all material.

LA: So there would have to be something similar to that in the brain.

Dr. Elam: When speaking of man-made computers, sometimes the term "software" is used to refer to the entire collection of instructions that makes a computer do what it does. "Soft" implies that it is easily changed, while "hardware" is usually unalterable. But instructions can exist in any form, even as hardware. In fact, modern computers use micro instructions built into the processor that program the processor's ability to process instructions. It can go the other way too: hardware can be configured by software even to the extent of producing hardware processors for special tasks by arranging the connections in an unorganized array of gates. "Firmware" is another term: programs stored in that manner are considered to be part of the computer, for they are essen-

tial to its usefulness; but they are no different from software programs in that they are made up of the same type of instructions. This makes it clear that the brain could resemble a computer even if all of the instructions were in "firmware." Something like this takes place inside living cells where information coded in DNA instructs processing: the program is stored in the DNA molecules.

LA: So the point you are making is that it is not unreasonable or without precedent that a brain could contain a software program. Of course that by itself doesn't prove that it's so.

Dr. Elam: In man-made computers, the "memory" holds both the software programs and the data. Since brains have memory, there is certainly a mechanism that could be used to store instructions. In fact, the distinction between instructions and data is, in a broad sense, an artificial one. So if we define a computer as something that responds in a programmatic way to something stored in its memory, the brain could easily qualify as a target of such a model. It has been pointed out that in a computer a single memory failure can make the machine stop. This is true. The argument goes that since memory in biological systems is not perfect, the brain could not be depending on a series of stored instructions where 100% reliability is necessary. The counter argument is that computer programmers are not concerned about the reliability of the hardware because it is perfect nearly all the time. If it were not perfect, they would have to make the software resilient, which can be done. In fact, in large software systems error-recovery mechanisms are everywhere, not so much to guard against hardware errors but to recover from programming errors. Furthermore, the hardware really is not perfect; it's just that en-

gineers have arranged self-correcting mechanisms where the chance of failure is significant. In theory, any amount of unreliability can be handled in this manner.

LA: Would you be able to apply this same model to the brains that are being grown in laboratories?

Dr. Elam: That is an interesting question. These embryonic brains have no body to serve, so they cannot be shown to be functional other than in very basic ways. This would be analogous to a rudimentary processor without screen or keyboard responding to elementary inputs from switches by turning lights on and off. By studying the responses of the lights to the positions of the switches you could perhaps formulate a model of the processor without understanding how it works, but you would not be able to conclude from that whether it has any additional capabilities. If it turns out that these little brains have less capability than would be expected at the same stage of development in nature, one explanation would be that the software is missing.

LA: The next question being, "Where does the software come from?"

Dr. Elam: That is the question, certainly. What is the origin of all this information? From whence come the methods if we are not embedded in a grand simulation? Information always involves a language code that is understood both by the sender and the receiver. If it has no purpose or if the purpose is not achieved, there is no information. There is always a sender who has a purpose; it is impossible for a mindless material process to produce information. This is an elementary fact that is seldom mentioned within

the walls of academia for obvious reasons.

LA: What about the fact that different areas in the brain have been shown to be involved in different functions? That makes it seem that there isn't just one computer.

Dr. Elam: That's true. Brains have many processors performing simultaneously. The common, man-made computer does what it does by acting on instructions in a serial fashion: processing them one at a time but so quickly that it appears to be doing things simultaneously. But there can be several processors at work simultaneously, and some parallel processing takes place inside each processor; also in certain peripheral operations, arrays of specialized processors improve performance. But overall, the instruction stream goes through a relatively small "bottleneck" of one or more processors. However, the fastest computers are massively parallel with the workload being spread among a large number of processors. Quantum computers carry this processing parallelism even to individual bits of data. So regardless of how many processors there are in a brain or however things are arranged, it could still qualify as a computer—in the basic sense that it is programmable.

LA: I'm afraid I've gotten you off the philosophy-modeling track here with my questions about software.

Dr. Elam: Not at all. I was trying to point out that the program that makes a brain do what it does would be virtually impossible to understand, and it need not be in the form of a separate thing. It can be built right in with the processor if it never needs to change and if the processor runs only the one program. Com-

puters running dedicated programs that never change are everywhere. In many households there are more of these specialized computers than there are house flies. By the way, if there were a fly buzzing about, its brain would be far more complex than any of the other household computers, though of course this fact would be underappreciated.

LA: If all fly brains of the same species are running the same program, how do you account for fly personalities?

Dr. Elam: Fly personalities?

LA: If you have ever chased a fly, you know that it learns; and those of us with experience hunting flies know that each one has its own personality. So there must be differences in fly brains.

Dr. Elam: Let's look to our model for an answer. Can computers learn and change their behavior? Yes, indeed. It is not difficult to write a program that does that, and most programs do it in some fashion—even though the program (that is the instructions which may even be "hard wired") may never change. We know that brains not only learn and become differentiated from one another in that sense, they also evolve—if I may use that word in this context—over the course of their lifetime. This too is not difficult to program, and man-made computers do it all the time.

LA: It sounds like rather sophisticated programming.

Dr. Elam: Yes, some of it is quite clever to be sure.

LA: So really the program is designed to evolve itself if I understand what you're saying.

Dr. Elam: In computers it's quite common.

LA: I'm surprised to hear you say that. Isn't a program that is sophisticated enough to purposefully change itself not something that could appear by a series of accidents? At least it is difficult to conceive of that.

Dr. Elam: It could not evolve by a random process. I can say that because I'm a philosopher, not a scientist. A scientist would be on shaky ground if he proposed that a brain depends on programming, because such a thing would stretch her evolution paradigm too far. Thousands of strokes that are coherent not only to the immediate context but meaningful to a complex overall design would have to occur before the program would work even in a most rudimentary form from which differentiation might by some infinitesimal chance make a significant improvement. A program is far too fragile and intricate to be written by stabs and dabs of a careless process. However, the scientist would have no need to contemplate the computational model because evolutionary descent answers the question about commonality plus all other questions that occur to evolutionists. Nevertheless, there are a few who have tried this approach anyway, and they have been more successful than is widely recognized. They have had but a crumb of recognition. But as a philosopher I can talk freely about non-evolutionary models even though I'm a materialist. Also I can speak of the evolutionary principle in contexts outside of its hallowed and central position as creator of all living things without causing anyone much discomfort since philosophers are not taken that seriously. Remember, in philosophy we're not claiming that we have knowledge really; we're exploring different ways of think-

ing, none of which need be true, but any of which might be useful in some way. For the scientist it is much easier to conceive of the brain being made up of a mass of relatively simple self-organizing elements, and Friar Occam and I would have to agree that it would be more likely. But we will ignore that and see whether the computational model has anything useful to offer.

LA: Let me try to summarize what you have said so far: according to this computer-like model, brain activity depends on programming stored in the connections and arrangements of pathways, which we might as well call "firmware."

Dr. Elam: That's right. Firmware determines the brain's capability (assuming healthy physiology) and evolves during the lifetime of the organism. Also we noted that functional evolution of a program need not involve modifying the program's original instructions. I could add that the scientist would prefer that evolution happen by the instructions being experimentally altered because any sort of intelligent programming is beyond the pall. But in man-made computers, at least, it is more easily done by means of memory changes outside of the program proper. In other words, the program changes itself not by undergoing any change to its structure from the outside, but by being designed to change its own behavior by reference to stored data which is constantly being updated. Of course this does not preclude its being changed by something outside of itself also. Remember that a program is essentially information, and, depending on the storage mechanism, information can be changed either by the program itself or by some independent means.

LA: So we are now considering a sort of evolution that would ordinarily be called development or maturing?

Dr. Elam: That's right. Evolution within programs so designed can be very quick and can be influenced in a variety of ways. But such programs themselves could never be the result of chance, so their natural existence is very unlikely. On the other hand, man-made programs are written by the aid of evolution. Even some trial-and-error is involved, but the changes made during the process are not random; that would take forever.

LA: Now help me understand this. You are saying that the evolution observed is the result of design, but the design itself is the result of evolution?

Dr. Elam: We never can get away from evolution. Evolution is wonderful. No wonder people become enamored of it and deify it—but that's a different model entirely. You find evolution everywhere. But there are many kinds of evolution. If you were to ask a software developer to describe how a software program is written, you would soon realize that he uses evolution as a tool. Much of the work that goes on there at every level is incremental and depends on trials—trial-and-error in other words.

LA: That sounds very much like Darwinian evolution.

Dr. Elam: Far from it actually. The difference is that the incremental developments are far from random. A good term for it would be incremental design, for this is where the intelligence of the developer is essential. Even though it is incremental, the tentative designs are often done far in advance. Some have argued

that genetic algorithms can be just as smart. They have their place, but so far no search-algorithm has rivaled human ingenuity when it comes to discovering solutions to design problems.

LA: I suppose the strict materialist could point to this as an example of evolution.

Dr. Elam: If I understand what you mean

LA: I mean since we're all the product of evolution Now here we have ample evidence that evolution can speed itself up.

Dr. Elam: The implication being

LA: Something like this might have occurred in the past.

Dr. Elam: After a sufficient accumulation of intelligence I'm not well acquainted with everything that has been proposed to explain the impossibly unlikely. But there is nothing new under the sun. ... It might be something to develop philosophically if there is no scientific evidence for it. But to develop my point a bit further: All designers work this way, as far as I know, regardless of what is being designed and regardless of the medium in which they work to represent the design. Some of the trial-and-error takes place in the designer's mind, to be sure; some in the medium; and much in the evolution of the object of the design. The point is, all that is called intelligent design is based on evolutionary processes—as far as we know. So when you talk about intelligent design to an evolutionist, you must admit that it's a metaphor based on human experience with design.

LA: That makes sense to me. How can we possibly know how God

designed things?

Dr. Elam: I agree. If you take human experience with designing and idealize it by removing the trial-and-error, how do you know such a thing exists?

LA: I guess I've gotten us off track again.

Dr. Elam: You actually have this time. Are you ready to proceed from where we left off?

LA: About the computer as a model of the brain—I don't think we've done much with it yet.

Dr. Elam: All right. Let's take it a step further. We have suggested that a brain might be equivalent to a computer (or several computers) running programs that had an intelligent designer. With a myriad of different brain types to develop, our intelligent designer would not be a smart designer even if each program were a marvel of software engineering.

LA: Please explain that one.

Dr. Elam: Such a designer would be working hard but not smart. The reason is all of his designs share some common functions. The smart programmer would write a program that writes the program for any given brain type by changing a few parameters. In other words, there would only be one design for brains: the design of the procedure which produces the arrangements of cells that make a brain—any brain.

LA: If I understand what you're telling me now, someone could write a computer program that writes another computer program

on its own?

Dr. Elam: Absolutely. It's quite common. This sort of thing is how you tap the power inherent in computers. Because of the way that computers are presented to consumers, this power is seldom appreciated by computer users. But software developers use it all the time. What I'm saying is that all brain designs could be the product of a single software program—to extend the computer analogy—which is designed to write the software program that suits each and every brain—such that each brain is equipped with the programming to manage the specific systems of the creature it serves.

LA: Haven't you just introduced a master Creator? I mean, this master program would have to be written by some super intelligence.

Dr. Elam: Remember, we are referring to a model of someone's version of reality, not necessarily reality itself. But yes, in the model we have been discussing this super brain-generating procedure is essentially information, and it would need a host, so it would have to be part of a larger program that "simulates" the universe. But this must be understood as a metaphor or more properly a theory of a metaphor because nobody has the ability to conceive of a computer capable of hosting such a simulation—although there are those who do it anyway.

LA: It would mean that the universe is really a simulation on some grand computer. It's a wild idea that I never took for being anything but science fantasy.

Dr. Elam: Yes. It's a favorite notion of cosmologists who conceive, or say they conceive, of a computer built by future generations so powerful that they use it to simulate their own past—the whole evolution of our physical universe.

LA: Why not let it be God's computer?

Dr. Elam: The answer to that is obvious, isn't it? Actually, some of them allow for God: They say we are a simulation within a simulation, and so on. Then after a number of simulations within simulations you have the ultimate evolution of humanity to which they assign some title of deity.

LA: That puts God out there a long way.

Dr. Elam: Precisely. Pick whatever number of simulations within simulations gives you the degree of security you like. Some of them choose infinity. It's a triple-walled defense: their god is a product of evolution who came into being in a far-distant future.

LA: What do you actually think of this computer-in-the sky notion?

Dr. Elam: It gets us all off the hook, but the price is too high.

LA: To what are you referring?

Dr. Elam: The foundational problem in philosophy: how can there be anything? The physical theorists have it all worked out with their equations showing how it started from nothing. But when we philosophers look over their shoulders they throw up their hands because we ask, "Whence the math?" In other words, no one has explained how there could be physical laws to be dis-

covered in the first place. *You* can say it's part of God's creation, but *we* have to resolve the issue without resorting to that level of mystery. And we can easily do that by sticking a big computer in there: all the laws and math are established by the computer software. Whether it's better to take that view (which really is tantamount to acknowledging an intelligent Creator) or better to not even attempt to explain where the math comes from are basically the two ways of thinking about it.

LA: You said no one is able to conceive of a universe-simulating computer.

Dr. Elam: We don't mean a computer quite literally like the computers we know. It is a metaphor for whatever it is that hosts the universe and provides the physical laws. At one time scientists postulated the ether, an undetectable substance filling space, because they thought light waves needed a medium. Then it was discovered that electromagnetic waves need nothing but space, so the ether became unnecessary. The universe-simulating computer is like that: the hope is that it will become unnecessary someday.

LA: Perhaps it is a metaphor for God. No, I retract that.
Buddhism ...

Dr. Elam: Right. It's very impersonal. If there has to be a God, let it be impersonal: providing life unconditionally.

LA: I'm still not clear on why something like a computer would be needed for there to be physical laws.

Dr. Elam: Here is another analogy that may help: Picture a choir singing. Each member is looking at a score written by the com-

poser. You need a composer to write down the music before you can have a choir that sounds like anything. And someone had to make up the musical scale and notation of staves and the marks that represent notes before the score could be written. Even if there is no visible score because everyone has memorized her part doesn't change the fact that there had to be a composer. You could think of life being an extension of that: we are what we are because we are following a script. The reason the computer is preferred in the analogy rather than a musical score or a script is that it is the most capable technology we know of. That's all.

LA: Tell me again: you entertain all these theories in order to solve the foundational problem in philosophy, which is ...

Dr. Elam: "How can there be anything?" Or more profoundly, "Why should there be anything?" That anything at all should exist is the "brick wall" that we cannot get past. These are not necessarily atheistic questions. Include God in there too. It is simply beyond the ability of the human mind to conceive of something coming from absolutely nothing.

LA: So the universe-simulating computer pushes the problem further back and lets the scientists play with their math in good conscience.

Dr. Elam: Not in good conscience really. But here We need not dwell on this any longer. So far, our brain model is entirely physical. It can account for everything the brain does. But there is the issue of consciousness—which it does not fully explain.

LA: I was wondering about that.

Dr. Elam: Yes. It is difficult or impossible to imagine your human experience being the output of a computer. If there were such an output it would have nothing to connect to but itself, and that is not an output.

LA: How do you define consciousness? I understand it intuitively, but I'm not sure I could put it into words.

Dr. Elam: Consciousness cannot be observed or measured by someone outside the subject except by comparison with what physical responses someone might expect that would indirectly indicate consciousness. Biologists are eager to show that consciousness exists in many creatures. But when we check that against our model, we find that computers can be programmed to mimic all sorts of human-like interactions, and we know they are not conscious. Nevertheless, anti-theists will insist that animal—and even machine—consciousness is on a continuum with human consciousness.

LA: Do you believe that? A machine being conscious? It's well known that the atheist mindset spawns all kinds of crazy conclusions in addition to the primary one.

Dr. Elam: Some people go to the other extreme and reject such statements as nonsense. There are many options. I only believe there are different ways of looking at things. It might be impossible to prove that any given organism is conscious—or even to define what consciousness means. But for the purposes of a model of you, I think we need to consider consciousness and let your intuitive understanding of it suffice.

LA: Could we say that creativity is tied to consciousness? If so, then creative output could be its measure.

Dr. Elam: Give me an example of a creative output.

LA: How about a work of art, say a painting?

Dr. Elam: I have a friend who is a successful and very wealthy artist. His productivity is staggering, but he guards his methods. Without being too specific, I will tell you that he paints nothing anymore. It is all generated by a computer program. There is no intelligence in that software other than what he put there, yet it produces art of the sort that he is known for. Not all of it is good; he quickly looks through thumbnail images and selects those that please him. In that manner he is able to produce dozens of masterpieces in an hour if he chooses to do so. Those he selects go into production on a paint-printer.

LA: So the only conscious part of that process is the artist's selecting one machine-generated image from another.

Dr. Elam: I wouldn't call even that conscious. If you knew him you would know what I mean. But apparently he has communicated something to his buyers and collectors. But if you had picked another form of art, such as literature, the evidence of consciousness would be ample. I need not prove to you that it would be impossible for a computer to generate a novel that would be worth reading.

LA: I can understand how a painter might get tired of paint, but who could tire of words?

Dr. Elam: All right. Let us try to model your particular belief. We need a model of consciousness, which apparently is beyond the material realm—having to do with the non-material something you call spirit.

LA: How do you define "soul"?

Dr. Elam: I like the way you define it, which in my terms would be the higher attributes of the brain such as mind and emotion. However, that does not preclude such things from having a seat in what you call the spirit as well. Indeed, it takes a sharp two-edged sword to draw the distinction. Nevertheless, there is a distinction; I believe the good book says so.

LA: Yes, and the sword is the good book itself.

Dr. Elam: I have no doubt it's all in there somewhere. But for our purposes we need a working definition, and I propose that we keep it simple: the body is separate from the mind, and the spirit is something different from both. Then we can speak of the soul as a composite involving all three parts; that is, the complete person is represented by the soul. If you picture a triangle with body, mind, and spirit at its corners, the soul would include the entire area inside, and the consciousness would be a smaller circle inside the triangle. The locus of consciousness would be closer to the mind in a person whose attention tends to focus on intellectual issues, and so on; and its size would be larger in a person who is more aware in general. There is an emotional tension between the center of consciousness and the three corners of the soul, which is partly what determines its location. Another way to picture the soul is a vertical stack in three tiers: the body at the base

supports the mind (through the brain), and the mind hosts the spirit, which is on top. ... Okay?

LA: I'm still trying to picture that triangle. Which way

Dr. Elam: The triangle is best pictured inverted with the point representing the body at the bottom and the mind and spirit at the top, the mind being on the left and the spirit at the right-hand vertex. Unfortunately, the triangle omits the hierarchical structure depicted by the three tiers; both are reasonable depictions, but there is no way that I know of to show them both in one figure.

LA: I'm making a drawing of the triangle in my notes.

Dr. Elam: Good. Keep it simple for now: just the triangle; we will add more to it later, so leave space around it. You can label the vertices by putting letters near the corners just inside the triangle: "M" at the top left for the mind, "S" on the right for "Spirit," and "B" at the bottom to indicate the body. Inside the triangle draw your circle of consciousness.

LA: All right. ... It is the spirit that makes mankind unique among living creatures.

Dr. Elam: That's a question we might be able to address later. Now I'm sure you will want to account for the domain of the spirit, something that reaches much higher than this triangle suggests. So draw a line upward from the spirit corner of the triangle. Some would say that's all there is; it's like an antenna to the universe of the spirit. But I think that will not do for us. You want there to be a real spiritual entity in this model of you. So draw an

oval above, connected to the triangle by that vertical line. That is your spirit, a real being with its own spirit-mind and spirit-body.

LA: All right. ... I've got it. That would solve a problem I have often wondered about: it would allow for a spirit outside of the body that does not have to develop from infancy but would be ready at each stage of the soul as it develops. I like it. But speaking of the good book, there is a place where it says, "You do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child; neither do you know the work of God who has made everything."

Dr. Elam: That's absolutely correct; it's what I keep saying: We do not really know what we know. All we know is ways of thinking, some of which are useful while some aren't so productive. Solomon also wrote in your book, "However much a man may toil in his seeking, he will not find out what God has done; even though a wise man claims to know, he has not understood it." Personally, I would follow old Solomon, simplifying my philosophy even further and favoring those thoughts that lead to happiness as being the only productive ones—like having a paper published. (laughs) Now where were we?

LA: The spirit above connecting to the soul.

Dr. Elam: Oh, yes. Now consider this: The spirit is like a person sitting at a computer playing a reality video game and identified with a character being simulated in the computer, which would be like the player's body and mind. I would not go so far as to say there is any soul or spirit in the computer simulation—I'm not that much of a reductionist. But as a picture of the temporal man and your immortal spirit, I think it will serve.

LA: That makes two seats of consciousness, doesn't it?

Dr. Elam: True. I don't see how we can avoid that if you want the spirit to be something significant.

LA: I hope you're not thinking this will take the place of God or the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Elam: No, not at all. You believe that the domain of the spirit is vast, so I'm trying to conjure up an image that complies with your theology. The person playing the game is not alone in a vacuum: there is the whole real world in which he or she lives.

LA: It's a little confusing to have two spirits. What shall we call this spirit above?

Dr. Elam: Let's refer to the spirit above simply as your spirit. Then the spirit-corner of the triangle we can call your spiritual receptor or the portal through which your soul receives inspiration from your spirit.

LA: Why not simply combine the two? I know you want the separate spirit so that it works with your notion of someone playing a reality game. But I'm not sure it's quite correct to have the lower consciousness in the soul and another consciousness in the spirit.

Dr. Elam: I think you really do want a spirit entity that is rather complete in itself. How else will you allow for what you believe happens to a person's spirit at death? Don't you say of someone who has died that she has "gone to be with the Lord?" I think you need a spirit able to think and interact in heaven without depending on the physical body.

LA: The spirit could become an individual at the time of death, taking with it the mind or at least some spiritual aspect of the temporal mind.

Dr. Elam: And what will it do for a body?

LA: It uses a body waiting for it in heaven—something to put on until the resurrection.

Dr. Elam: I'm proposing that it would be simpler if the spirit were self-sufficient from the start. It more easily accounts for cases where the spirit has apparently left and returned to the body. You have some instances of that in your good book, do you not? Even the apostle Paul admitted of the possibility of being absent from his body on the occasion of his receiving special revelation, did he not? Also you have the phenomenon of inspiration to account for. Unless you want to allow inspiration only from sources totally outside of the person, we need a source that is not routinely accessible to the mind yet is part of the individual. It contains the self-referencing aspect of consciousness, which is easier to ascribe to this spirit outside the soul proper than it is to a faculty intrinsic to the soul. You have a real advantage there over those of us who are materialists because we have no explanation for the uncanny ability we have to observe ourselves almost as if we were another person looking in from the outside.

LA: Okay. I'll buy that, at least tentatively. But it seems that it would be rather important to pin down exactly when this spirit gets put together.

Dr. Elam: We might have more to say about that later. But we do

need that spirit to be something definite before the birth of the body, as in the verse you just quoted, do we not?

LA: All right, you win. I hadn't thought too much about this before. What about all the other characters in the game? Do they have players connected to them too?

Dr. Elam: Yes. I'm thinking of the type of game that involves a host of players. Participants in this type of game are at various locations, their computers being connected through a network. The virtual world is populated by others with whom you can interact, and each of these characters is connected to a player somewhere. Normally you are not interacting with their player/spirits directly but only through the physical senses of your simulated character—that is, through the game.

LA: So we've gotten to the distinction between spirit and soul as you promised at the outset. I'm impressed. The real person playing the game represents my spiritual body, and the virtual person would be my physical body and mind.

Dr. Elam: And you can explore and travel and meet people from all over the virtual world as an integrated spirit-soul yet with definitely distinct spirit and soul or body—more or less. The real you is outside the computer, but that person being simulated in the computer is your responsibility. ... Let me propose that we represent all this in more definite terms. What I have in mind is a game that I designed. It grew out of a project. ... The most promising graduate student I ever had, a brilliant fellow, Lew is his name.... Anyway, Lew was engaged in exploring the age-old question about the theoretical limits of free will. He suddenly asserted,

rather dogmatically I thought, that free will is self serving in its essence. It turned out he was reacting to a statement I had made earlier in which I cited evidence from a sociology report that happiness often accompanies voluntary servanthood; therefore, free will was not incompatible with obedience to another's wishes. He challenged me to show him a model that supported my statement. He was sure that servanthood was unnatural behavior which would never be freely chosen and could not possibly foster happiness; and he distrusted the testimony of anyone who said otherwise. I knew of no model that would address that issue but thought it would be a worthwhile exercise to make one since we had survey data from the report to verify it. To my mind that meant that a model agreeing with me was not only possible but inevitable. He suggested we build a computer simulation, that is a philosophic model, which would be more definitive than arguments expressed in the English language and would not be subject to false statements that arise from philosophical biases. He claimed to have mastered the elements of programming. He was a very brilliant fellow, and I had no doubt that he could do it. To make sure the effort was fair and balanced, he proposed that I design the procedures for creating the virtual world, and he would implement my design using whatever gaming libraries he could find on the grounds of the university. That was my intention, of course, and to keep him honest I insisted that my son, who heads the computer lab, oversee the writing of the code. Lew was so sure that voluntary servanthood was contrary to human nature that he said he would concede and accept my position if the model produced any significant exception to his rule.

LA: So your graduate student became your opponent. Back when I attended college that would have been very unusual.

Dr. Elam: It happens—maybe more often these days. I did not have to accept his challenge; I could even have dismissed him for it immediately. But I liked the fellow a lot, and the subject matter interested me, so his proposal fell in line with what I wanted.

LA: I want to make sure I'm clear on this. The two of you were to be collaborating on a computer program designed to simulate a world in which it would be shown how different patterns of behavior may or may not lead to happiness?

Dr. Elam: Something like that. The first problem I encountered, as I think you are anticipating, was defining happiness. It was clear that we needed an analog since I had no intention of having him try to simulate a human being to the point where a character could answer the question "are you happy" in a meaningful way. My colleague became interested, and she made suggestions. We wanted the characters in the simulation to seek something analogous to happiness, something that was observable and quantifiable. After much discussion, proposals, and counter proposals we finally settled on using a simple measure based on inflation in the soul. I know that doesn't make any sense, so let's use your drawing of the soul to illustrate it. Imagine that inside the triangle there is an atmosphere with a pressure measurable on a barometer. Let's say thirty inches and above is happiness, and below thirty inches is unhappiness. This isn't exactly how it's done in the simulator, but for our purposes it's an acceptable abstraction. The pressure averaged over the allotted time is our measure of happi-

ness.

LA: That seems reasonable. So we are talking now about a philosophic model, not a philosophy model.

Dr. Elam: Yes, this is using computers to simulate something that we wish to study. It's like an experiment in a laboratory where you can control conditions much easier than you can in a natural setting. Later we will use the whole thing as a philosophy model, but first we need to know about the thing that we want to hold up as a model.

LA: Earlier you cited a tree as an example of a model. There was no computer involved in that.

Dr. Elam: We could make a computer program to model a tree and the various ways that trees respond to the environment. Then we could contemplate that model of trees, looking for similarities between the tree-model and the human being. That might give us a slight advantage because the computer model is a simplification featuring only the essentials. Now I happen to have this model of a human being, which obviously is much richer in significant features than that of a tree. After I describe it to you, we can see if it proves to be a useful model of who we are and what we do—beyond the rather narrow purpose for which it was designed. You and I are not going to be playing the game or using it to simulate ourselves; but by simply knowing about the game and how it works we can see if it helps us understand ourselves better.

LA: The tree model was limited, but at least it was easy to understand.

Dr. Elam: The game is a relatively simple simulation; that is, it has no direct connection to the working of mind or emotion. We only needed to make our simulator approximate human activity well enough to answer that question about servanthood and happiness without going into too much detail.

LA: All right. What is the time allotment you spoke of?

Dr. Elam: Each player has a personal time limit—maximum lifespan—though death can occur sooner—and usually does. The pressure reading in the soul is averaged over the time period spanning the start of adulthood to the end of life.

LA: So if this is a game, what is the object? Is it to have the highest average pressure?

Dr. Elam: Oh—the object is simply to survive to one's maximum lifespan. Since there is no cause of death in that case, any player who gets that far is declared a winner and gets to be called an immortal. We had to have a clear-cut goal in order to get people interested in playing.

LA: You said you designed all this yourself. Was Lew happy with the way you and your colleague formulated happiness?

Dr. Elam: Yes, provided we count only those who live their maximum lifespan. He was adamant about that. No one could be happy about death, so regardless of how optimal their barometric readings, anyone dying of a cause was disqualified.

LA: And you went along with that?

Dr. Elam: He had a point. Not a very good one, but there was

some reason in it, so I let it go. It was either that or abandon the project.

LA: How long do you expect the game will run?

Dr. Elam: There is a time limit for the entire virtual world.

LA: So at that point—at the world's time limit—your argument with Lew gets settled?

Dr. Elam: That's when the final numbers come in. In order to prevent anyone's behavior from being influenced by knowing the time of the end, I alone determined when it would be; I'm the only one who knows, and it's programmed into the system in such a way that it cannot be interrogated or changed.

LA: Then none of those still playing at the final hour will have an opportunity to win?

Dr. Elam: Some of them would certainly have won, as I'll explain later, and those will be removed from the game and counted as having won. To be fair to the others and to give Lew the benefit of any doubt, the game will go on for one additional hour and ten minutes. Those who persevere to their personal time limits during that time will have reached the goal and won. But I'm not too hopeful of that because life during that last hour will be frightful. He agreed at the outset that if as few as one percent qualify as happy servants he would concede that it would be possible in real life. Currently it is running around seven percent, so there is no doubt about the outcome.

LA: It doesn't seem fair to those who get taken out of the game

early—depriving them of reaching their goal, which apparently they stand a very good chance of doing.

Dr. Elam: Too bad for them, but worse for the others. Consider that removing them suddenly like that will destabilize the virtual world, making it tough for those living during the ensuing chaos. We had to make some kind of provision for bringing the game to a close. After all, its primary purpose is to settle an argument, not to provide entertainment. Everyone knows by now that Lew will lose, but it is not official until the end is played out just as it was planned in the beginning. Lew will get his entertainment during the last thirty-five minutes. Chaos is what he likes. It won't matter to him that life will be exceedingly difficult for the remaining players. Few of them will win; if he had his way there would be no winners. Death is what he likes to see—as do so many of the young folks who get addicted to reality games.

LA: It's a strange kind of justice—to have the players subordinate to the battle between you and Lew.

Dr. Elam: "The Lord has made everything for himself."

LA: Yes, "even the wicked for the day of trouble." But these players ...

Dr. Elam: There would be no game if there were no dispute to be settled.

LA: Can you tell me what it's like to play the game?

Dr. Elam: It is not your typical ultra-reality game; there is no special virtual-reality equipment. You sit facing a simple touch

screen. What you see on the screen is as if you were looking through the eyes of your character. It is like you being there in the virtual world. This simulated person who represents your incarnation in the virtual world is quite autonomous, going about daily life following a routine and not seeming to be aware that you exist—for the most part. But on occasion your character will pause because of indecision—actually because the program has come to an impasse, which I'll explain in a minute. At that point a menu of choices pops up on the screen, and you can suggest one of them by touching it. There will be a nudge in the direction of your advice, but there is no coercion because the player/character interface was not designed to support overpowering influences. One of the bad choices—one that you know will lead to trouble—might be chosen instead of your suggestion. You can imagine how extremely frustrating this is to the player, especially when it becomes a habit and happens over and over again. Sometimes it drives players to the brink of despair; and then almost anything can happen, because the player will begin giving bad advice, sabotaging whatever success the character may be having in order to derail the bad habit. But it almost never works.

LA: I believe you have achieved a realistic simulation.

Dr. Elam: Thank you. On the positive side, if someone's character does follow the player's advice and it turns out well, she may look to her spirit more frequently. In that way the player can have some influence on her behavior, and her spirit's guidance might become habitual for her. I'm speaking of a typical, average adult character. It is possible for a much tighter relationship to develop between the player and the character, as we shall see. On the oth-

er hand, many characters come to depend even less on their players as time goes on because the software automatically adjusts itself (in order to exercise kindness toward rabid evolutionists, I try to avoid using their sacred word routinely for trivial things like this)—adjusts to handle the exceptions better as time goes on.

LA: Let me see if I can express it in terms of what we are modeling: I would be going about life, pretty much following a routine that seems to be working and probably is similar to what other people are doing. And I would be virtually—I'd better not use that word. ... I'd be *practically* cut off from my spirit.

Dr. Elam: That's right. It's essentially mechanical. Even though seeming intelligence is involved, we would have to call it artificial. But from the character's point of view ... shall we say it's creative and obviously quite satisfactory? But let's not get into the philosophy aspect just yet. I would like to describe the game more fully.

LA: Fine. Apparently you do have a kind of brain simulation here after all.

Dr. Elam: No, not really. Far from it. The simulation is entirely rule based. The behavior of the simulated character is determined by a set of procedures that merely mimic typical activity in life. In other words, it is not getting down to the underlying structure of things.

LA: Doesn't being so far abstracted from the actual workings of things make it seem unrealistic to the player?

Dr. Elam: Well, yes and no. An answer to that requires a little ex-

planation. I designed what we call the LBA, the living being actor, which creates the graphical representation of the person or animal that you see on the screen. By itself the LBA can do only rudimentary things. It can show a person walking, for example, perhaps following a path and avoiding obstacles. But there is no plan of action. It does a rather good job of depicting animals; but without a more complex plan the humans it simulates are like zombies—it was eerie to watch them. But we had a lot of fun making the LBA and plugging in various parameters to have it simulate various animals.

LA: So you made one program that produces animal as well as human simulations?

Dr. Elam: That's right. Reminiscent of our discussion about how various brain designs could have been created, isn't it?

LA: Do you think computer technology is opening up new ways to understand creation?

Dr. Elam: Oh, absolutely. It has given man tools of the type only God knew anything about.

LA: But you don't believe in God.

Dr. Elam: I don't need to. But I do find it fruitful to talk about him.

LA: What are these parameters you spoke of?

Dr. Elam: They're a much-simplified way of representing genetic data. But they're sufficiently complex to express a variety of traits like looks, intelligence, and personality. We call them "life spe-

cifiers"—LifeSpecs for short—ghastly computerish nomenclature, I admit.

LA: Are new individuals created by joining two LifeSpecs?

Dr. Elam: Yes, indeed. But you're getting ahead of me. We're still talking about testing the LBA, which is limited to these rather mechanical, zombie-like beings. So in order to give the humans a more intelligent sort of behavior without having to actually simulate intelligence—or brains at least—we created a data base of plans of actions. For this we enlisted the help of students who added their POAs to the data base, making it representative of a variety of approaches to accomplishing tasks.

LA: Where does all this fit on my diagram? Or does it require another picture?

Dr. Elam: You can add it to what you have. Draw a box centered just below the bottom of the triangle and touching the body corner. You can label it "LBA." This is what animates the body. By placing it at the bottom point of the triangle you should not think of it as involving only the body: its major concern is the body, but the mind and spirit are involved there too. Then below the LBA and connected to it by a short line draw an oval and label it "Session." This represents the activity of the LBA and contains all the current data. Then below that and a little to the right draw a box labeled "LS" for LifeSpec. Connect the LifeSpec to the session. What this shows is that we have a session on the computer running the LBA to animate the body using the particular specification from the LifeSpec.

LA: So it will be a human and not a monkey.

Dr. Elam: Yes, and so it will have traits of physical appearance and personality that make the person unique.

LA: Now you have these virtual humans running around according to their own plans of action. How do they interact?

Dr. Elam: Oh, yes: you can draw the POA data base too. Put a box below the session oval on the left and connect it to the session. This shows the Plans-Of-Action data base being available to the LBA during and through the session. ... How do the characters interact with one another? What you do when you encounter a situation with another person is an aspect of the POA, so personal interactions were already accounted for to some extent. The object was not to simulate the universe but only a small subset of life in just enough detail to make it realistic enough to serve as our model for the purpose of settling the argument. But it turned out to be more difficult to implement what I had specified than Lew had expected. He worked hard completing the LBA and extending the details represented in the POA. Gradually it became more lifelike, but still there were many situations that were unbelievably comical; it was about as lifelike as a cartoon, and he couldn't get beyond that.

LA: Couldn't the player be allowed to give out more direction to make it more realistic?

Dr. Elam: He tried that, but it defeated the goal we had started with, which was to create an unbiased representation of life. And having the player more involved in manipulating the LBA really

didn't work so well either: it tended to make the characters seem a little more human but a lot like puppets. So he had a choice of either cartoons or puppets. What was needed was another mechanism that would boost apparent intelligence so as to make it more successful in resolving conflicts and doing constructive things. I pointed out that it was time to implement something I had called the Wisdom Gate. But Lew was at a loss as to what wisdom was exactly. So I showed him the wisdom literature, which he had never seen before; and that turned out to be the key.

LA: Instead of these people all behaving like cartoon characters, you could give them various degrees of wisdom. Give me an example of how you made use of wisdom literature.

Dr. Elam: It was not as difficult as Lew thought it would be really. I would never ask him to do something that was impossible. A separate data base was created for rules of wisdom—based on epigrams like, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers a multitude of offenses" and "Belittling your neighbor makes no sense" and "A fool has no interest in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."

LA: Proverbs all. But isn't that last one a little dangerous when a character is starting from scratch? Someone might take it as a worthy goal.

Dr. Elam: Wisdom for the wise and folly for the fool. Yes, both need instructing on how to behave when they are only specters rising out of computer calculations. Rudimentary wisdom follows from principles of mere being, but that is not enough to make a being distinctly human, for there are human behaviors that are

not what can be synthesized from basic principles.

LA: "When a man's folly ruins his life, his heart rages against the Lord."

Dr. Elam: That's a good example. How in the world would they know to do that without being instructed? You can't derive it from first principles. Or how about this: "When pride appears, disgrace soon follows." Who would think that out for himself before it is too late? But a word to the wise is sufficient.

LA: How is it that some turn out to be fools?

Dr. Elam: It's the course of least resistance. It takes no coaxing at all to make a fool and one who is proud of it: "Even walking down the street he lacks sense, and he makes sure everyone knows he is a fool."

LA: I imagine the players would be eager to make sure their characters invest in true wisdom and shun the rest. So making that happen must be more difficult than one would think.

Dr. Elam: Desperately eager—at least they should be. Because once he starts down the path of mental indolence, how do you get the budding fool to listen? You might explain the principles of wisdom and get him to parrot them back to you, but there is no commitment.

LA: "Like a lame man's legs that hang useless is a proverb in the mouth of a fool."

Dr. Elam: There is reason to pity a fool, but not the basically good character who insists on ruining his testimony with an occasional

binge.

LA: "Dead flies make ointment stink; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor."

Dr. Elam: And of course children have no wisdom of their own.

LA: : "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." I suppose part of the problem is with the players who are not committed to dispensing strict wisdom. If your character happens to be a parent, would you advise the character to use the rod of discipline to drive foolishness from the child?

Dr. Elam: Even though they never would do that in real life, when you're responsible for a character in a game you can do what works best without needing to protect your own skin because nothing in the simulated world can reach out and arrest you. So players are free to impart true wisdom; however, most of the players that Lew had enlisted had the typical college-student mind filled with academic foolishness. Of course the other problem is getting your character to pay much attention to you, which with some of those players was not a bad thing. Actually, children are more responsive than adults on the whole, which is a good thing because children have a real vacuum when it comes to wisdom, and folly rushes in to fill it whenever you're not looking.

LA: What about self sacrifice, which is something you need to have in your characters in order to prove your point and win the argument. I don't remember that sort of thing appearing in the wisdom literature.

Dr. Elam: You have hit on my problem. You're right; there is no

such thing. The proverbs tend to be on the order of "A kind man benefits himself." That's about as close as they come, which is nowhere near servanthood.

LA: Isn't there one about a wise servant?

Dr. Elam: You mean, "A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully?"

LA: That's it.

Dr. Elam: Really it's in the wrong vein, isn't it? It's primarily about warning the son, not about commending the servant. And the result has the servant ceasing to be a servant.

LA: I can't think of any others. Job, of course, is commended for being a servant of God, but you need people who serve others since you don't believe in God.

Dr. Elam: The literature is rich in sound advice like "Whoever finds wisdom finds life and obtains favor from the Lord while he who fails to find her injures himself." But it definitely stops short of recommending servanthood. The practice of slavery at the time those proverbs were propounded is at least partially to blame for that, for slavery virtually makes an institution of grudging service. "A servant will not be corrected by words, for though he understands he will not respond." I was worried, frankly, when I discovered this. It appeared that there was nothing inherent in the mores of the society produced by my design that would foster any sort of self sacrifice. It was a fairly good implementation of life, but somehow, even after priming it with real-world data, nothing went much beyond self preservation.

LA: What about love?

Dr. Elam: That was the one hope I had. Love is a versatile power and will make a person serve and cleave to another. But more often than not the self-sacrifice aspect is shallow and transient, and lifespan is shortened as often as not in such relationships. I had hoped that we could get better results from love at the outset of the new virtual world before things became too complicated. But it did not go well as I'll explain shortly. Even parental self-sacrifice is mixed with elements of self-preservation. Obviously, Lew would not be persuaded by that.

LA: At least you had in your favor plenty of proverbs to sell the need for wisdom. Overall longevity would be enhanced by that, I would think.

Dr. Elam: Yes. "With wisdom dwells prudence; wisdom finds knowledge and discretion." Lew was amazed when he read the wisdom literature. He coined "Powered by Proverbs" and applied for a patent. He objected to certain ones being in the game, but there was no disputing the fact that all of them were needed to produce human-like characters. Whether the wisdom was sought or spurned by the character the presence of it was necessary to produce the pole around which revolved the variety of behavior we recognize as human. So in the end he had to agree that each proverb was making its contribution. Thus we finished the wisdom data base; we call it the Proverb Library.

LA: I'm thinking of some that would be perfect for your game because they focus on longevity: "He who hates wisdom loves death, for by wisdom your days are multiplied and years are added to

your life." Also, "Be not overly wicked, neither be foolish. Why should you die before your time?"

Dr. Elam: The last one you mentioned is Lew's favorite. One proverb in particular is popular among the players, and they slip it in whenever they get a chance: "The wise of heart will be receptive to commands, but a babbling fool comes to ruin."

LA: You mean some characters take that to heart and become more receptive to commands?

Dr. Elam: No.

LA: (laughs) How does the player derive enjoyment from this game if the characters are so reluctant to interact with their players? You have it set up so that the computer takes care of everything. It seems to be capable of running the characters' lives without any participation from the "spiritual world" being necessary.

Dr. Elam: Well, it didn't run by itself exactly. In order for wisdom to take effect it has to go through the Wisdom Gate. This is how our simulator accounts for the variation in the use of wisdom from one person to the next. You can add this to your diagram: To the left and above the mind corner put a circle representing the Wisdom Gate with a "W" inside the circle, and above it draw a rectangle for the Proverb Library. A line from the proverbs down through the gate and to the mind shows how wisdom is modulated. Virtually all the wisdom in the world is in the library, but the amount of it that the person uses depends on how wide and often the gate is opened. A parameter inherited through the

LifeSpec determines the size of the Wisdom Gate. Our simulated person can theoretically optimize his own wisdom potential, but it requires wisdom to prime the conscience with a commitment to seek wisdom: the desire to open the Wisdom Gate is not something you are born with. What is needed is an inspiration from the spirit, which means the player needs to coach the character about the need for wisdom.

LA: I see. So in terms of the game, the person has a better prospect of long life if the player is diligent in encouraging his character to build up a conscience about the need for wisdom.

Dr. Elam: That's right; particularly wisdom that balances the soul.

LA: We've mentioned conscience. Is there a place for it in the diagram?

Dr. Elam: I liken conscience to inertia. If you think of a moving object, say an automobile, it takes effort to speed it up or slow it down or make it turn to the right or the left. Basically it tends to go in the same direction at the same speed unless there are outside forces like friction to slow it down or the roadway forcing the car to turn because the steering mechanism has changed the angle of the front wheels slightly.

LA: You're saying that conscience is what resists change?

Dr. Elam: A fundamental aspect of the equations on which the LBA is based is a stabilizing factor that keeps outside influences from affecting it too much. That by itself resists change to a certain degree. But I would not call that "conscience" because it is quite mechanical. There is another sort of inertia in the area that

we have been calling the soul. It is really just the way that the mind unconsciously perceives the mass of information from past experience. The content of the soul does not change its makeup quickly, and so there is a perception about what the person is, the self-image, that helps to stabilize the mind.

LA: I see. It would not be obvious what is meant by placing "conscience" in the middle of the triangle.

Dr. Elam: There are two levels in the soul. This is not easily drawn on your diagram. Think of it as a sea below and an atmosphere above. The sea is populated by inputs from the LBA, the physical senses. It's a sort of memory. The atmosphere above is fed by inflows from the top of the triangle. Both are perceived by the mind, and they present two different and conflicting images of the person to himself: the lower and higher natures. Both have a stabilizing effect, obviously, because they are what the person is; but the stabilizing effect of the higher nature is where I would place conscience.

LA: I thought you would say that the player is the conscience of the character.

Dr. Elam: The player does have an effect on the state of the soul. There is another little detail though: the Inspiration Gate. Not everything the player might wish to communicate to the character will necessarily reach the heart.

LA: The heart?

Dr. Elam: I just threw that in. It seemed like a good word to describe the place where inspiration is processed. ... Well, maybe

not. The mind is involved as much as anything. You see, normally I describe the workings of philosophical models in purely materialistic terms. The spirit is simply a highly developed form of mental activity within the brain, and so on. There is no such thing as the heart in reality, so I haven't thought out where the term might apply in this metaphysical interpretation. Anyway, we have what I'm calling the Inspiration Gate. You can draw it as a circle on the line connecting your spirit to the spirit receptor on your triangle. The line goes from the spirit down through the gate to the receptor. Label this gate with an "I". There is a third gate, the Helper Gate, which I'll describe when we come to it. Other than that, you have a pretty complete picture of the way the simulator in our game works. If the Inspiration Gate is open wide the player can have a lot of influence, even giving specific instructions about applying wisdom.

LA: So the player needs to be acquainted with the wisdom literature as well, obviously.

Dr. Elam: It's very helpful indeed. When they share the same wisdom basis, even with a minimal opening of the gates—a smattering of wisdom—we get action that looks much less artificial. That doesn't mean that the wisdom is always applied in a positive way; there are fools, and everyone acts foolishly sometimes. But we couldn't produce realistic fools without the presence of wisdom for them to react against.

LA: Exactly how is the connection made between the player and the person being simulated? I thought the player's involvement tended to make the character behave like a puppet.

Dr. Elam: Beyond the occasional need for direction, which is not essential to the flow of the game, it turned out that we needed to involve the player to fill in gaps and resolve ambiguities which come up when applying the rules. There are many complex rules for resolving conflicts, but in cases where the rules are unworkable, the program has to keep trying random variations until one is encountered that works. Sometimes the result is so incongruous with what took place immediately before that it produces unaccountable, insane behavior. By enlisting the help of the player, those problems are quickly solved. Thus the player has certain opportunities to become involved and eagerly awaits additional opportunities to influence his character. For some it's a constant string of incidents, one thing after another, the player constantly having to resolve conflicts to keep the character from going crazy. Some characters have a knack for constantly running into situations that were never envisioned when the rules were set up.

LA: Say I'm a simulated character. Would it be like me waiting for an inspiration when something in my life wasn't working out very well?

Dr. Elam: Perhaps. But remember, the character is only a computer simulation and a very approximate one at that. The only seat of consciousness is the one the player is sitting on.

LA: (laughs) You suggested that a more meaningful relationship with the virtual character sometimes develops.

Dr. Elam: There is a process. With some characters it happens quickly; others take longer. The LBA naturally seeks company; the POA, for most personalities, puts a premium on efficient ways

of doing things, giving the LBA reason to ask almost anyone for advice—primarily as a means of seeking company. If this fails to get results, it forces the center of consciousness to move toward the spirit as she seeks answers and fellowship within herself, and if she develops the habit of keeping her Inspiration Gate open, it can lead to an integration of soul and spirit in which she becomes more conscious and perceptive, and her wisdom increases.

LA: Could you untangle that for me? It gets confusing when you mix the model and its mechanisms and what we're modeling in the same paragraph.

Dr. Elam: I was referring only to the game. You understand I used the words "conscious" and "perceptive" as artifacts of the simulation not that we are creating anything like true consciousness within the simulated mind of that virtual character. (Of course if I were describing this game to another materialist, I wouldn't use the term "spirit" at all; I would say "player" in every case, for "spirit" is simply an interpretation of phenomena that can be interpreted in other ways.) I am not intending to construe any of this as a model of you quite yet; so these words are merely to describe what the player who is absorbed in the game tends to impute to the character. The way it works is: 1) the character asks; 2) the player responds with a wisdom choice or a simple direction; 3) the character retrieves the corresponding wisdom rule from the library, or if it is a simple direction she acts on that; 4) the LBA interprets the wisdom rule in light of the present situation or simply carries out the direction. Thus the character and the player become integrated in their responding to the events encountered in life. The steps taken by the character after she listens

to her spirit for advice are not literally what I just described. The system does go through similar (though more complex) steps, but if I were to frame it in terms of the character's hypothetical experience, "retrieving the wisdom rule" would be like remembering something or perhaps consulting a reference on the topic that seemed to be hinted at by her spirit.

LA: How does the character ask for advice or direction?

Dr. Elam: When the character gets to the point of asking, a dialog pops up on the screen. Questions and answers are limited. There is only so much that the LBA is designed to recognize and process. Directions that the player can give are limited to a menu of choices like "Go visit x" or "Move toward the exit now."

LA: Thank you. So we're still only talking about the game, and the wise character eventually leans—or appears to lean—on the player for help.

Dr. Elam: When that begins to happen, the player's participation usually escalates quickly, and it becomes a form of fellowship where the player *feels* incarnate in the character. But, as I mentioned earlier, if the player's mind is messed up, there will be little hope for the character, and less harm is likely if isolation between player and character is maintained.

LA: I imagine that would repel the center of consciousness away from the spirit corner, making an intellectual or a carnal type of soul.

Dr. Elam: That's exactly how our simulator responds in such cases. Simultaneously, it reduces the size of the circle of con-

sciousness, causing more imbalance.

LA: Is there something a wise parent can do to counteract the effect of an ineffective player who is influencing her child?

Dr. Elam: That's a great question. There are players who do not know their proverbs. For example, "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools."

LA: I know a little boy whose spirit seems to harbor anger for no apparent reason.

Dr. Elam: You're drawing an inference there from the game to real life; so be careful to make that distinction—you will see what I mean presently. During childhood the character's Wisdom Gate is closed to the Proverb Library. Wisdom requires mental processing, and the child simply does not have the capacity for it. So the player supplies the child's soul directly with a substitute for wisdom suited to the age of the child. Most players find immense enjoyment in the first half-hour of the game before the character is weaned from their direct input. Then comes the adolescent phase. The character is potentially unstable during that transition since wisdom is still absent and the player sometimes has very little positive influence, which is very scary. Now to answer your question: yes, there are influences from others. You can indicate this on your drawing: down at the level of the LBA, make a two-way arrow out to the right-hand side and write the word "others" there. Most interactions with parents and other characters come through the physical senses; they are filtered by the LBA before being passed to the soul. Depending on the child's capabilities, these inputs will have some effect. But the child's own player's in-

put is direct; it needs no filtering or interpretation, and consequently it is much stronger. A mother can work via the LBA to counteract a faulty spirit in her child to a limited extent as the child grows older. However, a good mother would not sit by and let her child's player put the young soul at risk. If possible she would contact the other player directly. She would leave her own soul unattended and go to sit beside the player who has been assigned to her child, thus becoming, in effect, a surrogate spirit for the child. I must admit, however, that this provision in my design has been spurned by all of the young women players who are friends of Lew. They look askance at my son's friends who have taken an active role in correcting errant spirits of children.

LA: Hmm. ... Very interesting.

Dr. Elam: Yes, you can draw that other gate as a circle between the spirit and the Proverb Library. Label this "H" for the Helper Gate. Connect it to the spirit oval and also run a line from it down to the top of the triangle. Draw another, larger circle around the Helper Gate. This represents the helper/player—in this case the mother. Notice that she takes control of the Helper Gate and determines what reaches the child from the child's own spirit.

LA: I have to keep reminding myself that we are only talking about a simulation.

Dr. Elam: I understand. There is a potential for abuse in this helper seat, and abuse does occur. But I have not seen a case where that was intentional; it's always lack of wisdom.

LA: Was Lew satisfied that you had achieved a sufficiently accur-

ate simulation of life?

Dr. Elam: No, not quite. We both agreed that there was still something missing. The characters were not motivated to do anything very significant because there was no challenge. The problem was that the social environment was too simplistic: the social economy was lacking the weight of outside obligations and challenges. So we had to include the evolution of government in the substrate.

LA: "In the substrate." Do you mean the basic program had to be rewritten?

Dr. Elam: No, it was merely an addition because the program we created was not directly specifying such particulars. When the program runs, it creates the particulars. To include the effect of government in the simulation was not a major addition to the program because a few simple rules determine the way governments evolve. The additional burdens, constraints, and opportunities it places on personal experience and formation of character are similar to those arising from the vagaries of natural occurrences, which we had already accounted for in what we call the substrate of this particular software program. The addition of political powers made use of some of the same mechanisms with unique parameters and frequencies to make them represent personal experiences that arise in that connection. So after extending the program a bit, all we had to do was specify the initial condition. Given Lew's gang of players from the university, it was clear what that should be. As Solomon said, "A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart inclines to the left."

LA: Were *you* satisfied that your simulation was accurate?

Dr. Elam: Yes. But it was not a pretty picture. When I laid it to heart, examining it all Yes, it was all too realistic. There was little justice for the characters to be encouraged by. The same events were happening to the righteous and the unrighteous, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to the religious and the irreligious. Children were full of evil and displayed nothing but madness their entire lives. But I still had hope because of my son.

LA: What does the player see and hear, exactly. Are the character's thoughts known to the player?

Dr. Elam: You see through your character's eyes and you can hear everything your character says aloud. Thoughts are there too; you can open a window on the computer screen to read them. But it's made up mostly of cryptic, low-level codes, generally repetitious, and not very interesting. The processing of the POA is shown, and you can see how actions are generated. But little of it is significant to you as the player. You want thoughts that are more coherent and directed to you and not just mental rattling. So that's what you look for—and hope for—something better than mere ruminations within the soul, which are doubly frustrating because your character's reception of your input is blocked by that sort of soul-ish mental activity.

LA: That closes the Inspiration Gate, I suppose. Does it go on and on like that for a long time? I think this game has the potential to be a real drag.

Dr. Elam: Oh it comes to an end, all right. Since this is a life simulation, the character dies sooner or later. It doesn't take too many hours in real time since the simulated lifetimes are greatly condensed.

LA: Is that all there is? I mean, the character dies and that's the end of the game? Is there no consolation?

Dr. Elam: Insofar as that player and character are concerned, they're out of the game. And their hope is ended if the death comes before the character's time limit. Nevertheless, the game has a definite attraction; as discouraging as most of the circumstances are that they get born into, everyone wants to try it.

LA: I take it that as of this moment you haven't gotten to the point where Lew agrees that he has lost the argument.

Dr. Elam: Well, we have, though not formally since the game is still going on. But you are jumping ahead again. ... It was necessary that we get several people involved at once in order to make it more realistic—and interesting for everyone. Before long the game had become somewhat of a sensation, believe it or not. Even the psychologists had become interested in it (in spite of the fact that I had used no theories from psychology in its design). At that point Lew saw how he could turn it into a financial goldmine. He got permission from the university to use the code in a commercial product. To make it a more enticing game, he added another layer, and that was the quest to avoid death.

LA: It sounds like he had forgotten the original purpose. Wasn't he originally wanting to show that no servant could be happy

since he believed that happiness was the fruit of self-serving living?

Dr. Elam: Yes, he was; and yes, it appeared that he had forgotten; but I knew it was the prospect of getting rich that made him change the focus of the game. He still intended to disprove my assertion that people can be happy serving others.

LA: I suppose he added mystical rites, gurus, priests, and all that nonsense to give the characters something to mess with in their pursuit of immortality.

Dr. Elam: Yes, he did. To his credit he used real-world information. He set it up so that there is no particular place to go or person to see in one's quest for immortality. Many claim they possess the keys to heaven and hell, but they are found in diverse places. There is much profiteering involved and plenty of false information to snare those who are low on wisdom. I thought he designed that part of it as well as could be expected.

LA: Suppose I'm playing the game; I'm the average person, not too wise, and I become involved with my character in such a way that the quest for eternal life is supremely important to us—or "me" I should say. Where do I look?

Dr. Elam: There is no answer to that. There are all those things to try if someone wants to go that route, but in fact they are all futile, and none of the characters pursuing immortality find it. The reason is, this sort of thing is contrary to sound wisdom, and Lew let it fall out that way (he had no choice, really). Unwise actions always have the effect of narrowing the Wisdom Gate—just as wise ac-

tions tend to hold it open. Few characters have the fortune to survive the quest for immortality offered by Lew's charlatans, let alone find what they are seeking. The effect it has on wisdom is devastating, and lives are either sadly or deliriously cut short.

LA: So in effect Lew made a trap that removes some characters from being potential evidence for your side of the argument.

Dr. Elam: Most characters actually. It greatly reduces the number that he has to be concerned about. The remnant he can focus on more easily.

LA: What influence does he have? I thought the rules of the game were set up to be a fair representation of human life, not something he can manipulate to satisfy his own ends.

Dr. Elam: Here's how it actually went: Having completed the testing, we announced to everyone that we were restarting the game in its final form. The world was rebuilt with animals, and then we set pristine LifeSpecs for the first two humans, a man and a woman. I wanted to start things out right with the hope that we could avoid the curse of the real world, so I took the man and my colleague took the woman and we became their spirits and integrated with them right away because their Wisdom Gates were ample and wide open. Lew was not happy about that. He objected that it would not be a realistic simulation even if the programming were all correct. Lew, that rascal ...

LA: So what did he do?

Dr. Elam: He hacked the LifeSpec of the woman, making her wisdom gate vulnerable to outside influences and allowing him to in-

ject lies, which he did. Consequently she acted very foolishly before my colleague could stop her. The man was horrified, and his center of consciousness went into panic mode and wouldn't hold still, in spite of my efforts to stabilize it; and he did something rash: he followed her lead—because he loved her, was afraid she would die, and did not want to be left alone. I saw that if Lew was going to do that any time he wished, the game would not be an objective test. I knew he had left the Wisdom Gate vulnerable to hacking on purpose, but I didn't say anything to him at that time because we were using the commercial version, which was his game.

LA: Couldn't you call a foul?

Dr. Elam: And start all over? Yes, with respect to the argument, I could have done that. But I had a secret weapon: my son. I put the problem before him. He knew even more about the inner workings than Lew did. He suggested that we create a character with normal initial wisdom that would increase over time. This was possible due to an option he had coded into the LifeSpec unbeknownst to Lew, and it had the effect of making the Wisdom Gate totally automatic and securing it against manipulation. The character would not appear to be especially well equipped for long life because of his average wisdom inflow; but wisdom would increase if he survived. The only problem with using this was that the LifeSpec could only be set directly for the first pair. From then on it was a matter of propagation.

LA: Go on. How did you manage to do it? Or were you able to do it?

Dr. Elam: I thought you might have guessed by now.

LA: No—I'm listening. I understand that Lew has a way of injecting his own "wisdom," except for the case where the gate is programmed to take care of itself. What about Eve's—I mean the first pair's—offspring? Wouldn't the damaged LifeSpec get passed on?

Dr. Elam: Yes, unfortunately. Did I mention that the time it takes to grow to adulthood is collapsed into the first hour of the game for each player? In fact, the personal time limit—which runs about six hours—starts at adulthood, and that's when the Proverb Library is opened to the new adult. So the childhood and adolescent phases depend entirely on the player and the influence of others: the Wisdom Gate is there, but it is not connected to the proverbs. That was by design; but the integrity of my design was compromised by this vulnerability to Lew's lies, which exists from the very genesis of the character, and there is nothing the player can do to keep Lew's influence out. During childhood, a wise and diligent player can counteract Lew's input, but in many cases only deliberate discipline from the parent can keep the child from becoming a monster.

LA: In the case of the adult, I presume that Lew simply nullified the wisdom of any character he thought was surviving too long.

Dr. Elam: He didn't have to. Enough damage was done by his standard counterfeit wisdom that was carried forward in every LifeSpec: "First serve thyself." Few were aware that it was unnatural; therefore, few were surviving to their time limit. Lew knew that would happen and wasn't even monitoring the game personally. But he kept an eye on everything through his operatives.

LA: I'm not coming up with anything. ... How did you manage to manipulate the LifeSpec of someone to protect them against this?

Dr. Elam: Under other circumstances it would have been easy since software is readily modified at any time. But in this instance we were in a contest with Lew, and any changes would have to be agreed upon. We had to get his consent first. We made a bargain: he would permit us to pair our custom LifeSpec with that of an existing character and play the offspring if we would permit him to do the same.

LA: I see where this is going—I think. Lew seems to have gotten to the point where he had no fear of what you might do. Was he unaware of history? Didn't he have a suspicion?

Dr. Elam: No. He was totally ignorant of the history, as are most students since the Great Gaps doctrine mandates the omission of any history tainted with true mythology—which is an oxymoron to the small minds that staff the liberal-arts standards commission.

LA: I should have known. How did you and your son fare with that rather lopsided agreement?

Dr. Elam: It worked according to our plan. The LifeSpec of our virtual child was such that he was immediately integrated with the player, who was my son, of course. You see, I had mated a perfect male LifeSpec to a female virgin such that the baby she bore would have a LifeSpec that made a perfect body for my son to spirit. He had reverse-engineered the LifeSpec we needed to provide her, starting with the one we wanted and working backwards. That would not have been possible with just any girl, by

the way.

LA: No one suspected that your son's character was special, right?

Dr. Elam: Well, no one other than his mother. He appeared to be a normal boy; nevertheless, Lew kept an eye on him, and when he added one thing to another and realized that we had a reason for waiting a long time for his mother, he attempted to bribe my son to leave off playing the game.

LA: It seems to me that Lew—or his character—was acting like the devil. (laughs)

Dr. Elam: (laughs) A brilliant guess indeed. Lew himself had become proud of his success. He seemed to think he could do anything. I reluctantly gave him notice that his appointment would be terminated at the end of the semester.

LA: I suppose he will continue to harass your son as long as the game lasts.

Dr. Elam: Lew did not take the time to play a complete game, and he had no intention of doing so. The characters he played were short lived because he exploded them—allowed them to get over-inflated—as soon as he was through using them; he had no scruples about entering the game more than once, which was violating an unwritten rule—so many are waiting to play, it's a matter of common courtesy. All he cared about was making it difficult for us. He went in and made arrangements that would prevent our character from living a full lifetime.

LA: How did the character he planted turn out?

Dr. Elam: The character he planted with his customized LifeSpec turned out to be great in stature but low in wisdom, and he found little favor anywhere. Lew said it would not count and tried again, but each time the results were similar and grotesque. He deployed his abominations immediately, but we waited to introduce ours until our lady came along.

LA: Was your son's character ultimately taken out by Lew's operatives?

Dr. Elam: Yes and No. My son was focused on winning the argument for me, so he emphasized servanthood. The constant outflow of service was so severe that it reduced the pressure in his soul to a very low level, making him a man of sorrows. The Helper Gate is where service outflow occurs; in fact this is the primary purpose for which it was designed. Characters have control of their Helper Gates for what goes out but not for what comes in. When there is net outflow, the atmosphere in the soul must be replenished through the Inspiration Gate and/or the Wisdom Gate. So as his wisdom continued to increase there would have been plenty of the "all in moderation" wisdom pressuring him to go easy on the servant business—and he could have used some happiness—but the outflow kept such pressure from accumulating. Paradoxically, when captured and tortured by Lew's operatives, my son poured everything he had in through his Inspiration Gate while releasing the pressure build-up with a great blast of outflow through his Helper Gate. Then, his spirit being exhausted, the Inspiration Gate slammed shut, resulting in a sudden and deadly drop in pressure. But the LBA shut down due to what the computer people call a "fatal exception;" death was not caused by the

low pressure but by the LBA essentially giving up. This left the player's screen blank and in command mode without providing him a menu of choices or any other guidance. So my son's character was dead. Nevertheless, he knew exactly what to do in order to restart the LBA.

LA: Where did the outflow go? Or was it just dissipated?

Dr. Elam: No, it wasn't dissipated. Part of our soul modeling is a law of the conservation of the soul's life breath. While some of it goes to power the LBA, any excess normally goes to another soul through an established relationship. In this case there was far more than any of his connections could use. Ordinarily there is no such surplus because the outflow matches a particular need and is measured by that. When my son released his soul's dying breath he sent it to my colleague who had not been in the game since her original character died. Being without a character to receive it, his outflow was imputed to her—that is Eve's soul, if we must give her a name. Think of it as the bookkeeping which the computer does in keeping track of all this. I'm not sure anyone other than my son knew about this possibility; the system wasn't designed to accommodate that sort of thing. There was no pressure on her side; thus her capacity was unlimited as far as the math was concerned.

LA: So his expiring breath was stored. That's nice. But on what basis could you bring him back to life? Wouldn't it be entirely unnatural and outside the provisions of your design? I can't imagine that Lew would allow it.

Dr. Elam: Death terminates the session, but the LifeSpec is not destroyed since it is purely information; it remains in the log, the

record of what took place. So there is always a latent possibility of resurrection; that is, of reusing the LifeSpec of the deceased.

LA: I know what this scenario is supposed to be depicting, of course. You must have made this happen intentionally.

Dr. Elam: My son did. He already had some experience resurrecting one of the other characters by giving the appropriate command. He shares your theological beliefs, by the way.

LA: That explains everything. Nevertheless, your materialistic mechanisms are ingenious. Tell me this: How could the LifeSpec be reused? Can the player just reach into the log somehow and reactivate his character?

Dr. Elam: There's a little more to it than that. The LifeSpec was available in the record, and it could theoretically be used to resume the session of our character, for nothing else is needed other than a player to reconnect it to. In normal cases this is not possible because a closed session does not retain its data, and the character would have to start from an embryo without any preparation. In other words, it would be like trying to grow a baby without a womb; there's no provision for that in the game, so it wouldn't work at all. But if the session retains its connection to the LifeSpec and is not actually closed, all of the data about the state of the soul is still there. So the session still has all these references to the player—like a very strong magnet. And that's exactly what we had. The session had everything needed to re-energize the LBA and recreate the soul, much like body and spirit connect in a birth, except here we had the information to remake the adult soul. The system readily took my son's instruction to recon-

nect, and the LBA was reactivated. He had laid down his life, and he took it up again; and so our character was resurrected, and life proceeded without our having to make a single change in the way the system worked. There was nothing Lew could do about it.

LA: Would that be a mini-model? ... The magnet?

Dr. Elam: Hmm. ... It could be that. Magnets attract only certain materials—typically iron. I think you have something there.

LA: Did your son then retrieve that wonderful outflow that he managed to impute to Eve? He would have had to, wouldn't he? His soul was totally exhausted at that point.

Dr. Elam: Yes, it flowed back immediately, but the program did not handle it logically. Well, under the circumstances it was logical; just that it violated the law of soul-breath conservation. Since there was no limiting measure of capacity or pressure in Eve's soul, it remained the same when my son withdrew his breath.

LA: So it was like a bank account where the computer was stuck and it showed the same balance regardless of how much was taken out?

Dr. Elam: That's right.

LA: And I suppose any of Eve's relatives—everyone, in other words—could draw from it. That's very clever.

Dr. Elam: Yes, but not everyone has the required connection. Being in the human family is not quite enough. The connection is possible, but you need help making it. I'll explain that presently.

LA: By the way, I was going to ask you: how did that special LifeSpec get passed on to your son's character? As I understand it, one's LifeSpec is inherited from both parents.

Dr. Elam: It did not get passed on exactly as we specified it. In the LifeSpec there is a master switch that enables all three gates to the higher faculties, and I designed it to have three possible values: for the lower animals it is 00—no gates and no higher faculties; for humans the value is 01—permitting expression of the gate-defining parameters; if the value is 10—what I call the god setting—the gates are all maximized. When my son wrote the computer code that simulates this switch he made it recognize 11: a combination of the god and human settings wherein the gates start normally then increase gradually to maximum. Our LifeSpec had the god setting, which, added to her human setting, produced this combination.

LA: So your son would have started life with his wisdom and inspirational faculties resembling those of his mother.

Dr. Elam: Yes. Her genetic wisdom and inspiration settings were only average. On the other hand she had a large center of consciousness that reached both her mind and spirit—not inherited, but due to her player's influence. An evidence of this is that she was yielded to what would have felt foreign to her body if her center of consciousness were lower down in her soul.

LA: She must have been well integrated with her player, and the player must have been exceptional.

Dr. Elam: I think I see what you're getting at. Her player is my

colleague's daughter and a friend of my son's.

LA: You mentioned that your son had resurrected someone else. Was his name Lazarus, by any chance?

Dr. Elam: It could be. I don't remember hearing his name. My son loved that family, especially the sisters of the man who had died—the players, you see—which is why he went to see whether he could bring their brother back into the game. The real brother—the player—had gone somewhere, vacating his computer just when one of those difficulties came up needing the player's attention. This one was exceptionally bad: the character was sick for no reason, and after a certain amount of time with no player responding, the LBA put the session on hold. My son went to the house where the three of them lived and submitted a certain command through the brother's computer, and bingo, the brother's character stood up.

LA: I can imagine that most people would be unable to sit at the computer for six or seven hours straight. This type of thing must happen frequently.

Dr. Elam: Not as often as one might expect because the occasions when the LBA gets stuck and cannot proceed without player intervention are rare. But it does happen. Notably a student will commit to playing the game and then forget about it and never complete the session. In that case it is likely that the character will languish for lack of a player and be suspended when there is no input.

LA: Is abnormal pressure the usual cause of death?

Dr. Elam: Yes, that was supposed to be the only cause. If you refer to your diagram, you can see how easy it is to avoid death. Flow comes in both through the Wisdom Gate and the Inspiration Gate. As it was originally designed, that was enough to supply the needs of the LBA with some to spare. Any excess gets shared with others through the Helper Gate, and thus the pressure is regulated. If the pressure becomes too low, such that there is not enough flow through the LBA to sustain the session, the character dies. The other extreme is when too much pressure builds up. Lew's lie about serving one's self to achieve happiness is a partial truth. A selfish character never approaches the Helper Gate with his consciousness, so he becomes puffed up with wisdom or spiritual pride and is quite happy in it. Picture the sides of the triangle bulging outward. If the pressure continues to increase, it reaches a point where a blowout occurs, and that destroys the session immediately. That is the leading cause of early death. The other cause, very low pressure, happens when there is simply too little wisdom and inspiration. But this languishing from inattention is something else entirely: the character is not at fault. It was not anticipated in the design that players would be long absent, which is why the program does not know what to do about it and leaves the session data intact.

LA: Do those characters all get resurrected?

Dr. Elam: I don't think so. But a number of them did when my son gave out that rush of his life's breath when he died. They were characters who had become his friends earlier, and that relationship channeled a bit of his breath to them, which lifted their LBAs out of suspension for a little while. But the players who had those

characters were no longer in the game, so after walking around awhile, each character faded out again as the LBA realized no one was at the computer.

LA: You said that the outflow through the Helper Gate has to go somewhere. How does one decide what to do with it?

Dr. Elam: It is more a question of what not to do with it. There will be obvious needs, and you can't meet them all. Also, genuine love takes a substantial flow.

LA: But isn't love usually reciprocated, and in such cases wouldn't the flows in your model oppose one another?

Dr. Elam: Yes they would appear to. But what happens when two flows oppose one another is not what you would expect of a fluid in that simple pipe-like connection; so the image I gave you breaks down there. It's not a physical thing at all in the program—just a calculation. For example, if character A sends ten puffs to character B, and character B sends fifteen to A, the result is B loses five and A gains five. But there is a difference in quality too: what I have called breath can include soul stuff made of various elements including the spiritual and carnal. So character A gives up ten of itself and receives fifteen of the other.

LA: Then is it only through the LBAs that soul stuff can get used up?

Dr. Elam: At death it dissipates in the nether space when there is a blowout or through the struggling LBA if it is a case of the pressure being too low.

LA: What of the person who constantly receives love but never returns it?

Dr. Elam: It's self regulating. Such a character becomes puffed up and repulsive.

LA: Suppose someone still loves him—unconditionally.

Dr. Elam: It could kill him. You might as well place a hot ember on his head.

LA: You don't mean that to be realistic, do you?

Dr. Elam: None of it is completely realistic. But in defense of my model I would point out that it doesn't happen often that one simply over-inflates and explodes. The happiness of moderately high pressure tends to bring about generosity, and the outflow from that relieves the pressure. Another mitigating factor is the fact that outflow cannot occur when the pressure in the receiver exceeds that in the sender.

LA: So an attempt by a normal person to send love to someone who is overinflated has no effect?

Dr. Elam: There will be some effect. The way I have been describing this is a simplification of the actual method used to account for such effects. It would be like the rejected love leaving a little heating, which causes the pressure to rise a little, and that could be the end of him.

LA: Like a hot ember on the head.

Dr. Elam: Indeed.

LA: In a case like that, where the pressure in the sender is lower, wouldn't the flow go the other way?

Dr. Elam: No. The Helper Gate allows flow into the character's soul but not the other way unless the character deliberately opens the gate for outflow. The high-pressure fellow would have to meter out the flow.

LA: So you can't protect yourself! Doesn't that make one vulnerable to receiving too much—and of the wrong kind?

Dr. Elam: Yes indeed. But remember these connections that make flow between characters possible depend on significant relationships having been established first. Even so, it is not always easy to keep one's pressure steady. Frequent swings between sadness and happiness are quite common.

LA: That's realistic enough. I was going to say, though, celebrities would be at great risk of bursting from overinflation.

Dr. Elam: Without the connection of a significant relationship, love does nothing for the other. In fact, it isn't love; it's idolatry—because the connection is only imaginary. It's possible to spend one's affection and even adoration on anything. The nice thing about that is it costs the soul nothing and has no negative impact on happiness.

LA: As opposed to a real relationship where there is risk of too little return?

Dr. That's right. Now while this problem of regulating one's pressure is the central concern for most of the characters in the game,

there are two exceptions, one of which we have already mentioned.

LA: You're not referring to the child where the mother takes control of the Helper Gate.

Dr. Elan: Yes, that's it. The other one I think we'll come to shortly. It uses the same mechanism.

LA: The big question I have at this point is whether you yourself deliberately designed this game around the biblical drama; or did all this just happen to be the way it turned out—with a little help from your son.

Dr. Elan: The game would have served to settle the argument without these special maneuvers if Lew hadn't messed up the LifeSpec of the first woman. When he did that it occurred to me that we could turn to mythology and perhaps find guidance for a course of action somewhere within those stories about contests among the gods. It might even lead to something interesting. I thought of the dying-god myth with resurrection leading to victory as something we might try to emulate. But as it turned out I did not need to use any of that information. The choice was so clear: my son knew enough about how things worked to have every confidence that our system would create happy servants. Since he shares your interpretation of the Bible, he is quite familiar with the theology. He sees himself being led to act out the drama, but for what reason he does not know. Personally I think this is just an echo of a historical event; all major events send echoes throughout the universe. (It's merely a philosopher's speculation, of course.)

LA: And the virgin birth?

Dr. Elam: That was the only way we could introduce the character, and it had the added benefit of building a high servanthood average. Making him go through the whole childhood process as an obedient child established a strong foundation for servanthood. The special character that Lew introduced was as far from that as one can imagine—bold, brash, and never experiencing pain. Overblown pride is inevitable when a character is introduced the way he did it. So the virgin birth was the perfect solution both for establishing servanthood and for introducing a LifeSpec that the enemy couldn't manipulate. Of course we picked our girl carefully. She had to have no prior sexual entanglements because that would have compromised her higher consciousness and made her unable to accept our plan for her.

LA: So your resurrected character was invincible from then on?

Dr. Elam: He enlisted one of his friends to sit with him and take over regulating the pressure. This is the other exception that I mentioned earlier, where the seat of the protective mother is now occupied by someone we call the Helper. You can represent this person by drawing a circle around the Helper Gate on your diagram if you haven't done so already. Now his Helper Gate was still connected to that reservoir of the overflow from his death, and without help there would be an irresistible inflow back through the Helper Gate. The Helper's presence meant that dangerous fluctuations in pressure would be avoided, and happiness would be maintained.

LA: If I'm understanding your drama here, your son would not be

living to the end of his allotted lifespan.

Dr. Elam: Not immediately; I took him out of the game shortly after his resurrection.

LA: So he was not your "exhibit A."

Dr. Elam: He was set up for maintaining a consistently high pressure, compensating for the years of sorrow and making his average pressure exceed thirty. And his servanthood ratio was quite high, so there was no doubt that he would qualify. But we needed more like him to get that one percent that we needed to prove my case against Lew.

LA: How does one qualify as a servant?

Dr. Elam: The criterion we established at the outset was that outflow through the Helper Gate had to be at least fifty percent greater than inflow averaged over the lifetime. Lew would have agreed to a lower value than that even, but I could not see calling anything less than fifty percent true servanthood.

LA: I see where Lew got his confidence: that much outflow would make it difficult to maintain pressure.

Dr. Elm: Right. That's what Lew thought, and it's certainly true that unless you increase your inflow of wisdom—and/or inspiration—your efforts to serve others will deflate your soul. So it takes more than a willingness to be a servant, and Lew believed no one would make enough of an effort for an entire lifetime.

LA: Let me guess: you managed to get more characters qualified by following the example of your son.

Dr. Elam: It really is remarkable. Let me explain how it works. First I will have to describe my son. If the Inspiration Gate is wide open, as it was for him, you have a character who communicates seamlessly with the player. This gives that player the ability to interact indirectly with other characters by making use of normal communication between associates at the LBA level, which is then easily channeled back to him as he observes things through his character's eyes. So you see my son was able to have a great deal of influence over more than one character. His character was a great teacher, as you can imagine. "He who walks with the wise becomes wise." Furthermore, personal traits are not completely determined by the LifeSpec. Characters can influence other characters by various means. A character who has high spiritual input through his Inspiration Gate can teach true spirituality to another character. But to make one become a servant with high outflow through the Helper Gate as well as maintaining an internal pressure greater than thirty inches just isn't realistic given the compromised wisdom channel that everyone other than my son must deal with. So what he has to do is sit down alongside the player, just like my son's Helper did. In this arrangement the Helper makes up whatever is lacking in the character's service, drawing on Eve's reservoir of the breath of life as necessary. So you see, that's the reason I took him out of the game—so he could help other players be happy servants and hopefully qualify.

LA: It seems like your son would have a limit on how many he could handle at once.

Dr. Elam: What that limit would be we haven't discovered. He has trained wonderful helpers to take his place alongside players so

he can effectively be many places at once. But he has had relatively few takers. Most prefer to seek immortality by other means, even though it never works. Those my son attracted to himself while his character was in the game tried to spread the word—telling others that it is impossible for them to win on their own. But few believed it, and instead they kept trying other means. Yes, some have come to us; we have accumulated more than enough to make our exhibit to convince Lew.

LA: Explain to me again how this Helper makes it happen.

Dr. Elam: Because the Helper has full control of the Helper Gate and also has the connection to Eve's reservoir, both the pressure and the outflow are managed to meet the criteria. Even if there is not enough outflow to establish servanthood, immortality is guaranteed—shall we call it iron-clad?

LA: But who has been a consistent servant?

Dr. Elam: None have, thanks to Lew's counterfeit wisdom. Unfortunately there is nothing in the old wisdom library of proverbs to strongly refute the Lewisms. But there are those perplexing condemnations: "There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. ... God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." The conclusion of one who has no other information would be that submission to my son's Helper in itself satisfies the servanthood requirement—especially considering that it was done by rejecting Lew's false attractions. Of course it was really that strong magnetic attraction that pulled them in; nevertheless, they came and submitted. But in reality it is that flow from Eve's reservoir mediated by the Helper that makes the

passing servanthood score.

LA: It seems like cheating when you consider the original argument.

Dr. Elam: It is cheating—cheating death. But it's all perfectly legal too as Lew has to admit.

LA: I'm amazed that you were able to accomplish all this.

Dr. Elam: It's very simple really. The player is the spirit. The simulated characters are manifestations of a software program, following rules. New rules, variations of existing rules, and the manipulation of parameters are theoretically possible. The only restrictions are the will of the software developer. In this case we have a contest, and any such changes cannot honestly be made without the two sides agreeing to it. The ability of the character with maximized gates to do exceptional things is what results from the original procedure in the original design having reached and exceeded certain limits. Though it was not fully appreciated by Lew, my son saw the potential there when he coded it. But to make use of it we had to wait for the right female LifeSpec to appear. To make sure she would appear and to preserve her LifeSpec purity, we dispensed to a certain spirit-wise character a code of moral law that he imposed on the race we had chosen for her. Meanwhile, Lou was happy launching his game empire while his quasi-natural character was making sure nobody reached immortality. Actually, the law was making his job easier because illegal activity degrades the wisdom variable. Finally we got the girl we needed, and soon we had my son involved in the action. That was the game changer, and we started to reap immortal servants

soon thereafter.

LA: So the characters who finish the game alive become immortal. Where do they go?

Dr. Elam: (laughs) Immortal only through the players. When you win the game you get to be called an immortal. In a sense they are immortal in the game too because every time someone reaches their time limit their name appears chiseled into Mt. Moriah as if by magic—an extra bit of programming that Lew didn't notice, slipped into the system by you-know-who. My son's personality has this magnetic attraction, you know, which attracts certain other characters—certain ones, not everyone. There is an elite body of the immortals, all fans of my son, who have joined with him, sharing in the spirit.

LA: What about those who die before the time limit—those who have no connection to your son? Do they have any consolation?

Dr. Elam: That's the unfortunate thing and the reason the game is banned in some places. The player's identification with the character in the game sometimes becomes so profound that permanent death is a real blow. It has been a boon to psychotherapists.

LA: Tell me again why we are doing this.

Dr. Elam: We're about to explore how we might use this game as a psychology model. Perhaps something interesting will turn up. So let's try it out and see. What are some questions you would like it to answer for you?

LA: How does it account for prayer?

Dr. Elam: For that we must extend our model a bit. Follow me now: You are sitting at a computer console, playing the game and thoroughly absorbed in the virtual world. How are you going to send a message to someone in the real world? What other channel do you have available?

LA: I'm afraid I don't know.

Dr. Elam: It's right in front of your nose: the computer!

LA: I thought the computer was all about my interaction with the virtual world.

Dr. Elam: That is true, but there is more. I meant it is right in front of your real nose, not your virtual nose. ... Why not send an email?

LA: But I'm the character who needs to send up the prayer. It's my mind or my soul—whichever it is I'm not sure. It's my consciousness, here in the triangle.

Dr. Elam: Good observation.

LA: So what's the solution?

Dr. Elam: You are the character. The virtual world is what you in your mind call the real world. But you also believe there is a spiritual world and that you are somehow connected to it. How would your mind communicate with your spirit about what to include in your prayer?

LA: By speaking? My player can hear me speak, right?

Dr. Elam: Yes.

LA: I don't see any other way if my silent mental thoughts aren't that intelligible to my spirit.

Dr. Elam: I don't either unless your spirit is exceptional.

LA: Are you saying then that silent prayer is impossible? I need a model where God observes everything!

Dr. Elam: Let's see what the model says about that. In terms of the game now: You *as the player* interact with others in the virtual-reality world by means of the computer network. But it is your own local computer that runs the LBA software that simulates your character's body and ultimately your mind. The owner of the computer network could listen in but only to what your computer sends out. Your character's private thoughts do not go out over the network since there is no need for them in the interaction with the rest of the virtual world. I know you are used to others sneaking in through the network and spying on what you are doing, but the software in this game does not allow that. Spying can only happen when you run exploitative programs on your computer as happens whenever you enter any commercial website.

LA: So God does not know what we think?

Dr. Elam: According to the model, you have perfect privacy in your thoughts. Aren't you glad of that?

LA: Well, yes. But wait: God *does* know our thoughts. "You understand my thoughts from afar."

Dr. Elam: David went on to say, "Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it." Are you sure he was meaning

thoughts apart from speech?

LA: It's debatable, I suppose. But why limit God?

Dr. Elam: Later in the same psalm you find: "Your eyes saw my substance before it was formed; it was all written in your book."

LA: So there you go: God even knows minute details before they come into being. So why not thoughts?

Dr. Elam: Are you prepared to accept that all your thoughts were preordained?

LA: That is a difficult one.

Dr. Elam: So it was for David. He write in the same psalm: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain to it."

LA: We certainly have our limitations.

Dr. Elam: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his inward parts." In our model, the player has access to the character's thoughts; so there is another channel by which thoughts could possibly be communicated beyond your own computer. But that would be at the discretion of the player, who bears the most responsibility, of course.

LA: Could the Helper step in where the spirit is lacking?

Dr. Elam: Certainly, in which case your thoughts are already outside of yourself. In fact, the Helper may be quite interested in helping you with your thoughts.

LA: By what means? I wish it were true!

Dr. Elam: I think you know the answer to that. What is it we referred to? Hebrews 4:12 or thereabouts?

LA: So we're back to that! "The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Scriptures, of course. The Bible. You're right; I did know it.

Dr. Elam: What seems insoluble is never so with the proper tools. Take a mundane example: Engineers have learned to get their tools from mathematicians. Someone who is short on knowledge of math might find Maxwell's famous equations insoluble because imaginary numbers have no place in their understanding. It takes another dimension mathematically to model electromagnetic waves, and that's what the imaginary part of complex numbers represents. Similarly your theology is stymied sometimes for trying to work something out on one plane. My first undergraduate degree was in mathematics, and I find that training quite useful even in philosophy.

LA: So it's a bit more complex than it seems at first. Apart from the model, what is your opinion about private thoughts?

Dr. Elam: No one cares, really. If you think about it, your thoughts are pretty worthless until you express them in some way. "All the ways of man are pure in his own eyes." When speaking you exercise more of your soul, and if what comes out is only marginally better, still it is more truly you.

LA: According to Solomon, "A fool's mouth is his ruin."

Dr. Elam: (laughs) "The words of a man's mouth are deep waters," either way. "The wellspring of wisdom is like a bubbling brook." Ultimately, "The Lord weighs the spirit."

LA: I will have to maintain that God knows *all* of the details—body, mind, and spirit. But I understand too that the spirit is the important thing.

Dr. Elam: In the game we have the logs. Nearly everything that happens is preserved in the logs. Nearly all that the characters do and say is recorded—like omni-surveillance. Nearly every detail is there.

LA: Is everything done in private also captured in this surveillance video?

Dr. Elam: Nearly everything.

LA: You keep saying "nearly." What is omitted.

Dr. Elam: I'm talking about the way our game works. In case there is a dispute in the end over what happened, nearly everything is captured in the local logs in each computer or in the master log. But the form is quite different from what a video camera would show. What is recorded is the essence of things in the code used within the computer, and some things have negative essence. That's the way the calculation comes out when one's soul-wisdom is low while one's spirit-wisdom is very high. It's a little technical, I know. If the essence is zero or negative, the thing is not recorded.

LA: What is spirit-wisdom? I thought wisdom was from the Proverb Library and fed into the soul through the Wisdom Gate.

Dr. Elam: It helps if your spirit has wisdom too. Remember, we touched on the fact that everything went better when the player was acquainted with wisdom literature.

LA: I remember now. So a silent prayer would just stay inside me and not be heard—except perhaps entering the log for future reference if I'm not being too foolish. That doesn't agree with my theology.

Dr. Elam: For present practical purposes the silent prayer would go nowhere. Unless you are able to think in your spirit.

LA: Now what does that mean?

Dr. Elam: Thinking in your spirit? Well, let's see. You need to get your player involved. We understand the difficulty of communicating something to the player without speaking. I don't think you want to write out your prayer or say it in sign language or anything like that. The Inspiration Gate is one-way only, so you can't make use of that directly. But there is the provision by which the character can ask for direction or wisdom. What if your player/spirit is completely engrossed in what you are doing and you are constantly depending on your spirit for direction? You are so well integrated that you are acting as one. Would that not be ideal?

LA: In that case my spirit is involved in the virtual world, hardly remembering that there is a spiritual world. I see what you've done. You've put your finger on a sore spot.

Dr. Elam: That's our purpose: to help you improve your philosophy models so that they become more useful to you.

LA: What's the solution to this problem? We would call it worldliness.

Dr. Elam: You tell me. All I can tell you is that the model seems to indicate that there is a potential for integration between your virtual self and your real or spiritual self. Still your spirit could remain sufficiently aloof. I mean the player does not have to be so engrossed in the virtual world that the real world is forgotten.

LA: Now you leave me to apply that! Look, this is not a game: I'm really here; I was born a physical being. This world, if it isn't the real world, is still the real world to me. The spirit domain, as you call it, is something I can barely imagine; I've never actually been there and I have no idea who or what my so-called player is.

Dr. Elam: That's right; of course you have never been there because ...

LA: I know the model is a simulation. I get it that there is supposed to be a real me—like the player—out there somewhere. But I don't know where that is!

Dr. Elam: No, not *out there somewhere*. It's really you. Your consciousness is you, and that depends on your spirit as well as your soul unless your Inspiration Gate is shut tight or your circle of consciousness is in another corner. For you, Lynn Andrew, I believe everything you experience depends to some degree on your spirit. Didn't you tell me that's what makes you human?

LA: When you put it that way I just need to remember who I am.

Dr. Elam: There you go! I think our model is holding up nicely. It hasn't led us astray yet.

LA: I'm not quite so confident about that.

Dr. Elam: You have to remember not to think of the virtual world as being located in a particular place with respect to the players. That's why we call it "virtual." It has no physical existence of its own other than electrical impulses in the computers. Each player experiences the virtual world through his or her eyes and ears and thus in his or her mind, the computer screen being the means. If you insist on putting them together in one picture, the better image would be of the character being located in the head of the player, not somewhere inside the computer. But that doesn't diminish the role of the computer, of course.

LA: This certainly has given me something to think about, which I'm anxious to do. I've taken up a great deal of your time, much more than I anticipated, so I must be going. And I thank you *immensely* for your kindness, Dr. Elam.

Dr. Elam: We haven't answered your question about prayer yet.

LA: Oh. Um. ... Right. Where did we leave it?

Dr. Elam: Getting your spirit to send the email for you—silently.

LA: I understand that prayer needs to be focused and intelligible in my spirit—thinking in my spirit as you put it. But the model didn't seem to support that very well. Too bad the Inspiration

Gate doesn't work both ways; then ...

Dr. Elam: You can't inspire your spirit with your mind. But feedback to your spirit is automatic; it appears in that window on your player's screen. To think coherently in the spirit—that is to make your silent thoughts appear on the screen without clutter—is theoretically possible, but it doesn't seem to happen naturally—according to the game, you understand, for in the game we're not simulating thoughts as you might think; only human-like actions that would derive from presumed thoughts. The data that gets generated in that process is the closest thing that we have, and that's what appears on the screen.

LA: But it real life real thoughts exist, so one must focus them in the spirit. That isn't too difficult.

Dr. Elam: Are you sure you believe that?

LA: Well—if we're talking about the same thing. Uncluttered thoughts is what I meant. It's that simple. The model makes it too complicated.

Dr. Elam: Perhaps I don't understand what you want the role of the spirit to be in this.

LA: I believe that true prayer is not like talking to another person. God is spirit, so communicating with him must be done in the spirit.

Dr. Elam: Is it your mind or your spirit that is in the driver's seat?

LA: When you put it that way I know you have this model of the spirit being the one who must transmit the message. But I'm

not sure that the mind should be dictating the message apart from the spirit. Ideally there would be perfect agreement between the two at the outset.

Dr. Elam: I'm not a psychologist, and our simulation of the human mind is very simplistic, so this may not mean much outside of the game. I was trying to point out that while it is theoretically possible to have one's consciousness wide enough to feed the mind directly from the spirit portal, it rarely happens. In fact, the only example of it was our lady who became my son's mother. See—if you could do that, it would open the possibility of thinking right in step with your spirit.

LA: In other words, being controlled by *the Spirit*. ... Producing holiness.

Dr. Elam: Maybe. I think so in her case. But you still have to question the sanctity of the human spirit; certainly many of our players would not be able to impart holiness to their characters regardless of how spiritually the soul might be oriented. However, I must tell you that even if you could achieve purely spiritual thought, your own spirit/player may have trouble with email addresses and other issues. We're not all perfectly competent in those things.

LA: I meant the Holy Spirit who indwells believers, not the human spirit.

Dr. Elam: If you were playing the game, you would be one of the fortunate ones who have my son's Helper—your personal Helper—sitting next to your player. She can see your thoughts on the

screen too.

LA: I have an idea what you mean, but tell me again about this "Helper." You discussed the Helper before, but I thought she was concerned with stabilizing the soul's pressure to maintain happiness.

Dr. Elam: You remember this is someone my son has assigned to be with your spirit—someone he has trained in wisdom and with whom he keeps in contact.

LA: You're not modeling a guardian angel here, I take it—just want to be sure I understand.

Dr. Elam: No, this is all about your spirit who has a permanent Helper—not just any helper but one who represents my son and is dedicated to helping you. All of the helpers are women, of course. It really isn't a man's job; most men wouldn't have the patience. Helpers have been specially picked by my colleague who knows women like only a woman can.

LA: This is very strange. I do see that you are trying to make a connection with the Savior. A surrogate seems a little odd though. On the other hand, the way I relate to someone depends on who I am with respect to the person. Certainly it depends on who the person is too, but maybe not so much as who I am in that person's view. So if I believe the Helper is competent and her assignment is in my best interest—well, it could be a good arrangement.

Dr. Elam: I believe that's sound as far as it goes.

LA: All right. So I have become in effect your son's intimate, and

he probably knows me better than I know him. And his representative is trained to ignore the clutter and extract prayerful thoughts from the screen and send them out in email messages. Is that how it works?

Dr. Elam: I don't think your thoughts are quite what you want to be in your email exactly. You wanted the spirit involved in the origin of the message too. Now the Helper can take care of that for you. She understands all that low-level information of which your thoughts are comprised, and she can make sense of it much better than your own player can. But it doesn't stop there: she can figure out what you meant or what you should have meant when you didn't get it into your thoughts properly at all. You see, here's the problem: my son really wants to be in contact with certain characters in the game, but since he is no longer in the game directly, he has to work through the players. That's why he sent the helpers and made it pretty foolproof for you.

LA: Of course. That's splendid! I wouldn't want it any other way. This is a model of the Spirit of Christ knowing all about my imperfect thoughts yet willing and able to make use of them—to be my interpreter. I like the email idea too. Email is pretty reliable. I would like to think that my prayers are heard that well. ... In your game now, do you actually have these women going to sit beside players?

Dr. Elam: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

LA: How does your son select which players get helpers?

Dr. Elam: They happen to be the ones he personally invited to

join the game.

LA: Oh. I see. ... These women I don't think they would be a suitable model for the Holy Spirit. We speak of him as the third person of the trinity. To have him represented by a delegation of women seems almost blasphemous—to me.

Dr. Elam: I see your point. The model is not necessarily a perfect vehicle for your theology, of course, though thanks to my son's way of doing things it matches up fairly well. There were some practical issues we had to deal with. First of all, we needed personal envoys who, for however many hours were needed, could sit beside and coach a winning spirit. They had to trust that my son knew better than they about the game, consulting with him frequently, yet wise in the ways of the spirit (or the psyche as I would say), balancing his knowledge with spiritual insight. They had to be able to nurse the soul, drawing from the reservoir of life's breath in order to keep the pressure within range. Secondly, they had to be trustworthy. Frankly, we could not find enough men we could trust to follow our instructions and not do their own thing—like Lew did. My colleague had the solution; she was able to gather enough trustworthy women who were in one or another of her seven fellowship groups (yes, she is a passionate Christian just like my son). The third problem is the one I mentioned earlier: the task is more suited to the nurturing nature of women. It calls not only for patience and longsuffering but a degree of love and kindness more characteristic of women. So these practical considerations had to be met—unfortunately compromising the suitability of the model for your purposes. But using women turned out to be a good choice; they work well with both women and men

players. In the thick of trials they have proven to be effective comforters—remarkably even more so to the male players than to the females.

LA: I'll accept that. There is a feminine aspect of God, definitely. But to say that he is like a mother hen to her chicks is not to say that he is a female deity.

Dr. Elam: I wholeheartedly agree with that. Similes need not carry complex meaning; sometimes they emphasize one point only. In fact, metaphors of all sorts are most commonly limited in their intended scope. Our vehicle, being designed and built to simulate human beings, naturally parallels your tenor and serves nicely even as an allegory for you; but remember, it is at best an overblown metaphor and cannot accurately answer to everything. ... A moment ago we mentioned the problem of achieving any significant degree of holiness within your natural spirit.

LA: Now I see what you had in mind. Of course it requires the Holy Spirit. I understand your caveat, but I must say this model is great! Is there anything in it about being born again?

Dr. Elam: You might consider the fact that one of the original purposes of the seat at the Helper Gate was to give a mother recourse when her child's spirit was excessively unruly. When you receive my son's Helper you are in a similar need spiritually, even though your soul may be mature in other respects. Spiritually you are getting a new kind of life. At least that seems to be how the model would be interpreted if we want it to jibe with your theology.

LA: So my Helper is acting as a sort of mother—through my spirit? or directly to my soul?

Dr. Elam: Think back: when a mother takes that place beside the spirit of her child, she modulates or even replaces the flow that normally goes from the child's own spirit down through the Helper Gate. So the same would have to be true with the Helper except that the flow originates from the Helper. Remember too that this was a temporary arrangement for the child, serving only until the mind matured to the point of being able to receive wisdom.

LA: I don't agree with that: I don't believe the Holy Spirit's ministry is temporary.

Dr. Elam: Your Helper stays for the duration of your life, working with your spirit constantly. Only the *direct* flow to the soul would be temporary.

LA: All right. Let me think about that. ... There would be a time of special nurturing.

Dr. Elam: At least that's the way it works in the game. If the Helper were permitted to exert direct influence on the soul throughout the character's lifetime, Lew would certainly raise an objection, pointing out that the Helper Gate was designed primarily for the discharge of goodwill from the soul to others, not for the purpose of giving the soul a spiritual high.

LA: Now, if I understand you, this is implying that spiritually mature Christians are not in direct communion with the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Elam: Your old nature must be weaned from that direct stim-

ulation as soon as your new nature has developed sufficiently. That's the essential difference between this and your physical childhood in which your natural spirit compensated for the immaturity of your mind. After your second birth there is another childhood in which the immaturity of your spirit is being offset by direct feeding from your Helper spirit—but only until your spirit becomes mature in its new life.

LA: So the Holy Spirit would be flowing directly into the old nature (for a time) and at the same time would be working with the person's spirit to ... create the new nature, did you say?

Dr. Elam: Where else could the new nature be located?

LA: "The old has passed away and the new has come." There should be a transformation of the soul as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit. "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Dr. Elam: If the soul is being transformed directly, then eventually the old nature would cease to exist.

LA: No, I don't believe that.

Dr. Elam: If you did, I don't know how the model could account for it, since direct flow from the Helper spirit would raise the pressure to dangerous levels if carried on too long. But it fits nicely with having your new nature be a regeneration of your spirit—which, after all, is the immortal part of you.

LA: Now this is very interesting. The new nature, you say, is really a sanctification of the spirit, leaving the soul untouched. That smacks of Gnosticism.

Dr. Elam: We have to go back and decide what we mean by this spirit that we have depicted as an oval above the triangle of your soul. If you keep that Inspiration Gate closed, making it quite separate from your soul, it would be the Gnostic's model.

LA: And if the Inspiration Gate is open?

Dr. Elam: What do you think?

LA: Well, the spirit would have more influence on the soul.

Dr. Elam: *Your* spirit would have more influence.

LA: More influence on the rest of me.

Dr. Elam: Meaning?

LA: I'm not sure what you're getting at.

Dr. Elam: We have noted before that the degree of integration between the spirit and the soul can vary.

LA: Integration Okay, so if the Inspiration Gate is wide open, the spirit and the Wait a minute. It isn't that simple. I'm a character in the game, and I have these *two* spirits or players watching over me. Aren't we a sort of trinity?

Dr. Elam: Born to trouble as sparks fly upward.

LA: What do you mean by that?

Dr. Elam: You can ignore our own spirit and live in your soul simply by closing your Inspiration Gate. But you cannot ignore your Helper spirit, for she is managing your Helper channel.

LA: I thought that sort of direct action was temporary.

Dr. Elam: The initial inflow from the Helper spirit had a purpose. (You find there is always a purpose whenever you try to be realistic.) After that is complete and you fail to allow integration of your soul with your new nature, you can expect another kind of flow from the Helper, and its purpose is to drive your circle of consciousness toward your spirit. Your Helper will not rest until you become integrated with your reborn spirit. Your new nature is really you.

LA: So my new nature is something I must listen to through my Inspiration Gate.

Dr. Elam: Yes, but your new nature, though it began in your spirit, extends over your soul as well.

LA: All right. That's better. And I must orient myself to it rather than to the old nature in my soul area.

Dr. Elam: Ideally. Otherwise, you get consciously reprimanded by your Helper, who has a war going on two fronts.

LA: A war? Why do you call it a war?

Dr. Elam: The old nature wars ...

LA: Yes, the old nature wars against the new. I would love it if this model could give me some insight about conquering the old nature.

Dr. Elam: You see where the front lines are. Look at your diagram. Your Helper feeds through the upper region of your soul,

between your mind and your spirit portal. Down below is your lower nature, which is very much part of your soul. In fact, your mind and spirit cannot exist without your lower nature. Immediately after what we have called the new birth, the Helper sends a cleansing flood to your soul that gets rid of the most noxious elements floating around in there. But it cannot last long, as we have noted, because of the pressure buildup. The soul is quite happy about the high, of course, and would like it to continue, but it was only the opening salvo of the war, the initial air strike; the naval war must be carried on from then on within your soul. The other front is in your own spirit, where the new nature is established by a sort of genocide, completely remaking the old. So if you are a trinity, it is a trinity of trouble in your body, soul, and spirit.

LA: It gives one great respect for the Helper.

Dr. Elam: The Helper's goal, of course, is to bring about not only immortality but also servanthood, the whole purpose being to present evidence to Lew that a servant can win the game. Making the servant is the most difficult part of the task because it requires the cooperation of the soul.

LA: After the new-birth experience it seems that we would be eager to cooperate. I know all too well that in many cases that is not so. Is there anything in the model that can help to explain why?

Dr. Elam: To answer that it would require me to elaborate on the mechanisms within our soul model.

LA: I would like to know—if you have time to explain it.

Dr. Elam: All right. Let's try this: Think of the circle of consciousness as an inflated life raft on the triangular sea of the soul. There is a prevailing breeze from the north, the upper regions of the soul, to the south, the land of the body. If no counter effort is made, the raft drifts to the south. This is all normal and natural. Note that your benevolent breezes must flow in the opposite direction, northward to the Helper Gate, which requires some effort. In addition there is an inflow from the body, which is much different: think of it as the source of the aquatic creatures that populate the sea, representing the results of visual images, sounds, things people have said, etc. Some of them you observe as they come in if your raft is located near the body, but many more slip by and go on to inhabit deeper levels.

LA: How is the raft propelled against the wind? A sail would not work; I know enough about sailing to know that a life raft would not sail well enough to make any upwind progress.

Dr. Elam. Ha! You are right about that, of course. The location and movement of the circle of consciousness is effected by emotion. What shall we use to represent that?

LA: Emotion? How about e-motion.

Dr. Elam: E-motion? That doesn't mean anything to me.

LA: Perhaps it's too silly. E-motion as in "electric" motion. The life raft could have electric propulsion—say an electric outboard motor.

Dr. Elam: (hearty laugh) That's good. The motor of e-motion. For some it's a rather large motor. (laughs again)

LA: It could be the kind of motor that uses a propeller in the air instead of in the water. Then it could also serve to make a flow of air toward the benevolence gate.

Dr. Elam: So the life raft would simply direct its flow of air northward toward the benevolence gate. What would keep it from propelling itself southward at the same time?

LA: It would have to be secured to the shore by some mooring arrangement. Then it could hang there and blast away, sending its friendly currents to whomever has a need.

Dr. Elam: (laughs) Now I like that! You're not a bad metaphor maker yourself. (laughs) What would this apparatus consist of?

LA: You have seen boats with big fans pushing them along. There would have to be a means of steering and a source of power.

Dr. Elam: Let's see what we can do with that as a secondary metaphor. I detect a trinity of motor, steering, and power. So we have found the emotion to be made of its own body, mind, and spirit. The spirit supplies the power for the mind which steers the boat. Without the mind at the helm, the emotion runs your craft all over the place, bumping into everything randomly without purpose. I'll have to suggest that to my psychologist friends as a model they might find a use for.

LA: Is this how your simulator works?

Dr. Elam: Well, yes and no. No, not directly: If I were to try to describe the workings of the simulator, it would make no sense at all. That's because the simulator is a program for the computer in

a language that allows us to make design statements not about the design of the world we are simulating, for we did not design that, but the design of the means of simulating it. So in order to describe the workings of the simulator to you I have resorted to visual analogs. So yes, these images are true to the workings of the simulator as metaphors, and there is nothing wrong with that.

LA: I don't see anything in your metaphor to account for special friends. What about soul mates? Or is it a matter of the spirit?

Dr. Elam: Communications with friends and acquaintances, strangers, enemies—all personal interactions—are by means of LBA, which is to say your voice, ears, eyes, sense of touch, and so forth. In your diagram you have the LBA depicted at the bottom of the soul's triangle, which is not the best way to represent the connection with the mind. The layered depiction I mentioned earlier, where the body, mind, and spirit are shown in a vertical arrangement better represents the body being the foundation of and host of all your mental functions. In fact, everything external to your mind and spirit comes in this way, and every action initiated within your mind interacts with the world through the LBA. Now I think your question was about friendships proper, not just acquaintances, and yes, we had to bring the spirit in to account for that because there is a higher sort of affinity and even communication that could not be reduced to a simple physical process. What we came up with is a parallel friendship at the spirit level.

LA: I think you touched on this before. The players become friends as a result of the friendship developing between characters.

Dr. Elam: If one of the players develops an interest in another character (through his own character), for whatever reason, naturally he or she will become curious about whom the other player might be.

LA: I don't imagine one character would say to another: "Ask your spirit what her email address is because my spirit wants to know."

Dr. Elam: (laughs) If the players were not known to one another previously, one of them would have to spend time trying to find the other's address. Assuming that the two are not ideologically isolated from one another, their social networks likely intersect somewhere; thus the address is obtained. So one player sends an email to the other, proposing that they correspond about their characters. For example, a woman whose character is in love usually wants to establish communication with the player connected to her character's man.

LA: You're suggesting that this is not always the case—because sometimes the spirit disagrees with the soul? How could that be? I suppose she could be in love for the wrong reasons, and the spirit senses danger ahead.

Dr. Elam: Everything could be quite normal and still the player sees no reason to communicate with the other player. When the Inspiration Gate is seldom used, this is almost certain to be the case because the player is not getting much out of the game at that point.

LA: So you decided to allow for the possibility of human love developing without involving spirits.

Dr. Elam: There is "spiritual" content in the atmosphere of the soul left over from childhood if nothing else. Love always involves what you would call a spiritual component, but it can be entirely soulish spirit and have no enduring substance.

LA: It must seem to them that it has substance.

Dr. Elam: Yes, certainly, especially when the remains of the spiritual inflow from childhood have not become too extremely rarefied. But there is nothing about it that will endure beyond the end of the game. Even though it is a spiritual substance in terms of the soul's economy, it is a virtual spirituality, not spiritual in reality.

LA: That is not what I thought "soul mate" meant. I am more interested in the other kind of spiritual friendship, where the spiritual component would have real substance.

Dr. Elam: Whenever there is integration of the soul and spirit, you have the player participating in everything and naturally wanting to communicate with all the players corresponding to friends and acquaintances in the game—like a good parent wanting to know something about the parents of the youngster's friends. Sometimes friendships develop at that level and certainly it affects the characters.

LA: It sounds like the initiative must come from the spirits; there is no way that the souls could force it. The heart, maybe? Where is the heart in all of this?

Dr. Elam: No, I would not put it that the initiative must come from the spirit. When spirit and soul are integrated, it is im-

possible to rule out one affecting the other. The heart is difficult to define, so I do not make much of it. In this integrated type of person, the heart certainly involves the spirit, while in one whose inspiration is lacking, the heart would be limited to the soul proper. If you wish to speak of the heart, you can take it as being roughly synonymous with the soul, perhaps looking at the soul more abstractly—but that is of little use. It should be a good, solid metaphor for something, but I'm afraid there is only a shadow of that something in mankind. You can see the symbol of a heart in the triangle of the soul, especially if you puff out the sides a bit with high pressure and represent a very active Helper channel by drawing it down into the interior a little. But this symbol has nothing to do with the workings of the simulator; it's only a curiosity, like a vestige of something that was more prominent at one time. We use the term when we are not sure what we mean.

LA: The reason I was asking about soul mates—or I guess what would better be called spirit mates—is I have this pet theory that some friendships on earth are the result of friendships in heaven, not the other way around.

Dr. Elam: This has been observed. Sometimes the players are friends first, and they try to steer their characters to meet in the virtual world.

LA: You meet this person, and you hardly get acquainted before you sense that a relationship already exists, and if there is no opportunity to actually establish a friendship, your paths keep crossing by unlikely chances.

Dr. Elam: I've seen precisely that happen in the game. Two play-

ers who are good friends have characters who are not compatible for one reason or another: location, age, family, employment, gender, or various other social circumstances. But if they can maneuver their characters to come into contact even briefly they feel that they have achieved something; it's a game within the game that we did not foresee.

LA: That's not quite the romantic thing I had in mind.

Dr. Elam: The players never seem to tire of trying to bring such meetings about. It is hard to say what their motives are; it could be a number of things. No doubt they wish their characters could get together more often and complete the circuit. They should know it is not allowed and never will happen.

LA: Why? Why disallow it if the players and the characters are all for it?

Dr. Elam: It becomes self destructive in every case. That's why we caution the players about pressing it too far.

LA: I don't understand why that would be.

Dr. Elam: The game was never designed for it. Conflicts are normal in life and likewise in our simulation. Any benefit of the game is for us, here on this side. The characters are vehicles, merely phantoms of the computer. Don't you find that every comfort brings its conflicts and that extreme comforts carry the seeds of extreme conflicts?

LA: If I understand what you are saying, the players who are doing this are not being wise in trying to override the conflicts.

Dr. Elam: I would say they are fooling around.

LA: They would not have the benefit of your son's helpers.

Dr. Elam: One would hope not. But such players do not become instantly obedient to the wisdom of their Helper.

LA: Let's take a happier example: let's consider characters well integrated and with spirits, learned and well obedient to their helpers. I would hope they would perceive and relate to one another differently!

Dr. Elam: Yes, to be sure. They know they are in the same family—my son's expended family, in effect. And you know how families are!

LA: Pardon my fantasy. Your model seems to be no better than real life.

Dr. Elam: Thank you. But I warned you about that: you're born to trouble as sparks fly upward.

LA: Then let me ask you directly: how did you get it to mimic the real world so well when most of the turmoil in life ultimately issues from sex? I don't see anywhere in your modeling of the soul and spirit where differences due to gender are brought out. Nor do I see where the soul's continual seeking satisfaction in love relationships is being modeled at all.

Dr. Elam: I wondered when you would get around to that. No, we have not included those things in the model except in a very basic way at the LBA level. I had not gotten very far into the design process—it was on the second day I think—when I realized that it

would be impossible to model the strongest force of all. When I mentioned the problem to Lew, he disagreed with me about the strength and importance of love in the patterns of human behavior. It was his opinion that simple equations representing sexual attraction would account for ninety percent of the forces involved. I was not in a position to dispute that since he was going on what he had been taught in his psychology class. So the decision was made to go ahead with the project even though I had come to the conclusion that a complete simulation including the mainspring of human behavior was impossible. In other words, we could program Genesis One, but the subject of the Second Chapter was not amenable to mathematical modeling.

LA: Something is missing in my understanding. If your simulator is so deficient, as you seem to be saying it is now, how is it that it gives results that appear to be lifelike to the players.

Dr. Elam: The answer is obvious, is it not? The players themselves are the wellsprings of that undefinable thing without which the game would be a lackluster exercise.

LA: I'm writing a book about love—a story, not a psychological or philosophical treatise.

Dr. Elam: There is no other way to approach the subject. You cannot reduce it to a formula or even a system of formulas. Genesis One you can analyze: all textbooks are Genesis-One books. Genesis Three you can write about: what is called literature is based on the pathos and irony from Genesis Three onward. But in Genesis Two you will find a land that can only be told of in legends, for it is a place we can no longer visit since we have lost our hearts.

LE: "But our hearts we lost—how long ago!"

Dr. Elam: "In a place no chart nor ship can show." (laughs) You asked me, "Where in the soul is the heart?" We left our hearts in the garden. Genesis Two is painful because we seek to go back there, but we seek in vain. What we call a heart is a mirage, a ghost of what might have been; we see through it and see nothing. Nevertheless, as spectral as it is, I submit that at the center of our loves remains a vital link to the creative force of Genesis Two, which explains why love moves us like nothing else. To prove this it is only necessary to point out that the best-selling authors write about love in one way or another. The reason they get so little respect from academia—other than the fact that they make too much money—is that most of them treat love as if it can be reduced to a formula, and so their books are either mawkish or simply erogenous.

LA: This is very interesting to me because I have long felt that the fundamental connection between earth and heaven is love. So in order to write about it I had to bring heaven into the picture.

Dr. Elam: I agree. It's one of those things that you cannot observe directly without it turning into something else.

LA: Now in your game You say that somehow the mainspring of love comes in through the human players. Do you consider that effect to be part of the model we are considering?

Dr. Elam: Well. ... I'm convinced it's there, but it's elusive.

LA: Do you mean that it's already part of the model somehow?

Dr. Elam: No. If it were part of the model you would be able to identify some characteristic, some evidence of behavior on the part of the players or their characters that is not explainable by anything else. But I have not found any. It's a question I have asked myself, and I'm always tempted to put it down as imaginary. But then I pick up a story such as *Tristan and Isolde* and there it is as clear as a bell in a story that cannot be true but is.

LA: Or the second chapter of Genesis?

Dr. Elam: Yes, as plain as day there, in the second chapter of Genesis.

LA: How would you rate your experience—as the first player in the game?

Dr. Elam: Very strange, being alone in the world with one other soul.

LA: Was it love at first sight?

Dr. Elam: Yes, it was, if I may boast. But most of the credit goes to my son who did the real work of making the images look realistic. I could not have envisioned her from the LifeSpec, so she was a surprise. Indeed she was one who would take your breath away. I'm sure she would take any man's breath away, though she was only an image on a screen generated by electrical impulses in the computer.

LA: Are you referring to Adam's appreciation of her physical beauty?

Dr. Elam: Yes. But compared to I'm sorry about where this is

leading.

LA: Go ahead.

Dr. Elam: Don't you know? You must know. She thought Adam was wonderful.

LA: Yes, I know. That counted for more than anything. But ...

Dr. Elam: Don't even try to redeem it. I have ruined it already, haven't I? That's what I mean by not approaching this subject directly. It crumbles immediately whether you're a psychologist or not.

LA: It was not long before he did something noble and foolish—somehow both at once.

Dr. Elam: It is a good story if you take yourself out of it. That's why we need stories, Lynn. I think of Samson and Delilah. Adam was worse than Samson and Eve was worse than Delilah when it came to their first test, so when you read their story you can feel the glory in it. A good story takes you back to Genesis Two in spite of the Fall like nothing else can.

LA: Here is my dilemma: if love is the connection between heaven and earth, how does it properly manifest itself? The pagans tried to make religion serve love, and it became a demon. The ascetics sought pure spirituality and found it petrifying. We seek wholeness in vain. Jesus demonstrated it, but who can follow his example?

Dr. Elam: Born to trouble. If you could have stopped in Chapter Two, I think you would know the answer. But now you never will

know truly until some dream of the prophets comes to life. Meanwhile you have the storybooks to help you cry about what you forfeited and dream about finding it again.

LA: Where would one's consciousness be when reading such a story? I mean in terms of the model of the soul? Where does the book come in? The sort of story we are talking about wouldn't be found in the Proverb Library, would it? It isn't something the spirit has produced—at least not my spirit if I am the reader.

Dr. Elam: To answer that I think we must first ask where the writer's center of consciousness was when writing the story. To make it simple, there are four possibilities: the three corners of the triangle and the middle. A story of the type you are writing could be written with your raft snuggled up to your Inspiration Gate, pinched in tight. Or it could be from the middle, fishing in the deep. The question really is not where the reader is; the reader will be where you are; and there are different approaches to life.

LA: Could an author be spanning both the inspiration and the wisdom gates at the same time?

Dr. Elam: That is just possible. Your raft can become elongated and sit in the way of both corners. We observed it once, remember? But few possess what it takes to keep it there. If you can do it, you may well have a classic because it puts your center at the channel to the Helper Gate from which the most direct influences of heaven may be felt.

LA: Did you foresee that this Helper Gate would be so versatile?

Dr. Elam: I knew it opened up many possibilities. Good and bad

always accompany freedom.

LA: Are you suggesting that evil spirits could take advantage of that seat?

Dr. Elam: Yes, but they would have to be invited. Only mothers and such can go there without an invitation.

LA: And such? What do you mean?

Dr. Elam: Relatives. Wives, primarily.

LA: That would not be good. Where does it leave the Holy Spirit?

Dr. Elam: I think you can figure that out. I'll only say that for some men there are worse arrangements. But reserve your final judgment until we touch on families.

LA: That reminds me: does the model allow emailing a family member?

Dr. Elam: Of course! Email is email. All you need is the person's email address. That's the model. What it represents is that your spirit can make contact with anyone anywhere at any time. It's like email: you send a message addressed to someone, and if the address is right, the recipient will receive it—and perhaps will read it.

LA: So how do I send a spiritual message, say to someone whom I haven't heard from in a long time and is not answering his phone?

Dr. Elam: You would need the cooperation of your player/spirit, of course. Granted that, your spirit has to determine who is spiriting this other person. If that works out, the email will be routed

properly, but then it is up to the other player to get the message to the character, which in many cases would not be easy and in some cases impossible.

LA: So what good is it?

Dr. Elam: Well, you know the address for reaching God; it's good for that.

LA: I thought my Helper would take care of that.

Dr. Elam: Oh, she would, I suppose. But I think she would want to get it from you anyway, just to make sure she understands your intention.

LA: It seems silly. An email address to make sure my prayer is routed correctly?

Dr. Elam: That's model terminology. Call it s-mail—spirit mail.

LA: That doesn't help. What is God's s-mail address?

Dr. Elam: I wouldn't expect that it would be too difficult. I thought you would know it.

LA: Is this a riddle?

Dr. Elam: He's your God. I'm just suggesting that you might clarify your thinking by using a model that we are all familiar with. It seems to me that if you want your prayer to go to your Father in heaven, you would make sure it gets routed by way of the Son who is your connection to him by the Spirit. Do I have that right?

LA: Thank you. I would say the address would be "—in the name

of Jesus Christ."

Dr. Elam: Then I must assume that's what it is.

LA: Am I correct then in assuming that s-mail is good for prayer and nothing else in spite of the potential you mentioned?

Dr. Elam: Between certain players there is knowledge of email addresses, as we have noted. It would be no different from any other group of people; some acquaintances exist prior to involvement in the game. If your spirit happens to know the spirit of another character—you know what the potential is. The other possibility that you mentioned before is where a character has an address and gives it to another character.

LA: I'm thinking now that could be dangerous.

Dr. Elam: I agree. You could be setting your spirit up to get junk s-mail.

LA: And I suppose those could be harmful if opened—infesting one's computer with unfriendly invaders.

Dr. Elam: Or the messages might be in languages you do not understand. You could be listening to your spirit and not understanding anything.

LA: So receiving a spiritual message is no guarantee that it's beneficial?

Dr. Elam: Just like email. There are hostile beings everywhere passing lies through unwitting players. But there is another way: a secure channel in the special case of two people both having help-

ers. In the game these helpers are constantly communicating with each other by email and consulting with my son.

LA: I see. My Helper could pass on a message to someone else's Helper. That would explain why thinking about a person will sometimes be felt by him.

Dr. Elam: I would guess that however much information gets passed depends on how important it seems to your Helper.

LA: How would I know if someone has contacted me by this means?

Dr. Elam: You might not know. You might receive it through your Inspiration Gate if your Helper shares it with your spirit. If you are unaware of the party or the subject, you will probably ignore it.

LA: If I'm looking at a person who is not looking at me, sometimes I can get their attention simply by concentrating on them. Do you think that would that be a sort of spiritual communication too?

Dr. Elam: I see no place for that in our model. So if we stay with the model, we would have to conclude that it's a function of the physical; neither of your spirits are involved.

LA: So what people refer to as a sixth sense would be physical?

Dr. Elam: That would be a reasonable conclusion. Animals seem to have similar abilities, don't they? Much is still unknown about the physical world.

LA: You mentioned animals before when you were explaining about wisdom, and you hinted that they might have a little of it, even on the spiritual side.

Dr. Elam: Certainly no animal would be able to play the game, so according to our model, animals do not have spirits.

LA: Some people believe that certain animals, notably their pets, will be resurrected and live with them in heaven. Apparently the model excludes that. I won't ask you what you think.

Dr. Elam: I'll tell you anyway. I think the model does *not* absolutely exclude pets from heaven.

LA: Would you mind explaining?

Dr. Elam: It's amazing how close people get to their pets, isn't it?

LA: I've thought about that. Sometimes it amounts to symbiosis. I guess the person's spirit would have to be involved if the animal is that important. Are you saying the pet could go with the person like a hitchhiker to heaven?

Dr. Elam: If the synergy has become essential, I don't see why not. But it would depend on the spirit, I should think. Just speculation, of course. Somehow they would have to produce a surrogate animal outside of the game. But it leads to something even more interesting: if an animal could integrate with the soul and spirit of a person, why not another person?

LA: I'm not sure I follow you. People already have their spirits.

Dr. Elam: But if a pet cannot be divided from its master, wouldn't

a very close relationship between two people present the same problem?

LA: This is wild.

Dr. Elam: Aren't there certain scriptures you would apply to it if you thought it were possible?

LA: Yes.

Dr. Elam: So ...?

LA: It would violate a lot of other scriptures.

Dr. Elam: Such as?

LA: Individuals are held responsible for their own actions. I know that's a general statement, not a quotation. But individual responsibility is everywhere implied, I believe.

Dr. Elam: Does individual responsibility exclude a wider responsibility?

LA: No. Of course not. But that's of a different sort. However ... I see what you're getting at.

Dr. Elam: Many cultures carry the notion of the organic family. And it is not unknown in Christianity, if I'm not mistaken.

LA: Cults too. Is there a provision for this sort of thing in the model?

Dr. Elam: What we have in the model—as it has turned out—is this sort-of magnetism that my son has. He attracts certain other characters. You suggested that we have a sub-model in the mag-

net, and if we may apply that, it would mean that one who had been attached to my son effectively becomes a magnet too, just like a piece of iron is a conductor of magnetism and acts as a magnet even though it is not itself permanently magnetized. So there's a model.

LA: Now what do I do with this? Do we have a model of person A being attached to your son and person B being attached indirectly through person A? That would make sense only if person B is also of magnetic material, in which case there could be an attraction to your son directly.

Dr. Elam: Could be, but would he be necessarily? I don't think the possibility of attraction makes it inevitable. That's a pretty general rule and one that is definitely built into the game.

LA: So this piggy-back salvation could happen in the case where there is some reluctance to attach directly to your son. The connection is made indirectly.

Dr. Elam: On the other hand, person B might be such a demand on person A's outflow that it would impede the Helper's ability to keep the soul's pressure in the healthy range. I don't know that, since to my knowledge it has not been tested yet in the game. But in theory it could happen.

LA: So they both would be lost, and person A would have been much better off being unattached to B.

Dr. Elam: I would say so. Now if that isn't scary enough, consider your other attachments. What about the nation? I'm reminded of this because of the frequent mention of nations in your Bible.

They're often treated as personages, apparently the individuals being merged into one package.

LA: I've often wondered about that, but I never thought national identity would be as important as one's individual relationship to God.

Dr. Elam: In the model all we have is the formula for the rise and fall of nations. Currently this nation is in its disintegration phase and if there is any survival in the offing it will be by means of a force capable of arresting the balkanization. You know what that means to the social ecology.

LA: The social fabric has already been shredded in most places with few exceptions, and it has put a great strain on the church.

Dr. Elam: You didn't use the word "judgment."

LA: No, but I believe that's what it is.

Dr. Elam: Judgment of whom or what?

LA: I'm not sure I want to proceed with this. I was going to ask you, where is Satan in the email model?

Dr. Elam: The email universe is vast, good and bad. That's your clue from the model.

LA: So when I address my message to God, what does the devil get from it?

Dr. Elam: Not much if you're careful to use the right address.

LA: So Satan cannot hear prayers?

Dr. Elam: If one of his operatives is present with you in the virtual world and you speak a prayer in his hearing, I don't see what would prevent his spirit from turning it into an s-mail to Satan.

LA: That makes us awfully vulnerable. I was afraid of that.

Dr. Elam: Not really. Do you think that what you have to say would be important enough for Satan to be interested in it? If you do, then pray in your prayer closet, not on a street corner. ... Where have I heard that before?

LA: Nice. ... Does Satan have the ability to monitor what goes out over the network?

Dr. Elam: As you know, the Uninet is tightly controlled. Lew does not have the ability to monitor what comes in and goes out. Is Satan equal to God?

LA: No. He is a created being. But he's the ruler of this world.

Dr. Elam: Is he actually the owner?

LA: No. He's somewhat of a usurper. He's hijacked it for his own purposes—like Lew has taken over your game.

Dr. Elam: Lew has to interact in the game like anyone else. But he could and does exert his influence directly on the players.

LA: That would depend on him gaining access to their homes or wherever they're sitting as they play the game, wouldn't it?

Dr. Elam: I should think so. He would have to be invited in. Probably no one would turn Lew away. He's made a name for himself, and he's becoming wealthy, which many people find worshipful.

LA: We need to pray in the Spirit, and even then there is a danger of being influenced by the enemy. Isn't Lew disgusting?

Dr. Elam: Be careful! He is not your student.

LA: I'm sorry.

Dr. Elam: Lew is operating out of spite now. He knows he has lost the argument, but that has not kept him from attacking our players in various ways. If it were not for the helpers who are in close communication with my son, he would be shutting them down.

LA: Cyber warfare being now a model of the war in heaven ...

Dr. Elam: Also there could be a language difference.

LA: I would assume (referring to the model) that emails to God could be in one's own language.

Dr. Elam: Oh, yes. That sort of language difference would not be a problem. But in the virtual world you are seeing things within virtual time and from a virtual point of view. It's like another language compared to the real world. We have taken care of that in the simulator to make it practical for our players. But did you think English is the language of heaven?

LA: My spirit Helper takes care of translating that.

Dr. Elam: I Hope so. That's all I meant.

LA: So what about people who do not have the Holy Spirit's aid? Are they able to pray?

Dr. Elam: If they knew the address, they could send one directly

to God themselves. But the untranslated message would not be showing respect for the Almighty. I think you would like them to be converted and have a Helper on board before they do much praying anyway. I'm just making this application for you, of course; all I know is the design of the game.

LA: Everyone knows you designed the game, is that correct?

Dr. Elam: Yes.

LA: Do the players ever send you emails complaining about suspected bugs in the program?

Dr. Elam: At first, yes, there were several like that, but I forwarded them to my son to answer. Then when he left the game and got involved with the helpers full time, I had my email address changed because I was getting more than I could sort through each day. That cut down on the email traffic we had to deal with. Those that come to me through my son are the only ones I read now.

LA: Do you answer them all?

Dr. Elam: No, that would not be possible without violating the ground rules of the game. The players easily forget that this is a contest to prove a point. Those who are cognizant of this will not be trying to get me to violate the rules. For example, I can't just reach in and inflate a sagging soul; but they're asking me to do that all the time. I could do it if I didn't have to contend with Lew. He would consider it cheating, of course.

LA: So things have to be let go according to the workings-out of

the various programs in the system. Is that a fair statement?

Dr. Elam: Generally that is correct. There are times when there really is a bug such that a particular algorithm is not always working as designed. Those we can correct.

LA: Was the design of the game then made to exclude or discourage players from contacting the makers?

Dr. Elam: Not at all. But there is a procedure and there are guidelines. On the screen a player need only touch "Contact us" to get the information, and there is a form that can be filled out to expedite the processing on this end. The characters do not have access directly to that, of course, but they do have access to libraries and the internet (we used that venerable term in the game).

LA: I'm amazed. The characters can read, then?

Dr. Elam: (laughs) No, they do not literally read anything; the LBA is far from being able to do that. When a character "reads" a book or something from the internet, it will have the effect of modifying one or more parameters in the session that help determine the character's future behavior.

LA: Is the Bible available to them?

Dr. Elam: Yes, it is now, thanks to my son and his friends. It took a lot of time and effort to extract scriptures in a form that could be used in the virtual world.

LA: Was Lew concerned about that?

Dr. Elam: No. He saw no particular danger in it. He looks at

things much differently than you do. What seems of value to you appears to be worthless to him (and vice versa).

LA: Do his friends feel the same way?

Dr. Elam: Oh, yes. They all do.

LA: I know the game simulates the human mind only in a very cursory manner, but if your son's helpers put so much effort into making the Bible available, it must have a practical effect.

Dr. Elam: If a character is disposed to make use of it, those virtual scriptures are an effective counter to Lew's lies that come mixed in with the proverbs.

LA: So that makes up for the defective LifeSpec?

Dr. Elam: Right. It doesn't remove the toxic elements already polluting the waters of the soul, but if used properly it nullifies the incoming lies and informs the character about the Helper Gate and the Helper.

LA: I would imagine that awareness helps the character maintain pressure.

Dr. Elam: Instruction about becoming a servant is there too.

LA: That must make the character who reads that virtual bible more likely to become a winner and a servant.

Dr. Elam: It has become essential. At first the helpers had to work awfully hard at it. With the virtual scriptures now available, they're working through that, and things are much easier in some cases. In other cases it has the opposite effect.

LA: How so?

Dr. Elam: It's amazing how confused some of the poor things are about everything. They turn it upside down and become worse off. If they apply the virtual word properly, it corrects what comes through the wisdom gate; but if the words are misapplied, the errors are sometimes made worse.

LA: Do the virtual scriptures have any other practical uses?

Dr. Elam: Several. For one thing it keeps them occupied trying to understand the riddles and puzzles it contains. This keeps them from destructive activities such as fishing.

LA: You mentioned fishing before.

Dr. Elam: Yes, fishing for denizens of the deep. Everyone has them. Some are poisonous and some are deadly. But the sport is irresistible to most characters. Also the scriptures provide the background for the guidelines, which is much more efficient than the guidelines themselves.

LA: Tell me more about this fishing. You said earlier that the sea represents the lower nature.

Dr. Elam: Right. What would you expect to find in the sea?

LA: I think you said whatever comes in through the LBA—through the senses—goes there. Why would that have to be the lower nature?

Dr. Elam: Don't get the idea that your lower nature is something you can do without. It is the foundation of your soul.

LA: Then it is not evil.

Dr. Elam: You probably don't want to say that.

LA: All right. I'm getting the picture. Um-hm. ... No fishing, huh?

Dr. Elam: I think this is the opposite of what a psychiatrist would tell you. I was merely trying to look at it from your point of view.

LA: Then I'm supposed to know what this means, obviously.

Dr. Elam: Isn't there a song about it?

LA: No fishing? ... Now that you mention it, I believe there is. It's about our sins that God buries in the sea. "No fishin'," the song says—leave them buried in the sea where God has put them. If God has forgotten my sins, why should I fish them out and go over them again?

Dr. Elam: I don't know. To make yourself miserable, I guess.

LA: I never thought of that sea as being somewhere in my own soul.

Dr. Elam: Where did you think it was?

LA: The sea! The ocean—I don't know.

Dr. Elam: You do know that it's a metaphor.

LA: Yes. I just never thought much about it before.

Dr. Elam: Apparently whoever wrote that song thought the sea was a metaphor for the mind of the believer. How else could someone go fishing for past sins?

LA: I think it's a metaphor for something more abstract. The sea of forgetfulness, I think.

Dr. Elam: Is it a sea only God can make use of?

LA: Well, no. I think he expects me to make use of it too.

Dr. Elam: You might consider what happens when you fish out a shameful thing that you have pulled up innumerable times, and every time it causes you to feel pain all over again. Do you think your Holy Ghost is mystified about why you feel the way you do on those occasions?

LA: I see what you mean. The sea is in me. It would have to be. Then how could God bury a sin so completely that I totally forget it?

Dr. Elam: No one said you would forget it totally. Only God forgets it—until you dredge it up and remind him of it.

LA: Oh, that's awful!

Dr. Elam: No fishin'.

LA: Thank you. I never thought it through quite like that before. I think it will help.

Dr. Elam: Lynn, I must be firm with you. You and your kind do not appreciate the treasure you possess. The vast majority of humanity has no way to be forgiven. They have nothing to erase the guilt when they have harmed someone, so they spend their days on earth getting by as best they can and trying to forget by indulging in busyness or pleasure or debauchery. It simply does not

work when you try to bury it yourself. It is a miracle that only God can perform.

LA: ...

Dr. Elam: I'm sorry. I'm no theologian, but I believe that particular aspect of your faith is worth more than all the world. I don't know why everyone can't see it.

LA: Please don't be sorry. I needed to hear that.

Dr. Elam: There is another problem with this fishing business. The sea in your soul, your lower nature, is a repository of all kinds of things. As we said before, you can't live without it. Now I'm not a psychologist, and so I'm not qualified to make recommendations other than to try to clarify what you already know.

LA: I have a hunch what you're getting at.

Dr. Elam: What would you call it? Introspection?

LA: No. That would be too broad, wouldn't it? Maybe "indulging the lower nature."

Dr. Elam: There you go.

LA: Thinking about what concerns only the lower nature.

Dr. Elam: Go on.

LA: This is terrible. Secret sins?

Dr. Elam: You have this nice division in your soul, the surface of the sea dividing the higher nature from the lower.

LA: I think you're going to say that whatever function the lower nature performs it does so without needing help from my consciousness. What if I need to remember something that I saw yesterday—nothing evil or harmful, just something that passed by my senses quickly. I know it's in there somewhere.

Dr. Elam: That's no problem at all. Anything worthwhile is accessible through the higher nature too. Our model does not have the "unconscious" mind being contained exclusively in the lower nature. ... But do you spend your time immersed in your lower nature?

LA: I would hope not.

Dr. Elam: Some people do.

LA: I thought we already covered the different options that people choose or favor for one reason or another, namely the corners of the triangle.

Dr. Elam: That is one aspect. But there is also the vertical dimension not shown on your diagram.

LA: How could someone who is oriented toward their spirit be concerned about their lower nature?

Dr. Elam: Let's rephrase that: "How could a spiritual consciousness be immersed in the lower nature."

LA: That does suggest a possibility.

Dr. Elam: Something I would call "taste" is involved here. Do you know what I mean?

LA: Absolutely! Some people have a taste for music that I can't stand. To me it sounds devilish. But Christians flock to these concerts ...

Dr. Elam: Don't even mention it. What about yourself?

LA: About my tastes?

Dr. Elam: The lower nature has a lot to offer. You mentioned "secret sins" a moment ago.

LA: ... You want me to put that together with "taste," don't you?

Dr. Elam: You probably don't have any difficulty avoiding that which is unsavory.

LA: What are we talking about here? Sins are to be confessed and left for God to deal with.

Dr. Elam: You may have no taste for sinning. But do you replay things in your mind that are—shall we say—a bit shabby?

LA: It's hard not to.

Dr. Elam: Things that would be out of your lower nature?

LA: I don't spend all my time seeking a pure and holy mind.

Dr. Elam: That would be a waste of time, I'm sure.

LA: Then what are you trying to point out?

Dr. Elam: Taste.

LA: Taste? Taste for the holy would be a good thing. I guess ...

Dr. Elam: What would you say to those people who enjoy devilish music when they say it's a matter of taste?

LA: They need to develop a taste for something better—or a distaste for that raucous stuff. But I would never say it.

Dr. Elam: Why?

LA: It would do no good.

Dr. Elam: But you must believe that one can change one's tastes, or you would not have contemplated telling them that.

LA: Well, yes. It's not too hard to cultivate a taste for something. I see. That's the key, isn't it?

Dr. Elam: Almost.

LA: What else?

Dr. Elam: Like anything else you achieve, you have to want to do it.

LA: Emotions, in other words. You're making it seem so practical.

Dr. Elam: You have the benefit of some experience. You know how to marshal your emotions.

LA: Taking thought. Thinking aright and being convinced of it. If something is worthy you can get excited about it.

Dr. Elam: *You* can, but not everyone can. This is the second treasure you possess. If I may refer to our model, your spirit's Helper has more than a little to do with your wanting something for no reason other than that it is worthy.

LA: Thank you for the reminder.

Dr. Elam: Now about your tastes.

LA: I must confess I had sort-of given up on the battle to stop re-playing episodes, good and bad, that I know are a waste of time. It's in bad taste, isn't it?

Dr. Elam: For you, worry is in bad taste, I believe. You have better things to occupy your mind, and I know you hold the better things in high regard.

LA: Not many seem to know the difference, judging by what I hear in the hallways at my church.

Dr. Elam: I can tell you that if they were characters in my game, their helpers would make sure they started paying attention. Getting someone sanctified in under six hours is a big job.

LA: Is there anything I can do about it?

Dr. Elam: Why ask me? ... What are good tastes based on? I mean, is there any standard, in your view?

LA: I guess it's a matter of one's personality and temperament, ultimately—modified by the Holy Spirit, of course.

Dr. Elam: Make up your mind. Which is it?

LA: ... When I read certain scriptures I definitely taste something that is good, but it comes from outside myself, I think. Is that what you mean by a standard?

Dr. Elam: Give me an example.

LA: Psalms. Psalm 103 for example.

Dr. Elam: There's your prescription. If it works for you, tell it to others. ... Does it work for you?

LA: The standard is there; I'm sure of that. In the New Testament too, of course. What a lofty standard the Sermon on the Mount sets for us.

Dr. Elam: "Do not lay up for yourself treasure on earth." Where your treasure is, there will the center of your spiritual life be also.

LA: How is human nature so perverse that we can say we love the Sermon on the Mount but live as though it didn't exist?

Dr. Elam: Blessed are those whose center of their spiritual life is pure, for they shall see God.

LA: Maybe I'm too extreme, but things bother me that seem to have no unpleasant effect on others. For example, I received an email this morning forwarded by a Christian acquaintance, a collection of cartoons on the subject of getting old. They struck me as being very funny, but they were not what I would call "in good taste" at all. One of them keeps popping up in my mind. It is very funny, but it is disgusting too. I wish I had never looked at those cartoons.

Dr. Elam: Unless we are committed to psychology we can easily identify pollution in the lower nature. There was a time when noxious intake was limited to what came into one's ears directly from another person—denunciations of providence, lewd humor, and the like. Now such things pour in through the entertain-

ment media at such a rate that everyone's lower nature is polluted. There are those who must avoid indulging in any introspection on that account; they have to keep their minds busy or benumbed all the time lest the toxins unsettle their minds: as long as your attention is taken up with activity, you can avoid exposure to the poison lurking within your soul. The alternative is to become acclimated to it, accepting some degree of insanity and not minding the bad taste.

LA: That's a stark picture.

Dr. Elam: What is your experience?

LA: I agree. ... I'm wondering about myself and others who are Bible believers. When I compare the taste I get reading the Scriptures to the taste I get ruminating on worldly things—I guess you would say toxic things lurking in my lower nature—the difference is like day and night.

Dr. Elam: Tastes can be sensitive or dull.

LA: I'm not sure it's a blessing to have sensitive taste. It makes life more difficult.

Dr. Elam: Difficulty is what you need; it's how you have gotten to where you are.

LA: How do you know that about me?

Dr. Elam: It applies to everyone.

LA: Of course. I know that. ...

Dr. Elam: You may know people who think it is no sin to indulge

their lower nature; they have a taste for it which makes matters of the higher nature seem bland in comparison.

LA: That does seem to fit. But surely we are not breaking any commandment by remembering events from the past or making plans for the future.

Dr. Elam: That would be your judgment. Someone said, "Take no thought for the morrow."

LA: But that isn't quite the same as breaking a commandment.

Dr. Elam: Only the first one.

LA: This is extreme. How serious is it, in your opinion?

Dr. Elam: You are the Bible student.

LA: Yes, I know what Christ said, but I also know where we live. I'm sorry I said that about my sensitive taste. I'll have to trust that it is a good thing. But it definitely cuts me off from fellowship with other believers.

Dr. Elam: How is that?

LA: What it amounts to is a lot of disagreement in this area.

Dr. Elam: Prophets are never popular.

LA: I'm not claiming to be a prophet.

Dr. Elam: You can be a prophet and still be unsure of your calling, if I remember right.

LA: I really have no claim to be any better just because my taste is

more sensitive. I hate to think of how many hours of the Lord's time I have wasted replaying thoughts that had no value.

Dr. Elam: Why do you say "wasted?"

LA: The time could have been spent in prayer, for example.

Dr. Elam: Do you have that much to say to God?

LA: Oh. ...

Dr. Elam: Then do you listen?

LA: Not as well as some do, I'm sure.

Dr. Elam: Why is that?

LA: ... I'm not sure. Maybe I'm not patient enough.

Dr. Elam: There is a remedy for everything—for you, that is. Just a corollary—part of your second treasure.

LA: Prayer makes one ready to receive.

Dr. Elam: So you knew it all along.

LA: I don't think so. Somehow you bring it out of me. Can the model be of any use here? My approach falls short of what truly devout people achieve. How is it done in the virtual world?

Dr. Elam: We already discussed one thing: the matter of the proper address. I'm sure you know about the guidelines in the Scriptures.

LA: All right then. Down to the basics: learning God's ways and praying accordingly. But how can your game be a model for that if

you are so restricted by Lew. God isn't restricted by the devil!

Dr. Elam: So you say. How is it that you say the devil rules the world? Doesn't that mean God is letting him have his way?

LA: But letting Satan have his way for a time isn't the same as being restricted by the devil.

Dr. Elam: How can God and Satan both be rulers? I know you would say they rule in different ways and through different people. However, surely you would say that God could dismiss Satan if he chose to. But since he has been allowed to carry on, at least within certain bounds, I think we must admit that God and Satan are respecting some agreement between them.

LA: This certainly challenges popular ideas about prayer. We have been operating under the notion that a petition by many is more effective than only a few voices.

Dr. Elam: Lew cannot ignore it when a great volume of petitions come in about a particular thing. To him it only means unhappy customers.

LA: Does that mean you can sometimes go against the ground rules that Lew would otherwise be enforcing?

Dr. Elam: Precisely.

LA: I see. Suppose one character in the game gets into a lot of Bible and succeeds in getting out regular emails properly addressed to you about a particular thing. Does that open up such possibilities?

Dr. Elam: We sort them according to importance. Remember, our aim is to make all of my son's friends winners. So naturally they get priority. Also we are quite interested in winners who are servants. They get the highest priority.

LA: So it sounds like the important thing is what type of character is sending the emails, not how many are sent.

Dr. Elam: That's absolutely correct.

LA: That goes against the notion that God has no favorites.

Dr. Elam: No kidding.

LA: I mean, if I were to say to someone that God respects one prayer of person A while ignoring a hundred prayers of person B, I would be taken for a kook if not a heretic.

Dr. Elam: Who is that "someone?"

LA: Just the average person.

Dr. Elam: In other words, someone who does not know his Bible.

LA: I know you're right. It's one of those things that the Bible says and everyone ignores. It's interesting that we come to the same conclusion when—as a parallel, I mean—when we look at the corresponding thing in the model.

Dr. Elam: It is rather uncanny. Now before we get away from this, I need to tell you that you are failing to recognize your third treasure. Half the people on earth would give anything to have what you have, yet you seem to be unaware of what it's worth. You, Lynn Andrew, are one of those whom God listens to—according to

your beliefs. You qualify as one of his children, yet you treat it as a common thing to be heard by the Creator at your merest whim. To even have made that comment about God having no favorites indicates that you do not understand the incredible value of your privilege.

LA: ... This is a lot for me to digest all at once.

Dr. Elam: That's up to you.

LA: ... What happens to my spirit after death?

Dr. Elam: Are you referring to the game now?

LA: Yes. In the game.

Dr. Elam: When you quit the game, you're still you. Get up from the computer desk and stretch.

LA: A person could pray—email God—after death?

Dr. Elam: I don't know. It's what our model seems to indicate.

LA: So after my death, all that is left is my spirit. Then what?

Dr. Elam: If you want to stay with the model ...

LA: My Helper would still be with me, right?

Dr. Elam: Her assignment is over, and her presence is no longer necessary because the game session is closed. I think she would probably leave.

LA: But what comes next?

Dr. Elam: It depends ... whatever you do in life.

LA: Oh. ... In the model I'm done with virtual reality, and the rest is regular life. But I doubt that the afterlife is anything like that.

Dr. Elam: How do you think it would be?

LA: Heaven or hell, basically.

Dr. Elam: And this earth can't serve as a model?

LA: Perhaps in a sense. But there's nothing literally like heaven on this earth.

Dr. Elam: It leads there, possibly?

LA: Okay. So the model indicates that after death there is another existence somehow comparable to our earthly experience. Is that what I'm supposed to believe? Not heaven but an intermediate place—purgatory?

Dr. Elam: Let's see what we can make of it. Remember, at best the model is only giving us clues.

LA: I think we're stretching it too far. When I die I'm expecting to meet Jesus.

Dr. Elam: Is that inconsistent with anything? I understand he is quite familiar with this world. Your Helper has imparted spiritual wisdom to you if you have paid any attention at all. Maybe the process has been completed, even. I'm sure you will have the recommendation you need, and you will be welcomed along with the saints.

LA: All right. Fine. That's really all that matters to me. Then let the model end there.

Dr. Elam: After the game is over, I will be hosting a banquet in honor of my son for all the folks who played the game with good will toward him yet did not live to be called immortals.

LA: That's a very liberal definition of salvation. Will it be held here at the university?

Dr. Elam: Yes. The festivities begin here. I can't tell you when it will be exactly, but preliminary arrangements have been made.

LA: Since no one knows exactly when the game will end ...

Dr. Elam: Correct. Invitations will go out as soon as the world's time limit is reached. Everyone knows the end is near, so preliminary travel arrangements can be made.

LA: Do you really expect people to come long distances to celebrate losing a game?

Dr. Elam: Well, no. But I've reserved a place for them. No one can say it wasn't a serious invitation.

LA: How do you know ahead of time how many there will be if you do not expect many responses?

Dr. Elam: We have a way of knowing.

LA: But you can't force them all to attend!

Dr. Elam: No. ... None will come. They have other priorities. We will give their places to those who were removed at the game time limit. In fact all who had my son's helpers will come, for they are the ones who feel connected.

LA: I see. That's where you get your head count.

Dr. Elam: Yes, because none of them will have done it on their own. My son determines the winners. That is how we know how many there will be. But the invitation goes out to others initially, and if they come they will be counted as having won.

LA: How generous of you! But you're sure they won't come?

Dr. Elam: They won't come. It would be humiliating, you see.

LA: It seems unfair. I'm sure some would come if they knew.

Dr. Elam: It took a little planning, but it was the only way we could make the arrangements for the banquet and not have too few or too many places prepared. At the same time no worthy player can say he wasn't invited.

LA: If it's a genuine invitation, I think some would come.

Dr. Elam: If they would come to honor my son now, they would have been interested enough to seek his graces while in the game.

LA: But there—in the game—it was the character, not the player. You've told me that the player doesn't always have a lot to say about what the character does. So how can you put this on the player?

Dr. Elam: This is about a game; it's only a simulation of real life. Seldom do things go exactly as you wish in a game, unless you're a real master. No one questions whether a game is fair and just or not because the rules can be quite arbitrary. The players know and expect that.

LA: Now you're sounding like "the game" is not just the name you call your philosophical simulation program. Now you're telling me it's in fact very much like a game, being unfair and unjust by design like any other game.

Dr. Elam: And life isn't?

LA: All right. But the question is about how serious all of this is. If we are taking the banquet to be part of the model, then I believe it parallels an invitation Jesus told us about, and what he said was serious—of course!

Dr. Elam: I didn't mean the game isn't serious. It depends on the objective of each player. I only meant that by its nature the players cannot expect to win simply because they try hard to win. There are elements beyond anyone's control. Games are generally that way, aren't they?

LA: Of course you're right.

Dr. Elam: I'll give you an example. Relationships formed in the virtual world sometimes carry over to the real world—whenever people remember that it is only a game and there is a real world waiting for them when the game is over.

LA: So there would be friends in heaven as a result of meeting them on earth. That's hardly a revelation.

Dr. Elam: But there is no end to how specific it might be. The implication is that the more heavenly minded you are, the more you will be concerned about arranging heaven to your liking.

LA: That is a more radical idea.

Dr. Elam: Basically it is the same thing with more emphasis, is it not? Players sometimes become acquainted with each other indirectly through their characters in the game—particularly those with souls who are spiritual and well integrated with their players. It doesn't have to be deliberate on the part of the characters, but typically it occurs among those who take seriously the injunction in their scripture: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

LA: Jesus mentioned to his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. That I can accept—even that it applies to all his followers. But whether anyone else can do anything like that is very doubtful in my book—so far at least.

Dr. Elam: Let's say in your virtual world you discover a place you would prefer over any other, and you take up your residence there and meet others of a like mind. And as a result your players get together after the game. It happens.

LA: So in heaven I could be living in a neighborhood full of my favorite people.

Dr. Elam: Why not? "Lay up for yourself treasure in heaven."

LA: Okay. Maybe there is something to that. What about those who die with the wrong attitude about salvation—I mean who haven't made it through alive.

Dr. Elam: You mean those with a grudge against the creator of the game, I presume, like in our proverb. ... All right, let's think: what happens in this world when someone loses a game?

LA: Some forget it after awhile. Some complain about it forever. ... So this unfortunate person gets up from the computer console and remembers that it was only a game—like a bad dream. That's according to the model. What it's supposed to mean is he is a spirit in a spirit world that resembles this world. And he is not particularly happy. I see what you mean about the banquet not being appealing to one such as that.

Dr. Elam: That's good. You're getting the hang of it.

LA: Obviously he's not going to think he is in heaven.

Dr. Elam: But he knows he has died—that is he has failed to achieve immortality. And what did he leave behind? He has no more reward, for the memory of him soon fades. His love and his hate and his envy have already perished, and forever he has no more share in all that is done under the virtual sun. I'm not a psychologist, but I can say with confidence that the first person he meets will hear about it.

LA: If it is like this world, chances are he wouldn't get a lot of sympathy.

Dr. Elam: There is a possibility that others were concerned enough about him to have sent someone to lead him in the right direction.

LA: Arrangements made by a veteran player—someone who knew him before the game or met him in the game?

Dr. Elam: Or in answer to prayer by friends back in the virtual world—maybe?

LA: Prayers after his death? So you think not only could he pray himself into salvation but people he left behind could pray for his salvation after his death?

Dr. Elam: I thought you might object to that. The model does seem to have quirks in it.

LA: Being approached by would-be rescuers after death sounds awfully much like what went on in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.

Dr. Elam: Precisely. But most of them rejected the good advice and chose that dreary place of the dead rather than the glorious country, as I recall.

LA: And the others, the one or two who were persuaded to go on to glory?

Dr. Elam: What would you think? If they had no such advantage as in Lewis' fantasy they would be on their own crossing the divide to the glorious country. But I like Lewis' idea that they would meet some enlightened guide who knew the way to the mountain of the Lord.

LA: This is just a lot of speculation, of course. I submit to you that the model really doesn't have much substance to go on here.

Dr. Elam: I think it's remarkable enough that it seems to be more or less compatible with your theology in that area. At least it tends to confirm the suspicion many have that the afterlife is more complex than your conservative images typically allow.

LA: It hasn't answered for an analogy to hell. I grant you that the world has become hellish in a lot of places, but nothing like the

Lake of Fire.

Dr. Elam: That's in the future, isn't it?

LA: Well, yes.

Dr. Elam: What of today?

LA: Hades, Sheol—the place of the dead.

Dr. Elam: So the forlorn game-loser that no one cares about goes out into this chaotic world. It seems there is no hope for him since there was only one chance to play. Soon he forgets that he ever played the game. Is that dead enough?

LA: That works, somewhat. But I would expect the winners to find themselves in a much better place. It sounds now like we need two separate earths. I understand that different outlooks can make life on earth either heaven or hell in a figurative sense. But I'll never take that as a suitable analogy.

Dr. Elam: If you want two earths, you can have two separate earths—separated by time though it's the same earth really. There are different dispensations according to your theology.

LA: But not immediately, so our winner would live for some time in a world that is nothing like heaven and then die. No, his winning the game is not a big deal—how could you expect it to be?

Dr. Elam: There is the banquet. You aren't in a position to appreciate what I have in store for the winners.

LA: All right. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. I'll accept that the model has no serious shortcomings in that area. Maybe it will

answer a question sometime. But look; here's something that's probably beyond its limits: how did we all suddenly get to an age where we can sit down at a computer and participate in the virtual world? I mean, of course, in terms of a model of our spirits' realm, which I assume is heaven: it dictates that the spirit of a baby is not newly minted when the baby is born.

Dr. Elam: The analogy does not match time like that. Your entire lifetime in the virtual world can take place in one sitting at the computer in the real world. You go from infancy to ripe old age in just a few hours at the computer.

LA: That's interesting. I didn't make that distinction. So the spirit, relative to the virtual lifetime, would not age much. But that doesn't answer my question. There is no definitive mention in the scriptures about pre-existence. That seems to conflict with having these adult players representing spirits. They all have histories starting from their infancy before they enter the game, and they will probably live long after the game is over. Are you asking me to believe that my spirit was once an infant long before I was born, and someday it will die?

Dr. Elam: One false assumption you have there is that your spirit was *you* before your body was you. In our game the prospective players wait in a queue, and the next newborn (we don't attempt to simulate anything preceding birth) in the virtual world gets paired with the player at the head of the line—at least normally that's the way it works. So there is no pre-existence because the unique person begins when the spirit and soul are united.

LA: I see. That works. But the prior life of these spirits is some-

thing foreign to Scripture.

Dr. Elam: Aren't you glad of that? Think of the speculation and wild stories it would spawn. But the origin of the human spirit as an entity distinct from the brain must have a story behind it. So why not let the model stand for that too?

LA: I suppose it would be possible. If twelve legions of angels and probably a lot more are in the story, why not other spirits? But spirits without bodies are hard to imagine; I've been taught that much.

Dr. Elam: That's why you need the model. According to the model, these spirits are at another level of being, definitely with bodies. What name should properly be attached to them I'm not sure. I don't suppose you would want to mix them up with guardian angels.

LA: No, that has been tried and found wanting.

Dr. Elam: One thing about our player/spirits that you might consider is that they are not immortal until they win at the game.

LA: But that's only a make-believe thing. In the model they are ordinary people and will die someday like everyone else. The fact that they get to be called immortals doesn't really affect their mortality.

Dr. Elam: I don't think death in this world is a necessity—according to your beliefs.

LA: You must be referring to the Rapture. But that applies only to these end times.

Dr. Elam: How long did you think my game has been around?

LA: How long did it take you to come up with this model?—not the game; I mean using it as the model we have been discussing?

Dr. Elam: I started when you got here, and I'm still working on it. Or I should say *we* are working on it. I couldn't have done it without you.

LA: All right, that's clever. But seriously, the model has it that there are spiritual beings with finite lifetimes. Doesn't that violate a principle? You were telling me that information is timeless because it weighs nothing. Are you telling me that spirits have weight? If spirits can be overweight, I think your model has just sunk.

Dr. Elam: (laughs) I think I know what you mean—no mass, no time. Well, let's take the information that constitutes a book. Under the right circumstances it can be immortal. But the paper or whatever medium serves as its host had a beginning and will have an end. The same is true of the information that constitutes human bodies, and I would guess the same is true for those spirit folks.

LA: Okay. I'm not prepared to argue what ultimately happens to them.

Dr. Elam: You're not? Remember that one of them is you!

LA: Well, yes. I mean the others that have no earthly host.

Dr. Elam: How do you know there are any others?

LA: Well, I guess I don't. That would make it nice and neat—but risky. Oh, never mind. ... Another question, and I'm almost afraid to ask it: if a spirit grows from infancy, that implies there was a time before it existed.

Dr. Elam: I agree; we would have to say that.

LA: Are you going to allow the model to stretch that far?

Dr. Elam: I'm willing to try. If it breaks, it breaks.

LA: This implies that spirits mate and have children. That's definitely unorthodox in my creed.

Dr. Elam: How do you explain the origin of these spirits?

LA: It's simply beyond what we know.

Dr. Elam: Then ...

LA: Yes, I know what you're going to say: how do I know it's wrong if I don't know anything about it?

Dr. Elam: Children often disbelieve sex when they first hear about it. It is odd, really. And it's utterly amazing how the principle is implemented throughout the living world. If I believed there were a God, I would say it appears that he likes the arrangement very much.

LA: I guess the principle of the blending of two spirits to make a third is not totally abhorrent. But it seems more orthodox, somehow, to allow that they are all direct, individual creations.

Dr. Elam: Only I would submit that it seems God has not been do-

ing things that way. He seems to be using layers and layers of leverage—an astounding masterpiece at the highest level, if you ask me.

LA: Something else to think about perhaps—no, I'm not going to think about that. Tell me this: When there is a birth in the virtual world, the newborn needs a spirit. Who decides which spirit gets assigned to it?

Dr. Elam: I thought we mentioned that already. At present there are more people wanting to play our game than there are characters for them to join with. The next baby simply gets the next player in line.

LA: Regardless of where it is?

Dr. Elam: Regardless of where it is. They don't get to decide where they will be born.

LA: So if I were a player living in the USA, I might find myself in Haiti, born into poverty?

Dr. Elam: As a matter of fact Lew has extended the game to cover most of the Americas, including Haiti. But you would have to stay within your own country. Each has its own waiting list. And you would match your gender, of course.

LA: Infant mortality must be extremely disappointing. In the case like that does the player get another chance?

Dr. Elam: You get only one chance—because there are so many waiting.

LA: Are infants who die then unsaved?

Dr. Elam: The game wasn't designed in enough detail to be modeling every theological issue. It was for the purpose of settling a philosophical dispute. But let's see what we have. There would not have been a failure in that young character's behavior caused by a low wisdom inflow—that is soul-wisdom—because there is no wisdom processing in youngsters. What they get is through spirit-wisdom alone and from being influenced by others. As you know, everyone's experience in the game is limited by a time setting. That clock starts running at the onset of adulthood. So it would not be true that a youngster who dies before that happens would have died while the clock was still running; neither would there be a wisdom failure—provided the spirit's wisdom, alone or with a Helper, is strong. So technically, going by the rules, those dying as infants have not yet failed to reach immortality. That's about all I can get out of it.

LA: Interesting. Did you just make that up?

Dr. Elam: I made everything up. Here's one for you: do you see any significance in the fact that there is no correlation initially between the genetic makeup of the player and the LifeSpec of the virtual person since they arrive at the point of pairing by entirely different means?—excepting the case where my son was incarnated.

LA: Yes! That would explain something I have wondered about. How is it that moral character traits seem to have no correlation to that of the parents? According to the model we would expect it to be random.

Dr. Elam: Not random in a true sense, for there are deterministic factors. Maybe the model falls short here too. My personal philosophy is that the seeming lack of correlation could have an underlying purpose—excuse my slip: I should have said my favorite personal philosophy, for there are others to choose from.

LA: Neither would there be any correlation in physical appearance, obviously.

Dr. Elam: True. An overweight player might be attached to a lightweight character. A good-looking player might spirit a disabled character.

LA: That as implications! We always assumed our physical appearance would carry over to heaven.

Dr. Elam: Certainly the model indicates otherwise unless by rare coincidence. The LBA is capable of modeling imperfect bodies and minds, and it does so according to the simplified genetic rules it follows. As you can imagine, the player's experience is profoundly influenced by that.

LA: Are all of the players of sound mind and body?

Dr. Elam: It depends on what you mean by sound mind. No, I do know what you mean. There are no severely handicapped players.

LA: Taking this to its logical conclusion, it would be a mistake to judge the quality of a person's ultimate eternal being by physical and mental conditions here in this life.

Dr. Elam: And moral too, perhaps. In my opinion, the best experience a player can have is to become the spirit of an extremely dis-

advantaged character in the game.

LA: You know ... I was going to say the implications we have wrung out of your game have taken us far afield, but the game itself is pretty wild.

Dr. Elam: Yet the program was designed to mimic observable things, and it would not have gotten to be so wild if Lew had not tried to subvert the natural working out of things. Of course for most players it simulates ordinary life and mundane existence pretty well.

LA: That's just it. Why do people spend so much time with reality games like this in real life offers the same sort of thing with more realism?

Dr. Elam: I was thinking about that too. Can you think of a reason?

LA: Obviously it fills some need that is not met in real life. A need for adventure, perhaps. But real life has that too.

Dr. Elam: It's curious, isn't it? The experience is not nearly as real as real life, whatever that means—you know what I mean. It can be rather cursory even while the player's imagination is called on to fill in the gaps. Yet in its effect it is more real than real—it has a lasting effect, which is why you have to be an adult to play. People line up to play even though few have a very positive experience, and for most they come out worse off.

LA: It has to be the search for a better life.

Dr. Elam: Yes?

LA: An application? ... Spirits looking for a better life through incarnation? I don't know anything about that.

Dr. Elam: Oh, I'm sure you do.

LA: I was going to avoid the subject because so few come out with immortality. It seems too risky. Why would any of them want to take such a chance?

Dr. Elam: What would be their alternative?

LA: Just living and dying as people do on earth, according to the model. Though a few find salvation. ... Oh, I see. That's what we're modeling, isn't it?

Dr. Elam: Strictly speaking, the model would not prevent there being another chance in their own native world. But I like better the idea we already mentioned: that these spirits were created and propagated for this purpose alone, and they all play the game. Of course that's only conjecture.

LA: It seems an unfortunate doom if they have never been guilty of sin.

Dr. Elam: How do we know they haven't? You believe the war in heaven began before there was a Garden in Eden, I think. Spirits inheriting sin from sinful parents would either be seeking salvation by proving they could live in obedience in the new simulated world or promoting universal sin in order to support the devil and prove that perfect obedience is impossible. Thus your good and evil amongst mankind.

LA: Of course. ... But look: I'll not be able to take much more of

this. My head is spinning.

Dr. Elam: There's something I really like about your theology, Lynn. In my book it wins hands down, and it is what I would adopt if I needed to adopt something. What I like is your Jewish Millennium—much more attractive than the various counterfeits in other religions and cults. You all get to come back with Christ and clean up this old earth and participate in a decent government. I would love to be there.

LA: Lew is the devil, right?

Dr. Elam: Yes, yes, I know. He gets his deserts and isn't around to mess things up during most of that thousand years. But I would love to see the King on his throne and justice being done. And peace!

LA: You could be there, you know.

Dr. Elam: I plan to—through my son, that is. We have decided to continue the game and simulate the Millennium!

LA: Then all of your unsettled immortals will have a place to go!

Dr. Elam: Precisely. But you know what is making it essential?

LA: No. Why is it essential?

Dr. Elam: The babies. The infant mortalities especially. Those players who were cheated out of a game because their characters died young. They were all saved, you know. But they need to grow up!

LA: What about the government?—setting that right.

Dr. Elam: My son is quite keen about that too, but the real pull was the players who were winners technically only because their characters died before their personal time of responsibility began. Mind you, not being in that position, I'm more interested in the just and honest government of the Millennium.

LA: What about the Tribulation period? As I'm sure you know the Scriptures have much in them that we believe applies to that frightful seven years.

Dr. Elam: Lew has a team working on that; it is to be his game.

LA: Can you tell me a little about it? Will he be using the same simulation program with different parameters?

Dr. Elam: No. He wanted to be free of any legal restraint so his team started from scratch—so they say. I know he is using the same LBA code, but since he hates the Helper Gate in our model I'm sure he has modified other parts of our code extensively. It's the sort of game that appeals to animal instincts. As I'm sure you are aware, there are plenty of examples of that type of computer game where the players plunge into the worst kind of evil. But never has it been done on a scale such as this. Lew is using the same multiple-player game framework that we used, and he expects there to be millions participating in the wars.

LA: Can't you stop him by proving that he is using software that is not his?

Dr. Elam: We could. But we have a better plan. My son knows some things about the code he is "borrowing" that Lew is ignorant of, and he has a plan to intervene before Israel is destroyed.

LA: Israel? Is this a geopolitical game?

Dr. Elam: Yes and no, as I am so fond of saying. It will be advertised as such, but the geopolitics are stripped bare. The final destruction of Israel is the end of it.

LA: So what has been a delicate standoff for so long is going to collapse suddenly? That would make a short end of Israel. How did he manage to make a game for millions of players out of it?

Dr. Elam: Very simply. This genre of computer game thrives on close-range, personal combat. The more blood and gore the more those players like it. There are already billions of people playing such games. Lew is tapping into that market, so his game uses the same type of primitive warfare.

LA: It makes me shudder. I wonder if he is referring to the book of Revelation as a model.

Dr. Elam: I doubt that he cares about that. His world is virtually disconnected from yours.

LA: One would think his regard for the wisdom literature would have piqued his interest.

Dr. Elam: I think his interest in that went only as far as it was useful to the development of the game. He is not stupid; he is merely a fool and seems to like being one.

LA: We need not talk about applying this to the present hour. It will be a great relief when it is over. Let the Rapture be within a week, and I'll be happy.

Dr. Elam: If you will permit me to digress from metaphor making—this is one thing I don't understand about your kind. You seem to have no qualms about leaving the rest in the lurch.

LA: Everyone has a chance to go.

Dr. Elam: Do they?

LA: The Gospel has gone out by Radio, TV, books, signs, personal witnessing—every means available until recently. But few are willing to listen because ...

Dr. Elam: Were any means left unused?

LA: We're not perfect, certainly. We try to get the word out as best we can; but only God can change a person's heart.

Dr. Elam: I don't know. I'm just a philosopher, not a theologian. But I understand other means were used with great effect long ago when Israel was in dire straits. Fasting, sackcloth and ashes. Similar techniques are used today too—by your enemies.

LA: I wanted to avoid getting into this. I know you're right. The church in this nation grew soft, passionless, and incredibly lazy. How much greater effect we might have had no one knows. Half the nation might have been saved.

Dr. Elam: All Nineveh repented.

LA: The whole nation might have been saved. Now it is being judged severely for its moral decline, which might not have taken place if the church had carried out its commission.

Dr. Elam: Are you sure about that?

LA: That the nation is being judged?

Dr. Elam: Yes. About who is being judged.

LA: The nation.

Dr. Elam: Including the church?

LA: Well, yes. Christians have been guilty of the same things.

Dr. Elam: Again, I'm no theologian, but I would expect God to judge those who had the greater responsibility.

LA: But the Rapture proves

Dr. Elam: They're incompatible, aren't they?

LA: Yes. It's very, very scary. Would you mind if I put a transcript of this on my web site?

Dr. Elam: Go ahead, but use different names. And delete what I'm going to say next.

LA: Thank you.

Dr. Elam:

LA: What will you do if he wins?

Dr. Elam:

LA: How can you be so certain?

Dr. Elam:

LA: I'm very glad to hear you say that.

Dr. Elam:

LA: Yes, I'll turn it off and not record any more.