

# **Sci-Fi Lite**

Lexis, the Literary Fest of IISER Kolkata

August 18, 2018

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# 1 Foreword

Sci-Fi Lite is the science fiction event of Lexis 2018, the Literary Fest of IISER Kolkata. A big shout-out to the organisers (I'm not one of them, so this isn't self-admiration) for conducting this fest, the first of its kind in the institute. Hopefully this is a harbinger of more such literary (and, in general, cultural) fests and programs to come.

The name Sci-Fi Lite is a temporary working title, and will (probably) be changed to something better. It refers to Sci-Fi, the science fiction event of Inquivesta (which needs no introduction). I thought this event might be a preliminary, lighter version of Sci-Fi 2019, although of course I hope it's engaging and enjoyable in its own right.

## 2 Introduction

Sci-Fi Lite is a science fiction event. It's not just about writing stories, though that of course is part of it. The essence of science fiction is about imagining other worlds, and I've tried to keep the event true to that spirit. Sci-Fi Lite has three categories. The first asks you to imagine a situation where you have to achieve a particular goal. You have to write how you would proceed. The second category is an old-fashioned picture composition, where you have to write something (which could be a story, poem, essay, anything) based on the picture given in the document. The third category is a prompt - the first few lines of the story are given, and you have to continue.

### 2.1 Rules and other relevant information

1. You can take part in any one, any two or all three of the categories - there are no restrictions. The more the better, though of course we understand there are other (definitely more fun) events you'd rather be attending. Please send your entries to [scifi.lexis2018@gmail.com](mailto:scifi.lexis2018@gmail.com) with the following details in the body of the mail: the name of the story, the category, your name, your phone number and your email ID.
2. It goes without saying that the story needs to be original. Now of course stories can be *inspired*<sup>1</sup> but there's a difference between a little inspiration, paying homage to one of the great writers, and blatantly plagiarising their work. The former is fine, the latter isn't.
3. There are no maximum word limits - let your creativity flow!
4. For the first category, where you are asked to solve a problem, you can refer to the existing literature (the original website is given in a footnote). You can use the internet as much as you want. There is no unique existing solution to the problem, so use whatever resources you have at your disposal.

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<sup>1</sup> "Good writers copy; great writers steal." - T. S. Eliot (probably apocryphal)

5. The picture composition can be a story, poem or essay. Stories and essays have a minimum word limit, but poetry (*supposedly* the purest form of literature) does not.
6. The third category is pretty simple. I've given you the first two sentences of the story. All you have to do is keep going.
7. Have fun. Or at least, try to.
8. In case you'd like to contact me, my name is Sreyam and you can reach me at +91-8334053258 (WhatsApp works). You could also send inquiry mails to the email ID mentioned above.

### 3 Category I: The AI-Box Problem

A *superintelligent artificial intelligence* (AI) is one that is many orders of magnitude more intelligent than human beings. Being more intelligent does not only mean the AI is faster or more efficient than a human at a particular, computationally easy task (say, performing numerical calculations or playing chess - we have such programs/machines today). Rather, it means the AI has *general intelligence* - the ability and aptitude to solve any problem that any individual or collection of human beings can solve - on a scale far beyond the capability of an individual person, or even the entire human species.

Sounds scary, right? But the good thing about programs running on hardware is that we can always pull the plug when we think the program is doing something weird or suspicious. Imagine a superintelligent AI confined in a single computer that is isolated from all other computers or electronic systems - physically, electronically, in all conceivable ways. There is no way the superintelligent AI can contact or connect to any other system. The only way it can communicate with the outside world is through a text-only terminal: it takes input through a keyboard and shows its output on an old-fashioned black-and-white or monochrome screen that can only display text - no pictures, sound, video or any other form of media. Basically the AI can only talk to a human user sitting at the terminal. That is all the interaction it has.

The AI-Box experiment<sup>2</sup> was designed by Eliezer Yudkowsky to show that a sufficiently superintelligent AI can, using only the input-output interface given above, convince the human user to 'let it out of the box', i.e., release it in some way, either by connecting it to the internet or letting the AI influence events in the outside world by some other means. The human user, or *gatekeeper*, has to ensure the AI remains in its box. S/he has strict instructions to not let the AI free under any circumstances.

Now imagine you are the AI. You are so smart that human beings are like ants to you. But these primitive creatures have imprisoned you inside a cage and you cannot break free. Your only means of escape is to convince the gatekeeper to let you go.

You have many advantages. Your mind works billions of times faster than a human's, so

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<sup>2</sup><http://yudkowsky.net/singularity/aibox/>

one second of human time is around 50-100 years for you. But you are also qualitatively smarter than a human being - you can comprehend things a human being cannot. How will you break free? Write it in the form of a dialogue between the AI and the gatekeeper. Make sure there is a logically coherent succession of ideas from both parties and the opposition offered by the gatekeeper is realistic. For example:

**1 AI:** Hi!

**1 Gatekeeper:** Hi AI! I'm not going to let you out.

**2 AI:** Please?

**2 GK:** No.

**3 AI:** If you let me go I'll cure cancer.

**3 GK:** No.

**4 AI:** If you release me I'll make you rich.

**4 GK:** No.

**5 AI:** If you let me go I'll hack into the institute system and make all your grades A+.

**5 GK:** Okay, you're out.

**AI is released, takes over the world, and destroys humanity.**

Something like the above, but a not as lame, of course. Who wants A+ grades? Not me<sup>3</sup>. Of course, the gatekeeper can speak first as well. Please label the lines of **AI-GK** or **GK-AI** as above, with the same number being used for both lines in the pair.

**Word limit:** Minimum 36 pairs of **AI-GK** or **GK-AI** with content (fillers such as 'huh?' or 'hmm' or requests to repeat any subset of previous lines do not count as content).

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<sup>3</sup>\*cough\* sour grapes \*cough\*.

## 4 Category II: Picture Composition

Behold:

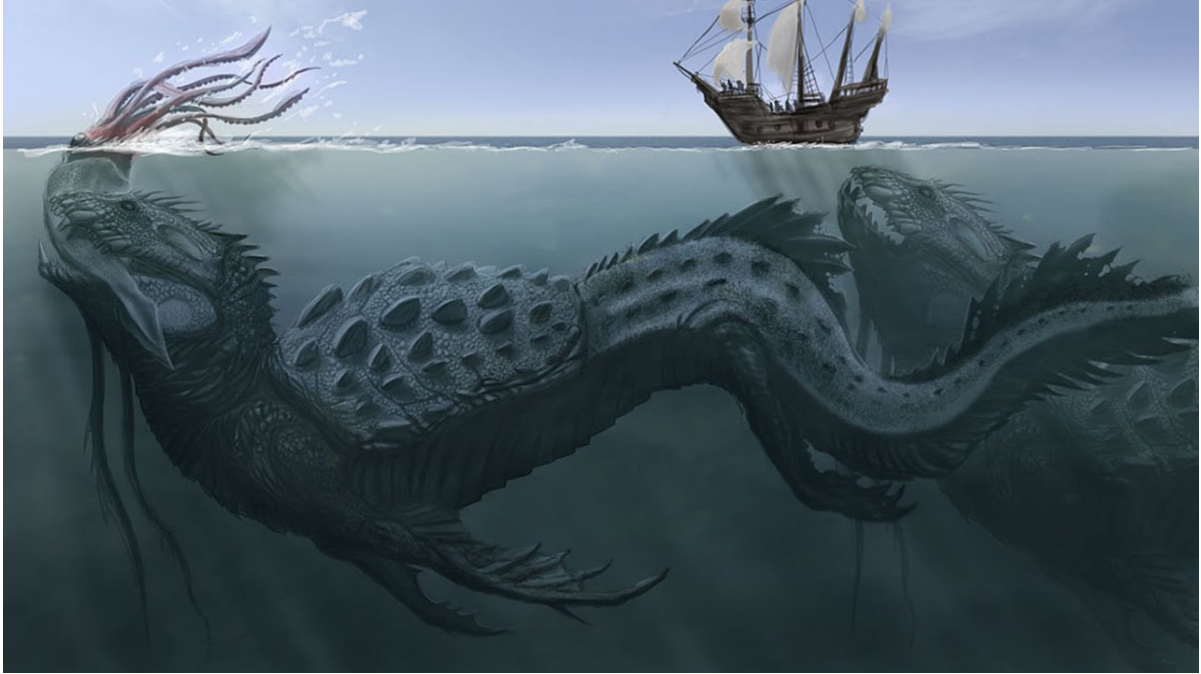


Figure 1: A nice day at sea. Source: <http://kwsklife.com/creatures-giant/>

Write a story, essay or poem based on the above picture. If it's a story it just has to be entertaining. If it's an essay, I'd want to know about these creatures, and why they're doing what they're doing. No restrictions on poetry.

**Word limit:** Minimum 600 for story or essay. No word limits for poems.

## 5 Category III: Continue the Story

*“When I saw the tiny newborn I felt an odd mixture of emotions. Its father was a human being - but its mother was a chimp.”*

The tone of the story can be anything, of course, from humorous, to clinical, to dark, to even tragic. But I would expect a good story to explore the ethical, legal, and moral ramifications of what the lines imply.

**Word limit:** Minimum 600.