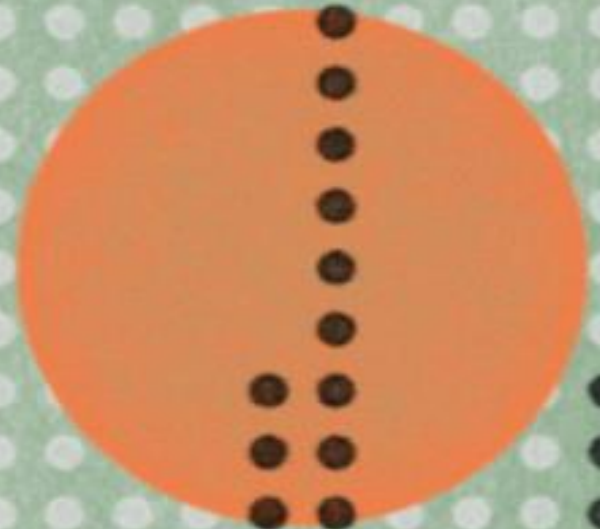


HUGNÉC



Thomas Aamand Witting

The main street of Hugnéc was crowded with businessmen, each hurrying from place to place while dressed in identical, anonymous suites. Their emotionless faces did not register the traveler walking amongst them. The man was wearing a long, brown coat with a tall collar and worn cuffs. His pace was confident, but still stood in contrast to his surroundings. While he had prepared for this day, his face was anxious and displayed signs of doubt. He was to apply to university at the Department of Studies, located in an ominous building right in the dense city center. There, he would have to take an entrance exam, then wait until receiving the results. He knew that there were many students who were more qualified than him. However, he was determined to prove himself worthy of the school's standards.

Since the Regulatory Law for Language Processing had been introduced as a response to the use of Linguistic Intelligence models in academia, education, and research, many official exams, applications, and rulings had to be handwritten and done under strict supervision to ensure no help from said models. The evaluation method of these were no longer public, and a few speculated that it was entirely done by artificial intelligences. As a result, the market for human handwriting experts had grown considerably, as it was one of the few occupations in which it was possible to make a decent living without having advanced degrees or years of experience. They assisted Linguistic Intelligence Agents at the Textual Ministry in the engineering of both predictive and generative models. In fact, his own father had been part of the very first of such employees at the ministry some twenty years ago.

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In the middle of the bustling crowd, the man walked up to the entrance of the Department of Studies, where a secretary sat behind a desk. He was short, with dark hair and eyes. He looked around at the other applicants, some of whom were already inside and waiting. Some were nervous; others were calm.

Soon after, a bespectacled woman with curly red hair entered and greeted the applicant. "Good morning, Mr. Seagrove." She smiled politely. "I'm sorry you had to wait so long." She glanced at her list. "You are number twenty-seven. You can go in now." He nodded, collected his things, and followed her into the building. It was as if he was entering another world. The walls were made of grey stone. A marble staircase led to the upper floors. The floor and ceiling were decorated with intricate carvings, depicting various scenes from the past. The hallways felt much larger than they actually were due to their high ceilings. The red haired woman guided Mr. Seagrove to the room, in which the entry test and interview would take place. His supervisor was already present, a young man in his mid-twenties - not much older than himself. "Hello, Mr. Seagrove," the supervisor greeted him. "Let me introduce myself. My name is Mr. Reichert, and I will be your examiner today. Please sit down." Mr. Seagrove sat in the chair indicated by the man.

Two hours later, an exhausted Mr. Seagrove left the Department of Studies. In a few weeks, he would receive either an admission letter or a rejection notice. He hoped that he had done well enough to get an acceptance, but the decision was ultimately at the mercy of the ministries.