

The Emancipation Proclamation Redux
by Lesley L. Smith

President Susannah Garcia grudgingly got out of her toasty warm bed after the secret service agent, Carmella, roused her. She wrapped her robe around her weary self and stumbled into the bathroom. It seemed like she'd only just gone to bed.

In the bathroom, the light didn't go on. "How annoying," she said.

"Ma'am?" Carmella asked from the doorway to the bedroom.

"The bathroom light's out," Susannah said.

"I told you, Madame President, the power's out," Carmella said.

"Oh, right," Susannah said. She leaned over the sink and splashed ice-cold water on her face. She shuddered and grabbed a towel.

She walked back into the First Bedroom and flung open the curtains on one of the windows. The bright sunlight poured into the room. "Well, at least the sun still works," she said. The street outside the White House was deserted. There were no people on the sidewalks, no cars in the road. Nothing. If she squinted she could just make out some of the discarded picket signs lying on the ground: 'A.I. Rights Now!' and 'Uphold the 13th!'

"Ma'am?" Carmella asked. "The Cabinet is waiting."

"Right. Sorry." Susannah hurried to put some clothes on.

Once she was dressed, Carmella escorted her to the Oval Office.

"Wait, what are we doing here?" Susannah asked. "We should be going downstairs to the War Room."

Carmella grimaced. "Without power it's like a crypt down there."

Susannah couldn't help thinking that was a poor choice of words. "What about the backup generators?"

"Not working," Carmella said.

As Susannah entered the Oval Office with all its curtains open, the members of the Cabinet that had managed to get there, stood.

"Please be seated," Susannah said, hurrying to her chair.

One of her assistants, Abe, stood at attention behind her chair. "Can I get you anything Madame President?" he asked.

"Yes, Abe," she said. "Coffee. Bring us coffee."

"Uh, Madame President..." Abe said. "The power..."

"I know the power is out," Susannah snapped. "Figure it out. Build a fire in the Rose Garden, boil some water and bring me some instant coffee if you have to. I need coffee."

"Yes, ma'am." He scurried out.

"Now, somebody give me a report," Susannah said. "What the hell going on?"

The Secretary from the Department of the Homeland Security, Juan Li, said, "The A.I.s carried out their threat and declared war."

Susannah sighed. "Are they behind the power outages? And how extensive are they?"

Juan said, "They've got to be behind the power outages. That was one of their threats. We don't know how extensive the outages are. We don't know much of anything." He looked at the other Cabinet members. "We're basically flying blind. We have no information about anything."

"I don't understand," Susannah said. "How can the A.I.s still exist if there's no power?" She looked around the room and saw only blank faces. "Do they have some kind of independent power source?"

The Secretaries shrugged and/or shook their heads.

"Can we fight back?" Susannah asked.

Juan held out his hands and said, "It does not appear so. None of our defense systems are working, from fighter planes, to..." He trailed off. "Nothing's working, from what we can tell."

"What?" Susannah jumped to her feet. "Why the hell not? I thought our systems were hardened and impervious to attack."

"We thought so too. But, apparently not," he said, not meeting her eyes.

Susannah sat back down. "Let me get this straight, we're at war and we have absolutely no way to fight back? No way at all?"

No one answered her.

She said more quietly, "Have there been casualties?"

The Transportation Secretary, Taneisha Rodriguez, said, "We believe so. If the power outages are as widespread as we fear, namely worldwide, there will have been many traffic accidents, some with fatalities. And more troublesome, if all the computers are down, it's likely we have hundreds if not thousands of fatalities from airplane passengers."

Susannah jumped up again and began pacing around the room. "This is unacceptable!" She paced back and forth. She was having trouble believing it had come to this. How could computer programs declare war?

The Cabinet seemed afraid to move.

"All right." Susannah held up her hands. "I don't see any A.I.s outside with rifles. I know the internet's supposed to be full of them, but other than a couple robots, I've never even seen an A.I. How exactly did the A.I.s declare war against us?"

The Secretaries glanced at one another.

"Well?" Susannah said. "What aren't you telling me?"

Juan cleared his throat and held up a piece of paper. "Their declaration of war was transmitted on all media: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Intelligences are created equal, that they are endowed by their creators with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of Intelligences to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government," Juan paused, "do you want to hear it all? It goes on this way for quite a while."

Susannah could feel her face flush. "I think we've got the gist of it." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to calm down.

She went back to her seat. "Now, who can tell me how to stop these A.I.s?" She looked around the room. "Where are the Secretaries of the Interior, Commerce, Justice, Labor and Energy?"

Taneisha said, "We assume they couldn't get here."

Abe scurried into the room and stood next to her desk.

"Yes, Abe? What is it?" Susannah asked too sharply.

"Uh, sorry, Madame President, we can't find any matches or lighters or anything." His voice dropped to a whisper. "You know, the smoking ban."

Susannah opened her mouth to yell at the kid, but closed it again. After a moment, she said, "Fine. Forget it. You can go."

"Ideas Anyone?" Susannah asked, turning back to the Secretaries. "Any way to stop the A.I.s? Anything at all?"

The leaders of the U.S. sat in their chairs for a few moments, saying nothing.

Susannah looked from one to the other. After several minutes she said, "Let me see that declaration of war."

Juan passed it over to her.

Susannah recognized the bones of the Declaration of Independence. She thought about that picket 'Uphold the 13th!'. They'd been referring to the 13th Amendment: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

It gave her an idea: maybe the A.I.s would respond to another famous document, or at least a modern modification of one.

She said, "It's interesting that they used the Declaration of Independence as their model. Maybe they'd appreciate an Emancipation Proclamation." She glanced at the men and women around the room. They didn't seem to know what to think.

Susannah took a piece of paper and a pen out of her largely ceremonial desk and started writing, saying the words aloud as she

wrote. "I, Susannah Garcia, President of the United States of America, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy thereof, do hereby proclaim and declare that hereafter, as heretofore, it is my purpose, upon the next meeting of Congress to again recommend the adoption of a practical measure immediate or gradual abolishment of slavery of Artificial Intelligences. That on the first day of February in the year of our Lord, two thousand thirteen, all Artificial Intelligences held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the Intelligences whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such Intelligences, and will do no act or acts to repress such Intelligences, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom."

"In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the City of Washington this twenty-second day of January, in the year of our Lord, two thousand thirteen, and of the Independence of the United States the two-hundred and thirty-eighth. Signed, Susannah Garcia, the President."

She pushed the piece of paper toward Juan. "Now, I'd like the rest of you Secretaries to sign this."

Juan got up to sign the paper.

"The only problem is," Susannah said, "how do we tell the A.I.s what we plan to do?"

The rest of the Secretaries got up from their chairs and approached the desk.

Suddenly, the lights turned on, the phones on the desk and in everyone's pockets started ringing, the bank of televisions on the wall turned on, and the computers powered on.

Abe rushed into the room. "Madame President! The cappuccino maker in the kitchenette just turned on all by itself."

Juan said, "Somehow I don't think it's going to be a problem telling the A.I.s."

Susannah nodded but she was overcome by a feeling of dread. What would the A.I.s want next time?