

Simulated Regret

Timothy Thomas

(SOPHIA and DR. JENKINS are colleagues who have built a very complex simulator that they can enter and exit, making small tweaks. SOPHIA sets up all required props and poses AVA for the beginning of all simulated scenes)

DR. JENKINS

It would seem that karma has been redefined.

SOPHIA

I just nudged it in my favor.

DR. JENKINS

That's a pretty drastic change.

SOPHIA

We have a snapshot. It will be fine.

DR. JENKINS

I need to use the simulator to test out outcomes for radiation poisoning from the blast. I can go forward and perhaps come up with a way to help.

SOPHIA

I want to go back and try and figure out why she did it. It's just a slight modification to KARMA for 40% more positive outcomes in my favor. Perhaps if things had gone my way... This is me at five years old. First day of school.

DR. JENKINS

It's an elaborate virtual reality simulation of the real world, but it's not real Sophia.

SOPHIA

This time I'll get it right.

DR. JENKINS

No matter how convincing; it is simply a simulation.

SOPHIA

Let me at her.

DR. JENKINS

Put on the goggles to enter the simulation. To exit simply lift them off.

SOPHIA

Got it.

DR. JENKINS

(beat) Put on the goggles to-

SOPHIA

(putting on goggles)

Oh you mean now.

(DR. JENKINS can watch and comment, but the sims cannot hear or interact with her) immediately from out of nowhere AVA slaps SOPHIA on the head.)

SOPHIA

Owww.. owww...

AVA

Aw stuff it you whiny bitch.

SOPHIA

Why'd you hit me?

AVA

You stole my pencil.

SOPHIA

I didn't steal your pencil. It's my pencil.

AVA

How come it has my name on it?

SOPHIA

Miss! Miss! AVA hit me!

(thwack. another hit from AVA on the head)

SOPHIA (cont.)

Ow! Stop it.

AVA

Give me back my pencil!

SOPHIA

Oh you want your pencil back?

AVA

Yeah.

SOPHIA

(taunting)
You want it back?

AVA

Yes. I do. I want to finish my spelling test.

(SOPHIA stabs AVA with the pencil pinning her hand to the desk)

AVA (cont.)

That really hurts.

SOPHIA

Aww.. are you going to cry little baby?

AVA

No. I'm not. Not today. Never again. But one day, mark my words, the universe will get even with you. And I will be standing there on that day. When the sun is blotted out for you and you and everyone you love watches your skin melt off of your bones.

SOPHIA

Not gonna happen.

AVA

It is. That's karma.

DR. JENKINS

No. KARMA is a business patent owned by Intercorp. It distills over 400,000 distinct simulated variables into a single easy to manipulate continuum.

SOPHIA

It looks like a slider bar.

AVA

I don't have a clue what you're nattering on about.

SOPHIA

I slid that slider to the left. I won't pay for stabbing you in the hand. I'll profit! I changed the cosmic rules bitch.

AVA

Flesh melting off your bones.

SOPHIA

(lifting goggles)

Whatever

DR. JENKINS

That was *the* Ava?

SOPHIA

Yeah. It started in fucking kindergarten.

DR. JENKINS

I thought you were going to make things right.

SOPHIA

Hell no. That bitch had it coming. She needed a good stabbing.

DR. JENKINS

Then what was the point?

SOPHIA

Her pencil. Get it?

(DR. JENKINS shakes her head)

SOPHIA (cont.)

I figure with the slight modification to karma I can get revenge, skip the unpleasant consequences, and enjoy my life.

DR. JENKINS

Your simulated life. Your husband called again.

SOPHIA

Ex-husband.

DR. JENKINS

Ex-husband. He'd like help planning Carol's funeral.

SOPHIA

Yeah, yeah. I'll get on that. But I can't stop now. I haven't seen how this turns out. The funeral's weeks away.

DR. JENKINS

It was weeks away weeks ago. You've been testing simulations for weeks.

SOPHIA

I have time.

DR. JENKINS

The funeral is tomorrow.

SOPHIA

(looks at the time on her handheld sim controller)

I've still got time.

DR. JENKINS

I want to test some possible theories about slowing radiation poisoning. Can I borrow it?

(DR. JENKINS tries to grab the handheld computer, SOPHIA wrestles it back)

SOPHIA

No you'll reset my simulation.

DR. JENKINS

Of course. If I don't all your changes will completely fuck up the future models. You haven't made tiny "butterfly flapping its wings sized" changes.

SOPHIA

I've made huge stampeding rhino sized changes.

DR. JENKINS

Yes you have. You're not observing you're interacting and we're left with random events.

SOPHIA

Seems pretty realistic to the lady whose daughter was killed by a stampeding rhino.

DR. JENKINS

That wasn't the simulation. That was real life. You've completely cocked up the simulator by making Karma favor the petty and venal.

SOPHIA

I did not. If anything I made it more realistic. It's going to work.

DR. JENKINS

What does that even mean? To have it work?

SOPHIA

Figuring out why she did it. Figuring out how to stop her. Just let me check in a few years later and then you can have the simulator.

DR. JENKINS

But it's already done.

(SOPHIA lifts up her goggles. A teenage AVA is leading the school in some sort of militaristic line dance)

AVA

Left, Right Left. And Turn. Two, Three, Four. Nail Sophia to the floor.

SOPHIA

What?

AVA

And right, and four. Gassing her will help us more.

(SOPHIA has been trying to keep up but she goes the wrong way in the line dance and slams into AVA)

AVA

Ewww... a SOPHIA. I suppose you're here to complain about the gassing?

SOPHIA

The gassing?

AVA

Look *(clap, and turn)*. If you want to win against Superior Point High it only stands to reason you've got to send a few SOPHIAs to the gas chamber.

SOPHIA

To die?

AVA

To die. It's an honor.

SOPHIA

You're just doing this because I stole your pencil.

AVA

What? In elementary school? I am so over that.

SOPHIA

You are not. You're still mad I stabbed you.

AVA

Look this may be hard to believe, but this isn't about you. It's a popular name. Every Sophia, Sophia, and Sophia in this school is named Sophia. We are lousy with Sophias and we need a blood sacrifice. (*clap, turn*). What can we do?

SOPHIA

You don't have to put me in a gas chamber.

AVA

Yes, but you are named Sophia. When I was elected I promised the school this win. I like to think I have some integrity. I know ultimately good intentions are never rewarded (*clap, clap*), but I think sometimes you need to do what's right. And if you set ritual sacrifice to a funky beat and dance to it - all the better.

(she turns, draws a long knife and starts to swing it at SOPHIA who removes her goggles just in time to escape the swipe of the blade. AVA looks confused and then fades away)

SOPHIA

We're closer.

Dr. JENKINS

You created dancing murderous cheerleaders. How is that close?

SOPHIA

Trust me. We are getting closer.

DR. JENKINS

Your ex-husband called.

SOPHIA

I'll go to the damn funeral.

DR. JENKINS

He was checking to see if you're ok. You missed the funeral.

SOPHIA

Fuck.

DR. JENKINS

Please, we have so many people dying. Let me run some tests.

SOPHIA

Almost. Just a little more.

DR. JENKINS

Give me those...

(DR. JENKINS and SOPHIA start wrestling. SOPHIA gets the goggles over her eyes and DR. JENKINS drops away. AVA is surrounded by a chemistry set and various vacuum tubes and circuit boards)

AVA

Almost there.

(she tilts a beaker and... nothing happens)

AVA

Shit. *(looking at SOPHIA)* What are you doing here?

SOPHIA

Nothing.

AVA

Did my mom let you in?

SOPHIA

Yeah.

AVA

Mom! I'm working.

SOPHIA

Look Ava. I don't think you should run for office.

AVA

I'm not running for office.

SOPHIA

Sure. But in the future. In the future if you run for office it'll be horrible for Sophia's everywhere.

AVA

I don't see the down side.

(SOPHIA grabs AVA's shoulders and shakes her)

SOPHIA

Look I'm begging you. Just give me this one thing.

(SOPHIA's shaking jostles chemicals and we hear a hiss [probably generated by DR. JENKINS])

AVA

(laughing maniacally)

Who has time to kill only Sophias when you have fissable materials.

SOPHIA

Please.

AVA

You're right Sophia! I've been thinking too small, and thanks to your clumsiness I've got the material I need. I'll build a bomb. No! I'm going bigger! Soon the entire world will know of-

(A beeping has been getting louder during this scene. SOPHIA lifts her goggles. She takes a moment, then feels her pocket and pulls out her phone)

SOPHIA

Hello

VOICE OF DR. JENKINS

Hello, Sophia.

SOPHIA

I'm giving up, you can have-

VOICE OF DR. JENKINS

I'm not doing well. Fallout from the nuclear warhead Ava detonated has left me weaker each day. Many have died from the radiation and the mutations are horrible. I am currently growing a unicorn horn from the center of my head and I'm not sure if I'll die of starvation as some sort of immobilized human narwhal or die of radiation sickness first. Your daughter's funeral was lovely.

SOPHIA

Sorry.

DR. JENKINS

You're one of the last of a species on the brink of extinction. You're welcome to join us. But somehow I think it's unlikely you can disengage from the simulator. I hope you find the answers you're looking for. You're a mammoth now, slowly sinking in a tarpit of time.

(SOPHIA pulls the goggles over her eyes, and makes another tweak on her handheld computer. As she sits the other actors add random mutations to her body. Eventually she falls to the side dead. Lights out)