

THE IMITATION GAME—Rudy Rucker

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Rudy Rucker has worked as a mathematics professor, a software engineer, a computer science professor, an artist and a writer. He's published twenty-nine books, including a non-fiction book on the meaning of computers: *The Lifebox, the Seashell and the Soul*. He has been known to say everything is made of gnarl. He publishes an online SF zine called *Flurb*. He's currently writing a cyberpunkish trilogy of novels in which nanotechnology changes everything. He's currently finishing the second of the series, *Hylozoic*. The first in the series, *Postsingular*, appeared from Tor in Fall, 2007, and is also available for free download on the web. See Rudy's portal, rudyrucker.com, for more info.

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It was a rainy Sunday night, June 6, 1954. Alan Turing was walking down the liquidly lamp-lit street to the Manchester train station, wearing a long raincoat with a furled umbrella concealed beneath. His Greek paramour Zeno was due on the 9pm coach, having taken a ferry from Calais. And, no, the name had no philosophical import, it was simply the boy's name. If all went well, Zeno and Alan would be spending the night together in the sepulchral Manchester Midland travelers' hotel—Alan's own home nearby was watched. He'd booked the hotel room under a pseudonym.

Barring any intrusions from the morals squad, Alan and Zeno would set off bright and early tomorrow for a lovely week of tramping across the hills of the Lake Country, free as rabbits, sleeping in serendipitous inns. Alan sent up a fervent prayer, if not to God, then to the deterministic universe's initial boundary condition.

“Let it be so.”

Surely the cosmos bore no distinct animus towards homosexuals, and the world might yet grant some peace to the tormented, fretful gnat labeled Alan Turing. But it was by no means a given that the assignation with Zeno would click. Last spring, the suspicious authorities had deported Alan's Norwegian flame Kjell straight back to Bergen before Alan even saw him.

It was as if Alan's persecutors supposed him likely to be teaching his men top-secret code-breaking algorithms, rather than sensually savoring his rare hours of private joy. Although, yes, Alan did relish playing the tutor, and it was in fact conceivable that he might feel the urge to discuss those topics upon which he'd worked during the war years. After all, it was no one but he, Alan Turing, who'd been the brains of the British cryptography team at Bletchley Park, cracking the Nazi Enigma code and shortening the War by several years—little thanks that he'd ever gotten for that.

The churning of a human mind is unpredictable, as is the anatomy of the human heart. Alan's work on universal machines and computational morphogenesis had convinced him that the world is both deterministic *and* overflowing with endless surprise. His proof of the unsolvability of the Halting Problem had established, at least to Alan's satisfaction, that there could never be any shortcuts for predicting the figures of Nature's stately dance.

Few but Alan had as yet grasped the new order. The prating philo-sophers still supposed, for instance, that there must be some element of randomness at play in order that each human face be slightly different. Far from it. The differences were simply the computation-amplified results of disparities among the embryos and their wombs—with these disparities stemming in turn from the cosmic computation's orderly exfoliation of the universe's initial conditions.

Of late Alan had been testing his ideas with experiments involving the massed cellular computations by which a living organism transforms egg to embryo to adult. Input acorn; output oak. He'd already published his results involving the dappling of a brindle cow, but his latest experiments were so close to magic that he was holding them secret, wanting to refine the work in the alchemical privacy of his starkly under-furnished home. Should all go well, a Nobel prize might grace the burgeoning field of computational morpho-genesis. This time Alan didn't want a droning gas-bag like Alonzo Church to steal his thunder—as had happened with the Hilbert *Entscheidungsproblem*.

Alan glanced at his watch. Only three minutes till the coach arrived. His heart was pounding. Soon he'd be committing lewd and lascivious acts (luscious phrase) with a man in England. To avoid a stint in jail, he'd sworn to abjure this practice—but he'd found wiggle room for his conscience. Given that Zeno was a visiting Greek national, he wasn't, strictly speaking, a 'man in England', assuming that 'in' was construed to mean 'who is a member citizen of'. Chop the logic and let the tree of the Knowledge of

Good and Evil fall, soundless in the moldering woods.

It had been nearly a year since Alan had enjoyed manly love—last summer on the island of Corfu with none other than Zeno, who'd taken Alan for a memorable row in his dory. Alan had just been coming off his court-ordered estrogen treatments, and thanks to the lingering effects of the libido-reducing hormones, the sex had been less intense than one might wish. This coming week would be different. Alan felt randy as a hat rack; his whole being was on the surface of his skin.

Approaching the train station, he glanced back over his shoulder—reluctantly playing the socially assigned role of furtive perv—and sure enough, a weedy whey-faced fellow was mooching along half a block behind, a man with a little round mouth like a lamprey eel's. Officer Harold Jenkins. Devil take the beastly prig!

Alan twitched his eyes forward again, pretending not to have seen the detective. What with the growing trans-Atlantic hysteria over homosexuals and atomic secrets, the security minders grew ever more officious. In these darkening times, Alan sometimes mused that the United States had been colonized by the lowest dregs of British society: sexually obsessed zealots, degenerate criminals, and murderous slave masters.

On the elevated tracks, Zeno's train was pulling in. What to do? Surely Detective Jenkins didn't realize that Alan was meeting this particular train. Alan's incoming mail was vetted by the censors—he estimated that by now Her Majesty was employing the equivalent of two point seven workers full time to torment that disgraced boffin, Professor A.M. Turing. But—score one for Prof Turing—his written communications with Zeno had been encrypted via a sheaf of one-time pads he'd left in Corfu with his golden-eyed Greek god, bringing a matching sheaf home. Alan had made the pads from clipped-out sections of identical newspapers; he'd also built Zeno a cardboard cipher wheel to simplify the look-ups.

No, no, in all likelihood, Jenkins was in this louche district on a routine patrol, although now, having spotted Turing, he would of course dog his steps. The arches beneath the elevated tracks were the precise spot where, two years ago, Alan had connected with a sweet-faced boy whose dishonesty had led to Alan's conviction for acts of gross indecency. Alan's arrest had been to some extent his own doing; he'd been foolish enough to call the police when one of the boy's friends burglarized his house. "Silly ass," Alan's big brother had said. Remembering the phrase made Alan wince and snicker. A silly ass in a dunce's cap, with donkey ears. A suffering human being nonetheless.

The train screeched to a stop, puffing out steam. The doors of the carriages slammed open. Alan would have loved to sashay up there like Snow White on the palace steps. But how to shed Jenkins?

Not to worry; he'd prepared a plan. He darted into the men's public lavatory, inwardly chuckling at the vile, voyeuristic thrill that disk-mouthed Jenkins must feel to see his quarry going to earth. The echoing stony chamber was redolent with the rich scent of putrefying urine, the airborne biochemical signature of an immortal colony of microorganisms indigenous to the standing waters of the train station pissoir. It put Alan in mind of his latest Petri-dish experiments at home. He'd learned to grow stripes, spots and spirals in the flat mediums, and then he'd moved into the third dimension. He'd grown tentacles, hairs, and, just yesterday, a conglomeration of tis-sue very like a human ear.

Like a thieves' treasure cave, the wonderful bathroom ran straight through to the other side of the elevated track—with an exit on the far side. Striding through the room's length, Alan drew out his umbrella, folded his mackintosh into a small bundle tucked beneath one arm, and hiked up the over-long pants of his dark suit to display the prominent red tartan spats that he'd worn, the spats a joking gift from a Cambridge friend. Exiting the jakes on the other side of the tracks, Alan opened his high-domed umbrella and pulled it low over his head. With the spats and dark suit replacing the beige mac and ground-dragging cuffs, he looked quite the different man from before.

Not risking a backward glance, he clattered up the stairs to the platform. And there was Zeno, his handsome, bearded face alight. Zeno was tall for a Greek, with much the same build as Alan's. As planned, Alan paused briefly by Zeno as if asking a question, privily passing him a little map and a key to their room at the Midland Hotel. And then Alan was off down the street, singing in the rain, leading the way.

Alan didn't notice Detective Jenkins following him in an un-marked car. Once Jenkins had determined where Alan and Zeno were bound, he put in a call to the security office at MI5. The matter was out of his hands now.

The sex was even more enjoyable than Alan had hoped. He and Zeno slept till mid-morning, Zeno's leg heavy across his, the two of them spooned together in one of the room's twin beds. Alan awoke to a knocking on the door, followed by a rattling of keys.

He sprang across the carpet and leaned against the door. "We're still asleep," he said, striving for an authoritative tone.

"The dining room's about to close," whined a woman's voice. "Might I bring the gentlemen their breakfast in the room?"

"Indeed," said Alan through the door. "A British breakfast for two. We have a train to catch rather soon." Earlier this week, he'd had his housekeeper send his bag ahead to Cumbria in the Lake District.

"Very good, sir. Full breakfast for two."

"Wash," said Zeno, sticking his head out of the bathroom. At the sound of the maid, he'd darted right in there and started the tub. He looked happy. "Hot water."

Alan joined Zeno in the bath for a minute, and the dear boy brought him right off. But then Alan grew anxious about the return of the maid. He donned his clothes and rucked up the second bed so it would look slept in. Now Zeno emerged from his bath, utterly lovely in his nudity. Anxious Alan shooed him into his clothes. Fin-ally the maid appeared with the platters of food, really quite a nice-looking breakfast, with kippers, sausages, fried eggs, toast, honey, marmalade, cream and a lovely great pot of tea, steaming hot.

Seeing the maid face to face, Alan realized they knew each other; she was the cousin of his housekeeper. Although the bent little woman feigned not to recognize him, he could see in her eyes that she knew exactly what he and Zeno were doing here. And there was a sense that she knew something more. She gave him a particularly odd look when she poured out the two mugs of tea. Wanting to be shot of her, Alan handed her a coin and she withdrew.

"Milk tea," said Zeno, tipping half his mug back into the pot and topping it up with cream. He raised the mug as if in a toast, then slurped most of it down. Alan's tea was still too hot for his lips, so he simply waved his mug and smiled.

It seemed that even with the cream, Zeno's tea was very hot indeed. Setting his mug down with a clatter, he began fanning his hands at his mouth, theatrically gasping for breath. Alan took it for a joke, and let out one of his grating laughs. But this was no farce.

Zeno squeaked and clutched at his throat; beads of sweat covered

his face; foam coated his lips. He dropped to the floor in a heap, spasmed his limbs like a starfish, and beat a tattoo on the floor.

Hardly knowing what to think, Alan knelt over his inert friend, massaging his chest. The man had stopped breathing; he had no pulse. Alan made as if to press his mouth to Zeno's, hoping to resuscitate him. But then he smelled bitter almonds—the classic sign of cyanide poisoning.

Recoiling as abruptly as a piece of spring-loaded machinery, Alan ran into the bathroom and rinsed out his mouth. Her Majesty's spy-masters had gone mad; they'd meant to murder them both. In the Queen's eyes, Alan was an even greater risk than a rogue atomic scientist. Alan's cryptographic work on breaking the Enigma code was a secret—the very existence of his work was unknown to the public at large.

His only hope was to slip out of the country and take on a new life. But how? He thought distractedly of the ear-shaped form he'd grown in the Petri dish at home. Why not a new face?

Alan leaned over Zeno, rubbing his poor, dear chest. The man was very dead. Alan went and listened by the room's door. Were MI5 agents lurking without, showing their teeth like hideous omni-vorous ghouls? But he heard not a sound. The likeliest possibility was that some low-ranking operative had paid the maid to let him dose the tea—and had then gotten well out of the way. Perhaps Alan had a little time.

He imagined setting his internal computational system to double speed. Stepping lively, he exchanged clothes with Zeno—a bit tricky as the other man's body was so limp. Better than rigor mortis, at any rate.

Finding a pair of scissors in Zeno's travel kit, Alan trimmed off the pathetic, noble beard, sticking the whiskers to his own chin with smears of honey. A crude initial imitation, a first-order effect.

Alan packed Zeno's bag and made an effort to lift the corpse to his feet. Good lord but this was hard. Alan thought to tie a necktie to the suitcase, run the tie over his shoulder and knot it around Zeno's right arm. If Alan held the suitcase in his left hand, it made a useful counterweight.

It was a good thing that, having survived the estrogen treatments, Alan had begun training again. He was very nearly as fit as in his early thirties. Suitcase in place, right arm tightly wrapped around Zeno's midriff and grasping the man's belt, Alan waltzed his friend down the hotel's back stairs, emerging into a car park where, thank you Great Algorithmist, a

cabbie was having a smoke.

“My friend Turing is sick,” said Alan, mustering an imitation of a Greek accent. “I want take him home.”

“Blind pissed of a Monday morn,” cackled the cabbie, jumping to his own conclusions. “That’s the high life for fair. And red spats! What’s our toff ‘s address?”

With a supreme effort, Alan swung Zeno into the cab’s rear seat and sat next to him. Alan reached into the body’s coat and pretended to read off his home address. Nobody seemed to be tailing the cab. The spooks were lying low, lest blame for the murder fall upon them.

As soon as the cab drew up to Alan’s house, he overpaid the driver and dragged Zeno to his feet, waving off all offers of assistance. He didn’t want the cabbie to get a close look at the crude honey-sticky beard on his chin. And then he was in his house, which was blessedly empty, Monday being the housekeeper’s day off. Moving from window to window, Alan drew the curtains.

He dressed Zeno in Turing pajamas, laid him out in the professor-ial bed, and vigorously washed the corpse’s face, not forgetting to wash his own hands afterwards. Seeking out an apple from the kitchen, he took two bites, then dipped the rest of the apple into a solution of potassium cyanide that he happened to have about the place in a jam jar. He’d always loved the scene in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* when the Wicked Witch lowers an apple into a cauldron of poison. Dip the apple in the brew, let the sleeping death seep through!

Alan set the poison apple down beside Zeno. A Snow White suicide. Now to perfect the imitation game.

He labored all afternoon. He found a pair of cookie sheets in the kitchen—the housekeeper often did baking for him. He poured a quarter-inch of his specially treated gelatin solution onto each sheet—as it happened, the gelatin was from the bones of a pig. Man’s best friend. He set the oven on its lowest heat, and slid in the cookie sheets, leaving the oven door wide open so he could watch. Slowly the medium jelled. Alan’s customized jelly contained a sagacious mixture of activator and inhibitor compounds; it was tailored to promote just the right kind of embryological reaction-diffusion computation.

Carefully wielding a scalpel, Alan cut a tiny fleck of skin from the tip of

Zeno's cold nose. He set the fleck into the middle of the upper cookie sheet, and then looked in the mirror, preparing to repeat the process on himself. Oh blast, he still had honey and hair on his chin. Silly ass. Carefully he swabbed off the mess with toilet paper, flushing the evidence down the commode. And then he took the scalpel to his own nose.

After he set his fleck of tissue into place on the lower pan, his tiny cut *would* keep on bleeding, and he had to spend nearly half an hour staunching the flow, greatly worried that he might scatter drops of blood around. Mentally he was running double-strength error-checking routines to keep himself from mucking things up. It was so very hard to be tidy.

When his housekeeper arrived tomorrow morning, Alan's digs should look chaste, sarcophagal, Egyptian. The imitation Turing corpse would be a mournful *memento mori* of a solitary life gone wrong, and the puzzled poisoners would hesitate to intervene. The man who knew too much would be dead; that was primary *desi-deratum*. After a perfunctory inquest, the Turing replica would be cremated, bringing the persecution to a halt. And Alan's mother might forever believe that her son's death was an accident. For years she'd been chiding him over his messy fecklessness with the chemi-cals in his home lab.

Outside a car drove past very slowly. The brutes were wondering what was going on. Yet they hesitated to burst in, lest the neighbors learn of their perfidy. With shaking hands, Alan poured himself a glass of sherry. Steady, old man. See this through.

He pulled up a kitchen chair and sat down to stare through the open oven door. Like puffing pastry, the flecks of skin were rising up from the cookie sheets, with disks of cellular growth radiating out as the tissues grew. Slowly the noses hove into view, and then the lips, the eye holes, the forehead, the chins. As the afternoon light waned, Alan saw the faces age, Zeno in the top pan, Alan on the bottom. They began as innocent babes, became pert boys, spotty youths, and finally grown men.

Ah, the pathos of biology's irreversible computations, thought Alan, forcing a wry smile. But the orotund verbiage of academe did little to block the pain. Dear Zeno was dead. Alan's life as he'd known it was at an end. He wept.

It was dark outside now. Alan drew the pans from the oven, shud-dering at the enormity of what he'd wrought. The uncanny empty-eyed faces had an expectant air; they were like holiday pie crusts, waiting for steak and kidney, for mincemeat and plums.

Bristles had pushed out of the two flaccid chins, forming little beards. Time to slow down the computation. One didn't want the wrinkles of extreme old age. Alan doused the living faces with inhi-bitor solution, damping their cellular computations to a normal rate.

He carried the bearded Turing face into his bedroom and pressed it onto the corpse. The tissues took hold, sinking in a bit, which was good. Using his fingers, Alan smoothed the joins at the edges of the eyes and lips. As the living face absorbed cyanide from the dead man's tissues, its color began to fade. A few minutes later, the face was waxen and dead. The illusion was nearly complete.

Alan momentarily lost his composure and gagged; he ran to the toilet and vomited, though little came up. He'd neglected to eat any-thing today other than those two bites of apple. Finally his stomach-spasms stopped. In full error-correction mode, he remembered to wash his hands several times before wiping his face. And then he drank a quart of water from the tap.

He took his razor and shaved the still-bearded dead Turing face in his bed. The barbering went faster than when he'd shaved Zeno in the hotel. It was better to stand so that he saw the face upside down. Was barbering a good career? Surely he'd never work as a scientist again. Given any fresh input, the halted Turing persecution would resume.

Alan cleaned up once more and drifted back into the kitchen. Time to skulk out through the dark garden with Zeno's passport, bicycle through the familiar woods to a station down the line, and catch a train. Probably the secret police wouldn't be much interested in pursuing Zeno. They'd be glad Zeno had posed their murder as a suicide, and the less questions asked the better.

But to be safe, Turing would flee along an unexpected route. He'd take the train to Plymouth, the ferry from there to Santander on the north coast of Spain, a train south through Spain to the Medi-terranean port of Tarifa, and another ferry from Tarifa to Tangiers.

Tangiers was an open city, an international zone. He could buy a fresh passport there. He'd be free to live as he liked—in a small way. Perhaps he'd master the violin. And read the Iliad in Greek. Alan glanced down at the flaccid Zeno face, imagining himself as a Greek musician.

If you were me, from A to Z, if I were you, from Z to A...

Alan caught himself. His mind was spinning in loops, avoiding what had to be done next. It was time.

He scrubbed his features raw and donned his new face.