# THE LINE TO ANCHOR CITY

SIMON DE LA ROUVIERE

# CONTENTS

# The Logged Universe

In 2021, humanity unearthed a strange artefact. Dated to a few millions years ago, it revealed countless logs of a future humanity that was recorded into software that resembled a modern day blockchain. Uncertain of whether the artefact was prophecy, technologists and writers have been decoding the stories hidden within.

These are the stories and artefacts of the Logged Universe.

Story: *The Line To Anchor City*.

Era: *Middle*.

Simulation City Location:
*0x*7a8742acf0330eab3fc22ec56cdba907f927239649c950098888a19dcefbee08

Also known as: *The Line*

Anchor City Location:
*0x*4d4e1ee8bb5db2a92b69a06a4c191009dd0bd4a99f3b5ebde02f21566341c1c1.

Also known as: *The Wellspring*

The Logs Interpreted & Told By: *Simon de la Rouviere*

# The Line To Anchor City

For the umpteenth time, the line to Anchor City disappeared in front of Alan Bloom into the horizon. He straightened himself and let a deep sigh float from his simulated lungs into the throng of fellow uploaded minds alongside him. Despite countless denials, he believed that this time, he would make it back to reality.

That's what all of the uploaded minds in this endless line wanted. To move on from their infinite simulated lives. To anchor themselves again in a real city. One last life, truly lived. New challenges, unforgettable memories, and a chance to be alive again. However, the *Uploaded Minds and Human Coexistence Pact* determined the fates of uploaded minds like Alan. At the end of the line, before the gates to Anchor City, were the agents.

Alongside a large stack of required documents, each uploaded mind had to have a reason to move on. For most of the minds, the answer was the same: they've become bored of all of their lives. To live a final life of limitations meant feeling human again for one last time. For many uploaded minds this was true, and that's the reason that Alan's lawyers recommended he present.

But, Alan had his own reason to move on towards the city that allowed him to have a real body again. An infinite amount of lives weren't enough to shake a woman he once met on a promenade in Kinshasa. That distant evening, the city of Brazzaville on the opposite bank illuminated a simulated cloud that had just burst its numerous waters into the Congo River. Even now, the fresh smell of petrichor rising from the soaked earth would take him back to that night when she introduced herself.

"Hi," she said from a gentle smile.

Ensuing discussions about soil and rain led them to an agreement to leave the rest of the uploaded minds in the public overworld sim-

ulation behind and disappear into their own instance: a common act where uploaded minds forked the simulation into less computationally intensive copies for their own, private use. It was the start of a budding relationship that grew over countless simulations until the long river of time washed them apart. She moved on.

After another infinite lives since, Alan could no longer resist the pull of her gravity from where she used to be. She was the reason. However, afraid to get denied, he kept with his lawyer's recommendations and used the same reason she also said goodbye with: "I want feel human again. To be real again." Many made it through the line and into Anchor City, but many were also, unfortunately, frequently denied: Alan Bloom, included. He never knew why. Frustrating, like a pregnant cloud that would not release its life-giving rain.

As he practised the rehearsed reason in his head, the line shuffled forward like a wave, minds rippling down it from the agents up ahead to somewhere distant behind him.

Coming into view was Cappy's Hotel.

With the line ever present and many millions undertaking it every day, it had formed its own city. Bars, hotels, police, housing authorities, and all the usual abundant bureaucracy you'd find in any metropolis. With many uploaded minds living an infinite amount of lives, it wasn't that absurd that a city had grown from a queue.

"Alan? Is that you? So nice to see you again! Staying for the night?" Cappy announced, shouting through his unkempt beard.

Alan smiled at his old friend. "Of course. How could I not? A nice rest, defrag the old loose ends, and enjoy some amazing curries. How have you been, man? Still not moving on?"

Cappy stroked his beard in thought. *That was new. Was he going to join the line?* "Frankly Alan. If I see you one more time coming past here, I think I might follow you along," Cappy said, throwing out a laugh and a slap onto Alan's back. "Come! Take your papers to storage and then join us for a beer and some hot curry!"

Alan dragged his papers to the back of the hotel and tugged on the storage locker. It didn't budge. Not wanting to make a scene, he

tugged a bit harder and then stopped before the handle might break. A hotel employee putting out some trash, spotted him and hurried over. One loud bang on the door later and it popped open. Alan nodded a thank you, avoiding the worker's eyes and found a corner for his documents. Despite the warm glow from the hotel in the line behind him, butterflies were flapping about in his stomach. Forgetting a document meant you were denied without appeal. So, even though his papers were in order for the past hundred times he's walked the line, Alan, paged through it all again.

*Documentation of All Lives Lived.*
*Negative Tests for Common Memetic Pathogens.*
*Proof-of-Updates to Core Logic Units.*
*Proof-of-Funds to Anchor.*
*Initial Upload Certificates.*

...

Sitting alone in the penumbra, paging through piles of papers, it reminded him of his pointless pre-upload life. Even though his past was hazy, he had not forgotten why he chose to exit and upload his mind. Infinite lives as a simulated mind was his opportunity to get rid of his social anxiety. It would allow him to not be so afraid. To not be that 40-something weirdo in the office without a family.

In time, it did help. Yet, like a river coursing over the earth and etching a canyon, the more he lived, the harder it became to change course. Alan became more Alan: a reserved man that truly felt free when he first uploaded, only to settle back in his ways. In his most free and flourishing lives, he spent it with her.

After what felt like an hour, he came to what was supposed to be the penultimate document: *The Attestation*. If the agents discovered he lied or forged any documents, the attestation gave them the right to delist him from Anchor City, freeing up space for another mind. Real death. Except, the document wasn't there. His eyes darted around the storage locker, only finding the neatly stored documents from the other patrons. Nothing! Alan hurriedly got up and retraced his steps right into Cappy's bearded silhouette entering the locker.

"You look like a feedback loop gone awry!" Cappy said through a slurred smile. "Your curry is getting cold, you nincompoop.

Come!" Alan was still frozen, but Cappy grabbed his arm.

Alan shrugged him away. "Wait. My attestation! I lost it."

"Alan, you've done this so many times now. It's in there. Relax buddy," Cappy said, tacking on a laugh. Alan still wasn't sure, but Cappy was right. His curry was getting cold.

Floating in thought through sounds of patrons clinking their glasses and sauces being slurped from bowls, Alan found their table already adorned with a few empty beers. As he took a bite of the now somewhat cold curry, he could feel Cappy's eyes dissect his clouded mind.

"Yo, mate, relax! The attestation is in there. Push comes to shove, you can always get back in the line!"

Despite the cold curry, the chilli pushed simulated sweat to Alan's forehead. That, or he was actually bristled by Cappy's comment alongside his attestation anxiety. "Fuck that, Cappy. I'm done, man. I can't come back here." Alan straightened himself before he boiled over. "In fact, last time I checked, you've never even faced the line! So, rich coming from you!"

Cappy was unperturbed by Alan's outburst, still nursing a beer and staring into the distance: perhaps even peering into the lines of code that made up their simulation. A deep breath rose in Cappy's chest and he exhaled himself into an upright position. Despite not ageing, Alan could see the years on his face. They've done a lot together. From living an instance of becoming writers, to an instance of becoming cooks. Alan's shoulders slouched. He felt bad. It was Cappy that first persuaded Alan to try and move on. It wasn't due to some philosophical or existential reason. Cappy just became fed up with him endlessly talking about her.

"Alan," Cappy started, swallowing more than the sip of his beer. "You're right…"

"I'm sorry. Dude…"

"No, you're right…" Cappy said with an escaping chuckle that turned into a sigh. "Can I level with you?"

That's a line Cappy never seemed to cross. Never got serious. A happy go lucky man, living each life like he was watching himself in

a film: detached with a metaphorical box of popcorn by his side. Alan nodded.

"I lied… I just can't handle the rejection. You know me, man. Never afraid. Remember that time we took up base jumping? But. For some reason, I have this mental block when it comes to the line, and I think I know why." Cappy looked up as Alan nodded back without judgement. Cappy continued, his eyes mapping out his reasons on the table amongst the empty beers. "It's fucking stupid. My dad, you see. I was a chubby kid. He kept saying how fat I was, and so no matter how much I tried, I always feared that people would reject me for that. And somehow it feels like my father is one of the agents, and going to judge me for..."

"No! Hey," Alan interjected.

"It's so stupid. So many lives to unlearn it and… Listen, sorry," Cappy said, pulling himself straight.

"No. Look. It's normal. We all share some of the scars of our pre-upload selves…"

Cappy slouched back into his beer. "I'm just so tired. I'm so bored. I can't do this anymore. Life upon life, upon life. I've been everywhere. Even made it out of this simulated solar system. I've loved everyone. I've created so many things… Do you want to know the real reason I started this hotel in the line?"

Alan always thought that Cappy just wanted something different. No doubt that Alan also felt that tinge of emptiness from all his own lives, but he hadn't hit rock bottom yet: that deep abyss where some minds even spent lives just lying on their back, just to see what that would feel like.

"I started this hotel, because I was in the line, ready to leave. To move on. To anchor. But, I couldn't face the rejection. It's so silly. So, I stopped. To help others instead."

No doubt that Cappy's helped many minds move on. Millions of them came through the hotel: some for the last time, and some, again and again. Like Alan.

"You've helped many a wary mind in this line, Cappy. Cheers to that," Alan said, lifting his beer. Cappy just drunkenly slapped Alan's mug, mimicking a cheers. "Thanks for sharing!"

"It's stupid. Whatever…" Cappy said, seemingly waving away his vulnerable self.

Alan leaned into the moment to console his friend, changing the topic to what Cappy did best. "Want to help me?"

Cappy smiled. "What you got, brother?"

"I trained as an actor. Helps me sell my reason. Wanna hear?"

"Oh yeah? Go for it."

This was Alan's trump card that would get him to move on. He straightened himself and rested into a swagger and confidence that covered up his usual anxious self. He projected the words he had said so many times over: "I want to live a life with limitations. To anchor myself to the blockchain. To exist outside of all these infinite simulations. To be real. To live among the humans again. I am tired. I am bored. I want out of this prison of the mind."

Raptured by Alan's new talent, the rest of the lounge fell silent for a moment.

"Damn," was all that Cappy could muster as the clientele resumed their clinking drinks and hearty meals. It was hard to tell if it was due to Cappy being sincerely flabbergasted or whether the alcohol was talking for him. "I've had many actors come past here, and that, I'm not lying, is fucking good."

Regardless, Alan's heart warmed. He knew why. Maybe he could finally get to see her again.

The rest of evening was spent over more beers and stores about some strange lives that they've lived. When Alan retreated to bed, he gave himself permission again to wonder why she mattered so much. He's lived countless lives with many people. *Why her?* He tried to recall his first life. The one before the upload. If Cappy's fear came from his pre-upload life, maybe she mattered because of a memory he had once lost.

*Pre-upload life.* Such a strange feeling and concept. A distant memory, much like the inability to place the source of a faint smell. And yet, to become anchored into a nanobody would be a final rebirth back to reality: anchored to the same hyperreal blockchain database that the humans use. Equals again in a way that a simulation could never be. The risk of death would be ever present, only

hindered by accidents and the maintenance of the city that kept them running. No restart. That's how the humans ordained it.

Life would slow down, their simulated mental cycles reduced and limited by the pace of the chain itself. A reasonable trade-off. *Limited by the pace…* That's where the memories of his first life sprouted again. She reminded him of the girl he grew up with on the farm next door. After all these lives, he never made the connection. As kids they roamed the farms between, playing at myriads of fantasies. On the cusp of becoming a teenager, with all its hormones and confusion, she left. Never to be seen again. Is that why he missed the woman he spent so many lives with as an uploaded mind? Both had the same messy, dark hair and slim face. And both moved on.

Now, more than ever, he hoped they would let him give up this fake, simulated life. To be alive and walk through Anchor City, to find her. He let go and his head sank into the pillow with dreams of the promised city.

To humans, they wouldn't notice Anchor City, unless they knew it existed. It was entirely white, the size of a bus and located in Antarctica. If you peered behind its unassuming veneer you'd see a mass of densely packed circuitry and cooling systems: the digital backbone that powered the uploaded minds. Once anchored, a mind gained a tiny body, fit to size for its computational power. Despite being limited by the pace of the chain, the newly anchored minds still ran 500x times faster than humans. Thus, in that white, bus-sized city were millions of minds creating an abundance of new, final memories and experiencing what it's like again to live in the real world.

Anchored minds were allowed to venture away from Anchor City, but they rarely did. Nowhere else on Earth was the bandwidth as fast and the computational power as dense. To venture away from Anchor City as a nanobot was the same as a human venturing into the vast nothingness of most of the universe. Moving on, however, didn't mean giving up on living. All the anchored minds just wanted to feel alive again. To feel like death was possible. Thus, even though it looked like snow, Anchor City had many layers of computation, augmented reality filters through immense streets, and stories of

millions of lives. It was as if a human walked into a multi-layered city that combined a server farm with pieces of New York, Tokyo, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Johannesburg, Lagos, Cairo, Mumbai, and Jakarta combined. Within all of that, she was there. Or, Alan hoped she was.

<p style="text-align:center">❧</p>

THE NEXT MORNING HE GOT UP EARLY, FETCHED HIS CART OF documents, and joined the line for the final stretch. Cappy, somehow, not hungover said goodbye with a joke and nothing about his heart that he spilled over the beers the previous evening. "I hope I don't see you again!" Old habits, even after infinite lives, die hard.

Alan laughed and wanted to reply with a similar joke related to Cappy's anxiety about rejection, but couldn't find something to say.

As Alan got closer his palms started sweating. It never did. He watched as the minds in front of him went through the gauntlet. Denied. Denied. Accepted. Denied. Accepted. Accepted. Minds sent back to live many more lives, or minds given the opportunity to live one final one. To anchor back into the reality. *Should I do it?* A question that always faced him when he came close to the answer. But, this time, it was clear. His time had come. A deep anxious sigh left his body, rattling every simulated bone he had in himself.

"Who are you?" Came the faceless agent behind the transparent window.

"My pre-upload self was Alan Bloom. My simulated id is 0xbe6d59ff."

"What is your reason?"

Alan straightened himself into the strut he had practiced for a lifetime. "I want to live a life with limitations. To anchor myself to the blockchain. To exist outside of all these infinite simulations. To be real. To live among the humans again. I am tired. I am bored. I want out of this prison of the mind." Flawless, he felt.

Unmoved by his magnum opus, the agent continued. "*Documentation of All Lives Lived*."

*Anti-climax…* Alan nodded and gave it to the agent.

"*Negative Tests for Common Memetic Pathogens.*"

The laboratory reports were extensive, but it all passed the required checks. The documentation checking continued for a few hours until it came to the *Attestation*. Alan's stomach lurched at the sight of the missing document. It usually rested neatly in between "*Signatures To Delist*" and the final document: "*Receipt of Payment To Pre-Pay Delisting Fee.*" His eyes widened, with bright dread rushing in. *No. No. Please. No.* It really was missing!

"Alan Bloom, please present your *Attestation*."

His world started turning, shock and heat coursing through his simulated veins. *I can't. I really can't…* His body took control, words bursting from the banks of his subconscious.

"Please… Please! I can't keep doing this," Alan shouted, simulated spit splashing into the glass divider. His palms launched from his sides, trying to slam his desired reality into place. "I want to see her again. Please. I miss her! PLEASE!"

"Guards," the agent said, with the calmest voice that only caused Alan to lose control of his legs. He fell to the floor. As it dawned on him, he noticed the line fidgeting and pulsating, as if it were about to vomit out something it tried to keep down. As the guards drew closer, a few seconds later, the line belched up Cappy, holding Alan's *Attestation*.

"It… It was…" Cappy started, catching his breath. "It was outside the hotel!"

"Holy shit. Cappy, get up," Alan said, hoisting his friend up from the floor. He looked around at the guards, making sure they knew what was going on. Alan took the *Attestation* and presented it to the agent.

"*Receipt of Payment To Pre-Pay Delisting Fee.*"

Alan moved to hand over the last document and paused. The adrenaline had given him newfound clarity. "I need to revise my reason."

"What's your reason?"

Alan glanced at Cappy that was still catching his breath through his beard. His friend, spilling his guts over the beers at the hotel,

held the true reason. They were the same. If Alan gave up all his simulated lives for one last one in Anchor City, he had no proof that she would still even be alive, or that she would even care about him. He never knew the real reason that made him want to move on. Until now. "I want to see her again. But. I also want to stop being afraid. By moving on I can also let go. I need to."

Cappy's eyes widened alongside a smile.

"Reason revised. Please present your final document. *Receipt of Payment To Pre-Pay Delisting Fee.*"

A blackhole of anxiety formed in Alan's stomach. This was it.

The agent's blank face rose up from his computer. "Thank you Alan Bloom. Given analysis of all the documents, your reason is legitimate. You are cleared to anchor."

...and suddenly, the black hole in his stomach became like the end of a wormhole, spewing out all the emotions he had collected over his many lifetimes. *Is that all it was? You had to merely speak your truth?*

"Here's your anchor certificate. Keep it safe. If you die, you will be delisted along with the certificate. Proceed to the transaction pool. A miner will anchor you."

Alan faced Cappy. Stunned, they launched into a deep hug, one that tried to come as close as possible to share what they were feeling. Cappy unwrapped, speechless.

Alan reciprocated what Cappy had offered to so many before him. "I'll have a room for you in the city. Please. When you are ready. Come! Just speak your truth!"

Cappy, still frozen, only eked out a nod.

The line didn't wait. Alan was ushered along and slowly moved forward to the transaction pool. A miner took his anchor certificate, stamped it with some computational gas and turned towards Alan.

"This is your final chance to turn back. From here on out, you will give up the opportunity to live a further infinite lives, in exchange for one final one in the real world. Do you want to proceed?"

All Alan could see was the visions of Anchor City, her face, and his final opportunity to let go. Tears streamed down as if all his infinite lives in all the simulations came to say goodbye. He had lived so much. He had seen so much. He took a deep breath and let the last

tears fall where they belonged. Here, at the end of the line, in this infinite simulation.

"I'm ready to anchor."