

THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG

one act political satire

by Revelly Robinson

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Synopsis

The play is set at a court hearing of a man from rural Victoria who has been charged with sedition for publishing remarks on the internet that are deciphered as supportive of Al Qaeda. The man's defence is that he did not publish the remarks but that his chicken had lain on egg on his computer keyboard which caused the random configuration of letters to be posted on the internet. Courtroom drama erupts as accusation fly about who really posted the comments, the defendant, the chicken...or the egg.

Characters

Judge

Alfred Doomsbury (the defendant)

Prosecutor

Graham Bell (the prosecution's witness)

Sound effect: Rustling of papers and the crowd.

Judge: Silence!

Sound effect: Banging of the gavel.

Judge: This court is now in session. The matter of the Commonwealth against Alfred Doomsbury will now be heard. Mr Doomsbury, to the charge of urging a person to assist the enemy under section 80.2 of the Commonwealth Criminal Code, how do you plead?

Alfred: *nervously*) I...plead not guilty, sir...I mean, your honour.

Judge: And is it correct that you are representing yourself in this matter, Mr Doomsbury?

Alfred: Yes, your honour. I can't afford meself no lawyer.

Judge: Very well. Are you aware of the severity of the alleged offences, Mr Doomsbury?

Alfred: Well, yes sir...but I didn't do nothing wrong... I promise sir.

Judge: Right. Prosecutor, you may now make your opening address.

Prosecutor: Thank you, your honour. Your honour, the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions charges the defendant, Alfred Doomsbury, with the offence of Sedition under the Criminal Code. On 14 February 2006 the defendant transmitted a message, via the internet, to a communal forum inciting persons to assist the enemy, the enemy in this situation being Al Qaeda, a terrorist organisation so proclaimed by the Attorney-General. The defendant was reckless as to the seditious communication which had the effect of inciting others to assist the enemy by posting the comment "orf peop/ sld ionj alq] deea 2 8sh". This has been deciphered to mean "all people should join Al Qaeda death to Bush".

Judge: Excuse me Prosecutor. Can you please repeat the seditious comment in question?

Prosecutor: Certainly, your honour. The seditious comment is "orf peop/ sld ionj alq] deea 2 8sh". This was posted on the internet chat-based forum "Stoneage.com" which is a forum for users to exchange discussions on internet access in rural areas.

Judge: Very well. And the defendant, Mr Doomsbury, your opening address please.

Alfred: Yes, your honour. My name is Alfred Doomsbury and I'm from Yackandandah sir. The internet's no good where I'm from sir. And the connection cuts out all the time. I'm just on dialup y'see. Anyway, what happened on this day is that, you see sir, I own a chicken farm and I like to give me chooks a bit of freedom, you see, you like free-range chooks don't you, your honour? Well so anyhow, on this day I was on the Stoneage.com website chatting to people about my internet connection. But it takes so long to download you see, so I went away from my computer for a bit. Couldn't of been more than fifteen minutes, I reckon, at the tops. Anyway, I comes back and next thing I know is that one of me chooks had jumped on me computer, you see, and laid an egg. I just wanted to save the egg, your honour. I wasn't paying no attention to what was written up there. 'Cos it wasn't me that wrote it, it was the chicken...so how can I be guilty your honour?

Judge: Is that the conclusion of your opening address Mr Doomsbury? I see, Prosecutor you may proceed with your case.

Prosecutor: I call the first witness for the Commonwealth, from the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation - Mr Graham Bell.

Sound effect: Footsteps of person entering the court.

Prosecutor: Mr Bell, do you swear that you will answer all such questions asked of you, without favour or affection to either party, and that your answers will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help you God.

Graham: I swear.

Prosecutor: Thank you Mr Bell. Mr Bell can you please state your full name and position for the record.

Graham: My full name is Graham Gregory Bell. I am a Senior Intelligence Officer at the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation and I specialise in the decryption of internet communications.

Prosecutor: Thank you Mr Bell. And can you please state what your role entails?

Graham: I perform intelligence services for the Commonwealth. I monitor the internet and all transmitted information for any content that can be considered malicious to the national interest. This includes content that may be encoded, encrypted or transmitted in another language.

Prosecutor: And Mr Bell, why did this particular transmission catch your attention?

Graham: It was the use of Alq] that initially brought our attention to the seditious communication. We monitor any transmissions, particularly public postings for any derivations of known terrorist organisations, Al Qaeda of course being the organisation that's the most fully investigated. We want to make sure we capture every possible permutation of the name. In this case there was an obvious link between the intent in the message and terrorist organisation.

Prosecutor: And then what action did you take?

Graham: In consultation with my superiors and the relevant areas of the organisation we analysed the communication and came to the unanimous conclusion that the intent of the post was to urge others to join Al Qaeda. This intent is further reinforced by the sentence suffix 'Death to Bush'.

Prosecutor: And how did you come to that deduction?

Graham: Well first of all we took a commonsense approach to interpretation and analysed the sentence word by word. Look at the term 'orf' that's obviously meant to mean 'all', 'peop/' means peoples, 'sld' is a direct translation of 'should' and 'ionj' is an anagram of 'join'. Then of course there's the obvious 'alqj'. Finally to render the intent unequivocal the last three words of the sentence are 'deea 2 8sh' meaning Death to Bush.

Prosecutor: So you figured out the code...

Graham: The message in code was 'All people should join Al Qaeda death to Bush'.

Prosecutor: And where did the code appear?

Graham: We thought that the posting of the code on the Stoneage.com website was also highly suspicious. The posting was clearly strategically arranged to encourage people from rural areas to join Al Qaeda.

Prosecutor: Why did this pose a concern?

Graham: Well we have had concerns that Al Qaeda and other affiliated organisations have been trying for some time to increase their allegiances in rural communities. As a result, communications in these areas have been highly monitored.

Prosecutor: And how did you trace the code?

Graham: We tracked the code through the IP address of the computer that made the posting. The records of the Stoneage.com website and the details provided by the internet service provider confirmed that it was Mr Domsbury's computer that made the posting.

Prosecutor: What did you do after you translated and traced the code?

Graham: I briefed the relevant superiors and in consultation with the Attorney-General's Department we made a submission to the Attorney-General for him to recommend that the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions commence proceedings against Mr Doomsbury.

Prosecutor: Thank you Mr Bell. Your honour I have no further questions.

Judge: Thank you Prosecutor. Does the defence have any questions for cross-examination.

Alfred: Um...no sir...your worship. No questions...

Judge: Does the prosecution have any further witnesses?

Prosecutor: No further witnesses, your honour.

Judge: Very well, now can the defendant please present his case.

Alfred: Um...yes sir...

Judge: Mr Doomsbury...would you like to take the stand?

Alfred: I would, your honour, I would like to tell my story..

Judge: If that's the case please take the stand.

Alfred: Of course, sir.

Judge: Now Mr Doomsbury, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God.

Alfred: I do, sir.

Judge: Very good. Now please state your name and occupation for the record and then proceed with your witness statement.

Alfred: My name is Alfred Doomsbury. I'm a chicken farmer from Yackandandah...some ducks and geese as well...but mainly chickens. On 14 February 2006 I was trying to get on this internet forum...Stoneage.com it's called...see I'd been having problems with my connection lately and it'd been going really slow...so I wanted to get some tips you see...on how I could make me connect quicker. So anyway...I was trying to load up and it was taking ages and ages...it seemed like I'd been waiting forever...so I went into the kitchen to get meself a cuppa...couldn't of been gone more than ten minutes I reckon...and during that time the bloomin' chook must've got on the computer...you see...sometimes I leave the windows open...that time of the year being hot and all...and the chooks...I just like to let them run free...so I comes back...and there this bloomin' chook was on me computer...and not only that...but she laid an egg for me as well...so don't blame her your honour...she's a good chook and all...but you see I didn't know I was sending this message...committing treason...or whatever...and neither did me chicken...she just wanted someplace to lay her egg is all...

Prosecutor: Objection, Your honour!

Judge: Yes, are those all the facts Mr Doomsbury?

Alfred: Yes...well I guess that's all I want to say. I'm sorry for all the fuss I caused with saying this stuff about Al Qaeda and stuff...but you see I didn't know...

Judge: Okay, thank you for your statement Mr Doomsbury. Does the prosecution have any questions for the witness?

Prosecutor: Mr Doomsbury, you are a subscriber to the internet, is that correct?

Alfred: Yes sir.

Prosecutor: And while on the internet what websites do you commonly visit?

Alfred: Well, I use my email and internet banking and I sometimes look up what's new in chicken farming and of course I go on Stoneage.com sometimes.

Prosecutor: So Mr Doomsbury, would you say you're a fairly avid internet user?

Alfred: Well, I like to look up things on the internet. I just wish it wasn't so slow is all.

Prosecutor: So Mr Doomsbury, as an avid internet user would you say that you are aware of how to monitor your usage on the internet?

Alfred: Well, what do you mean?

Prosecutor: I mean that as an internet user you are responsible for the actions taken online using your internet account, is that not correct?

Alfred: Well...I try to be...but I couldn't control the chicken...

Prosecutor: But you were indeed reckless to the communications that could be made on your computer, were you not?

Alfred: But...but...I didn't even know the chicken was there?

Prosecutor: Precisely. You should have been monitoring the usage of your computer to prevent any seditious communication? Do you not agree Mr Doomsbury?

Alfred: Well I only left the room for a minute or so...and when the chooks get clucky they can lay their eggs anywhere you know...and this chook really took a liking to my keyboard.

Prosecutor: Mr Doomsbury, whether or not the chicken was on your computer is irrelevant, don't you agree?

Alfred: No...well...yes...well what do you mean by that question?

Prosecutor: I mean that regardless of whether or not the chicken had caused the post to be made it was nonetheless your responsibility to monitor your computer against any potential for seditious activities, something that you failed to do, isn't that correct?

Alfred: Well it's true that it might not of been the chicken...

Prosecutor: Precisely my point, Mr Doomsbury.

Alfred: It could've been the egg.

Prosecutor: Excuse me?

Alfred: It could've been either the chicken or the egg, when it was coming out I mean, that wrote those things. It's hard to tell. But the egg could've rolled over the keyboard or something. So I'm not blaming the chicken.

Prosecutor: Are you blaming the egg, Mr Doomsbury?

Alfred: Well I'm not blaming no one for nothing. I keep tellings you. I didn't commit no crime here...and neither did my chicken...and neither did her egg.

Prosecutor: Mr Doomsbury, the facts of the matter are that at 2.16pm on 14 February 2006 a communication was sent from your computer to Stoneage.com, is that correct?

Alfred: That's true sir.

Prosecutor: And you admit that you were using your computer and your internet account to access the Stoneage.com website at that time, is that correct?

