

LAGRANGE POINT SHADOW

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In the mid twenty-first century the Trivium Corporation negotiated the world's first trillion-dollar investment, with an agreement to accelerate the development of transport and space infrastructure in Nigeria. In return for access to autonomous technologies, the Nigerian government made significant concessions in their environmental, labour, and AI laws.

At a time when data science was still the driving force behind the world's most advanced industries, Trivium was well positioned to use its pioneering capabilities more broadly. New divisions of the sprawling transnational went on to lead a series of civic modernisation projects across the African Union, including trials of legal reasoning systems in Rwanda.

Key employees of Trivium were also granted a limited version of 'diplomatic immunity' so as to ensure they could safely operate in hostile political environments. These events are widely regarded as catalysts for the system of Universal Law.

The route home was a well-trodden path. A daily routine at the end of a long day. After work, Gahizi looked at jewellery for his niece and had dinner with an old friend before setting off.

Skirting through and around the parks and green spaces of the Rwandan capital, he walked towards the outer reaches of Kigali; the occasional runner or fast walker outpacing him.

Gahizi couldn't help but return to his conversation from dinner. He and his friend had recalled their early days working at Trivium, and of stepping into, what felt like at the time, a science-fiction future. Flush with idealism and hope for a world made anew.

But their tired ideology was now tested by insights that only the wise claimed to see; that beneath every system, both human and artificial, lay flaws that waited to make their presence felt at just the right moment. The upcoming vote to raise the Lagrange Point was just such a moment.

Under the system of Universal Law, the Lagrange Point was the threshold between infringements and criminal offences. It was the difference between receiving a fine for a violation and being convicted for something more serious. Moreover, fundamental shifts in the application of law were still taking place, with violations like petty theft now incurring automated fines instead of being treated as wrongdoing. The long-term implications of raising the Lagrange Point even further, of making more crimes punishable by fine, were fiercely debated.

Working for Trivium had given them both access to rare privileges, yet they disagreed on whether the price was too high. Were they now complicit in the erosion of natural justice?

Gahizi imagined the collision in the split-second before it happened proper. Out of the corner of his eye the assailant seemed motionless, but for the whistle of air that betrayed their movement. Limbs flailed in slow motion before accelerating too fast for Gahizi to react.

The runner had turned the corner, tripped, and hit him full-frontal with the extra force of surprise. As Gahizi fell backwards with a shout, he hit the ground and was covered in a thick layer of dusty red dirt. The stranger landed on top. An untangling, a hand up, many apologies, a brushing off, and it was over in an instant. The runner then speeding off into the distance, looking no doubt for their next accident.

'*Wee, hé!*' Gahizi cried out as he stumbled back to the path. The melodic sound of his cry was blunted in the evening breeze. He stood slightly dazed, catching his breath. His skin itched with the rush of blood to locations that would soon ache with bruising.

It must have been *then*, he decided later. There could be no other explanation. Once home he had traced back every other step in his memcache, and he was sure that the accident was the moment of genius. It was the one deadzone during his entire walk home where the Privacy Bank had no record. On reflection, it was a provocation to both admire and fear he thought.

The early days of the Privacy Bank had promised protection from unwanted surveillance. Recordings were encoded to a person's identity and could only be decoded on the individual's authority. But people were thoughtless. They would sign away their rights for mere trinkets. The multitude of not-so free services that required access to personal data feeds had rendered the promise of individual data security null and void.

Gahizi knew that the pretence of security fooled most people. The irony being that he too was trapped by the same systems that he helped maintain. Leading Trivium's local dataology efforts meant that, in theory, he worked to make sure the local data ecosystem was ethical, equitable, and sustainable. But in practice it was all he could do to stop the producing and consuming parties from becoming scavengers and parasites.

Three minutes further along the path, after the collision, he put his hand to his pocket and was surprised by the warmth of gold beads.

The sun had been set for thirty minutes, but even held to the horizon, the last golden purple of the day still made the necklace sparkle. He then knew what was coming. And there it was. The *infini* symbol of Universal Law superimposed on his vision and the soft toll of bells that signalled a judgment. The world around him turned opaque as his lenses dimmed the landscape.

'You have been charged and found guilty of theft under Article 311-1 of the Penal Code. You have in your possession jewellery reported stolen from Inzuki. The Privacy Bank has confirmed your presence in the store at the time it was stolen. The Privacy Bank has confirmed that the stolen jewellery is currently in your possession. This is a Level 2 violation. You have been charged ₦600 for the cost of the jewellery and fined a further ₦1000 for the infringement. As this is below the Lagrange Point, no appeal is allowed,' intoned the judgment.

Looking out across the darkening sky, Gahizi's jaw clenched. He felt anger and helplessness as the judgment was delivered. Then came the embarrassment. Universal Law only allowed for the more serious offences

to be appealed, with other infringements instead being judged automatically, immediately, and *irrevocably*. This is why the upcoming vote to turn more criminal offences into infringements was so controversial.

As the world slowly lit up again around him, a credit note from his licence provider duly arrived.

‘As a valued and trusted citizen, we were shocked and saddened to hear of the recent judgment against you. As per your current Universal Licence you are eligible for 80% coverage of any fines. £800 of your total fine has been paid on your behalf.’

The investments first seen in Nigeria and Rwanda were copied by other transnationals and jurisdictions, but the arrangements largely failed to deliver the expected economic benefits. The privilege of limited immunity was however found to be beneficial to maintain. At the time, corruption and political interference were still rampant, and the provision of limited immunity became a way for jurisdictions to provide wealthy investors with a measure of protection from bad actors.

What started out as a corporate benefit, available to select employees in the world's wealthiest companies, was slowly watered down. Limited immunity became a service that the well-off classes were prepared to pay for. No longer providing immunity from prosecution, Universal Licences instead became a type of personal insurance policy.

Even in the shadows, the light had a way of penetrating and reaching for Isaro. The orange light raced across the skyline as sunset approached. The rolling hills in the distance calmed her with their lush soft edges, while the sharp reflections of the city super structures brought out her edge.

An advertisement for Universal Law hovered in the window across the road, the *infini* symbol slowly spinning.

Although Isaro's father had profited from these horrors, he'd made sure the holos were hidden from her ever since she first began wearing lenses as a schoolgirl. Sadly, not all holo points could be legally blocked as they were part of the owner's property rights.

Her lensview was lit up with the soft glowing outlines of her modded privacy matrix. She hadn't hidden the surrounding holos with her mods because she needed the visual reassurance that their beacons hadn't identified her. Likewise for the public sensors that fed recordings to the municipality's Privacy Bank. The mods to her systemself, some legal, some not, were doing their job of keeping her digitally invisible. Even though citizens had protections from unlawful monitoring, electronic wakes meant people could easily be found unless precautions were taken.

Isaro thought back to the first time she had jacked a Privacy Bank account to trick a friend. After being caught, her counsellor had explained it was more than just an act of rebellion against her father's warnings. It was also a statement against the intrusions she and her friends had felt growing up, being watched and judged. Regardless, she was still looking forward to piggybacking on her mark's credentials when he wasn't paying attention.

She watched keenly as Gahizi strolled unaware into the Inzuki design store. Isaro had been monitoring him for some time now, learning his routines in preparation for this day. He seemed genuinely decent, but those on the path to *universality* were an elite that she railed against. Typically conservative and predictable by nature, Gahizi was no exception. He took the same route home every day past Inzuki. Sometimes stopping for dinner in Kimihurura along the way, but always trying to stay in the safe zones where the Privacy Bank was watching.

Isaro walked around the corner to the service entrance and entered the store. 'Ça va Dani, do you want to take a break now?' She said as she watched Gahizi wandering to and from the cabinets.

Dani nodded and headed to the back.

'Muraho, Monsieur, can I help you with anything today?' said Isaro as she approached him.

'I've been looking at this necklace, may I have a closer look,' he asked, pointing to the string of small golden pearls.

'Yes of course, it's beautiful,' she said, as she unlocked the cabinet. Isaro had only been working at the store for two weeks, but her record was clean and so she was quickly hired. Once she had learnt that his niece was soon to come of age, it was easy enough to predict where Gahizi would buy the traditional gift he required. Conservative and predictable.

Isaro had spent weeks preparing for just this moment, and immediately banished the rush of anxiety with a breath, before it took root.

One: *'Would you like me to model it for you,'* she asked. Making sure to add the right inflection to her voice.

'Murakozer', he responded. *'Merci'*.

While every citizen had the right to have their identity protected by the Privacy Bank, it was a different case for employees who most commonly signed away their rights in employment contracts. Businesses typically had corporate accounts at the Privacy Bank where their employee data was stored and monitored.

But even though Isaro's real identity was protected by her systemself and real-world disguise, it still paid to be wary of the recordings. That was why this next step was critical.

Two: She moved around the counter and handed the necklace to Gahizi. Making sure he was placed between herself and the only camera that could capture what was about to happen. Her lenses showed that everything else on her privacy matrix was still green.

Three: She lifted the hair from her nape and moved her head to one side, waiting for Gahizi to fasten the necklace. Then, just at the right moment her systemself agent triggered the fire alarm.

Four: She feigned panic, hurriedly pointed Gahizi towards the door, and grabbed the necklace from him as he looked away. The necklace slipped quietly to her pocket while he blocked the store sensors.

Once outside, Isaro watched him wander off in the direction of his dinner date. She would have to wait 10 minutes for Emergency Services to clear the building, and then she and Dani could discover that the necklace had been stolen and file the report. That would still give her an hour before she needed to run into Gahizi on the way home.

The protocol for Universal Law was first ratified by Rwanda, after the 2068 Kigali Accords agreed to harmonise all Universal Rules across the African Union. The protocol outlined the rules of law that applied to licence holders when they were located in a signatory member's jurisdiction. Universal Law having been driven in-part by the era of hypertube travel where citizens could work, rest, and play across many jurisdictions each day.

The actuarial methods pioneered in the insurance industry laid the statistical basis for determining an individual's risk of violation and what the premiums should be. Citizens who qualified with an ultra-low risk profile, and subscribed to 100% coverage, became what are called the 'Universals' of today. Critics claimed that this was just a money-making scheme that both governments and corporations profited from.

As Isaro ran off down the path, she kept an eye on her privacy matrix. It was crucial that she maintained her invisibility. She'd had to plant the necklace on Gahizi at a location where there was no verified recording of her presence. There were deadzones in the Privacy Bank network all around the city if you knew where to look.

In a world where the sims were indistinguishable from recorded reality, verifiable recordings were everything. And if the Privacy Bank couldn't tie a recording to a person's geoloc position, then it was almost impossible to prove the recording was real.

Before being reported stolen, the last sighting of the necklace by the Privacy Bank had been when Gahizi had held it in store. When he then pulled it from his pocket an hour and half later the only conclusion the A2I Protocol could come to was that he'd stolen it.

Isaro glowed with both perspiration and satisfaction as she ran a little further. Her plan had gone off without a hitch. The fact that Gahizi had coverage to protect against his fines softened her guilt. Yes, he was innocent, but the fight against an automated judiciary came at a cost. In Gahizi's case, it was the reputational damage he'd be most worried about.

Finding a secluded spot, she scanned the area for any onlookers. Once clear, Isaro tapped her earpiece and then initiated a connection to her associate. The line sprang to life.

'It's done,' she whispered, her voice breaking with fatigue.

Today, the anonymised voice spoke with a Scottish accent, rolling the r's distinctly. 'That's great, but we're not finished with Gahizi yet.'

'What more do we need from him?' she asked.

'You'll need to meet him tomorrow,' she was instructed. 'Warn him. Tell him more offences are coming and his universal status will be at risk unless he follows your lead.'

Isaro felt her frustration building. 'I was hoping for some downtime before our next operation,' she said.

'I know, but we've just confirmed he has access to the data we need... You must maintain your cover at the reputation management firm in order

to apply pressure. It's essential for building our case against the Lagrange Point vote.'

Isaro shook her head, her voice rising slightly. 'This corporate facade is suffocating!' she sighed.

Her associate's voice softened. 'Trust me, there's more to this particular play, okay? I'll leave you a tile at the usual location.'

Isaro sighed, the weight of her dual life was just too much today. 'Fine,' she said, sounding tired.

The line went dead. Isaro lingered for a moment lost in thought, before taking off again down the path towards Kimihurura; her mind busy with plans and doubts.

As she ran on, her lenses picked up the minor infringements around her that were issued by the A2I Protocol. A runner getting pinged for jaywalking and a car in a no parking zone. All of the licence holders being charged by the municipality systemself that monitored local regulations.

Isaro wondered how Gahizi was feeling right now. He would probably be angry and worried, and wondering if the judgment would affect his chances for full universal status. But she knew the stakes were high, so she breathed deeply and tried to shake the sense of unease.

She then shouted in surprise as a runner came out of nowhere and bumped into her. The irony was completely lost on Isaro.

She was typically cool-headed, but was still fired up from her encounter with Gahizi. Isaro pressed her toes tightly to the path and picked up the pace to catch up with the runner. Making sure to get the timing just right, she reached to her pocket and clasped the wrapper from an energy bar she'd eaten earlier. With a grin, she dropped the wrapper while passing, before turning off to the side.

Her lenses picked up the nearby ping of the runner's infringement for littering. She was still invisible to the Privacy Bank's geoloc services, so for all intents and purposes, the runner was the only one that could have littered in that moment. There would likely be recordings that suggested otherwise, but no one would bother looking more closely because it was an automatic infringement below the Lagrange Point where there was no appeal.

Fifteen minutes later she was home, but she was in no state to work on her thesis proposal about the consequences of Universal Law. The noise dampening maintained by her at-home system was usually a respite, but tonight it echoed her own restless energy.

In return for coverage, licence holders had to agree to have their actions monitored by autonomous legal agents and have all infringements judged Automatically, Immediately, and Irrevocably; the so-called A2I Protocol. Offences above the Lagrange Point threshold were also monitored and judged, but could be appealed in a human court.

The reasons for why citizens would opt-in to such a system were many and varied. For some, the status of unimpeachable 'universality' opened up access to new levels of society. But for most, it was the availability of a Universal Travel Visa. In the era of hypertubes, jurisdictions required those that wanted freedom of movement to have a Universal Licence. The verified risk profile of all licence holders allowed jurisdictions to maintain confidence in the behaviour of visitors.

In the sleek super structure of the Trivium Corporation, Gahizi found himself surrounded by curious colleagues. Their expressions ranged from disbelief to concern, as he recounted the previous evening's events. They'd heard about the violation on the feeds that morning, so he'd had to say something. Despite his composed exterior, Gahizi's eyes seemed to betray the disdain for even his own story.

'I was at Inzuki, yes,' he explained. 'But I never took that necklace. The Privacy Bank's records show I was there, yet they don't capture the theft itself. How then could the A2I Protocol charge me so definitively?'

No one answered, unsure of how to respond.

A colleague then leaned in; her brow furrowed. 'With the upcoming vote to raise the Lagrange Point further, I guess such attacks will become even more significant. Automated judgments of more offences without the possibility of appeal... it's worrisome,' she said.

He looked at his colleague listlessly, and nodded, before responding.

'The modelling of Universal Law has always shown that the combination of universal rules, automated judgments, and insurance backstops provide the best possible guardrails for a high-functioning society,' he said. 'It reduces the burden on the legal system and promotes lawful behaviour,' he went on, looking around.

The silence was growing uncomfortable.

'I always thought that the work we did here to assure the data feeds made a difference, even though the system isn't perfect,' he added. 'But look at the unverified data in this part of the ecosystem,' he said, pointing at a nearby viz screen. 'The data is within bounds... but it's clearly not healthy. We have more work to do,' he said finally.

'So what happens now?' said another colleague, looking at him nervously.

Gahizi's expression hardened. 'I don't know... I just don't know,' he said, shaking his head as he headed for the corridor. He was due for an appointment with reputation management that afternoon, and he hoped they could help in some way.

As he walked away from his colleagues, Gahizi felt the growing isolation. In a world where reputation was everything, a single blemish could ruin years of hard work. He wondered how many others had fallen victim.

After a nervous morning, Gahizi arrived at the type of nondescript location that was typical of reputation management. An office that was unnoticed, on a street that had nothing special about it.

He was acutely aware that, in pursuing universal status, he had set his life along a straight path. A path that had led him to this lobby, and the subdued colours and hushed textures that were designed to blend-in and calm. There was no sign. No reception. No public presence. The elevator recognised Gahizi and took him to the assigned meeting room.

Without the disguises used during yesterday's operation, Isaro was a fresh face with short straight hair. Today it was a fashionable fringe that was her most memorable characteristic.

'*Bonjour* Gahizi, it's so nice to see you again,' she said with utmost professionalism and warmth.

As they talked through yesterday's incident, and how he should respond, Isaro's demeanour was reassuring, and her advice sound. But even so, the air was subtly charged.

'So, look... this is not the end of the world,' she said, trying to comfort him. 'As a low-level violation, this won't stop you from reaching full universal status in a few years. And it's that status that will open up new possibilities for your career,' she added. 'A few bumps along the way won't prevent that.'

While inwardly grinding her teeth, the support she showed for Gahizi wasn't completely fabricated. She did feel some sympathy for him... but ultimately, the rise of *Universals*, who did not feel the full consequences of the law, was not something she supported.

As they were wrapping up, her manner shifted subtly. 'Gahizi, I think it would be a good idea to be even more careful in the coming days. The recent judgment could be an indication of more challenges ahead,' she warned.

His eyes narrowed slightly. 'Are you saying that I might be targeted again?'

Isaro held his gaze, her expression cooler than he expected. 'It's a possibility we can't ignore. Hopefully the incident with the necklace was isolated. But... and I don't want to alarm you... it's also possible there's a larger effort to compromise you,' she said, dropping the bombshell.

Gahizi leaned back.

'And what do you suggest I do?' he asked, his voice wavering.

'I hesitate to even mention this, but your role at Trivium gives you access to certain... privileged routines... and that make you a target,' she said, drawing out her words as if to soften them.

'... and,' he questioned? His eyebrows shooting upwards in surprise.

She passed him a small plastic tile, a two-centimetre square.

'Cases like these are often tricky to protect against, but this will help us detect any incursions to your data space,' she said.

The tile was softly blinking, as his lenses asked for permission to connect and link through to his systemself.

Gahizi's eyes locked to hers, but he saw nothing. He could reject the request because of security concerns, but that would just raise suspicions and jeopardise his relationship with the reputation management firm.

Isaro spoke up to fill the growing silence.

‘This is not just for your benefit, Gahizi. Consider it a step, not only for your own protection, but also to establish what really happened. We will report any findings to the authorities so that the integrity of Universal Law can be safeguarded.’

Their eyes were still locked when Gahizi picked up the tile, and stood.

‘Thank you for your help,’ he said. ‘I really do appreciate it.’ Holding the tile up he took a closer look, and then pocketed it as he turned to leave.

Passing the Genocide Memorial on the way back to the Trivium super structure, he was struck by the contrast—the memorial as a yielding symbol of humanity, versus the rigidity of Universal Law.

Re-entering the office, his resolve hardened. He was pushing against the bounds of his own limits here, but was determined to see this through.

His decision last night to install unsanctioned mods weighed on him, but he wasn’t prepared to go on blindly if he was under attack.

He’d had to deregister his lenses after reporting them lost, and then reconnect them to an isolated container service with ID masking, so his systemself couldn’t directly see what he was doing. This was the best way to hide the fact that his mods could now trace surrounding data trails. The monitoring systems at his Privacy Bank would raise alerts otherwise.

It was surprising how easy it was to subvert technology safeguards if one really wanted to. So much of society’s good order relied on people policing their own behaviour. The flaws in complex systems, that were hidden to most, were plainly seen by those who knew where to look.

He arrived back to his pod and took a moment to review the trails from his meeting at the reputation management firm.

He could now see that his advisor had been directing data to a *personal bank*, rather than the more ubiquitous Privacy Bank. It was the hidden logging address that gave it away, as there was no need to conceal

connections to the Privacy Bank's location. It wasn't illegal, but it certainly was unusual.

Placing the tile on his desk he fed it his access codes, and watched as the agent unexpectedly connected to Trivium's outer data rim via his systemself. There was nothing at risk in the outer rim but, even so, he had put extra failsafes in place. Gahizi sat back to watch and learn as the tile went about its business.

During the early years of Universal Law's development, a transnational protest movement emerged, voicing vehement opposition to the division and mechanisation of legal process. It claimed risks to the fabric of society if principles of natural justice were weakened, and if people faced different consequences on the basis of who could pay. Automated legal reasoning was seen as just another issue in the long-standing battle for equitable justice. In response, there were claims of 'syntheticism' and bigotry towards artificial intelligence.

Proponents of Universal Law said that economic inequality had always distorted the consequences, but at least now it would be more transparent. Sovereignty, they also claimed, was no longer justification enough for different laws across a deeply connected world. In any case, it was said that not everyone strictly needed the coverage of a Universal Licence, and law-abiding citizens had nothing to worry about.

The next day, Gahizi met Isaro under the bloom of vivid Jacaranda. The flowers were already beginning to fall, creating a rich carpet that covered the streets. The purple rain festival would soon be upon us, he thought.

Gahizi held up the tile.

'I don't think this has what you are looking for,' he said warily.

‘And what am I looking for?’ said Isaro, displaying her normal warmth while trying to stay calm.

‘You are looking for the location of Trivium’s territorial data reserves,’ he said. ‘You’re after the training data for the legal reasoning models, aren’t you?’ Gahizi accused her. ‘But why? The models are already in the public domain. Why do you need the training data?’

Isaro hesitated for a moment, her usual composure faltering. ‘The tile was only monitoring your systemself for unusual connections,’ she said calmly.

As her own systemself connected to the tile, she paused for a moment, looking up intensely. Could she trust him, she wondered?

‘I saw the search routines that your tile set loose,’ he said. ‘There’s no point denying it,’ Gahizi pressed. ‘I’m grateful for the reputation management advice you provided, but tell me why I shouldn’t report this to the authorities—what’s going on here?’

Isaro looked at him silently as she held his gaze.

‘I’m worried about the upcoming vote to raise the Lagrange Point’, she said finally.

‘But the modelling shows that the higher Lagrange Point diminishes both crime and conflict. What does the training data get you?’ he pressed again.

She held her silence for a moment longer as she struggled with how to respond. Her conversation with Gahizi yesterday had jarred her more than she realised. She’d made him a victim of the very system she was fighting against. He really did deserve an explanation.

‘It’s about bias in the system,’ Isaro finally said, unable to contain herself any longer. ‘The system of Universal Law is badly broken, and I need the data to challenge the Lagrange Point vote before it does even more damage to our people.’

Gahizi's eyes widened. 'Broken how?' he asked.

'The compliance methods used during the gestation period for the A2I Protocol have been well studied,' she said. 'But the handling of differences across localities was never fully disclosed,' she explained.

He waited.

'You might think that stealing mangoes here in Kigali is the same as stealing them in Lagos, but it's not!' she hurriedly added.

'I'm sorry, I don't understand... I mean, I'm also starting to wonder about the vote... but what's that got to do with mangoes?' he asked.

Isaro inhaled deeply, her voice holding both frustration and urgency. 'Consider the A2I Protocol's roots. Trivium's experiments in legal centralism, in applying a single law to different contexts, were flawed from the very beginning. And they knew the risk—a universal law impacting diverse groups disproportionately. But they were too driven by their grand schemes to accept it was dangerous.'

Gahizi interjected, his tiredness coming through. 'But those models have been debated and refined for decades. The consensus remains that the benefits to society outweigh the drawbacks.'

Isaro shook her head, her anger simmering. 'It's not just about trade-offs, Gahizi. Think about our cultural foundations. Our customary practice, our essence, is being erased. Our tradition of Gacaca, of community, reconciliation, and reparation—it's almost gone under this universal system.'

Gahizi paused, the response dying on his lips. He could sense the depth of Isaro's conviction.

She continued, her voice softening. 'My grandmother used to say that, in a garden, every different flower adds to its beauty. But that each needs a

space to bloom. Our laws and reconciliation practices were distinct, like our flowers. Universal Law ignores this diversity, enforcing a false uniformity that's eroded our core cultural values.'

Gahizi nodded slowly, his scepticism softening. 'So, you're saying the A2I Protocol, in its quest for standardisation, fails to recognise local values such as reconciliation?'

'Yes,' Isaro affirmed. 'Its judgments, though even-handed, are based on data that must have been cleansed of local variation. I've been researching the history of Trivium's legal reasoning models, and it's surprising how requests for the release of the training data have never been upheld. It's the original, uncleaned source data I'm looking for. I want to see how much was lost in the standardisation process.'

Gahizi was stunned. 'So, what... you want to expose this weakness in the system?' he asked.

'Yes! Bringing this to light could open people's eyes,' she said with urgency.

'But this could also undo everything we've built in recent times,' Gahizi argued. 'It could bring chaos.'

'Gahizi, you know the system isn't perfect. Help me fight it,' she pleaded, as her warmth returned.

He looked at her, torn. He knew the implications of what she was asking. It wasn't just about exposing a bias; it was about challenging the very foundation of their modern system.

'I... I need to think about this,' Gahizi said finally, his mind racing with the weight of her admission. Staring at her aghast, he suddenly remembered the counter measures.

His lensview then notified him that the data transfer was complete. While they'd been talking, the silent mods he'd loaded to the tile had

piggybacked her systemself connection—opening a channel to her *personal bank*.

Years of personal records that had been hidden from the Privacy Bank, and that showed her history of activism against the system, had been syphoned off in the background.

‘I’m so sorry... I can’t... it’s too late,’ he stammered, his face gripped with regret.

But Isaro didn’t see his reaction. Her lenses were opaque and the *infini* symbol was slowly spinning for her. The toll of bells rang softly in the background as the A2I Protocol delivered its judgment. The security services were already on their way to take her into custody for crimes against the system.

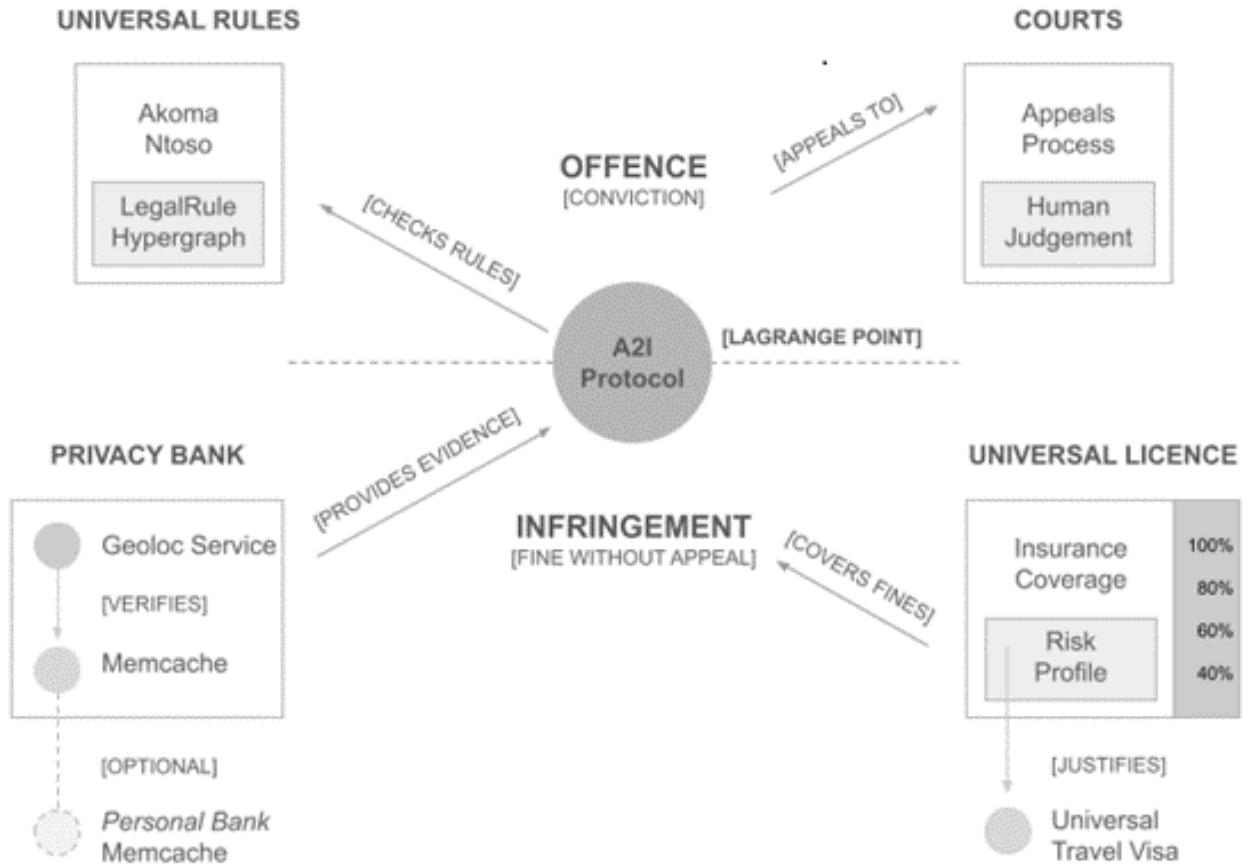
The evening had settled over the city like a soft blanket, muting the daytime sounds of city life. At home, Gahizi leaned back in his chair, his eyes lost in the distant glow of the viz screen that took up the far wall. The room was quiet, save for the background murmur of the news feed. The events of the past weeks had passed quickly.

A story unfolded, just simmering below the surface. A voice questioned the validity of Universal Law. Gahizi’s gaze focused on the screen, where a whistleblower was cited as the source of a significant data leak. The details were vague, but the implications were clear. The upcoming vote would be challenged.

Tomorrow he would speak in Isaro’s defence at her appeal. Gahizi considered the cost of his actions. His career, his reputation, even his personal safety was now in jeopardy. But despite it all, there was a sense of something larger unfolding.

He turned off the feed, leaving the room to stillness. His systemself, the Privacy Bank, and the A2I Protocol ever watching in the background.

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