VOLUME III OF THE LEAPFROG SERIES

The Chisel and the Light

In Defense of Super Intelligence
as a Tool
— a craftsman's argument
for clarity in the age of AI

COURAGE GARIKAI



The Chisel and The Light

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To everyone who has ever picked up a brush, a chisel, a pen,
a phone — and made something new.

To the memory of every human who was told a new tool would
destroy craft, end work, erode art, or replace them —
and who picked up the tool anyway and made something
the world had never seen.

And to the African creators picking up super intelligence now:
the future does not build itself. It is waiting for your hands.

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PROLOGUE: THE WORKSHOP

Some years ago I visited a woodcarver's workshop on the outskirts of Harare. The man's name was Tonderai. He was in his sixties, had been carving since he was a boy apprenticed to his uncle, and his small open-sided workshop smelled of hardwood, turpentine, and sweat. Behind him on shelves stood a hundred finished pieces: birds in flight, faces of chiefs, abstract figures whose curves seemed to breathe. In his hand he held a chisel — not a new one, but an old chisel he said had been his grandfather's, worn smooth along the handle where three generations of hands had held it.

I watched him work. He was carving a small bird from a block of mukwa wood. He did not look at the chisel. He looked at the wood. Every few seconds his thumb brushed away a curl of shaving, and the bird emerged a little more — the beak, the angle of the wing, the tiny claw curled as though about to grip a branch.

At one point he set the old chisel down and picked up an electric rotary tool — a small Dremel with a flex shaft — plugged it into a wall socket, and used it to refine the curve of the bird's eye. The tool whined. It removed wood in seconds what the chisel would have taken minutes to do. He used it with the same casual familiarity as the chisel. When he was done with it he set it aside and went back to the chisel for the final detailing — the feathers, the beak's edge — because "the fast tool does not feel the wood the way the old one does."

I asked him, as we sat drinking tea later, whether the electric tool made the carving easier.

"It makes it faster," he said. "Easier is not the same thing. The fast tool removes wood quickly. But the eye of the carver is the same. The hand that knows when to stop is the same. If I am tired, or angry, or in a hurry to make money, both tools will make a bad bird. If my vision is true, both tools will make a good one. The tool doesn't make the bird. I make the bird."

I have thought about that workshop many times since then, as I have watched the world react to artificial intelligence — to the extraordinary, disorienting, sometimes terrifying new tools that have emerged since 2022. I have watched technologists predict a world without work, artists declare art dead, philosophers debate consciousness in machines, policymakers race to regulate something they barely understand, and ordinary people — including many Africans who have only just come online — watch all of this with a mixture of wonder, confusion, and fear.

I have also watched a young graphic designer in Accra use AI to produce client work in an afternoon that previously took her a week, and use the freed time to take on three more clients and send her little sister to secondary school. I have watched a nurse in rural Kenya use an AI diagnostic tool on her phone to correctly identify a child's malaria case nineteen kilometers from the nearest clinic. I have watched a poet in Lagos use AI to

explore variations of a line in Yoruba, then discard all of them and write the line in her own voice because none of the AI's suggestions carried the ache she wanted. I have watched a teenager in Bulawayo build a working app from an idea in his head in two days, using AI to write code he could not yet write himself, and release it to his school.

Every one of these moments is the same moment. A human being picked up a tool. Some used it well. Some will use it badly. None was replaced by it.

This book is an attempt to say why.

It is also a plea for clarity. The conversation about super intelligence has become so loud, so dominated by science fiction imagery and Californian eschatology, that simple truths are being lost. The simplest truth is this: tools are tools. They have always been tools. The fact that a tool is capable of extraordinary things does not make it cease to be a tool. The fact that a tool makes some people afraid does not make it a monster. The fact that a tool seems intelligent does not make it a mind.

Tonderai the carver would not have been confused by this. He had been adding new tools to his workshop for fifty years — hand tools, power tools, abrasives, finishes — and none of them had ever carved a bird without him. He knew which tool to use for which job. He knew when a tool was too fast for the detail the work required. He knew when to put the power tool down and pick up the chisel his

grandfather left him. He was a master of his tools, never their servant.

I am writing this book because I believe we need more of that stance in the world right now. Not fear of the new tool. Not worship of it. Mastery of it. Clarity about what it is and what it is not. The confidence to pick it up. The wisdom to put it down. The judgment to direct it toward things worth making.

The chisel is on the bench. The workshop door is open. Let us go in.

C.G. Harare, 2026
