

The Radicalization of Ziz Lasota: How an AI Doomer Became an Accused Cult Leader

Lasota's friends, colleagues, and family talk about how a NASA intern and Google employee wound up at the center of a bizarre string of murders across the country

Tessa Stuart



December 2, 2025

Ziz Lasota and Gwen Danielson had reached a stalemate. It was nighttime on the *Caleb*, the ancient steel-hulled tugboat where they had spent the last five months of 2017, anchored in the outer harbor of Pillar Point, 25 miles south of San Francisco. With their high cheekbones, dimpled chins, and penetrating gazes, the pair looked enough like siblings that strangers sometimes commented on their resemblance, but each could barely see the other in the pitch black that night, sitting on the floor of the boat's cramped control room.

By her own account, Lasota was angry. Speaking into the dark, she remembers warning Danielson that "I would not at any point back down, and if [that] meant we were consigned to a runaway positive feedback loop of revenge, so be it ... we might as well try to kill each other right then and there." Then Lasota — who, at six foot two, stood five inches taller than Danielson — rose to her feet, silent, waiting for Danielson's reply.

The rift in their relationship had started over money: It had cost more than expected to buy, fix up, and maintain the fleet of boats on which they hoped to eventually house a gang of brilliant programmers devoted to saving the world from an AI-engineered apocalypse.

On top of the upfront costs, they were paying berthing fees for three boats, not including the *Caleb*. Anchoring their tugboat in the outer harbor, where there was no fee, was meant to give them breathing room, but instead it teed up expensive clashes with the United States Coast Guard (who believed their boat, loaded with thousands of gallons of diesel fuel, posed a threat to the environment), and a nearby fuel dock operator (who accused them of illegally accessing his equipment in the middle of the night to pump contaminated bilge water off the boat). After they were discovered doing that, they were ordered to hire a tanker truck to remove any remaining "hazardous fluids" from the tug. (Lasota did not respond to interview requests, and lawyers representing her in pending criminal cases declined to comment for this story. Accounts of these events are drawn from Lasota's and Danielson's blogs, relevant court documents, and interviews.)

The pair eventually became so desperate for money that they even, against their convictions as devout vegans, registered the *Caleb* for the purposes of ferrying crabbers out to sea to drop their traps for cash — a period Lasota referred to on her blog as "our attempt to be brutal consequentialists."

When Danielson first pitched Lasota on the idea of bringing other similarly brainy, ambitious, cash-poor members of the Bay Area's Rationalist community together to live on boats, it felt like a revelation. Both had moved to the notoriously expensive enclave to be part of an elite intellectual community that considered itself the last best hope to save humanity from total annihilation by superhuman artificial intelligence. By living on the water, they figured they could stay close to that community, without slaving away at a soul-sucking corporate tech job just to afford rent.

Danielson, who is bigender, was already living on a 30-foot Bermuda Sloop called the *Islander* when they met Lasota. Both navigating the early stages of their respective



Zia Lasota moved to the Bay Area to be closer to the Rationalist community.

Sonoma County Sheriff's Office

gender transitions, the pair bonded instantly, and Lasota was captivated with Danielson’s vision for a “Rationalist Fleet.” “Maybe following Gwen’s crazy idea would be an answer to the problem where whatever I expect to try, I just expected it will be too slow for me to save the world,” Lasota wrote on her blog.

Together, with a third Rationalist, they toured a series of boats of varying levels of seaworthiness: a moldy motorboat for \$1,000, a liveaboard “with no working motor but a pretty decent interior” hawked by a guy with a swastika tattoo, a Coast Guard Cutter turned fishing vessel named *Pacific Hunter*, and a sailboat with cabins for six called *The Rapture*. (“I joked if we bought it we could refresh that paint, then cross it out, and write, ‘*The Singularity*,’” Lasota later wrote, referring to the hypothetical point at which artificial intelligence will outstrip human intelligence, and become self-improving — an event, some believe, which will quickly lead to human extinction.)

In the end, they opted for a decommissioned Navy tugboat called the *Caleb*. With the help of a motley crew recruited via a Rationalist mailing list, in July 2017, they piloted the *Caleb* down the West Coast. Pillar Point wasn’t supposed to be their final destination — Lasota and Danielson planned to head toward Benicia or somewhere along the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to start their housing project in earnest. But, under increasing financial pressure, and after a dispute with the boat’s co-owner, they stopped at Pillar Point to think through their next steps.

Living without the burden of rent (on land, at least) was supposed to give Lasota and Danielson more time to devote to AI safety, but instead, in the months that followed, any time not consumed by boat crises, they spent talking — refining each other’s speculative theories about the brain and the laws of the universe — and beginning to question whether the community they’d poured so much effort into was made up of the kind of people they once believed it to be.

Later, Lasota and Danielson’s disappointment would extend beyond the Rationalist community to two of its most hallowed institutions — the Machine Intelligence Research Institute (MIRI) and the Center for Applied Rationality (CFAR). They would become increasingly disillusioned with both before stumbling upon information that torched any remaining faith they’d placed in either organization.

But none of that had happened yet, the night on the *Caleb*, as Lasota towered over Danielson, challenging her closest friend to a fight to the death. In Lasota’s mind, their disagreement was about more than just money. At one time, Danielson had been unanimously declared “dictator” of the Rationalist Fleet, but Lasota was starting to feel like she was spending all of her time talking Danielson through “mental upgrades,” and all of her resources fixing problems Danielson got them into.

The challenge she issued that night was grounded in a theory she had begun refining on the boat. Lasota called it a “Timeless Gambit,” and she explained it as a way to shape shared “expectations in potential outcomes” — computations that “exist in multiple people’s heads, and multiple places in time.” The underlying idea is that each decision you make does not just affect your immediate, physical future, it determines how others will treat you in all predictions, simulations, and parallel versions of that

situation. If, for example, Danielson knew their actions would lead to Lasota escalating dramatically — challenging them to a fight to the death — another version of Danielson might have treated Lasota differently in the lead-up to their fight. In the years that followed, observers would come to recognize the contours of her theory in the baffling logic that accompanied a series of violent encounters around the country.

On the *Caleb*, Lasota’s gambit worked: Danielson stayed on the floor, assuring Lasota that they were not a threat and telling her that they would “rather be my number two than fight.” There was no altercation — no violence at all — only, according to Lasota, a quiet reshuffling of the dynamics of their relationship.

But their quarrel that night would have another downstream effect: Lasota’s account of the dispute, memorialized on her blog, Sincerely, was offered years later as evidence she was dangerous and should be cast out of the Rationalist community. “Ziz has taken more than one action that had a reasonable probability of causing fear of physical violence in those around her,” CFAR’s president, Anna Salamon, wrote on Facebook, using the boat story as an example. Danielson argued that the scene was misused and misinterpreted, by Salamon and others, in an effort to portray Danielson as a victim of Ziz’s abuse — a characterization Danielson strongly rejected.

By that point, two years after the fight, some members of the community were becoming disconcerted by Lasota. Her presence, her writing, the way she dressed — in all black, often in long robes — made them uneasy. The final straw came in late 2019, after Lasota, Danielson, and two others were arrested while staging a protest at a reunion for alumni of CFAR’s self-help workshops.

Of those four protesters, today, one is dead, another is awaiting trial for her murder, a third disappeared, and the fourth — Lasota — is languishing in a county jail in Maryland, awaiting trial on unrelated charges.

At least five others who entered Lasota’s orbit in the years that followed the protest are also dead or in jail: Two are accused of separate murders on opposite sides of the country, and two are persons of interest in a double homicide in Pennsylvania. Earlier this year, a fifth died in a shootout with the U.S. Border Patrol. As for the *Caleb*, it is rotting, half-sunk in the outer harbor at Pillar Point, abandoned, along with the dream of a Rationalist Fleet, years ago.

TODAY, MOST PEOPLE WHO ARE FAMILIAR with the Rationalist community probably associate it with a handful of online spaces, the most prominent of which is LessWrong, a forum for people curious about cognitive bias and Bayesian reasoning, the practice of assigning mathematical probabilities to possible outcomes. It’s the kind of place where one can find other people interested in the Paperclip Problem — the idea that a superhuman AI could be given a simple task like “maximize paper clip production” and end up destroying the world — or argue with effective altruists about “shrimp welfare,” the idea that shrimp are “moral patients” whose pain and suffering everyone should care about much more.

But the online forum began with a much more specific mission: In 2003, a young Eliezer Yudkowsky was dreaming up an ambitious plan to recruit an army of individuals



Gwen Danielson (pictured) lived with Ziz Lasota on a boat, where they devoted time to saving the world from an AI-engineered apocalypse.

Sonoma County Sheriff's Office

who would devote themselves to stopping superhuman AI from destroying its human creators.

“I think I may have to split my attention one more time, hopefully the last, and write something to attract the people we need. My current thought is a book on the underlying theory and specific human practice of rationality... I don’t think we’ll find the people we need by posting a job opening. Movements often start around books; we don’t have our book yet,” he wrote in an email to a Silicon Valley listserv.

Yudkowsky, an autodidact who dropped out of school in the eighth grade, had been captivated by the idea of the Singularity since he first ran across the concept as a teen reading sci-fi author Vernor Vinge’s short story collection *True Names and Other Dangers*. By age 21, he had co-founded the nonprofit Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence, or SIAI. Yudkowsky, the institute’s sole employee, was determined to build machine superintelligence himself — before eventually recognizing all the ways that could go wrong and devoting himself to AI alignment (working to ensure that artificial intelligence shares humans’ values and priorities) instead.

“It was obviously the most important thing going on,” Yudkowsky explained to *Rolling Stone* in 2023, “and the things that would, like, determine the fate of the galaxy and all that.”

In order to succeed, Yudkowsky knew he would need a lot more people — a lot more of a certain kind of person — to join his cause. After sending that 2003 email, he set to work on a series of lengthy essays about overcoming one’s own inherent cognitive biases. (The logic was simple, as one ex-Rationalist put it, “Yud tried to talk to people about AI, and they disagreed with him, and he concluded they were insane and needed to learn how to think better.”)

The collection was called *The Sequences* and it, in turn, drew people to LessWrong, the forum Yudkowsky started and would later identify as “a key venue for SIAI recruitment.” He followed *The Sequences* up with a second opus: *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality*, a 660,000-word J.K. Rowling-inspired fan fiction about a young wizard whose real superpower is his cool, rational mind. Both works revolve around the same core idea: that brains are systematically irrational, but there are ways to train yours to think better.

His plan worked. Drove of readers — young, brainy high achievers who wanted to make a difference in the world — read *The Sequences* or the Potter fan fic, and many came to Berkeley to work or volunteer at two organizations, both spun out of Yudkowsky’s original think tank: The Machine Intelligence Research Institute, or MIRI, devoted to the technical research needed to develop friendly AI, and the Center for Applied Rationality, or CFAR, devoted to the broader goal of helping people become more rational so they would take the threat of artificial intelligence more seriously.

“He spun this grand tale of adventure and great danger ... *Here’s this great mathematical evil, and we have to beat it by being better at math* — and to me, that was very seductive,” says Qiaochu Yuan, a young math prodigy and MIT graduate who moved to the Bay Area and got involved with CFAR after reading Yudkowsky. “I was like,

‘Wow, that sounds really nice. I would love to be a big-shot hero and save the world with the power of math.’”



Eliezer Yudkowsky (pictured in 2023) is a leading voice in the Rationalist movement, working to ensure AI shares humans’ values and priorities. Lasota and Danielson were followers of his teachings.

JASON HENRY/“The New York Times”/Redux

Lasota and Danielson were among them, too. Both dropped out of school — Danielson abandoning an academic scholarship at Rice University, Lasota leaving graduate studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign — and moved to the Bay Area convinced by Yudkowsky’s argument the Singularity was coming, that it would almost certainly spell doom for life on Earth, and that the only way to stop it was if enough intellectually-gifted individuals banded together to find a solution in time.

LASOTA GREW UP THE ELDEST OF THREE children in a house in the woods outside Fairbanks, Alaska. Her father, Dan, had been a physics and astronomy major at the University of Rochester where he worked at the university’s Mees Observatory. Her mother, Kate, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the same college with a degree in integrated sciences.

In 1988, the fall after Kate graduated, the couple, already married, moved to Alaska, where Dan, an early computer wiz, taught Introduction to Macintosh Computers to

community college students at a University of Alaska, Fairbanks campus. He went on to work in several computer systems roles for government research organizations, before starting his own database company in 1998.

Today, Dan is an instructional designer at the University of Fairbanks, where he was described in a staff spotlight as “our go-to person for all things related to research on AI in education,” and a devotee of games like *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Civilization 6*.

All three of his children studied at the university — including Ziz, a University Honors Scholar who graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in computer science in 2013. (Dan and Kate did not respond to interview requests.)

Ziz struggled as a child with behavioral issues that her parents, one family member tells me, seemed to attribute to boredom from not being intellectually challenged by her coursework: “They would say that the teachers in the system didn’t know how to educate [her].”

But she shared her father’s interest in astronomy and video games. As a college student, she interned at NASA, where she helped design a tool to measure ejections of plasma from the sun’s atmosphere, and later developed a video game of her own.

In college, she also spent a lot of time watching videos on the internet, which she later described on her blog as “hour for hour, one of the most valuable things I’ve ever done.” At first it was videos of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins or the author Christopher Hitchens in debates about atheism. She went on to mainline philosophy vlogs, becoming obsessed with the study of ethics.

“I wanted to know what everyone would do in the trolley problem,” Lasota wrote, referring to the famous quandary that ponders whether it is more ethical to allow the tram to remain on a collision course where it would kill five people, or to intervene, diverting the trolley to kill just one person. “This led to me becoming a vegetarian, then a vegan.” One day, she was on an online philosophy forum when she stumbled on Yudkowsky’s *Sequences* and, in turn, “the most important problem in the world”: the Singularity. Still a college student, she began donating to MIRI, convinced that “our survival, the survival of sentient life, depends on it.”

By 2016, the year Lasota and Danielson arrived in the Bay Area, a vibrant community had taken root in the East Bay, where Rationalists lived in group houses and interrogated each other’s patterns of thinking at CFAR workshops and weekly LessWrong meetups. There were parties and cuddle puddles — yes, piles of cuddling humans — and a wealth of people who had been conditioned to apply Bayesian principles to every decision they made.

The community also had a surprisingly high proportion of members who identify as trans or gender fluid. There is no consensus on why that is. According to a recent LessWrong community survey, the number of respondents who considered themselves trans, nonbinary, or otherwise gender nonconforming more than doubled the number of cis-women. (Cis-men vastly outnumber both, making up roughly 80 percent of respondents.) Some speculate that Rationalists, obsessed with correcting their own cognitive

biases, might be more open-minded about gender identity than the general population; others suggested a shared interest in transhumanism — harnessing technology to extend life and enhance the corporeal experience — could be a factor.

In many ways, the scene that greeted them when they arrived in the Bay Area didn't match their expectations. Danielson wrote on their blog about being disappointed in meeting so many people who had also read Yudkowsky's writing, but who had not come away with the same sense of purpose they had.

After a board game night hosted by the South Bay LessWrong chapter, they wrote: "There wasn't anybody besides me who didn't want to play board games but wanted to discuss strategy for saving the world, or rationality tech development, or AI alignment research ... Where are the people working on saving the world? How/why are these people orienting towards these bizarre topics, even after reading *The Sequences*? Why is everyone committing slow-motion mass suicide after being told that's what's going on and info about the path out?"

Lasota struggled, too. She had originally moved to the Bay Area determined to fulfill what she had come to believe was her destiny: scoring a lucrative tech job, then "earning to give" — donating the lion's share of her salary — to support MIRI's work. Doing so, she wrote, was "one of my main guesses about how I could best contribute to saving the world."

That dream quickly ran up against the fact that she did not function well in the punishing conditions startups demanded. She writes that she was fired twice for refusing to work more than eight hours a day. Without a steady income, she borrowed from her parents and bounced between Airbnbs in increasingly far-flung corners of the Bay Area, spending her money on rideshares to rationalist meetups. It was at one of these, in Berkeley, where she met Danielson.

They connected instantly: That night, Lasota later remembered on her blog, Danielson brought her back to their sailboat, where they showed Lasota a dragon-shaped necklace and confided that they were an otherkin — someone who identifies as nonhuman, in their case, specifically, a dragon.

The pair became close. Lasota moved onto Danielson's boat, where they talked, Lasota wrote, "for several hours a day. About transness, about neuroscience, about their old crazy plans to save the world (breed superintelligent dogs) ... About my mental tech I wrote about on my blog. About my (much cruder back then) theories of human morality."

For both of them, connecting with another trans person in the community felt good. Lasota had some ugly experiences after relocating to the Bay Area. At Liminal, a Rationalist group house where she briefly crashed, she wrote that after she was introduced as a non-transitioning trans woman — she took hormones, but had decided against pursuing a transition surgically or legally — one roommate "looked at me with something like disgust and asked when I'd be leaving." At a CFAR workshop, she remembered a conversation where her interlocutor "poked at my transness, in ways that suggested they thought I was a delusional man." At a LessWrong meetup, a man



The Caleb tugboat was meant to be part of a fleet of vessels where Rationalists could live for cheap.

San Mateo County Harbor District

tried to convince her that she was an “autogynephile” — a straight man with a sexual fetish imagining himself as a woman.

Lasota was also forced to reckon with the belief — advanced by some figures in the Rationalist movement — that transitioning was a bad idea because it would make her a less “effective” agent in the AI safety movement. She seemed to have internalized the idea that transitioning “would interfere with my ability to make money due to discrimination, and destroy too great a chunk of my tiny probability of saving the world.” She even, as Rationalists do, assigned a figure to the reduction in expected impact she would have if she *did* transition, pegging it at somewhere between 10 and 40 percent.

On the boat, Lasota hashed out these frustrations and more with Danielson. By this time, she’d adopted the name Ziz (a beautiful and terrifying world destroyer from Worm, a web serial popular with Rationalists), began wearing dark robes (a symbol of “nonsubmission”), and identifying, religiously, as a “Sith” — rivals to the Jedi order in *Star Wars*. “The Sith do what they want deep down. They remove all obstructions to that and express their true values,” she wrote on her blog. (Siths, *Star Wars* fans may recall, also destroy their masters.)

Danielson was struggling, too. They had, by this time, become convinced that CFAR discriminated against them on the basis of their gender identity. According to Danielson’s account, they had volunteered at the first of a series of CFAR workshops in early 2017, before beginning their transition. They write that they asked to volunteer for the remaining sessions after they began presenting as female, but they were told the volunteer slots had been filled. “I was excluded from what I had been led to understand was the hiring pipeline for CFAR,” Danielson wrote. (CFAR’s Anna Salamon did not respond to a request for comment.)

In January 2019, Michael Vassar, the former president of MIRI, met with Lasota and Danielson in hopes, according to one person present, of dissuading them from suing CFAR for gender discrimination. Neither mention a potential lawsuit in any of their writings, and no suit was ever filed, but over the course of their conversation with Vassar, they learned a critical piece of information: that MIRI had reached a settlement with a former employee who had waged a protracted campaign to smear the organization as a “cult” and a “pedophile ring.”

The revelation shocked Lasota and Danielson to their cores. (“THEY PAID THAT FUCKER?!” Lasota remembered shouting when she heard.) She was stunned that the organization she’d placed so much faith in would use money she’d donated — the little money she and her friends had — not for time-sensitive, potentially world-saving research, but to pay off a disgruntled employee.

Beyond the feeling of betrayal, there was something else that irked Lasota: the idea that an organization that staked so much of its credibility on sound decision-making would make the fundamentally unsound decision of paying what Lasota viewed as blackmail.

Lasota and Danielson decided to air their grievances against both CFAR and MIRI at one of the largest annual gatherings of Rationalists: the CFAR alumni reunion, scheduled to take place in November 2019 in Northern California.

The reunion gave attendees the chance to give presentations on any subject of their choosing. Two years earlier, in 2017, Danielson, Lasota, and Dan Powell, the other part-owner of the *Caleb*, had attended the reunion and given a talk about their plans for the Rationalist Fleet. This time around, Danielson explained on her blog, “I spent several weeks preparing a series of talks and discussion groups that I thought had the best chance of communicating the base information, our models, how to perceive deep aspects of their own and others’ psychologies and ethics, and how to escape traps like the Bay area housing market.”

Lasota and two other acquaintances, both transwomen in the Rationalist scene — Somni Leatham and Emma Borhanian — planned to give their own talks that were similarly critical of MIRI, CFAR, and the Rationalist community.

But, according to Danielson’s blog, CFAR leadership interceded, telling Lasota and Danielson they were not welcome at the event after seeing a series of Discord posts by Lasota that they deemed threatening.

So, instead, they decided to stage a protest.

LASOTA, DANIELSON, BORHANIAN, AND LEATHAM ARRIVED at Westminster Woods, the redwood-shaded Sonoma County retreat center where CFAR planned to hold its alumni reunion, on the afternoon of Nov. 15, 2019, shortly before the event was scheduled to begin. They wore long dark robes, according to a police report that would be filed later that day, along with black latex gloves, black silicone shoe covers, white Guy Fawkes masks, body cameras, and two-way radios.

When deputies from the Sonoma County Sheriff’s Office arrived, three protesters stood at the entrance to the retreat center, proffering leaflets. The flyers, which quoted Yudkowsky’s *Sequences*, also declared it was time “to process what happened to MIRI, CFAR, and the rationality community. It is not what it once seemed like it would become. New things can be built.”

The papers also criticized MIRI’s decision to settle with the disgruntled employee — a decision which, in their view, made the organization “super exploitable.” Because of it, virtually anyone could “use MIRI & CFAR as their personal bank and tell them what to do instead of anticipating that they wouldn’t pay out.”

“It’s easy to see this is incorrect if you are thinking with tdt” — Timeless Decision Theory — the flyer read.

Timeless Decision Theory is a framework Yudkowsky came up with in 2010. The easiest way to explain it is through a famous thought experiment called Newcomb’s Problem: an all-knowing predictor presents you with two boxes. The first box, which is transparent, has \$1,000 inside, the other, which is opaque, has either \$1 million or nothing. You have to decide whether to take both boxes, or only the second. The catch is: If the predictor predicts you will choose both boxes, the second box will be empty, but if it predicts you’ll only choose box two, box two will contain \$1 million. One



Somni Leatham



Emma Borhanian

school of thought — Causal Decision Theory — says to choose both boxes because the boxes are already filled, and your decision can't change the past. With his own theory, Yudkowsky posited the opposite: If you choose box two, box two will have a \$1 million, because the all-knowing predictor — armed with perfect knowledge of your decision-making — has already guessed that you are the type of person who would take box two.

The idea is that your decisions don't just determine your immediate future — they also determine what copies or simulations of you would do under the same conditions across time and space.

MIRI, in the protesters' view, had failed this type of test: The organization would never have been “blackmailed” if it wasn't already the type of organization that could be “blackmailed” in the first place. But because it was, every assumption anyone ever made about MIRI — and its potential to save the world — needed to be reconsidered.

The four strangely dressed figures had parked vehicles — a white Ford Econoline box truck and mini school bus — across the camp's entrances and exits. They refused to speak with retreat center staff, who called the sheriff's office, speculating that one of the protesters might have a gun. None did, but a SWAT team swarmed the camp, a bomb squad was called in, and at least one police helicopter was dispatched to the scene. The protesters were quickly and forcibly arrested; as they were being wrestled to the ground, both Lasota and Danielson screamed that they were being sexually assaulted.

Aella, a popular Substack author and cam girl, was among those planning to attend the reunion that weekend. When she arrived and saw police lights, at first she thought there'd been a car accident, but soon news of the protest and the police response spread on group chats and email listservs, and everyone who was supposed to be arriving for the retreat ended up at a café 10 minutes down the road.

Aella figured it was par for the course. “This just happens,” she remembers thinking. “You just get insane people sometimes. If you're a big enough community, it's inevitable that you get a few people. And there have been a few people, besides the Zizians, who have sort of gone insane.”

But there was at least one person present that day to whom the protesters did not seem insane: a young Berkeley graduate named Daniel Blank, who carpooled to the retreat with other CFAR alums, and watched through the trees as deputies approached Lasota and her friends. (Neither Blank nor his lawyer responded to a request for comment.)

“He was very upset by the whole thing,” a friend who was present recalls. The protesters' allegations against MIRI and CFAR — and more so the way that everyone seemed to be shrugging them off — unnerved Blank. “He seemed confused, like, ‘How do we know they're not right?’”

The night before, roughly 500 people — mostly alumni of past CFAR workshops, including Blank — received an email accusing CFAR and its sister organization, MIRI, of a litany of offenses, but above all abandoning their founding mission.

Sender: Ziz <OneTrueZiz@gmail.com>

Subject: Fall of MIRI and CFAR

MIRI paid out to blackmail over statutory rape. Theft of donor funds to deceive donors. CFAR helped cover it up, implemented in part by their president and founder pushing anti-rationality, and anti-ethics, and perpetrating religious abuse, and using antitransfemist memes as a tool for gaslighting...

MIRI and CFAR started out as SIAI, an organization once functional enough to halt and pivot to AI alignment from accelerationism. They rotted...

If you do not want to die with this plague consuming our world, then turn your hopes back to the hard-to-define things that generated these institutions that no longer deserve them.

Blank's friends recall trying to break the incident down the way they'd learned to at CFAR workshops, demonstrating how the protesters had failed to act rationally. But Blank, described by one friend as "both brilliant and also incredibly naive," did not seem entirely convinced.

BEFORE THE PROTEST, LASOTA WROTE a second email, this one addressed specifically to Yudkowsky. (Danielson was cc'd.) In it, she invoked allegations spread by a disgruntled ex-MIRI employee that Yudkowsky had committed statutory rape, and she further accused him of starting an AI arms race that would exterminate life on Earth.

The first set of allegations have been investigated and deemed baseless. They stem from a report filed by a onetime MIRI employee named Louie Helm who claimed a teenager was "being exploited" by a group of men, including Yudkowsky, who ran a local youth camp — referring to the Summer Program for Applied Rationality and Cognition, hosted by CFAR.

According to the sealed police report obtained by *Rolling Stone*, Helm accused Yudkowsky of having a sexual relationship with a then-18-year-old that began at least two and half years prior.

Officers were dispatched to Yudkowsky's home, which, at the time, he shared with the 18-year-old in question. The "alleged victim," officers wrote in the report, stressed that they "lived in a happy and safe environment." That person later transitioned; today, he lives with his wife, whom he met in Berkeley's Rationalist scene, and their two young children. When I spoke to him earlier this year, he told me he rejects the notion that he was exploited by anyone other than Helm, the disgruntled employee, whom he felt used him as ammunition against Yudkowsky and MIRI. "I was expedient," he says.

After *Rolling Stone* reached out to Yudkowsky for comment, he posted a lengthy response on X denying Helm's allegation, and writing, "To the best of my knowledge, I have never in my life had sex with anyone under the age of 18. I have not had sex,

at all, with the particular person the Ziz cult thinks I had sex with, whom I am not naming here for reasons of their own privacy.” Helm did not respond to a request for comment.

The day after this story was published, MIRI’s CEO shared a letter that was signed by Helm in 2015 as part of the legal efforts to resolve their dispute. It reads: “Sorry, I now believe many of the claims I published on miricult.com are inaccurate, and that many of the other things I said there, or I said about MIRI to journalists and government agencies, were based on unreliable evidence and hearsay.”

Lasota was said to be sensitive to abuse concerns — one friend of Borhanian’s tells me that “one of the reasons that she was so close to Ziz was that she was incredibly grateful to Ziz for helping her get out of an abusive relationship. It made her feel seen and accepted.” (Both Borhanian and Leatham lived in a group house called Guilt with a roommate who, they alleged, would regularly beat Borhanian with a bamboo stick. The roommate could not be reached for comment.)

On her own blog, Lasota claimed she was “molested” by her grandfather, whom she called a “pedophile.” Robert Lasota, Dan’s father and Ziz’s grandfather, was convicted in late 1980s of molesting his daughter, but that conviction was later thrown out, and the case was retried, unsuccessfully, twice. (Reached by *Rolling Stone*, Lasota’s grandparents strenuously denied Ziz’s allegation.)

Lasota’s second accusation — that Yudkowsky started an AI arms race — referred to an uncomfortable truth: that Yudkowsky, despite his ceaseless warnings about the threat posed by AI, has arguably done more than any other person alive to hasten the acceleration of artificial intelligence technology.

In 2005, shortly after he began working on *The Sequences*, Yudkowsky was introduced to Peter Thiel — the co-founder of PayPal and Palantir — at a dinner party in San Francisco. Thiel took an interest in his work and began funding Yudkowsky’s Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence, and together, with famed computer scientist Ray Kurzweil, they created an annual conference, the Singularity Summit, at Stanford University. (Jeffrey Epstein was another early supporter of SIAI; he gave \$50,000 through his own foundation in 2009.)

The founders of the AI lab DeepMind persuaded Thiel to fund their startup, later purchased by Google, at the Singularity Summit. DeepMind’s early success, in turn, impressed a young Thiel acolyte, Sam Altman, who went on to co-found Open AI with Elon Musk, a MIRI backer (and, apparently, a LessWrong reader — he connected with the singer Grimes after they made the same joke about a popular LessWrong thought experiment called “Roko’s Basilisk”). Altman has credited Yudkowsky with sparking his pursuit of Artificial General Intelligence — artificial intelligence that is as smart as, or smarter, than humans.

Many of the young readers who flocked to the Bay Area after reading Yudkowsky’s work eventually went into the field of AI, too: Today, a notable share of the people Lasota emailed the night before the CFAR reunion are employed by the biggest

firms developing artificial intelligence technology, including Anthropic, OpenAI, and DeepMind.

In her message to Yudkowsky, Lasota invoked an epic battle of the kind that he had once promised his young readers:

*Our civilization is doing an unending holocaust, birth to death to many billions of sentient beings per year. That's what kind of morality you import when you import code from the system... We will not just sit on our hands and let you or your masters, or their god-Cancer conquer the world... We will exercise self defense, and we will defend each other, and we will defend sentient life... And I stake my soul, and much more importantly the multiverse on justice without compromise or concession... If you want to make it out of this universe
alive, I suggest you do the same.
Come clean, and we may talk of what can be done to pick up the pieces.*

The missive was signed:

*Sincerely,
Darth Ziz
(Interim de facto leader of the vegan Sith.)*

Lasota and Danielson remained convinced by Yudkowsky's warning of the dire threat posed by artificial intelligence. But where Yudkowsky's fear had revolved around the existential threat AI posed to mankind, the vegan Sith — which at that point, consisted only of Lasota and Danielson — recommitted with a fierce moral urgency to the cause of protecting all sentient life.

INSTEAD OF RALLYING THROUNGS OF RATIONALISTS against MIRI and CFAR, the protest only seemed to drive Lasota and Danielson further to the fringes of the community. By December 2019, both had been banned from LessWrong after attempting to post their grievances about CFAR and MIRI there. A Facebook group called Bay Area Rationalist Community Safety Discussion sprung up, where the protest, and Lasota's role in it specifically, was dissected; Lasota was not allowed in the group, and Danielson complained that their own posts defending their friend were censored by moderators. They were booted from the MIRIx Discord server, banned from meetups for Slate Star Codex (another Rationalist forum) and unwelcome at REACH — the Rationalist and Effective Altruist Community Hub — a community space in Oakland.

Most consequentially, a website, Zizians.info, appeared online, declaring Lasota the leader of a “peculiar online cult” that the site's author christened the “Zizians.” Earlier this year, as reporters puzzled over a string of murders allegedly committed by

individuals in Lasota’s orbit, the site was treated as an authority on the subject, the claims repeated uncritically in several stories. (Lasota, for her part, blasted the site’s contents as “not just distortions but several jailbroken, outright lies” when it materialized in early 2020. She rejected most fiercely the author’s assertion that she played any role in encouraging the suicides of two close friends.)

The police response to the protest, and perhaps more so the reaction from the Rationalist community, had a profound impact on Lasota who, according to those who knew her, grew more pessimistic about humanity and the idea of redemption afterward.

Still facing a pile of fines and bills over the failures to maintain the *Caleb*, Lasota and Danielson were now being forced to pay, along with Leatham and Borhanian, for their legal defense in separate cases spawned by the protest. First there was the criminal case — all four were charged with conspiracy, trespassing, wearing a mask for an unlawful purpose, resisting arrest, false imprisonment, and child endangerment, the last charge added to account for the “emotional and mental suffering” of a class of school children at the retreat center that day — then a countersuit, filed by the protesters, alleging mistreatment at the hands of the sheriff’s office during their arrest and detention.

To remain close to their lawyers and the courthouse, the four of them stayed together in a series of Airbnbs near Santa Rosa. Daniel Blank, the young Rationalist who watched their protest from the highway, volunteered to serve as the foursome’s process server, delivering paperwork to witnesses and a judge they sought to disqualify from the case. But soon they were banned from Airbnb, too. A host apparently recognized them from a newspaper article about the protest and contacted the platform, which revoked Borhanian’s account for violating its terms of service.

Not long after that, Lasota, Danielson, Leatham, and Borhanian moved onto a dusty lot at the end of a cul-de-sac in Vallejo, California, crowded with RVs and shipping containers, and owned by a man named Curtis Lind.

LASOTA AND DANIELSON FIRST MET LIND when they pulled the *Caleb* up to the Pillar Point dock one day to refuel. Lind walked over and introduced himself as the owner of the *Robert Gray*, a 1932 Army Corps survey vessel. “I got to be pretty friendly with some of them — friendly enough so that I took one of them to a Walmart to buy [their] first bra,” Lind later told a documentary crew with NuReality Productions, who interviewed the octogenarian for an unrelated film project.

When Lind sold his boat and moved onto the property he owned in Vallejo, Lasota and Danielson asked to join him. They had a new concept: Instead of boats, they would buy and outfit small, U-Haul-style box trucks. They called them “Slackmobiles” in reference to the idea of acquiring “slack” — sufficient surplus resources — to do things beyond simply struggling to survive. The ideological heir to the Rationalist Fleet, Slackmobiles were a way to recapture “mental and logistical autonomy,” Danielson wrote.

Owning a Slackmobile, Danielson wrote in 2020, had the added advantage of insulating them from the kind of “civilizational decay and collapse” Danielson estimated had 75 percent probability of occurring by 2025.

Borhanian was especially passionate about Danielson’s idea, one person who knew her tells me. The former Google software engineer believed if she could figure out a straightforward and scalable way to build Slackmobiles or teach others how to do it, the information could effectively prevent the best and brightest from being funneled into corporate jobs where they would ultimately burn out. If a person had slack, Borhanian believed, the time they might spend working to afford rent could be used for something more productive like AI safety, or advocating for the welfare of all sentient beings.

As they began to outfit their box trucks and RVs on Lind’s lot in early 2020, their rent and expenses were mostly covered by Bitcoin, in which Borhanian and Leatham were both heavily invested, as well as savings Lasota had squirreled away during her time working at Google in 2018. Just as Bitcoin crashed in March 2020, and the group lost its ability to pay rent, they were offered some cosmic slack of their own: Because of the pandemic, the state of California placed a temporary moratorium on evictions. Soon after protections went into effect, Lind said, Lasota and the others stopped paying him.

In April of that year, Danielson’s then-lawyer told the court that his client had disappeared; he heard they may have died by suicide. His repeated calls to Danielson went unanswered, he wrote, before the number was disconnected. Then, in August — the month after the moratorium on evictions ended — Lasota was reported missing, too, also presumed dead.

According to documents later filed in San Mateo District Court, on the afternoon of Aug. 19, 2022, Lasota had taken Borhanian and her youngest sister, Naomi Lasota, out “for an afternoon on the water” aboard the *Black Cygnet*, the small sailboat she purchased before the *Caleb*. Around 11 p.m., as the three headed back toward the marina, Lasota fell off the back of the boat and into the bay, according to Borhanian.

“I lost sight of [Lasota] while looking for a life preserver,” Borhanian wrote in a petition intended to officially establish Lasota’s death. The pair called the Coast Guard, which mounted an exhaustive search effort — involving a helicopter, a drone, and several boats — before it was called off, unsuccessful.

Lasota’s parents placed an obituary in their hometown newspaper, remembering her love for “adventure, friends, and family, music, blueberries, biking, computer games, and animals.”

Dan Kapelovitz, the lawyer representing Lasota in the ongoing criminal case over the CFAR reunion protest, was still fighting for footage of her arrest when he received the news. He notified the court of Lasota’s apparent death and formally requested to be let off the case, which he believes would eventually have been dropped. (“The government had an extremely weak case,” he tells me.)

Just a few months after Kapelovitz lodged his request, he received an email from the district attorney in Vallejo, informing him that his client was, in fact, alive.

IN THE FALL OF 2022, APPARENTLY UNAWARE of the legal efforts to declare Lasota legally dead, Lind had sought a court order to formally evict her, Danielson, Borhanian, plus 18 other named residents and “all unknown occupants” whom, Lind alleged, owed him more than \$60,000 back rent, damages, and other costs. Lind was granted a judgment against his tenants on Oct. 27 of that year. Among those unknown occupants was an individual later named in court documents as Suri Dao, a former National Merit Scholar who identified as bigender and was estranged from their parents.

Two and half weeks later — two days before the Solano County Sheriff was reportedly set to evict them — Dao approached Lind asking for help, he later said. There was a leak in Dao’s trailer, and they didn’t know how to turn the water off. According to Lind’s account of the events, he was bending over outside Dao’s trailer when he was hit on the back of the head.



Curtis Lind owned the land where Lasota and some of her followers lived. He was later killed.

Curtis Lind/GoFundMe

“The right hand side of my skull was shattered. My nose was shoved over flat,” Lind said in the unpublished video footage. He managed to get to his feet and pull out the gun he said he began wearing after Borhanian flashed a knife at him a few weeks earlier. Standing around him were Dao, Borhanian, and Leatham. Lind shot Borhanian fatally, then fired several rounds at Leatham before running out of ammunition.

“I was bleeding from numerous puncture wounds — I think around 50. I couldn’t see out of my right eye — had been punctured three times. The back of my neck had some severe cuts, like somebody was trying to cut my head off ... Oh, and I had a sword, a long sword, all the way through my chest, right next to my heart, sticking out the other end,” Lind later said. The samurai sword was still sticking through his chest when he banged on the door of another tenant’s nearby RV, telling him, “I’m dying.”

Leatham and Dao were arrested that day and charged with aggravated mayhem, the attempted murder of Lind, as well as Borhanian’s murder, under a California law that allows for a person to be charged if they provoke another person to kill.

At least one person blamed the Rationalist community’s treatment of Lasota and her friends for the tragedy: In April 2023, an acquaintance, Octavia Nouzen — who claims to have helped author Zizians.info — wrote, “Emma is dead because we all called her and her friends a cult so much that they couldn’t find anywhere to live” other than Lind’s lot.

A few days after Lind’s stabbing, Lasota’s former lawyer Dan Kapelovitz received an email from a deputy district attorney in Sonoma County.

“I just wanted to reach out and let you know Lasota was contacted by police in Vallejo this weekend (Leatham was involved in an attack and was charged with attempted murder). Lasota was on scene, alive and well,” the deputy DA wrote.

Lasota, according to reporting by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, had been handcuffed at gunpoint at the scene and taken to Vallejo police headquarters, “where a homicide investigator said she faked a medical emergency and was taken by ambulance to a hospital,” from which she later disappeared.

THE NEXT TIME LASOTA APPEARED on law enforcement radar was two months later, on Jan. 12, 2023, at an airport hotel on the outskirts of Philadelphia. State police had come to Candlewood Suites to serve a warrant in connection with an investigation into the murders of Rita and Richard Zajko, the parents of a young Rationalist known to friends as Jamie. The couple was shot in their home two weeks earlier, on New Year’s Eve — their child’s 30th birthday.

Police arrived at the hotel hoping to retrieve a 9 mm Smith & Wesson MP and a DNA sample belonging to Jamie Zajko. As Zajko, who is nonbinary, was being escorted by police out of the motel, they shouted to hotel staff to notify Zajiko’s travel companion, Daniel Blank, that they had been detained. Blank, the young vegan Rationalist who watched the CFAR protest and later assisted the four during their legal troubles, had cut off contact with his own family a month earlier.

Zajko, who had a masters degree in bioinformatics, was originally drawn into Less-Wrong after reading Yudkowsky’s Harry Potter fan fiction. After college, they moved to the Bay Area where they interned at NASA and lived in the same group house, Guilt, with Borhanian, Leatham, and the roommate they accused of abuse. According to Danielson, they mounted an effort with Borhanian in 2019 to “get Jamie out” of their abusive living situation — even offering help to build a Slackmobile where they could live.

Their efforts failed, but they left a lasting impression on Zajko. “One of the last times I heard from Jamie, [they] told us a bit about [their] living in an RV by [themselves] on that piece of land [they] bought,” a friend who knew Zajko from a LessWrong study group, tells me. Three years later, in August 2021, Zajko wrote on Tumblr about their decision to build a Slackmobile, an effort they say began in earnest “after I noticed the extent of my complicity with the animal murder industry.” That post was liked by Daniel Blank.

A few weeks before he stopped speaking to his family, Blank, a Berkeley graduate and a beloved member of the Bay Area Rationalist community, known for his brilliance and generosity, posted on his own Tumblr: “I don’t know if this is the sort of thing posted here, or if it’ll get any response, but: I have been told that (and it seems accurate that) I am bad at coming up with strategies from scratch, and tend to follow whatever opportunities to do good come my way instead. Since I would like to devote my life to the truth, life, and agency of all sentient beings, and am largely lost on how to do so, has anyone any advice?”

Before he dropped off radar, a friend from the Rationalist community tells me Blank “seemed to be successively joining various vegan groups and then being disappointed in the lack of efficacy.” The friend, an effective altruist, recalls that in her final conversation with Blank, “I tried to walk him into incrementalism, but I still worry that I was counterproductive. I said, ‘What are you going to do? Wage war on the non-vegan singlehandedly? You need to have a clear path to impact.’ But I think that what he heard is, ‘You should wage war on the non-vegans singlehandedly.’”

The last message Blank’s parents received from him was a graphic video of animals being slaughtered. “Look what you’ve done,” he wrote, according to reporting from the news site VT Digger.

The state troopers who detained Zajko in Pennsylvania knew Blank as Zajko’s roommate — they had interviewed both of them about the Zajko murders a week earlier at the house where the pair were living in Vermont.

When they learned — after Zajko called out to the hotel staff — that Blank was also in the hotel, they got a second search warrant — for the same gun and Blank’s DNA — and forced their way into his room. They were surprised to find two people inside: Blank and another person, this one laying on the bathroom floor, unresponsive: Ziz Lasota.

The trooper, using male pronouns for Lasota, later described the scene in court: “He had his eyes closed. He would not speak. He was just laying almost unconscious or as if he was dead on the ground.” It would eventually take “four or five” officers to carry Lasota out of the hotel room. “Just the weight of carrying a limp body is not easy,” the trooper said. Lasota, who police eventually managed with some difficulty to fingerprint, was charged with disorderly conduct and obstructing or hindering police. She was held on those charges in Pennsylvania for months, her bail set at \$500,000.

Lasota finally posted a reduced bail in June 2023. When she failed to show up at court that December, a judge issued a bench warrant for her arrest. By then, Zajko and



A January 2023 mug shot photo of Lasota was taken while she refused to open her eyes or speak.

Delaware County Sheriff's Office

Blank had returned to Vermont. Lasota and two others — Teresa Youngblut, a young HPMoR fan from Washington who adopted the name “Milo,” and a German quant trader called Ophelia Bauckholt, both vegans who were active in online Rationalist communities — were reportedly living together in an Airbnb in North Carolina. A little more than a year would pass, before violence would explode again — on opposite ends of the country, just a few days apart.

On Jan. 20, 2025, Youngblut and Bauckholt were in Vermont, looking to purchase property, when they were pulled over by Border Patrol for an immigration check. (Bauckholt was in the U.S. on an H1-B visa, reserved for highly skilled workers.) According to a federal indictment, both the driver and passenger exited the vehicle and opened fire on the federal agents. One Border Patrol officer, David Maland, was killed in the firefight, as was Bauckholt. Youngblut was hospitalized and later charged with Maland’s murder. Their guns, investigators would later learn, were purchased by Zajko.

Three days earlier, on the other side of the country, just as the cases against Leatham and Suri Dao were preparing to go to trial, Curtis Lind — the key witness in those trials — was attacked again, this time fatally. Lind was approached and stabbed in the chest by a figure in a beanie and mask. A 22-year-old former Oxford student named Maximillian Snyder was arrested and charged with Lind’s murder. Snyder, a Yudkowsky reader, had once been awarded an \$11,000 AI Alignment research prize in a contest judged by MIRI’s president and, records show, he had applied for a marriage license with Youngblut one month earlier.

Contacted in jail by a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* two weeks after his arrest, Snyder agreed to dictate an open letter over the phone: It was addressed to Yudkowsky, imploring him to go vegan.

Four weeks after that, Maryland State Police approached a pair of box trucks parked on an unpaved road near Frostburg, Maryland. In the cab of one of the trucks, State Trooper Brandon Jeffries would later recall in court records obtained by *Rolling Stone*, he found a young man dressed all in black: Daniel Blank. The windows of the second truck were fogged over, but when Jeffries unlatched the back door, he discovered two others, similarly clad in black and wearing holsters stocked with guns and ammunition: Lasota and Zajko. The trucks were registered to Youngblut.

TO PEOPLE WHO KNEW LASOTA AND the others, the seemingly inexplicable series of attacks that took place after they were pushed out of the Rationalist community fit within a common understanding.

“The core thing motivating a lot of what they were doing was looking at the horrors of factory farming and being unwilling to accept it,” a friend explains. They were convinced “anybody who could tolerate this is a monster.” But there was another aspect, too: They believed “making it stop isn’t enough. We need to make it not have happened in the first place.”

According to Lasota’s interpretation of Timeless Decision Theory, it is possible to “collapse the timeline” — making it so that certain events “never happened” at all. As



Teresa Youngblut pictured at Newport City Inn and Suites in Vermont.

one person puts it, the logic boils down to: “If you punish the people who do a bad thing hard enough, then there won’t have been any incentive for them to do it in the first place, and therefore they won’t have done it at all, in any alternate timeline.”

This, people who knew Lasota suspect, is the ideology underpinning the series of violent encounters that Lasota’s friends and acquaintances were involved with in the years that followed their protest of the CFAR reunion.

According to Yudkowsky, it’s also a bastardization of his original theory, now known as “Logical Decision Theory” or LDT. “I don’t expect the Zizian concept of ‘Timeless Decision Theory’ much resembles the actuality, though I have not tried to learn about the details of what they say they believe,” Yudkowsky tells me via email. “But at any rate, LDT does not say to assault your landlord or a passing police officer, because nothing particularly good will happen on this Earth if LDT-reasoners do that, and like most decision theories, LDT advises people to do things that have good consequences rather than bad consequences.”



Border Patrol Agent David Maland was killed earlier this year after pulling over Teresa Youngblut and Ophelia Bauckholt.

Department of Homeland Security/AP

The reason that LDT — the former Timeless Decision Theory — is discussed in Rationalist circles at all is, as a former colleague of Lasota’s tells me, because “it is a

pretty realistic situation for AIs to find themselves in.” In that world — a world where countless, nearly identical simulations are run over and over again — there is simply a source code and a series of weights that can be changed to determine an output.

The logic doesn’t work in the real world because, in the real world, people don’t function like perfectly predictable machines. Or, as a different friend, puts it: “ZDT” — Zizian decision theory — “is an excellent decision theory for getting your fucking friends killed.”

LASOTA AND HER FRIENDS WERE DRAWN to the Bay Area by the promise that they could be heroes. Instead of reorienting toward the real world after they became disillusioned with the figures who perpetuated that fantasy, they dropped deeper into a shared delusion that they alone could change the course of history. And they lashed out violently at any point that reality — the reality that rent will eventually come due, the reality that we live in a society with laws, and courts, and fines, and police officers — intruded on their fantasy.

“Deeply immersed in Yudkowsky’s ideas, the Zizians took his framework to an extreme, embracing anarchist ideology and actions. Their radicalization process highlights a key issue: The Rationality movement offers methods for deconstructing thinking and beliefs, but offers no safeguards to prevent vulnerable individuals from spiraling into self-destruction and such harmful extremes,” Dr. Nirit Weiss-Blatt, author of the book *Techlash*, tells me.

Suri Dao and Somni Leatham, charged in the 2022 murder of Emma Borhanian, and the attempted murder of the landlord Curtis Lind, are scheduled to go to trial in Solano County in March 2026. Maximillian Snyder, who is charged in Lind’s January 2025 murder, pleaded not guilty in March 2025; he is scheduled to return to Solano County Superior Court in January. His onetime partner, Teresa Youngblut, faces four federal charges in Vermont related to the murder of Border Patrol agent David Maland, a case in which prosecutors intend to pursue the death penalty. She has pleaded not guilty; a trial is pending.

This summer, Gwen Danielson appeared in court in Sonoma County to answer the criminal charges related to the CFAR protest, which have been reduced to misdemeanors. “Due to the case still being open, Ms. Danielson has no comment at this time. She looks forward to concluding this matter and moving forward with her life,” attorney Scott Emerick, who is representing Danielson, tells *Rolling Stone*.

Lasota, Zajko, and Blank remain in custody in Maryland on weapons, drugs, and trespassing charges; their trial is set to start in February. After that case is adjudicated, Lasota faces a separate set of federal charges filed against her in June. (When she was arrested in Maryland, the federal government alleges, Lasota was in possession of several guns which, as a fugitive of justice after skipping bail in Pennsylvania, she was prohibited from having. She faces a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison if convicted. Lasota pleaded not guilty to those charges in November; asked to state her age for the record in court, she replied: “Timeless.”) The cases against her in Pennsylvania and Sonoma County remain open, as well.

From jail this spring, Zajko — who, along with Blank, remains a person of interest in Zajko’s parents’ murders in Pennsylvania — wrote an open letter, in which they reiterated Lasota’s accusations against Yudkowsky, including the claim that Yudkowsky has accelerated progress toward an artificial general intelligence, declaring “Yudkowsky may yet kill the world!”

In the letter, Zajko writes, “I have been unable to read the news while in jail. The little news I’ve gotten was enough to determine that my friends and I are being described as Satan’s lapdogs, the devil, and the Manson family all rolled into one ... For instance, there were no truck-fulls of guns, no machine gun, and I didn’t murder my parents. I assume that if the papers are lying about that, then they’re lying about a lot of other things, too. You still have the option to read what Ziz actually wrote from the source, instead of relying on misrepresentative summaries. Sincerely.fyi is on the Wayback Machine. You may even like what you read.”



This story has been updated to include the text of a 2015 letter signed by Louie Helm as part of the legal efforts to resolve his dispute with MIRI.

The Ted K Archive

Tessa Stuart

The Radicalization of Ziz Lasota: How an AI Doomer Became an Accused Cult
Leader

Lasota's friends, colleagues, and family talk about how a NASA intern and Google
employee wound up at the center of a bizarre string of murders across the country

December 2, 2025

<www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ziz-lasota-zizians-ai-cult-1235468289>

Cover Illustration by Mathew Cooley

www.thetedkarchive.com