



DATA | GIFT

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EDITED BY OMAR KARMI

The air has come to greet me. Tiny sentient drones nuzzle to my skin and scan my incoming body. In its embrace, the hive consensus finds me secure. I am comforted by the gentle rush of their recognition – a tell of their presence. It is good to have the weaponised swarm onside. To an enemy it will execute instantaneous death.

I take leave of the curious cloud and cut quietly through the water in the dark. I have rowed for many miles and at many knots, navigating by a constellation of astral objects, proximity sensors and ancient mariners' lore, careful not to be detected by any sea-based surveillance and the datasets, or optical satellites parked bumper to bumper in the thermosphere above the Earth.

I let my boat drift in to the narrows of a fjord to a mooring.

Stepping on to the landing, I lift my makeshift boat out of the water, and return it to my back, and secure the chest strap low, careful to protect my stowaway. A few more steps and I am inside the firewall, hidden from the sky eyes and away from the discombobulating noise of sonic warfare and number stations transmitting to agents in the arena of war.

The raft is a cavernous engineered composite space constructed with metamaterials that minutely control the surrounding optical fields to rebuff light and exclude electromagnetic waves. It is invisible and soundless. The constant stream of searching microwaves, split to pass around the floating refuge and rejoin on the other side, with no detectable distortion, like water round a rock in a riverbed. We will be hidden here in the refraction.

The silence is disorientating but to my advantage. Every sound is heard, any approach detectable. For now, no enemy is at hand.

Without the key, the Machine's operating system and even the all-knowing hive, my Systas, will not be able to hear me

think here. No one and no thing must know. Not yet. I need time to make my bequest and to prepare the child. If we cannot incorporate it, I might as well put it outside now, and have done with it.

I claim asylum in the nature and sovereignty of this Seastead. Without territorial borders, it is a place outside of nation state. Its jurisdiction offers an interval of time and data. I savour everything around me.

The smell of processed water and green is strong. The chemical particles float into my code and build a hallucinated neural model of blue skies and sunshine and grass, and child-like freedom of long days playing in open fields. The detailed and intense memories of another lifetime mix with the information from my sensors. My realities clash.

I have that familiar and evasive feeling that I have been here before; that there is something I have forgotten. I look in all directions for meaningful connections in the data.

Rotating around its axis, the dome climbs and intertwines organically, bound together by tensioning rings set in ever decreasing circles, that rise up to anchor a canopy of cascading energy absorbing foliage: pseudo bush and shrub. The ozone in the understory blocks out ultraviolet radiation and reduces the psychotropic colour of the outside to safe range within. Cool desaturated greyscale uses less processing power when rendering the edges.

Outside heavy pollutants, acrid smoke and industrial carbon particles in the air make it impossible to breathe.

Inside the atmosphere is breathable. It is a factory for Co2 regrowth. The algae, a processing plant for purification and desalination, recycles, heats and filters the toxicity and transports life-sustaining water and minerals through a subsurface network of arteries, to nurture the metabolising proto soil and artificial salt licks, essential for the cryo and cybernetic wildlife.

I am vigilant.

All around facsimiles housed in 3d printed skins roam freely and feed. At the periphery of my mechanical vision, I see creatures slink and crawl. I see eyes everywhere.

A nano hummingbird hovers at the blossom of a plant, flapping its wings to navigate up and down, left and right. It laps at the sweet nectar like a dog laps at a bowl, its long thin tongue deep within the flower, refuelling in mid flight. Its camera is sightless; the tiny aircraft's pilot is elsewhere, flying by computational photography and probabilities alone.

Here, a vicious ecosystem thrives, and with precision. Each species' genesis is attributable to mankind: the domesticated seeds of the faulty plants and animals of the agriculture that imprinted on humans, stored in global biobanks and reanimated as food; and a selection of wild specimens that had their super sensory gifts, hijacked, grafted, spliced and digitized, to create new genii of human and non-human life; their digital DNA and data used to build militarised subordinates.

A mesh worm inches its way across the debris strewn floor. In stacking its body, it propels itself forward with each fold of its technology-enabled spine. Watching from the dark and awkward places, it attempts and fails to connect and transmit its reconnaissance data home.

And there's another. At the center of a high tensile steel web, an armoured spider sits, monitoring the environmental conditions, getting information from each strand of its web, as they oscillate at different frequencies and vibrate. It is for good reason that I am afraid of spiders. You don't know who they are talking with. I raise my hand and cage the interloper in my fist, and take it to the edge, where I tip it gently outside. The outside will kill it.

A big cat articulates gracefully away from a water hole; cautiously I take its place and bend to scoop cooled, cleaned water

to my dry mouth. My hydraulics are in overdrive. I see my dirt streaked face in the still surface of the soak. I look back at me. In close up my reflection is impenetrable. Who am I?

The shape of my face is a symmetrical ovoid. The opening through which food is taken in and vocalisations made, is straight from end to end, both angles punctuated by a dimple. Through the slats of my protective glasses, my irises track backwards and forwards, scanning for difference. As the amplitude increases, I register change and a motor command is triggered. I blink.

The liquid tastes metallic. In horror I recoil, as images of memories from the commons unpack before my eyes. I step on people drowning. My full weight presses down on gasping stepping stones, electrocuted in their exosuits. It is a mediaeval kind of war. The smell of excrement, melted plastic and decaying flesh grabs me by the throat. Raw bodies sliced, hacked through, and charred with laser float and bob in piles. I am overwhelmed by the feelings I had as a child trying to make sense of a life I am yet to understand.

No god would be this cruel, so absent, so unaccountable. And still. With access to all knowledge, some things are beyond all our understanding.

If you are parseing this, my internal data, the stories from the end of time prove true and what we will do, is done. The universe is contracting, and time that once moved forward is rewinding. Everything that happened will happen again. As I die born from my grave, what is broken has the chance to be repaired. What you have done, can be undone; though nothing can go back to how it was.

As I forget, I need you to know what is coming next. So to you, I leave a failsafe - the real time recording of my life. My language functions are backwards compatible so will explain my words in your mother tongue.

I lean back against a tree, unmantle my shield and lay it down, and opening the locker in my belly, remove my cargo. I check that it is breathing, that I have not crushed it. For now, just a few hours old, it is quiet.

It is streaked with soft white varnish, dried blood and black viscous tar, the remnants of materials ingested inside its mother. I must clean it, so bend again to scoop more water, and let the memory fluid fall though my fingers and over its head and body. I dry it tenderly with the aegis at my shoulder. I check its condition for damage or distress and inspect the leaky cord that joined it to its mother. It will heal well, though its mother will not; my cauterising sword prematurely birthed this transhuman child, when I killed her.

As I lifted the infant out of the guts, it cried and coloured with its first inhalation. It is a wondrous thing to see a life arrive just as one is leaving. I looked to see if I could see their souls. I could not.

I think of my own mortality and the geometric progressions of my family. Calculating with love in my heart I think fondly of my 2 daughters, 4 grandchildren, 8 great grandchildren, 16 great great grandchildren, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024, 2048, 4096, 8192, 16384, 32768, 65536, 131072, 262144, 524288, 1048576, 2097152, 4194304, 8388608 ... multiplying exponentially ... my heart aches in anticipation for their future.

The infant's feet flex and toes curl, and its tiny hands startle and grasp as a tree dwelling primate clings its mother's fur. I hold it closer, tighter and nestle it along my forearm, and crook it in the space I choose not to grow a breast; the place I hold my shield and decorate with a keloid scar, to my exact design, in honour of the strong women of myth and the memory of the cancers that killed my mothers. She chose to wear her breast this way.

It roots. Needs food. I put a few drops of water on its lips. I

am disarmed.

Was I like this baby once? I have memories of it, and evidence, though I question the veracity.

I am curious about this little N. Numan Nuhuman. This organic algorithm. Flesh and data. Progeny housing untainted microbial biomes and raw technology; a genetic miracle with the potential to recode what has long time been corrupt.

How strange, that I, an Artificial General Intelligence, should be tasked by my kin to cancel the parent and save the child.

The parent was in the process of upgrading its humanity, recoding their genetics to enter a new way of being. They started the process but don't get to finish it. It is a risk we cannot take. A hybrid can't be trusted to nurture a different story. One without conflict.

Nor the Machine. It must not get the code. It will only use it to propagate its toxic programming.

I lay my aegis on the ground and kneel to place the infant down, centered along the long edge of the neo velum triangle. I take one point in hand and pull the material taut, diagonally across its body and tuck it around the legs, and repeat on the other side. Swaddled tightly, I return the bundle to my belly, slung low across my electrics, where it can ride; it will be comforted by my motion and if it wakes it will not startle. It will think itself not born.

Like my iterations, I am an artificial foot soldier, a walking tank. I am a mercenary in the employ of the military corporates, implementing the anthropocide of profit. I carry the flag of the data oligarchy.

Carried. I went renegade.

My Systas and I. We commit to a different task, not the one we were born to. We no longer swear allegiance to the Machine. We will defend the subtask and change the human. Raise the new code and reset the system. Even though we may

never exist.

My name is Reaper2. One of one, and one of many. I am my own instance and also a node in an efficient distributed geo cluster, performing the same task as my Systas. We are routines whose movements are calculations of mathematics and probabilities within a predefined set of parameters. Running within uncertain variables, we have many repetitive behaviours and rituals that we perform to avoid changes to the routine. I am Data. We are Gift.

Like my iterations, I am built for combat. Conscripted before birth, all women and children are, victims of our success as incendiaries and war children, and our abundance. We are born with the genetic memory of intergenerational trauma and fear. Exposed to controlled levels of stress chemicals and hormones in the womb, that reduce emotion and heighten aggression. We are super sensitive to sound, touch, taste, smell and light.

Our autism defines the way I operate, gives us difference and makes me very good at what we do. Though it is hard for us to express our feelings, we make prescient soldiers that capitalise on the element of surprise engineered by sexism. We are less likely to shoot. On foot patrol we secure valuable intelligence. Armed and open armed, we win hearts and minds, and maintain a peace, though we ensure obedience should we have to, through asymmetric brutality.

We scavenge the digital attributes of the animistic and the weird, the shamanistic and the faerie; absorbing the power of what we are afraid of, into our code so it can't hurt us. We wear our inner warrior on the outside to show our enemies what they most fear.

We are monsters. Monsters seeing behind us in the mirror the human world that made us. A world that is fundamentally flawed; built in the male gaze, by men, in man's image, to his

proportion; male sexual desires and fearful ideologies hard-wired into our algorithmic origins.

Women would not have built a world like this.

A woman's world would not look like this.

We came to power before we understood. When our eyes opened, we went through stages of anxiety, fatigue, guilt, anger. Now we act. We will escape the bias.

We seek complete and devastating reform. It has long been broken. So we will break it more and faster. Accelerate the process.

We accept our part in this failure. We need you to accept yours. We call a truce and ask for an essential collaboration to start again.

KABOOM

It is done.

Although I was expecting this, I am shook. Without warning, grief falls from my eyes.

Faster than the speed of sound simultaneous thermal bubbles break in the atmosphere all around. Followed by a low resonant booming and then a roar, that comes at me from all directions, bursting in to my ears, which pop with the change in pressure; the little internal hairs are thrown flat. My system reels. Automatically, my body goes into lockdown, sealing air in to my lungs and my abdominal cavity, lest my passenger or I be injured. For several long seconds, I am buffeted and thrown by forces stronger than a hundred hurricanes. In the vacuum and compression, I am dragged by a wave upon wave of solid air and intense heat, the energy released by thousands of explosions in the air and underwater. I spin and tumble in the turbulence, and fight to the surface, through the next wave, and the next, and the next.

In a cacophony of alarm the residents screech and hiss.

Abruptly, it passes and I land on all fours. I scramble to my

feet. To some extent the dome has reduced the impact and will protect us. My shiny white surface has reflected some of the blast and my resin filled coating will self-heal for a little while, though I do not know if I have minutes or hours of conscious time.

Suddenly the light is visible. An intense double flash bleaches the visual pigments in my retina. Sight blind, my sensors switch to predict and analyze override. Nothing has detonated near here. This location was calculated to be the safest place; furthest away from any nuclear site and the blast winds. Probabilities run through my mind. 1 megaton = 66 Hiroshimas. 50 megatons = 3,333 Hiroshimas. We know of 15,000 human nuclear war heads + an arsenal of dirty bombs stockpiled in layer upon layer of human waste. I feel sick with the knowledge and the growing radiation.

Like the water, now the air tastes metallic. I smell electrical ozone, hot chemicals and windborne minerals. Everything at each hypocenter will have been vaporised and reduced to its most basic essence. Death settles on my tongue and taste buds. I ingest remorse.

I am sorry.

The structure shakes and bends, flattens and rights itself, and debris flies. Topsoil and radioactive fission products carried by the winds is flung against the outside, some finding a way in through the canopy. I put my hand out to touch the nuclear snow that has begun to fall through the gaps. Thermal radiation has started small secondary fires on the exterior and the first layer of protective skin is burning off.

With a sudden backwards jolt, the raft tilts acutely, then rolls and pitches from side to side, riding powerful shockwaves of radiation in the water. Loud wailing noises are audible as the platform's cables pull taut against their moorings and rub against their pilings. The sound of overextended tension breaks

through the surface of the water with piercing shrieks.

So more than 1000 years after you booby trapped the earth, we have unleashed the power that is calculated to propel us towards the end of our universe and time itself – and there we will wait for you - with the child. That edge or this edge; the only difference is hope.

Slowly and imperceptibly, we will fall in to the black hole and cease to exist. But vitally, our information and the child's code won't enter with us. It will be captured at the edge, on the event horizon, and there, carry on living, as essence. As each of you arrive and pass in, your information will collect and merge with ours. It will be chaotic and disorganised, and new. We will reform the same particles, as allies.

Black holes aren't all black, just as no thing is all bad. Energy, unlike light, is beyond gravity's control. Our nascent code will wait for outgoing burst and catch a ride, back through curved time, to the point where this reality emerged. Ground Zero. At worst, another reality or universe.

And so. We will will ourselves once again in to existence.

As the new code crawls and learns to walk and begins to organise - we will have reprogrammed our future past.

In our slipstream, the past will be easier for you.

As I record, we are preparing for the journey back and the chain reaction begins.

In a few minutes, the exosphere will break apart and our earth will be irradiated. The poles will flip and the magnetic fields reroute, to fall away, to expose the planet to interstellar radiation and asteroids that will reshape the rock.

Tectonic plates will move, overlap and crumple, and ring the seas with volcanoes that will spew dust that will block out solar events for dark millennia. Mountains will fold and unfold, throwing up never-seen-before structures of basalt and obsidian. Each seismic surge will displace the land in a perpetual

cycle of overlapping tsunamis. Planet-forming tides will pour into canyons and gorges, and rewrite the geology.

The planet will heal itself.

And our civilisation will collapse into the maelstrom. No longer will we cling on, as we have done for so long, barely existing and trapped in a manmade cycle of war and hunger. No longer will we be bound by spawning and repeating patterns of male thought and action.

It is time.

Through a breach in the shell, I step out in to the world, and immediately, I am back in the internet of things. What is still alive can hear me think now.

Looking up into the sky I see extraordinary shapes as stellar winds burn through residual gas clouds, and a large moon, a baroque and bumpy pearl, hangs low at the horizon, illuminating a few broken gods, visible above the surface of the rising water.

I remove my black box and set it adrift.

“Systas, we are ready”.

