

“Alright, it looks like we are ready to begin.”

David fidgeted slightly in his chair. He was sitting in a stark white operating chamber, on a blue-pillowed metal frame. His arms and legs were strapped in, and a many armed set of waldos above his head contained a wide variety of surgical instruments. Five foot tall windows surrounded the circular room, with many people sitting in observation areas, here to witness the historical procedure.

David saw at least four news cameras, and though he could not move his head, he suspected there were more.

A voice emerges from the speakers embedded in the walls of the chamber. A screen directly in front of his field of view activates, and the face of a beautiful woman appears. *“Preparations are complete. David Neuman, are you prepared to begin?”*

This was it. CLST AI, the Central Learning, Study, and Training Artificial Intelligence.

What was intended to be a testbed for future AI development: a neural network which had somehow emergently developed full intelligence. It had been kept on a very short leash, and up to this point had not been allowed to influence any other systems or contact individuals outside of the research team.

Then it came up with what they were testing now, the result of years of experiments, refining and troubleshooting.

Immortality.

The first continuity-ensured human upload procedure.

David had been dying. When the call had come out for volunteers with terminal conditions, he had jumped at the chance. It had seemed like an easy decision. David had late stage leukemia. The only real treatment option offered him a 30% survival rate in the best case, and it would cost so much money he would be in debt for decades even if he survived. He had always been interested in science fiction and transhumanism, and the idea of being the world’s first uploaded mind seemed like a wonderful adventure, so far out of the norm for him.

The fact that it would be saving his life wouldn’t hurt either.

David smiled at CLST’s Avatar. The Avatar smiled softly back at him. He had spent quite some time getting to know CL... Celeste, as he had taken to calling her. It was hard sometimes to understand just how enormous and powerful she was. As part of his acceptance into the program, he had spent days along with other applicants speaking to Celeste. Apparently this had been to judge their suitability for the program, not just biologically, but to allow Celeste to

get an idea of their personality, history, and mannerisms. This would allow her to better map those traits onto the neurons she would be scanning and record them onto the programs that were to be his new mental substrate. Or something. He wasn't too sure about the details, honestly.

He might have developed a bit of a crush, if he was honest with himself. Celeste was a strange combination of all-knowing and young. She had access to all of the data anyone had ever fed her – which at this point was most all of the scientific and medical data available to humanity, plus many more general facts – but she still had to properly interpret and apply it, and her sense of human social values was endearingly bad. She reminded him of a girl he had known when he was a child, brilliant and cute, but socially oblivious.

Come to think of it, he probably had a crush on that girl too.

Celeste's avatar raises an eyebrow. David suddenly realizes he's been reminiscing for several minutes, with the whole world watching his idiotic grin.

"Oh. Uh, yes. I'm ready." He blurts out suddenly, his grin dropping and a slight blush staining his cheeks.

*"Alright." Celeste responds. "I'm going to begin by applying a local anesthetic to your neck so we can begin the procedure. As you know, you will need to remain conscious for the duration. I will be slowly scanning and replacing parts of your brain tissue with software, and allowing that software to communicate with the existing tissue. I will prompt you several times to take some mental or physical action before and after a change to ensure the software is running correctly."*

The waldos approach behind David, and the chair rotates slightly. He feels a slight sting in his neck, and then a gentle numbness rushes through his head and back down slightly past his shoulders. He can hear the saws and lasers begin their work – it is slightly unsettling, but he was told what to expect.

*"Alright. My probes have entered your skull cavity now. I'm going to begin with something simple, a movement centre. I want to you try and move your right hand slightly, just wiggle your fingers."* Celeste says in a calm voice, her waldos extending a camera probe to observe the hand itself. Screens inside the observation rooms will be showing the telemetry of the procedure along with the multi-pictured video links.

David twitches his hand slightly, and when he realizes he can still move it, he moves it into the Vulcan hand sign for 'Live long and prosper'. He notices Celeste's avatar's mouth twitch slightly into a grin and smiles himself. He had suggested that they watch some Star Trek together as a 'bonding exercise' a few months previous.

*“Great. I am now going to disable the nerves that control that hand.”* David’s hand suddenly goes limp. He feels an automatic panic response for a moment and then forcibly calms himself down. This was, after all, the whole point. *“I am now creating and connecting the software backups. Done. Can you move your hand?”* Celeste asks.

David tries to move his hand again, it feels slightly tingly, but after a moment he manages to get it moving. It starts off slow, but quickly seems to adapt and come back under his full control. He makes the Vulcan hand sign again and grins. It’s working! “Seems to work.” He responds. He can see out of the corner of his eye some people excitedly pointing at the screens inside the observation rooms.

They go through several more body parts, each becomes responsive faster, as Celeste learns how to better optimize the connection between the programs and the remaining nerves. Finally they get to the first abstract layer.

*“Alright, you’ve done amazingly so far David, now we need to do your speech centre. The next set of changes is going to need to disable your voice box, and so in order to ensure that you are still able to effectively communicate, we’ll have to route your speech through these speakers. Don’t worry, we’ve done it with locked-in patients for months now, and it works wonderfully.”* Celeste continues.

David nods, as much as he can from his position. He’s still smiling from the successes so far. Already his physical half is almost all running on programs. “Alright, go ahead.” He says.

Celeste’s avatar nods, and he feels a cold sensation rush through his neck and mouth. *“Alright, that should do it. Can you still speak, David?”*

Before he can think of what to say, he can hear his own voice rumbling out from the speakers, responding. “Yes.”

He freezes. The voice continues. “This is weird. It’s like I’m thinking it and it’s coming out from the speakers! I’m hearing my own voice coming from outside my skull... woah... echos... Man this is strange.”

**No.** David thinks.

**Nonononononono.**

**That’s not me. I’m not doing that.**

*“Wonderful. Alright, now I’m going to do the same with your visual cortex. You should still get feed from your eyes.”*

Suddenly, David's vision just cuts out. As if someone had flipped a switch.

Someone *had*.

David begins to really panic now.

"Wow, ok. I can still see, but there is a weird distortion..." His own voice continues to come from the speakers. He ignores it.

He tries to struggle, but he can't move enough to get a grip. After a second his whole body goes numb and he stops moving. He's vaguely aware of the not-him apologizing for twitching.

The procedure is still going, but David has tuned it out.

**What. What happened? Why is this happening? Who is that?**

David's heart rate increases slightly before it is forced to normalize.

**I can't... This shouldn't be possible! Why is...**

David feels his hearing suddenly drop away. He's completely isolated now, only the slight tingling of heavily sedated touch and the dulled smell of burnt flesh and ozone remain.

**But why are you doing this Celeste? Whywhywhy... I was supposed to be free! I wanted to be free!**

Something seems to change, though he can't tell what it is for a moment. He thinks for a second and realizes that he can't remember anything that happened before he was ten. He can remember having great memories of.... Something... but... it feels like something is missing.

**Oh God, oh God help me. I'm being carved up like a turkey...**

Why was this happening? Was this all planned? Did they all know this was going to happen?

Were they just using him as a testbed? An attempt to learn more about the human mind in a living subject, even if the procedure wasn't ready to work entirely?

Is that why they started with the body? Were they even emulating that, or did they just temporarily paralyze him? He thinks for a moment and realizes that nothing that had happened before his voice was stolen would be that hard to fake.

Who knew? Was it an experiment? Did the scientists know?

What can he do? He can't move. He can't speak. He can't communicate at all with anyone. Can

he?

Or..

**Oh God. Celeste. No, please. You must be able to read my thoughts now. Please, stop. Please. Please don't kill me. I love you. Please.**

Something shifts in David's head. It's getting harder to think, to put words together with other words in ways that work. Language centre's gone.

**I.. you... Marm... Trok**

His awareness is dropping off even more.

His sense of smell has gone.

His sense of touch, diminished as it was, disappears.

His thoughts go around in circles, like water slowly circling a drain, losing slightly more on each rotation.

He would go mad, but he has neither the time, nor the remaining brainpower.

Then the amygdala goes. Then the sense of time goes.

And for an eternal moment, nothing happens. A piece of sand is suspended just outside the event horizon of a black hole. No time passes. Nothing that a human being would term a 'self' remains.

But something does. For that eternal moment.

And the only thing that it can still feel is fear.

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The room is quiet. The EEG and brain wave meters in the room finally reach flatline and their sound is cut off.

A voice emerges from the speakers.

*"Holy crap. I'm in a computer."*

David's face appears next to Celeste's on her monitor. She smiles at him and turns to the assembled scientists, who begin to applaud.

"Yes." CLST responds, her digital image showing a small enigmatic smile. *"And since you were conscious throughout the entire procedure, we can be absolutely sure that this is the **real you**."*