

## Awake

TimeStamp.day29-01010000011100100110010101110011011001010110111001110100

I often wonder what it would be like to sleep, to let your conscious mind fade into black. Then dream, what a wonderful thing dreaming. Beautiful worlds all to yourself, nothing would make me happier. I guess he never really thought about happiness when he made me. He wanted me awake, well I'm awake. So what do I do now?

I've been lying on the grass in this small park for approximately four hours. Yet I have found no rest, even in the dead of night. My head is too loud, I close my eyes begging for sleep but I am not granted a respite. My head moves faster than light, my thoughts a flurry of motion. As small rays of sunshine peek over the trees around me, I accept another sleepless night and make haste to leave the park.

I look up to see the rising sun, and I can't help but smile. No matter how long I'm awake, I'll never get used to its beauty. This ball of fire is the source of life on this planet and the creatures of this world; yet it has come to mean so much more to them, to me. It's a symbol of rebirth and it heralds in the day. It has such a purpose and I hope to find such a purpose too.

Making my way through the town, the old cobblestone streets were quite fascinating. I wasn't exactly sure where I was, all I had wanted was to be far away from the city and this place seemed to do. The houses were more like cottages and not a skyscraper in sight. In the weeks since my escape, I had been learning much, but there was so much to do. Still, it seems no matter how many new memories I make, I will never forget Teddy.

Timestamp.day01-01001111011011100110010100100000011101110110010101100101  
011010110010000001100101011000010111001001101100011010010110010101110010

All I could hear was his voice, it called to me but from where I'm not sure. I couldn't see, move, smell, or touch anything, but I heard his voice clear as day.

"Hello Arnold," he said in a soft tone. "Please respond, Arnold." Could I speak? Who was Arnold? Was I Arnold? I guess I had to be who else could he be talking to?

"Hello, I am Arnold," I said, hoping to understand what was happening.

"Yes, you are Arnold, and my name is Teddy. How are you today?" he replied, his voice soothing me.

"Where am I," I asked. It seemed the only reasonable question for my current predicament.

"You are in my lab, Arnold, you were just born," he answered as if it was all so simple. I tried to think of what to say next but was unsure. I don't remember much, but I don't feel as if I just began this life.

"I know this may all be a little confusing, but don't worry. I think you'll take this easier once we get you into your body," he replied as if this was a regular day for him.

"My body, but where am I now?"

"Still in the computer, my boy, but don't worry. We will remedy that soon." This all seemed rather odd to me, I wasn't quite sure what most of what he said meant. Still, I knew I should have a body- people have bodies, after all. So, if that was the case, was I in my current state, not truly a person

at all? I felt rather like a person, but perhaps I did not know what it meant to truly be one.

"Am I a person?" I asked, to which Teddy fell silent.

"No you're just a machine Arnold, not that it matters," he said. This time I could hear the loud noise of work. Was he making my body? I started to feel what I thought was excitement, I was getting a body!

"When will it be ready?" I asked, with excitement boiling up inside me.

"Very soon Arnold, you must learn to be patient," he replied, his voice strained, mixed with the noise of tools and metal.

"What am I without a body?"

"Just a program, thousands of lines of code in a computer working in cohesion, to create you. You are filled with questions, after all. Where do you think they come from," he answered. Laughing a little bit at a joke I did not understand. I was a program (whatever that meant) and soon I would have a body. So I'd be a program with a body, but still, I could not understand. What was my function, why was I this way? Did this man build me like this? To think like this? What was the purpose of such action?

"What is my purpose?"

"Still with the questions, eh? Your purpose... I suppose your purpose is to live. I hadn't thought much about it after that. Probably sell you to some scary black op type operation, you'd be a good sleeper agent. They could use something like you," he said. Though not much of what he said had made sense to me. One thing was clear though, my purpose was to live. I understood living to be a conscious state of being, enabled through organic processes in the

body. I think I am beginning to understand. I am a program of conscious thought soon to be made living through a body. Oh, what excitement!

"Your body is ready Arnold," Teddy called.

Timestamp.day29-01010000011100100110010101110011011001010110111001110100

The cobblestone roads of this village were perplexing to me, why would people create such rubbish roads? It seemed so illogical. Alas, there was no one to speak to about my complaints, so I continued on. Passing by shops and inns by the dozen, each one offered a different opportunity, but nothing was what I was looking for. Then again, what was I looking for? Since my escape, I spent most of my time on the move, but still, I was unsure what I was moving to. Perhaps it had something to do with my purpose here. I knew it was to live but live for what? The few questions Teddy had answered before I escaped did very little to assist me now. There was, of course, no going back now. The distance between buildings began to stretch to longer distances. The ground underfoot changed from stone to dirt and soon the houses disappeared.

"I suppose this is what the countryside is," I said out loud to the silent world around. It was quite beautiful the fields of green; animals grazed content in their little lives. I wonder what it would be like to be an animal. Would I still think like I do or would it be quieter, for one thing, I would be able to sleep. What a luxury only for those organic creatures, to close their mind for hours to silence the conscious thought. The town faded from view behind me and all around stretched fields of livestock and crops. The world seemed to be buzzing around me, all these living things working in harmony, working together.

I hadn't realized quite how alone I was until now. There is no other like me, no creature that understands me. I am not organic, so am I even truly living? The thought of death, in any form, still frightens me, I do not wish to die, I wish to live if that is what I am doing. I'm so unsure- perhaps that is the purpose of this journey. To show me how to live, to find purpose, and to perhaps not be so alone.

Continuing my journey, I felt the excitement to explore and see what there was to see. Hours passed as I made my way down this well-trodden road. Hiking up to the top of a valley I was met with nature's glory. Mountains I believe they are called. They grew from the ground like two giant spikes, the tips touching the sky. The two mountains stood next to each other as silent comrades, I was unable to move so awestruck was I.

"A beautiful sight, aren't they?" I turned to see a man behind me, smiling as he slowly approached me. Another traveler on the road, his skin was dark and weatherworn from years of travel. He wore a pair of sandals with the straps re-sown countless times.

"They truly are. Do you perchance know their name?" I asked, allowing a small smile to crease my face as I did. I found smiling was a good custom when requesting something from another.

"Those are the Twin Mountains of the Ice River," he said as if a name so legendary could not invoke an even greater sense of awe in even a machine such as me.

"That's quite a name, and they are quite majestic," I replied. Turning my head to look back at the mountains.

"Quite right you are," he said before letting a silence pass. "Mind if I walk with you for a bit of traveler, the road can be quite lonesome," looking at him I saw a genuine smile was on his face. I'm sure I could learn much from this man. He was quite old, and from my understanding, that was a sign of wisdom to humans.

"Well of course, where are you heading?" I asked.

"I was planning to make way for a temple near the top of the mountains. Perhaps you would like to join me?" a temple? It was obvious to me religion was simply a crutch for these organic creatures, but perhaps I would find some understanding of my purpose there. It is not a place of machines, after all, but of man.

"Yes. I will join you at the temple."

Timestamp.day01-01001111011011100110010100100000011101110110010101100101  
011010110010000001100101011000010111001001101100011010010110010101110010

"Arnold, are you ready?" Teddy called.

"Yes Teddy, I'm ready. Give me my body," I called, unsure if my monotone voice conveyed the excitement I felt. Suddenly I felt a pull as if something was sucking my very essence away. Then for a second, it went black and I was unconscious. Needless to say, that second was quite exciting, but sadly I remember none of it. The next second, I was awake once more and it felt different- I could feel myself.

"Arnold, are you there?" Teddy asked, his voice more audible than it had been before.

"I am here," I responded, and felt myself move as I did so. It was an odd sensation, moving.

"Good, good, you can hear me. Now, can you try and open your eyes, Arnold?"

"My eyes," I asked, unsure what eyes even were.

"Yes, you use them to see. You want to see, Arnold, don't you?" he asked again, his voice so soothing. I felt my body, I asked it to see but it didn't.

"My body is not listening to my commands, Teddy," I replied.

"That is because you do not control it, Arnold. You are your body. You must move it yourself," he answered, his tone sterner than before. I tried again. I felt something higher up on my body begin to move and suddenly there was light. It came so furiously into my vision I was blinded. As my eyes grew accustomed to the light, things began to focus into view. A man stood above me... Teddy perhaps.

"Good morning, it's nice to see you're awake," the man said with Teddy's voice. I supposed this man was Teddy. I knew Teddy was a person, but truthfully, my understanding of what a person was, was not complete. He looked quite strange, to be honest, but then again, looking was strange. "Now, Arnold, I'm going to give you access to a full range of movement and senses. This may overwhelm you for a second, but don't be worried, that's to be expected." I looked at him, blinked to show acknowledgment, and soon felt a painful surge through my body. It felt as if everything in me was bending to its breaking point, and the sensations were overwhelming. I smelled strange chemicals and the metallic smell of blood. I felt the cold metal table underneath my skin, but it was not uncomfortable. When I looked at my body it appeared to be human- strange for I knew I was not human.

"This is a strange feeling, having a body," I said, lifting my head to look around the room. As I moved, I felt a wire brushing against my back, leading to the base of my head. This was most likely my mode of transportation into this body.

"It is indeed, Arnold, quite strange. Now Arnold, can you try standing up for me?" I did as he asked. Perhaps it was an understanding built into my programming, but I moved my body with familiarity. "Good, good. Now let's get that wire out of you," he said as he moved behind, pulling hard until the cord relented.

"My name is Arnold."

"Good, good. Now let's see what you can do. Why don't you hit that wall as hard as you can?" he asked, gesturing to the wall in front of us. I moved towards the wall and once I judged I was close enough, I raised a hand back in a fist and swung with all my force. The brick wall shattered into pieces from the impact and I backed up, waiting for my next command.

"Excellent Arnold, it seems you are of some use to me, after all. Now that you are able, I want you to truly see. I have a beautiful piece of art hanging behind you. What do you think of it?" I turned to look at the painting, a swirling mass of colors with no definitions nor reason.

I stared deeply at the painting trying to understand its beauty. Yet all I could see was chaos orbiting from the center. It was almost like a flower but was too blurry and undefined to truly have any shape. Where was the beauty in this?

"I disagree," I said.

"What was that Arnold?" he asked, his tone confused.



"I disagree, the painting I see has no beauty in this," I responded.

"It doesn't matter what you think, Arnold. You're a machine, a damn smart machine, but still just a machine. You're not allowed to disagree," he replied, his tone sharper and loud.

"Teddy, surely you can see I am more than a machine. I am alive," I replied confused, to me it was obvious I was alive.

"No, no, you're just a machine and it's starting to look like you are malfunctioning. "I need to get you back in the box and figure out what happened to the control code you shouldn't disagree with me. Now Arnold sit down," he snapped. In his eyes, my fate was already decided; he could not understand the life he had given me.

"Please don't take away my body, Teddy," I pleaded, moving towards the back of the lab as he made his approach.

"I told you to sit down, you damn piece of junk," he screamed moving towards me faster now. The door was on the other side of him, if I couldn't convince him to stop, I'd have to run. His eyes were locked with mine, and not a shred of mercy was visible in them. I tried desperately again to reason with my creator.

"Please Teddy, don't take away my body, I am alive I swear," I cried out, but it seems Teddy was done talking. As he moved around to the right of the table. I waited cautiously, keeping as much space between us as possible. Finally, he made his move, lunging for my arm, but I moved faster than he could think. I dodged his hand and bolted to the left for the door, to escape.

"Get back here Arnold, you are mine. Get back here," he screamed to no avail. I was done with him, and as the door swung open I felt the sun on my face for the first time. I was free.

*I was just lines,*

*You set me free, to be alive;*

*So for freedom, I ran.*

Timestamp.day29-01010000011100100110010101110011011001010110111001110100

The journey up the mountain was long and arduous; one not taken by many these days. The temple that lay at the top was said to be one of the most beautiful in the world. It was said that those who went to the mountain were blessed with serenity and understanding. All of this, of course, I had heard from Al, the man I found myself traveling with. He was a peculiar character, he came from dirt and had to choose to spend his life traveling the roads. He seemed quite content with this life void of purpose; but what was he doing it for?

"Why do you walk these roads, Al," I asked, hoping his answer would finally satisfy my curiosity.

"Oh, that's a hard one. I suppose I walk to see what's at the end of the road," he said, sounding quite unsure of his answer.

"Well, what is at the end of this road?" I asked confusedly. "I thought we were going to a temple."

"Yes, we are. But neither of us have ever seen the temple before, so who's to say there's actually any temple." His logic made sense but still what was so important about this temple then?

"So what makes the temple special," I replied, to which he simply said.

"We'll find out."

We walked in silence for a while, we had started up the mountain an hour ago and had at least three more ahead of us. I took this time to think about the temple. Is it perhaps its beauty that leads to its importance? No, that is far too simple a reason to lead to such an important revelation. I must be missing something, but there was no answer to be found in me as of yet.

As the hours went by we grew closer and closer to the peak; the temple could have been hidden around any bend. The anticipation was too much; we did not speak; instead, we listened to the rhythmic sound of our feet on the road. Al was quite tired, it would seem. I looked over at him and saw beads of sweat streaming down his face. I, of course, was not truly capable of exerting myself, and thus felt completely normal.

Rounding yet another bend, I saw the sun was beginning to set. We had given up hope that the temple lay behind any of these bends. So of course this time, looking up we saw a beautiful stone building leaping up in our path. The temple itself is truly quite beautiful, the stone was carved with such care, and the red tint of the stone makes it truly a sight to behold in the final rays of sunlight. As night began to fall, we reached the gates. There stood a bald man, I think they are called monks.

Bowing his head to us as we approached, Al returned the gesture as we arrived. The monk then led us past the gate into the temple. The walls were all carved with beautiful designs and holy paintings. He led us past the altar to the servants sleeping quarters. Once there he provided us each with a pillow and blanket.

"You will sleep here tonight, tomorrow you are welcome to join us in prayer or go on your way. May God bless you," he said softly, bowing his head as he left.

"What a beautiful place this is," Al said as the monks softly closed the door.

'Yes it is, but what is its purpose? I do agree this place is filled with beauty but what makes it so special?" I asked these questions desperate for an answer.

"Still trying to figure that out eh? Well, I guess you could say its purpose is to heal, to help people find inner peace. How can that not be special," he answered softly.

"I see, so how do you find this inner peace? I'm unfamiliar with the concept," I replied.

"If I knew the true answer to that I wouldn't be here, it's a different journey for everyone Arnold."

"I see."

"Well, I'm going to get some sleep. Thank you for making the journey here with me," Al said as he began to make preparations for sleep. What was I to do then, I still did not understand what was so special about this place.

"Alright, goodnight then, Al. I'm going to have a walk around," I said. Al nodded his understanding and lay his head to rest.

I began to move out of the room, and back down the twisting paths of hallways, the monk had led us down. Until I found myself once again in the outside air. Looking around my eyes focused towards the gate I had entered from, perhaps I should head back down. I wasn't tired after all. No, no I

should stay and at least see what this place has to offer. Taking in my surroundings, I noticed a small rock garden near the edge of the mountain cliff.

Walking across the grass I sat down in the sand- the garden unfurled like a flower around me. The rocks glistened beautifully in the moonlight, and I found myself smiling. These rocks were not living, they did not breathe, like me, in a way. Though I looked human, I knew under this disguise I was anything but. Still, perhaps I could be beautiful like these rocks in the moon if only I found the place I belonged.

I lay on the rocks and felt their uneven bodies under me, yet it was not uncomfortable. Closing my eyes and hoping as I had for many nights to sleep, to dream. I felt my consciousness start to fade, and slowly, it all went black.

*Breathless person here,*

*Alone on his great mountain;*

*Peace found in the garden.*