

A Cup of Joe in the Morning

I have found my coffee has started to taste less bitter in the morning and I'm not entirely sure why. I make it out of the exact same brand of canned coffee, in the exact same machine at work. It's a short drive so I never have time to give in my cravings to warrant going to some branded factory of caffeine. Work coffee is work coffee. I even drinking it out of the exact same mug left behind by some previous co-worker.

Walking the aisles today has been less satisfying than usual. There is a specific kind of peace found in all this regularly maintained digital perfection, but I guess not this morning. Sleep alluded me. Sleep also makes me sloppy as I realize halfway through an aisle that I totally shouldn't be walking with liquids amidst all this electricity. However, I have found myself tempted at times to test our systems in ways other than just the regular daily checks, but also am desirous of still possessing my job.

Looping back, I find an empty slot that I once thought filled and contemplated the nature of such a severance of service with us. And by us I don't mean 3 employees in a basement. Time passes mysteriously down here. I guess the regularity of the temperature adds to the confusion. My coffee brings me back.

My desk is still cluttered. I've said to myself for about a month now that I would clean it but almost every time, I just end up finding a new non-contract filled area to place my mug. For fear of spoiling the efforts of other above ground desk clerks. I don't find satisfaction in the thud of a mug on my desktop down here, the sound doesn't really care. No sound really carries, it just gets sucked up in the well of air conditioners.

I wonder about what work I have to do today.

There's gods in that mountain

“Remember, it was a jester who first made God laugh” – Unknown

The community of Cave Creek, Arizona had historically been accustomed to finding gold in caves. But this time, they found a system of belief. A local waitress of good repute had gone on a hike when she stumbled upon the cave. Blistering 100-degree heat had warranted a break from long term exercise, and in retreating into the shade she stumbled upon a set of machinery unbeknownst to her. Confounded and worried, her response of alerting the local police seemed a pertinent response. A junior police officer fresh out of the academy was sent to check this tale and in turn also found this mysterious machinery wiring along in the regulated cave. Inspecting said machine, he found a curious panel with a blinking green light. It reminded him of those old computer screens he had grown up around. Keypad attached, it merely said “how can I help you?”

One could equate the flood of data scientists into this small town to the prospector rush in California in the late 1800s. Every motel the town possessed, which was altogether not too many considering its scale, was full within a month. All funded by corporations vying for a hot ticket into the past, or at least those interested in how one can keep machinery running above ground and in such un-ideal circumstances as the Arizona desert. There was a bounty to be found in putting data in uncomfortable places in their eyes.

The government took point on the deciphering of the machine. They had initially irrationally feared it to be a bomb, sending specialists with a seemingly specific skillset to carefully open it up to see the contents. They left disappointed. With that theory out of the way, the data scientists were sent in. Commencing diagnostics, they had found the machine to possess a series of servers each focused on a different aspect of the local land and its inhabitants: the water levels, the disease rates, marriages, conflicts, the death rates and records, and so on and so forth. Concerned with the breaches in privacy of seemingly the entire county, the data scientists immediately desired to seek out where all this data was going. They found that it was going precisely nowhere but there.

At this juncture, and for fear of breaches in public security, the government employees immediately desired to shut the machine down. This was met by an altogether Valkyric response from the more tenacious scientists there. Expelling those who they deemed too connected to Big America, the scientists organized themselves in a system to each handle a specific facet of the data this machine was producing. A scientist of great repute took point, even going so far as to

sleep next to the machine at night. She found constant peaceful sleep in the eerie green light the display cast over her cot.

And thusly this coven of scientist got to work. And long after each of their representative corporations had sent a letter informing them of their severance, they still worked. Savings diminished. Many were sent to hospitals in dehydrated states. Death occurred. But on they worked. Reporters took point largely with the head scientist, who responded with the same disinterested and deadpan response essentially telling them to go away. These veiled responses exposed her true intent however, that they would be limiting in their release of information. And such was how they interested their swarms of recruits. Who wouldn't want to know what this machine was indeed pumping out?

They had a brief period of trial for all new recruits, for at that point an even more established hierarchy was formed for those who had just arrived and those how been there from the start and had fought off the government's defiling of what they held sacred, placing their civilian bodies on the line as a threat of a potential mass government endorsed killing. In turn of those who had been there at the start, each was segregated into their individual factions with the head dealing directly with the machine and the data it outputted. At the top of all that was the head scientist. And above her was the waitress who had found the machine, for they held her in great esteem as well as founder of all they held sacred.

She was also their primary point of contact for the outside world. A lucrative gold mine of food and drink, this hive of scientists was regularly delivered food and water from the restaurant she worked at which closed almost entirely to the public, entering into this niche realm of service. Luckily rural America has a good heart, and she saw part of the bounty from it or enough to put a son through college.

After months, dissent amongst the ranks formed as the lower status scientists grew angry with the lack of contact with the machine. Raising their concerns, the chief of it all in turn permitted one individual contact with the machine's core every day at dawn. Why dawn many asked. Her response was simply that it had told her so.

It was at this juncture that a certain scribe was tasked with documenting these dawn interactions, for it was deemed necessary to record this facet of the machine's functioning. A second cot was erected near its core, and as such now the scribe and the chief both slept under the green light. Naturally a relationship formed between these two people who had been forced together by their communities' anguish. Their interactions became just as much a part of their days as their interactions with the machine. The nature of this relationship I am uncertain.

This continued for a good several months before funds started to run low. Considering the long-term practical feasibility of the enterprise, the chief quietly voiced her doubts to the scribe over their work. The nature of this all confounded her, the purposefulness of all this data.

“Why can’t you see?” The scribe replied with a slight smile, “We’re documenting the spirit of data.” The Chief laughed.

Diving toward humanity

Being employed at a hotel to teach scuba diving was, in many ways, not as ideal as one would think, but he enjoyed the range of people it allowed him to meet. He had been working at said hotel for about 3 years, and up to that point had taught about nine hundred and fifty of the exact same three classes. Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. Of course, he rarely saw people take all three of his classes, but he enjoyed the idea that someday someone would just to prove him wrong. Wrong about what he wasn’t entirely sure, but he enjoyed the premise.

It was at the nine hundred and fifty-one that he met a certain employee of a large tech start-up based in California. The nature of her work resulted in a career kept afloat by non-disclosure agreements. As such, and considering the nature of a hotel sponsored scuba class, the two never really spoke about anything other than passing pleasantries of life. She was once more another individual who wafted in and out of his life at a nondescript time in it. Or at least such was the case until a shark, now notorious online, bit into a fiber optic cable off the coast.

I knew her from the outset, but I couldn’t entirely tell where from. Considering my career and overall quiet social life, I assumed that I had taught her at some point. What I wondered was whether she had taken an intermediate or advanced class. It mattered not considering the context of the job.

“So, as the packet we sent ahead goes, we need you to dive down and repair a cable.”

“Simple as that?”

“Simple as that. It’s essentially like shrink wrap, they’ll fill you in on the logistics when you get there”

“An idea of the depth? I might need to go borrow some specialty equipment from a friend.”

“My advisor says it’s around 450 feet down, which I figured is probably a very deep dive for you considering our class capped out at 70 feet”

Ah, so she took the intermediate.

2 days later I found myself on a ship off the coast, bobbing back and forth this time just above the water. This equipment was heavier than I was used to, but I guess such is the price for making sure my lungs don't essentially explode. I roll back into the waves, as a fresh swell of cold hits my body.

I waft there in the cold for a while, letting my body and the wetsuit do its magic to maintain my internal temperature. I acclimatize to the unnatural set of gases entering my body ensuring optimum oxygen levels. With pressure gauge and repair kit in hand I slowly start to head down. They've equipped me with some sort of reflective tool to gauge where the damage is and assured me that the sharks have all been taken out of the equation by a different boat 2 miles away spilling blood into the sea.

I head down, my focus laser sharp on the blinking of the tool that's going to help me find the cable, I wonder about the priority of this all. Thrust once more into the ocean for a task connected so deeply to my life on a different kind of apathetic scale than I'm used to. I dive toward cross continental medical records, calls from estranged children, and falafel recipes. None of which I will ever have access to other than my own select slice of life within that context, locked away by series of encoded platforms that make it intentionally easy for us to dislocate ourselves from each other and our bodies.

It's at this point that I remember I have to re-acclimatize to the pressure and stop. The blinking indicates I am halfway there. Halfway between the world and humanity. I see the hull of the ship above me steadily rocking in the water, beneath something indicated by a hallowed red blinking. I can still see the faint outline of the sun above me. I descend one more.

I am reliant on this gas bottled and pressurized in some location unbeknownst to me. At least I'll be aware of how my data gets to where it is going, an element I have presumed a given for most of my adult life. A lot has been assumed as a given. It is curious to spy this all so far away from anything directly human. The barrier between my water and the seas water breaks down. The cable is in sight now.

It's a small tear but the damage is apparent. I relate to this mass of metal and glass as I wonder about the anguish a shark might inflict on my own body, but then I get ahead of myself. Placing the film around the cable, the wrap sets to work under the guide of the heater element I've also been handed. With the valve firmly placed, I vacuum out the remnants of liquid. It reminds me the time I almost choked out on sea water.

The mass of cable is underwhelming, its trunk no thicker than my thigh. It is my no means any form of root. For the arteries of the digital age, these cables seem more like the off

spindling of a bastardized root system. I wonder about our data as a form of contemporary societal blood, oxygenated by our lives. Social media as hemoglobin.

I start my ascent.