

Biolog™

“Where do you want to go today?”

“What do you want to be today?”

“Who do you want to see today?”

The questions awoke him with a start, if “awoke” could be the proper word. Had he been asleep? And could he even wake “with a start?” A quick meld gave him an answer.

OED™: To start: to undergo a sudden involuntary movement of the body, caused by surprise, alarm, acute pain, etc.

He did not even have a body....

He wondered if those who once did have bodies ever woke, startled or not, with such philosophical dilemmas. It was all new to him. It had only been a week since he had begun his experiment, since he began his descent into the paradox of carefully planned randomness. No, it wasn't quite randomness, though, was it? After all, he had planned the weeks of his existence, the days and hours even, dividing time into a virtual night and day.

It was the line between night and day that took the most getting used to. All of his conscious life up until then had been lived in the light of the EternalDigitalDay™. It was a fact that unlike the TruSims™ he did need brief rest periods to recharge the little biology which he ensconced, but such periods had been very short. And when he had been involved in extended melds with others, which he had seldom actually participated in, the TruSimSim™ patch made it seem, to him at least, as if he had missed nothing at all. If he were lucky no one else would have noticed that he had been “gone.” In any case it was in very poor taste to reference the dependencies one experienced as a Biolog™. Whatever embarrassment he occasionally felt for his continued biological dependence, though, had never led him to seriously consider the Glorfig™ to TruSim™ status and to electronic Nirvana. Something had always kept him back.

But that was all a long time ago. If he had the courage to check the RealEarthChronograph™ he could know exactly how long it had been, but he did not need that information now. There was a time when he had checked it obsessively, in the months after Lucy had left. But when he knew for certain that she was truly gone there had been no point. It was bad enough just to sense that it had been nearly a year since he had had any contact with another human being. He never accessed the record of the day itself either—the day the Silence had begun—and had sought to make the best of his solitude.

If the Designers had not foreseen the eventuality of personality cannibalism, at least they had provided an excellent emergency firewall, and with it the potential to store a copy of as much of the VitalityInterface™ behind it as any user might want. And, he, thankfully, had set his Biolog™ for updating on a millisecond basis. Even if he seldom interacted with the outside world in those days before the Silence, he had never wanted to let it pass by completely unregarded. And so, in addition to the standard databanks of human knowledge, which

encompassed the complete electronic production of human history, he had a copy of every piece of data from the first moment of his own existence until the day the data died.

“What do you want to be today?”

“Who do you want to see today?”

“Where do you want to go today?”

The questions were still cycling. He had forgotten to turn them off, like some blaring clock radio somewhere in the AD, or the Analog Day, as the Designers had labeled the entire span of history before their declaration of the dawn of the Eternal Digital Day. They had not addressed how an eternal day could actually have a dawning. They had, however, at least been honest enough to acknowledge that initially it would not be truly eternal for the first Biologs™, who had come into the system as intact humans. Something in the nature of biology made rest, and consequent disruption of full consciousness, a necessity.

The Biologs™ had had no trouble in adjusting to the dataports which were necessary to be a part of the Day. They had been used to the wetware that had allowed them to create, no which had allowed them to be, the first true syntheses of the biological life and weblog. That was, indeed, where their name had come from. Sunil Pandey, the “Maharaja of Mumbai,” who at 33 had become the head of Nayadin Group™, a multinational controlling the world entertainment industry and a sizable share of the health and information technologies sectors, had chosen himself to be the first Biolog™. And his BiologCasts™, which captured his thoughts on sports and travel and technology and on what he called his “creative takeovers” of both corporations and young nubile of the party set had created a shockwave of interest around the world. His Moonship One™ BiologCast™ had strained Internet hubs around the world. Soon Biologs™ were everywhere and approached ubiquity in the cities, and blogs began their rapid descent into the dust pile history, used only by those who still had not bridged the divide between the Earth based Internet and Webfinity™, the satellite web platform Nayadin had developed.

Though the Biolog™ concept was designed for mobility, the activity levels of most Biologs™ themselves sharply decreased, as they simply chose to augment reality whenever they deemed it deficient. And the Biologs™ who had joined the Day complex had rapidly lost any interest in the real world at all, preferring their own virtual manipulations of it and the constant communication which they experienced with others. And, so, it was only logical that the next step for many was to simply leave the biology to someone else and then to abandon it altogether.

The Designers had been keen on regaining momentum from Nayadin, and so had met every goal they had promised for subsequent upgrades. The children of the first Biologs™, had only required the minimal biological development of their cerebral cortex and higher brain functions, lessening the amount of rest they needed. To ease this radical transition of doing away with the body, the Designers had offered the BioPriv™. They had incorporated into the self-sustaining Day Complex the capacity, if any second generation Biolog™ chose to exercise it, to have remainder of their nascent biology developed, and to actually be born into the world.

No one had exercised the privilege, and when the Glorfig™ upgrade to TruSim™ status had been offered, most Biologs™ had renounced their biology completely and made the jump to being completely electronic entities, “the jump to light to light speed” some had called it. To the Designers credit, they had never forced anyone to make the change, aside from advertising the benefits of the Glorfig™ in the official communication, which one did not even have to receive in any case. Several of the Designers themselves had joined the DayComplex™ and Glorfigged™. And if the company once had not had the best track record with the backward compatibility of their software in the distant past, they had an admirable record with the wetware of human bodies, and a Biolog™ could function very well alongside TruSims™ inside the Day™.

“Who do you want to see today?”

“Where do you want to go today?”

“What do you want to be today?”

He still had not turned off the questions, but did so now. They were questions from an early version of the interface. He had chosen them as an alarm because, though constant stimulation was something he had been used to his entire life, he wasn't used to waking to it from sleep. And his first attempt at waking to the old school shtick of music and banter, a sample of which he had gotten from a 1990's video data file, had proved disastrous. Rising up from the oblivion of sleep itself was a rather frightening novelty, much less rising to “Then put your little hand in mine / There ain't no hill or mountain we can't climb” being sung, followed by a boisterous DJ, “Okay, campers, rise and shine, and don't forget your booties 'cause it's coooold out there today.”

Cold? He had never actually felt one degree of any temperature in his life, nor seen any color, nor smelled a scent. And neurons could not feel pain. He reflected again upon his waking that morning. Perhaps, at least his neurons had shaken with “a start.” He liked that thought.

He had begun his experiment by assigning himself the sleep cycle that a human with a body would experience. In fact, he was on a quest to shape his life in all possible ways to experience an unmediated, unplanned existence. The division into day and night had been his first experiment. Shortly after he had Ordained this command, an AgentMeld™ which he had programmed to track his thoughts and present interesting synergies in the data had suggested this:

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning-the first day.

He pondered the paradox. It was actually godhood he had been wanting to escape. For all his life he had created his own existence, the land and city and roomscape he would inhabit, and how he would Present, that is when there still had been others to whom to Present. This restlessness to be contingent, to not feel the weight of omnipotence had all gone unnoticed in the time before the Silence when there were others with whom to interact to variegate his existence. In the early

years, with a TruSim™ they could together create difference, a unique reality or sensation or vision, or whatever they chose to together. Of course, then too it had been artifice, but the contact made it bearable, the contact had made it life. And in the year before the Silence there had been Lucy, one of the few remaining Biologs™, and his melds with her had then the most intensely satisfying of his life and created happiness and longings in him he had never known before.

So now, if he wanted to experience the vagaries and serendipities of creatureliness, and if he had to act like a god to do it, so be it. Maybe somewhere down the road it would not be so. Maybe one day he would be able to experience at least one moment totally unplanned by himself. “Somewhere down the road?” “One day?” Even the language he used in his own mind was rooted in space and time. Even the TruSims™ he had talked to before the Silence had not fully escaped the need to reference a reality they had never experienced. Language might, indeed, be malleable and conventional but it was inextricably linked with matter, with the stuff of earth.

And in the Silence he had begun to wonder whether his restlessness was the result of not having had the birthright of being fully human. Could one even have a birthright if one had never been born? He remembered the weight of the term “birthright” sink into him when he had first encountered it when reading further in the god text presented by the AgentMeld™. He had accessed its definition:

OED: Birthright: Right by birth; the rights, privileges, or possessions to which one is entitled by birth; inheritance, patrimony. (Specifically used of the special rights of the first-born.)

Why did he want to be born? He had remembered what a TruSim™ had once said to him, “Man, and that is exactly what you are while you’re still stuck in that mud of your brain, you know you’re never going to use your BioPriv™. So why don’t you just Glorfig™ already, baby, and come into the Light.” And it was true. The TruSims™ never seemed to have the reservations that crept into his mind. They conversed and created at a pace that he could almost keep up with technically, but often he found he did not want to. It was this which had saved him.

He did not often think of that day when it happened. Before that day, he had not melded with anyone for nearly year. He had been missing Lucy. He had never had a connection with anyone else like the one he had with her, and the thought of a meld with a TruSim™ depressed him. Lucy had never felt the need to Present in divergent forms, and during the times he melded with her he did not either. They each had simply chosen TruePhenotypicExpression™ and simply talked, if one could call it that. They were both intensely interested in the nature of things, of the philosophical implications of their own unique existence, of the world outside the Day complex, not the depressing geopolitics of the Earth, which seemed headed for catastrophe, but the world itself, mountains, deserts, stream, dogs, the taste of water.

He was intensely attracted to her and did not know why. Their relationship had not been erotic in any way. Not because he had somehow transcended the erotic. There were more data files for those musings than could be accessed in several life times, even they were the theoretically endless lifetimes of a TruSim™. And if he had wanted to, there were TruSims™ who had chosen to transcend gender altogether and were willing to put those files and their own imaginations to

use in orgiastic melds which no Analog human could even begin to imagine. No, though he was amused by the humor of it as they were both basically only half-developed brains, he loved her for her mind, for who she really was not for how well she could create or control her environment. He loved her for her dreams.

She was the only person he had ever known to contemplate using the BioPriv™. And despite her often lighthearted banter when she talked about it, free associating about what she would do if she ever did choose that option, he knew she had been serious.

She would often say, “I swear, Nous,” for all their full-hearted embrace of technology his parents, it seems, had an affinity for ancient Greek and for irony, “I swear that one of these days I will be just gone, no notice or anything. And then you hear won’t hear anything from me for a long time. First off, its not nine months like with the Analogs, but it does take awhile for them to get you in body. And you don’t really want to be awake for that. You can be, but when those nerve endings come online? Well, let’s just say, to experience the world in all its goodness and pain might be wonderful in theory but its best to ease into it by way of oblivion.”

“You will do a video meld as soon as you can, though, won’t you?” Nous had asked on one occasion.

“No,” she had replied with animation in her voice, “If you want to see me. I mean really see me. You’ll just have to come yourself.”

“So, that will be it then? No more communication at all?”

“Now, I didn’t say that, Nous. You’re not going to get rid of me that easily,” she had replied. “But I am going totally Analog, at least for a while. No, they will have to just scan in my snail mail, minus the slime, of course.”

She had begun laughing at the last comment and continued on lightheartedly, “No, It’ll be like I am a pioneer waiting on a wild frontier someplace, waiting for my mail order husband. Well, best friend at least.”

She had said the last line with a smile and a wink, and then the conversation moved on to whether there was actually anywhere in the real world where any wilderness still existed. That was the last time they had melded, and then she was gone.

He had paid great attention to the RealEarthCronograph™ in those days, counting down the six months it took to ensconce a body and have it stimulated to function as an adult human, as an Analog. The time passed slower than any he had ever experienced. When six months had nearly passed he created as many AgentMelds™ as he could conceive of to monitor communication and news from the world outside. He wanted to hear from Lucy herself, but he was also interested in any news that might appear as well. After all, no one had ever actuated the BioPriv™ that he had heard about and surely there would be some attention paid to the story.

Six months had come and passed, and then seven and eight went by. He had no way of asking what had happened to Lucy. The Designers had instituted rigorous privacy guidelines into the founding code of the complex. And if Lucy had chosen to keep even her arrival into the world a secret, he knew there was no way he could have found out. He had made a few inquiries to see if anyone else had melded with her, but no one ever had. Curiously, as he made his inquiries, he noted that a inordinately large number of people were on ExtendedVacationMelds™™, as NoMeldsDesired notices came pouring in like the ancient “Out of Office” replies of the Analog Day.

Also fewer and fewer people than normal had sent meld requests to him as well, which suited him just fine, even though the absence of Lucy left a gaping vacuum in his reality. He did not know if he could be depressed without hormones, but he was experiencing whatever the strictly mental equivalent of it was. What made it worse was that he did not have any files of this melds with Lucy. She had insisted that real people didn’t have the need to capture their interactions, at least not until the late 20th century, and so they shouldn’t either. He had agreed, not because he had fully embraced her radical goal of “being creaturely,” as she had called it, but simply because he had found it impossible to say no to her. And so he did the next best thing, and immersed himself in the images and sounds and video clips that had informed their conversations. He had asked her if he could at least have an AgentMeld™ keep a bibliography of any data they had used from the VitalityInterface™ during their melds, and she had agreed. In immersing himself in these, the topography of the entire world, it seemed, and vast panorama stars in desert skies and melancholy beautiful songs and the faces of a hundred cultures flooded his mind.

One day, though, he received a request for a meld that was different. It was from a TruSim™, but he, or at least that was how he chose to Present, had said he curious about the BioPriv™, and wanted to meet as he had heard that Nous still held onto the option. Nous was about to deny the request, when he remembered that he had heard about this TruSim™ from several others when he was making his inquiries about Lucy. One had said, “Yeah, Nous, he’s not a Biolog™, but still I think you would find him very interesting. He is pretty interested in the Analog Day as well, though who knows why. And, if nothing else, you both have crazy, ancient Greek names.”

And, so, Nous had initiated the meld with Cronus, as he had named himself, and, indeed, it been quite interesting initially. Early on, Nous had asked about his name, “So, is that Chronos as in the god of time or Cronus the Titan who devoured his children. And I am hoping it is not the latter, because, God, no pun intended, you should access the Goya painting on that. Its frightening whether you’ve got a body to be ripped apart or not. Those eyes are terrifying” Nous was pleased with the speed at which he was melding as he flashed the Goya across the meld.

“I thought they were one and the same,” Cronus replied. “But I’m seeing it now. One was a primal deity personifying time, the other the scary Titan. But, wait, he still was the god of time for that generation of gods though, so that work for me. But to answer your question, it is time that really interests me. For a TruSim™ it really can never end, and sometimes I wonder what it’s going to take to fill it all. I mean one’s got to have a lot of personality to fill all that emptiness. And then there’s you. If you do the BioPriv™, you will have a lot less time to have to deal with. Is that why hang onto it?”

Nous was not at all used to talking to a TruSim™ about his BioPriv™. It was, after all, generally something most of them considered to be ridiculous. He was surprised by the sensitivity of the question though. And so, though he gave Cronus an answer that conveyed none of the deep feelings attached to his need to keep it, he did answer him truly, “Well, I suppose I just want to keep my options open. It might not always be that way, but it is for now.”

“Yeah, well, there’s getting to be less and less of a world to go to, isn’t there?” Cronus had replied. “I mean the Indian subcontinent was blown pieces and covered with fallout five years ago. Goodbye, Sunil Pandey. And now that the Islamic Order has taken over most of Western China, including six weapons sites, who knows what’s going to happen out there. Still, I suppose there are some beautiful places, if you could get to them, that is.”

Cronus had continued on with a lengthy discussion of his interest in the Analog Day, about how he was not content with the data streams that the Designers had offered and had requested as many actual camera feeds as they could give him. He went into great detail about many of the places and people he had seen, splashing the images across the meld.

Nous, was fascinated at first, but soon began to lose interest. Cronus’ interest was not the same as Lucy’s. If anything, it was more intense, hungry even. Where Lucy had wanted to be present in the images she created, to give herself to them, Cronus wanted to devour them. He discussed and analyzed each scene in excruciating detail. Nous began to be bored and engaged an AgentMeld™ he had created to AutoRespond™. It was not strictly polite, but he had only ever employed one with TruSims™, and none of them had even seemed to notice, so great was their love for their own creations.

Cronus’ mention of mountains had reminded Nous of one of his favorite melds with Lucy involving a hike up to the summit of a nameless Rocky Mountain peak, nameless because Lucy had insisted that it could only have a real name if they had really hiked it. He had tried to access the bibliography of meld, but found that it was unavailable. A strange sensation he had never felt seeped into his mind, like the leak of dark water into a ship’s hold. He tried to access another file. No luck. And then another. No. The level of the sensation began to rise. Another. No. No. No. He then, knew with perfect clarity, what it was that he was feeling. It was fear.

At the moment, just as he had returned to his conversation to Cronus, he heard him say, “No, if I had the option I am going totally Analog, at least for a while. No, they will have to just scan in my snail mail, minus the slime, of course.”

“What did you just say?” Nous asked. The phrase had seared into his mind, the odd break of the verb tense in its middle and it’s verbatim quoting of Lucy, even though the voice had been that of Cronus, had jolted him to awareness.

But things were happening quickly now. The image he was seeing was changing. Cronus’ body and limbs elongated and his clothes melted into naked, brown skin. The head grew disproportionately large, with white hair protruding wildly out from it. Two long arms had reached out to Nous and were pulling him toward the mouth. And there were the eyes, the crazed, ravenous eyes. It was the Goya. It was only an image that was Presenting, but Nous knew

with deathly certainty that it was also really happening, that he was in the grip of Cronus and that he would be devoured piece by piece.



Cronus' now booming voice shouted out, "You called, it Nous. Cronus the Titan it is."

The gaping mouth of Cronus came nearer and grew wider and wider, and from it echoed a cacophony of voices, some only murmuring, others screaming in pain. He was about to be swallowed into the darkness, when he heard one voice scream clearly above the rest. He had heard it because it was the voice he loved best.

From the black maw, the unmistakable voice of Lucy screamed, "Nous, shut it down!"

There were no time to Ordain any complex command. The darkness was building. Nous' consciousness had nearly faded, but managed one final thought.

"Firewall."

Nous jolted back to the present. He had never recalled that day with such intensity before. He had not allowed himself to. He did not know why he did so today, but was surprised to discover that the experience had created a new resolve in him. He would use the BioPriv™.

In the encounter with Cronus, the firewall had worked perfectly. The control that Cronus had temporarily established over his

data files had completely been removed with no loss at all, and Nous' brain had not as yet been penetrated. It was at the moment when it very nearly had been when Lucy had shouted. He could only wonder how many layers of personality and consciousness she had struggled up through to warn him.

He could not set his mind to think of what Lucy's existence had become. Did she even have a consciousness? Cronus had obviously cannibalized a host of TruSims™ as well, but perhaps for them it still remained bearable. But for Lucy, who wanted nothing more than to lie in a lush field of grass and blow the bloom from dandelion blossoms, to feel the breath of the wind on her own

skin, what could life be like inside an eternal miasma of selfish personality strands and dark data? And with its geothermal power plant which provided an almost neverending energy supply and its impervious shell, the Day complex was ideally suited to be a hell. And Lucy, whose name meant light bringer, had been swallowed into its darkness. He could not bear to think of it.

The firewall had continued to work, and Cronus was on the other side of it, but so too were the Designers and the entire outside world. The BioPriv™, though, was on this side. It was intended to be an option entirely at the discretion of the Biolog™. The TruSims had called it a suicide pill which Biologs™ kept in a sort of personal medicine cabinet. Of course, under normal circumstances, he would certainly have communicated with the Designers about his intentions to initiate the BioPriv™, but that was no longer an option, he could not risk disabling the firewall.

Now that he had made up his mind, the BioPriv™ beckoned to him like a portal to another world, through which he was eager to jump. Even if Lucy would not be on the other side, the things that had animated her soul were, and surely they were worth experiencing. If for no other reason, he would go now especially because she could not. He would go and be a creature.

He did not need to research the procedure. Lucy must have gone over it a hundred times, charting out what she thought were the best options. He remembered them all precisely and plotted out his choices. And there was really nothing to wait for. He knew that his experiments with night and day, conditioned contingency, and programmed serendipity could go nowhere at all. And, if something did go wrong and he never did come out of the darkness which he was about to enter, so be it, at least he would be better off than he was now. He remembered Lucy and formed the thought of a single word.

“Ordain!”

* * *

It was silent, but he knew he was waking, swirling up from oblivion. It was, however, like no other waking he had ever experienced before. It seemed as if he was rising up in a dark well, floating up, up until he stuck inside a body. He had a body. He knew this to be true, even though he had still could not open his eyes, nor could he really feel any sensations at all as yet. But he could feel the new sensation of gravity as the pull that kept him prone. There was a different sort of gravity, too, which he could not name, of being master of, yes, but also of a piece with a little chunk of matter. It felt like coming home.

He was surprised that he could hear no voices around him, but perhaps they were easing him into contact. What surprised him even more was the cold. He had felt it immediately, and it had thrilled him. It was what he had imagined it would be like to dive into a spring fed pool. It was unexpected, though. He thought that surely that he would awake in a carefully controlled, warm environment, lit with bright lights.

When he finally opened his eyes, it was dark. He lifted his hand in front of his face and could barely see the outlines of his palm. Though he knew that something was terribly wrong, at that moment he could feel nothing but the joy inside of him. He raised his other hand and rubbed

them together just to feel the sensation, slowly tracing out the ridges of his fingertips. A single tear issued of the corner of his right eye and he could feel its wet track on his cheek. Finally, he sat up and looked back at the closed portal that led to his artificial womb and to the Day™ complex beyond. He sat in an egg shaped indentation in a wall on the edge of the flat, padded surface where he had been deposited. He gently lowered his feet to touch the cold floor. He was free.

At first, walking was not an option, and he had crashed to the floor and could only crawl on his stomach. His muscles would have been stimulated in the final stages of the BioPriv™ process, but they were still weak. And, though he had the body and coordination of an adult, he still had to progress through the stages of ambulation that every baby has to, crawling, standing, and then walking. But finally he had mastered it, only to immediately bloody his knees on the base of a counter. Blood. He bent down to feel it and raised his fingers to see its dark vitality against his hand. For a moment he thought of tasting it, but decided that the taste of water would be far better introduction to organic life. He was thirsty.

He moved from the room he had arrived in, which was a sort of neonatal ward for adult bodies with large incubators and banks of computers which were all dead. They did not evidently share the same power source as the Day™ complex. He began stumbling down hallways. He was looking for the light.

Finally, he pushed through a large set of doors and came into the vast foyer covered in black marble tile, and the light blinded him. Even though it was the dim light of evening, it was the most he had ever seen up until that point, and it took a while for his eyes to adjust. On the other side of the room, large glass windows looked out onto a wide open landscape. One of the windows had been cracked open by a tree which grew from a crack in the floor, and a cold wind blew into the room.

He staggered forward toward the tree, carefully looking down at the floor as he walked. As he approached the windows, the coldness intensified and his body began to shiver, but he continued walking, hungry to see the land and sky. Reaching out, he felt the smooth needles of the pine tree, crushing them in his hands. He raised the broken needles to his face and smelled and felt the clean tingle of pine scent in his nostrils. He remembered his Rocky Mountain hike with Lucy, and was flooded with emotion. Only now, the adrenaline and hormones pouring through his body made them feel like none he had ever experienced before, like a coursing river. Lifting his face, he looked out on the landscape and knew with certainty that he would not survive the night.

In front of him and to the left was a large complex of buildings. The largest one had been made of silvered glass, but now only dimly reflected the bleak landscape in its few remaining panels which had remained intact. One complete side of the building had been destroyed, leaving only part of the name of the company of the Designers, M I C R O S. The remaining letters had been destroyed with the building. Scanning to the right of the buildings, past parking lots choked with grass and the occasional tree protruding through the concrete, a thickly overgrown woodland began. Directly in front of him, a large lake glistened pink and golden in the last rays of the sun, which was setting on the horizon behind him. Around the lake, stood a ring of softly forested

hills, above a leaden sky of dark, gray clouds looked as if they were about to send snow. Nous looked on it all through tears in his eyes.

It was beautiful.

