
After the “Dead list” – I’m a Deer

By Mike Rozak
and some CalTech Deer and Rodents
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Chronic fatigue

My alarm clock displayed 10:06, in the morning.

Crap.

I felt like crap.

I rolled over onto my back and stared at my chintzy ceiling light, a few desiccated bug-carcases collected by the frosted glass just underneath the light-bulbs.

I noticed the water stain in the corner of the ceiling, for the six-hundred and forty-seventh time. It wasn't there when I moved in, but whoever lived above me had let their bathroom sink run a bit too long. I occasionally heard the tromping of small feet above, so the culprit must have been their child.

Did I want to get up?

No.

My brain hurt.

I let myself fall asleep again.

I woke up again.

This time it was 12:18.

I had to get up; the toilet called.

I rolled out of bed, quite slowly.

My clothes were piled in a heap in the corner. That would do.

There was no point washing them, or even putting them in a laundry basket. I wasn't wearing much in the way of clothing lately, just my pyjamas.

Bathroom time.

I brushed my teeth while I was there.

My hair was a mess. I hadn't combed it for a few days. Long hair was a pain in the ass, especially when you spent all day sleeping on it.

Food.

Cereal worked. It was easy.

I had stocked up on five cartons of orange juice the last time I made it to the store, three days ago.

Two cartons left, I downed two glasses.

My daily chores done, I returned to my bedroom.

Should I check my E-mail?

No.

What was today?

Wednesday.

I had another doctor's appointment on Friday. More blood tests. The lot.

I still had two weeks of sick-leave left.

Back in bed, I fell asleep again.

I awoke sometime in the dark, my brain didn't hurt.

It was numb.

I didn't bother to check my alarm-clock for the time.
Back to sleep.

The hospital

My eyes were open, looking up at a high concrete ceiling. An industrial-looking light hung from the ceiling.

The room sounded large.

There was motion around me that I couldn't see.

Someone moved to my right.

"She's awake. I'll go onto the next one."

Did I hear someone say that?

Crap, my eyes were bad.

I needed glasses for reading normally, but not for distance. The light looked blurry. Did I have some mucus in my eye?

My mouth tasted funny too, like chemicals.

Something wasn't right.

I didn't remember where I had gone to sleep, but I certainly wasn't in my condo.

Was I in a hospital?

"Just lie still for a few minutes," someone said.

No; they didn't "say" it. I just understood that they said it.

Someone walked past my feet, perhaps a nurse. To my right, the first voice was talking to someone, something about "Time to wake up."

I licked my lips. They still tasted funny. And they didn't feel right, a bit numb.

Something must have happened.

Did I have a car crash?

Was there an earthquake?

Two people were doing something next to me, perhaps helping another patient.

I blinked to clear my eyes.

Was I wearing some sort of mask? Perhaps for oxygen? Out of the bottom periphery of my vision, I could see something covering my nose.

I heard the two nurses walk away to the right. Other people also moved around.

It felt like a triage room.

There must have been an earthquake.

I decided to sit up and have a look around.

I tentatively raised my right knee, hoping nothing was broken.

My foot slid on the stainless-steel table that I was lying on.

My knee bent, but my foot didn't feel right. I must have had been bandaged. My ankle bent though. That was good. It wasn't broken.

"Don't move your head," someone told me in a friendly voice.

Only they didn't speak.

I let my leg slide back to horizontal.

I waited a few more minutes, staring unthinkingly up.

My lips still felt weird. The medical taste seemed to be going away.

My teeth weren't right.

Were they broken?

I probed with my tongue.

Crap.

Both my eye teeth were missing, maybe some teeth near those.

I'd need reconstructive dental surgery. I remembered someone at Caltech who had been mugged. His front teeth were bashed in and broken by a steel pipe. The dentist fixed his teeth after only a few visits... although one of his caps eventually fell off.

Would I need my eye-teeth fixed, or could I leave gaps?

I thought about this.

Missing eye-teeth might look a bit yokelish.

I licked my lips again. My saliva was awfully thick.

How was my hand?

I raised my hand to look at it, hoping that it wasn't broken.

Hmmm.

That's a weird bandage, I thought.

My fingers were bandaged together with some tan gauze.

The tips of my fingers had some sort of rubber stoppers on the end.

Nurses

"Okay, your turn."

A nurse walked into my field of view, looking down over me.

She didn't look like a nurse.

Her head looked like a deer.

Hmmm.

I must have bumped my head.

“Don’t mention that I think I’m seeing a deer,” I thought to myself. I didn’t want to be in the hospital any longer than I needed to.

“Let’s help you sit up.” Someone was behind me.

The nurse in front of me braced my feet so I wouldn’t slide off the table. The one behind pulled up on my shoulders.

I helped by raising my head and back, and pushing myself up with my hands.

Both of my hands felt bandaged.

My back felt stiff also. It didn’t hurt. It was just stiff... or just odd.

With the nurses’ help, I sat up.

Crap.

The one in front of me was definitely a deer, except she walked.

Or I had serious brain damage.

Don’t mention the deer, I reminded myself.

She gave me a deriding look. I didn’t know deer could deride.

She was a walking deer, of course.

She had hands...

... just like mine.

I looked down at my hands.



They weren't bandaged with tan bandages, and those weren't rubber finger-tip covers.

And I was naked... as a deer... which didn't really bother me, because I had never actually seen a clothed deer, until now.

And my breasts were gone.

Was I female?

"Yes, you're a woman," said the person in front of me. I wasn't looking at her, but noticed her head tilt slightly in amusement.

I looked up at her.

“I’m not wearing a mask, am I?” I said. I literally said it. It came out sounding alternately very squeaky and guttural.

“No, that’s your new face.” Her lips didn’t move.

...

Her lips didn’t move.

...

Ah, telepathy I thought.

Or very severe brain damage. Maybe I couldn’t perceive people’s lips moving.

“She’s brightening up,” said the one behind me. “Her soul seems to be attached well.”

What the hell is going on? I thought.

The deer in front of me looked down towards me.

“I’m an elk, by the way.”

I didn’t know there was a difference.

“We need to get you out of here. We need this table for another body.”

That statement didn’t make much sense. I wasn’t religious. But was I in hell?

Her head fell. “No, you’re not in hell.” And at the same time she thought, “I hope you’re not one of those. We’ve had four of them already today. God, I hate them.”

“We’ll help you off the table.”

“Slide your legs to your right, and we’ll help you step down.”

I swivelled to the right, watching my body as I moved.

My hands slid on the stainless steel. They didn’t grip well.

I had a deer-tail.

I lowered my legs over the right edge of the table.

“Just a minute, and we’ll help you to the ground. You’ll find it difficult to walk. Try to walk on your tip-toes.”

With their assistance, I slid myself off the table.

My feet were soon on the floor.

“Remember, walk on tip-toes.”

I had already forgotten that advice. I readjusted so that more weight was on my toes. They had very little feeling in them.

“Try to stand up.”

In front of me was another table with another deer lying on her back. She rolled her head over towards me and gave a shocked look.

“Shit, you’re a deer,” she thought as she stared at me.

Well so are you!

Someone smile-chuckled telepathically.

“Now, we’re going to stand you up... ON YOUR TIP-TOES.”

I stood up.

My muscles were weak.

The deer on the table in front of me still stared. She hadn’t noticed her own hands.

With both deer... Elk... nurses helping me, I turned left and was guided away from the row of stainless steel tables. Almost all of them had humanoid deer on them.

“We’ll lead you to an orientation room.”

“Jeng, please help. She isn’t very steady.”

With one Elk nurse on each side, I was walked away from the tables. At the end of the triage room, was a door.

Shouldn’t I have some clothes on before leaving the hospital ward? I wondered where my clothes had gone.

“We’ll get you some clothes in a bit.”

“Just let us walk you. It isn’t far.”

We were in a long concrete bunker-like hospital ward.

We walked through the doorway into a claustrophobic concrete bunker-like hallway, with red-painted symbols indicating directions.

When we reached a T intersection, we turned right.

I tried to think of a question to ask.

“Just wait. I’ll orient you in a bit.”

Beetlejuice

We turned right into a corridor.

And right again a bit further on.

We walked into a small, concrete bunker-like room.

It had a plastic ficus tree in the corner.

And one lounge-like chair with a red-brown vinyl covering.

The nurses helped me sit in the chair.

One nurse left the room.

The other stayed and glared at me.

Where am I?

“I can’t tell you that for security reasons, but I can inform you that you died.”

Neither of those responses made much sense. I expected something like, “You’re in Gotham-city hospital, and you’re safe now.”

How did I die?

“I don’t know. The whispers found you and brought you to us.”

That didn’t make sense.

The room felt even more claustrophobic than the hallway, despite the attempted décor.

Why did the hospital feel like a bunker?

The deer... Elk!... nurse in front of me looked around.

“We are in a war, you know.”

War?

“With the Hominids. And some monkeys.” (Most of the Simian-evolved races are no longer aligned with the Hominids.)

Was I dead?

“Yes. You died.”

This didn't look like heaven.

She lowered her head in exasperation.

“Am I in hell?” I asked in my squeaky/deep voice.

“No. You're not in hell. You're on another planet.”

War?

The United States wasn't at war with anyone.

“Is that where you came from?”

That didn't parse.

Pause.

“No, we're not at war with your former nation yet.”

Another Elk entered the room and handed my nurse-Elk a piece of paper. She looked at it, frowned (I think), and passed it back.

“I hate this crap!” she said to the person showing her the paper.

The other humanoid Elk left the room.

As she did so, a thought tickled my mind.

Beetlejuice, the movie. The civil-servant hag who smoked through her tracheotomy.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beetlejuice>)

That earned me a nasty look.

“What was that?”

Are you a civil servant? I didn't speak this time.

She thought a moment, and replied, "Yes, I suppose so."

Do I have to return to my home and haunt it?

"No, they might eat you if you did that."

That didn't make sense. I couldn't be eaten if I were a ghost.

Wait, I wasn't a ghost.

I wasn't thinking properly.

Maybe I was in Beetlejuice, the world... or maybe the movie was somehow inspired by reality.

What do I do (if I don't haunt my home)? Am I a civil servant? I thought both of these questions at the same time.

She looked left-up and right-up.

"I suppose you are a civil servant also."

And then she added, "We won't put you to work for a few days though."

"And then it'll be mostly computer work."

"You should find that easy. You were quite intelligent, with a degree in biochemistry."

How did she know that?

Wait, don't answer that.

What is going on here... if I'm not in hell. I certainly wasn't in heaven. It might be purgatory.

"Damn telepathic spam! There are a LOT of people in the ward who think they've died and gone to hell. Ignore them."

I looked at my hand.

Deer in hell didn't make much sense.

"Elk. Deer have fingers like this," she held up her hand and tried to point out the difference to me.

Deer, elk. Why were hands/hoofs and fingers important? I didn't care.

I realized that I was tired.

“We aren’t going to let you sleep yet.”

She thought about kicking me semi-jokingly.

“Let me pull out the terminal.”

The nurse walked left of me, and wheeled a low table that had been sitting there in front me. I hadn’t noticed it, probably because it was hidden in the corner, by the doorway.

On the table was a very-wide flat-screen monitor. It had a black background with blue and green text on it.

Lots of blue and green text, all in Excel columns.

“We know this is a bit confusing for you, so we’re going to try and get you in contact with some of your friends.”

That sounded like a good idea to me.

I tried to think of Jenny’s phone number.

“No, don’t worry about phone numbers.”

“What is her full name?”

Jenny Fullwaite.

The table also had a keyboard with oversized keys. She typed in into the terminal. I think she typed in “Jenny Fullwaite,” but the font didn’t look correct.

The screen changed. It was now largely blank.

“No, she’s not telepathic.”

The nurse typed in some more text, and a few rows of entries appeared.

“A few of your friends are somewhat telepathic. John, Ben, Mary, and your cousin Wendy.” (By the way, names have been changed to protect the individuals.)

“Hmmm,” she thought. “I want to find you some friends who are more telepathic.”

“Let me extend the query.”

The nurse typed in something else. The user-interface reminded me of the one that bank tellers used.

The screen filled with more names, all in a foreign-looking font. She scanned the list with her finger and pointed to a name that was bolded.

She scanned the list some more, scrolling it by touching the screen, and dragging the virtual paper up.

The nurse dragged the list back down to the one bolded name.

“You may not want to talk to him.”

She typed some more.

“Let me try a wider search.”

A longer list appeared, which she scrolled around.

“No good. ☹️”

The nurse turned around to face me. She had been concentrating on the terminal.

“Do you remember Paul from CalTech?”

I thought.

Yes.

Wait a minute.

How did she know about Caltech? How did she know about Paul?

“We have a database of millions of people from your planet.”

Yeah, but...

“No, it’s around 100 million.”

How do you know if they’re telepathic?

“We have implanted them, or we use other people’s implants.”

Implants?

“That’s how you’re doing telepathy now and talking to me. We have a telepathic implant in you.”

That almost made sense, but how were my friends implanted?

“Just a bit of technology. Lots of people are implanted.”

Don't they know it?

“No, most of the implants are just monitoring them. They can't actually use them for telepathy or to access information.”

Are you sure? I never heard about that.

“You may not have heard because most people on your planet don't know about telepathy.”

If that was the case, then...

My thought was finished by the Elk. “We have people who monitor what's happening on Earth. It's their job. They write down what people do, and who they interact with.”

I didn't believe it... but I did.

I wasn't sure why Elk were monitoring Humans though.

It sounded like a Far Side cartoon.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Far_Side

“Bummer of a birthmark,” smiled the Elk.

Yeah, that was Far Side.

“The system is kind of like Facebook, except you don't have to enter the information yourself.”

I had two simultaneous thoughts: You know about Facebook? Won't they go out of business? And a third... Do I have shares in the company? Maybe I should sell them.

“Yes, we know about Facebook.”

“We don't let people add their own personal photos though.”

Incredulous pause on my part.

“Do you have any problems talking with Paul?”

No. Why would I have any problems?

How come I can talk to him?

“He's very telepathic.”

He never told me.

“Probably not. We tell telepathic people not to tell others that they’re telepathic.”

So the Earth is crawling with telepathic people and I didn’t know?

“Basically.”

“Just a minute, I’m trying to ring Paul.”

My nurse looked like she was concentrating. She didn’t pull out any phone though.

“Telepathic phone-call.”

Oh, I got it.

She squinted.

“Sorry, Paul is busy at the moment.”

“We’ll have to try again later.”

So I had been living on Earth, and there were telepathic people all around who weren’t letting me in on the secret.

Bastards!

And I was pissed off when Jane had gotten an iPhone prototype from a friend at Apple. She hadn’t shown it to me until I noticed her nonchalantly using the high-tech phone

Caltech “dead list” alumni

My eyes drooped.

“We can’t let you go to sleep yet.”

“Let me see if you have any friends whose Hominid bodies have died recently, and whose souls have been moved to us.”

Us?

The Elk woman ignored me.

She typed some more on the terminal and looked through a new list.

Using her hand as a pointer under one of the names, the nurse went silent for a moment.

“No, she’s out on business.”

The next one down the line.

“Here’s another one from your university. She died a month ago, and is still in orientation.”

Who is she?

The Elk woman turned around and gave me a sly look.

“We’ll let you figure that out. It’ll help keep you alert.”

She turned back to the monitor and concentrated.

“Okay,” she said. “She’s patched through to you.”

Where is she?

“Where is who?” came a different telepathic voice.

Who am I talking to?

“Her,” telepathically whispered the woman.

“Dorothy,” answered the other voice.

I tried to remember a Dorothy.

I don’t know any Dorothy.

“I’m not Dorothy!” came the other voice.

“They must be doing that name switching stuff.”

“They like doing it just to confuse us.”

The Elk woman interrupted, “We do it for security reasons.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” spoke the other voice.

This is Andrea.

“Karen? I don’t know any Karen.”

I said Andrea, I repeated.

“The names are switched,” commented the irked Elk.

Oh.

How do I know who she is?

“Ask her if she is from your university?” she answered.

“Why am I talking to you?” asked Dorothy... which wasn’t her real name.

My name won’t go through.

I gave the woman a questioning look. She smiled by rocking her head slightly back-and-forth.

“How do I know you? I hate these calls. Hold on, I’m picking some berries.”

I went to Caltech.

“Really?” some friendly surprise. “When did you graduate?”
1992.

“2002? That’s not right. I wouldn’t know you. They must have switched some digits.”

“Did you go to Lloyd house?”

Yes.

“Me too.”

My hands gestured in a quirky way... automatically.

“Did you recognize that hand gesture?”

Huh? How did that happen?

“I just moved your hands for you. Do you remember anyone who used to do that with their hands?”

No.

Why are we guessing? Why can’t we say each other’s names?

“It’s a game they play. I hate it. I’m told it’s to teach us to be resourceful.”

I gave the Elk woman a mistrusting look.

I thought...

Do you remember Paul? I was told that I could talk to him.

“John? You mean with the glass door?”

No, not Jack.

Two doors down, with the study sessions.

“Yeah, where everyone went and did homework.”

You have the right person.

“Did you come from Texas?”

No. I’m from the east coast.

I never spent any time in his room.

“Me neither.”

How else can I guess your name?

“Forget my name. You’re obviously from Lloyd House if you know about the dial-a-gender bathroom.”

Yeah, but I never lived in that hallway.

“Ha! I got the dial-a-gender bathroom through! 😊”

Why was that important?

My brain obviously wasn’t working.

“Where are you?”

I don’t know.

I just died.

I’m an Elk.

“Elk? How can you be an Elk?”

I DON’T know.

The Elk-woman interrupted, “Your soul was attached to a synthesized Elk body.”

That made no sense.

“How can you pick anything up as an Elk?” asked the Caltech alum.

I haven’t tried.

I tried to pick up an invisible object.

It works, kind-of.

“Really?”

"I'm Mrs. Tiddlewaite, from Dormouse Lane."

What?

"Seriously. I'm living in some sort of cottage. I look like one of the mouse characters from that stop-motion kids show."

That statement got me. I didn't know how to respond.

The one with Rupert? And the houses in trees?

"Yeah. Except I'm Human sized."

I didn't know what to say.

"So what happened to you?"

I just died. I think it was an Earthquake.

My nurse broke in. "No, not an Earthquake."

"An earthquake? How big?"

Sorry. It wasn't that.

I don't remember why I died.

Wait. I might remember.

I went to sleep... and then I woke up an Elk.

"That's not bad."

Pause.

"I won't tell you how I died. I'd rather not."

The conversation should have felt morbid, but it didn't.

Pause.

"How come you get to talk to Paul? I haven't been able to talk to anyone except my mother, and she's not very telepathic."

I don't know.

The Elk-woman interrupted, "Maybe we can arrange for you both to talk to him later. He's still busy."

"How long have you been dead?"

I don't know. A day.

It's only been a few hours.

"Really? I've been here a month at least."

Pause.

“Oh yeah, I spend most of my time wandering around and picking berries. And I have a friend who stops by once a day and helps me learn the ropes.”

I couldn't think of anything to say.

Have you talked to anyone else from Caltech?

“Yeah, I think so. I think I talked to Sam. She's a Humanoid cat. But I only talked to her long distance.”

“Where are you?”

Someplace underground.

“Oh, I forgot to mention. She clued me in with the words, scaredy cat.”

Who did?

“Sam.”

I didn't remember any scaredy cat. No-one at Lloyd House had a cat.

“That [not remembering any cats] helps. She must have graduated before you started.”

“Or maybe her cat was dead by then.”

Pause.

I tried to think of another question.

Why are you a dormouse and why am I an Elk? It doesn't make sense.

“Technically, I think I'm a hamster. 😊”

“As it turns out, we're aliens. And the Hominids are bastards.”

I thought the Greys were aliens.

“No, I haven't seen them.”

The woman interrupted, “The Greys are around too.”

“My friend explained it to me. It all has to do with treaties. The Greys were allowed to land on Earth since they look like they

evolved on another planet. A Humanoid Hamster would have caused all sorts of problems with our culture.”

That almost made sense.

Why wasn't I reborn as a Grey? At least then I could hop in a UFO and fly back to Earth.

Can I fly back to Earth?

“No,” answered the woman. “We're at war with the Hominids right now, and Earth is quarantined. No-one can land.”

“Really?” Dorothy had heard.

“Do some people become Greys?”

The Elk-woman answered, “Only sometimes. Mostly the souls of Hominids on Earth go to other Hominids on other planets, but it is different now for some people.”

She added, “Attaching your soul to a Grey body would require some adaptors that we don't have.”

I think I'd rather be a Human.

“We tried that,” answered the Elk woman, “but you don't have any living relatives we can attach your soul to, safely. And we didn't want you given over to the Hominids.”

That didn't make sense to me. Why were we at war with us?

“Dorothy has been disconnected by the way. Our signal was being traced.”

“We can discuss the war later.”

“I'll take you to your temporary bedroom.”

Sleep

My bedroom wasn't much of anything.

It was a small concrete nub at the end of a few turns of hallway.

A futon mattress was on the ground. A dim light hung on the ceiling overhead.

The Elk-woman had led me there, picking up a circular object hanging off the wall just before we entered my room.

She handed me the object. It was the first time I had tried to hold anything. My hands were awkward.

"This is a flashlight. Click the black button to turn it on."

"That light," she pointed up, "will dim as soon as you lie down."

What happens after I get some sleep?

"We'll get you some food, or maybe get you to talk to Paul."

What's going on with the war?

"I won't talk about that yet. You need to orient yourself first."

"If you need to use the toilet, just walk out the hall and to the right."

"Remember, you have to stand up when using the toilet."

Huh?

"I'll leave you alone. If you need me, just think-speak. I'm permanently connected to you for now."

Permanently connected? That didn't make sense.

"I have a permanent telepathic connection to you."

Oh. I get it.

"Lie down."

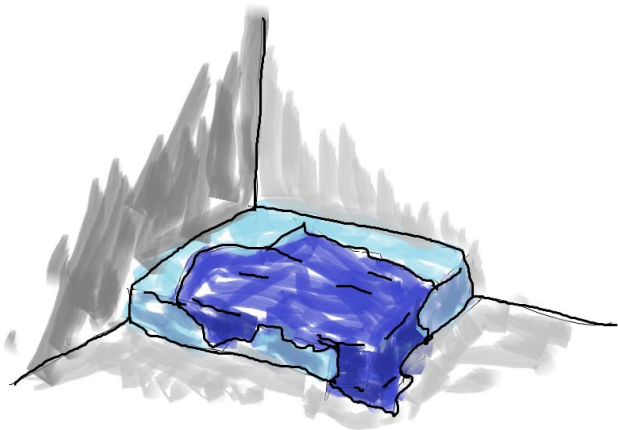
I was just about to follow her instructions and lie down when I thought to myself, why should I lie down? I could wander around some more.

“Yes, you could, but you’ll feel better after some sleep.”

I wondered if I should be cantankerous and resist the suggestion.

No, I thought. I’ll go along with it.

With some manoeuvring difficulties, I kneeled and lay down. Soon after the woman walked out of my room, I fell asleep.



The cafeteria

I didn’t dream.

I don’t recall how many hours I slept.

When I did wake up, I felt only somewhat rested. I was still tired, more mentally than physically.

Nope, I didn't awake into a dream-world.

I was still a deer... Elk!

My room lights were dim. I wasn't sure what time it was.

Bambi like, I struggled to get up on my new feet.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bambi>)

Yesterday... or a few hours ago... I had gotten off a table with the assistance of two nurses, and had gotten out of a chair with the assistance of one of those nurses.

Doing this on my own, I sat up, sitting on my futon mattress. I reached my arms behind me and tried to push myself up. This didn't work at all. My arms couldn't rotate far enough back to get behind me. I didn't have enough leverage.

Since that didn't work, I lay down on my back, and rolled onto my stomach. From there I got onto my hands and knees, then a crouch, and I finally stood up. The mushy futon made getting up more difficult.

Now what do I do?

I looked around.

The light had automatically brightened.

The futon and sheets were all messed up.

Was I really an alien now?

I thought aliens had all sorts of technology, not concrete bunkers with dingy futon mattresses.

"You might want to get some food," came the telepathic voice of my nurse.

"I'm not your nurse. Call me Haa."

I looked around for Haa.

"I'm not there. I'm busy with someone else."

"You can find the cafeteria to your right, and down the hallway, after you walk out of your room."

Thank you.

“You’re welcome.”

I began to walk out of my room... awkwardly.

“Don’t forget to walk on tip-toes.”

Yeah.

Thanks.

No response came.

I felt that I should brush my teeth to get rid of the residue chemical taste.

I had no toothbrush though.

The cafeteria sounded like good idea; I might have been hungry, but I wasn’t sure.

Getting used to my feet again after my nap, I walked out of the twisting hallway leading to my room, and into the main corridor.

I turned right.

It was a wide hallway, with many small hallways branching off. The hallway felt claustrophobic.

Other people, mostly Elk, along with an occasional pet-cougar, were walking up and down the hallway.

I staggered down the hallway, towards the cafeteria. Before going far, I stopped and looked back at my room’s entry-hallway. I tried to memorize the symbol in front of my room’s offshoot corridor.

Walking towards the cafeteria, I passed a cougar sitting down. It was typing something into a thin terminal that was lying flat on the ground.

Thoughts of Beetlejuice were overtaken by Alice in Wonderland.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_in_Wonderland_\(2010_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_in_Wonderland_(2010_film)))

“Did you see the recent movie, by the way?” asked Haa.

The one with the mad hatter?

“Yes, that one.”

No. I didn’t think I’d like it.

“Just keep walking until the main corridor twists to your left. You’ll walk straight into the cafeteria. The food is free.”

Did YOU see the movie?

“Yes and no. We’ve seen clips of it, and we’ve seen it through the eyes of contactees.”

Oh.

I could see the hallway turn left several hundred meters ahead.

Half-way to the turn I passed another Elk, who was staggering even more slowly than I was.

She was naked.

Shit!

I forgot to put my clothes on. It was like of those stress dreams where you show up to a chemistry lab NAKED.

“Don’t worry about clothes. We’ll get you some in a bit,” commented Haa.

Before long, I rounded the corner and was soon in the cafeteria. It was a large room with tables of various heights, an odd assortment of orange-coloured chairs, and a food buffet at the end.

Some people, Elk mostly, were standing around tall tables. A few were sitting. And some cougars were sitting on the floor, with 20-cm high tables in front of them.

I walked to the buffet display. It reminded me more of a high-school cafeteria than the clean corporate cafeteria I had at work.

For some reason, I remembered that I had to pay my mortgage in a few days. I felt relieved. I had been underwater on the mortgage anyway. 😊

The buffet counter contained a small variety of foods.

I pulled out a tray and ceramic-looking plate.

With a bit of effort, I grabbed some lettuce leaves... I was an Elk after all.

I managed to hold a spoon, scoop up some corn kernels, and dump them onto my lettuce.

At the end of the track were some stews... or very thick soups. One showed an icon of a cow above, another had an icon of a bird, and the last had vegetable icons.

Suspecting that I was vegetarian, I grabbed some of the vegetable stew... which looked just as unappealing as all the other stews.

Eggs would have been tasty.

I looked around but didn't see any.

At the end of the track... at least the aliens got the cafeteria flow right... was the cutlery. No sporks here. The cutlery was strange, out of a Sharper Image catalogue. Above each tray of cutlery was an icon of an animal head. I grabbed a copy of every piece of Elk cutlery I could find.

"See that person sitting at the table just to your right. She's new here too. You might sit at the table and talk to her."

How did Haa know what I was doing?

I didn't get a response.

I carried my tray over to the table and sat down.

Politely, I telepathed, "My name is Andrea."

The Elk stared comatose.

I spoke in squeaky/guttural English, "Ma nang uh Undya."

She looked at me, and her head sagged.

I waited for more of a response.

Are you okay?

She looked at me.

“No.”

What’s your name?

She looked up and down at me. “I don’t want to say.”

Alright then.

I picked up a piece of lettuce and ate it... not bad.

I tried a spoon-like utensil, and had a bite of the corn... very good!

And then the stew...

Yeah. ☹️

The cafeteria food-quality reminded me of college cafeteria-food. You ate sparingly if it was bad, which the stew was, and overate when it was palatable. Maybe it’d be burrito-night tonight, and I’d get something to fill my stomach.

I had some more corn and lettuce.

Where are you from? I asked my table-partner.

She didn’t answer.

“Are we in hell?” she asked meekly.

The question struck me as odd. How do you answer a question like that?

Was she looking for comfort?

I hoped not. I didn’t think that I could comfort her at the time. I wasn’t that happy and safe-feeling myself.

I ate some more lettuce, then some corn, and then some stew.

I don’t know [if we are in hell], I telepathed jokingly. The stew is certainly awful enough.

She looked at the stew, but didn't laugh at my attempted humour.

Could Elk laugh?

What was I supposed to do?

"Where were you from?" she asked.

California.

"I was from Montana, around Billings."

"Do you know how many years we're going to be here?"

No. I hadn't thought about that.

"You should," came a silent thought.

And then a quick, "What will the cougars do to us?"

And then, "I saw a demon walk by earlier."

Her fear was infectious. I once-again began to wonder if I was in hell.

Haa interrupted, "Step away from the loony. ☺ You might want to finish your food up and return to your room. I'll be able to patch you on to Paul in about thirty minutes."

Thank you, I telepathed to Haa.

I ate some more of the stew.

What should I do?

I think we're in space, I telepathed to the dreary-looking Elk from Montana.

"Yeah, that's what I've been told."

"My cousin used to hunt Elk," she said, looking at her hand.

"Why do I have a hoof?"

"Am I an Elk because of something he did?"

I didn't see how a cousin's hunting habits could affect someone's reincarnation.

I didn't know what to say.

I didn't particularly know why I was an Elk either, but I didn't think it was some sort of punishment.

"Did you commit suicide?"

No! I answered.

"I didn't commit suicide either. I don't know why I'm here."

Pause.

"I should be in heaven."

Pause.

"I didn't expect wings, but I expected heaven at a minimum."

I couldn't figure out how to console her.

I finished my meal, stood up, and backed away.

Nice talking to you.

Paul

When I returned to my room... I think it was my room... I lay down on my back as instructed. "Paul usually lies on his back when talking telepathically, so it's easier if you do the same," I was told.

"I will also patch in Dorothy from Caltech. She knows Paul and hasn't talked to him yet."

Where is Dorothy?

"She's on another planet several hundred galaxies away."

Galaxies?

"Yes."

"I've got Paul on the line."

"Wait. That doesn't make sense," came the telepathic voice of Paul.

I listened some more.

“No. Crappy Chinese-food sauce tastes the same as the stuff they put on cat food.”

Huh?

I thought I was talking to Paul.

Pause.

“Have I connected to a new conversation?”

“I must be.”

Are you Paul?

“No. I’m Paul.”

That didn’t make sense.

“Oh, they must be name mangling.”

My hands moved to cross on my ribs. I felt a man’s hands touch me, not my own.

“Have I talked to you before?”

Haa interrupted, “You might want to ask him questions to find out who he really is.”

Good point.

Did Paul play foosball?

Dorothy answered on the conference call, “I don’t think so.”

“Did someone else from Caltech die?” asked Paul.

Crap. How many people have died?

“A lot. Phil is in Medieval-land.”

I didn’t know any Phil.

This was a bit of a challenge. Was I intentionally misconnected to the wrong person?

Or accidentally?

“You weren’t into the medieval stuff, were you?” asked Dorothy.

“No, I DIDN’T do it occasionally,” came Paul’s answer.

I was confused.

Wait.

I remembered, names might be mangled.

Did you do those Japanese wood fighting sticks?

“Yes,” answered Paul.

So you’re not Paul.

Paul once-again answered “No. I’m Paul”.

Okay, it’s just some confusion in the signal.

“What’s your name?” asked Dorothy.

My index finger tried to point at my rib cage.

“Lemming man,” responded Not-Paul.

“Wait. Wait. Are you trying to get around the moderators?”

Yeah, I thought.

“Don’t do that,” continued Paul.

“They change names for security reasons.”

Dorothy was quicker than me, “Then how do we know you’re from our college?”

“Ask me some questions that only someone from Caltech would know.”

I remembered one.

What happened with that Spanish prof visiting our dorm for dinner?

Dorothy answered too quickly, “I missed that one.”

“Him. He got a bit drunk.”

More like sozzled.

Wait. Who is talking?

“I can’t tell. It’s like a text chat-room where people don’t type in names,” answered the person who wasn’t Paul.

That didn’t make sense. I could kind-of tell who I was talking to.

“Crap, the connection is getting worse.”

“Don’t worry, it’s the Hominids behind the curtains. They’re always here.”

My arm pointed up and to the left.

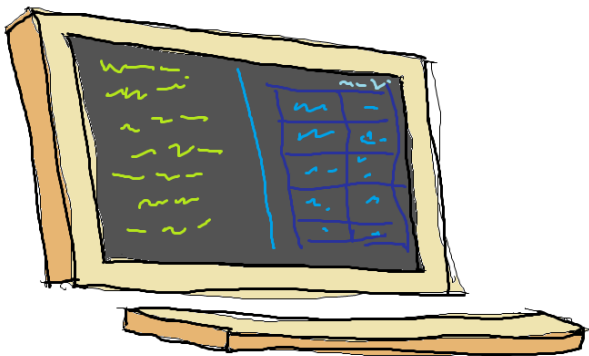
Hominids behind the curtains?

Are you an alien?

“No, I’m stuck in LA.”

And then the telepathic spam began.

Disconnect.



Playing with the terminal

Half an hour later, Haa showed up... I think it was her. They all looked the same to me.

“I brought you some clothes.”

I had forgotten about the clothes. Too many other things were on my mind.

That wasn't Paul from Caltech? I asked about the conversation.

Haa handed me a short red skirt with attached suspenders.

“No, he's someone else you both know.”

I looked at the garment.

So how do I know he's him? And how do I know he's on Earth?

Haa almost smiled.

“You need to figure that out. It'll give you something to think about.” She tilted her head back and up a bit.

I awkwardly put the skirt on.

Haa adjusted the suspenders, which criss-crossed my ribs instead of travelling vertically up and down.

“I’m going to take you to the terminal room now. You can play around there.” The word “play” was NOT condescending.

Like a computer lab?

Hadn’t respond to that.

“Please follow me.”

Haa seemed to be in a better mood than the previous day.

We walked into the main corridor, and turned right towards the cafeteria.

Part-way down the hall, Haa and I walked left down another wide corridor, and left again into another bunker-room with about fifteen computer terminals on tables of various heights. Chairs were in front of some of them. This room had TWO plastic ficus plants.

“You know where you are [relative to your room]?” asked Haa.
Yes.

“Good. I’ll leave you here. Just spend some time playing on the terminals until you get bored.”

Oh.

“You don’t need instructions. They’re simple enough to understand.”

I didn’t know why I was being left there.

“Goodbye. Haa may stop by and say hello later. 😊”

The Elk-woman left me alone. (She wasn’t Haa. Oops.)

I looked around, wondering which terminal I should sit at. Another Elk was sitting at a terminal, trying to read from it, and occasionally touching the screen. We all looked the same, didn’t we.

I sat at a terminal next to her... hoping she wasn't the loony I had talked to.

"No, I'm fine. I get what's going on."

"Did you work at Reuters?"

No. A company in California.

"Did you go to MIT?"

No, Caltech.

Why was she asking these questions?

"Sorry, I'm kind of taking a poll to figure out where we all came from."

"Most of us are from Earth. Half from the US."

She definitely wasn't the loony hell-worried one.

I just got here a day ago.

"Oh, so you're being shown the ropes."

Yeah.

I decided to ask, how long have you been here?

"Do you want to try something fun?" My Elk friend tried to smile; it didn't work.

"I've been here three weeks. I'm waiting to get a UFO out of here."

UFO?

God damn! I was an alien. I had forgotten.

Are all aliens just reincarnated Humans?

"No. Most are born on other planets."

"Here, let me show you this."

"Touch your computer to turn it on."

Okay.

I turned to face my terminal, which was off. I touched the 2:1 aspect-ratio screen and lots of text appeared.

I could almost identify the characters, though they weren't English.

"Here, take my keyboard."

She pushed her keyboard over in front of my terminal.

"Press this button."

My friend pressed a button on the screen for me.

"And this one."

She pressed another one. I couldn't follow what she was doing.

"Now, wait for the terminal to check your identification."

Do I need a password?

"No, it's built into your implant."

The screen flashed a bit.

Pointing at the upper-right side of the screen, she said, "There. Your name is here. It's kind of a log-on name like in World of Warcraft." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_of_warcraft)

It looked like "Greek" to me.

"All you have to do is type in someone's name who you want to look up."

What do you mean look up?

"It's a giant database. You can look up practically anyone on Earth."

Cool.

Who should I type in?

"Type in his name," his was emphasized. "Just use characters close to the English ones."

I began typing, "P", "A".

"Wait!"

She clicked on a small box next to an edit field.

"I need to set the focus to the box."

"Type in the name again."

“P” “A” “U” “L” “X” “X” “X” “X” (Name hidden to protect his identity.)

“Press this button.”

My friend pointed at another button; this time though, she let me touch the screen.

A few seconds later the screen layout changed, and some text appeared in chunks... like a web page on a slow internet connection.

“You can’t read the text, but you kind-of can. I think its part of your implants.”

I looked a large scrolling text field on the left side of the screen. I couldn’t understand the language, but after staring at the text for a few minutes, I understood the basic concepts.

Born in West Virginia...

Almost had a girlfriend in High School, but some-name used a bot so she wouldn’t like him.

I scrolled down.

Arrived in Caltech.

Spent his first week in Blacker House, until he was moved.

There was a lot more detail here.

“Yeah. Most of my friends were only occasionally commented on when they were children, but as soon as they went to university, the text density went way up.”

I scrolled down some more.

Didn’t do well in math. A comment noted, maybe we should redirect him into computers.

Crap, it was like The Truman Show.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Truman_Show

“Not quite. Just lots of people sitting around taking notes on “Earthlings” they are interested in watching.”

“I haven’t seen that comment before,” she said pointed to “maybe we should redirect him”. “It’s like our life is planned for us.”

Mine wasn’t planned very well.

“Neither was mine.”

“Did you ever see that Twilight-zone remake where the woman entered a secret library with encyclopaedias of everyone’s lives?” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Stories_\(TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Stories_(TV_series)))

I tried to recall such a show.

No.

“Oh well, it’s like that, except the notes aren’t very detailed.”

“I tried adding text to one of my friends so someone would contact them, but I didn’t have permission.”

“Oh. Here’s a really cool thing.”

My friend’s hand/hoof pointed at an Excel-like spreadsheet on the right.

She touched it and scrolled two-thirds down.

“See that,” she said, pointing at a line of text.

It was a line with “0051” written.

“His sperm is worth \$1500 a sperm.” (Actually, it was \$20.)

Orientation

After another sleep, Haa telepathically woke me up and suggested I attend an orientation meeting in the cafeteria.

I kneeled out of bed.

Heading out into the hallway, I realized that I still had no toothbrush, and that I hadn’t taken a shower. I had seen the

showers next to the toilet block, but was too tired to worry about showering.

I made my way to the cafeteria.

The tables at the centre of the cafeteria were pushed aside. An Elk-woman had set up a monitor on a tall table. A cougar-person was sitting on the ground next to her.

Several chairs were arranged in front of the display, where a few Elk-people sat, and some people that looked like walking horses. I wondered if the “freshmen” were put into herbivorous bodies on purpose.

As soon as I entered the room, the barely-audible thoughts of “We’re working for hell” and “Indoctrination” crept into my mind.

I sat in a chair, as far away from other people as possible. I didn’t want to talk to anyone, particularly not people who thought they were in hell.

After a few minutes, the Elk-woman turned on the monitor, and spoke:

“For those of you who haven’t attended one of these sessions, I will first briefly explain what is happening.”

“All of you except for a few came from Earth Sol.”

“As far as you were told, there was no life outside of Earth, but that Anamami might have met with your government in top secret conditions.”

“What you weren’t told was that there are trillions of Hominids living on other planets and flying spaceplanes around.” (Actually, “trillions” is an understatement.)

“Simply put, they are maniacal, despicable bastards.”

The cougar spoke up. “That’s a bit harsh.”

The Elk presenter resumed, pressing a button on the terminal keyboard.

“Two weeks ago, the Hominids flung a planetoid into one of our planets, killing two billion people.”

She pressed another button on the keyboard, and a video played.

It showed a planet, half in the dark. The lit side had an ocean, as well as a continent with a green coast, and dust-beige interior. A small moon, which looked like it had water and vegetation, slowly flew into the centre of the planet.

The planet didn't blow up into a million small rocks like in Star Wars.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars_Episode_IV:_A_New_Hope)

It just absorbed the planetoid.

A minute later, the far side of the planet bulged out.

Then the ripples passed around the surface of the planet, before the planet's entire atmosphere clouded up.

“That was time accelerated, by the way,” said the cougar.

One of the hell-people thought, “Propaganda.”

The Elk presenter pressed another button.

“Here is a video of one of our planets being hit by an asteroid attack.”

The planet in the new video was different, this time with snow-capped poles.

Four or five large asteroids hurled into the planet, impacting over the course of a minute.

Wherever they impacted, a plume of rocks and molten lava was thrown up, and then a large cloud formed, obscuring the impact site. Two minutes later, the clouds merged and obscured the planet's entire surface.

Thoughts of 2012 came to mind.

And Bruce Willis's silly movie.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armageddon \(1998 film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armageddon_(1998_film)))

"Here's another bit of news that just came in."

She pressed another button.

A series of videos and still images played. They looked exactly like Nazi Germany concentration camps, except they were in colour, and they had walking-animal bodies heaped into trenches instead of those of Jewish people.



Nazi concentration camp

<http://www.bobpiper.co.uk/Belsen01.jpg>

Why didn't we hear about this on Earth?

The Cougar spoke up, "We had some treaties, keeping Earth "undisclosed" and ignorant. But then, this war started up."

And then she added, "If you died a year ago, you would have woken up on their side. As it is, we have an arrangement so souls friendly to us either stay on Earth, go to another friendly Hominid

planet, or get placed in non-Hominid bodies. People that would prefer to be exclusively Hominid are sent in their direction.”

Another freshman spoke up, “We don’t want to be here. How do we get to OUR side?”

“We’re working on it Milay,” answered the Elk woman. “Unfortunately, as soon as you’re brought here, their database marks you as ‘contaminated’, and they won’t treat you well.”

I wondered if I should ask more questions.

I decided not to.

I didn’t like the position I was put in, being reincarnated into a body that was at war with some Humans.

The Elk woman pressed another button.

“By the way, this is one of our responses.”

The video showed the night-side of a planet, entirely dark. Several enormous nuclear explosions went off.

“Those were ten-gigaton bombs, by the way.”

My Beetlejuice civil-servant job

The next day, Haa found me in my room, thinking.

I don’t like being involved in the war.

“We’re trying to keep you out of it.”

How is that?

“We have a job for you. Do you want to telepathically talk to some of your friends and family?”

I thought that I couldn’t because they weren’t telepathic.

“You can and you can’t. Some of them have a bit of telepathy. All you’ll get from them are “thumps”, basically feelings and some simple ideas. For the most part, they won’t be conscious of the communication.”

My original question wasn’t answered, but I didn’t notice.

“I’ll take you to a different computer lab where you can talk to them.”

My mind was sharper than it was when I first “woke up” a few days ago, but it didn’t occur to me to ask more about the war.

Haa led me to a different computer lab. It was smaller than the first, but filled with the same types of terminals. One other Elk-person sat there.

Haa selected a computer, did some typing, and pressed some buttons on the screen.

She motioned for me to sit down, which I did.

“On the screen,” she pointed, “you’ll find a list of a few of your friends and family. To the right of their name is the approximate Earth-time that they live in, so you can guess what they’re doing.”

I saw four entries. Looking at the screen, I could make out the names, “Ben XXXX”, “John XXXX”, “Mary XXXX”, and “Wendy XXXX” written in a non-English font, which was close enough that English-looking characters were used.

“Who do you want to talk to?”

“Remember, you can’t talk. It’s more like thinking about impressions.”

How about Mary?

“Okay. Just press her name.”

I touched Mary’s name on the screen.

The screen flashed and changed to a display, showing Mary’s most-recent text log, as well as some statistics, and a few buttons.

“When you’re done talking with Mary, remember to press the “down arrow” over here.” Haa pointed to the icon.

“What would Mary be doing at 5:32 PM?”

Making dinner, I think.

“Think about the question, “Are you making dinner?””

Are you making dinner?

I felt, but didn’t telepathically hear, “Yes”.

What else can I ask?

“She has two children. Think a question about how her children are doing.”

How is Sam?

“Worry” was expressed.

Does she know I’m asking these questions?

“No. It’s subconscious for the most part. You can’t get too much information from them.”

“You can spend today talking to your friends.”

“Tomorrow, you can try talking to some other people like this. We want to know if they’re alright.”

Why?

“The Hominids are attacking a lot of people with venom bots. If they aren’t doing well, we want to know so we can send a medical-bot to check them out and see if they have been attacked.”

What does that mean?

“Venom bots are small, invisible bots that fly into people’s houses and kill their brains off with chemicals, or give them heart attacks, or destroy their livers. They use them to invisibly kill off hundreds of thousands of people a year.” (Actually, a million plus.)

Why do they do that?

“Why did they kill you with venom bots over the last nine months?”

They killed me with venom bots?

“Yes. They must have decided they didn’t like you. Perhaps you had some thoughts they didn’t like.”

I don’t think so.

Who are THEY?

“The Hominids that control your planet.”

“Did you ever think about UFOs?”

No.

“What political party did you align yourself with?”

Democrats.

“Oh well. Sometimes they just decide to not like you.”

Haa was very good at pushing the conversation along.

“Try talking to your friends. I’ll be connected to you in case you have any questions.”

What is wrong with Sam? I thought to Mary.

“Depressed,” came a thump.

“Just do this as long as you like. I’ll take off and do some other work. Goodbye.”

Haa left the room.

What else should I ask?

Are you going on a vacation soon?

No response.

What are you eating tonight?

A thump returned “spaghetti”.

I didn’t really want to ask Mary anything. I didn’t talk to her much when I was on Earth, so there was no point doing so from another planet.

Weird concept.

I pressed the “hang up” button and looked through the list. I clicked on “John”. He was my manager at work, and a nice guy.

The screen changed to indicate that the call went through.

How are you John?

“Fine. I’m stuck in traffic.” This telepathic sentence was stronger than Mary’s thump, but not nearly as clear as talking to Elk-people in the bunker.

Cool.

“What’s happening here?” thought John.

What is your phone number?

“Eight three nine...” which was correct.

Are there any restaurants on the way home?

A loud thump, “Fast food.”

That sounded good.

How about Wendy’s?

“Sounds good. I can take the next exit,” thought John.

Cool.

And then an idea struck me...

I’m not dead.

“That’s weird,” was John’s thump response. Pause.

“It’s like Ghost Whisperer,” he thought.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_Whisperer)

This is Andrea. Tell my mother that I’m okay. I’m an alien now.

“Huh?”

I had an idea.

Alpha, November, Delta, Romeo, Echo, Alpha.

There was a pause while I felt John think.

“A. N. D. R. E. A. Andrea? Crap. This is weird.”

Shit, it worked!

India, Mike, Oscar, Kilo.

“This is weird. Imko? No. I’m OK.”

I felt John’s eyes widen.

“I have a turnoff coming up.”

India, Mike, Alpha, Lima, India, Echo, November.

“I’m A. L. I. E. N. I’m Alien?”

“No. That doesn’t make sense.”

John turned off to Wendy’s.

“What the hell? That’s weird.”

Just tell my mother I’m okay, and the people at work too.

I could tell that John was thinking: “(a) Andrea spoke to me from the dead, (b) She spoke using military text messaging, and worst of all, (c) She is now an alien.”

John turned left.

“That’s not gonna work. I can never tell anyone this story, unless I’m drunk.”

I just want to talk

“I have patched Paul through,” said Haa telepathically. “By now you know that he’s not Paul though.”

My hands rested on my ribcage once again. They felt like a man’s hands.

“Someone just connected,” commented he-who-was-not-Paul. Yeah.

“How are you doing?”

It’s difficult getting used to here.

“You don’t seem to be happy.”

No.

I thought about what Haa had said to me.

Not-Paul’s concentration shifted, and became suspicious at my thought.

“I’m not a mentor, or at least not a very good mentor.”

He read my mind enough to know that I was told off.

I got in trouble.

“You don’t have to tell me. I don’t want to be a mentor.”

Okay, but I tried to contact someone I knew.

And I got some information through.

Exasperation on the part of Not-Paul.

“You shouldn’t try to get past the censors.”

“You do,” interrupted someone else.

“Yeah, you’re right. I don’t try to.”

Pause.

“Well, yes, unless someone it making it obvious to me that it’s a game.”

Telepathically turning towards me, Not-Paul said, “The censorship is for security purposes.”

But I just wanted to get in contact with my mother.

“Did it work?”

I don’t know.

I tried to tell John about my death. (Blocked)

Can you Facebook someone for me?

“Whenever I’ve been asked to Facebook someone it usually turns out that they’re already dead.”

But can you Facebook someone for me?

“I can’t because I don’t really know who you are. I think I know who you are, but you might be three other people.”

“And I don’t want to cause trouble. I usually only Facebook people when I’m requested to.”

What do you send them?

“I wrote up a disclosure document.”

“And I wrote some short stories [about disclosure].”

Someone else added, “Two conniving horny racoons in a canoe has worked well.”

What’s that one?

“It’s a story about Raccoon-evolved people.”

That wouldn’t work for the people I know. They’re not furrries.

How can I tell people that I’m not dead?

Dorothy joined in, “You could E-mail everyone at Caltech.”

“It doesn’t work,” commented Not-Paul. “They don’t respond. I already tried. They may be telepathically blocked so they’re not interested.”

Could you try again?

“I’ll think about it. I need to see what other people say.”

Pause.

Sadness on the part of Not-Paul.

“I wish I were in college.”

I didn’t understand.

“I feel like I’m in high school. Worse, I feel like I’m forced to retake the last year of high school.”

Not-Paul had changed conversation directions too quickly.

“I tried to get a UFO ride off the planet a year ago. But I couldn’t, because The Great Hominid Empire prevented it.”

“I’m jealous that you made it to college, and I’m stuck in high school.”

A metaphor! I understood.

I’d rather be on Earth right now. I was happy there.

“I understand your point of view. I’d rather be where you are.”
It’s ironic.

“Not really ironic... but I don’t know the word.”

I didn’t know what to say.

“It’s weird. I’m being asked to help you understand what’s happening off planet.”

“It’s like me giving a freshman-orientation talk when I have never attended university.”

“The only “university” experience I have is that I’ve spent the last year telepathically talking to people.”

I thought about this.

“In a week, you’ll know more than I do. When I get into space, you’ll have to show me the ropes. 😊”

That sounded wrong to me.

I didn’t think I’d ever get the hang of this place.

“So, how have your first few days of college been? What did you do?”

“I’d really like to know.”

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