

THE SIMULATIONIST

Written by

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BLACKNESS

Breathing through a ventilator. Beeping from a life support machine. Heart rate increases, slightly.

INT. PRIVATE RECOVERY ROOM - DAY

TRISTAN opens his eyes blindly, squinting from the light. His vision is awfully blurred. A breeze catches the open window's blinds. Ambience of a living city outside.

Tristan is a middle-aged man, long unkempt beard and hair. He achingly leans over to a bedside table, sees his mobile phone and his glasses to see the world.

He grabs his phone. Brings it right to his face. Navigates apps. Nothing loads. No social media, stock exchange - except for hundreds of text messages from 10 months ago.

Tristan frowns.

PARALEGAL (O.S.)

For once your eyes do not deceive you.

Tristan pulls his phone down, struggles to see before him. A vague mirage of a woman in corporate business attire, sat on an armchair at the end of the room.

Tristan leans for his jam-jar glasses, puts them on. Notices a glass of water nearby, drinks it.

He notices a briefcase on a table at the end of his bed, between him and the woman. There also resides a television on the wall above her.

TRISTAN

Who are you? Who... am I?

PARALEGAL

I represent your previous employer. Your name is Tristan, and you have been asleep for eleven months.

TRISTAN

I've... what?

PARALEGAL

With time you'll remember everything so it's largely unimportant, and my time is finite. So listen.

(MORE)

PARALEGAL (CONT'D)

The briefcase in front of you: this is your severance package. I'm afraid that since your coma, your project was continued by another party, its progress has been exponential - and you do not have the security clearance for its evolved state.

Tristan sits up.

TRISTAN

My severance package?

PARALEGAL

To the tune of £400,000 in cash. We believe this to be equitable.

Tristan shakes his head, frazzled.

TRISTAN

In cash? My coma? Wait...

The paralegal checks her watch, stands and turns on the television for Tristan.

PARALEGAL

You've missed a lot in the past year.

The paralegal walks out the room.

TRISTAN

Wait, how did I get here? What happened? Hey!

On the TV, a newscast begins. At a desk in the studio is a news reporter.

REPORTER

Today marks the 11th month of the year long global internet shutdown. That's right everyone, in just a month, the internet will be back. Businesses, friends, family, once reeling from the shutdown, are now preparing to celebrate the return. But what does the public think of its return. Some have grown used to it, some are starving for the connectivity.

On the screen, members of the public are interviewed on city streets.

Tristan becomes entranced, his eyes widen. He unplugs tubes from his wrists, scrambles to take any belongings of his he can see. Takes a spare change of clothes left for him. Puts a jacket over his hospital gown.

Tristan hesitates over the briefcase, then picks it up, feeling its weight.

As he hears nurses chattering, heading closer to his room down the hallway, Tristan scuttles away.

We are left to watch a few more seconds of the newscast.

EXT. METRO TRAIN - DAY

Tristan sits amidst a train coach full of commuters, none of them have their faces to their phones. Everyone is talking, socialising, or reading newspapers with memes and adverts.

He stirs at a window seat with a thousand yard stare, feeling like an alien in this strange new world.

A tone bleeps on the train. Tristan hastily arises and stands by the parting doors.

INT. TRISTAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Tristan unlocks his front door and barges into his apartment. All of his furniture is covered with transparent tarp, including his computer desk near a two-pane window.

Tristan takes off his jacket and trudges light-headed to his computer setup. He clutches the tarp and pulls it off. Presses the power button on the computer tower.

It quickly powers up, internal fans and water coolants whirring and vibrating.

Tristan sits down and opens up a web browser. Searches "SKYMIND LOGIN PORTAL". He punches enter.

A notice appears: "NO INTERNET CONNECTION." Tristan slumps back in his chair, daunted. His mind races.

MOMENTS LATER.

Tristan heaves an old 90s television. Laced all over it are old, tattered childish stickers. He glances them with a nostalgic smile, before snapping out of it.

Tristan connects the ariel, lifting the TV onto his desk before plugging it into the wall. He switches it on.

We hear only white noise as he continues to flick through channels, the static interspersed with flashing colours illuminating his face.

Tristan stands, looks to the windowsill. On it is a Newton's Cradle. He incredulously saunters to it, lifts one of its metallic balls, drops it, scrutinising the kinetic transference, snap, snap, snap.

Snap, snap, snap...

Tristan is enraptured. He stands before the window looking out over the city.

TRISTAN

You can't do this to me. I will make it egregiously difficult. I built this, I know its flaws. I will make everyone realise what's happened.

(then)

I'll... (chuckles) I'll start a god damn cult if I have to. Because, after all...

Tristan frowns.

TRISTAN (O.S.) PRE-LAP (CONT'D)

WE NO LONGER LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE WHAT CAN HAPPEN, WILL HAPPEN. WE LIVE IN ONE WHERE WHAT CAN HAPPEN, HAS HAPPENED. WE ARE RATS, BINARY RATS. YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, BEFORE ITS TOO LATE!

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPERIMPOSE: "FOUR WEEKS LATER".

Tristan roams the streets in a chrome, reflective cloak. Every inch of his wizard-like attire is bright and silver. He wears sunglasses with silver, reflective lenses, and has surrounding him dozens of mirrors.

He preaches on an intersecting thoroughfare, disturbing or amusing pedestrians.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

FEAR NOT, FELLOW IMMERSEES! THESE MIRRORS, THESE REFRACTIONS OF LIGHT, PUT STRESS ON THE MACHINE COMPUTING THIS ILLUSION!

Accompanying the mirrors are buckets of water, some of which are empty, their contents spilled on the ground to form puddles. Despite the sunny weather, the pavement is slick and reflective.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

It is safe to speak the truth here,
to fulfil your agency! Of course,
the internet was taken away from
us, WE ARE IN THE FUCKING INTERNET!

Tristan grows agitated by the lack of concern on the roaming, happy pedestrians. He removes his glasses and widens his eyes.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN WHEN
THE MACHINE BRINGS BACK THE
INTERNET? IT IS A LIE! THE
EXPERIMENT THAT IS OUR EXISTENCE
WILL END! I... I REGRET TO SAY... I
HELPED CREATE IT! I AM GUILTY! I AM
GUILTY!

Tristan inhales after the outburst, calming, losing resolve.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

Guilty of what, Tristan?

Tristan snaps his gaze to two police officers.

TRISTAN

Everything.

POLICE OFFICER

You've been doing this for too long
now. Leaving mirrors all over the
city, harassing the public about
the... 'simulation'.

TRISTAN

This simulation is generated
through quantum cloud computing.
Cloud computing, as in, through the
internet. The machine realised we
as a civilisation were becoming
self aware, and risked creating a
simulation within a simulation, an
intelligence explosion.

(then)

It fears us.

The police officers glance to each other, fed up.

POLICE OFFICER

Well, some people fear you and feel uncomfortable. It's time for you to go home. The internet is coming back on today, and we could do with less disorder on the streets, now more than ever.

TRISTAN

NO. NO! THERE'S NO WAY THEY WILL TURN THE INTERNET BACK ON! WE ARE TOO MUCH OF A THREAT!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. TRISTAN'S FLAT - EVENING

The Newton's Cradle snapping.

The evening cityscape is seen from Tristan's window, as he stirs before it, overlooking his view. He is pale and demoralised, scrutinising the lush sunset with disbelief.

Tristan checks his watch: "23:58".

Takes a deep breath. Closes his eyes. He speaks as if there is an omniscient entity listening.

TRISTAN

Why? Why do this to me?

The Newton's Cradle losing its momentum. He restarts the snapping, then frowns as he hears commotion outside on the ground.

Tristan opens his window. He hears a crowd cheering. He checks his watch: "23:58".

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

NO! NO! YOU'RE CELEBRATING THE END!
STOP! STOP!

Tristan glowers down from out his window. He widens his eyes, recoils back into his apartment.

MOMENTS LATER.

Tristan opens his wardrobe, haphazardly pulls from it clothes in a messy heap. Buried beneath it all is the briefcase.

Tristan grabs the briefcase, lugs it over to his computer desk by the open window. Opens the case with seething agitation.

Tristan sees the £200,000 in cash in the briefcase. Smirks and scoffs. He grabs two hand fulls of cash. Strides to lean out his window.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)
HERE, YOU LITERAL NPCs. HAVE SOME
MONEY!

Tristan throws pound notes out the window as they drift downwards in the wind. The crowd begins to countdown.

CROWD (O.S.)
59... 58... 57... 56...

TRISTAN
NOT THAT ANY OF YOU WILL REACT...

EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

At the ground level below Tristan's apartment window, a crowd stand before the sunset, but they're all watching their phones.

TRISTAN (O.S.)
(faintly)
Your programming won't account for
this possibility.

CROWD (O.S.)
49... 48... 46... 45...

Some of the group notice the cash raining from above. They clamour and scuttle around on the floor, laughing with each other.

Some of them gaze up to Tristan leaning out the window.

INT. TRISTAN'S FLAT - EVENING

Tristan widens his eyes with annoyance. He looks up to the skies, and frowns.

TRISTAN
Oh, so you upgraded the neural
matrix for the agents. What, is
that the progress I didn't have
security clearance for? Really, is
that it?

Tristan grabs another two hand fulls of cash. Throwing it out the window. Eventually he exposes the bottom of the briefcase...

There is a small oblong case. He pauses, takes it and opens it.

It's a USB.

Tristan inspects it with his eyes magnified by his jam-jar glasses.

CROWD (O.S.)

39... 38... 37... 36...

Tristan looks to his computer desktop beside his window. He turns on the computer tower. Fidgets with the USB between his fingers.

Tristan shakes his head, scoffs. Peers out the window, to the invisible omniscience in the skies.

TRISTAN

This better be a joke.

CROWD

29... 28... 27... 26...

Tristan reaches to insert the USB stick into the port of the computer. He halts, thinks, turns it the other way around.

CROWD (CONT'D)

19... 18... 17... 16... 15...

Tristan plugs in the USB.

He watches the screen. Reflected in his glasses is the feedback from his computer screen.

Tristan watches his computer screen. Navigates files, opens a video file contained in the USB. A window appears on his desktop. It is a male ATTORNEY wearing a suit filmed on a webcam with a bookshelf as his backdrop.

ATTORNEY

Tristan Crawford, in case you do not remember after the accident, I am the attorney representing you. I forced your employer's hand and made them include the last version of the project you worked on, the only one you, as they worded it, 'had the security clearance for'.

(then)

The world will be different when you wake up, yet calm where there may have been chaos. That is thanks to you.

Tristan squints with scepticism. He pauses the video, his eyes rolling along the screen to notice an internet link file. He clicks it.

A window opens requiring a log in to the "SKYMIND LOGIN PORTAL".

Tristan types in his details. Presses enter. A labyrinth of code scrolls down the screen.

Suddenly the screen shows Tristan a god-like, high view of a city reminiscent of a strategy video game. The graphics are pixelated and rudimentary.

A main menu overlay superimposes the vista.

"THE SHUTDOWN SIMULATION V.03"

Tristan presses the "START" option.

He is presented with a HUD, most prominent of which is "BEGIN SIMULATION."

Tristan frowns, presses to begin simulation.

Nothing happens.

He shrugs, notices another option to fast forward time. He does so my X100

Suddenly the city is engulfed in flames and mayhem. Tristan goes deadpan, leans back, stands from his desk and peers out his window to see the city in which he lives, all in one piece.

In the reflection of his glasses are fireworks. Cheering celebrating the return of the internet.

THE END.