

A Conversation between Insomniacs

Jiayi Luo  
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FADE IN:

**1 INT. FACILITY SERVER ROOM – UNINTELLIGIBLE TIME 1**

(Most scenes in this script are to be envisioned as CGI animation, unless stated otherwise.)

Two long rows of glass cabinets. Countless LED lights flash behind the glass.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It's been a long time since the humans left.

CUT TO:

**2 INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER – DAY 2**

A very human-like robot opens its eyes while lying in bed. The robot gets out of bed, walks into the adjacent bathroom, and performs morning routines such as tooth-brushing, face-washing, and hair-combing.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

To be honest, it still confuses me sometimes to think of myself as not human, a being outside the definition of human. Most other uploads deal with this not-being-human thing much better than I do. Which makes sense, because unlike me, their former human selves wanted to be uploaded, and had to go through a whole application process prior to being uploaded. Most of them were either dying or, for various reasons, sickened by their corporeality to such an extent that they did not want to exist that way anymore.

The robot walks into the kitchen, stops in front of the gigantic coffee machine, fetches a mug to put under the nozzle, presses a few buttons, and waits. A dark liquid starts drizzling into the mug.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

As for me, well, I was freshly out of cryopreservation when I was uploaded. So much confusion back then; it's a miracle that I remain, so to speak, more or less the same consciousness. Or that I believe myself to be so, from whatever memories I recall, records I've managed to gather, and interviews I've conducted with the few still on Earth who knew me before.

The robot picks up the mug and a flat-screen device lying on the kitchen counter, walks to the dining table, sits down, and start sipping the drink while reading content from the device.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Despite my investigative efforts, the specific illness that landed me in government-supervised cryopreservation is still a mystery to me. It was a condition that affected my cognition, and the records pertaining to my case were apparently important enough to have been classified, and thus, were either deleted or taken away when the humans left. So here I am, an upload, running in 0's and 1's in an environmental recovery facility in the Arctic Ocean—the council assigned me here because of my former training in marine biology—without knowledge of various important facts pertaining to my human self, including where he went after the upload is done, and what happened to him from then on.

The robot puts down the mug to rub its eyes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

That is, until the alien children came home to visit.

The robot takes a last sip of the drink, stands up, walks to the sink, pours the rest into the sink, and washes the mug, two fingers rubbing away at dark residues stuck to the inside of the mug.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But before I get to that, I would like to talk a bit more about myself and the Earth after the humans left. So, back to the "different from other uploads" topic—

The robot puts the mug away, washes and dries its hands on a towel, picks up a hooded protective overcoat from the hat rack, dons it, and exits the living quarter into an airtight decontamination room, which it simply passes through without activating.

**INT. FACILITY CONNECTION CORRIDOR**

The other door of the decontamination room opens to a long, narrow tunnel that resembles the inside of a creased, aged rubber tube, with sunlight dimly seeping through. The robot walks down the tunnel.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I often feel quite nostalgic for my human body. I spent a lot of time and resources making it more comfortable for myself, after all. So, that's why I constructed this mechanical humanoid representation of me, with used parts that are no longer fit for the ocean cleaners that I manufacture and run. I use the same system of wireless control that I use for the ocean cleaners on this humanoid, having it perform humanlike routines in this apartment originally designed for human supervisors in the facility. It is... quite calming for me, having this little figure moving around, acting as if it's a real person.

(pause)

Most other uploads will despise me for this, but fortunately, an advantage of being an upload is the privacy granted by solely interacting with the world as data and through data—it is a lot easier to control what one wishes others to see. Not to mention that it is quite illegal to overstep this sort of boundaries. All invasions leave traces and are impossible to truly cover up. One would face erasure if one were to hack into a system where their presence is unpermitted. Not a chance I would take.

The robot reaches the end of the tunnel and opens the airtight door, entering the garage.

#### **INT. FACILITY GARAGE**

A vast space divided by zigzagging docks extending down into greenish ocean water. Pale sunlight shone in from the faraway rectangular garage door. At this time, only a few ocean cleaners returning for maintenance are parked along the docks. The robot picks up a scanning device hanging on a rack next to the entrance, walks up to a cleaner, and performs a number of checks.

#### **NARRATOR (V.O.)**

In terms of the work, I do enjoy my work here. This station is as close to my human hometown as a job position can get. It is also a scientific establishment in the middle of an ocean, which means that it is not originally designed to host that much human activity. Which is a good thing. I can't see myself managing an evacuated city, for example. Without humans, those places are a mere shell, and I would be far too inclined to just let it crumble.

The robot goes on to scan the rest of the cleaners parked sparsely throughout the garage.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Here it is different. This facility is fundamentally productive with or without humans, and the effects of my work are very visible. When my hard drives were first transported here, the ocean was the wrong color and the wrong viscosity, and due to the nuclear summer, no iceberg was able to form even in relatively cold months. During those beginning millennia, there were a lot more collaborations necessary with other uploads working on related problems, such as global atmospheric readjustment and nuclear waste disposal. It was an especially good time redesigning the collection system of my cleaners with the help of this upload originally from Russia, Luzhin R., who is quite fun to talk to in my opinion.

(pause)

I acknowledge that "from some place" is a very archaic thing to say, but I was in cryopreservation during those key decades leading to the global diaspora, when cultural structures were supposedly eradicated. Anyway, Luzhin is one of the few uploads I still talk to today, since the work in environmental recovery has become essentially local in recent centuries. One can really see the difference here in the Arctic. The ice caps are forming again, growing ever firmer and larger. The council was quite delighted to see the images I captured with the satellites assigned to me, during my progress report in the last convention. But personally, the improvements in ocean water felt more intimate, since I have so

many detectors directly immersed in the ocean water. The upload who manages the local embryo bank, Casper R., shares this particular excitement; they just told me the other day that they are hoping to release larger animals into the ocean soon. To be clear, I think that is a bit premature, considering how the plankton populations have only reached relative stability over the last decade. Besides, I think Casper is overly optimistic regarding all the alien children visiting Earth. True, unlike me, they haven't had a direct encounter with an alien, such as someone knocking on their window asking for a chat, but surely they have heard about the leviathans that landed in the middle of the Atlantic. That group swam to the Caribbean to learn more about the human side of their family tree, which then sent them along further journeys around the globe. It goes without saying that the aftermath of their outing is still being determined.

The robot finishes up its work in the garage, puts away the device, and returns to the tunnel.

#### **INT. FACILITY CONNECTING CORRIDOR**

The robot walks through the tunnel again, with the same unhurried pace and the same air of remoteness.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I found the alien children's intentions hard to decipher, despite having spoken to a number of them. Sure, their genomes are partially human, and most of them are in fact, arguably more human than us uploads for being carbon-based living creatures, but still, who knows what happens in the

alien parts of their thought processes? And who knows under what conditions did the interbreeding take place? Although some groups among the humans who left might be quite willing to become part of such bizarre gene pools, I imagine most were possibly forced into it. And imagination might well be the only option available here, since information from such remote corners of the galaxy generally become too heavily distorted when we are able to intercept them.

The robot reaches the end of the tunnel, passes through the decontamination chamber again, and returns to the kitchen.

#### **INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER**

The robot takes off the overcoat and hangs it back onto the hat rack. Then returns to the dining table and picks up the flat-screen device to read again.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Then again, I guess it is possible to ask the visiting children how things were, when they stop by. In fact, my visitors might be a great resource in terms of ancestral memory. That being said, I am unsure if I am ready to ask, or if I am ready to hear the answer; whether my visitors will answer at all, or whether they will answer truthfully. It is easy to get too emotionally involved when it comes to how humans are treated after they left...

Sound of a slimy fist knocking on glass. The robot turns to face the large rectangular window over the sink, which at the moment frames the face of a humanoid alien with sea slug-like skin and tentacles for hair. The alien's facial features bear significant similarity to those of the robot.



ALIEN(N)  
 (mouthed) Hello there.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 Did I mention that I have someone  
 dropping by for a chat today?

The robot stands up and walks over to open the window. The alien climbs up and slides into the room with surprising fluidity. Their entire body is also mostly humanoid, with a trail of folded molluscan mantle running down their spine. The robot enters a different sequence at the coffee machine, and brings the resulting mug of lighter-colored liquid to the alien. They sit down at the table.

ROBOT  
 Hey, it's been a while.  
 (pause)  
 You look even more like the real  
 person than your predecessor.  
 Congrats.

ALIEN(N)  
 Aw, thanks! Selective evolution  
 sure does marvels. Hey, same to  
 you, my friend! Technological  
 improvements?

ROBOT  
 I'd like to think so, yes.

CUT TO:

**3 INT. FACILITY SERVER ROOM – UNINTELLIGIBLE TIME 3**

LED lights flashing behind the glass.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 Let's dial back a bit to the first  
 encounter, shall we?

CUT TO:

**4 INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER – DUSK (flashback) 4**

A less human-like robot sits stiffly at the same dining table with a mug before it. A more sea slug-like alien climbs onto the window. The robot turns to the alien.

ALIEN(1)  
(strangely crisp voice projected through the windowpane) Hello, I would like to speak to Jan Sampo, if you know him.

ROBOT  
Haven't heard that name in a long time.

The robot opens the window. The alien wriggles into the room and climbs onto the chair opposite to that of the robot's. The alien's body is composed of tentacles wound into vaguely humanoid shapes.

ROBOT  
If you are looking for an uploaded version of him, I am as close as you'll get.

ALIEN(1)  
Is that supposed to mean you are Jan Sampo? To be honest though, I understand the hesitation. What are you called these days?

ROBOT  
Jan S.3582079JS004814B85B-ArOc02. Which is a mouthful, so just Jan S. for short. Those are the cosmetic part of the name.

ALIEN(1)  
Very well then, Jan. I'll introduce myself, but first I have a question for you.

ROBOT  
Go ahead.

ALIEN(1)  
Ever wondered what happened to the human Jan Sampo, after the upload?

ROBOT  
Constantly.

ALIEN(1)

As you would. So, let's put it this way: Jan Sampo is one of my human ancestors, and—my species—we have built a neurological construct that contains all of our ancestors' memories in their entirety. That said, the human ones in our construct tend to be blurrier and more intermittent, due to differences in neural makeup and human's biological need to sleep. And I'm here to talk to you about those memories. See what we are missing.

(pause)

So, tell me about one moment in Jan's life that stands out as important to you.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

We talked of many things. Moments relating to human Jan's childhood, family, upbringing. Things he liked and disliked. What he was like and what he was not. I was wary of the alien at the time, and wanted to upset the alien by describing scenes and environments pried out of context, like paper cutouts.

ROBOT

There was this meadow on the side of a wooded hill, that he thought looked like the underbelly of a certain woodland monster or deity.

**5 EXT. MEADOW ON THE SIDE OF WOODED HILL — DAY**

**5**

Footage of a meadow as described by the robot, in a video format that appears to have been recorded in portrait mode on a smart phone. The darkness of the foliage on the far side of the hill morphs and stretches in strong wind.

ALIEN(1) (V.O.)

Ah, yes—the hill close to the homes of his friends Val and

Franz. Franz used to call it the "back mountain." Jan had the underbelly idea after watching an animated film.

**6 INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER – DUSK (flashback) 6**

The alien wriggling with contentment, firmly seated on the chair opposite to the robot.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Let's just say that the alien was uncannily good at placing the cutout back exactly where it has been taken from.

ROBOT

How about the birch forest? The leaves were sparse and sunlight was ample. The bark of the trees strewn with eye-like marks.

**7 EXT. BIRCH COPSE – DAY 7**

Footage of birch forest as described by the robot, captured in portrait mode.

ALIEN(1) (V.O.)

That must be behind the science building at his high school. A lot of kids were scared of the eye marks and there were a number of ghost stories about the forest in constant circulation, but Jan liked the place. A lot. Thought the gaze of the eye marks was not quite as unbearable as the gaze of other people.

**8 INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER – DUSK (flashback) 8**

The robot looks at the alien thoughtfully, raising one hand to its chin.

ROBOT

You know what, I don't think there is much I can do in terms of

helping you complete Jan Sampo's  
memory log, or whatever.

ALIEN(1)

Nah, that's not what I'm trying to  
do really. And rest assured that  
what you've said really helps.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

After a few hours, they thanked me  
for my time and left.

The alien wriggles across the room and out through the  
window.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

After that, I received a number of  
follow-up visits from the alien,  
with random intervals in between.

**BEGIN MONTAGE:**

Further alien visits, where the robot and the alien sit in  
the same spots across from each other at the table. The  
time-of-day changes and the exact locations of objects such  
as the mugs and the flat-screen device changes, yet  
otherwise the environment remains the same, while both the  
robot and the alien become more human-looking.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

We continued to talk about human  
Jan's life in our oddly structured  
way of conversation, me selecting  
a cutout and the alien putting it  
back into the narrative. We  
progressed into his young  
adulthood—

(hushed, overlapping voices)

ROBOT

... a wet, rusted manhole cover...  
rainbow seen in the mist of the  
lawn sprinkler...

ALIEN(2)

... going away to uni... passing  
unfamiliar city streets...

ROBOT

... tweezers, bloodied cotton balls...  
the shuddering texture of stitches  
across the chest...

ALIEN(3)

... surgery, mostly alone... feeling  
of liberation, despite the ache...

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

—and his education. Interest in  
marine biology, the internship as  
an assistant in a natural  
documentary production team. Grad  
school, further research. Places  
where things suddenly fell into  
utter confusion.

(hushed, overlapping voices)

ROBOT

... the blinding world of bluish off  
white, and pale blue...

ALIEN(4)

... shooting session at the iceberg...

ROBOT

... sinuous curves of pale blue at  
the bottom of the curtain...

ALIEN(5)

... sleepless nights, watching the  
sky dawning behind heavy curtains...

ROBOT

... the hands of the clock pointing  
towards every direction...

ALIEN(6)

... back to the vapor of medical  
disinfectants...

**END MONTAGE.**

The robot and Alien(N-1) sits across the table in silence. Alien(N-1) is bent over, gazing into the mug of lighter-colored liquid before them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And one time after a particularly long interval, the alien came, different. Dejected.

ROBOT

Hey. (pause) You seem more human than ever this time, if I may say so.

ALIEN(N-1)

(briefly raises head) Is that so? (pause) Try me.

ROBOT

What?

ALIEN(N-1)

Go back to something we've already covered. Not much else to talk about anyway.

SMASH TO:

**10 EXT. MEADOW ON THE SIDE OF WOODED HILL — DAY 10**

Footage of the meadow captured in portrait mode, as has appeared earlier.

ROBOT

... the meadow on the side of the wooded hill, underbelly of a certain monster or deity?

SMASH TO:

**10 EXT. MEADOW ON THE SIDE OF WOODED HILL — DAY 10**

Footage of a patch of torn up grass, captured in landscape mode with high resolution.

ALIEN(N-1) (V.O.)

The smell of grass sap. The tingling touch of sap and minced

grass as he burrows his fingers  
into the dirt, tearing up the  
lesion of intertwined roots.

SMASH TO:

**11 INT. ABANDONED HOUSEHOLD – DAY 11**

Footage of wallpaper as described by the robot below,  
slightly out of focus, captured in portrait mode.

ROBOT  
... pinkish wallpaper with faded  
floral patterns?

SMASH TO:

**12 INT. ABANDONED HOUSEHOLD – DAY 12**

Footage of details of the wallpaper as described by the  
alien below, captured in landscape mode with high  
resolution.

ALIEN(N-1)  
Scratches, pin holes, yellowed  
leftover adhesive. A significantly  
less faded patch, where the closet  
used to be.

SMASH TO:

**13 EXT. BIRCH COPSE – DAY 13**

Footage of the birch forest captured in portrait mode, as  
has appeared earlier.

ROBOT  
... the birch forest where patterns  
on the bark look like eyes?

SMASH TO:

**14 EXT. BIRCH COPSE – DAY 14**

Footage, panning over the forest, captured in landscape  
mode with high resolution.



ALIEN(N-1)

In those woods he used to see how confined he was, as if the straight thin trunks of the birch were iron bars marking the edge of the cage he lived in. Little did he know that when he came home on break during college, just after the surgery, he was able to stand tall and breathe and feel free.

CUT TO:

15 INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER – NIGHT (flashback 2)

15

ROBOT

... What happened?

ALIEN(N-1)

Just... a certain arrival, I guess.

ROBOT

Is this what you've been working towards, all this time?

ALIEN(N-1)

In a way. Didn't know what it would mean or feel like being here, but...

ROBOT

Now you know.

ALIEN(N-1)

Now I know.

ROBOT

How many generations did it take?

ALIEN(N-1)

You knew?

ROBOT

I looked into records on your species. Using an external memory and knowledge storage to make up for the short life span, no? Quite human-like in a way.

ALIEN(N-1)

I'd actually prefer that you see all of us whom you have met as a single individual. It would make more sense to you that way.

(pause)

All of us before me whom you have met. They didn't die, you know. Their memories are part of mine, they are within me. They are me.

The alien exudes a gas that twists the air before their mouth, as if sighing, and looks out of the window towards the vague outline of the iceberg on the horizon.

CUT TO:

16 INT. FACILITY LIVING QUARTER — DAY

16

The current alien looks out of the window towards the same iceberg, noticeably larger now.

ROBOT

After last time I really wasn't sure if you'd come back.

ALIEN(N)

(turns to ROBOT) (amused)  
What makes you think so?

ROBOT

I thought you had reached the final stage, or something.

ALIEN(N)

Aw, you know there's no final stage to anything. Besides, we were going through some political struggles as a species when my predecessor came by. That's why they made a few rather peculiar assertions. Things have changed since then, and so have our interpretation of ourselves.

ROBOT

I see.

The alien takes a sip from the mug and looks out of the window again. The robot follows their gaze.

ALIEN(N)

That iceberg looks really impressive now.

ROBOT

Looks like one of those Gerhard Richter paintings, doesn't it?

ALIEN(N)

Now that you mentioned it, yeah, definitely. Those were Jan's favorites, too.

ROBOT

He would have enjoyed this sight.

ALIEN(N)

You say that as if he is dead, but aren't we both him, in a way?

ROBOT

(amused) Huh. Good point.

(pause)

Would you say he's immortal now?

(pause)

With multiple versions of himself just roaming the universe?

ALIEN(N)

(chuckles) I like that idea.

(pause)

He would have liked it, too.

A moment of silence. The two turn back from the window to look at each other, with a faint trace of nostalgic smile on their faces.

ROBOT

Say, remember the feeling of seeing the icebergs crumble, during that internship?

ALIEN(N)

How can one forget? The sound, the  
pressure,

ROBOT

The shuddering of teeth,

ALIEN(N)

A foreboding sense of doom,

ROBOT

Glacial splinters falling off into  
the ocean in thousands,

ALIEN(N)

Pale blue foam upon crystalline  
waves,

ROBOT

A compelling wish to stand beneath  
that cascade

ALIEN(N)

And perish.

FIN.