

The Past that Swallows All

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Even now it is occurring. Even now our world is being constantly devoured and lost. Lost forever beyond recall our world is consumed by the Past. Most worry about the future, but to do so is the height of folly. What is the future but something that will someday be part of the Past? People worry about the present, but what use is that with the future barely being born before us and the Past stealing the present out from under our very feet? People are worried how they will live their lives and avoid death, but the

Past takes no heed to them and silently devours their thoughts as soon as they exist. Life and death are insignificant in comparison. No, the inescapable Past is what swallows all.

Most of your life has passed the point of possible remembrance even now. How then can we remember that which came before us? How then shall the discoveries and revelations of our ancestors be unearthed in the sands of time? The Past is not a world which is easily explored, yet I feel I must. We are not a product of the future but of the Past; we are the child of all we have forgotten. Oh for the knowledge locked behind the mighty gates of the Past, oh that I could freely explore that elusive land.

These were the thoughts of my mind as I sat in my study and stared at the barren trees and the garish walls. Something had to be done. Or did it? Perhaps I could forget the world which had consumed so much of my own, the world that would eventually swallow me as well without a trace of my existence in a history book, or any book beyond a census. Perhaps I would be happier that way. It would be simple enough; with a single night's sleep the edge of my passion would be gone and it would fade to a nagging thought. It would be all too easy to forget.

So I left the house immediately.

I drove to my work at the research institution and began a new creation, one I could hopefully find excuses for my colleagues about until I had finished it. Of course, even I could not say to what ends I performed my experiments. Nevertheless, I began programming a machine that could take me to another time.

As my creation began to take shape it consumed all of my time and passion as I poured myself into it. While I knew I could never create something as advanced as what was found in nature, I hoped for something a bit more nuanced than the crude binary systems everyone has been so obsessed with since the discovery we could code things rather than just pushing levers about. Of course, biological tampering has been explored, but this is merely cutting and pasting chunks of DNA about without really creating anything of our own. There are rules in the biological world that you must abide by. DNA will not say what you want it to say, it can only become what it is. Embryos can become whatever you want them to, but they cannot change species, and cannot be used for the same species if something as simple as blood type does not add



up. No, if I were to break the rules of the universe and transcend the fourth dimension, I could not be bound by such rules as DNA.

However, in my own, clumsy mind, I could not think of anything better than DNA either, and thus began to use my own, raw chemicals to create it. It did not copy the pattern of any living thing; it was my own code. Of course, in order for my code to work I had to feed it into a “brain” as I like to call it—a sort of biological motherboard would be closer to explaining its level of simplicity though. I was sure this sort of experimentation would catch the attention and financial support of the scientific community, and sure enough they began trying to use my creation in menial, physical tasks. All of their vision had been crushed by the “laws” of nature which they dutifully worked under, but I would not let my own plans be crushed so. My colleagues were never quite sure what to call my invention, so they simply named it after me, which I found rather endearing. Every day I would enter more information into Cecil’s database, coding exactly what I wanted and didn’t want from our journey.

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If the object is complete, then I will have the height of human knowledge. It had been proven to work with basic commands, but I was worried that my personal hopes for the project would mean nothing to Cecil. How could he compute desires? How could he travel time? How can anything escape the ever-encroaching Past? Cecil, after all, wasn’t even alive. But I felt like he was alive. After all, he could process more advanced information than most people, he needed fuel to work just as we need food, and his brain had been slowly growing larger. The only thing he could not do was reproduce. Granted, neither could I. I laughed at the irony that the cells that comprised my body met more of the criterion for life than I did as a whole.

It was then I realized Cecil was missing something that made me greater than my cells beyond my intellect. It was then I decided Cecil must understand my emotions. The difficulty was not so much in my ability to do such a thing; after all, what are emotions beyond a series of hormones and chemical interactions? With my own flesh I made Cecil my own, and through the atrocities I committed, he was perfected. Soon enough, Cecil seemed more like a child than a machine, and I refused to let any of my colleagues touch him.

When I finally thought I had done all I could do to complete Cecil and the pressure for me to resign Cecil to the institution, as well as my position, became a threat, I decided it was time for us to leave the Present. I entered the cockpit and finally commanded Cecil to do what he had been created for. The world disappeared around me and I could not breathe, as though I was travelling too fast for my chest to expand against the resistance. I became more and more certain that I was speeding towards my death, but I no longer wished to live in such a world as I did, so I made no



effort to turn Cecil off, knowing I was in good company with Cecil, knowing he alone understood my intent and my feelings.

It was then that I passed out. Looking back, it is then that I wished I had died.

I woke up vomiting. I was in a crater, the remains of Cecil smoldering around me. I had sustained serious burns, but I was alive. I began to look where Cecil's brain had been, but the world spun around me, and despite my pilot's training there was nothing I could do but fall on the ground and continue dry heaving, my skin still seeming to burn apart from the wreckage. Once I was able to stand once more, I returned to Cecil, hoping to salvage what was left of him; he was my legacy, my one companion as I had careened toward death. I knew I could make another brain just as I had Cecil's, but it wouldn't have all of the emotions and plans that I had poured into Cecil. It simply wouldn't be Cecil anymore. When I found Cecil had been utterly destroyed in the wreck, I sobbed uncontrollably. His death meant no less to me simply because he had never been alive. I staggered out of the crater, half-walking, half-crawling up the sides until I reached the top. The air was heavy and extremely humid, and lush trees surrounded me.

This made no sense. Darting out of the bushes came a rabbit chased down by a lizard running on its hind legs as a basilisk might. It was about the size of a turkey and unlike any lizard I had ever seen. Despite of my pain and grief, a deep-seated urge in me wanted to begin studying and recording the flora and fauna around me as much of it was unknown to me, but other necessities called, and what remained in my digestive system after the vomiting made its exist through other means. My head throbbed in pain. As it felt like my skull was about to burst, I began to sweat furiously. It ran down my body in streams because of the high humidity, then I was overcome with extreme cold and violent shivering.

Thus I wavered between ice and fire for I know not how long. I know not how long I wandered or how long I writhed on the ground in my agony. I called out for Cecil and could not say if I was calling for my creation or my own sanity. Many visions of monsters and giants came across my path and I believe I spoke to them, touched them, followed them begging for release. But they all left me, even the beasts unwilling to kill me in my sickness. I ripped at my hair and it came out in handfuls, sometimes flakes of charred skin coming along with it. The very wind scraped against my raw skin rougher than any sackcloth could and the ashes of my own flesh covered me; thus I mourned my own existence.

After I came to my senses once more, I went to soak myself in a stream. It was clearer than any I had ever seen, and the water was sweet to taste. The trees that surrounded me were all twenty to fifty feet in circumference and I became certain that many of the creatures that surrounded me were new species. Cecil had transported me somewhere, and I knew I must find out where. I feared whatever I was suffering from would soon take my life, so I began at once, ignoring the pain, for nursing my wounds would do me no good.



The first people I came upon led me back to their city. They seemed to view me as a novelty, and showed me to others to responses of either laughter or disgust. They dressed in skins and primitive cloths, but they were clearly civilized, and I could see their city was already old. Their language was like none I had ever heard, but everyone spoke it without variance of accent or any seemed confusion. This indeed must be a civilization untouched by modern man entirely, I thought at first, but then began to fear that I had entered a post-apocalyptic society when I encountered their inventions. Primitive societies would not be capable of what these people were, and the violence and debauchery I saw within the city certainly seemed reminiscent of modern times rather than the simplicity of the ancient.

When I saw an enormous, crumbling statue of a man, I motioned towards it only to be answered with the word “Meshelah.” When I did not understand, I was led out of the city to meet an old man. He sat surrounded by many as he recited something to them. I was motioned to sit, and I listened as he spoke. Perhaps he told stories of Meshelah, this ancient hero they had honored in the city, but I never heard his name in the old man’s speech. For hours upon hours he spoke, and though I could not understand, I soon picked up on a rhythm in his words, and at times his voice almost became a song. I noticed another man mouthing along with the poem of the old man. I realized this must be how they transferred information, through spoken word rather than written. The knowledge and age of the old man I could tell was immense. When the sun set, the old man finally stopped speaking and the crowd chanted “Meshelah” over and over in what seemed to be their form of applause.

As they chanted, I realized I had misunderstood what they were saying, for a fourth syllable became apparent. “Methushelah.” In horror, I looked at the man and realized he had not been telling of the ancient hero after all, that he had been the ancient hero the statue was modelled after. I realized I had been sent back in time, far, far back.

My instructions to Cecil once again surfaced in my mind:

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If the object is complete, then I will have the height of human knowledge. The delight I should have felt was stifled. Cecil had redirected me to the time that best fit my other criteria. Here was the land I had hoped to find. Here was a land where death only struck after hundreds of years, where men could complete incredible things in their lives instead of having to constantly pass on information to the next generation. Many generations could live together simultaneously, little was forgotten, the world was ahead. Time as of yet meant little to these people, the Past was still weak and small to them. But though I could hear their knowledge, I could not learn it. But the Past still consumed me, just as death consumed my body, and I knew I could never enjoy this land. My present was still constantly being whisked away from under me,



only now it was lost to a Past not my own. All my work was naught but a hollow and worthless endeavor.

I sat and tried to think of a way to avoid death which was perhaps only days away for me. I had no way to return to modern medicine, and these people, though advanced, would have had no reason to invent medicine yet due to their nearly-ageless bodies. An idea struck on me, and idea that likely would not work, but that had never stopped me before. I had no wormholes, but I had paradox on my side now that I was out of my time. I returned to the city, saw the corruption and murders about me, and joined it. I was weak, but I killed as many as I could. In time travel to the past, one must be careful of killing one's own ancestors or you will never have been born to come back and kill them at all. Perhaps if I did, everything I had done would become undone. If I failed, I believed I had nothing to lose.

As I killed, nothing happened. No rips in time, no ceasing to exist, nothing. I left the city and began killing people on my way through the countryside. I looked more demon than man by this point, and people fled at the sight of me. I thought surely, my actions must have some effect. I was killing fathers of entire civilizations, and yet nothing changed. So I killed not only the fathers but the children as well and the mothers heavy with child. Some fought back against me, and though they were much stronger they did not have my abandon, and the fear of death was still new and strange to them. My murders brought them horror, while their attacks upon me had no effect, for I had become one with my pain. So I slaughtered as many as I found, desperately hoping my torture would come to an end.

It was not until it began to rain and I saw people scream in terror at the skies did I finally understand. Rivers began to overflow and despite their knowledge, the people had no way of dealing with the rain, indeed, it seemed entirely foreign to them. I had made no difference because these people were doomed for destruction anyway, and I had only joined them in the wickedness that had caused the Flood. I watched their panic resignedly, knowing it would do them no good. Perhaps finally under the waves that would surround me, I would find my peace.

