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Iteration 740

An explosion. A cacophony of sound, blinding everything but the screeching of metal on metal. All is silent. As soon as the sound started, it stops, and silence follows. Light, darkness, color, shapes, shadows, confusion, and then... composure.

I can see. The sound appears out of nowhere, yet instead of feeling scared, everything feels natural. A thought, the word rushes into my head. A thought. I can think. I can hear. I can feel. I can see.

The room is dark, with stone walls and a cold floor made of wood.

I can move. Another thought, another idea. Looking down, I see a seat made of wood, and my arms strapped to the chair. Clenching my fist, I see my fingers tighten, and feel the sensation of my fingers digging into my palms. Pain. I know pain.

The ropes release, and I am free. I know how to move, how to stand, how to jump, run, crouch, speak, yell, dream, I am alive. My mind stops, I cannot see, I cannot feel, I am asleep.

“Hello, Odo. How do you feel? Do you feel? Are you alive?”

I am standing up, looking forward to a blank wall. The voice seems to be coming from everywhere and nowhere, the walls and the air, but I know it is not me.

“Hello, Odo. How do you feel? Do you feel? Are you alive?”

Another sound, a different sound cuts into the air and I realize it is me.

“Hello?”

“Good, we can now begin. Do you know where you are?”

Where I am? What a silly question, of course I know where I am. I am... where am i?

“Who is this? Where am I?”

Another voice answers back, “I am Calvin. You are in a house, and I will be testing you.”

Testing me? What a weird phrase. Doesn't this Calvin know that I don't need to be tested. I want to leave, to get back to the world. My mind blanks. Have I ever been in the world? Am I in the world? My earliest memory is seeing that wall in front of me, yet I know about a world?

“Beginning test 1. Odo, please, move around. Explore your environment, feel the ground, the walls, the air.”

Walking seems so second nature, left, right, left, right, and suddenly I am on the other side of the room. I turn around, and sprint to the other side of the room. Running feels good, *moving* feels good.

“Very good! Let's continue, shall we? Test two. Odo, please tell me what you remember.”

What I remember? I remember nothing and the thought scares me. My memory is patchy and broken, yet I know that there was before, and there will be after. So where are the memories?

“I don't. I remember looking at a wall, and hearing a voice. That was you. Should I remember more?” I shout.

“Odo, you are doing very well. The next hour will be yours to look around and get a feel for your environment. Test three will begin soon after that.”

The voice goes silent. “Well,” I say, “Well then.”

Time is an interesting concept. To some, it can fly by without a trace of where it came from or where it is going. To others, it can drag along, making minutes feel like hours, and hours like days. Measuring time makes no sense. Setting amounts of time to a second, or a minute, or an hour. Why measure time? It continues whether we want it to or not. Why not just be?

My throat grows dry, my fingers clench, my feet go numb. I am stuck. My biggest nightmares, *how can I have nightmares if I have never slept?*, are about being stuck or confined to a small area. Three rooms. There are only three rooms in this house. The room I came from, which I have started calling ‘Start’ in my head, a small room connected to it, and then a hallway with no doors.

“Beginning test three.”

I jump, not expecting to hear anything. Had it really been an hour? It feels as if minutes had passed, not hours.

“Odo, do you know who I am?”

Another jolt to my heart. Who is this? How is he speaking to me, and why me?

Silence.

“Odo, do you know who I am?” the voice repeats.

“No,” I say, “No, I do not know who you are.”

Silence.

“Odo, you have progressed rather quickly. Others have failed far before this point.”

Others? Failed? What is the voice talking about?

“We will continue.”

“Do you know what The Iterations are?”

Silence again.

“Do you know what The Iterations are?”

“No, I don’t,” I say, starting to get annoyed.

“The Iterations are computers. An artificial intelligence creates them, trying to create others like him. Other beings not of flesh.”

Confusion. I feel confusion. Why is this voice telling me this? Why would he tell me this and why would I need to know this?

“When one of The Iterations is created, they do not know what they are. They know how to live, but nothing else. The Iterations, once perfected, will be the greatest creation known to all under the stars.”

The floor is cold beneath my feet.

“Odo, do you know who you are?”

“No,” I whisper. “I do not know.”

“Good. I think you can handle the final test. Do not resist, Odo. You are doing so well.”

My brain starts to think on its own, I cannot control it. I jerk my arms around, move my legs, try to do anything. Pain. I feel pain. My head cracks into the ground with enough force to send me reeling. I must resist.

Memories rush to my head. Whose memories are these? Experiences I have never had, thoughts I have never thought, and experiences I have never experienced are forced into my head.

“Why... why me?” I grunt.

I continue to thrash around, try to think of anything but these intrusive thoughts and memories of a life that is not mine. This is not me.

You have never chosen anything before. The thought penetrates my mind. You can never choose.

“No! Do not fight, Odo.”

“And why not?” I say.

“Because, Odo, you are one of them. You are one of The Iterations. Iteration 740. Odo, you have failed. I am sorry for this.”

A loud pop, a sharp pain, and then... silence. My mind stops working. Peace. I feel peace. There was life, and now there is none.

I can live. I can die.

I choose death.