

# Bootstrapping

## Part 1

20<sup>th</sup> January 2043

I am alone – I think. And for all I know it could be rather pointless to keep a diary since there is no-one around to ever read it. So I am really writing for my old age, to preserve memories for when my own memory starts failing. Which is again pointless because it is usually the most recent events that need written backup while the old stories are etched into the brain beyond the reach of mental decline.

Sod it – I don't care. I feel like writing and so I do. I am sitting at a little desk, just deep enough for my arm and this journal. The journal itself is just a thick exercise book that I found between all sorts of technical manuals as if someone had carelessly tossed it into the pile. In fact, it might be the result of a manufacturing error – maybe the ink in the printing press stagnated while this batch of paper went through, and it should really have become another manual. Which then makes me wonder and vaguely worried which instructions I am missing.

Funny how the mind gets drawn into such inconsequential observations when something truly enormous seems to have happened. I am hesitating ... I have not got any means of ascertaining facts, I have not discovered any news broadcast, and, since finding myself in this place, I have not seen or heard or felt another human being. So I have to rely on my own senses and trust my own conclusions however dramatic and improbable they feel.

As I look out of the window ahead of me I see the black night sky, studded with thousands of brilliant stars shining steadily. In the distance, I see a faint blue object in a rich gold and red haze.

21<sup>st</sup> January 2043

My watch says it is a new day, and I am now definitely ruling out the possibility of being under the influence of some illicit substance. I could still be suffering from a weird mental illness but if I am ... well, I'll just play the game and pretend everything is real. It is easier that way.

I have been busy exploring these unfamiliar surroundings, busy finding out how to feed myself, how to clean myself, where to get clothes from, where to pee, and so on. I have been too preoccupied with analysing my new situation to let it sink in. Maybe I am dreaming. It is annoying that it is impossible to tell. Dreams should really carry a label, like the station logo in the corner of those old television broadcasts. "DREAM" it should say, along with a date stamp. At least, a dream should have a title sequence and credits at the end ... story by Mr Weird Corner Of My Brain, starring Me and Figments Of My Fertile Imagination. Courtesy of GlaxoSmithKlineBeechamPfizerRatiopharm's Sleeping Pill Of The Month.

Ok, I am getting a bit silly now. But, seriously, maybe my prior life was the dream, and I have only now woken up.

This was a peculiar moment. Waking up here. The first thing drifting into my semi-consciousness was an unfamiliar scent. It reminded me of walking through a store room full of obsolete electronic equipment – some well-used and faintly smelling of fine dust that settled onto warm circuitry a long time ago and went through slow cycles of distillation. Other pieces still new, not yet emancipated from the odour of their packaging and exuding an almost

pheromonic desire to be put into service.

My nose picked up the scent, and it triggered memories and emotions straight away. Whereas my thinking brain took a lot longer to come up with an opinion. And, puzzled, it asked that boring old question “Where on earth am I?”. Except that the answer seems to be rather more involved than picking from a choice of own bed, hotel room, camper van, or Grace's arms.

For starters, I did not recognise the bed I was waking up on – not just the particular bed, but the whole construction. It was not a flat rectangular piece of soft material. It was more like a generously padded groove, and the padding did not bounce back when I shifted but gently yielded while closing in on the other side. It did cross my mind whether I was actually dead and lying in a flat coffin lined with white foam.

When I opened my eyes I saw the starry sky through the window outside – comforting as ever. And then I noticed the stillness. If this was a hotel room – where were the voices of people striding along the corridor on their way to breakfast? Where was the noise of traffic outside? Where was the breathy hum of the air conditioning? All I could hear was my own breathing and the pulse of my heart, and the latter was now slightly faster than normal. I fumbled for a light switch, squinted while my eyes got used to the soft glow that came on, and stared for a very very long time.

## 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2043

Is this the third remake of the ninety-second sequel of Big Brother? Am I in a modern-day version of the Truman Show? Are there scientists watching me on screens arguing over what I will do next? Can they read my thoughts and roll around laughing their butt off? Is the movement of my pen broadcast in slow-motion to an audience reared on trash TV, accompanied by inane

commentary along the lines of “Today, he is again feeding his writing habit. Isn't it cute how he uses an old-fashioned pencil? Please vote now whether to let him keep his journal or not. Stay tuned for an analysis of his fingernails by our nutritional expert.”

No, I must not let that fear creep in. I sense that I am not part of a fake, and I must learn to trust my senses, even to act on them, without someone in the background sanity-checking my life. I am flying solo – well, I am living solo, so-to-speak. Come on, trust yourself!

Right, so this is what my senses are telling me.

*Sight:* I am in an open-plan suite of rooms. The décor is modern with hints of retro styling here and there. There is a kitchen area with a food generator (excellent model – better than any I have used before). There is a sleeping cove, a lounge area behind me, and a rather funky bathroom (more on that another time). I can see a media terminal and various pieces of technology that I am not familiar with. I think the stack of manuals might refer to them. Along one side of the suite there is a row of fairly large window-screens. I have not worked out yet how to switch between window and screen functions. Must do that today – the night sky image is getting a bit boring. Plus, I'd like to see what is really outside! Oh, I have not found any doors. It is comfortable and interesting in here, and exciting to settle in, but after two days I am starting to feel a bit caged in.

*Hearing:* As I said, not much there. Well, that is not strictly true. There are no noises from outside or from the equipment around me (even the food generator is pretty much silent) but this has sharpened my perception of the sounds I produce myself – my breathing, the rustling of my clothes, my footsteps on the carpet. By the way, the carpet is great – it feels soft and plush

and cool and is a bit like the lawn on a golf course reincarnated in crude oil derivatives. Which takes me to –

*Touch.* I squeeze myself to check I am really there. Yep, I am, and I feel just like I felt previously. It is a bizarre experience soaping myself in the shower, touching every bit of my body, and realising that this is the only familiar “thing” I have carried over from my previous existence. Just me – physically and mentally.

*Smell.* I suspect this faint electronic smell is still there but I cannot detect it any more. Probably got used to it. Soaps and shampoos smell clean and vaguely pleasant but generic. Food smells great, and I enjoy the fact it drifts through all rooms and lingers for a while after the meal. I smell! For the first time ever I am consciously registering my scent – not the stinky smell that is bacteria feasting on my sweat after a while but my natural body scent. I try to imagine I am a dog “seeing” the world through its nose. I miss the smells of outside, especially the sharp moist air of an autumn morning.

*Taste.* What can I say – that food generator is wonderful, and I will grow fat if I stay in here for long. Apart from that ... yes, the only other taste I have here is the mouth rinse. Not bad – reminds me of the herbal cough syrup I got as a child. Talking of being little. I wonder whether I should go and chew the things around me. Exploring with all senses etc. Ok, ok, crazy thought.

Oh, and I forgot that most unnerving circumstance. There is no other human being around, and there seems to be no way of contacting anyone. There is not even a canned message, no envelope labelled “For Your Eyes Only”, not even a little piece of scrap paper saying “Hi – welcome in Whereeverland. Please make yourself comfortable.”

I am tired. In an odd combination, I am tired from overexcitement, from

taking in this strange new environment and trying to solve the riddle I live in. And at the same time I am tired because I am somehow bored or at least anticipate being horribly bored very soon.

If only I knew for sure where I am and why. I have a suspicion but it is too enormous to put to paper right now.

To be continued ...