

# Bootstrapping

Part 5 Previous episodes at <http://www.solysis.com/Home/articles>

## 20<sup>th</sup> February 2043

I have reason to be proud of myself, have I not? Yes, tricked the food generator into producing a dandy little birthday cake for myself. Yeah, plucked up the courage to take off a few wall panels. Worked out how to program the window screens. Started cable-sniffing as a new hobby. Successfully got out of bed every morning.

Oh what ground-breaking, earth-shattering feats. Reminiscing a bit about good old times. Reading a few books. How wonderful! Keeping a pretty meaningless journal. How amazing!!

What have I managed to accomplish in the past month that would justify ME having been made the sole survivor of humanity, the thinnest of connections between an incredibly rich and colorful past and a mysterious future? I have managed to stay alive (not exactly my achievement but rather that of the people who built the place I am in), and I managed to stay sane (I think, anyway).

And yet, I feel a strong responsibility to play my part in a drama I don't know, created by a writer I have never met, and with me as the sole actor. Surely whoever planned the Human Continued Existence Programme had a very precise idea what the task of me (or anyone else ending up in my place) would be. Sadly, he or she did not think of leaving me an instruction manual.

Or a script for this act of the drama. And so I feel not just responsible for somehow rising to the challenge of making something extraordinary from a unique situation, but also responsible for finding out, and living up to, whatever it was that the late script writer had in mind for the future. It is almost as if I have been entrusted with executing a will but have not been told what is in it.

For want of another convincing purpose in life I'll make this my purpose, then: to play the part I was meant to play, to be a cog in the machine, at least until I can see more clearly what is hidden beneath, behind, and above the surface.

Actually – scratch that wimpy hedge. Following a purpose in life is not the outcome of carefully weighing pros and cons, it asks for the soul. No holding back. ... Well, I am not good at not holding back but I'll try to let go and dive into the adventure.

## 21<sup>st</sup> February 2043

The clue to my mission of course lies in the term HCEP itself that seems to be the title of this drama. HUMAN CONTINUED EXISTENCE programme it says, which is a rather strong hint that humanity should survive the calamity that thrust me here. I don't know whether it was part of the grand plan that there should only be a single survivor or whether Act One has actually gone wrong but it does not matter. There is only me, and somehow I need to create a new human population out of – myself.

What am I to do – clone myself?? That is a rather awful thing to contemplate. For starters, I would go on my nerves very quickly; there is not even enough space here for more than a handful of people. Would the life support systems

sustain many me's? Also, even assuming that machinery for cloning is built into this place somewhere (like the food generator – a people replicator), I would put a few drops of blood into a hole in the wall somewhere and later get out ... a baby? Or identical twins? Triplets? Octuplets? Or maybe staggered over time – every year another me?

Ok, infant care is not the slog it used to be, what with automatic nappies and sleep cycle steering. But I recoil in horror at the prospect of bringing up lots of children, let alone copies of me. Apart from the fact that the poor kids would live in a seriously warped environment.

It was a sticky point between Grace and me. Not an elephant in the room, just part of the subtle scaffolding that kept our lives intertwined and yet separate. I can't remember Grace ever mentioning she wanted children (and, strangely, if she had, I am not sure she would necessarily have wanted them from me). It was the way she changed whenever we met a family – an unusual awkwardness betraying bottled up feelings. I wonder just now whether those feelings were not of the motherly kind but rather fear that \*I\* might one day broach the question of starting a family together. As much as Grace and I seemed to be joined at the soul sometimes, and as much as we shared our inner lives, we did not (dare) talking about children. We did not even talk about formally becoming life partners, as if putting the magic between us into words would destroy it.

Incidentally, Grace is (was?) not the only person to whom I feel connected through my soul. It has happened maybe half a dozen times that I encountered a stranger who seemed ridiculously familiar. I remember a street party near my first student den (this was the time when it was still possible to have such innocent fun) that brought together almost the whole neighbourhood – people of all ages, from all walks of life – and I happened to

sit next to a wonderfully weird old man. Imagine – he had been born in the Soviet Union and was old enough to have suffered under Stalin! As communism collapsed he was already nearing retirement after most of his working life spent in the same drab government office carefully drawing up economic plans he knew were perfectly useless. Little did I know then that I would later earn a living with remarkably similar futile intellectual exercises.

Anyway, this guy left the Soviet Union as soon as he could and from then on lived an amazingly colourful life, as if playing catch-up. He helped negotiate a number of international natural gas deals, founded and conducted his own semi-professional orchestra, variously lived in Sweden, Italy, Angola, and Canada, and had just taken up fashion photography, probably as a cover for flirting gentlemanly but voraciously with women a quarter his age. I got to know his life story in a conversation that was as relaxing and comfortable as if I was talking to an old family friend, and we sat there chatting, sipping beers long after most people around us had gone home and the air turned moist and heavy. Of course, before we started talking I knew nothing about him. And yet, I felt I knew something in him. I am sure our souls already knew each other. – We never met again, and I sometimes wonder what has become of this wonderfully weird old man.

The whole cloning idea is ridiculous. Even if I could make it happen and maybe even manage to come out mentally in one piece at the other end – all I know about genetics suggests that I would be the founding father of an incestuously degenerating version of humanity with a short life span indeed. Which seems utterly pointless.

There must be another way.

There just has to be.

## 04<sup>th</sup> March 2043

Not much time to keep my journal ... researching, reading, ... if there was a method for restarting humanity that the HCEP guys had in mind it must be mentioned somewhere in the canned internet or the other stuff on my media terminal. Search technology is crap, just like it was in my childhood. Seemed like the signal-to-noise ratio was barely keeping up with the exploding amount of material to filter, and I resent anyway machines guessing what I am actually looking for. Good search technology is still a nut to crack in case I manage to breed a new generation of scientists.

## 06<sup>th</sup> March 2043

My amateurish trawl through the media terminal has for the first time led me to something recent, dated *after* I woke up in this place. It is some kind of log:

```
5483930034.20430209.143239 .
5483930034.20430209.143239 ..
5483930034.20430209.143239 exs0
5483930034.20430209.143240 recll 5483930034 fail retrying
5483930034.20430209.143245 recll 5483930034 100%
5483930034.20430209.143256 autocfg 94 20-3 xeee4
5483930034.20430209.143300 wait launch .
5483930034.20430209.143325 wait launch ..
5483930034.20430209.143415 wait launch ...
5483930034.20430209.150100 wait launch ....
```

Launch what? A missile? A piece of software? An advertising campaign? I can't make sense of this. I would brush it aside if it was not part of the era after event X (event X is now my shorthand for the catastrophe that got me

here). Something is happening, awakening ... and waiting for me to give the launch command. Suddenly, my broad and aimless browsing in old data is brushed aside, and there is a mysterious focal point to my search.

```
5483930034.20430209.160100 wait launch .....
```

```
5483930034.20430210.220100 wait launch .....
```

How can I interact with this process?

To be continued ...

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