

Die Gedanken Sind Frei

Irbisgreif

Description

THIS story is set in The Accord setting. I received permission to write a story in this rather dystopic setting and decided to produce this short of sorts for my own enjoyment. This tells the story of an assistant on a mining facility on the fringes of the Accord. Be aware that this is a horror story, and should not be read by those who do not want to explore themes of loss of agency, death, locked-in syndrome, slavery, and emotional trauma.

Name of the story's from an old German song.

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ZERO-FIVE-HUNDRED hours, as always. I always woke at the same time, stepped from my pod, and walked down the corridor with the other thirty-five assistants. Just as I had for the past seven years.

Another day of mining had begun, and I was a labourer. At least, that's what my vision displayed. The time, my exact position in the mining complex, and 0077-22F-0773A0C1, A, Labour. Labour was all I had

found my body able to do since it had arrived at this place. Each day the exact same routine.

Zero-five-hundred: Wake up and proceed to preparation area.

Zero-six-hundred: Finish morning nutrient slurry, stretches, and suiting into mining pressure suit.

Zero-six-thirty: Arrive at rock-face and begin drilling out portions of the wall.

Twelve-thirty: Stop and take nutrient slurry from the food dispenser in my suit.

Thirteen-hundred: Resume drilling.

Nineteen-hundred: Second meal from the food dispenser in my suit.

Nineteen-thirty: Resume drilling.

Twenty-two-thirty: Return to the preparation area.

Twenty-three-thirty: Finish de-suiting and evening nutrient slurry, return to pod and sleep.

This had been my cycle, without fail or modification, for seven years.

I had seen a prison back home, I knew that life was regimented like this for those who had committed crimes, but I found myself struck and awed by how efficient the Accord was at enforcing the schedule. There was no bell or tone to announce, no

need for me to ever even be told that this was my life now. The chip did that.

I was also distraught, because my whole life up until the Accord visited had been dedicated to my role as a doctor and healer. I could not imagine a more mindless task than the production of iron on a nameless metal asteroid in an otherwise lifeless system.

Of course, if I were mindless, I think I could stomach what I had become. Perhaps it would not be so bad if I just could remember my name.

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TALONS OF WHITE looked over the production numbers for the mining facility, turning his eyes between each of the screens on his desk and calculating trends. It looked that production would remain stable for several years, as the asteroid was proving to have a very good supply of the specific iron-indium alloys that the military needed. Projections logged, the bird walked back to his bunk and stretched his back, looking out over a group of the assistants in their pods.

"Must be easy for you," he thought, "You don't have to think about how mindlessly pointless this job is."

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WITHOUT a name, I had trouble thinking of myself sometimes, and any effort to remember my name resulted in the slightest of headaches

and an inability to recall. Did the birds have to take that from me? I never intended any of them any harm, or any other person. Surely my name was not so dangerous.

It was not even my own name being lost that hurt the most. For nineteen years on this rock, I had watched my wife stepping out of the pod across from me and proceeding alongside me into the mines. And in nineteen years I could not even remember what beautiful name I had whispered on my beak when we had made love, back before the Accord came.

It was hard to remember even that, watching her wordlessly age. I just wanted to reach out and tell her that I still loved her, that she still meant everything to me, but I had not spoken since we were chipped, and could not get even a millimetre of freedom of muscle control. It made me want to scream and tear at my body with inchoate rage, but instead, I found there was only one thing I could do.

Zero-six-thirty: Arrive at rock-face and begin drilling out portions of the wall.

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BEAK OF RED sighed as he looked over the requisition reports. It was so dreary and boring assigned to the mines. Talons of White was lucky to have gotten a new, planet-side job. That had left Beak of Red to calculate the best drilling angles...or more accurately watch the computer predict and run shafts and direct the assistants accordingly. Why not completely automate the facility, at this point?

It was not like someone was needed here to keep the Greifoni company. They were all class A assistants now, and had been for nearly thirty years. Cognition would have stopped decades ago.

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WHEN the new batch of eighteen assistants arrived, all aged eighteen, I wanted to cry. I realized that in some facility in this damned Accord, they were breeding us, and I knew that each of my species was as lifeless as these poor new assistants was. We were a very strong, emotional people, and to think of passionless mating and the production of more mining assistants for distribution at some industrial facility... it was utterly heartless.

Years of speculating as my body went through the motions of digging out the metals they wanted to fuel their industry and war machines had left me coming up blank.

We had never attacked, we had never even met them! Just a few simple transmissions to see if we were alone and they came, took our world, and chipped every single one of my species. Space-faring for us had been theoretical, and we had cheered when they first arrived, assuming that their physical resemblance to our own form meant we were not alone.

But we were very strong, good mining stock I suppose. And so we had been conquered and chipped and sent to the mines and by Ithra and Morain I just want to move in some way the damned chip does not force it has been so long since I could even

say something and my wife is *right there please...*

Thirteen-hundred: Resume drilling.

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POINTLESS work, thought Jackdaw. There were much richer and more useful sources of iron and iridium now. The class c assistant looked out over the monitors. They had decided 19 years ago that a free avian was not even needed, just 48 Greifoni and a class c assistant. Jackdaw wondered if he had known he would be going to the mines anyway when he was chipped. Not like he could remember.

He sipped on the stimdrink he liked, and wondered if liking the bitter flavour was a carry-over. Sometimes preferences were not lost in the archiving.

Lucky Greifoni, life was probably easier as a class A.

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EVERY few years, a new batch of Greifoni, and the oldest—0077-22F-0773A0C1—tried not to think of them at all. Not since his wife had gone.

Really, it was best not to think at all. It had taken nearly a decade of mental fortitude to stop using first-person pronouns. If one simply focussed on the tasks, even if not in control, it was easier to feel less and less like a person. Easier to just. Be.

After all, it was clear that this purgatory was forever.

Or at least until the body could not continue to move.

0077-22F-0773A0C1 would have paused for a moment to contemplate that, but there was no pausing, the chip was in charge. The chip was the person, now.

Nineteen-thirty: Resume drilling.

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JACKDAW looked over the Greifon roster and at the upcoming shipments. More assistants bound for the rock. More pods that needed to be freed up. He tapped across a few names, picking out the oldest, most feeble of the Greifoni. After all, it was not like they had an opinion about being scrapped. And it was not like a very different fate awaited him.

Well, he might find a nice free avian that wanted to grow old with him if he ever got reassigned, but he was capable of thinking, after all. After so long, there would not be a single thinking Greifon left in the galaxy.

Ah, 0077-22F-0773A0C1 was getting up in years. Time to retire. The Greifon's production had dropped below the break-even threshold of 16-tonnes, after all.

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SOMETHING different today. It could only be one thing, but at least this unit could look at something other than the same corridor, pod, and rock-face as the day came to a close.

And it was not like the Accord was cruel or harsh. The chip had kept him from feeling pain his whole adult life, even as he reached old age. Were the chip not there,

he would no longer be able to easily push and move the carts at the extreme weight. The arthritis and repetitive motion strains would have added up to agony, but thanks to the chip, all he felt was the slight knowledge that his body was degrading. The chip was not so bad, he supposed.

Ah, the air tastes a bit dryer, it probably just nitrogen now. He was a doctor once. I was.

I know that this is a peaceful, easy way to go.

I can be me for a moment.

I just wish that...

remember...

name...



BEAK OF TEAL looked over the data on the Greifoni chipings. It had been nearly a century since anyone had bothered to look, but when you work in a minor desk job at the ministry, sometimes you have to go back and review old things. Sometimes you found something interesting.

"Oh, wow, they made a mistake."

She shook her head and motioned for her nearby assistant, "Jackdaw, do me a favour, I need you to carry this update out for the Greifoni chips. Looks like when they conquered the planet they did not bother to update the chips for the new psychology. It was a common error early on."

Jackdaw thought back to the few things they remembered from their time on the now-automated mining station a few years

ago. Unfortunate for those Greifoni, really, but no worse than what had happened to most Core species in the end.

The free avian shook her head, not knowing or caring about Jackdaw's thoughts. "The chips have been allowing the Greifoni thoughts to be free. Easy fix, though."



10 REM patch 444-93B (update) sets
chips for "gryphons" to burn out
all cognitive portions of the brain,
unneeded for class a and the species
is entirely mining labour; bugfix bk
f teal; approval 42b6a9