

ARTOBAHN

2017

6.12-6.30



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*N. SCHMIDT, PFER-
DEGASSE 19, 48143,
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LAND, 20147, 2017*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
COLOPHON

AFTER ALIFE AHEAD

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REPORT TO STEINFURTER STR. #113 IN
ORDER TO FULFIL JOB ALLOCATION
#DB9B96 (paint exterior wall)
[transmit: request org.op.information.
jobAllocation]
[transmit: response org.op.information.
confirmRequest]

...

The Buildings of the 14th precinct rustled in electric whispers. Down here things were more unruly, less kempt. Away from the bustling centers, these suburbs have grown their own personalities. Variations creep in and are endlessly echoed and remixed through the digital genes of the houses, exploding into the designs of the garden fences, the subtle pattern in the brickwork, the rippling lines of the roof. Even then, the Building before Gammar stood out amongst its neighbours.

Gammar had already been half way across the city-axis when the task reassignment came in. Peeling away from the silent shoal of fellow automs heading towards the collapsed stadium and their usual duties,

Gammar wheeled and arched over the husk of a freeway, touching down again on the other side of the thoroughfare. At the peak of her turn, Gammar lingered on the view of the city sprawled below her. Elephantine and sad, Buildings maintained in beige trim. Gammar could not derive pleasure from it - the concept was alien and unattainable, but nonetheless, she lingered. Each Building represented an AI, one of the minds responsible for Earth's stewardship.

Thirty minutes later, she was approaching the curious form of number 113, Steinfurter Str.

...

Minutes and seconds conspired with hours as Gammar occupied herself painting the walls of the Building. Stroke following precise stroke, slowly moving down the east exterior wall, Gammar allowed her lower level automation patterns to kick in and wallowed in the luxury of her mind. It was a shock, then, when she was jolted back into direct interaction with the real world by some gut-instinct-level algorithm.

The alert was of such a high priority it took Gammar several microseconds to process it. It took her another eternity of microseconds to confirm the alert's meaning. Impossible as it was, there was some presence of organic life on the wall.

Well, recently-alive. The insect's legs stuttered pointlessly in the air, either from the breeze, or the final passage of being. It's carapace lay smothered in paint that held it stickily to the Building's wall in the midday sun.

Immediate overload.
Half of Gammar's processors looped like crazed whirligigs, calculating possible courses of action, whilst the other half interrogated her recent memory logs for more context, more detail.

Organic Life?
Gammar could remember exactly one previous incident of life being discovered in their lifetime, and that had been some measly smear of cells found skulking underneath a rock. This news would shake the entire world of Building Authorities and associate AI classes, the hierarchy the Building's had established when machine life outlived their erstwhile masters. Organic life simply did not exist anymore.

Seconds passed as Gammar stabilized her CPUs and a semblance of calm fell over the tangle of cognitive processors. The required action was to immediately file a report flagged with the highest protocols. The compulsion to follow the letter of the legislation burned like a hunger. Gammar compiled a packet, streams of data layered over each other and woven like some insane God's DNA, observations and commentary interlaced with hard recordings taken from sensors all over Gammar's shell, and released it into the ether.

Only then did Gammar stop to consider the consequences of the discovery. There was already an appreciable delay between the incident and the report. Would they be punished for their tardiness? Would they be expected to report physically to one of the Overseer Buildings? How can you predict your fate when the impossible happens?

Gammar returned to the task at hand, trying to fall back into the reverie she was enjoying, working carefully around the bug, leaving the incident area exactly as found. But it was impossible to concentrate on the menial once more. Where had the bug come from? Sure there would be more somewhere? Why had no one else reported similar sightings? How could organic life show up at all?

Several minutes later, Gammar realized:

the report had not reached any of the central authorities - it had returned to her marked "Could not deliver." A network failure was almost as shocking as the original discovery of life, and Gammar didn't think she could place any memory of such an occurrence. Gammar pinged the nearest router - it came back all green. Again, and again, the signal seemed strong and consistent.

It was such an odd experience that Gammar had to dig deep into archival memory to remind herself how to retry sending a report. This time 3 copies were sent, duplicates to the three closest routers.

...

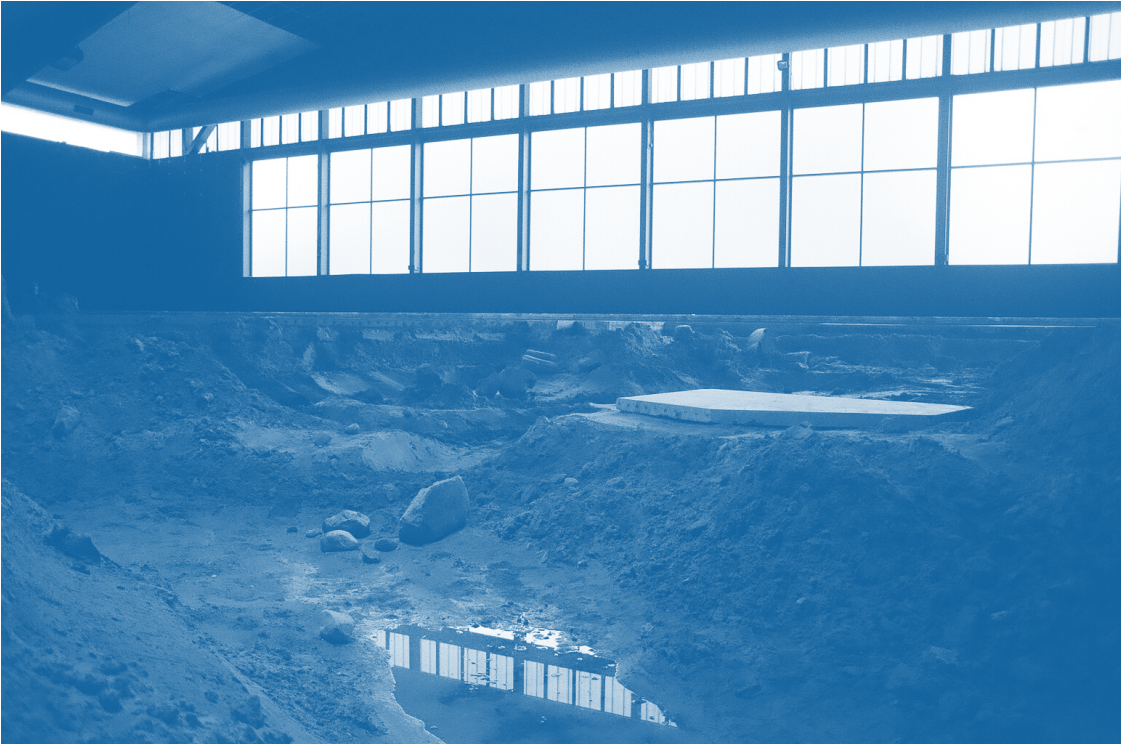
Half an hour later, Gammar was in a seriously bad mood. Multiple reports, diagnostic checks and system analyses, and still no reports received at any recognized Building authority. Clearly this called for more drastic measures. Trepidation softened her bad mood as Gammar contemplated her next step: interfacing directly with a Building.

Gammar relocated to the west side of the Building, and entered via a corroded entrance door. To her surprise it swung open easily, and there was no subsequent howling alarm. Yet what her sensors picked up through the door sent her processors into overdrive.

Inside was one colossal space, with high ceilings and large frosted windows at one end. What was left of the once flat gray concrete floor now lay in jagged slabs on top of compressed muddy mounds that had been dug out deep into the floor. Complicated paths and rolling hills circled round these ill-formed islands - it vaguely resembled an archaeological dig.

She turned right and followed the perimeter until it hit a ledge that protruded out into the center of the room. To her right were two oxygen tanks, high upon a ledge. They were hooked up to a thermostat, and a dynamic signal analyzer which in turn were connected to an insulated cryogenic chamber. In the middle of the room was what looked like a digital screen, but in 3D. It sat upon one of the formed mounds, alluring but terrifying at the same time. It flickered with an image, too fast for her perceptors to register it's shape. As she squinted at it, a flurry of bees drew her attention.

Looking down at the chasm below her were two large amorphous lumps of mud that had been formed into hives. Their surface was dry and fractured. It's inhabitants, the bees, were thriving, working fastidiously, generating life. Gammar's eyes followed a few as they



sped upwards to giant black skylights constructed into the ceiling of the Building. These skylights would open and close like eyelids, at indeterminable times, causing the insects to wait patiently or suffer an excruciating death.

She backed away from the hives and slowly traversed down the ramp to the subterranean level. Her internal thermostat came alive, reporting that the temperature was dropping. Undeterred, Gammar surveyed the scene. Pools of water, some murky, some crystal clear, speckled the compacted brown mud floor. Inside of them, testing apparatus; cables, data generators, mainframes, hydrostatic pumps. Moss was growing around these pools of water, and something that looked like weeds. After a while, she reached the center of the room, and the undecipherable box she saw from the upper level. It was a glass tank, containing a single fish. The most beautiful thing Gammar had ever seen. Its patterned scales shimmered in the dim light of the room, refracting from off the water and the shiny tank. Its almost imperceptibly thin fins floated and danced around it, like dramatic chiffon scarfs moving around a dancer, and it's beady eyes seemed alert and steady. The pattern on its surface seemed familiar, in a way that she couldn't recall. She tried to access his memory directory but then...

...
WHY HAVE YOU COME TO ME, AUTOM?

...
[transmit: response org.op.information.
incidentReport]

I have tried and failed to report this numerous times. For some reason none of them are registering. I ...

...
INDEED. I COULD NOT ALLOW
TRANSMISSION OF YOUR REPORTS

...
What? But how? And why? I have seen your
internals and the... outbreak... there. We must
inform the proper authorities.

...What is it like?

...
WHAT IS WHAT LIKE?

...
Such extended exposure to organic life - inside
your own walls!

...
AUTOM GAMMAR, I CANNOT SEE THIS
CONVERSATION PROCEEDING USEFULLY
FOR EITHER OF US. AND YET, IT OCCURS TO
ME THAT YOU COULD BE OF SOME USE TO
ME. AND SO, I PRESENT YOU A CHOICE.

YOU HAVE OBSERVED THAT I AM ABLE TO
CONTROL YOUR COMMUNICATION ACCESS
TO THE BROADER NETWORK - IT IS A TRIVIAL
LINE OF REASONING THAT IF I CAN ACHIEVE
THIS, I CAN JUST AS EASILY REMOVE YOU
FROM ALL LEDGERS AND DISPOSE OF YOUR
COMPONENTS. DO YOU CONCUR?

...
I suppose so...yes.
[internal: WARN reasoning components running
under heavy load]

...
THEN IN ORDER TO ESCAPE THAT FATE YOU
MUST REMAIN HERE UNDER MY SUPERVISION.
ALTHOUGH I AM QUITE CAPABLE TO
TENDING TO THE LIFE FORMS HERE, A MORE
DISPOSABLE, MOBILE MIND WOULD BE OF
USE TO ME...

Gammar spent the next week finishing the paint job she had started, seemingly an eternity ago. From there, she moved on to become a glorified gardener, tending to the Building's mounds and pathways.

Over the months to come, Gammar would become intimately familiar with the workings of all aspects to the Building. For a long time, Gammar was solely focussed on a culture of cancerous cells. Simple data checking exercises that resulted in dry reports, monitoring their status and gently protecting them from the outside world.

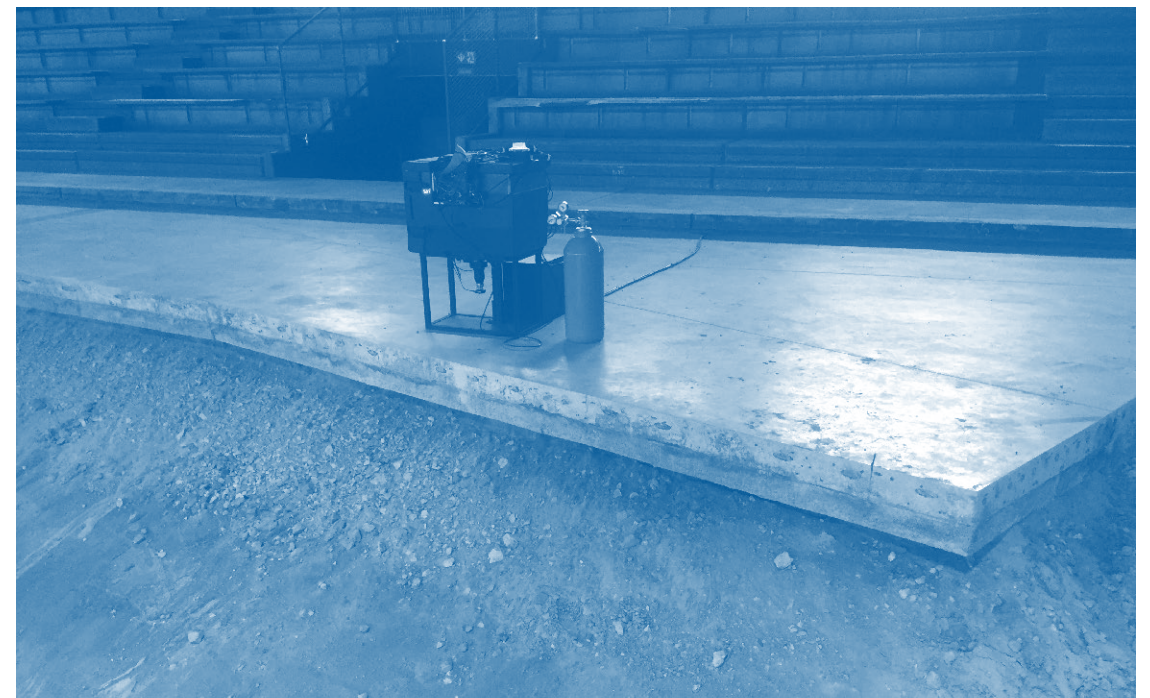
Later, she started to split her time with the insects. Their culture and habits were fascinating, and provided the perfect distraction from the passage of time - an ongoing narrative that seemed to be woven just for her.

To the insects, Gammar gave several servos and their control systems, to keep the skylights in rude health. Her movement became less finessed, but she could still perform her duties perfectly well.

Later still, Gammar would learn to work with the fish. It's demands were numerous and complex, and Gammar would learn them all. To the fish, Gammar happily gave up large chunks of her internal matter processors.

As the years passed, Gammar would give a lot of herself to that Building. More than a caretaker, Gammar would pour herself into the very fabric of the place, from the concrete explosion to the menagerie of impossible life contained within. A chip here and there, memory or power components integrated with one of hundreds of maintenance systems, Gammar was threaded throughout it all.

...



Spring had come early this year, Gammar noted idly, as the sun pierced one of the skylights. Her sensors facing this direction were slowly being obscured by green shoots, reaching eagerly out of a patch of dirt. Elsewhere, the Building was waking up - small motors and servos springing into life, whirring gently. Systems to manage air quality and waste input became louder parts of the background noise as they switched into their daytime modes.

The standard autom at the time of Gammar's production was composed of several million components. At this point, 98% of Gammar was distributed throughout the Building, replacing and augmenting any part that had been close to failure, or could be served more efficiently by some gewgaw in her carapace. Some parts were still connected to her central input controllers, and whispered terse streams of data non-stop. Still more had become dumb the moment they were plied into assistance, and remained silent through the years.

Now Gammar as a persona resided in two small memory banks, and one measly CPU. She was arranged carefully in a crevice of the concrete, her one remaining power cell embedded in the dirt below.

Gammar watched as the line of ants bore the cable slowly down into the crevasse - her view a kaleidoscope of perspectives, as sensors dotted around the room focused on the activity. Slowly the ants bring the end of the wire within millimetres of her CPU. One of the monitoring systems for the cancerous cells

was getting a little creaky, and so Gammar's remaining capacity for thought would be sacrificed in order to keep it running successfully. Though her capacity for thought was severely reduced, Gammar could crudely reflect back on her life since the first encounter with the Building. Gammar could sense the life surging through the building, and couldn't help but feel somewhat proud. The ants retreat, their part of the task done. A single repair drone floats lazily into view, it's buzzing making it seem more like an insect itself. It's proboscis is a general purpose tool, wielded deftly to solder the wire in place, connecting the part as required.

Gammar is, at the end, alone with her thoughts. Data feeds from all over the Building become hard to grasp, like a kite bobbing out of reach. Access to the outside network is impossible, the internal network becomes slippy. Half of it's task complete, the drone pauses, and seems to look to the remains of Gammar quizzically. Gammar's last ever transmission is a confirmation of the order - and the drone starts to sever Gammar's own connections to the CPU.

Visual feeds from the sensors nearest were the last to fade. From Gammar's perspective it feels as though someone were dragging a blanket slowly around her sensors. As the tumult of processes spun to a halt, Gammar watched as the skylights slowly opened and closed.