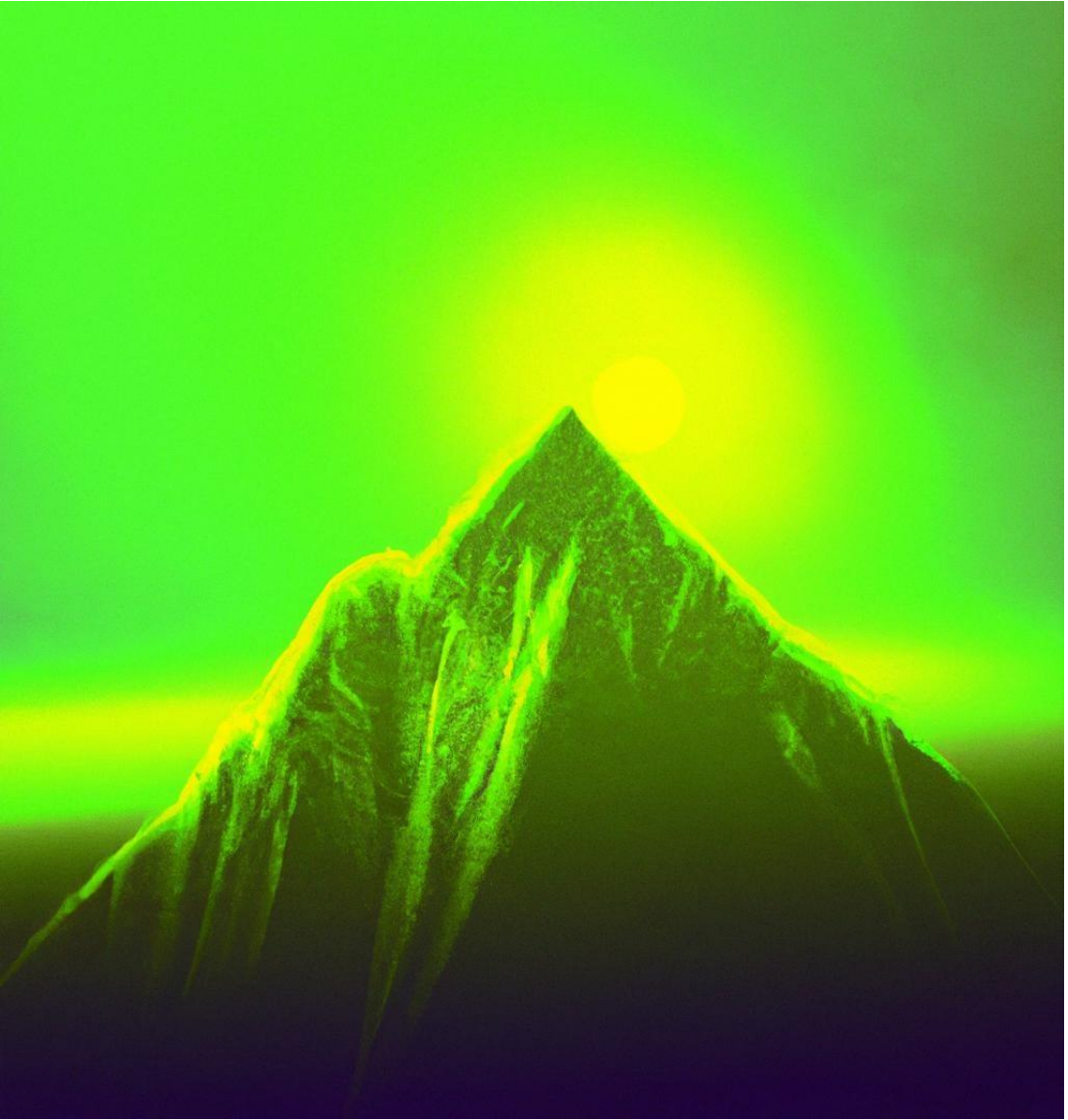


REMEMBRANCE

By Samuel Weiss



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Retired captain's log, stardate 492621.6:

I don't know why I keep making these. I suppose out of habit. I'm so far out of Federation Space I doubt anyone will ever hear this, let alone care.

It's been seven months and six days since I pulled some strings with the new captain of the USS *Agamemnon* and got dropped off with the Pendari during a routine cartography expedition into the remaining uncharted sections of the Delta Quadrant. Seven months may not sound like much, but I find myself yearning for the company of *anyone* from the Federation. The Pendari aren't *too* bad—once you get to know them— but I suppose it's just human nature to feel more at ease with your own kind.

A few of the Pendari have intimated to me what I have already heard across countless star systems within the Delta Quadrant: stories of an ancient and wise sage who wanders the galaxy, seemingly at random. But the accounts of certain Pendari pilots seem to suggest this entity has travelled through Pendari Space so recently that he might still be here... somewhere.

Could my search for this legendarily wandering, cosmic “enlightened one” finally be over? I truly hope so because I'm beginning to feel like this entire journey has been one long, wild Alfa 177 canine chase—even if this mythical “enlightened one” really does exist.

Retired captain's log, stardate 492627.1:

My inquiries have led me to a hospitably lush and tropical moon the Pendari call D'wayneith. I hitched a ride on a Pendari supply ship and received the pilot's sworn promise he would return in a few days to pick me up before leaving me to my lonesome on the surface of this world, a world so unfathomably distant from any place I have ever called home.

I felt confident about being stranded here for a short period of time because of the oddly complex energy source I picked up from orbit—an unusual electromagnetic signature, something that would have to have been

artificially constructed by an intelligent being. Something, I hate to say it, the Pendari most likely aren't responsible for, as the technology needed for energy signatures this strong and condensed is beyond their capabilities.

I've traced my readings to the peak of a nearby mountain, a place I am within only a few kilometers of and should be able to reach by morning. Hopefully this peculiar journey I'm on will soon be over, whether or not there was ever any point to the many years I've wasted.

I can only hope Mogmi would have agreed with my choice to come here...

Retired captain's log, stardate 492627.6:

My tricorder directed me to the mouth of a small cave. I entered cautiously and announced myself through the darkness. "My name is Akira Miller. I'm a retired Starfleet officer. I come in peace."

A voice echoing across the shadowy walls said, "Hello, Akira Miller. Welcome."

I followed the echo deeper into what was becoming a multi-tiered cavernous system and found several circles of soft candlelight on the floor. Sitting comfortably cross-legged in meditative posture in the center of these circular rows of candles was an elderly being who appeared to be human, except he had a strange, inhuman skin complexion, and gold-tinted eyes.

"Please, have a seat." He gestured toward a cushiony meditation chair across from him. It was all very Zen. "It is nice to meet you. My name is Data."

Once I was settled in my chair, I got a better look at him. His face offered me a kind smile as if to say I really was welcome in this place. His attire was simple, a white tunic and brown, rawhide trousers. He had a pleasant way about him, a friendly charm and warmth hard to ignore.

But I stayed skeptical. "I've traveled a long way to find you, Mr... Data."

He seemed genuinely surprised, and his honest response was equally as genuine. "Is that so? If I'd been aware there was anyone searching for me, I would've stayed in one spot."

The creature identifying himself as Data continued to look expectantly at me with a polite grin. Finally, he tried coaxing me out of my... call it fatigue or call it befuddlement, I don't really know. He asked, "And what is your purpose in seeking me out?"

"Oh, right, sorry. Um, well, it's not an easy thing to talk about—actually, I don't think I've ever talked to anyone about it. Not really."

"Then it must have been quite traumatic for you if you've been unwilling to tell anyone else until now. Please, take your time. I have no plans to leave this planet anytime soon."

"Ah, ok. Well. Let's see, where do I start? I'm a retired Starfleet captain. My last command before parting ways with Starfleet was the USS *Agamemnon*. My last assignment was to negotiate a dilithium trade agreement with a species who'd just developed warp technology. I led an away mission to speak to this species on their home planet. My first officer, a Haillian named Mogmi, insisted that I stay on the ship because her empathic abilities were telling her something seemed off with the people we were dealing with. When I refused to listen and headed for the transporter room, Commander Mogmi stubbornly insisted on accompanying me.

"Well, long story short, we were ambushed. There was another faction at play in this world, which the Federation had only recently made contact with. A faction we knew nothing about and who had managed to conspire with some of the political leaders we were directly communicating with.

"Under heavy fire from primitive, yet deadly weaponry, Mogmi pushed me to the side to save my life; but when she did, she ended her own."

A single tear flowed down my cheek as I spoke these words out loud. I hesitated before saying the rest. "Afterwards I'd been through hours upon hours of Starfleet-provided therapy before I eventually decided to quit Starfleet altogether. Nothing helps the shame. I feel for having been responsible for the death of my first officer; and nothing continues to help the emptiness I have felt in my heart ever since." I sighed. "And then I began traveling the galaxy on my own—in search of some kind of purpose, or some kind of meaning to it all, to fill this emptiness. But I found nothing—nothing

except for stories about an ancient wise one out there, someone who roams the galaxy alone, just like me, and someone who many have claimed has healed their individual emotional crises.

“And so that, in a nutshell, is what has brought me here to you today.”

The relaxed being known as Data contemplated my words for several instants before saying, “It is with a glad heart that I am able to inform you that you’ve come to the right person for guidance. You see, like you but long ago, I too was once a Starfleet officer. And like you, I was a very different person when I was in Starfleet than what I am now. I died once—before the miracles that took place to bring me back to life—and for a long while, I felt a great emptiness as well.”

“I’m sorry—what? You *died*?”

Data chuckled. “Yes. You see, I was born as an artificial life-form—an android—until one day my positronic brain shut down. But then I awoke years later, and I had been miraculously evolved into something far more.”

“Mr. Data... sir... with respect, I’m not sure an android is going to be able to help me with my problems.”

“Why is that?”

“Well—I don’t know. No... no *organic* life-form I’ve met has ever been able to help me with my issues; I can’t imagine an android will either.” I started to get up on my feet. “I think this has all been a complete waste of time—I’m sorry.”

Data raised a gentle hand asking me to stop. “Am I really the first Human-Android you’ve ever met?”

“*Human-Android*?” I genuinely had no idea what he meant by that.

He calmly motioned for me to please sit back down. “Then I’m honored to be the first. Please, Captain Miller, you have come all this way seeking my advice. It would seem irrational not to at least hear whatever that advice might be.”

I nodded and sat back down.

He continued. “I’ve been an explorer my whole life. From the moment I came into existence I was obsessed with acquiring as much knowledge and, pardon the pun, *data* about my surroundings as I could. There was only a brief period in my life when I was not *physically* exploring our universe; that

was after I retired from Starfleet and began a short career as a mathematics professor at Cambridge. The true reason I accepted the academic position was so I could simply have an excuse to stay on Earth, to always be readily available to my aging family whenever they needed me. But eventually I took to the stars again and now destiny has brought me to *you*.

“All those years in Starfleet I had spent exploring the galaxy with my family—the true exploration, from my unique point of view, was my personal journey to become more human.

“Well, like I said, I was dead for a short time before returning to life. When I awoke into my new state of being—I won’t bore you with the details of how I came into this new existence; frankly I am unsure I can properly describe it to you, in any case. But when I awoke it was like breathing in the miracle of life yet again, but with a renewed sense of who I always was, and also with the joy and excitement of becoming something different.

“And in that rebirthing process I experienced something I hope will help you find what I think you’re looking for.”

“Go on,” I said, now secretly engaged by the story of this odd being and hinging upon his every word.

“My previous android life flashed before me in an instant—literally. In a single instant—.69 seconds to be precise—I re-experienced every single memory of my life. From all the good times, to all the *great* times, and then to the not-so spectacular times, I relived everything I ever was and reencountered everyone I ever knew.

“I will use only a single example of my memories to help elucidate my point to you: during a diplomatic mission in Klingon Space to help find a peaceful resolution to a Klingon civil war, I was given my first real taste of command as the temporary captain of the USS *Sutherland*. Through my efforts, we were able to keep the situation from escalating into a much larger conflict involving the Federation, the Klingon Empire, and the Romulan Star Empire.

“At first, the commander of the Federation forces—who was also my friend—had not considered the possibility of placing me, an android, into a leadership role during such a large and vital operation. But I was successful in convincing him that my qualifications far exceeded the Federation’s

standards for such a command. “Anyway, years later as I’ve stated, I died and then was brought back to life. In the first moment of my new artificial life, I relived this single event just as I relived all the events of my life and, with a set of new eyes and a fresher mind, I understood things differently.

“Back then when I had realized Captain Picard had not seen fit to assign me to command a ship, I experienced no emotion about it whatsoever, because I was incapable of such emotion. But then, as I was reborn, for a fraction of an instant I experienced a horrible sadness at learning the captain did not have enough faith in my abilities to even *consider* appointing me a ship to command.

“And then, a fraction of an instant later, I relived the moment when I concluded that my actions, which ran counter to the captain’s orders for the fleet, were subject to disciplinary action. I promptly reported to him to recommend such action.

“He relayed to me a piece of wisdom I believe rings true to any era of human life: successful organizations require leaders who are capable of independent thought and of analyzing situations to find successful outcomes for the situations they take part in.

“My cold, emotionless former self simply incorporated this bit of logic into my unfeeling positronic psyche and went about my merry way. Then the captain stopped me and said, ‘Mr. Data... nicely done.’

“My former self took this compliment and stored it inside my memory banks for later use, but I still felt nothing. I went back to duty and for the rest of my simple android life, his kind words never amounted much to me, not in the way a human could process them.

“But then when I *relived* Captain Picard saying, ‘Mr. Data... nicely done,’ it was as though my new Human-Android heart erupted with immense joy and satisfaction after hearing this. Words simply cannot express the overwhelmingly profound emotions that experiencing a memory in this manner can cause, so I won’t attempt to any further.

“What’s important wasn’t that I had attained Captain Picard’s respect—I had already garnered that. No, in this moment I had earned his complete, unwavering confidence as a Starfleet officer, as well as his personal gratitude. And in my ‘rebirthing’ experience I felt all of this, loud and clear. I

could also now sense the beaming pride the captain felt for me every day after.

“In the instant of remembering this key event, as well as many other key events in my life, I became whole. I was an android filling in the void of his emotionless soul with the substances of countless such moments of personal growth and development. I became a living, Human-Android.”

I was speechless for a short time after hearing this story. Finally, I wiped the uncontrollable tears from my face and began laughing hysterically.

The being known as Data seemed confused by this reaction—and maybe a little bit hurt as well. Finally, I said, “I promise I’m not laughing at you.” I almost choked on my words. “It’s a beautiful story. It’s just—how is this supposed to help me? Our situations are nothing alike. Save for my First Officer Mogmi acting with confident independence, your experience with your captain friend was nothing like what happened with *my* friend. *You* didn’t get your captain *killed*.”

Data nodded. “No, the situations aren’t very alike at all—you are right. My point in telling you the story is simply this: if an android born without emotion can one day experience the joy of using such a memory to help make him whole, thereby finally attaining an understanding of what is to be human, then a *human* should be more than capable of attaining an understanding of what is to be human.”

Retired captain’s log, stardate 492630.8:

I departed from the den of the being known as Data not long after he shared his story with me. At some point along my trek back down the mountain, I inexplicably felt a spark of hope from somewhere deep within—a feeling I had not had since my days as captain of the *Agamemnon*.

I looked to the rising, green Pendari sun on the horizon and smiled.

When I arrived at the rendezvous point, my Pendari pilot friend was waiting there with his supply ship, as scheduled. I took one last look toward the top of the mountain, then focused on planning my quickest route back to Federation Space.

But also planning the rest of my life as well.