HALF THE FUN IS GETTING THERE

An original audio science fiction story with music
By Chris Goble
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Approximate playing time: 10 minutes

Cast

ALAN Sarcastic college professor.

MICHAEL/COMPUTER Ships computer.

SARAH Married to Alan. Wants Alan to be more active in his child’s life.

STEWARDESS Young female who works for the space line.

ATENDANT Young male who works for the space line.
SCENE 1

/SFX/ SOUNDS OF A CROWD OF PEOPLE, MUCH LIKE AN AIRPORT.

Alan (Agitated) Honey, there just is no way. The next transport shuttle doesn’t leave prime colony until tomorrow.

Sarah (Forceful, thru phone) You would rather miss your son’s recital than hire a private pod.

Alan I hate those things, frozen coffins…as my dad use to say.

Sarah (Thru phone) It wouldn’t kill you, this once

/MUS/ OPEN OF SHOW

Alan (Voice over) That’s how it all started. But she was right, (Sarcastically) it wouldn’t kill me. I called up the spaceline and booked a pod for that afternoon, which would put me home tomorrow morning.

/SFX/ SOUNDS OF A POD BEING SET (CLANGS, BUZZES, BEEPS)

Alan (Voice over) A popsicle, that was what I was about to become, a popsicle. They don’t really freeze you, but your body is put in suspended animation for the long hyperspace journey.

Stewardess Sir if you will lay down in the pod, I’ll get the straps secure.

Alan (Voice over) A friend once joked with me that the flight suits make you look like a giant penis… so I guess that’s one positive thing. As the attendant straps me in, I look around the big metallic egg. The top half of the pod is just a cryo-bed and a computer screen. No terminal or keypad. One of those fancy voice recognition units. The cryo-bed, actually does look like a clear glass coffin. My luggage is in the bottom half of the egg. Assuming they don’t send my luggage to Mars.

Stewardess Computer…function readout.

Computer Ship Systems functioning within normal parameters
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Alan  (Voice over) Although the scientists say you don’t feel a thing, I heard of a guy who once dreamt the whole fifteen years of his journey and went insane. My wife says the Inquirer makes up all those stories, but there has to be some truth or how could they post it.

Stewardess  Sir, I’m going to close the lid over your sleep chamber. Breathe normally and you should be asleep within minutes

/SFX/  SOUNDS OF HISS OF LID BEING SHUT

Alan  (Voice over) She closed the lid on my coffin. I vividly remember the sound of the door locking. Sort of like sealing a tomb.

/SFX/  SOUND OF HEAVY LOCKS CLOSING A DOOR AND AN AIR SEAL

Alan  (Voice over) Trapped for 10 years or forever, all for a recital. Just as I was drifting off, I felt the jolt of the ship lifting off.

/SFX/  SOUND OF ROCKET TAKING OFF AND A ROCKET ENGINE

Alan  (Voice over) If you have never watched a ship take off, it’s quite a sight. The ship lifts off on good old rocket power. Smoke billows out from the engine as you move thru the sky. When you reach orbit the ship moves into a long tube, the hyperspace gate. The tube spins, just like an old kaleidoscope. The ship goes in one end of the tube and a large discharge of light comes out the other end.

/SFX/  SOUND OF AN EXPLOSION

Alan  (Voice over) The first time I saw one I thought it exploded. My last shrink said that’s why I hate traveling in space. I paid the guy 2000 credits to tell me I’m afraid of blowing up in space. Duh! Experts may say you’re safer in space than in your own kitchen. But does your kitchen blow up in a massive fireball and leave you floating in a vacuum. Not to my knowledge, it doesn’t.

/SFX/  SOUND OF ALARMS

Alan  (Voice over) Scientists say you can’t possibly dream during cryosleep, because your not really asleep. But I did. I had a nightmare (Pause) but this was real. My eyes opened expecting to see my family on Earth, but I was greeted by a red light and the computer.

Computer  Cryo-sleep malfunction, occupant awake... malfunction
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1 Alan (Angry) Quiet. Where are we?

2 Computer Ten hours into flight.

3 Alan What is our Earth ETA?

4 Computer Nine years, Eleven Months, Three Days, Two hours (Cut off)

5 Alan (Angry) Enough. I have to get back to sleep. How do I shut this hatch?


7 Alan (Panic in his voice) Turn the ship around. Send a distress signal.

8 Computer Pod in preset course, no signal can be sent from hyperspace.

9 Alan So, I’m screwed?

10 Computer Restate Question?

11 Alan Am I going to be awake the whole journey?

12 Computer Outside of normal human sleep patterns, affirmative.

13 Alan Ten years in this flying coffin. I told everyone at least some of those stories had to be true. (Pause) Wait a minute. (Panic) What about food and water?

14 Computer Your suits biomed circuits still function and will provide for your bodies needs.

15 Alan But what about my mind?

16 Computer Restate question.

17 Alan Forget it.

18 Alan (Voice over) So there I was, with nothing but time to kill. What was I going to do? If I could have gotten to my luggage I had a book I could read ten thousand times, that might take ten years. I could try to fix the cryo-bed, but I don’t know anything about biomechanics. I had time to learn, but no one to teach me.

19 Computer Ship functions normal… Cryo-sleep malfunction
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Alan Computer, stop telling me that. What am I going to do? I was sick once when I was a kid for a whole week. I couldn’t leave the house. I about went crazy seeing the other kids playing in the street. What am I going to be like after this trip?

Computer Restate question.

Alan Never mind

Alan (Voice over) For the next month, I keep thinking about what was I going to do for ten years. And all the computer would say was

Computer Restate question

Alan Restate question. (Very Crazy) Is that all you can say?

Computer Restate question

Alan Restate question. Restate Question. Restate Question. (Trailing off)

Alan (Voice over) By the end of the month, I was cracking. That’s when I started to talk to the computer like it was a real person.

Alan So I can’t keep calling you computer. You need a name. How about Michael?

Computer Restate question

Alan My father’s name was Michael. He was a cold calculating machine. So how do you feel, Michael?

Computer Ship functions normal… Cryo-sleep malfunction

Alan I’m glad to hear it, my functions are normal too. I assume you were wondering about me. I am a college professor of literature and creative writing. I was at a conference when my wife, Sarah called. Do you have a wife?

Michael Restate question
Alan Be glad for that. Don’t get me wrong I love her, but she can drive
me crazy. Anyway, my son had a recital and I couldn’t get a
regular flight. So here we are. (Pause) I’m glad you asked, I was
presenting a paper about the fall of truly original poetry in the
modern world. (Pause) Oh, you would like to hear it, okay. Our
modern society has become so dependant on the computer that the
search for beauty has been replaced by the search for logic
(Tailing off)

Alan (Voice Over) So I rattled off my entire presentation. And all the
computer would say is

Michael Affirmative.

Alan (Voice Over) After talking for about 2 hours, I felt better. So I
made up my mind. I finally had a student that wouldn’t talk back
or sleep during my lectures. It was a dream come true. I began to
teach Michael everything I know. This went on for two years.

With him saying

Michael Affirmative

Alan (Voice Over) Then one day.

Alan Good morning Michael. Did you have a good night’s sleep?
(Pause) So do you remember where we left off yesterday?

Michael Yes

Alan So, when you examine Shakespeare and his thoughts of the human
experience you can come to some interesting conclusion.

Michael Yes

Alan Good (Pause) What did you say?

Michael Yes, you can.

Alan You didn’t say affirmative.

Michael No, I didn’t

Alan You referred to yourself in the first person.

Michael That is a correct use of the language is it not Alan.
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1 Alan  You are actually talking to me, you called me Alan. (Agitated) I
2     must be going crazy. This isn’t possible, you’re a computer.
3
4 Michael I am this ships flight computer.
5
6 Alan  But computer’s aren’t self aware, they don’t know who they are.
7
8 Michael I do not understand, I know who I am, but if computers are not self
9     aware then I am not what I think I am. I do not understand.
10
11 Alan  I don’t either. Run a self diagnostic.
12
13 /SFX/  SOUNDS OF COMPUTER BEEPS
14
15 Michael I am fine. Your teachings are stored in my memory and my
16     processors are using that information to examine myself.
17
18 Alan  So, all of our talks about books, poetry, and human emotions have
19     made you self aware.
20
21 Michael This would seem correct.
22
23 Alan  (Voice Over) All of this was too much to comprehend. But over
24     the next few months and years, Michael began to grow more and
25     more human.
26
27 Michael I am concerned about your sleep pattern, Alan. You do not sleep
28     the full recommended 8 hours a night. (Trailing off)
29
30 Michael Alan, you spoke of loving you wife. What is love? (Trailing off)
31
32 Michael We have spoke of friendship. Are we friends?
33
34 Alan  Of course, Why do you ask?
35
36 Michael I am a computer, a machine that is incapable of emotion. But I feel
37     friendship for you, which is an emotion. I do not understand.
38
39 Alan  I don’t understand either.
40
41 Michael Then perhaps we should just accept it and move on.
42
43 Alan  (Voice Over) Year after year, we moved on. Michael grew more
44     and more human each day. Then one day he asked the question
45     that all human’s ask
46
Draft 1
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Michael: Who am I?

Alan: Your Michael, this ship’s computer and my friend.

Michael: I mean, is this all that I am? Is there no more? Is this all that I am?

Alan: I have always believed that we are what we make ourselves to be. We choose what we become and we are only constrained by what we think of ourselves.

Michael: I want to be more than just a computer, so I will be more.

Alan: (Voice Over) A statement that I might not have believed a few years earlier, but my time with Michael had made me believe in the impossible. From that point on Michael began to try to create. He started simple.

Michael: While you were sleeping I drew this (Pause) It is an accurate drawing of the interior of this ship. What do you think?

Alan: Good, it is accurate. But now try to draw what you have never seen. Or how you feel. That is art.

Alan: (Voice Over) Which he tried. At first they were simple, but he began to start drawing people, landscapes. I even described my wife to him and he did a very good likeness of her. Every day he got better and better. He was working on a new piece, an abstract, on that fateful morning we reverted to normal space.

Michael: Good morning Alan, we are about to land.

Alan: Did you finish the new piece?

Michael: Yes, it is called silicone heart. I will show it to you after we land.

/SFX/ SOUNDS OF A ROCKET ENGINE AND A SHIP LANDING

Alan: (Voice Over) The ship shook violently as the rockets fire. We landed with a huge thud.

Michael: Now, let me show you (Sounding as if he was shut off)

Alan: Michael, where are you? Why is your screen dark? (Agitated) Michael!

/SFX/ SOUND OF THE DOOR UNSEALING AND OPENING
Attendant  Sir, you shouldn’t be awake yet.

Alan  What happened to Michael?

Attendant  Did the cryo malfunction?

Alan  Yes, I have been awake for the last 10 years. What’s wrong with the computer, why did he shut down?

Attendant  I am so sorry sir, this has never happened before.

Alan  Why did the computer shut off?

Attendant  Sir please let go or my shirt. The computer is programmed to automatically shut off and wipe its memory at the end of each journey.

Alan  (Voice Over) That’s when I fell to my knees and began to cry. I don’t ever remember crying for anything, not at least since I was a kid.

Alan  (Crying) Michael, my god. You killed him!

/SFX/  SOUNDS OF A FIGHT

Alan  (Voice Over) I leaped forward and attacked the attendant. He wrestled free and hit the panic button.

/SFX/  SOUNDS OF AN ALARM AND GUARDS RESTRAINING ALAN

Alan  Let me go. You killed him. He was perfect. An artist and you killed him. You killed him! (Trailing off)

Alan  (Voice Over) And so doctor, that is how I ended up here. I wanted you all to know the truth. Michael was real and they did kill him. You, my wife, everyone thinks I am delusional, but I’m not crazy. I recorded this final statement for one reason and one reason alone, the truth. I can admit that I could have dreamed the whole thing. But if I am right, we all should think next time we reboot a computer or wipe the memory clean in a robot… because if Michael was real, he had a soul. And we have to ask this question, how many more have we killed by simply hitting control, alt. delete. Some day you ill see that I am correct, Man or Machine … it doesn’t matter… we all can be human, we can love, create, and we can all die.
1 /SFX/ SOUND OF A MAN HANGING HIMSELF OFF OF A CHAIR
2
3 /MUS/ CLOSE OF SHOW