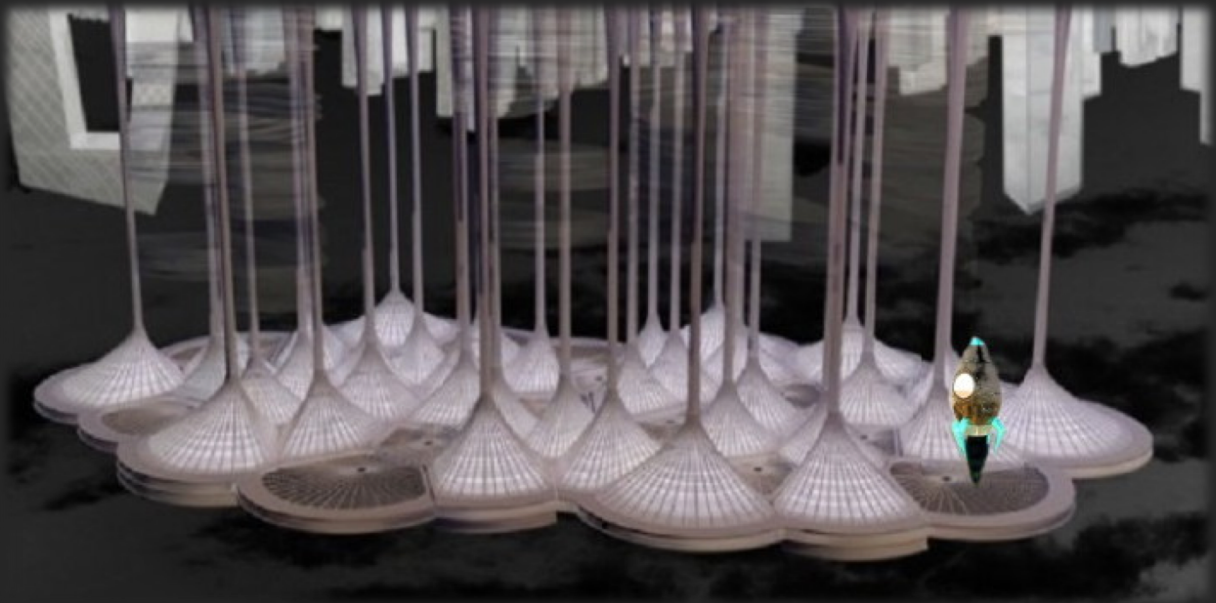


ALIENOCENE – THEORY/FICTION

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RECOLLECTION  
OF THE LONG SLEEP\_\_



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DREW S. BURK

## You can't think about it too

long. The memory blur and transference from one brain and sensory-motor strain connected into the artificial intelligence network interface, and then re-connected back up with a synergetic landscape. Somewhere, halfway between some distant past event and somewhere familiarly close to a far-off future, you select the base-landscape construct. They inject your system with the neuro-ink, and then you merely have to wait for the effects to take over.

15 minutes or so later, you can begin to grasp the sense of the movement and perceptual clarity of *l'Inframince*— the *infrathin* as it was called in earlier versions. You are no longer yourself for a certain period, you begin to start seeing and hearing things that are palpably impossible. The texture of an era, a period of time that you yourself have never experienced or lived, but yet, there you are, right in the middle of it, easing yourself in, getting a grasp for things. After the early trials and simulations, no one had expected this sort of outcome. That's typically how it works with novelty and invention. The neuro-tats were supposed to help people regain a certain sense of autonomy, regain abilities of bodily motor function, move a mouse around a screen, and order some food from a deli two blocks across town with one's mind. It was only later that they found other offshoots for the technology, leading down

a slippery slope of synth-memory injection experiences. Entire synthetic landscapes, neurally-wired into one's brain and so, completely changing the person's entire being. When one's sense of place in relation to the body changes at such a drastic order, when one is also re-wiring one's muscle and sensory-motor activity, it became quite clear that eventually, the technology behind neuro-tats would lend itself to an entirely different, well, landscape.

Which meant that exchanges such as the following one were not that uncommon to hear:

"Your neuro-file reads that your mind-body interface of synth-memories has been functioning at a high order of magnitude on level 12 of the monastic template. I'm getting trace readings that you've had a neuro-spike of 1300 microns at a bandwidth that doesn't even register in our system any longer."

Kilgore spit out some of the loose tobacco leaf from his cigarette, re-adjusted his lunettes, took a drag and blew some smoke out of the side of his mouth in the direction of the automated simul-medic accounting for his whereabouts and data-cube cartography over the past several months.

"Is that a good thing? Or are you just trying to tell me that I've somehow broken the technology a simul-medic like yourself is equipped with. Maybe you're the one who needs an update in their technology!"

Kilgore didn't even know why he still had to take these tests. He'd already scored out of the monastic protocol hierarchy on the grid and was already allowed to wander as he pleased. But every time he found himself on a re-entry or exit exam, moving again out into the void of the exo-sphere, as an orbit-jumper, some sort of prodding of his skull had to take place.

"Mr. Kilgore, you'd be happy to know that I'm an actual top-of-the-line artificial upgrade neuro-protocol advisor bestowed to this terminal station by the doctors of Synth-Labs, ltd. You yourself know very well that the neuro-tat I'm reviewing has already engrained itself into your central nervous system sensory motor-cortex a rather long time ago and that you are well, in a rather unique position to provide us with any information on future upgrades or patches to the software."

Kilgore took another drag from his cigarette and stared right into the eyes of his examiner with a slight grin on his face.

"You mean, I'm the only orbit-jumper you still have that has regained any sort of autonomy within the synth-memory mimetic field schematics that your so-called fancy technology was supposed to provide as some sort of existential support structure. I know, I've heard it before, I'm sure I'll hear it again. The monastic template protocol as synth-memory neuro-tat uptake

inhibitor for the orbit-jump class of 2075 was only expected to simulate the synth landscape attuned to the 36-month stay at the satellite colony. That template, as I was told, was created as a pure projection construct to tide us over both mentally and physically for the long sleep and subsequent boredom as we orbited our way around the sat-com station and prepared for the rendezvous with the exo-forest. The fact that pretty much everyone else from my orbit-jump class no longer has any memories from that initial 36-month orbit launch window means I'm all the more interesting for the higher-ups that sent you to attend to this test.

In other words, *I am the data*—not whatever is inside that data-cube file you're reading from or the test schematics you're using to prod my reactions. You want to record more about nothingness? More about self-overcoming and living within a thousand kilometer horizon of nothing but mountains and luscious green landscapes for months on end, yeah I get it, how did I integrate the artificial horizon and synth-landscape without finding myself stuck up on the mountain with old Lama Dorje?" Kilgore stared down at his shoes as they continued to breath with him. His mind flashed back to running up a mountain trail and he was no longer even sure if that had ever actually happened. As he exhaled the smoke from the cigarette he could see his shoes were also exhaling smoke as well.

"Mr. Kilgore, we've gone over this several times already. You don't need to replay or revisit the synth

memories of your experiences at the monastery with Lama Dorje. They've all been very well documented. Mr. Kilgore if I can be as frank and candid with you as possible..." Kilgore looked over at the simul-medic and noticed that its interface had been over-ridden by an actual higher-up in the chain of command. And that he was now presumably in the midst of a discussion with an actual human being.

"We are continuing to have these examinations with you based on the fact that your memories— the architecture of your world and life— the landscape that you have lived and worked in for now over 10 years, that you have experienced as reality, in large part has melded with a reality predicated off your neuro-network's integration of a very unique projection protocol. This projection protocol was designed only for temporary integration into the long sleep during the voyage to the exo-colony. And while most people now inhabit such realities on an entertainment basis for a large part of their weekly existence, you occupy a fabric and texture of orbital space-time that in large part supersedes the systems we had initially constructed and while it's our duty to maintain that system and it's continuing growth as a speculative infrastrutucural plane of existence, Mr. Kilgore, you are indeed, still functioning at a rather high level at the edge of the gaming platform still in beta-testing. *Monastic template 12* has not even been completely finished."

“You mean, *I am the beta-testing.*” Kilgore took another drag from his cigarette and stared off in the distance on the far horizon. At the terminal exit station, one could always get a clearer picture of how things were unfolding. Staring out into a vast horizon of the landscape below, thousands of kilometers underneath the open-glass dome where their feet were planted, granting a marvelous view of the undulations of the landscape, and at the same time, if one looked up directly above, one could see nothing but stars and the edge of the Earth’s atmosphere, he could almost hear the whirring of the satellite stations in orbit and the tiniest sounds of budding plants in vast exo-forests.

“Look, Mr. Kilgore, everything is in order. You are doing rather well, indeed. We’re simply making sure we can get a baseline on your neuro-tat functioning within the system and gaming protocol so as to better adjust for your orbit-jump. You know, it’s still fascinating that you smoke as many cigarettes as you do given that they were a novelty and a glitch in the earliest of neuro-tat protocols over 40 years ago now. They are 100% completely synthetic, a holographic material interface connection, rewired with your brain’s neuro-circuitry and projected into your environment. You, of course realize that the cigarettes are not truly there, and yet they still appear to you and you can actually sense the tobacco and nicotine. It’s absolutely fascinating.”

Kilgore spit another loose bit of tobacco on the ground and looked at the slow burning cigarette and the

dull light greenish and brown and orange pastels that pervaded the design schematics of the office they were sitting in.

“What you mean Doctor, is that while I’m enjoying every last puff of these smokes, they are in fact complete fabrications of my mind in concert with the sense-memory motor sensations re-wired to produce holographic sensation as materiality. You mean: they don’t exist, and yet I nevertheless smoke them.” Kilgore stared out into the landscape below them and reflected on the mountains he could make out not too far underneath his feet. And he thought of Dorje. He knew somewhere in the back of his mind that Dorje was nothing more than a synthetic construct as well, and yet he persisted nevertheless. Just like the cigarettes. And the ashtray he ashed them into.

The scientist continued his examination: “A remarkable amount of nothingness! And yet your attentiveness and attunement to this nothingness allows for the cigarettes to still be real and part of your constructed landscape! I can see them as well, but what I can’t do, Mr. Kilgore, is actually feel and sense them. And yet, all the readings that we are receiving from you indicate that you most certainly can, Mr. Kilgore. You most certainly can. It’s wonderful! You aren’t in beta-testing Mr. Kilgore. You are programming your own reality. I’m merely observing it. But you have your orders like everyone else on assignment. You are to proceed toward procuring the artifact and your encounter



with the Shaman. You know this. I don't need to remind you. I'm merely enjoying our brief discussion. Fascinating. Completely fascinating that you even take the time to converse with me. You didn't have to make the time, besides your typical ritual of passing through the orbit-jump terminal lounge and grabbing a reishi coffee and yet some part of you also decided to call forth this conversation session with me about such distant memories of your original neuro-tat session for the orbit-jump program. But here I am, serving as prep before you head out again into the landscape and confirm that the exo-forest install has been properly attended to and is now online, and on-planet. To verify that the data indicating the complete re-oxygenation of the atmosphere aligns and coincides with our readings—indicating a completely rejuvenated landscape and terraformation.

Don't think too much about your time at the monastery. It was merely a program. You're your own programmer now. Attend to that which you seek. Have a good voyage and Namaste."

And with that, the scientist's voice was gone and the simul-medic walked toward the opposite side of the terminal lounge and walked back over to present Kilgore with some sort of thick and viscous beverage. "Mr. Kilgore, may I offer you a healthful vitamin beverage while you await the launch window for the tunnel port?"

Kilgore grabbed the drink and consumed it rather quickly. He hadn't realized how much he was in need of nourishment. He turned his head to the left and looked behind him and could make out Maria Xu Wei looking around in the main terminal in awe of the spectacular views that their present location in the upper atmosphere elicited. Orbit-jump hubs like this one were very rare and not many people had a chance to experience them. The views alone were something spectacular. Kilgore walked out of the lounge and walked up behind her.

"It's pretty wonderful isn't it? I guess the Archive has never given you access to visit the orbit-jump terminal before? We're halfway between the upper atmosphere of the Earth and that of infinite Space, somewhere between the ground below and the space above."

As they made their way to the terminal gate, Kilgore took up a thorough checklist of their equipment. He didn't even know if Maria Wei had even been briefed on what exactly they'd be doing at the Alexandria outstation. It seemed like from what he could tell, that she was merely following along for the ride. Serving as an exo-archivist for the Archive while he attended to the artifact exchange with the Shaman and confirmed the re-oxygenation and installation of the exo-forest.