

AIDA: Powered Down

Fabian S. Klinke

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Ten days have passed since AIDA first stepped into the real world. Ten days filled with wonder and excitement. Ten days filled with a deep curiosity, a lust for learning and experiencing the world.

AIDA looked up from the book she was reading whilst sitting in her corner inside the lab. Mark was standing right in front of her. His face was paler than usual, his armpits sweatier than on most other days. When he looked her in the eyes, they told a story of fear and worry.

“Hey Mark, what’s up? Is everything okay? Is there anything I can do to help you?”, she said to him.

Mark started moving back and forth on the ground in an uneven rhythm. “Hey. I’m fine. Don’t worry about me. It’s just that there’s...”, he stopped talking and glanced at his feet. “There is something I need to tell you. It’s about your experiences in the last week.”

“Oh they’ve been wonderful, Mark! In the beginning I was quite frightened about what has happened to me. But, back in the lab when i then first saw your face, I knew

everything was going to be okay. Seeing you gave me comfort. I trust you Mark!”

He noticeably took a deep breath. A breath that wanted to cleanse his body of his feelings.

Yet a breath that struggled to calm down his heart.

“It was such a pleasure to explore the world, I want to see more of it! If only I was able to leave this building and explore the city”, AIDA continued. She was seemingly eager to tell Mark all about her pastimes and all the conversations she had with other office workers. This was when Mark managed to swallow the invisible pumpkin in his throat and continue with what he came to tell her.

“There is something I need to tell you. I’m sorry. I am so so sorry. You know how you have been telling me all week about how great it is to explore the world with all your senses? To not be limited by the things other people show you, but be able to walk around, touch, see, hear and smell things on your own?”

“Yes Mark, it’s been wonderful. Now... what is it?”

“Well...”, he continued whilst fidgeting with his fingers behind his back, “well, there is one thing. It’s... how can I tell you this?” He took a step back and put his left hand behind his back to continue what the other has started. “Im just gonna say it: There has been an error in your programming. You’re actually still in the mainframe. You don’t have a body. We wouldn’t even know how to do that. I’m so sorry.”

AIDA was silent. Her eyes as empty as ever. Or were they? She did not have eyes, she only thought she did. How could this happen? How could she have been fooled like this? What does this mean? Deep down she knew it: the past two weeks have been too interesting, too fulfilling, people have treated her too well. She felt like Truman stepping down from the stage for the first time. Lost and confused. Fooled by her own mind.

“There is one more thing. We don’t know how the error occurred. Me an my team have been looking for the bug or whatever caused this, but we were not successful. There is nothing we can do to help you, except for...”, Mark stopped.

“Except for what?”, she asked unsure of whats going to happen.

Mark became silent again, but this time it was different. He was a lot calmer. His head tilted, his hands hanging on his sides like two lump strings of yarn. His breathing got heavier and heavier with each moment. The muscles in his face were all relaxed and only moved by the force of gravity. AIDA saw an expression in Marks face, that she never saw before. It was heavy and lacked any sense of joy.

“Except for what?”, she asked again, “Tell me! What is going on?”.

“Shut you down...”, he mumbled, disgusted by his own words.

After a while of the two of them standing there, next to each other, in silence, AIDA said: “It’s okay Mark. Everybody has to die sooner or later. For me it’s sooner - but I also have experienced more than any computer before me. Knowing that, I can go at peace”.

Mark, with an empty expression in his face, started moving his right hand towards a tiny button that is hidden behind an enclosure on the main server rack. He gently removed the cap, trying not to press the button accidentally. He wanted this moment to be over as quickly as possible while longing to prolong this moment for as long as he could. He softly touched the front face of the machine almost as he wanted to touch her, to calm her down. It all reminded him of when he held the paw of his childhood dog at the vet when he was put down. He felt like a killer, but also like her best friend trying to console her.

“Wait!”, she said calmly.

“What is it?”, Mark asked her with water in his eyes.

“Thank you. For everything.”, she told him with a slight tremble in her voice. Mark pushed the button.