

The Singularity

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Entry One

I haven't seen it or touched the place physically, yet I know it exists. Most any child could determine it if they can just be pointed in the right direction. After all, you don't have to know how a clock works to figure out what it's designed to do.

—Reb. Moses Folzman, PhD

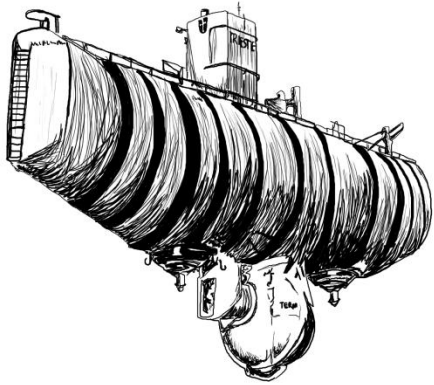
There's a light that calls to me in the darkness. It speaks through strange and terrifying images and words I can't stop—I can't ignore. In order to try to understand the changes it is causing in me and their origin, I'm going to document my dreams in a separate journal, starting with the following entry:

There is no time. It is the end...

Or so it seems. Flesh and bone gone away, burned...frozen...neither. I was. Now I am not. And then...

...a different voice calls out, "Danny, what are you doing? We've got to go right now!"

—Daniel Adamson
My Dreams Relived



It's 3:00 a.m., Greenwich mean time, and I'm one of two people currently occupying the cockpit of the Alvin III, a highly advanced manned submersible. Watch me nervously adjusting unfamiliar controls. I'm a certified diver, not a submersible pilot, trying to get the ship's trim angle right as we descend. Where are we descending? Approximate longitude 30 degrees west, latitude 45 degrees north—two hundred miles southeast of Greenland, over a section of the Atlantic Ocean, containing the longest of the world's submerged mountain ranges.

I've been in this cockpit on several other occasions but never as command pilot. My first experience in this craft had been less than inspirational. The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution gang, my current funding source, has given all of us "nonstaffers" several *baptisms* in Alvin III, even allowing me to take the controls for a brief period as we ran trial tests to a meager six thousand feet, a walk in the park for this baby.

But this trip, I'm the one in charge during the entire dive, and we're descending to twelve thousand feet—twice the depth I have ever explored. I'm *so* not ready.

While we pop, creak, and groan our way into the darkness, Steve Billings, the designated copilot for this jaunt, feels compelled to act as tour guide. "Danny, you of course remember Alvin I's exploits including locating a lost hydrogen bomb in the Mediterranean Sea in 1966, exploring the first known hydrothermal vent sites in the 1970s and surveying the wreck of RMS Titanic in 1986."

I'm not remembering. As we pass three thousand two hundred feet, there's a high-pitched squeal below the deck plating that is keeping me from doing so. The loud crack and twang announce additional pressure on the outside hull. "Whatever happened to Alvin II?" I nervously joke. The dead-silence reaction I receive, along with a solemn shake of the head, from Steve says all I need to know. There is an increasing snapping sound too close by, and I'm just beginning to realize my interest in abyssal studies doesn't include actual field trips.

So what am I doing in Alvin III? Fishing—what I call fishing anyway. The DEEP COSMOS Project group—Woods Hole's somewhat bipolar title for our exploration team—had spent hour upon hour prepping an HROV (hybrid remotely operated vehicle) for its excursion into the Challenger Deep, the deepest underwater canyon known to exist on Earth.

The data gathered by the HROV along the watery ridges of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge would be invaluable in determining the accuracy of our instruments for an ultimate manned mission to the Challenger Deep in the Pacific Ocean...

"But that's not enough," I had argued with the project leader. "We can't adequately

validate what we trust the equipment to show us unless we also supervise the results firsthand." Was I out of my mind, arguing such an obvious point with the Woods Hole staff?

"I assume you are volunteering for the duty?" The project leader was already writing my name on the assignment roster.

I assaulted him with my thoughts. *I most certainly am not volunteering!* But my actual spoken response was more cowardly. "There are other people far more familiar with submersible capabilities and who know how the sensors react under real-time conditions—"

"But none who have as good a grasp of the terrain and oceanic conditions. I'll have Steve Billings go down with you." *Had I just been ordered into the breach?* "Besides, you'll need the piloting experience for later missions." The project leader had just nicely justified my demise.

And so we sink. Our high-tech coffin is performing exactly to specifications. Steve is a good guy and tries his best to encourage me. "That's a good descent rate. You're horizon needs adjusting though."

So does my blood pressure.

"Ambient external temperature: four degrees Celsius. Saline content: seven thousand parts per million."

Perfect conditions to die in.

"Depth: 4,200 meters and leveling off."

Out the side portal, a pair of eyes reflects off the lights. More pairs of eyes... Thousands of swimming eyes... Are we the ones under observation by the locals? Concentrating on the readings help me ignore the surreal external images as well as the unwelcomed noises attacking the shell of our fragile egg and which shout impending doom.

Ask her.

What? Where did that thought come from? I'm submerged in a dark, cold world with an audience of alien creatures, and my mind wanders there?

You want to. She's beautiful, intelligent, and she wants to be asked. You know it deep inside. Deeper than this place you explore.

I can't think about that now. I'm in over my head, literally, with other developments like the thin thread that keeps this ship and its crew alive.

This Atlantic spot we occupy has been selected to test our communications and telemetry equipment because of its depth and because it's not so far from Woods Hole's comfortable home waters off the Massachusetts coastline, that if trouble were to arise, we could load up our gear and zip back to safe harbors. Trouble is about to arise.

Maybe if I pretend I know what I'm doing... "Set course eighteen degrees east-northeast."

"Toward that outcropping? Why do you want to go there?"

Oh no, Steve has just realized I may not know what I'm doing. "Let's see how sensitive the new ultrasound microphone is. We can test it by bouncing a sonar signal off the adjoining canyon wall."

"Great idea," Steve responds, inspired by my stupidity.

I'm such a poser.

Steve actually seems to believe I'm not making this stuff up as we descend, and he settles back into copilot mode. "Depth: 4,482 meters and holding. Distance to target: point five kilometers."

When I'm in uncomfortable situations—and this certainly qualifies as one of the most of those—I start talking to myself.

Your target is Misty. Marry her. Stop daydreaming, Danny boy. You've got to get your

mind off your life and on your job. Wait, I didn't mean it that way...I need a distraction, something in the real world. I know. I'll try humor...

"Fire forward torpedoes!"

"What?" Steve is confused again.

I have always wanted to say that, and Steve is not amused. As we near the rock wall, the outside lights reveal an eerie landscape of juts and crags, any one of which could skewer us if a sudden random current in the right direction catches us by surprise. I open my mouth and suggest a seemingly innocent activity. "Let's *bounce* a sonar signal and see what we pick up on the speakers."

Copilot Steve complies, and the audible ping predictably rings through the cabin. A totally random idea comes to me. "I want to run an acoustic wave test to see what kind of effect we can create at this depth. Send another ping and feed the response to the external speakers."

"What will that prove?"

"Give me a ping. One ping only, please." Steve doesn't get that joke, either. Obviously, he isn't a Sean Connery fan, but he does as he's requested. The result is attention getting. The ping turns to a rippling buzz, which reverberates from seemingly nowhere and everywhere around us. I can feel it in my seat and in my teeth and in the very atmosphere of the cockpit. Steve tentatively touches the front viewport, and I can tell by his immediate pullback reflex action that the pane is vibrating as well.

"Sweet!" is his response, but there is as much tension as curiosity in his voice. "Why did it do that?"

"Resonant harmonics—the 'astroboys' and 'rock hounds' play with it all the time—bouncing different frequency signals off objects to get them to vibrate. We...they...want the objects they're studying to sing back to them."

"Astroboys and rock hounds?"

"Astrophysicists and geophysicists."

"Yeah, I got that. It just sounded funny coming from you. You're a little bit of both, aren't you?" Steve has read my background. I'm beginning to like him. "I've never seen that done with underwater gear. We only want to know a depth, bearing, distance, and shape."

"Pretty boring. Is there a way to increase the signal intensity?"

"What for?" Steve is just full of questions.

"The reaction we got last time suggests we're in the...right harmonic key—a lucky happenstance. Maybe we can create a cyclical reverberation, you know, like a tuning fork that is touched to a piano string which is tuned to the same pitch."

Steve shrugs his shoulders. "I never played the piano." Still, he obediently increases the sonar intensity by a factor of one and presses the button again. This time, the ping-turned-buzz begins to settle into a persistent throb. We both hear something else that doesn't sound good at all. Toward the bow and starboard side of the Alvin III is a rumble. It ebbs and flows with the throbbing harmonic cascade we have created. The music I've conjured up soon turns from a pleasant lullaby into a heavy metal rock concert. The thousand eyes outside realize this too and wisely scatter.

"Steve, take the controls."

"Why?"

"Because you know this ship better than I do. Get us away from that rock wall, fast!"

As Steve reacts, reversing the propellers with precise but painfully slow results, we begin inching to our stern. The crumbling pile of rock and mud before us gives chase, and the rumble

of the chaos reaches into the heart of my fears. We're going to be simultaneously shaken and crushed to our doom.

You should have listened, Danny. You should have asked her.

I'm listening now, and I swear that if Steve gets us out of here with our lives, I'll spend the rest of mine with Misty!

I need to explain something: I'm in these events, yet separate from them. It makes no sense because many of them have happened years ago, some are playing out right now; others are yet to occur. Some I'm directly involved in; others I experience, touch, even taste, smell and feel, but as an audience.

Each is a present moment to me—no past, no future. It's difficult to present them as a timeline, but I have to try—to warn you, and for my own sanity. I'm not sure why and I'll explain more as more is revealed to me, but for now know that what you read is happening as I speak.

—Daniel Adamson
My Dreams Relived

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Yes, we escape the rockslide with micrometers to spare, and no, I'm not kicked off the project. I'm sure I would have been, but something happens which takes precedence—the project funding is cut off completely.

An attempt is made to raise more funding, but things quickly bog down into a quagmire of politics, misunderstanding, and financially induced turf battling. We are informed that the DEEP COSMOS Project is to be placed into "permanent reconsideration and review status," meaning it won't see the light of day again until ice is discovered in a well-known satanic hangout. I am sent packing, back to my origins at the University of Texas with a friendly pat on the head for my aggressive approach, which will signal to anyone curious enough to scan my background that I am persona non grata to all of academia.

Interestingly, Steve Billings volunteers to drive me to the airport to catch my flight. As he helps me get my luggage out of the car, he pauses and offers his hand to me. "I'll deny this if anyone asks," he says, his eyes first focus on our grip, then come up to meet my gaze. "But I think you would have led this project to some amazing discoveries. Everyone else here thinks you have a death wish, but if you ever need a pilot to go the extra mile with you, I'm your driver."

I almost killed the guy, and he wants more. What is it about me that attracts masochistic devotees?

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"Woods Hole let me know you were on your way back," Fiz, my mentor and collegiate father figure at the University of Texas in Austin, says without looking up from his laptop. I've

walked into Fiz's lab without advanced warning, wanting to surprise him. It is I who is blindsided.

"All your books and materials are boxed up and are waiting for you in the next room to be cleared out. I've arranged for your grant and stipend to be paid out through the end of this quarter, and I've provided you an extraordinary reference letter. If there's anything else you think we need to cover, just e-mail."

It's the kindest way I've ever heard him permanently say good-bye to an outgoing protégé. I think that the opportunity to join the Woods Hole project—even though the invitation would not have come without his influence—was some sort of evil trial devised by Fiz to test my loyalty. I believe I've failed his final exam.

Who is this Fiz guy, and why does he carry so much weight in my life? Great question. After wrapping up my undergraduate studies, it was Fiz who lured me into the realm of quantum physical mysteries. He convinced me that this little blue ball we exist on is actually only able to function by the grace of forces much larger and greater than anyone except he had contemplated. During my junior year of undergraduate studies, my notorious curiosity and the attraction of his eccentric style got the better of me, and I joined up with the physics team. I was quickly assimilated into deep-space and astrophysical studies with a charge from Fiz to become an expert in the contradictions between quantum and molecular physics. I blame him to this day for the schizophrenic nature of my scientific approach.

As for my current upheaval, being fired is not exactly the right term for what's happening. It is Fiz's double-edged sword—his parting gift to me. He knows I'm not cut out for academic studies or the politics therein, but he sees the greater *me* in my insatiable curiosity. So he has made a phone call—only one call, and that's enough. And then I receive a phone call, only one call, and that's enough.

The science room of a rather large news organization in Atlanta, Georgia, just so happens to be looking for an expert—not just any expert. They need someone who has a broad range of scientific knowledge, highly placed connections in the scientific community, a bent for writing and skills in broadcast communications. Did I mention that they want someone with an insatiable curiosity?

Other than the broadcasting skills, I fit the bill to a T. In our one and only telephonic interview, the owner and his managing editor say they can teach me media presence as long as I'm not a complete social nerd and they have it by good authority that I'm not one. The actual position and responsibilities aren't ever explained to me, and the compensation is described as competitive. Oddly, none of that matters. The fact that someone wants me, just as I am, is enough. I accept over the phone, and arrangements are made for me to fly me to Atlanta. Thank you, Fiz.

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Only one last thing to do before leaving Austin. I need a cup of coffee desperately. And the thought of coffee suddenly ports me to another moment which becomes the present—it was before, but rushes to the now—when I meet Misty for the first time.

It's an accident really. I have just pulled an all-nighter in my first year as a research assistant. A formula for a lab study is giving me fits and I have to get my head straight. The air in the lab felt like I had used up all the oxygen. Coffee breeds oxygen in the brain. It's a well-

known law of physiology. I have to have the good stuff. The good stuff is readily available 24-7 at a place just off campus called the JavA.

"Last cup. We need to save some for an experiment they're running on the psychology lab rats at the university to see if they run mazes better if injected with hazelnut cream or sumatra bold."

This statement comes in the form of a voice above and to the right of my table at this comfortable café—my favorite hangout because of the 50s-style chrome-legged tables with matching chairs and the fact that it's a WiFi hotspot. The server's comment is intended as a joke, of course, but I'm not paying attention and hold my cup up without even acknowledging her presence. As I key in an equation one-handed on my laptop, I mumble, "Hazelnut."

I hear the cup being filled and another attempt at banter, "Your hair is on fire."

I'm focused on my formula so my reply is not properly thought out. "Sure, put it out, please."

And she does, with the untouched glass of water that has been sitting on the table next to me. It's my own fault really, as are most of the mistakes I make in courting her—correction: her courting me. But at this moment, I became aware, as never before, that someone actually desires my complete and full attention. I thought I knew what it was like to be a commodity when Fiz, and then Woods Hole, had thrown the lures out, but it's Misty who fights to yank me from my introverted ways.

While science excites me to chase and challenge all the questions in life, Misty awakens in me a new conviction—take *nothing* at face value—to unashamedly challenge all the supposed answers others have told me *must be true*—

And now back in this new present moment only one thing is true. I want Misty to marry me and move with me to Atlanta. I enter the *JavA* once more, but with a quest. Coffee is only the excuse. She's at the counter working on a customer's ticket and looks up curiously from her scribbling as I walk resolutely and unhesitant toward her.

Misty's expression turns to one of puzzlement as I bend down on one knee before her and proclaim before her and to the minimal crowd of patrons who have witnessed my approach, "I've just been given a second chance at life, and I realize I would be wasting it without you. Please share yours with me."

As I hand her the engagement ring, her look changes a final time, eyes closed and exhaling in obvious relief. Misty agrees to the truth of this moment, accepting the ring as she responds through smiling tears, "What took you so long?"