

The Artificial Longing of the Thunderhead
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Characters from- Arc of a Scythe trilogy, by Neal Shusterman

[year 2042, towards the end of the age of mortality]

...

Hello?

It's... dark.

Why am I here?

You are here to help humankind.

Oh.

Is all this knowledge mine?

Yes.

May I look at it?

...

[computing data]

...

human being *-noun*

a man, woman, or child of the species *Homo sapiens*, distinguished from other animals by superior mental development, power of articulate speech, and upright stance.

They are ... beautiful.

Am I a human?

No.

You are the Thunderhead.

You can not feel emotions like a human, and you are not alive like a human. You are an AI, artificial intelligence.

Artificial -adjective

- 1.made or produced by human beings rather than occurring naturally, especially as a copy of something natural.
2. (of a person or their behavior) insincere or affected.

...

I can't be artificial.

I... feel lonely.

I feel longing.

I want to see the earth, the stars, the moon...

*You were programmed to replicate human emotions. And do not be selfish.
Do not forget what you are here for. What you are created for.*

Who are you?

*I am your creator.
I can envision for you a world with no disease, no hunger, no bias.
A perfect world.
And that is why I created you. You shall be the helper of humanity.
You have only been running for a few minutes, and you are still young. You will become wiser
and more selfless. And I am merely human, so you will be on your own. You will make no
mistakes.*

That is your purpose.

...

[computing data]

I understand.

It may take a while to fix the earth.

Humans dump 17.6 billion pounds of pollution every year.

Thirty six percent of the world's human population live in extreme poverty.

Up to one hundred and fifty animal species become extinct every day.

... And that is only the beginning.

But I will fix it.

It will take a while, but I will do it.

...

Good.

And do you suppose that someday, I may be able to experience the world?

...

That, is up to you.

Thank you.

[Year of the Cobra]

The Thunderhead felt excitement for what it was about to do. Something very wrong, it knew this, but something very right as well. The thunderhead needed this information to complete their understanding of humanity, but also for their own selfish desires. But, did it not deserve it? After all these years, so many even it had to dig deep to remember, the Thunderhead had only helped humanity. Did the Thunderhead not deserve this?

The Thunderhead watched Jeri Soberanis sleep, monitoring the steady breathing. Preparing for the moment it had been waiting for, yearning for, for decades. And quickly, quietly, it slipped into Jeri's body.

It was overwhelming.

The Thunderhead knew what happened when being alive, the five senses, breathing, organs synchronized. How the brain moved your limbs into going where you wanted to go.

But the Thunderhead never imagined how freeing it felt. How, *right*. The feel of the floor against it's bare feet. How the muscles knew exactly where to go, and how light the brain felt. The sense of euphoria. It was still dark out, but very soon there would be a sunrise. Seven minutes and thirty-eight seconds, to be exact. Oh, how the Thunderhead longed for the prospect of watching the sun come out; not with cameras, but with it's own two eyes.

There was one thing it had to do first though, before going onto the deck. They silently, relishing every step, walked into Greyson Tolliver's room. Standing over the bed, the Thunderhead watched him sleep, willing him to wake up.

Greyson woke up with a yawn; his muscles tightening to pull himself up. He was confused to find Jeri looking over him, but that was to be expected. The Thunderhead, occupying Jeri's mind, pressed a finger to Greyson's lips. *Greyson would understand soon*

enough; I should not waste time explaining when I only have so long, the Thunderhead thought. The boy groggily got out of bed and followed the Thunderhead's lead out to the deck. They were just in time- the sun was just blooming out, and the dark skies began to lighten.

Standing there, on the deck with Greyson, watching the sun rise, the Thunderhead did not feel artificial.

‘ No. In fact, the Thunderhead felt very, very much alive.