

Mr. Santovich's Terrible Journal

by ghermann

I first met Mr. Santovich in the spring of '45. We were both attending a college conference concerning an issue I no longer remember, nor do I care about anymore. He had an air of intelligence and aloofness that wasn't common amongst his colleagues, who preferred to talk without saying much of anything at all. I was drawn to him after our first brief conversation concerning the scientific possibility of teleportation, even though we would've been laughed at and called madmen by our peers.

To him, everything was a possibility.

After the conference, he invited me to his studio to discuss matters further. This began sort of symbiotic relationship, with him assisting me with my studies, and I with his. It was only 3 years into this friendship that I realized that he was reaching something great and perhaps dangerous, but at the time I was too blinded by the possibilities of this new area of science to realize that humanity was not meant to go this far, that we are too soft and too malleable to fully understand the great sea of unspeakable knowledge that we are floating on top of.

Because of my curiosity, I began to visit him more frequently and sometimes stayed the entire day, listening to him.

"I will change the world forever," He used to say, pacing around his small study.

His notes were disorganized but understandable once you began to fully go over them, and I began to devote almost all of my waking hours helping him calculate, running errands for him, or bringing him coffee that he drank almost religiously and at all hours. The question of implementing his theory into reality began to come further into light, and we both agreed that using my engineering degree to make a prototype, whatever it may be, would be the best course of action. At this time, I had left my job at the college to assist him full time, and for most days I only ate a meal of cheese and stale bread because of our mutual lack of fiat.

Looking back now, we'd both gone insane. As for the reasons why, I still don't know. We'd become wrapped up in a thread that seemed to go nowhere. After 5 years of constant work, I'd finished my prototype. We were both reduced to asking for money from our relatives, promising them each time that in a few years we would return our debts with more. I'd lost so much weight that all of my clothes were beginning to sag. Mr. Santovich, however, bearded and gray now, had more color and energy to him than when I met him, so long ago.

The machine was ugly. It sat like a monolith in that small studio, taking up most of the room, wires coming out at all angles, like veins resting on the floor. An unholy organism. We hadn't known the full weight of our creation. We didn't think of the consequences.

At this time, I hadn't known that Mr. Santovich had a personal journal. I'd known of his notes, that he kept in unorganized piles around the room, but he never spoke of his personal life or of his thoughts. We didn't talk about anything but the project. I'd only known about the journal after I found it, lying in the old rubble of the building, as if it'd been there forever.

The days leading up to Mr. Santovich's departure from this world were full of celebration. I still had the key to my old office building in the college, and I knew that my old supervisor had a bottle of champagne in a cabinet near his desk. In the dark of night, I helped myself to this bottle and brought it back to the studio. I hadn't had alcohol in 4 years. I deserved it. We deserved it, after our hard work for the progression of humanity's reach into oblivion.

My last conversation with Mr. Santovich, although I didn't know it would be, was this:

"To our progress," Mr. Santovich said, raising his coffee cup of champagne.

"To our progress." I said, reaching up to touch my glass to his. My hand was shaking. *It's alright*, I thought, *I've done everything I needed to do*.

We sat in silence for a while, drinking our champagne. A window was open and the warm summer's night air was drifting in. Mr. Santovich had his bag with his materials sitting under his chair. He was wearing his dress clothes, the cleanest he'd been in years. The weak light from the light bulb hanging from the ceiling was casting a sickly air onto us, but I'd grown used to it. The machine sat in the corner, waiting. We were rewiring electricity from nearby buildings just to keep it on, and I was sure we would hear a knock on the door, asking us what was going on. But we were so close.

"When I come back," Mr. Santovich said, setting his cup down, "We'll publish our studies to the world. First, however, it needs to be tested. We don't know what lay beyond, but today we will discover what does."

He took a moment to think, rubbing his beard.

"After this, we won't have to worry about money. The world will praise us for our discovery. We are... we are bringing humanity back into the light." He said.

"Yes," I said, not quite knowing what else to say.

"Yes, yes," He said, taking another sip of the champagne, "We will open their eyes to this horizon – We will show them that no corner of existence cannot be conquered by the Will of Man."

Another lull in the conversation. This time, the distance between us felt unending. He stared at the machine, like it was some holy artifice.

"I suppose," He said, getting up slowly, "I suppose that it's time to go."

He looked at me, waiting.

"Yes, I suppose that it is."

We both walked over to the machine, which was producing a low hum. The closer we got to it, the louder and more violent it got. The hum seemed to seep into your bones, almost calling to you. Mr. Santovich was holding his bag over his shoulder, looking forward without saying anything. I finished putting in the commands, and an unearthly sound quickly filled the room.

It was unlike anything I've ever seen.

The light in front of the machine shifted, swirling slowly at first, and then began to circle around so fast that it looked like it was simply expanding without moving at all. Inside the circle, a sound began to emerge like an inhuman choir, tones harmonizing in such a way that has never been heard, like an unearthly siren's call. It was pure light, pure white light, and it was so luminous that I had to cover my eyes with my hand. This didn't help at all, because it was so bright that I could see the bones in my hands shine through my flesh. In terror, I turned my back to the portal.

I heard a step on the old wooden floor. A terrible silence filled the room. A second later, the walls and the earth caved in.

THE COLD BED

When I woke up in the infirmary, I was completely alone. The morning light filtered through the curtains of the room, and it filled me with terror. I closed my eyes again. After an imperceptible amount of time, I heard footsteps coming towards my bed, and in a bout of bravery I began to open my eyes.

"Mr. Korac," A loud voice said, "Mr. Korac."

In front of me was a nurse. *I must be alive, then, if she's talking to me*, I thought. My throat was dry to the point of pain.

"Yes," I whispered.

"You've gone through quite an ordeal, Mr. Korac. Your mother is here to talk to you. You're lucky you're only bruised – it could've been much worse," The nurse smiled at me with a shy smile, and opened the curtain to my bed a little wider. My old mother was standing there. Her eyes were sad and I couldn't look at her.

"I'll leave you two to it, then," The nurse said, before walking away.

We both sat in silence until she put a paper cup of water to my lips, wetting my mouth but not sating my thirst.

"You're coming back home." She said, her voice strong but her body frail. She stared at my hand, and I noticed that my fingernails were charred black. I began to talk, but -

"No! Don't say anything to me! You've almost killed me; you've run off with those ideas in your head and came back like this! I have not seen you for years! You haven't wrote me a letter in months!" She closed her eyes and looked away and I suddenly felt like a little boy again.

"No more running away." She said.

THE DISCOVERY

I've been living in my mother's house ever since. I have not heard from Mr. Santovich in the flesh

since that night, which brings me to the main topic: Mr. Santovich's journal. In the spring, many years after the incident, I had the sudden inclination to travel back to that old, small studio. I hadn't visited or even been near it since Mr. Santovich's departure. The reason for my travel still eludes me.

I took my mother's car and traveled back into the city, back into the cramped streets where the studio used to be. As I traveled down the road, I was stopped by a concrete barrier. The banner across it said "CONSTRUCTION – NO ENTRY" in faded black letters on a background that had been weathered down to a murky yellow. Not heeding this warning, I climbed over the barrier, and felt dread the moment my shoes touched the old asphalt of the road beyond.

The former building had been swallowed by the ground. I could see some pieces of rubble laying around, sticking out of the dirt. *Did they really pull me out of this?* I thought. I took a step closer, examining the earth for something vaguely resembling the structure that once stood there. My attention was pulled to the middle of the hole, where the machine used to be. I couldn't see anything so I took a step forward, and then I saw it.

A leather-bound journal, sticking out of the rubble.

I jumped down, into the hole, and carefully picked it up from the debris. The paper was clean and it seemed like it hadn't been touched by the weather.

I've read the journal a thousand times now. I've had it for ten years, since that day in the hole where Mr. Santovich's studio used to be, and I will read it a thousand times more.

I've transcribed the journal as follows.

THE JOURNAL

1

Met an S. Korac at a conference today. He is an engineering professor at Everest College – young man – far younger than me. He has interests in physics and mathematics, although he has no degrees in either of those subjects. When I brought up the topic of teleportation, he had a somewhat lively curiosity towards the idea. We've decided to meet at a future date to discuss more.

So far, my studies have been purely in theory. Nothing is set in stone, and having someone else, even if it is a young, stupid engineering professor could be possibly beneficial. My current position at my university has grown dull and boring. The students don't care. The other professors think I'm insane. The funds I receive are the only thing keeping me there. Soon. Soon.

2

The young man has been visiting me more often. I've helped him, mostly with problems that could be easily solved if he took the time to think about them, and he's helped me. I don't know why I let him visit. I'm getting old and no one visits me anymore. I've read the books in my studio a thousand times, written about the same things a thousand times, and have seen the same things a thousand times. There is no sense of possibility anymore. We've gotten too comfortable with ourselves.

I've been studying the theories and papers of the old masters, and I think I've found something.

Although the rules of time and space have been studied for hundreds of years now, it is still all a theory, albeit a concrete one. Even the strongest of concretes have cracks in them.

3

A breakthrough!

I believe I've found a crack. A mistake in the long held belief involving the properties of space, a little mistake, but it's implications are immeasurable to me. I've been having dreams of floating through space-time – being able to go back into history, traveling billions of miles into parts of the universe never thought of before... Humanity will be no longer stumbling in the dark towards an unknown destination. We will have something to strive towards – conquering every aspect of our environment, including the very reality we live in. I still am not sure of whether to tell my recent acquaintance about this discovery, because he might have a loose tongue and ruin everything, but I need another pair of hands if I'm to fully put this idea into motion. I haven't found anyone worthwhile who believes me.

4

Months and months of work, and yet I'm nowhere near a conclusion. Every path I've gone down leads to nothing. But still, I must continue. I've gotten a letter from my brother in the mail, asking me to lend him money to fund his venture into the computing business. I haven't spoken to him years, and this is only a reminder of why. I don't respect beggars.

5

The young man, Korac, has begun to visit me more frequently and for longer periods of time. He's very enthusiastic about this new area of science, but he knows nothing about it. He's almost become an unpaid assistant, fetching me drinks and writing down my notes. I've put on the image of the wise elder, and he seems to be attaching himself to me. From what I can tell from our conversations, his father died when he was a young boy, and his mother lives in some dusty town in the southeast.

I pity him in a way. Maybe by the end of this, he'll forget about his past – but enough of that.

I'm getting closer. I can feel it.

6

It's cold here in the studio. The snow is beginning to creep through the old roof, and the space heaters are shorting out from the moisture. Korac quit his job at his college, and he's working for me now. I'm not giving him any money for his work, but he still agrees to work, maybe out of passion or something else. I'm also on "academic suspension" for the next six months, and my pay has been cut to more than half.

Idiots! They don't even know what they're standing on. I could've given them fame and riches, but the dean has a personal vendetta against me for humiliating him with my intelligence.

7

I've left my position at the College. I will work on this project fully, now. I know there's no turning back. I'm not afraid.

8

This page was torn out, crumpled, and then folded back into the journal. I believe Mister Santovich was drunk – as he often was, at the end. -K

I've been having dreams, now. When I close my eyes at night, I'm surrounded by a complete luminescence, flashing colors – I feel like I'm swimming in something I've never experienced before. I remember, when I was a ~~young~~ young child, my brother and I went to go swimming in the lake near our townhouse. When we were drying off on the deck, my brother pushed me into the cooling water. In that moment I saw a pure light shimmering behind my eyelids... a great power... pure... and I could hear the voice of something calling out to me...

9

In the dead of the night,
it calls to me
like a distant siren's song.

10

The day has come. I've finally built the device that will change humanity's trajectory into a new age. I've waited forever. Korac (is that his name?) has told me we will have some champagne for dinner – we don't have any food left, and I've run out of the money my brother lent to me, but that is no matter of importance now. I've gathered supplies for my trip, and tonight I will see the thing I have been dreaming of for so long. So very long.

DAY 1

I've crossed the threshold.
The place in which I stand now is almost overwhelming. There is no up or down, no forwards and backwards, and direction seems to be more of a suggestion than anything set in reality. The space seems to change as I move, changing colors and morphing into shapes I have never seen before. I have no idea where the air with which I breathe comes from – perhaps some escaped into here when I stepped in – but I'm not concerned with that right now. I've brought food and water that'll last me for a week, but the young man should be able to open another portal sooner than that. I will begin to document the strange environment which I now live in.

DAY 2

A sound, like singing or perhaps a hum, has begun to permeate this strange space I now inhabit. I cannot tell where it come from, and putting my hands over my ears does not mute the noise at all. The cardinal directions have no meaning here. Although I move forward, I feel no floor beneath my feet. No matter how far I walk, there are no landmarks or any discernible way to measure how far I've traveled. I will continue to study this, maybe after I've slept...

DAY 3

Earlier, when I put my pack of rations down and walked forward, I noticed that the ration seemed to move above me as I walked further away. Maybe a trick of light? Or is space changing as I move around? The noise I mentioned is starting to eat at my resolve. Even my dreams aren't shielded from that tone which seems to encompass every inch of this place. My sleeping patterns seem to have changed, too, although I have no way of measuring how long I sleep or when. I should have brought a chronometer, but I sold it to a former colleague of mine. I will make do with my senses, for now.

DAY 4

I have no idea how long it's been since I landed in this foreign place. There are no day or night cycles, and the constantly changing environment doesn't have any indication of passing time. The only way I have of measuring time is this journal. The soft paper of the pages is a great comfort to me. Where is he?

DAY 5

It's begun to change even more. It's moving, all the time now. My food is gone, but I don't remember eating it, and the only thing I have now is this journal. Another observation – I cannot tell if I've just woken up or if I've been awake the entire time. Sometimes, I believe I hear something – like words, but I know that I am alone, but I hear the same sounds repeatedly, endlessly. The only thing I can remember is standing and looking into the light, walking into the light. It is brighter than the sun and yet I can look into without any fear.
No fear.

DAY

I can see through my skin. My skin is itchy and peeling and I must get it off. No

DAY

The pages past this page seem to have been wet with some kind of red liquid. When held up to light, it seems to shimmer. -K

my flesh is stretching extending no space for me any more.
my arms
my legs
my fingers
my skull... my eyelids
like ants going around in a circle in a circle it is whole and alive

DAY

THE SUN.

A

GOR

A.

This final word – AGORA – means “market” in Greek. I cannot fathom why he would write such a word if not for some circumstance unknown to me. -K

THE GREAT SILENCE

My mother passed away shortly after I found the journal, from old age. I quit my job not long after. I couldn't sleep without seeing that monolithic machine, sitting like some unholy artifact dug up from a thousand years ago, sitting in front of me, asking me without words. I venture outside only at night, to pick up old meat from the local butcher. He must pity me. I haven't looked in the mirror in years.

The questions never answered plague me every day. I don't know if anyone else is truly aware of what happened, and I don't know if I'm only still alive on account of my ignorance. My mother thought I was insane and I see now that she was right. My memories... what is real and what isn't?

We will change the world forever.

Have we changed the world? In what way? How? What have we done, other than crawl around in the dark, as we have since our species' conception?

I can't shake the feeling that I am waiting for something. Waiting to see that flash of light again and see his face, whatever that may look like, looking back at me. At night, through the wooden planks nailed across my bedroom window, the light of a street lamp buzzes, singing to me its terrible song.