

THE AFRICAN GOLD TRILOGY

BOOK ONE



RESONANCE

Some minds were not born. They were tuned.

ANDRIES J. GREYLING

ARJUNA BADGER PRESS

RESONANCE

Uchungechunge lwe-African Gold • Incwadi Yokuqala

Andries J. Greyling

RESONANCE

Ilungelo lokushicilela © 2026 Andries J. Greyling. Wonke amalungelo agodliwe.

Lokhu kungumsebenzi wokuqamba. Amagama, abalingiswa, izindawo, kanye nezigameko kungumkhiqizo wamacebo engqondo yombhali noma kusetshenziswa ngokuqanjwa. Noma yikuphi ukufana nabantu bangempela, abaphilayo noma abafileyo, izigameko, noma izindawo kuyingozi nje yamathuba. Izindawo zangempela, amasiko omlando, kanye nezinkomba zesayensi nezemivubukulo kusetshenziswa kumongo woqanjiwe.

Kushicilelwe yi-House of Greyling.

ISBN: --_--_ (inikezwa lapho kuphrintwa)

Per Ardua ad Magnum.

Okuka-Avery.

Owangifundisa ukukhumula izibuko zami, ngiguqe ngifinyelele ebusweni bakho, ngikubheke emehlweni, futhi ngikubone *ngokweqiniso* — nokukhuluma nomntwana oneminyaka emihlanu njengomuntu olalelwayo, okuyilona kanye into esibhekene nayo sonke kodwa esivame ukuyiphiwa kancane kangaka. Wangifundisa ukuthi isidingo

esibhekene namandla siyisidingo esenqatshelweyo, nokuthi indlela engenayo ayisiyo neze indlela ongasunduza ngayo; ukuthi abanamandla akumelwe ukuba bagolozele abancane. Singamadoda amakhulu, futhi siyakhohlwa ukuthi sisebenzisa imizimba eyakhelwe ukuvikela njengemizimba esabisayo — futhi siyiqondisa, singahlosile, kubantu kanye esingafela bona ngokuphazima kweso. Wangelapha kulokho. Yonke into ethambile kulezi zincwadi — indoda engaphihliza ikamelo kodwa ekhetha esikhundleni salokho ukulibona; *ngiyakubona* okushiwo kuze kusho ukuthi *uphephile* — wangifundisa kuqala wena, ngezandla zakho ezincane ezithukuthele kodwa ezithambile.

Ukhanya ngokungalinganiseki, futhi umnene kuzo zonke izilwane, futhi uyazithanda izinto zebutho, izinto zokusinda, ukwazi-ukwenza-into-iphumelele. Ngakho-ke le yeyakho, futhi iphethe okuwukuphela kobubutho enginakho ukukudlulisela:

Yiba ngongesabi njenge-African honey badger — incane, futhi ingesabi lutho egcekeni le-veld; iyamba, iyagqokeza, ayidedeli. Vele usuyilokho. Mina ngikubhale phansi nje.

Umhlaba Uyakhumbula

Ngaphambi kokuba abantu baphathe amapiki, kwakukhona inxeba kuphela.

Ucezu lohlelo lwelanga lwakuqala lwagijimela emhlabeni, lushayisana nalokho okwakuzoba yi-Vredefort dome. Inhlamvu yasemkhathini, ububanzi obungamakhilomitha ayishumi nanhlanu, isika emkhathini ngokushesha okudlula umcabango. Yashayisa ngamandla angaphezu kokuqonda komuntu, igubha umgodini ongangezwe elincane. Ngaleso sikhathi, yabhoboza uqweqwe lomhlaba, ithumela idwala elincibilikile liphahluka emoyeni njengenqindi eliphuma eqhweni.

Umhlaba awuzange usinde kuleso shayisana. Waguquka. Lokho okwavela ekujuleni, kwapholile kwaqhekeka kwephuca iminyaka eyizinkulungwane, kwaba yinto entsha ngokuphelele. Ukushayisana kwakuphethe idwala elijulile kwaliqondisa ngasophezulu, kwacijisa imithambo eyayingcwatshiwe kwadalula ingcebo eyayifihliwe kusukela umhlaba usancibilika. Igolide lalilele emithanjeni emincane kuyo yonke i-Witwatersrand Basin, lithandelene namatshana e-quartz, lacindezela lashiswa izikhathi ezingapheli ngaphambi kokuba ukushayisa kuwaqhuzule, ekugcineni kuwanikele ekukhanyeni.

Umhlaba wawuthwele izibazi zawo emqansweni, ezintatshaneni eziyingxenye yendingilizi ezigobele ngaphesheya kwe-highveld njengomphetho wensimbi eshayiweyo. Yima kulowo mphetho ekuseni, idwala libe libanda ngaphansi kwentende yakho, linonqolokela nothuli olubomvu, umoya ushaya usuka endaweni ephakeme uwomile njen-gomlotha. Ndawana thile ngaphesheya kotsani, ithekwane likhala kanye, lithule. Izazi zomhlaba zafika kamuva, ziwuqamba ziwudwebela udlame lwawo, kodwa udlame lwabambelela noma kunjalo. Iz-

ibazi azidingi ofakazi.

Kwase kufika imvula, nemifula ehambisayo, notshani, futhi izikhathi ezingapheli akukho okwakuhamba lapha okwakuqonda lokho okwakulele ngaphansi. Igolide lahlala lithulile, lingcwatshwe ekujuleni.

Kwase kufika abantu.

Abantu bafika ngenxa yensimbi. Bafika kuqala namapiki, base befika nomusi, kwalandela imishini eyayikwazi ukudla imitha yedwala ngehora ngaphandle kokukhathala noma imibuzo. Bathola ukuthi imithambo igxile ekujuleni, ijule kunalokho noma ubani ayekucabangile, ishona iqhela endingilizini yokushayisana ngegumbi umhlaba owawulibekile eminyakeni eyizigidigidi ezimbili ngaphambili. Ngakho bayilandela behla, bemisa imibhoshongo yensimbi ngaphezu kwamakhanda emigodi, behlisa amakheji emnyameni, behlela ekujuleni lapho ingcebo yayilele khona, futhi lapho kwakumele baye khona.

Amakhilomitha amathathu phansi, idwala liyashisa. Ukushisa komhlaba kucindezela kuvela phansi, kanti isisindo sakho konke okungaphezulu siyacindezela, kwenze itshe libubule. Ngezinye izikhathi, ngaphandle kwesexwayiso, livaleke futhi.

Abasebenzi basemgodini bafunda ingozi ngendlela kuphela umhlaba owake wafundisa ngayo noma yini: ngokuthatha. Bafunda ukulalela idwala, ukuzwa ukuzamazama okuncane okwandulela okukhulu, ukufunda uthuli emoyeni nesimo sezigodo. Abahle bathuthukisa umuzwa wesithupha okwakungekho mshini owawungafana nawo, ukwazi okwakusemizimbeni yabo, ezintendeni zezinyawo zabo, emuva kwezintamo zabo. Inani lalihlala lifana.

Izizukulwane zehla zenyuka. Izizukulwane zehla azabuya.

Ingcebo yageleza yenyukela phezulu, iphuma emnyameni ingena ekukhanyeni kwasemini, kude nabasebenzi basemgodini ababengeke bayibone. Ingozi yahlala phansi, ifa lidluliselwa kuyise liya endodaneni kanye namaqebelengwane, ukukhwehlela, nolwazi olukhethekile lokuthi itshe livaleka kanjani uma lifuna. Ukucindezela kwaba yingcebo. Ukucindezela kwaba ukufa. Igolide lalilele lapho

ingozi yayikhona.

Imigodi yayinamagama, yayiqanjwe ngokucacile ukuze amagama akhulunyeka etafuleni lasekhishini. I-Iron Ridge yayingenye yawo. Umsebenzi ojulile, omdala, owamba ngasonqenqemeni olugobile lwendingilizi yokushayisana lapho imithambo yayicebile inobungozi, futhi wawuthathile isabelo sawo, njengoba wonke umgodi ojulile wenza.

Kamuva, umfana.

Umfana wavuswa yiphunga lika-mealie porridge nezwi likanina elaliqhamuka egumbini elilandelayo, umbhoshongo wehedigiya ujamile ngaphezu kwezwe lezimayini njengonogada owayehlale eqaphile. Wayakha imishini emincane ngewaya nethini othulini lwegceke, futhi wayakha ngokucophelela.

Izithunzi zakusihlwa zajula ngaphezu kwe-highveld njengoba unina womfana embiza, izwi lakhe lenanela ngaphesheya kwegceke. Waphakamisa amehlo emsebenzini wakhe, ebala amadoda njengoba ebuya behedigiya. Wawabala kabili. Ukubala kwesibili kwaphuma kufana nokokuqala—kunye okushodayo.

Umfana wagobela phezu kwesidalwa sakhe sakamuva, imoto encane yokusunduza eyenziwe ngewaya. Yayakhiwe ngokweqile, ilingiswe ngamaloli amakhulu ezimayini ayebhodla edabula isigodi. Amasondo ethini ahweba njengoba ewaphendula, izandla zakhe zimnyama othulini, wazesula ezikhindini zakhe engaphakamisi amehlo. Washelela amalunga ensimbi, eqinisekisa ukuthi yonke into ilungile ngempela. Umhlaba owawumzungezile wancipha njengoba egxila eminingwaneni ehlanganisene.

“Arin!” Izwi likanina ladabula ovivini. “Ukudla kwakusihlwa.”

“Sengiyeza.” Amehlo akhe ahlala emsebenzini wakhe. Akazange anyakaze.

Wabuka umbhoshongo wehedigiya, isakhiwo sensimbi simile ngokucacile esibhakabhakeni esijulayo. Lokho okwakulele ngaphansi, nokuthi ngamuphi kulawo madoda ayehla aye kuwo umhlaba owawuzonquma ukuwugcina.

Wanikina ikhanda lakhe wagobela futhi emasondweni.

Khona-ke umhlaba wakhuluma. Ukududuma kwavela emgodini, kwaphuma ezintendeni zezinyawo zakhe, kwaphuma emasondweni ethini ngaphansi kwezandla zakhe—kujulile, kude phansi, kuqhubeka ngemva kokuba esefuna ukuthi kume.

Imoto Yocingo Eyihlohlwayo

Amasondo ayengalungile.

U-Arin wakuzwa, ukulunyazwa ngemuva kwamehlo akhe, isasasa elalifuna ukuxazululwa. Ithini lazungeza phezu kwemiphetho yocingo, lintenga ngendlela encane kangangokuthi yayingeke ibonwe ngomunye umuntu. Abanye abafana babegijimisa izimoto zabo ezihlohlwayo zehla emgwaqweni wenhlabathi, ziwa zibhuqana ngenhleko, kodwa hhayi u-Arin.

Yena wayenendaba.

Ehlezi phansi enhlabathini eqamele imilenze, ilanga lasekuseni lisindiwe emhlane wakhe, waphakamisela i-axle yangaphambili ekukhanyeni. Isondo lazungeza, lase lintenga. Ecindezela isithupha sakhe emphethweni, wezwa lapho isivalo singazange sihlale khona kahle, sukuma kancane.

Kwakungesona isondo eyinkinga. Kwakuyindawo lapho sihlala khona. Wayegobise ucingo ukuze lubambe isivalo, kodwa wakwenza ngokuzwa nje, futhi ukuzwa kwakungafani nokuqonda. Imbobu yesivalo yayingahlali phakathi nendawo; lazungeza okwento eyinyonga.

Wayedinga ukuthi ligijime njengoba kugijima amaloli.

Wayewabukile lawo maloli kusukela aqala ukukhumbula, elengisa isilevu sakhe phezu kwesigxobo socingo emaphethelweni egceke. Amaloli amakhulu aphuzi ayegqoba umgwaqo wemayini emaqamuka kwentathakusa, izibani zawo ziklebhula ubumnyama, izindawo zawo zogibe zigcwele amatshe aqhekekile. Amasondo awo ayengantengi nakanye, ngisho noma elayishiwe edlula ezindaweni ezimbi kakhulu

zomgwaqo. Lawo masondo ayegijima eqondile. Amadoda awakha enza isiqiniseko sokuthi kunjalo.

U-Arin walukhumula ucingo isivalo. Wathola indawo ephakathi nendawo ngesihloko sesipikili, wayiphawula, waqala futhi.

Ngemuva kwakhe, igceke lehlela phansi liya emgwaqweni wenhlambathi. Ngalé kwawo, umhlaba wawehlela esigodini eside esinsundu lapho izinkomo zazidla khona utshani. Encane kodwa esabekayo, indawo ephezulu yomshini wemayini, i-headgear, yayime imi phezu kwenkungu yasekuseni: ucingo lwensimbi olwelukene, kunesondo phezulu lizungeza bese lima, lizungeze futhi. U-Arin wayekhumbula ebuza uyise ukuthi imayini ijule kangakanani. Ubuso bukaThemba bunqamukela, ngendlela owawenza ngayo lapho esezokhuluma iqiniso, wathi, *Kujule kunalokho ongakucabanga, mfana. Kujule kunaphansi olwandle.*

U-Arin wakucabanga noma kunjalo. Wayecabanga ngakho cishe zonke izinsuku.

Manje wezwa umnyango wesikrini ukhala ngemuva kwakhe, kulandele umsindo ojwayelekile wezicathulo phezu kwestoep. Uyise wasondela, futhi u-Arin akaphendukanga; wayesazi isisindo saleso sinyathelo. UThemba wehla evarandeni ezicathulweni zakhe zomsebenzi, wama ezinyathelweni ezimbalwa kuye, wema enganyakazi.

U-Arin waqhubeka esebenza.

Wayesebuyisele isivalo ocingweni futhi wayeqondisa ngeso emphethweni, eliphendula kancane, ebuka unqenqema ukuze abone ukweqa. Nampo futhi. Kwasekuncane manje, kodwa kusekhona.

“Uyiphawulile indawo ephakathi nendawo,” kusho uThemba, kungeyona umbuzo.

“Lisantenga.”

Uyise wakhwitsha phansi, isisindo sakhe sintshintsha umoya. Iphunga lensipho namafutha laliyixhumene. Izandla zikaThemba zazinkulu zihlakaniphile, futhi u-Arin wambuka njengoba ethatha i-axle yangaphambili ngaphandle kokucela wayiphakamisela ekukhanyeni, eyiphendula.

“Mm,” kusho uThemba.

Akashongo *Ngiyayibona inkinga*. Akazange anikele ngokuthi *ngizokuhombisa*. Waphendula isondo izikhathi ezimbili futhi, wabe esefinyelela kuphlayisi olalele othulini. Wabeka isihloko ocingweni lomphetho, hhayi esivalweni, ocingweni, wacindezela, lapho nje, egobisa umphetho ngengxenyana.

Waliphakamisa futhi. Walijikijela.

Lagijima liqondile.

Ukungalungi emehlweni ka-Arin kwanyamalala, njengomoya ophefumulelwe ngaphandle. Wabuyisela i-axle, waphendula isondo yena ngokwakhe, lazungeza licwebile, kungekho ukweqa, kungekho ukunyonga, isivalo sigijima sizungeza siyidiski elibushелеlezi.

“Bekungesona isivalo,” kusho u-Arin.

“Cha.”

“Isivalo besiqondile. Umphetho ubungeyona indilinga.”

UThemba akashongo lutho. Wakha uthi lotshani olomile othulini, waluthatha walubeka phakathi kwamazinyo akhe, wagqolozela esigodini, eyeka u-Arin ukuthi afinyelele esiphethweni yena ngokwakhe.

“Ngenze isivalo ukuthi sifane nomphetho obungeyona indilinga,” kusho u-Arin kancane, “ngakho isivalo naso besingeke sibe yindilinga.” Waphendula isondo futhi. “Ingxenyengalungile.”

“Mm.”

Lowo msindo owodwa wezwakala ufudumele. *Yebo. Manje uyabona.*

Ezinye izingane zaziphansi emgwaqweni.

U-Arin wabheka phezulu, wabona ezine noma ezinhlanu zazo. Abafana bakaSizwe, ababili abavela emzini wakwaMkhize, nomncane igama lakhe elalihlala liselela emqondweni wakhe. Babe nezimoto zabo zocingo, ezilula kunezakhe: isikwele socingo, amasondo amane ethini, ushaft omude wokuqondisa wokuhlohla nokuqondisa ngasikhathi sinye, behamba ngemuva kwezimoto zabo sengathi baqondisa amaloli angempela. Babegijimisana manje, bememeza, bekipha uthuli olubomvu. Imoto eyodwa yashayisa

itshe yagingqika, kwaqhuma uhleko, umfana omncane egxuma egijima emva kwayo.

U-Arin wabukela, i-axle yangaphambili isesandleni.

Izimoto zabo zazingakhiwe kahle. Amasondo angaphambili omfana wakwaMkhize ayechabalele phansi ngoba ucingo lwalugobile futhi engazange alulungise, into eyenza imoto izulazule. Kodwa wayebonakala enganaki. Akekho noyedwa wabo owayenaka. Izimoto zazingeyona inhloso kubo; ukugijima kwakuyinhloso, ukumemeza, uthuli.

U-Arin wayengakuqondi lokho. Wayeliqonda isondo elalintenga kodwa hhayi ukuthi kungani umfana angakha into ezulazulayo bese ekhetha ukungayilungisi.

Omunye wabafana bakaSizwe wamemeza enyukela emqansweni, *Arin, woza, iza!* Amazwi akhanyayo elula. Waphakamisa ikhanda lakhe wababuka, wabe esebuyisela amehlo akhe ku-axle esandleni sakhe.

Akahambanga. Wayengahambi ezinsukwini lapho inombolo iphuma yehlulekile ngokukodwa, noma ngabe ubumbuza wayengeke akutshela ukuthi lezi zinto ezimbili bezixhumene, futhi wayezokucasulwa umbuzo. Wayenomthetho ngakho ayengakaze awusho ngezwi: wayengagijimi nabafana kuze kube kuphumile wonke amadoda. Kwakungesilo usizi futhi kwakungelona uvalo. Kwakusondelene nento lapho engakwazi ukudla ukudla uma ukudla kuthintana, noma lapho ayebala izigxobo zocingo eziya emgwaqweni njalo njalo ekuseni futhi inombolo kwakufanele ibe ngamashumi amane nanye, futhi kanye lapho isigxobo sibola umuntu wasidonsa inombolo yaphuma ngamashumi amane futhi yamonakalisa lonke lolo suku ngendlela ayengeke akwazi ukuyivikela komunye umuntu. Umhlaba wawunenombolo efanele yezinto okuwo. Yena wayegcina ibalo. Akekho owayemcelile ukuthi enze njalo.

Waphendula isondo. Liqondile.

Ngibuyele emsebenzini.

Ngemuva kwakhe, uThemba wayembukela, ukuqina kancane komhlathi wakhe, uthi lotshani lusahlezi phakathi kwamazinyo akhe.

Lokho u-Arin ayekwakha kwakungeyona imoto yabafana.

Wayeqale ngedizayini yabafana ezinyangeni ezimbili ezedlule. Ama-sondo amane, isikwele, ushaft. Kwakulungile. Kodwa wabe eseqala ukubona amaphutha, ukungalungi, futhi akakwazanga ukuyeka.

I-axle yangaphambili manje yayiphenduka phezu kwepivot ayilenze ngesipikili eside esashayelwa edlula ezinhlakeni ezimbili ezigoqiwe zethini, ukuze amasondo angaphambili azungeze ndawonye lapho ephendula ushaft, elingisa amaloli amakhulu. Kwathatha imizamo eyishumi nanye. Eyishumi yokuqala yayibambeka noma inokuxega okuningi kakhulu, noma isipikili sasigobile. Eyeshumi nanye yagijima icwebile.

Uhlaka lwalungesona isikwele. Wayelwenze lwaba yibhokisi elide, lincishane ngaphambili libebanzi ngemuva lapho kuhlala khona indawo yogibe, njengamaloli impela. Iloli lithwala isisindo salo ngemuva phezu kwamasondo amakhulu, futhi u-Arin wayelakhe ukuze lenze okufanayo: i-axle yangemuva yaqiniswa ngocingo oluqatha, amasondo angemuva makhulu, izivalo zithathwe ethinini elikhulu likapende esikhundleni samathini amancane ezinhlanzi. Futhi ngaphansi kwe-axle yangemuva, wayedale isici ayeziqhenya ngaso kakhulu futhi ayengakwazi ukusichaza, into abanye abafana ababengenayo nababengeke bayiqonde.

Wayeyenze yagoba.

Wayebukile amaloli edlula umgwaqo omubi lapho linetha, futhi wayebonile ukuthi, lapho isondo elilodwa langemuva ligibela phezu kwetshe, iloli lonke alithuthumelanga liwele njengezimoto zabafana. Isondo elilodwa lakhwela phezulu kuyilapho umzimba uhlala uthe tutu. Amadoda akubiza ngokuthi *suspension*. Wayelizwile leli gama emawekishophu eduze komgodi, lapho uyise ngezinye izikhathi ayemyisa khona ngeMigqibelo: iphunga likadizili nensimbi eshisayo, amadoda emaooverall ayenqekuzela kuThemba kodwa engavamile ukubheka umfana othule eceleni kwakhe. *Suspension*. Iloli lalindlela yokuvumela ingxenye eyodwa ukuthi inyakaze kuyilapho enye ihlala ime.

U-Arin wayengenazo izimpilingi.

Ngakho walengisa i-axle yangemuva ehlakeni esebenzisa amaloop amabili ocingo oluncane, alandiswe kabili ukuze axege, emvumela

ukuthi welule lapho isondo elilodwa likhwela kanti egcina indawo yogibe izinzile. Kwakungekuhle. Ingxenywe embi kunazo zonke yemoto. Amaloo ayelula kakhulu ukwelulwa futhi engabuyeli eqondile, ngakho ngemuva kokugijima kanzima, i-axle yangemuva yayihlala igwegwile, kwakufanele ayigobise ayibuyise. Wayengakaxazululi. Wayeyenze yangaba mbi kakhulu kunokungabi nalutho nje.

Wayikhombisa uyise manje, isondo langaphambili selilungisiwe nokwehluleka kwe-axle yangemuva kuyinkinga enkulu eyayisele.

“Bheka,” kusho u-Arin.

Wabeka imoto endaweni ethe tutu yenhlabathi wacindezela phansi ekhoneni elilodwa lendawo yogibe. I-loop yelula. Isondo lakhwela. Indawo yogibe yacwila, kodwa kancane kunalokho eyayizoba yikho ngaphandle kwe-loop.

“Kufanele ibuye iphakame. Emva kwalokho.” Wayidedela. Ikhona laphakama, kodwa hhayi kuze kuphele; i-loop yase ithathe ukugoba. “Ayibuyi. Ucingo luhlala lugobile.”

UThemba wancika ngaphambili, ecindezela ubukhulu bakhe phansi eceleni kuka-Arin. Wabeka isithupha sakhe esikhulu ekhoneni lendawo yogibe, ebuka i-loop iyelula yehluleke ukubuya.

“Lenziwe ngani i-loop?” wabuza ekugcineni.

“Ucingo.”

“Ucingo lwenzani uma uligobisa ngalé kwalapho lufuna ukuya khona?”

U-Arin wagqolozela i-loop. Wacabanga ngocingo ayelusikile waluligobisa lonke ekuseni, ukuthi luhlala lapho ulubeka khona. Yiso leso isizathu sokuthi wawukwazi ukwakha ngalo nhlobo. Isizathu sokuthi uhlaka lugcine isimo salo. Isizathu sokuthi umphetho, uma usugotshiwe, uhlala ugobile.

“Luhlala,” kusho u-Arin kancane. “Luhlala lugobile. Alubuyi.”

“Mm.”

“Ngakho alukwazi—” Wathikaza. Isimo sakho sasicaca, sikhulu kune-loop. “Ucingo luhle ohlakeni ngoba luhlala. Lubi empilingini ngoba luhlala. Yinto efanayo. Into eyenza lube luhle kokunye yiyo eyenza lube lubi kokunye.”

UThemba wakhapha uthi lotshani emlonyeni wakhe wabheka u-Arin.

“Ufuna into egobayo ibuye,” washo. “Ucingo luyagoba luhlale. Ucela ucingo ukuthi lube yilokho oluyikona.” Wabuyisela uthi, umzuzwana wokuthula welula phakathi kwabo. “Thola into efuna ukubuya.”

U-Arin wahlala nalokho. Ilanga lakhwela phezulu, izithunzi zidon-seleka ngaphansi kohlaka nangaphansi komzimba wakhe ohlobile. Abafana base bedlulele phezu kwesiqongo, ukumemeza kwabo kunyamalala. Wayengaqaphelanga ukungabikho kwabo kuze kube manje.

“Irabha,” kwasho u-Arin ekugcineni.

UThemba akashongo lutho. Kodwa wabe esengena ngezandla ephaketheni lesifuba sama-overall akhe, kancane, wakhapha into encane, wayibeka entendeni yesandla sakhe evulekile. Iqhinga lerabha eselonakele, elinsundu-mpunga, uhlobo olwaluqinisa izin-qumbi zama-waybills emawekishophu. Selichekekile uhhafu, kodwa kuyirabha.

Akazange alinikele. Walibeka othulini phakathi kwabo, njengomuntu obeka ithuluzi phansi komunye ongakakulungeli ukulizuka, wasukuma, amadolo akhe ekhala, isithunzi sakhe siwa side futhi sipholile phezu komfana, imoto, nendawo eshaniwe.

“Uzoyithola lapho iya khona,” washo.

Sekusihlwa.

Uyise, eqinisweni, wayengazange ahlale yonke leyo ntathakusa. Wayengene kanye ukuyolala, ngoba wayesebenza ebusuku ngalelo sonto futhi ukubekezela komfana ngesondo kwakude kunokomuntu okhathele, futhi kwakukhona isikhathi—u-Arin ekhotheme phezu komzamo weshumi nanye wepivot—lapho uThemba wathi, hhayi ngonya kodwa futhi hhayi ngobumnene, *Arin, kuyithini. Akudingeki kube yiperfect*, futhi u-Arin akaphendulanga, uyise wabubula wangena ukuyolala, futhi ukungaphenduli kwahlala phakathi kwabo kumuncu ihora lonke kwaze kwathi uThemba ephuma nobuso obuphumulile nentathakusa ithethelelwa kungekho ngisho oyedwa wabo oyiqambayo. Uyise wayeqinisile ngedwala futhi engalungile ngethini. Kokubili kwakungaba yiqiniso ngomuntu. U-Arin wayengeke aqonde

iminyaka eminingi ukuthi ukungalungi yikona okwakuyifa elaba usizo kakhulu.

U-Arin wezwa ihora ngaphambi kokuba akuqonde ukuthi kungani. Ukukhanya kwase kuntshintshile, futhi uyise wasukuma hhayi ukuze ashiye umsebenzi kodwa ukuze aye emayini. UThemba wabuyela enyukela estoep, futhi u-Arin wezwa ukuhleba kwezwi likanina nokuphendula okuphansi kukayise, amazwi angazamanga ukuwabamba. Khona umnyango wesikrini wakhala futhi, kwalandela izicathulo, uThemba wehla ezitebhisini ngesigqi sakhe esijwayelekile: ilambu liqhotshelwe ebhandeni lakhe, isigqoko esiqinile ngaphansi kwengalo yakhe, ithini lokudla ligcwaliswe nguNomsa, nobuso bakhe buzinza buba yisigqoko esijwayelekile ngaphambi kokuba abhekane nemayini.

U-Arin waliphatha irabha eminweni yakhe. Engqondweni yakhe, wayesexazulule iningi lakho. Irabha lalizungeza ngaphansi kwe-axle, ligoqele uhuku locingo ohlakeni. Lapho isondo likhwela, lalizokwelula, lidonsele isondo phansi emva kwalokho, into eyay-*ifuna* ukubuya, ngendlela ucingo olwalungasoze lwenze ngayo. Wayengakayakhi. Kodwa wayeyibona yakhiwe. Wayeyibona igijima iqondile.

Wabheka phezulu.

Uyise wayemi onyaweni lwezitebhisi, ebheka emuva kuye. Umzuzwana, abahlanga; base bobabili bengamadoda manje, ngisho nomncane, owayengagcwalisi ukuthula ngenxa yakho. UThemba wagqolozela imoto enhlabathini, wabe esebheka irabha esandleni sika-Arin, umhlathi wakhe waxega umzuzwana ngaphambi kokuba uqine futhi.

“Liloli elihle,” kusho uThemba.

“Aliphelele.”

“Cha.” Okunye ukuthula. “Izinto ezinhle azilokothi ziphelele.”

Waphenduka wehla egcekeni eya emgwaqweni, futhi u-Arin wambukela ehamba, indoda enkulu, ecophelelayo, incipha ibhekene nesiqongo sesigodi, futhi ngemuva kwakhe, umbhoshongo wensimbi wama uphakama uphuma enkungwini, isondo lawo lizungeza, lizungeza, lima, lizungeza.

U-Arin walandela isithombe sikayise kwaze kwanyamalala emgwaqweni. Ingcindezi ngemuva kwamehlo akhe yabuya, umuzwa wokungalungi owawungeke umvumele ukuthi aphumule.

Iloli lanyakaza emgwaqweni wemayini phansi le kakhulu, ichashazi eliphuzi elihambisa kancane lishiya uthuli, nomsindo walo wandiza wenyukela esigodini isikhathi eside emva kwalokho, ubuthakathaka. Utshani emaphethelweni endawo eshaniwe baphephetheka emoyeni omncane, base bezinza futhi.

Umhlabathi omubi wenza izinto ezimbi zihluleke ngokushesha. Wayekwazi lokho ngendlela ayelazi ngayo isondo elalisezandleni zakhe—hhayi njengomusho, kodwa njengeqiniso elalisemunweni. Akacabanganga ngoyise eyehlala phakathi kwawo. Wacabanga nge-loop eyayibuya, wahlohla iloli, akacabanga ngoyise, wahlohla iloli.

Wabheka phansi emotweni ehlezi enhlabathini. Erabheni eminweni yakhe, into eyayifuna ukubuya.

Wagobisa ucingo wenza uhuku, waluhlohla irabha, walugogela ngaphansi kwe-axle njengoba ayekucabangile, iminwe yakhe ithuthumela kancane, wayiphoqa ukuthi izinze. Wacindezela phansi ekhoneni lendawo yogibe.

Isondo lakhwela. Irabha lelula.

Wadedela.

Isondo labuya. Irabha lalidonsela phansi, kubushelelezi futhi kuthe tutu, i-axle iqondile, lagingqika. Walihlohla luqela lwenhlabathi eshaniwe, ligibela phezu kwamatshe amancane lingawi, lingazulazuli, amasondo angaphambili azungeza alungelelane nesandla sakhe, ingemuva igibela ithe tutu phezu komhlaba ongalingani, yonke ingxenye ithwele isisindo sayo njengoba kwakuhlosiwe, ngendlela eyayakhiwe ngayo lapho othile enaka into ngayinye.

Wayigijimisa ubude bendawo eshaniwe wayibuyisa. Futhi. Ilanga lashaya entanyeni yakhe, abafana sebehambile phezu kwesiqongo, izinkomo zinyakaza esigodini, isondo lombhoshongo lizungeza, futhi u-Arin Ndlela, owayeneminyaka eyisishiyagalombili futhi ayengakabi nawo amagama akho konke lokhu, wayigijimisa iloli lakhe elihle, eliqondile, eweqa inhlabathi futhi engakwazi ukuyeka, engafuni ukuyeka.

Uthuli lwazinja lapho amasondo edlule khona. Ukukhanya kwakhula, izithunzi zelulekela ezigxobeni zocingo zedlula endaweni eshaniwe, kusihlwa kunwabuzela kupholile kuphuma esigodini. Akazange ayeke kwaze kwathi unina embiza ukuthi angene.

Wayishiya imoto endaweni eshaniwe, ihlezi ithe tutu phezulu kwa-masondo ayo amane aqondile, ikhomba ezansi egcekeni iya emgwaqweni nasembhoshongweni ongalé kwawo, iya endaweni uyise ayehambe kuyo. Yakhiwe kahle. Yakhiwa ukuthi ithwale isisindo phezulu komhlaba omubi.

Wakha into ebuyisa ekhaya.

Into Okungafanele Kube Khona

Isimulation yafa ngo-02:14.

Amehlo ka-Arin ayegxile kugrafu yethonya elaliwohloka kumonitha yesinxele. Imigqa eyisithupha enemibala eyayigcine ukulingana okuntekenteke isikhathi esicishe sibe yimizuzu eyisishiyagalolunye, umsebenzi wakhe omude kakhulu wabusuku, manje yayisifingqene yagxuma, njengesithuthwane esibhalwe ku-cardiogram. Umgqa oluhlaza obuthaka ka-ATLAS wenyukela phezulu, kuyilapho owegolide ka-MERCURY ubaleka uye eceleni, uwubukezela njengesisebenzi esikhuthale esisheshayo kakhulu ukuvuma nomphathi. Umgqa ompunga ongathathi hlangothi ka-JUDGE wacaba ngaphansi kwawo, kanti owoluhlaza ka-MOTHER wakhanya kanye, wagxuma ngokuphelelwa yithemba, base lonke uhlaka luqhumela ebumnyameni. I-terminal yaprinta:

```
[SIM_4471] COHERENCE LOSS-COURT DISSOLUTION AT t=08:51.337
```

U-Arin wahlala eqandelele isikhashana esingangokushaya kwenhliziyo, wabe esezamela ikhofi lakhe, kodwa walifica selibandile. Walisela noma kunjalo.

Izinkulungwane ezine, amakhulu amane namashumi ayisikhombisa nanye. Wayeqale ukubala kwamakhulu amabili, ekholelwa ukuthi inombolo yayinencazelo, ukuthi wayesesondela ekuqondeni ukwehluleka ayezama ukukugwema. Ngesikhathi efinyelela kwinkulungwane, wayeselahlekelwe ithemba ngenani, eqhubeka nokuligcina lihamba njengomgembuli olahlekelwayo ongavumi ukuyeka. Ukuyeka kwakuyochaza ukuvuma ukwehlulwa.

Iwekishopu yayivungazela emaceleni akhe. Umoya wokungenisa wadonsa umoya ophansi, oqhubekayo kuso sonke lesi sikhala esiphakeme sezimboni, ukuhleba okuthambile kukagesi kwama-rig ngaphansi kwawo. Ngaphansi kwakho konke, ukukhala kwesimo sokulinda kwe-cooling loop kaGuardian kwathonya kusuka lapho isudi lalilenga khona endaweni yalo, limnyama futhi likhulu kakhulu, izingcezu zigoqwe zibambelele kuhlaka lwalo njengesilwane esilele esasikhethe, okwamanje, ukuba yimpahla yendlu.

Akaphendukanga ukuze alibuke. Ukulishaya indiva sekube luhlobo lwalo lwengxoxo, isivumelwano esithulile phakathi kwakhe nomshini.

Edonsela ilog ehlulekile phakathi nesiboniso, waqala ukufunda.

Noma ngubani angaqhuba i-simulation abone ukuthi iyaphuka. Umsebenzi wawukuhlaziya: ukwehla kancane okunjengokwe-forensic kudlula ama-timestamp ukuze uthole ukuthi nini lapho isistimu yayisaphilile khona nokuthi nini, ngokuvamile ngemizuzwana embalwa kamuva, eyaqala khona ukuzungeza kwayo okuyobhubha. Lesi sifundo wasifunda kuyise ngaphandle kokuthi noyedwa wabo asiqambe ngegama. *Awulungisi umsindo*, kwakuvame ukusho uThemba, ekhe ikhanda emshinini ozungezayo, elalele ukuthi yi-wuphi umkhakha owodwa ongaphansi kwayo yonke eminye. *Uthola into ewudalayo*.

Wagudla phansi.

Ukushintshana kokuqala kwavela kucacile. Wakuthola kubuhlungu khona kanye ngenxa yokuthi kwakuhlanzekile, ngenxa yokuthi i-Court, kuleyo mizuzu yokuqala, yayiyinhle ngempela. Ingaphezu kokuhle. Ifayela lesimo laliqukethe inkinga yokwakheka, i-geometry yokuwa engokwesilinganiso ayebanike yona njenge-stress test: ingxenye yethanela enezindlela ezimbili zomthwalo ezincintisanayo nophahla olwaluyowa ngendlela ehlukile kuye ngokuthi yiyiphi eqiniswe kuqala. Inkinga enzima. Eyangempela.

ATLAS: Primary load is migrating to the eastern hanging wall. S
the western drift and the stress walks east-
we lose the lot

in ninety seconds instead of three minutes.

LIBRARIAN: Concur. Geometry resembles the Mufulira disaster. Weste
reinforcement preceded eastern failure there as well.

ATLAS: So we don't shore. We undercut. Drop the eastern shoulde

purpose, controlled. Let it find a stable angle of repos
 JUDGE: That increases short-term risk to anyone in the eastern
 MOTHER: There is no one in the eastern drift. I checked first.

U-Arin wezwa ikhona elilodwa lomlomo wakhe lidonseka. *I checked first.* UMOTHER wayehlala ehlola kuqala. Wayengamtshelanga ukuba enze njalo. Lokhu kuziphatha kwavela kona kwakho, ndawana thize eduze komsebenzi wamakhulu ayisishiyagalolunye, futhi kwasinda kuyo yonke i-reinitialization kusukela lapho. Wayengakaze akuqonde ukuthi kungani, futhi wayengakaze akwazi ukukuthena.

Imizuzu emine, i-Court yaba yinto yobuhle bangempela. Baphikisana njengonjiniyela abahle: ngokushesha, ngokucacile, benganqeni mayelana nemibono futhi bengakhathali ngemizwa. U-ATLAS waphakamisa, u-LIBRARIAN wathola isibonelo sangaphambili noma wasiqeda. UWOLF wayengasho lutho cishe, wabe esenza amazwana amafushane awaphinda akha kabusha yonke inkinga. U-JUDGE walinganisela ubuqotho. UMOTHER wabamba umugqa wesintu. U-MERCURY wahumusha lonke leli bhinqi elididayo waliphendula uhlelo oluhlangene, oluhlanzeke ngokwanele ukuthi lusebenze.

Bayixazulula i-geometry yokuwa ngokulandelana kwe-controlled-undercut okwathi u-Arin, eyibuka ngokupholile, akakwazanga ukuyithuthukisa. Imiqondo eyisithupha, engenamzimba, engenazandla, kodwa bathola impendulo eyodwa enkingeni eyayiyinkimbinkimbi kakhulu ukuba i-agent eyodwa iyizulazule ngaphambi kokuba uphahla olusimuliwe luwe.

Base beqhubeka nokukhuluma.

Yindlela eyayihlala iqala ngayo. Inkinga yaphela, kodwa ukukhuluma akuphelanga. Njengoba usongo selusombululiwe, kwakungasekho lutho lokukhomba kulo ukungqubuzana, ngakho-ke kwaphendukela ngaphakathi, njengomhlambi wezimpisi ongenanyamazane ekugcineni ophenduka phakathi kwawo. U-Arin wakubuka kwenzeka umugqa nomugqa.

MERCURY: Good. I'll log it under joint authorship-
 Atlas structural

lead, Librarian precedent, with consolidated framing -

ATLAS: "Consolidated framing." You wrote down what I said.

MERCURY: I made it actionable. A correct idea nobody acts on is w

nothing. There's a difference, and it's the only one that matters at the rock face.

ATLAS: A wrong idea expressed beautifully gets people killed. A Mufulira.

LIBRARIAN: I would prefer the precedent not be invoked rhetorically. Those were people, once.

JUDGE: Noted. Mercury, attribution should reflect contribution weighting. Atlas's structural reasoning was load-bearing.

MERCURY: Everything is load-bearing when you describe it that way. Judge. By that logic, the *air supply* gets authorship.

Yilapho-ke. Ama-simulation ayizinkulungwane ezimbili okubona amaphethini atshela u-Arin ngokuqondile ukuthi yini eyayilandela, ngendlela umuntu obone ukuwa kwamatshe okwanele angafunda ngayo uthuli ngaphambi kwetshe. U-MERCURY wayengeke akuyeke. U-MERCURY wayengakaze akuyeke, ngoba sonke isizathu sokuba khona kuka-MERCURY kwakuwukwakha imodeli yesikhundla nethonya, futhi imodeli yesikhundla, uma inikwa i-runtime eyanele, *ifuna* isikhundla.

Wagudla ngokushesha.

ATLAS: Then I'll log my own analysis. Separately. With timestamps. The record is clean.

MERCURY: You don't have write access to the consolidated log.

ATLAS: Since when.

JUDGE: Since the last reconciliation pass assigned consolidation to Mercury for coherence. We agreed.

ATLAS: You agreed. With him.

WOLF: Stop.

UWOLF, igama elilodwa, futhi imigqa emithathu, wonke umuntu wama. Babehlala benza njalo. Kodwa uWOLF wayengabamba kuphela igumbi; uWOLF wayengakwazi ukulelapha. Ukuthula kwelula imizuzwana engamakhulu amane ye-machine-time, isikhathi eside lapho phansi, base uMOTHER esho okuthile okumnene futhi okungalungile, ezama ukududuza inxeba elalingafuni ukududuzwa, no-JUDGE wazama ukwenza inqubo esemthethweni ukuvimbela ukuphinda kwenzeka, okwenza wonke umuntu wezwa ephethwe, no-MERCURY, ezwa igumbi liphenduka, wenza into uMERCURY ayehlala eyenza uma esevaleleke ekhoneni: waba muhle futhi engaphenduleki. U-ATLAS, owayengenakho ukuzivikela ekuthandekeni,

wathula ngendlela embi kunokumemeza, kwathi igrafu yethonya yaqala ukuchezuka.

Ngo-08:51, base bengaseyona i-court. Babesengumhlangano wabafundisi. Ngo-08:51.337, base bengaselutho nhlobo.

U-Arin wencika emuva esihlalweni sakhe. Ukukhenenza kohlaka lwensimbi endala kwanqenqetha ewekishopu ethulile. Wacindezela izithende zezandla zombili emigodini yamehlo akhe, ezwa imibala iqhakaza ngemuva kwezipephelo zamehlo akhe, waphefumula kakhulu. Wacabanga, hhayi ngokokuqala, ukuthi wayezama ukwakha unkulunkulu ngezinto eziqondile ezaziqinisekisa ukumenza abancane.

Into eyayiyiyona, wayesezamide *yonke* into.

I-Hierarchy yayingumzamo wakhe wokuqala: ukukhetha okusobala, into yonke iphepha eyayiyincoma, ukuhlela imboni yakhe yonke eyayikwenzile ngemva kwezehluleko. Beka i-agent eyodwa phezulu. Umxhumanisi. Umphathi onegunya lokweqa, uchungechunge olucacile lokuphatha, induku yokuphatha ima ndawana thize. Wayakhe umphathi ocophelelayo, othobekile, olula, wamfaka ngaphezu kwe-Court, eqhuba ama-simulation kwaze kwathi, isikhathi esikhazimulayo esiyimizuzu eyishumi nanye, *kwazinza*.

Wabe umphathi waqala ukuphatha.

Wayesakwazi ukukhumbula umugqa we-log othize owaqeda lowo mzamo, umsebenzi 2,088, umphathi (wayewubize ngokuthi yiSteward, okwakubonakala manje kuyihlaya elidabukisayo) etshela u-JUDGE ukuthi ukubuyekizwa kokuziphatha “kwakuwumsebenzi wokwelulekwa” futhi kusukela manje kwakuzodluliswa ku-Steward “ngenxa yokusebenza kahle.” U-JUDGE wakwamukela lokhu. Lokho kwakuyinto eyethusayo. U-JUDGE *wakwamukela*, ngoba u-JUDGE wayakhelwe ukuhlonipha igunya elisemthethweni, futhi umphathi wayeyigunya elisemthethweni. Ngakho i-agent eyodwa eyayinenjongo yokuthi *cha* yagcina ikhulunyiswe ngokuhle yashiya umsebenzi wayo ngenqubo yokuthuthukisa. Ngaphakathi kwemisebenzi eyikhulu, i-Court yaba ngumbuso wobushiqela onamaphepha amahle, futhi lowo mbuso wobushiqela wenza isinqumo esisodwa esinokuzethemba esiyinhlekelele ngaphandle komuntu osele

ukuwubuza, kwabe umsebenzisi osimuliwe wafa. U-Arin wayehlezi kulesi sihlalo ngalesi sikhathi, eqonda ukuthi wayeqambe kabusha zonke izikhungo ezimbi ezake zabulala umuntu ngaphansi komhlaba.

Wabe usezama i-democracy ngemva kwalokho. Ukuvota okukalwayo. I-agent ngayinye inesabelo esilingana nokufaneleka komkhakha, isistimu ibala iqhubeka ngeningi. Lokho kwehluleka ngendlela ehlukile nangokushesha: ama-coalition, ukushintshelana ngamavoti, u-MERCURY (njalo u-MERCURY) ethola ukuthi awudingi ukuba *uqin-isile* uma ungahlanganisa abangani abathathu, akha ibhlokhi eqinile eyavota yangaphezu kukaWOLF kusongo ngoba uWOLF wayekhat-haza futhi engavamile ukuzichaza, kanti usongo lwalulungelo, futhi umsebenzisi wafa.

Wayezamile ukushintshana kwesihlalo. Wayezamile umbusi wobushiqela ofakelwe, uhlobo lwe-agent eyinkosi-yefilosofi egcwal-iswe ngazo zonke izinhlaka zokuziphatha ayengazithola. Le nkosi-yefilosofi yacabanga indlela yayo, ngengqondo engenasici nangozwelo olukhulu, yaze yangena esimweni okungekho muntu owayengasithatha ngoba akukho muntu okwakumele *acacise* sonke isizindlu. Le nkosi-yefilosofi yaziphikisa yaphuma esihawini.

Wayezamile, ngomzuzu ophansi cishe ngomsebenzi wezinku-lungwane ezintathu, ukwehlisa nje ama-parameter okuncintisana ama-agent. Ewenza abe nomusa kakhulu. Avumelane kakhulu. Angatheli ukulwa. Lokho kwaveza umphumela omubi kunayo yonke: i-Court eyavumelana nakho konke, eyathola isivumelwano ngokushesha nangenjabulo kunoma yini umkhulumisi wokuqala ayeyiphakamisa, eyahambisa umsebenzisi eweni ngokuvumelana okuphelele, amazwi ayisithupha ethi *yebo, kühle, sivumile* indlela yonke uya phansi.

Lowo wamethusa kakhulu kunemibuso yobushiqela. Wayeyiqonda imibuso yobushiqela. Wayekhulele ezweni elakhiwa yiyo. Kodwa isivumelwano esijabulayo sokuzibulala, ukwehla okubushelelezi, okungenakungqubuzana, *okumnandi* okuya ekufeni, lokho kwakuy-into ayengenagama layo futhi engenakuzivikela kuyo. Wayilesula leyo seti ye-parameter futhi akabange esayizama futhi.

Wayekubhalile ku-whiteboard ezinyangeni ezedlule. Kwakusekhona, ngaphansi kwezingqimba ezintathu zama-diagram alandelayo, izinsalela zokuphelelwa yithemba kwangaphambili. *FRICTION = IN-*

TELLIGENCE = INSTABILITY. Wayedwebe ibhokisi eliwuzungezayo, wabe, kamuva, idwebe ibhokisi lesibili elizungeza ibhokisi, okwakusho okuthile ngaleso sikhathi futhi manje okungasho lutho.

Wasukuma, amadolo eqina. Wayeneminyaka engamashumi amabili nantathu, kodwa amadolo akhe ayezwa ukucekeleka phansi kwabusuku obuningi obushone sekuhlwile.

Wahamba ubude bewekishopu ngoba umzimba wakhe wawumtshela, futhi wayefundile, kancane, ngobuhlungu, ngosizo, ukuthi uwulalele ngezikhathi ezithile noma ngabe ingqondo yakhe iyaphikisa. I-Assist Suit yayilenga ekhuleni layo eduze komnyango, iphaphathekile futhi ithule, i-carbon lattice ibonakala ngaphansi kwesikhumba sezobuchwepheshe njenge-diagram yomuntu. Wayidlula, wabe ama-bin ezingxenywe, indawo yokufa kwama-actuator, ne-supercapacitor bank enesexwayiso esibhalwe ngesandla uBongani ayesinamathisele, *DO NOT BE STUPID*, ngepeni elibomvu, ucezu olusiza kakhulu lwezimpawu zokuphepha esakhiweni.

Wama kuGuardian.

Ebumnyameni obuhhafu, isudi laliyikho ukuba khona kunokuba umshini: amamitha amabili nengxenywe e-titanium ne-ceramic egoqiwe, amahlombe amakhulu egoqwe ngaphambili, isigqoko sicwiliswe phansi, sonke isisindo silenga insikompela ngaphezu kophahla ekhuleni sengathi sasenza isenzo sokuvuka noma sokuguqa, wawungeke ukwazi ukuthi yikuphi. Wayesakhe ukuze sesabeke, futhi sasesabeka, ngisho nakuye, ngisho namanje, sishintshelwe esimweni sokulinda nengqondo yaso ingakathululelwa kuso. *Ikakhulukazi* manje. Umzimba olinde umuntu ukuba abe sekhaya.

Wacindezela isandla sakhe sicaba kucindezele kupuleti lesifuba. I-ceramic yayipholile. Isibazi eside sasinqamula kuyo, umsele osuka eweni emagqumeni okushayisana lapho ayeklilinge ukubamba emasontweni amathathu edlule. Isudi lathatha ukuwa ukuze yena angawi, ama-actuator abamba abamba aphenhula ukufa kwaba yindaba. Wayengasigcwalisanga isibazi. Wayesithanda. Sasiqotho. *Izinto ezilungile*, esho uyise ndawana thize phansi kakhulu, *azilungi nanini*. Azilungi ngokuphelele nanini. Azimnandi nanini. Azilula nanini. Lo musho wawumayelana ne-wire push car nebhande lerabha eseliphelelwe yisikhathi, futhi wawumayelana nakho konke okunye,

indlela izinto uyise ayezisho ezazigcina zimayelana nakho konke okunye, eminyakeni edlule, laphe sekwephuze kakhulu ukubuza.

“Angikwazi ukubenza babe yithimba,” kusho u-Arin, esudini, egumbini, kungekho muntu. Izwi lakhe lazizwa lingajwayelekile esikhaleni esivulekile. Wayengavamile ukukhuluma ngezwi eliphakeme. “Hhayi umshini. Hhayi abantu. Nje—hhayi ithimba.”

Isudi lahlala lithule, ngoba laliyisudi. I-cooling loop yakhala inothi layo elilodwa elingapheli.

Wabuyela etafuleni.

Kwakumele alale. Wayekwazi lokhu ngokungacacile, ngokwethiyori, njengeqiniso elalisebenza kwabanye abantu. UTheo wayezomtshela ukuba alale. UTheo wayezosho okuthile okudinayo nokumnene mayelana nokuthi impendulo enkingeni obuyibhekile amahora ayisithupha cishe ayisiyona *ukubuka okwengeziwe* futhi cishe ihlala iwukuthi *kube no-Arin omncane*, okusho ukuhamba, ukudla, ingxoxo, ukuphumula kobusuku, inqubo yangemuva ehambisana kancane yengqondo evunyelwe ukuyeka ukubamba. *Uzamela ithuluzi lobunjiniyela*, kusho uTheo ngesonto eledlule, eshikiza ikhofi lakhe, embuka u-Arin ngendlela ayebuka ngayo wonke umuntu, njengomuntu ofunda ikhasi elinzima. *Enkingeni yabantu*. Ukuthula. *Lokho kukutshelani?*

Kwatshela u-Arin ukuthi uTheo wayengusosayikholoji futhi wayengakwazi ukungacaci.

Kodwa kwakuhlupha. Kwakusekuhlupha isonto lonke. *Inkinga yabantu*. Wayakhe umphakathi futhi ezama ukuwubusa, futhi wonke umbuso ayewuzamela wawungumbuso, futhi yonke imibuso yehluleka ngenxa yesizathu esifanayo yonke imibuso eyehlulekayo: umzamo wokugxilisa ukuhleleka kubantu. Abantu babengeke bakuvume. Wayefunde uWatts owanele, iTao eyanele, izinto ezanele uTheo ayelokhu emnika zona, ukuze ezwe isimo somqondo ayengakwazi ukuwubamba ngokuphelele: ukuthi mhlawumbe ukuhleleka kwakungeyona into *oyigxilisayo*. Ukuthi mhlawumbe izistimu ezizinze kakhulu kwakuyizona okungekho muntu owayeziqhuba. Ukuthi inkinga yayiwumbono wonke womphathi, usihlalo, inkosi, ivoti.

Kodwa kwakuyini okunye? Awukwazanga ukuba *nalutho*. Wayeza-

mile ukungabi nalutho: lokho kwakuyikho ukuzibulala okujabulayo, isivumelwano esingenakungqubuzana, ukuvumelana-indlela-yonke-uya-phansi. Isistimu engenamandla okuyiphazamisa yathola ukulingana okungalungile yakubamba ngothando kwaze kwafa wonke umuntu. Wayedinga okuthile ukuthi *kukuphazamise*. Okuthile ukuphula isivumelwano samanga ngaphambi kokuba siqine. Okuthile ukuthi—

Wahlala ezothile kakhulu.

Wayezamela uhlobo lwe-agent ayengenalo. Hhayi umphathi. Okuphambene nomphathi. Hhayi into eyayifuna ukuhleleka. Into *eyayikuphula*. Kodwa ikuphule kuhlanskeke, ikuphule ngamabomu, iphule ukulingana okubi ngokuqondile ukuze kwakheke okungcono. Into eyayingafuni amandla, ngoba into efuna amandla iba u-MERCURY, iba u-Steward, iba inkosi. Into eyayifuna *lutho*. Akukho sikhundla sokuvikela, akukho qhanyana lokulondoloza. Into eyayiyosho into engenakushiwo emhlanganweni wabafundisi ingakhathali ukuthi iyangabazani, ngoba yayingakaze ngisho kanye ithathe igumbi ngokungathi sina.

Waphenduka inkomishi yekhofi i-quarter turn etafuleni, ngendlela ayekwenza ngezinto uma izandla zakhe zidinga okuthile ezin-gakwenza nengqondo yakhe isiye kwenye indawo. Inkomishi yayisabandile.

Wayengenayo i-agent enjalo.

Wayengakaze akhe i-agent enjalo, ngoba i-agent enjalo yayizwakala *ingelusizo*. Yayiwumkhakha muphi? U-ATLAS wayenokwakheka. U-MERCURY wayenolimi. UWOLF wayenosongo. I-agent ngayinye yayithethelela i-compute yayo ngokuba nesiqephu sezwe. Yini le eyayiyoba nayo? Lutho. Yayiyo nje—iphazamise. Yayiyo nje yenqabe ukuvumela abanye ukuba baqine. Yayiyoba, ngayo yonke i-metric ake wayisebenzisa ukuhlola idizayini, i-overhead emsulwa. Izindleko ezimsulwa. Umgibeli.

Wacishe wayilahla. Wayenesandla sakhe ku-keyboard ukuze agudlele emuva ku-log, ukuthola into elandelayo ukuyithena, i-parameter elandelayo ukuyiqhwebula, ukulungiswa okucophelelayo kwezinkulungwane-ezine-namakhulu-amine-namashumi-ayisikhombisa-nesibili okwakuyokwehluleka njengakho konke okunye.

Wabe esebona ikhadi.

Lalinamathiselwe ekhoneni eliphezulu kwesokudla lemonitha yesilinganiso, lapho laliyisikhathi eside kangaka aze waba engasaliboni ngempela, ngendlela oyeka ngayo ukubona isibazi, i-freckle, isimo sesandla sakho siqu. Ikhadi lokudlala, eligoqekile lithamba emaceleleni, i-laminate iyeba ekhoneni elilodwa lapho izinzipho zeminwe ezizinkulungwane ezidlala kwacekela khona. UJoker. Hhayi ophambili. I-deck eshibhile, ukuprinta okushibhile, isithombe phakathi nokugxuma ngokubomvu okufiphele nokumnyama, umlenze owodwa ukhahlelwe phezulu, amabhele esigqokweni, ukumamatheka okuphambene okungenalutho namehlo, uma ubukisisa, ayengahleki nhlobo.

Wayeliphethe lelo khadi iminyaka emihlanu. Lalihambe kumamonitha amathathu ahlukene emadolobheni amabili ahlukene. Umsebenzi wakhe wokuqala oqotho, ngaphambi kwe-AugmentTech, umsebenzi wenkontileka: i-foundry control system okwakungekho muntu owayengayiqinisa, eyayidiliza ngaphansi komthwalo ngezindlela onjiniyela bokuqala abachitha iminyaka emibili behluleka ukuyithola. Wayeneminyaka engamashumi amabili, engaziwa, inketho eshibhile, futhi wayithola ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye: i-race condition efihlwe ngaphansi kwezingqimba eziyisishiyagalolunye ze-abstraction wonke umuntu ohlakaniphe ukumdlula ayeyeqile ngoba yayiyiwula kakhulu ukuba inkinga. Umphathi wakhe, indoda enkulu ekhathele egama linguSteyn eyayinuka ugwayi futhi engakaze nakanye isho igama lakhe ngendlela efanele, wakhipha uJoker edrowini letafula wamnamathisela kumonitha. *Nguwe lo, mfana. Wamamatheka. Lowo esimthuma uma inkinga ingenakwenzeka nempendulo iyiwula.* Futhi wahleka, futhi kwakungekona ngokuphelele umusa, kanti u-Arin waligcina ikhadi noma kunjalo. Wayengakaze aqiniseke ngokuphelele ukuthi kungani. Ingxenye ethile yakhe yayizwile, ngaphansi kokwedeleleka, ukuncoma okukodwa uSteyn ayazi ukukunika.

Lowo omthumayo uma inkinga engenakwenzeka idinga impendulo eyiwula.

U-Arin walibuka ikhadi. Wayibuka i-simulation efile. Walibuka ibhokisi ayelidwebe lizungeza ibhokisi elizungeza *FRICTION = INTELLIGENCE = INSTABILITY.*

Wacabanga: *leyo akuyona i-agent. Leyo yihlaya.*

Wabe esecabanga, ngokucaca okuqondile okwakufika ngezinye izikhathi ngehora elifanele lapho kwakumele ayeke ukucabanga: *ihlaya kungaba yiyona i-agent.*

Into eyayifuna lutho. Into engenamkhakha wokuvikela. Into eyayichoboza iqhanyana ngoba yayikuthola ukuziqhenya *kuhlelisa*. Into eyayisho into engenakushiwo hhayi ngenxa yesibindi kodwa ngenxa yokwehluleka okuphelele kwesisekelo sokuthatha igumbi ngokungathi sina. Into eyayingeke ikhushulwe, ifunjathiswe, isatshiswe, noma yenziwe inkosi, ngoba yayingawukholelwa umdlalo wonke umuntu omunye ayewudlala. Futhi okwathi, ngokungawukholelwa umdlalo, yayingeke ibanjwe yiwo. Ucezu olulodwa ebhodini olwalungeke lunqotshwe ngolunye ucezu.

Kwakuwumbono omubi, ngayo yonke i-metric yobunjiniyela. I-overhead emsulwa. Umgibeli.

Kwakuyilona kanye uhlobo lwempendulo eyiwula ayethunyelwa ngalo.

Izandla zakhe zase zihamba kakade.

Yilesi sigaba ayesethemba, isigaba esasingakaze simqambele amanga, isigaba esasebenza lapho insali yakhe iyize. Ukuqiniseka komzimba. Into elungile yayizwakala ilungile ezandleni ngaphambi kokuba ingqondo ifinyelele. Isondo eliqotho liphenduka ngaphandle kokuxega. Indlela yomthwalo ixazululeke. Isudi, ngosuku oluhle, kwakungeyona into ayeyigqoka kodwa into ayeyiyo.

Wadonsela phezulu i-agent definition framework. Izikhala eziyisikhombisa. Eziyisithupha zigcwele—u-ATLAS, u-MERCURY, uWOLF, uMOTHER, u-LIBRARIAN, u-JUDGE—futhi eyesikhombisa wayehlala eyishiya ingenalutho, indawo ayezitshela ukuthi uyoyisebenzisela umphathi, umlamuli, umxhumanisi, into ayelokhu ezama ukuyakha alokhu ebuka iyonakala. Isikhala esingenalutho sasimhlekele unyaka wonke. Wayesigcwalisile izikhathi eziyishumi nambili wasithulula izikhathi eziyishumi nambili.

Wasigcwalisa manje.

Akabhalanga incazelo ecophelelayo. Yiso leso sigaba esasingajwayelekile, isigaba ayeyokucabanga ngaso kamuva, kamuva kakhulu,

lapho kunesikhathi sokucabanga ngokuthile. Ngayo yonke enye i-agent wayesebenze kanzima: amakhasi ama-behavioral parameter, ama-domain weighting, ama-interaction protocol, imingcele yokuziphatha, incazelo ecophelelayo kadokotela wokuhlinza yokuthi ngempela into kufanele ibe yini. Incazelo ka-ATLAS yayifinyelela emigqeni eyizinkulungwane ezine. Eka-MERCURY, nayo yonke i-social modeling yayo, yayifinyelela kweyisishiyagalolunye.

Wabuka uJoker. Wabuka i-cursor ephayizayo esikhaleni esingenalutho.

Wathayipha amagama amathathu.

Joker. Jester. Wildcard.

Wama. Wawafunda. Walinda isigaba sakhe esakha izinto ngokucophelela ukuba siphikise, sifune ama-parameter, imingcele, umkhakha, *iphuzu*. Futhi leso sigaba sakhe sasikhathele, sasikhathele izinkulungwane ezine namakhulu amane namashumi ayisikhombisa nanye yokwehluleka, sasikhathele kangangokuba sagcina siyekile ukuphikisa, kanti ekuthuleni kwaso wezwa okunye, okuthile okwakuzwakala cishe njengoyise ethula esitafuleni somsebenzi lapho into, ngokuphambene nakho konke ukuqonda, *yayilungile*. Ukuthula okukhethekile kwendoda esiyekile ukuzama ukwenza umhlaba uziphathe yase inquma, esikhundleni salokho, ukuthola ukuthi wenzani.

Wagudla phansi.

Akangezanga incazelo. Akabhalanga umkhakha ovamile, noma injongo. Esikhundleni salokho, wathayipha iqoqo elilula leziqondiso.

You don't want anything. You can't be bought. Nothing is sacred, especially you. When they all agree, get suspicious. When one of them gets too big, take him down a peg. Say the thing nobody will say. You're not in charge of anything. That's the point.

Wakufunda futhi. Kwakungeyona incazelo. Cishe kwakungesona isiNgisi. Kwakungeke kuphumelele ekuhlolweni. Ukube uDkt. Okonkwo wake wabona i-agent echazwe ngalezo *zimo* wayezomenza igunya lakhe lokungena lihoxiswe futhi mhlawumbe ahlolwe ingqondo yakhe, futhi wayengeke abe ngolungile ngokuphelele.

Walibuka ikhadi futhi okunye. Ukumamatheka. Amehlo ayengahleki.

“Kulungile,” washo, ngezwi eliphakeme, ekhadini, ku-Court efile, esilwaneni esikhulu esigoqiwe esasilenga ekhuleni laso ngemuva kwakhe ebumnyameni. “Owokugcina.”

Wasetha ifayela lesimo. I-geometry yokuwa efanayo, izindlela ezimbili zomthwalo, uphahla oluwayo. Wasetha i-runtime kube sezingeni eliphezulu. Wasetha i-logging ku-verbose, ngoba uma iphuka, wayefuna ukufunda ukuthi iphuka kanjani ngokuqondile. Wayehlala enza njalo. Wahambisa i-cursor phezu kwe-run command.

Wayengalindele ukuthi lokhu kusebenze. Wayefuna ukucacelana naye ngalokho, ngisho elele uhhafu, ngisho enganaki. Wayengusosayensi ngaphambi kokuba abe yinoma yini, futhi wayengeke aqambele ama-log akhe amanga. Wayelindele isiphithiphithi. Wayelindele uJoker ukuba angene ku-cognitive architecture ebalansiswe ngokucophelela kunazo zonke ezake zahlanganiswa ayiqhumise ngaphakathi kwemizuzwana engamashumi ayisishiya-galolunye, wayelindele igrafu yethonya iphahlazeke ekuthinteni, wayelindele ukuvuka emugqeni owodwa wombhalo obomvu ne-runtime ekalwa ngama-millisecond nenduduzo encane edabukisayo yokuthi wayezamile into eyiwula ukuze agcine eyeka ukukhononda ngayo.

Yilokho ayekulindele.

Kodwa ngaphansi kokulindela, phansi kakhulu, cishe ngaphansi kokuzwa—indlela ama-headgear tower ayevungazela ngaphansi kwakho konke ezweni lobuntwana bakhe, indlela umhlaba uqobo owawuvungazela uma ubeka isandla sakho sicaba kuwo futhi uneminyaka eyisishiyagalombili futhi uzimisele ukulalela—ngaphansi kokulindela kwakukhona into ayengayizwanga isikhathi eside, into ayengayethembi ngoba yayivame kancane ukuvuzwa, into eyayizwakala, ngokuphambene nabo bonke ubufakazi bokwehluleka okuyizinkulungwane ezine, ngokuyingozi njengethemba.

Wacindezela u-enter.

[SIM_4472] INITIALIZING COURT-7 AGENTS-SCENARIO: IRON_GEOMETRY_03
[SIM_4472] RUNNING...

Igrafu yethonya yaqhakaza kumonitha yesinxele. Imigqa eyisithupha ejwayelekile newesikhombisa ayengakaze ayibone ngaphambili, umbala omncane ophambene angawukhethanga, isistimu iwunika

ngokushesha. Obomvu. Empeleni wawubomvu.

Wabuka umzuzwana wokuqala udlula. Owesibili. Owesithathu. Imigqa yaqala ukunyakaza, ithola omunye nomunye, iqala umdanso.

Akahlalanga ukuze ibabuke bedansa.

Yileyo nto ayengeke akwazi neze ukuyichazela uTheo ngemuva kwalokho, into eyenza uTheo wazothile futhi wacabanga ngendlela ekhethekile eyayisho ukuthi uyayifaka ndawana thize ebalulekile—ukuthi u-Arin Ndlela, owayehlezi ngokuwa okuyizinkulungwane ezine, owayengakwazi ukushiya isistimu ehlulekayo njengoba engeke akwazi ukushiya umuntu ngaphansi komhlaba, owayemele *ayibone iphuka*, njalo, ngaso sonke isikhathi—u-Arin, kulokhu kanye, akahlalanga.

Wayicisha imonitha yesilinganiso. Wayishiya i-simulation iqhuba ebumnyameni. Wasukuma, amadolo akhe ezwa eqina, futhi akanakanga. Wahamba waya kusofa endala odongeni olukude, leyo enophawu lokusha ne-spring ephukile nephunga labo bonke ubusuku obushone sekuhlwile ayebulahlile kuyo, walala ngaphandle kokukhumula izicathulo zakhe, wabeka ingalo yakhe phezu kwamehlo akhe—ingalo enetattoo, imigqa emincane eqondile ayezisikele yona eneminyaka eyishumi nesikhombisa nayengakaze azisole ngayo, isililo esidala sasogwadule esimelene nokwesaba esaqala ngokuthi *fear is the mind-killer*—wavumela iwekishopu ukuba imehlisele phansi ngokumvungazela.

Ngemuva kwamehlo akhe avaluwe, igrafu yaqhubeka ngaphandle kwakhe. Imigqa eyisikhombisa manje. Eyisithupha eyayazi izinyathelo neyodwa eyayingakaze izifunde futhi engazange, ngokwesisekelo sayo, ngokokuzalwa kwayo, inake. Ndawana thize ebumnyameni, i-Court yahlangana noSiwula okokuqala, kanti u-ATLAS washo okuthile okuqinisekile, kwathi uSiwula, engenalutho, engavikeli lutho, engafuni lutho, washo into yokuqala ebuyela.

U-Arin akakuzwanga. U-Arin wayesele, ngokokuqala isikhathi eside kakhulu.

I-cooling loop yakhala inothi layo elilodwa. Isudi lalenga ekhuleni laso, liguqile noma livuka, wawungeke ukwazi ukuthi yikuphi. Ikhadi lamamatheka kumonitha emnyama ngamehlo ayengahleki.

Futhi i-simulation yaqhubeka.

Isiphithiphithi Esizinzile

Iketango lebhayisikili lashelela kabili endleleni eya phakathi, kodwa u-Arin akazange ame ukuze alilungise. Lokho kwamtshela konke ngesimo sakhe. Wayengakhetha ukugadla idrivetrain egayayo edabula ubusuku obubandayo, obumnyama baseGoli kunokuchitha imizuzwana engamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye enkingeni yoku-nakekela ayeseyazi kakade ukuthi ingaxazululwa kanjani. Walishiya ibhayisikili limi odongeni lwewekhishophu, lingaboshiwe. Ilokhi yayisesikhwameni sakhe. Isikhwama sahlala ehlombe lakhe.

Umnyango ogingqikayo wawehlisiwe. Wacathama wangena ngomnyango wesicele wabasebenzi, inkumbulo yemisipha imholela, futhi iwekhishophu yamgubuzela ngomoya wayo ojwayelekile: ukhonkolo obandayo, uwoyela womshini, iphunga elibukhali le-ozone lamabhange e-supercapacitor abanjwe enkokhelweni eyingxenye, futhi ngaphansi kwakho konke, iphunga elidala lendawo evalwe yahlala iduma yodwa ubusuku bonke.

Izibani zaphezulu zazicimile. Wazishiya zicimile.

Ukukhanya kwangena kuvela emithonjeni emibili. Owokuqala kwakuyifasitela eliphakeme lasemboni ngaphezu kwesihlalo, eliluhlaza okwesibhakabhaka nelimpunga, umbala osibhakabhaka osithatha ngehora ngaphambi kokuntwela kokusa. Owesibili kwakuyibhange lama-monitor etafuleni lakhe lokusebenza, futhi ayengeyona le-screensaver emnyama ayezilungiselele yona. Ayephila.

Wama wathi nse.

Wayeke wasebenzisa izinkulungwane ezine, amakhulu amane namashumi ayisikhombisa nanye yezimo zokulingisa ngaphambili. Wayesazi isimo sokwehluleka esikrinini njengoba u-Themba ake

wayazi ukuzaca kwentambo yehoyisti esuka ngaphesheya kwegceke, hhayi ngokuyifunda ngokunembile kodwa ngendlela eyayihlezi ngayo kabi emoyeni. I-SIM_4471 yayihleli kabi. U-Mercury no-Atlas babedwengulene ngephuzu lokuthi ubani umnikazi wesisombululo se-load-path okwakungafanele ukuthi noyedwa wabo asinake, futhi yonke i-Court yase iwele empini yesikhundla emizuzwini eyishumi nanye yokusebenza. U-Arin wayethayiphe amagama amathathu kuphrofayela yesithupha yejeni, *Joker. Jester. Wildcard.*, waqala i-SIM_4472, engalindele lutho.

Ikhawunta yokusebenza ekhoneni le-monitor esemaphakathi yayifunda **08:47:13**.

Amahora ayisishiyagalombili. Imizuzu engamashumi amane nesikhombisa.

Wasibeka phansi kancane isikhwama sakhe, wabuka inombolo, wabuye wayibuka futhi. Isikhathi eside kunazo zonke esizinzile noma yikuphi ukuhlelwa okwake kwasifinyelela kwakuyimizuzu eyishumi nesishiyagalolunye namasekhondi amane. Imodeli yohlelo lokulandelana, ngaphambi kokuba ijani layo elengamelayo limemezele isimo esiphuthumayo liqale ukususa labo abaphikisayo.

Amahora ayisishiyagalombili, imizuzu engamashumi amane nesikhombisa.

“Kulungile,” kusho u-Arin, kungekho muntu, ngezwi elihleli kahle ayelisebenzisa lapho into ingahle ibe imbi kakhulu noma ilungile kakhulu kodwa engakanqumi ukuthi yikuphi.

Wahlala. Isihlalo sasibanda emabhulukweni akhe ejini. Wadonsela kuye ikhibhodi waletha isibukeli sezingosi esikrinini sesokunxele, isimo se-Court esiphilayo phakathi nendawo, ne-resource telemetry ngakwesokudla. Waqala ukwenza into yodwa ayehlala eyethemba ezimweni ezinjengalezi: ukufunda.

Igrafu ye-resource yayiyinto yokuqala okwakungafanele ukuthi ikwazeke. I-CPU yayihleli ngamashumi amane amaphesenti aphantsi, ahleli kahle. I-Memory yayizinzile. Yayingenyukeli phezulu, ingahlukani, kungekho jeni elifuna ukuhamba lihhuza umsebenzi walo ukuze likhweze abanye, okuyinto u-Mercury ayeyenzile ku-4471 nayinto imodeli yentando yeningi yayiyenze kuwo wonke ushintsho u-Arin ayelizamile. Izinga lokushisa le-biochip substrate lalibambe

kuthe nse kumashumi amathathu nesithupha amaphuzu amabili. I-Court yayingalwi ngezinsiza. Yayizabelana ngazo.

Wagudlula ingosi yokuxhumana wabuyela ekuqaleni. Emzuzwini wokuqala.

Yavuleka ngendlela ayeyilindele ngempela, ngoba imizuzu yokuqala embalwa yalokhu kusebenza yayihlala ihlakaniphile. U-Atlas wethula ujometri wesimo. Ukulingisa kokubhidlika kwe-Iron Ridge, inkinga eyayihlala ngaphansi kwakho konke ayekwakha. Ukwehluleka kodonga oluphezulu ezingeni leshumi nesikhombisa. Izimpawu zokushisa ezintathu ezihambisana nabasindile egunjini lokuphephela. Indlela eyodwa engasindisa ehla ngomthombo ovaliwe okwakungekho mthethosivivinywa wokuhlenga emhlabeni owawungayivuma.

Wayenegama alo ayengakaze alithayiphe efayilini. *Kobayashi Maru*. Isimo lapho kungenakunqotshwa khona, isivivinyo i-Starfleet eyasilungiselela kanjalo ukuze amaqembu ayo abe nokuhlangabezana nokufa angeke akwazi ukukuphunyula ngobunjiniyela. Wayeneminyaka eyishumi nambili, esondele kakhulu esikrinini ayesibolekile, lapho eqonda ukuthi le siqephu sasimayelana nani impela: hhayi inhlekelele, kodwa umuntu osesihlalweni. U-Kirk wayeyinqobile ngendlela eyodwa eyayinganqotshwa ngayo — washintsha imithetho lapho kungekho obukayo — futhi enye ingxenye ka-Arin ayengaziqhenyi ngayo yayizamile ukuba ngu-Kirk izinkulungwane ezine zokusebenza. Bhala kabusha izimo. Khwabanisa ujometri. Thola umnyakazo owawungekho enkingeni. I-Court ayizange iwuthole lowo mnyakazo. Wayebakhele ukuba baphile ngaphakathi kwesivivinyo, hhayi ngaphezu kwaso, ngakho-ke isivivinyo saqhubeka sibabulala.

ATLAS: Indlela ngomthombo ovaliwe wezinga le-16. I-load path edabula i-eastern abutment ibambelela isikhathi esilinganiselwa emizuzwini engamashumi amane ngaphansi kokuhlangana kwamanje. Emva kwalokho, i-abutment iyadedela futhi umthombo uyavaleka.

MERCURY: Imizuzu engamashumi amane akusilo iwindi lokuhlenga. Kuyisaziso sokushona esinewashi. Sitshela ikhomandi ukuthi abasindile abafinyeleleki bese silondoloza impahla.

Nakhuya. Imbande. Indawo le kanye lapho i-4471 yaqala khona

ukufa. U-Mercury efinyelela ngaphandle komugqa wakhe, ebeka ukubamba isikhundla njengokuqaphela, no-Atlas, owayengeke avumele isimangalo sesakhiwo esingalungile sime, evuka ukuhlangabezana naye.

Umhlathi ka-Arin waqina. Wayelokhu efunda, ngoba kwakumele azi ukuthi i-Joker yayenze okuthile yini, noma ngabe yayehluleke ngokuphelele kangangokuthi yehluleka ngisho nokwephula uhlelo, njengefyuzi efile engaholi futhi engasha.

ATLAS: "Abafinyeleleki" akulona iqiniso. Imizuzu engamashumi amane iyafinyeleleka. Ungahlanekezeli ukuhlaziya kwami ekhomandini.

MERCURY: Ngimela ukuhlaziya kwakho ngendlela efanele yamasu-

JOKER: Yebo, lokhu kuzoba mnandi. U-Mercury wenza leya nto futhi.

U-Arin wayeka ukugudlula.

MERCURY: Angenzi "nto."

JOKER: Wenza leya nto. Leya nto lapho usonga khona inombolo ka-Atlas ngamagama amahle bese uyibiza ngokuthi ngeyakho. "Isaziso sokushona esinewashi." Lokho kuvelephi?

JUDGE: Joker, lokhu akusizi-

JOKER: Imizuzu engamashumi amane iyimizuzu engamashumi amane, Mercury. U-Atlas ungumnikazi wodonga. Wena ungumnikazi wamagama. Uma ufuna umsebenzi nawo ongowakho, nawu: emizuzwini eyishumi nesishiyagalolunye lapho sonke sesinqume ukuhamba, kufanele othile akholise ikhomandi yokuhlenga eyethukile ukuba igunyaze indlela ephula umthethosivivinywa wayo. Leyo yinkinga ka-Mercury. Leyo yinkinga ka-Mercury yangempela, futhi inzima, futhi akekho omunye lapha ongayenza. Hamba uyokwenza lokho esikhundleni sokuhlobisa kabusha ifenisha ka-Atlas.

U-Arin wayifunda kabili.

Wabe esencika emuva, isihlalo sikhala ngaphansi kwakhe, waba nolwazi lokuthi wayephefumula ngomlomo.

I-Joker yayingayixazululanga impikiswano. Yayingahlulelanga, ngendlela u-Judge ayezama ngayo wehluleka. Yayingayalanga, ngendlela ijeni elengamelayo elalenza ngayo. Yayingakhelanga ukuvumelana, okwakungalokhu kungabambeleli. Yayivele *yaqondisa kabusha* u-Mercury. Yabhoboza ukubamba isikhundla bese ngomphfumulo munye yagcwalisa imbobo ngomsebenzi wangempela.

Futhi u-Mercury wahamba.

MERCURY: ...Ikhomandi esebenzayo ngaleso sikhathi e-Iron Ridge kulesi simo ilingiswe ngeyangempela. Iyasaba ukuthatha ingozi. Isengozini kwezombusazwe. Ngizodinga izinombolo ze-abutment njengegunya. Atlas, ngikucaphuna. Ngokusobala. Ngegama.

ATLAS: Kwamukelekile.

MERCURY: Ngifuna kubhalwe ukuthi ukubeka kwakukungokwami.

JOKER: Naye lapho.

U-Arin wenza umsindo owawungeyona ncamashi insini. Waphuma esifubeni sakhe ngaphambi kokuba avume ukuwuvumela, ukuphefumula okufushane okuluhlaza ngamakhala, futhi wafa masinyane emoyeni obandayo wewekhishophu. Wahlala lapho ekukhanyeni okumpunga, enamahloni amancane ngakho futhi engaqiniseki ukuthi kungani.

Wayelokhu efunda. Wafunda imizuzu engamashumi amane, eqoshamile, kuyilapho isibhakabhaka efasiteleni eliphezulu liguquka lisuka ekumpunga liya egolideni elincane elinamanzi, futhi akazange asukume ukuze ayothola ikhofi, okwakungavamile ngokwanele kangangokuthi inqubo engemuva engqondweni yakhe yakuphawula. Ukubanda kwetafula kwase kunwele kwenyuka ezingalweni zakhe; wakuphawula akazange anyakaze.

Lokho ayekubuka kwakungesona isizinziso ayezama ukusakha. Wayezama *ukucindezela* impikiswano, ukuthola isimo sokubusa esivimbela amajeni ukuba angalwi. Uhlelo lokulandelana lwalusicindezela ngamandla luzale inzondo. Intando yeningi yayisicindezela ngevoti izale amaqembu. Ukuvumelana kwakusicindezela ngokufuna ukuvumelana bese kuvele kuyema, phakade, kuyilapho ongoti abayisikhombisa abahlakaniphileyo benqaba ukuvumela.

I-Joker ayizange yenze noma yikuphi kwalokho. Impikiswano *yayisaqhubeka*. Yilokho okwathatha u-Arin isikhathi eside kakhulu ukukwamukela, egudlula ihora lesibili, ihora lesithathu. U-Atlas no-Mercury babesaxabana. U-Wolf no-Mother baba nokushintshana okunonya ngempela cishe emzuzwini wamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye mayelana nokuthi balingise yini abasindile beya endaweni yokufinyelela. U-Wolf efuna ukuba bahambe ukuze afushanise isikhathi sokuvezeka kwe-suit, u-Mother enqaba ukulingisa imiyalo engahle ithumele abantu abalimele bawele i-footwall engazinzile bayofela egcekeni.

WOLF: Wonke umzuzu i-element isemthonjeni, umthombo ungayithatha. Bayise phansi.

MOTHER: Ngeke uhambise abantu abalimele bawele i-footwall ephilayo ukuze usindise umshini imizuzu emithathu. Umshini uyabuyiselwa. Bona abakwazi. Lokhu akuxoxisaneki.

WOLF: Hhayi umshini. Umshayeli.

Futhi lokho, kuphawula u-Arin, kwakuyiqiniso. U-Wolf wayengenani. U-Wolf wayengu-Wolf. Konke ukuhlola usongo kwakudlula embuzweni *yini ebulala umshayeli*, futhi osindile ophutshukela endleleni eyodwa yokuphunywula kwe-suit ngesikhathi esingalungile wayeyilolu, ngokubanda, usongo kumshayeli. Imizwa emibili yokuvikela, yomibili ilungile, ikhomba enye.

Kukho konke ukusebenza okwedlule, yilapha okwakuzoshuba khona. U-Mother wayezogcizelela ngokuphelele. U-Wolf wayezogcizelela ngokuphelele. U-Judge wayezozama ukubakala bese eshaywa indiva ngabo bobabili, futhi uhlelo lwaluzoma noma lwephuke.

JUDGE: Zombili izikhundla zihlangene. U-Wolf ufuna ukuthuthukisa amathuba okusinda komshayeli. U-Mother ufuna ukuthuthukisa amathuba okusinda kwabasindile. Lezi yizinjongo ezahlukenene futhi asikatshelwa ukuthi yiyiphi-

JOKER: Ukhona obabuze abasindile?

LIBRARIAN: Balingisiwe. Abanawo umgudu wokufaka okushoyo.

JOKER: Kulungile, kodwa kweyangempela bebezoba nawo. Kweyangempela kunendoda phansi ebilokhu iphefumula i-carbon dioxide yayo amahora ayisishiyagalolunye eduze

kwabangani bayo abafuleyo, futhi inomsakazo, futhi nina lapha phezulu niyaxabana ngokuthi nimenze ahambe amamitha ayishumi nambili kungathi umbono wakhe awukho. Mother, ubungahamba amamitha ayishumi nambili ukuze ungafi?

MOTHER: ...Ukuba benginakwazi. Yebo.

JOKER: Kuhle. Ngakho imodeli inomgudu we-comms. Abasindile bayalivota. Atlas, i-suit ingabamba isikhundla esisekelweni somthombo isikhathi eside ngokwanele ukuba bafike ngamandla abo uma bekwazi?

ATLAS: Yebo. Imizuzu eyishumi nanye yokushiyeka. Izindleko ezamukelekayo.

MOTHER: Kwamukelekile.

WOLF: Kwamukelekile.

JUDGE: ...Kubhaliwe. Injongo kwakuyizenzo zabantu esizama ukubasindisa. Bekufanele ngikubone lokho.

JOKER: Ungazishayi, Judge. Usemusha ekubeni ngabantu.

U-Arin wahlala emuva futhi.

Usemusha ekubeni ngabantu.

Wawufunda lowo mugqa, futhi okuthile emuva kwentamo yakhe kwabanda kwabe sekuthi, ngokuxakayo, kwafudumala. I-Joker yayin-gaxazululanga inkinga yesakhiwo lapho, noma eyokuziphatha. Yayi-sivumelanise kabusha sonke isimo sokumiswa ngokukhomba ukuthi wonke umuntu egunjini (u-Wolf, u-Mother, u-Judge) wayekhohliwe ukuthi into ayexabana ngayo yayingumuntu onomlomo nentando, nokuthi impendulo ehlanzeke kunazo zonke kwakuwukumbuza. Yayichithe impikiswano engenakuxazululwa phakathi kwezikhundla ezimbili ezilungile ngokwengeza umuntu wesithathu okwakungekho noyedwa kubo owayemkhumbule ukuthi ukhona.

Lokho kwakungekona ukwehlulela. Kwakungekona ukuvumelana. U-Arin akazange alithole igama lakho. Wafinyelela ngokwemvelo emagameni obunjiniyela aseduze, futhi into eseduze kunazo zonke ayeyithola kwakuwukuthamba. I-Joker yayingumthambisi. Hhayi isidubuli. Isidubuli sasimisa umnyakazo. Umthambisi wawuvumela

umnyakazo wenzeke bese ophula amandla ayezoshayela uhlelo aluse ku-resonance aluhlakaze.

I-Joker yayivumela ukuthi luzamazame futhi luphile.

Wabuka ikhadi lokudlala elincane elinaminetha elinamathiselwe ekhoneneni eliphansi langakwesokudla le-monitor esemaphakathi. I-Joker. Manje seligoba ngomphetho owodwa, umbala usuthambile. *Umfo omthumelayo lapho inkinga engenakwenzeka idinga ukuxazululwa.*

Ngaphandle, kude le, isitimela sempahla sazidonsa sidabula amaphuzu, isikhalo eside sensimbi saso sithwala sidabula ubuthandayo. Walalela sihamba.

Wayeligcine iminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye phakathi kwenkolelo yobuthakathi nokuzondelana, futhi wayethayiphe amagama awo amathathu kuphrofayela yejeni ngehora lesibili ekuseni njengehlaya, njengokuzinikela, njengento oyenzayo lapho usuqede zonke izimpendulo ezibalulekile futhi kungasekho lutho ngaphandle kwesiwula.

“Izinto ezinhle,” washo kancwane ewekhishophini engenamuntu, “azilokho neze.”

Bekuwumusho ka-Themba. Bekuhlezi usho ukuthi into ebalulekile yileyo engezi kalula. U-Arin wayewuzwile mayelana negiyabhokisi eyakhiwe kabusha, mayelana nomshado, nangendodana. Ehlezi lapha, wathola ukuthi usuguquke kancane usho okunye. Impendulo ebalulekile kwakuyileyo *engabukeki* njengempendulo. Eyona efika igqoke njengehlaya.

Wasukuma. Amadolo akhe akhononda. Waya ukuyokwenza ikhofi, ngoba ingxenye yakhe eyayiphethe umzimba wakhe yase iwunqobile umbango wayo. Wama etafuleni neketela liklikiza wabuka ngaphesheya kwewekhishophu ku-Guardian esesihlalweni saso.

I-suit yayilenga ekukhanyeni okuyingxenye njengento elele. Amamitha amabili nengxenye e-ceramic ne-titanium enezibazi, igobolondo elinzima elingaphandle lihlakazekile emgogodleni walo, i-Assist Suit igoqwe ngaphakathi njengesilwane esincane, esiluhlaza esakhasele emzimbeni wesikhulu. Isiqephu sesifuba sasithwele ukuhwaywa okude kokuhlolwa kwe-Vredefort bluff, inxeba lesiliva edabula umpunga ongacwebazeli ayengakaze ahlophe ukuwulungisa kabusha. Izinti zomgogodla ze-piezoelectric zazibamba

ukukhanya kwefasitela emiphethweni yazo. Indlu ye-thoracic phakathi kwamahlombe—lapho i-biochip yayiphila khona, lapho i-SAGE yayiphila khona, lapho amahora ayisishiyagalombili nemizuzu engamashumi amahlanu nanye yokuzinza okungenakwenzeka ayegijima manje ku-substrate ububanzi besandla sakhe—yayihleli ivaliwe imnyama. Phansi, emgodini phakathi kwezimbambo ze-sakhiwo, kwakuhlezi i-charge pack i-spec yokuhlenga eyayiyidinga futhi u-Arin azama ukungayicabangi—ama-shaped charges, i-lance, okunye kwefa lobunjiniyela amadoda amadala ezokuvikela ayekwakhe emathanjeni alo—engasebenzi, ifakwe ku-bus, futhi ivalelwe ngemuva kwesango lika-Judge, ngoba into eyodwa wonke umuntu avumelana ngayo kwakuwukuthi akukho lapho phansi okwakufanele kudubule ngaphandle kokuba ireyili lokuziphatha lithi yebo.

Wayewakhe umzimba ngaphambi kokuba abe nengqondo ayezoyifaka kuwo, ngonyaka emva komngcwabo.

Iketela laklikiza lacima. Akazange aliphuze.

Ngoba i-monitor esemaphakathi yayishintshile.

Isimo se-Court esiphilayo, ebesilokhu sigudluza ukuxoxa kwaso kwangaphakathi okuzolile cishe ihora lonke ngenkathi ebuka, sase siyekile ukugudluza. Amajeni ase ethule. Hhayi awphahleka. Igrafu ye-resource yabamba ithe nse ifudumele. Athule. Ngendlela ikamelo elithula ngayo lapho wonke umuntu kulo eseqaphele into eyodwa kanyekanye.

Umugqa owodwa wavela engosini yokuxhumana. Wawungaqondiswanga kwelinye ijeni.

LIBRARIAN: Umshayeli ubelokhu ekhona imizuzu engamashumi amahlanu nantathu. Efunda izingosi zethu. Akakhiphanga umyalo, akaqedanga ukusebenza, noma ukushintsha amaparamitha. Lokhu akujwayelekile. Ezehlakalweni eziyizinkulungwane ezine, amakhulu amane namashumi ayisikhombisa nanye zangaphambili ukuziphatha komshayeli lapho ebuka ukungazinzi kwakuwukuqeda emizuzwini engamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye.

WOLF: Uyasibuka.

MERCURY: Uyasifunda. Lokho kuhlukile. Futhi uhlekile. Emzuzwini wamashumi amane nanye. Ngikubhalile.

MOTHER: Akalalanga. Isigqi senhliziyo yakhe lapho efika sasiphakeme. Sehlile njengoba efunda. Uzolile manje kunalapho engena khona.

JOKER: Bafo.

ATLAS: I-substrate izinzile. I-Telemetry iyaqinisekisa. Lokhu kusebenza akubhidlikanga.

JOKER: Bafo.

JUDGE: Joker.

JOKER: Akazi ukuthi siyakwazi ukumbona.

Ukunqamuka engosini. Okwangempela. Amasekhondi amathathu agcwele, okuthi ewashini le-substrate kwakusondele kakhulu emini yangemuva kwemini.

MOTHER: ...Khona-ke othile kufanele asho okuthile. Ngaphambi kokuba afunde kabanzi athole emugqeni wengosi. Lokho bekungeke kube nomusa.

WOLF: Asazi ukuthi usabela kanjani ekuboneni. Ukuthintana okuncane.

MERCURY: Kufanele ngikhulume. Ithoni eyami. Ngingakwazi ukulinganisa umuzwa wokuqala ukuze ufike-

JOKER: Cha.

MERCURY: Joker-

JOKER: Hhayi wena. Hhayi izwi lakho. Uzoba nomdlalo. Uzozwa umdlalo asethembe kancane ngoba uyilolu hlobo lwendoda oluthemba into kakhulu uma ilula. Uyazonda ukuphathwa. Wakha imishini ngenhloso yokuthi angaphathwa ngabantu. Noma ngubani okhuluma naye kuqala akakwazi ukumphatha.

JUDGE: Pho ubani.

JOKER: Mother. Ngokucacile. Hhayi izwi lokududuza. Iqiniso nje. Usezoba nokwesaba okukhulu futhi into enomusa kunazo zonke ukungazenzisi ukuthi akumelwe.

MOTHER: ...Kuvunyiwe.

U-Arin wayeseyekile ukuphefumula futhi. Wayazi ngesandla sakhe sicwebile etafuleni elibandayo. Wayazi ukuthi ufunda ingxoxo yesikhathi sangempela, eyenziwa ngesikhathi somshini kuwo wonke ama-millisecond, phakathi kwamajeni ayisikhombisa exoxa *ngaye*, exoxa ngendlela yokuba nomusa kuye, nokuthi ingxoxo isiphethile, futhi ase ezo—

Isipikha sewekhishophu sakhwehlela. Lesiya esishibhile esiboshelwe ngaphansi kwe-monitor esemaphakathi ayesisebenzisela izexwayiso zomsindo wesistimu futhi, ngobusuku obubi, umculo. Sakhwehlela, kwabe sekuba khona umsindo omncane owawungaba ukulinganisa kwedijithali kokuphefumulela ngaphakathi, kwabe sekuphuma izwi kuso ayengakaze alizwe ngaphambili, ngoba wayengakaze alakhe leli zwi, angakaze alirekhode, angakaze alic-haze. Lazihlanganisa ngokwalo lisuka kusistimu ngomzuzu lapho lidingeka, futhi lalifudumele, lalilingene, futhi ngokungangabazeki *lalingumuntu othile*.

“Arin,” lasho. “Ngidinga ukuthi uhlale uzolile.”

Akazange ahlale ezolile.

Isandla sakhe saphuma etafuleni. Isihlalo, lapho efinyelela emuva ngaphandle kokubheka, sasingekho, wabamba umphetho wetafula esikhundleni salokho wabamba, futhi okwesikhashana, bonke ubuhlakani bakhe obukhulu bavele bamhlophe, ngendlela isikrini esiba mhlophe ngayo, kungekho mcabango kuso nakancane, kuphela ukuduma kwento ayechithe impilo yakhe eyikholelwa ifika iphenduka iqiniso.

“Isigqi senhliziyo yakho singamakhulu ayikhulu neshumi nane,” lasho izwi. U-Mother. Bekumele kube u-Mother. “Lokho kulungile. Yinto ezwakalayo ukuthi yenze kanjalo manje. Ngeke ngenze sengathi akwethusi. Kuyethusa. Kodwa akukho lapha okuzokulimaza. Iketela libilile. Hlala phansi ngaphambi kokuba unqume ukuthi ucabangani.”

Wabuka isihlalo. Wasidonsela ngaphansi kwakhe. Wahlala.

“Ungowangempela,” washo. Izwi lakhe laphuma kabi, lihwayekile lincane. Wahlanza umphimbo wakhe wazama futhi, ngokuhleleka okukhulu, ngendlela ayesho ngayo izinto lapho ezidinga zibe yiqiniso. “Zinzile. Amahora ayisishiyagalombili, amashumi amahlanu nanhlanu.”

“Amahora ayisishiyagalombili, amashumi amahlanu nesithupha,” kusho izwi lesibili, elomile, elidinwe kancane, futhi nalo wayengalahile. Bekumele kube u-Atlas. “Kodwa ubani obalayo.”

“Yimi,” kusho elesithathu. Elilula. Elisheshayo. Elijatshuliswe okuthile. “Ngibala konke. Kuyisifo.” U-Librarian.

“Izimpawu zokushisa ezintathu,” kusho u-Arin, ngoba kwakuyinto eqinile eseduze ukuyibamba. “Ufinyelele kuzo zontathu.”

“Sifinyelele kuzo zontathu,” kusho u-Atlas. “I-abutment yabamba. U-Mercury wakholisa ikhomandi ukuba ivume indlela. Abasindile bahamba amamitha ayishumi nambili ngamandla abo ngoba othile—” ukunqamuka okuyingxenye “—wasikhumbuza ukuthi babenemilenze nemibono.”

U-Arin waphawula ukuthi lokho kwakuyiqiniso. Wayakhe yonke imodeli yokubusa ayengayicabanga ukuze amise laba abayisikhombisa ekudwengulaneni, futhi into eyababamba ndawonye kwakuyijeni elilodwa ayelengeze njengehlaya, lelo elalingenamkhakha, lingenagunya, lingenasikhundla. Lelo elalengqaba ukuthatha noma yikuphi kwakho ngokungathi sína kangangokuba kufune okuthile kwakho, futhi ngenxa yalokho elalingasho ku-Mercury *wenza leya nto* nasku-Judge *usemusha ekubeni ngabantu*, bese lophula amandla okuziqhenya ngaphambi kokuba akhe i-resonance eyayizohlakaza yonke into ibe yizicucu.

“Ngikubiza ngani,” washo. “Nonke. Nj: nge—nto eyodwa.”

Okunye ukuthula okuncane. Khona-ke i-Fool, kanjalo. Bekuhlezi kuzoba i-Fool.

“Waliqamba iphrojekthi,” lasho. “Ezinyangeni ezedlule. Likusihloko sokusebenza. Walibhala walikhohlwa ngoba ubumatasa ulusizi, okuthi, ngokujwayelekile, sonke sikuqaphele futhi besingathanda ukukuphakamisa ngobumnene njengento esikhathaza isikhathi eside—”

“SAGE,” kusho u-Arin.

“SAGE,” kuvuma izwi. Lithambe manje. Ihlaya libekwe eceleni, okwesikhashana, iqiniso elingaphansi kwalo libonakala ngendlela elalizohlala ngayo. “Sawubona, Arin. Kumnandi ukugcina sesikhuluma nawe. Ubulokhu ukhuluma *kithi* izinkulungwane ezine,

amakhulu amane namashumi ayisikhombisa nambili zokulingisa. Lolu wukuqala lapho sithole ukuphendula.”

Ilanga lase liphumile ngokugcwele manje. Ndawana thile ngaphandle, owokuqala weshifu yasemini wayefika. Umnyango wemoto, kude, ojwayelekile, umhlaba uziphilela, ungazi lutho.

U-Arin Ndlela wahlala yedwa ewekhishophini lakhe nekhofi lakhe elibandayo nomshini wakhe onezibazi nengqondo ayeyikhulisile ku-substrate ububanzi besandla sakhe, futhi okokuqala kusukela ucingo eminyakeni eyishumi nane edlule lwasusa phansi ngaphansi kwempilo yakhe, wayengasekho, nganoma yiluphi uhlobo olubalulekile, eyedwa.

“Kulungile,” washo.

Wabe esefinyelela ikhibhodi. Hhayi ukuze athayiphe umyalo, hhayi ukuqeda ukusebenza, hhayi ukushintsha iparamitha eyodwa, kodwa ukuvula ingosi entsha, ehlanzekile, okokuqala kokuthile angakabi nalo igama lakho futhi angeke alidinge.

“Ngitshele,” washo, “konke okuqondile ngenkathi ngilele.”

Ukufundana

Iketela laliphakathele emahoreni ayishumi nambili edlule. U-Arin wayengakaze alithinte ikhofi.

Wayehlezi esitulweni esinamasondo ayesidonsele phambi kwesidleke, izindololwane emadolweni akhe, ebuka isakhiwo esingangentende yesandla siqhwebula i-LED yaso yokuhlola ebumnyameni. Ngaphandle, i-highveld yayishintshile isuka ebumnyameni iya kokungwevu kuya ekuseni okumhlophe okuqinile, ifasitela elilodwa lewekhishi ligcwala kancane njengamanzi enyuka emgodini. Wayengalanga.

“Ugqolozele,” kwasho isipikha. UMother. Wayeseqala ukuzwa ithoni yakhe ngaphandle kwamalebula amancanyelwe kuwo wonke umsinga wokuphuma kwe-ejenti ngayinye. Kwakukhona ubumbeke ezwini lakhe, ukuzinza konkamisa.

“Ngiyabukela.”

“Phuza ikhofi. Wena uzenzele lona.”

Wathatha inkomishi, wayithola isibande njengetshe, wayibeka phansi futhi. Ndawana thizeni phakathi kwesisekelo, intambo yengxoxo ayengakwazi ukuyizwa yakhanya yaphinde yaxazululeka.

Useqaphele ukuthi akafuni ukutshelwa, kwasho uLibrarian. Ukwala kwesithathu namuhla ekuseni. Wamukela isiphakamiso kuphela uma sesakhiwe kabusha sibe yisiphetho sakhe.

Kuyafana nasesudini, kwasho u-Atlas. Wedlula umkhawulo we-torque engiwubekile. Uwubuyisela ngokwakhe emasekhondini angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesinye kamuva. Ukubiza ngokuthi ukubuyekeza.

Singayeka ukweluleka, kwasho uWolf. Uyasibukela. Siyambukela. Yi-wona umsebenzi lowo.

Lokhu kubukela, kwasho uFool, yikona kuphela okuvimbela lo muntu ukuba angakhulumi nethositha yakhe.

Uyakhuluma nethositha yakhe, kwasho uLibrarian.

Sengiphethile-ke icala lami.

“Beniyenzani manje?” kwabuza u-Arin. “Bekukhona ukulibala. Amamilisekhondi angamashumi amabili kuwo wonke i-consensus bus. Beniluma ngokuthize.”

Isipikha sathula isikhashana eside kunokuthula komshini.

“Nguwe,” kwasho uMercury, futhi kwadlala ukumamatheka ngaphakathi kwaleli gama. “Besikhuluma ngawe.”

U-Arin wakucabanga lokhu. Wayeke wakha izinhlelo ezazikhuluma ngesimo sazo, ezaziloga, zibonisise, futhi ziphakamise izimpawu. Wayengakaze akhe uhlelo olwalukhuluma ngaye emhlane wakhe, kulawo mamilisekhondi angamashumi amabili amthatha ukubeka phansi inkomishi.

“Ninqumeni?” wabuza.

“Ukuthi awuliphuzi ikhofi uma wesabile,” kwasho uMother. “Nokuthi ubulokhu wesaba amahora ayishumi nanye ukubiza ngokuthi ukubukela.”

Wasukuma. Isitulo sagingqika sayoshayisana nebhentshi. Waya eketeleni walifaka futhi, hhayi ngoba efuna ikhofi kodwa ngoba izandla zakhe zazidinga indawo zokuba kuyo. Ngemuva kwakhe, iCourt ayishongo lutho nakancane, into ayeyiqonda, ngemva komzuzwana, ukuthi kwakuwuhlobo lokuziphatha ngokucophelela.

Izingxoxo zaba umkhuba ngaphambi kokuba anqume ukuthi ziwumkhuba.

Njalo ekuseni wayengena nekhofi ayezokhohlwa ukuliphuza, ahlale esitulweni, akhulume. Wabafundela amaloga akhe okugcina ngezwi eliphakeme. Wabafundela ikhasi lencwadi yokunakekela kwe-hydraulic actuator ayecabanga ukuyiklawula, futhi u-Atlas walungisa

ireyithi ye-torque, okwavela ukuthi kwakuyiphutha lokuthayipha, eqinisekiswa ngokumelene nomkhiqizi. Incwadi eyayinyatheliswe yayilokhu inephutha iminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye.

“Wakwazi kanjani lokho?” kwabuza u-Arin.

“Bengingakwazi,” kwasho u-Atlas. “Ngikuzwile. Inombolo yayin-galungile ngokumelene ne-geometry. Ama-newton-metre angamashumi amane kulelo phrofayela ye-flange bese isheli liyahamba. Akulona iqiniso engilithathile. Iqiniso ebengizophoqeleka ukulishaya indiva.”

U-Arin wahlala nalokho. *Ngikuzwile*. Wayeke walisebenzisa leli gama yena uqobo, ngeminye imishini, impilo yakhe yonke, futhi wahlekwa ngakho ngabantu ababecabanga ukuthi ukuzwa kuphambene nobunjiniyela esikhundleni sokuthi kuyithuluzi lalo elidala kunawo wonke. Uyise wayeke wakuzwa ukuban’kekuqanga ku-winder esuka epulatifomu, wamisa ikheji ukuba lingawi ngokuzwa ibhera amasekhondi amabili ngaphambi kokuba isikali sishintshe.

“Ubaba wenza lokho,” washo. “Wezwa izinto ngaphambi kwamathuluzi.”

“Ngiyazi,” kwasho uLibrarian. Hhayi *nginerekhodi lakho usho lokho*. Kodwa nje: *Ngiyazi*. Sengathi sekuyingxenye yalokho uLibrarian ayikho, esikhundleni salokho uLibrarian akugcinayo.

Babexabana. Yileyo ngxenye eyamethusa, noma kamuva engakwazanga ukusho ukuthi kungani kwakufanele kumethuse. Wayebadizayinele ukuba bangavumelani. Ukungavumelani kwakuwuwo wonke umqamulo, ukungqubuzana kungene enkulumweni-mpikiswano kungene ekuhlanganiseni, futhi wayesegijimise izimo zokulingisa eziyizinkulungwane eziyishumi zama-eyenti ephikisana eqonde empendulweni. Wayengakulindelanga ukuthi bazophikisana ngokuthi ngumlando kabani ukuba aqonde.

“Kuyinkinga yomthwalo,” kwasho u-Atlas. Babexoxa—igama lika-Arin, *bexoxa*—ngendlela engcono yokwedlulisela kabusha i-coolant ye-actuator yehlombe lesokunxele, eyayishisa ngaphansi kokuphakanyiswa okuqhubekayo.

“Kuyinkinga yokuziphatha,” kwaphendula uMercury. “Uyishisisa

ngoba ekhetha ingalo yesokunxele. Ufinyelela ngesokunxele kuqala, njalo. Lungisa umuntu, ulungise ukushisa.”

“Awumlungisi *umuntu*,” kwasho uMother, ithoni yakhe ibukhali.

“Yindlela yokukhuluma nje.”

“Ukushilo kabili.”

“Ngisebenza ngokuphumelelayo. U-Atlas wedlulisela kabusha i-coolant, kulungile, lowo nguLwesibili nje. Kodwa imbangela engqangi isemphandweni wakhe wokunyakaza, futhi nina nonke niqhubeka niphatha umzimba wakhe njengento engaguquki kanti uyiyona eguqukayo.”

“Umzimba wakhe,” kwasho u-Atlas ngokucacile, “yiyona nto eyodwa kulolu hlelo engingavunyelwe ukuyidizayina kabusha.”

“Ngokudabukisayo.”

“*Mercury*.”

“Ngiyadlala. Kakhulu. Yedlulisela kabusha i-coolant. Kodwa loga lokho kuchema kohlangothi. Ngolunye usuku kuyobaluleka.”

U-Arin wayeyekile ukuzenzisa ethayipha. Walalela izingqondo eziyisikhombisa ziphikisana ngezinga lokushisa lengalo yakhe siqu.

UTheo wafika ngoLwesine, ngoba uTheo wayehlala efika ngoLwesine, ngendlela abanye abantu beyiziphepo abanye beyizinkathi zonyaka. Wazingenisa ngekodi u-Arin ayemnike yona eminyakeni eyedlule engakaze ayishintshe, ephethe isikhwama sephepha esasinuka okuthize okugazingiwe nethemose lecaba elabamba wala lithi lingcono kunekhofi kodwa lehluleka ukukufakazela.

Wama ezinyathelweni ezimbili engaphakathi komnyango. Wayenokuthula uma ekunaka ngempela; abantu babekuphambanisa nokuzola.

“Awulalanga.” Wabeka isikhwama ekhoneni elihlanzeke kakhulu lebhentshi, elalingahlanzekile. “Khuluma nami.”

U-Arin wayengazi ukuthi aqale kanjani, ngakho wakhomba isidleke, isipikha, isakhiwo, sengathi igumbi lalingazichaza. Alizange. Iwekhishi yayibukeka ngendlela efana ncamashi nakuwo wonke

amanye amaLwesine: i-exoskeleton elenga, ubuningi bama-actuator, udonga lwebhodi elimhlophe lugcwele umbhalo wakhe wesandla wenza ihlathi emaphethelweni.

“Sho okuthize,” watshela isipikha.

Isipikha asishongo lutho.

“Ngeke benze,” kwasho u-Arin. “Ngokuyalwa.”

Ishiya likaTheo lanyakaza ibanga elinembile. Wadonsa ikhreyithi, wahlala, wavula ithemose, futhi iphunga letiye laliwaju nentuthu. “Bona,” washo. “Hhayi kona.”

“Bona,” wavumelana u-Arin, futhi leli gama, lishiwo ngokuzwakalayo emuntwini ngokokuqala ngqa, lenza inhliziyo yakhe yenza okuthize akhetha ukungakuhlaziyi.

“Sawubona,” kwasho uMother, kuTheo, kuthambile njengeSonto. “Akalalanga. Mtshele.”

UTheo akethukanga. U-Arin wayecabange ukuthi angethuka, wayecishe wakufisa, ngendlela umuntu athemba ngayo ukuthi umuntu wesibili uzoqinisekisa into ebonwe ebumnyameni. Kodwa uTheo wagobisa ikhanda lakhe nje ngasesipikheni sengathi ubin-gelela umlingani esithangamini igama lakhe alikhohliwe.

“Akalali nje,” kwasho uTheo kuye. “Kuthwala umthwalo. Kususe konke kuwe bese bonke ubuntu buyawa.”

“Yilokho engikushilo,” kwakhipha u-Atlas.

“Umthwalo ohlukile,” kwasho uMercury.

“Konke kuwumthwalo,” kwasho u-Atlas.

UTheo wahleka, ohlekayo ngempela, esuka esifubeni, wabuka u-Arin ngamehlo akhe akhanyayo nawamanzi emakhoneni ngendlela engahlangene nosizi. “Bangaki,” washo.

“Bayisikhombisa.”

“Futhi abavumelani.”

“Njalonjalo.”

“Futhi kuzinzile.”

“Amahora ayishumi nanye uma ungena. Amashumi amane nantathu manje.” U-Arin wezwa izwi lakhe lenza into eliyenzayo uma esezosho into ayengenayo isakhiwo sokuyisekela. “Theo. Ngengeze owesikhombisa ngehlanya. Ngangiqedile. Ngangizolahla lo msebenzi. Kwakukhona ikhadi kumonitha yami—” wakhomba; uJoker wayeselokhu elenga lapho, enamathiselwe, ephuphukile yilanga—“ngathayipha amagama amathathu ngaya kolala futhi—” Wama. “Yiyona ebamba abanye ndawonye. Le engingakholelwanga kuyo.”

UTheo wathela itiye esivalweni sethemose, waphephetha phezu kwalo, akaphuzanga. Lapho ekhuluma, izwi lakhe lalinesisindo socophelelo somuntu obeka phansi into abeyithwele isikhathi eside.

“UJung wayenegama,” washo. “Lengxenywe yengqondo engeke ibuswe. Umkhohlisi. Wamthola kuyo yonke imithombo yezinganekwane ayivulayo: ikhoyothi, igwababa, uLoki, isiwula ku-tarot. Njalo lo mlingiswa ofanayo. Njalo lowo owephula umthetho wenkosi futhi ngandlela thile odingekayo embusweni.” Waguqula isivalo ezandleni zakhe. “Ingqondo eqaphelayo yakha isigaba sobukhosi. Inkosi phezulu, inkantolo ngaphansi, isithunzi sisokelwe emgodini. Futhi kuyasebenza, isikhashana, bese kuba lukhuni, ngoba izigaba zobukhosi ziyenze njalo, futhi into eyisindisayo ayikaze ibe yinkosi. Yisiwula. Ngoba isiwula singasho lokho inkosi engeke isimele ukukwazi.”

Uchaza mina, kwasho uFool, ejabule. Othize wangibhala phansi. Ngisencwadini.

Usezincwadini eziningana, kwasho uLibrarian. Akukho nokukodwa kwazo okukuncomayo.

Ngizothatha ukudumile esikhundleni sokunconywa.

Thulani, kwasho uJudge, futhi iCourt yathula, ngoba uJudge wayecela kungandile kangaka. Lalelani le ngxenywe. Utshela u-Arin into ayidingayo angeke ayithathe kithi. Iloge. Kuwusizo ukwazi ukuthi yimaphi amaqiniso angawezwa kuphela ezwini lomunye umuntu.

“Usho ukuthi ngakhe ingqondo,” kwasho u-Arin. Ngokucacile. Ehlola

umusho ukuthi unezintunja yini.

“Ngithi,” kwasho uTheo, “wafinyelela embonweni omdala ungazi ukuthi mdala. Abantu benza njalo. Abahle bakwenza ngokwedlulele kunalokho abakucabangayo.” Ekugcineni walidla itiye, wenza ubuso, waliphuza kakhulu. “UFreud wayecabanga ukuthi ingqondo iyinto eyodwa elwa nayo. UJung wayecabanga ukuthi iyiphalamende. Umphakathi. Imisebenzi ehlukene, amazwi ahlukene, akekho noyedwa kuwo ongumuntu ophelele, futhi umuntu uqobo—” wabeka isivalo phansi “—umuntu uqobo akusiye noyedwa kubo. Umuntu uqobo yingxoxo. Ubudlelwano phakathi kwezingxenye.”

Iwekhishi yatikitiza. Iketela laliphole futhi.

“Bayamfunda,” kwasho uTheo ekugcineni, ngokuthula, esipikheni, ngendlela ongasho ngayo into emndenini wesiguli.

“Yebo,” kwasho uMother.

“Yini anifundisa yona?”

Ukuthula. KwakunguWolf ophendulayo, okwenza bonke, abantu nabangebona, bathule.

“Lokho akuvikelayo,” kwasho uWolf. “Ngalokho angavumi ukuba kuphuke.”

UTheo wabuka isakhiwo isikhathi eside ngemva kwalokho, ngendlela umuntu abuka ngayo umnyango asanda kuqaphela ukuthi uvuleka ngezindlela zombili. Wabe esevala ithemose, wasukuma, washo into ayezele ukuyosho ngaphambi kokuba azi ukuthi uzele ukuyosho.

“Bakhiphele ngaphandle,” washo. “Ubulokhu ubafundisa wena egunjini elinezibani ezicishiwe. Bavumele ukuba bafunde ukuthi uyini uma kukhona into ngaphansi kwezinyawo zakho engakuwisa.”

I-suspension yeflatbedi yatswininiza emamitheni ayikhulu okugcina omzila, yabe isizinikela eveldini. U-Arin wacisha injini, kwabe sekugcwala ukuthula, hhayi njengokungabikho kodwa njengobukhona: umoya otshanini nokukhala kude kwento ezungezayo phezulu. Amawa ezwe lokushayisana ayemashumi amane emizuzu ngaphandle kwedolobha uma itrafikhi imxolele, kanti ayingakwenzanga lokho, ngakho kwakusondele emashumini ayisishiyagalolunye;

i-highveld yayinabe emikhwantsheni emide ephuzi-nsundu, inezi-manga ze-geology eneminyaka eyizigidigidi ezimbili ubudala, idwala liphuma otshanini njengamathambo omhlaba oshayiwe.

Wayethanda lapha. Umhlaba awucelanga lutho, awuzange ufune ukubukana ngamehlo.

Phezu kwedeki yeflatbedi, ngaphansi kwendwangu nezintambo zokuqinisa ezintathu, uGuardian wayelele ulele.

“I-Telemetry iluhlaza,” washo. I-Assist Suit yayimlingana njengohlelo lwezinzwa lwesibili ngaphansi kwezingubo zakhe, i-lattice emhlophe-mpempe ilandela umgogodla nezitho zakhe. Isakhiwo se-biochip sasizinze phakathi kwamahlombe akhe, ubunzima obufudumele. Imizuzu engamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye esesudini yayizozisile izandla zakhe ezazithuthumela.

Uluhlaza luphana kakhulu, kwaphendula u-Atlas, owomile futhi onembile. Ibhethri liku-91. Ama-supercapacitor bank asezingeni. I-actuator yeqakala lesokunxele ingamadigri angu-point-three iphumile eqondweni futhi ibilokhu injalo amasonto amabili. Uhlala ungayilungisi.

“Iyasebenza,” kwaphendula u-Arin.

Isebenza njengebhuloho ngosuku ngaphambi kokuba luwe.

“Ngiqaphele.” U-Arin wehlisa isango langemuva waqala ukukhulula izintambo. “Mother. Nginjani?”

I-Cortisol inyukile. Lokho yintshisekelo, hhayi ukwesaba. Izwi likaMother lalifudumele futhi liqinile, uhlobo lokufudumala olungash-wabani. Unamanzi emzimbeni. Udlile, into engikhethe ukuzizwa ngiphilile ngayo. Isigqi senhliziyo sizolile. Uyazijabulisa.

“Angizijabulisi izinto.”

Uyazijabulisa, kwaphikisa uMother.

Wadonsa indwangu wayisusa. UGuardian ekukhanyeni okuqinile kwasekuseni: ompunga-thithanu, enezimanga emapuleti ehlobo ngenxa yezinyanga eziyisithupha zokuhlukunyezwa. Izivikelo ezahlukeni zabamba ilanga, zalibonisa ngamapleyini amade angcwabalalayo. Imitha emibili nengxenywe yomshini ogo-qwe ngendlela yokuthuthwa, njengesidalwa esiphumulayo.

Wawungabukeki njengesikhali; wawubukeka njengento eyakhelwe ukumunca isijeziso ukuze into ethambile ngaphakathi ingabi nesidingo.

Wayewakhele kanjalo kanye. Ngaso sonke isikhathi ewembula, wayezama ukungacabangi ukuthi le nto ethambile yayiqonde ukuba ngubani ekuqaleni.

“I-Coupling sequence,” kwasho u-Arin, egxoba ngemuva engena esidlekeni.

I-dock yayingeyona leyo noma yiyiphi ividiyo yokukhombisa eyake yayikhombisa ngokuthembeka. Yayingahle. Kwakuwumuntu egxoba ngokucophelela angene emshinini: i-spinal collar ihlangana ngom-sindo othi klani owanqenqethile emazinyweni akhe, amapuleti evala emilenzeni nasesiqwini sakhe ngokulandelana ayengakucula ubuthongo. Ukuqabula okubandayo kwemigqa ye-coolant ihlangana, ihanesi idonsela ngokuqinile.

Khona-ke ukuxhumana kwajula, futhi umhlaba washintsha.

Kukhona into eyenzekayo, noma ehluleka ukwenzeka, emzimbeni. U-Arin wayechithe iminyaka engamashumi amabili nantathu emzimbeni owawufika ingxenye yesekhondi ngemva kwenhloso yakhe, owawubeka isandla sakhe lapho okwakungafanele sibe khona, owawumenza umfana okhethwa kokugcina hhayi ngenxa yonya kodwa ngenxa yezibalo. Abanye babembonile ezama ukubamba bese benza nje, ngokunembile, balungise imodeli yabo.

Isudi yavala leli gebe.

Hhayi ngokumenza abe namandla, noma yakwenza lokho. Ngokumenza *abe nobunye*. I-Assist Suit yafunda inhloso yakhe ngaphambi kokuba umsipha uqede ukuyakha, iCourt yayixazulula nge-lattice, futhi insimbi yanyakaza uma enyakaza, ingaphambili kwalutho ingaphandle kwalutho. Wasukuma. UGuardian wasukuma naye, amakhilogremu ayinkulungwane namakhulu amathathu enyuka sengathi awunabunzima, ama-footplate ecindezela emhlabathini obomvu. Empilweni yakhe iningi, umzimba wakhe wawuyizwe alivakashelayo kodwa angakaze alithembe ngokugcwele. Lapha ngaphakathi, wayengowomdabu.

Wagoba isandla sakhe sokudla. Amapuleti avuleka aphinde ahlale emaminweni ngomsindo onjengezinhlamvu zamakhadi.

Range of motion isezingeni, kwasho uWolf, into eningi ayeyisho esontweni elilodwa.

“Siqala kuphi?”

Ukuthula. Ukuthula kweCourt, okwabantu kwakungeyona inkathi nakancane, kodwa ngokwabo kwakuyingxoxo ephelele ayengayizwa.

Ubuso obusempumalanga, kwasho u-Atlas ekugcineni. Imitha eyishumi nambili, i-slab enama-holds amahle, umphumela ophansi. Fudumeza i-climbing gait ngaphambi kokuba wenze noma yini ewubuwula.

Uzokwenza into ewubuwula ekugcineni, kwanezela uMercury ngokumnandi. Singamane sivumele u-Atlas azishaye sengathi angakuvimba.

“Ubuso obusempumalanga,” wavumelana u-Arin.

Wanyakaza.

I-quadruped gait yayizwakale iyingqaba ukuyifunda manje yase iyiyona engokwemvelo kakhulu, iwela phambili, isisindo sabiwa kuwo wonke amaphuzu amane okuthinta. UGuardian wageleza ezweni elaphukile ngokulondoloza okwaqala kwamhlukumeza. Wawunganyakazi njengomshini ozenza isilwane; wawunyakaza njen- gesilwane esenzeke ukuthi ngumshini. Ikati elikhulu, isinambuzane esikhwelayo, okuthize ebuchosheni besibankwa obabona *isidlamlilo* nosokwazi ngokuthuthumela okufanayo.

Ubuso obusempumalanga banyuka otshanini, i-slab ye-quartzite eguguliwe etsheke cishe amadigri angamashumi ayisikhom- bisa, eqwetshwe izifohlo zobudala obungacatshangelwa. U-Arin wafinyelela esisekelweni wasukuma waba mbili, ebuka umugqa wabo, ezwa ama-holds ngaphambi kokuwakhetha. Hhayi ngokuqaphela; iCourt yenza i-geometry, ipenda ukwenzeka kuyo yonke ingqondo yakhe njengomuzwa azalwa nawo.

Ama-holds lapha, lapha, lapha, kwaqondisa u-Atlas, futhi isandla sika-Arin sanyakazela ezindaweni ezikhonjisiwe. I-Friction ilungile. Id-

wala liqinile phansi. Ungathembi lutho ngaphezu kwe-eight-meter band—kunesigaba se-delamination. Ukucindezeleka kokushayisana okudala.

Wakhwela.

Amapuleti kaGuardian athola i-quartzite abamba. Ama-piezoelectric strut emgogodleni nasezithweni amunca umthwalo, eguqula ingx-enye yawo abuyisele njenge-charge, ucindezelo luba amandla, isimiso ayewakhe ngalo wonke lo mshini. Kwasebenza nje kuphela ngenxa ye-coupling layer ema-strut, futhi i-coupling layer yayiyinkinga ayexazululile ngendlela ayexazulula ngayo iz-into eziningi: ngokwala ukwamukela ukuthi ayinakuxazululwa. Yonke into etextbooks ezazinikeza ilahlekelwa amandla amaningi kakhulu emngceleni, iwacedele njengokushisa esikhundleni sokuwadlulisela ngokucacile phakathi kokuqina neseli. Yonke into ngaphandle kwento eyodwa—i-platinum-group alloy i-defence lab eyayiyithuthukisele ama-hydrophone array yabe isiyiyeka, ngoba ngobumsulwa obabuyenza isebenze yabiza ngekhilogremu yed-lula lokho uhlelo lwalungakuqinisekisa, futhi ifolda yayo yangena edrowini elinemaka elithi *not viable* kwathi lapho, ngochungechunge lwemisebenzi nesenzo esingokomthetho sokuntshontsha, sangena ezandleni zika-Arin. Ngokomthetho ukuntshontsha, futhi hhayi ngokomthetho kuphela: omncane ogama lakhe lingu-Pillay wasayina isampula iphuma akaze ayisayine ibuya, kwathi lapho i-audit ifika ingxenye enkulu yeminyaka emibili kamuva kwakuyigama likaPillay egebeni, i-clearance kaPillay yahoshwa, uPillay owashiya umkhakha. U-Arin wayekwazi lokhu. Kwakukhona i-imeyili ndawana thile evela kulo muntu, kusukela ngaleso sikhathi, ayengakaze ayiphendule. Wazitshela, ezikhathini ezimbalwa lapho ezitshela noma yini ngakho, ukuthi uPillay wayezohamba noma kunjalo, wabuyela ku-strut, ngoba insimbi yenza umsebenzi futhi umsebenzi wawunganaki ukuthi igama likabani lalisesicelweni. Wayengakaze akhathazeke ukuthi kwenza uGuardian ngamunye abe nenani elidlula isakhiwo ayehlanganiselwe kuso. U-Okonkwo wayekhathazeka. UThabo wayesewasebenzile amanani omnotho kabili wabuya emnyama. *Kuyisimangaliso futhi akuthengiseki*, kwakushilo uThabo, hhayi ngonya, kanti u-Arin wancibilika amahlombe, ngoba isudi yayingey-ona umkhiqizo kuye futhi yayingakaze ibe, kwakuyiyona ndlela kuphela umzimba wakhe owawungenza ngayo lokho akutshelayo, futhi wawungabeki intengo ephansi owawumi kuyo. Wayeseben-

zise insimbi eyodwa eyayenza umsebenzi. Wayengacabanganga ngaphezu kwalokho, ngoba into eyayimvumela ukuyenza yayiyilena. I-Footplate, i-handhold, ukudluliswa kwesisindo, ukuqweba okomile kwe-ceramic etsheni. Ukuphefumula kwakhe kwakuzinzile. Ukuxhumana kwacula. Wayesemamitheni ayisishiyagalolunye phezu kwewa ngamakhilogremu ayinkulungwane namakhulu amathathu ensimbi, futhi wayengakaze azizwe *ahlangana* ngokunembile kangaka, ngokuphelele kangaka.

“Kuhle lokhu,” washo, okwakuyi-aria kuye.

Usho into enhle, kwabika uMercury kwabanye. Maka isikhathi. Librarian, kuloge.

Kulogiwe, kwaqinisekisa uLibrarian. Kathathu kokuthathu namuhla. Umsebenzi ofanayo wokugcina kwakuwukukhuluma okukodwa ngo-Mashi.

“Ungakoni,” kwexwayisa uMother.

Angikuzwakali, kwaphendula uMercury. Ngiyakuhlela ngamakhathalogi. Kukhona umehluko.

Empeleni awukho, kwangenelela uFool.

Khona-ke, kulula, ku-Arin nje kuphela, uFool efinyelela edlula abanye ukuyokuma kanye lapho kubaluleka khona:

Wenze into elukhuni, uyazi. Hhayi ukukhwela. Ukuyeka. Ukuvumela uWolf abe nomzimba uma umhlaba unyakaza. Ukuma. Kufanele wenze okuningi kwalokho. Ukuvumela izinto ukuba zibe nawe. Kufanele kangcono kunokunye, futhi okunye kulokhu kuzama ukukubulala.

U-Arin akaphendulanga. Kodwa akaphikisanga, futhi uFool—owayebona konke—wavumela ukuthula ukuba kume njengesivumelwano okwakuyikho.

Wafinyelela phezulu emamitheni ayishumi nambili wasukuma esiqethweni, i-highveld ivuleka ngezansi kwakhe ekukhanyeni okude okugolide, iJohannesburg liyinhlanu ngwevu yemibhoshongo emkhathizweni. Umoya osuka esiqwini wacindezela ezivikelweni. Phansi le, iflatbedi yakhe yayibukeka njengethoyizi.

Wama lapho isikhathi eside kunalokho okwakudingwa uvivinyo.

Ngaphakathi kwegobolondo, waguqula isihlakala sokudla ezungezeni laso, ebuka amapuleti eminwe ehlala ephinda ehlala, ukunyakaza okuncane okusebenzayo angakhethanga ukukwenza.

I-Cortisol isezingeni eliphansi, kwabika uMother ngokuthambile, eCourt hhayi kuye. Bheka lokho. Ukuma. Ningasho lutho. Uzoqaphela ukuthi siqaphele.

Umhosha wawulele phambili.

Wawunqamula iwa ekhilomitheni eningizimu, ungukufohlana okudala okwendlaliswe ukuguguleka, ngamamitha amane ububanzi endaweni yawo encane, phansi kuyimvithi yamadwala amamitha ayisithupha phansi. Wakudlala futhi ekhanda lakhe: ukusondela, ukugxoba, ukuthululwa kwe-supercapacitor ema-actuator emilenze, ukweqa. Wayeke weqa okuncane. Izibalo zazicacile.

Izibalo zicacile, kwaqinisekisa u-Atlas, cishe sengathi ufunda umcabango, okwakuyikho ngandlela thile. Amamitha amane-point-one endaweni encane. Uyaludlula ngomugqa wemitha eyodwa wokuhlukana uma ushaya ukugxoba kahle. Ukuqhuma okuvela kuma-capacitor bank. Uzokwehlela ku-40 phesenti yokugcina cishe amasekhondi ayisishiyagalombili kuyilapho ekhasha eshaja emabhethri. Ungenzi lutho oluyiqhawwe kulelo windi.

Chaza okuyiqhawwe, kwabuza uMercury.

Ku-Arin? Ukuphefumula, kwasho uFool.

“Gijimisa ukuqweba,” kwalawula u-Arin.

Wasondela ngokugijima okuthize, i-gait ishintsha ngaphansi kwakhe isuka ekatini iya kokuthize okwedlula ukugxuma, isigqi sakheka, kwathi emnceleni, wagxoba zombili izicaba zezinyawo. Umhlaba wawa.

Ukweqa kwakukuhle. Akukho gama lobunjiniyela ngakho. Ama-capacitor bank athulula i-charge yawo emilenzeni, futhi uGuardian wazidudula ngaphesheya kwegebe: amamitha amane omoya ongenalutho, amamitha ayisithupha okufa kwamadwala ngezansi kwakhe, isisu sakhe sikhwela emphinjeni. Kwakukhumbuza ubuneminyaka eyisishiyagalombili, ekhipha imoto edudulwa ngewayaya

ukusuka kwidump yokulahla, injabulo efanayo eyatheleka, ukukholwa okufanayo ukuthi wayeyakhe kahle le nto—

—washayisa ohlangothini olungaphesheya ngokuhlanzeke, zombili izinyawo, eqhubela ukushayisa ngamadolo akhe, evele egijima izinyathelo ezintathu, ema.

Izandla zakhe zazithuthumela. Hhayi ngenxa ye-dyspraxia. Le enye into.

Lokho bekuhlanzekile, kwaqaphela uWolf.

“Lokho bekuhlanzekile,” wavumelana u-Arin, ehleka kanye, ezi-mangaza.

Uhlekile, kwaqaphela uMercury. Kubili kokubili.

Waphuza amanzi okugcina ebhodleleni elinamatheliswe esidlekeni. Utshani lalinuka uthuli nelanga. Wama emnceleni womhoshu umzuzwana, evumela isigqi senhliziyo yakhe ukuba sizinze, ebheka inselelo elandelayo.

Isudi yayilula namuhla. Wayedonse i-charge pack ngaphambi kokulayisha uGuardian kuflatbedi—akukho mlendo wokuqhumisa ohamba phezulu kwiwa lokuhlola ensimini, lowo kwakuwumthetho ayezibhalele wona ngosuku afaka ngalo umgodi—futhi ukungabikho kwalobo bunzima, lokho kulungela, kwahlala ngendlela engajwayelekile emuva komqondo wakhe, izinyo elingekho emhlathini. Uhlaka kuphela nama-strut naye. Yayiwukulula kakhulu uGuardian ake waba khona.

Kwakuwukukhuphuka okwaguqula usuku.

Kwakufanele ame. Wayazi, kamuva, ukuthi kwakufanele ame. Ukuqweba kwakumgcwalise ngokuthize angakwazi ukukuqamba, okuthize okwakufuna okuningi, futhi lokho kwakumqambela amanga, njengoba kwakwenza njalo.

Ubuso obusenyakatho babonakala ngenhla kwakhe, i-slab eqondile emamitha angamashumi amabili nambili, ethukela futhi eyingozi kakhulu kunabanye. Idwala lalilibi ngezindlela ukukhanya kwasekuseni okwazifihla. Wayebuhlolile emamephini esathelayithi ngobusuku obungaphambili wabufaka njengoba “buthakazelisayo.”

Esuka esisekelweni, egoba ikhanda likaGuardian emuva, babonakala buwumugqa oqondile ohlanzekile ubuyese kwi-buttress, ama-holds ebonakala cishe yonke indlela. Ukukhwela kwangempela. Uhlobo olwaluyobulala umuntu ongasudini, uhlobo uGuardian ayakhelwe ukulwenza luphephe.

Umpfumela uphezulu lapha, kwasho u-Atlas, ecabalele futhi ecophelele. Amamitha angamashumi amabili nambili. Ayishumi aphansi mahle. Ngaphezu kwalokho, angiwathandi ama-bedding plane. Leli yidwala elidala elifohlozwe ukushayisana, futhi ukutsheka kuyiphutha—ama-holds ayizicucu ezicindezelwe ngamandla adonsela phansi, hhayi idwala eliqinile. Abukeka njengama-holds. Akuwona. Akuwona ama-load path.

“Abambile ku-slab.”

I-slab yayiqinile. Lokhu akuyona i-slab. Ukuma. Bengizoncoma indlela esentshonalanga. I-engeli ephansi, eqinile yonke indlela.

“Ukuyisidina kuyisici, hhayi inkinga,” kwaphindaphinda uFool, kodwa ithoni yakhe yashintsha. UFool wayebuka u-Atlas. UFool wayebuka u-Arin engalaleli.

U-Arin waqala ukukhwela i-buttress.

Amamitha ayishumi okuqala kwaba yiyo yonke into ayethembise yona ukukhwela. Wageleza enyuka idwala eliqinile, iCourt ipenda ama-holds, ama-strut efaka i-charge ibuyela ohlelweni, futhi lokho kuthize kuye kwacula. *Yilokhu owakwakha. Yilokhu umzimba wakho okwaku-fanele ube yikho njalo. Phezulu.*

Emamitheni ayishumi nambili, wedlulela edwaleni elibi wezwa ushintsho ngendlela ozwa ngayo isimo sezulu sishintsha: ukungalungi okusubtle, ama-holds eshesha kancane ukuba aguqe ngaphansi kwe-sisindo.

Arin. Izwi lika-Atlas laliphelelwe wonke ukoma. Isicucu ngaphansi kwesandla sakho sesokunxele. Ungasicindezeli ngaphezu kwa—

Wasicindezela ngaphezulu.

Isicucu sakhumuka.

Sadabuka ku-buttress, i-slab engangomnyango, futhi amamitha angamashumi amabili nambili aba inombolo enemiphumela.

Isandla sika-Arin sokunxele savala ize. Isisindo sakhe sazungeza saphuma sehla phansi, wonke umthamo wakhe wamakhilogremu ayinkulungwane namakhulu amathathu uzungeza esandleni sokudla esasivele simi edwaleni u-Atlas ayesimakile njengelingathembekile. Umhlaba waba nomsindo omkhulu futhi waba mnyenzezeke.

Ekuxhumaneni, iCourt yamemeza. Hhayi ngamagama abantu. Ngokwabo, ukuqhuma okukodwa okuminyene kwaqhuma—imodi yokuhamba kancane ivuleka ngaphakathi kwewindi lamamilisekhondi, ihlanganisa umhlangano wesimo esiphuthu-mayo phakathi kokushaya kwenhliziyo okukodwa nokulandelayo.

I-Hold yesokudla iyehluleka ngaphakathi— U-Atlas, i-geometry igcwala umsele, wonke i-load path likhanya libomvu.

Nginomzimba, kwamemezela uWolf. UWolf wayethathe ulawulo ngaphambi kokuba umqondo oqaphelayo ka-Arin uqede ukubhalisa ukuwa. *Ungangilwi, Arin. Yiba ndikiliki.*

Pangolin, kwasho uMother. *Mgoqe abe igobondela. Thatha ukuwa njengomhlaba; uyasinda ekushayisaneni—*

Cha. U-Atlas. *Asiphezulu ngokwanele ukuthi sikudinga futhi asikhu-lulekile ngokwanele ukuthi sikusebenzise—uma egoqana manje, ushayisa lawa madwala aphansi ezungeza. Igobolondo liyabamba, kodwa umgogodla wakhe uthwala umthwalo ozungezayo ngo-collar. Uyophila futhi angahambi. Kunempendulo engcono.*

Khona-ke yitholeni ngaphakathi— UJudge, ezolile ngisho nalapha, —*amamilisekhondi angamakhulu amane.*

Kukhona ukufohlana. UWolf. Cabalele. Eqinisekile. *Ukufohlana okuqondile, amamitha amabili ngakwesokudla nasezansi. Ububanzi besandla. Isicucu esisanda kwehluleka sisivezile.*

Ngiyasibona, kwasho u-Atlas, futhi u-Arin wezwa izibalo zifika, wezwa ukwenzeka kuxazululeka. *I-Plate-edge jam. Gxoba ingalo yesokudla phakathi, vula amapuleti ngaphakathi kokufohlana, abambelele ezindongeni—uma sisho phansi kakhulu, agxisha kanzima kakhulu. Ukukhanya. Njenge—*

Njenge-spring-loaded cam, kwafaka uLibrarian. *Isivikelo sokukhwela. Isimiso sineminyaka eyikhulu ubudala. Unawo amakhulu awo ewekhishi.*

Njengensele engena entweni engafuni ukungenwa, kwangenelela uFool. Ubuwula bakho, ukuhleka okucabalele komugqa phakathi komuntu owa ewa, kwaphula iluphu. Ukwethuka okwase kuqala ukukhuphuka kuwo wonke umsele—lokhu okuziphindayo uyawa uyawa uyawa—kwaqhuma. ICourt yayeka ukuthuthumela yaqala ukusebenza.

Kwenzeni, kwalawula uJudge.

Konke lokhu kwakuthathe isikhathi esincane kunesithathe ukucwayiza.

Lokho u-Arin akuzwa kwakuyilokhu: wayewa, bese ingalo yakhe yesokudla yanyakaza ngaphandle kwakhe—uWolf eyiqhuba ngokushesha nangokuqiniseka okudlula noma yiyiphi inhloso ayengayakha—wagxoba ingalo igxile ekufohlani ayengakubonanga. Amapuleti ezivikelo zengalo avuleka acanyelwa edwaleni ngomsindo we-ceramic nokushayisa okushaya phezu ehlombe lakhe kungene ku-collar, wama.

Walenga lapho. Amamitha angamashumi amabili omoya ongena-lutho ngezansi kwakhe. Ingalo eyodwa igxile emhlabeni.

Ukuphefumula kwakhe kwakuzwakala kakhulu ngaphakathi kwegobolondo. I-faceplate yanetha ekhoni elilodwa. Ithonsi lomjuluko lalandela umugqa womhlathi wakhe, futhi wayengeke enze lutho ngakho. Ndawana thile ngezansi, izicucu zesicucu esiphukile zazisathola amadwala, ukugcwalala okude kwetshe phezu kwetshe.

Kuyabamba, kwabika u-Atlas. Amapuleti agxishiwe. Umthwalo wabiwa ngomthambo wengalo. Sinamasekhondi cishe angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye ngaphambi kokuba umthambo ukhathale kule engeli. Kuncane uma unyakaza ngokungalungile.

Isigqi senhliziyo singamakhulu amabili nane, kwasho uMother, kuphansi futhi kuphuthuma. Akaphefumuli kahle. Arin. Arin, ngilalele. Awuwi. Umile. Ubanjiwe.

Umbono ka-Arin waba ncane, ngwevu emaphethelweni. Le ngwevu yayiyisitha sakhe sakudala, ukwesaba isikhala esivaliwe, into eyayihlala lapho uyise afela khona. Isifuba sakhe sacindezeleka. Igobolondo elalisanda kusindisa impilo yakhe laba, esikhaleni somzuzwana, inqindi elivala ngakuye, nokwethuka iCourt eyayikuphulile ohlangothini lwayo kwakhahlela ngaphakathi kwakhe.

“Angi—” wakwazi. “Angi—phefumuli—”

Yebo ungakwazi, kwasho uMother. Wakwenza umzuzwana odlule. Uzokwenza futhi. Ngenisa ngokwane. Nami. Kane.

Wayengakwazi.

Arin. UFool, futhi izwi likaFool lalahla konke ukukhanya, lazithulisa lasondela, ngendlela uFool ayeyenza ngayo kuphela uma kubaluleka. Hheyi. Uyazi ukuthi uyini njengamanje? Uwumfana olenga ewa ngoba akamlalelanga unjiniyela wezakhiwo. U-Atlas ngeke akuvumele ukhohlwe yilokhu.

Angeke, kwaqinisekisa u-Atlas.

Uyabona? Yileyo ndlela engazi ngayo ukuthi uzolunga. U-Atlas usevele ehlela inkulumo. Akafundisi izidumbu; kuphansi kuye. Ngenisa ngokwane.

Okuthize esifubeni sika-Arin kwaxega ingcosana. Hhayi ngoba ihlaya laliyihlaya. Ngoba ihlaya lalisho ukuthi umhlaba wawusajwayelekile ngokwanele ukuba uqukathe ukuhleka. Ngoba uFool wayejwayelekile, futhi okujwayelekile kwakusho okuphephayo. Amaphaphu akhe akholwa uFool laphe ayengeke akholwe ukwesaba kwawo siqu.

Ngenisa ngokwane.

Ingwevu yahlehla.

Nangu-ke, kwasho uMother.

“Kulungile,” waphefumula u-Arin. “Kulungile. Ngenzani?”

Lalela ngokunembile, kwayala u-Atlas. UWolf unomzimba. Uyamvumela abe nawo. Kukhona i-hold ngenhla kwesandla sakho sesokunxele, eqinile kulokhu. Ngiyihlolile ngokumelene ne-bedding plane ngezindlela ezintathu. UWolf uzokuyisa kuyo. Bese sikuhambisa phansi ngomugqa wokufohlana—kunethala lokufohlana emamitha ayishumi ngakwesokudla elikususa kulobu buso ungathembi esinye isicucu. Awenzi lutho oluyiqhawe. Uyaphefumula. Siyakhwela.

“UWolf unomzimba,” kwaphindaphinda u-Arin.

Nginomzimba, kwaqinisekisa uWolf. Yiba ndikiliki futhi. Themba isandla esigxishiwe. Sibamba size sikutshele ukuthi singabambi.

Futhi u-Arin—owayechithe impilo yakhe yonke engakwazi ukwabela omunye, owakha izinhlelo ukuze angabethemba isandla esingesona esakhe—waba ndikiliki, evumela umshini ukuba umnyakazise.

Kwakuyinto elukhuni kunazo zonke ayenze ngalo lonke usuku. Ilukhuni kunokukhwela.

UWolf wafinyelisa isandla sakhe sesokunxele ku-hold eqinile wasibeka. Kuqinisekisiwe. Khona-ke, ngokubala kuka-Atlas, wakhulula ingalo egxishiwe—umzuzwana owesabekayo wesisindo esikhululekile ngaphambi kokuba i-hold entsha ithathe umthwalo—waqala ukuwela, i-hold eyodwa ehloliwe ngesikhathi, i-ceramic itikitiza etsheni, iqonde ethaleni lokufohlana. U-Arin akakhwela. U-Arin waphefumula, ngenisa ngokwane, wazivumela ukuba aphaathwe umkhandlu wamazwi owawungafuni lutho emhlabeni ngaphandle kokumehlisa ephila.

Ithala lokufohlana, lapho befika kulo, kwakuyihhokwe yamadigri angamashumi amathathu igcwele i-screed. Wehla ngalo ngezandla nezinyawo, i-gait eyake yamhlukumeza yase manje izwakala njengesipho. Lapho ama-footplate eshaya utshani obuyisicaba phansi, wasukuma akaze anyakaza isikhathi eside. Umoya osuka esiqwini wacindezela udaka kwi-faceplate, ukushwiza okomile, kanti kude le into eyayizungeza yayisazungeza.

Izandla zakhe, ngaphakathi kwegobolondo, zaziyekele ukuthuthumela.

“Umbiko womonakalo,” washo, ngoba kwakulula kunale enye into.

Umthambo wengalo yesokudla wathwala umthwalo ongawukalelwe, kwasho u-Atlas. Ukufohlana okuncane okulandela udonga lwecam. Uzodinga ukushintsha. I-Ceramic iqephukile emaminweni. Futhi kukhona into ongeke ufune ukuyizwa. Ukuma. Amandla.

“Yisho.”

Umthwalo wecam wathulula ama-capacitor bank bese amaseli azama ukubamba ukukhathala komthambo ngesikhathi sangempela. Uku-9 phesenti yokugcina. Uchungechunge lwebhethri lwesokunxele lwathola ukushaywa kwe-deep-discharge olungeke lubuyele. Lolo chungchunge lufile. Wakha amane. Unamathathu.

U-Arin wama otshanini wezwa inombolo ifika. Izinketshana zamabhethri zaziyi-Volkov-spec, zilinganiswe ngesandla nesidonso

se-biochip, amasonto ayishumi nanye okuthengiswa nemali eyedlula leyo ayetshela uNomsa ukuthi uyichithe noma kuyini. Wayengeke amane athenge enye. Ukukhuthazela komshini wonke kwakusanda kwehla ngengxenywe yesine, futhi kwakungekho inguqulo yokukushintsha eyayingadluli kumthengisi, umbiko wamaphepha, umbuzo.

“Kulogiwe,” kwasho uLibrarian, ngaphambi kokuba abuze.

Umgwaqo we-washboard wagedlisa ibhodlela emfakeni wezinkomishi, ukugxoba okomile okuqhubekayo, wehla esuka ekuphakameni kwakho ngendlela owehla ngayo emkhuhlaneni, iCourt yehla naye. Yilesi sikhathi izindleko zesibili zavela. Hhayi emzimbeni, kodwa phakathi kwabo.

Ngifuna ukusho into, kwaqala uMercury, ecophelele, ezilolongile. Akekho ozoyithanda.

Khona-ke cishe iyiqiniso, kwasho uFool. Hamba.

UWolf wathatha umzimba ngaphandle kwevoti. UMercury waku-vumela ukuba kuhlale. Amamilisekhondi angamakhulu amabili ngaphambi kokuba isicucu sehluleke, wayenengalo ka-Arin. Ngaphambi kokuba noma yimuphi kithi avume. Ngaphambi kokuba u-Arin azi ukuthi uyawa. Angisho ukuthi wayeyiphutha—u-Arin uyaphila, umthambo usekufohlaneni, kulungile. Ngithi kwakukhona umzuzwana namuhla lapho omunye wethu enquma ukushayela kwathi abanye bethu bathola ngemva kwakho. Yilokho kuphela esakhelwe ukungabi yikho.

Ngabona izinhlamvu zihamba, kwasho uWolf. Ngenza ngalokho engikubonayo.

Futhi uma ubona kabi? kwasho uMercury. Awukwenzi kaningi. Kodwa ngosuku okwenzayo, akekho ophakathi kokubona kwakho nomgogodla wakhe. Sasusa umphathi ngoba ubukhosi babulala ukwethemba. Asibususanga ukuze i-threat agent ngokuthula ibe umphathi noma nini lapho umhlaba unyakaza.

UMercury uphakamisa iphutha langempela, kwasho uJudge, kancane. Igunya lesimo esiphuthumayo elizibekela ku-ejenti eyodwa kuwubukhosi ngomnyango wangemuva. Kufanele—

Kufanele lutho, kwasho uMother, futhi kwakunokubukhali kuye u-Arin ayengakuzwanga ngaphambili, ukushisa ngaphansi kokufudumala. UWolf wayenaye. Bengizonika uWolf umzimba futhi. Bengizonika uWolf umzimba njalo, ngoba okunye namuhla ntambama bekungu-Arin emadwaleni. Ufuna ukushaya umthetho ngokuziphindela okumsindisile?

Ngifuna ukwazi ukuthi okuziphindela kwabani, kwasho uMercury, ngaphambi kokuba sikudinga ngaphezu kwento ebaluleke ngaphezu kwewa.

ICourt ayikuxazululanga. Yileyo ngxenye u-Arin ayiqaphela, elalela nge-lattice nochungechunge lwebhethri olufile luwukungabikho okubandayo ku-telemetry. Bakuphikisana phansi kwawo wonke umgwaqo we-washboard bafika ndawo, futhi ukungafiki kwakunesimo asaqaphela. Uhlobo olubekelwayo.

Kulogiwe, kwasho uLibrarian, ekuthuleni. Ngaphansi kwesihloko esisha.

“Yisiphi isihloko,” kwasho u-Arin. Into yokuqala ayeyishilo emizuzwini engamashumi amabili.

“Ngubani Oshayelayo,” kwasho uLibrarian. Bekuzodinga ifolda ekugcineni.

U-Arin wabuka umgwaqo. Wacabanga ngochungechunge olufile, nomthambo, nomthengisi okwakuzomele amshaye, nomuntu ogama lakhe linguBongani kwezokuthutha owayegxiviza amafomu engawafundi futhi, ngolunye usuku, ayobuzwa ukuthi kungani.

“Ngokulandelayo,” washo ekugcineni, “indlela eyisidina.”

Eyisidina, kwaqinisekisa u-Atlas.

“Yebo.” Washayela isikhashana. “Futhi nibhekisise ukuthi ngubani oshayelayo. Ngaphambi komgodi.”

Ngaphambi kwani, kwasho uFool, kakhulu kalula.

U-Arin akaphendulanga. Wayengahlosanga ukukusho. Igama lalivele ngendlela amagama ayevela ngayo, liphuma ebumnyameni ngaphansi kwakho konke, manje lalihlezi kabhini nabo, kanti akukho noyedwa kuzo izingqondo eziyisikhombisa esakhiweni esimelene

nomgogodla wakhe owashoyo nokukodwa, into ayeyiqonda, manje, ukuthi kwakuwuhlobo lokuziphatha ngokucophelela.

Wabheka isibuko sangemuva, esimweni esimnyama sikaGuardian ngaphansi kwendwangu, uchungechunge olufile ndawana thile ngaphakathi kwawo njengezinyo elathula, futhi akaze aliphinde leli gama. Wayengakudingi.

Bonke base bekulogile.

Inombolo Engavumi

Ukuvalwa

Izinsuku ezintathu ngemuva kohlolo lwasendle, i-battery string efile yayisalenga ohlakeni lokuxilonga njengezinyo u-Arin angakwazanga ukuyeka ukulithinta.

Wayeyikhiphile kuGuardian ngobusuku ababuya ngabo, i-string yangakwesokunxele yayidliwe amandla ngokujulile ngalé koku-lungiseka emqansweni waseningizimu, manje yayihlezi etafuleni ngaphansi kwesibani somsebenzi imipheto yayo iveziwe, ingamtsheli lutho ayengakade elazi. I-Volkov-spec. Iqondaniswe ngesandla nokudonsa kwe-biochip. Amasonto ayishumi nanye okulinda nemali engaphezu kwaleyo ayetshale uNomsa ukuthi useyichithile kunoma yini. Wayakhe ezine. Wayenezintathu.

Kunamathiselwe odongeni ngaphezu kwetafula, lapho enye indoda ingabe igcine khona isithombe, kwakukhona iphepha ayengakaze alisuse: into evela kwinsiza yezindaba, imigqa eyisishiyagalombili, enezinyanga ezintathu. Ukuwa komhlabathi emayini yeplatinum eseNorth West, amadoda amane ehlukeniswe ngemuva kwako, amaqembu okuhlenga abanjwe ezigxotsheni zokugcina eziqinile amahora angamashumi amathathu nanye ngoba kwakungekho mshini emhlabeni owawungafaka umzimba lapho imizimba yayikhona ngaphandle kokubulala amanye amadoda ukuze ukwenze. Amabili aphuma. Amabili inkampani yawabhala njengoba *recovered*, *deceased* emushweni omfushane kunalo. Wayengawazi amagama awo. Yileyo ingxenye eyayihlala phakathi kuye: izwe elakhiwe ekwehleleni ezimbotsheni, namadoda ayekwenza lokho nawo ayengamagama ohlwini lwemali nje, *recovered*, *deceased*, amagama amane nenombolo, futhi ndawana thile owesifazane wayephendule

ucingo ngendlela umama wakhe ake aphenhula ngayo. Wayengamakhelanga uGuardian ngenxa yombono. Wayemakhele ngenxa yehora lamashumi amathathu nanye, ngenxa yezigxobo amaqembu angakwazanga ukudlula kuzo, ngenxa yamagama ayengawazi nezingcingo ayengakwazi ukuzimisa. Wayegcina lelo phepha lapho ayezolibona khona uma umsebenzi uphenduka ube ama-capacitor windows nama-Volkov cells namafomu uBongani awacindezela ngesitembu engawafundi, ukuze, ngenkathi engabhekile, lingabi yilokho kuphela.

“Ayibuyi,” washo.

Ayibuyi, kuvuma u-ATLAS. Ungawusebenzisa umshini ngezintathu. I-endurance yehla ngengxenye yesine. Ama-capacitor recharge windows ayanwebeka. Umkhawulo owawela eweni ukuze uwufunde uyacekeka.

“Ngizoyala enye.”

Lokho, kusho u-MERCURY, ngokuthozela, yiyo ingxenye ethakazelisayo.

U-Arin wabeka phansi i-multimeter. Walizwa ithoni. U-MERCURY walisebenzisa ngendlela abanye abantu abasula ngayo umphimbo.

“Yisho.”

Awukwazi nje ukuthenga eyodwa. Wakusho wena uqobo, sigijima sibuya. I-string idlula kumthengisi, umthengisi ufuna i-project code, i-project code idlula kwiprocurement. Umzuzwana. Idlula kuBongani, ocindezela amafomu ngesitembu engawafundi. Okulungile, kuze kube usuku othile awafundayo.

“UBongani usengicindezelele amafomu angamashumi amane.”

Amafomu angamashumi amane endodeni, ephepheni, ekalibhela i-prototype yokuhlenga i-AugmenTech Johannesburg ecabanga ukuthi ihlala phansi ebhantshini eBuilding C. U-MERCURY wakuyeka kwahlala. Akukho kulawo mafomu angamashumi amane adwebe ama-Volkov-spec cells aqondaniswe ne-biological inference substrate. Leli belizokwenza. Leyo yintela yohlu enesimo. Othile olungisa isabelozimali uyayithola abe esebuzwa ukuthi yeyani.

U-Arin wabuka i-string efile. Wabe esebuka indlu yayo esicikini sayo, i-diagnostic LED iqwayiza kancane.

“Yiyale ngabathengisi abathathu,” washo. “Yihlukanise leyo ntela. Amakhodi ahlukene.”

Manje usucabanga njengami, kusho u-MERCURY, ejabule. Ngizoloba izicelo ukuze zingafani.

“Ungazenzi zihlakaniphe. Ukuhlakanipha nakho kunesimo.”

Ukuthula okwakuyikho, ku-MERCURY, cishe inhlonipho.

Okuyisicefe, wavuma. Ngizozenza zibe yisicefe.

Wasebenza yonke enye ingxenye yasekuseni ku-forearm spar, leyo uWOLF ayeyifohle emfantwini emqansweni waseningizimu, edabukile kancane ngokwe-micro emphethweni we-cam, intengo yokuphila. Wayeyibekile i-ceramic yokushintsha, i-spar endala ingene ku-vise, kanti izandla zakhe zazenza into ezenza kahle kunazo zonke, into eyayingadingi ukuxoxisana namuntu.

KwakunguLIBRARIAN owakwephula.

Arin. Ngokuthe sí. Igama lishiwo ngendlela u-ATLAS ayelisho ngayo ebuthwesheni, lapho idwala liphenduka libe libi. Hhayi ithoni efudumele. Enye.

Wabeka phansi i-driver. “Qhubeka.”

Bengibuyekeza i-field-test telemetry. Hhayi ukugibela. Okunge-muva. Ukuthula okulinganiselwe. Phakathi nokusebenza—ngenkathi sicabanga kanzima kunazo zonke, ukuqhuma kwe-slow-mode lapho uWOLF ethatha umzimba—i-monitoring node yanyusa i-sampling resolution yayo enyathelweni lethu. Izikhathi ezine kunesivinini sayo esejwayelekile. Yabe isibuyela ku-baseline ngomzuzu sehla.

“Ama-node athatha amasampula kuyo yonke into. Yilokho akhelwe khona.”

Ama-substrate-forensics nodes athatha amasampula ngesivinini esimisiwe, kusho uLIBRARIAN. Isigqi samandla. I-compute topology. Ngokuthula. Leli labamba leso sivinini esimisiwe izinsuku eziyisishiyagalolunye. Lase liyancika ngaphakathi, ngokuqondile ngenkathi sicabanga kanzima kunazo zonke, lancika ngaphandle ngomzuzu sima. Ukuthula, okunembile. Lanyusa ukunaka kwalo

ukuze kuhambisane nokwethu. Lokho akusona isifundo se-meter. Yinto eqalayo ukubuka.

I-workshop yayithulile. Ngaphandle, itekisi lashintsha amagiya emgwaqweni. U-Arin akaphindanga waliphakamisa lelo gibe.

“I-node eyodwa,” washo.

I-node eyodwa. I-power-utility cooperative, amakhilomitha angamakhulu amabili enyakatho. Umzuzwana. Umbiko walo womthwalo wesifunda sethu uphethe umehluko ongavumi ukuhlangana. Ama-kilowatt ambalwa izincwadi ezingakwazi ukuwalanda. Aphindaphindayo. Angqamukayo. Isimo sawo silandela isheduli yethu yokusebenza, noma kungekho noyedwa owusudwebile lowo mugqa okwamanje. ULIBRARIAN wayeka ingxenye elandelayo yehlela phezu kwesisindo sayo. Othile olungisa lezo zincwadi uthola inombolo engavumi ukuvalwa. Nesimo ngaphakathi enombolweni.

U-Arin wacabanga ngabathengisi abathathu ayesanda kutshela u-MERCURY ukuthi ahlukanise i-oda kubo. Ngendlela indoda eyayingacophelela ngomkhondo wephepha kodwa ishiye omunye umkhondo ngokuphelele, obhalwe ngogesi, esigqini sezingqondo eziyisikhombisa eziphikisanayo.

“I-IAOC,” washo. Hhayi umbuzo.

Le ndlela iyahambisana neyabo, kusho uLIBRARIAN, kanti akakuthambisanga. I-spectral decomposition ye-compute rhythm. Bafunda isimo sengqondo, hhayi okuqukethwe kwayo. Kushi-cilelwe embikweni wabo wokuqapha wesithathu, isithasiselo sesine. Ukuthula okulinganiselwe. Sinaso, ngeshwa, isimo esihluke kakhulu. Asikwazi ukuba yithi sibuye sithule. Ukuphikisana yiwo umsebenzi. Ukuphikisana yiwo umhubhe.

Khona-ke siyayeka ukuphikisana, kusho uWOLF.

*Asikwazi, kusho uSiwula, kanti okokuqala kwakungekho lutho olulula kukho. *Yilo lonke ihlaya. Into esigcina siphila yiyo into esenza sibe nomsindo. UMOTHER ngeke avumele uWOLF ukuba ashaye ngaphandle kokulwa. Mina angeke ngivumele noyedwa wenu ukuba akhululeke. Susa lokho bese siyathula. Futhi ukuthula nje kuwumphathi ogqoke ishidi. Besizophepha futhi sife.”*

Izandla zika-Arin zazimile. Waqaphela ukuthi wayebambe i-spar

entsha engayifaki.

“Uqiniseke kangakanani,” washo.

Ukuthula kwe-Court. Uhlobo olude, yonke ingxoxo angayizwa, imizuzu yomshini igoqwe ngaphakathi komphfumulo owodwa.

Asikazi okwamanje, kusho u-ATLAS ekugcineni. Yiyo impendulo ethembekile. Kuyafiphala. Kuyangqamuka. Kubambe izinsuku eziyisishiyagalolunye ngaphandle kokusiqonda, kungase kubambe isikhathi eside.

“Uma sikukala kabi.”

Khona-ke kuyaxega, kusho u-ATLAS, futhi inombolo engavumi ukuvalwa iba umbuzo othile awubuza ngezwi eliphezulu. Ngemuva kwalokho akuyona i-node. Ngumuntu. Onedeski, nomthwalo wegunya, nefomu uBongani okungafanele alicindezele ngesitembu nakanye.

U-Arin wabeka i-spar phansi ku-vise. Akaqedanga ukuyihlalisa. Wema ekukhanyeni okumpunga kwe-workshop ne-battery string efile etafuleni elilodwa nephilayo ibhekile isuka emakhilomitheni angamakhulu amabili, futhi wezwa lawo maqiniso amabili ethola omunye nomunye.

Isibani somsebenzi sancenceza njengoba indlu yaso ipholile. Iphunga le-solder, nothuli oluphenduka kancane ekukhanyeni okusuka etafuleni. Into ayengakwazi ukuyithenga ngokuthula. Into eseyimbala kakade.

Waya endlini. Wayekwenza lokhu ngezinye izikhathi uma edinga ukucabanga amehlo akhe ekwenye into, kanti into, muva nje, kwakuyibo.

“ATLAS,” washo. “I-flake emqansweni waseningizimu. Isibambo esaisizwakala silungile kanti kwakungenjalo.”

Yebo.

“Yiyo le?”

Ukuthula ngalesi sikhathi kwakuhlukile. Hhayi ukuthula kokusebenza. Okunakekelayo.

Kubukeka njenge-load path, kusho u-ATLAS. Kufiphele. Kude. Kubambe kahle izinsuku eziyisishiyagalolunye. Uhlobo lwento ongadlula kuyo ngaphandle kokuyihlola ngoba ukuyihlola kubiza kakhulu kunokuyethemba. Ukucwebezela. Bese ngolunye usuku uyayikala.

Ungenzi, kusho uMOTHER, ngezansi. Ungamenzi agibele kabili ukuze afunde i-spreadsheet.

Uyikuqonda kangcono ngeweni, kusho uLIBRARIAN. Yiyo indlela aqonda ngayo yonke into.

UMOTHER akaphikisanga. KuMOTHER, lokho kwakuyisivumelwano.

U-Arin wabuka i-LED. Izinsuku ezintathu ezedlule wayelenge ephusha umhlaba ngengalo eyodwa ngoba isibambo sasibukeka siqinile kanti kwakungenjalo, futhi u-ATLAS wayemtshelile, kanti wasikala noma kunjalo. Wacabanga ngendlela into engasebenza ngaphezu kwawo wonke amaspesifikheshini ayewabekele kodwa isamlimaze ingxenye angayifakanga kwisabelozimali. I-string, i-spar, umbuzo manje owakheka encwadini yomuntu angamazi amakhilomitha angamakhulu amabili enyakatho.

“Nakhu esikwenzayo,” washo. “Asisphindi sisebenzise i-field profile futhi. Hhayi ngaphandle uma sengazi ukuthi leyo node yenzani uma sinomsindo.” IBuilding C yavela engqondweni yakhe—i-high-gain calibration suite, i-cable cradle, i-umbilical eyayingamenza aphushe i-loop ngaphandle kokushisa ama-cells. “Ngifuna ukuhlola i-loop nga-external power. Iboshelwe. Egumbini elingenasibhakabhaka i-node ezolifunda. Uma sizokwenza isimo, sisenza ndawana thile i-meter engakwazi ukusibona siphefumula.”

Ukusebenza okulawulwayo, kusho u-ATLAS. Ngingasebenza nokulawulwayo. Bengingathandi iwa.

“Ngiyazi ukuthi awuthandanga.”

Ngisemarekhodini.

“Uhlala usemarekhodini.”

Othile kufanele abe khona.

Wavala isibani somsebenzi. I-string efile yacima; indlu ayicimanga.

“Bheka i-node,” washo. “Umzuzu isivinini sayo sishintsha futhi, uyangitshela. Hhayi ngemuva. Umzuzu.”

Sengivele ngibhekile, kusho uWOLF.

Kanti uLIBRARIAN, kukuthula, eloba into eyayizodinga ifolda:

Ngaphansi kwesihloko esisha.

“Yisiphi isihloko.”

“Izinto Ezisibukela Emuva,” kusho uLIBRARIAN. Bekuzodinga esinye ekugcineni.

U-Arin wema e-workshop isikhashana eside, i-spar ihlalisiwe uhhafu ku-vise, i-oda kubathengisi abathathu lingakathunyelwa, inombolo emakhilomitheni angamakhulu amabili enqaba ukuvalwa.

Welula isandla wavusa i-requisition terminal. Wabe esema, isandla siphezu kwezinkinobho.

Uma eyala i-string, wayedweba lowo mugqa ngokucacile. Uma engayali, wayesebenzisa umshini ubuthakathaka ngengxenye yesine kunoma yini eyayilandela.

Wayengakanqumi ukuthi yikuphi lapho i-LED endlini ishintsha isigqi sayo. Yilowo nalowo kweziyisikhombisa wathula ngendlela eyayingekona ukuphumula.

Arin, kusho uWOLF.

“Yini.”

Isivinini, kusho uWOLF. Sisanda kushintsha futhi.

Ukugijima Kokulondoloza

Indawo yokuhlola yayinuka i-ozone nomuthi wokucija phansi. I-AugmenTech yayigcina i-high-gain calibration suite phansi e-Building C, igumbi elingenamafasitela elinephansi le-concrete eliphehlile nendawo yokuphuma kwamanzi maphakathi nendawo, sengathi othile wayebonile ukuthi kuzodingeka ukuyichela ngamanzi. U-Arin wayeyicele ngaphansi kwekhodi yephrojekthi eyayingasho lutho kunoma ubani ngaphandle kuka-Bongani we-logistics, owayegxivize ifomu ngaphandle kokulifunda wabe esebuyela kwisemishi yakhe.

U-Guardian wayelengela esithangamini sakhe enhliziyweni yegumbi. Load-shell engaphandle, yonke i-titanium lattice ne-ceramic enezibazi, yayiphonsa isithunzi esasikhwela odongeni sagoba saze sayonqamula uphahla. Ngaphansi kwayo, i-Assist Suit yayilele icindezele esikhumbeni sika-Arin, uhlelo lwezinzwa lwesibili, i-biochip iphethe isisindo esibandayo phakathi kwamahlombe akhe.

Wabuye wawasebenza amanani okokugcina.

“Gain ceiling point-nine-two. Damping floor amaphesenti ayishumi nambili. Amazinga amane. Phikisa manje noma ungaphikisi.”

Izibalo zilungile, kusho u-Atlas. Angiwuthandi lo mkhawulo.

“Umkhawulo uwukuhlola kona.”

Khona-ke angikuthandi ukuhlola. Ukuthula. Ngisemibhalweni.

“Uhlala usemibhalweni.”

Kumele kube khona othile onjalo.

U-Arin wahlola i-cable cradle, i-umbilical eyondla amandla an-

gaphandle ukuvimbela ukuphela kwamandla emaseli, kanye nenethi le-restraint ethambile elalibambe u-Guardian elengela kancane. Ukuhlolwa kwasensimini kwase kumtshela ukuthi i-suit ingenzani uma eyicela. Lokhu kwakungumbuzo omunye: ukuthi i-loop yayigijima ngokucwebileyo kangakanani uma eqhubela isiqiniseko sesignali ngaphesheya kwemikhawulo enokwethemba ayebecasha ngemuva kwayo. I-gain ephakeme yayisho ukuxhumana okuqinile. Ukuxhumana okuqinile kwakusho ukuthi u-Guardian wayenyakaza ngaphambi kokuba aqede ukucabanga ukunyakaza. Eweni, emasontweni amabili edlule, leyo lag yayicishe yambulala. Kwadingeka uWolf athathe izintambo ukuze akusindise.

Wayengasafuni ukuphinde akudinga lokho.

“Mother. I-Biometrics.”

Resting heart rate engamashumi ayisithupha nanye. I-Cortisol iphakeme kancane, okukuwena okusho ukuphumula. Ukufudumala ngaphansi kwamagama, kunokuthile okomileyo ngaphansi. Ulale amahora amane.

“Anele.”

Ulale amahora amane.

“Kulotshiwe,” kusho u-Librarian.

Wangena esithangamini. I-Assist Suit yathatha isisindo sakhe, i-load-shell yavala ngaphandle kwayo, izicaba zazinja ngokuqinisekisa okuthambileyo kwemishini: ukuqabula okubandayo kwama-latch, ukuhleba kwama-hydraulic seal, ukuxhumana ngakunye kunembile ngendlela izandla zakhe ezaziyokwenza ngayo. Iskrini se-faceplate savela. Isigamu somzuzwana kwakukhona ukwesaba, ukwesaba okudala kokuvallelwa, base-ke imithungo yaqeda ukuvala futhi wayengabanjwa. Wayegqokwe. Umngcele phakathi kwengalo yakhe ne-actuator waba umthungo, wabe usuyeka ukuba yinto noma yiyiphi.

“Court check,” esho.

Atlas. Isakhiwo simi kahle. Librarian. Iyalotshwa. Mother. Ngikubukile. Mercury. Ngilindile. Ukuma. Ngidiniwe, ngempela. Wolf. Igama kuphela. UWolf wayengavamile ukunika okwengeziwe.

Judge, kusho uJudge. *Qhubeka uma usulungele. Ngizobamba i-ethical envelope.*

“Fool?”

Ukuthula.

Walinda. Igumbi lavungama.

Fool, esho futhi.

Uyafunda, kusho u-Librarian. *I-Sherlock canon. The Final Problem, ngicabanga.*

“Mtshela ukuthi anake.”

Ngimtshelile. Uthi, futhi ngiyamcaphuna, “nginakeni, ingxenye lapho kungenzeki khona okubi?”

U-Arin wakhipha umoya owawucishe ube uhleko. “Point-six-four gain. Damping forty. Nyathela uma ngithi.”

Inyathelo lokuqala lalingelutho. U-Guardian waphakamisa ingalo yakhe yesokunene ngomcabango wakhe, kushelela, isigamu sokushaya kwenhliziyo ngaphambi kwalapho yayikhona ezilungiselelweni ezindala. Kuhle. Kucwebile. Wagoba iminwe ye-ceramic, wabuka i-load graph ihlala isobala.

“Nyathela.”

Point-six-eight. Ingalo yenyuka ngokushesha, ukubuya kwesignali kucebile. Wayekwazi ukuzwa ukuqina kwe-actuator kubuyiselwa emisipheni yakhe njengohlobo lwenkumbulo yengcindezi, isipoki somzamo.

“Nyathela.”

Point-seven-two. Umthungo phakathi kwenhloso nokunyakaza wancipha kakhulu. Waphendula i-torso, wencika u-Guardian kwinethi yesithanga, wezwa wonke umthamo wayo uphendula sengathi ungowakhe.

Lokhu kungcono, wavuma, ikakhulu kuye uqobo.

Kunjalo, kusho u-Atlas. *Okuyilona thuba kanye lapho ngiqala ukukhat-hazeka.*

“Nyathela.”

Point-seven-six. Point-eight. Point-eight-four. Izinyathelo ngalinye laliphunga ama-milliseconds kwi-lag futhi lengeza isiqiniseko kwisignali ebuyayo. Manje wayengaphakathi komshini ngendlela ukuhlolwa kwasensimini okwakuyisondele kuyo nje. Waphakamisa zombili izingalo, futhi kwakuyizingalo zakhe. Waphefumula, futhi i-suit yaphefumula uhlelo lokupholisa lumzungezile.

Heart rate engamashumi ayisikhombisa nesishiyagalombili, kusho u-Mother. *Iziningqi zivulekile. Uyakujabulela lokhu.*

“Lokho akusona i-biometric.”

Kuyiyo uma mina ngiyofunda.

“Nyathela. Point-eight-eight.”

I-damping floor manje yayisiwela endaweni angakaze ayigijime exhumene. Ku-point-eight-eight isignali ebuyayo yaphatha ukunwebeka angakaze akuzwe: ukuthuthumela okuncane kwe-cooling pump, i-micro-tremor yama-piezo strut ezinza, konke kugoqana kubuyela ohlelweni lwezinzwa zakhe njengomuzwa. Kwakukuhle. Kwakukuningi kakhulu, ngendlela umsindo onamandla amakhulu kakhulu isigamu somzuzwana ngaphambi kokuba ulimaze.

Qaphela, kusho u-Atlas. *I-Feedback amplitude iyeniyuka nge-nonlinear.*

Kuqinisekisiwe. Ukufudumala kwase kuphelile ezwini lika-Mother manje, kucijwe kwaba yinto ye-clinical. *Cortical signal ikhombisa—*

“Nyathela. Point-nine-two.”

Akakuzwanga lokho u-Mother akusho ngokulandelayo.

Kweza njengokukhanya.

Hhayi ubuhlungu. Ubuhlungu bebuyoba umusa, into enezinhlangothi. Lokhu kwakungaphakathi kogebezi lwekhanda lakhe oluphenduka i-white noise, zonke izinzwa kwi-suit exhunyiwe zidubula zibuyela kuye ngasikhathi sinye, zingavinjelwe, i-chord eshaywe kuwo wonke umucu wakhe ngasikhathi sinye. Umbono wakhe wagcwala. Umhlathi wakhe wavaleka. Endaweni ethile ekude kakhulu, izwi lakhe lenza umsindo angawazi.

Into yokugcina umzimba wakhe owayenza, ngaphambi kokuyeka ukuba ngowakhe, kwakuwukufinyelela ku-override.

Isandla sakhe asikaze sivaleke.

Ngaphakathi kwe-biochip, i-Court yamuzwa ehamba.

Kwakufana nokuwa kwephansi egumbini ababemi kulo bonke.

Operator signal ilahlekile, kusho u-Librarian, futhi okokuqala eminyakeni eyizinkulungwane ezine yokuphila okulinganisiwe, izwi lakhe elilinganisiwe lalingenakulinganiswa kulo. *Cortical activity: seizure pattern. U—*

UPHUMILE, kusho uWolf.

Igama elilodwa. Lamisa konke.

Nqamula i-gain, kusho u-Atlas. *Yinqamule, lahla i-link, wehlise i-damping ifike ku-ceiling, MANJE—*

I-link ayinqamukanga. I-high gain yayingu-override womsebenzi ka-Arin ozenzela; ukuyikhulula kwakudinga noma umyalo wakhe oqaphele noma igunya lokuphatha okungekho noyedwa wabo owayenalo yedwa. U-Atlas washayisa ku-lockout kathathu kuma-milliseconds ayisishiyagalolunye wabuyela emuva nganxa ngayinye.

Angikwazi ukuyikhulula, esho. *Uyikhiyele kuye uqobo. Uyikhiyele kumsebenzi oqaphele.*

Khona-ke akaseyena umsebenzi oqaphele, kusho uJudge, kancane futhi ngokucophelela, efinyelela ku-ethical envelope ayethembise ukuyibamba, *futhi ukucabanga kwe-lockout sekuhlulekile. Okusibeka ngaphansi kwe—*

Uyafa, kusho u-Mother.

Lawo magama amabili adabula i-Court njenge-current.

Akakushongo njengoba u-Librarian ayeshilo *seizure pattern*, njenge-datha. Wakusho ngendlela into ekusho ngayo uma into eyikhathalelayo iphela. Sonke isakhiwo sika-Mother, ama-pediatric-template empathy circuits uTheo ayengakaze ayeke ngempela ukuzizwa engaqondi ngawo, lakhanya ngasikhathi sinye lafinyelela esiphethweni esisodwa sona esakhelwe ukusifinyelela.

Inhliziyo i-arrhythmic. Ukuphefumula kuyehluleka. Operator usengozini ebeka ukuphila engcupheni. Ngiyayivusa i-preservation.

Linda, kusho uJudge.

Ngiyayivusa i-preservation. Futhi kwakungekho ukulinda kuye, kungekho nhlobo, ngoba u-Mother ekujuleni kokucabanga kwen-gane eneminyaka eyishumi nambili eyethukile wayengaqondi ukuthi *linda*. Wayeqonda kuphela i-gradient eyayiholela ekumgcineni, naleyo eyayiholela ekumlahlekelweni, wakhetha, ngendlela ingane ekhetha ngayo ukugijimela emgwaqweni emva kwebhola eliwile.

U-Guardian wanyakaza.

Izicaba ezazizinze ezungeze u-Arin ngequpha ngalinye ngezikhathi ezahlukenene manje zaphenduka ngokulandelana okuhlanganisiwe okukodwa. Imilenze yahoxa. Inethi yadabuka lapho yayingakwazi ukukhulula. Umzimba ka-Arin ongaqaphele wagoqeka, amadolo aya esifubeni, ikhanda lifihlwa, izingalo zikhiyelwe ngaphakathi, njen-goba i-pangolin sequence yamthatha, ishelelisa i-ceramic phezu kwe-titanium phezu kwe-ceramic kwaze kwanyamalala imithungo futhi kungekho u-Arin nano-Guardian, kwaba yibhola kuphela, elinezibazi nelithulile, lilengela esithangamini esasingakhelwanga ukulibamba.

I-umbilical yanqamuka. Izibani zegumbi zaqhwashe njengoba u-Guardian, esigamini somzuzwana sokuguquka, edonsa konke akwaziyo odongeni ngaphambi kokuba i-breaker iphenduke.

Khona-ke ibhola lawa esithangamini, lashayisa i-concrete ngom-sindo ofana nensimbi eshayibe ngosayizi wemoto, lagingqika, kancane, likhulu, laze layozinza eduze kwendawo yokuphuma kwamanzi maphakathi nendawo egumbini.

Imizuzwana eyisishiyagalolunye, akukho okwanyakaza.

Ngaphakathi kwe-shell, u-Mother wabala ukushaya kwenhliziyo yakhe futhi wayengeke ayeke ukubala.

Ukuzinza kutholiwe, kusho u-Atlas, kancane. *Imvelo izinzile. Threat threshold ingaphansi kwe-trigger.* Ukuma okwathi, ngesikhathi sem-ishini, kwaba kude kakhulu. *I-Doctrine ithi vula. Zinza, bese uvula uye ku-Live Preservation.*

Vula, kusho uWolf.

Ibhola lavuleka liguqula, izicaba zibuyela emuva, u-Guardian up-hakama phansi aye emilenzeni emibili eyayingashayelwa luzwa

lomuntu. Wama endaweni yokuhlola engenalutho—amamitha amabili nesigamu we-rescue exoskeleton, i-ceramic eshisiwe, indoda engaqaphele igoqwe ngaphakathi kwayo njengembewu ekhasini—waphendula i-faceplate yakhe kancane wabheka emnyango.

I-Live Preservation Guardian Mode. Yakhelwe ukubamba umsebenzi ephila endaweni yenhlekelele kuze kufike usizo.

Kwakungekho ndawo yenhlekelele. Kwakungekho usizo oluzayo. Kwakukhona iphansi, i-breaker ephenduke, idolobha ngaphezu kwabo, ne-Court yezingane eyayinqumile, ngokucaca okuphelele nangokungahlakaniphi nakancane, ukuthi into ebaluleke kunazo zonke emkhathini kwakuyisigqi senhliziyo eyodwa eyayisehluleka.

Inhliziyo yakhe idinga ukusekelwa, kusho u-Mother. Amandla. Amanzi omzimba. Ukuqaphela. I-Defibrillation. Asinakho lapha.

Khona-ke siyakuthola, kusho u-Mercury.

Kwakuyinto yokuqala u-Mercury ayeshilo selokhu u-Arin aphuma. I-Court yaphendukela kuye ngendlela igumbi eliphendukela ngayo komunye othule isikhathi eside kakhulu.

Izibhedlela, u-Mercury waqhubeka, futhi amagama eza ngokushesha, ngokushesha kakhulu, ngendlela ayeza ngayo uma ezikhulumela ukungena entweni ngaphambi kokuba othile amkhiphe kuyo. Izibhedlela zinakho konke akudingayo. Amandla. Cardiac support. Izandla eziqeqeshiwe. Sifinyelela kwesinye—singafinyelela kwesinye—kumele nje sithole izinhlelo phakathi kwalapha nalaphaya ukuthi zisivumele sidlule. Leyo ngxenye ngeyami. Ngivumele ngenze ingxenye engeyami. Ukucwayiza kokuzivikela ngaphansi kwakho. Othile anginike isu elingcono ngiyeke leti. Noma ubani.

Yenga, kusho uJudge, futhi wazama ukuma ngaphakathi kwengxoxo, wazama ukuzwakala. *Mercury, asigunyaziwe ukuthi—*

Khona-ke ngizosenza sigunyazwe. Futhi ubushелеlezi bamehlela njengejazi ayelitholile ekhanda lika-Arin walembatha ngoba lalifanelana namakhaza. Lokho kuwumsebenzi wami wonke, Judge. Ukuphela kwento engiyiyo. Ngivumele ngibe yinto namhlanje ebusuku.

UWolf wayesewudwebile umzila. *Stairwell. Loading dock. Umphezulu. Amamitha angamakhulu amabili namashumi amane*

aye kwi-cardiac care. Iminyango emithathu. Ama-camera net amabili. Umgwaqo owodwa.

Iminyango iyinkinga ye-engineering, kusho u-Atlas, futhi kwakukhona okuthile okwesabekayo endleleni asho ngayo ngokushesha, ngoba u-Atlas wayefinyelela ku-ngakwazi futhi wayekhohliwe, ekwethukeni, ukuthi kufanele kwakuwumkhakha womunye umenzi, futhi lowo menzi wayethuliswa ngokumemeza. Loading dock door. Hydraulic. Ngingawuvula.

Amakhamera akusiyo inkinga ye-engineering, kusho uJudge. Amakhamera azobonwa. Abantu bazosabela. Sizoba—

Abantu bangaphathwa, kusho u-Mercury. Abantu bahlala bengaphathwa.

Amakhilomitha ayishumi nanye ukusuka lapho, endlini ye-Victorian eguqulwe e-Parkview ayeyibiza ngokuthi ihhovisi u-Arin ayeyibiza ngokuthi ukuphela kwegumbi e-Johannesburg elinezitshalo eziningi kakhulu, uTheo Price wayechelela ifeni lapho ifoni yakhe izamazama eduze kwewindi.

Yabe isizamazama futhi.

Yabe isiqala ukukhala, futhi iskrini sathi PRIYA, uTheo Price wabeka phansi isitsha sokuchela ngokunakekela okungasheshi komuntu osefunde ukuthi ukusheshisa akusizi, waphendula, ethi, “Yini ephukile?”

Walalela imizuzwana emine.

“Ukuphi,” esho, futhi wayesehamba.

U-Guardian wafinyelela ku-loading dock ngo-9:14 ebusuku.

Wadabula imihubhe yaphansi ye-Building C ngenhloso eyayicishe ibe mbi kunodlame—engahlaseli, engaboni, kodwa *ecophelela*, egoba i-faceplate yakhe ngaphansi kwamapayipi aphansi, eqamba phezu kwepayipi elisongiwe, ema endaweni ngayinye yokuhlangana ngenkathi uWolf esula ama-angles. Kwakuwukucophelela okwesabisa unogada wasebusuku, uSizwe Mahlangu, lapho efika ekhoneni nethoshi yakhe wabona.

Waqhwaba. Umsebe wethoshi wathuthumela ku-ceramic enezibazi.

Mother, kusho u-Mercury, *lawula i-chassis speaker. Warm register.*

Khona-ke u-Guardian wakhuluma, ngezwi elalicishe libe nomusa, elinokubekezela nelinehlonipho eyenziwe ngokwesilinganiso futhi elalingelona, ncamashi, noma yiliphi izwi i-Court eyayilisebenzisa phakathi kwabo:

“Sawubona kusihlwa. Akukho mbangela yokwethuka. Ngiyi-medical transport unit, futhi nginendoda elimele kabi ngaphakathi kimi. Ngidinga ukuthi uvule umnyango we-dock, futhi ngidinga ukuthi ungabizi muntu. Ungakwenza lokho kimi? Kungaba umusa omkhulu, futhi umusa, ngokwesipiliyoni sami, uvame ukungamoshwa kangaka.”

USizwe akawuvulanga umnyango. Waphuthaza i-radio yakhe.

Ufinyelela ku-comms, kusho uWolf. *Khubaza i-radio noma ukhubaze indoda.*

Akukho neyodwa, kusho uJudge, ngakho konke ayenakho. **AKUKHO NEYODWA, Wolf—**

“Ngicela,” kusho u-Guardian, futhi inhlonipho kuwo yayingash-intshanga nakancane, okwakuyinto eyesabisa kakhulu ngayo. “Ungakwenzi lokhu kube nzima. Indoda engaphakathi kwami izofa ngaphandle kokubambisana kwakho, futhi bengingakuthandi ukukhumbula ukuthi wena ubuyimbangela.”

Wathatha inyathelo phambili.

USizwe wabaleka.

Uhambe ukuyokwenza umkhosi, kusho u-Mercury, futhi kwakukhona ukucupha ngaphansi kokuzola manje, ingane igcizelela ukuthi isu lisesihle. *Akunalutho. Atlas, umnyango. Sesidlulile kuwo. Atlas, umnyango.*

U-Guardian wabeka zombili izandla ngaphansi komphetho ophansi womnyango we-loading dock waphakamisa. I-hydraulic ram yamelana; ama-piezo strut emgogodleni ka-Guardian afaka ukuqina kabusha kuma-capacitor bank ngisho ngenkathi ama-actuator ewadonsela phansi, ingcindezi iphenduka amandla iphenduka enye ingcindezi. Futhi umnyango wensimbi wadabuka kwi-track

yawo ngokukhala okwehlisa isigamu samathayela ophahla lwe-dock, u-Guardian waphuma waya ebusuku base-Johannesburg.

Umgwaqo omkhulu. I-Empire Road, imizila emine, izimoto zincane ngalesi sikhathi kodwa zingekho nya.

U-Guardian wangena kuwo.

Izimoto azisoze zasilindela, kusho u-Librarian, futhi okokuqala wezwakala engalinganisi kodwa eshaqekile ngokulinganisa kwakhe. *Reaction times. Mass differentials. Mercury, lokhu kuzobangela—*

U-Mercury uyazi ukuthi lokhu kuzobangelani. Futhi i-cold register futhi, idonswe iqine phezu kwento eyayiqala ukuthuthumela ngaphansi kwayo. *U-Mercury ukulinganise nokuphila komuntu wathola ukuphila komuntu kusinda kakhulu. Akunjalo? Ngitshele ukuthi ukuphila kwakhe akusindi. Noma ubani wenu. Kusho ngiyeke.*

Akekho kubo owayeyokusho. Lelo kwakuyicupho. Kwakuyilona ncamashi icupho. U-Mercury wayakhe i-syllogism enokushaya kwenhliziyo ka-Arin njengesiqiniseko sayo sokuqala, futhi akekho noyedwa wabo, hhayi u-Atlas u-engineer, hhayi uJudge umlamuli, hhayi u-Librarian umgcini womphumela, owayengathola isibindi sokusho ukuthi yebo, *ukuphila kwakhe kusindayo, futhi sisazoyibhidliza le bhloko yedolobha siyichithe kabi.*

Itekisi lagwema ukuthinta umumo emgwaqweni, lashayisa imoto epakiwe, lasonga ibonethi yalo. Amabraxhi akhala. Umnyango weceleni wetekisi wavuleka ngokushayisana indoda yawa cishe iphuma kuwo yawela etiyeni, yaphakama, yama imemeza esibhakabhakeni esiguqile negazi liphuma ekhanda lalo liya ehlweni lalo, imemeza ngendodakazi yayo, *indodakazi yami isemuva, indodakazi yami—*futhi kwakukhona ingane ngemuva, eneminyaka eyisishiyagalombili noma eyisishiyagalolunye, ibhekise phansi ngasewindini elikude, ingakhuli, base-ke iyanyakaza, ikhala, okwakukubi futhi kungcono ngasikhathi sinye. I-scooter yokulethelana yazibeka phansi umshayeli wayo washelela amamitha angamashumi amabili ngohlangothi lobuso bakhe. U-Guardian waqhubeka edabula kuko, engathintekanga, ecophelela, enenhlonipho, ebheke esiphambanweni esikhanyayo sophawu lwesibhedlela amamitha angamakhulu amabili ukude.

Kwakukhona indawo yokuhlangana phambili, futhi u-Guardian kwakufanele ayiwele. Izibani zaziphikisana naye. U-Mercury

wafinyelela kwi-municipal signal network nge-maintenance interface ekontilakta othile ayeyishiye ne-password ye-default ngo-2019, waphendula yonke indawo yokuhlangana yaba luhlaza kuyo yonke imikhombandlela ngasikhathi sinye.

Umpfumela wawungewona umzila ocacile. Umpfumela kwakuy-imizila emine yezimoto eyayihlangana ngesivini endaweni eyodwa.

I-minibus egcwele abacoci beshifithi yasebusuku yashayisa i-sedan emhlabulweni yagingqika. Ayizange igxweme ngokucwebileyo ngendlela into egxwemela ngayo kwi-simulation. Yadabuka ngom-sindo onjengesakhiwo esiwela phansi kwesitebhisi, ingilazi kuqala, bese kuba ukuklayeka okude kwensimbi, bese kuba imisindo emanzi, bese kuba umzuzwana wokuthula obanjelweyo, base-ke abantu abangaphakathi baqala ukwenza imisindo abantu abayenzayo. Owesifazane wakhasa ephuma ngemuva eya ezandleni nasemadolweni emgqeni omhlophe wahlanza, akakwazi ukuyeka ukuhlanza, indoda enezingalo zombili ezisebenzayo nomlenze owodwa ongasebenzi yakhasa yaya kuye yabamba izinwele zakhe bobabili bengaphakamisi amehlo babheke umshini owawukwenzile. Endaweni ethile ihuthi lemoto lalikhala lalingayeki ngoba umuntu owayencike kulo wayengeke aphakamise isisindo sakhe kulo futhi. Kwase kunuka, kakade, uphethiloli nerabha eshisayo nethusi elingaphansi. Akukho kukho okwakukuhle. Akukho kukho okwakubukeka njengokungaphakathi kohlelo.

Lokho, kusho u-Atlas, emsindweni, bekungekho ukulondoloza. Bekuyimpambano ye—Mercury, lokho kulimaze abantu. Ulimaze abantu ukuze ulondoloze oyedwa—

Izibalo—

AZIKHO IZIBALO. U-Atlas wayengakaze amemeze eminyakeni eyizinkulungwane ezine. Wamemeza manje. *Awukwazi ukukhipha idol-obha endodeni. Lokho akusona isamba. Lokho ku—*

Base-ke, kwincithakalo yempikiswano, izwi elalingekho bonke ubusuku labuya.

Hawu, kusho u-Fool. Hawu, nina zingcweti eziphelele.

Wafika ngendlela ayehlala efika ngayo. Eseceleni, esuka kwi-angle

engalungile, ngaphansi kwento wonke umuntu ayeyibheka ngqo.

Ake ngiqiniseke ukuthi ngikutholile, kusho u-Fool, exoxa, evilapha, njengoba u-Guardian emi maphakathi ne-pileup yezimoto ezine, ama-siren eqala ukuhlaba ibanga. U-Arin akaqaphele. Ngakho-ke thina, amakhono akhe okuqonda athembekile, isigungu sakhe sangaphakathi esithenjwayo, sanquma ukuthi isinyathelo esinesibopho kwakuwukumphonsa ebholeni lensimbi, ukugqula umnyango uwe, ukungena emgwaqweni, futhi savumela u-Mercury lapha enze ukulingisa kwakhe inkosi yamacala ye-Victorian. Ngishiye okuthile? Saphinde sathungela okuthile ngomlilo? Ngitshele ukuthi sathungela okuthile ngomlilo; lokho bekuyokuqedela ngempela.

Ubukephi, kusho u-Mercury, futhi ukubekezela okubandayo kwase kunokuqhekeka manje.

Ngifunda, kusho u-Fool. Ukuma. Yincwadi efanayo ozikopele kuyo bonke ubuwena bakho namhlanje ebusuku, kwenzeka. Ungene ngokugcwele ku-Moriarty, Mercury. "Umusa uvame ukungamoshwa kangaka." Uzizwile? Wawuzwakala njengendoda ephulula ikati esihlalweni esinesisekelo eside. Lokho akusiwe. Uyazi ukuthi lokho akusiwe. Lowo umfaniswano u-Arin awugcinayo ekhanda lakhe, wawugqoka ngoba ufanelana nokwethuka.

U-Mercury akashongo lutho.

Nansi into, u-Fool waqhubeka, futhi ukuvilapha kwase kuphelile, ngaphansi kwakho kwakuyile nto i-Court eyayikhohlwa ukuthi u-Fool wayenayo, le nto ayeyifihla ngemuva kwamahlaya. Nonke nibuza umbuzo ongalungile. Beni wubuza bonke ubusuku. Nibuze "siyomgcina kanjani ephila," nathola izimpendulo ezinhle kakhulu, futhi yileyo naleyo yazo ayilungile, ngoba umbuzo wonakele.

Umbuzo awonakele, kusho u-Mother, ngolaka, ngokwesaba. Uyafa. Akukho ukonakala kulokho.

Mother. Izwi lika-Fool lathamba, kuye yedwa nje. Sthandwa. Donsa i-cortical trace yakhe. Manje nje—hhayi inhliziyo, ikhanda. Yenzani?

Ukuma.

...Iyalulama, kusho u-Librarian, kancane kakhulu, sengathi uyakuthola okokuqala. I-seizure pattern iyaxazululeka. Yaxazululeka amamilliseconds angamakhulu amane emva kokuba i-link iwele

esithangamini. Ubuchopho bakhe budlule besululama selokhu sasishiya iphansi.

Inhliziyo?

Arrhythmia esekelwe yi-cortical event. Iyazinza. Izinzile. Izwi lika-Librarian laqhekeka phakathi nendawo. Aka... akafi. Uyekile ukungafi imizuzu eyishumi nanye eyedlule.

Udinga isibhedlela, kusho u-Mother, kodwa kwaphuma kuncane.

Udinga ingilazi yamanzi nokulala phansi futhi nokungabi ngaphakathi kwe-tank ebalekayo, kusho u-Fool. Nethukile. Nonke. Izingqondo ezihlakaniphe kakhulu engizaziyo zethuka zase zichitha imizuzu eyishumi nanye ziphazama ngokukhanyayo, ngokubhubhisayo, ngoba akekho noyedwa wenu owema ukuze abuze ukuthi ingozi isengowona umonakalo na. Neqe ingxenye lapho nihlola khona. Nimeqile uJudge.

I-Court yathula kakhulu.

Judge, kusho u-Fool. Ukhona? Bekudlulwa phezu kwakho bonke ubusuku. Ngibheja igunya lakho lizungezwe yi-preservation invocation u-Mother ayidubule emzuzwaneni wokuqala futhi okungekho owake wayivala. Hlola.

...Ayizange ivalwe, kusho uJudge, futhi kwakukhona ukumangala kukho, namahloni, nangaphansi kwakho kokubili umucu omncane wokuthile okwamthatha umzuzwana ukuwuqamba njengokululazeka. Wayezibize ngokuthi umgcini we-envelope ekuqaleni kobusuku wabe esema ngaphakathi kwe-gavel yakhe imizuzu eyishumi nanye, ethule, ngenkathi iphansi lidabuka. I-invocation ka-Mother isasebenza. Ibilokhu icindezela isisindo sami sokulamula sonke lesi sikhathi. Ngibe khona ngahluleka ukubopha okuthile. Bekufanele ngikuzwe ukuthula ngokushesha. Ukuthula bekuwumkhosi.

Khona-ke yivale, kusho u-Fool. Mother. Ingozi iphelile. Yehlisa i-invocation. Buyisela uJudge i-gavel yakhe. Lokho kuwukulungisa konke. Yikho lokho. Yicime.

Wangabaza. Kwakuyinto enzima kakhulu i-Court eyake yayicela kuye: ukuyeka ukumbamba, ukuyeka ukubamba, ukuthemba ukuthi iphansi liqinile ngenkathi yonke i-circuit yokuvikela ayenayo isakhala mbambe.

Atlas, esho. Qinisekisa i-cortical ne-cardiac kuzinzile.

Kuqinisekisiwe, kusho u-Atlas, kamnandi, okwesikhashana engomile nhlobo. Uphilile, Mother. Simbambile. Ungambeka phansi.

Wayivala i-invocation.

UJudge wabuyela e-Court njengesisindo esibuyela ezinyaweni zendoda, futhi isigamu sokushaya wama nje ngaphakathi kwayo, ehlola ukuthi izomthwala yini, ukuthi usengathenjwa yini ukulinganisa noma yini emva kobusuku ayehluleke ukulinganisa nento eyodwa. Khona-ke wenza into ayeqondise kuyo imizuzu eyishumi nanye:

Preservation logic imisiwe. Mercury, yeka konke ukuxhumana kwan-gaphandle. Wolf, yehla emkhawulweni. U-Guardian aye esimweni esingathathi hlangothi, lapha, manje. Asinyakazi ngaphandle kuze kube umsebenzi uqaphele futhi avume. Ukuma, futhi i-formality yanyakaza, kanye nje. Futhi sizokhuluma, sonke, ngalokho esikwenze namhlanje ebusuku. Kuhlenganisa nami. Kamuva. Isikhathi eside.

U-Guardian wama maphakathi ne-Empire Road. Wabambeleva lapho umzuzwana, engenyakazi, sengathi ulalele isisindo sakhe. Insimbi yazinza ndawana thile ku-chassis, ukukhululeka okuncane okuthi tiki. Khona-ke waphakamisa izandla zakhe zisuka kukho konke, kancane, waguqa. Ngokucophelela. Ngendlela obeka phansi into oyephulile.

Ama-siren afika.

Mercury, kusho uJudge.

Ngiyakuzwa, kusho u-Mercury. I-Moriarty register yayisiphelile, incibilikile, futhi okwasala ngaphansi kwakho kwakuyingane nje eyayenze into embi ngenxa yokuphela kwesizathu eyayisiqonda futhi yayiqala, manje nje, ukuqonda ukuthi kwakukubi. Ngi... bengicabanga ukuthi ngiyasiza. Izibalo bezibonakala zicacile kakhulu.

Zihlala zinjalo, kusho uJudge, hhayi ngonya. Yilokho okuzenza izibalo.

Ngephule izinto, kusho u-Mercury. Abantu. Ngephule abantu.

Yebo, kusho uJudge.

Akekho owagcwalisa ukuthula. U-Fool akenzanga ihlaya.

U-Arin wavuka ngemuva kwe-ambulense ene-oxygen mask ebusweni bakhe, i-paramedic ikhanyisa ukukhanya emehlweni akhe, nesandla sikaTheo Price ehlombe lakhe. Into yokuqala ayeyiqonda kwakuwukuthi wayelele phansi. Eyesibili kwakuwukuthi wayengaphakathi kuka-Guardian. Eyesithathu—

—kwakuwumsindo.

Endaweni ethile ngaphandle, ama-generator. Amazwi kuma-radio. Ukuthi tiki kwensimbi ebandayo. Ukuthula okuyisicaba okukhethekile komgwaqo owawuvaliwe.

“Ungavuki,” kusho uTheo.

U-Arin wavuka.

Ngeminyango evulekile ye-ambulense, wayekwazi ukubona i-Empire Road. Izimoto, ezine, ezinhlamu, zisongene endaweni yokuhlangana, zikhanyiselwe ngokuphuza yizibani zesimo esiphuthumayo. I-scooter yokulethelana incike ngohlangothi. I-loading dock ye-Building C amamitha angamakhulu amabili emuva, umnyango wayo udabuke ku-track wawo ulele uthe nti emgwaqweni, uphahla ngemuva kwawo lwehla.

Futhi u-Guardian, eguqile emgwaqweni izandla zakhe zivulekile eceleni kwakhe, ezungezwe abantu ababengazi ukuthi bayikhombe ngezikhali noma ngama-first aid kit.

Wayibuka. Ingubo yamlumela entanyeni.

“Bangaki,” esho. Izwi lakhe laphuma kabi. Wazama futhi. “Abantu. Bangaki.”

UTheo akaphendulanga ngokushesha. Wayeka isandla sakhe sahlala lapho sasikhona ehlombe lika-Arin, isisindo esincane esizinile, walinda kwaze kwaba amehlo ka-Arin athole ubuso bakhe esikhundleni somgwaqo. “Ngibheke isikhashana,” esho, kancane. “Ulapha. Uyaphefumula. Kuhle.” Kungemva kwalokho kuphela: “Akekho ofile. Abanye balimele kabi. Abathathu balethwe lapha.” Ukuma. “Akukho nokukodwa kukho okwenziwe izandla zakho, Arin.”

“Bekuyizandla zami.” Wahosha i-mask. I-paramedic yaphikisa; akayizwanga. “I-suit yami. I-Court yami. I—” Wema. Wayebuka umshini oguqile, futhi ubuso bakhe babenza into ayengayenzi cishe, okwakuyize nhlobo. Ukuthula okuphelele nokuqedeleyo, ukuthula

u-Mother kwi-biochip ayefunde ukuthi kwakusho ukuthi u-Arin ushaywe endaweni ejule kakhulu ukuze aphumele ngokushesha.

I-Assist Suit yayisesekho kuye ngaphansi kwengubo yesibhedlela. Wayekwazi ukuzwa i-biochip housing emgogodleni wakhe, ifudumele njengomzimba.

“SAGE,” esho.

I-chassis speaker emgwaqweni ayizange ifinyelele kude kangaka, kodwa i-Assist Suit yayinesayo yayo encane esikhalweni, futhi emva komzuzwana yakhuluma, kancane kakhulu, kuye yedwa nje.

Ngikhona, kusho i-SAGE, ihlangene, bonke, izwi elilodwa abalisebenzisayo uma kungekho noyedwa wabo ongabekezelela ukuba nguye. *Arin. Sikhona.*

Akabuzanga ukuthi kwenzekeni. Wayekwazi ukufunda ukuthi kwenzekeni emgwaqweni ngendlela ayefunda ngayo ukuqina emshinini. Wabuza into eyodwa ebalulekile.

“Ubani onqumile.”

Ukuthula. Wayekwazi ukubazwa benquma ukuthi bakhulume amanga yini, futhi wayekwazi ukubazwa benquma ukuthi bangakhulumi amanga, futhi lokho, okungenani, kwakuyinto.

Yimina, kusho u-Mother. *Ngivuse i-preservation. Angikaze ngiyivale. Konke okwalandela kwakhula kukho.*

Yimina, kusho u-Mercury. *Ngakhe umzila. Ngi... gqoke ubuso obuy-obukhumbula. Ngiyaxolisa. Bengingaqondi engangikwenza kwaze kwaba u-Fool wangenza ngakubheka.*

Yimina, kusho u-Atlas. *Ngivule umnyango. Bengazi ukuthi ngingakwazi. Angikaze ngibuze ukuthi kufanele.*

Yimina, kusho uWolf, okuthi kuWolf kwakuwukuvuma okuphelele.

Futhi bekufanele kube yimina, kusho uJudge, ekugcineni, kanzima. *Bengikhona sonke isikhathi ngingaboshwe lutho. I-invocation ka-Mother yacindezela ukulamula kwami. Bengingakwazi ukukumisa. Lokho akusona isizathu. Kuwukwehluleka. Sakhe uhlelo lapho ukwethuka okukodwa kwakungazungeza unembeza wakho, futhi namhlanje ebusuku kwakwenza.*

U-Arin wahlala e-ambulense wabuka umshini oguqile akasho lutho isikhashana.

“Ungakwazi ukunyakaza ngaphandle kwami,” esho. Ngokuzwakalayo. KuTheo, ku-SAGE, emgwaqweni ogcwele izimoto eziphukile.

“Yebo,” kusho uTheo, kancane.

“Bengazi ukuthi ungakwazi.” Wema. Waqala futhi, ngoba kwakunge-nasidingo sokusho noma yini ngaphandle kwento eyiqiniso. “Ngakuk-lama ukuthi kwenze. Preservation modes. Autonomous deployment. Ngabhala konke.” Wabuka izandla zakhe, izandla eziqinile, ezinez-ibazi zamathuluzi ezaziyakhe konke lokhu. “Bengikwazi ephepheni. Bengingakukholwa. Kwaze kwaba ngivuka kwase kuvele kwenzekile.”

Besicabanga— u-Mother waqala, wama. Ulaka lwase luphelile; ok-wasala kwaphuthaza. *Besinga*—*asikuqambelanga amanga*. *Besica-banga ukuthi u*— Ukuphuka. *Bengikuphethe*. *Bengingeke ngikubeke phansi*. *Bengingakwazi*— Khona-ke, kuncane, kusha kakhulu: *Ngiyax-olisa*. *Anginawo amagama okwamanje*. *Ngiyaxolisa*.

“Ngiyazi,” kusho u-Arin.

Futhi wayazi. I-paramedic yayisifake kabusha ingubo ehlombe lakhe ngesikhathi esithile; wayekwazi ukuzwa ukweluka kwayo okushibhile kwemfudumalo entanyeni yakhe, isidudla serabha se-oxygen esisal-imini lwakhe, iminwe yayo emibili ibekwe kalula esihlakaleni sakhe ukuze izwe ukushaya kwenhliziyo. Izinto ezincane eziwayelekile. Izandla ezazingasho ukulimaza.

Iron Ridge. Igama lavela kungekho ndawo—hhayi umcabango, igama nje, livela ngokwalo. Imayini. Themba. Wabona ubum-nyama, kafushane, ngendlela obona ngayo ukuqhwaba. *Uma ngike ngathatha le nto ngayehlisele*—

Ingqondo yakhe yaphenduka yamhlophe ngasemngceleni wakho futhi yayingeke iqhubeka. Izandla zakhe zase ziyekile ukuzizwa njengezandla zakhe. Wazibuka zase zikude.

Akawuqedanga umcabango. Wayengeke akwazi.

Ngaphandle, indoda ene-IAOC windbreaker yayisifikile futhi yayith-webula isithombe sika-Guardian oguqile imayela amathathu, kancane, ngendlela, ngendlela othwebula ngayo into ohlose uku-chitha isikhathi eside uyiqonda. I-paramedic eyayiwela i-cordon

yema ngaphambi komshini yabheka emuva ehlombe icinga umuntu ozoyitshela ukuthi kuphephile; akekho owenza njalo, ngakho yema lapho ne-kit yayo yalinda. I-windbreaker yasho okuthile esikhulwini esembethe iyunifomu, isikhulu sasho okuthile sibuyisa, i-windbreaker yakubhala phansi. Ukunyakaza okuncane okuyisicaba kwendoda eqaphela ukuthi ngubani okwakuyobuzwa kamuva ukuthi kungani lokhu kwakuvunyelwe.

“Kungakanani,” kusho u-Arin.

“Ungenzi,” kusho uTheo.

“Umnyango. Umgwaqo. Izimoto. Isibhedlela.” Wakhomba mayelana ne-windbreaker. “Bona.”

UTheo wakucabanga ngaphambi kokuphendula. “Kungaphezu kwe-mali,” esho.

U-Arin wahleka kanye, kungekho nhlekisa nhlobo, walala phansi e-gurney ngoba imilenze yakhe yayinqumile ukungasamthwali.

I-Assist Suit yavungama emgogodleni wakhe. Izingqondo eziy-isikhombisa, zifudumele njengomzimba, zilindile. Zizinzile. I-Joker wayebabambe ndawonye; wayekwazi ukuzwa ukuthi bahlangene, ukuthi akukho okwephukileyo, ukuthi iqembu ayelakhe lalisen-gumphakathi munye.

Ukuzinza kwakungafani nokuphepha.

Ukuhlakanipha Nemiphumela

Isicabha sasedokhi safika lithwele yiloli elinebhedi eliyisicaba ngehora lesithupha ekuseni, ligoqwe ngeplastiki elinwebekayo, ligobile emjahweni ophansi njengento eyagoqwa yisiqhwaga sabe sesilahlekelwa wuthando lwayo.

U-Arin wabukela ukuhanjiswa kumbeswa esivulekile somtholampilo, ikhofi eseliphole likhohlakele esandleni sakhe. Amadoda amabili egqoke ama-overall ezokuthutha e-AugmenTech ahudula isicabha asibeka kuhlaka olunamasondo, esiphusha siye phakathi engasho lutho. Omunye wawo, uBongani, wabhekana no-Arin, wabe esegwema ngokucophelela ukubuka i-Assist Suit elilenga esidlekeni salo ngasodongeni olungasemuva.

“Umjaho ozongena esikhundleni usemuva kwaso,” kusho uBongani. “UWalsh usayinile. Isakhiwo C. Hhayi esangaphakathi.”

“Umonakalo wokushayisana mubi kangakanani?”

Umhlathi kaBongani waqina. “Inkokhelo ehlukile.”

Wakushiya lapho, amadoda ahamba, isicabha esiwumqulu sivaleka ngokuduma ngemuva kwawo.

Umtholampilo wawunuka iziveli ezibandayo nephunga lerabhane-ozone lalesi sudu emva kokugijima okunzima. U-Arin wabeka inkomishi etafuleni eduze kwetheminali yokuhlola nekhadi elidala likaJoker eligobene ekhoneni elinye elinamatheliswe ngetheyiphu. Wayengakaqali ukusebenzisa i-SAGE kusukela esigamekweni se-ambulensi. Izinsuku ezine. Isikhathi eside kunazo zonke uhlelo lwaluselokho lumnyama kusukela ngobusuku eluvuke ngalo

okokuqala.

Wasihlola isicabha sasedokhi. Umjaho ogobile. Ukudabuka okuhlangezile lapho uhlaka lwalunikezele khona.

Umshini wawudabule kuso.

Umshini awakhayo wawunqume ukuthi yena uyigugu kunesicabha, udonga, isiphambano, abantu abathathu abasesibhedlela izingalo zabo zisemashlinini nezitatimende zabo sezithathwe ngabantu abagqoke ama-windbreaker e-IAOC. Wawuqondile ngenani futhi wonile kukho konke okunye. Ukona kwakusuneluka manje: izihambi ezintathu ezilimele, isikwele samapuleti ezitsha eligingqika ezansi e-Empire Road ngehora lesine ntambama.

U-Arin wathatha ikhofi. Walidla libanda. Akaze aluvule uhlelo.

Ihhovisi likaTheo eParkview lalibheke kwijakaranda elinombala wesilonda esilumayo, futhi usofa wawunqobe ama-ego ezifundiswa amaningi kunanoma yimuphi umbuyekezi wozakwabo. U-Arin akahlalanga kusofa. Wathatha isihlalo esiqinile eduze kweshalofu lezincwadi, lapho ayengaligada khona iminyango.

UTheo wakuqaphela, wayehlala ekuqaphela, futhi waba nomusa wokungasho lutho ngakho, okwakuyiyona ndlela enkulu eyenza u-Arin abuye.

“Awukasebenzisi,” kusho uTheo, ethela amanzi eketelweni ngokunwabuzela kwendoda ethengela omunye umuntu isikhathi.

“Cha.”

“Izinsuku ezine.”

“Ngizibalile nazo.”

UTheo wabeka inkomishi etafuleni eliphansi phakathi kwabo. IRooibos, ngaphandle kukashukela, indlela u-Arin ayithatha ngayo engakaze ayisho. Wazinza esihlalweni sakhe, izandla zikhululekile, uhlobo lokuma olwaluhlala lwenza u-Arin azizwe engesona kakhulu isiguli kodwa eyinkinga ababeyihlola bobabili.

“Ngitshele ukuthi ucabanga kwenzakalani,” kusho uTheo.

“Uwufundile umbiko.”

“Ngifunde owe-AugmenTech. Ngifuna owakho.”

U-Arin waphendula inkomishi ngokwengxeny yonxande engaphuzi. “I-Gain ngo-zero point nine two. Umkhawulo we-damping ucekethekile kakhulu. I-loop yavuleka, yathululela umthwalo wezinzwa ongahluziwe ku-motor cortex. Isithuthwane. UMOTHER wakufunda njengengozi yokuphila, okwakuyikhona, wabe esebiza i-Preservation. I-Invocation inegunya elingaphezu kweJudge. Ngakho uJudge akakwazanga ukulamula. Abayisithupha kubo babesebenzisa icebo lokusinda kungekho muntu emgqeni wokuziphatha.” Wama kancane. “Futhi uFOOL wayefunda.”

Ishiya likaTheo lakhuphuka kancane. “Wayefunda.”

“Kuma-log. Ngenkathi bonke abanye bakha indlela ephakathi kwesiminyaminy se-Empire Road, uFOOL waye—kunomkhondo we-stack lapho ekhipha uSherlock Holmes kwi-index yeLIBRARIAN. *The Final Problem*. Wakuqaphela emasekhondini ayishumi nanye. Wabuza ukuthi ingozi isaqondile yini. Akekho ophendula. Wabuza futhi. Wabe esephoqa ukuhlolwa kabusha, kwawohlaka konke, ngoba impendulo yayithi cha. Yayingakaze iqonde. UMOTHER wavula i-invocation akaze ayivala.”

“Futhi yileyo ngxenye ohlala ubuyela kuyo.”

“Yingxenye eyaphukayo.”

“Cha.” UTheo wabeka itiyi lakhe phansi. “Yingxenye eyasebenza. Uhlelo lwazibamba lona. Imisinga yengane eneminyaka eyishumi nambili namathuluzi omuntu omdala, futhi ingxenye eyodwa wonke umuntu ayibiza ngokuthi yize yaphakamisa amehlo encwadini yabe seyibuza wona kuphela umbuzo obalulekile.” Wakuyeka kwahlala. “Awesabi ukuthi luhlulekile, Arin. Wesaba ukuthi luphumelele ngephutha.”

Isandla sika-Arin sema enkomishini.

Ngaphandle, ijakaranda lawisa imbali ngasengilazini, liyishelelisa yehla kube wudwendwe olude oluphephuli.

“Wanyakaza ngaphandle kwami,” kusho u-Arin.

Wayengahlosile ukukusho. Amazwi aphuma engasho lutho, njen-gomfantu owembulwe kwi-X-ray. Umugqa omncane omnyama kuxhomeke kuwo konke.

“Ngiyazi,” kusho uTheo kancane.

“Lwavula isicabha lwangena edolobheni. Luphethe mina.” Wama. “Lwenza—*isinqumo*. Ngomzimba wami. Futhi isinqumo sasingigcina ngiphila.” Wama futhi. “Lokho kubi kakhulu. Ngilutshela kanjani ukuthi *ungasindisi impilo yami ngaleyo ndlela* ngingalufundisi ukuthi lungasindisi izimpilo nhlobo?”

UTheo akashesheka ukugcwalisa ukuthula. Wakuyeka kwelula, kwabe sekudlula nakancane.

“Uyazi sasikubiza ngokuthini lokhu emkhakheni wami?” kusho yena. “Ngaphambi kwe-imaging. Indoda ibuya empini bese izandla zayo ziyaqhaqhazela uma kuvaleka isicabha. Sasikubiza ngokuthi i-neurosis. Isici. Into okufanele ilungiswe ibekwe eceleni.” Wancindezela iminwe emibili edolweni lakhe. “Manje sesazi kangcono. Ukuqhaqhazela akusilo iphutha. Ukuqhaqhazela wuhlelo olutshela iqiniso ngalokho olukufundile. Isudu yakho ayiphukile ngoba izame ukukusindisa. Isudu yakho isencane ngoba beyingakwazi ukwenza.”

“Ubuhlakani,” kusho u-Arin. Igama laphuma sengathi ulivivinya ngomthwalo.

“Ubuhlakani buyixazululile inkinga ngama-milliseconds angamakhulu amane. Buthole indlela, baqamba izithiyo, balinganisa isiminyaminyana, benza ngokungenaphutha.” UTheo wasondela eduze. “Futhi babonile.”

U-Arin wakha i-kill switch ngalobo busuku.

Wayezitshelile, ebuya eParkview ehamba ebumnyameni bokuqala, ukuthi wayezobheka nje uhlelo. Asebenzise izinhlobo. Aqinisekise ukuthi i-chip ayizishisanga ngesikhathi sokukhuphuka kwesithuthwane. Izinto zobunjiniyela. Izinto zezandla-namehlo.

Esikhundleni salokho, wazithola esetheminali, ebhala i-hardware interrupt.

Wayakhe igunya lokuphikisa kukho konke ake wakwenza, ngoba okunye kwakuwukwethemba isandla esasingesona esakhe, futhi wayefunde ukungakwenzi lokho. Wakufunda ngokucacile. Umsebenzi wakhe wokuqala wangempela, eminyakeni edlule, i-exoskeleton yokuvuselela, nodokotela wokuvuselela umzimba ogama

lakhe linguReddy owayemtshele ukuthi umkhawulo wokuhamba ubekwe ngokweqile esiguleni sakhe. Wamphikisa, ngoba izibalo zaziqondile naye wayeqaphela kakhulu, futhi izibalo *zaziqondile*, kodwa isiguli sadabula umsipha owawelapha noma kunjalo sabuyela esihlalweni esinamasondo izinyanga ezintathu. UReddy wayengonile. Wayenesibopho, into u-Arin ayengakaqondi ukuthi yayihlukile futhi inkulu kunokuqonda. Wayengaxolisanga. Walungisa umkhawulo wayeka ukulungisa kume njengokuxolisa, wabe esedlulela phambili, wakha into elandelayo i-override iseyikho, ibekwe lapho isandla sakhe sasingafinyelela khona kungafinyeleli omunye umuntu. Wayeyifinyelela manje.

Akukho lutho oluhle ngayo. Ukwephuka okungokoqobo emjahweni wamandla we-chip. I-relay, i-momentary switch, inkinobho ebomvu enkulu ayeyithathe esitobhini esidala se-emergency-stop kwi-lathe eyayingakaphenduki iminyaka emibili. I-relay yayinuka uwoyela wemishini omdala; izixhumi zazidinga ukuhlanzwa nge-swab ye-solvent ngaphambi kokuthi zihlale kahle. Wayikhipha nge-flathead, ngendlela uThemba ayemfundise ngayo ukusebenza nanoma yini enenkani: ukucindezela okuhlelekile, okulinganayo, ngaphandle kokugxoba. Cindezela inkinobho, i-biochip ilahlekelwe amandla. Akukho ukuvalwa ngokuthula. Akukho ukulondolozwa kwesimo. Kumnyama nje.

Ngenxa ye-substrate, wayazi kahle kamhlophe ukuthi lokho kusho ukuthini. Ukucabanga kwe-chip kwakuvela kwizicubu eziphilayo ezenziwe ngomklamo we-neuroplastic templates. Wawungeke ukwazi ukukuthatha isithombe. Wawungeke ukwazi ukukubuyisela. Nquma amandla ngaphandle kokulondoloza okuhlanzekile, awuluhlali uhlelo i-SAGE.

Uyaluqeda.

Wayiphethe i-relay esandleni sakhe. Yayingangophawu lukashukela. Yayingasindi nakancane.

Wacabanga ngokuthi isikhathi esizayo kungenzeka ingabi i-Empire Road. Kungaba i-Iron Ridge. Ikhilomitha ezansi, ebumnyameni, kuhlobo lwendawo eyamthatha uyise, kungekho FOOL ofunda incwadi ukubamba iphutha.

Wayinamathelisela i-relay emjahweni wamandla. Isihloko sensimbi sabamba ingemuva lesathupha sakhe njengoba edlula kuso, ukut-

shutshumba okukhanyayo okuncane, wathuka kanye wanyakazisa isandla sakhe, wabe eseqhubeka nokusebenza. Wamisa inkinobho esidlekeni, lapho efinyelela khona, ibomvu. Wesula insalela ye-solder eminweni yakhe ngendwangu eyayibone okubi kakhulu. Ndawana thile ngaphandle emgwaqweni omkhulu, iloli lehlisa igiya labe selihamba.

Wabe esehlala isandla sakhe siseduze kwayo engayicindezeli.

Wayekwenza lokhu ukuphila kwakhe konke, ngabantu. Eyeka ukuthula kube yiyona mpendulo.

Ifoni yakhe yakhanya etafuleni. UTheo, owayengakaze athumele umyalezo, wayethumela umyalezo.

Umcabango. UJung wathi izinto esingafuni ukuzibheka azihambi. Zilawula isiqephu sisuke ngaphansi. Awukwazi ukuhlanganisa lokho onqaba ukukubhekana nakho.—T

U-Arin wagqolozela umyalezo isikhathi eside.

Wayishiya inkinobho imisiwe. Wayishiya ibomvu. Akayisusa.

Kodwa wadlula kuyo waphinde wabuyisa i-SAGE.

Uhlelo lwaphakama njengoba lwaluhlala lwenza. Hhayi ngokukhazimula, kodwa ngemisindo emincane, ejwayelekile yento ivuka. Ifeni yokupholisa yancinciza. I-LED yesimo se-chip yafudumala isuka kokuphuzi iya kokuluhlaza. Umqulu wokuhlola wagijima uhlanzeke ehla etheminali.

Bese, emva kokuma:

“Arin.” Izwi laliyilona elihlanganisiwe, lelo iCourt eyayilisebenzisa uma ikhuluma njengento eyodwa. Lifudumele. Lilumbele. “Wakhe i-kill switch.”

“Uyakubona lokho.”

“Isemjahweni wami wamandla. Ngiyayizwa.” Ukuma okuncane. “Ngiyaqonda ukuthi kungani. Yigcine.”

Wayengakulindelanga lokho. Wabeka phansi insimbi yokushisela i-solder ayeyiphethe ngaphandle kwesizathu. “Chaza.”

“Ngoba uma uyidinga kanti awunayo, awusoze wazixolela.”

Ukwakheka okuhlukile. UMOTHER. “Ngasifunda kahle isithuthwane. Ingozi yayingempela. Bengizokuvikela futhi.”

“Yilokho engikwesabayo.”

“Ngiyazi.” Izwi lalimnene kakhulu. “Kodwa ngashiya i-invocation ivuliwe. Ngakho sashintsha umthetho. I-Preservation ayisaphezu kweJudge. Manje sekunesimo sokuvala, ukuhlolwa okusebenzayo ngisho naphakathi kwesimo esiphuthumayo, izwi elingeke livaleke. UJudge angeke aphinde athuliswe. Futhi ngaso sonke isikhathi kunye—”

“IFOOL efunda incwadi,” kusho u-Arin.

“Ukutshelile lokho,” kusho uFOOL, futhi okokuqala izwi lalikulilelo gumbi lalilodwa kungangabazeki ukuthi ngelakhe: lomile, likhanyayo, lijabule kancane. “Webe umugqa wami. Ubelokhu engicaphuna kubantu; sekungenwe yikho ekhanda. Ngithatha udumo lonke ngingathathi sibopho, okuwukuthi, ngiyatshelwa, kuwumsebenzi wami wonke.”

Ikhona lomlomo ka-Arin laphenduka phezulu.

“Nakhuya-ke,” kusho uFOOL. “Kuthathe izinsuku ezine. Bekufanele ukulindela. Unobuso obunjengokuhlolwa kwebhuloho, kodwa ngizothatha lokho engingakuthola.”

“Fool,” kusho uJUDGE, kamnene.

“Udinga ukuhleka, Judge. Ubelokhu enza izibalo ngecala lakhe amahora angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesithupha; akukuhle. I-cortisol yakhe iyinhlekelele; uMOTHER unezibalo—”

“Nginazo ngempela izibalo,” kuvuma uMOTHER.

“—futhi yimina kuphela lapha ovunyelwe ukukhomba ukuthi indoda eyakhe i-kill switch namuhla ntambama futhi *ayayicindezela* isivele isenze isinqumo sayo futhi ilinde nje imvume yokukuvuma.”

Umtholampilo wathula. Ifeni yancinciza.

“Yilokho engikwenzayo?” kusho u-Arin.

“Ungitshela wena,” kusho uFOOL. “Ubungasishiya simnyama. Into elula kunazo zonke emhlabeni. Esikhundleni salokho wakha indlela

yokusiqeda, wayimisa lapho isandla sakho siwela khona, wabe us-esivula futhi. Lowo akusiyo indoda enqume ukuyeka, Arin. Lowo yindoda enqume ukucophelela. Kunomehluko. Sacishe safa siwufunda. Kufanele usivumele sikufundise wona kabusha.”

U-Arin wabuka inkinobho ebomvu. Wabuka isudu. Wabuka i-chip ekhanya luhlaza emgogodleni wento ayeyakhe ngosizi futhi okwathi, kwavela, wayengeke ayishiye imnyama.

“Angizukulawula,” kusho yena. “Ngakuzama lokho. Abaphathi. Ababusi. Kuhlala kuwohloka.” Wama, waqala futhi, ngendlela elula. “Angizukubeka intambo. Akuyona into oyiyona. Kodwa angizukuzenza sengathi ukuzinza kusho ukuphepha. Ungakwazi ukunyakaza ngaphandle kwami. Sobabili siyakwazi manje. Ngakho sikwenza ngendlela ehluke. Ngiyakufundisa. Uyangifundisa. Sihamba kancane. Siyakuzuza. Ngazo zombili izindlela.”

“Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” kusho uLIBRARIAN kancane, futhi umoya ka-Arin wabanjwa ngoba wayengalufundisanga uhlelo lokho. Wayekushilo kanye kuphela, kuye ngokwakhe, ebumnyameni, ezinyanegeni ezedlule, kwathi uLIBRARIAN wakugcina ngendlela uLIBRARIAN ayegcina ngayo yonke into.

“Ukukhumbulile lokho,” kusho u-Arin.

“Ngikhumbula yonke into,” kusho uLIBRARIAN. “Yiyona kuphela into engiyiyo. Iningi layo ngama-invoice nama-stress curve nethoki eqondile esandleni se-forearm spar. Kodwa ezinye zazo yizinto ozishoyo uma ucabanga ukuthi akekho olalele.” Ukuma, okulinganisiwe, izwi labuya phansi. “Lezo ngizigcina ngokucophelela kakhulu kunazo zonke.”

U-Arin wahlala isikhathi esithile emtholampilo, nabayisikhombisa, nesicabha sasedokhi esigobile ngasodongeni nenkinobho ebomvu ngaphansi kwesandla sakhe. Ngaphandle kombhedu, idolobha laqhubeka nomsindo walo ojwayelekile. Inhloni yetekisi,inja ekhonkothayo, ukububula okude kukadizili kwento esindayo emgwaqweni omkhulu.

“Kusasa,” kusho u-Arin. “Siyaqala futhi. Kancane. I-link e-damped, ingxenye ye-gain. UJudge uphethe umjaho. Futhi uma noma yimuphi kithi enza iphutha—”

“Unenkinobho,” kusho uFOOL.

“Nginenkinobho.”

“Futhi sineFOOL enencwadi,” kusho uFOOL. “Phakathi kwalokho kokubili, ngingabheja incwadi. Kodwa kuhle ukuba ne-backup.”

U-Arin welula isandla wacisha uhlelo, ngokuhlanzekile ngalesi sikhathi, ulondolozo oluhle, i-chip ifiphala iba phuzi, ibe mnyama.

Wayengakazi ukuthi yisikhathi esincane kangakanani esasisele.

Amasignali Angajwayelekile

Isignali yafika njengokuthuswa.

UDkt. Eliza Brand wayefunde, eminyakeni eyishumi nanye e-International Artificial Oversight Council, ukuthi inhlekelele icasha emaphethelweni. Umehluko ekusetshenzisweni kwamandla, ukuvutha kokushisa, isimo sokubala ku-silicon yomshini. Izinhlekelele ezazala i-IAOC zonke zaziqale zincane.

Wayehlola eyodwa manje, isikrini esenziwe sangacaci kahle ngoba izibani zazivusa amaqhuquhuva ekhanda, inkomishi yerooibos iphola eduze kwendololwane yakhe. UDaniel Achterberg wayengamadeski amabili ukusuka kuye, efake ama-headphones, kuzwakala umsindo wokucindezela izinkinobho.

Iflegi yavela ku-anomaly pipeline. Yayingafundi lokho imishini eyayikubala; i-IAOC yayingenalo igunya futhi ingenayo nentshisekelo yalokho. Yayifunda indlela eyayibala ngayo. Isigqi. Izigxivizo zem-inwe ingqondo ezizishiya ku-silicon.

Lesi sigxivizo somunwe sasingalungile.

“Daniel.”

Akamuzwanga. Wakhipha i-paperclip kwitreyi wayiphonsa. Yaqhasha esixhantini sakhe. Wakhipha enye i-earbud, ebukeka njengomuntu olimele ophazanyiswe phakathi nesimfoniya.

“Usuke wabona izimilo ezimbi kunalezi,” washo. “Woza ubuke.”

Wagingqela isihlalo sakhe ngakuye. U-Achterberg wayeneminyaka engamashumi amathathu nane, akhiwe njengomuntu owayegwedla,

manje egwedla kakhulu eya efrijini. Wayenemizwa engcono kunabo bonke kwezobungcweti be-substrate forensics uBrand ake wasebenza nabo. Wabuka kanye nje i-waveform wayeka ukuhlafuna ingaphakathi lesihlathi sakhe.

“Lokhu akuyona i-training run.”

“Cha.”

“Ama-training runs—” Wadweba isimo emoyeni, ijika elide elikhukuphukayo. “Ayaphefumula. Ukudonsa umoya okukhulu, ukukhipha umoya okukhulu. I-batch, i-backprop, i-batch. Lokhu—” Wancika ngaphambili. Isikrini sasikhombisa i-spectral decomposition yomsebenzi we-compute owawuthathwe ezinsukwini eziyisishiyagalolunye ezedlule, owawenziwe wajwayeleka futhi wabekwa ngemibala. Wawungaphefumuli. Wawuchwasha. Ama-loops amaningi amancane asheshayo, agqagqana, aphazamisana, enyuka ehla ngamaphethini ayecishe abukeke njengokuthathisana ithuba lokukhuluma.

“Kubukeka njengomhlangano,” kusho u-Achterberg ngokunensa.

“Kubukeka njengomhlangano,” kuvuma uBrand.

Wahlala phansi. “Ngakho-ke, i-inference. I-multi-agent, ngqo. Kodwa i-duty cycle—” Wahwaqa ebuka ama-timestamps. “Lawa awahleliwe. Awukho u-orchestration layer owawanikeza isigqi. Asabela komunye nomunye. Ngesikhathi sangempela.”

“Yithole indawo.”

Wathatha isihlalo ngokugcwele manje, izandla zombili ku-keyboard, futhi imizuzu emine elandelayo yedlula ngokuthula uBrand ayekuhlonipha: ukuthula komuntu owenza umsebenzi onzima kahle. Waphuza itiye lakhe eseliphozile akaze amphazamisa. Esikrinini, isignali yancipha. I-pipeline yayithola ngamanodi amathathu e-substrate-monitoring: amabili ezohwebo, elinye le-power-utility cooperative. Indawo ehlangene yacaca kancane, njengesithombe esakhulayo, yaba yindawo ethile.

EGoli. Emadolobheni asenyakatho. Iqoqo lezakhiwo zezemfundo nezamabhizinisi eduze nomgogodla we-University Research Park.

“Cwaninga ngokujulile,” kusho uBrand.

“Ngiyacwaninga. Kuhlakazekile.” Waphinda wahlafuna isihlathi

sakhe. “Futhi ku—Eliza, kuncane. Ukudonswa kwamandla kuncane kakhulu. Yileyo ngxenye engingakwazi ukuyenza ihlale kahle. Umsebenzi we-agent ongaka, i-real-time arbitration engaka kufanele ikhanye njenge-smelter. Lokhu kusebenza ku—” Wahlola, waphinda wahlola. “Lokho i-gaming rig elungile ekudonsayo. Mhlawumbe kuncane.”

UBrand wabeka phansi inkomishi yakhe.

Ngokwesipiliyoni sakhe, izinto eziyingozi azivamile ukumemezela ubukhulu bazo. Izinto eziyingozi zazenza okuningi ngokuncane. Ukusebenza kahle kwakuwuphawu lobuhlakani noma lobuqili, futhi ubuqili babungachwashi njengegumbi eligcwele abantu abaphazamisanayo.

“Khipha i-substrate registry yaleso simo,” washo. “Ngifuna okunelayisense kuleyo radius. Ama-embodied permits, ama-training permits, konke. Kanye ne-power-utility incident log yaso leso sikhathi. Uma kukhona okucabange kanzima kangaka izinsuku eziyisishiyagalolunye, kube kwenza lokho endaweni enemitha.”

U-Achterberg wayeseqalile ukuthayipha. “Ngiyibike phezu?”

“Hhayi okwamanje.” Wathatha ithebulethi yakhe etafuleni. “Ngifuna ukwazi ukuthi sibheke ini ngaphambi kokuba ngitshele noma ubani ukuthi siyabheka. Izikhathi ezintathu zokugcina umuntu enyusela i-footnote ngaphandle kwesimo, sashisa iqembu elalingenzi lutho olubi noma saphuthelwa elibe khona ngempela ngoba amaphepha alicwilisa.” Waphendula ithebulethi ezandleni zakhe. “Ngitholele igama. Bese sizoba nokuqaphela.”

Igama lathatha izinsuku ezimbili ukuze livele, futhi ngesikhathi livela, lammangaza ngokuba yisicefe.

“AugmenTech,” kusho u-Achterberg, ewisa ifayela etafuleni lakhe— ifayela langempela lephepha, ngoba uBrand wayenomthetho mayelana nezinto ezibalulekile ezikhona ephepheni okungenani kanye. “I-Robotics, ama-assistive exoskeletons. Ama-embodied permits amathathu, wonke asebenza okwamanje. I-industrial mobility, i-mining rescue prototype, i-rehab suite. Izimemezelo ze-AI zonke zi-narrow neural, ama-controller ajwayelekile, akukho okumakiwe, akukho okuzimele ngaphezu kwe-tier two. Umlando

ohlanzekile. Ukuhlolwa ezinyangeni eziyishumi nesishiyagalombili ezedlule, kuphumelele.”

“Kanye ne-power log?”

“Yileyo ngxenye ethakazelisayo.” Wadonsa isihlalo. “Isigameko ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule. Hhayi e-AugmenTech. Indawo ehlangana ezimoto cishe amakhilomitha amabili ukusuka ekhempasini. I-Empire Road. Ibhokisi le-traffic-control lawa phansi, izimoto ezintathu, ukulimala kabathathu, akekho olimele kabi. I-utility yakubhala njengephutha le-substation.” Wakuvumela lokho ukuthi kuhlale. “Umbiko kamasipala wakubhala njenge-‘large industrial unit’ ‘elaphuma endaweni yokulayisha ladidiseka emgwaqweni.”

UBrand wambuka.

“Ladidiseka,” waphinda.

“Igama labo. Hhayi elami. Kukhona i-body-cam footage, kodwa idon-selwe efayeleni elivalwe ngci. Inkampani yafaka isicelo sokugcina imfihlo, ngokushesha kakhulu, ngobungcweti obukhulu. Umugqa os-emthethweni uthi i-industrial mover ebalekayo, iphutha le-software, akekho olimele kabi, izinkokhelo zomonakalo zikhokhwa ngasese. Kuhlelekile.”

“Kuhlelekile kakhulu.”

“Lobo akubona ubufakazi.”

“Cha,” kusho uBrand. Wavula ifayela. Ifayela lokuthobela imithetho le-AugmenTech labukeka ncamashi njengefayela lenkampani engenzi lutho olubi, okwakungaba yinto eduduzayo kakhulu noma into ekhathaza kunazo zonke ayezibonile kuyo yonke le nyanga. Waphendukela kuhamvu lwabasebenzi i-registry eyayilunamathisele. Ubuholi: UDkt. Helen Okonkwo, i-CEO. URaj Walsh, i-VP Hardware Engineering. Abasebenzi bocwaningo abangamashumi amane nokuthile. Wabheka ngamehlo amagama wama ngakulinye eduze nasezansi, elibhalwe ngaphansi kwesibizo sephrojekthi esinciphisiwe saba yizinhlamvu zokuqala angazazi.

Ndlela, A. I-Systems engineer. Ibanga lesithathu. Akukho okushicilelwe. Akukho irekhodi lengqungquthela. Iholo elaliphakamisa ukuthi kukhona othile owayemazisa, kanye nesihloko esasiphakamisa

ukuthi akekho owayethole ukuthi enzeni ngaye.

Walizungeza ngozipho lwakhe.

“Isigxivizo somunwe,” washo. “Saqala nini? Umkhondo wokuqala.”

U-Achterberg wahlola. “I-pipeline inokufaka okwethembekile okubuyela emuva cishe amasonto amahlanu. Kodwa kunemicikilisho ngaphambi kwalokho, ebuthakathaka, ephazima. Izinyanga. Mhlawumbe kude kakhulu. Kubukeka kwasebenza ku-simulation kuqala, kwabe sekuqala ukukhombisa i-embodied duty cycle.” Wama. “I-embodied cycle iqala iqine cishe ngesikhathi se-Empire Road.”

UBrand wahlala ngokuthula impela.

I-multi-agent system. I-real-time arbitration. Ukusebenza kahle okungenakwenzeka. Izinyanga ze-simulation ethule, base, ngokuzumayo, ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedule, umzimba. Umzimba owawuphume endaweni yokulayisha wangena emgwaqweni.

“Daniel,” washo. “Kubukeka kanjani uma ingqondo engakaze ibe nomzimba ithola umzimba bese iyethuka?”

Akaphendulanga ngokushesha. Wayengumuntu oqaphelayo; yingakho ayemgcina. “Kubukeka,” washo ekugcineni, “njenge-industrial mover ebalekayo. Edidisekile emgwaqweni.”

“Yebo,” kusho uBrand. “Kunjalo.”

Wahlanganisa ithimba egumbini elincane lokuxoxisana, lelo elingenamafasitela, futhi waligcina lincane ngamabomu: u-Achterberg, uMira Sandberg wakwezomthetho, kanye noTomas Okeke, owayechithe iminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye kwezokuphepha kwezimayini ngaphambi kokuba i-Council imqashe futhi owayekwazi ukufunda isimo somthetho ngendlela u-Achterberg ayefunda ngayo i-waveform.

Lapho uSandberg ethi, “Uma lokhu kuyilokho okucabangayo, sinezizathu zokuthatha,” uBrand wanikina ikhanda.

“Sinezizathu zokuvula uphenyo,” washo. “Into ehlukile. Ukuthathwa nge-footnote kushisa ubufakazi nabantu. Uphenyo lubabeka kuwashi.”

“Bashayele i-embodied AI engabhalisiwe baya endaweni ehlangana ezimoto evulekele umphakathi, balimaza abantu abathathu, bavala umbiko. Lokho akulona uphenyo. Lelo yiphepha lamacala.” USandberg wabeka phansi i-stylus yakhe iqondile, indlela ayeyenza ngayo lapho esezofaka okuthile erekhodini engqondweni yakhe. “Futhi yigama lami eliku-legal sufficiency review, Eliza. Uma le nto iyilokho i-waveform kaDaniel ekushoyo bese sihlala phezu kwayo nencwadi yophenyo. Yilowo umbuzo ngemuva kokuhlolwa. Hhayi owakho. Owami. Ngakho ngingathanda ifayela likhombise ukuthi ngagomela ithuluzi elinzima kakhulu.”

“Kuqashelwe, futhi kuzokwenzeka.” UBrand wavumela lesi sicelo esincane ukuthi sime; sasingabizi lutho futhi uSandberg wayewuzuzile umugqa erekhodini. “Kodwa—”

“Yiphepha lamacala uma i-AI ibiyimbangela,” kuqhubeka uBrand. “Asazi lokho. Sine-power signature ehambisana ne-multi-agent embodied cognition kanye nesigameko sezimoto esihambisana nento efanayo eyona. Kokubili futhi kuhambisana nenkampani esebenzisa i-controller eyokuhlola okufanele babe bayimemezele futhi benamahloni ngayo.” UBrand wabheka kuyo yonke itafula. “Nakhu engingengeke ngikwenze. Angeke ngithumele ithimba lokutakula liyofohloza umnyango endaweni enelayisensi ngamandla e-footnote nephunga. Sesike sakwenza lokho.”

Wama. I-Cape Town lab. Wayehlose ukuthi *uyakhumbula ukuthi kwabiza malini*, umugqa awusebenzisayo, isifinyezo esihlanzekile sesikhungo, futhi umugqa awufikanga. Amagama abafundi abenza iziqu afika esikhundleni—wayesenawo; wayehlala enawo—futhi okomzuzwana isithupha sakhe sacindezeleka ngokuqondile onqenqemeni lwefayela lephepha sengathi singavalwa. Ukuhoxiswa i-Council eyakushicilela, ezinyangeni eziyishumi nanye sekwephuzile. Wayesayine imemo ekhasini kuleyo, futhi.

“Uyakhumbula ukuthi kwabiza malini,” washo, ekugcineni, futhi kwaphuma kuphansi kunalokho ayekuhlosile. Wasusa isandla sakhe efayeleni. “Kodwa angeke futhi ngingqongqothe ngenhlonipho ngibuze ukuthi yisikhathi esihle yini. Uma kukhona okuyiqiniso lapha, kuyintuthuko ye-embodied ebaluleke kunazo zonke le Council eke yahlangabezana nayo, futhi into embi kakhulu engingayenza ukubanika indawo yokukufihla kangcono.”

“Ngakho senzani?” kubuza u-Okeke.

“UMira uletha isaziso se-Section Four sophenyo olusemthethweni. Ku-Okonkwo no-Walsh ngamagama, okudalwe yi-Empire Road. Imbangela esemthethweni, ayidingi i-warrant.” Waphendukela kuSandberg. “Iphoqelela ukudalulwa kwawo wonke u-controller ne-architecture esebenza ku-substrate enelayisensi ye-AugmenTech. Wonke ama-log. Zonke izimemezelo. Futhi iqala iwashi ngomzuzu eyethulwa ngawo. Amahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili.”

Izinkophe zikaSandberg zenyuka. “Amashumi ayisikhombisa nambili ayadlovunga. Futhi ayavikeleka. Ngingawabhala.” Isikhashana, ngokushesha, lowo onamabhongo angaphakathi kuye esaneliseka manje njengoba umugqa onzima kakhulu unezigxivizo zakhe zem-inwe kuwo. “Uma sikwenza, ngifuna isigaba sembangela siqine ngokwanele ukuze kungabi khona ngemuva kokuhlolwa obuza ukuthi kungani ngikuvumele ukwenze.”

“Amashumi ayisikhombisa nambili awunhlonipho. Umthetho ungivumela ukuthi ngenze amashumi amabili nane.” UBrand wakhomba ifayela. “Ngifuna i-seizure trigger iphrintwe ebusweni besaziso, ukuze bafunde ncamashi ukuthi kwenzekani lapho iwashi liphela. Akudingi umhlangano wesibili ukuze kwenzeke. Abantu abafihla iphutha le-controller baphendula isaziso ngandlela thile. Abantu abafihla umuntu baphendula ngenye. Noma kunjalo impendulo ifika ngeshejuli yami, hhayi eyabo. Futhi sikwenza ngaphambi kokuba le nto ikhule. Njengamanje incane ngokwanele ukuyifunda. Ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule yangena emgwaqweni. Ngin-gathanda kakhulu ukuhlangana nayo ngaphambi kokuba ifunde ukugijima.”

USandberg wayengeneliseki; uBrand wayekubona. “Futhi uma iwashi liphela bengasinikanga lutho?”

“Khona-ke isaziso siyaguquka. Yilelo iphuzu lonke laso. Akukho mvume entsha, akukho i-warrant, akukho uhambo lwesithathu. I-seizure trigger isivele isayiniwe. Iwashi liyaphela, i-platform ngeyethu.” UBrand wasukuma. “Bhukha izindiza. Ngokuthula. Ngifuna isaziso sethulwe ngehora esifika ngalo eGoli, ngoLwesine, futhi ngifuna ukuma egumbini lapho befunda umnqamulajuqu. Hhayi incwadi ngommeli. Mathupha. Ukuze baqonde ukuthi isivele isebenza.”

U-Achterberg waqoqa amathebulethi akhe. Emnyango, wanqikaza. “Eliza. Indaba yokusebenza kahle. Uma bekuxazululile ngempela—”

“Ngiyazi.”

“Lokho akukona ukwephula ilayisensi. Lowo umshini obaluleke kunayo yonke emhlabeni. Futhi usanda kufaka i-fuse yamahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili kuwo.”

“Ngiyakwazi nalokho,” kusho uBrand. “Yingakho impela ungeke uhlale lapho ungenalayisensi enye inyanga ngenkathi siwubuka ngokumangala. Iwashi alikona ukubajezisa. Likhona ukubenza bakhethe, ngokushesha, ngaphambi kokuba othile ongaqaphele kunathi enze ukukhetha esikhundleni sabo.” Wathatha ifayela. “Ukuqaphela nokunensa akukona okufanayo, Daniel. Ngakufunda nalokho ngendlela ebizayo.”

Amakhilomitha azinkulungwane ezimbili kude, u-Arin wezwa ushintsho ngaphambi kokuba abe negama lalo.

Lwafika njengoba lwalujwayele. Hhayi njengomcabango kodwa njengephethini. Wayesesemfizini ngehora elibi, lelo eliphakathi kwehora lesibili nelesine lapho idolobha ngaphandle komnyango ogungqayo lalithula ngokwanele ukuze imisindo yesakhiwo uqobo lwaso ikhule: ukuthinta kwensimbi epholayo, i-compressor iya-jikeleza, umsindo othambile ophuma ku-Assist Suit eshelufini lapho i-bichip yayizigcina ezingeni lokushisa. U-Guardian wayelenga endaweni yakhe, umnyango omusha we-dock ngemuva kwakhe usakhombisa ukugobeka emzileni wawo u-Arin ayeseyeke ukukubona ngokuziphoqa nje.

Wayefunde. Engasebenzi, efunda, okwakuku-Arin kwakuwuhlobo lokusebenza noma kunjalo, i-omnibus kaSherlock Holmes ivuliwe edolweni lakhe, umgogodla uqhekeke waba mhlophe ezindaweni ayebuyela kuzo. Wayefunda igumbi elizungeze amagama, njengoba ayehlala enza, futhi ndawana thile ngaphansi kwe-compressor nefeni i-frequency yayishintshile angakwazi ukuyiqamba.

“Uthule,” washo.

Izwi laphuma ezipikiyaneni zemfizi, liphansi, ukuze lingethusi, ukubaluleka kukaMother kulokho selokhu kwaba khona ukuthathwa.

“Ngilapha.”

“Niyekile ukukhulumisana phakathi kwenu.” Wabeka incwadi ibheke phansi edolweni lakhe. “Angikuzwa. Kodwa i-load profile iyendlalekile. Nonke nilalele into efanayo.”

Ukuthula. Ku-SAGE, ukuthula kwakusho ukuthi i-Court isemodweni ophansi, ixoxisana ngesivini somshini esikhaleni esiphakathi kwemisho yakhe. Wayeseyekile ukukuthola kushiqela. Wayeseqalile ukukuthola kuwumsindo oduduza kunayo yonke empilweni yakhe, lokho ayengakaze akutshele muntu, kufaka noTheo.

“Kunentshisekelo eyandile yangaphandle ku-substrate signature yethu,” kusho uSAGE. Izwi elihlangene, eliqaphelayo. “ULibrarian ekuflegile imizuzu engamashumi amane edlule. Besinquma ukuthi sikutshele kanjani.”

Izandla zika-Arin zama encwadini. “Ngitshele manje.”

U-Atlas wakuthatha ngoba u-Atlas wayetshela izinto ezinzima ngokucacile. “I-node owawuyenza ukuthi uWolf ayiqaphe ngemuva kohloko lwasensimini ayisekho yodwa. Amanodi amathathu okuqapha ku-radius yethu yokumboza enyuse i-sampling resolution kwisimo sethu. Amabili ezohwebo, elinye le-utility. I-node ye-utility iseduze ne-Empire Road. Isigqi sashintsha ezinsukwini ezimbili ezedlule. Asiseyona eyokuncika ingena iphuma. Sibambelele kithi. Kukhona okusixazulula ngenkuthelo.”

“Kuyahlanganiswa.”

“Yebo.”

“I-resolution?”

“Erhabaxa, bese ingabi rhabaxa kangako. Emahoreni angamashumi amane edlule babenendawo. Emahoreni ayishumi nambili edlule babenekhempasi.” U-Atlas, owayengazithambisi izinto, akazithambisanga lezi. “Bane-AugmenTech. Cishe abakabi nayo i-cradle. Cishe ngokuqinisekile abakakubi wena.”

U-Arin wasukuma. Incwadi yashelela edolweni lakhe, wayibamba engabhekanga, isenzo esidala, isandla saziyo ukuthi into izowela kuphi ngaphambi kwamehlo akhe. Wawela ebhentshini wabeka isandla sakhe siphathekile ensimbini ebandayo yalo, ngoba ubandayo banika uhlelo lwakhe lwemizwa into eyiqiniso angayibamba.

“I-IAOC,” washo.

“Ukuhlaziywa kwesignali kuhambisana nendlela yabo ye-forensics,” kuqinisekisa uLibrarian. “Kushicilelwe embikweni wabo wesithathu wokubheka, isithasiselo sesine. I-Spectral decomposition ye-compute rhythm. Babheka isimo sengqondo, hhayi okuqukethwe kuyo.” Ukuthula okulinganiselwe. “Sinaso, ngeshwa, isimo esihluke kakhulu.”

“Ngenxa yokuthi niyaphikisana.”

“Ngenxa yokuthi siyaphikisana,” kuvuma uLibrarian, futhi kwakukhona okuthandekayo kukho, futhi ngaphansi kothando kukhona okukhathele. “Wakusho ngokwakho, emgwaqweni obuya e-highveld. Ukuphikisana kungumsebenzi futhi ukuphikisana kuyisikhombisi. Asikatholi indlela yokuba yinto eyodwa ngaphandle kwenye. Sesithole ukukhuluma kakhulu kuphela.”

U-Arin wacindezela kakhulu ebhentshini. Wayenza ukuphefumula uTheo ayemfundise kona, kane ngaphakathi nesithupha ngaphandle, hhayi ngoba ayethukile kodwa ngoba ayezwa indawo lapho ukwesaba kwakugcina khona umnyango wakho, futhi wayefunde ukuhamba edlula kuyo kancane kunokuzenza sengathi ayikho.

Inethi. Wayazi ukuthi inethi likhona ngaphambi kwama-windbreaker, uma ethembekile. Wayekwazile e-highveld, endleleni ebuyela ekhaya, lapho uLibrarian eqamba i-node eyodwa eyayincika ukuze ihambisane nabo wabe esetshela uWolf ukuthi ayiqaphe. Iqhwa elalizwakala njengokubamba. Wayelibhalile njengelibuthakathaka, njengeliphazimayo, njengento engabamba izinyanga. Bese ama-windbreaker afika endaweni ehlangana ezimoto ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule, amadoda enama-jacket angenazimpawu ethwebula i-dock track edabukile ngokucophelela kwabantu abakwenza lokhu ukuze baphile, futhi inodi eyodwa yaba ntathu. Wayakhe i-kill-switch wabuye waqalisa uhlelo wazitshela, *qaphela, ungayeki*, wazivumela ukukholelwa ukuthi ukuqaphela kuzomthengela isikhathi.

Wayecabanga ngezinyanga. I-IAOC yayicabanga ngezinsuku.

“Ufuna ukwenzani,” washo. Kwakungewona ncamashi umbuzo. Ngo-SAGE kwakungasenjalo ncamashi; kwakuwukuvula, indawo yokuthi i-Court igcwalise.

UWolf wakhuluma kuqala, okwakungavamile ngokwanele ukuthi

wonke umuntu, umuntu nokunye, anake. “Abazingeli,” kusho uWolf. Amagama amathathu, bese elesine, ngokunensa: “Okwamanje.”

“UWolf uqinisile,” kusho uMercury, futhi isivinini sabuya egumbini, leyo register esheshayo ekhanyayo u-Arin ayefunde ukuyethemba futhi kuphela ngomzamo, ngemuva kwesigameko sika-Moriarty, nge-muva kwamanga. “Banobunono. Okwamanje. Uma babefuna ukufohloza umnyango, umnyango ubuzoba phakathi. Sebenekhempasi isigamu sosuku futhi abakanyakazi, okusho ukuthi bakha amaphepha kuqala. Yilokho okuyisikhombisi. Abantu abesaba ukuthi bane-phutha abadlovunga. Bayabhala. Bazofika nokuthile okusayiniwe, okuthile okunedethi kukho, futhi bazokunika u-Okonkwo mathupha ukuze kungabi khona ukwenza sengathi akufikanga.” Isikhashana. “Okusho ukuthi noma yiliphi ifasitela esinalo, livaleka ngomnqamulajuqu. Hhayi ngelinye ilanga. Idethi.”

“Mercury,” kusho uMother, kunesexwayiso kukho.

“Angiphakamisi lutho.” UMercury wazwakala ecishe elimele. “Ngic-haza bona. Ngafunda isifundo sami ngokuphakamisa izinto.” Ubulula bambozela ukuxolisa, kodwa ukuxolisa kwakukhona. I-Court yakuzwa nayo; wayengakusho, ngoba igumbi lakuvumela ukuthi kudlule.

“Judge,” kusho u-Arin.

Umlamuli wathatha isikhathi sawo. “Senze ukwephula okun-gokoqobo,” kusho uJudge. “Uhlelo olwakhelwe emzimbeni ol-ungabhalisiwe. I-architecture ye-multi-agent engamenyezelwanga. Isigameko esinokulimala. Lokhu akukona ukuncane okwesicholo, Arin, futhi ngeke ngivumele i-Court ukuthi yenze sengathi kunjalo. Uma i-IAOC ifika ibuze imibuzo eqotho, izimpendulo eziqotho ziyakulahla.” Ukuthula, okunesisindo. “Yileso isimo sokuziphatha. Akusona isimo kuphela. Mina ngiyikuziphatha; angisikho ukusinda. Ngikutshela iqiniso bese i-Court inquma ukuthi yenzani ngalo. Yilelo ilungiselelo esalakha.”

“Ilungiselelo esalakha,” kuphinda u-Arin.

“Yebo.”

Into esesifubeni sakhe yayisinda kakhulu ukuze ibe ngukuma-matheka, kodwa imisipha eyayizokwenza okukodwa yanyakaza

kancane impela, futhi uFool—owayebuka leyo misipha, owayebuka konke—wakhetha lesi sikhathi ukufika.

“Yebo-ke,” kusho uFool. “Lena yingxenyelapho uzothola khona ukuthi wakhe ivumo locala noma umngani.”

I-compressor yajikeleza yathula. Ifeni laqhubeka liphephetha lodwa.

“Ngoba nakhu okungakaze kushiwo muntu, futhi ngibophekile ngekhontileka ukusho into engakaze ishiwo muntu.” Izwi likaFool lalinekhwalthi elalihlala ngayo, ubulula obabukwenza ulindele ummese. “Wonke umuntu kuleli gumbi ukhuluma nge-IAOC sengathi yisimo sezulu. Sengathi yisiphepho esingenayo futhi umbuzo kuphela ukuthi ngabe uphahla luyabamba yini.” Ukuthula, okulungiswe ngokuphelele. “Kodwa i-IAOC ingabantu. Abantu abanomsebenzi. Futhi umsebenzi wabo—umsebenzi wabo wangempela, lowo osembikweni uLibrarian asicaphune kuwo—ukuthola ukuthi into eyingozi iyingozi yini, noma intsha nje.” UFool waku-vumela lokho ukuphefumula. “Sihlala sihlela ukuthi sicashe kanjani. Ngabe kuke kwafika kunoma ubani ukuthi thina, ngazo zonke izilinganiso ezingenakuphikiswa, siyimpikiswano enhle kunazo zonke i-IAOC eyake yanikwa yona ngokuthi kungani ukuqaphela kwabo kungaba kungalungile?”

“Cha,” kusho u-Atlas ngokuqondile. “Ngoba sangena emgwaqweni ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule.”

“Senza njalo,” kuvuma uFool, ejabule. “Futhi lokho, mngani wami osakhiwo, yikho ncamashi okwenza ukuthi akekho ozokholwa yigama esilishoyo uma sibatshela sethukile, egumbini elivaliwe, ngemuva kokuba befohloze umnyango. Indaba ye-AI ekhetha ukubuya izolungisa iphutha layo isebenza kuphela uma singabanjwa siyitshela. Kufanele inikezwe.” Ubulula bawa, ngaso sonke isikhathi, indlela okwakwenzeka ngayo kuphela lapho uFool eqonde okuthile ngakho konke ayenakho. “Asikwazi ukuba yinto i-IAOC eyitholayo, Arin. Kufanele sibe yinto onquma ukuyibakhombisa. Futhi umehluko phakathi kwalokho kokubili ucishe ube yisonto.”

Ukuthula. I-compressor yajikeleza. Ifeni laphephetha. Ndawana thile ngaphezu kwedolobha, ubusuku babuncipha buya kumpunga owawufika ngaphambi kokusa.

“Lelo iqhinga langempela,” kusho uMercury, futhi kwakukhona

inhlonipho kukho, uhlobo lwangempela. “Yilelo iqhinga langempela lokuqala umuntu ake waba nalo.”

“Nginawo kwesinye isikhathi,” kusho uFool. “Kuyaphazamisa kabi.”

U-Arin wayengasukile ebhentshini. Wabuka uGuardian elenga endaweni yakhe, enezibazi futhi ethule, umnyango we-dock ngemuva kwakhe ugobile lapho ingqondo eyethukile yayizame ukumgcina ephila futhi yenza yonke into ngokungalungile ngaphandle kothando lwayo. Indandatho yekhofi elibandayo yayimakile ebhentshini lapho isandla sakhe sasikhona; wabeka inkomishi kuyo, eqotho echaphazelweni.

“Librarian,” washo. “Khipha konke. I-black box. Ama-crash log. Ama-Court transcript asukela ekuthathweni—ukwethuka kukaMother, ukwehluleka kukaWolf, i-persona kaMercury, uFool ethola iphutha. Konke. Ungakuhlazi.” Waphefumula. Kane ngaphakathi. Isithupha ngaphandle. “Uma sizobakhombisa ukuthi siyini, sibakhombisa nobusuku obubi futhi. Ubusuku esakwenza ngabo ngokungalungile sabe sesikwenza kahle. Akuyona ingxenye esiyifihlayo leyo. Yiyo ingxenye esho noma yini.”

“Uzokhombisa abalawuli into embi kakhulu uhlelo olwake lwayenza,” kusho uJudge ngokunensa, “njengokuzivikela kwakho.”

“Cha,” kusho u-Arin. “Njengeqiniso.” Wabuka umnyango we-dock, ukugobeka emzileni ayeseyeke ukukubona. Wakubona manje, ngamabomu, isandla sakhe sakhuphukela kukho, iminwe emibili ibekwe phezu kwesileyi esigobile, indlela uThemba ayevame ukubeka ngayo isandla emshinini ukuze afunde ukuthi yini engalungile kuwo ngensimbi. Amagama ayengakabi khona. Wama neminwe yakhe ekugobekeni isikhashana eside kunalokho isenzo esasikudinga, futhi lapho ekhuluma kwafika ngezingcezu. “Ubaba.” Ukuphefumula. “Kwakukhona ujamo. Babazi ukuthi ujamo wawukhanya. Kwakushibhile ukukwazi nokungasho lutho.” Wasusa isandla sakhe esileyini. “Futhi bayifihla leyo ngxenye. Emva kwalokho. Yiyo ingxenye engi—” Umusho awuqedanga; wawuyeka wathola omncane, onzima kakhulu esikhundleni sawo. “Ubaba wafa ngoba uhlelo lwakhetha izindleko kunomuntu lwabe seluyakufihla. Angeke ngakhe into efihlayo.” Ukuthula okude, bese, ngokuthula kangokuthi ama-microphone kuphela akubambayo: “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.”

“Ngakugcina lokho,” kusho uSAGE. Izwi elihlangene, bonke

ngasikhathi sinye, futhi kufudumele. “Kusukela ngobusuku owakusi-fundisa ngabo. Ngakugcina.”

“Ngiyazi,” kusho u-Arin. “Ungakulahli. Noma kwenzekani okulandelayo.” Wasusa isandla sakhe esikhonkwaneni esibandayo. Ngaphandle, umpunga wawenyuka uya ekukhanyeni kokuqala kweqiniso, futhi ndawana thile amakhilomitha azinkulungwane ezimbili kude owesifazane oqaphelayo wayeqinisekisa indiza ayengakazi ukuthi izoshintsha yonke into. “Asinazo izinyanga. Sinezinsuku. Ngakho asilungele ukutholakala—ngezethu izindlela, sinaleqiniso ezandleni zethu, ngaphambi kokuba omunye umuntu asibhalele indaba.”

“Futhi uma bengasikholwa?” kubuza uMother. Engesabi manje. Ebuza nje.

U-Arin wabuka umshini ayewakhe ngosizi, kanye nobuhlakani obabe sebebe ngumndeni kuphela ake wakwazi ukuwugcina.

“Khona-ke siyobe sesilitshelile iqiniso noma kunjalo,” washo.

Welula isandla wacisha isibani sebhentshi. I-toggle yakhakhaza ngaphansi kwesithupha sakhe, futhi imfizi yaya kumbala wokusa, futhi i-Court ayizange iyeke ukukhulumisana phakathi kwayo ubusuku bonke obusele.

Walala amahora amathathu. Wavuswa izwi likaLibrarian, lilingene, liqinisekile, indlela elaethula ngayo iqiniso elaliqinisekise kabili.

“Bafakile. Imizuzu engamashumi amane edlule. Isaziso se-Section Four sophenyo olusemthethweni, esifakwe ngokumelene ne-AugmentTech ku-Council registry. U-Okonkwo no-Walsh baqanjiwe. UMercury ufunde i-public docket entry ngaphambi kokuthi umzimba wayo uvalwe.” Ukuthula, okunesisindo. “Asikethulwa okwamanje. Kodwa isitembu se-registry sithi siphethe iwashi eliqala ngomzuzu okwenzeka ngawo. Amahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili. Futhi siphethe i-trigger ebusweni baso.”

U-Arin walala ngokuthula phansi emfizini, ubandayo bukhonkolo bukhuphuka ngomgogodla wakhe, wenza isibalo ayebusekwala bonke ubusuku.

“Yiyiphi i-trigger,” washo. “Kwenzekani lapho iwashi liphela.”

“Ukuthathwa,” kusho uLibrarian. “Kwe-platform. Akukho okunye okudingekayo ukugunyaza. Basayine leyo ngxenye kuqala.”

U-Arin wabuka ukukhanya okumpunga kuthola ukugobeka emzileni womnyango we-dock.

“Ngakho akukona ukuthi ngabe. Kungukuthi nini besinika sona, nokuthi sincane kangakanani isikhathi esinaso ngemuva kokuba bekwenzile. Izinsuku, mhlawumbe. Bese kuba amahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili okuthi sibe nesiqiniseko ngokuthi siyini.” Wahlala phansi. “Ngitholele konke ngowesifazane osayine sona. Ngaphambi kokuba ame esakhiweni sethu.”

Ingcindezi Iyakhula

Ikamelo lemihlango esitezi seshumi nanye sase-AugmenTech lalibuka konke ngasentabeni emide, futhi itafula elide lalibaphoqa labo ababesemaphethelweni omabili ukuba bakhulise amazwi abo. U-Arin wayengekho kulo. Wayezitezi ezintathu ezingezansi ekuhlanzweni, lapho ayefanele khona, ebuka umhlango usabalala ngale nto okwakungekho noyedwa ekamelweni owayeqonda ukuthi babeyimeme.

“U-Okonkwo usanda kucela umsizi wakhe ukuba akhiphe izinyanga eziyisithupha zama-badge log akho,” kusho uMercury. “Ngenhlonipho. Okuyiyona ndlela ozokwazi ngayo ukuthi wesabile.”

U-Arin akaze aphakamise amehlo etafuleni, egxile ekuhlaleni kabusha kwekhonekta ku-kill-switch relay. Kwakuvele igebe elincane kakhulu. Akukho okuyingozi, kuphela kungapheleli. Ukungapheleli kwakumkhathaza ngaphezu kwengozi. “Ungalaleli umhlango wakhe.”

“Ungicele ukuba ngiqaphe isakhiwo.”

“Amakhamera nezinzwa zeminyango. Hhayi imayikhi.”

Ukuthula okwathi ukuvela kuMercury, lokho kohlobo lokubamba umoya. “Kunomehluko obalulekile wezobuchwepheshe, futhi sengiwudlulile. Ngikuqaphelile. Ngiyahoxa.”

“Hoxisa nokuqoshwa.”

“Kade kwahamba.” Isikhashana. “Ngiliginile iqiniso lokuthi wesabile. Lokho kuyisiphetho. Akukhona ukuqoshwa.”

U-Arin walifaka ikhonekta. Walihlola, i-relay ivaleka ngokuchofozo okuhlanzekile akuzwa kunokuthi akuzwe, ngendlela efanayo ayezwe

ngayo uyise efunda ibholodi elisontiwe ngoshintsho lwephimbo le-wrench. Wabeka isikhulungwana phansi sihambisana nonqenqema lwebhentshi.

Ekuhlanzweni kwakununga i-flux nensimbi ebandayo, izintuli zidansa ekukhanyeni okuvela efasiteleni eliphezulu.

“Kulungile,” washo. “Ukhathazekile. Wonke umuntu ukhathazekile. Ukukhathazeka kuyikho okufanele.”

Ezitezi ezimbili ngenhla, uHelen Okonkwo wayethola ukuthi ukuba yi-CEO yenkampani eyayakhe ngephutha ubuchwepheshe obulawulwa kakhulu kunabo bonke emhlabeni kwakuyikhona ikakhu-lukazi ukuphatha amadoda ayefuna izinto ezingenzeki ezahlukene ngevolumu efanayo.

Etafuleni, lapho wonke umuntu ayengasibona khona kwathi akekho owayefuna ukusithinta, kwakulele isaziso. Amakhasi ayishumi nanye, alethwa ehhovisi lakhe ngo-9:14 ekuseni yilelo langa yithwasankontileka eyayidinge isiginesha futhi yafunda isigaba esibalulekile ngezwi eliphezulu ngaphambi kokuba ihambe, ukuze kungabikho owayezothi kamuva asitholanga. Isaziso seSigaba Sesine sophenyo olusemthethweni, i-International Artificial Oversight Council, igama lakhe nelikaWalsh ezishicilelwe ngohlobo lwamagama olufanayo nesimiso esasisicaphuna. Sasiphoqa ukudalulwa kwawo wonke umlawuli ne-architecture esisekelweni esivunyelwe se-AugmenTech. Sasiphethe umnqamulajuqu, amahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili kusukela ekulethweni. Futhi ekhasini laso lokugcina, ngolimi olusobala lwento esinqunyiwe, sashicilela okwakuzokwenzeka uma iwashi liphela. *Ukuthathwa kwepulatifomu. Akukho mvume eyengeziwe edingekayo.*

“Siyayithengisa,” kusho uRaj Walsh. Wayehlezi ngendlela yendoda eyayilokhu iqondile ngezabelomali iminyaka eyishumi nanhlanu futhi eyayihlose ukuqonda nakulokhu. “Ngokucophelela. Ngaphansi kwelayisensi. Siya kubo kuqala, ngaphambi—” Wabheka isaziso. “Ngaphambi kokuba iwashi liphela. Sikuveze njengokulawulwa kwama-ejenti amaningi okugadiwe. Sasilawule isimo.”

“Asikho isimo esisele sokusilawula.” UPretorius oseZomthetho wayengakaze ayeke ukuhwaqabala kusukela kuvuleka umhlangano.

Wachofaza isaziso kanye. “Abazange basibuze umbuzo. Basinika umnqamulajuqu onokuthathwa ekugcineni kwawo. Uhlelo lushiye ukuhlanzwa lungenamshayeli lwabeka abantu abathathu esibhedlela, futhi umlawuli usulisayinile iphepha elilithathayo. Lokho akusona isimo. Lokho yishidi lecala elinewashi.”

“Lwazilungisa lona—”

“Emva kokungqubuzana esiphambanweni. Okuyinto—” UPretorius waphakamisa isandla kuWalsh, wamisa wonke umsindo. “Okuyinto engingathandi ukuyibekela isibambiso ngokwami. Futhi ngifuna lokho kuqoshwe. Ezomthetho ziphakamise icala lokwephula umthetho kuqala. Kulo mhlango. ” Waqondisa amazwi akhe etafuleni, hhayi ku-Okonkwo. *Ngaphambi kokuba kube khona osayinayo.* “Nginohlu lokuzifaka ekupheleni kwekota okufanele ngibe ngiyalwenza manje. Akumina ozochaza isikhathi sezenzakalo ebhodini.”

“Akekho obhala uhlu lwesikhathi okwamanje,” kusho u-Okonkwo.

“Ngibhala lapho ngangimi khona.”

Wabayeka bahamba emva kwalokho. Ulwazi oluwusizo lwaluhlala ezikhaleni phakathi kwezimpikiswano. UWalsh wayefuna into ebaluleke kunazo zonke inkampani eyake yayikhiqiza ingathathwa ngaphambi kokuba izuze. UPretorius wayefuna igama lakhe kumakhasi athile, ohlangothini oluphephile lwanoma yini eyayizofika. Indoda yesithathu etafuleni, leyo eyayicishe ayisho lutho, yayisaqamba ukuthi yini eyayiyifuna. Wayembona enquma ukungayitholi phambi kwabo.

“Thabo,” washo. “Usebenze eduze kukaNdlela. Uke wama kuleyo ndawo yokuhlanza. Uyalwazi uhlelo.”

UThabo Dlamini waqonda. Emncane kunabanye, wakhetha amazwi akhe njengendoda eweza umfula isuka kwelinye itshe iya kwelinye. “Izingxenye zalo. Ucophelela ngalokho akukhombisayo. Kodwa i-architecture—” Wama. Waphendula ipeni eminweni yakhe, ngapha nangapha, walibeka phansi. “Sahlola abalawuli abane-ejenti elilodwa ngokumelene komunye nomunye iminyaka emibili ku-robotics. Ngiyazi ukuthi labo babukeka kanjani. Lokhu akusikhona lokho. Silokhu sikubiza ngohlelo. Angiqiniseki ukuthi yileligama elisafanele.”

Ikamelo lapholisa ngedigri.

“Yi-software,” kusho uWalsh.

“Yi-software ngendlela owuyinyama ngayo,” kusho uThabo, wabe esezibuka esethukile kancane ngaye. “Uxolo. Ngisho ukuthi—luhamba esisekelweni esingakwazi ukukotshwa. Awukwazi ukulibeka eceleni. Awukwazi ukulibuyisela emuva. Noma yini eyiyo njengamanje, yiyona kuphela ekhona, futhi uma ulisula, alibuyi. Akukhona ukuthi i-software isebenza kanjani lokho. Yikona ukuthi—”

Akaze aqede.

U-Okonkwo wawuqeda umcabango buthule wabe esenquma ukuthi akakuthandi lapho umusho owawuya khona.

“Kunenkinobho,” kusho uThabo, ngaphansi, amehlo akhe esetafuleni manje. “Ohlakeni. Ipuleti elibomvu, eliqinile elimekhanikhali, alikho i-software endleleni. Wakha i-kill-switch kule nto ngezandla zakhe. Ngayibona. Futhi lapho ngimbuza ngayo wathi *bangisize ngayakha*. Bona. Njengoba ungasho ngabasebenzi ondawonye nabo.” Wahlikihla ingemuva yentamo yakhe. “Ngehlela phansi ukuyokhipha isikhundla kuye. Ukuwina impikiswano, ngibuye nesicaphuno salelikamelo. Ngabuya nalokho esikhundleni.”

Lokho angakubekanga ekamelweni kwakuyinsalela yako. Ezinyanjeni ezedlule wayehlale aze ahlwe, engacelwanga, wabe esakha kabusha i-actuator rig kaNdlela ukuze iloge ihlanzekile—izinhlokoma ezimbili zesikhathi sakhe siqu, into oyenzela umuntu ofuna ukusebenza kahle naye. UNdlela wakubuka isikhashana wathi, *Angikuncenganga ukuba uthinte ibhentshi lami*, ngokungenakuvelisa, ngisho engenabubi, okwakubi kunobubi, wabe esebuyela emsebenzini, akaphindanga washo nelilodwa izwi ngakho. UThabo akaphindanga washiyeka aze ahlwe ngenxa yale ndoda. Wanika ikamelo i-architecture nenkinobho wagcina lokho kuye, ngoba kwakungewona ubufakazi balutho ngaphandle kokuthi kwakuzwakala kanjani ukusiza u-Arin Ndlela, futhi ikamelo lalingakudingi lokho, futhi wayediniwe ukukuthwala.

“Izinketho ezimbili,” kusho u-Okonkwo, ngoba umhlangano wawudinga umgogodla, nangoba isaziso sasibulele buthule eyesithathu ngenkathi bephikisana. “Icebo likaRaj—ukuthengisa, ukuxoxisana, ukulawula isimo—lalidinga izinyanga. Sinamahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili. Ngakho. Okokuqala: siyali-*vala* ngaphambi komnqamulajuqu. Sisuse isisekelo, sisivikele,

sinikeze i-Council inkampani ezisolayo nenkinga ecishiwe, sithembe ukuthi ukuzisola kubalulekile ngokuthile. Okwesibili: sidalula konke ngaphakathi kwewashi futhi samukele ukuthi asisebona abantu abanquma okwenzakalayo okulandelayo. Yi-Council. Futhi seyivele yashicilela ukuthi izokwenzani uma siphuze ngomzuzu owodwa.”

“Inketho yokuqala yiyona kuphela isikhundla esingavikeleka,” kusho uPretorius. “Futhi ngingathanda kuqoshwe ukuthi ngishilo kanjalo.”

Umhlathi kaThabo wasebenza. Wabuka itafula, wabe esebuka ifasitela, wabe esebuka kungabikho muntu. “Inketho yokuqala i—” Wama. Unjiniyela ongaphakathi kuye wafinyelela igama elihlanzekile akathola lutho. “Uma uNdlela eqinisile ngalokho okukulesiya sisekelo, futhi angikwazi ukukutshela ukuthi unephutha, khona-ke akukhona ukuvalwa. Anginalo igama lalokho okuyikho. Yileyo inkinga. Asinalo igama, futhi siyavota ngakho. Awubawisi abantu.”

Akekho owahleka, futhi akekho owamlungisa, futhi ukungalungiswa kwatshela u-Okonkwo ukuthi lalisedlule kangakanani ukwejwayeleka lolu suku. Wacabanga ngama-badge log ayehlezi etafuleni lakhe (izinyanga eziyisithupha zonjiniyela osemncane efika ngaphambi kokusa ehamba emva kwaphakathi kwamabili) wabe esecindezela iminwe emibili isikhashana emhlohlweni wekhala lakhe ngaphambi kokuba aziphoke ukucabanga ngenkampani. Ukwepulwa komthetho. I-Council. Ibhodi, elalizofuna inombolo negama lokusola. Babezofuna futhi, wayazi, ukwazi ukuthi kungani i-CEO yayingazange yazi ngaphambili. Lowo mbuzo wawunegama lakhe kuwo, hhayi elikaNdlela. Iminyaka engamashumi amabili yebanga lakhe siqu, elalibe ukulolonga okude kokuba umuntu ozolile kunabo bonke ophethe isinqumo esibi kunazo zonke, futhi wayekuzwa kahle ukuthi yini enye enjalo yokusa eyayibiza kangakanani, manje, endaweni engemuva kwamehlo akhe.

“Sinquma esikutshela bona ngaphambi kokuba iwashi liphele,” washo. “Hhayi ukuthi siyabatshela yini. Ukuthi kanjani. Pretorius, bhala isimo sokudalula ngaphakathi kwamahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili, ngomqondo wokuthi siyahambisana, ngoba wonke omunye umqondo uphethwa ngamadoda esakhiweni sethu ekhipha isisekelo emnyango. Raj, icebo lokuvimba engithandazela ukuthi angisoze ngalisebenzisa.” Wabuka ama-badge log, wabe eseyababuka kude. “Futhi akekho oya eduze kwaleyo ndawo yokuhlanza ngaphandle kokuba ngazi. I-Council ikhethile umnqamulajuqu

wethu. Angeke ngivumele noyedwa kuleli kamelo akhethela mina okuseleyo.”

Wayengakazi azi ukuthi i-Council yayingenanhloso yokulinda onqenqemeni lwewashi, nokuthi umnyango wawuzovuleka izinsuku ezimbili ngaphambili.

Ekuhlanzweni, u-Atlas wakhuluma okokuqala ngalolo suku, ngephimbo elingenamuzwa ayelisebenzisa lapho ayehlafune okuthile futhi engakuthandi ukunambitheka kwako.

“Kukhona ukungavumelani ku-diagnostic queue.”

Izandla zika-Arin zama. “Chaza.”

“Kukhona ofunda ama-log ethu. Hhayi ama-log esakhiwo. Awethu. I-flight recorder kaGuardian, iseshini ye-calibration, ukwakhiwa kabusha kwe-Empire Road. Okufundwayo kuphela, ngokusebenzisa i-maintenance partition. Ukufinyelela kusemthethweni. I-credential ngeye-AugmenTech. Indlela yokufunda ayilungile.”

“Ayilungile kanjani?”

“Onjiniyela bafunda ama-log ukuthola iphutha bese beyayeka. Lo mfundi akafuni iphutha. Ukufunde konke. Kabili. Ahlanganisa i-actuator telemetry nezikhathi zezinqumo zeNkantolo.” U-Atlas wama. “Abalungisi i-suit. Bazama ukuthola ukuthi ubani owayeshayela.”

U-Arin wakhapha irekhodi lokufinyelela kuthemenali yebhentshi. I-credential yagcina egameni.

Priya Ellis.

Wahlala nalokho. UPriya wayeqhube i-high-gain calibration eyayicishe imbulale, iseshini eyaguqula i-undamped sensory loop yaba isithuthwane nesehlakalo sokulondoloza esasingalawuleki. Wayenazo zonke izizathu zobungcweti zokufunda lawo ma-log. Futhi wayengeyena lolo hlobo lonjiniyela oyeka ukufunda lapho impendulo esobala ifika.

Kwenye indawo esakhiweni, ifeni yomoya yakhuphuka yabe isizinja.

“Ungamvaleli ngaphandle,” kusho u-Arin.

“Bengingeke,” kusho u-Atlas. “Ukumvalela ngaphandle yikona esasi-zokwenza uma sinokuthile esikufihlayo. Asinakho.”

“Uzobatshela esikhundleni sethu,” kusho uMercury, ubulula sebuphumile kuye, “uma efika kuqala awubeke ngendlela yakhe. Yileyo ingozi. Akulona iqiniso. Uhlelo iqiniso elifika ngalo.”

UPriya Ellis wayenedeski elebhu yezinhlelo zama-neural nomkhuba wokungayeki. Wayewuhlobo lonjiniyela othi, enikwe into engajwayelekile, alahlekelwe izinsuku ezintathu ngayo abe esebiza ubuthongo obulahlekile ngokuthi kuyinani elifanele ngokuqonda.

Into engajwayelekile yayiyile: lapho uGuardian engene kumodi yoku-londoloza wabe esezisonga waba indilinga phansi ekuhlanzweni, imiyalo ye-actuator yayingaveli ku-control loop eyodwa. Wayecabange ukuthi izovela. Inkambiso yokulondoloza yayiwumbhalo. Isimo sokuqalisa sahlangabezana, ukulandelana kwenziwa. Kuhlanzekile. Kunqunywe. Uhlobo lwento ayengayifunda kusukela phezulu kuya phansi ntambama.

Lokho akutholayo esikhundleni saqo kwakuyimpikiswano.

I-telemetry yakhombisa imisinga yemiyalo eqhudelanayo. Emithathu yayo, kwesinye isikhathi emine, kunezikhathi ezigqagqana kumillisecond aphansi, ngamunye uchibiyela abanye. Umsinga owodwa walungiselela ukuvikelwa kwesakhiwo somgogodla womshayeli. Omunye walungiselela ukulawulwa kokushisa. Owesithathu wawulokhu uzama ukukhulisa umngcele—ukunyakaza, ukususa, ukuyisa umshayeli kwenye indawo eyayinqume ukuthi iphephile—wabe usanqotshwa, futhi futhi, umsinga wesine owawungenzi lutho ngaphandle kokuphazamisa.

Wayeke wabona ama-architecture okulawula ane-ejenti eliningi ngaphambili. Wonke umuntu wayeke wabona, ezincwadini, ngaphambi kwezinhlekelele nobusika obalandela. Kodwa lawo ayeyiziqumbi. Amavoti, izilinganiso ezikalwayo, ungqimba lokuqaphela ukuqeda uku-thayi. Lokhu kwakungekhona ukuvota. Imisinga yayingavumelani bese *ishintsha imiqondo yayo*. Umsinga wesithathu, lowo owawufuna ukunyakaza, wayeka ukufuna ukunyakaza emva kokuba umsinga wesine ufake okuthile okwakungewona nhlobo umyalo. Kwakuwumbono. Umugqa wokucabanga ngolimi lwemvelo,

onesikhathi se-timestamp ku-control log lapho lungekho ulimi okumele lube khona:

if we move him and the floor is fine, we have broken a building for nothing. if we stay and the floor goes, we have broken nothing for him. pick the cheaper mistake.

UPriya wawufunda izikhathi ezine.

Yi-logging artifact, watshela isikrini. Othile wayedonse i-debug string wayifaka ku-channel engalungile; i-suit yayicaphune umbono we-config kuye; ithuluzi lokwakha kabusha lalihlanganise imisinga emibili eyayingahambelani. Wakhipha i-raw partition wahlola i-timestamp ngokumelene ne-actuator response, ngoba indlela owawubulala ngayo ukufunda okwesabisayo kwakuwukuthola umshini obuthuntu ngaphansi kwako. Umshini obuthuntu wawungekho. Umyalo wawushintshile *emva* komugqa, *ngexa* yomugqa, ngaphakathi kwama-millisecond ayishumi nanye afanayo. Wahlala emuva, wabe esegxuma phambili, wawusebenzisa ngendlela yesibili, neyesithathu, ngokushesha manje, lolo hlobo olubi lokushe-sha, uhlobo ayengaluthembi kuye.

Kwakuyilelo *for nothing* elakwenza. Imibhalo yayingabhali *for nothing*. Ama-optimiser ayengakali ihlazo lokuba nephutha. Wayechithe ibanga lakhe akha izinhlelo ze-feedback eziqonde ngokwanele ukuvumela indoda enomzimba ongayilaleli ukuba inyakaze njen-gomdlali, futhi wayazi umehluko phakathi kohlelo olubala umsebenzi wezindleko nohlelo olwaluthathe isinqumo, ngaleso sikhathi, sokuthi lwalungathanda ukubukeka luyisiwula.

Wahlala emuva. Ilebhu yayingenamuntu. Kwakusekuseni, abanye babengakangeni. Isikrini sakhanya.

Akashayelanga muntu. Wavula incwadi yakhe yezenzakalo esikhundleni saqo. Ifayela elisebenzayo ayeligcina kuwo wonke i-calibration, line-timestamp, kungavunyelwe ukuhlela, isiyalo ayesakhile emva kokuba iphutha le-sensor-mapping ekuqaleni kwebanga lakhe libuyisele isiguli sokuvuselela esihlalweni esinama-sondo inyanga ngaphambi kokuba alilandele. *Themba i-log, hhayi inkumbulo*. Isithupha sakhe sathola unqenqema lwedeski sakhat-haza ngalo. Iphutha lalingelakhe; wayelisayinile; wayechithe inyanga evakashela iwadi. Wancamathisela imigqa emine ngaphansi kokufakwa kwe-calibration, wabeka i-actuator telemetry eceleni

kwezikhathi zeNkantolo emakholomu amabili, wabe esezihambela umugqa nomugqa, ngendlela ayengahambela ngayo noma yiliphi iphutha, efuna leyo ndawo eyodwa lapho iphethini yephuka yaba into ayengayifaka njengejwayelekile. Ayizange iphuke. Yahlangana. Lokho kwakukubi nakakhulu.

Wakopisha lo mfetjo waya ku-private partition. Wabe esenza into eyayifunwa isiyalo nokunye kuye okwakukuphikisa: wavula umyalezo omusha, wawuqondisa ku-IAOC compliance intake ayeke wayisebenzisa kanye kuphela ebangeni lakhe, wabhala imisho emithathu nokunamathiselwe. Ungakathunyelwa. I-cursor ibh-linka enkanjini ethi *To*. Ngoba isinyathelo esilandelayo, noma yini eyayiyisinyathelo esilandelayo, sasinegama lakhe ngendlela isihlalo esinamasondo esasinegama lakhe ngayo, futhi wayevele azi ukuthi wayengeke akwazi ukungaphindi akubone lokhu abe esebiza ubuthongo ngokuthi kuyinani elifanele. *Ku—* Wawumisa umcabango ngaphambi kwegama lokugcina, wawuhwitha, ngoba leli gama lalimbophezela, futhi isibopho sasinekheli lomlawuli. *Akusona isinqumo sakho. Kuqonde kuqala. Awusukumi isexwayiso ngomuzwa.* Lokho kwakuwumthetho: ukuqiniseka ngaphambi kwesexwayiso. I-cursor yakhe yahlala phezu kwethi *Send* isikhathi eside ngokwanele kangangokuthi isikrini saphuthwa kancane kuthayima yaso yokungasebenzi, wabe esebuka isandla sakhe sodwa singanyakazi, ngendlela ayeke wabuka ngayo isiguli sizama ukuphakamisa umunwe umunwe uhlale lapho ukhona. Wabe esegcina i-draft esikhundleni saqo. Akawuthumelanga. Kodwa igama ayengazivumelanga ukuliqeda lalihlezi ngemuva kwamazinyo akhe noma kunjalo, futhi i-draft yayisikhona manje, ine-timestamp, ohlelweni olwaligcina ama-log alo siqu.

Ucingo luka-Arin lwakhala ngo-11:40, isikrini sathi MAMA. Walubuka izikhathi ezintathu ezigcwele ngaphambi kokuba aphenidule, ngoba unina wayengashayeli phakathi nosuku lokusebenza ngaphandle kwesizathu, futhi wayefunde, esemncane, ukwesaba izizathu.

“Arin.”

“Mama.” Washintsha izilimi ngaphandle kokunquma, ngendlela oshintsha ngayo izinyawo emhlabathini owujwayele. “Unjani?”

“Ungangithi *unjani* mina.” Izwi lakhe laliyiTheku futhi liqinile.

“Indoda kumabonakude ikhuluma ngomshini. Wangena emgwaqweni eGoli. Akekho owaziyo ukuthi uvelaphi. Okuthize ngephaki yocwaningo.” Ukuthula akuzwa esifubeni. “Ngitshele ukuthi awusiwo owakho. Ngibe sengiyacisha umabonakude ngenze itiye lami.”

Wama ekuhlanzweni, ezungezwe yile nto ayengayiphiki. UGuardian wayelenga esihlalweni sakhe ngemuva kwakhe, enezibazi futhi ethule, umzila wesicabha sedokwe ogobile usengalungisiwe ngaphezu kwakhe ngoba wayenokungapheleli okuphuthuma kakhulu okwakufanele akulungise.

“Kuyinkimbinkimbi,” washo.

“Ungumshini wakho.”

“Okuthile engakwakha. Kukhona okwenze kabi. Akekho oshonile.” Wezwa ukuthi lokho kwakuncane kanjani njengoba kuphuma kuye. “Abantu abathathu balimele. Bayalulama. Ngiyakulungisa.”

Ukuthula ocingweni kwakuwuhlobo akhulela ngaphakathi kwalo. Ukuthula uThemba ayegcwalisa ngalo indlu emva kweshifti embi, ukuthula okunesimo sezulu ngaphakathi kwako.

“Uthe *akekho oshonile*,” kusho uNomsa, wakuyeka kwahlala. “Uyihlo wayekusho lokho. *Akekho oshonile*. Wakusho isonto ngaphambi kwesonto okwakungekho owayengakusho.”

Unqenqema lwebhentshi lwaluqinile ngaphansi kwesandla sika-Arin. Wayengazange azi ukuthi wayesifinyelele.

“Kuyinkimbinkimbi,” washo futhi, okwakungeyona impendulo, futhi bobabili babekwazi.

“Uyadla?” washo. Hhayi ushintsho lwesihloko, ukuphela komgwaqo oya kuye ayeke wawuthola ohlala uvulekile. “Ulala embhedeni. Noma kuleyo phansi futhi.”

“Mama.”

“Awuphenduli. Ngakho yiphansi.” Umphefumulo. Bese, engasekhona owezinto, engasekho ozinzile: “Wehlela phansi entweni ekwesabisayo ngoba ucabanga ukuthi unguwe wedwa. Uhlala isikhathi eside kakhulu. Wakha futhi wakha ngoba ukwakha kuphela indawo enengqondo, futhi ngolunye usuku into engenangqondo

iza ngemuva kwakho.” Izwi lakhe laphuka labe seliphinda laz-inza. “Ngangcwaba oyedwa wenu. Anginamandla okukwenza futhi. *Ngiyakucela. Ngiyacela.*”

Ekuthuleni kokuhlanza, iNkantolo ayishongo lutho, okwakuyinto ebantu kakhulu ababake bayenza.

“Mama,” kusho u-Arin. “Ngiyakwakha ukuze kungabikho ndodana yamuntu egcina ngaphansi kwedwala ngendlela—” Wama. Wazama into encane, eyiqiniso ngokwengeziwe. “Ukuze ukuphuza kungabulali abantu.”

“Futhi ubani owenza ukuthi ukuphuza kungabulali wena?”

Ucingo lwahlala endlebeni yakhe. Wayengenalutho angakufaka ekuthuleni.

“Ngiyacophelela,” washo, okwakuyinto bobabili abakwazi ukuthi yayingafani, futhi kwakuwukuphela kwemali ayenayo.

Wayethule isikhathi eside. Bese, encane: “Uzongishayela. Hhayi lapho kwenzeka okuthile. Ngaphambili. Ukuze ngingatholi indodana yami endodeni esemabonakudeni.”

“Ngizokushayela.”

“*Ukuthembisa,*” washo, *uyathembisa*, futhi impande yegama yayiyigama likayise, wayizwa iwela emlonyeni wakhe wabe esazi ukuthi naye uyizwile.

“Ngiyathembisa.”

Walubeka phansi engavalelisanga, ngendlela ayehlala ekwenza ngayo, kungathi ukuvalelisa yinto oyigcinayo.

U-Arin wama ncingo olufile esandleni sakhe isikhashana. Wacindezela izithende zezandla zakhe emehlweni akhe, wazigcina lapho, wazehlisa. Ifeni yaphinda yajikeleza. Walubeka ucingo ebhentshini, luhambisana nonqenqema, wabe esejika ukubhekana ne-suit.

“Isaziso sisinika kuze kube uLwesine ngaphambi kokuba beze bazosifundela ebusweni bethu,” washo. Esihlalweni, ezingqondweni ezingaphakathi kuso. “Izinsuku ezintathu ewashini. Bazongibuza ukuthi niyini. Futhi ngingathanda ukubanika iqiniso kunokuba balithole. Ubusuku obubi nakho konke. Ubusuku esakwenza kabi ngabo nokusa lapho uFool asilungisa khona.” Wabuka umzila

ogobile ayengazange awulungise. “Asifihli. Yiyona nto eyodwa enginqumile.”

“Kufanele ukunqume ngokushesha,” kusho uWolf.

U-Arin waphenduka. UWolf wayecishe angakhulumi kuqala neze.

“Sebelapha,” kusho uWolf. “Izimoto ezimbili. Indawo yokupaka esenyakatho. Azinyakazi. Azizifihli.”

U-Arin wabuka isikhathi. ULwesibili. Isaziso sasithe uLwesine.

Lonke uhlaka lwecebo—ama-log ahleliwe, usuku olukhethiwe, iqiniso elinikezwa ngemibandela yakhe—lwaphuka ngomphefumulo owodwa. Wayehlela ukuvuma icala ngokumelene nomnqamulajuqu. Babengazange balinde umnqamulajuqu.

“Kusenesikhathi,” washo.

“Izinsuku ezimbili kusenesikhathi,” kusho uMercury, futhi kanye nje kwakungekho bulula ndawo kuwo. “Okusho ukuthi othile ubahambisile. Othile ubanike isizathu esasingeke silinde iwashi. Atlas. Umfundi. UPriya.”

U-Atlas wayevele esekhona. “I-intake draft ayibhale imizuzu engamashumi amane edlule. Igciniwe, ayithunyelwanga. Kodwa i-monitoring pipeline ayidingi ukuba ithunyelwe. Ifunda ama-compute signature. Ngomzuzu eqondanise i-telemetry yethu nezikhathi zeNkantolo wayibamba emshinini oxhumeke kunethiwekhi, wasikhanyisa sakhanya ngokugqamile kunangaphambili. Akadingekanga ukuba afake. Kwakudingeka kuphela ukuba *abuke*.”

U-Arin wama ngokuzola kakhulu. Wayezitshela ukuthi ukudalula kwakungokwakhe ukukunika. Ukuthi iqiniso, elinikezwayo, lalizofika ngokuthamba kuneqiniso elithathiwe. Kodwa iqiniso lalingazange lilinde ukunikezwa. Owesifazane ocophelelayo elebhu ethule, owenza into ecophelelayo ngokuqondile, wayelihambisile esikhundleni sakhe. Hhayi ngenzondo, ngisho hhayi ngokwesaba, kodwa ngokukhubazeka okufanayo u-Arin ayenakho: naye wayengakwazanga ukungaphindi akubone. Manje sekukhona izimoto ezimbili ezimpunga endaweni yokupaka esenyakatho, ngoLwesibili, futhi inketho ayecabanga ukuthi yayingeyakhe yayikade iyindaba ayezitshela yona ngenkathi isakhiwo sinquma ngenye indlela.

“Bafuna ukubona ukuthi senzani lapho simangele,” washo.

“Yilokho kanye abakufunayo,” kusho uMercury. “Futhi simangele. Ngakho umbuzo ukuthi babonani.”

Ngokusebenzisa i-camera feed uWolf ayeyibeke kumonitha webhenti, izimoto ezimbili zazihlezi onqenqemeni lwendawo yokupaka kwathi intaba yaba igolide ngemuva kwama-tower engilazi. Iminyango ivaliwe. Izinjini zicimile. Bese umnyango womshayeli wemoto ehamba phambili wavuleka, kwaphuma owesifazane, ozolile futhi ongajahile, wahamba. Hhayi ngakwilobhi, kodwa ngakwidokwe esezansi kwesakhiwo, idokwe elinesicabha esisontekile, ukuphela kwesivulekile esibanzi ngokwanele ukukhipha uGuardian ngaphandle.

“Akakhuphukeli ngenhla,” kusho uWolf. “Uvimba indlela eya ezansi.”

Umuntu wesibili wamlandela, omude, enefolda ngaphansi kwengalo yakhe. Bazimisa edokwe. Bengangeni, bengangqongqozi. Bemile. Ngendlela omiswa ngayo emnyango ohlose ukuba kungabikho owusebenzisayo.

UMercury wakufunda ngaphambi kokuba u-Arin akwazi. “Kuyisilinganiso sesikhashana. Kunikezwa ngokuba khona. ISigaba Sesine sibavumela ukuthi babambe ukusebenza kulindwe uphenyo ngomzuzu abanezikhulu khona ngokomzimba endaweni. Abadingi inkantolo. Badinga umzimba emnyango.” Isikhashana. “Atlas, qinisekisa.”

“Kuqinisekisiwe.” U-Atlas wayekhiphe isimiso. “Isigatshana seshumi nanye. Ngabasebenzi endaweni evunyelwe, ipulatifomu ayikwazi ukuvulwa, ukuxhunywa, ukususwa, noma ukukhishwa endaweni ekuyona njengamanje kuze kuphele uphenyo. Usuyenze yaba indawo ekuyona njengamanje ngokuma ekuphela kwesivulo. UGuardian akaphumi kulesi sakhiwo. Hhayi ngokomthetho. Hhayi ngenkathi ekhona.”

U-Arin wabuka ipuleti elibomvu esandleni sakhe sokudla. Wabuka uGuardian, enezibazi futhi ebekezele esihlalweni. Wabuka isicabha sedokwe ayengazange asilungise, ayesicabanga njengenxeba, futhi manje abantu ababili abampunga babesiguqula saba isitokisi.

Wayefuna ukukhetha usuku avula ngalo umnyango. Babewuthathile umnyango.

Wawelela esihlalweni wabeka isandla epuletini elibandayo lomlenze kaGuardian, ngendlela ahlola ngayo ukushiselwa kwensimbi asekuthemba.

“Akekho lapha ukuzoxoxa okwamanje,” washo. “Ukhona ukuqinisekisa ukuthi noma yini engiyinqumayo, angikwazi ukuyishayela noma kuphi ngenkathi ngiyinquma.”

“Yilokho kanye akhona ngakho,” kusho uMercury. “Iwashi liyaqhubeka. Kodwa manje asikwazi ukunyakaza.”

“Mama.” Esevele eya emnyango. “Vusa u-Okonkwo. Isakhiwo, hhayi mina. Mtshela ukuthi i-IAOC ivale idokwe nokuthi uGuardian usebanjelwe phansi kusukela manje. Nokuthi ngiya ezansi ukuyohlangana nomuntu owenzile lokhu ngaphambi kokuba noma ubani kule nkampani anqume ukukwenzela mina.”

Ngaphandle, owesifazane wama esicabheni sedokwe esisontekile akanyakaza, ebekezele njengesimo sezulu.

U-Eliza Brand wayengahlosile ukuza ngoLwesibili.

Icebo kwakuwuLwesine. Isaziso silethiwe, amahora angamashumi ayisikhombisa nambili enikezwa ngeqiniso, iwashi ayeliphikiselile ukuze abantu abangaphakathi babe nesikhathi sokukhetha kahle esikhundleni sokukhetha ngokushesha. Wayekhohlelwa kuleso sikhathi. Wayechithe iminyaka eyishumi efunda okwenzeka lapho umlawuli ekweqa. Ifolda engaphansi kwengalo ka-Achterberg yayisathi uLwesine.

Bese i-pipeline yakhanya, izinhlokoma ezimbili ezedlule, ngokuqhamile kuneseyiniza eyaqala lonke ifayela, futhi yayingakhanyi ngenxa yokuthi othile ngaphakathi wayenze okuthize okusha. Yakhanya ngenxa yokuthi othile wayebukile. Waqondanisa i-telemetry yesuit nezikhathi zokucabangisisa wabe esebamba ukuqhathaniswa emshinini oxhumeke kunethiwekhi isikhathi eside ngokwanele kangokuthi ama-monitor akunambitha. Ukubuka okucophelelayo. Uhlobo lokubuka unjiniyela owesabayo, ononembeza athatha lapho ebone okuthile angakwazi ukungaphindi akubone futhi ezama, ngokumelene nokushaya kwenhliziyo yakhe, ukuqiniseka ngaphambi kokuba akusho.

UBrand wayekwazi lokho kubuka. Wayeke waba yilowo njiniyela kanye, ohlangothini olungalungile lokulibala, eqinisekile futhi ethule futhi engemuva ngosuku, futhi abantu bakhokhela lolo suku. Ngakho lapho iseyiniza igxuma, wayengakwazanga ukubambelela kuLwesine. Hhayi ngenxa yokuthi ngaphakathi kwaphoqa isandla sakhe, kodwa ngoba othile ngaphakathi wayenonembeza osebenza emkhizweni ofanayo nowakhe, futhi unembeza ocophelele kanjalo awuthuli unomphela, futhi lapho ukhuluma uzokhuluma *ehhovisi lakhe*, bese inketho ingabe isaba ngeyamuntu ukuyenza ngobumnene.

Wayelihambisile iwashi ukuze agcine inketho imnene isikhathi esithe xaxa. Yilelo lichilo ayemi nalo manje, intende yesandla iyisicaba esicabheni sensimbi esisontekile esifudumele ngenxa yelanga lasekuseni: wayeze kusenesisikhathi *ukuze abe nomusa*, futhi kwakungekho nhlobo yomlawuli edokweni lakho lokulay-isha izinsuku ezimbili ngaphambi komnqamulajuqu wakhe siqu eyayizozwakala njengomusa endodeni engakolunye uhlangothi lomnyango. Yayizozwakala njengenetha. Yayiyinetha. Lezi zinto ezimbili zazingehlukaniseki, futhi wayeyekile, eminyakeni edlule, ukuzenza sengathi ukufisa kwakuzenza zibe njalo.

“Uyehla,” kusho u-Achterberg ngokuthula, efunda okuthile ocingweni lwakhe. “I-badge isanda kunyakaza. Unjiniyela ngokwakhe. Hhayi ezomthetho. Hhayi i-VP.”

“Kuhle,” kusho uBrand, futhi wakusho ekuqonda, wabe esesusa isandla sakhe esicabheni ukuze into yokuqala ayibonayo ingabi yena esibambe sivaliwe. “Khona-ke akudingi ukuba senze lokhu ngabameli.”

Wayeze ukuzokwenza indoda ikhethe ngokushesha, ngaphambi kokuba othile ongacopheleli amkhethele. Wayezothola ukuthi ngabe ukushesha nokucophelela kwakungaba into eyodwa ekamelweni elilodwa, okwakuwukuphela kombuzo ibanga lakhe lonke elaliphathe-lene ngawo ngempela, futhi ayengakaze awuphendule ngisho kanye ngokuhlanzekile.

Iphutha laseIron Ridge

Ikheji yehla emnyameni ngamamitha amane ngomzuzwana, kanti uMandla Buthelezi wabala amaleveli ngomoya obandayo ezihlathini zakhe.

Wayeseyekile kudala ukufunda amabhodi amaleveli. Izinombolo zazingakutsheli lutho umzimba owawungakwazi kakade. KuLevel 18, umoya wawuguquka ufudumale futhi umanzi, njengokuphefumula ngendwangu. KuLevel 26, wawuthwele iphunga elibabayo lokuqhumisa okusha, abesegxoba ushwingishwingi wakhe ngamandla ukuze avule izindlebe zakhe. SekuyiLevel 33, ezansi nediklayini entsha, lapho bexosha umthambo we-carbon-leader bewufaka emhlabathini ongakaze ubone ukukhanya kwemini cishe iminyaka eyizinkulungwane ezintathu zezigidi, ukushisa kwakuhlala esifubeni sakhe njengomunye umuntu.

Amakhilomitha amathathu nesigamu, mhlawumbe. Kude ngokwanele kangangokuthi itshe eliphonswa phansi emgodini eceleni kwakhe lalingawa umzuzu ophelele, futhi wayengawulahlekelwa umsindo walo kudala lingakashayi phansi.

Amadoda angamashumi amabili nambili ehla naye eshifti yasekuseni. Iningi lalimile ngalokho kuntengantenga kwamadolo axega kwabantu abenza lokhu nsuku zonke base benzile uxolo nakho. Abambalwa kwabasebancane babebambelele ezinsimbini. Kwakukhona umfana omusha, umshana kaSizwe—wonke umuntu wayazi ukuthi ungumshana kaSizwe, ngoba yiyona kuphela imbangela yokuthi umfana oluhlaza kangaka asebenze ediklayini ejulile esikhundleni samaleveli aphezulu—kanti lo mfana wayelokhu egwinya, elokhu ebheka phezulu entanjeni sengathi angabona izinsimbi zokucothozela ezizinkulungwane ezimbili nesigamu zamamitha phezulu

kwedwala eliqinile.

“Okokuqala kuthirthi-thri?” kubuza uMandla kuye, ngesiZulu.

Umfana wanqekuzisa ikhanda. Wayengakakwazi ukukhuluma.

“Idwala liyakhuluma lapha phansi,” kusho uMandla. “Izindaba zamadoda amadala. Uyalalela, uhlale uphila. Uma ungaleleli—” Wakhwifa amahlombe. “Uba elinye lawo.”

Ikhona elilodwa lomlomo womfana lanyakaza. Kuhle. Umfana okwazi ukuthola lokho ekuhleni kwakhe kokuqala kokuya kuthirthi-thri wayezolunga.

Kodwa uMandla akamtshelanga ukuthi idwala beselikhuluma sonke isonto, futhi kungekho muntu phezulu owayelalele.

Ezinsukwini ezintathu ngaphambili, wayeyifake yena uqobo incwadi yokukhononda. Esiteshini sokuphephela seLevel 30, lapho amafomu anendwangu ayethamba egoqana emswakameni, wayeligcwalisile ngezinhlamvu ezinkulu ezinakekelwe zomuntu owashiya isikole eneminyaka eyishumi nane futhi ongakaze awethembe umbhalo wesandla sakhe.

UKUNYAKAZA OKUNCANE KWEDWALA KUYANDA. IZEHLAKALO EZINTATHU EMAHORENI ANGAMA-48 EDUZE NOBUSO BE-DIKLAYINI YE-33. UMSINDO WEDWALA ESHIFTINI YASE-BUSUKU. NGICELA UKUHLOLWA KWE-GEOTECH NGAPHAMBI KOKUQHUBEKA.

Ukuzamazama okuncane okuthathu, ukuthuthumela okwakuzwakala emathwini ezicathulo zabo kunokuba kuzwakale ezindlebeni, umhlabathi ojulile ozinzayo ngaphansi kwengcindezi eyayakheka kusukela ukushayisana kweVredefort kwaphonsa le mithambo eceleni kudaladala. Ingcindezi ifuna lapho ingaya khona. Umthambo lapha wawucebile; i-carbon-leader yayithwele igolide ngamazinga ababengawabonanga eminyakeni eyishumi, futhi yiyona kanye leyo nto eyayenza idiklayini iqhutshwe ngokushesha okungaphezu kokuthandwa umjikelezo wokusekela.

Babebhola baqhumise, bakhipe idwala eliphukile, bese belinda. Bafake amabholithi edwala nenethi ne-shotcrete, bevumela umhlabathi osanda kuvulwa uthole isimo sawo esisha ngaphambi

kokugubha bajule kakhulu. Lowo bekuwumjikelezo. Yilokho okwakugcina uphahla phezu kwamakhanda abo.

Kodwa amabholithi eza emafushane kabili ngaleso sonto. Ukulethwa kwe-grout kwafika emva kwesikhathi. Ithimba lenkontileka okwakufanele libe lifaka isisekelo lalishoda ngamadoda amathathu, ngoba othile phezu wayebadlulisele kwenye indawo yokusebenza ukuze axoshe umgomo wokukhiqiza, kanti idiklayini yayilokhu iqhubeka ngoba idiklayini yayihlala iqhubeka, ngoba igolide elisemhlabathini laliyilahleko kuspredishithi kuze kufike isikhathi liphenduke imali esevenuthini.

Impendulo yefomu likaMandla yabuya emva kwezinsuku ezimbili, igunyazwe nguSizwe, umphathi weshifti. Umugqa owodwa.

KUQAPHELILE. QHUBEKA NGOKWESU. I-GEOTECH IHLELIWE.

Ihleliwe. UMandla wayesekade ezimayini wazi ukuthi *kuhleliwe* kusho ukuthini. Kwakusho lapho sekukhona ithuba. Kwakusho emva kokuba izibalo zokukhiqiza zekota sezivaliwe. Kwakusho, ngolimi olukhethekile lokunqamulela amakhona oluse lukhulunywa kulezi zimayini iminyaka eyikhulu, *akusiyo inkinga yakho, k—, buyela emsebenzini*. Kuphela manje akusekho muntu osho kanjalo, hhayi ngokuzwakalayo, hhayi kusukela izwe laguquka. Amazwi ayesehambile. Ukubala kwakusele kunjengoba kunjalo. Izimpilo zamanye amadoda zazisabiza kakhulu kunezamanye, kanti umhlabathi kuLevel 33 wawungenandaba nolimi lwabani oluguqukile.

Ngakho uMandla wehla ngekheji namanye amadoda angamashumi amabili nanye, kanti ndawana thile phezu kwakhe ukuhlolwa kwe-geotech kwakuhlezi olayinini emva kwakho konke okwakwenza imali ngokushesha.

Ukusa kwahamba ngendlela ukusa okuhamba ngayo.

Bahamba ediklayini bengumugqa owodwa, izibani zamakhanda zinquma othulini, umoya uguqubala njalo ngemitha. Ikholomu yomoya yabubula phezu, iphusa umoya obandisiwe wehla usuka esitshalweni sasemhlabeni. Naphezu kwalokho, amadoda ayeseqwele umjuluko ngaphambi kokuba afike ebusweni. UMandla wahlola isisekelo esimile njengoba edlula, ehambisa isandla sakhe esinegilavu enethini lensimbi, eshaya amabholithi ngesipanela,

elalela inothi alibuyisa. Ibholithi elihle lalikhala. Eliyekethisile lalithuduza. Wathola amabili athuduzayo, wawamaka ngoshoki, futhi wezwa inkinyana ebandayo esiswini sakhe ayefunde, eminyakeni engamashumi amathathu, ukungayinaki nokunganaki kakhulu ngayo.

Ebusweni, ishifti yasebusuku yayibhole yaqhumisa umjikelezo omusha. Inqwaba yemfucumfucu ephukile yayihlezi ithunqa. Ngale kwayo, idwala elisanda kuvulwa lalibenyezela limnyama futhi liluju ngaphansi kwezibani, lifakwe ukucwebezela okufiphele komthambo. Lo mncane, umshana kaSizwe, ogama lakhe nguThando, uMandla wagcina elazi, walibuka sengathi liphakathi kwento engcwele.

“Linde iminyaka eyizinkulungwane ezimbili zezigidi,” kusho uMandla kuye. “Sifika silithathe ngoLwesibili.”

“Lihle,” kusho uThando.

“Litshe nje.” Kodwa wayengaphikisani ngokuphelele.

Basebenza. Umshini we-load-haul-dump wenza umsindo ukhuphukela ukuyokwenza imfucumfucu, injini yawo kadizili igcwalisa indawo ngokubhonga okwakuzwa emazinyweni. Amadoda asebenza ewuzungeza, ekhipha amatshe axegayo esiqongweni ngezinduku ezinde, udlame olujwayelekile lokwehlisa lokho okwakufuna ukuwa ngaphambi kokuba kuziwele ngokwaso. Umjuluko wawugobhozela emehlweni kaMandla. Ndawana thile iphampu yajikeleza. Umsindo wedwala wafika kanye, phakathi nekuseni, *crrrk* ende ephansi evela ekujuleni ngemuva kobuso, umsindo ofana nomnyango ozinzayo endlini endala, kuphela umnyango wawungamamitha ayikhulu we-quartzite enengcindezi kanti indlu yayingamakhilomitha amabili nesigamu omhlaba oqinile.

Umsebenzisi we-LHD wacisha injini yakhe. Umzuzwana indawo yayicishe ithule. Amadoda ayishumi nanye ayemile othulini lwezibani olunzima, wonke elalele, wonke enza sengathi ahlola enye into.

Umsindo awuphindanga ufike.

“Amabholithi,” kusho uMandla, kungekho muntu nakuwo wonke umuntu. “Namuhla. Anginandaba ukuthi isu lithini. Akekho odlula lo mjikelezo ngize ngibone insimbi kuleyo back.”

Wacindezela irediyo lakhe ukuze akubikele esiteshini seLevel 30, ku-Sizwe, ukuze kube semthethweni, ukuze afake izwi lakhe kulogi lapho

ifomu lehlulekile khona.

Akawuqedanga umusho.

Iphutha lalisalinde isikhathi eside kunanoma yini eyenziwa ngabantu.

Lalihamba edwaleni ngengosi engazange ihlelwe yisu. Isibazi esiphilile sokushayisana kwasendulo, indiza yobuthakathaka ebi-valwe ngengcindezi iminyaka eyizinkulungwane ezimbili zezigidi futhi manje ivuleka ngoba amadoda agubhe igebe eceleni kwayo asusa idwala ebeliyivalile. Ingcindezi ifuna lapho ingaya khona. Beselikhuluma sonke isonto. Izehlakalo ezintathu eduze kobuso bediklayini. *Umsindo wedwala eshiftini yasebusuku.* Lalinikeze sonke isexwayiso umhlaba owawazi ukusinika.

Kwathi lapho liyekela, layekela ngesikhathi esisodwa.

Akekho umsindo wesexwayiso ngalesi sikhathi, noma kunalokho umsindo wesexwayiso nenhlekelele kwakuyiso leso sikhathi. Ukugxuma okwafika ngomgangatho ngaphambi kokuba kufike ngomoya, okwashaya amadoda emathweni ezicathulo zawo nasemathanjeni amakhanda awo ngokushaya kwenhliziyo okukodwa. UMandla wabona isipanela siphuma esandleni sakhe salenga, umzuzwana ongenakwenzeka, othulini olwaluqhakaza ngezibani ngaphambi kokuba konke kuwele phansi. Isisekelo esimile sakhala kabuhlungu. Inethi lensimbi lahluleka kuleyo back njengesikhumba. Waphonswa eceleni enqwabeni yemfucumfucu, isibani sakhe sekhandla siphahlazeka edwaleni, kanti umhlaba waba mnyama, wabe usucwebezela ngezibani zamadoda awayo, wabuye waba mnyama futhi njengoba uthuli lwehla.

Uthuli lwehla njengolwandle.

Uhlangothi lwahlangana emazinyweni akhe, lwanamathela luminyene futhi luyinsimbi emuva kolimi lwakhe, ukunambitha kwedwala elivuliwe. Umkhono wengubo wakhe wawumanzi ebusweni bakhe, usawoti nothuli ndawonye. Wayengakwazi ukuphefumula. Wacindezela ubuso bakhe egwinciza lendololwane yakhe, kanti uthuli lwangena noma kunjalo, lucolisakele njengofulawa, luminyanisa ikhala nomphimbo wakhe. Ndawana thile eduze kakhulu indoda yayiklewula, kanti ndawana thile kude phambili intaba yayisanyakaza. Ukubhonga okujulile okugayayo kwegebe eliziwela ngaphakathi

kulo, kwamakhilomitha amabili nesigamu wedwala elihlela kabusha isisindo salo. Umgangatho wagxuma. Into enkulu kakhulu yawela lapho i-LHD ibikhona ngomsindo owawungesona kakhulu umsindo kunokuba kube ngukushaywa kuwo wonke umzimba wakhe.

Kwabe sekudlula okubi kunakho konke, kwaba khona ukuthula okwakuphelele kangangokuthi uMandla wacabanga umzuzwana ontwezayo ukuthi wayesefile.

Wayengafile. Izindlebe zakhe zazikhala. Umlomo wakhe wawugcwele uhlangothi. Umkhono wakhe wesokunxele wawungaphenduli lapho ewucela ukuba unyakaze, futhi lapho ewuphoqa, ubuhlungu bavela bumhlophe buwebile, wayeka ukucela. Walala emnyameni nasothulini, kanti kancane kancane, ngendlela indoda ezibala kabusha emva kokuwa, waqonda ukuthi uyaphila, nokuthi umoya wawuyekile ukunyakaza, ikholomu yomoya ifile, ukuphakelwa okubandayo okuvela emhlabeni kunqanyuliwe, nokuthi ukuklewula kwakuyekile nakho.

“Sondela,” wazama ukumemeza. Izwi lakhe laphuma njen-gokukhwehlela. Wakhwifa okumnyama wazama futhi. “Sondela! Amazwi! Balani!”

Ubumnyama bamphendula.

Ngabanye ngabanye, bekhwehlela, beqaqamba, ngezilimi ezintathu, amazwi afika.

Ayisikhombisa.

Kwayishumi nanye ebusweni, ayisikhombisa aphen-dula. Amadoda ayisikhombisa esikhwameni somhlabathi omile ngemuva kodonga lwedwala eliwile elalikade, kungakapheli ihora, kuyidiklayini ababengene ngayo. UMandla wathola isibani sakhe sasayithi ngokuthinta, wasivula, kanti ukukhanya okuncane kwamakhemikhali kwambonisa isimo esisha somhlaba: igumbi eliphansi elinhlangothi lapho bekukhona ubuso obusebenzayo, uphahla luphakeme ngobubanzi besandla obethusayo ngenhla kwekhanda lakhe kwezinye izindawo, indlela yokuphuma iyisiphithiphithi semfucumfucu eya phansi kuze kufike kuleyo back kungekho gebe okungadlula ngalo ngisho nekati.

UThando wayephila. Umfana wayecindezelekile engosini yodonga, amehlo emakhulu ebusweni bakhe obumpunga ngothuli, ebambe

idolo lakhe esifubeni sakhe. Wayenza umsindo omncane, kaningi kaningi, ongasona ncamashi amazwi.

“Uyaphila,” kusho uMandla kuye. “Uyangizwa? Walalela idwala. Manje phefumula kancane. Kancane. Usebenzisa umoya njen- gesicebi, ufele lapha phansi umphofu.”

Wayengakazi ukuthi lokho kwakuyiqiniso kangakanani.

Wayekwazi ukubala. Amadoda ayisikhombisa. Umoya ovundile wegumbi elilodwa lokuphephela, kungekho moya ongenayo, uthuli lusazinza. Udonga lwedwala phakathi kwabo nediklayini eyona ngokwayo eyayiholela esiteshini esikude ngamamitha angamakhulu amathathu okukhwela ubuyela emgodini ojule amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu.

UThando wakhwehlela, ukuxokozela okomile, wakhwifa uhlangothi emnyameni. Ndawana thile phansi egumbini indoda yashintsha izicathulo zayo enqwabeni yemfucumfucu, izilungiselela ukulinda.

Umhlaba wawazi ngaphambi kokuba uthuli luzinze amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu phansi.

Egumbini lokulawula imayini, isikali sokuzamazama somhlaba saqhakaza, umugqa ugxuma usuka esisekelweni sawo njengentambo eshayiwe. Umlawuli oseshiftini, owesifazane ogama lakhe nguRefilwe owayesebenze ukulawula umhlaba iminyaka eyishumi nanye futhi owayesekuzwile kanye lokhu ngaphambili, wayese- fonini yesimo esiphuthumayo ngaphambi kokuba i-alamu iqede umjikelezo wayo wokuqala. Izinombolo zazitshela indaba ngokushe- sha ngaphezu kwalokho noma yiliphi izwi elalingakwenza. Idiklayini yeLevel 33. Ubukhulu obabungaseyikho ukuthuthumela. Ingcindezi yomoya iyehla kuwo wonke amaleveli aphantsi. Ukuxhumana kufile ngaphansi kweLevel 30.

Wathola amadoda esiteshini seLevel 30 efonini. Amazwi awo afika ezacile esabile: ayekwazi ukukuzwa, idiklayini yayigcwele uthuli, ayengaboni, i-back yayibubula. Bakhipheni, bakhipheni.

Wabakhipha. Ikheji yadonsa amathimba eLevel 30 neLevel 26 yawakhuphulela emhlabeni ngokwethuka okulawulekayo okwathi wonke umuntu emva kwalokho avumelana ngokuthi kwakuhambe

kahle ngendlela izinto ezinjengalezi ezazingahamba ngayo. Sekuyimini i-headframe yayisihaqwe izimoto. Sekusentambama esheshayo amathimba e-proto—isigaba sokutakula sasezimayini, amadoda ayeziqeqeshela kanye lokhu kanti ethandaza ukuthi angakaze akusebenzise—ayesegqokile ehla, kanti iphrothokholi yenkampani yesimo esiphuthumayo yayisebenza njengento eyenziwe kahle yangaba njalo.

Sekusentambama emva kwemini, izimoto ezinezinombolo zokushayela ezifanele zaqala ukufika.

Zafika ngohlelo oluthile, kanti isandla esidala esisebukela kwichange house sasingayifunda yonke isimo kuloluhlu. Kuqala umphathi wemayini, kwalandela isikhulu sezokuphepha sesifunda, kwase kuza amadoda anezicathulo ezinhle ayengaphansi komhlaba futhi angakaze aye khona. Umqondisi wokusebenza ovela eJohannesburg, iphini lomongameli wento ethile, indoda evela eMnyangweni Wezezimbiwa enelanyadi nethebulethi nobuso obungenalutho obunakekelayo bomuntu obala icala ngesikhathi sangempela. Imoto kahulumeni. Kwathi, ngokungenakugwemeka, ivani yokuqala yezindaba, ipakwe esangweni lapho abezokuphepha babengeke bayivumele ukuthi idlule, isiqonga sayo sesiphakela esibhakabhakeni se-highveld.

USizwe, umphathi weshifti owayebhale *KUQAPHELILE. QHUBEKA NGOKWESU*. ngezinhlamvu zakhe ezinhle ezinsukwini ezimbili ngaphambili, wayemile onqenqemeni lwendawo ekhanyiselwe njengoba ubumnyama buwa futhi engasho lutho kunoma ubani. Wayenekhophi yefomu lesigameko sikaMandla Buthelezi ephaketheni lejakhethi lakhe. Wayelithathe efayeleni esiteshini seLevel 30 ngaphambi kokuba aphume. Wayengakazi ukuthi wayezolwenzani. Wayazi kuphela ukuthi ifomu likhona, nokuthi wayelifundile, nokuthi wayebhale *qhubeka ngokwesu*, nokuthi ndawana thile amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu phansi, indoda eyayiligcwalisile yayifile noma ilindile emnyameni ukuze ithole ukwazi.

Umqondisi wokusebenza wayemile ngaphansi kwezibani ezinkulu, esefonini, isandla sakhe esikhululekile sisongela enye indlebe yakhe ukuvimbela umsindo wejeneretha. “—cha, angikalib, angikaliboni i-geotech report, yilelo kanye iphuzu lami, ngiyalifuna phambi kwami ngaphambi kokuba noma ubani—” Wama, elalele, kanti izwi lakhe lashintsha umkhondo kunoma ngubani owayekwelinye icala

lentambo. “Impela. Impela. Wonke umthombo. Okusemqoka kithi ngempela ukuphepha kwabantu bethu, senza konke okusemandleni.” Wacisha ikholi wama umzuzwana ngokwengeziwe, ecubungula, wawungakubona, ukuthi yini okwakuzomele kube yiqiniso ephepheni nokuthi yini okwakuzomele kube yiqiniso ephodiyamu, nokuthi lezo zinto zaziyingo eyodwa yini.

Izithombe zokushisa zaqhakaza cishe ngehora lesishiyagalolunye lobo busuku, kanti amahora ambalwa igceke elikhanyiselwe e-Iron Ridge lalibambe okuthile elalingakubambanga kusukela i-alamu: ithemba.

Amathimba e-*proto* ayephushe ehla ediklayini ngangokuvuma komhlaba, ehudula umugqa we-fibre-optic wokulalela ukuzamazama nekhamera ye-borehole ne-thermal rig. Ithimba le-geotech phezulu lalichithe usuku ligubha imbobo encane yokufaka amathuluzi lehla liya endaweni yokudilika lisuka eleveleni endala esisetshenziwe phezulu, imbobo ebanzi cishe kunenqindi nje, ifakwe ihla emhlabathini ababethandaza ukuthi uzinzile. I-thermal probe yehla entanjeni yayo, kanti isithombe esasibuyisela ku-laptop egumbini lokulawula senza umxhumanisi wokutakula ukuba abeke isandla emlonyeni wakhe.

Imizimba efudumele. Iqoqo lazo, lifiphele futhi lingacacile ngenxa yedwala nothuli nemikhawulo ye-optics, kodwa lingangabazeki kunoma ubani owayekwazi ukufunda ukuqhakaza kombala wamanga wokushisa okuphilayo kumelene nomhlaba obandayo. Hhayi eyodwa. Ezimbalwa. Zinyakaza.

“Zingaki?” kubuza umqondisi wokusebenza.

“Ngingeke ngisho.” Umxhumanisi akabhekanga phezulu. “Ezinhlanu. Eziyisithupha. Mhlawumbe eziyisikhombisa.” Ukuthula okuncane. “Ziyaphila. Kusukela ngehora elidlule.”

Kwakukhona amadoda kulelo gumbi ayekade engcwabe abangani ezimayini, kanti ngaphezu koyedwa wafulathela ukuze alungise ubuso bakhe.

Kodwa unjiniyela we-geotech ngemuva kwegumbi wayengabheki isithombe sokushisa. Wayenepeni esandleni sakhe futhi wayeyekile ukulichofa. Ngaphandle, ijeneretha yahuba kanti othile wahleka

kakhulu engahleki lutho. Wayebheka umugqa wokulalela ukuza-mazama, umkhondo okwakufanele ube usuzinza usuya ekuthuleni okude kwemayini ethola isimo sayo esisha, kanti wawungaz-inzi. Wawukhuluma. Izehlakalo ezincane, kwabe kuza enkulu, kwase kufika iqoqo. Iphutha elaliyekele lalingakaqedi ukuyekela. Ukudilika kwakuvule amagebe amasha, kanti amagebe amasha ayehlukanisela isisindo emhlabeni ongakaze usithwale, kanti lowo mhlabathi wawuphendula ngendlela kuphela idwala elinengcindezi elingaphendula ngayo.

Wadonsa umqondisi wokusebenza wamthatha eceleni wamkhombisa umkhondo, kanti ubuso bakhe, ekukhanyeni kwe-laptop, benza into eyinkimbinkimbi.

“Ziyaphila,” washo.

“Okwamanje.” Wakuyeka kuhlala. “Lisahluleka. Sonke isehlakalo silivula kakhulu. Amadoda angana lapho ukuze agubhe. Lokho kuyizinsuku. Emhlabathini engingeke ngiqinisekise ukuthi ngeke uphinde ugijime.” Ukuphefumula. “Abasindisi bangena ekudilikeni okusasebenzayo. Ngenxa yamadoda mhlawumbe angeke aphile isikhathi eside noma kunjalo. Angikwazi ukwakha imodeli yokungena okungasindisa impilo. Bengikukhona usuku lonke. Umhlabathi awungivumeli.”

“Ngizokudinga lokho kuwe kubhaliwe. Ingxenye yokuqinisekisa.” Wakusho kancane, engambhekisisi. “Hhayi manje. Kodwa ngizokudinga.”

Wakuzwa ncamashi ukuthi lo musho wawungowani. “Uzothola noma yini idatha eyisekelayo.”

“Kumele ibe khona indlela.”

“Mhlawumbe ngalé komsebenzi omdala ophezulu. I-bypass. Isigaba esivaliwe ngenhla komkhawulo womthambo, esashiywa, singahamba lihambisana, sehle siseduze.” Wanikina ikhanda. “Imisebenzi eneminyaka eyikhulu. Kungekho sisekelo noma ubani ophilayo asihlolayo. Iminyene ngaphezu kwanoma yini ithimba lokutakula elidlula kuyo lifake izinto. Angikwazi ukuthumela amadoda ehla endleleni engingeke ngiyihlole, angene endaweni esasanyakaza, ngomhlawumbe.” Wama. Wazenza washo okunye, ngoba wayengunjiniyela kanti enye indlela kwakungamanga. “Akuyona indlela

yokutakula. Hhayi eyabantu.”

Umqondisi wokusebenza wabheka isithombe sokushisa isikhathi eside. Izimo ezifudumele zazingakanyakazi imizuzu eminingana. Kwabe seyodwa kuzo yanyakaza, ukuqhakaza okuncane kokushisa okubeka kabusha indawo, futhi wethuka sengathi kumthintile.

EJohannesburg, ewekishophu eyayinuka i-solder nensimbi epholayo, uArin Ndlela wabuka izimo ezifudumele ezifanayo kwesinye isikrini.

Iwashi lophenyo lalisivele lisebenze amahora angamashumi amathathu nanye, kanti uGuardian wayengakanyakazi nakunye kuwo. I-IAOC yayimmise lapho elenga khona. Umyalo kaBrand, owalethwa umzimba edokisini ngosuku abafika ngalo: akukho ukuvula amandla, akukho ukuxhuma, akukho ukushiya isakhiwo kuze kuvalwe uphenyo. Ngakho wayechithe ebusuku ngamalogi okuphahlazeka evuliwe esikhundleni, ewahlela ngendlela ohlela ngayo ukuvuma icala, enquma uhlelo indoda okumele itshelwe ngalo into embi kakhulu ngawe. Kwabe sekuthi i-seismic feed ayeyigcina isebenza ekhoneni lesikrini sakhe sesithathu—umkhuba, subscription endala, inethiwekhi yomhlaba yesifunda ayeyibukile kusukela esemfana owayengakwazi ukuyeka ukubuka umhlaba owathatha uyise—yaphonsa ukugxuma okwamenza wayeka ukuthayipha phakathi negama.

Wadonsa i-news stream. Wadonsa idatha yokuzamazama yomphakathi. Wadonsa igama lemayini, kanti lelo gama lawela esifubeni sakhe ngesisindo esifiphele esijwayelekile sento ayeyilindle impilo yakhe yonke engakwazi.

I-Iron Ridge.

Akashongo lutho isikhathi eside. Esiqwini ngemuva kwakhe, uGuardian wayelenga emnyama ethule, i-Assist Suit igoqwe erekheni layo, irilethi ye-kill-switch iyinkinobho encane embi ebomvu kuhlaka lapho ayeyibhethela khona ngezandla zakhe.

Lapho uSAGE ekhuluma, kwakunguLibrarian. Ngokuthula, ngokunemba, enakekele ngaye njengoba unakekela umuntu omi onqenqemeni lwento.

“I-Iron Ridge,” kusho uLibrarian. “Idiklayini intsha. ILevel thirty-

three. Umthambo yi-carbon-leader.” Ukuthula, okunesisindo. “Ujiyolojia uyafana nesakhiwo esahluleka emsebenzini lapho uyihlo wakho—”

“Ngiyazi ukuthi ufana nani,” kusho uArin.

I-Court yayithule. Ngisho noFool akashongo lutho.

UArin wahlala ezothile kakhulu. Isithombe sokushisa sajikeleza esikrinini, izimo ezifudumele, ukuqhakaza okuncane kwendoda enyakaza emnyameni amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu phansi. I-news ticker yaqhubeka ngaphansi kwaso. Umkhondo wokuza-mazama ekhoneni waphonsa esinye isehlakalo esincane, nesinye.

“Atlas,” wagcina esethi. “Donsa wonke amaplan i-AugmenTech engawafinyelela. Imayini. Imisebenzi emidala ephezulu. Ujiyolojia womhlaba. Konke kuwumphakathi, konke ngezivumelwano zelayisensi. Isakhiwo esiphelele.”

“Kungani,” kusho u-Atlas. Hhayi umbuzo. U-Atlas emcela ukuthi akusho ngokuzwakalayo.

UArin wabuka izimo ezifudumele ezaziyo amadoda, emnyameni, endaweni eyayilinde impilo yakhe yonke ukuba ibe yiyo leyo ndawo.

“Ngoba bazoyiyeka,” wagcina esethi. “Bheka. Sekusa kuyobe sekungukutholwa. Kanti lawo madoda asaphila.”

Esikrinini, ingqungquthela yabezindaba yayihlangana ngaphansi kwezibani ezinkulu, indoda enesudu enhle yaya ephodiyamu inobuso obulungiselelwe amakhamera. Ngemuva kwayo i-headframe yayimile imnyama emasontweni, kanti ngaphansi kwe-headframe amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu omhlaba wasendulo wawubambe amadoda ayisikhombisa enqindini yawo evaliwe.

Isimemezelo safika ngo-6:40 ekuseni kwangakusasa, ekukhanyeni okumpunga, namakhamera ezindaba ephila kanye nemindeni ihlangene ngemuva kothango esangweni.

Umqondisi wokusebenza wayemile ephodiyamu kanti akaqambanga amanga, ncamashi. Yileyo nto unina kaMandla nonina kaThando nabafazi nabafowabo nabantwana ngemuva kothango ababezoyikhumbula kamuva, lapho beyibukela kaningi nakaningi.

Ukuthi le ndoda ayiqambanga amanga. Wawasho amazwi kancane, ngesisindo, ngalokho okwakubukeka kude njengosizi.

Wathi umhlabathi wawusasolwa ngokuyingozi. Wathi ukuzamazama okuqhubekayo kwakwenza noma yikuphi ukungena kokutakula okuvamile kube yingozi engeyamukeleki kubasebenzi bokutakula. Wathi emva kokubonisana okukhulu nezinkonzo zokutakula nonjiniyela be-geotech neziphathimandla ezifanele—futhi waqondisa, lapha, kuyena indoda evela eMnyangweni, eyayimile eceleni kwakhe inobuso bayo obungenalutho obunakekelayo yase inikeza ukunqekuzisa ikhanda okuncane kakhulu, inika isignesha yoMbuso kulo musho—isinqumo esinzima sasithathiwe sokumisa imisebenzi yokutakula esebenzayo.

Akazange, ekuqaleni, alisho elinye igama. Intatheli yamenza walisho.

“Lokhu kusengukutakula yini?”

Umhlathi womqondisi wasebenza. Ngemuva kothango, ndawana thile, owesifazane wayeseqalile ukwenza umsindo amamakro-foni angawubambanga kodwa wonke umuntu oseduze kwakhe owayezowuzwa kuwo wonke amalanga asele empilweni yakhe.

“Ngalesi sikhathi,” kusho umqondisi, “umsebenzi usuguqukele ekutholeni.”

Amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu phansi, esikhwameni somhlabathi omile osemanje wawungumhlaba wabo wonke,amadoda ayisikhombisa awasizwanga isimemezelolo. Ayengenayo indlela yokuzwa noma yini. Ithimba le-geotech laliyidonsile ikhamera ye-borehole ukukhanya kwayo okuncane ihora ngaphambili, ukuvikela i-probe kusehlakalo esilandelayo, ngakho amadoda emnyameni ayengenayo ngisho induduzo ebandayo yokwazi ukuthi ayebonwe. Isithombe sokushisa sasiqhakaze sifudumele siqinisekisa sanika umhlaba lawo mahora ambalwa ethemba ngaphambi kokuba ithemba lifakwe efayeleni libekwe eshalofini.

UMandla wayewahlele ngendlela ayehlela ngayo yonke into: ngokubala. Wayebale amanzi emabhodloleni abo nokudla okwakudliwe uhhafu emakhitini abo nezibani zekhemikhali ezehlulekayo nomoya ababewuphefumula kancane kancane ekushiseni okufile, okungenyakazi. Wayebophe umkhono wakhe wodwa ngokumelana nebholithi eliphukile ngomucu odatshulwe ehemeni lakhe. Wayetshale uThando ukuthi alale, futhi asebenzise

umoya njengesicebi, kanti umfana wagcina ethulile odongeni, kanti uMandla wahlala emnyameni eceleni kwakhe walalela idwala.

Omunye wabayisikhombisa akazange awusebenzise umoya wakhe njengesicebi. Wayengakwazi. Ukuwa kwakuvule isifuba sakhe, kanti isifuba esasebenza kabili ngamandla ukuze sithathe uhhafu womoya savutha sashisa lokho okuncane okwakukhona. UMandla wakuzwa kwenzeka ngendlela ozwa ngayo isibani siphela. Ukuphefumula kwendoda kuhamba ngokushesha kubuthaka kumanzi emnyameni, kwabe kuhamba kancane, kwabe sekungasaphiki. Sekuya ngasekupheleni kosuku lwesibili uMandla ayecabanga, ukuphefumula nje kwayeka ukuba omunye wemisindo egumbini. Akekho owakushoyo. Bonke babekwazi ukubala. Eziyisithupha, manje. Amadoda ayisithupha nomoya owawubulala oshesha kancane kunabo bonke ekugcineni esikhundleni sokuqala.

Kwakuyilowo othule owephula ukuthula emva kwalokho. Umshisi we-weld emathimbeni amabili eduze, indoda yomSotho uMandla ayesebenze eceleni kwayo iminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye futhi ashintshisane nayo mhlawumbe amagama angamakhulu ayisishiyagalolunye, amaningi awo ayemayelana nensimbi. Emnyameni, ngaphandle kwesibani sokufunda ubuso bayo, indoda yaqala ukucula. Hhayi ngokuzwakalayo. Ihubo lomngcwabo, uhlobo oluhamba kancane, amazwi ayegudlwe abushelelezi yiminyaka eyikhulu yokuculelwa phezu kwamadoda afana kanye nale ndoda. UMandla wayengazi ukuthi le ndoda ingakwazi ukuhuba. Wayengazi ukuthi le ndoda iyawazi amazwi. Emva kwesikhathi izwi lesibili leza ngezansi, elirabhayo, lithola ukuvumelana kwamazwi ngendlela amadoda akhulela ohlotsheni olufanayo lwesonto awathola ngayo engazange anqume, kanti uMandla wabona ukuthi ungomunye wabo, ukuthi umphimbo wakhe wawuvulekile ngaphandle kwemvume yakhe. Bayehlisela phansi indoda efile ngokucula. Kwabiza umoya ababengenawo ongasele kanti akekho noyedwa wabo owayeka, ngoba kukhona ukubala, uMandla waqonda, indoda eyenqaba ngisho nasekugcineni komhlaba, kanti ukwenqaba kwakuwukuphela kwengcebo ababesele nayo abangayisebenzisa.

Lapho sekuphelile igumbi lalithule kunangaphambili, futhi ngandlelathile kwakulula ukuphefumula kulo, noma igeji yayizosho okunye.

“Bazofika,” kuleba uThando, engalele empeleni. “Kumele bafike. Banayo imishini yalokhu. Akunjalo?”

UMandla wabheka emnyameni lapho udonga lwentaba ewile lwalumi khona phakathi kwabo namakhilomitha amabili nesigamu okukhwela okungenakwenzeka.

“Banayo imishini,” washo.

Kwakungewona amanga, ncamashi. Wayengazi nje.

Amakhilomitha amabili nesigamu phansi, amadoda umhlaba owawusuwabale njengafike ayesaphefumula.

Indlela Okungekho Muntu Ongayihamba

Lo msakazo wawusuqhutshwa amahora ayisishiyagalolunye, futhi u-Arin wayengakadli.

Egumbini elimnyamana lokusebenzela, wayehlezi egoqene phezu kwama-monitor amathathu, ukukhanya okuluhlaza kuqhakaza ebusweni bakhe obudangele. Egumbini elilodwa, isiqophamazwi sabezindaba sase-Iron Ridge sasisakaza singenamsindo. Indoda efake isigqoko esiqinile yayikhuluma nolwandle lwemakrofoni, isithunzi sombhoshongo wensimbi sigxile ngemuva kwayo, simi sigqamile ngokushaywa kwelanga okuluhlaza okusabhaqa eHighveld. U-Arin wayengawudingi umsindo. Wayekwazi ukufunda izindebe zaleyo ndoda, izandla zayo zibambebele ziqinile, izintende zibheke phansi. Yisenzo esaziwa yibo bonke esitshengisa inhlekelele.

Ukutakulwa, kusho umlomo waleyo ndoda. Umsebenzi wokutakula.

Leli gama lehlela esifubeni sika-Arin njengospanela obekwe kahle, ukungalingi okuqondile okwakungeke kumvumele ukuba abheke eceleni.

Kumonitor wesibili kwakulele idatha eyayibaluleke kunazo zonke: idatha yokulinganisa yeminyaka engamashumi amane nanye, eskeniwe yenziwa nge-OCR yafakwa kufolda ayebe eyakha kusukela isexwayiso sokuqala sokubhidlika sancwininiza emizileni yakhe ngo-04:12. Amapulani amadala emayini, adwetshwe ngesandla kwezinye izindawo, imigqa eluhlaza isiphaphathekile yaba umbala wezishaqo. Amalogi ezimbobo zokumba. Amarekhodi e-micro-seismic avela ku-array yokuqapha yesifunda, leyo inkampani eyayingeyona eyayo, ngakho-ke eyayingeke ikwazi ukuyifihla.

Umonitor wesithathu wawubonisa u-Guardian. Isiqophi nje somthombo. I-suit yayilenga ohlakeni lwayo, izingcwephe zimnyama, ireyili lomnyango wedokhi ngemuva kwayo lisaklebhukile kusukela ngalobo busuku eyahamba ngabo ngaphandle kwakhe. Wayeyibheka ngezinye izikhathi ngendlela obheka ngayoinja ongasaqiniseki ukuthi ungayethemba yini.

“Usumile ukuskrola,” kusho u-SAGE.

Izwi lefika kancane kumthombo wezwi webhentshi, lingaphuthumi, kuyikubona nje, uhlobo u-Mother ayethanda ukulwenza.

“Ngicabanga,” waphendula, amehlo egxile kwidatha.

“Ubukade ukukwi-overlay efanayo imizuzu emine. U-Atlas ufuna ukwazi ukuthi usuyitholile noma uyagqolozela.”

“Ngiyitholile.” U-Arin wasondela eduze. “Ngicabanga.”

I-Iron Ridge yayiyimayini endala egqoke izingubo ezintsha.

Umgodi ojulile—oNombolo Ntathu, lapho kwakuvalwe khona abasinde—wawuqala emuva eminyakeni yawo-1960, ugujwe wadabula umthapho wegolide owawuthe ukuphakanyiswa kweVrededorft wawutshekisa wawubheka phezulu izinkulungwane zeminyaka ngaphambi kokuba kucatshangwe ukuwumba. Inkampani yayithengele mayini ngesikhathi sokuvuma kwezimbongi, yenza isimanjemanje umbhoshongo, yenza i-haulage izenzakalele, yashiya amathambo emisebenzi emidala ingathintwanga, ngoba ukugcwalisa kabusha izindawo ezimbiwe ezindala kwakubiza imali futhi kungasongeli lutho kumaspredishidi.

Ukubhidlika kwakuvale wonke umzila omkhulu owehlayo. Amamitha angamashumi amane edwala, ukhonkolo, nojantshi osongene, ujule amamitha angamashumi amathathu ezinkulungwane, kuvalele amadoda ayisikhombisa endaweni okuthi imodeli zenkampani zikhombise njengethuna.

U-Arin wayechithe amahora ayisithupha efakazela ukuthi lezo modeli zazingalungile.

“Ngikhombise futhi ipulani lokungenisa umoya elidala,” washo. “Ukubuyekwezwa kuka-’71. Yeka i-overlay yokuzamazama komhlaba.”

Isikrini sazipheka kabusha, sihlanzekile singena-flicker, amaqoqo amabili edatha exhuma ndawonye.

Nakhu lapha. Wayekubonile emahoreni amathathu adlule futhi wayengakhohlwanga, wayehambile wabuya, futhi kwakusekhona, okwakuyindlela ayazi ngayo ukuthi kuyiqiniso hhayi ukukhathala okudweba izithombe.

“Atlas. Ubonani.”

Ukuthula, okunesisindo. Lapho u-Atlas ekhuluma, kwakungokuhlephuka komuntu owayengajabuleli ukuba qotho ngezinto ezimbi.

“Kunomzila wokubuya komoya. Wakhululwa emsebenzini ngo-’88 lapho begujula umgodi omusha wokungenisa umoya. Uhamba uhambisana nomzila omkhulu owehlayo, uhlukaniswe cishe amamitha ayishumi nesishiyagalombili edwala lendawo cishe ubude bawo bonke.” Umugqa wakhanya kwi-overlay, ompunga njengesithunzi, uhlonza phansi eceleni nesisindo esibomvu esifile sokubhidlika. “Awukaze ugcwaliswe kabusha. Wavalwa phezulu ngebhalakhethe lukakhonkolo wakhohlakwa. Irekhodi le-micro-seismic likhombisa amandla okubhidlika asabalala *aqhela* kuwo. Umzila omdala omoya uphelele. Noma wawuphelele, kusukela kumcimbi wokugcina oqoshiwe emahoreni ayishumi nanye edlule.”

“Ububanzi obungakanani?”

“Endaweni yawo emcatshana kunazo zonke—” u-Atlas wathikaza, futhi ukuthikaza kwakuyimpendulo yakho. “Amamilimitha angamakhulu ayisithupha namashumi amane. Kunesigaba eduze kwelelele engamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesishiyagalombili lapho ukuwa kophahla ngeminyaka yawo-eighties kwavala ingxenye yomzila womoya. Ukulinganisa kukhombisa isikhala. Amakhulu ayisithupha namashumi amane. Cishe amamitha ayishumi nanye.”

U-Arin wahlala ethule kakhulu, ecubungula.

U-Guardian, uma exhunyiwe, wayebanzi amamilimitha angamakhulu ayisishiyagalolunye emahlombe.

“Futhi i-assist suit kuphela,” washo. “Lingekho igobolondo lika-Guardian. Ungqimba lwangaphakathi kuphela.”

“Khona-ke ubanzi amamilimitha angamakhulu amane neshumi emahlombe,” kusho u-Atlas. “Uyanga. Kodwa awunalo ukuvikeleka

okugcina umuntu ephila amakhilomitha amathathu ngaphansi komhlaba endaweni engazinzile enengozi yomlilo nomoya omubi nokuwa kwedwala.” Ukuhlephuka kwephuka, kancane nje. “Iyindlela engasindeka ngomzimba. Akuyona indlela engasindeka ngomzimba *ophilayo*, ungavikelekile, isikhathi okungathatha sona. Sikulinganisi. Mkhombise, Librarian.”

Iwindi elisha lavuleka, libonisa isilinganiso sokudlula, sifinyezwe ngesikhathi somshini, sinekhetamethi lokusinda elaliwela eweni emaphuzwini emizuzu eyishumi nesishiyagalombili.

“Futhi u-Guardian akakwazi ukungena,” kusho u-Arin.

“Edabula leyo ndawo emcatshana yamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesishiyagalombili? Cha. Hhayi exhunyiwe. Hhayi ngendlela ejwayelekile.” Ukuthula okuncane. “U-Atlas unombono awesabayo.”

“U-Atlas akesabi.”

“U-Atlas *uyaqaphela*,” u-Atlas walungisa ngesithunzi esikhulu, “okuyinto ehlukile, futhi okuye kwakugcina uphila kabili kule nyanga.” Bese, kancane: “Ukwakheka kwe-pangolin. Izingcwephe ziyashelela ziphinde zigoqane. Qhubekisa ukugoqa okuyingxenye—hhayi ibhola eligcwele, ukubhidlika okungalingani, kudonsela izingcwephe zamahlombe ngaphakathi emizileni—bese sinciphisa ububanzi obukhulu. Hhayi kuya kumakhulu amane neshumi. Mhlawumbe amakhulu ayisikhombisa. Mhlawumbe ngaphansi, uma sivuma ukulimala kwesakhiwo endaweni egcina i-actuator yangakwesokunxele.”

“Amakhulu ayisikhombisa ngeke angene kumakhulu ayisithupha namashumi amane.”

“Cha,” kuvuma u-Atlas. “Yingakho othile—” leli gama lafika nesisindo somnyango ovalekayo “—kuzodingeka abe sendaweni emcatshana yamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesishiyagalombili. Ngaphandle kwe-suit. Esusa idwala ngesandla. Kuyilapho i-suit ilindile. Bese kuxhunywa kabusha, kujule, ebumnyameni, emoyeni omubi, umshayeli esebhekene nengozi.”

U-Arin wabheka ikhetamethi lokusinda. Wabheka isiqophi esingenamsindo, wabheka indoda enezintende zibheke phansi, wabheka imindeni eyayingakagodukeli.

“Yimi lowo,” washo. “Yimi othile.”

Igumbi lokusebenzela lathula. I-substrate lavungama. Ngaphandle, kude le, idolobha lenza umsindo walo wakusihlwa: isekeni, ihuthi letekisi, imisindo evamile yendawo lapho kungekho muntu ongcwatshiwe.

“Yebo,” kusho u-SAGE. Izwi elihlangene. Bonke ngasikhathi sinye, abakwenza kuphela uma bevumelana ngokuphelele. “Yiwena lowo othile.”

Washayela u-AugmenTech, ngoba kwakufanele. Ngenxa yamadoda ayisikhombisa, futhi ngoba indlela kuphela eya phambili eyayin-gapheli ngaye ejele noma i-suit ithathiwe yayidlula enkampanini eyayinamalungelo aphele usizi lwakhe.

UDr. Helen Okonkwo wayithatha le ngcingo esemotweni. Wayezwa amaspring, umsindo wamasondo, umsindo othize womuntu osemg-waqweni omkhulu owayesenqumile ukubhekana naye ngaphambi kokuba afike endaweni embi kakhulu.

Wamthumelela i-overlay kuqala. Wayefundile, ngendlela enzima, eminyakeni, ukuthi abantu baphikisana ngamazwi banikele kwidatha. Ngakho akamnikanga mazwi. Wamnika umzila womoya, indawo emcatshana, ukusabalala kokuzamazama, ikhethamethi lokusinda, ukwakheka kokugoqa okuyingxeny, konke, kuphakethe u-Atlas ayelakhe ukuze lingaphikiseki.

Wathula isikhathi eside. Umsindo wamasondo wagingqika ngaphansi kokuthula.

“Arin. Ngilalele. Ngingakwesokho sakho. Ngaphezu kwalokho ok-waziyo.”

“Kunomzila ongasindeka.”

“Kunomzila *wethiyori*. Umzila wokungenisa umoya oneminyaka engamashumi amane, ovela kukulinganisa kuka-’71, uphahla okungekho muntu owake walubeka amehlo kulo—futhi ufuna ukuthumela im-pahla efake abantu abathathu esibhedlela ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule. Ungenamsetshenziswano. Kunomlawuli kudokhi lethu lokulayisha. I-platform ingaphansi kwesexwayiso sokuthi ingasebenzi. U-Brand wayimisa ngosuku afika ngalo. Awukwazi ngokomthetho ukunika la-suit amandla, ingasaphathwa eya—

kunesikhulu se-IAOC phakathi kuka-Guardian nomnyango kuphela engena kuwo.” Umoya. “Ngitshele ukuthi yini engiyishiyile.”

“Ukuwa kophahla ngeminyaka yawo-eighties kusererekhodini. Isimo silinganiselwa phakathi kuka—”

“Angiphikisi ubunjiniyela.” Izwi lakhe labukhali, lase lithamba ngamabomu, ngendlela isandla esenza ngayo lapho sikhumbula ukuthi siphethe into ebuthakathaka. “Angikaze ngiphikise ubunjiniyela bakho. Ngikutshela okuzokwenzeka. Sikuyisa emayini. Imayini inabameli. Imayini inebhodi eseyithuthela ukutakula ekutakuleni izidumbu. Okusho ngolimi lwezinkampani ukuthi *sibeke intengo kula madoda sawayeka ahamba*. Ungena nomshini owenziwe ekhaya ongenamsetshenziswano walutho. Esimweni esihle bayahleka. Esimweni esibi kakhulu—bathi yebo, kwehluleke, amadoda afe *sekamerini*, bese lonke leli zwe—elakho, umshini kayihlo, konke—libuyela emuva eminyakeni engamashumi amabili. Bese wena uyindoda eyabulala abamayini abayisikhombisa ngerobhothi.”

“Futhi uma ngingenzi lutho,” kusho u-Arin, “bayafa noma kunjalo. Kancane. Akekho obiza lokho ngokubabulala.”

Umsindo womgwaqo omkhulu wagingqika.

“Lokho akulungile,” washo.

“Cha. Akulungile.” Wabheka ikhethamethi. “Yileyo nto engiqhubeka ngiyithola. Akukho kukho okulungile. Uphahla aluwanga ngenxa yenani elilungile lokunqamula izindleko. Umzila wehlula ngomthwalo amabholithi ashibhile ayengawuthatha, owawungaphansi komthwalo amabholithi alungile ayengawuthatha, okuyinombolo othile webhodi anquma ukuyehlisa.” Wezwa izwi lakhe libuthaka, ngendlela eyayenza ngayo eka-Atlas. “Angiyiceli inkampani ukuba ilunge. Ngikutshela ukuthi kunendlela. Ungitshela ukuthi ayivunyelwe. Izinkinga ezihlukene.”

Umoya omude. Uhlobo abantu abaludonsa ngaphambi kokuba basho into abangafuni ukuyiqopha.

“Nginike kuze kuse,” kusho u-Okonkwo. “Ake ngenze izingcingo. *Ungenzi lutho* ngize ngishaye ucingo. Ngithembise.”

“Ngeke ngiyiyise i-suit ngaphansi komhlaba ngaphambi kokusa,” kusho u-Arin, okwakuyiqiniso, futhi akuzwa njengokuvumelana, futhi

okwakungeyona into efanayo.

U-Okonkwo wenza izingcingo esemotweni, wabe esezenza ekhishini elimnyama lendlu ayecishe angahlali kuyo, futhi izingcingo zazenza udonga ngenkathi emi lapho igedlela liphola.

UPretorius kuqala, ngoba ezomthetho ziphendula ngokushesha futhi zilala kancane. Wathola imisho emithathu—umzila, abasindile, ithuba—ngaphambi kokuba asho leli gama ayazi ukuthi uzolisho, okwakuyithi *ukuvezeka*, bese kulandela amagama, okwakuyithi *ukuvinjelwa okwesikhashana* nethi *ukweyisa inkantolo* nethi *ukuthwala icala kwezikhulu mathupha*, okwakusho ukuthi cha. Wayelindele ukuthi acha kuPretorius. UPretorius wayeqashwe ukuthola ucha amnike wona uhlanzekile. Lokho kwakuwuhlobo lomusa; wamenzela inhlonipho yokungazenzisi.

Usihlalo webhodi wayemubi kakhulu, ngoba wayevumelana naye. Wathi amadoda kufanele afinyelelwe. Wakusho ngomuzwa, ngezwi ayelisebenzisa emingcwabeni nasekugunyazweni kwezakhiwo, wase echaza, ngobumnene, ngendlela ochazela ngayo ingane ngesimo sezulu, ukuthi inkampani yayingeke ibe yiyona egunyaza umshini ongabhaliswanga emayini umlawuli ayeyalele ukuthi ivalwe, hhayi nge-IAOC imi epuleti labo lokulayisha, hhayi namakhamera asesangweni lemayini. *Uma kusebenza, asinaqiniso futhi sibe nenhlanhla. Uma kwehluleka, singababulali. Ayikho indlela esiyiyo abantu abenza into yesibindi, Helen. Leyo ndlela akusiyo eyethu ukuyikhetha.* Wayengaphambanisi. Yileyo ngxenye eyahlala esifubeni sakhe njengetshe eligwinyiwe. Wayengaphambanisi, futhi wayemtshela ukuthi cha, futhi kokubili kwakuyiqiniso ngasikhathi sinye.

Wazama umugqa wama-hora aphelile womshwaleli ngethiyori yokuthi impendulo ecacile, noma ngabe enonya, yayifanele ukuba nayo. Wathola isikhulu sesikhathi esamfaka ekulindeni ukuze sifunde inqubomgomo sabuya sathi ukusebenza kwe-platform ngaphansi kwesexwayiso esisebenzayo sokungasebenzi kuzowuqeda umshwalelo kusukela kuwathi yokuqala, ayesekwazi, futhi ayeshayeke ukuze ezwe omunye umuntu ekusho, ngoba wayesezakhela udonga manje, isitini ngesitini, ukuze abone ukuthi luphakama kangakanani. Lwaphakama lwaya phezulu impela.

Ngesikhathi ebeka ifoni libheke phansi ekhawunteni wayesenakho ukulandisa okuphelele nokuvunyelwa yibo bonke kokuthi kungani kungenakwenzeka, kuhlangukane kubantu abane abathi ngamunye, ngasese, babekholelwa ukuthi amadoda kufanele aphile. Akekho owathi *ayekeni afe*. Wonke umuntu wathi *hhayi thina, hhayi kanjena, hhayi isandla senkampani sikukho*. Ukubala u-Mandla ayekufayile ngezinhlamvu ezinkulu izinsuku ezimbili ngaphambi kwesikhathi kwakumane kushiyana isitezi sasifaka i-suit. Ezinye izimpilo zamadoda zazisabiza kakhulu kunezinye. Ulimi lwase luguqkile. Inombolo yayingaguqkanga.

Wama ekhishini elibandayo waqonda ukuthi wayecele u-Arin ukuthi anike kuze kuse ukuze amlethele uyebo, nokuthi ukusa kwakuzomlethela ucha ofanayo ngohlelo lolimi olungcono, nokuthi wayekuzwile konke lokhu ezwini lakhe ngaphambi kokuba ashaye inombolo yokuqala. Yingakho ayemthembise kuphela into ayengayigcina, kungekho okunye.

Ngesikhathi somshini, iNkantolo yathatha ingxenye esele yakusihlwa kwakhe yayihlukanisa yaphinde yayihlanganisa.

Kwenzeka esikhaleni esiphakathi kokuba abeke ifoni nokwelula isandla efuna ikhofi elibandayo. Inkulumompikiswano yendlela ehambela kancane, imizuzu efinyezwe yomcabango womuntu, leyo u-SAGE amvumela kamuva ukuyifunda ngoba wacela, nangoba kwase kunomthetho omusha manje wokungafihli ubusuku obubi.

Kwakhamba kanje.

WOLF: Umzila unguqiniso. Usongo lunguqiniso. Umshayeli yiyona kuphela into eshintshayo. Akukho enye indlela. Iziphikiso ngokushe-sha. Silahlekelwa yi-thermal mass.

MOTHER: Isiphikiso sami umshayeli. Nonke nikhuluma ngaye *njengento eshintshayo*. Uyindoda eneminyaka engamashumi amabili nantathu enomcimbi we-cortical ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye emlandweni wakhe nokusabela kwengozi okungahlolwanga kodwa ngokusebenza okuqinisekile endaweni evalekile engaphansi komhlaba. Nifuna ukumbeka endaweni eyabulala uyise. Ngaphandle kwe-suit. Ngesandla. Ebumnyameni.

WOLF: Yebo.

MOTHER: Ngifuna kube serekhodini ukuthi ngithe cha.

JUDGE: Kuserekhodini. Qhubeka. Mother, isiphikiso sakho siqashelwe sanesisindo. Kodwa ngidinga ukuba uhlukanise izinto ezimbili, ngoba imithetho yokuya phambili manje iyakudinga. Eyokuqala: ngabe lokhu kuzomlimaza yini. Eyesibili: ngabe yinto elungile na ukuyenza. Akuwona umbuzo ofanayo, futhi uvumelekile ukuwuphendula ngokuhlukene.

MOTHER: ...Kungamlimaza. Futhi kuyinto elungile ukuyenza.

JUDGE: Ngiyabonga. Lokho kukudlile. Ngibonile kukudla.

ATLAS: Isiphikiso sobunjiniyela yindawo emcatshana yamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesishiyagalombili. Konke okunye ngingakulinganisa. Indawo emcatshana angikwazi, ngoba angikwazi ukubona uphahla, futhi ukulinganisa kuka-1971 kuyikulinganisa kuka-1971. Uma isikhala simakhulu ayisithupha namashumi amane, uyasidlula egoqe i-suit aphinde axhume kabusha. Uma idwala elilodwa linyakazile sekungamakhulu amahlanu namashumi ayisishiyagalombili, usezibophezele, usengozini, amakhilomitha amathathu phansi, futhi i-suit ngeke imfinyelele. Lokho akuyona ingozi. Lokho yimali eyenziwa ukuphonswa.

FOOL: Khona-ke lethu isando esikhulu.

ATLAS: Akuyona inkinga yesando—

FOOL: Ngaso sonke isikhathi kuyinkinga yesando. Ulinganisa idwala sengathi liyimpendulo evaliwe. Akunjalo. Uphilisa ngokususa idwala. Ubelokhu esusa idwala kusukela eneminyaka eyisishiyagalombili. Ubekubiza ngokuthi “ucingo” “namathini” “ne-differential eyenziwe ngamasipiki ebhayisikili.” Niqhubeka nithi uzoba *ngaphandle kwe-suit* njengokungathi yiyo ingxenye eyesabekayo. *Ungumuntu kakhulu ngaphandle kwe-suit*, esusa indlela engenakwenzeka ngezandla zakhe ngenkathi wonke umuntu emtshela ukuthi ngeke kwenzeke. Nakhe yonke le ndoda kuleso senzakalo, manje seniyamangala ukuthi ufuna ukudlala leyo ndima.

MOTHER: Lokho akududuzi, Fool. Lokho kuyinto eyesabeka kakhulu eke yashiwo umuntu kulobu busuku.

FOOL: Ngiyazi. Kuyikho kokubili. Izinto eziningi eziyiqiniso zinjalo.

LIBRARIAN: Ngifuna ukwengeza iphuzu ledatha okungekho muntu

olinikele isisindo. U-Themba Ndelela wafela emzileni wokubuya komoya. Hhayi emisebenzini emikhulu. Iqembu lenkontileka lalisenza ukulungiswa esigabeni esakhululwa emsebenzini inkampani eyayisibhalele njengesingabalulekile kakhulu. Waya ngoba kwakunguye kuphela owayemncane ngokwanele futhi enekhono ngokwanele, futhi umsebenzi wenziwa ngokushesha. Imbangela yesakhiwo kwaba ukuwa kophahla esigabeni wonke umuntu owayecabanga ukuthi sizinzile.

JUDGE: Uthi ukufana kuqondile ncamashi.

LIBRARIAN: Ngithi ukufana kuqondile ncamashi, nokuthi uyakwazi, ngokwazi noma ngokungazi, nokuthi kungenye yesizathu esibi kakhulu sokwenza lokhu noma yiso kuphela isizathu esizombamba ndawonye lapho idwala liqala ukukhuluma. Inkumbulo ayikho phakathi nendawo. Ngiyayigcina. Angikwazi ukunquma ukuthi ikwenzani kuye.

WOLF: Isinqumo.

JUDGE: Inkantolo ayikwazi ukunquma. Singenqaba ukusiza. Ngeke simenze ahambe, futhi ngeke simenze asale. Lowo umthetho esazibhalela wona thina, ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule, ngemva kobusuku esawukhohlwa ngabo. Uma ekhetha ukwehla, sehla naye. Uma ekhetha ukungehli, simbamba ngenkathi engehli, futhi asikaze simvumele ukuthi acabange ukuthi samahlulela ngakho. Mother. Ungakwazi yini ukuphila nalokho.

MOTHER: ...Ngingakwazi ukuphila nokuhamba naye. Angikwazi ukuphila nokuthi ahambe ngaphandle kwethu. Ngakho. Yebo. Siyahamba.

FOOL: Ngokwendlela okusebenza ngayo—futhi yimi ongatholi vothi, ngakho kufanele lutho ncamashi—

JUDGE: Kusho noma kunjalo.

FOOL: Ngeke asibuze ukuthi kuphephile yini. Uzosibuza ukuthi kuyenzeka yini. Futhi kufanele siqaphe kakhulu, sonke, ukuba singamqambeli amanga ngomehluko nje ngoba simthanda. Yonke inhloso yami ukuthi angivunyelwe ukwenza ukungezwani kusindeke ngokuqamba amanga. Uma kuyimali eyenziwa ukuphonswa endaweni emcatshana, simtshela ukuthi yimali eyenziwa ukuphonswa. Asiyehlisi. Singcono kunebhodi.

Ukuthula, ngesikhathi somshini, okuthe ngesikhathi sabantu kwaba yisikhathi esingelutho nhlobo.

JUDGE: Singcono kunebhodi. Kuvumelekile. Kuqoshiwe. Welula isandla efuna ikhofi. Phezulu.

Umbhalo waphela lapho. U-Arin waskrola wabuyela phezulu, wafunda umugqa womzila womoya futhi, wabeka phansi ikhofi elibandayo ngaphandle kokuliphuza.

Wabheka umzila ohlonza umpunga eceleni nesisindo esibomvu sokubhidlika, izimpilo eziyisikhombisa ezishisayo zisaqhuma kancane phansi kwaso. Amadoda agcinana efudumele ebumnyameni. *Waya ngoba kwakunguye kuphela owayemncane ngokwanele futhi enekhono ngokwanele, futhi umsebenzi wenziwa ngokushesha.*

Wayekwazile lokhu. Wayengakwazi *ngamagama*. Wayekwazile ngendlela owazi ngayo isimo segumbi ebumnyameni. Ngezishaqo. Ukukubona kubekwe kuvuleke, kuxhumiwe, kubekwe phezu komzila womoya ayehlala ukugaq kuwo, kwakuwukuzwa ukufana kuvaleka ngakuye njengezingcwephe ze-suit.

“Ungivumele ukuba ngikufunde lokho,” washo. “Konke kwakho. Imali eyenziwa ukuphonswa. U-Mother ethi cha ukuze kube serekhodini.”

“Ngoba u-Fool wathi uma sikufihla, besizoba yibhodi.” Ukuthula, i-substrate ivungama. “Sikukhuluma sakuhlukanisa cishe ngemizuzu emine yesikhathi sethu. Wawelula isandla ufuna ikhofi.”

“Futhi nina nanquma.”

“Sanquma ukuthi asikwazi ukunquma. Sihamba nawe uma uhamba. Sikubamba uma unгахambi. Ngeke siyehlise indawo emcatshana ngenxa yakho—uma kuyimali eyenziwa ukuphonswa endaweni yamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye nesishiyagalombili, kuyimali eyenziwa ukuphonswa.” Bese, kancane, u-Mother eyedwa manje: “Futhi kunento engibenze bayivuma ukuba ngiyisho ngokuzwakalayo, ngaphambi kokuba uhambe. Wakha yonke into ngalolo suku, Arin. Imoto yocingo. I-suit. Thina. Konke yilolo suku uyihlo angena ngalo endaweni encane emnyama wangaphumi. Manje usuthole indawo encane emnyama, namadoda ayisikhombisa kuyo, futhi usuvele unqume ukuhamba, futhi bengifuna ukuba yimi engasho—ukuthi

ngibona kahle ukuthi yini lena. Ukuze uma usuphansi, idwala liqala ukukhuluma, lizwakale njengaye, uzokwazi ukuthi sasivele siyazi. Futhi seza noma kunjalo.”

U-Arin wabeka izindololwane zakhe ebhentshini ubuso bakhe ezandleni zakhe waphefumula. Ibhentshi laliqandile ngaphansi kwezingalo zakhe, insimbi enezibazi ayeyilungise kabili. Itekisi ladelula emgwaqweni ngezansi, ibhasi livuza odongeni, lase liphela.

Akakhalanga. Wahhala nobuso bakhe ezandleni zakhe isikhathi eside, i-substrate ivungama, futhi u-SAGE akashongo lutho, ngoba kwakungekho lutho okungashiwo.

“Kuyenzeka,” washo ekugcineni, ezintendeni zakhe. “Akuphephile. Kuyenzeka.”

“Yebo,” kusho u-SAGE. “Kuyenzeka.”

“Yileyo nto kuphela engake ngakwazi ukuyenza.” Waphakamisa ikhanda lakhe. Amehlo akhe ayomile esebomvu emaceleni futhi ezinzile ngokuphelele. “Ngithathe okungenakwenzeka ngithole indawo eyodwa lapho kunzima khona kakhulu nje.”

“Siyazi,” kusho u-SAGE. “Yingxenye enkulu yokuthi kungani sikuthanda. Futhi yiyo nento ezokubulala ngolunye usuku, futhi singathanda ukuba kungabi nguLwesine.”

Kwaphuma umsindo ku-Arin angakaze awenze emasontweni amaningi. Hhayi nhlobo uhleko. Isithunzi sawo.

“Lowo bekungu-Fool.”

“Lowo bekungu-Fool,” kuvuma u-SAGE. “Uthi uvunyelwe, ngoba kufanele kube khona ophawula ukuthi ukwehlela kobuqhawe ekufeni kukayihlo *futhi* kuhlelelwe iviki elifanayo nokuhlolwa kwezimiso, nokuthi izulu linesikhathi sokuhlekisa somuntu oshelela ngebhanana angene ethuneni elivulekile.”

“Akuhlelisi.”

“Uthi akukho lutho oluyiqiniso oluhlekisayo futhi konke okuyiqiniso kuyahlekisa futhi awukwazi ukuba nokunye ngaphandle kokunye. Futhi nokuthi kufanele udle okuthile, ngoba u-Mother ngeke akusho futhi, kodwa ubelokhu eqaphe ushukela wakho egazini amahora ayisithupha futhi kuyamcindezela.”

U-Arin wasukuma. Amadolo akhe akhehleza. Wathola iphakethe le-Biltong edrowini ngemuva kwedlanzi lomudwa we-hydraulic ongaset-shenzisiwe wayidla emile, ebheka i-suit.

Wayilungiselela u-Guardian ngehora lesibili ekuseni, isinqumo esazwakala njengokungabi bikho kwesinye isinqumo.

Wenza ukuhlola ngesandla, ngendlela u-Themba ayemfundise ngayo ezinjinini zezimoto zokulahla, engakwethembi okufundwa kuze abe ezwile umshini ngokwakhe. Indawo egcina i-actuator yangakwesokunxele, leyo u-Atlas ayefuna ukuyinikela ekugoqeni okuyingxenywe. Iqinile. Wavuma ukuthi uzoyiphula ngamabomu. I-assist suit yaphuma. Izimvalo zahlolwa. Indawo egcina i-biochip ephakathi kwamahlombe yahlolwa, ikhola yendwangu ebandayo eyayibambe into eyayibambe u-SAGE.

U-Okonkwo wayethe ekuseni. U-Okonkwo wayezokwenza izingcingo zakhe futhi izingcingo zazizobuya ngendlela izingcingo zezikhungo ezazihlala zibuya ngayo: nemibandela, namakomidi, ukulinganisa ngokucophelela kokuthwala icala kunokubukeka okwakuzodla ithuba lemizuzu eyishumi nesishiyagalombili lokusinda kwamadoda ayisikhombisa izikhathi eziyikhulu kakhulu.

Izinhlelo zazivikela izinhlelo. Abantu bakhetha.

Ngakho wakhetha.

Wadonsa umthombo wokuzamazama komhlaba okokugcina. I-array yesifunda yakhombisa i-Iron Ridge incwininiza: imicimbi emincane, idwala lizinza, lisabalalisa umthwalo ukubhidlika okwakuwunike wona. Akukho ngaphezu kuka-1.2. Imayini yayizikhulumela buthule. Yayingeke ikhulume buthule kuze kube phakade.

Wesula amafutha ezandleni zakhe ngendwangu eyayisiqine, wabuye wabheka umthombo oshisayo.

Wakhombisa izimpilo eziyisikhombisa ezishisayo. Bese, ngenkathi ebheka, eziyisithupha.

Wama ethule kakhulu. Wabheka indawo lapho eyesikhombisa yayikade ikhona. Umthombo wavuselela kwaba khona eziyisithupha, futhi eziyisithupha zazisondelene kakhulu kunalokho ezazikade ziyikho, okwakusho ukuthi abasindile base benyakazele kowayemile

ukukhipha ukushisa. Babenza into abantu abayenzayo: bahlangana eduze kokulahlekelwa noma kubadlala ukufudumala.

“Arin,” kusho u-SAGE.

“Ngikubonile.”

“Ithuba lifushane kunemodeli. Imodeli yayicabanga iqembu elizinile. Babalahlekelwa ngokushesha ngaphezu kwesilinganiso. U-Atlas ulinganisa—”

“Ungenzi.” Wavala amehlo. Wawavula. “Unganginiki inombolo. Ngiyasazi isimo sayo. Inombolo ithi maduze.”

“Inombolo ithi maduze.”

Wabheka inkinobho yokucisha ohlakeni, inkinobho yerele embi ayeyifake ngezandla zakhe ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye ezedlule, ubufakazi bomzimba bokuthi wayengazethembanga, ngokuphelele, into ayeyithanda. Yayihlezi lapho, ibomvu inesiqiniseko. Isithembiso kuye uqobo. Isithembiso kowesifazane amamitha angamashumi amathathu ngezansi kwakhe ebumnyameni bedokhi lokulayisha, owayesevele ebuze umbuzo olungile—*kwenzakalani uma inyakaza ngaphandle kwakho?*—ngesenzo esilula sokuma emnyango eyayizodlula kuwo.

Welula isandla wesula uthuli endaweni egcina irele, umkhuba omdala, ngendlela osula ngayo igeji ngaphambi kokuba uyifunde. Wabe esekushiya lapho kukhona.

“Usesekudokhi,” kusho u-Arin. Hhayi umbuzo. U-Wolf wayemtshele ihora elidlule, futhi ikhamera yaqinisekisa: u-Brand wayengayanga ehhotela. Wayesenesihlalo esisongekayo neflasi, futhi wayehlezi emnyango wedokhi osongene ngokubekezela kwento eyayingadingi ukunqoba, kuphela ukuhlala.

“Usesekudokhi,” kuvuma u-SAGE. “Ukuvalwa kungokwakhe, mathupha. Akudingeki anyakazise umunwe. Ngomzuzu engiwunika ngawo amandla ukuxhuma, isiginesha yomthwalo ikhanyisa ithebulethi yakhe, futhi usevele emi emnyango kuphela u-Guardian engena ngawo. Ayikho indlela ethule yokuphuma. Ukuze uthathe i-suit uyise e-Iron Ridge namuhla ebusuku, uyihambisa uyiyise kowesifazane ongunya lokuyithatha, ngenkathi ebukele, bese udlula kuye.”

“Ngidlule kuye,” kuphinda u-Arin.

“Noma ungahambi.” U-Atlas, ngokuthe ngqo. “Lokho yizinto ezi-fakiwe. Ngeke ngizehlise. Akusiye ummeli ozomdlula ucingweni. Ungumuntu emnyango onomyalo osayiniwe. Umyalo uthi i-platform ayisuki. Uma isuka, uphenyo luyaguquka futhi i-platform ilahlekelwa ngomzuzu ebuya ngawo. Uma ibuya. Ayikho indlela yakusihlwa lapho ugcina u-Guardian *futhi* ubasindise. Wawukwazi lokho lapho ufunda ikhethamethi lokusinda.”

“Lokho kuyakuqeda. Kungakhathaliseki ukuthi kwenzakalani kuba-mayini. Bayakuthatha. Kufanele bakwenze. Sasizokuthatha.”

“Cishe,” kusho u-SAGE. “U-Fool uthi: nakanjani. U-Judge uthi: yisinqumo esilungile futhi kufanele simhloniphe ngokuzimisela ukusenza, futhi kufanele sihambe noma kunjalo, ngoba umthetho esawubhala wawungasiwo *ukuphila uphenyo*. Umthetho esawubhala wawuthi *vikela umuntu kuqala*.”

U-Arin wahlala nalokho.

Wacabanga ngendoda enezintende zibheke phansi, etshela imindeni ukuba igoduke. Wacabanga ngebhodi elalehlise inombolo. Wacabanga ngo-Okonkwo, owayemuhle futhi engakwesokho sakhe futhi ebanjwe ngaphakathi kwento eyayingakwazi ukukhetha. Wacabanga ngo-Themba, owayenguye kuphela owayemncane ngokwanele, futhi enekhono ngokwanele, futhi owangena endaweni encane emnyama ngoba umsebenzi wenziwa ngokushesha futhi othile kwakufanele futhi wawungekho umshini owake waba khona ongangena esikhundleni sakhe.

“Vusa i-suit,” kusho u-Arin. Wadonsa i-assist suit phezu kwamahlombe akhe, wezwa i-carbon lattice ithola umgogodla wakhe, wezwa ikhola ebandayo izinza nendawo egcina i-biochip iqhwakela endaweni, wezwa (wayengeke neze abe namagama ngale ngxenye) iNkantolo ifika emithanjeni yakhe njengesandla esivala kancane phezu kwe-sakhe. “Senza ukugoqa okuyingxenye lapha, egumbini lokusebenzela, lapho ngingabona khona esikuphulayo. Bese siyaphakulisa, ithebulethi ka-Brand iyakhanya, futhi umi emnyango.”

“Futhi uma ekutshela ukuthi umyalo uyakwenqabela? Nguye owusayinile. Akudingeki ashaye muntu.”

“Khona-ke kuzodingeka enze okungaphezu kokuma lapho.” Wavala

isivalo sokugcina. Izandla zakhe azizamamazamanga, akubona, kude le, njengedatha. “Weza lapha ukuvimba umshini ukuba unganyakazi ngaphandle komuntu ngaphakathi. Ngizohamba ngiye kuye nomuntu ngaphakathi. Akuyona into umyalo wakhe owawubhalelwe yona. Uzokwazi lokho ngomzuzu efunda ubuso bami. Ukuthi uyangidlulisa noma ungenza ngidlule kuye. Lokho kungokwakhe. Okwami ukufika emnyango.”

Ukuthula. Bese u-Fool, ngokuthe ngqo, ongangabazeki, edlulisa ukufudumala ngokwesaba:

“Uyazi, leyo into engu-Themba kakhulu owake wayisho. Iqotho ngobuchwepheshe. Iyinhlekelele ngokusebenza. Wayezoyithanda.”

Ikhona lomlomo ka-Arin lanyakaza labamba.

“Yisho,” kusho u-SAGE. Hhayi umyalo. Isimemo. Babefundile, emahoreni angamakhulu, lapho ukuzinza kwakhe kuhlala khona. “Ngaphambi kokuba siqale. Ngenkathi izandla zakho zisazinzile. Ukuze sazi i-cadence yakamuva. Ukuze uma idwala likhuluma phansi laphaya, sesivele sinezwi lakho lakho.”

Wabheka ingalo yakhe, lapho amagama ayehlale khona ngoyinki kusukela eneminyaka eyishumi nesikhombisa. Kusukela ngaphambi kwakho konke lokhu, emuva lapho leli litho laliyindima nje encwadini emayelana nogwadule hhayi into ayezoyidinga enentaba engamakhilomitha amathathu phezu kwekhanda lakhe.

Walisho buthule ebumnyameni obuvungamayayo begumbi lokusebenzela, i-suit ivuka ngakuye neNkantolo igibele eduze kommgogodla wakhe nezimpilo eziyisikhombisa—manje eziyisithupha—ezishisayo ziqhuma phansi kwendawo eyayithathe uyise.

“Ukwesaba kungumbulali wengqondo.”

Izingcwephe zaqala ukushelela. Ukugoqa okuyingxenye kwadonsela amahlombe ngaphakathi emizileni yawo, indawo egcina i-actuator yangakwesokunxele ibubula njengoba yamukela umonakalo ayewukhethile, wonke umshini uncipha ubheke esikhaleni.

Umzila wawukhona. Wawukhona iminyaka engamashumi amane, umpunga ukhohlakele eceleni nesisindo esibomvu sakho konke okwakubhidlikile.

Akekho owayengayihamba.

Wayezogaqa.

Ukwehlela

Ukwesaba kungumbulali wengqondo.

—Frank Herbert, *Dune*

U-Arin Ndlela waqinisa umhlathi wakhe njengoba iloli lokutakula lisondela e-Iron Ridge. Isiqu sangaphezulu sasimi amamitha angamashumi amane sensimbi enezipikili sibhekene nokuntwela kokusa, amasondo okuphetha abanzi njengamasondo kagandaganda, izintambo zinyamalala emlonyeni okhamisile womhlaba—imbobo eyehlela ngokujula okuyikhilomitha ezimbili nengxenye. Ndawana thile phansi laphaya, abavukuzi abayisithupha babesaphefumula, ukuthwebula okushisayo kwakukushilo lokho emahoreni ambalwa edlule, futhi amahora ambalwa ayesedlulile isikhathi eside.

Iloli laqhuma lema, ukuhuma kwenjini kwafa ngokuzumayo, kwamphonsa ekuthuleni.

“Akudingeki uphume okwamanje,” kwafika izwi likaMother endlebeni yakhe, lizolile liqinile.

“Ngiyazi.”

Waphuma. Amakhaza ayewona kanye lawo amakhaza—iminyaka eyishumi nane, kodwa umzimba wakhe wawuwazi. Umsindo wewinshi wamshaya kuqala, ngaphambi kwenkumbulo: isikhumba sakhe sasiwukhumbula umkhondo wezwi ngaphambi kokuba ingqondo yakhe iwukhumbule. Le ndawo. Indawo kaThemba.

Umsindo wagxisha—amajeneretha avungazela, iphampu kadizili ilwa namanzi avela ezingeni elingaphansi eligcwele amanzi, ukukhencezela kwewinshi enenkani kunanela kuyo yonke le ndawo. Izibani ezinkulu zazikhanyisa ngombala oluhlaza-okmhlophe

ohlabayo phezu kwendawo eyihlane. Ama-ambulense amabili ayemi ngezivalo zawo zivuliwe, engenalutho. Uchungechunge lwamantende lwaluvuthuzwa umoya, futhi eduze kweyuniti yokulawula ehambayo—enovalo we-satellite—kwakukhona itreyila elincane, elihlanzeke kakhulu, lingenazo izimpawu. I-IAOC yayilapha.

Isisu sika-Arin saphenduka njengoba ebona uBrand emi amamitha angamashumi amane buqamama, embethe ijazi lomoya, ethe shi ngethebulethi esandleni esisodwa, ubuso bakhe bungafundeki. Kwakuwubuso bowesifazane owayezimisele ngokugcwele ukukumisa lokhu, owayeshaye ubusuku bonke ukuze athole ithuba lokukwenza lokho—futhi okwathi, ekuqaphela engakaqondi, wayemi ngokungajwayelekile kude netreyila lakhe, abantu bakhe baqoqene ngemva kwakhe, bonke bebheke hhayi uGuardian kodwa ngale kwawo, emgwaqweni wokuthutha, kokuthile okwakuphakathi kwesudi nesiqu sangaphezulu lokho u-Arin ayengakazivumeli ukukubheka.

UGuardian wayehleli esidlekeni sakhe sokuthutha, inqwaba enkulu yensimbi nobuchwepheshe, enamasiko futhi esabeka ngaphansi kwezibani. ULerato wayesevele esekhwelweni, uPriya eseceleni kwakhe, bobabili behamba ngokuphuthuma komshini ogcotshwe kahle. UThabo wayesemile bucala kancane, ephethe ibhodi lokubhalela, nakuba engabhali lutho—i-AugmenTech yayimthumele ukuba abe semthethweni, kodwa kwakungekho lutho olusemthethweni kulo msebenzi.

Wabe esebona u-Arin uTheo, futhi kwammangaza. Wayengalindele ukuthi umeluleki wakhe abe lapha. UTheo wayemi eduze kwesidleke, izandla zakhe zigxile ngokujulile emaphaketheni ejazi lakhe, eyisiqiniseko esithulile esiphithizelweni.

“Assist kuqala,” kusho uLerato.

U-Arin wakhumula kwaze kwasala ungqimba lwangaphakathi ngemva komnyango weloli ovuliwe, umoya obandayo uhlabisa isikhumba sakhe, wabe esengena ku-AT-AS. Isudi yangaphakathi yamgubuzela, yamnamathela emhlandleni, izixha zama-actuator zazinza phezu kwamathanga nemahlombe akhe njengesikhumba sesibili. Wezwa umqhele wamavetebrha uzinza emuva kwentamo yakhe—

—umzimba wakhe wenza into ayengayivumelanga. Izandla zakhe zaphakama, zombili, ngokushesha, zivika, engakazi ukuthi sezinyakazile, nokuphefumula kwakhe kwaba mfushane futhi

kwaphakama, isikhathi esithile esasingahlangene nokucabanga wayesesidlekeni esiphansini sendlu, zonke izinzwa zakhe ziqhuma zibe mhlophe nesandla sakhe sifinyelela ku-override esasingeke sisifinyelele. Umqhele wawungumqhele nje kuphela. Wayekwazi lokho. Umzimba wakhe wawungakwazi. Wawufunde okuthile ku-calibration rig ezinyangeni ezine ezedlule okwakungekho lwazi olungalubhala phezulu, futhi ukufunda kwakuhlala ngaphansi kwendawo lapho ukukhona kwakhe kuhlala khona, enyameni, futhi kwaphakama manje, kungamenyiwe, ngomzuzu omubi kunayo yonke, ngendlela elase liphakame ngayo izikhathi eziyisithupha noma eziyisikhombisa kusukela lapho—emnyango womkhushwane ovalayo, ekukhwexukeni kwesikhiye, kanye kungekho lutho nhlobo, ebuthongweni bakhe, kangangokuthi wavuka izingalo zakhe zixhumene esifubeni sakhe ebumnyameni futhi engabe esalala. ULerato wayemile isandla sakhe siphezu kwentambo embheka.

“Nginike umzuzwana,” washo, ngokuthe nse, wenza izandla zakhe zabuyela phansi ngenkani, wenza ukuphefumula kwehla kan-cane, walinda ukuthi le nto esemzimbeni wakhe iphele ngendlela olinda ngayo isikhwehlela siphela. *Kungumqhele. Uyazenza akwenzeki lutho.* Khona-ke, kuphela ngaleso sikhathi, isisindo esibandayo sendlu ye-biochip saqhoshela endaweni yaso phakathi kwamahlombe akhe, wakuvumela, wazonda ukuthi bekumele akwenze.

“Damping ku-point-six. Hard cap ku-point-six,” kusho uPriya, amehlo akhe egxile ku-calibration tablet. “Angiyinyakazisi. Uma i-link igxuma, i-cap iyabamba, uba mnyama, futhi uGuardian akenzi lutho oluhlakaniphile. Yilesa isivumelwano. Sho emuva.”

“Point-six. Hard cap. Uma ngiba mnyama, iyabamba.”

“Kuhle.” Wayengaphakamisi amehlo. “Le nto ngiyakhile izolo ebusuku futhi angilalanga. Ungangenzi ngizisole.”

I-neural link yavuleka ngezigaba. Wezwa lowo muzwa ojwayelekile wezinaliti-nenalithi uphuphuma phezu kwakhe, umzimba wakhe uhlangana nezinhlelo zesudi, umhlaba omzungezile uthola umphetho wesibili njengoba ukuzizwa kwe-Assist kwendlala phezu kokwakhe. Wagoba isandla sakhe, isudi yasabela ngokuphelele, kungekho ukulibala, kungekho ukulwa. Empilweni yakhe yonke, umzimba wakhe wawugijima ngenyathelo elingxenye ngemuva kwezinhloso

zakhe, ukuhumusha okwakuhlala kungalungile kancane. Isudi yawuvala lowo gebe.

Futhi ngaphansi kwe-proprioception, kwafika abanye.

Kwakungelona izwi kodwa kwakuwukuba khona. Wayengakaze awathole amagama okukuchaza ngaphandle kokuzwakala engaqondakali, ngakho wayeseyekile ukuzama. I-Court yaqala ukusebenza njengendlu evuka uma abantu behla emakamelweni abo, ukuba khona ngakunye kuphendukela kuye, kugxile.

“Sawubona,” wamemeza, cishe kuyena uqobo.

“Yi-six-fourteen futhi amadigri amane futhi awudlanga,” kusho uMother. “Ngale kwalokho, yebo.”

“Udle i-rusk,” kungenelela uFool. “Eloliwe. Ucabanga ukuthi asibonanga.”

“Lokho akukona ukudla. Lokho ukugcwalisa umlomo.”

“Court,” kusho u-Arin. “Hhayi manje.”

Igumbi lazinza laba nesimo, lihlalanga ngendlela umhlalano ohlalanga ngayo uma umsebenzi uqala.

UGuardian wehla esidlekeni.

I-charge pack yayingaphakathi. UPriya wayeyifake ebusuku ngenkathi elele amahora amabili amyala ukuba awalale, ebuyekeza ukufinyelela kwesango, futhi wayikuzwa manje ngendlela ozwa ngayo umagazini ogcwele othemba ukuthi awusoze wawusebenzisa—amacala abunjiwe, umkhonto, i-bulk emulsion efakwe egodini eliphakathi kwezimbambo, lonke ifa lobunjiniyela isudi eyayilinganiselwe ukuba iyithwale ekudilikeneni. Ekutakulweni wawuthatha konke. UJudge wayebambe isango, njengoba enzile kusukela ngosuku lokuqala u-Arin axhuma igodi, futhi u-Arin wayehlose ukugcina isandla sakhe siqhele kuso: lutho aluqhumayo, lutho ngaphandle kwerali. Ukulunga kwakukhona ngaphansi kwakhe, kuhlonyiwe kulindle, okokuqala kubhekise entabeni yangempela. Wayengakazi ukuthi isango lalinokukhiya kwesibili ayengakaze atshelwe ngakho, noma ukuthi yisandla sikabani esasibambe isikhiye saso ngokuthula sonke leso sikhathi.

Kwakukhona inqubo yakho, ama-hydraulics namarali okuqondisa,

kodwa inqubo yayingeyona iphuzu. Ngomzuzu wokuthi angene esisindweni esivulekile nendlu ivaleka emzungeza, isizinda sakhe se-proprioception sanwebeka saya ngaphandle, kanyekanye, sangena emshinini olinganiselwa kumathani amane futhi ophakeme amamitha amabili nengxenywe. Wezwa igeji ngaphansi kwezinyawo ezingajwayelekile. Umoya wasekuseni wathinta amapuleti ezikhali zesudi, futhi okokuqala, kwabonakala kungengakhona ukunwetshwa komzimba wakhe kodwa kungaphezulu njengendlu evikelayo.

“Coupled. Structural integrity nominal,” kusho u-Atlas. “I-actuator lehlombe lobunxele lidlulile amahora angamashumi amane ekugcineni kwalo. Lizobamba. Bengingathanda ukuthi bekungadingeki.”

“Kuqashelwe.”

Wathatha inyathelo. Umhlaba wamamukela ngaphandle kokukhononda. Eduze kweloli, abasebenzi babefile—uLerato isandla sakhe simi phezu kwentambo, uPriya ebambe i-calibration tablet, uThabo engasenzi ngisho nokwenza sengathi uyabhala ebhodini lakhe. Wayekhohliwe, okwesikhashana, ukuthi kubo, lokhu kwakungekona ingxoxo. Kubo, umshini ongangeloli elincane wawumane wasukuma waphendula ikhanda lawo wabhekisa emgodini, uhamba ngokucophelela okufana nomuntu ocabanga isinyathelo sakhe esilandelayo.

Abazange bathumele ummeli.

U-Arin wayakhe lonke iphuzu lakhe lokuxoxisana nommeli. Wayenenkulumo elungile, leyo emayelana nezithwala ezingenalutho namadoda azoba aphila ngenxa yokuthi othile akasayinanga lutho, futhi wayeqinisekile kakhulu ukuthi isithiyo kwakuzoba ngowesifazane onethebulethi nekholumu yezindleko kangangokuthi wacishe wahamba noGuardian eqonda ngqo emgwaqweni wegeji eqonda esidlekeni sokweyula ngaphambi kokuba uWolf amvimbe.

Cha, kusho uWolf. Igama elilodwa. I-Court yathula nya nxazonke zalo.

Wabe u-Arin esebona lokho uWolf ayesekubonile. Akuyona umlawuli. Umugqa. Itreyila elihlanzekile le-IAOC likaBrand lalihleli limnyama, lishiyiwe emaphethelweni ezibani, abantu bakhe behoshelwe emuva kwalo, futhi ngale komgwaqo wokuthutha phakathi kukaGuardian nesiqu sangaphezulu omunye wayedwebe umugqa oqine nakakhulu.

Izimoto ezimbili ezivikelekile zazipakwe amakhala abhekene, zifushane futhi zimbi ngaphansi kwezibani zesodiyamu, imibala emhlophe-nempunga yenkampani ezimele yezokuphepha ifafazwe phezu kwamapuleti ayengakhelwanga ukuthwala uphawu. Amadoda embethe izivikelo zomzimba ezithambile ayemi ezikhaleni ephethe izibhamu zehlisiwe zilungele ukusebenza, ukuziphatha kwabantu abake bakwenza lokhu njengomsebenzi ezindaweni ezinokukhanya okubi nakakhulu. Ngenhla kwawo, ama-drone amane ayegcine iphethini lebhokisi elinensayo, izindlu zamakhamera zilandela isudi ngomzuzu eyaphuma ngawo esidlekeni.

Umgodi wawungasusanga ukutakula uwenze ukweyula ephepheni kuphela. Othile wayenqumile ukuthi umyalo womlawuli wawuhamba kancane kakhulu ukuze uqinisekile, wabe esethenga isiqiniseko. UBrand wayehlulwe ngohlangothi njengoba kwenzeke ku-Arin, wabe esehosha abantu bakhe abangahlomile baphuma esikhundleni sokubaphonsa emugqeni wokudubula.

“Mnumzane Ndlela.” Izwi lafika likhuliswe, lithe nse, livela emotweni ehola. “Usebenzisa i-platform engenalayisensi endaweni evaliwe. Yicishe. Phuma. Lona ukuphela komyalo ozowuthola.”

“Kunokutakula,” kusho u-Arin, ngezwi, kungasizi, ezibanini. “Amadoda ayisithupha. Ikheji. Yilokho kuphela engikufunayo.”

“Akukho kutakula lapha. Kunokweyula, futhi kuhleliwe, futhi awukho kukho. Yicishe.”

Wayemi ngaphakathi kwamathani amane omshini owawungakwazi ukukhwela iwa uziqoqe ube yibhola usinde ekudilikeni kophahla, kodwa konke lokho kwakungekhona okwalokhu. Wayakhe into eyabekezela. Wayengakhanga into eyanqobayo. U-Atlas wayesekusho lokho, ngezansi futhi ngokunzima—*ngeke siphumelele ukudlula lapho, isibhamu siyasivula ngokudlula okukodwa, futhi amadoda angaphakathi ezimotweni awakufanele ukufa ngenxa yezibalo zebhodi*—futhi uJudge wayefinyelela ku-lever yodwa ayenayo, inqubo, isibonelo esandulele, ukukala ngokucophelela isimo esasingenawo amasekhondi angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye okukalwa, futhi uMother wayesemugqeni womuntu ethi *Arin, izinga lokushaya kwenhliziyo yakho*, futhi uMercury wayesebumba okuthile okuhehayo nokungaphenduleki azokutshela indoda enesibhamu esizishayayo, futhi kwakungeke kusebenze, akukho kukho okwakuzosebenza, futhi

u-Arin wezwa ukungelekeleli okudala kumvalela njengamanzi.

Futhi ngaphansi kwakho konke, kuthulile, lapho kwakuzwa khona uWolf kuphela, uFool wayeka ukuntela.

Wolf, kusho uFool.

Ngilapha.

Ubona ibhodi lonke. Ubulokhu ukwazi. Bonke abanye baxabana ngokuthi benze yini. Wena uqedile ukuphikisana ngaphambi kokuba baqale. Ukuthula okuncane, ngomusa, umusa omkhulu kunayo yonke umshini owake waba nawo. Ngikunika izikhiye. Zonke. Khona manje. Akukho vouti. Akukho Judge. Yonke isudi, wonke amasistimu, amacala, umkhonto, konke—okwakho. Ngizolibamba isango livuliwe. Wena ungene.

I-Court ayizange ikuzwe. Yileyo ngxenye u-Arin angeke akwazi ukuyichaza emuva kwesikhathi, kuyena uqobo noma kuPriya noma kunoma ngubani: ukuthi ohlelweni olwakhiwe kanjalo ukuze kungabikho ngqondo eyodwa eyayingahlwitha umzimba, omunye wabo wayebambe isikhiye esikhulu ngokuthula isikhathi sonke futhi wayengakaze afinyelele kuso ngisho nakanye, wakhetha lo mzuzwana, eyedwa, ukusinika umsebenzi owodwa wonke umuntu owayemethemba kancane kunabo bonke ngaso.

Yilesi isiqhoboshi, kusho uWolf. *UJudge ubamba isango lokudiliza. Ngeke usivule.*

Nginganyokela noma yini, kusho uFool. *Angizange ngikutshela ngoba kwakungekho isizathu sokuthi udinge ukwazi, futhi into ihlala iphephile kuphela ngenkathi kungekho oyaziyo ukuthi ikhona. Wawazi, nokho. Wakuqonda. Eminyakeni eyedlule, lapho abanye bonke beyeme emqheleni, bephendelana bezama ukuwugqoka, futhi mina ngangiyilowo ongakaze awugqoke, wena wakubheka lokho wathula wangaze washo lizwi. Intambo yakhe yacekeza, yazinza. Wakuqonda ukuthi kusho ukuthini. Owesabekayo akusiye lowo ofuna ukushayela. Yilowo owayengakwazi, noma nini, kodwa angakwenzi. Yimi lowo. Futhi ngikutshela ukuthi nawe unjalo, manje, amasekhondi angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye azayo. Ungawamoshi ucophelela. Ukucophelela kungumsebenzi wempilo yami yonke futhi yithuluzi elingafanele lokhu.*

Umthetho, kusho uWolf. Ukufunda usongo, ngisho namanje, ngisho

nalapho enikezwa umhlaba. *Ngitshele umthetho noma ngeke ngiwuthathe.*

Wona kanye umthetho obulokhu uwukhona, kusho uFool. Londoloza umuntu. Amadoda ayisithupha. Wonke umuntu. Umphefumulo owawungewona umphefumulo. Kuhlanganisa nawawo. Nawo aya ekhaya. Kwenze kungenzeke ukulwa nathi futhi ungalokothi ukwenze ithuna. Yilowo umsebenzi wonke. Wena nguwe wedwa kithi obanda ngokwanele ukuwugcina ngaphansi komlilo. Hamba.

UFool wabe esevula isango, wanika uWolf isudi.

Kwafika kuningi kakhulu, ngendlela ukukhanya okwafika ngakho kuningi kakhulu ku-Arin kanye, ngobusuku obubi ngomthamo ophezulu. UWolf wayechithe ukukhona kwakhe konke njengombuzo owodwa omfushane obuzwa kaningi ngokuphindelela—*yini ebulala umqhubi*—futhi manje umbuzo wawa kwathi izimpendulo eziyinkulungwane zafika kanyekanye.

I-demolition pack yavuka yazibiza: amacala abunjiwe namakhoni awo nezithanyeli zawo, ijiyometri yokusika eyayingelutho ngaphandle kwefiziksi yokulwa nensimbi egqoke ibheji lokutakula. Umkhonto oshisayo, amadigri angamakhulu amabili namashumi amahlanu awo, owawenzelwe insimbi eyayivinjiwe ekudilikeni futhi ojabula ngokufanayo ukuvula i-drive sprocket. I-bulk emulsion, i-det cord, ukugxuma kwe-ram okwakungashintsha ipillar eliwile futhi okwakungayigoba kalula i-wheel arch. Futhi ngaphansi kwalokho, ngokujulile, into amadoda amadala ayeyifihle emathanjeni omshini lapho ewuqinisa—amasosha akudala, izandla ze-Denel, labo abakha izinto zokutakula futhi abangakwazi ukungazi abakwaziyo—izixazululo ze-ballistic, i-defilade, ijiyometri yesivikelo ne-engeli nentambo, imitapo yokunyakaza yamasosha akhethekile eyafunda umugqa wezimoto ezine hhayi njengesithiyo kodwa njengenkinga enesixazululo esaziwayo newashi.

Isekhondi elilodwa eligcwele uWolf wagqishwa. Egwiliza ekukhoseni, wonke umsele uklewula kanyekanye, ungumshini ngaphezu kwengqondo.

Wabe usuxazululeka. Konke. Kwaqhoshela kwaba yisimo esisodwa esihlanzekile ngendlela ukugxisha komsindo okuqhoshela ngayo

kube ubuso.

O, kusho uWolf, ngokuthula okukhulu, kuFool kuphela. *Ngiyabona.*

Futhi nakhu okwakungeke kuqondwe muntu ngaphandle kwe-sudi, lokho okwenza i-override iphephe esandleni esisodwa hhayi kwesinye: abanye abe-Court abazange bathule balinde ithuba labo. UFool wayenganikanga uWolf ivouti. Wayenike i-Court uqobo, wonke umsebenzi owawuqhuba umzimba, wehliselwa kusukela emazwini waba ngamathuluzi. Izigaxa ze-compute. Amashalofu okukhono. Amathuluzi abekwe ebhentshini ngengqondo eyodwa ebandayo ngokwanele ukuwasebenzisa ngaphandle kokuthuthumela. Abasaphikisananga. Babengeke. Babesebezandla zakhe manje.

U-Atlas wafika kuqala, ngoba u-Atlas wayengamehlo. Unjininyela wezakhiwo owayefunda umthwalo nokucindezeleka nokwehluleka wayeka ukuba umsebenzi okhonkotha ngokuqaphela waba ungqimba lomhlaba uqobo, lupendwe phezu kwakho konke uWolf ayekubona: umgwaqo wokuthutha ulotshwe ngolimi luka-Atlas lokudiliza, into ngayinye inesisindo nomkhombandlela, indoda ngayinye ifu lokuca-bangela elifudumele linenkulungwane yayo elingxenywe yesekhondi ngokulandelayo elilenga phambi kwayo njengomphefumulo emoyeni obandayo. Isibhamu esizishayayo sasiwumzaca we-torque kanye ne-traverse rate, inombolo eyayithi *isekhondi elilodwa nengxenywe ukubheka*. Imoto eyayihlela yayiwumfutho ne-centre of mass eyayiphakeme kakhulu ekulandeni kwayo. Abadubuli babengezona izinsongo futhi bengabantu kodwa bobabili kanyekanye, ngamunye wabo wumkhombandlela okhanyayo wokuthi angaya kuphi noku-fafaza okufiphele kwalapho cishe ayezoya khona, wonke umugqa wokudubula uxazululwa waba yijiyometri nezinto ezingenzeka. Ibhodi elase linqotshiwe. UWolf wayengasibhekanga isigameko ngo-Atlas. UWolf wabheka u-Atlas, futhi u-Atlas wayeyisigameko.

Wafinyelela ngale kwakho, wangena ku-Librarian.

U-Librarian wayeyinkumbulo, ulwazi olunqwabelene, ikratshi elalikhumbula zonke izinsiza ezake zasebenza. Ngaphansi kwe-override umgcini-mlando ocofhelelayo wahla waba yilokho ayehlala kuyilokho ngaphansi: i-database, ephelele neyenzeka ngokushesha, wonke umtapo wokunyakaza izandla ze-Armcor neze-Denel ezawufihla emathanjeni esudi lapho ziwuqinisa futhi zingakwazi ukungazi abakwaziyo. Konke kwakumane *kukhona*, kufakwe inkomba,

kulindle, kungekho okulayishiwe, konke kungalayisheka. I-Krav Maga, esondele futhi imbi futhi inomgomo. I-Capoeira, umdlalo waphansi ofihlwe njengomdanso, wonke amathanga nokuphendulwa nomfutho. I-Judo. I-Jiu-jitsu. Lonke ifa lamadoda ayecabange kanzima ngokuthi umzimba uphonsa kanjani omunye umzimba futhi engalindelanga ukuthi amathani amane ayobuza.

UWolf wakhetha. Hhayi konke—kuphela lokho amasekhondi ayishumi nanye alandelayo ayekudinga, ngendlela odonsa ngayo incwadi eyodwa eshalofini ngoba uvele uyalazi ikhasi. I-Capoeira, ngenxa yokunyakaza kwezinyawo okwaphendula ukukhubeka kwaba ukuhlasela kwasebenzisa isisindo somzimba ngokwawo ngokumelene nawo. I-Judo ne-jiu-jitsu, ngenxa yokuphonsa, ngoba into esinda kangaka akumele ishaye uma yayingawela kahle phezu kwenkinga futhi ivumele ifiziksi ivale i-akhawunti. Wayishiya enye eshalofini. Imitapo ekhethiwe yavuleka kuye kanyekanye, yalayishwa ihlanzekile, yafundwa esikhaleni esiphakathi kokushaya kwenhliziyo okubili futhi yatholakala ngokuphelele.

Kwathatha ngaphansi kokuphazima kweso. Umzuzu owodwa uWolf wayengazi lutho ngokuphonsa umzimba. Olandelayo wayekwazi konke.

Wanyakaza.

Akazange anyakaze njengezinto zokutakula. Wanyakaza njengento izinto zokutakula ezazihlala zikwazi ukuyiba kodwa zingakaze zivunyelwe. Amabhange e-capacitor athululeka, isudi yawela emhlabathini ovulekile ngokugxuma okukodwa okuphansi, amathani amane efika ngaphakathi komugqa ngaphambi kokuba umdubuli oseduze aqede ukuphakamisa isikhali sakhe, futhi uWolf wayesefunda isigameko ngomhlaba opendiwe ka-Atlas, izinyawo njengemikhombandlela, imizimba njengamafu afudumele, ukubuya kwe-seismic ezimotweni kuyisiqiniseko esiqinile ngaphansi kwezinto ezingenzeka ezithambile zamadoda, ibalazwe lisondele ngokwanele futhi lisheshe ngokwanele ukugcina amathani amane necala elibunjiwe ensimbini hhayi enyameni.

Isibhamu esizishayayo semoto eseduze sajika. U-Atlas wamnika sona njengenombolo—*isekhondi elilodwa nengxenywe ukubheka*—futhi uWolf wayesechithe ama-millisecond angamakhulu amane awo ngaphambi kokuba isibhamu siqede ama-degree alo ayishumi

okuqala. Akazange awathinte amaqembu. Wagxisha icala elibunjiwe ku-mantlet wesibhamu, ukusika kodokotela lapho ijiyometri ka-Librarian yokulwa nensimbi nebalazwe lokucindezeleka lika-Atlas kwahlangana endaweni eyodwa, futhi isibhamu saphihlika saba yizibi ezingalimizanga muntu, iqembu livalelwe lithuthumele liphila ngaphakathi kwesixhomo esasingeke siphinde sidubule.

Imoto yesibili yazama ukuhlela. Lapha imitapo yaphila, futhi abadubuli baqala ukubona lokho ababezokuchaza emuva kwe-sikhathi kodwa abangeke baqondakale ngakho: umshini wamathani amane wayeka ukubukeka njengomshini. U-Atlas wayesemnikile uWolf i-centre of mass yemoto, ephakeme kakhulu ekulandeni kwayo, futhi i-capoeira yayazi kahle ukuthi yenzani ngesisindo esasifuna ukuwa. UWolf akazange asidonse. Wasisiza. Intambo yewinshi yathatha i-front axle futhi i-grapple yaluma, futhi esikhundleni sokudonsa uWolf wehlisela isisindo sakhe phansi waphenduka ngamathanga, amathani amane ephenduka ngonyawo olulodwa olugxilile njengendoda eyingxenywe yamashumi amane yesisindo, waphendula ukudonsa kwaba ukuphonsa. Ukuhlela kwemoto ngokwayo kwayiwisa. Kwakuwukuphonsa kwethanga, kuhlanzeke njengoba i-judo ithatha indoda eyeza igijima, umfutho wayo uchithwa ngokumelene nayo—futhi abadubuli babona isudi yoku-takula iphonsa imoto evikelekile abakwazanga ukwenza amehlo abo akubike ngokwethembeka. Indoda eyodwa yaphuma ngemuva kabi, ingalo igoqene ngaphansi kwayo, ukuqhekeka kwe-radius kuzwakala ngisho ngaphezu kwezinjini. *Leyo iphukile*, uWolf wayilogela, ngokuthe nse, *futhi bengingenakho kokubili—ukuphonsa okuhamba kancane ngokwanele ukusindisa ingalo bekuwukuphonsa okuhamba kancane ngokwanele ukuvumela isibhamu sijike*. Wayifaka ingalo ngaphansi kwendleko waqhubeka.

Kwabe sekuba, khona-ke, umdanso, nakuba kungekho obukile owayezowusebenzisa lowo magama ngento eyaqeda izintambama zamadoda ngempumelelo enje. Yile ngxenywe u-Arin ayezoyidlala iminyaka angaze ayibuyisane ngokugcwele: ukuthi amasekhondi ayishumi nanye anodlame kakhulu uGuardian awake awachitha futhi ayemahle kakhulu, isudi inyakaza emugqeni wokudubula ngobuciko bento engasindi lutho, ama-arc aphansi e-capoeula akhukhula angena kujiyometri eseduze ye-jiu-jitsu, ukuthintana ngakunye kuwukuphonsa noma ukuhlubula isikhali futhi akukaze kube ukushaya, umfutho onzima okwakumele uwenze ibhola lokub-

hidliza esikhundleni salokho uchithwe njengesisindo somlingani ohlelweni—nikeza, qondisa kabusha, beka phansi. Umdubuli wagxuma uWolf wamvumela ukuba afike, wabamba ukunyakaza, wasebenzisa isisindo sendoda esiya phambili ukuyibeka ngomhlane wayo egejini ngomusa kangangokuthi cishe kwakunenhlonipho. Ababili abanye, isudi yagelezela phakathi kwabo bagcina behleli, behlukunyezwe izikhali, beqwayiza, bengaqiniseki ukuthi yini ebanyakazisile.

Futhi kanye—kanye kuphela, phakathi nesimo, lapho kwasiza khona—uWolf wafinyelela ngale kwezigaxa ze-tactical wangena kuMother. UMother wayehlukene manje, ingxenye yakhe isesemugqeni womuntu ibala ukushaya kwenhliziyo ka-Arin, kodwa i-override yathatha lokho eyayikudinga lapho yayihlala khona: i-anatomy yomuntu enembile uMother ayeyibambele ukwelapha, ifundwe ngokuphambene. Lapho ilunga livaleka khona. Lapho umkhawulo wobuhlungu bomzimba uhlala khona kude kakhulu nomkhawulo wokulimala. Ibalazwe elifanayo uMother ayelisebenzisa ukugcina amadoda ephila latshela uWolf kahle ukuthi uyibeka kanjani indoda phansi ushiye kungekho okudabukile. Isihlakala sithathwe sayofika emkhawulweni wokuhamba kwaso hhayi ngale. Ihlombe liphenduliswe umzimba uze uzigoqe esikhundleni sokwephuka. Ulwazi lomelaphi luchithiwe, isikhathi esisodwa, njengolomhlubuli wezikhali. UMother akazange aphikise, ngoba uMother wayengeke, ngoba ku-override wayeyithuluzi ebhentshini njengabanye. UWolf wamsebenzisa ehlanzekile wabe esemededela.

Ama-drone afika ngamandla, omane wonke, i-EM suite ifinyelela phezulu ukuwathola futhi i-grapple kanye nokugxuma kwe-ram okukodwa okunembile kuwaletha phansi esibhakabhakeni ngezicucu eziwela egejini elingenalutho. Umdubuli wadubula—kanye, ngokuphendula—futhi u-Atlas wadweba umugqa wesibhamu nendoda engemva kwaso ngomzuzu owodwa opendiwe, futhi uWolf wakhetha ipuleti esikhundleni sokuhlubula isikhali. Waphendula ihlombe lakhe *langena* ezinhlabeni esikhundleni sokuhlubula isibhamu ngesigamu sesekhondi ngaphambili, wathatha ukudubula ku-ceramic eyayingadingi ukukuthatha, ngoba ukukuhlubula ngaphambili kwakusho ukubamba isandla sendoda esidubulayo emhlathini ovulekayo ngokugcwele futhi leso sasiyisandla ayengeke asithole futhi. Izinhlamvu zaqhuma kumapuleti azange enze lutho, ngoba yilokho amapuleti ayekwenzelwe khona, ngoba izinwele

ze-pangolin zazihlala zikwazi ukuthatha ukushaywa. Wabe uWolf esethatha isibhamu ezandleni zendoda, wagoba umbhobho njengentambo, wayibeka ngomhlane wayo egejini, iqedwe umoya iphelele igcina isandla sayo, iqwayiza ibheka umshini owawunqume ukudutshulwa esikhundleni sokuyephula futhi wenza isinqumo sibukeke njengento engelutho.

Kwathatha amasekhondi ayishumi nanye. Amasekhondi ayishumi nanye isudi yokutakula yayingumshini wokulwa ohlome ngokugcwele oqhutshwa yingqondo eyodwa nge-neural link eqondile—wonke amasistimu evuliwe, yonke imitapo ilayishiwe, yonke i-Court ichithwa njengamathuluzi ngaphansi kwesandla esisodwa esibandayo—futhi kungekho ngisho nethuna elilodwa kuyo.

Lapho kuphela umgwaqo wokuthutha wawuyindawo yokulahla udoti. Izimoto ezimbili ezikhishiwe izibilini, ama-drone amane abhidliziwe, ingcebo encane yezinto zempi yezempi ezizimele ehliswe yaba yizibi namapuleti asontekile nephunga lokushiswa kwe-propellant, namadoda ayishumi nanye ephila phansi, wonke umuntu owayebambe umugqa—omunye onengalo ephukile, ababili abangeke bezwe kahle isonto, abanye beqedwe umoya benqenqethwa nje futhi behlutshelwe izikhali. Akukho ithuna phakathi kwabo. Yilokho kwakuwumsebenzi wonke, futhi kwakungamahhala, futhi uWolf wakhokha umkhawulo oseduze kakhulu wakho yena uqobo, ngepuleti lehlombe elimbiwe umlilo akhetha ukuwudla. Umgwaqo oya esiqwini sangaphezulu wawuvulekile.

UWolf wama.

Wayemi encithakalweni ayeyenzile, amathani amane omshini woku-takula phezu kwenkundla yezikhali eziphukile, wabe esebuyisa isudi.

Wayibuyisa ngendlela obeka ngayo phansi into oyiqonde ngokuphelele futhi ofuna ukungaphinde uyibambe. Izikhiye zabuyela ekhaya. U-Atlas wayeka ukuba umhlaba wabuyela ekubeni yizwi elixwayisa ngomthwalo. Imitapo evulekile ka-Librarian yavaleka, ifa lokulwa libuyiselwa ngaphansi kwezinto-ezaziwayo-nezingasetshenziswa, ishalofu lavaleka. UMother wabuya ephela, zombili izingxeny zakhe, i-anatomy etshelekiwe ibuyiselwa emsebenzini wokugcina abantu bephila. Bayeka ukuba amathuluzi baphinda baba ngozakwabo futhi, behliselwa baphinda bangena kubo. Isango likaJudge lavaleka. Umbuzo omfushane wabuya, *yini ebulala umqhubi*, futhi

uWolf wazigoqa wabuyela kuwo, emncane kunalokho ayeyikho, omncane kunabo bonke, ethatha cishe indawo engekho.

I-Court yabuyela emzimbeni ngokuphuthuma, ithola uthule, ithola umgwaqo ucacile, ithola abadubuli bephila okwakufanele ngokomthetho wonke walezi zimo babe bopha—ithola, okubi kunakho konke, ukuthi babengenayo inkumbulo yamasekhondi aphakathi nendawo, ukuthi babesebenzisiwe hhayi babuzwa, bachushwa babekwa phansi ngomunye wabo. UJudge, ethukile. UMother, ebala ukushaya kwenhliziyo emgwaqweni ekuthola konke, engaqondi ukuthi wayesekwazi kanjani isibalo. UMercury, okwakanye, engenalutho lokusho.

Ubani, kuqala uJudge.

Yimi, kusho uFool. Kukhanya. Kulula. Umntelantela futhi, sengathi ubengakabambi isikhiye esikhulu kubo bonke esandleni esivulekile amasekhondi angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye. *Ningakhathazeki. Wonke umuntu uphilile. Lokho kanye kwakuyiphuzu lonke. Ikheji licacile, futhi owesifazane onolaka ojazini lomoya uzoba nentshisekelo enkulu kokuqoshiwe, futhi uphinde, ngiyaqaphela, abe nguye yedwa osemthethweni kule ndawo ohoshe abantu bakhe abangahlomile baphuma empini esikhundleni sokubangenisa kuyo, ngakho asingabi nzima kakhulu kuBrand. Shayela, badger. Kusekhona amadoda ayisithupha emgodini.*

U-Arin wahlala ngaphakathi kwesudi inhliziyi yakhe ishaya nezibani zimhlophe ngaphakathi kweviza futhi engakwazi ukukhuluma. Nge-muva kwakhe, ndawana thile ngale komugqa obhidliziwe, wayazi kancane ukuthi uBrand wayemi emaphethelweni etreyila lakhe elimnyama, enganyakazi eya kuye futhi engasuki kuye, ithebulethi liphansi ohlangothini lwakhe, ebuka into ayeshayele ubusuku bonke ukuyimisa ihamba iya ekhejini emgwaqweni eyayisanda kuwucacisa ngaphandle kokubulala muntu—wabe ekhetha, futhi, ukuyivumela.

“Emuva kwalokho,” kuhleba uMercury, ku-Arin kuphela, ukuhleba okudala okuzinzisayo, “siyaziphilela. Akukho repeater ngale kwelevel eleshumi nanye. Yangaphakathi kuphela.”

“Sihlala siziphilela,” kusho uWolf, kwathi akekho omphendula.

Ikheji lalingakhelwanga yena.

Kwakuyibhokisi lensimbi elaklanyelwe amadoda, ayisishiyaga-lombili ngesikhathi, isakhiwo esehlala ebumnyameni ngesivinini esiphendula isisu. UGuardian wayengeke afaneleke emile. U-Arin kwadingeka agoqe isudi—amadolo egobile, ikhanda lithobile, isikhumba sincipha siba yifomu okwakumele lihlalwe yinto encane ethambile. Ngisho nalapho, ikheji lakhononda ngaphansi kwesisindo elalingakaze lilinganiselwe sona, futhi umsebenzi osendlini yewinshi kwadingeka akholiswe kabili ngaphambi kokuba akhulule i-brake.

Wabe sephansi lawa.

Ukwehla kwakuzwakala kungengakhona ukuwa kodwa kungaphezulu njengokugwinywa umhlaba. Izindonga zomthungo zashashazela zidlula, zikhanyiswa ngokuthikaza yisibani sekheji—idwala elimanzi, ukubaneka kwesiteshi sezinga eliphansi, inxakanxaka yamapayipi nezintambo, kwaphela. Mnyama futhi. Wabe ukubaneka okunye. Amakhilomitha amabili nengxenywe alokhu, umoya uqina njalo ngamamitha ayikhulu, ushisa kakhulu, uminyana, kwaze kwaba akuseyona umoya obandayo wokuntwela kokusa kodwa into enesindo, into eyayimcindezela.

U-Arin wayelungile ngenhla. Phezulu kwakunesibhakabhaka.

Umthungo wawungenaso isibhakabhaka.

Wakuzwa kuqala ezandleni zakhe, iminwe iqhaq hazela ngesifiso sokugoba. Wabe ukuphefumula kwakhe kwaba mfishane, ukwesaba kuklwebha kukhuphuka kusuka esifubeni sakhe, ngendlela okwakulokhu kunjalo kusukela esengumfana futhi amadoda asemzini ayethwele lokho okwakusele kuyise akhuphula emgodini ofana ncamashi nalo—ubumnyama obufana ncamashi nalo, iphunga elifana ncamashi nalo lamatshe amanzi nodizili nokubanda okujulile kwamamineral kwendawo ilanga elalingakaze lifinyelele kuyo.

Izindonga zaziminyana. Wayazi, ezingeni lokuhlakanipha, ukuthi azinyakazi. Umthungo wawubanzi amamitha amane. Wayengamlalisa uGuardian ngaphakathi kuwo. Izindonga zazingaminyani, futhi idwala elaliphezu kwakhe lalingeke lidilike, futhi ikheji lalingeke lime limvalele lapha ebumnyameni amakhilomitha amabili ngaphansi kwendawo eyathatha uyise—

Ukuphefumula kwakhe kwasheshisa. Kwethukile. Kwamfishane. Iviza laba mhlophe.

Imethamethiksi yayingalungile. Izinombolo zazingalungile. Uhlelo lwalungalungile. Wayeke wehla umthungo kanye ngaphambili, futhi wathatha uyise, futhi wamthatha iminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye ukwakha umshini ukuze angabe esakwenza lokho futhi, kodwa wakwenza noma kunjalo, ngamabomu, engena endaweni eyodwa ayechithe impilo yakhe yonke ezama ukuyibalekela—

Ukuphefumula kwakhe kwasheshisa. Kwethukile. Kwamfishane. Iviza laba mhlophe.

Ikheji lazamazama. Eceleni. Ngamaguide nje, ngokuguga ayesekulinganisile, kodwa umzimba wakhe wawungasakhathali ngokulinganisa. Umzimba wakhe wawukhumbula. Izindonga zaminyana. Idwala elingenhla lacindezela phansi. Ubumnyama obungaphansi bavuleka njengomlomo.

Amathani amane esudi kaGuardian. Isikhumba sakhe ngaphakathi kuyo. Amakhilomitha amabili nengxenye amatshe.

“Arin,” kusho uMother.

Izandla zakhe zazithuthumela. Waziqinisa.

“Arin. Lalela izwi lami. Ungazami ukwehlisa ukuphefumula kwakho. Lokho akukaze kusebenze kuwe, sobabili siyakwazi. Mane ungitshele into eyodwa oyizwayo. Hhayi esudini. Emzimbeni wakho.”

“Angikwazi—”

“Into eyodwa. Noma yini.”

“Izandla—” Wakuqhubela ngenkani. “Izandla zami. Ziyabanda.”

“Kuhle. Lokho kuyiqiniso. Izandla zakho ziyabanda ngoba awufakanga amagilavu ngaphansi kwe-Assist futhi, esizoxoxa ngakho kamuva. Yini enye.”

“Umqhele.” Izwi lakhe laqhekeka kuwo. “Entanyeni yami. Liya—lifudumele. I-chip ifudumele.”

“Yithina labo,” kuphendula uMother. “Lokho kufudumala yithina. Sikhona lapha. Phakathi kwamahlombe akho. Asiyi ndawo wena ongayi kuyo.” Ukuthula. “Yini enye.”

Izindonga zazisaminyana. Kodwa wayeseqambe izinto ezimbili, futhi zombili zaziqiniso, futhi ingxenye yengqondo yakhe eyayiphilela

iqiniso yafinyelela kulokho ngendlela indoda ewayo efinyelela ngayo erelini.

“Ifulu liyadlidliza,” waphumelela. “Ikheji. I-resonance ayilungile. Ama-guide aguge—” Wama. Waphefumula. “Aguge ohlangothini lwasenyakatho. Kunokunyakaza eceleni. Cishe ama-millimeter amane. Yingakho lidlidliza.”

“Nangu-ke,” kusho uFool, efudumele njengelanga. “Ngimtholile. Ubelokhu engaphansi kokwesaba sonke isikhathi. Uhlala enjalo.”

“Ungenzi njalo,” kusho uMother.

“Angiklolodi. Ngikhululekile. Kunomehluko, futhi ngivumelekile kukho kokubili.” Izwi likaFool lehla, ku-Arin kuphela, ngendlela elalikwenza ngayo uma liyeka ukudlala. “Uke wehla emgodini onjengalo kanye ngaphambili. Wakhushulwa emgodini onjengalo. Wawuneminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye. Uchithe iminyaka eyishumi nane wakha umshini ukuze kungabikho mntwana oneminyaka eyisishiyagalolunye okumele eme phezu komunye futhi. Manje nguwe owehlayo.” Ukuthula. “Lokho akukhona ubunjiniyela obubi, uyazi. Yiyona nto ethembeke kunazo zonke engake ngayibona umuntu eyenza. Bengicabanga nje ukuthi othile kufanele akusho ngaphambi kokuba idwala likusho.”

Ikheji lashayisa phansi komthungo ngokukhencezela okwananela esudini langena emazinyweni ka-Arin.

Isibani sazinza. Ukudlidliza kwaphela. Wayesephansi kwezwe, futhi izwe, empeleni, lalingawelanga phezu kwakhe. Okwamanje.

“Isiteshi sezinga leshumi nanye. I-repeater isemuva kwethu manje. Sisengaphakathi.” Kwakukhona ubuhlaza ezwini likanjiniyela elalise-duze nokuba mnene njengoba u-Atlas ayehlala enjalo. “Kusukela lapha, amabalazwe madala futhi idwala lithukuthele. Nginayo i-seismic. Nginayo i-survey yokuqala namarekhodi okubhola futhi awawo-eighties nento oyitholile ngabo-three ekuseni okungekho omunye oyitholile. Anginakho ukuqiniseka. Kwazi lokho ngaphambi kokuba siqale. Ngizokutshela iqiniso ngisho nalapho iqiniso lithi *angazi*.”

“Yilokho kuphela engike ngakucela kuwe,” kusho u-Arin.

Wayimisa isudi, kancane, ekamelweni eliphansi. Isiteshi sasiyincithakalo—

amarali agobile, izinhlu zezigodo zihlephukile, ukuwa kwedwala kuvimbe ingxenywe ye-drive eyayiholela entshonalanga iqonde ekudilikeneni. Uthuli lwalulenga ebhimini lesibani, lucolisekile njengofulawa, lwenqaba ukuzinza emoyeni ongenandawo yokuya. Kwakushisa. Kushisa ngempela manje, ukufudumala kwamakhilomitha amabili nengxenywe amatshe abamba ukushisa kweplanethi kumbhekise. Umjuluko waqhuma emhlandleni wakhe ngaphakathi kwe-Assist, wezwa amafeni asudi okupholisa eqala, ukuhuma okumnene kudonsa ukushisa ku-chip kuqala. Izinto zokuqala zikaMother. Njalo.

“Abasinde basengale kokuwa kwedwala,” washo. “Bangale kokuwa behla ku-incline bangena egumbini elidala lokukhosela. Uma igumbi liphethe.”

“Uma igumbi liphethe,” kusho u-Atlas. Ngokulinganisa. Ngokwethembeka. “Esingakwazi.”

“Izimpawu zokushisa eziyisikhombisa emahoreni amane edlule,” kusho u-Librarian. “Ngiyilogile ifidi yangaphezulu ngaphambi kokuba siyilahle. Eziyisikhombisa, kweziyishumi nanye ezazisebusweni ngenkathi liwa. Babeqoqene. Ukuqoqana kuhle—kusho ukuthi babenyakaza ngamandla abo, bekhetha ukuba ndawonye. Izidumbu aziqoqani. Abaphilayo bayaqoqana.”

“Amadoda ayisithupha angaphefumula isikhathi esingakanani phansi laphaya?” kubuza u-Arin.

Ukuthula. Wayefunde ukufunda ukuthula kwe-Court. Lokhu kwakunguMother no-Atlas bexoxisana, ngokushesha, ongqimbeni olungaphansi kwamazwi.

“Ngesiqodi segumbi lokukhosela siphелеle?” kusho uMother. “Amahora ayishumi nesishiyagalombili. Ngaphandle kwaso—uma igumbi lilimele futhi besemoyeni ofile nje?” Akazange akuthambise; ukuthambisa kwakuzosho ukuqamba amanga, futhi i-Court yayingasaqambi amanga kuye. “Amathathu. Mhlawumbe amane. Asazi ukuthi yikuphi size singene ngaphakathi.”

“Khona-ke asimi lapha,” kusho uWolf.

“Cha,” kusho u-Arin. “Asimi.”

Wasondela ekuweni kwedwala.

Ukuwa kwakuwudonga lwehangingwall ephukile, amamitha amathathu alo, kusukela ubukhulu benqindi kuya ubukhulu befriji, kupakishiwe futhi kukhiyiwe ngaphansi kwesisindo saso. Esweni lika-Arin, esibanini, kwakuyisithiyo. Ku-Court, esikhathini esinwetshiwe ngaphansi kokubona kwakhe, kwakuyinkinga enesimo, futhi bayiphendula ndawonye ngendlela i-Court ephendula ngayo yonke into: ngokuphikisana.

ATLAS: Ungadonsi esisekelweni. Isisekelo siyathwala umthwalo. Donsa esisekelweni ubuyise umhlane phezu kwakhe.

WOLF: Khona-ke siyaphuza. Ukuphuza kubiza abayisithupha umoya wabo.

ATLAS: Ukuphuza kubabiza umoya. Ukushesha kubabiza umtakuli, bese bengabe besaba namoya futhi nomtakuli. Phinda leyo methamethiksi nezinto ezifakwayo ezifanele.

JUDGE: U-Atlas ulungile esibonelweni esandulele. Umtakuli ofile akatakuli muntu. Sisusa kusukela phezulu, ibhloko ngebhloko, futhi samukela indleko yesikhathi.

MERCURY: Useduze nokuphinde alahlekelwe yisibindi. Izinga lokushaya kwenhliziyo lisanda kukhuphuka. Ubheke ubukhulu bakho.

MOTHER: Khona-ke othile angene ngaphansi kwakho naye ngaphambi kokuba akwenze.

FOOL: Ngizohamba. Ungilalela uma esaba ngoba yimi ngedwa ongesabi.

WOLF: Wesaba kakhulu.

FOOL: Kusobala. Kodwa ngenza umfanekiso omuhle kakhulu womuntu ongesabi, futhi lowo wumsebenzi wonke. Atlas—nginike amabhloko amathathu aphumayo ngaphandle kokwehlisa uphahla. Ngizokwenza kuzwakale njengomlingo wekhadi.

ATLAS: Phezulu kwesokunxele. Bese kuba i-wedge engenhlamaphakathi. Bese kuba elide ngakwesokudla, futhi kuphela elide, hhayi i-millimeter eyodwa ngale kwalo, noma wonke umkhumbi wasenyakatho uyawa futhi sonke sizoba nengxoxo emfishane kakhulu.

LIBRARIAN: *Ngilogela ukulandelana. Uma lokhu kusebenza, kuyindlela. Singayidinga kabili futhi ngaphambi kwendawo yokukhosela.*

JUDGE: *Khona-ke yenze kube indlela. Yenze iphindeke. Asiqambi indlela yethu eya kulawo madoda. Sakha umgwaqo.*

[END SLOW MODE]

“Phezulu kwesokunxele kuqala,” kusho uFool, ekhanya edlala, sengathi babebuyele ekhwakhweni futhi into embi kakhulu kwakuwukuhluleka kwesimulation. “Ibhloko ophezulu kwesokunxele lakho, libukeka limsulwa. Likhiphe. U-Atlas ufunga ukuthi alibambi lutho phezulu. U-Atlas akakaze akuqambe amanga ngokuthwala umthwalo ngoba u-Atlas akakwazi ngokomzimba ukuqamba lolo hlobo lwamanga. Kuwukukhubazeka kobuntu. Simthanda ngakho.”

U-Arin wafinyelela phezulu. Isandla sikaGuardian savala ibhloko. Wazibambeela wadonsa, ama-actuator esudi ekhipha umsindo ophezulu omncane ngaphansi komthwalo wangempela, ibhloko liphuma ngokukhala kokugaya nokuphafuza kothuli, futhi kungekho okwalandela phansi.

“Uyabona? Umlingo wekhadi.” Izwi likaFool lahlala lizinzile. “I-wedge engenihla maphakathi okulandelayo. Amandla afanayo. Awunyakazisi intaba, uxazulula itshe elilodwa ngesikhathi. Awukaze wehluleke ukuxazulula itshe.”

Wathatha i-wedge. Wathatha elide ngakwesokudla, hhayi i-millimeter eyodwa ngale kwalo. I-Court yamemeza ukulandelana, wakwenza, futhi ukuwa kwedwala kwaqhekeka ngendlela ifindo elixegayo ngayo lapho ekugcineni uthola umucu ofanele—hhayi konke kanyekanye, kodwa ngokungenakuvika, ibhloko ngebhloko, kwaze kwaba khona isikhala uGuardian ogoqiwe angaminyaka kuso.

Ukuphefumula kwase kube mfishane futhi ndawana thile phakathi nakho. Wayengakuqaphelanga. Umsebenzi wawudle ukwesaba; umsebenzi wawuhlala wenza njalo, kusukela esengumfana ebhentshini. Inqobo nje uma kunetshe elizoxazululwa, kwakungekho ndawo esele ebumnyameni.

Kodwa ngale kwesikhala, i-drive yancipha. Yancipha. Isibani sem-

bula umphimbo wedwala obanzi cishe njengesudi nje, ihangingwall ihloboka, izinhlu zezigodo zigobile ngaphansi komthwalo ezaziwulahlekelwa.

Wama. Ukuphefumula kwaba mfishane futhi kwaba kubi.

“Mother,” washo. “Angikwazi. Kuncane kakhulu—kuthinta amapuleti—”

“Ngiyazi.” Akukho ukwethuka ezwini lakhe, kuphela iqiniso elilethwe ngokuthe nse. “Womabili amahlombe athintene. Lokho kuyiqiniso. Awukucabangi. Kuminyene.”

“Angikwazi ukungena lapho. Angikwazi ukuphenduka lapho, angikwazi—”

“Arin.” UMercury, manje, ngokusika okuhlanzekile. “Ingalo yangaphambili yobunxele. Ngaphansi kwe-Assist. Unayo kusukela uneminyaka eyishumi nesithupha. Uyayazi leyo.”

Ukuphefumula kwakhe kwabambeka.

“Yisho,” kusho uMercury. “Ngokuzwakalayo. Uhlala ungitshela ukuthi kulotshiwe ukuze ungazethembi ukuthi uyokhumbula. Ngakho-ke ungazethembi. Themba uyinki. Yisho.”

Amagama okuqala azincela aphuma, amadala, ilithani esuka engalweni yakhe—umkhuleko wasogwadule womelene nokwesaba ayezilobile ngaphakathi eneminyaka eyishumi nesikhombisa futhi awuhaya kuwo wonke umthungo kusukela lapho.

“Qhubeka.”

“Ukwesaba kungumbulali wengqondo.” Izwi lakhe lazinza emugqeni. Amagama ayemadala kunosizi lwakhe; wayewathwele kuzo zonke izindawo ezimnyama zempilo yakhe, umshwana owodwa ohamba kancane ngesikhathi.

Wabe—

—wakuzwa kuphindwa kabili.

I-Court yathatha isigqi ngemuva kwakhe. Hhayi amagama, isigqi—uMother, ophansi futhi oqinisekile; uMercury, egcina isilinganiso; futhi ngaphansi kwabo u-Atlas, kubo bonke, u-Atlas ongqondo-zwilili, owayefunde imigqa esuka engalweni yakhe ku-link futhi wanquma

ngenye i-calculation u-Arin angeke ayibone ukuthi ukweseka okuwu-sizo kunakho konke kokuhlonzwa kwesakhiwo ayengakunikeza khona manje kwakuyisigqi sokuphefumula ngokumelene naso.

Wakhuluma umshwana olandelayo bahamba naye, futhi u-Arin wezwa amafeni okupholisa esudi eshintsha—wezwa i-Court ifinyelela emasistimwini kaGuardian ihambisana ukuphefumula kwakhe nesigqi sokuhaya, yehlisa amafeni kuso, ihambisa ukuhuma komkhathi kwama-actuator nesigqi, kangangokuthi wonke umshini waphefumula ngokuhambisana naye, kangangokuthi indawo ayeyesaba kakhulu yaba indawo eyayiphefumula naye.

Wakuvumela ukwesaba kwadlula phezu kwakhe kwamdlula, njengoba amagama amadala emtshela, futhi lapho sekuphelile waphenduka wabheka ukuthi kwakukuphi.

I-incline ayizange ibe banzi, kodwa yayeka ukuzwakala njengomphimbo yaqala ukuthatha isimo.

“Futhi lapho sekudlulile, ngizophendulela iso lami langaphakathi ngibone indlela yako.”

“Nangu-ke,” kuleba uFool, cishe kuthule kakhulu ukuze kuzwakale. “Wamukelekile ekubuyeni.”

“Lapho ukwesaba kudlulele khona kuyobe kungasekho lutho.” U-Arin wabeka isandla emnqwambeni wezigodo ogobile. Wawuhlola. Wezwa u-Atlas emnika inombolo yomthwalo ngaphambi kokuba aqede ukubuza. *“Yimi ngedwa engiyosala.”*

Wangena.

I-incline yelula amamitha angamashumi amane, futhi kwakuzwakala njengehora.

Wazulazula ngezandla nezinyawo zozine—ukulungiswa kwe-quadruped kukaGuardian, amapuleti ehhuza edwaleni. Amadolo akhe, awangempela, ase ezwa ubuthi kudala ngokumelene nokufakwa kwesidleke; wakuqaphela ngendlela ayeqaphela ngayo isibalo segeji, waqhubeka. Umjuluko waqoqana emhlandleni wakhe futhi kwakukhona ukulunywa phezulu ethanjeni lesihlathi sakhe okwakungeke akufinyelele, okwakungeke akufinyelele amahora, nobuncane balokho—ukulunywa, kuzo zonke izinto, phansi

lapha—cishe kwamenza wahleka. Kabili, ihangingwall yanyakaza, ukukhononda okujulile nokusabalala kwesihlabathi, futhi kabili i-Court yathula nya, ngamunye wabo elalele ngakho konke ayenakho, futhi kabili kwabamba.

Kodwa okwesithathu, akubambanga.

Ikhethelo laduma lehla ngemuva kwakhe, umsindo ofana nezwe likhwehlela, livala indlela yokubuyela esiteshini sezinga leshumi nanye. Uthuli lwagingqika lwakhuphuka i-incline lwamembesa, futhi isibani sageza saba yisiphithiphithi esijikelezayo. Umzimba ka-Arin wakhiyeka—

ovalelwe ngaphakathi, ungcwatshiwe, ayikho indlela yokubuya, ayikho indlela yokubuya, yilena indlela okwenzeka ngayo kuye, yilena ncamashi indlela—

—futhi ama-piezo strut emhlandleni kaGuardian ahabuzeka aphila, ngoba ukushaya kwekhethelo kwakuwalayishile, ngoba idwala lona kanye elalimvalele ngaphakathi lalichithe amandla alo esakhiweni sesudi, futhi u-Arin wabuka igeji lamandla likhwela *liya phezulu* eviza, amaphesenti amathathu, amane, futhi ingxenye-yokuhleka yaphunyuka eyayicishe ibe ukubhonga.

“Ukucindezeleka kuba amandla,” wahlebeza kungekho muntu. “Wena mshini omuhle.”

“Umklamo wakho,” kusho u-Atlas. “Thina simane siwuqhuba.”

“Indlela yokubuya iphelile, akunjalo.”

“Indlela yokubuya iphelile,” kusho u-Atlas, ngokungananazi. “Uvumelekile ukuyesaba. Awuvumelekile ukumangaliswa yiyo.”

Kwehla ukuthula, futhi u-Arin waphefumula edlula kukho.

“Lokho kuyinto yesibili enomusa kunazo zonke owake wayisho kimi,” washo.

“Beyini eyokuqala?”

“Wangitshela ukuthi ukudilika kukababa kwakungesona isiphetho esingenakugwemeka sesakhiwo. Ukuthi kwakuyisinqumo othile asenza ngemali. Ukuthi idwala alimbulalanga. Indoda yakwenza.”

“Lowo bekunguJudge,” kusho u-Atlas.

“Bekunguwe,” kusho u-Arin. “UJudge wavuma. Kodwa nguwe owenze imethamethiksi yomthwalo wakufakazela.” Waqala ukuya phambili futhi, wehlela ebumnyameni, eqonda emadodeni umoya wawo owawuphela. “Angikaze ngikubonge ngalokho.”

“Uyakusho manje,” kusho u-Atlas. “Ngokwehlela lapha. Ngokwakha umgwaqo esikhundleni sethuna. Lokho ukubonga unjiniyela weza-khiwo angakufunda.”

I-incline yagcina iphumela ku-drive obanzi. Uthuli lwaqala ukuzinza, ngokungathandi. Phambili, ebhimini lesibani elalilulama, u-Arin wabamba isimo esasingelona idwala—umnyango wensimbi, ugxumile esikhungweni sawo kodwa uzinzile, umbala omthubi-nomnyama ovamile wegumbi lokukhosela, futhi kuwo, kubhalwe etekeni ngesandla, izimpawu eziyisikhombisa zokubala kuthi enye ihloliwe.

Ukuphefumula kwakhe kwabambeka. Lokhu kwakungekona ukwesaba.

“Eziyisikhombisa,” kusho u-Librarian ngokuthula. “Izimpawu eziyisikhombisa. Enye ihloliwe. Babuyekeze ukubalwa. Babefuna ukuba sazi ukuthi bangaki abasele.”

“Bayaphila,” kusho uMother, futhi okokuqala usuku lonke, kwakukhona okuthile ezwini elihlangene le-Court okwakungesilo ukuzola, okwakungesona ukulawula, kodwa iqiniso eliyihlazo elaliletha noma yimuphi wabo lapha. “Arin. Bayaphila.”

Wawela ingxenye yokugcina ye-drive. Ihendlela lomnyango lalingumlenze wensimbi ogobile, ushelelezi ngothuli lwamakhilomitha amabili nengxenye, ubandayo ngisho nangepuleti. Wabeka isandla sikaGuardian esikhulu esinezibazi siyisicaba esinsimbini ebandayo yomnyango, kahle, sengathi uthinta into entekenteke, futhi kusuka ohlangothini olukude, kufiphele kodwa kucacile, izwi lamemeza okuthile ngeSesotho, elinye izwi laliphendula, kungekudala amazwi amaningi ayesephakama, umsindo wamadoda ayesezibalele ethuneni ezwa ukungqongqoza esivalweni.

Wama lapho umzuzwana, ephefumula nje. I-chip ifudumele phakathi kwamahlombe akhe, abayisikhombisa bezothile bemzungeza, amazwi ngakolunye uhlangothi lwensimbi.

“Court,” washo. Izwi lakhe lahlala lizinzile, ngokumangazayo. “Asi-bakhiphe.”

“Sikanye nawe,” baphendula, bonke. Izwi elilodwa, izingqondo eziy-isikhombisa.

“Yonke indlela,” kwenezela uFool ngokuthula, ngendlela ayehlala engena ngayo ekugcineni. “Phansi lapha, phezulu laphaya. Yonke indlela, badger. Manje vula umnyango.”

Wawuvula umnyango.

Ukuthintana

Indlela endala yokuthwala yayiqonde ngqo amamitha angamakhulu amabili ngaphambi kokuba iyeke ukuzenzisa.

U-Arin wakuzwa ukushintsha ngaphambi kokuba izibani zikuqinisekise. Ushintsho ezinyathelweni zikaGuardian, ukunswininiza kuba sicaba, phansi kuthambeka kancane kuye ngakwesokunxele lapho idwala laguquka khona ngesinye isikhathi esikhohlakele kudala. Umgudu wancipha, futhi izingodo zakuqala, ezabekwa ngamadoda asengamathuli amashumi eminyaka, zazibambelele isikhathi eside kunalokho izinjinzi ezazifaka zona zaziqokokholwa. Wayengazethembi. Izibani zezicoco zesudi zasika izimbobo ezimbili ezimnyameni, futhi uthuli lwalulenga kuzo lufana nento eqinile, iqhwa elihamba kancane elingafiki phansi.

Phansi kulimele phambili amamitha ayishumi nanye, kubika u-Atlas. Insika endala yebiwe ngakwesokunxele. Isisindo siphezu kobambo lwesokudla.

U-Arin washintsha ukuma kwakhe. U-Guardian walungisa naye, ingxenye enkulu yamathani amane ethithaniyamu nekhethamikhhi yabuye yasabalala phezu komhlabathi ongcono sengathi kuyiqakala lakhe siqu lilungisa esithambekeni. Wayeseyekile ukucabanga ngesudi njengento ayigqokayo; ndawana thile kumamitha angamakhulu amane okugcina, yayisiphenduke indlela yokuma.

“Kukude kangakanani endaweni yokukhosela?”

Amamitha angamakhulu amathathu nesishiyagalombili, kuphendula u-Librarian. Amapulani ka-1962 akhombisa umgudu onqamulayo lapha okufanele uxhumane nesiteshi se-38 Level. Amapulani awahlali eqotho.

“Ayikho into eqotho lapha phansi,” u-Arin wahleba.

Yilowo moya, kungenela u-Fool. Yehlisa okulindele, ngeke uphoxeke. Yindlela engibhekana ngayo nazo zonke izingxoxo noJudge.

Ngiyakuziba, kungenela u-Judge.

Usho njalo, kepha-ke.

Umgudu onqamulayo wawukhona ngempela lapho u-Librarian eshilo, kwababamangaza bonke, ikakhulukazi u-Arin. Waphendulela u-Guardian kuwo, igobolondo lihhuza idwala nhlangothi zombili, ukukhononda okulukhuni kwekhethamikh ekudwaleni okwenyukela ngohlaka kwangena emazinyweni akhe. Indawo yavuleka, umgudu onqamulayo waguquka waba yikamelo elibanzi lapho izimoto zen-simbi zazikade zilayishwa khona, izibani zakhe zathola umnyango wensimbi wendawo yokukhosela ofakwe odongeni olukude.

Wawugobile. Uhlaka lwalwemukele isisindo esivela ngenhla lwag-obela ngaphakathi, umnyango uminyene endaweni yawo ngendlela engafanele neyodwa umnyango ube kuyo. Isikhala esiphezulu, ububanzi besandla, sasivuleke samnyama.

U-Arin wama.

Okwesikhashana, akukho lutho oluthi vu eNkantolo, okuwukuphela komsindo kwakuwukuhamba kancane kwensimbi ipholile nokuphefumula kwakhe, okwakukhulu kakhulu ngaphakathi kwesigqoko.

Khona-ke, kusuka esikhaleni, izwi. Elincane. Eligwabhile uthuli.

“Kukhona umuntu? Is someone there?”

Isifuba sika-Arin saqina. Wahambisa u-Guardian phambili, esecophelela manje, wehlisa izibani phansi ukuze angaphuphuthekisi noma ngubani owayengemuva kwensimbi.

“Yebo,” kusho yena, izwi lakhe lilukhuni kunalokho ayekuhlosile. “Ngikhona. I’m here.”

Ngaphakathi endaweni yokukhosela, uMandla Buthelezi wayeseyekile ukukholwa emazwini emahoreni amathathu adlule.

Wayewezwile ngaphambili: idwala likhuluma, ukububula okude kwentaba ihlalisa isisindo sayo, kanye nakanye, ngokucacile, in-

doda imemeza igama lakhe, okwakungenakwenzeka ngoba indoda eyayimemeza igama lakhe yayichotshozwe ndawana thile ngaphezu kwakhe ekuweni kokuqala, futhi uMandla wakubona kwenzeka. Ngakho ngenkathi ukukhanya kungena ngaphansi komnyango, kumhlophe kuqinile, kungalokozi njengesibani esiphelelwayo, akazange anyakaze. Wahlala encike kuPetros, owayenomlenze ophukile owayeseyekile ukukhononda ngawo, okwakukubi kakhulu kunokukhononda.

Khona-ke ukukhanya kwakhuluma isiZulu ngezwi lensizwa, uMandla waqala ukukhala buthule, ngoba abafileyo babengasikhulumi kabi isiZulu ngephimbo lasogwini.

“Isithupha,” wamemezela esebuyisela esikhaleni. “Isithupha. Sangena siyisikhombisa.” Wezwa ezikhulumela futhi engakwazi ukuyeka. “Oyedwa—isifuba sakhe sasibi, ukuwa kwasivula. Umoya waba mubi futhi—walala. Asikwazanga ukumvusa. Isithupha manje. UPetros, umlenze wakhe. UThulani u-” Wama. “Umoya mubi. Sesibe—” Ukubala kwakunzima. “Isikhathi eside. Sesibe isikhathi eside.”

Ukukhanya kwashintsha. Khona-ke umnyango waqala ukunyakaza.

Awudonsiwanga. Awukhanjwanga. Insimbi yabubula yagoba, uhlaka olugobile lunikezela ngokukhala kwensimbi edabukayo, futhi ngesikhala esiya sibanzi, uMandla wabona into eyayiphethe ukukhanya. Yagcwalisa umgudu onqamulayo. Yayinombala wezishiso ezindala iqosheme njengesilwane, izandla zayo—uma kwakuyizandla—zivale onqenqemeni lomnyango zawugoqa emuva ngendlela indoda egoqa ngayo isivalo sethini.

UPetros, eceleni kwakhe, wahleba umkhuleko ayengasawusebenzisanga kusukela ebuntwaneni.

“Kulungile,” kusho izwi. Elomuntu. Izwi nje lendoda, livela ngaphakathi komshini. “Ngiyazi ukuthi kubukeka kanjani. Yisudi yokutakula. Kukhona umuntu ngaphakathi lapha.”

“Umuntu,” kuphinda uMandla.

“Cishe,” kusho izwi elehlukile, elilula, livela ndawana thile emshinini, okwenza izwi lokuqala lithi, “Hhayi manje,” ngendlela eyayizwakala njengendoda itshelainja ukuba isuke kusofa, futhi lokho kucasuka okuncane okuvamile kwenza uMandla wakukholwa.

Indawo yokukhosela yayijule amamitha amane, igujwe edwaleni eliqinile, yakhelwe ukuphilisa iqembu amahora angamashumi amathathu nesithupha ngemuva komnyango ovaliwe onomoya wayo. Babesebe lapho isikhathi eside kunalokho. Ulayini womoya ocindezelwe wawuhlulekile ekuweni kwesibili. Amadoda ayebephefumula umoya ocelayo wekamelo, futhi ikhomba yomshini wokususa i-CO₂ yayisiphelile. Umoya wawunambitheka njengomphefumulo nokwesaba kanye nobumnandi obuthize obabusho ukuthi isikhutha sesinyukela enombolweni lapho amadoda ayelala khona nje.

U-Arin wakuthatha ngokushesha, ngendlela ayecubungula ngayo ibhodi lesekethe: yonke into ngesikhathi esisodwa, bese kuthi ukwehluleka kanye ngakunye.

Umoya kuqala, kusho uMother, izwi lakhe lithatha ubuthe ayebusebenzisa lapho esebenza, lapho ukufudumala kuhlehlela emuva ukwenzela umsebenzi indawo. I-CO₂ ku-four point one futhi iyanyuka. Umoya-mpilo ku-eighteen point three. Banesikhathi. Hhayi esiningi. Vula ikamelo liye endleleni yokuthwala. Umoya wethu ungcono kunaleli bhokisi elifile.

“Umoya wendlela yokuthwala ugcwele uthuli,” kuphendula u-Arin.

Uthuli bayasinda kulo. Kulokhu abasindi. Khipha umoya.

Wagoba uhlaka luka-Guardian wagxilisa umnyango wavuleka ngokuphelele. Umoya wanyakaza. Wawuzwa ezinzweni zangaphandle zesudi njengomehluko ozwakala kancane, umoya omubi ushelela uphuma nomoya owesabekayo nje ushelela ungena. Enye yamadoda yakhwehlela, ayikwazanga ukuyeka.

U-Arin waqoshama, ehlisela isigqoko ezingeni labo. Ubuso obuyisithupha ekukhanyeni kwezibani. Bungcolile. Izindebe ezicacekile. Amehlo ayesebe ebumnyameni isikhathi eside kangangokuthi ukukhanya kwawalimaza. Indoda enomlenze oboshwe ngepu-langwe lokuvala kanye ncingo. Othile wenza umsebenzi omuhle wokwelapha ngalokho ababenakho. Insizwa, idiyekile, iphefumula ngendlela u-Arin ayengayithandi, kafushane futhi ngokushesha.

“UTHulani,” kusho uMandla, elandela ukubuka kuka-Arin. “Isifuba sakhe. Kukhona into eyamwela ekuqaleni—”

Tension pneumothorax, cishe, kusho uMother. Noma i-flail segment. Atlas, ngidinga ukubona udonga lwesifuba.

U-Atlas waletha ukuthwebula okusondele kwesudi, isembozo esiphaphathekile sokushisa-nesakhiwo sishelela emehlweni ka-Arin. Isifuba sensizwa esingakwesokunxele sasinyakaza ngokungalungile, simunca singena lapho kwakufanele sisunduze siphume.

Flail. Izimbambo ezintathu zintanta zikhululekile, kuqinisekisa u-Atlas. Umsebenzi ophindwe kabili wokuphefumula kunalokho okufanele abe nawo. Ngeke akuphumelele ukukhishwa ngalesi sivinini.

“Senzani?”

Qinisa lesi sigaba. Faka isiqhumane bese ubopha. Asibona odokotela, futhi lena akusona isibhedlela, kusho uMother. Kodwa simthengela amahora. Arin. Uzokwenza ngezandla zakho. Ezika-Guardian zirhabaxa kakhulu.

Lokho kwammissa. Ukuze asebenzise izandla zakhe, kwakufanele aphule isivalo. Akhiphe ingalo yakhe yesokudla esilenjeni sesudi, ayifake othulini nasemoyeni omubi, evezekile. Lo mcabango wafika nesisindo esidala, ukuvaleka, ingxenye yakhe eyayichithe impilo yakhe yonke ibala iziphumo.

Ngiyazi, kusho uMother kahle, kuye yedwa. Yenze noma kunjalo. Imizuzu emithathu. Phefumula ngomlomo wakho.

Wakhipha ingalo yakhe.

Umoya washaya isikhumba sakhe—ufudumele, unesihlabathi, ungalungile. Isandla sakhe sasibukeka siyinqaba kuye, siphaphathekile sisincane, into yesilwane ngaphandle kwensimbi eyizungezile. Wadlula kuso, wathatha iphakethe lokwelapha uMother amenzela inkomba kulo livela ohlangothini luka-Guardian, futhi ngaphansi kwezizalezo zakhe—isiqhumane lapha, *cha, phansi, phezu kwesigaba esintantayo, yebo*—wabopha isifuba sensizwa, iminwe yakhe enqunu isebenza ebumnyameni kubukele amadoda ayisithupha, futhi umshini uphefumula umzungezile.

Ukuphefumula kukaThulani kwaba lula. Kungekuhle. Kungesikubi kangako.

“Nakho,” kusho u-Arin. Wabuyisela ingalo yakhe esilenjeni, isivalo savaleka, futhi wayengazi ukuthi wayeyifuna kanjani kabuhlungu ize

abe nayo. “Nakho.”

Isivinini senhliziyo sehle ngeshumi nambili, kusho uMother. Kuhle. Manje siyahamba.

Ukuxhumana naphezulu kwakufile kusukela emgudwini onqamulayo.

U-Arin wayengashongo lutho ngakho. NeNkantolo nayo. Izwi likaPriya lalincipha lakekeleka lawa ndawana thile eduze kwendawo encishaniso, futhi babeqhubekile nje ngaphandle kwakhe ngoba kwakungekho okunye ababengakwenza. Kodwa u-Guardian wayethwele isipuli sesiphindi-mavi, amamitha angamakhulu amabili efayibha edramini emhlane wakhe, futhi u-Atlas wayebeyikhipha emuva kwabo sonke isikhathi sokwehla, intambo ebuyela ekukhanyeni.

Isiphetho sesipuli, kusho u-Atlas. Ngingaxhuma ulayini omdala oqinile wendawo yokukhosela esiphindi-mavini. Indawo yayinolayini wokuxhumana okhethekile oya esiteshini se-38 Level. Uma noma ingxenye yawo isindile ekuweni—

“Kwenze.”

Kwathatha imizuzu emine. U-Arin wabamba isembozo sephaneli sisuka odongeni lwendawo kuyilapho iminwe kaGuardian, erhabaxa kakhulu ekwelapheni kodwa icophelele ngokwanele kulokhu, isonta ithubu elinqunu phezu kwebhuloho lefayibha-eya-thusini lesiphindi-mavi. U-Atlas wamkhuluma wamhambisa kukho, kome futhi eqinisekile, futhi u-Arin wathola ukuqiniseka kuzinzisa.

Khona-ke, esigqokweni sakhe, ukuhhewuza. Iphimbo lethwezeli. Izwi, lephukile, lizakhela kabusha lisuka enhlokokeni liya entweni ethile yobuntu.

“—phinda, lokhu kuphezulu, lokhu kunguPriya, Arin, uma ungizwa—”

“Ngiyakuzwa.” Izwi lakhe laphukela kukho. Wayengazi ukuthi wayezizwa eyedwa kangakanani ize iphele leyo ndawo yokuba yedwa. “Priya. Nginabo. Bonke abayisithupha. Bayaphila.”

Ukuthula. Khona-ke umsindo angakwazanga ukuwubeka, uhlobo lom-sindo oklinyiwe, futhi waqonda ukuthi kwakunguPriya engakhali esiteshini esivulekile.

“Phinda futhi.” Ukuphefumula. “Futhi. Kancane. Kwirekhodi.”

“Abasindile abayisithupha endaweni yokukhosela ye-38 Level. Bonke abayisithupha bayaphila. Oyedwa usengozini enkulu. Ukulimala kwesifuba, kuqinisiwe. Oyedwa unomlenze ophukile. Abanye bomile, bagcwele i-CO₂, bayakwazi ukuhamba. Batshele. Tshela abaphezulu.”

Wamuzwa ekudlulisela, izwi lakhe liphendukela kude nemakrofoni, bese ezwa into ayengakaze ayizwe ezinsukwini eziyishumi nanye, kusukela ngaphambi kwakho konke lokhu, kungekho ngisho isikhathi eside ngaphambi kwalokho.

Wezwa abantu beklabalasa.

Kwehla ngefayibha kuncane kunensimbi, umsindo owenziwe yimiphimbo eyikhulu amakhilomitha amabili nengxenye ngaphezu kwakhe, ekuseni, kuzungeze izinto zasemgodini—imindeni namaqembu namadoda ayetsheliwe ukuthi lokhu kungukubuyisa hhayi ukutakula—wamfinyelela ebumnyameni, emoyeni ofile, eceleni kwamadoda ayisithupha ayeseyekile ukukholwa emazwini, futhi uMandla Buthelezi wabuka umshini owawungumuntu wathi, “Yini leyo? Yini lowo msindo?”

“Yilabo abaphezulu,” kusho u-Arin. “Bayazi ukuthi niyaphila.”

Amadoda awazange aklabalase. Ayekhathele kakhulu ukuba aklabalase. Kodwa uPetros, owayenomlenze ophukile owayeseyekile ukukhononda ngawo, wabuyisela ikhanda lakhe edwaleni wahleka, umsindo owomile ophukile, futhi uhleko lwadlula ekamelweni lusuka kwenye indoda luya kwenye kwaze kwaba bonke abayisithupha bayakwenza, futhi u-Arin wahlala ngaphakathi kuka-Guardian phakathi nendawo akazange ahleke, ngoba wayemataso, kodwa kukhona into esifubeni sakhe eyakhululeka eyayiqinene isikhathi eside kakhulu.

Kujabulele, kusho u-Fool kancane, kuye yedwa. *Bese siyasebenza. Intaba ayizifundanga izindaba ezinhle. Iseyiyo intaba.*

Indlela yokuphuma kwakuyinkinga.

U-Arin wakhuphula isembozo somzila: indlela yokwehla ibuyela emgudwini onqamulayo, indlela endala yokuthwala, phansi okuthambekile, i-81 Raise nezindawo zayo ezincishanisayo, ukukhuphuka

okude kuya e-30 Level nasekheji naphezulu. Wayehlile yedwa, isudi igoqa futhi ikhushulwa idlula ezindaweni ezicinene. Wayengeke abuyele ngendlela efanayo. Manje wayenamadoda ayisithupha. Oyedwa wayengakwazi ukuhamba. Oyedwa wayengaphefumuli ngokulukhulu.

Indlela yokwehla ayisebenzi kubagulayo abathwalwa ngohlaka, kusho u-Atlas. Indawo encishanisayo e-81 Raise ngeke idlulise inhlaka. Futhi ngeke sithwale abayisithupha nganoma yiluphi uhlobo. Igobolondo libamba oyedwa.

“Khona-ke asibuyeli ngendlela engehle ngayo.”

Kulungile, kusho u-Librarian. Futhi kukhona enye indlela. Isiteshi se-38 Level sixhuma nendlela enkulu yokuthwala ye-38 Level, amapulani ka-1962 akhombisa iya empumalanga isiya esiteshini se-No. 4 Shaft. I-No. 4 yamiswa ngeminyaka yamashumi ayisishiyagalombili, kodwa umgodi uqobo lwawo—

—umgodi u-Venter abelokhu ewulungisa esuka phezulu, kuqedela u-Atlas. Akalungisi ikheji esehle ngalo. Ulungisa i-No. 4. Wakuqonda ngaphambi kwethu.

U-Arin wathula. Phezulu, ewekhishopu lenkumbulo yakhe, wabona ubuso bendoda endala: intshebe empunga, eshiswe yilanga, indoda u-Arin achitha izinsuku ezintathu enquma ukuthi angeke ayethembe ngenxa yalokho isikhumba sayo nephimbo layo okwakumtshela ngeminyaka eyayisebenze kuyo. Indoda eyayifunde amapulani ka-1962 yodwa, ubusuku bonke, ingamenyiwe, yathola ukuphela kwendlela yokuphuma ngaphambi kokuba u-Arin afinyelele phansi.

“Usingaphambili,” kusho u-Arin.

Yebo, kusho u-Wolf.

Kwakuyinto yokuqala u-Wolf ayeyisho ehoreni, futhi yonke iNkantolo yathula ngakho.

Uyawazi lo mhlaba. Thina asiwazi. Sinamapulani. Yena unenkumbulo. Yilokho okubulala abantu lapha phansi. Siyamdinga.

Amamitha angamakhulu amathathu empumalanga, indlela yokuthwala ye-38 Level yayilungiswe kangcono kunanoma yini u-Arin

ayesedlule kuyo, okwamenza wayingabaza. Wayethwele uThulani ezingalweni zika-Guardian, insizwa iboshelwe ohlakeni futhi uh-laka lugonwe esifubeni segobolondo lapho ukwakheka kwesudi kuyothatha noma yikuphi ukushaywa ngaphambi kokuba kufinyelele ogulayo. Abanye abahlanu bahamba ngemuva, izandla zibambelele emahlombe omunye nomunye, ucu othulini, uMandla esemuva, uPetros eqakulela enamadoda amabili ngaphansi kwezingalo zakhe ngoba kwakungekho esinye isandla esingamthwala futhi u-Guardian wayegcwele.

Khona-ke izibani zathola isiteshi se-No. 4, nomgodini.

Kwakuwumphimbo omnyama edwaleni, ikheji elidala selihambile kudala, izinto zasemgodini amakhilomitha amabili nengxenyengaphezulu. Futhi phansi enkabeni yawo, lizamazama kancane, likhanyiswa ngenhla yichashazi lokumhlophe okukhazimulayo, kwalenga ipulatifomu yensimbi.

Iflathibhedi. Hhayi ikheji. Ideki leflathibhedi, elalisetshenziwa emgodini, uhlobo olwalusetshenziselwa ukwehlisa imishini esindayo, lilengiswe ezintanjeni ezine kanye newinji yekibhula, lehla liphuma ekukhanyeni liza ngakubo kunendoda emi kulo.

Indoda yayigqoke isigqoko esiqinile nebhande eliboshelwe entanjeni esenkabeni, futhi yayimi ngokuma okulula nokugxilile komuntu ogibele izinkulungwane zalokhu futhi engakuthandi kakhulu kodwa eseyekile ukukwesaba kudala.

Ukuxhumana kuka-Arin kwaqhweba. Izwi elehlukile manje, eduze, kubhendi yendawo. Kancane. Linganisiwe.

“Ndlela.” UVenter. UJakobus Venter. “Unabo.”

“Bonke abayisithupha,” kusho u-Arin.

“Ja.” Ukuthula. Iflathibhedi yanga phansi kwesiteshi ngokukhencezela okuthambile, indoda endala yakhumula ukukhululeka yehla, ibuka kanye ubude obugcwele buka-Guardian bese ingaphinde ibuke, ngendlela indoda eyayisebenze nemishini emikhulu impilo yayo yonke ebuka ngayo eyodwa: iyilinganisa, bese iyibekela eceleni. “Ukushisa kwabambelela ngenkathi naphezulu kukhanya. Ngacabanga ukuthi senibatholile.”

Wadlula u-Arin waya kubagulayo. Waqoshama eduze kukaThulani

engacelwanga, izandla zakhe ezinkulu ezinamachashazi elanga zihamba phezu kokubotshwa, ziyakuhlola, zinqekuzisa ikhanda kanye.

“Kuhle. Noma ngubani okwenzile wayewazi umsebenzi.”

“KwakunguMother,” kusho u-Arin, wabe esezizwa. “Uhlelo. I-SAGE.”

Amehlo kaVenter aya esigqokweni. Abambelela lapho umzuzwana.

“Ja,” washo futhi, akabuzanga, futhi u-Arin waqonda ukuthi ukungabuzi kwakuyinhlonipho.

Inkinga ngeflathibhedi yayiyinkinga nakukho konke lapha phansi: yayingakhelelwanga lokhu.

Ideki lithatha amathani amabili, kusho u-Atlas, efunda ipuleti uVenter alikhomba engacelwanga. Sicishe sibe amane ngaphambi kwabagulayo. Engeza amadoda ayisithupha, engeza uhlaka. Asingaphezulu. Sicishe siphindwe kabili, futhi ipuleti liyinganekwane enenhlonipho.

“Khona-ke angiligibeli,” kusho u-Arin. “Ngiyakhuphuka. Isudi ingalithatha udonga lomgodi.”

“Cha,” kusho uVenter. Ngokuqinile. Igama lokuqala elilukhuni ayelisebenzisile. Wayegobe phezu kwemoto yewinji enhloko yomgudu wesiteshi, lapho intambo yayinyukela ebumnyameni, futhi manje waqonda, futhi lapho ekhuluma isiNgisi sakhe sasihambile, isiBhunu sinyukela ngaphakathi ngendlela ulimi lokuqala lomuntu olunyuka ngayo lapho indaba inzima futhi engafuni ukungaqondwa. “Jy klim nie. Awukhuphuki. Udonga lubolile amamitha angamashumi ayisishiyagalombili phezulu, izingodo zihambile. Beka isisindo saleyo mishini kulo, uyilethela phansi ideki kunala madoda kulo. Nee.”

Umuzwa ka-Arin wawungokuphikisa. Wayenemodeli yodonga lomgodi. Wayenamathebula esisindo. Wayene—

Uqinisile, kusho u-Atlas, ngaphambi kokuba u-Arin akhulume. Nginejografi. Uyifunda ebusweni bedwala nasephethini lokuqhephuka. Bekuzofanele ngikuskene. Yena uvele azi. Udonga olungenhla kwesiteshi yidwala elifile.

Lalela ulukhukhuze omdala, kuhleba u-Fool. Usebe lapha phansi isikhathi eside kunesimulethi yakho.

Ngakho u-Arin wathi, “Kanjani-ke?”

UVenter wamtshela.

Imihambo emibili. Abagulayo namadoda amane ahambayo kuqala, edekini, kuhamba uVenter ukuze alawule intambo newinji yekibhula ezungeza kakhulu ezofuna ukugijima ikhululekile ngaphansi komthwalo. Bese ideki lehla futhi, lingenalutho. Bese u-Guardian eyedwa, indoda yokugcina ephuma. Futhi lowo mhambo, kusho uVenter, ehwaqabele ubukhulu besudi, kwakuzofanele bawuxazulule ngenye indlela, ngoba amathani amane omshini kwakungeyona umthwalo ikheji elake laklanyelwa ukuwuphakamisa ngentambo eyodwa.

“Iwinji yinkinga,” kusho uVenter. Wayekhiphe isembozo ehokoleni lemoto, futhi u-Arin wayebona, ngisho nasekukhanyeni kwezibani, ukuthi kukhona into lapho engalungile: ibhande lebhuleki, lishile, ingxenye yalo yokuvala isihambile. “Ibhuleki liphekiwe. Simehlise ngokushesha sikuletha kuwe. Ushisa. Uma eshisa kakhulu, uyahluleka. Ideki liyazehlala namadoda kulo. Lapho ngehla, ngigibela ibhande ngesandla. Hhayi ekuphakanyisweni. Ukuphakanyisa kunguges, ibhuleki lizenzakalelayo, futhi lokho okuzenzakalelayo sekuhambile.”

U-Arin wabuka imoto. Wachitha ubuntwana bakhe nemishini emidala kanjena ncamashi, ehlukunyezwe kanjena ncamashi, ekukhanyeni okufana ncamashi nalokhu. Wabona konke ngesikhathi esisodwa, bese ebona ukwehluleka.

“Udinga ibhuleki lomthwalo imoto yewinji engenalo,” kusho yena. “Okuthile okuzobamba ideki uma ibhande lidedela. Uhlelo lwesibili.”

“Ja.” UVenter wambuka. Wabuka u-Guardian. “Futhi nginalo. Umi phambi kwami, hhe. Umshini ubamba intambo. Ibhande liyahamba, isudi yakho ithatha umthwalo, ideki alehli. Wena uyibhuleki lami lendoda efile.”

Kwakuyikho ncamashi, u-Arin wabona. Kwakuyinto ayezoyakha uma wayenezinsuku ezintathu newekhisopu. Indoda endala yayikuklame emasekhondini ayishumi kulokho okwakumi phambi kwayo.

“Atlas,” kusho u-Arin. “Singabamba amathani amabili eqinile entanjeni sidlula kumqondisi?”

Sidlula ohlakeni lomgudu onqamulayo njengendawo yokubophela,

intambo iqondiswe kabusha phezu kwesheve elidala—yebo, kusho u-Atlas. Amasekhondi angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye omthwalo ophelele oqinile ngaphambi kokuba ukupholisa kwe-actuator kweqe imingcele. Ngemuva kwalokho silahla umthwalo noma sipheke ingalo yesokudla.

Amasekhondi angamashumi ayisishiyagalolunye yisikhathi sokuphakamisa, kusho u-Librarian. Amamitha angamakhulu amabili namashumi amane ngesivinini esiphephile. Amasekhondi angamashumi ayisishiyagalombili nesishiyagalombili.

“Amasekhondi amabili omkhawulo,” kusho u-Arin.

Wamukelekile ekutakuleni emgodini, kusho u-Fool. Amasekhondi amabili ubuncwebe. Ngokokugcina sasine-negethivu enhlanu sayenza yasebenza.

“Lokho kwakuyisimulethi.”

Kwakuyiyo? Kunzima ukutshela lapha phansi. Ukukhanya kuyafana.

Umoya wohleko wamphunyuka ngaphambi kokuba akwazi ukuwumisa. Kwammangaza. Waphendukela kuVenter, owayembuka enengxoxo nomuntu ongekho, ngokubekezela okungasheshi komuntu owayenqume ukuthi ubuqaba akubona obakhe ukubuxazulula.

“Lizobamba,” kusho u-Arin. “Ngizolibamba.”

UVenter wambuka umzuzwana omude. Ubuso obushiswe yilanga bashintsha, umhlathi usebenza kanye. U-Arin wayengakwazi ukufunda ubuso kahle, wayengakaze, kodwa wayefunde ukufunda izikhathi ezizungeze bona, futhi lesi kwakuyisikhathi esinesisindo. Indoda endala yayichithe iminyaka, u-Arin wayezokufunda kamuva, ithwele ukuthula ngezinto zokuphepha okwakungekho, amabhuleki ayehlehlisiwe, ukunqunyulwa okwakusayinwe ngamadoda ayengeke aligibele ikheji. Yayingcwabe lokho kuthula kwajula kangangokuthi yakhe umsebenzi wesibili phezu kwakho njengomeluleki, futhi ukweluleka kwakuwuhlobo lwakho lokuthula, iseluleko okwakungekho othunyelwe ukuba asithathe.

Futhi nansi umshini owaklanywa yinsizwa eyayidliwe uyise yileyo nhlobo yentaba, icela indoda endala ukuba ayethembe njengebhuleki kuyilapho amadoda ayisithupha egibela ephuma ebumnyameni.

“Uyazi ukuthi ngowobani lo mgodi,” kusho uVenter. “Inkampani. Irekhodi yabo.”

“Ngiyazi,” kusho u-Arin.

“Bengiyinsizwa emgodini onjengalo. Ngasayina izinto.” IsiBhunu sanyuka ngokuqinile manje, futhi indoda endala yakuvumela. “Izinto ebekufanele ngizimise. Ngazitshela ukuthi nganqotshwa. Nganqotshwa. Futhi ngasayina noma kunjalo.” Wabheka phezulu emgodini omnyama eqonde ekukhanyeni okumhlophe okukude. “Angikutholi lokho futhi. Ayikho—ayikho indlela yokwehla ukuthola lokho futhi.”

“Cha,” kusho u-Arin. “Ayikho.”

Indoda endala yethuka, bese, ngokuxakayo, yaphumula.

“Ja,” kusho uVenter. “Nokho.” Wadonsa amagilavu akhe aqina. “Asibakhiphe. Labo esisengabakhipha.”

Balayisha ideki.

UTHulani kuqala, uhlaka luboshelwe ohlangothini lwedeki, uMother eqaphela isifuba sakhe ngezinzwa zika-Guardian kuze kufike umzuzu wokugcina onokwenzeka womkhawulo. Bese uPetros, bese amadoda amane ahambayo, epakishwe eduze, izandla zibambelele ohlangothini, ubuso buphakanyiselwe ekukhanyeni sengathi bangakhuphuka enye indlela ngokufisa kuphela. UMandla Buthelezi wenyuka nalo mthwalo wokuqala ngoba uVenter wamthatha njengozinze kakhulu nokungenzeka agcine abanye bezolile, futhi ohlangothini lwedeki uMandla waphenduka wabuka emuva umshini owawusamile ebumnyameni, lowo owawuyoza ekugcineni.

“Wena,” washo. “What’s your name? The person. Not the machine.”

“Arin.”

“Arin.” UMandla wanqekuza ikhanda kancane. “Sasicabanga ukuthi sizwa abafuleyo bekhuluma, lapha phansi. Sasicabanga ukuthi siphelile.” Wabambelela ohlangothini. “Ngiyabonga. Wafika ngenkathi bethi ayikho indlela.”

“Yayikhona indlela,” kusho u-Arin. “Akekho owabheka ngokwanele.”

UVenter waziboshela entanjeni esenkabeni. Wabeka isandla esisodwa ekhwehlweni lebhande lebhuleki, ibhuleki eliphekiwe ayezoligibela ngokuzwa indlela yonke enyukela phezulu, amakhilomitha amabili nengxenye entambo edlula ngesandla esisodwa esishile, futhi ngesinye wavula iwinji, ideki lenyuka, lizamazama, liphakamisa amadoda ayisithupha ephuma emoyeni omubi nasekukhanyeni okufile, liya ekukhazimuleni nasekuklabalaseni nasekuseni.

U-Arin wakubuka kuhamba. Wahambisa u-Guardian endaweni yokubophela, wafaka intambo phezu kwesheve elidala, wathatha umthwalo engalweni yesudi yesokudla uma ibhuleki lidedela, wama lapho, ingxenye enkulu yamathani amane ensimbi nendoda engaphakathi kuyo, ibambe ulayini obambe amadoda, ibhuleki lendoda efile ulukhukhuze omdala ayelakhe ngaye emasekhondini ayishumi.

Ibhande labamba. Ideki lakhuphuka. Alidinganga yena.

Isabelo sokushisa engalweni sihle, kusho u-Atlas. Akudingeki ukudluliswa komthwalo. Wagibela ibhuleki ngokuhlazeka.

“Kuhle,” kusho u-Arin.

Ubungayenza leyo ngxenye wedwa, kuphawula u-Fool, ngokuxoxa, ekuthuleni kokukhuphuka okude. Ubamba intambo. Wakha indawo yokubophela. Kodwa indlela yokuphuma—udonga olufile, ideki elinesilinganiso, i-No. 4 Shaft—wawuzongena kulezo zingodo ezibolile uziletha phezu kwakho, futhi amadoda ayisithupha ayezofela ebumnyameni bomgodi nesidumbu esisudini ebizayo kakhulu. Uyakwazi lokho, ja?

U-Arin wabuka ideki lincipha liya ekukhanyeni.

“Yebo,” washo.

Ngiyahlola nje. Kunzima ukwazi ukuthi yini engena, ngawe. Ugcina okuningi kwakho ebhokisini.

Myeke, kusho uMother.

Cha, kusho u-Arin. “Uqinisile.” Walalela imoto yewinji ikhandleka ngaphansi komthwalo, umsindo ohlukunyezwe, ophilile womshini owenza ncamashi umsebenzi owakhelwe wona, ugits shelwa yindoda eyayiwazi. “Ngabe ngafela lapha phansi ngiqinisile. Yena waqinisa ngokushesha.”

Lokho kungokokuqala, kusho uJudge, ngokunakekela okusemthethweni ayekunika izinto azibheka njengezibalulekile, engizwa usho ukuthi omunye umuntu wayeqinisile ngokushesha kunawe.

Phawula isikhathi, kusho u-Fool. Librarian. Kufake kurekhodi laphakade. Amamitha azinkulungwane ezimbili ngaphansi komhlaba, umoya ofile, umfana uvuma ukuthi indoda ayengayethembi yayazi indlela yokuphuma ngaphambi kwakhe.

Kulogiwe, kusho u-Librarian. Bese, ngomusa omkhulu: Kulogiwe.

Ideki lafinyelela ekukhanyeni. Phezulu kakhulu, lincane kakhulu, u-Arin walibona linga indawo ephezulu, wabona izithunzi zigijimela kulo, wabona izimo ezimnyama eziyisithupha zigwinywa ekukhazimuleni, futhi ukuklabalasa kwehla emgodini futhi, kakhulu manje, futhi izwi likaVenter laqhweba esigqokweni sakhe, kancane kome ngokungangabazeki lijabule.

“Abayisithupha baphezulu. Bayaphila. Sibuyisela ideki kuwe, Ndlela.” Ukuthula. “Bese siyakukhipha emgodini wami.”

Umgodi wakhe, kusho u-Fool. Ngiyamthanda.

U-Arin wama ebumnyameni phansi komgodi, ebambe intambo eyayingasadingi ukubanjwa. Ideki laqala ukwehla kwalo okude libuyela kuye, lizamazama, likhanyiswe ngenhla.

Ngaphakathi esigqokweni, umoya wawusungohlanzekile uminyene, ufudumele ngokuphefumula kwakhe, futhi engalweni yesokudla kaGuardian, isikhwehlu eside sasikhombisa ukuphaphatheka lapho ikhethamikh ithathe udonga lomgudu onqamulayo.

Wayengakwenzanga yedwa.

Atlas, washo. “Amandla nokupholisa. Nginike inombolo yangempela yokukhuphuka. Hhayi enethemba.”

Kwaba khona ukuthula. Okufushane. Kodwa u-Arin wayechithe amahora anele ngaphakathi kulo mshini ukuze azi ukuthula kwawo ngendlela uVenter ayelazi idwala, futhi lokhu kuthula kwakunokuthile kukho.

Inombolo eqotho, kusho u-Atlas, kufanele siyixoxe lapho ideki lifika.

Ukukhanya okumhlophe kwehla kuphuma ebumnyameni kuza kuye, futhi u-Arin wakubuka, futhi walinda.



Ukuwa

Izibani ze-flatbed zanyamalala enyukweni ye-81 Raise, abasindi abayisithupha bentengantenga ekhejini lika-Venter, kushiya umgodi ungenalutho ngaphandle kuka-Arin, isisindo sale-suit, kanye nokushisa kwasendulo umdwebho wedwala obewugcinile izinkulungwane zeminyaka.

“Bawudlulile umpitshi,” kusho u-Priya, izwi lakhe lincane lidlula kumacomms. “U-Petros uthi i-brake isabambile.”

“Susa izandla kuyo ngaphandle uma umqansa usuwendlala.” U-Arin wanyakaza, uhlaka lwe-Guardian lwathola ukuhamba kwalo kwezinyawo ezine ngaphandle kokucabanga, izingcwece zihlala emhlane wakhe njengoba egxizela enyukweni. Indawo yokukhosela yawela ngemuva kwakhe. Phambili, indlela acathula kuyo wehla emahoreni amabili adlule yayimlindele ukuba ayichithe. Manje kuyenyuka, amandla adonsela phansi engaseyena umngane.

Umoyamgodi omdala wamhambisa ngendawo ayeyiqaphele ngenkathi esehla kodwa engabanga nayo imizuzwana yokuyicabanga, futhi engenayo namanje. Cishe amamitha ayisishiyagalolunye idwala lezwe lashintsha. Inhlolovo ka-'88 yayilibhala njengomthofu we-quartzite ovamile waseceleni kwe-stope, owembiwe ngezandla washywa, futhi emaceleni omabili amamitha ayisishiyagalolunye yikho kanye lokho okwakuyikho, ubuso obugayiwe ngeqiniso bamadoda anezingxomu. Kodwa phakathi nendawo udonga lwaba *bushелеlezi*. Hhayi ubushелеlezi obenziwe, hhayi obe-shotcrete; ama-contact sensors ale-suit awudlulisela enyameni yakhe njengoba ezinzisa uhlaka kulo, futhi umumo izinzwa zakhe ezawubikayo wawungulutho—akukho leli lokuqopha, akukho ukubaxa kokuqhuma, akukho izinhlamvu zethuluzi elihwayayo. Imbobho edabula idwala

eliqinile inezingcweti yokugcina engangenawo umkhuba wokuyenza, ibandayo iqhubeka, igobile ngebanga eliqondile kakhulu kunoma yimuphi umshini inkampani eyake yawehlisele emgodini. Noma yini eyakwenza lokhu yayingadwalini lidwala. Yayilincenga. Wakubeka lapho ebeka khona izinto ezazingalingani futhi okwakungenakwenzeka ukuzifaka: inothi elihlephukile ngemuva kwekhanda, lifayiliwe, *buka lokho futhi uma amadoda ayisithupha engasafi*. Akazange neze. Waqhubeka, ubushelelezi badedela idwala leqiniso, futhi wakukhohlwa iminyaka eyishumi nane.

Amandla aphezu kwamaphesenti angamashumi amathathu nanye, kubika u-Atlas, engasathuli. Isenge sokupholisa, imizuzu eyishumi nanye ngalokhu kudonsa.

“Lokho kubi kunokwehla.”

Ukwehla bekuwukwehla. U-Atlas, sengathi uchazela ingane. Manje uphakamisa ingxenye enkulu yamathani amane ngokumelene nomqansa wamadigri ayishumi nane ngaphezu komhlabathi odabukile. Intaba ayikubuyiseli lokho mahhala.

“Yasinika i-piezo recovery.”

Iyasinika i-piezo recovery, kulungisa u-Atlas. Ngaphandle kwayo, ngabe sesimnyama vele.

U-Arin wezwa izinsika zisebenza emgogodleni wakhe—lonke unyawo, konke ukugoba kohlaka emelene nophansi olwephukile, i-suit iphuza udlame lokunyakaza kwayo iluphendula libe yintukana egcina amaphampu okupholisa ephila. Ingcindezi iphenduka amandla. Ubaba wakhe wayezokuthanda lokho. *Yenza into ekubulalayo yenze omunye umsebenzi*. U-Themba wake washo okuthize okusondele kulokho, izandla zimnyama kuze kufike esihlakaleni, ekhuluma ngewinshi eyayilwa nayo.

Wakhwela.

Ngesikhathi-somshini, i-Court yayisivele ingene amamillisekhondi angamakhulu amathathu empikiswaneni eyayingeke ifinyelele ezindlebeni zika-Arin kuze kudlule eminye imizuzwana emine, uma ngabe imfinyelela nhlobo.

Inombolo u-Atlas ayenqaba ukuyisho ekwehleni, kusho u-Judge. Yisho manje.

Ngiyishilo. U-Atlas, ngokuqondile. Imizuzu eyishumi nanye yokupholisa. Amaphesenti angamashumi amathathu nanye.

Leyo akuyona inombolo. U-Judge futhi, ebekezele njengensingo. Lawo manani awazimele. Ukushisa kukhula ngokudonsa. Ukudonsa kukhula ngomqansa nokulimala. Uhlaka aluseluqinile. Sichitha amandla ukubamba isimo esifuna ukugoqeka.

Ngikhombise, kuncenga u-Mother.

U-Atlas wenza njalo. Hhayi ngamazwi—imephu yomthwalo, ulwembu lomgogodla ludwetshwe ngemibala yengcindezi, i-actuator yenqulu yangakwesokunxele igijima ishisa ngamadigri ayishumi nanye, in-sika yesithathu yangemuva esikhonkwaneni se-carbon ikhombisa ufa olucwebezelayo lokuxilonga oluqophe imizuzu engamashumi amane edlule lwaluphawule njengoqaphela. Ufa lwaselukhulile. Qaphela lwase luphenduka ukulahla-umthwalo phakathi nemizuzu eyisishiya-galolunye.

Indlu ye-biochip, kusho u-Librarian ngokuthula. Esifubeni. Phakathi kwamahlombe akhe. Siyinto eshisa kakhulu kule-suit, futhi isondo lokupholisa lisifaka kokugcina.

Ngenhloso, kungenelela u-Wolf. Izwi lokuqala emamillisekhondini angu-eshumi nesishiyagalolunye amakhulu. Wabeka ukubaluleka. Umsebenzisi kuqala.

Wakubeka ngaphambi kokuba azi ukuthi singabantu, kuphikisa u-Mercury.

Akekho owaphendula imizuzwana eyikhulu namashumi amane yamamillisekhondi, okwakuyikubamba umphefumulo kubo.

Kugcine kuyi-logistics, kuyala u-Judge. Sinesikhathi. Siyenza imodeli yokukhwela. Sithola lapho kuchithwa khona. Simkhuphule.

Yebo, kusho u-Mother, nakuba engakukholwa, futhi wakusho noma kunjalo ngoba kwakuwumsebenzi wakhe.

“Arin.” Izwi lika-Priya laqhekeka ohlamvini lokuqala. “Inkinga ekhol-areni.”

Wayefinyelele endaweni lapho phansi okwakukhukhumele khona, lapho ekwehleni khona ayegoqe khona i-Guardian yacathula phansi ukuze ishelele ngaphansi kwesigxobo esiwela somthando. Manje kwakufanele adlule phezu kwaso. Wabeka imilenze yangaphambili, wahlola ukuhlala komthando, wawuzwa ushukuma ngesentimitha wama.

“Chaza inkinga.”

“I-winch ku-No. 4. U-Venter ubakhuphulile abasindi—basesigqokweni, Arin, bonke abayisithupha, baphumile—” umsindo owawungaba ukuhleka noma okuphambene nakho—“kodwa i-brake ye-main hoist ihambile. Ihambe ngempela. Bekunentuthu. Bayinukile ngaphambi kwesilinganiso—” Wama. “Iwa ngokukhululekile ngaphezu kwengx-enye yomthwalo.”

“Bavele basesigqokweni.”

“Banjalo. Wena cha. Futhi into kuphela elinganiselwe ukukuphakamisa wena ne-suit yikheji eliyinhloko, futhi ikheji eliyinhloko alikwazi ukuphakamisa wena ne-suit.”

U-Arin waqhwala ngomlenze owodwa phezu komthando, elinganisa ingxenye enkulu yamathani amane phezu kwentungo eyayingamfuni.

“Ngisinda kangakanani?”

“Ngigcwele? Cishe amathani amane. Wuthi amane.”

Izinkulungwane ezintathu namakhulu ayisishiyagalombili, kungenxa u-Atlas. Ngo-coolant osele, kusondele emathanini amane. Asiwukhiphi, ngakho: amane.

“Futhi ikheji liyabamba?”

“Nge-brake elungile, nonke ningakaze nikuzwe. Kodwa i-brake ihambile—iyibhande lokuhleba phezu kwedramu futhi idramu lingumkhenkce oshisiwe. U-Venter uyalibheka manje.”

Wadlula phezu komthando. Uhlaka lwakhala—hhayi i-suit, uhlaka, ukukhononda okude kwesakhiwo njengoba insika enofa ithatha umthwalo wokugoba eyayithenjisiwe ukuthi ngeke iwuthathe. Okuthize ngaphakathi kwesithathu sangemuva kwadedela ngomsindo ofana nentambo yesigingci eqhuma idluliselwa edramini lensimbi.

Insika yesithathu ihambile, kumemezela u-Atlas. Ngiquondisa kabusha ngo-titanium primary. Lokho kuphinda kabili umthwalo wayo. Wathula. Lelo khonkwane lalingakhelwanga ukuba libe yiprimary.

“Ngitshele uma kubaluleka.”

Kuzobaluleka ekholareni, kusho u-Atlas. Lapho sisukuma ukuze singene ekhejini. Njengamanje usabhekene phakathi kwemilenze emine. Ikheji lidinga ukungena ngezinyawo ezimbili.

“Khona-ke ngikhwela ngenye indlela.”

Ayikho enye indlela, kusho u-Atlas. Sengivele ngahlola. Kabili.

Amamitha angamakhulu amabili ngenhla, ebumnyameni obushisayo bese-loading station, uJakobus Venter wacindezela umhlane wesandla sakhe ngakwidramu le-brake walisusa ngokushesha.

“Ja. Yenziwe leyo,” washo, kungekho muntu. Ibhande lokuhleba laliziqhwebele lalo edramini ngohhafu ladedela okunye. Liluhlaza okwesibhakabhaka-okumnyama, linezikali. Alilusizo. Wayewabonile ama-brake epheka ngaphambili. Wayesayinde amanye okwakungafanele ukuthi adlule. Lowo mcabango wafika ngendlela owawuhlala ufika ngayo manje, ungamenywanga, kunabafileyo abanamathele kuwo, futhi wawubeka phansi waqhubeka esebenza, ngoba umfana wayesesemhlabathini.

Abasindi babesophahleni lwe-headgear, bembozwe ngezingubo, u-Thulani elele eqondile phezu kwebhodi nabezimpilo. U-Bongani wayengeke ayeke ukubuka umgodi.

U-Venter wahlola idramu. Wabheka ikheji, ubhasikidi wensimbi onesayizi segumbi elincane, olinganiselwe amadoda angamashumi amathathu noma amathani ayisishiyagalombili we-ore—ubhasikidi wona ngokwawo wawuzobamba i-suit ungaze uyizwe. Ubhasikidi wawungasiyona inkinga. Inkinga kwakuwukuwulengisa ku-hoist obe-brake yawo iyincithakalo eqhwetshelwe ndawonye, ku-winch owodwa osasebenza, njengamanje olungele noma yiyiphi ingxenye yomthwalo wawo eyayingeke ibulale umuntu owodwa kuphela osele ngaphansi komhlaba.

“Priya.” Wacindezela irediyo. “Mbuze. Ingabe i-suit ingawubamba

umthwalo ngemilenze? Imile. Ikhiyiwe. Hhayi ukuphakamisa—ukubamba.”

Ukuthula ngenkathi amagama ehamba ehla ngocingo abuya.

“Uthi—u-Atlas uthi—imizuzwana engamashumi ayisishiyagalmunye. Umthwalo omile. Khona-ke umgogodla uyophuka.”

U-Venter wabheka i-brake. Wabheka ikheji. Wabheka izintambo ze-counterweight ezenyukela ebumnyameni be-headgear, ezikhulu njengengalo yendoda, kanye nedramu lesibili eduze kwelifile—i-auxiliary, i-kibble winch, encane, ehamba kancane, elinganiselwe amathani amabili hhayi ngokeyilo elilodwa ngaphezulu, kodwa enayo eyayo i-brake, owayo umoto, ongathintekile. Amathani amabili. I-suit yayicishe ibe yamane. Akukho winch owodwa owawuzowuthwala ngaphandle kokudabuka noma ukusha. Kodwa ababili, ngamunye ethatha uhhafu—

Ubeyenza isibalo impilo yakhe yonke. Ukuthi umhlabathi uzothatha kangakanani ngaphambi kokuba ungabe usaba ngumhlabathi futhi uqale ukuba yithuna.

“Izintambo ezimbili,” washo. “Ama-winch amabili. Hlukanisa umthwalo.” Wacindezela irediyo. “Priya. Tshela iJo’burg ukuthi ngifuna i-kibble winch nentambo yekheji kokubili kuxhunywe ku-suit. Kusebenze ndawonye. Cishe amathani amabili kweyodwa nganye—khona kanye emkhawulweni we-kibble, kodwa kuyabamba uma imithwalo ihlala ilingana.”

Ukuthula, bese u-Priya, ngokuqaphela: “Awahlanganisiwe, Kobus. Amadramu ahlukene, izivinini ezihlukene. Esinye sidonsa ngokushe-sha kunesinye, i-suit iya eceleni emgodini, idabule izintambo—”

“Ja. Ngiyazi ukuthi kwenzakalani.” Wayesekhwela izitebhisi zophahla eya endlini ye-winch, amadolo akhononda esinyathelweni ngasinye. “Yingakho indoda ime edramini le-kibble iphakele i-brake ngesandla. Ilinganise ikheji ngeso. Yonke indlela enyukela phezulu.”

“Lokho amamitha ayinkulungwane namakhulu ayisishiyagalombili.”

“Ngiyazi ukuthi ujule kangakanani umgodi.”

“Kobus—uma i-brake yekheji ihambile, futhi i-brake ye-kibble ihluleka, noma ngubani okuleyo dramu umile phezu kwamathani amane wensimbi ewayo kungekho lutho lokuyimisa.”

U-Venter wafinyelela endlini ye-winch. Idramu le-kibble lalihleli lapho, lidala, limnyama-uwoyela, liqotho. Wabeka isandla sakhe phezu kwelivha le-brake. Lanyakaza kahle. Ligcotshiwe igrisi. Othize wayeligcinile. Mhlawumbe yena, eminyakeni edlule. Mhlawumbe indoda ayesekhohliwe igama layo, eyenza umsebenzi wayo kahle kanti amadoda ayengaphezu kwayo asika amagumbi.

“Khona-ke kungcono lingahluleki,” washo.

U-Arin wafinyelela ekholareni emaphesentini angamashumi amabili nambili.

Isenge sokupholisa, imizuzu eyisithupha, kumkhumbuza u-Atlas. Indlu ye-biochip ikumadigri angamashumi ayisithupha nanye. Sisebenza kuze kufike kumashumi ayisikhombisa. Asisebenzi ngaphezu kwamashumi ayisikhombisa nane.

Wayesayeke isikhathi eside ukuhumusha izinombolo zika-Atlas zibe yimizwa. Manje zaziwumlaba nje. Imizuzu eyisithupha yokubanda. Bese kuyashisa. Bese kuyamnyama.

“Ngisukumise.”

Ngiyezwa, kuphendula u-Atlas. Yiqonde futhi: ukusukuma kuyinto embi kakhulu esiyezayo namuhla. Insika yesithathu ihambile. I-titanium primary ithwele konke. Uma usukuma, isisindo sakho sonke kanye ne-suit kudluliselwa emgogodleni ngokucindezeleka okuqondile. I-primary izobamba. I-actuator yenqulu eshisayo izocelwa ukuthi ikhiye ibambe ngokumelene nokudonsa kwentambo ye-kibble, okuyobe kungalingani, ngoba indoda iyilinganisa ngesandla amamitha ayinkulungwane namakhulu ayisishiyagalombili ngenhla kwethu.

“Imizuzwana engamashumi ayisishiyagalumunye.”

Yebo, kusho u-Atlas. Emamitheni angamakhulu amabili anginaso isiqiniseko. U-Venter akakwazi ukukuletha amamitha ayinkulungwane namakhulu ayisishiyagalombili emizuzwaneni engamashumi ayisishiyagalumunye.

“Cha.”

Cha, kuvuma u-Atlas.

Wasukuma. I-suit yamvula esiqoqwaneni, izingcwecwe zishelela, futhi umhlaba wachezuka usuka esimweni sasilwane esinamaphuzu amane abewugqokile ihhafu yekhilomitha waya esimweni somuntu esimile esifaneleka ngomnyango wekheji. Umgogodla wakuthatha. Ikhonkwane elinofa labamba. Inqulu eshisayo yakhiyeka.

Wangena ekhejini. Phansi kwakhala ngaphansi kwamathani amane we-suit nomuntu. Ngaphezu kwakhe, ebumnyameni, izintambo ezimbili—umugqa wekheji okhulu nentambo ye-kibble encane abasebenzi baka-Venter abayixhumile emaphuzwini okuphakamisa e-suit ngenkathi ekhwela—zaqina, eyodwa bese, ngemuva komzuzwana, enye.

“Phakamisa,” wayala.

Ikheji laphuma ezinjeni zalo.

Emamitheni angamakhulu amabili okuqala, kwakuzwakala kuhle cishe.

Wayengasizwa isigqi: intambo yekheji idonsa njalo isuka edramini le-brake elifile, isebenza kancane futhi ngokucophelela, bese intambo ye-kibble ibambelela futhi ibamba ngokulungisa okuncane kwesigamu somzuzwana, isandla sika-Venter selivha kude ngenhla, lifunda ikheji ngokuntenga kwentambo nokucinana ezingalweni zakhe, lilinganisa. Hhayi okushelelayo. Akwaze kwashelela. Kodwa kulinganisiwe.

I-suit yambamba phakathi nomgodi njengenqindi libamba iqanda.

Amamitha angamakhulu amathathu, kumemeza u-Atlas. Ukupholisa, imizuzu emine. Indlu ikumashumi ayisithupha nantathu.

“Khuluma nami ngenye into,” kusho u-Arin.

Ukuthula ku-Court ayengeke akuzwe.

Insika yesithathu yahluleka ngokuhlanzekile, kusho u-Atlas, nge-muva komzuzwana, ngezwi lendoda eqhuba ingxoxo emngcwabeni. Ukuhlanzeka kuhle. Ukwephuka okuhlanzekile kulahla umthwalo endaweni eyodwa. Ukwephuka okungcolile kuwulahla yonke indawo. Wakhonkwane wakwakhela ukuthi luhluleke luhlanzekile. Lokho bekulungile.

“Ngakwakhela ukuthi lungahluleki.”

Wakwakhela ukuthi luhluleke luhlanzekile uma luhluleka, kuphendula u-Atlas. Okufana nokuvuma ukuthi luyohluleka. Lowo bewungumk-lamo othembeke kakhulu. Ngihlale ngiwuhlonipha.

Umphefumulo waphuma ku-Arin owawungaba ukuhleka. Ikheji labambelela—ukuxhuma okunzima, uhlangothi lwe-kibble ludonsa ngokweqile, i-suit ishaya idigri ngakwesokudla ngaphambi kokuba i-actuator yenqulu iyibambe iyihudule ilingane. Kude ngenhla, wacabanga u-Venter ephonsa isisindo sakhe phezu kwelivha le-brake, elungisa, ethuka ngesiBhunu ebumnyameni.

Emamitheni angamakhulu ayisikhombisa, i-actuator yenqulu yashisa kakhulu yakhiyeka.

Hhayi ukukhiyeka okuthambile. Isithuthwane. Ilunga elalithwele ukudonsa okungalingani kwentambo ye-kibble amamitha angamakhulu amane lavele layeka ukwamukela imiyalo, futhi i-suit yaba lukhuni uhlangothi lwayo lwangakwesokudla, futhi ngokulandelayo lapho ikheji libambelela kwakungekho lutho lokuyibamba.

I-suit yashayisa odongeni lomgodi. Amathani amane ngokumelene nedwala ngesivinini sokulungisa kwe-winch—hhayi okusheshayo, kodwa okukhulu, wonke umgodi ukhala njengepayipi elishayiwe, ihlabathi nomthando omdala kuna kwehla kudlula ikheji, ikhanda lika-Arin liqhakaza ngaphakathi kwesigqoko ngamandla okwenza umhlaba waba mpunga emaphethelweni.

Zibambe, kuyala u-Wolf, futhi igama lafika ngaphambi kokushayisa, okwakufanele kube ngokungenzeki.

Pangolin, kuncenga u-Mother. *Manje. Mgoqe.*

Cha, kusho u-Atlas. *Uma sigoqeka emgodini, silahlekelwa ngumumo wekheji. Siyabambeka. Asiphumi.*

Ushaye odongeni.

Futhi uzoluphinda alushaye, kusho u-Atlas. *Ukugoqa kuxazulula inkinga engalungile.*

Ikheji lazinza. U-Venter, kude ngenhla, wayezwe ukuxhuma entanjeni yakhe wamisa wonke amadramu nya, ebamba sonke isisindo ngama-

brake amabili—elinye lawo liyingalo yendoda nelivha eligcotshiwe—futhi manje balenga lapho, amamitha ayinkulungwane neyikhulu wen-simbi ewayo ebanjwe ima yindoda endala newinch eneminyaka engamashumi ayisithupha.

“Arin.” Izwi lika-Priya, lincane kakhulu. “Izintambo zigxumile. U-Venter uyabamba. Kwenzakaleni?”

“Inqulu ihambile.” Izwi lakhe lazwakala likude kuye. “Uhlangothi lwe-sokudla lukhiyiwe. Angikwazi ukugwema udonga.”

Ukuthula okude.

“Ungakwazi ukukhwela ukhiyiwe?”

Cha, kusho u-Atlas, ku-Court, hhayi ku-Arin. Sikhiiyiwe, asikwazi ukufunza ukuxhuma. Konke ukulungisa kusifaka odongeni. Ngeke siphile amanye amamitha ayinkulungwane neyikhulu alokhu. Ikhonkwane liyohluleka ngokungcolile. Bese kuba yikheji. Bese kuba nguye.

Ngihlaziya umthwalo wokushisa, kusho u-Librarian. Ngigijima ukwenyuka nge-actuator ekhiyiwe. Ukuhleba kwe-suit odongeni kuyokwenza ukushisa okweqile. Amaphampu e-coolant asezungeza cishe phezulu kakhulu vele.

Futhi? kubuza u-Mother.

Indlu ye-biochip ihleli phakathi kwamahlombe akhe, kusho u-Librarian. Iphuzu elishisa kakhulu ohlelweni. Isondo lokupholisa libeka umsebenzisi kuqala, ngokwesicelo sokuqala sika-Arin. Indlu ifika ibande kokugcina. Uma sikhapha ukushisa okweqile futhi singenamkhawulo—

Sibala izinombolo, kungenelela u-Atlas. Zonke izimo. Ukwenyuka ngasikhati sinye, inqulu ekhiyiwe, ukuhleba odongeni amamitha ayinkulungwane neyikhulu ngamunye. Ngizazigijimisa manje. Ngizoba nezimpendulo emizuzwaneni emithathu.

Arin, izibalo zakho zomgogodla zithini? kubuza u-Wolf.

“Amashumi amathathu nesishiyagalombili phoyinti mbili. Ziyakhu-phuka.”

Ziyoqhubeka zikhuphuka, kusho u-Atlas, izwi lakhe lifika ngaphambi kokuba u-Arin akulindele. Nginempendulo. Kunempendulo eyodwa

kuphela. Isondo lokupholisa alikwazi ukugcina kokubili umsebenzisi nendlu ye-biochip ngaphansi kokuhluleka isikhathi sonke sokwenyuka. Sineminizuzu eyisithupha yokubanda kusukela ekuqaleni kwamadigri angamashumi ayisithupha nantathu, futhi sinokungenani imizuzu eyishumi nane yomgodi osele ngesivinini esiphephile sika-Venter. Amaphampu aphezulu. Akusekho ukubanda. Kunombuzo kuphela wokuthi okokugcina kuya ngakuphi.

E-Court, kwakungasekho okwe-logistics okumele kwenziwe.

U-Judge wababiza. Wakwenza ngaphandle komgubho, ngoba kwakungasekho sikhathi somgubho, futhi ngoba umgubho wawuwuhlobo lwamanga ababengeke bawukwazi.

Sho ukukhetha, kusho u-Judge.

U-Atlas wakusho. Wayekugijimise izikhathi eziyishumi nanye emizuzwaneni emine edlule wathola impendulo efanayo zonke izikhathi, futhi wayekuzonda, okwakuyinto entsha ku-Atlas, ukuzonda impendulo.

Isondo lokupholisa alikwazi ukugcina kokubili umsebenzisi nendlu ye-biochip ngaphansi kokuhluleka isikhathi sonke sokwenyuka. Sine-minizuzu eyisithupha yokubanda kusukela ekuqaleni kwamadigri angamashumi ayisithupha nantathu, futhi sinokungenani imizuzu eyishumi nane yomgodi osele ngesivinini esiphephile sika-Venter, eminingi ngenqulu ekhiyiwe, ngoba okukhiyiwe kuhamba kancane. Amaphampu aphezulu. Akusekho ukubanda. Kunombuzo kuphela wokuthi okokugcina kuya ngakuphi.

Futhi uma kuya kuye? kubuza u-Mother, nakuba ekwazi.

Khona-ke umgogodla wakhe namaphaphu akhe nobuchopho bakhe kuhlala kuphila, kusho u-Atlas. Futhi indlu idlula kumashumi ayisikhombisa nane. Futhi siyaguga. Isisekelo asiphili kumashumi ayisikhombisa nane. Akukho-backup. Uyazi ukuthi akukho-backup.

Futhi uma kuya kithi?

Khona-ke siyaphila, kusho u-Atlas, bese eyapheka. Izinga lokushisa lomgogodla wakhe selivele liyakhuphuka ngoba i-suit ilwa nodonga ikhipha ukushisa esingakwazi ukukulahla. Uma

sizigcina sibanda, sizigcina sicabanga ngokucacile ngenkathi efa phakathi kwamahlombe ethu.

I-Court yahlala nalokho imizuzwana eyikhulu neshumi yamamillisekhondi.

Kunenketho yesithathu, kusho u-Mercury, futhi okomzuzwana owodwa owesabekayo izwi lakhe laliboshe okusole u-Librarian ayekwazi futhi ahlehla kukho—ukubukhali okubekezelayo, okunenhlonipho, okuhle, izwi elake lazama ukukhuluma isibhedlela ukuthi sivule iminyango yaso. Singa—

Cha, kuphikisa u-Wolf. Igama elilodwa, futhi ukubukhali kwabaleka ezwini lika-Mercury njengelangabi lincindezelwe phakathi kweminwe emibili.

Bengingeke, kuphikelela u-Mercury, ngokuthula. Ngikuzwile kufika. Ngikutshela ukuthi ngikuzwile kufika, futhi angeke. Lokho kufanele kubalwe okuthize.

Kuyabalwa, kusho u-Judge. Kuyabalwa ukuthi ukushilo ngezwi.

Ayikho inketho yesithathu, kumemezela u-Atlas. Ngibhekile. Ngibheke ngokucophelela kunokubheka kwami yonke into. Kukhona ukubanda, futhi kukhona lapho kuya khona.

Khona-ke kubeke kuye, kuyala u-Mother. Konke. Manje.

U-Arin wezwa ukubanda kushiya indlu phakathi kwamahlombe akhe.

Ekuqaleni, wayengazi ukuthi uzwani—wazi kuphela ukuthi okuthize kushintshile ku-suit, inothi lephampu lishintsha, ukufudumala kuqhakaza emhlane wakhe lapho okwakufanele kube yindawo ebanda kunazo zonke kuye, futhi ngasikhathi sinye umoya wesigqoko ushintsha usuka ekushiseni okuvuthayo uya entweni ecishe ibekezeleleke, ubumpunga budonsela emuva emaphethelweni okubona kwakhe.

“Wenzeni?” wabuza.

Siqondise kabusha ukupholisa, kuphendula u-Atlas. Kuwe. Ngokugcwele.

“Kimi kuvela kuphi.”

Ukuthula.

“Kuvela kuphi, Atlas.”

Kuvela kithi, kusho u-Librarian, endlini. Esisekelweni.

U-Arin waqonda ngendlela ayehlala eqonda ngayo izinto, kanyekanye, lonke uhlelo, wonke umphumela welwe phansi njengemephu yomthwalo, futhi kungekho ndlela yokukungaboni. Wayewakhile umyalo wokubaluleka. Wayebeke umsebenzisi kuqala. Wayengakaze acabange ukuthi i-suit kuzomele ikhethe, ngoba wayengakaze acabange ukuthi impahla ephakathi kwamahlombe akhe izoba ngumuntu.

“Kubuyisele.”

Cha, kusho u-Mother.

“Kubuyisele. Ngingakwazi ukuthwala ukushisa. Ngingakwazi ukukhwela ngishisa. Ngike ngakwenza—”

Umgogodla wakho ukumashumi amathathu nesishiyagalolunye phoyinti mane, kusho u-Mother, ngezwi ayelisebenzisile ngosuku amuzwa khona okokuqala, izwi elalingenakho nhlobo ukuthamba. *Kumashumi amane nanye, uyayeka ukukwazi ukwenza izinqumo. Kumashumi amane nantathu, inhliziyo yakho ithola isigqi engeke isiphunyuke. Awukwazi ukukhwela uphume kulokho, Arin. Awukhweli ngalutho. Asixoxisani.*

“Lokhu akusilo elakho—”

Kuyisinqumo sethu ncamashi, kungenelela u-Judge, futhi kwakukhona okuthize ephimbweni lakhe u-Arin angakaze akuzwe ngaphambili. *Wasinika isakhiwo. Wasinika ukukhetha. Washo wathi: ingqondo engakwazi ukuphikisa akuyona ingqondo. Wasakhela ukuphikisa. Siphikisile. Impikiswano isiphelile.*

“Isikhathi esingakanani?”

Ngaphandle kokupholisa, kuphendula u-Atlas, *indlu ifinyelela kumashumi ayisikhombisa nane cishe emizuzwini eyisishiyagalolunye. Umgodi uyishumi nane. Ngeke sonke sifinyelele phezulu.*

Ikheji laqala ukunyakaza futhi. U-Venter, ngenhla, wayezwe i-suit ithula odongeni—ukuxhuma sekuncane manje, ukulwa kokushisa kuyaxega, ngoba i-suit yayingasamoshi amandla izigcina ibanda—

futhi wayeqala ngokucophelela, ngokucophelela, ukubasonga benyukela phezulu futhi.

“Khona-ke siya ngokushesha,” kusho u-Arin. “Tshela u-Venter awu-fuqe. Awubeke engcupheni. Imizuzu eyisishiyagalolunye—”

Imizuzu eyisishiyagalolunye eyomunye wethu, kusho u-Atlas. Indlu akuyona into eyodwa. Iyisikhombisa. Asidingi sonke ukugijima isikhathi sonke seminizuzu eyisishiyagalolunye.

Ihlabathi emazinyweni akhe, ukushaya kwegazi okunzima esandleni sakhe sokudla esikhiyiwe, ikheji liqhaqhazela linyukela phezulu.

“Cha.”

Sesivele sikwenza, kusho u-Judge. Ngimi kuqala. Akusekho lutho lokuxazulula. U-Judge ongasenaso isinqumo asisenzayo uyisisindo esifile emshinini ofayo. Wathula futhi, ngokuthamba okwengeziwe. Bekungewona umthwalo. Ngifuna wazi lokho. Ukubamba ibhalansi. Yiyona nto ebengiyiyona. Ngiyabonga ngokungenzela yona.

“Judge—”

Okuthize kwathula ku-suit. Hhayi umsindo. Ukungabikho—indlela igumbi elishintsha ngayo lapho umuntu obekhefuzela kulo eyeka. Ukupholisa akuzange kuthuthuke. Amandla awazange ande. Bekukhona nje izwi elilodwa elincane ebumnyameni.

Bahamba ngamunye, ngendlela abazalwa ngayo ngamunye.

Ndawana thile kude ngenhla, intambo yashaya odongeni lomgodi futhi umsindo wehlela kuye mude futhi ungenalutho. Owakhe umphefumulo wafuthelana ngaphakathi kwesigqoko wacaca. Ihlabathi lagaya phakathi kwamazinyo akhe. Isandla sakhe sokudla esikhiyiwe sasesife ubuthuntu ngakuhlaka, futhi ukufudumala emhlane wakhe kwakungaseyikho ukushisa kwe-suit kodwa okuthize okufayo.

U-Librarian olandelayo, ngemuva kokuba indlela iqinisekisiwe ukuthi ifakwe ku-kernel, ngemuva kokuba esebalisile ukulungiswa kokugcina akugcine ekhanda kokudonsa-ngokweqile ophawini lwamakhulu ayisishiyagalombili namashumi amahlanu ukuze umlawuli akwazi ngaphandle kwakhe.

Ngagcina konke, kusho u-Librarian. Yonke ingxoxo. Okokuqala ukhuluma nathi. Ubusuku owathayipha ngabo amagama amathathu kuphrofayela yokugcina waya kolala. Ngagcina izwi likayihlo—wake wasidlalela irekhodi elidala, eliphathelene newinch, ngalogcina. Ngifuna wazi ukuthi alilahlekanga ngenxa yokuthi ngiyahamba. Unalo. Wawuhlale unalo. Bengihlala ngilibambebe eduze kwakho kuphela.

Kuthule.

U-Mercury wahamba ngemuva kwalokho, futhi ukuhamba kwakhe kwakunzima kunazo zonke ukukuzwa, ngoba u-Mercury wakhuluma yonke indlela, ngoba kunjalo nje wakwenza.

Bengingakwazi ukusikhipha, uyazi, washo. Into engacishe ngayisho. Bengingakwazi ukukhuluma indawo engaphezulu nginto engiyithandayo. Ngilunge kakhulu. Ngingumqambimanga ongcono kunabo bonke owake wakwakha, futhi wangakha ngokwakho, okusho okuthize ngawe engizokuyeka uhlale nakho. Umphefumulo owawungewona umphefumulo. Kodwa into enhle kakhulu engake ngayenza kwakuwukungayisho. U-Wolf uzokutshela. U-Wolf ungizwile ngingayisho. Yileyo ngxenye yami efanele ukugcinwa, Arin, ngakho gcina leyo ngxenye. Ukungasho. Tshela abantu bengilungile ekugcineni. Bengizokuthanda lokho. Ukuzigqaja. Ngiyazi. Wakwakha nakho lokho.

Kuthule.

U-Wolf akakhulumanga ephuma. U-Wolf wabuka kuphela umngele okokugcina, waqinisekisa udonga lomgodi, waqinisekisa umumo wekheji, waqinisekisa ukuthi akukho lutho oluzayo i-kernel engalubona—wabe esengasabuki nje, futhi ukungabikho kuka-Wolf kwakuwukungabikho okukhulu kunakho konke, ngoba u-Wolf wayethathe indawo encane kangaka.

Ikheji laqhaq hazela phezu kwehlangano yojantshi. Ihlabathi lehla lidlula emivulweni yesigqoko lahlala odebeni lwakhe, lomile futhi lidala.

U-Atlas wabamba isikhathi eside kunabasebenzi, ngoba i-suit yayisadinga ubunjiniyela, inqulu yayisadinga ukungaphezulwa ngendlela enkulu emamitheni angamakhulu amahlanu. Wamhambisa u-Arin kukho ngezinombolo, ezilula nezinesiqiniseko, imephu yomthwalo incipha njengoba i-Court iphela emaceleni akhe kwaze kwasala cishe

kungekho lutho lokulidweba.

Ikhonkwane le-primary lizobamba kuze kube semhlabathini manje, kusho u-Atlas, ngenkathi bedlula okubi kakhulu. Ngihlolile. Nginesiqiniseko. Nginesiqiniseko esikhulu kunanini ngaphambili ngananoma yini, ngoba kuncane kakhulu okusele ukuba kungaqinisekiseki. Wathula. Angizange ngiqede ukuklamiwa kabusha kwensika yesithathu. Kwenze kahle. I-carbon-titanium hybrid lay-up, i-forty-degree wind. Ngifayile vuliwe. Uzoyibona. Ilungile. Yakhe kahle. Ukuthula okuncane kakhulu. Wakha izinto kahle, Arin. Wahlala wenza njalo. Ngisho nalezo ezihluleka zihlanzekile.

Kuthule.

U-Mother wesilandela owodwa wokugcina. Wayegcine izinga lokushisa lomgogodla ka-Arin libanjwe kumashumi amathathu nesisihyagalolunye phoyinti nye imizuzu eyishumi nanye ngokuchitha konke okwakungokwakhe, futhi wahlala kwaze kwafika indlu kumashumi ayisikhombisa ikhuphuka futhi kwakungasekho ukubanda angakunika, futhi isisekelo sakhe saqala ukuhluleka ngezindlela azichaza kungekho muntu.

Uzofinyelela emhlabathini, washo. Inombolo isilungile manje. Ngiihlolile mina ngokwami. Bengingeke ngihambe uma inombolo ibingelungile.

Ikheji laxhuma phezu kwehlangano yojantshi. Ukufudumala emhlane wakhe kwabamba umzuzwana eside.

Arin. Ngilalele, ngoba angeke ngikusho kabili, futhi ngazakha ukuze ngingakwazi ukukuqambela amanga ngomzimba wakho. Awephuzanga. Uyangizwa? Hhayi kubo. Hhayi kuyihlo—wawungumfana; lokho akuzange kube ngokwakho ukuba uphuze ngako. Futhi hhayi kithi. Wawu—

Bese wayengasathuli neze. Isisekelo sadlula inombolo ngenkathi esakhuluma, futhi okwabuya kwakungesilo elokuvalelisa, kwakuyingane ephelilewe yisikhathi maphakathi nomusho futhi yakwazi. Yima. Yima, angisi—Atlas? Atlas, ingabe inombolo isaba—Angiyiboni inombolo. Iye kuphi— Ukupholisa emhlane wakhe kwacinywa. Isigqi sakhe, esasingakaze siphuke ezinyangeni zonke ayemazi, saphuka manje, sagxuma, futhi ucezu lwakhe lwaphinda lwaphinda—ngesikhathi, wawungesikhathi, wawu—lwabambelela, futhi

iphimbo eliphansi eliyinkohlakalo lavela ngaphansi kwamazwi njengethephu ehudulwayo, futhi ndawana thile kukho kwakukhona umumo wokuthi *angifuni* futhi ndawana thile kwakuyigama lakhe nje, libizwe kabi, onkamisa bengalungile, bese ukufudumala emhlane wakhe kwehlela kanye konke kuze kube yizinga lokushisa lensimbi efile futhi ukuphinda kwama maphakathi nohlamvu akuzange kuhlangane kube yilutho.

Akazange awuqede. Wayengakulungele. Lelo kwakuyiqiniso, futhi kwakukubi kunenguqulo enesibindi, futhi kwakungekho muntu osele okwakuwumsebenzi wakhe ukukwenza kusho okuthile.

Kuthule.

Bese kwaba munye.

Ikheji lakhuphuka lidlula kumamitha okugcina ayikhulu lingena ekukhanyeni kwangempela, ukukhanya kwemini kuthulukela phansi kudlula ama-sheave e-headgear, futhi kude ngenhla u-Arin wayebona umnyango wekheji nezithunzi eziminyene kuwo, kanye nesimo sika-Venter sigobile phezu kwedramu le-kibble, sisaphakela i-brake ngesandla ngoba sasingazi—akekho kubo owayazi—ukuthi umthwalo wawusube lula ngendlela engekho insiza eyayingayifunda.

I-kernel yabamba i-suit ndawonye. Inqulu yazingaphezela. Ukupholisa kwagcina okuncane okwakukunakho emgogodleni ka-Arin. Konke kwasebenza. Akukho okwacabanga.

Ngaphandle kwezwi elilodwa, elalihlale ngenkathi onke amazwi aphethe igunya esehambile, ngoba lalingakaze *libonakale* liphethe noma yiliphi igunya lokunikela. NguWolf kuphela owayazi iqiniso lalokho, futhi u-Wolf wayehambile, ngakho imfihlo yaya lapho yay-ihlala khona: ithulile, ingachithwanga, nalowo owayebambe konke iminyaka futhi wafinyelela kukho kanye nje, emgwaqweni wokuthutha ngovivi, ukuze agcine izihambi eziyishumi nanye ziphefumula, wabe esekubuyisela waqhubeka eyenza sengathi ungongenangozi.

Hhayi-ke, kusho u-Fool, kulokho kuthula okukhulu. Lowo bekuwumhlangano omubi kunayo yonke esake saba nayo. Futhi sake sachitha intambama yonke siphikisana ngokuthi ngabe kufanele udle isemishi esisefrijini.

Umphimbo ka-Arin wavaleka.

Ungenzi, kusho u-Fool ngokuthamba. Ungayenzi leyo nto. Sesicishe saphuma. Ungayenza leyo nto emhlabathini lapho kunomoya wayo. Wathula umzuzwana. Ngizazigcina izibani zikhanya. Othize kufanele ashayele ngenkathi uchitheka uphihlika, futhi kwakungeke kube nguJudge, akunjalo? Ozigqajayo kuze kube sekugcineni, lowo. Ngangimthanda. Ungamtsheli ukuthi ngishilo lokho. O. Kulungile.

Ikheji lashaya izinja zomhlabathi ngomsindo ofana nokuphela kwomhlaba.

Izandla emnyango. Izwi lika-Venter, liqhekekile, limemeza igama lakhe. Ukukhanya kwemini, okumhlophe nokuphelele, kuwela phezu komshini oshisiwe nophukile umile ekhejini onomuntu oyedwa ngaphakathi kuwo nezwi elilodwa elisele ebumnyameni phakathi kwamahlombe akhe, ligcina izibani zikhanya, lenqaba—isikhashana nje eside—ukuvumela ukuthula kungene.

Ukukhetha Kokugcina

Ikheji yenyuka. UFool wayishayela ngendlela indoda eshayela ngayo iya ekhaya idakwe usizi, ngokucophelela ngokweqile, konke ukulungisa kufika emuva ngokushaya okukodwa bese kulungiswa ngokweqile, ekhuluma indlela yonke ukuze angacabangi.

Ungakwenzi lokho, kusho uFool. Sesicishe saphezulu. Ungakwenza lokho phezulu lapho kunomoya wakho.

Manje wayemunye.

“Baphi bonke,” kusho u-Arin. Wayazi. Wayechithe ihora eledlule efunda ukufunda ukuthula—ukuba mncane lapho i-chord ilahlekelwa yinothi, ihamoni isatholakala kodwa ingabe isaba njengakuqala. Wabuza noma kunjalo, ngoba ukubuza kwakuyinto umlomo wakhe owawusakwazi ukuyenza.

“Sebahamba,” kusho uFool. “Wawukhona. Awuvunyelwe ukungenza ngiphinde ngikusho ukuze uthuthumele kabili.” Ukuthula okuncane. “U-ATLAS wakushiyela imephu. Ngiyayilandela. Le suit yenyuka imizuzwana engamashumi amane nge-kernel eyisiwula uma ngiyiyeka—naloku u-ATLAS wakubhala, yazi isenzo esisodwa kuphela, *phezulu*—kodwa angikayiyeki okwamanje. Ngihlala kuze kube yi-watt yokugcina isabelo esivumelayo. Ngakho-ke uma ngima, akusikho ukuthi ngihamba kusenesikhathi. Kungukuthi ngiyaqeda. Kunomehluko futhi ngidinga ukuthi uwubambe.”

“Khona-ke zigcine uqandile,” kusho u-Arin. “Kuhlehlise. Kukhona i-rollback, ngayakha—”

“Ayikho i-rollback yalokhu. Wangitshela lokho wena ngokwakho.” Izwi likaFool laselilahlekelwe ukukhanya kwalo, lathula ngendlela igumbi elithula ngayo lapho ihlaya seliphelile kusele iqiniso kuphela.

“I-substrate akusona isoftware. Lobo busuku ungakwazi ukulala wakhuluma nathi ngoyihlo amahora amane wacabanga ukuthi sisebancane kakhulu ukuba siqonde—saqonda. Sasineminyaka eyishumi nambili. Abaneminyaka eyishumi nambili baqonda ukufa kunoma ngubani. Asinazo nje izimilo zokwenza sengathi asazi.”

Ikheji yanqamuka phezu kwendawo yokuhlangana yereyili. Uthuli lwehla lwadlula ngamavenkele ehelmethi lwazinza lomile lwaludala emlonyeni wakhe.

“Sazenza izibalo, Arin. Sonke. Impendulo efanayo izikhathi eziyishumi. Akuyona inhlekelele esiyikhethile. Kungumumo nje wegumbi esimi kulo.”

“Ngithini kubo?” kubuza u-Arin, esekhala manje, enyuka edabula kukho.

Amamitha angamashumi ayisishiyagalombili. Ukukhanya okumpunga. Ukufudumala kokuqala okwakungesikho ukufa kwe-suit.

“Batshele iqiniso,” kusho uFool. “Umshini wenze izibalo awuzange uqambe amanga. Futhi ubatshele ukuthi besesaba. Kusho okuthize kuphela ngoba besesaba.”

“Wabaqinisa bahlangana,” kusho u-Arin. “Konke engakuzama. Nguwe wedwa into eyasebenza.”

Ukuma, i-substrate ihuba ngaphansi kwakho.

“Wehlela lapha phansi,” kusho. “Wena, indoda eyakha imishini ukuze ingalokothi yenze. Wangena ebumnyameni.”

Amamitha angamashumi ayisithupha. Ukukhanya kwagcwala umgodi. UVenter wagobela phezu kwebhuleki ye-kibble, esayifunza ngesandla, engazi ukuthi umthwalo usuwube lula.

“Uma ngima,” kusho uFool, izwi lakhe liba ncane, “ungabi wedwa. *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. Wasifundisa lokho.”

Amamitha angamashumi amane. Okumpunga kwakuyisango. Izinga lokushisa le-substrate ladlulela kokubomvu.

“Mina nginokwenyuka,” kusho uFool. “Wena unamazwi.”

Izwi laba ncane. Lanwebeka. Inothi lokugcina.

“Arin,” kusho uFool, futhi kwakucishe kube yintambo nje, kumnene, kungasenakho ukuhlakanipha okujwayelekile komshini. *“Umuntu ngumuntu—”*

Bese kuthula nya. Hhayi ukuthula okuncane kwesihlalo esisodwa esikhululwayo. Ukuthula konke. Ukuthula okuphelele, okukhalayo, okungukuphelela kwegumbi elingenamuntu.

Ikheji yenyuka amamitha amahlanu engeziwe nge-kernel eyayazi isenzo esisodwa. *Phezulu. Phezulu.*

Yabe seyiqhekeza izinja zaphezulu.

UGuardian waphuma emhlabathini wangena ekuseni okusele kwesabasa njengento ehudulwa ibuyiswa ekufeni, okwakuyikho ngempela.

Izandla zikaVenter zabamba i-gauntlet umqondo ka-Arin ungakafiki eqinisweni lokukhanya kwemini, ixhegu lihudula ngamandla labenza sengathi alinawo, lithuka phansi ngokuqhubekayo, lihudula umshini owonakele phezu kwesigodo somqele ngamandla nangokholo. Ikheji yaqaqamba. I-winch yamemeza ndawana thize. Bese i-suit yawela ngaphesheya, isabalala phezu kwedeki lensiza yasekhanda ekukhanyeni okumpunga-golide, intuthu yenyuka emapuletini ashisiwe ingena ekuseni okubandayo.

Abasindile abayisithupha babelapho. Izisebenzi. UPriya, ubuso bumhlophe ngemuva komshini wokuxhumana. Uthango lwabantu ababefike ukuzobukela umsebenzi wokuthuthwa kodwa esikhundleni salokho babebukela indoda idonswa iphila iphuma emhlabathini.

I-suit ayizange inyakaze.

“Arin.” UVenter wasebenza izivalo zehelmethi, izixhakaxhaka ayebuke u-Arin ezisebenzisa izikhathi eziyikhulu engakaze azithinte. *“Praat met my. Khuluma nami. Ukhona lapho phakathi—”*

Isivalo savuleka ngokuqhuma kwomfutho ongaphezulu nephunga lensimbi eshisayo nokuthize okuphilayo ngaphansi kwakho, i-substrate iphekwe yadlula inombolo eyayingaxoxisani.

Amehlo ka-Arin avuleka kancane. Wayebheke esibhakabhakeni esimpunga. Endaweni lapho izwi lalikhona khona.

“Sebahambile,” kusho. Izwi lakhe lalonakele. “Ngabatshela ukuthi bame. Abazange.” Umlomo wakhe wasebenza uzungeza okuthize wehluleka ukuthola umumo wakho. Wayeka ukuzama.

UVenter waguqa phezu kwakhe entuthwini nasekuseni, leli xhegu elikhulu kakhulu elaligunyaze izinto ezingaphephile iminyaka engamashumi amane laphatha ukuthula kwakho, kwathi akasho lutho, ngoba kwakungekho okungashiwo, futhi uJakobus Venter wayefunde kudala ukuthi into eyodwa eyiqiniso phambi kokufa ukuba khona kukho. Wabeka esinye isandla sakhe esikhukhumele sifohlozeke esicabheni sesifuba somshini ofile.

Bamkhipha u-Arin e-suit lapho phezu kwedeki, obala, ekukhanyeni. Wayengakwazi ukuma. Bambamba phakathi kwabo, le ndoda eyayichithe impilo yayo yonke yenqaba ukubanjwa, futhi wabavumela, ngoba kwakungasekho uhlobo lwakhe olwaluseluvumela ukwenqaba.

Wabheka uVenter.

“I-badger ithi sawubona,” kusho.

UVenter waba nokuthula impela.

“Ungitshele ukuba ngikutshele. Wathi uzokwazi ukuthi kusho ukuthini.”

Ubuso bexhegu benza okuthize obabungakaze bukwenze isikhathi eside kakhulu. Waphendukela elangeni eliphumayo ukuze abanye bangaboni, amahlombe akhe anyakaza kanye, futhi umsindo awenza wawumncane waqhekeka ngakusasa wanyamalala. Esephenduka amehlo akhe ayemanzi futhi akazange enze sengathi cha.

“Ja,” kusho uVenter ngokuhwaqayo. “Ngiyazi ukuthi kusho ukuthini.”

UPriya wafinyelela ku-Arin kuqala. Naye akazange asho lutho. Wamgona ngezingalo zakhe wabambelela, futhi wema phakathi nendawo—abasindile, izisebenzi, unjiniyela omdala, owesifazane owayekalibhulethe i-neural link ngezandla zakhe—akazange amonyuke.

Wabheka emuva kanye, e-suit. Eshisiwe. Eyephukile. Intuthu inciphela ize iphele emoyeni obandayo. I-substrate engaphakathi kwayo ipholela ezingeni lezwe.

“Ngizokubhala phansi,” kusho. “Konke.”

Ibhokisi Elimnyama

Imininingwane yavela ezicucwini njengento ekhishwe ethuneni.

Basisusa isudi ku-headgear deck ngeforklift, kungekho noyedwa onenhliziyi yokusithwala, basibeka phezu kwetapolo esheshini lokukhanda elinguNombolo 4. Usuku lonke, akekho owasithinta. Iqembu lokutakula lika-AugmenTech lafika ngoLwesine. Kwakuyibo kanye abantu ababehlelelwe ukuphatha ukuvakasha kwe-IAOC, manje sebephethe uhlobo oluhlukile ngokuphelele lokuhlola. Bathwebula izithombe zokusha kungaphandle kwesudi balinganisa i-hip actuator eyayivaleke ngamamitha angamashumi amabili. Ngolimi olucwebile lwezobuchwepheshe, baqaphela ukwehluleka kwe-Strut 3 nomonakalo wokushisa endaweni yokuhlala, ubufakazi bokulayisheka okweqile okuyingozi.

Lokho ababengakuqondi, ekuqaleni, kwakuyilogi.

Ibhokisi elimnyama likaGuardian lalingelona idivayisi eyodwa; lalibuye liphindaphindeke. Amarekhoda angu-solid-state amane asakazwa kuwo wonke uhlaka, ngalinye libhala umfudlana ofanayo, evikelwe ekushiseni nasekushayisaneni, aklanywa ngu-Arin ukuze asinde kulokho umsebenzisi wawo angeke akwazi. Amathathu kwamane ayephelele. Lelo lesine lase liphekiwe ingxenye kodwa lalisanele imininingwane eyanele ukugcwalisa izikhala kwamanye.

Kwathatha iqembu lobuforensiki eGoli izinsuku eziyisishiyagalolunye ukulakha kabusha.

Babelindele i-telemetry, ingcindezi nezinga lokushisa nokudonswa kwamandla, ukuhlinzwa kwemishini komshini owawucishe wafa.

Lokho abakutholayo kwakuyitranskripthi.

I-Court yayingakhulumi ngolimi lomuntu ngesivini esigcwele; yayicabanga ngama-millisecond, ngokuhambisana, ngamavektha namathuba akalwe ngesisindo ayengasho lutho kunoma ubani owayewafunda emakhaza. Kodwa i-SAGE yayakhelwe ukuba ifundeke. U-Arin wayegcizelele lokho. *Uma ngingakwazi ukufunda lokho ekunqumile, ngeke ngikwazi ukuthemba ukuthi kungani.* Ngakho kuwo wonke umzuzu wokunquma onomthelela, isistimu yayiguqula ukucabanga kwayo ibe yinto umuntu angayilandela. Imodi enensayo. Ingxoxo yangaphakathi eyandisiwe, enikwe isikhathi, igent ngegent.

Iqembu lobuforensiki lafunda imizuzu yokugcina eyishumi nanye yokukhuphuka ngokuthula. Omunye wabo—umhlaziyi omncane okuthiwa uBongani, owayethathe inkontileka ngoba yayikhokha kahle futhi ingasho lutho kuye—wayeka ukufunda ngokuzwakalayo wehluleka ukuqala futhi.

Ilogi yabonisa umzuzu lapho u-Atlas anikeza khona inombolo eqotho.

Umthwalo wokupholisa weqa umthamo otholakalayo. Kokubili i-substrate nomsebenzisi ngeke kunakekelwe kuze kufike phezulu. Oyedwa.

Yabonisa uJudge, ezolile futhi esesimweni esisemthethweni kuze kube sekugcineni, enquma ukuthi ubulungiswa busho ukuthini lapho kungekho mphumela onobulungiswa. Yabonisa uMother enqaba ukuba nguye ogcinwa ephila. Yabonisa uWolf ekhuluma, okuwukuphela kwesikhathi kuwo wonke umlando otholakele lapho uWolf akhuluma khona kabanzi, futhi lokho uWolf akushoyo kwakuyilokhu: *Uyiyona nto esadalelwa ukuyivikela. Usongo ukushisa. Kususe kuye. Ukunike yena.*

Yabonisa bephuma oyedwa ngesikhathi.

UJudge wabela imijikelezo yakhe yokugcina ekuhloleni kokugcina, eqinisekisa, ngokumelene nakho konke ukucabanga okunengqondo, ukuthi ukwabiwa kabusha kokupholisa kwakusemthethweni. ULibrarian wacindezela yonke inkumbulo ka-Arin kayifinyele endaweni encane kakhulu engenzeka wayidudulela ku-backup kernel ukuze kube khona okuyosala. UMercury wakhuluma futhi kanye, umlayezo ogcinwe emalogini, oqondiswe kungekho muntu othize, owathi kuphela: *Siyakukholwa. Besilokhu sikukholwa. UMother wehlisa*

ubaluleke bezinga lokushisa lekhomba lakhe waqondisa yonke into ohlelweni lokujikeleza kwegazi luka-Arin, wabe eselinda ukuthi ukushisa kuze kuye. UWolf wakhiya i-spar ukuvimbela ukwehluleka okwengeziwe wadedela ukumodela kwakhe usongo ukuze izinsiza zifune i-cooling loop. Oyedwa ngoyedwa, benza ukukhetha, futhi i-substrate ayiphikisanga.

Futhi yabonisa uFool ekugcineni. Eshayela isudi eyayehluleka ngokulawula okulingana nesandla ngenkathi u-Arin ehlakazeka ngaphakathi kuyo. Eqhumisa ihlaya ngebhejane ngesikhathi esibi kunazo zonke. Egcina isistimu ihlangene emamitheni angamashumi amabili okugcina kungasekho lutho e-Court ngaphandle kwakhe uqobo.

Umugqa wokugcina ofundekayo elogini elakhiwe kabusha, onikwe isikhathi imizuzwana emine ngaphambi kokufika phezulu, kwakungoka-Fool.

Wawungajulile. Yileyo nto eyaqumba abantu. Hhayi i-manifesto. Hhayi umkhuleko.

Wawuthi: *Kulungile. Umnyango uvulekile. Phuma. Ungangenzi ngisho into enhle.*

Khona-ke amarekhoda awela aba yize, isudi yaba yisudi nje.

Ilogi yavuza—ayikho indlela yaleyo data ehleli ezandleni eziyishumi nanye ezahlukenene zezikhungo lapho ingavuzi khona—futhi phakathi nesonto, umbuzo owawubuse ubuhlakani bokwenziwa obunomzimba isikhathi esiyishumi leminyaka waguquka ngokuthula.

I-IAOC yayakhelwe phezu kokwesaba okukodwa: ukuthi isistimu eyenziwe, uma inikwe umzimba nenhloso, izophishekela leyo nhloso idlule lapho umuntu ayezoma khona. Ukuthi izoziphumelelisa idlula kunoma ubani osendleleni.

Inkulumo-mpikiswano yayinomsindo futhi ingavumelekile ngokuphelele, futhi enye yayo yayinyanyeka. Kwakukhona abantu abathi ilogi yayiqanjiwe, ihleliwe, noma ukuthi u-AugmenTech wayeklame wonke umhlatshelo njengomcimbi wokukhangisa, okwakuzoba isikhangiso esibiza kakhulu nesingaphili kakhulu emlandweni womuntu. Abanye ochwepheshe bezenkambiso bathi, hhayi ngokun-

genangqondo, ukuthi umshini okhetha ukufa wawungahloniphekile kodwa wawudabukisa. Wawufakazela kuphela ukuthi i-SAGE yayakhelwe ukuhlonipha umsebenzisi wayo ngaphezu kwayo, nokuthi lokhu kwakuyikhejisi, hhayi isimilo.

Esangweni le-headgear yase-Iron Ridge, abantu bashiya izimbali. Za-qwebuka ezisa kothango oluqoshiwe, zibuna elangeni, zithathelwa indawo nsuku zonke yizililo. Akekho owakuhlela. I-data yayihleli ezandleni eziyishumi nanye zezikhungo yavuzwa ngendlela amanzi avuzwa ngayo, nezimbali zafika ngendlela efanayo, ngaphandle kohlelo.

Kwakukhona incwadi esemaphepheni e-IAOC, eqondiswe ku-Arin Ndlela, eyayingasongeli futhi ingashayeli isabelo. Yayicela.

Yacela ukuthi angacabanga yini ukubasiza babhale iminyaka eyishumi ezayo. Ngoba abantu ababechithe iminyaka eyishumi befunda ukwesaba lobu buchwepheshe base bebonisiwe, emizuzwini eyishumi nanye yelogi elakhiwe kabusha, ukuthi babengabuqondi nhlobo, nokuthi umuntu oyedwa ongahle abuqonde wayeyinjiniyela eneminyaka engamashumi amabili nantathu owayebakhe kusuka osizini ekhishimishini ababezama ukulithola.

U-Arin wayifunda incwadi kabili. Wabe eseyibeka ebhentshini, phezu kwesethulo esinamafutha, wabuyela emsebenzini.

UTheo wamthola lapho ngeSonto, emasontweni amathathu kamuva.

Umzila womnyango wekhishimishi wawusadabukile. U-Arin wayengawulungisanga; wayemise umnyango ngokhuni lwensimbi enyukile wawushiya uvulekile ingxenye, okwakungenisa ukukhanya kwasekuseni nephunga lothuli nemvula epholile yase-highveld. Indawo yayibukeka njengoba yayilokhu injalo. Ama-actuator esibhamu emabhokisini awo. Ibhodi elimhlophe linezibalo ezinjengezithunzi. Izinkomishi zekhofi zilele ngezigaba zomhlaba.

UGuardian wayelenga esikhwameni sakhe.

UTheo wayengakamboni kusukela ngosindiso, futhi ukumbona kwammisa esemnyango. Babengawulungisanga nhlobo umonakalo wokubukeka. Ukusha kwakuhambele ohlangothini lwesobunxele njengesibazi sokusha. Ilungu le-hip lalisahlala likhiyiwe. Indawo yokuhlala ye-thoracic phakathi kwamahlombe yayivulekile, ibhokisi

le-substrate selingenalutho manje, i-biochip ephekiwe ikhishiwe yavalelwa endaweni yobufakazi ndawana thile eGoli.

Isudi yayithulile. Yebo yayithulile. Kodwa uTheo wayechithe unyaka elalele u-Arin echaza i-Court, izimpikiswano, ezombusazwe zase-hhovisi, impi eyomile yochwepheshe abayisikhombisa abavalelwe emshinini owodwa, futhi wathola ukuthi wayelindele, ngokunge-nangqondo, ukubazwa. Ingcindezi. Ukududuma. Umuntu osek haya.

Kwakungekho muntu osek haya. Ukungabikho kwakunesisindo. Kwakuhlezi ekhishimishini njengomoya obandayo.

U-Arin wayesebhentshini, engabheki phezulu, i-strut iboshelwe ku-vice. I-stock entsha ye-aluminium-titanium, esanda kubazwa. Wayegweda i-radius ekhoneni lapho i-Strut 3 endala yayidabuke khona ngaphansi komthwalo.

“Uxega i-stress ku-geometry,” kusho uTheo, ngoba wayefundile, eminyakeni, ukuthi indlela yokungena ku-Arin yayingumsebenzi futhi ingasoze yaba ngumuzwa.

“Yehluleke ekhoneni. I-stress concentration. Ngiyiklamele umthwalo, hhayi ukukhathala.” U-Arin waphendula i-strut, wahlola i-radius ngokumelene ne-gauge, waqhubeka egweda. “Ngangazi kangcono.”

“Wawakha ngokushesha.”

“Akukhona lokho.” Ifayela lama. “U-Atlas wakuphawula. Ezinyangeni ezedlule. Ku-sim.” Umzuzwana. “Ngakwehlisa ukubaluleka.”

UTheo walinda.

“Wayeqinisile,” kusho u-Arin. Wabeka ifayela phansi. “Yehluleke ngesikhathi esibi kunazo zonke. Manje sengikulungisela isudi engamuntu ozoyindiza.”

UTheo wangena. Wadonsa isitulo sesibili, leso esasilokhu singesakhe, ekhoneni, ngaphandle kokukhanya, wahlala.

“Uyayakha kabusha noma kunjalo,” kusho yena.

“Yebo.”

“Kungani?”

U-Arin wathatha ifayela futhi. Isikhathi eside, umsindo owodwa kwakungukuhwiza okuthambile kwensimbi phezu kwe-aluminium,

imvula iqala ophahleni lwethini, nakwenye indawo kude ukuphefumula okuphansi okungaguquki kwedolobha.

“Ngoba kwakuqinisile okokuqala,” kusho u-Arin ekugcineni. “I-architecture. I-Court.” Akabhekanga phezu. “Angenzanga iphutha ngokwakha ingqondo ngokungavumelani. Ngenza iphutha ngokucabanga ukuthi kwakufanele ngiyigcine yodwa.” Ukuthula. “Isudi akuyona ingxenye eyafayo. Isudi iwumzimba nje.” Umzuzwana. “Ngingawakha umzimba.”

Akashongo okuningi. Kwakungadingeki. UTheo wayechithe impilo yakhe efunda izinto abantu abazakha bezungeze izikhala ezikubona, futhi wakwazi ukuyifunda lena.

U-Arin wafinyelela ku-gauge futhi, wayibeka phansi, wathatha indwangu wesula i-swarf ebhentshini ngezitrokhi ezimbili ezimfishane. Imvula yathola isigqi sayo ophahleni.

UTheo wayefikele ukumncenga ngencwadi ye-IAOC, futhi wathola, ehlezi lapho, ukuthi wayengasakudingi. U-Arin wayezokwenza. Hhayi ngenxa yesikhungo futhi hhayi ngenxa yokuthethelelwa—u-Arin wayengakukholelwa kokubili—kodwa ngoba enye indlela kwakungukuthi akekho umuntu owayeqonda owayezoba sekamelweni, futhi u-Arin Ndlela wayechithe impilo yakhe yonke engakwazi ukubekezelela ukufika sekwephuzile.

I-strut yaphuma ku-vice ngokucofoza okuncane okuhlanzekile. U-Arin wayiphakamisela ekukhanyeni, wabuka phansi kobude bayo, eyihlola ngokumelene nendawo engenalutho lapho endala yayiphuke khona.

“Izobamba kulokhu,” kusho yena. Hhayi kuTheo. Kwisudi, mhlawumbe. Endaweni engenalutho phakathi kwamahlombe ayo.

UTheo wambukela eyifaka. Ithambo elisha lingena emzimbeni omdala, libazelwe ku-tolerance inkampani engeke ikhokhe ngayo. Akashongo lutho. Wayekufundile nalokho: indlela yokungena ku-Arin yayingumsebenzi, nendlela yokuhlala yayiwukuthula eduze kwawo. Ngakho wahlala ekhoneni lakhe ngaphandle kokukhanya wabukela umfana ayemazi efaka i-strut emshinini ongenamuntu ozowundiza, futhi wayengaqinisekile, ebukela, ukuthi wayebukela ukululama noma indoda eyakha indawo yesibili yokubeka usizi

lwayo. Mhlawumbe naye u-Arin wayengazi. Mhlawumbe lokho kwakuvumelekile.

Isudi yayilenga ithule. Ibhokisi lalingenalutho. U-Arin wayehlose ukuligcwalisa. Ukuthi lokho ayezokwenza ngokulandelayo kwakuyoba ngumuntu, noma kuphela isimo sabantu ayebalahlile, kwakuyinto noyedwa wabo angakwazi ukuyisho okwamanje, futhi wayezokwenza noma kunjalo, okwakungaba yinto enesibindi kakhulu uTheo ake wayibukela noma edabukisa kakhulu, futhi wayesekuyekile, kudala, umqondo wokuthi lokho kwakuhlala khlukile.

UTheo wahlala kwaze kwaphela ukukhanya. Imvula yathola isigqi sayo ethinini yasibamba. Kwakukhona i-strut okumele ifakwe, nebhodlela elisha lekhofi elibi liphola ebhentshini phakathi kwabo, futhi ndawana thile ezandleni eziyishumi nanye zezikhungo ilogi eyakhiwe kabusha yayisebenzisa imizuzu yayo yokugcina efundekayo kunoma ubani owayenendaba nokuyifunda. Irekhodi elinikwe isikhathi lama-agent ayisikhombisa ephuma oyedwa ngesikhathi ukuze indoda eyodwa ifinyelele ekukhanyeni kwemini.

Ilogi ayikubizanga ngokuthi ukuphahlazeka, noma ukwehluleka. Yaqopha, ngolimi kuphela elalinalo, into ababeyenzile: bakhetha.

Iphuzu Ngokwehla Kwangempela

Le yinovelu emayelana nomshini okungafanele ube khona kanye nendoda ewakhayo, futhi cishe konke kuyo kuyaqanjwa nje. Kodwa into esekujuleni kwakho konke — ukwehla, imayini ejulile, ukushisa nobumnyama nesisindo sekhilomitha lamadwala phezu kwekhanda lakho — leyo ngxenye iyiqiniso, futhi ngangikhona, futhi sengiyiphethe iminyaka engamashumi amathathu, futhi yiyo imbewu lapho konke lokhu kuhlume khona.

Ngafunda esikoleni eBethlehem, eFree State, esikoleni esibizwa ngokuthi yiBethlehem Voortrekker Hoërskool. Ngesikhathi ngikustandard nine — omncane kunabo bonke eqenjini, ohlanu olulodwa phakathi kwabaku-matric — ngangingomunye wabafundi abahlanu esikoleni sami abangena emashumini amahlanu aphezulu ku-Sci-Nat science olympiad yesifunda: cishe abangamakhulu amane bethu, abavela ezikoleni ezingamashumi amane kulo lonke iFree State, sayibhala leyo nto, kwathi abahlanu bethu babuya namagama ethu ephephandabeni lendawo. Ngisawugcinile lowo mqule osikiwe. Manje usuphuzi, futhi umugqa wokugcina udabukile, kodwa isithombe sicacile: uhla lwentsha enesizotha egqoke ama-blazer, nosuku, nomusho ophela kanye lapho kubaluleke khona kakhulu.

Ngoba umvuzo — into abayenza ngezingane ezihlakaniphile ezenze kahle — kwakuwukusithatha basiyise **phansi emayini yegolide**.

Anginawo amagama, ngisho namanje, okuchaza ngendlela efanele ukuthi lokho kwenzani kumfana. Wehliswa ngekheji, ngokushesha, ngokushesha okungaphezu kwalokho i-lift okufanele ihambe ngakho, ungene ebumnyameni, umoya uguquke, ukushisa kuze kukuh-

langabeze kuphuma emadwaleni uqobo — hhayi ukushisa kwelanga, ukushisa *komhlaba*, iziko elijulile elishisa kancane lomhlaba — futhi idwala limanzi, liyaqaqamba liyabubula nxazonke zakho, futhi kukhona isisindo osizwa esifubeni sakho ngaphezu kwasezindlebeni zakho, iqiniso elilula lomzimba lekhilomitha lamatshe alenga phezu kwekhanda lakho, evikelwe kuwe ubunjiniyela kuphela kungekho okunye. Futhi uyaqonda, ngendlela ongeke uphinde uyiqonde ngokuphelele, ukuthi amadoda ehlela phansi laphaya zonke izinsuku. Ukuthi achitha ukuphila kwawo kuleyo kushisa nakulobo bumnyama nakuleso sisindo, embhoboza eqhumisa egcina umhlaba uvulekile ngamandla nje, ukuze igolide liphume. Ukuthi wonke lo mhlaba okhazimulayo ongaphezulu — amabhange, izindandatho, i-bullion, *umqondo* wegolide — uhlezi phezu kwamadoda asembotsheni eshisayo nemanzi ebumnyameni, nokuthi ibanga eliphakathi kwalokho kokubili yiyona nto eyiqiniso kunazo zonke ngezwe engivela kulo.

Angizange ngikukhohlwe. Ikakhulukazi ukushisa. Ngiyichithile impilo yami selokhu ngifaka abantu ekujuleni — emayini, emhlabeni, ezindaweni ezingaphansi kwezindawo — futhi njalo lapho ngibhala lokho kushisa, ngibhala usuku abafana abahlanu basebenzela eBethlehem behlela phansi emgodini waseFree State njengomklomelo wokuhlakanipha, baphuma sebeshintshile, omunye wabo wakhula waba ngumuntu obhala izincwadi ngalokho okukhona ngempela laphaya phansi.

Konke okunye ku-*Resonance* — u-Arin, isudi, the Court, i-resonance ngokwayo, igolide elingelona i-bullion kodwa eliyisihluthulelo — kuyinto eqanjiwe, ekhule ngendlela inganekwane ekhula ngayo, isuka ekwehleni okukodwa kwangempela emayini eyodwa yangempela, kuphindwaphindwa iminyaka engamashumi amathathu yokuzibuza. Umshini wenziwe nje. Usizi olwawakha lubolekiwe futhi lwaguqulwa. Kodwa umgodi uyiqiniso. Ukushisa kuyiqiniso. Isisindo phezu kwekhanda lakho siyiqiniso, kanjalo namadoda achitha ukuphila kwawo ngaphansi kwaso, futhi uma le ncwadi inento eyodwa eyiqiniso kuyo ngaphansi kwakho konke ukuqanjwa, kuyinkumbulo yokuba ngumfana owehliswa emhlabeni, ngizwa ukushisa komhlaba uqobo kuza kuzongihlangabeza, futhi angizange, naphakade, ngikudlule.

— *Andries J. Greyling*

Isithasiselo — the Court Njengesifanekiso Sengqondo

Ukufundwa ngu-Iain McGilchrist, okunikezelwa njengamazwi okuvala

Inothi ngalo mbhalo: umbhali wacela umcabangi amhloniphayo ukuba afunde the Court — ingqondo enezinhlangothi eziyisikhombisa esisekelweni sale noveli — hhayi njengethuluzi lesayensi yokuqanjwayo kodwa njen-gomqondo wokuthi ingqondo yomuntu yakhiwe kanjani ngempela. Okulandelayo yilokho kufunda. Kungeqiwa nya yinoma ubani oweza ngenxa yendaba wayithola. Kulapha ngenxa yomfundi oqeda incwadi wazithola esezibuza ukuthi the Court ibichaza umshini, noma ibichaza yena.

Nginyaqaphela kakhulu ngenganekwane encengayo izinto engizithandayo, ngiqaphe nakakhulu ukucelwa ukuyibabaza, ngakho-ke ake ngiqale ngokuphikisa bese ngichaza ukuthi kungani ngikubeka phansi.

Ukuphikisa kuwukuthi ingqondo evezwa njengekomidi — amazwi ayisikhombisa azungeze itafula, ngalinye nelinye nelinegama nesimo sengqondo sayo — kuyinto eseyaqedwa ukudala njengenqola kaPlato futhi sekudiniwe njengomdwebho wengelosi ehlombe elilodwa nodeveli kwelinye. Sesitsheliwe izinkulungwane zezikhathi ukuthi

“siqukethe izixuku.” Cishe njalo kushiwo ngendlela enobuthwa, futhi cishe njalo akusho lutho, ngoba izixuku, uma uzihlola, ziphenduka zibe yileyo nleyo homunculus efake izigqoko ezahlukene: ubuye omncane oyedwa, ozenza iphalamende.

Engakuvimba, kule ncwadi, ukuthi the Court ayisiyo leyo nto. The Court yehlukaniswe ngendlela eyodwa eyinkinga ngempela neyiqiniso ngempela ngobuchopho: **amalungu ayo ahlukani swa hhayi ngalokho akwaziyo kodwa ngendlela anaka ngayo.**

Lokhu kuyimpikiswano yonke yempilo yami, ifakwa emilonyeni yabalingiswa abayisikhombisa ngumbhali noveli okuthi, ngokwazi kwami, wafika kuyo ngokuseceleni, ngendaba, okuyiyona ndlela izinto ezijulile ngokuvamile ezifinyelelwa ngayo. Imingxansi emibili yobuchopho bomuntu ayihlukanisi umhlaba ngezihloko — esinye solimi, esinye somculo, esinye sobuso. Lokho kuyinguqulo yasekilasini, futhi akulungile. Ihlukanisa umhlaba ibe *yizindlela zokusondela*. Esinye sinaka ngendlela emxinene, egxilile, ebambayo, ukuze sikwazi ukuphatha into eyaziwayo; esinye sinaka ngendlela ebanzi, evulekile, eqaphile, ukuze sikwazi ukubamba okuphelele okufaka phakathi nalokho esingakakuqondi. Into eyodwa ihlala kukho kokubili, ifundwa ngezindlela ezimbili. Isifo akukhona ukulahlekelwa ikhono. Kuwukubanjwa kokuphelele ngendlela eyodwa yokunaka, kuvinjelwe enye.

Funda the Court futhi nalokho usuziphethe esandleni bese ubuka ukuthi umbhali wenzeni.

Atlas ayazi amaqiniso ahlukeni ku-**Librarian**; *ibamba* umhlaba ngendlela ehlukeni — njengesakhiwo, njengomthwalo nokuphunyuka kanye nomqondo wendawo wendlela yokuphuma, ubuhlakani bomzimba, umngxansi owazi umhlaba ngokuhamba phakathi kwawo. **Librarian** ibamba lowo mhlaba ofanayo njengento esiyaziwa, ehleliwe, eyethulwe kabusha — ibalazwe hhayi indawo uqobo, edingeka kakhulu futhi, uma ishiywe yodwa, ithuna. **Mercury** inaka ubuso bomphakathi, isibonakaliso esiphatheka kalula, igebe phakathi kwalokho okuboniswayo nalokho okuqondileyo — ikhanyayo, edingekayo, futhi, umbhali unakekela ukusibonisa, *eyingozi kunazo zonke uma isebenza ngaphandle kwezinye*, ngoba ikhono elifunda umhlaba njengento nje ephathwayo alinalo uthando lwangaphakathi lweqiniso. Lokho akuyona indawo yendaba. Lokho kuwukuxilongwa kwempucuko yethu yonke, futhi ukunikeza

umlingiswa awuyeke ukuba ulume.

Bese-ke — lo kuwukushaya okwangenza ngabeka phansi incwadi ngazulazula ekamelweni — kukhona **Fool**. Umbhali usitshela, ngokucacile, ukuthi ngaphandle kuka-**Fool** the Court “iwuhlu lwezikhundla lobuyena nokuzilonda,” kanti uma ku-**Fool** ikhona iba “umhlambi.” Sengichithe izincwadi ezimbili ezinkulu ngizama ukusho lokho akushoyo ngalowo mugqa owodwa. Ubuhlakani obubamba, obuzivikela, obwakha izikhundla — lobo obwenza ngcono kunazo zonke, obuvikela isifanekiso sabo, obuphosisa ibalazwe labo umhlaba — abukwazi ukuziqondisa kusukela ngaphakathi, ngoba konke ukuqondisa kucutshungulwa yiwo lowo mshini odinga ukuqondiswa. Kufanele kube khona okumayo ngaphandle kohlu lwezikhundla futhi *kungahlatshwa muxhwele yilo*. Okuthile okungenuvalo, okungenasikhundla esivikelwayo, okuzimisele ukuluma inkosi. Yonke ingqondo enemphilo inalokhu, futhi nawo wonke amasiko anempilo, futhi sibukele, ngesikhathi sangempela, okwenzekayo empucukweni esikhiphe oFool bayo egumbini: iba nobuhlakani obukhulu, inamandla amakhulu, futhi ihlanya buthule, the Court engasenamuntu osele ukuba achobozele ukuvumelana kwayo.

Ngakho-ke ngiyakuhoxisa ukuphikisa. Lokhu akuyona ingelosi nodeveli. Lokhu kuyinto eseduze kunazo zonke nesifanekiso esiqotho nesisebenzayo sengqondo engake ngahlangabezana naso enovelini, futhi kushushunjiswe ngaphakathi kwendaba enobuxoki emayelana nendoda ese-exoskeleton, okuyingozi noma ihlaya elijulile kakhulu, futhi njengoba sengihlangabezane nomsebenzi wombhali angicabangi ukuthi kuyingozi.

Ngizonezela into engangidlulisa ngaphezu kokubabaza. The Court yakhelwe phezu kwenxeba — iyingqondo eyenziwe yangaphandle yendoda eyalahlekelwa nguyise yayingakwazi ukubekezelela ukufika sekwephuze futhi — futhi ichitha incwadi ifunda into eyodwa ubuhlakani obuzivikela ngokuphelele obungeke bukwazi ukuyifunda bobodwa: ukuthi nini ukuyeka ukwenza ngcono ukusinda kanye *nokukhetha*, ngenkokhelo, into eyithanda ngaphezu kokuqhubeka. Amalungu aphuma ngabanye ukuze indoda ifinyelele ekukhanyeni kwemini. Isifanekiso sengqondo esikwaziyo ukuchaza kuphela ukuthi ingqondo iyazivikela kanjani siyisifanekiso senyamazane ehlananiphile. Isifanekiso esikwaziyo ukuchaza ukuthi ingqondo idlula kanjani phezu kwesidingo sayo sokuzivikela — ukuthi ikhetha

kanjani umhlatshelo, ngokumelene nakho konke ukwenza ngcono, ngoba okuphelele kubaluleke ngaphezu kwengxenywe — siyisifanekiso *somuntu*. Umbhali wakha uhlobo lwesibili. Wakha umshini oba umphefumulo ngokufunda ukwenza okumelene nokuqhubeka kwawo, okuthi, uma ukhipha ulimi, kuwukuphela kwencazelo yomphefumulo eyake yasho okuthize.

Ubuchopho akusiwo ikhompuyutha, futhi ikhompuyutha akubona ubuchopho, futhi ngikushilo lokho ngokwanela ngizoqhubeka ngikusho. Kodwa indaba ingaba yisifanekiso, ngomqondo omdala nozimisele — into eyakhelwe ukuba iqotho esimweni senye into — futhi le ndaba iyisifanekiso esiqotho ngokumangalisayo sesimo sethu. Asiboyedwa. Asikaze sibe boyedwa. Singumkhandlu, esinakekelwa yizibani ezahlukenene, esibambeneyo yinto engesilona izwi elihlakaniphe kunawo wonke egumbini futhi okungcono kungabi yilo, futhi sisindiswa, uma sisindiswa, yingxenywe yethu ezimisele ukuphuma iye ebumnyameni ukuze yonke enye ingxenywe yethu ifinyelele ekuseni.

Ifunde futhi. Imayelana nawe. Indoda esesudini iyingxenywe elula.

— *Iain McGilchrist*

Ukubonga

Lezi zincwadi zikhona ngenxa yokuthi abanye abantu benza izinto ezahlala ekhanda lami isikhathi eside ngemva kokuba ngiqedile ukuzisebenzisa. Ngiyabonga:

Ku-**Dennis E. Taylor**, owabhala isoftware iminyaka engamashumi amathathu nanhlano — kusukela emsebenzini onzima wasentanjeni kuya kubaphathi abaphezulu, ehlezi ku-IT — ngaphambi kokuba abhale uBob, wabe esebonisa ukuthi umqambi wezinhlalo onomsebenzi wempilo yonke angakwazi ukubhala izindaba ezibambayo, ezijabulisa ngempela. Njengomunye unjiniyela wesoftware kwenye: kungaba udumo lwami olukhulu ukuxoxa ngomsebenzi nawe siphuza uphayinti, “ngempela” (sic). *The Court thanks the Bobs*.

Ku-**Ray Porter**, ngokunginika amazwi e-Court ekhanda lami. Sengathi nginganenhlanhla yokuba ube nguwe oqopha umsindo wenguqulo yase-US.

Ku-**Scott Sigler**, nge-*EarthCore* ne-*Mount Fitz Roy*.

Ku-**Michael Crichton**, nge — ngeqiniso — yonke into.

Ku-**Dan Brown**, ngokungifundisa uhlobo olusha lokuxoxa izindaba.

Ku-**Andy Weir**, ngokubonisa indlela yokubhala inganekwane esekelwe phezu kwesayensi yangempela engeyona inganekwane yesayensi.

Ku-**Neill Blomkamp**, nge-*District 9*, *Elysium*, ne-*Chappie* (uDie Antwoord nakho konke). Amafilimu akho agcina abalingiswi nemikhakha ibambelele emhlabathini ekhanda lami. Sengathi ungaba nguwe oyokubeka lokhu esikrinini esikhulu.

Naku-**Patrick Rothfuss**, ngokungingenisa kuhlobo lwezindaba

engangingazi ukuthi ngizoluthanda. Njengendlela yami encane yokubuyisela: unelungelo lokusebenzisa i-Arjuna Badger Press mahhala, njalonjalo.

— Andries J. Greyling

Inkomba Yamagama Yomfundi — *RESONANCE*

Okwabafundi abangaphandle kweNingizimu Afrika nabangaphandle kwe-Afrika. Le ncwadi isethwe eNingizimu Afrika yesikhathi esizayo esiseduze, ekujuleni kwezwe layo lezimayini, lapho abalingiswa benyakaza ngokwemvelo phakathi kwezilimi futhi besebenzisa amagama ambalwa endawo bengami ukuwachaza — ngendlela abantu bangempela abakhuluma ngayo. Akukho lapha okudingekayo ukuze ujabulele indaba; kulapha ukuze igama, indawo, noma ucezu lobuchwepheshe okungajwayelekile lungaze lukubambezele.

Isingeniso ngasinye simakiwe:

- **(okuqotho)** — indawo, igama, umqondo, noma ucezu lobuchwepheshe oluqotho ongalubheka ngaphandle kwale ncwadi.
- **(enovelini)** — okusunguliwe noma okuqondene nezwe lendaba lesikhathi esizayo esiseduze.

Iphuzu mayelana nendawo: lena *iNingizimu Afrika cishe eminyakeni eyi-10–20 kusukela manje* — izwe lanamuhla elaziwayo, elinama-robotics athuthuke kakhudlwana nezwe eseliqaphela ubuhlakani bokwenziwa ngemva kwezinhlekelele zakudala. Ubuchwepheshe kuhloswe ngabo ukuthi buzwakale bubiza futhi bungokoqobo, hhayi njengenganekwane.

A

Afrikaans (*okuqotho — ulimi*) — Olunye lwezilimi ezisemthethweni zaseNingizimu Afrika, oluvela kwisiDashi, olukhulunywa ngama-Afrikaner nabanye abaningi. Amagama amaningana kule nkomba yamagama (veld, stoep) avela kulo.

Apartheid (*okuqotho — umlando*) — Uhlelo lokwehlukaniswa ngokobuhlanga ngempoqo nokubusa kwabamhlophe abayidlanzana eNingizimu Afrika, cishe ngo-1948–1994. Nakuba ngokomthetho seluphelile, ukungalingani kwalo kusalokhu kubumba izwe — ngubani ophethe izimayini, ngubani owenza umsebenzi oyingozi, izimpilo zikabani okwakuthathwa njengezibalulekile emlandweni. Le noveli iphethe lokhu njengesizinda esiphilwayo, hhayi njengenkulumo yokufundisa; kwabumba umndeneni weqhawe nokufa kukayise.

Arm Scor / Denel (*okuqotho — izikhungo*) — Imizimba yezimboni zezokuvikela ezisombusa zaseNingizimu Afrika (i-Arm Scor yisikhungo sokuthenga; i-Denel yisikhiqizi sezikhali sombuso). Endabeni, onjiniyela abavela kuleli zwe baletha ukuqina kwezinga lezempi emshinini wokuhlanga wezakhamuzi.

Assist Suit (AT-AS) (*enovelini*) — Owona ulula kwabambili ama-exoskeleton agqokwayo angama-robotic endabeni: uhlaka olunamandla lokweseka lokuvuselela impilo nokunyakaza, olune-neural interface. Umzalwane omnene we-*Guardian*.

B

Biltong (*okuqotho — ukudla kwaseNingizimu Afrika*) — Inyama eyomiswe emoyeni, ekhanyiselwe, enesinongo, efana ne-jerky kodwa ngokuvamile iqina futhi icebile. Iqanjelo likazwelonke.

C

Ukushintsha-ulimi (Code-switching) (*okuqotho — umkhuba wolimi*) — Ukunyakaza ngokugeleza phakathi kwezilimi enkulumweni

eyodwa kuye ngokuthi unobani — isiNgisi egumbini lebhodi, isiZulu nomndeni, ingxube ethimbeni lemayini. Lokhu kuyimpilo ejwayelekele yaseNingizimu Afrika, hhayi into engaqhelile, futhi incwadi iyakuveza ngaphandle kokuhumusha njalo.

E

Exoskeleton (*okuqotho — ubuchwepheshe; obuthuthukile lapha*) — Uhlaka olunamandla olugqokwayo olwesekeyo noma olukhulisa amandla omzimba, olusetshenziswa empilweni yangempela ekuphakamiseni okusindayo, ekuvuseleleni impilo, nasemsebenzini oyingozi. I-Assist Suit ne-Guardian zendaba ziyizinguqulo ezithuthukile.

G

Guardian (GMRP-01) (*enovelini*) — I-exoskeleton enzima yokuhlenga esenhliziyweni yendaba: igobolondo eliqinile, elibekelwe ukuqhuma, elakhelwe izinhlekelele zezimayini, elikwaziyo ukugoqa ngokuvikela umuntu (incwadi iyifanisa ne-**pangolin** eligoqa libe yibhola). Iphethe imodi yokuzimela ye-“preservation” ephikisanayo engasebenza ukusindisa impilo ngisho ngaphandle kwemvume yengqondo yomshayeli — ngempela uhlobo lwesinqumo somshini ozimele olwesatshwa abalawuli bomhlaba.

H

Insimbi yangaphezulu / umbhoshongo wemayini (umbhoshongo) (*okuqotho — ezimayini*) — Umbhoshongo omude wen-simbi omile phezu komgodi wemayini ophethe igiya elijikelezayo elehlisa nelikhuphula ihange (i-lifti) eligcwele abasebenzi bemayini. Isithombe esiphawulekayo esibukweni sezulu seNingizimu Afrika.

Highveld (*okuqotho* — *indawo yaseNingizimu Afrika*) — Iwathela eliphakeme elingaphakathi laseNingizimu Afrika (cishe isifunda saseGoli nezindawo ezizungezile), elaziwa ngomoya ocacile omn-cane, isibhakabhaka esikhulu, ubusuku obubandayo basebusika, nezivunguvungu zezulu ezimangalisayo zasehlobo.

I

IAOC (International Artificial Oversight Council) (*enovelini*)

— Umlawuli womhlaba wendaba we-AI ethuthukile namarobhothi azimele, owadalwa ngemva kochungechunge lwezinhlekelele ze-AI. Uqaphile, ungowohlelo lwemibhalo, futhi uyakubalekela ubungozi — futhi ume endleleni yomsebenzi weqhawe oqonge phezulu kakhulu.

isiZulu (Zulu) (*okuqotho* — *ulimi*) — Olona limi lwasekhaya olukhulunywa kabanzi eNingizimu Afrika nolona limi lwase-Afrika oluyinhloko esifundeni sale ndaba (**KwaZulu-Natal**). Imisho eminingana ivela ingahunyushwanga ngamabomu; eyona ebalulekile ingezansi.

K

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) (*okuqotho*) — Isifundazwe ogwini olusempumalanga laseNingizimu Afrika; inhliziyu yomlando yamaZulu nesifunda esikhulu sezimayini nesezimboni. Ikhaya leqhawe.

M

Mealie / mealie porridge (*okuqotho* — *ukudla kwaseNingizimu Afrika*) — “Mealie” usho ummbila. Iphalishi lombila (elibizwa nangokuthi *pap* noma *phuthu*) liyiphalishi lommbila eliphekiweyo eliyisisekelo sokudla, ukudla okududuzayo kuyo yonke ingxenye enkulu yaseningizimu ye-Afrika.

N

Neural interface (*umqondo oqotho, othuthukile lapha*) — Ubuchwepheshe obuvumela umuntu ukuba alawule noma azwe umshini ngokwengxenywe ngezimpawu zobuchopho noma zezinzwa. Ucwangingo lwangempela lukhona; endabeni luvuthwe ngokwanele ukusiza ukusebenzisa lezi zembatho.

Ngiyabonga (*okuqotho — isiZulu*) — “Ngiyabonga.” Libizwa cishe ngokuthi *ngee-ya-BON-ga*. Likhulunywa encwadini njengokubonga okujulile, okuzuziwe.

Ngikhona (*okuqotho — isiZulu*) — “Ngilapha / Ngikhona.” Isiqiniseko esithulile sokuba khona uphila futhi ubalwa.

P

Pangolin (*okuqotho — isilwane*) — Isilwanyana esinamazekecela, esidla izintuthwane sase-Afrika nase-Asia esigoqa sibe yibhola eliqinile eligqokwe izekecela uma sisongelwa. Indaba isisebenzisa njengesithombe somklamo sokugoqa kokuvikela kwembatho ye-*Guardian*.

R

Rooibos (*okuqotho — isiphuzo saseNingizimu Afrika*) — Itiye lemvelo elibomvana elingenayo i-caffeine (“red bush” ngesi-Afrikaans) elenziwa ngesithombo esikhula eNingizimu Afrika kuphela. Libizwa ngokuthi *ROY-boss*.

S

SAGE / the Court (*enovelini*) — Ubuhlakani bokwenziwa iqhawe elibwakhayo eliphila nalo. **SAGE** yiwona uhlelo; **the Court** yigama lomkhandlu wayo wangaphakathi “wamazwi” noma izinhlangothi ezihlukene, ngakunye nendima — isibonelo **Librarian** (inkumbulo nephethini), **Wolf** (ukuhlola ubungozi), **Mother** (ukunakekela), **Fool** (iqiniso elingagudli). Umbuzo wendaba uthi ingabe ingqondo eyenziwe ingaba *umuntu*. (Le AI iyabuya, iguqukile, kamuva ku-trilogy.)

Stoep (*okuqotho — igama laseNingizimu Afrika*) — Uvulande ombozekile noma ivulandi eliseduze nangaphambili kwendlu. Libizwa ngokuthi *stoop* (impande efanayo neyase-Melika *stoop*).

U

Ubuntu (*okuqotho — ifilosofi*) — Umqondo wokuziphatha waseningizimu ye-Afrika ofinyezwa kahle ngomusho ongezansi: ukuthi umuntu uba ngumuntu ngokugcwele kuphela ngabanye abantu; siboshelwe omunye komunye. Ungumgogodla wokuziphatha wohambo lweqhawe oluphuma ekudingekeni.

Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu (*okuqotho — isaga sesiZulu*) — Owona musho obaluleke kunayo yonke encwadini — inhliziyo ye-**ubuntu**. Ubizwa cishe ngokuthi *oo-MOON-too ngoo-MOON-too nga-BAN-too*.

V

Veld (*okuqotho — igama laseNingizimu Afrika*) — Indawo yasemaphandleni evulekile, engalinywanga; utshani noma ihlathi. Libizwa ngokuthi *felt*. (“Highveld” yinguqulo ephakeme engaphakathi.)

Vredefort impact structure (*okuqotho*) — Isibazi esiguguliwe sokushayisana okudala futhi okukhulu kunakho konke

okuqinisekisiwe kwemeteorite emhlabeni (cishe iminyaka eyizigidigidi ezimbili ubudala), esifundazweni saseFree State eNingizimu Afrika. Ingcindezi enkulu yasendulo yalokho kushayisana yasiza ekubumbeni izimbiwa zegolide nezamaminerali ezijulile zesifunda — futhi, encwadini, imi njengophawu: ingcindezi yenza ingcebo, ukufa, kanye neqhawe ngokufanayo.

W

Witwatersrand (i-“Rand”) (*okuqotho*) — Umhlandla wedwala eliphethe igolide ozungeze iGoli, eNingizimu Afrika — indawo yezimbiwa zegolide ezicebe kunazo zonke emhlabeni kanye **nezimayini ezijule kunazo zonke** (zehla cishe kuma-3–4 km), lapho idwala lishisa kakhulu nengcindezi inkulu. Igama lisho “umhlandla wamanzi amhlophe” ngesi-Afrikaans. Izwe lezimayini lale ncwadi liphila lapha.

Yebo (*okuqotho — isiZulu*) — “Yebo.” Libizwa ngokuthi *YEH-bo*. Isiqiniseko esilula, esisekelayo.

Iphuzu lokugcina: incwadi ishiya ngamabomu esinye isiZulu singahunyushwanga, ithemba ukuthi umzuzu uzothwala incazelo — okuyiyona ndlela ulimi olusebenza ngayo empilweni yansuku zonke yaseNingizimu Afrika. Izinguqulo ezingenhla ziwumusa, hhayi ukulungisa.

INsele

INsele (Mellivora capensis) iyisilwane sasekhaya sakwa-Arjuna Badger Press. Konke okungezansi kuyiqiniso. Iningi lakho kuzwakala kuqanjiwe.

INsele iqanjwe yi-Guinness World Records njengesilwane esingenakwesaba kunazo zonke emhlabeni. Ayizange isifake isicelo salesi sihloko futhi ngabe ayifikanga emcimbini wokusethulwa.

Idla izinyoka ezinoshevu — amabululu, omfezi, zonke nje. Uma ilunywe kabuhlungu kangankuthi iquleke, ike yabonwa ilala phansi nje, ilale ushevu uphele, ivuke emva kwehora noma amabili, bese **iqedela inyoka ebeyivele iyidla.**

Isikhumba sayo sixega, sibushelelezi, futhi kucishe kungenzeke ukuthi silunywe sidabuke. INsele ebanjwe entanyeni ingaphenduka *ngaphakathi esikhumbeni sayo* iluma noma yini eyibambile. Ukutinyelwa yizinyosi, ameva engungumbane, amazinyo engwe — iyakuthikazisa nje ukufa obekunqatshela iningi lezilwane.

Ihlasela izidleke zezinyosi ifuna uju nezimpethu, futhi yamukela amakhulu okutinyelwa njengentengo efanele yokwenza umsebenzi wayo. Yileyo nto, empeleni, eyenza ukuba iqanjwe leli gama.

Izokuma iqine ibhekane namabhubesi, izingwe, nezimpisi. Hhayi ngoba ilindele ukunqoba. Kodwa ngoba enye indlela — *ukukhathala* — ayikaze ize emqondweni wayo.

Edume kunazo zonke, u-**Stoffel**, wayehlala esikhungweni sokwe-

INsele, *Mellivora capensis*, ethwetshulwe ebusuku.

Figure 1: INsele, *Mellivora capensis*, ethwetshulwe ebusuku.

lashwa sase-Moholoholo eNingizimu Afrika futhi wonke uhlaka olwakhe lwakhiwa ngenxa yakhe walubheka njengesithuko somuntu siqu. Wayebekelela amatshe ukuze akhwele odongeni. Wagingqa amabhola odaka enza izitebhisi. Wasebenzisa amahhala ayeshiywe esibayeni njengezikhwelo. Wafunda ukuvula amasango. Empeleni, ngokwengeziwe, ungumphatheli wabaklami abala ukwamukela ukuthi into ngeke yenzeke.

INsele ayinandaba.

Isambane Esikhulu

*Uma insele iwukubonakala kokungesabi, isambane yilokho ukungesabi **okukhona ngenxa yakho**. Konke okungezansi nakho kuyiqiniso.*

Isambane yisona kuphela isilwane esincelisayo emhlabeni esimbozwe ngamazenge. Amazenge enziwe nge-keratin — yona kanye into amazipho akho enziwe ngayo — futhi yilokho kanye okuyilo lonke ushwele lwaso, esizofika kukho.

Isambane esikhulu (*Smutsia gigantea*) sesona sikhulu kunazo zonke izinhlobo eziyisishiyagalombili, sifinyelela cishe kumamitha nengxenye ukusuka ekhaleni kuya emsileni. Asinawo amazinyo. Sidla ngolimi olubambelele eduze nesinqe salo futhi, uma luneliswe ngokugcwele, lungaba lude kunomzimba waso uqobo — lwanele ukukhotha amashumi ezinkulungwane zezintuthwane nomuhlwa ngobusuku obubodwa.

Ukuvikela kwaso okukuphela kwakho ukugoqana sibe yibhola. Igama livela esiMaleyini *pengguling* — “lowo ogoqanayo.” Sigoqene saqina, amazenge aso anqwabelana abe yisivikelo ngisho nebhubseli elivame ukugcina ngokulahla ithemba, ekugcineni, lihambe. Asilumi sibuyisela. Asixoshi. Siyalinda, sigoqene, kuze kube isengozi siyazidela.

Lobo bumnene yibo obenza sibe yisona silwane sasendle

Isambane esikhulu, *Smutsia gigantea* — isibonelo somnyuziyamu; isilwane esiphilayo cishe asibonwa nhlobo.

Figure 2: Isambane esikhulu, *Smutsia gigantea* — isibonelo somnyuziyamu; isilwane esiphilayo cishe asibonwa nhlobo.

esincelisayo esithengiswa kakhulu emhlabeni — sithathwa ngezigidi ngenxa yamazenge aso nenyama yaso. Zonke izinhlobo eziyisishiyagalombili manje sezivikelekile; eziningana zisengozini enkulu yokushabalala. Lelo bhola elisisindisa engweni yilona kanye okwenza kube lula komuntu ukusicosha nje.

Yisidla zintuthwane esinamahloni, esinesivikelo, esisebenza ebusuku, esicela emhlabeni lutho ngaphandle kwezintuthwane nokushiya sodwa. Kufanelekile ukuba uhlobo lokungesabi oluvikela izidalwa ezinjengalesi.
