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Waking the Giant

Through the shroud of black clouds forever blanketing the arctic sky, over the defeated shoulders of ruddy mountains, the bloodshot eye of the unsinking summer sun looked down on the bare back of the bent old man. His skin was bronzed by the sun's radiation, whitened by scars accumulated during a life of toil, and stretched tight over sinuous muscles and long knobby bones. He walked carefully over the arid, rocky ground, feet barely protected by the thin rubber soles of what had once been shoes, now tied to his feet with the rotting strips of his last shirt.

He took a worn down wire brush from the dilapidated tool bag that hung at his side, reached up above his head, steadied his quaking hand, and delicately attacked the lichen that had begun growing beneath the nail of the smallest finger on the left hand of his creation.

When the fungus was destroyed, the old man paused, barely drawing breath through the white and yellow beard that had grown over his mouth. He wanted to speak, but there were no words, and no one to hear them. He let the brush fall to the ground. He wouldn't need it anymore. After fifty years in the wilderness with only machines for company, he had achieved perfection. The day he feared he would not live to see had come.

He drew back and examined the massive, lifeless fingertips before him. He imagined mice running, lost, through the labyrinth formed by the tall ceramic prints. He looked at his own fingertips. Over the years, his prints had vanished entirely, cut away on rocks, burned off, crushed in machinery, and he smiled, proud to have given his fingerprints to his creation.

He glanced to the south where the watchful red sun sat on the horizon. Immediately, a green spot formed on his retina, and he was returned to the dark classroom where a small, sad boy sat 80 years before, in a different life.

Dust motes floated above his head in the white light of the projector. An empty ocean spread across the screen. “Everything you ever see, touch, or smell, is made of microscopic particles called atoms.” A voice from a can. “An atom is smaller than you can imagine, but within that tiny particle is a tremendous energy...” The sky over the ocean darkened as a flower of light bloomed on the horizon and then erupted thousands of feet into the air. Several seconds passed silently as sound waves rushed towards the recording apparatus, and when the waves of white noise poured through the distorted classroom speakers, the boy heard the voice of God, and he knew that he had within himself the power to change the world. As the light on the screen faded, a green mark remained stained onto his retinas. As the voice of the narrator returned, the boy’s ears still rang with the sound of the explosion. And he wanted in that moment, like the atom, to become great. And now, a lifetime later, the day had come.

Scattered on the ground were the remains of many of the old man’s past creations. Automated machines as dexterous as a man and hundreds of times as powerful. He had hoped they would save men from labor. A machine that could synthesize virtually any substance. He had thought he would create a world of abundance. He had even discovered a means of harnessing the power of the atom that was lightweight, portable, safe. He had wanted mankind to live forever. He had been praised for his creations, and for a time, he believed he had achieved glory.

But then, he saw the evil that is in the hearts of men, and he knew that he had failed. His machines were not humanity’s salvation, but the means by which they darken the skies, destroy the land, and forget God. He had not liberated them, but strengthened the bars of their prison.

So he left the miserable world of man, and came north, to the only livable wilderness remaining, where wild animals still hid underground, where the black clouds were thin enough

that the sun and, occasionally even distant stars, could be seen. In the wilderness, with the aid of his failed creations, he set out to save the world.

To recreate Man, truly in the image of God.

He stepped eagerly past the rubble of his earlier creations, now spent from their years of labor, to a four story foot-ladder that creaked in the wind and beneath his pained steps as he climbed. At the top, the wind was strong and stole the breath from between his lips as he looked out across his completed creation: a man carved from the earth, with the nuclear heart of a star.

He stepped off the ladder, onto the marble waist of his colossus. The wind changed and filled his lungs and long hair and nearly blew him off balance, and he caught himself and looked blissfully over the still lifeless form of Man perfected, the thousand foot naked body, lying lifeless on the ground, facing heavenward.

He imagined how gloriously, on that very day, his titan would finally awake from slumber, its head rising above the mortal smog. How men, women, and children will look up in awe as he approaches in his magnificence. How they will be struck by the glory of God, and destroyed—transformed—gloriously.

He coughed, and there was blood in his beard. So hastily he made his way across the mountainous sculpted torso, the wind at his back. On the titan's chest, he stopped and knelt. A small door was built nearly seamlessly above the giant's heart. The old man pressed his fingertips to the stone and it popped open. Beneath the door there was a shallow cabinet containing a gold, key-activated switch.

With shaking hands, the old man reached into his bag and withdrew a golden key that had never been used. A strange energy extended into his limbs, a warmth, a numbness. He could

barely hold the key, but carefully, with both hands, he pushed it into the lock. He swallowed, and with difficulty, turned the key ninety degrees to the right.

He stood, stepped back. The wind sang and the sun grew brighter. Beneath him, a low hum was growing louder vibrating up to his teeth. He could feel the heat from the core rising through the titan's invincible chest to his feet. And the man looked across at the giant's head, and in the darkness of its nostrils, a light grew, and the light rose from between its parted lips, and leaked out of the cracks in its closed eyes. In that moment, it seemed like the giant would come roaring to life, rising, and bathing the earth in the glory of God. But instead, nothing.

In despair, the old man realized the humming below his feet was no heartbeat. The light coming from the giant's mouth was not the spark of life. He knew in that moment that he had failed, and his broken body collapsed onto the lifeless machine he had created.

And the wind blew over him, but it did not sing or howl.

And he knew he could never be more than a mere man.

The sun's rays still penetrated the clouds, but it was not watching him, it was burning millions of miles away without sense, or will, radiating indiscriminately in all directions.

And the atom...

The atom.

For the first time in years, with difficulty, his cracked lips parted and he croaked,

"The atom".

From where he lay, he looked up again at the giant's face. Still, light poured from its parted lips. With great effort, he lifted himself up and with great effort, walked. He slid carefully down the giant's enormous clavicle onto its neck, and from there he climbed a creaking, tired ladder onto its chin. A hot wind rose from the giant's mouth.

Without hesitating, the old man climbed over the white, lifeless lower lip and fell onto the black steel incisor the size of a dinner table.

The air was hot, and the hairs on his arm curled and blackened.

He glanced down at the giant's throat, and was forced by the bright light and hot wind that came from deeper within to close his eyes. He reached down into the abyss and found the scalding rocky surface of its tongue, and without hesitation, threw his body against it and clung to the round, rough, protruding buds.

Wind rose again from the giant's throat, and smoke began to rise from the man's curling beard, as he started his descent.

His bones creaked and his skin cracked. Steam rose steadily from his body as he climbed down the enormous pebbled tongue, toward the source of heat.

Bit by bit, his courser hairs and clothes too began to burn away. Where his skin touched stone, it stuck, melted to the surface. His fingernails curled back like black wood shavings, and cracked. Flames leapt from his skin, and soon his broken, bleeding, burning, body dangled from the base of the tongue.

Suddenly, a programmed impulse launched the tip of the tongue toward the roof of the mouth, and it rolled backward, a massive wave, flinging the old man down, down the throat toward the light, and what remained of his muscles, bones, teeth, brain, heart, his fibrous tissues, cells, molecules, were ripped violently and instantly apart inside the nuclear furnace of the titan's heart.

And His eyes opened, rolling, bright, and red.

Slowly, He stood and His head rose above the clouds, and His shadow fell across the earth.

And where His foot landed, the ground cracked.