

Like any boy, I spent many hours of my childhood entertaining myself with my imagination. When church services grew long, my hand could be made into an animal, my thumb and three fingers serving as legs while my index finger extended to form the neck and head of this strange creature. My pet entertained me by roaming around on my lap with no restriction other than being attached to my wrist.

one

I had another pet that accompanied our family on most road trips. I imagined it to be something like a cross between a squirrel and a rabbit. This nameless creature raced beside us, leaping along over hills and across rivers at sixty miles per hour, sailing with ease over all

THE GIANT

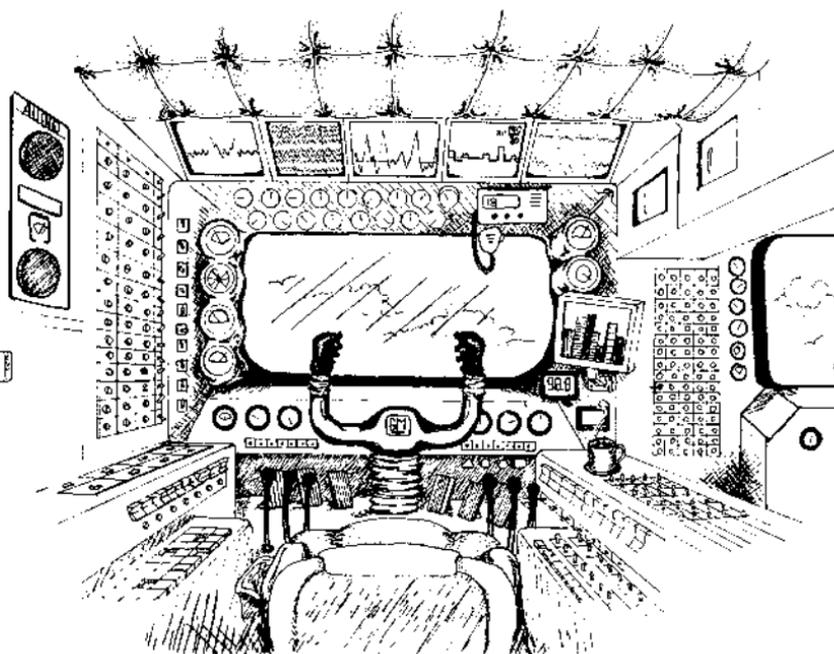
Like any boy, I spent many hours of my childhood entertaining myself with my imagination. When church services grew long, my hand could be made into an animal, my thumb and three fingers serving as legs while my index finger extended to form the neck and head of this strange creature. My pet entertained me by roaming around on my lap with no restriction other than being attached to my wrist.

I had another pet that accompanied our family on most road trips. I imagined it to be something like a cross between a squirrel and a rabbit. This nameless creature raced beside us, leaping along over hills and across rivers at sixty miles per hour, sailing with ease over all obstacles. Mile after mile I'd gaze out the window, charting the course of my invisible pet, planning where each long leap would land.

But my favorite game of imagination turned my body into a machine hundreds of feet tall. The grass became tiny

Shaking Hands With Mr. Parkinson

trees far below. The highly skilled operator of this machine was none other than me. I sat in the control center, peering out the windshield of my body's eyes. My skillful hands and fingers worked the controls with infinite precision. This enormous machine responded smoothly, and the world's populace far below watched, amazed, as I performed incredible demonstrations of dexterity and power.



The Machine

Now imagine yourself in such a vehicle for life. You are the operator. You are imprisoned within the vehicle's control center; you cannot leave until the day you die. Like the machine of my boyhood, this machine is wonderfully intricate and precise, yet powerful. Ease back on a lever,

twisting gently, and your machine raises its arm and opens its hand in a fluid motion. Lean into the control yoke and your vehicle moves smoothly forward. Reach up and pull a microphone to your lips and the public address system is activated.

To actually operate a machine that does what our bodies do would require a lot of automation. Two hands and two feet, even with twenty fingers and toes, would not be enough to pull all the levers, push all the pedals, flip all the switches, and press all the buttons to keep the machine in smooth operation. I imagine such a machine would need to be programmed so certain actions would automatically trigger a series of supporting functions. That way adrenalin could rush in as required without your needing to open a valve, and heart rate could accelerate without your twisting a knob. Blinking and swallowing would be controlled with no input on your part. Delicate adjustments to keep your machine upright and properly balanced in all situations would be performed by a computer.

The machine of your body is so marvelously designed, so perfectly coordinated, and so intuitively controlled that you really don't think of yourself as a prisoner because you are able to interact seamlessly with the world around you. But whether you think about it or not, you are nevertheless confined within.

Imagine your consternation one day when you ease back on the control and the machine's arm does not respond. A problem with the circuitry prevents the machine's appendages from responding to commands from the control center. As your vehicle's problems worsen, you begin searching

Shaking Hands With Mr. Parkinson

in alarm for a mechanic who can repair it, and panic as you learn the problem cannot be repaired.

An additional factor makes this terrifying situation even more desperate. The mechanic informs you that your vehicle's circuitry will continue to deteriorate, and the machinery will become progressively less responsive to your commands. Losing ability to interact with the world, you gaze out the windshield with mixed feelings. Part of you longs to escape this captivity, yet you have grown attached to this vehicle through the years of operating it.

We meet people like this from time to time. Perhaps you see a stoop-shouldered invalid at a rest home. There he sits in the corner, drooling, unable to utter an intelligible word. Subconsciously believing this person probably would not understand your attempts at conversation, you hurry by, not

knowing what to say. He looks at you sadly, looks from behind the windshield of his eyes. An intelligent man is imprisoned within. His skillful hands rest on the controls of his machine, but the machine no longer obeys his will.

He looks at
you sadly,
looks from
behind the
windshield
of his eyes.

The North Carolina sun shone warmly that May afternoon in 1998. Our family was among the other patrons gathered at Hope Mennonite School for a celebration of the last day of the school term. The children would give the program they had prepared. Afterward there would be a meal and a rousing game of softball. The air fairly crackled with anticipation.

two

THE GAME

The North Carolina sun shone warmly that May afternoon in 1998. Our family was among the other patrons gathered at Hope Mennonite School for a celebration of the last day of the school term. The children would give the program they had prepared. Afterward there would be a meal and a rousing game of softball. The air fairly crackled with anticipation.

Since school days, I had always thrilled at the prospect of a good ball game. I loved the feel of the bat held at tense readiness, the smooth, powerful swing, and the crack of a solid hit. I exulted in racing for the high fly, eyes riveted, every nerve straining, going low, scooping the ball in my sweaty glove, firing it to second base. But more than anything, I enjoyed pitching. The long backswing, the fluid forward motion and smooth release, and the satisfaction of a strategically placed pitch were my delight. The pitcher was at the center of the action. The pitcher set the pace of the game. I loved it, perhaps too much.