The Data Abyss

Society has forever changed since the adoption of computers and Big Data. I stood there thinking this to myself as I looked around at the hundreds of servers surrounding me. I thought back to when I first came to this place, many years ago.

FLASHBACK.

We had loaded the pack with only one supercomputer and a few servers. I could complete everything in my mission with just that. My buddy Miv and I climbed aboard the newly developed rocket and strapped in. I remembered the sounds of the switches clicking on and off as ground control checked that all rocket operations were functional. Moments later, the engines roared to life. It was time to go. I looked out the tiny slit that was our window, hoping that this mission would not last as long as I thought. As I felt the syringe pierce my arm, I tried to memorialize the comforts of the world as my vision grew dark.

Once we reached our destination and awoke, Miv and I pulled out our pack and moved into the station. It was a small area for us to house all the data from Earth and use it to analyze the future of humanity. The developments in technology made this quite easy with just a few tiny servers and a computer the size of a small tabletop. Miv and I put our set up together, then figured out our schedules and rotations for monitoring, updating and conducting maintenance.

The next month went smoothly, until we received communications from Earth. Miv and I read the message in silence. We had been expecting it, given the recent influx in data, but had not thought it would go to this extreme. My eyes were glued to the screen for what felt like eternity. When I finally internalized the message, I realized what a terrifying thing we had agreed to. The message informed us that the last month had been a test. The amount of data we had been working with was approximately 1% of the data that we would be working with from now on. Not only that, but the data was increasing exponentially, meaning by the time we would sort through and analyze 100% of the data for one day, we would have between double and triple that amount of data to sort through the next day. We would be getting another rocket sent our way with all the resources we would need within a few days. We were also informed that we would get much more sophisticated equipment to work with, but we would have to work much harder if we wanted to keep up with that amount of data.

With this revelation clawing at the back of my mind, I went to check on Miv. He had simply read the message once, then left. Miv had a family on Earth and our mission was only supposed to be for 1 month, but clearly we were going to be staying here a lot longer. I found him in our bunkers, in complete shock. He could not seem to comprehend our new task, or perhaps he didn’t want to. I tried to reason with him, but eventually his lack of response made me give up. I sent him to bed and told him we could switch shifts for now. I went back to our communications room and sent a response that we had received the message, then returned to check on the data.
The rocket with additional supplies and equipment arrived two days later. Miv had gotten himself together enough to help set everything up, though he still hadn’t communicated with me since reading the message from ground control. In silence, we put together a small building that would keep all the servers secure and functional, then loaded everything into that room. It took a long time to get everything up and running, but we managed.

For the next year, we continued to try and keep up with the data, but every month it got more and more ridiculous. There were times that we worked days without rest, just trying to get all the data analyzed and sent back to ground control. Miv had been out of sorts for a long time, but as the year progressed, he became a shell of his former self; completing his tasks, and surviving, but nothing more. Ground control eventually sent more equipment that worked faster and could analyze more data, but by the end of every month we would be incredibly far behind.

By the end of the year, we had only finished analyzing 2/3 of the previous year’s data when we got another message from Earth. This message said we would soon be sent another rocket with more data. Not only that, but they had received our message that there was not much space left in our building for more servers, so they would be sending us more materials to build another building with. They had also received our message that we wanted to come back to Earth and that they would do what they could. It was too much for Miv. After reading the message, I rushed after him, trying to get him to understand that it would be ok and that he shouldn’t give up hope, but I don’t think he could hear me. I found him the next day in pieces. It seemed he had blown himself up in desperation. I informed groundcontrol, but was directed to continue my work. My lack of emotions was probably a sign that I had been away from society too long, but I couldn’t comprehend that at the time. I simply continued my work, without change.

END FLASHBACK.

I looked down at the analysis that had just been completed. It seemed everything was in order. I returned the equipment to the appropriate shelf, then slowly looked at the hundreds of servers around me. I sighed deeply, then walked out of building 332. It was the last one we had built on this celestial body. I walked over to my transport rocket and strapped in. Then on the display I selected my last check-in point, celestial body 57. As the rocket launched, I again thought about how society has forever changed since the adoption of computers and Big Data.