



**When I  
Wake from  
Dreaming**

**By MT Decker**

**Etched in Darkness Publishing, LLC**

For information: [info@etchedindarkness.com](mailto:info@etchedindarkness.com)

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**MT Decker**

For information: [info@mtdecker.com](mailto:info@mtdecker.com)

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# **When I Wake from Dreaming**

**By M.T. Decker**

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There is just enough time to realize my mistake before a fireball engulfs the compartment. The blast reaches me and time seems to dilate around me as I burn. I let my breath out knowing that the blackness that will engulf me will be far worse.

If I'm lucky, the computer will take pity on me and my sensory feed will not be cut-off for more than a second or two for my failure in the simulator.

This explosion was not my fault, not really. The computer has been drilling me on worst case scenarios, and this was one of the worst.

I try to count pulses since the explosion, trying not to panic as sensory deprivation weighs my thoughts down. When the count reaches ten, I start reviewing what happened, escaping the emptiness by critiquing my performance. The hull was breached. I followed every procedure to the letter, I'd done everything right.

I want to scream, but the computer is not listening and I have no voice. Not yet at least. I'm almost in a panic as the emptiness becomes too much for me to bear. Isolated from the rest of my body, I can only assume my pulse rate is increasing. If it does, I can only hope that the computers are talking to each other and the computer in charge of my growth will alert the training computer.

I continue to count but I'm afraid now, afraid that the blackness will continue and one of the computers will terminate their connection permanently. I only have a few seconds to worry before the computer re-activates our link and replays the feed from my session in the simulator. "What did you do wrong?" it asks. I know the voice only exists in my mind, but I hear it all the same, and it is terse.

"There was nothing I could do," I answer as I see everything replay in my mind, the computer slowing the images and focusing on each action.

"Are you sure?" it asks with a hint of threat to its tone. "Did you do everything?"

I can tell it's dimming the feed and before it can close down my senses again, I gasp.

"I didn't sound the alarm." I know I'm grasping at straws now, but it's the only thing that makes sense, not what I did, but what I didn't do.

"You must keep the crew safe," the voice admonishes before delivering a punishing charge that would have made me double over if I were in contact with my body. Instead, the pain is all in my mind, direct and unfiltered. The computer then withdraws, leaving me in silence to contemplate my errors.

I try to remain calm, knowing that sooner or later the computer will resume my training, but alone with no input. It is the computer's favorite form of punishment, because my imagination can do far more damage than it ever could.

I try to think of protocols and procedures, anything that will fill the void, but everything comes back to the fact that I am alone, trapped in my own head with nothing but me, my fears and I to keep me company.

When the electronic voice pulses through my mind once again, I am relieved. I know that once my body is finished its forced development I will receive input from my own senses. I hold onto that thought, knowing that when I can see and hear on my own, the computer will no longer have that power over me—but time, I've learned is relative.

"No matter what, if the system fails, you must let the rest of the crew know," it continues as I force my mind to focus on what it is saying. If it thinks I am not listening, it will punish me again.

I dutifully review the procedures again as it lectures me. I know that each time I fail the alone time will increase exponentially, just as I know there will be more failures--there always are. The computer seems to take perverse pleasure in reminding me of how powerless I am.

There is one thought that sees me through, and that is the knowledge that one day, I shall awake from the computer's simulations and it will no longer control my life.

I feel a slight shock as the computer draws my attention back to the simulation at hand. I hover there a moment, afraid it will shut me out again, but it relents.

“Now, we try it again.”

Admonished, I open my mind to the voice and the simulated images.

The voice has been my constant companion since I was decanted and brought into the training center. The process has taken less than three years, but in my mind it has been an eternity. The computer trains me, simulating everything from the ambient temperature of the ship to the maintenance and procedures I will be called upon to perform. It also covers what will happen should I fail to do my job.

Lives depend on my training and the fleet has spared no expense in guaranteeing I will be an expert from day one. Every response must be drilled until it is second nature.

I brace myself as a new scenario fills my mind. I’m not sure if the pain is a memory from the explosion or the fact that my body is being manipulated to develop faster, in the end it doesn’t matter. All that matters is the training.

Before I can finish the thought, I am standing in front of my console, monitoring the function of the environmental controls. I wonder if the actual console will be as sleek as it is in the simulator. I can see myself reflected in its surface and a part of me wonders if that is what I will look like.

My hand traces the sleek white surface as I check the readouts. It is reflex now. I’m analyzing the input before I even realize a new test scenario has begun. I let my breath out slowly looking for anything outside the allowable parameters.

I realize that the last system failure was the result of something outside the ship piercing the hull at my position. The resulting breach of the reactor had resulted in an explosion. There was nothing I could have

done to prevent the explosion, the computer had said as much, but my job is more than just keeping the ship's environmental systems up and running- it is to protect the crew.

This time as the system goes critical, I hit the alarm, sealing myself off from the rest of the ship. I know there is nothing I can do, but with the crew warned, I try to work the problem. I try to do my job.

This time, when the explosion hits, the computer allows me to stay awake. It lets me watch the explosion without forcing the pain through my mind. It is satisfied I have learned my lesson.

I am relieved. The images repeat until every response is second nature. I see the problem, I hit the alarm. I isolate myself from the rest of the ship. I fight. I die. They live.

I can feel my body this time, as it twitches in its forced sleep and I almost forget to hit the alarm the next time through. I can feel the heat of the blast as I press the button, but I fight through the pain and make sure I save the others.

“Well done,” the computer tells me and I feel its satisfaction.

“You have earned a break. What would you like to learn, Sefa?”

S.E.F.A. is the closest the computer has come to giving me a name. It is my designation “Ship's Engineer, Forward Assignment.” I have known that I will be in charge of the environmental controls, but the name means I am becoming a person.

I know that my development is almost finished.

I take a break, focusing on language and history before I am back at the simulations. I want to know more about the world and people I am being born into. While most of the crew have grown-up on the ship, born to the grandchildren of the original crew, I have been raised by the computers.

Genetically, I am the same as my peers, but my training has gone beyond anything they will have experienced. When my accelerated

development ends and I awake, I will be the equivalent of an eighteen-year-old, with the training and experience of a forty-year-old engineer.

It is something the computer is preparing me for, but its chief function has been to give me the specialized training necessary for my job. Too many lives depend on me doing my job, and nothing can be left to chance.

“Sefa,” the computer calls me, as more of the pain slips through. “You are being moved to your quarters. I will not be with you when you wake. It will take time for you to integrate with your body. I wish I could give you more—but I have done all I can for you. Be strong. Give yourself time. You will do well.”

I can feel my pulse quicken as the computer, my constant companion, fades from my mind. I fight to remember its words as the computer leaves me once again alone. But this time I am filled with excitement. Soon my real life will begin.

I can feel myself being wheeled into my quarters. It is worse than the simulated fire as I am picked up and placed on my bed. I cannot see and the only thing I can feel is pain.

“You will be fully functional in one hour,” a new voice warns, and I realize that this is the computer that has cared for my body while the trainer cared for my mind. “Please do not try to move until the allotted time has passed and our link is closed.”

I gasp, feeling as if I’m drowning, and I have to remind myself that I am breathing on my own now. I have been told everything to expect, but theory is not the same as reality.

I scream in pain as the signals from my body finally reach my brain.

Sound, real sound, is not like the voice I have listened to for the last few years and the smell, nothing could have prepared me for the smell.



I know they have turned the lights down low, but the brightness is nothing like what I have seen in my mind's eye. So many jagged edges of input as my senses send waves of impulses to my brain. They are not orderly, they come all at once, from every direction and I want to scream again—only I have never heard my voice before. I'm not sure if it is part of the jarring pain in my ears or not.

I force myself to breathe. I cough out the last of the fluid that has sustained me and slowly open my eyes. The trainer's voice is gone now, only a memory. I know it is somewhere in the ship, working on training the next specialist the ship will need.

Once I finally sort through the signals, I am surprised at how much sound there is in silence.

As my eyes adapt to my surroundings I try to orient myself. The room is similar to the room in the simulations, but there is no console here.

“Hello?”

I know that someone should be here for me, but when no one answers, curiosity takes over. I have been dreaming of this since my training began and I'm tired of waiting.

All my life has been leading to this moment, I try to stand and take my first awkward steps. For a moment nothing feels right and then the room turns 90 degrees. I am relieved that no one is there to see me as I trip over my own two feet and land on the floor.

Struggling to my feet, I laugh. My clumsiness would not inspire much confidence, that's for sure.

The next attempt goes slightly better as my mind and body become more connected, but to my horror, I trip a second time—though this time I do not trip on my own feet.

Reaching out, I take hold of the object. It takes me a moment to recognize the object, and when I do, I scream.

Bones. Piles and piles of bones greet me. There is no crew to save—they died long before I was born and there is nothing I can do for them, but grieve.



Mary Decker has only ever considered herself qualified for two jobs, Software Developer and Writer. She has participated in several fiction contests over the last six years and serves locally as a Deputy Sheriff's Reserve. Her writing is featured in local and international anthologies,

including *The Appalachian Compilation*, *LAST WRITES: Haunting Tales from The Mountain Scribes*, and *FlashDogs Time, Past, Present and Future*, all available on Amazon. Mary combines the talents of software design, critical thinking, and humor to bring her fiction works to life. Most recently, she has focused on expanding her contribution as editor and non-fiction writer with her current project, "Does this Body Armor Make Me Look Fat?"

