

What I Am Worth

I am worth five-hundred and eighty-seven billion. I am the richest man alive, richer than any nobility or anyone that has ever stepped foot in the oval office. If my net worth was placed into large piles of single dollars arranged in cubes, it would cover the entirety of the planet. The amount of money I am worth, is greater than any population that has existed in all of human history.

But despite this wondrous well of finance I have, here I am, underneath the Earth's surface, picking away at rocks in nothing but a loin cloth. With me are others whose names I do not know, but all know mine. With my pickaxe I weakly hit the stone wall and free the glowing mineral from confinement. The moment it lands, a floating spherical machine with a glowing centre fires a beam that holds it in the air. It takes off before I can blink, and I continue. A gust of wind runs into the cave, and I long for my clothes. They were worth more than what the average American pays in taxes. I had at least twenty outfits for each season, and some for-business operations. I miss the comfort of my large, designer jacket with its fluffy interior, it was as though I never left bed! But all unessential objects were taken.

My arms have grown weak, I have been mining in this cave for fourteen hours. Every minute swinging this piece of metal like I am a caveman trying to recreate the works of Michelangelo. I stop for a moment; I need this moment to catch my breath. A man like me should not be doing this! I worked tirelessly to get to my position, being reduced to this... inhumanity? It is insulting! One of those machines flies over, its eye scans me up and down, and the metallic collar strangling me injects a substance into my veins, and I feel as though I have never been tired in my life.

The twentieth hour struck, and we were escorted onto machines that resemble horse drawn wagons, but it possesses no wheels or horses, and it could carry almost a thousand men. The structure is a jelly substance, that absorbs anything that touches it and keeps it in a stasis. In stasis you were conscious, but in almost a dreamlike state, awake but not. The jelly satiates you, heals your wounds and energises you, when leaving you feel like you've slept ten hours and drank a huge mug of coffee. This is where we live, in the jelly. Unfortunately, my eyes are open this time, and I can see ahead of me, I see a woman wearing only a loin cloth, and beside her is a man. They appear to be embracing, perhaps for comfort? Perhaps the two were married, perhaps they were close friends or siblings or some other variety of closeness? They probably know who I am, but they are insignificant. I'm left wondering when in God's name will things return to normal? Where I'm back at home, with whatever I desire? It's impossible life will remain this way!

I don't know how much time passed, but we were freed from the jelly substance and all lined into neat rows. I stand in the middle of my line, a man behind me appears to be

mumbling. I realise it was that man from the jelly, and the woman too, she is crying, and he attempts to console her. But if he turns, or speaks above a whisper, then he will perish. I've seen it happen once since resistance fell. A woman was talking to someone in line, a machine saw her, and the collar injected her with a substance... an ugly sight it was, when her body turned to mush. A mush I had to step in afterwards, mind you. And when I did, I could feel it trying to hold onto my foot as though it feared isolation. Since that point nobody speaks, he risks a lot for nothing. A wave of those machines flies over us, each scanning us individually, the man stops speaking, and the woman composes herself as best as possible. The machine scans her, its light turns red, I hear her panting like a gun points at her head, but strangely she begins laughing. A laugh like someone told her the funniest joke that had been uttered, a laughter of joy and whimsy, she snorted and wheezed, her smile so far up her face it appears to eat her. We are instructed to go inside, and inside we went, her laughter stopped yet her smile remains.

I think on when all humans were taken from any safe space they had. I was found in a safety bunker which I moved to within the hour of the invasion. It was seven days afterwards that they found me, they drilled in and carried me away, and I was placed into a typical neat line. There, thousands of people put up one final effort to defeat their attackers, and it was a disaster. Everyone who resisted was destroyed, vaporized is more apt as there was nothing left. The survivors gave in and stood in their lines and were removed of garments, given a small cloth and a collar. Each injected with all but two of its needles, and then they poked us into a mine, given pickaxes and sent to our tasks. Whatever these things are they do not speak. The only language they've used is one we all understand: pain. When I mined the wrong mineral, I was given a small shock, just enough to hurt and startle. This was done, what felt like, thousands of times until I understood what they wanted.

A new mine waited for us, and I was working as usual. I turn and I see those two, both mining beside each other, the girl still smiles. I can see the man mumbling at her, but she just smiles and mines. With teary eyes, he stops talking and continues his work.

Five hours have passed, five... five-hundred, and eighty-seven billion... do these monsters have any idea my value? What I am? About my work, my life? I built my way from nothing! I started from the bottom and worked my way up until I was the richest man on Earth! I am richer than anyone who has ever lived! But in one day, one single, lonely day, I lost everything that I was! Everything that made me. With that in my mind I shout, and I throw my pickaxe onto the ground. Everyone stares at me, all surprised by my sudden act of defiance. I expect this moment to bring upon a rebellion, a new wave of defiance, that all here would see me, the man they knew as being of the elite, stand against our authority in a moment of human triumph. But nobody moved. Their faces, what I believed would be hopeful, were all that of terror. All began working harder. A machine flies in, scans me, and stared as though looking into my soul. Everyone focusing on their mining, more so out of

fear than anything. The machine stared at me with its hateful eye, before a needle injects my neck, and everything fades to black.

I regain consciousness, and I am in the process of mining. My body moving on its own. I could feel a terrible pain in my face, a muscle pain, like one you would acquire from overexertion. My arms move without any care for my wishes. I realise the pain in my face is because I am smiling, so large you would believe this was what I always wanted. I cannot stop smiling. My arms keep mining, and my lips continue to point upwards, I had no control over anything but my eyes. I could see in the corner of my vision, the woman, she still smiles. She mines away like a machine, mining in a rhythm of perfection, each swing with the same power, each movement with the same timing. It is something we shared, as my body follows her. We move with the same motions at the same time. Our arms swinging, our faces smiling, our eyes open without a hint of exhaustion. It is within this moment of perfect movement, that I realise the full extent of what has happened. I am worth nothing, not a mountain of gold nor the dirt beneath my feet. I had no real status, no real anything. That man had more influence over people than I have, he has a connection. I was worth billions... but now I am worth only what I can give. And although me and her are mining with perfect swings, although we smile as we do our tasks, I would do anything to escape, but you wouldn't believe that looking at me. Looking in, we are perfect machines.