

The Fold: A Story About Everything and Nothing

by beaverteeth92

Greetings, neighbor! I'm glad you've decided to sit here and listen to what I have to say. My name is Rex Alti Caelique (pronounced 'kai-leek'), and I'm in charge of this place. Essentially, about fifty years ago, the whole world got together and decided that to preserve the human race, they needed to put the entire universe inside a computer. So they did. They took everything they knew – every mathematical formula, every scientific concept, every work of literature, art, memory, show, game, and idea, and placed it all in one giant hard drive. Pretty much every star system was photographed in 3D by fifty massive telescopes, and the resulting data was put right inside our database. But the world needed to leave a few people behind to run the system, or else the hard drive could crash and everything would be wiped out, defeating the entire purpose of keeping us here. That's my job. I make sure everything works, continually back up the system, and ensure nothing happens to the database.

Backing up the system and constantly maintaining it is a pain in the ass though. We only have five systems, and with the amount of data that needs to be stored, we can't keep a history, so old systems are old systems. Only the most immediate form of the universe gets a spot on a hard drive. No going back to twenty five years ago, or even back to that piss you took five minutes ago. What's now for them is now, and what's later is just going to end up on the system when it happens.

But I know I won't be doing this forever. The guys in charge kept two hundred people in a spaceship with the computer, forced to travel the universe for

eternity; inbreeding to ensure there's a constant stream of people to maintain the drive. I'm just another bored mortal in the reaches of space maintaining it. Sigh, I sometimes wonder whether or not I should just axe everything, find a permanent settlement, and live there with the rest of my friends. Then we could stop maintaining this and just get on with our lives. But then we'd just be sacrificing everyone, and that wouldn't be right for the guys who rely on us. It's a dilemma that'll take me a while to get through, but all in all, we're pretty much just doomed to a miserable existence up here.

We have to constantly search for food and supplies or we don't eat, but it's not like it'll matter for long. Me and the current 1066 of us won't live beyond our twenty-fifth birthdays. You see, space makes our muscles atrophy. No gravity equals no way to work muscle, equals no ability to do hard work, equals eventual death. And do you have any idea how long it takes to learn how to perform surgery or prescribe drugs? I mean back on Earth, from what I heard, the shelf life of a drug was about a few months. We've been in space for fifty years. Nothing's going to last that long. Plus it's not like we have a university in our ship. The main point is just to maintain the network out of honor for our fellow human beings. Nothing more, nothing less. And to ensure our own survival to ensure that's what happens.

So anyway, in case you're wondering, this is how our ship works. The whole thing is covered in panels to absorb radiation and photons from local stars. That's how we move. And due to inertia, we'll just keep going in a straight line, so it makes sure things are efficient. But occasionally, we'll get near a REALLY hot star and have to change our path. It's kind of convenient how when they put everything inside the

network, they also had to map the entire known universe. So we pretty much know where we're going at all times, and how to get out of a bad situation if we have to. There hasn't been an incident yet.

But I wonder what does happen inside the network. Does it actually work as well as the government hoped? Or are things pretty much like the old world my Grandpa Senex used to talk about? It's just something I've always wondered, but I know you're gonna find out. We're not allowed to in case we see something that could tempt us into destroying the network, but we'll let the cartographer tell you what's going on.

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Yesterday, I was notified that I'm to be a cartographer. I was made immune to any and all sensation – pain, heat, cold, pressure – you name it, I'm immune. My muscles won't atrophy, my bones won't decay, my brain can't be damaged, and I can't get sick. By all terms and purposes, I'm completely immortal. But I have to be. Imagine having to explore a black hole while being torn apart by the immense gravity, or having to be burned alive while exploring a star. It's quite painful to think about, and I obviously have to function to do my job. Luckily, I was given ways to avoid these sensations, but they aren't important right now. But my gear is powered by nuclear energy, which takes advantage of Einstein's famous $E = mc^2$ equation to destroy a lot of matter to create a ton of energy. My job is pretty damn interesting.

So now that I've mentioned what my job entails, I know what you're going to ask. Why, if everyone is inside a giant virtual world, must I be made immortal to

evade the laws of science that govern Old Earth? It sounds completely and utterly stupid, and I'm sure there are many reasons for it. But what it all comes down to is that my superiors are afraid that if even one person is allowed to change the laws that control everything even a little bit for any reason, there would be outright chaos. People could be floating uncontrollably due to lack of gravity, the stars could fall apart due to fluctuations in the strong force, and the transfer of all human life and resources into the New World would have been for absolutely nothing.

But how do I get around you may ask? No one can go faster than light, and the universe is very, very big. Here's my answer. Imagine a large rug with a gecko on top of it. What would be the best way to get the gecko to move from one end of the rug to the other? The answer would obviously be to fold it. Folding the rug allows the gecko to walk upside down (as geckos tend to do) across the fold to the other side with minimal effort, and all that has to be done to remove the fold is to flatten the paper again. Everything is fine, the gecko is where he needs to be, and all is normal. And in the case of the universe, it allows us to evade the effects of time dilation because there aren't large periods of travel involved.

Unfortunately, this is where the danger of using models comes into play. Remember that the universe is a lot more complex than a two-dimensional piece of household furniture. Whenever one folds the universe, bad things happen. Remember the mass-energy equivalence formula I mentioned earlier? Each fold is a collision between two extremely large areas with nearly limitless force. Modern scientists hypothesize the known universe to be approximately 110 billion light years long. When a linear section of space 110 billion light years long hits another

linear section of space 110 billion light years long, assuming each one has approximately 1.8×10^{56} kilograms of matter, the resulting explosion will release approximately 1.62×10^{58} petajoules of energy, as defined by Einstein's famous mass-energy equivalence statement. The resulting blast is enough to wipe out anything within a very sizable distance of the fold, outright eliminating countless civilizations, galaxies, and black holes we haven't come even close to observing.

Some say we should stop making folds and evade the laws of physics, regardless of whatever harm it could potentially cause. Others believe we should continue to fold, even though it destroys countless civilizations. Still, many other people support not folding at all and just want to stick to doing whatever makes them feel comfortable on New Earth, even though we pretty much know everything. It's a dilemma that's been bugging me for a long time, and I'm still not sure what to do. Do I evade the order that allows the universe to function and potentially create chaos, or do I create chaos by continuing to follow the established order that allows the universe to function? That's what I need to figure out, and I need to figure it out fast.

This whole controversy started pretty much as soon as people were entered into the New World. Folders, Orderers, and Stabilizers were ready to kill each other for the chance to promote their views, but no violence arose because everyone remembered that humanity was transferred so the human race wouldn't be eliminated. Eventually, about three weeks before I was selected as cartographer, one person stood up and made a declaration. Based on what I've heard, this individual made an impassioned speech about the merits of each theory, and

declared that in the end, none of it mattered. That everything is “fake”, and thus whatever happened was meaningless. I’m not sure whether or not to agree, but I have to pick between the three options.

As of now, my superiors have been kind enough to give me ten days to make this decision, with today as the first day. In the meantime, I can take time off from exploring and collecting data about star systems if I want to, write, or even sit back and enjoy the view, but I have one restriction. I am in no way, shape, or form allowed to communicate or even listen to any other human beings. They’re afraid that I may become emotive and allow them to influence my decision in this matter, and since it’s a pretty big deal, I need to do this on my own. When I was selected to be a cartographer, I never realized the job would entail such intense decision-making qualities. Immortality is one thing, but the ability to choose between saving or sparing entire galaxies is something else entirely. Hopefully, I’ll make the right choice in ten days, and everything will be just fine.

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It’s Day Two now. I have to decide how best to do this. I know everyone is expecting me to give my insight in just nine days, and it’s pissing me the hell off. I never wanted this job. Others just forced me to do it for their own personal reasons, and now I have, both figuratively and literally, the weight of the entire universe on my shoulders. What will I do? What can I do? What have others wanted me to do? I’ll have to think about this for a long, long time.

I'm getting agitated without being able to communicate. Never thought being a cartographer could be this stressful. No texting, no calling, no talking, no loving. Not even just sending an e-mail or mailing a letter that my significant other and kids can get. I never realized that being cut off from all other people for just one day could do this to me.

Yes, I'm bitching, and you're going to listen to me bitch. But you aren't "there". You're just a mute observer who I don't even know if I'm supposed to be talking to. I'm deaf to everything you say. Are you sympathetic? Or are you completely uncaring about my current situation? Both are perfectly fine, but just hear me out before you choose.

We're both people, right? We have two arms, two legs, a head and a mouth. We both have twelve ribs, ten fingers, and 206 bones. But what makes the two of us any different from each other? Our minds or our situations? I need to make a choice where the fate of billions and billions and billions of light years of unexplored space is at stake, and you need to make completely different choices. You have to decide what kind of toilet paper to buy, or what to get your boss for Christmas. I'm in a completely different situation entirely.

Just come on. Make it so I can hear you. Help a guy out. You can't be too influential on my decision-making process. What harm could a single conversation be? You can hear me suffering right? Bitching and moaning about how much my life sucks and how I never wanted to do this in the first place? I know you can hear me, and I want to hear you.

But I know there's nothing you can do. You're completely and utterly unable to communicate with me in any manner because we're in completely different realms – you in the Old World, me in the New World. Do you want to join me here? Where given the right circumstances, you can potentially live for eternity, doing nothing but exploring things no one in your world can explore? Or would it be too hard for you; too difficult to adjust to a world so different, yet so similar from your own?

Come on, just imagine how awesome it would be to come with me to explore Beatleguise or to find an exotic civilization! You can fly me to the moon and we could play among the stars. We could see what spring is like on Jupiter or Mars! But that's just a Sinatra song, and this is the world. I know you can never join me in here, and you and I can never communicate, touch, or even just look at each other.

Whatever. All this isolation is getting me sidetracked from what I need to do. Thanks for helping me procrastinate. You listening to me banter is going to help me decide what's best for this world, and I really appreciate it.

So to fold, or not to fold...

I know, I know. I just wasted a day, and I need to get right back on task to decide the fate of the universe. So this is what I'm thinking. I'm going to stop folding. William Wordsworth once said that the world is too much with us, and I'm pretty satisfied with what we know. I mean we put a guy on the moon a while back, we've figured out pretty much every law of physics, we've found exotic ecosystems

in Galaxy TN-543901 and a few more galaxies, every species on earth is documented, and the scope of human knowledge seems to be at its peak. In the fifty years we've been inside this virtual world, twenty other cartographers folded their way around numerous parts of the universe just to study, and shit did we get a lot of data! I mean we're at a breaking point where we're actually close to knowing everything. What else could possibly be gained from exploring more? It seems completely and utterly pointless. All it does is harm the environment and cause needless destruction! I'm sick of all the outright BULLSHIT!

But I think I'm just appealing to my emotions again instead of thinking about what needs to be thought about. I'm acting too irrational. I need to use what I know and what previous cartographers have discovered to realize the consequences of each possible choice I make. Here's what I think.

If I decide to stop folding, we lose potential knowledge. Each day is a day without progress, and human beings need to keep busy to feel a sense of purpose. Once you remove an individual's sense of purpose, bad things happen. People begin to realize how meaningless life is, how worthless they are, and how nothing would change once the world is rid of them. Yes, their families would grieve for a while and everyone would be depressed, but does that really change the world? How much of an impact can the loss of a few people have? I mean when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, it caused an outright shock to the American public and the rest of the world, but things died down. Everyone resumed living their lives normally. Jackie Kennedy married a Greek shipping magnate, a new president was inaugurated, and within a relatively short period of time, things went back to

normal. But that was just the loss of one man. If everyone loses a reason to live, there would be absolute hell.

If we continue to fold though, it could cause the collapse of numerous star systems, and with enough folds in a finite universe, at some point, all that would be left would be Earth, assuming we continue to fold out of its way. This would result in exactly the scenario depicted above, in which people go stark, raving mad (yay Dostoevsky!) over their lack of purpose and desire to live, because there would be nothing left to explore. All we'd have would be a "tiny, blue dot" as Carl Sagan would say, with nothing else to explore. Considering the fact that everything we see in front of us has been almost completely explained by modern science, this also would not be a good idea.

But what about evading the laws of physics? What possible implications could that have for the rest of the universe? I don't know; my brain is tired. I need some stress relief. I can't keep doing this for so long. Off to take a rest and continue this tomorrow.

Off to decision-making world again! It's Day Four. I remember hearing that on that day, God made all the stuff that grows in the ground and the trees, so I guess that's when He thought it would be cool to make stuff live. Of course I don't believe it anymore, but I don't feel comfortable judging things, as you may have noticed from my ramblings.

So about the laws of physics. We still don't know everything about how the forces of the universe interact with each other, and we definitely won't within the next week, but I get the impression that this could be the best possible option overall, as it results in no destruction of surrounding systems, no existential crises for those back on Earth, and I can still explore and enjoy my passion for science and bring new discoveries for people at home.

But what if even a single evasion of the laws opens up a gateway, like my superiors, who have much more scientific expertise than me say it will? What if everyone – my mother, my boss, my favorite band, my lover – what if it results in their inability to exist? I need them to exist, I want them to exist, I can't bear to not have them exist. If their nonexistence occurs, then I'll slowly go insane.

Yes, I'll go insane! Did you see what happened when I realized I had to go just ten days without speaking to people?! **I'M IMMORTAL! TEN DAYS IS NOTHING COMPARED TO AN ETERNITY!** And it's not like I can just get rid of my immortality. If there are no administrators, no superiors, and no other people, then no one can make me mortal so I can finally die in peace. Sartre was right. Hell is other people. And as long as other people are allowed to get in the way of my decision-making process, I'll never be able to do what I have to do.

It's gotten to the point where this is no longer about folding, the fate of the universe, or what the correct course of action to take is. It's about me. It's about my lack of personal comfort with potentially destroying everyone but me. Does this make me selfish? Do I need to take others into account when making this decision? Maybe that's what my superiors want. Maybe they don't want me to talk to people

so I can see what life is like without them. Maybe they want me to realize how worthless my existence is without anyone to share it with. Anyone to hang out with, to sit in a park and eat an ice cream cone with, or just to maintain even the most basic of communication.

But on the other hand, maybe they genuinely do seem to want what's best for me. After all, other people are very influential on one's opinions. For example, I've been influencing you with my thoughts for a while now. What do you think of me? How is my indecisiveness making you feel? Frustrated? Angry? Upset? Depressed? Did asking you that question and stating a bunch of possible answers make you feel more biased towards those options? Or did it make you feel sorry for my predicament? Either way, you were influenced in some way by it, and no matter what I do or say, it won't make a single bit of difference for me, but my point was that it's going to draw out some kind of pathos effect.

We're all pretty easy to influence emotionally. Watching a food commercial, receiving a sexual advance, and shaking hands with a stranger all make you feel a certain way, no matter how you actually experience these sensations. Some people may be completely disgusted by whatever fast food product is seen on screen, while others may feel the urge to go to the nearest grocery store and stock up on food. Or some people may be turned off by the disgusting broad who's too drunk to realize how unlikeable and unwantable she is, while others may just accept the advance and take her for a spin on their beds. Is the stranger fat? Thin? Short? Tall? Average? Any traits this person has will influence me and will influence you.

I can see why my superiors have chosen to disconnect me from any all human communication. It truly is despicable what even the most minor of situations with others can do to oneself. And why? Why do we continue to talk to other people? They harm us and help us, love us and hate us, crucify and resurrect us. Everything they do is contradictory by nature, but we put up with it anyway.

Even though I live in a world where we essentially know everything, this is one question I'll never figure out the answer to. I don't care that I'm immortal. I can go for eternity debating the merits of human contact. But I need it. I crave the attention others pay to me, whether I love or hate them. I know you're listening to me rant, and I like that you're willing to sit here and listen to it. It provides me a sense of comfort and tranquility. Even though I know you're never going to have to make a decision as hard as whether or not to potentially destroy countless galaxies and people, I know you're listening to me, and that's what matters. Thank you. Thanks for sticking with me for so long. I know I've been rambling about stuff you don't care about for quite a while, and I think I'm slowly on the road to making the decision I need to make, and I really appreciate your attention and presence in this matter. I'd give you a gift, but due to our entirely separate worlds, I can't.

I need you, and I know how badly you need me and the people you care about. Just find someone you love. Your dog, your sister, your best friend, a man or woman you're crazy about. Say "I love you." I know how badly that person needs to hear it, as I know how badly I need to hear it. I've been stuck in a virtual world with no human contact for five days now; my brain is about to explode. I just want to quit!

But what would that mean? I'd be betraying the ones I care about and giving the position to someone else who might not make the best decision for the universe. Am I willing to give up that power? To get this pain out of my chest, but to have an entirely new pain in its place? Absolutely not. I'm going to stick this out and make the best decision for everyone, as I was specifically chosen by my superiors to do so. Yes, I'm blindly listening to them. But does it matter? I have power. I have the power to make an impact on countless galaxies, solar systems, and nebulae, as I've stated many, many times before. I'm unwilling to surrender this power, because doing so would give it to one who wasn't selected or chosen to have it at first, and they think I'm the best possible person to have it. So I'm going to just take another break, explore my current system a bit, and chill. Once again, thanks for listening, and good-bye.

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Done with half of my ordeal. I still have another five days to decide whether or not I should continue to fold. Whether or not I should break the law, search for knowledge, or just give it up. At this point, I'm convinced none of it matters.

Think about it. Yesterday, I realized that no matter which decision I make, I'll still eventually sacrifice everyone I know, so it's a lose-lose situation. Everyone's fucked no matter what I do! If I stop exploring everyone's fucked because there's nothing to do, if I keep exploring everyone's fucked because there's nothing to do, and if I evade the laws of physics, everyone's...you guessed it...FUCKED BECASUSE

THERE'S NOTHING TO DO! All three options result in the death of the human race in a relatively short period of time, which defeats the entire purpose of placing us all inside a giant database. So you know what I'll do? I'll tell my superiors I'm just not going to make a decision and that whatever happens, happens.

But wait. Not making a decision is equivalent to making the decision to continue folding, and continuing to fold is just going to cause tons of destruction like it always has. Nothing will change. And if nothing changes, again, it represents a lack of progress, which will get rid of everyone I care about. There's really nothing I can do at this point but sit back and watch the fireworks.

I'm just a human being. Even if I am immortal, am I physically or emotionally any different from you, or from my mother, my father, your boss, or the guy at the mental hospital raving about how the government is controlling his mind with magnets? What makes us different? Is it that what he thinks is real is different from your personal reality? How are you able to prove that the government is not, in fact controlling this man's mind with magnets? Have you explored every possible way this could happen? Or are we simply at the point where we know mind control is impossible, so this man can't be telling the truth? In fact, how do we know mind control is impossible? How do we know anything is impossible? We used to think that transferring billions of people and sextillions of stars into a virtual world was impossible, and look now. We're all one big intergalactic family. How do I know for sure that making any of these decisions is going to lead to the destruction of the human race? Did I forget any variables in my dissertations, or was I right?

It doesn't matter. Even if what you believe is completely different from what I believe, our opinions are entirely subjective. There is no hidden quality in your beliefs that make them any less different from mine, and the fact that we both use the same organ to form thoughts seems to support this. But just by stating this, I realized something. That opinion is entirely subjective as well solely based on the definition of the claim I just made, which is that all opinions are subjective. So does it really matter what I believe? Will my opinions really affect all these people and systems, or will they all lead to the same inevitable conclusion – the end of everything? I don't know, and I doubt I will know at any point within the next four days. So here I am, completely clueless about what I know and what others know, in a world where almost everything is known by everyone. Knowing that this is true is very, very, very odd.

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Please. Just please stop me from having to keep doing this. I'm just a poor lonely cartographer. I can't have the fate of the entire world in my hands. What did I do to deserve this? Why was I chosen? I'm sure they could have found at least another fifteen people willing to do my job, and they probably could have done a lot better than me! I'm hopeless! I've managed to spend four entire days doing nothing but weighing out my options. What do you think? Do you think I'm hopeless? Do you think there's any chance in hell I'm going to make the right decision? I know you're frustrated with me and there's nothing I can do to stop that, but come on! I need help damn it!

Why couldn't they have assigned a second cartographer? The universe is *110 billion light years long!* They should have had a whole army of clones exploring the stars! Couldn't they have put together a bunch of us to make this decision, as opposed to just leaving me to do it alone? We could influence each other, but why would that be bad? Sometimes it's good to listen to others.

Look at "Twelve Angry Men." Twelve jurors in a room with eleven united in favor of something, and a single hero manages to change what they think they know. They believed that man was guilty, but they ruled him innocent. But which one was it? With what those men knew, was the supposed murderer a "supposed" murderer, or just a murderer in general? We have no way of knowing. We have no foresight into Reginald Rose's mind, the fictional judge's mind, or the fictional jury's mind. How are we supposed to declare the man innocent solely based on glasses imprints and personal issues? We aren't. But the jury worked together to reach a conclusion, and that's what I desire. I desire the ability to make this decision with other people, as it affects them just as much as it affects me.

Maybe doing this with other people would be less stressful. We could decide whether or not this actually is pointless, or whether there actually can be progress made in the decision-making process. If I had a companion to decide, we could, as my superiors say, influence each other. And maybe he or she would have better ideas. Maybe one day he'd go "Hey kid, just wanted to let you know that your idea about continuing to fold? Yeah it sucks. Fuck that shit. Just teleport the fuck out of there and violate the laws of physics."

But it wouldn't matter. We still wouldn't establish any kind of absolute truths or definite conclusions regarding which decision is best, even if we had a hundred billion cartographers. Every single one of them would have a different opinion, but in the long run, all would be equally valid. All of them would be both right and wrong, true and false, smart and stupid. Such is the nature of opinions, and such is the nature of discourse, where everything, yet somehow nothing is accomplished.

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I have just four days to present my decision to my superiors and I feel like I'm finally coming close to making a decision. No matter what I do or what I'd like others to do, I feel comfort knowing that in some way, it's going to be the "right" thing.

But it's also going to be the wrong thing. Folding, not folding, and scientific violation all open themselves to numerous problems, even though they may lead to a decent solution, although I already figured out the end result of each choice I make will lead to a universe with nothing.

But I know how I'll pick what to do! I'll just pick the most ethical route, even though I previously established that ethics are subjective. It'll make me feel the most comfortable, and I can use my last four days to make my decision without anything bothering me. I know I'm a good person, so I can make the right decision. When have I ever intentionally caused harm to anyone?

Yes, I know you're going to tell me that I've been destroying countless galaxies every time I fold, which causes intentional destruction. But how much was actually there? Back on Old Earth, we managed to explore almost 25 entire solar systems, and we discovered nothing but old ice and inhospitable wastelands. Is it possible that practically everything I've been destroying is just this? Empty space and nothing? Is destroying entire areas of nothing a bad thing? All the nothing I haven't been able to explore yet? The 3 Kelvin, inhospitable wasteland known as the universe is too cruel forcing me to consider this.

How do I know there's truly nothing? It's not like other cartographers have managed to explore the entire universe yet. Is there any way to safely claim the lack of any presence of life in other galaxies? Yes, we've discovered the occasional slime mold, but I mean true, intelligent life. In the fifty entire galaxies we've managed to explore, we haven't found a single species able to communicate with us. Nothing with radio waves or telephones or internet. No evidence of advance metalwork, or cultural diversity, or the ability to draw, sing, dance, or design. How would an alien feel in my position? Would he be able to make an ethical decision about how to handle the potential destruction of millions of worlds like his? Or is decision-making just a phenomenon restricted to humans? I have no idea.

It doesn't matter. I've managed to spend an entire week thinking this decision over, and I doubt an alien could do any better. So once again, it's all up to me to make the right decision. Yes me – not some alien, or anyone else, as I established yesterday.

I think my brain is getting rusty. I haven't had nearly as much to think about today due to the fact that my brain has been on edge for the past week. I'm sorry if I'm boring you. I'm just going to take another break, and I'll talk to you tomorrow.

Crap. I was just notified the deadline was pushed back two days. Tomorrow, I have to present my decision. I know you're looking forward to hearing what it is, but to be honest, I have no idea what I'm going to do. But you know what? I think this is for the best. After all, I seem to work better under tons of pressure, as it forces me to be inventive about the best way to do something. How should I make this decision? Is it even worth making it? Or would it just result in pain like I established earlier? I think I know now. Remember the rebel from my first day; the one who believed that everything was pointless because of our situation? I think I'm beginning to agree with him.

In a way, I'm not real. I'm just a character in a virtual book in an entirely fake universe. Nothing I do is going to affect it because I'm simply too weak to cause change. I don't exist. I just think I exist because of my situation. I'm deciding the fate of a fake universe inside a fake world, and none of it is going to matter because everything is going to go eventually. Whether it's a server malfunction or the people forced to maintain the system all die, I doubt we have much time left in this world. I have to use mine to ensure that what we do have is the best possible world though, even if it is fake.

But what makes you more real than me? You live in a world with real trees and houses. I live in a world with fake trees and houses. What's the difference between the two? Does the fact that I'm in a computer mean I can be less ethical? After all, everyone exists in here instead of inside a real world. But I feel real sensations. I may not be able to feel physical pain, but I'm able to suffer heartbreak, loneliness, and a lack of purpose, as can you in your world. It's easy to dismiss me as nonexistent. But I do exist inside a different realm, and solely by nature of existing somewhere, I exist. I know I'm real because of the situation I've been placed in. I can communicate with my superiors. I can love the people back home. I can make literally universe-changing decisions! Of course I'm real!

But so are you. You're just as real as me, and I'm just as real as you. We both can perform the same activities, except I can do more! I can visit other galaxies, travel across the stars, and even avoid death itself! In a way, I could say I have more existence than you!

Yes, I know in your world that "folding" is impossible and that no government would ever place a single person in a situation that mandates the entire future of human exploration and survival. It's absurd. But in my world, I have to be placed in such a situation. No one else can by pure virtue of the fact that I have to do what I have to do to get stuff done.

I think I know how I'm going to make my decision. At this point, I really don't want to have to choose, so I'm going to flip two coins. If both coins are heads, I'll continue to fold. If both coins are tails, I'll stop folding and go back home. If one coin is a head and one is a tail, I'll evade the laws of physics. Here goes nothing...

Greeting superiors! I have come to share with you my decision regarding the phenomenon known as “folding”. After carefully weighing my options, I have...WKQPRGFLITKDQF!!!

Hey it's Rex again. We finally decided to unplug that damned machine. We're all too sick of the bullshit involved, and that we have to sacrifice our lives to keep it going. Yeah, everything is gone, but who cares? It's all fake anyway.

Anyway, I think we're going to head back to Earth and tell everyone there how much we hate maintaining this piece of crap. Hopefully everyone's minds will be back in their own bodies and everything will be fine.

Unfortunately, we've been traveling for fifty years though, so it'll take a while to get back. But we made a base a couple solar systems from here and from there we'll just go back home.

I hope you learned a bit about the virtual world from our cartographer and that you'll be our record book when we need to know about it at some point in the future. Thanks, and good night!