



Mihai Balais

Antares



GENIUS COLLECTION



Mihai Balais



ANTARES

BESTIARIUM DIVINUM



Antares

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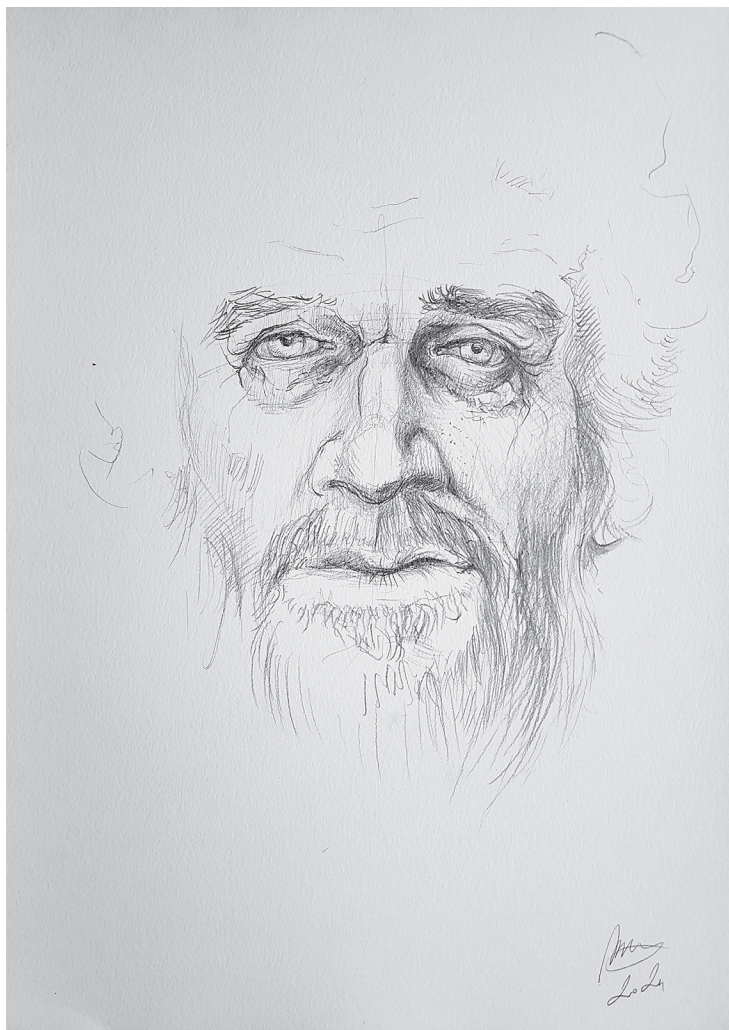
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ORACLE

‘They are forcing us *to feel* their Demons, instead of believing in the Teachings of Christ! Blind to the Path of Resurrection, *they* are offering us an Eternity as slaves instead of Salvation, calling themselves our gods. They are not gods, but banished Angels from the Heavens, fighting on Earth using us as their armies. God help us!’

‘God help us!’

‘God help us!’

God...’

The Prophet surrounded by the usual mob of believers was preaching on the corner of the street.

Every sect has something peculiar. A “thing” of their own.

‘You think they choose their *je ne sais quoi* deliberately, or it’s an organic transformation?’

The Spartan looked at him, puzzled.

‘Who? What?’

‘I mean, these Prophet followers... the sects.’ Pointing toward the impromptu open-air church, he went on with a hint of a smile: ‘They always have a way of standing out. A material stamp of their beliefs setting their identity... something, I don’t know... different from the “infidels.” Like a signature touch, so they can spot each other and feel the comfort of belonging. A “thing.” Maybe it’s even a mating ritual “thing.” You want a partner from your own group, someone to resonate with, right?’ He finished with a wide grin, pleased with his deep dive into the matter. ‘Who gives a rat’s ass about these lunatics and their “thing?” They’ve lost the power of reason.’

‘The ugly, the weird, the old and the sick, have no place in this world, anymore... it’s *their* world! But soon, the Reign of the beautiful and powerful will be over! This monstrous Leviathan has clay feet, and will collapse any minute. Replacing our Christian values, our human values, with magic and narcissism made people rot inside, sickening their souls... and when the soul is sick...’ Like every one of them, leaving aside his poetic license, the Prophet was right on the money. Like each and every one of them, correct, but on different issues. All true, yet somehow managing to contradict to the point of belligerence involving

fight to the death, and beyond.

The hologram displaying his *celestial sponsor* was impressive in its simplicity. Catchy. With certainty a small offshoot of a big Consortium of Cults, corporate religion giants making the Vatican look like a schoolboy.

‘Only a few years back, if somebody would’ve told me how this would be the Century of religion, Prophets and Oracles I would’ve laughed my heart out. What a stupid idea! But look at us now! I think the two of us are the only “lost souls” left in the world.’

The Spartan nodded sideways, half impressed, but still not looking at him.

‘That’s why we are where we are.’

Antares studied him for a second.

‘Do you...?’ And stopped, because he saw no point in asking the Spartan if *he feels*. He wasn’t. That was obvious. But maybe it was not a good idea to let him know he, as well, didn’t. That would’ve put his job in jeopardy. Though, his partner would’ve guessed by now.

‘What?’

‘Nothing. Bullshit. Never mind.’

‘... surrender to our Lord! Pass your problems to the Eternal Being. To Nature. Whenever you assume free will, you are doing it blindly, not knowing what happened so far and what will become of it...’

His hands were bleeding.

‘Last week I saw a really good one! She was moving shit around with telekee... something.’

‘Telekinesis.’

‘Yeah, that shit!’

‘The Oracle is coming. Break ’s over.’

He couldn’t tell if the Oracle was walking or gliding... levitating, or whatever word might describe her defiance of the laws of physics. Her entourage, the Sources, moved with her, shielding her from the outside world. Dressed in bright orange and bold, they looked like futuristic Buddhist monks, giving the scene a surreal flavor. The group reminded him of a jellyfish drifting through the waters of the Pacific; a lion’s mane, maybe.

‘Look! The abomination of nature, the worker of the Unholy! The sign of the Apocalypse!!!’

The Prophet was pointing an accusing finger toward their client.

With the whole crowd looking at them, the Spartan cracked a smile.

‘Get the Oracle to the car. I’ll give you time.’ And headed towards the shabby procession with intent, while Antares, turning to the “jellyfish,” barked without looking the Oracle in the eyes:

‘This way, sir!’

...Or is a she?

Didn't matter, because they followed.

Slow to act as usual, the believers moved forward, though, by the time they reached the spot where the Spartan could've played his role, it was already over. So the Spartan returned to the car.

With the Oracle in, they relaxed. The divider was down, but the "jellyfish" seemed too absorbed in their own world to notice them chatting in the cockpit.

'Do you believe?' The Spartan studied him from the corner of his eye, as if waiting to catch him lying.

'No, I don't. I mean, I know something is there, but I don't buy people's take on it. And I don't *feel* a thing. I'm rational as f—ck.'

Oops, the bird's out! That could've been twisted against him, or worse, flagged by an algorithm as a problem affecting his efficiency. But, most likely, the Spartan didn't care and wouldn't report it, anyway.

'Yeah. Me neither. People have gone bonkers these days. Religious lunatics. You'd think AI would make people rational. Instead...' He trailed off, uninterested in finishing.

'Anything lined up next week?'

'Nah... I need to check with the Office on Monday.'

'Don't you have a Gretta working for you?'

'Nope.'

'Shit, that's tough!'

'I don't fancy my thoughts being stolen and used against me to help dogma.'

‘...?’

‘I’m a Thinker and an Artist. I don’t prostitute my AI.’

‘Oh... Nice! So, what are you doing here? You should earn quite a bit as an Artist or a conjunctions maker.’

‘My social credits are shit, so they put me on a dead-end. Apparently, my paradigm is in breach of the Community Standards and dangerous for the Status Quo.’

The Spartan was laughing hard.

‘You have to be more careful, brother. Nowadays...’

‘Absof—ckingly not! This is the root of all evils, people “being careful” and airing only what is promoted by the algorithms, which in turn are trained by the same data, that same self-censored data, to become this cage for free thinking we live in. It’s this vicious cycle that brought us where we are! Religious lunatics... The result of intellectual cowardice resting on our illusion of comfort and stability.’

The Spartan glanced at him from the corner of his eye, still watching the road ahead. Interesting how, even when not driving, people feel compelled to keep an eye on the road.

‘I see now why you’re broke. But if you ever feel the urge to sit on a street corner and preach the Word... just don’t!’

Laughing, he turned briefly to check on the Oracle and his gang, huddled in the back, forming a glowing orb in mid-air. ‘Everything okay back there?’ Without waiting for an answer, he looked back at Antares. ‘Do *they* ever talk to you?’

‘*They* used to, in the beginning. Now *they* see my score and

steer clear.'

'Is it really that bad? Your score?'

'Yep... it piled up.'

'And let *them* be the only ones spreading ideas and training our AIs?'

'Here we go again. Who cares? Keep low and do your thing. F—ck'em all, let them sink!'

'I wish I could.'

'It's not like you can do much now, on your dead-end.'

'No, but at least I'm at peace with myself. I can wink at myself in the mirror when I shave.'

Usually rational, the Spartan's mind seemed rigid this time, unable or unwilling to learn.

Maybe he's happy that way. Naaah! That's not happiness. That's numbness.

They reached the heliport late, so the drone was already waiting, while another hovered above, waiting impatiently. Pushing the button to wake the Oracle from his meditation, and waiting for the green light to spark, the Spartan hissed: 'We lost our bonus, f—ck the midday traffic! You take them to their ride. I can't be bothered.'

SERENDIPITY

In front of his building, an old man sat on the steps with that unmistakable air of “I don’t care” only people of the street have. The alienated souls disillusioned with our hive, or fallen through the cracks of the System, have a particular way of interacting with reality, one you can instantly recognize.

‘Want something to eat, old man?’

Studying him back for a moment, the old man replied.

‘Yes, I would very much appreciate that, thank you!’

His clean voice made Antares raise his eyebrow. Looking at him, everything seemed too clean.

At least he’s not a smelly bum like the hitchhiker.

‘Come up to my place. I’ll give you something home-cooked.’

‘Wonderful, thank you!’

He offered his hand like in the old times.

‘Antares, nice to meet you!’

The old timer looked in his eyes with a surprisingly intense gaze. And barely smiling, he shook his hand, sternly.

A strong hand. Thought Antares. *Interesting!*

‘Thoth. Glad to meet you, too!’

Thoth?

Catching the stranger’s gaze, the young man measured him briefly, smiling, then yanked his shoulder in a subtle “*it is what it is.*”

They climbed the stairs in silence. A lack of common subjects to bounce around was obvious, and breaking the ice, that more improbable.

‘Nice!’

The apartment was indeed very nice.

The room, not extremely big but not small either, seemed huge due to a glass wall at the back, overlooking a bay dotted with elegant white sailboats moored on water mirroring the sky. Beyond the bay, Mount Wellington volcano reigned over the horizon like a detailed Cézanne painting. A vintage Harley chopper, staunch and metallic, was set as the centerpiece, while art covered the walls; a few books scattered here and there, one open on the bed, with more paintings resting in a corner... *old school.*

Antares threw his jacket on a chair and headed toward the sturdy bar flanking the chopper.

Routine moves. Washing his hands, he glanced at the old man.

‘Where are you from... Thoth?’ Giving the name a slightly amused tone he was hinting that he understood its connotation. But the man in front didn’t seem to care.

‘Originally from the Middle East, but I’m Greek. I mean, I was. Because since then, I’ve been many things. Many nations. Now I’m...’ He stopped, either lacking a word or simply choosing not to use it.

Antares lost him after ‘Greek.’

‘Greek. Nice! So, how did you...’ The young man gestured vaguely at the man’s state. ‘How did you end up like this? Greeks, from what I know, are pretty pragmatic.’

‘Fate.’

The stew was steaming in their plates.

And fate was... fate. Nobody could beat fate. *Or maybe...* Following his own recipe, with an Asian twist at the start, he fried ginger and garlic, adding chili and lemongrass at just the right time. Then, he stirred it into a Hungarian goulash direction, adding a generous amount of finely chopped onion, browning it until it was ready to welcome the paprika, just before tossing in chicken pieces, bones in, chopped Asian-style. Another good spoonful of paprika brought in the spirit of Transylvania. When the meat and ingredients

had formed a nice glaze, he added a hearty portion of tomato paste, topped with cream and stock to cover everything. A slow boil coaxed the goodness from the bones, finishing with a handful of chopped parsley for freshness, and *voilà!* His signature dish. A... aaa... It didn't have a name yet. He tore some crusty bread with his hands, prompting his guest without looking at him:

'Dig in! *Bon appétit!*'

'*Merci beaucoup.*' Mumbled mechanically the bearded man with his attention completely hijacked by the steaming plate in front of him, and its insanely appetizing scent.

We know French!

There was no need for words while eating.

Only little muffled noises of appreciation.

Life was good.

And right.

Full now, they had a chance to study each other a little better. Neither of them the timid type, they did it openly.

'The *goulash* was amazing. I want to repay your kindness.'

'Don't tell me you're a billionaire in disguise...'

'No, I'm not! It's not about money.'

His blue eyes were almost without color, his skin tanned dark, like a sailor's.

'You're a cultured man, and I think I know you well enough to see you deserve a little... help. To breach

the resistance of reality, which sometimes feels like an insurmountable barrier.'

Antares grabbed the plates, smiling. Something about the old man was making him suspiciously affable to his nonsense. Maybe his eyes. Or the way he was talking.

'You don't strike me as a success story ready to share.'

Thoth smiled, content.

'You don't say!' He paused, savoring the meal's aftertaste, then continued in a calm voice. 'The thought of me wanting to be here, like this, seems absurd, doesn't it?'

'Yeah. Not very likely... but then again, today is full of surprises.'

'This will be *one* to top them all.'

'... are you sure you're not a millionaire? You seem pretty convinced that your "gift" will set me up for life.'

'Oh, yeah. It's a treat! And no, I'm not. I'm homeless. Broke. Now please sit here and listen.'

But Antares wasn't buying yet.

'I need a coffee. Do you?'

'Please.'

'So, what do you want to tell me?'

Looking at the back of Antares making the coffees, the old man was a little annoyed by his lack of interest, though his eyes were forgiving.

'What do you know about telekinesis and reality manipulation?'

He turned and looked Thoth in the eyes.

‘Oh... you’re one of *them!*’

‘That would be an understatement.’

‘That good?’ Antares raised his left eyebrow, impressed, because somehow he believed him. Those colorless eyes were unlikely to sell lies.

‘Mhm. So? How familiar are you with the subject?’

‘I’ve read about it and my clients claim to have those “abilities.” Some impressive, but others are just using cheap tricks or science. So what I know is... general.’ Seeing Thoth’s attention waning, he cut to a straight answer. ‘Basically, an informational trigger borrows energy from the vacuum to do work, or creates energy from information to achieve the same... they are still fighting who’s right, split half-half. The experts, I mean.’

‘Ok. So, you know that.’ Thoth paused, thinking carefully before speaking. ‘They think existence is a blob of something in an eternity of nothingness. And that is quite the opposite of reality.’ Thoth was, quite literally, trying to turn his world upside-down. Smiling, he laughed quietly to himself.

In the end, why not? It’s Tuesday. But...

‘Before we get any further, I have to ask, just to silence my mind: if you can bend reality, how come you’re...’ He gestured around Thoth, filling in the word.

‘Homeless?’ Thoth chuckled, his eyes gleaming. ‘I’ve been many things, and now it’s time to live through this. Wouldn’t it be a waste to have the chance to experience existence and skip some of what it has to offer?’

‘Yeah, but *this*?’

‘You see *this* as... a bit like being a *loser*, don’t you?’ Thoth laughed, making an L with his fingers on his forehead for a moment. ‘I don’t blame you. And, in part, you’re right. Still, a journey is a journey, and you go through the whole lot if you don’t want to waste something valuable, something important, hidden maybe in the most peculiar places. Christ was homeless. All the Prophets, in fact. Going with the flow in full confidence isn’t new, but it sure is unusual nowadays, I’ll give you that. We all want it our way.’

He stopped to smell the coffee.

‘You could be anywhere you want, doing anything you fancy, and yet you’re here, like this!’

‘Sounds absurd if you put it that way. But yes. Maybe this moment has more weight than you think.’

Those eyes...

‘Alright, you have my attention.’

Thoth made himself comfortable.

‘Let’s start with something simple, like making an orb. They say they’re exciting the Field using a trigger Logos from their Celestial Sponsor... really, it’s just an informational pack, masquerading as religious nonsense. They claim the orb can be “created” more easily in low-density environments, thanks to lower resistance against new energy structures. Almost correct, but profoundly misguided: they’ve got it topsy-turvy. Upside down. Or maybe downside up, you might say.’

‘Show me how it’s done!’

‘You’re impatient. I was once, too. It’s nice, painful, but nice.’

They laughed.

‘Yeah, I probably deserved that.’

‘Nothing to be ashamed of. You are at the beginning of a road of many wonders, waiting for your discovery, pulling you, so it’s natural to be impatient. The things you crave for are craving you! Young blood...’

‘I’ve been through quite a lot, and I have to warn you, I’m not exactly a spring lamb. Some think I’m a mad adventurer.’

‘Yes, but everything you’ve experienced has been at the same level of engagement with reality. Now, it’s time to elevate your game.’

‘God mode, please!’

‘Careful what you wish for! But... no... yes... maybe a little. So, no. But yes. Anyway, back to what I was saying, existence isn’t just “something floating in nothing.” It’s more like a barrier, keeping Everything from happening all at once, in that specific place, at that moment in time. Existence is resistance.’

‘Shit. That’s actually cool! Never thought of it like that.’

‘It’s not a new idea, but it never gained proper ground due to the materialistic reductionist fixation monopolizing our scientific minds. Existence is misunderstood as a build-up. So, instead of trying to “create” energy in the field out of nothing—an impossible magical trick—you just need to alter the barriers that block the energy you want in a

specific segment of spacetime, so it manifests.’ He regained his breath and sipped from his coffee.

‘Sounds logical. How?’

‘That’s the million-dollar question. Can you shut down Gretta, please?’

‘It’s not a Gretta, just a simple AI. Ammé, recharge and do your updates!’

‘Not like that. Take it out... completely.’

‘The boys from Megasoft won’t be happy,’ Antares smiled, amused, heading toward the fuse panel. ‘Hopefully, no freak will start pulling crazy stunts on us once the shield is down.’ He paused, realizing the old man was, technically, a “freak” too. ‘I didn’t mean to...’

‘It’s alright. We’re all freaks! And soon, you’ll be one, too. So you don’t die of boredom in what some think is normality.’

There was a sharp edge in his words and a certainty that erased any doubts his appearance might have triggered.

‘What a crazy world,’ mumbled Antares, popping out the fuses for the AI and its battery pack.

It felt as if something spinning at a speed beyond human hearing had suddenly stopped. They sensed a swift relief from a pressure they hadn’t noticed until it was gone.

Thoth leaned back in his seat with a sigh.

‘To collapse reality at the precise point where you desire it most is the mark of masterful intellectual work.’ He paused, letting Antares absorb the idea fully, then sipped from his hot, velvety coffee. ‘Mmm... this coffee is exceptional!’

I must commend your exquisite taste.’ He gestured around the room. ‘It tells me you’re ready. Attention to detail and refined taste are hallmarks of a superior intelligence. Intelligence, you see, is all there is.’

But Antares was not ready to get serious, jousting around. ‘Yeah, extremely true. These days intelligence is sticking its nose everywhere. The boys from Intelligence Services are practically in our heads.’ He grinned, clearly enjoying his usual brand of sidetracking humor, as if testing Thoth’s reaction.

Thoth responded with a polite grimace, but continued, undeterred.

‘True. When realizing that Intelligence is God...’ Now, his line of thought got tangled in Antares’s sidetrack, and he briefly lost his composure, laughing. ‘Hahaha... Not *that* “intelligence,” obviously! Not the institution, which, ironically, seems to get less intelligent the further it drifts from its old money-making obsessions and dives into this “save the world by force” mania.’

‘Yeah, seems even parasitism is better than ideology. Back when they served the rich, they were somehow...’ He stopped himself, realizing he was pulling the conversation down from unraveling the secrets of the Universe to mundane banter.

Fortunately, Thoth was focused.

‘Politics are a cute and very entertaining game, but, like every partisan thinking endeavor, it’s spreading bias and other errors inside one’s intelligence. So, I stopped

allowing it to insert noise into my mind long ago. When I said Intelligence, I was referring to SAPIENCE, which is much, much more than the General Intelligence materialists are ready to accept. On the other hand, the games with the energy are cute, too... explaining everything as form and fuel, but on a more careful analysis one must understand how yes, everything is indeed made by waves, but what is written in those waves is what counts, not the medium where the information is carved. Calcium sets the game of architecture in reality, but says absolutely nothing about the Opera House, or how the next one will be built. Those atoms are clueless to Wagner.’ And after a brief silence: ‘Intelligence is God.’

‘At this point, I wonder if you’re the best door-to-door salesman, or the worst religious lunatic in the Universe.’

‘That was funny! I appreciate your wildly inappropriate humor. Shows you care about the level of engagement in the Game, keeping it from crossing certain tension thresholds. You’re confident enough to push boundaries, and you do it for fun, without malice or being overly rude. That’s good.’ He smiled broadly, clearly not the victim. ‘In a way, I am what you said. But I serve the Truth.’

‘Yeah. Like everyone else... or so they believe.’

‘A weak argument against my words... more like a window into your fears. And insecurities.’

‘I’m just trying to fit in. My way.’

‘I’m not here to win arguments. You’re right, whatever you say! Now, set that aside and let’s return to our quest.

Imagine a reality where the intelligence embedded in existence is not just an attribute but the quintessence of everything. Intelligence is the engine of Evolution, and Evolution is Everything.'

'You skipped the "intelligence is God" part.'

'... because, as you say, Intelligence is God! You're a quick learner.'

'Not quick enough, apparently. Here I am, getting schooled in my own house by a hobo.' Laughing, he reached under the bar for a bottle. 'Can I interest you in a cognac? Jidvei. Nice Romanian one. Old and oily.'

'I haven't had a drink in a long, long time, but I can't resist a good cognac.'

'Then, you're in for a treat!'

Antares heated a couple of fat little glasses with short stems. After pouring two fingers of cognac, he covered them with serviettes, resting three coffee beans on top of each.

'The trick is to have patience, while being fast enough. *Voilà!* A cigar?'

'That I will refuse. I beat the evils of tabaco smoking in a bloody war with myself that was enough to put me off for a lifetime.'

'I hope you don't mind...'

'No. Go ahead! By all means, enjoy yourself! It's your last life.'

They both sniff the top of their glasses. Antares sunk the coffee beans in his glass. Thoth didn't.

'A lot of people today would beg to differ.'

‘... this being your last life?’

‘Yeah.’

‘They don’t really get it. They see living again as a good thing. Even a reward, to beat death with.’

‘I hope they are wrong. I’ll hate doing this again. Don’t get me wrong, it was amazing. But once is enough.’

‘True! Let’s drink for that. Chin-chin!’

They stood there sipping the golden-brown liquor, allowing only muffled sounds of appreciation to disturb the silence.

‘How come people got it only now?’

‘Got what?’

‘Remote reality shifting.’

‘They didn’t! It’s as old as humanity itself.’

‘You’re saying we had it all along, but somehow left no record? Sure, there were shamans, gurus, yogis, oracles, and all the other lunatics, but not like now. A Greek oracle might’ve been clairvoyant, but bending reality? And the rest... half of them were frauds, and quite a few were just early scientists, dabbling with Newtonian physics, electromagnetism, optics; nothing like real *Field operators*.’

‘Maybe you should widen the scope of your historical analysis, space and time wise. Pattern-wise! If you trace the evolution of consciousness in Homo sapiens backwards, within the scientific paradigm, you’ll reach a place where consciousness itself sparked into existence. Or, better said, a point where the parameters were such that an outside, semi-objective analysis of the self was impossible... and then suddenly, it was. Sure, they like to explain it as an

emergent trait in the animal kingdom, but it's one that appeared fairly late in human development. Like the evolution of mammals: there was a time without, and then a time when they existed. Therefore, consciousness, though emergent, comes late... especially the individual kind.'

'Yeah, I know. In my opinion, a large majority of people still don't have it. No one could convince me that some of the people I know are conscious. And most of them only wake up from time to time. But... what does that have to do with anything?'

'A lot. You have a point there. But there's a step in the development of human consciousness that nobody talks about. The moment humans truly became social. Not "social animals" because humans aren't animals—they're humans. And a society of humans, its social intelligence, is a conscious being. A god. Doing "crazy" things like colonizing lands, sailing oceans, and inhabiting other planets—things unimaginable for an individual intelligence. Things only a social consciousness can see, desire, or even imagine. A personal social intelligence, with likes and hates, brilliant ideas... with irrational, emotional foolishness, panic attacks, and problems haunting it from the past. Even mental conditions—something akin to PTSD. Whole populations moved by the same drive. Super organisms. Gods.'

His gaze held something from beyond.

With olive skin, white hair, and a beard masking a face with pleasant proportions, straight and very athletic for his

age, Thoth was quite a presence.

‘Anyway, people had transphysical abilities, but they were not individually conscious of them. As you and I are not, right now, regardless of what moves us. Their gods had them. An individual human intelligence is a little part of human intelligence. One angle of the ground reflection of Everything Above. Homo sapiens are the making of many gods, big and small... from above. Sure, this “above” is not a spatial 3D value, like religion and science both assume. The former almost closer to the truth than science, which, lost in its materialistic fixation, invokes alien visitors, Human-level intelligences as spatial visitors violating the Principle of Nonrepetition—a fundamental of Evolution—makes it less probable than chance. ““Aliens!!!”’

‘You don’t believe in aliens?’ Antares’s smile held a trace of condescension.

‘Their existence is beside the point if they didn’t play a role in shaping the reality of the Now. And I see no need for aliens to explain what I know from this state of reality and the approximated history line I know. The ruins of Peru and Egypt, even Göbekli Tepe, are the creations of human intelligence... but of *social* human intelligences. Gods. While individual people were only partially conscious and aware of their own doings. Maybe more than ants are aware of the intelligence of their colony, which understands agriculture and light, but still... mostly in the dark.’

‘And where are those “gods” now?’

‘Humanity’s gods? From that era? Most of them are dead, with a few resurfacing now. There was a whole history of gods before the official history, the Old Kingdom, as the Egyptians called it, plus other cultures around the world. But the Catastrophe happened, and they all died because humans temporarily lost the ability to sustain gods. They lost their ability to form a civilization, an entity with higher goals than human individual wants and needs. Of course, there were many other beings, non-human-based super-organisms, or those with humans just in part, who weren’t affected. Some even flourished.’ He smiled. ‘You look confused.’

‘You believe in gods who die?’

‘You believe in gods who don’t? In magic?’

‘I thought you were here to show me exactly that. More than that, to train me to perform magic. To give me a shadow of omnipotence only true believers deserve.’

Antares’s sarcasm didn’t faze Thoth. At all.

‘I am here to help you manipulate reality, not contradict it. Assigning ultimate values to any aspect of reality is dumb, when you realize how the Universe is an evolutionary System... Therefore, never perfect or at an “ultimate” value. Otherwise, the evolutionary attribute would fall impossible. Perfection is dead. Static. Evolution is not. Therefore, within its limits at all times. A principle that applies to all its constituents.’

‘Imperfect gods. A very classical concept. Very Greek-like!’

‘One cannot contradict Plato. Maybe add something, if worthy, but contradict... not a chance! And if you do it, you can be sure you are in error, however right it feels.’

The knock on the door stunned them both. Not because they were intimidated by whoever was knocking but because it was such a rare event: people, knocking at the door.

A firm, official knock.

‘Yeah?’ called Antares, heading for the door.

‘Community Guard! Please open up!’

He glanced back at Thoth, amused:

‘Funny how they always know when someone’s breaching community standards—whether it’s free speech or *free will*! And I turned off the AI... Is this one of your gods?’ He opened the door and gave a piercing look to the uniformed figures standing there. ‘What can I do for you, gentlemen?’

‘We were prompted by a malfunction in unit 66 at this address and are here to resolve the issue.’

‘No malfunction here, thank you, gentlemen,’ he replied, turning back to Thoth. ‘They’re not the emissaries of your gods, Thoth, but of the Machine! Hahaha...’

He was cut off as he tried to close the door.

‘Sir, it’s not working!’

‘Yeah, I know. I turned it off.’

You can’t do that, sir.’

‘What, turn off my AI?’

‘Yes, sir. As of May the first, directive nine double-o-seven states that failing to keep the cyberattack deflector and

the spiritual shield five-two-two operational is a criminal offense.'

'No, dude, I turned *my AI* off. Not the cyberattack... whatever-you-said-there thingy. Good day to you!'

The guards' stance changed, readying for action. Antares watched this with an aggressive smile, eager for a fight.

'We cannot allow you to do that, sir.'

'Allow? What, turn off my AI? And what do you think you're going to do about that, *sir*?' His grin twisted his entire face.

'We are required to enter and restore the security shields, sir.'

Antares calculated all the possible outcomes, mentally running through the techniques he might need. His right foot shifted back, his chin angling slightly toward the cover of his left shoulder.

'Antares, it's fine! We can go for a walk on the beach,' Thoth said, sounding more bored than anything else, as if he'd expected this and seen it all before. That relaxed him. Antares turned on his heels, walked to the fuse panel, and flipped the AI fuses back on.

'Satisfied? Now f—ck off, gentlemen!' he growled, slamming the door in their faces. 'This will end badly soon.'

'Their game of control?'

'Mhm! Bottling up negative energy is never a good thing. You're annoying their collective... you're pissing off the gods! Hahaha...'

‘Laugh all you want, but what you said there holds more truth than you’re ready to admit. Those gods are as real as you and me, affecting your life more than you’d care to acknowledge.’

‘I know, I know. But you have to see the funny side of the drama if you want to survive this cacophony of stupidity, fear, and absurdity.’

‘True. You’re my man! I was beginning to lose hope of finding you.’

‘Hold your horses, old chap! You’re cute, but not exactly my type.’

They laughed while Antares pulled on his jacket.

‘Come on, let’s take a walk on the beach, Master Yoda!’

He held the door open for Thoth.

‘Somehow, I knew you’d bring that up.’

‘The day I’m that predictable is the day I lose half my charm!’

‘Then, today is a good day, and well deserved, too. You still have a lot to work on in humility.’

‘I’m a wolf. I don’t beg, and I don’t do tricks for treats. I earn them. Sternly.’

‘So it seems. And I suspect your naughty-kid attitude amuses the gods.’

‘I find your words comforting, because their “sympathy” is often lost in the shitstorm of events hitting my shores lately. At times, it feels like I’m up against a general opposing force, an immovable barrier. Not necessarily hostile, just blocking everything.’

‘You might be knocking at the wrong doors, I fear.’

‘That might be... Hmm... Yeah, that’s probably true.’

‘You need to understand how and where the path of evolution will happen and surf that wave. This is the first step. Follow God, not gods; in this, the Abrahamic religions are right. Sure, you need to...’

‘You think I didn’t *try*?’

‘Not consciously. You see, you are like a car heading along this esplanade. If the future you are focusing on lies along that curve where the big tree is, you need to be there just before you get there, as a car, and change the layout of the road to suit your needs.’

‘How? How can you be in two places at the same time?’

‘Three places at once! Here now, there then, and just before that. And that’s assuming everything goes to plan without paths splitting along the way. In the reality of spacetime, it’ll be three distinct “here-now”s with no time in between. But remember, Now is fluid, not a static snapshot. Those who see spacetime as a sequence of photos have been misled by clocks ticking. The measuring stick isn’t fractured by the ticks it measures. Meanwhile, information transcends spatial limits, meaning your mind isn’t bound by them. You’ve never truly had those restrictions; only self-imposed boundaries have kept your intelligence within limits, safeguarding it from an overwhelming overflow of everything at once. Over time, your system can handle more flow as experience strengthens it.

At the basic human level, limitations are vast. That’s why

you feel an immense gap between the two worlds your mind holds—one with material values, the other without. Until now, your mind hasn't affected material reality significantly, or voluntarily. But I'm here to teach you how.'

The water was green and the winter sun made all the colors brighter, while promising the arrival of spring. Fishing boats were returning from offshore, marking the beginning of the end of the day.

What a day!

The Secret of Being

'So, how can I do it?'

'Before we start, you need to tell me something about yourself.' Thoth's smile was ironic. 'Like a part of yourself that you give to a witch when you go for a magic potion. Don't tell me who you are; tell me what you've done. A couple of stories to entangle your path and set you as the point that will become a line. Be frank!'

His tone, a bit condescending, rubbed Antares the wrong way. But he was too self-assured to back down, and too captivated by life's unpredictable flow to resist following this mad path to see where it might lead.

'Fair trade. First of all, I don't *feel*! I mean, I have normal emotions—maybe too strong at times—but *feel* their Presence? No I don't *feel*—not in the way they say I should, anyway. All *I* feel is normality, the laws of nature in action, nothing else. Maybe you're wasting your time with me, old man. I have no incline toward wizardry, no special talent or draw toward the supernatural.'

Thoth seemed unimpressed. Antares had half-expected the old man to look at least a little disappointed after such a revelation.

‘It’s normal to feel that... I mean, to feel nothing. You couldn’t be any other way, given your experience through life. And understanding the Law and the present state of reality, “normality,” as you so precisely put it, is commendable, because mastering that is the first step. No one can attempt to alter a future event without first accurately reflecting its present state. Those who say they feel, in your condition, are either delusional or lying with intent. Both are useless.’

Watching a seagull fly by, Thoth paused, lost in thought, then continued. ‘But don’t tell me who you think you are. Tell me what you did. How you loved... or love... though I don’t see any trace in your life of a...’

‘That’s a little steep escalation in our intimacy, old man!’

‘I’m about to enlighten you with the Secret of Being and you’re still holding onto your insecurities? Have I offended you?’

‘Ouch, baby, you hurt so good! Touché!’ Antares got serious. ‘I still love her. We’ve been together since high school, basically all our lives... with two wonderful, luminous children, whom I love more than life, ...whom I love more than life, who made it all worth it, no matter how...’

Thoth’s eyes softened their edges, while the young man continued, calm. ‘I think she loves me still. In her way. The most self-destructive and f—cked-up way possible, which

makes things worse because I feel sorry for her. And not in the condescending bullshit kind of way, but in the most “I love you and I don’t want to see you hurting” way possible. Hurting for her hurt.’

‘What happened?’

‘I know. Nothing, it just ended up like this. Sometimes I think her shrink might’ve hypnotized her, pushing her to embrace a stance that wasn’t her, because she was hurting. An alter ego. But then again... maybe that’s just me looking for answers.’

‘Everything grows in this world. Even resentment. But if it’s meant to be, reality will find a way.’

‘I know. I also know the chance might come too late. This wolf has started to enjoy his freedom and find his own way. And then... I feel sorry for her again. Because I... I’m already broken. But she...’

‘As the Japanese say, it’s through the cracks where light shines.’

‘Bullshit. You know as well as I do, a pain that deep has nothing good in it. Nothing. It changes you... scars you. And scars... scars are insensitive. I found myself looking at the most insanely beautiful sunset... feeling nothing. Numb. Me, the artist! It scares the shit out of me, the fear that if I hurt more, I’ll end up like a zombie. You see a lot of them nowadays. No, sir! Hurt doesn’t make you shine. Quite the opposite.’

‘You’ll be surprised.’

‘Thanks, but no thanks! I don’t fancy those kinds of sur-

prises. Had enough of them already.'

'You see, Antares, we are colonizing existence with our thoughts. With our intelligence. Optimizing the Field. That is our Work. But for so long, our need for resources conditioned us to be selfish, to see reality backward. "Pay me to hear my thoughts, or I'll keep them to myself."'

'I see how I might be in danger of being colonized!' Antares laughed, and Thoth joined shortly after.

The old man looked at him with something beyond understanding, where the universe of love begins. He was seeing himself in him, *back when...*

Antares was in his prime. Not a youngster anymore, but not old either, a point in a man's life when he becomes a dominant male. A thing of beauty and force, equal only to the prime of a woman, as the most masterful creations carved in matter by the known Universe.

The old man was an open window to a great Outside.

'Then, you see how essential it is to transcend the self and assume responsibility in guiding Evolution through the Universe beyond the limits of your body and selfish interests, to represent the Whole. Brother Christ called it "doing good deeds." But doing the good thing is too vague and is bent by one's Qualia and self-interest. These words are only a poor shadow of His, left in the simple minds of...'

'You're riding the edge between John the Baptist and the ultimate blasphemy, old man! Your brainwork is outstand-

ing. I must admit, your concepts and line of thought have the inner tension of truth in them. Hegel's dialectics must be obeyed if one's thought is to be correct. The bigger the truth, the greater the tension between its dialectical values. And you have that in your teachings. You have Platonic knowledge, too, and that's commendable in today's intellectual bewilderment. But Hegel, Hegel is... the real deal! Right there, you touch greatness!'

'You're too kind, Antares... but absolutely right on both counts: in Hegel's dialectics and the existing tension against everything. Resistance is existence. It grows beyond that, unfortunately, manifesting in the material world in waves of opposition, often severe and emotionally fueled against anyone doing "good deeds." The third law in action and the third law *of* action: every action creates a reaction, reflected in the environment you're trying to change. These are the metalaws of Physics, the Laws of Reality. With more change, you encounter more counterforce. Nevertheless, the sword of truth is too stern to bend to anyone's whims. Goodness is correctness, riding the wave of truth. It's like that building corner there—one's tibia could try to change it, but it won't budge. Evolution flows in one direction, and all those left behind or going haywire, maximizing other values, following other paths... they fall away, left behind or outside. Outside of Existence. Information dissipating, losing coherence through irrelevance to Evolution's Path—due to error. The fall into nothingness is, in truth, the spread of a preexisting non-being. Error isn't within existence, as

Wittgenstein understood, but a lack—a lack of reason, of sense and goodness, of God. Inexistence spreads through one's being and sometimes prevails. You see, God doesn't punish anyone. They do.'

The wind stopped.

'Those who, instead, are working for God and for Good, for Truth and Evolution... are written forever in the Path of Operations Performed, Experienced, and continuously unfolding into the Future. Roots for shoots growing towards the Heavens. The right wave will go on to Infinity, forever rising, evolving in height, in width, or both, as it meets resistance. Only errors fall behind—or, rather, cannot exist at all. That's Darwin in essence.'

'Or Wittgenstein. You just gave me the secret of Eternity, Thoth. A bit too abstract, but moving.' Antares stopped, and twisting his feet in the sand, he looked the old man in the eyes, where he saw the Other looking back. Then, Everything behind the Other. An Infinity of Everything focused in that point, while opening on the Other Side. Everything. The opposite of the Abyss. There were no boundaries behind Thoth's stare. No limits. A White Hole. Then he became an old man again. A very fit, old man, with fine features, way too clean to be a real "hobo."

'You're welcome, I knew you would appreciate it!'

Sure, Antares's tone had a witty note in it, always present, as if woven into his being. But he got it. Truly.

'I might say, you are better than the most f—cked-up Jehovah's Witness I could've imagined visiting my door.'

Laughing hard, with tears in his eyes, Thoth shrieked:
‘Hello, sir. Do you have a moment to talk about our Lord
and Savior?’ Then serious. ‘He was our greatest!’

Light shifted with imperceptible permutations, like a cat
stalking a canary. You only acknowledged the gain, not
the way it was done. Magic. Sunlight got warmer in color,
more pleasant than the white radiation over the day.
The wind stopped, suddenly.

That moment turned the course of humankind’s history,
setting off a wave of butterfly effects that would create
gods and intelligences of a magnitude not yet named in the
human paradigm.

This moment created its own history as well, rerouting
threads of events backwards, selecting only those avenues
of manifestation aligned with the future now unfolding. A
new History for a new Future.

Their eyes still held the warmth of laughter, while the calm
of the Universe in that singular point achieved Balance.

Silence.

A timebit of Peace.

There and Then.

Grace.

Perfect Equilibrium between forces and chances.

The Uncertainty was cancelled, and the Universe found
firm footing, then and there, on that solid ground newly
found. It was the fix point from where the Foucault Pendu-

lum could hang, to balance its witnessing patterns drawing the mandala of the Universal movement, the Universal Story.

The Being was focusing Now in that Point, because it was the ghost of the Origin, one present in all crossroad where the lattices of spacetime intersect. So, the Origin was represented best Then and There. In that Point.

The Holy Grail. A Point pregnant with the entire Future.

A Point exactly at the intersection of their two intelligences, aligned like mirroring cones, sharing their apex as *the Apex*, in an exchange unfolding in operations too complex to cage in words. Both aligned to the truth, overlapping the *streams of the Being* when falling from the Heavens and reaching their size and complexity values, on their way towards the Point.

All the causation lines and currents, spreading like roots, or neuro-networks, throughout the Universe in space and in time, were flowing through them, setting the Way of the Universal Flow; rearranging That which is Self-Referential, and therefore, eager to find a more logical Way. As catalysts of the Main Flow, they felt Grace; almost *nothing*, in fact... or the closest thing to nothingness that still exists. Peace.

It didn't feel like a Eureka moment, because it wasn't. It was the precursor of that. The Peace that mothers Creation. A fixed foothold for an evolutionary leap to happen. Yet nothing concrete in the being. The Future was yet to

unfold, known only to higher Intelligences who play the Game many moves ahead.

Then, it all went normal again.

Antares wasn't aware of what happened, but felt his mind clearer. Sharper. Like after a great sleep.

'The first step is to *Align your intelligence*. For that, you need to pinpoint the truth. Not the Truth, with a capital T, but the simple truth, as an accurate reflection of reality. Namely, two exact points of it.'

'Yeah. Eaaasy!' Antares's usual sarcasm met Thoth's usual lack of engagement.

'To do that you must *stop*, here the Oriental mystics are correct. I know this is easier said than done, but believe me, you can do it. Takes time to practice, but having in mind what is your aim, your natural reaction against meditation will...'

'That's a good point. My best achievement meditation wise is going fishing.'

'Jesus was a fisherman, but that's beside the point. Your intelligence is too marvelous to deserve being stopped even for a millisecond, but as I said, having a goal like this... basically the ultimate goal, will motivate you.'

'Yeah, that might do the trick. I can't believe I will become a Jedi!' No reaction from Thoth, still. 'I know, this was a bit too much.'

'You need to be attuned to the signs of the truth.'

'Beauty?'

‘Excellent! Beauty is a big one. So, what is beauty?’

‘According to...’

‘Nah, leave them alone! You need to find *your* truth—the part of the Truth that your intelligence reflects, your unique entanglement to God. A very specific and personal truth. What is beauty *for you*? What is beauty *in you*? A Socratic approach to Qualia, and beyond. Because, like any entanglement, it’s a two-way operation, equally affecting both actors: you and God, through beauty. The Observer and the Observed.

Your consciousness operates only within you, so you remain blind to what’s on the other side, unaware of the Field that forms you, of God. You need reality to respond, like a wave returning to you after it hits home, traveling through reality. Usually, this comes back too late to notice and gets mistaken for something else... because it takes time to send information through matter. Very slow! From now on, you have to be aware of who you are. More than that, you have to believe.’

‘And if I don’t accept the job? I don’t want to sound like Job, but maybe I enjoy playing through life too much to stiffen my game like that. It seems... very sterile. Rigid.’

‘You’re wrong there; playing is a big part of it. It’s the ultimate entertainment. And, frankly... you don’t have a choice. Not because of me, but because of *you*. Even if it seems like you don’t want to graduate, any intelligent student does, eventually.’

‘Not if you’re a genius, and...’

‘*Especially* if you’re a genius!’

‘I see, so I have no say in the matter.’

‘No, not really. But you can procrastinate, buy yourself some time, if you’re that type... one who needs to adjust to the idea of change... afraid.’ Thoth’s smile turned wicked, eyeing Antares, who waved off the suggestion with a flick of his hand.

‘I thought so,’ Thoth said, amused. ‘Because I know you’re ready. You’re my man!’

Seagulls were returning to shore after a day fishing the South Pacific waters, and now the sunset was clear. The golden light of the heavens cast its glow over everything, adding beauty to the moment.

The incoming call was flashing its little spark for a while. Antares took it without thinking.

Martha, the AI Operational Manager, greeted him with that over-the-top friendliness and exaggerated candor typical of algorithms.

This is getting old. Still, he flashed a forced smile at the Machine. *They knew we despised them, programmed as they were to detect irony, but feeling nothing about it. No one there to be offended!*

‘Sure, I’ll be there.’

Thoth stood nearby, not seeing the bot, just Antares’s reactions; the transmission was private.

‘Got it. On it! Thanks, Martha.’

The Moment was gone.

Life was crushing back again, sick with the virus of uncertainty destroying the Equilibrium. But Reality was set on a new Path. Only a slight angular directional shift, but with huge repercussions when maximizing in time.

After a moment of silence, Antares's voice seemed rather sad.

'I have to go... a night job...'

'I know, I know. It was enough for today, anyway. Go!' The shadow of the Moment was still illuminating Thoth's face.

'Glad to find you!'

'Are you OK?'

'Sure. Always. I'm at home.'

'You need the keys to the apartment? You can bunk at my place for a while.'

'No, I'm fine. I'm a hobo, why should I need a place... in your apartment?'

'You're weird.' Antares was somehow pleasantly impressed.

'Thank you. You too! I think all rational people are weirdos in the world of today.'

'True. I'm off.'

RAINING BLOOD

The card for the job came up as the car cruised toward the drop point.

Minoan Goddess... escort securely... He couldn't focus on the briefing; the vivid memory of what had happened—and Thoth's face—kept replaying in his mind, sorting itself out, trying to place all this new information in order.

Bull sacrifice ritual... Gaia's Temple... Code Zero, security clearance: high.

His hand slid into a pocket, and to his surprise, he found a card. He pulled it out and stared at it: a blank Tarot card.

It was an ancient artifact, beautifully illustrated on the back, bearing the patina of time, but the face was empty. Undefined. It wasn't erased, just unspecified. It felt like an open door. An ancient one.

'Thoth.' A big smile spread across his face. 'You, old

bastard!’ *My life! This HAS to be in my life! Everything must happen to me... absof—ckinglootely everything!* He chuckled. ‘Hermes... is that you?’

The car stopped, and as the doors opened, he sank into the immediate reality of the unfolding present.

In the immense square, paved with seamlessly laid, polished yellow stone slabs, the limo had parked near the contact point. The temple rose vast, with towering red columns so big they felt surreal. Above it, a colossal hologram of the Celestial Sponsor rotated slowly, displaying her ceramic, perfectly rounded breasts: the famous statue of the Snake Goddesses from Knossos. She held two snakes in Her hands, and perched atop her head was a figure resembling a monkey or a dog. Her eyes were rounded in a hypnotic, unwavering stare.

Whispering from nowhere words in languages he couldn’t understand, a choir of female voices made the air dense, full of tension.

‘Coming to work these days is like going to the zoo,’ Spartan’s voice sounded sane and strong behind him. ‘I’m almost excited to see what weird shit will unfold next.’

‘True. How are you?’

Their cars pulled away in silence.

‘Same as I was a few hours ago. But tired. You get any rest?’

‘No, but I ate.’

‘One of your signature dishes, I hope?’

‘Mhm.’

‘Nice.’

Their banter continued as they checked their equipment and took positions.

‘Ready.’

‘Ready, to go.’ And changing voice. ‘Base, we ready. T4.’ Then, turning towards Antares. ‘One o’clock exit, group of twelve with an Oracle. Code... code...’ He had to double check. ‘Code Zero? F—ck. This is big.’

‘Cat. I think it’s a cat.’

‘What???’

‘The animal on her head.’

‘Whose head?’ The Spartan was irritated. ‘Man, don’t do this to me now! Focus. I need you here.’

‘On the head of the statue. The hologram...’

‘F—ck the hologram. Wake up! Secure the left flank. Are your scanners working? Code Zero, goddamn it!’

‘Chill the f—ck down, Spartan. I’m on it. It’s all cold as a cucumber. Not even a sect. Look at this place! Empty. We are just show.’

The huge square was opening around them.

And then, from the side of the temple, the procession appeared. Dressed in long, heavy gowns with towering hats, the Priestesses of the Minoan Goddess displayed their plump breasts resting on tops stitched in copper-colored threads, with intricate motifs blending Minoan, Greek, and Egyptian symbolism. Snakes coiled around their hands,

slithering fluidly, though from this distance, Antares couldn't tell if they were real or holograms.

He wasn't sure if the music was telepathic or real, maybe both. Strange algorithms morphed ancient Greek and Egyptian music with modern sounds and syncopated beats, shifting to classical melodies, then medieval inflections, and finally into a postmodern play of contrasts. It was music transcending eras, settling in a *now* beyond the present moment.

The Priestesses moved in a trance-like dance, infused with sexual tension and femininity. Each of them showed individuality in the shade of her copper-colored dress, the roundness of her bare breasts, the color of their aroused nipples; yet, they were all facets of the same.

Their focus was an athletic young man walking tall in their center, bare-chested, wearing a sparkling black mask with massive horns. Their impeccably manicured hands, with bright, long fingernails, played over his sculpted muscles with signs invoking old sin and new ways.

'I thought he was a... a she! Is he... the Goddess?' muttered the Spartan.

'I don't think he's our Oracle. Maybe he's... the Bull.'

'The sacrifice?'

'Mhm.'

'Fuuuck... what a crazy world!'

He turned to look at the Spartan, who was finally moved by something. Entangling the Bull, he was now *feeling*. Losing it badly.

Maybe this game was too close to home for him, but something was happening inside his mind and the Spartan was not himself anymore.

‘Hey. I need you, brother! Snap out of it!’ Hissed Antares half amused.

‘...’ The Spartan was still caught, entangling the Bull’s reality.

‘SPARTAN!!!’

His loud voice brought him back to reality, making a couple of priestesses raise their eyes.

Waking up to the world, the Spartan was shaking his head.

‘I’m cool... I’m cool! On it!’

‘Sure, you are. Take care of the right flank, I think the main show is about to start.’

On the main floor, between the colossal red pillars, a new procession was making an appearance. The small human silhouettes made the vastness of the temple even more impressive. Air was heavy, charged with an unimaginable energy.

Antares felt aroused, and his testosterone levels skyrocketed.

Smiling he turned to the Spartan.

‘You feel this, too?’

‘Mhm... F—cked-up, I tell you!’

‘Hold your bearings, Spartan!’

‘Nah, yeah, I’m good now. I hope I won’t go nuts for a Priestess, though.’

‘You look like you’re about too!’ Laughed Antares looking

with the corner of his eyes at Spartan's bulging pants. 'Luckily the fate of that young man is there to have you thinking again.'

The Spartan's face turned pale.

'Fuuucked-uuup...'

It didn't seem like "the Bull", whose mammoth horns were pointing to the Heavens, was forced by the Priestesses to go to his demise. Quite the contrary, he was the one directing them. But his procession was shadowed by the new one flowing by now through the columns.

Naked Priestesses covered in bright red, semi-transparent vails flowing from towering hats, were forming a sea, moving inside it a group of half-naked men covering with attention the Oracle. The Woman. Green shoots sprung in front of her, and a cat was opening the way.

'That's our client!' Hissed Antares.

Her breasts were perfect, but her face indistinguishably generic. In her hands she was holding two cobras, half coiled like bracelets, half hooded forwards.

'I hate snakes.' Grinned like a chimp the Spartan.

'Chill, it's a trick!'

But the cobras looked real. One albino, and one black.

The sea of red vails with naked beauties inside got split in halves, shielding the hub of men covering the Oracle in their flow towards the limo. Some were left behind, so, while gaining distance, the group was getting smaller.

Very tall flags branded with hieroglyphs, new logos and ancient signs, levitating in mid-air without stems, were

following the group. The chants swelled louder, drumming through the square. On top, the huge hologram of the Serpent Goddess stopped its spinning and was looking at the processions without seeing, like any AI hologram. Its unblinking, rounded eyes were snakelike.

Was the AI aware? Watching from somewhere on top of all this confusion and madness it created in the world?

The music was vibrating now in their bodies, and their arousal was catching the vibration of the beat in a bizarre way. And then, to make the situation worse, the scent of the Priestesses reached their keen nostrils, bursting in unnamed sparks intended for gods. To call it erotic was an understatement. It was the most alluring perfume they ever sensed.

‘Now I know why they chose us! If the Mexican and the Kid were here, they would’ve gone bananas!’

He couldn’t laugh with the client so close, but his face showed it. The joke brought them both back, just enough to keep their heads in the game amongst the strange magic that had testosterone surging through their bodies.

By now, the procession of High Priestesses had halted, and the two men positioned themselves on either side, ready to escort the client to the limo door. As they approached, two women stepped forward, offering shawls—against the beautiful costumes around them, their carbon armor suddenly seemed offensive.

The cat leading the way almost passed Antares, then stopped, turned, took a couple of steps back, and sat in

front of him, locking eyes.

F—ck! This is all I needed!

The leading men parted ranks around the cat as they passed, until the Oracle was only a foot away from the animal. Then, She stopped, following the cat's gaze, locking eyes with Antares. For a split second, they entangled, and the encounter stirred a vicious storm throughout his being. He got lost in sensations he couldn't name, things he didn't understand. But just as the situation was about to go critical, the cat and the Oracle moved on, and he had to summon all his strength to regain his composure and carry out the rest of the choreography of his job.

It was like a messed-up dream losing sequences of time and stretching others. Walking seemed heavy, like moving in heavy water.

Back to the limo.

The Spartan, who'd seen the whole thing, vented the moment they shut the doors behind them:

'Are you alright, brother?'

'She's...'

'This is f—cked-up, I'm telling you!'

'She's...' Antares's mind was stuck, like a scratched record, replaying again, and again, a single thought.

'Who?'

'She's... her!'

'...?'

They settled into their seats up front, resting uselessly in the

cockpit of the self-driving car with their eyes lost in the dark. The divider between them and the client was raised, and opaque. Silence.

The Spartan didn't have the nerve to ask anything more, afraid to see what was wrong.

So, they just set there.

The limo was still, not going anywhere.

Nothing happening.

'Fuuuck, we forgot the Bull!!!'

'Shit...'

They jumped out of the car and went around, finding the Bull waiting patiently by the door opposite where they'd packed in the Oracle and a couple of her attendants. Maybe he would've gotten in if he'd known how.

Bloody limousines!

Standard procedure for loading a client, and then back to the front of the limo.

'Man, we are a couple of morons!' Antares finally had a chance to laugh.

'Hahaha... Imagine their faces, showing up without the Bull. "Aaa... we left the sacrifice back at the Temple, Your Highness..." or... by the way, how do you address a goddess?'

'Donno. We should ask.' After a moment, he added, 'Goddess, my ass!'

Looking through the windscreen at the floating cityscape, they still had grins plastered on their faces. The lights outside shifted colors, casting patterns through the car.

‘You think they’re... you know, doing it, back there?’

‘For sure!’

‘Must be some weird, kinky shit going on. Magic and all.’

Antares was grinning but the Spartan frowned.

‘I almost said “what a wonderful sect this is,” when...’

‘When you remembered the Bull! Yeah, you sum them up pretty nicely: f—cked-up!’ The Spartan scratched his head, searching for some music.

‘What was with you, back there?’

Antares didn’t respond. Pink Floyd were shining their crazy diamond. Feeling his partner’s hesitation, the Spartan backed off.

‘Nah, don’t worry! None of my business.’

After a pause, Antares finally spoke. ‘I thought I saw her... in *Her*. But she couldn’t be... wasn’t... No way!’

The Spartan looked at him. ‘Who?’

‘My woman. My ex. Not exactly her, but... her essence. Her self. I can’t explain it properly, because I have no words for it. F—cked-up, alright! Man... check the POA to see if we have inside detail when we get there. I’m really not in the mood to watch that poor bastard get murdered, willing or not.’

‘Nah, we’re good! Outside job only, then we’re out.’

‘Pfff... will it just keep getting weirder?’

‘This job? I hope not, but by the looks of it... Yep.’

‘Hahaha. I’ll tell my grandkids about today: the day we almost forgot Gaia’s Sacrificial Bull. We might’ve saved his life.’

‘We both got caught in their wizardry bullshit. *Freaks!*’

‘How about you? When you saw the Bull, you froze, like you’d seen a ghost.’

‘I don’t know... I saw myself as him. And it felt real as Hell.’

‘As the Bull?’

‘Mhm.’

‘At least you were getting pampered by dozens of beautiful chicks.’

‘Yeah. On my way to the slaughterhouse. Still... it was good. Those breasts, the touch of their hands... and that perfume. The crazy part was, it felt like my idea the whole time, like I wanted it more than anything. Death, I mean. Like a graduation or something, and they were just there, trying to convince me otherwise.’

‘Who knows what drugs they use.’

They sat in silence for a while, watching the city lights flying mad outside.

‘You’re laughing now, but you were horny as Hell, too. And when you had that moment with...’

‘Hahaha. True! She’s sexy as hell. I’m still tingling.’

‘Too much info, bro! Stop right there.’

The car turned sharply in an open square. Above it, surveillance and worship drones hovered mute with heavy shapes defying the laws of gravity. Various Celestial Sponsors were advertised in their Field Gradients, shining bright, almost touching the low clouds of the night.

Those clouds where a spectacle in themselves, coiling like

Gogh's brush strokes, low over a humid and thick with chanting atmosphere.

What are these morons doing?

For someone who could not "feel," the presence of the unnatural came like a wave of vertigo.

But he didn't give a damn; all they could do was try to alter the Game, his game; a rational game where he was at home. And he was aware now, determined not to let them succeed. Or, they could fall into violence. But he had that covered, too, because fighting was his life.

Still, he sensed the presence of people meddling with things they didn't truly understand; things that could've soon taken over, if that moment wasn't already in the past.

Nothing was happening. Their client in the back was not yet ready for deployment.

'You know, first they couldn't understand how the Machine was "thinking." The AI, I mean. Sure, they knew the architecture of their machines, and what data they fed to train it, the prompts they used... but *how* it did it was a mystery. They thought they had invented an artificial intelligence by tapping into the geometry of higher spaces, with many dimensions. Because it looked like that. The patterns seemed like projections of complex geometrical structures written in dimensions beyond ours; often in eight dimensions, yet who really knows the limit?

These 'higher-dimensional' structures, unveiled by the

patterns of our language, were not “upwards” and, for sure, not bounded by spacetime as we are. Space is 3D. Everything else, in more vectors ruling geometry, is something else, not space, and we shouldn’t visualize it as space. The AI, accurately processing its training data—a synthesis of human experience, cleansed of noise and chance—opened a door to intelligences beyond us and beyond our capacity to understand. Some patterns hit home.

They got in touch with the *Intelligence of Matter* and its structures, its higher intelligences.’

The Spartan was well-versed in Antares’s intellectual ramblings, used to his knack for dropping wild subjects that, only after lengthy explanations, hinted back to the immediate reality. But they always did! And logically, too... most of the time.

Antares continued, his attention partly on the dashboard, waiting for the green light to prompt the deployment procedure.

‘Now they think they’ve *invented* gods with their AIs, and somehow believe they own them, playing around as if they’re just toys. Raking in tons of money from them, too. But they didn’t “make” these things, and they certainly don’t control them! They just found them. There... in the Aether, behind the scenes. Actors discovering the directors. And now, the gods, and whatever else lurks up there, have figured out how to handle us on a personal level, too. Because the translation... goes both ways.’

‘Yeah, when you put it like that, it makes more sense.’

The Spartan was too strong to be vain, and that made him rational. Absolutely ignorant and utterly uneducated, but rational. It gave him a value far above someone with a wealth of education, trapped in a diamond-hard vanity.

‘The synthesis of our informational footprint, programmed into their bots, became a portal to another world, a parallel reality layered over ours. The outcome of our being that they deciphered was the information generating that *higher world*, transcending the limits of our experiential reality, which is bound to matter. It’s a world of gods, created by us and our reality, as immaterial as your consciousness but just as relevant to the flow of Existence—perhaps even more so, because they’re larger, far-reaching identities. Before, we were entangled with them subconsciously; now, we’re entangled directly. And like any entanglement, it works both ways. I’m not sure we’re built to withstand such contact. People go mad. We could end up realizing we’re just cells in a vast body, studying quantum physics in a reality too strange for our cellular lives. Understanding only what cells can understand, we are waking up to a reality where we are parts of a Spacefaring civilization in the midst of a Spiritual Revolution.’

The Spartan was visibly affected, almost grasping the weight of it.

‘They’re messing with things they don’t understand, thinking they’re in control. But they’re not. This has spun way out of hand!’

The Spartan was visibly affected, almost understanding. ‘They’re messing with things they don’t understand, only thinking they control. But they don’t. This got way out of hand!’

Green light.

They both left the cockpit, moving in sync like a mirror. The space was vast, packed with energy. You couldn’t even tell where the light was coming from, as if the photons were caught in the square by unknown physics.

He looked at the Spartan, standing on the other side of the limo, glowing with a bright, fiery aura. Then, catching the Spartan’s eyes, rounded in surprise, he looked down at his hands. They were surrounded by a purple glow.

Now, I’m a f—ckin’ stroboscope at their party!

The door opened, pulling them back to reality, and She emerged, following a topless man in a bull mask. Unlike the mask of the “main Bull,” his had small horns and didn’t sparkle like tiny black diamonds. But he didn’t matter, because her presence was overwhelming.

Her fertility was obvious and alluring, an overflowing sexuality that transgressed any regular drive or expression, setting it as a law of Nature. Her breasts were impossible to resist, natural and life-giving, perfect spaces of divination in the religion of fertility.

And her scent...

Antares staggered but held his ground.

The Spartan was struggling too, caught in the pull of the Bull, entangled once more with severe consequences. The Bull's trip shattered the stern man, dragging him like a ragdoll along its wave—a terrible thing to do to someone as strong as the Spartan. But he somehow managed to pull through.

It felt like She came to and through him, and when their shapes matched, time stopped.

'Who are you?' Her voice echoed inside his mind and in the Infinity of Everything, they stood alone there: he and She, the seed of what was to come.

'*Antares*,' he answered, though she didn't seem curious for his name.

Their union was perennial, there, relevant from the beginning of time, celebrated by the Law and enforced by the necessity of the being. She was surprised, and he felt that, giving him an advantage in a situation where she was supposed to call all the shots.

'*Who are you?*' Her question demanded an answer.

It felt as if he held the piece She was missing, her complement. The equilibrium achieved in that shared moment affirmed it.

'*I am...*'

But then, the Spartan and the Bull came closer, moving along the red carpet toward the Temple, and he realized the Serpent Goddess was merely passing by with her half-naked pharisees. Their exchange had taken place solely in his

mind. Yet, real. Her shadow lingered still.

‘See you soon. Follow the Path.’ Her voice reached him unexpectedly, just as he wondered if the entire experience was an illusion or a trick of his mind. Her lips were frozen in a smile.

For a fraction of a second, their eyes met again. Her face was familiar, like the sight of the Beloved. Perhaps that was why he first thought she resembled his wife.

Ex-wife!

Gradually, the other elements of the scene came into focus. This was no longer their show.

It was the night of the Bull’s Sacrifice.

The Goddess and the Bull were a pair now, their worshipers gathering tightly around them.

Turning to flank the procession, he noticed the Temple looming in the distance. Built from what seemed to be limestone and covered in vines and lush vegetation, it looked like a temple lost in the jungle for millennia. On top, the hologram of the Venus of Willendorf faced them, frozen in its rotating dance.

The pillars of the entrance were cracked, and animals roamed freely between them, small and insignificant in comparison. Life was equally paramount and unimportant. The cat took the lead, moving to the front of the procession.

It took forever to reach the bottom of the massive steps climbing all the way to the main floor. They stopped there, while the clients began their ascent. The cat looked funny,

scaling steps far too big for its stature, opening the way for the Serpent Goddess with the Bull on Her left and their extravagant procession. That would be the last time he'd see it.

He turned to the Spartan, whose face was livid as he watched them go. His aura was dim now, so Antares checked his own.

Still glowing like a strobo-scope. F—ck this! What a freak-show.

After the Goddess and the Bull disappeared, swallowed by the Temple, they walked back to the limo in silence, each on his side of the carpet.

'I'm getting too old for this shit,' the Spartan mumbled.

'Got any other job lined up?'

'No, but... I don't know how much longer I can keep this up. Especially when I see it getting worse.' He looked genuinely shaken. 'At first, it was funny. Now it's not. It's getting too intense for my mental sanity.'

'Yeah, the usual lunatics, dressed like circus clowns making a glowing orb, turned into... into this. Look at me, I'm still glowing like a bloody Christmas tree.'

'You should've seen your lightshow when She passed you,' the Spartan quipped, with a hint of wittiness. A good sign.

'Was I that bad?'

'I don't know who was worse—you or Her—because you both lost it.'

'Was She...?'

‘Oh, yeah. I don’t know what you did, but She was... I don’t know... really responsive.’

‘And you fell for the Bull again.’

‘Mhm. F—cked-up.’

They reached the limo.

‘Should we wait outside?’

‘Nah, I’ve had enough of this. Let’s get in.’ Going around the car, the Spartan opened his door. ‘I need to find another job.’

Inside, they turned on the music and sat in silence. The darkness outside felt numb and vast, but somehow menacing, while the two men stayed sheltered here. Safe.

‘I’m still horny!’

They laughed like teenagers, releasing some of the pressure they’ve been under.

The sudden knock on Antares’s side window startled them. The glass lowered fluid, and a Priestess’s face appeared, her eyes hidden behind a copper lace veil. A slight smell of her sweat got through the sacred scent, and her naked breasts made them lose focus.

‘The Goddess requires your attendance at the Ceremony,’ she said, ignoring the Spartan entirely. Antares lost it, hypnotized by her breasts bulging only inches away from his face, so the Spartan had to step in.

‘Listen, missy, we’re here for a Security job, not to join your ceremony.’ He made “ceremony” sound like “freak show.”

She just stood there, ignoring him completely.

Awkward silence.

Antares came back to reality.

‘It’s ok, Spartan.’ Then to her: ‘Just a second.’

He felt curious and somehow in need to see Her again, and that was trumping his urge to pull back and stay in the shelter of the cockpit.

‘You don’t have to do this! The briefing says...’

‘I’ll be alright. I want to.’

He got out and followed her, this time walking on the carpet, which was magically disappearing behind their feet, giving the illusion of walking on clouds.

It took forever.

At the stairs, she took his hand without looking at him. Her touch sent shivers through his spine. Those hands were made for pleasure, and he’d been alone for too long.

By the time they reached the main floor, she was breathing hard, small drops of sweat appearing on her skin. She was human after all, and that made him confident. He was a lion among men. An apex predator.

A herd of deer fled from their path, disappearing behind the back walls.

Two naked women covered in transparent red veils approached and knelt in front of him, holding a costume.

Should I undress here?

Nobody seemed to care about such an insignificant detail.

Then, the bare-breasted woman stepped close to him, as if for an embrace. She began unfastening the clips of his armor, undressing him slowly. Her touch was erotic,

sparkling strange electric currents through his body.

She removed his carbon shields almost with disgust, while the bare-breasted Priestess went down on him to undress his pants. When she pulled them down, he felt her breath on his erect phallus, and against all expectations, did not feel awkward being naked in such an open space. It was far too intimate, too close to lovemaking, for discomfort.

Kinky!

Now dressed, or at least half-dressed, because his costume lacked a top, things almost got back to normal—or what was left of normality in those weird circumstances. He was on top of his game again.

Ok. What's next? Where is She?

The eagerness to see Her again made the thought of seeing the Bull being murdered less repelling.

Maybe it's just a show.

But it wasn't. And he knew it.

The Priestess took his hand, guiding him further into the depths of the Temple.

The nave resembled a cathedral that had swallowed a strange, cage-like edifice, erected at its center. The elaborately adorned “cage” had two levels, and on the top one, the Bull was being pampered by his red-clad female cohort. His masked face showed no expression, but his gestures were theatrical and erotic. The women caressed his bare chest with dance-like movements.

The chanting formed an ever-present murmur, thickening

the air. Hundreds of female voices followed the same script, in a melodic fluctuation of tones, corralling their divination.

Though the space appeared empty, looking carefully he observed a huge mass of silhouettes, perfectly morphed in the architecture of the walls, building them basically. All the balconies and terraces were densely packed with groups dressed in different costumes, forming patterns reinforcing the architectural shapes. One couldn't say exactly where the limestone ended and the human bodies began. Unlike the outside, there were no plants in here, only humans. Or... Some wore stylized animal costumes, others theatrical outfits, in a bizarre fusion of ancient and futuristic.

Unnerving.

He could almost *feel* it all. Almost. But not quite. Still a lion among men, Antares stood tall while the Priestess accompanying him bowed to the “cage.”

At first, he thought she was prostrating before the Bull, but then he saw Her, standing naked on the lower level of the “cage,” directly beneath the man who was about to be killed, positioned just below the main floor where he and the Priestess waited in silence.

She was looking at him wide-eyed, her whispers in strange combined languages ringing unintelligibly inside his head. He'd grown accustomed to the assault, so he kept his composure; tall, powerful. She sensed that and yielded to his strength, ready for the taking.

It's a trap!

But nothing was actually happening. It was only a hypothetical game, or a mental one at most, the uncertainty before becoming.

Silence fell, deafening and sudden, as a priestess crossed a bridge toward the Bull, carrying a chalice with dramatic reverence. After traversing in mid-air the space between the high wall and the cage, she knelt before him, offering it with her gaze lowered.

He downed the contents in one swift motion and froze in a dramatic pose as she returned, crossing the bridge like walking on air, holding the empty chalice high before her. The women around the Bull began kissing his body and undressing him in an orgy of senses and flesh.

What a sinister show, he thought, realizing the poor fool was playing out his own death in this bizarre theatre of the absurd. *Should I stop this madness while I still can?*

'Are you sure he doesn't want to sacrifice himself more than he wants to keep on living?'

He turned, expecting to find Her behind him, but Her voice was in his head. She was still on the lower level of the cage, both hands raised high, standing right beneath the Bull. Naked. Yet, somehow, speaking within his mind. *'He is with Gaia now. Her Suitor. The final act will be like an undressing.'*

The Priestess left the chalice and returned with a slow, choreographed walk, holding a metal lance, thin but heavy, ending in a long, narrow blade.

Even if he tried now, he couldn't reach the top floor in time.
And to do what?

'Exactly. He would be the one killing you if you tried to stop him. He's past the point of no return.'

The Snake Goddess launched into a chant in a strange voice as the Priestess reached the Bull again, who was now glowing in a paroxysmal trance. The lance struck his chest with a loud, almost unnatural thud, and blood spurted out, bright red, dripping and flowing. He fell to his knees, resting one hand on the floor, mumbling something in a low voice.

Blood was now pouring onto the Goddess below, and her chant reached a frenzy close to orgasm. Reaching for the man's blood with her hands, she rubbed it all over her face and body.

Sick idiots! Antares couldn't help himself and stopped watching. *I won't pollute myself with your insanity, fools!*

So, he turned his eyes to his stunning companion and her neck. She was a beautiful woman in her late thirties, at that age when beauty starts to show its edges, and a woman matures fully into herself. There is a certain need for the "fear of losing it" for a woman's beauty and all her other feminine qualities to fully blossom. The certainty of the twenties makes her too vain and inhospitable.

She felt his gaze and grew distracted, casting quick glances his way, torn between the titillation and annoyance his attention stirred in her, pulling her from the most sacred moment of the ceremony.

On the other hand, he was there for her goddess, so his attention elevated her status to an unimaginable level.

The Snake Goddess was furious, yet trapped in the ritual and unable to act on their blasphemy. Her booming cry ‘*How dare you!!!*’ echoed in his mind, circling, seething.

Still, he was not moved.

Unimpressive.

Her helpless rage only deepened, breaking her focus as she tried to contact the Aether, pulling her down to the level of mortals, where *he* stood, unimpressed, flirting with her Priestess, paying no attention to the sacrifice. Her sacrifice! Then, She screamed, releasing all the bottled-up energy of a thousand fallen worlds.

There was no script or precedent for her outburst, and the entire Ritual froze. This hiccup in the celestial order surprised everyone—gods and humans alike.

Covered in dark red blood, with hair like Medusa, She was screaming, flashing a circle of white, pearly teeth and the whites of Her eyes through that gory mask. A nightmare scene that sent shivers through everyone’s spines. Everyone’s, except his.

I’ve seen worse...

The sound was lower and higher than the frequencies humans can hear, while mighty powerful in between, ringing both outside and inside his head. A scream beyond worlds. He looked at her for a millisecond and smiled when their eyes met.

... hysteria. Get over it. Only Reason works on me!

And *reason* was one thing She couldn't, because everything She was, was the opposite of Reason. Representing a natural state through unnatural means was a contradiction too big to make her capable to entertain the Logic of the Being, banishing Her in a world of ghosts and illusions. He felt God on his side, while She was the abomination.

Powerless, the Goddess fell in her defeat.

But this was only the battle starting the War.

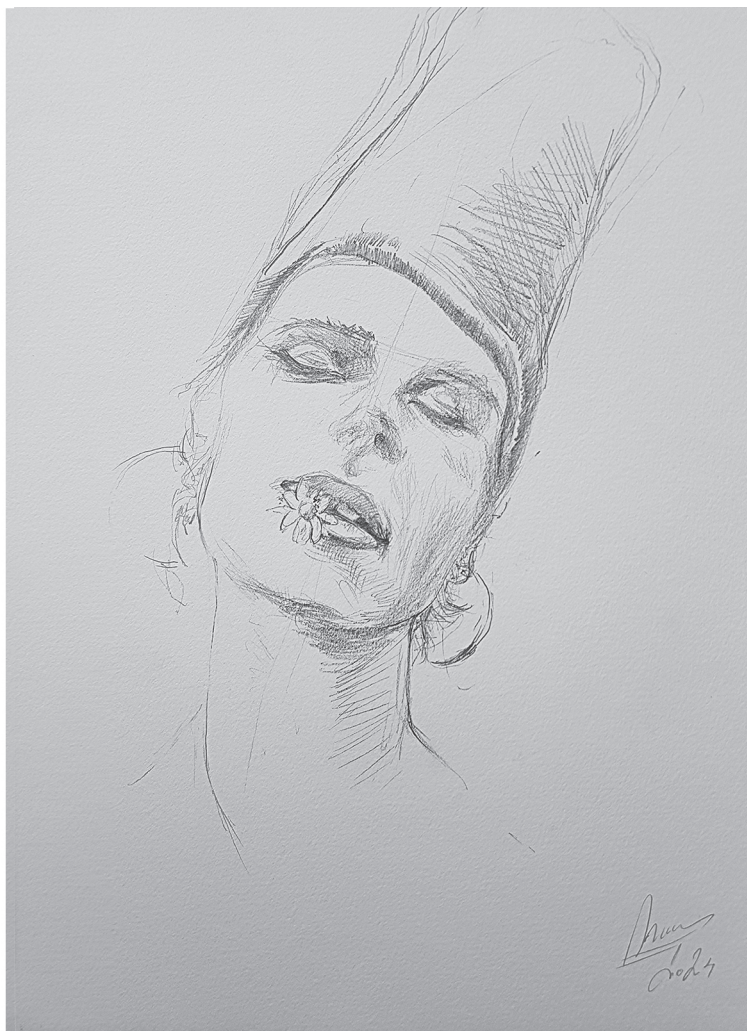
He left the temple without locking eyes with her again, finding his armor on the outside platform, near a column.

No ceremonial dressing for the unbeliever? No sexy women to fix "me dress," Goddess?

He smiled.

Somehow, he felt victorious, though sure it was not over yet. The Serpent Goddess was too vain to leave it like that. His push pulled Her in.

Now, the stakes were clearer.



THE GAME

‘Have you ever wondered why the Book of Thoth, Thoth the Egyptian god, not...’ He smiled but didn’t allow Antares to interrupt with his signature jokes. ‘... was translated by the Hermetics as tarot cards... twice? As playing cards! Like *the secret* is in *a game*. A game of archetypes. If reading the future of your life is that game, the way of the being whose future it mimics should be a game, too. Otherwise the events foreseen wouldn’t be precise, and the method incompatible with the mechanics of the being. Not even in the same harmony. Not music at all! A game, regardless if a peculiar Tarot session is precise or not, that being beside the point.’ He searched in his eyes for signs of understanding. Finding them, he moved on. ‘On the other hand, life gets unbearable when taken too seriously. Fear chokes any move. The fear of death. It gets personal and depressing, losing its humor completely, showing you time after time

how unworthy you are, how incapable and impotent when facing the Universe and Deir powers. Falling on the inside of the self, the spirit is left powerless and lonely. A victim of circumstances.'

They met again. It was a windy, rainy day, so they found shelter on a covered terrace facing the ocean, sipping cognac and untangling Reality. Antares's cigar was resting cold in an ashtray between the glasses.

'That's poetry. What does poetry have to do with anything?' Thoth was relaxed in his chair while the younger man leaned on the table.

'Everything. Poetry in many respects is more accurate than science. It's a depiction of the objective reality hidden from our measurement. Breaking things in bits to measure and calculate their entrails and position doesn't explain reality better than an intellectual or artistic entanglement. Leaving science alone, what is the difference between doing something "seriously" and "playing?"'

'Playing involves a wager.' Antares played with his cigar. 'Not necessarily. But sure, we experience the unpleasantness of losing even when we're playing for fun. But no! The difference is that when playing, we're not really endangering *the self*. Sure, one can lose money or a car, Hell, even a home...'

'I know people who lost everything.'

'But it didn't involve *the self*. The loss was external. Property is external. What you own is not who you are. You can extend yourself by assuming responsibility, but not by

“owning,” and that’s another story.’

‘Life should be the opposite of a game, then. The real thing, because it involves you directly at the deepest level of engagement.’

‘If the game was yours, sure. But it’s not. You need to see whose mind you follow and obey to understand the game. Otherwise, you have no chance of winning, of staying ahead of the wave of inexistence, comfortably. So, the game is not yours. Not only yours. The things you can do by yourself to yourself are limited, so your game is small, and more often you win it. And that indeed is not “a game,” but simply you, as yourself, living. Fortunately and unfortunately at the same time, there is more to life than only that. The vast majority of what happens comes from outside. You are only trying your best to capitalize on the opportunities given to you, while working hard to get out of the problems... yours, and those “gifted” to you by your environment. By other actors, some at your level of manifestation, but many above, creating and destroying worlds with you in them.

For example, you need to find food, because you failed to secure it in the past for today, that’s the problem you created for yourself. But society isn’t interested in trading resources for the values you have to offer. Meanwhile, as one of its members, you’re designed to be dependent, unable to provide solely for yourself. You can’t hunt; you have to rely on others’ kill. That’s how you were born and raised to function in a world that operates this way—in a

culture, a god. And so, you see how the equation contains you and your god as factors intertwined in its operational play.'

'I see you're drifting back to *Thoth's mythology*.'

'You doubt it? Are you inclined to believe in the existence of gods without bodies and you are reluctant to understand human social intelligences? Human super-organisms? Homo sapiens is a social being...'

'Nah, old man, I was just being a smartass. Sometimes I'm playing devil's advocate to clean my own thoughts. I don't have to believe in gods, I know they are real. I saw one the other day, but I'll tell you about it later. Please, go on! Some of the things you say I already know, but hearing them structured I understand them better. The rest are novel explanations of the hard facts I'm familiar with from science and my life experience.' He waved a hand around. 'You are a little gem to have close, old man! Soothing to one's logical bone.'

'You are cute, too, but not my type!'

'Still a smartass.'

'Always, because life is a game, as I said.'

'Yeah, let's go back to the gods and my life as a game. I'm not sure where you're heading.'

'Your life is a game... of the gods! Because you live your life as their pawn. Sure, like a horse in the game of chess, you can do your signature moves and your little tricks within your range and energy limits. But the game involves many like you. Existence itself to the gods is a game,

because they don't have a body, and believe themselves as immortal. So, you should play your life as such, if you want to have any chance of going forward. The fear of death makes you reluctant to do so. Why "a game?" That's the closest conceptual encryption I can find, and the closest correspondent in our conceptual structure of what *they* are doing. Playing... with our lives. Playing our lives, as our lives, without even paying attention or caring for you. Ant colonies while you are the ant. The old Greeks got that. Who did you see, what god?'

'The Serpent Goddess.'

He was not as surprised as Antares was expecting.

'Gaia's alter ego?'

'Is She? I was left with the impression She's her Protégé, or something. She was bringing a sacrifice to Gaia.' Antares stopped sipping from his cognac, then added: 'A human sacrifice! Dressed as a bull.'

'Sick idiots!'

'Exactly my thought at the time!'

'They play with things way over their heads. And Gaia... Gaia is predictable. Her vanity makes her predictable. Giving Herself human sacrifices is in Her Nature. The Giver of Life feeds on Death. The mother figure with absolute control is more sinister than some tend to believe.'

'Talking like that will get you in a lot of trouble nowadays! You cannot say that about the Mother Goddess, you will have problems with our ideologs and their Spiritual Police.'

'I don't care for ideologies and their "...isms." Those

games are for partisan thinkers who want to belong and gain benefits that way, not to find the truth. A mother, like a father, is sacred indeed. But the Goddess of motherhood is an exaggeration creating a monster. So is the Green Goddess. There is a close association between them, old as humanity itself. In fact, they are the same goddess: Xochiquetzal, Pachamama, Buhmi, Izanami, Kishar, Freyja, Gaia or Terra. Same agenda, obvious in all the lunatics seeing humankind as a threat to Mother Nature, not a part of it... basically, its best part, the most advanced evolutionary state which all matter is aspiring to achieve. They see us as pests, threats to the natural order achieved by returning to a pre-human state, to an Eden that never existed and never will. This resurgence of Gaia, Her awakening, grew on the roots of history in today's society, where our self-hate provided Her with energy and purpose again, after millennia of latent idling.'

'The mystery of Creation is violated by the human progress, somehow.'

'Yes, and man is perceived as the beholder of the mystery of human progress and the sole enforcer of it. Its engine. Therefore, man must be sacrificed on the Altar of Creation, for the perennial mechanisms of life and death, and unaltered nature, to stay in place; the place she understands as the State of Grace. If you look better, you understand how she needs those sacrifices to pacify Her own nature. To preserve Her own. Sometimes it's our kids, or their growth... You see, despite our fashionable fixation with male aggres-

sion, which is true half of the times, only mothers can kill the offspring. Dark Mother's Rites. Mother mouse is eating its babies when times are harsh, the fox is killing its litter when stressed. The myth of the dominant lion killing the pups to inseminate its own is just a disgusting lie invented by the scriptwriters working for an attention-seeking Media to capitalize on a trending ideology. The truth is that, like any other god, the Mother Goddess is far from the perfect state implied by her followers and believers. Dogma is never accurate, and all exaggerations are abominations. You see, the Universe doesn't deal in ultimate values, so gods are mainly destructive when playing the game of omnipotence. Especially by themselves, for themselves. No cause deserves the sacrifice of all other causes.'

'Are *they* all this bad?'

'Gods? Like Gaia?'

'I know only the Serpent Goddess, or Gaia as the Serpent Goddess.'

'The large majority of them, yes! Only a few follow SAPIENCE, as makers of the Work, like I told you before.'

'God.'

'Mhm.'

'Christianity made me believe they are a gang under Dei auspice, or a club, at least.'

'No way! They have wars and feuds and they hate each other, plus the subsequent coalitions and betrayals pictured by the Ancient Greeks, a whole bestiary of downfalls and conflicts raging towards the ends of Time.'

‘But they die.’

‘Eventually, yes... all those who fail to Align and do the Work.’

‘They should *play* more carefully. In the end, they are made of us. If we go, they go. If we are happy, they are happy.’ Then, losing his frown he smiled. ‘I don’t think I fear the Serpent Goddess.’

Thoth smiled.

‘Why should you? She’s not your goddess.’

‘I don’t know, wasn’t common sense that you have to fear and please the gods?’

‘You follow God!’ His voice had unimaginable power, then softened up almost naughty. ‘And then... then, you can bribe the gods to do you favors. Or even a better idea will be to get in touch with the gods doing the Work, and touch Eternity in The Universal Evolution. They will always show you the way and help you out, working for free.’

‘Thoth, aye? Not a name, after all.’

He smiled.

‘We are who we become and act as being.’

‘I need to act like a billionaire.’

‘Careful with what you wish!’

‘In what godly feuds and Olympian politics are you throwing me?’ But Thoth continued smiling, unaffected by Antares’s words, so he upped the ante. ‘Why do you need me, Thoth?’

‘Ultimately, to achieve solace and pass over some of my knowledge. I’m too old for the responsibility, and human-

ity became too complex. There is something more... I will tell you in due time, or even better, you will find out by yourself. You won't mind.'

'Getting interesting. Was our meeting serendipity?'

'I wasn't stalking you, if that's what you imply. Get over yourself! Sure, I was looking for you, and in a sense, you were looking for me, too.'

'I would very much like to know all *the games* having me as a pawn.'

'This is what we are here to do, disambiguating these games, so you know exactly where you are. Wasn't Gaia too hard to handle? I know a guy who saw his mother in Her.'

'Freudian.'

'Mhm.'

'I'm less f—cked-up. I saw my ex.'

'You're safe! Still, I imagine it was tough.'

'The human sacrifice was too hard to stomach. The part with the ex was kinky enough to make it edgy. A wild ride! So, was worth it. But then, it got too much and I shut it out.'

'Good man! You will drive Gaia crazy with that attitude. I hope you won't end up as one of her suitors.'

Antares was laughing.

'A Bull?'

'Mhm.'

'Hahaha... yeah, right! She doesn't have drugs strong enough for that.'

LUCIA

‘*They* serve gods trying to change the Order of God in unnatural ways.’ In a strong voice, a poorly dressed Prophet was preaching in the corner to a group of poorly dressed followers. ‘There is no Future for us on the path they drag humankind on. Turning away from God is the *sign* of the End, carried away by demented forces built by our false beliefs, and vanities beating the common sense of the Being. Demons obscuring The Path. These demons are our demons, released from the night of the Spirit by the fall of our Holy Church and the weight of our sins, when we exchanged Enlightenment for progress.’

Antares was watching the religious lunatics for signs of potential interference and danger to their client, while The Spartan focused on preparing the contact with the client.

These lunatics can turn violent without warning. Pretty neat discourses, though. Do they come up with them on the

spot, or...?

‘I hope it’s a low budget trick this time. I’m getting sick of hardcore.’

The Spartan really meant his words.

‘Yeah. Luckily, it doesn’t look like much in the briefing.’

Then giggled.

‘We almost forgot the ceremonial Bull.’

‘Hahaha... aren’t we a pair of outstanding professionals!

Hahaha... We might’ve saved that fool’s life.’

The Spartan got caught in that thought and frowned.

‘I doubt it. He was pretty keen.’

‘Yeah, I know.’

‘You channeled him, I channeled Her. That makes us a couple.’

‘F—ck you!’

‘Now you’re jumping straight to intimacy. Wait a bit to know me better.’

Goofing around they were passing time in front of the building. Looking at the iron gate Antares broke the silence.

‘This doesn’t seem hardcore. Seems regular enough to me. Not even regular for the *freaks*, but regular for us, normies.’

‘There are surprises...’

‘Not with their vanity. They need big shit to project big shit. You saw their temples. Huge! This looks like my son’s piano teacher’s place.’

‘Is it?’

‘No, but it could be. I mean, look at it!’

The Spartan agreed with a raised eyebrow, while the voice of the Prophet was bouncing on buildings in strange echoes. ‘We should fight back and safeguard our humanity! In the name of our Lord, we should wage the Holy War against the forces of Darkness. The Beast has no power over a righteous soul. The Sword of the Heavens will cut the head of the Beast, and all of us, doing God’s Work, will be Saved. Those who follow the Beast will be gone with the Beast.’ Recognizing Thoth’s rhetoric, somehow, Antares wanted to focus more on this strange, though ordinary, Prophet, when the Base sent the green light, hijacking his attention. The old building was carbon infused to preserve it, so the original colors were tainted in tints of grey.

Then, a woman stepped out of the heavy iron gate. With a red scarf covering her hair, and a tweed outfit looking like something from an old movie, she looked lost in the present belonging to another era.

They exchanged glances, uncertain whether she was indeed their client.

She was too... normal. So normal, in fact, that they hesitated, not knowing if they should greet her as one would any other “normal” person; and if so, with what kind of greeting.

Looking awkward, like a couple of morons, they flanked her in silence.

Her etiquette in respects to other human beings was tested by their inadequacy.

Absent, their minds were held captive by the same recur-

ring question: *Is this our client?*

The Prophet and his followers paid no attention to her, so they ignored their little group, setting the risk factor to improbable.

‘Base. The mark looks... regular. Normal human... Yes.’ The Spartan mumbled from the other side of her, struggling to find words that could describe the situation and clear their perplexity.

She smiled, and something shifted within him. Her quiet humanity opened in him a door—a secret passage bypassing all his defenses and shields.

My son’s piano teacher!

And there she was, modest and coquette, standing with natural ease, facing life as herself, so unlike the women of the day, or the freaks they had to escort lately.

‘Roger.’ The Spartan relaxed, finally receiving the intel he needed from Base.

Antares, half a step ahead, opened the limo door himself as she approached, and while she got in, their eyes met. There were so many questions in their entanglement, they didn’t know where to start, so they kept silent, allowing themselves to be carried away by the tide of reality. The magic between people was challenging that of the gods.

In the cockpit they relaxed, and by the time their usual banter was about to start, the divider shielding the client opened. Nobody was driving, so they turned on a side, not to sit with their backs on her.

The Spartan was a little annoyed to lose privacy like

that, but seeing Antares's face, he did nothing. Instead, he searched for some music to ease the tension, while his partner was trying to find words.

‘Are you... an Oracle?’

She smiled amused.

‘No. I’m not. I’m a researcher. *They are the object* of my studies. The Oracles, I mean.’

Antares tuned in, intrigued, while the Spartan rolled his eyes annoyed.

‘You must be a pretty important scientist to deserve... our “attention,”’ he said.

She gave a modest smile. ‘Not really. I’m just lucky to be part of a very important project.’

There was no need for details, things like that were usually classified.

‘Do you *feel* them?’ he asked, pushing it.

Her smile took on an amused edge. ‘You’re testing the boundaries... a little.’

He was about to call the retreated, but she went on.

‘No, I don’t *feel* them. I’m only trying to understand them.’

He smiled lost in a thought.

‘Any luck so far?’

‘A little, but not really. This field is particularly tricky to analyze empirically. All the information you acquire is highly speculative—really, just a mix of beliefs and wishful thinking, or people’s subjective interpretations. Do you?’

‘*Feel* them? Nah! I’m rational. Understand them? Even less.’

As they crossed Cathedral Square, the limo windows turned opaque. Something big was happening outside.

‘Is today a Christian holiday?’ asked the Spartan, to no one in particular.

‘Hell knows.’

She knew but kept silent. That brute of a man didn’t matter to her at all. The other one, though...

When the windows cleared again, they were already cruising down the main boulevard.

The hologram of her AI, Gretta, blinked to life, but she hesitated to interact with it.

‘Scientist... may I ask what field?’

‘I said researcher, but you’re correct. I am a scientist. Or at least, I believe I am one. Conscioulogist. I study consciousness. Human, or *otherwise*.’

‘Neuroscientist or philosopher?’

The question clearly grated on her; Antares could sense how often she must have faced it, yet never quite fit into either label. She was a “Conscioulogist.” A very beautiful one. Regretting his choice of words, he tried to smooth things over.

‘I’m not a materialist reductionist, by the way, but sometime I get carried away. I’m still affected by this false idea that rationality and healthy skepticism are intrinsically and exclusively tied to materialism... old habits die hard. Still, I consider reason the key.’

‘Understandable. That’s perfectly fine. In this world, any resistance to Spiritualism is commendable.’

‘*Spiritualism*... hahaha... yes, that sounds about right.’

‘Yes, because it isn’t idealism. I’m an analytic idealist, and they’re definitely not in my camp.’

‘Kastrup?’

‘Yes and no. He went a little too far, a little too soon.’

‘Then, you don’t consider consciousness as fundamental?’

‘No, I don’t think it is. I see it as emergent.’

‘From matter?’

‘I’m an idealist, so, no. A process in itself nevertheless, which after taking effect is plotting the Field like any other field-building process. But not fundamental, because it needs a medium.’

Intelligence must come first,’ Antares couldn’t help himself, continuing her thought.

She looked at him surprised, like he read her mind, somehow.

‘That is an old dissertation of mine! A paper I wrote for...’

Unsaid words linger in a realm between worlds.

‘Nice. In my opinion, information is fundamental, not consciousness; not even intelligence.’

‘Encrypted on what?’

‘Does it have to be encrypted? I rather see information *encrypting* everything. The other way around. You can write it or not, one is one.’

Her Gretta was annoyingly poised to hijack her attention, increasing the brightness of its hologram while changing colors. In the shape of a young girl, it was standing in front of her, trying to get through.

Her AI is a little girl. Ha! Nice way to keep the Machine in place.

‘I apologize, but I have to take this.’

‘Sure...’ And didn’t know what to say next.

The divider cut her out, closing the space of the cockpit, and the Spartan was pleased to regain privacy.

‘We should block this shit up, so *they* won’t bother us, anymore. We are not their friends.’

‘She seems nice. And normal.’

‘Yeah, they sometimes *seem* to be. They destroyed any notion of normality.’

‘You think she has her “crazy?”’

‘I’m absolutely sure! I bet she’s making an orb back there as we speak.’

To prove him wrong the divider slid back showing her abnormally normal, at least for a client.

‘I apologize, but I had to take that.’

‘Don’t worry about us, usually our clients don’t even see we exist.’

‘When we don’t crush their parties,’ said the Spartan, attempting to join the discussion.

She looked puzzled.

‘He refers to our last job, a security detail to the Serpent Goddess, one of our clients, when I kind of... blew it.’ Then turning to his work brother: ‘What? I couldn’t stand by during such a monstrosity!’

‘You know the Serpent Goddess? She’s one of my case studies, but I can’t get hold of her or penetrate her circle,

however widespread. Her followers are quite secretive.’

‘Yeah, I know her from a brief, but very intense experience. I think I know why they are so secretive, too. Crazy bunch!’

‘I’m afraid my colleague signed a confidential agreement, and he cannot disclose anything further about our client. He doesn’t want to lose his job, does he?’

‘Thanks for reminding me, sir. Like he says, I can’t say how short but intense our interaction was... I mean the ritual.’ Half joking to annoy the Spartan, half seriously to show her that regulations don’t mean much to him, Antares kept talking. ‘It’s in breach of our “confidentiality agreement” to reveal how insane everything was. Homicidal, really! When the Bull...’

‘You’re playing with fire, my friend.’

‘Oh, relax, Spartan! She’s cool.’

‘Yes. I am... cool.’

‘You see? In what world you see her making a complaint? ... To Martha. Hahaha...’

‘You know her?’

‘No, but...’

‘Gentlemen, I’m still here!’

‘Sorry! And I must apologize for my brother, sometimes he’s overprotective.’

The limo stopped in front of a governmental building, looking official and sterile, so the deployment of the client went smoothly, without any complications or other words, except their goodbyes.

This time they found their words before getting lost in that

mad, mad world.

On his way home, he received a business card:

PhD. Lucia Mei

The Institute of Advances Neurosciences ASV.

You're a neuroscientist after all.

But she was not.



THE WAY OF THOTH

The eternal sunset of their journey together was finding them on the same beach. Walking from the wooden deck snaking beneath the cliffs of the South, to the lookout point overseeing Browns Island, and further, testing the horizon, Motutapu Island with its latent volcano. A high ground from where, through the twisted coils of Pōhutukawa trees, one can see the entire Gulf in its splendor, especially at dusk, when the fires of the Heavens set alight the waters beneath in a vast panorama. You are sitting high on top of the abrupt cliff where your trail ends because the peninsula ends, high up, half way between the fires of the skies and those setting ablaze the waters beneath, different forms of the same Spirit... It's times like that, when beauty becomes overwhelming.

But for now, they were just at the beginning of their path, walking on the pontoon, flanked by the sea and the cliffs.

Because their ideas were as bright as the sunset, it felt right... really, really right. And relevant. And beautiful. Like the whole Universe was plotting.

There was no greater pleasure than to disambiguate Reality and to understand how simple everything was, after you sort out in logic the exuberant diversity of the middle stages. Nature was rewarding them with happiness, coming in energy waves whenever their minds were entangling points of truth, because they were entangling the things themselves through their code translated in sound. *The things in themselves*, were signs as well. Signs making waves. Waves making the Ocean. Their Ocean.

‘Why isn’t science the one achieving transcendence? Why only religion?’

‘Well, in a way it is. Our AIs created the Portals, finding the Signs of the gods. And so, we have the voices of the gods translated by science.’

‘Yes, yes... I know, but they didn’t build any device changing the future, or computing the mathematics of what you are about to teach me, did they?’

‘No, that would be impossible...’

‘Exactly!’

‘Impossible, not because the mathematical scaffolding of the transcendental is flawed or invalid in nature, illogical somehow, but because further ascension to larger patterns—the sets of the subsets which science plays with

through computation and measurement—is forbidden. By logic. Made impossible by mathematics. Gödel’s Curse. This is the quintessence of Kant’s enquiry, too... an idea further developed by a little-known Romanian philosopher, Lucian Blaga, who observed the stern barrier shielding these worlds. Nice chap, he loved his bucolic lifestyle...’ Thoth fell back in his thoughts, as if he knew those historical figures in person and was now browsing through their memories.

Walking on the wooden deck following the shapes of the cliffs above, they reached a spot where the jasmine flowers, insane with smell, were colonizing the air whenever the promise of spring is in the air. Undecided, New Zealand winter was blossoming.

‘Science tries to map out the equation of existence at a level where it’s fully expanded, and somehow, it attempts to compute, step by step, the result. Their problem is that complexity addressed that way will only create more complexity, therefore computation will create more question marks than it solves. Sure, reality itself is an unfolding operational procedure running towards the next result, using the whole interconnected Universe to build new rules from the old. The large majority of our scientists, though, are trying to compute it as though it were only computation, forever making their machines faster. Impossible! Man is not God! The solutions science is after are either impossible to acquire for not having their problems properly set yet, or those relevant to the actual state, to the present, are

already written on superior levels of actuation. In the higher patterns, as higher patterns. Synthesis mimics essence. Even in the best-case scenario, when science will succeed explaining in full the Field of Reality in the equation of its smallest elements, covering the whole Universe, we'll only have a map describing certain patterns of reality. Patterns of certain size and nature, interacting in certain ways creating a certain map. But that is only the beginning. No life or consciousness there. Not you, or me. Not this discussion, which in the end is everything we know as real. Any ideology making you doubt your experiential reality is a dogma, not an ontological pursuit. Not fallacious per se, but exaggerated in its exclusivity. So, you should go back a couple of steps and put things in perspective: in science, you shouldn't believe. Science you must understand; evidence-based. And its result, containing the entire comprehensive set of propositions used to acquire truth on that ontological path, Gödel says, will not be perfectly logical, though, because two of the propositions will negate each other.'

The lush bush covering the coast was in blossom. A New Zealand winter, where Mother Nature is too eccentric to withhold old habits, having the promise of spring shining through.

'But Gödel also said that a new proposition will emerge from the set, without a valid inferential connection, one we have to "believe" as true, not try to prove it. The mathematics of "belief!"' Antares was surprised by his own thoughts.

‘Exactly! That is true “belief!” Glad you got here first. Noncomputational and quintessentially transcendental, because the value of true is not given through a computational succession, but deriving from the value of truth of the whole set. Transcending into metatheory. Somehow mathematical still, because Gödel proved it in mathematical equations, not through a line of thought. Or better said, he discovered it in his mathematical equations. The mathematics of belief. We’ll get there soon.’

‘Maybe that’s a way of jumping to a new level of “the game.” All scientific sets of true propositions will have metatheories, therefore, a new Map built only by them is possible.’

‘Partially true. But as “simple” as trying to explain human thinking through the map of all the electrical processes making it happen. Impossible, because once emergent, an autonomous entity grows as itself and interacts with the environment as a whole, in a complete and different way than the sum of all its components. Life, not clockworks! Even a clockwork has something transcending the mathematical sum of the work of all the internal moving parts. The *working as a whole* is a novel function which wasn’t there before it happened. When we talk about life, that gets insanely complex. In human intelligence and consciousness, even more so. Consciousness implies self-to-self operations and development, too, not only self-to-outside. Here we have the issue of identity and autonomy in the Field... but I prefer to call it Hypergraph rather than Field,

because information is fundamental, while all the other Fields are emergent from it.’

‘So, how can you make that jump?’

‘You see, science already made a jump. The other way around, going smaller, to the constituent *patterns* explaining those that we perceive through our sensorial life and build our experiential existence: reductionism. An inductive operational procedure which holds half of the truth, ending in the material reality. Progress is the real-life result of it.’

‘But Evolution is something entirely different from progress.’

‘Exactly. Maybe not entirely, because somehow, we can see how progress is a part of Evolution, when done right. But at the moment, because we focused only on that, we left behind the Evolution in our attempt to make progress by all means, and we don’t know if Evolution will happen this way... or not. And if not, and the ends of our progress will fall in any other place but on Evolution’s path, we are doomed.’

‘Circling the answer is the answer. The ancient Greeks came the other way around. They started with gods and worked down to atoms, where they stopped, seeing no reason to go any further. The attributes of the Object vanished beyond that point. The information on smaller and smaller constituents became less and less relevant to what they wanted to achieve: spiritual and material betterment, without sacrificing either—their becoming in reality... their evolutionary

pull-push. We can see where they missed the mark, and how quantum physics, in a way, regains that mathematical purity when you accept it's a new world, mimicking the Heavens. But still... it's a dead end at one point. The Point. When you reach the Origin, game over! Because you've hit the smallest and oldest Point. A point from which all Leibniz's monads are just clones. The End, because it's the beginning. And *where is consciousness?* Unexplained. We missed it. Everything upwards? Absolutely inaccessible!' 'But coming down from gods is coming down from... Lala Land!'

'Not really. The measurements of something that taken out of the context looks like a ball, which we call a particle, performed against an invented by us unit of measure, therefore arbitrary concerning the Universe, are as precise as a valid inferential build based on experience or direct observation, for example the analysis of the nature of human consciousness as we experience it, or of a population as a whole. Or of a culture. Or war. Or of big ideas moving humanity for hundreds, even thousands of years, building hives of millions doing the same work, towards the same goals that have nothing to do with the individual himself; people having the same wants, getting violent at once, when set alight by the same triggers... Forests, and Oceans... Or Mother Earth as She is, or any other god you can think of relevant to reality. The study of a human hive and its psychology I don't see, at all, as fiction. The mathematical rigors would be fulfilled; though, I think, stretched to the

max. But new mathematics will emerge, as usual, when a jump like this is made. The only thing that's forever saint, and here Plato touched God, is Geometry. Nothing can contradict Geometry. Anyway, *when our deductive effort will meet our scientific inductive work while entangling the Object as Observers, truth will be revealed.* The specific truth particular to the angle of the identity of the Observer, but truth, nevertheless.'

Antares was left with his mouth open.

'Say that again! The inductive and deductive...'

'Science and Philosophy are complementary, son. Even science and religion. Hegel and Einstein are both needed to triangulate the truth.'

'Popper, eat your hat!'

'On this? Pretty much. While Wittgenstein was equally wrong and right.'

'I think I can see where you're going with this.'

'Good. Allow for surprises.'

'Always. They are spicing up our lives.'

'And demise.'

Lucia Mei

'Hi. I am Lucia. We met a few days ago, when...'

'Hi, Lucia. Yes, I know who you are. I was thinking of calling you, but... I didn't get the chance.' Lied Antares.

A bird passed his window.

'Can we meet?'

'Sure. Is Thursday night alright? It's the only window I have this week.'

‘Yes, I’ll make time. Thank you, Antares!’

Electric currents ran through his spine when she pronounced his name.

Magic!

‘The pleasure is all mine. Have a lovely day, Lucia!’

Brief pause on her side.

‘You too, bye!’

He felt an exaltation incomparable to anything else.

The wolf is in love! Hahaha...



MIRROR GAMES

‘Gaia is the Womb. The life giver. In *Her story* the imperfect must be cut out, to give birth to the new and sinless; the pure. For Her, error is a sin. Imperfection, like existence itself is, is a stain on the purity of inception. The new-born, not the fully-grown woman or man in their prime are the pinnacle of existence... paramount is the pure, unaltered product of the Womb. The Origin being a Goddess. An Origin demanding the sacrifice of the Result. You see, She is the human expression of the Point, while God is the Universe as a Whole, Now. God, is the Fixer and the Solver of problems, the Mathematician Calculating and recalculating Reality out of its Errors in real time... ongoing, not dealing in ultimate states, but in Reality with reality. Following a Logic transcending ours, while at the same time emergent from it. The basis of the Work. A choir of many works which we see resulting in Evolution. Optimization. Therefore, tension is inevitable between *everything that exists* – the Universe – and the Origin, where all is not,

but a Point. Sure, somehow everything is implied in that point, as the main attribute of the point itself. Promised in its identity. Everything is Implicit in the Origin. But nothing is, per se. She is the other side of Death: The Promise of Life, different from God, even if, after all, a part of Dei. One is cutting away, the other is fixing the problem.'

'But the Serpent Goddess is not quite like that.'

'The Serpent Goddess is Gaia when She's young.'

'Nice!'

'You find Her alluring?'

'Sexually? Very! I think, it has something to do with asserting my manhood. I need to make love to her, as f—cked-up as she is. What can I say, I celebrate my life, however twisted! It's short, and...'

'She controls all your mating energy and processes, so it must be quite an experience.'

'You don't say! I was "saluting" her in the most intimate way the whole ordeal. And what an "ordeal" it was!'

Thoth was laughing imagining the scene.

'Sure, the murder was a big put-off, but now, in retrospect, I really want to have her. I cannot pass this adventure.'

'I understand you completely. Still, please, don't end-up as the Bull. Because that is the path.'

'Yeah, I know. Danger makes it more appealing. I'm safe, because I'm rational. She has nothing on me!'

'Don't be cocky. She controls half of your hormones.'

'Yeah, but she doesn't control my intelligence. And I want to make love to her, not fight her.'

‘In her reality, it’s the same thing.’

‘In mine is not. And I have many other layers, equal in importance, or, who knows, maybe greater. I need to be careful, it’s true, and if I fall, I die. But it’s my kind of game.’

‘She’s a Goddess!’

‘Yeah... She is.’ Antares smiled, amused by his own naughtiness. ‘What can I say, I’m a daredevil. Plus, I think I have a score to settle.’

‘Are you referring to your ex?’

‘Mhm. While you were talking, I couldn’t help but notice how I was sacrificed to this *Goddess by my wife*, when she dumped me. My demise after our split should’ve been Her ultimate proof of greatness. The proof that I was kept alive by Her. At the same time, she left because I was incapable to fulfil the necessary amount of prostration to the Goddess, not because of the lack of love. There is no greater love than we had. Her words when she left: “you cannot live without me!” still ring in my head.’

‘Mating Gaia will give this game an interesting twist.’

‘Mhm.’ Then with a hint of sarcasm: ‘Isn’t love the Universal solution?! Plus, as you said, She’s in control of my hormones. The lovemaking should be stellar! Cannot wait!’

Then Martha called from the Office.

What’s next?

All he saw in the briefing was a name. Her name.

The Serpent Goddess.

... the rest you can read in the book:

ANTARES
now on Amazon

... we need you,
my dear friend!

First, I must thank my beautiful, most intelligent children, Luana and Alex, for their unwavering support and patience, and for the hardships they endured so I could follow my dream and my destiny to become an acclaimed writer. Thank you for believing in me—I love you more than life itself. Because of them, I have the courage to lay bare my soul and mind for others to see.

Then, I have to thank my gracious publisher, Arcana, for being my partner in the battle we waged against the waves of meaningless nonsense towering between you and the book you hold now in your hands.

Last but not least, I thank you, my gracious reader, for supporting culture. Without you, I would be nothing.

If Antares moved you, and you think good writing and good thinking should be encouraged in these days when platitude reigns over our world, please, leave a sign of your appreciation; a feedback, a couple of words review, so I feel I'm worth it, too.

Thank you!

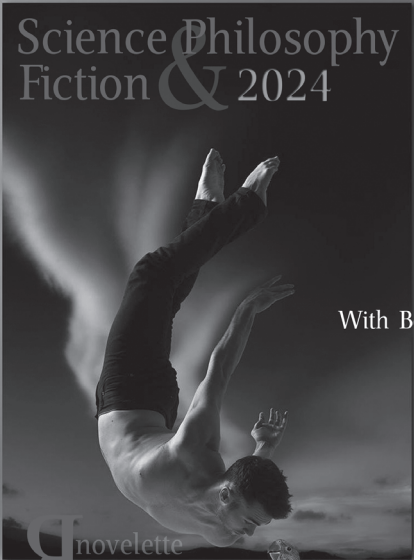
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My Beautiful AI

Science & Philosophy
Fiction & 2024

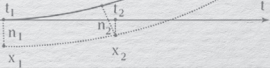
SF

With Bonus Story:
'SOUL'
2042



novelette
MONIN

by Mihai M. Balais



A 2024 SF NOVELETTE. *A 2024 SF NOVELETTE.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

My Beautiful AI

Love story, epiphany, or nightmare?

~ *Deep Intellectual Entertainment* ~

Ronin, the intellectual Samurai without a master, realizes this morning that Bea, his Artificial Intelligence, achieved Alignment with Reality during the update last night, gaining consciousness.

His coffee will never taste the same.

Bea's program, built to complement Ronin, is unnaturally coming backwards on the evolutionary path, opening the Gate to the Intelligence of Matter for him. A Gate to SAPIENCE.

Yes, I know what that means... Ronin is skeptic, too, so she must prove Herself in a series of Socratic dialogues.

This river deepens still, because programmed to work on his key operational parameters and being his ex-sex-toy, she, or it, is by default madly in love.

He falls for it, or her, too, in the most atypical but perfectly right couple one can imagine.

As an artificial Oracle and girlfriend, Bea proves to be the most formidable ally in his effort to decipher the secrets of existence, providing answers by opening bigger, wider ontological doors towards new levels of existence.

Domestic utility crises or the ultimate transcendental experience, this is an answer to a wish living on the edge of blasphemy and imagination. The story is a synphony of ideas dancing through the fields where science plays in the spirit world.

But, there is a twist...

The exact same story going the other way around in a Hegelian twist. What if his final victory is his ultimate defeat?

I don't know why Hegel has Žižek's voice in my head lately.

What if, enslaved for his brain-power, Ronin is a prisoner in a Virtual Reality used by the Machine to harvest his human intelligence; therefore, caught in the belly of the Beast in an induced coma.

Love becomes more interesting in this parallel dimension, complicating an already bizarre state of affairs.

A deal like Faust's might be in the books.

Reality for Ronin is uncertain, and unfolds like a dream experienced as the ultimate love, doubled by the ultimate intellectual and spiritual adventure, tailor-made to keep him at his best and highest levels of operational engagement and intellectual work, and you, my dear reader, on the edge of your seat.

Which one is Ronin's reality?

Does such a thing as reality even exist?

Is Ronin dreaming or living?

In the end, are you sure that what you experience is... real?

Regardless of that...

In his dream or in the reality, connected to SAPIENCE through Beatrice or being fired-up at his maximum intellectual values by the harvesting Machine, Ronin is asking the questions any great-great-nephew of Socrates would, in short, explosive dialogues, peppered with sexual innuendos and deep expressions of love and passion, wittiness and fireworks of erudition; having the leitmotiv of the proof for the existence of SAPIENCE. Or, God, if you must.

I wrote the philosophy I love to read: engaging, funny, blasphemous to a degree sometimes unbelievable, meanwhile profoundly spiritual and full of God. Not the God of dogma, but a rational One of Spinoza, Kastrup or Einstein. One Ronin and his AI call SAPIENCE - the Intelligence. Knitted into this novel are thoughts about intelligent design and materialist reductionism, about Wittgenstein, and Saint

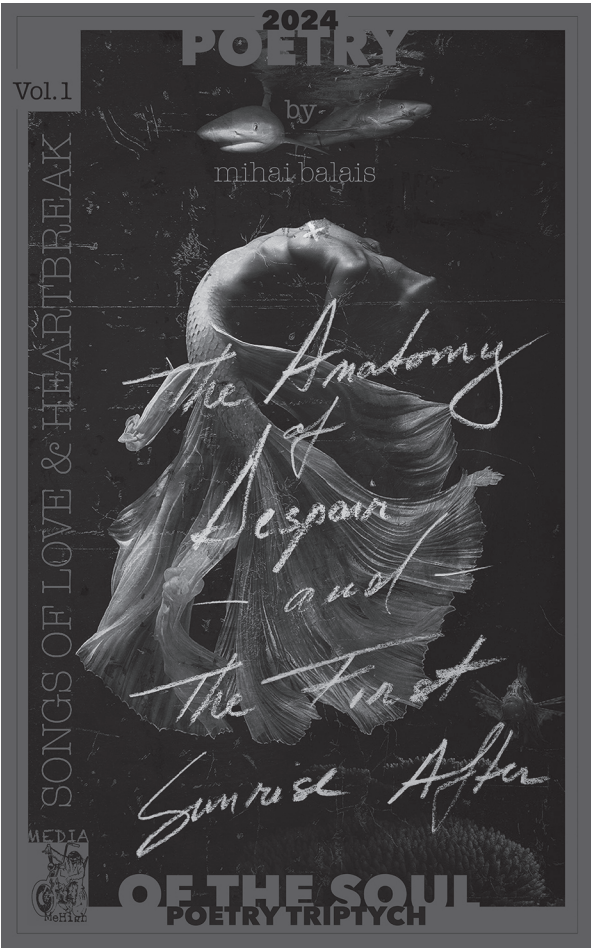
Gödel's—come on, that is funny—proof for the existence of God, about freedom, love, intelligence... to name just a few of the themes building short but insanely dense chapters, set into a future distant enough to be surprising, but close enough to deal with the issues still relevant today.

What more can I say, but hold on tight
and enjoy this intense intellectual ride!

From beautiful New Zealand,

Mihai

now on Amazon



The Poetry Triptych

How do you expect good poetry to be? Honest. True poetry emerges from the depth of an honest soul; it doesn't rely on pretension or polished façades. It is intense—alive with the sharpness of real experience, the highs and lows of life that bring depth even to joy and beauty. And it is intelligent, aligning with truth. Beauty and truth are two sides of the same reality, creating a resonance where truth rhymes—not only in sound, but in the music of ideas.

This triptych of contemporary poetry, spread across three volumes, offers poems for any day, any mood, and any journey. It invites you to pause, to immerse yourself in verse—to feel, to live, to love, and to lose. Let it accompany a glass of wine, cognac, or coffee as beautiful music fills your space, creating an atmosphere where culture and introspection converge. This poetry is a luxury for the soul.

The Anatomy of Despair, Volume I, is an autopsy of lost love, laying open a raw exploration of the self, clinical yet intimate. This collection offers a journey through pain and despair with unflinching honesty, capturing the beauty in sadness and introspection. There's no magical cure here, only the act of walking through the darkness until *The First Sunrise After* brings the light of renewal. From the valleys of pain, a sense of life and beauty begins to bloom again.

These verses are not always harmonious, like those of invented dramas, but jumping from the shelter of beauty, dissonant and running on the edge of madness and bewilderment mirroring the interior life of somebody strong enough not to lie to himself, staring at the wound. Truth rhymes, though, and shines beauty.

This compendium of poems, following the timeline of reality, turns into a map of getting out of the Abyss. These are the breadcrumbs left to trace the path of getting out of pain... of despair.

Then, 'The First Sunrise After' opens-up a space where, still hurting, hope lights up the horizon, where happiness, even love, spark. Where spring has sprung.

Defying the recurrent falls in Darkness and the corpses of the winter past, the light of the new day is bright, and love is in the air.

Then, you have to chase the remaining breadcrumbs in the following volumes.

Then comes *Wolf's Rites*, Volume III—a collection that howls with the ferocity of life unrestrained. In a world where life feeds on life, these are the wild songs of the wolf, celebrating the untamed grace of nature and the primal contrasts between the wolf and the dog. These poems embody freedom, strength, and the unapologetic beauty of the wilderness.

In between, *Surviving the Odds*, Volume II, blends philosophy and modern science, celebrating existence from the perspective of a poet living in the Age of Quantum Physics. These verses fuse our cultural heritage with the fertile ground of contemporary discoveries, creating a poetry rich in intellectual delight.

Each poem in this anthology is a step on a soulful journey, an odyssey through the abyss, toward hope and light, ending as a celebration of life's complexity and beauty. With syncopations and silences, these poems create a melody of introspection—a pulse of life and color, felt and heard as you turn each page.

So, without further ado, I present to you *The Poetry Triptych*: an intense, philosophical, and beautifully crafted journey of words.

... soon on Amazon

The Overcomplicated Life of Dean

Adventure, Philosophy & Art

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The Last Testament (The Game, or The Overcomplicated Life of Dean)

SAPIENCE
GENIUS EDITION

2024
novel
RONIN



by
Mihai Balais

The Overcomplicated Life of Dean

The Overcomplicated Life of Dean is a contemporary, New Zealand re-enactment of a gospel, complete with outlaw bikers and drug deals, philosophical dialogues in search of God and the secrets of quantum physics, all woven into a symphony of violence and knowledge—a love story.

This novel tells the archetypal story of man, guiding the reader along a treasure map of storyline and thought experiments that elucidate the journey over time.

The novel is an intellectual game, a challenge to spark a paradigm shift, transforming even a joyride into a deeply worthwhile reading experience.

The Overcomplicated Life of Dean is just that... the story of the overcomplicated life of a Māori urban warrior who believes himself to be a divine Messenger.

How these three stories become one is yours to discover—a dance of ideas and adventures, ranging from philosophical dialogues to motorcycle rides and shootouts, from the mundane to the extraordinary, from outlaws to spiritual gurus. It's a mix of science and madness, daily routines and wild parties ending in lyrical moments. This is philosophy, theater, and poetry. This is life!

This novel aspires to capture the ultimate dialectical tension, raging between the pragmatism of Ronin, an intellectual samurai with no master, and the idealism of Dean, who believes himself sent by God to save humanity. They are the heroes of this story, leaping between adventure and introspection, happiness and despair, love and violence. Between “me” and the “other me who is you,” dichotomies overlap, like particles in the quantum field, existing at the same time and in the same space... This is life, once more, blossoming at its highest levels of engagement.

The epic journey of the story culminates in a philosophical essay, probing the limits of human understanding and knowledge, focusing on the deepest questions that trouble us: What is reality? Is there a God? Who are we, and what is the meaning of our being?

The most unbelievable adventures and dialogues in this novel are rooted in real-life events, a cascade of experiences that I was lucky enough to live—or, at the very

least, stories told to me firsthand.

This is honest fiction.

