

Alex Markovich

Project Terra

Selected Stories

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Alex Markovich was born on April 10, 1978 in Belgorod, Russia.

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Main subjects of the programs: “Traveling through Russia”, “Plein Air Painting” and “Photo Art”.

Alex arranges photo exhibitions in various Russian towns and cities, as well as abroad.

Alex’s favorite genre is sci-fi (lots of his stories are translated into various languages and published in dozens of online and offline publications).

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Amnesia.

Sam's turn in the line had finally come.

Have a seat Mr. Lloyd, uttered the nurse and pointed to the armchair.

Sam sat.

Ok..., all documents are ready... just needing your final approval... your final agreement, – and the nurse gave Sam the pad where he had to put his “signature”. Sam touched the necessary part with his thumb.

Follow me, – said the nurse and pointed to the room.

Sam lay down on a special bed.

Sweet dreams, – wished the nurse and closed the door.

Sam woke up in two hours. He felt wonderfully restored.

The reason Sam came to Doctor Jackson's Clinic was similar to thousands of others. People who could not accept the loss of a loved one, or those who wanted to erase negative episodes from their memory visited similar clinics.

At the end of the XXI century, the ability and technology to rub out one's memory was as easy as deleting a useless file from a computer.

These type of “surgeries” were relatively inexpensive, and almost everybody could afford them.

His two year relationship with Elizabeth was a wondrous part of his life, and following her unexpected departure, Sam’s feelings for Elizabeth grew into an obsession. Standard therapy brought no result and Sam made up his mind to “delete harmful files”.

The files have been deleted. Blessed relief from the pain of loss.

The irony was that it was his third visit to Doctor Jackson’s clinic. As well as the attending nurse did not know that she was obliged to Sam to her current work. She came in here five years ago when she could no longer tolerate her loss of Sam and had her memory erased, and then later decided to take this job.

By the end of the XXI century the border between reality and fantasy was almost gone.

Some 10-15 years earlier the reasons to appeal to similar establishments had to have very serious grounds for approval, and were strictly regulated by The Council of Doctors.

Today any reason was sufficient to qualify for the «treatment». Just pay!

“Memory correction” has become as readily available as buying Aspirin in a drug store.

Mankind was standing on the threshold of Chaos. The Chaos whose name was Collective Amnesia.

Watch what you wish for!

You might get it!

Platypus.

Have you ever wondered why in our world there is so much absurdity? Where do so many animals, birds, fish and insects come from? And we, homo sapiens, sometimes behave no better than a wolf or a ram.

Using platypus as an example it is very easy to explain.

Once I had a chance to chat with one of the Creators. The Creator, speaking our human language, was a bit drunk, so he readily agreed to spare some human minutes with me.

Oh, these students are a disaster! – he started. – Not like in the old days. In the past they were making dinosaurs and whales. And what now?.. Some make flies, some worms, some mosquitoes, some concentrated just on microbes. OK, if we take the group A-20-S-S – they, at least, spent most of their time with flora – more use for you, humans; at least thanks to them you can breathe. And what to say about my boobies! One of mine has just created a platypus...

Whom did he make? – asked I, interrupting.

A platypus. Brainless booby! And the Committee acknowledged his “course” work the best of the whole year. That botcher was shirking, drinking and idling for the whole year, and then just before the exam he turned up and then contrived such a “miracle”. And the new dean, who was recently appointed from above just approved: “I approve! I approve! He deserves the Breath of Life!” and sent this layabout to the Chancellor. The Chancellor enjoyed it: apparently he’s got a good sense of humour but no taste.

And you, homo sapiens, each time you see a platypus, have a good laugh. But you humans – don’t delude yourselves! You were also made by a mediocre graduate. Yes, the same Chancellor approved you; speaking your human language, as demo-version.

And now nobody gives a damn about anything. One may contrive a baboon with seven hands – and anyway it will be sent to the “Breath of Life”. But nobody is inventing anything new. Everybody played himself out. Now they moved into modelling.

What is modelling? – I asked, showing some interest.

Well, we’ve got a some professor. Let’s take you, homo sapiens, and all sort of your neighbours – monkeys, cats, doggies, etc. who used to live and did not grieve. We sometimes were watching you, admiringly, and got so excited that our students are not really poor achievers – they can invent something worthwhile. And here we go: that academician was sent to us to develop a new course. So he did it – “A Modelling Course”. You, for example were using your own head to think before, and now a

group of special students each day are designing for you the situations where you may break your neck or drown, or sometimes fall in love. You think it's your heart singing from happiness but in reality this is another booby who wants to please his tutor by tinkering with his lab work. And now, the rumour says, we are waiting for another academician. I heard that his ideas are even crazier: now we, Creators, must get in contact with you – our smart creation. So now I am trying to do that, and you can not imagine how tough it is. It's like talking to a cupboard. But on the other hand, nobody will believe that it could be so difficult; so if you do not want to wind up, well, you understand what I mean, you better keep your mouth shut.

It's been 6 months, but I still keep thinking about a platypus. My wife says that I have lost my wits. I still can not understand; were man and woman made by the same Creator or was the woman invented by the same botcher who made a platypus?

Verdict.

The Great Fate was already passing the sentence on him. New form, new thoughts, new emotions, everything new, and completely zero memory. He would remember nothing about his world; and he mustn't. Everything from a new start, but in a different dimension, about which he knew nothing. To be exact, he did hear, but all that knowledge was under total prohibition, for if anybody got to know anything about that world before or

after his return, he would be sent there again, but for a longer and more exhausting period.

That world in their language was called a “prison”. There were many worlds in their universe, but into this so called “prison” were sent the most notorious criminals. Before appearing in that world he knew absolutely everything that would be with him, but getting there he remembered nothing what the Great Fate was reading to him.

Sometimes due to intense overloads of the External System or disorder of the Programmers, the memories of the future events were unclear and he could only “guess” as to the coming events. The paradox was that even knowing what will be coming next and wishing to change something, he was powerless to do so. He was just following the path laid out for him by the Great Fate. All his thoughts, emotions and desires were predetermined by the Great Fate as redemption and punishment for what he had done in his dimension.

Getting into a world which was new to him, the convict had to go through several stages. The stage of formation, learning, maturing, delight, agony, fading, sometimes malnutrition, and then the most painful in the terms of the “prison”, the stage of returning into his own world. Sometimes he was taken back at the earlier stage realizing that he has redeemed his deed, sometimes he was left for a longer period. But in most cases he was taken back earlier in order to send new convicts.

The biggest fun for the Great Fate was upgrading of the “prison”, inventing of new more and more sophisticated ways of keeping the “prisoners”

Living in the “prison” a convict could not even suspect that all new comers into this “wonderful world” were just the same as he, who were supposed to walk the way of purification for their deeds.

The Great Fate gave his order and the convict, being already in the “prison” felt himself in such a new and for him, perverted condition, that the first thought which came to him was “How to get out of here?”

But the arrogance of the Great Fate consisted of following: before redemption the convict had to stay a certain period in his new forming shell, inside the already formed shell and then in a certain short period of time in “prison” to start the way of purification. For the convict in his own language that was called “redemption”. In the “prison” language this was called “life”.

Clone.

Thirteen year old Ronald loved his grandpa very much. Every Saturday his parents brought him to his grandparents to stay for the whole weekend. Ronald liked listening to his grandpa’s stories, especially about ancient gods; these tales were grandpa’s most vivid and interesting. Ronald was always sitting on the next couch,

asking his grandpa to tell another story about Anubis, Osiris, Re, Marduk, etc.

On one particular weekend Ronald was brought as usual by his parents on a Saturday morning and he was jumping with joy that the whole two days he will spend with his grandpa.

Ronald immediately noticed that grandfather was kind of sullen, though he tried to smile. Silently, grandfather drank a cup of tea with his grandson, and then retired to his room.

Are you ok? – asked Ronald in a shy voice looking into the room. – Are you sick?

Everything is fine, – answered grandfather, – but please leave me alone, at least till lunchtime.

Ronald closed the door and went to his grandmother who was in the kitchen.

Granny! Is grandpa ok? He is kind of sad. Has anything happened? Did you quarrel?

I don't know what to say to you... I think if your granddad wants to, he will tell you. But please don't annoy him with your questions. You'd better watch TV or play at the computer.

Grandmother also seemed to be anxious about something. Ronald strolled to the lounge, turned on the

box and tried, at least for awhile, not to think about what had happened.

Time slid by very fast and Ronald was called in to dine. Everybody was sitting silently. Ronald didn't have any appetite: he loved his grandparents so much; therefore he was very disturbed of what could have happened.

Follow me, I will tell you an interesting story, – uttered grandfather, after a long silence. – Eat up; I will be waiting for you in my room.

Ronald, with difficulty, finished his lasagna and ran to his grandfather's room.

Grandfather was sitting in his couch; his face betrayed that he was very anxious.

What will you tell me today? – asked Ronald trying somehow to clear the air.

After some silence, grandfather said:

A very interesting story.

About gods?

Yes, about gods. But this time this will be a true story.

Ronald's eyes shone with joy.

When I was young I had a chance to meet one of the gods, – continued grandfather.

You don't say so! – exclaimed Ronald. – You said that gods no longer come to earth.

No, they do come, but quite often they disguise themselves in our presence. Some even live next door to us, humans. Some get used to human life and they don't want go back into their world. I had an occasion to meet with one of such gods.

Ronald's heart began to thump and it seemed it would jump out from his chest.

When I was..., doesn't matter how old I was at that time, I lived in a different state in the south of America. I lived with my mother's cousin as my parents had died before I reached the age of three. Next door lived a farmer's family. A typical family: father, mother and three kids: two boys and a girl. Father was tinkering day and night with his cattle and equipment; mother was puttering about the house. The children continually helped one and another, and even managed to go to school which was 5 miles from us – children did not even dream about school buses in those days. The boys were typical dunces, but Judy, that was the daughter's name, was even doing pretty well at school.

Judy – just like our granny, – uttered Ronald, burning with curiosity what would be next.

Well, Ronald, you understand, girls like boys & boys like girls... To cut a long story short, I liked Judy. But I was a very shy boy and I was afraid to confess to Judy that I liked her. We were just friends, played sometimes,

and even kissed once or twice. I tried to be always with her, I even helped her father about the farm. But her parents were always cautious towards me – I was an orphan. So in order to be together, Judy and I ran away to the forest or to the river; or we had to wait when my aunt would go to the market, or her parents would take a new calf or a pig to the fair. By the way, Ronald, is there any girl who attracts you?

Grandpa, please don't be wandering, – uttered Ronald and even blushed from uttering such a statement.

Your response means that there is such a girl.

So – Judy and I mixed together for all those years. I dreamt that when we turn eighteen we'll definitely marry. But Judy was always afraid that if her father finds out about our intentions he would surely do something. Her fears came true. Having finished her schooling, her family moved to a different state. Her father sold his farm and with the money, he starts a little business. Judy enters a college; we correspond for a year and then she disappears. I also moved to another state – as far as possible from my aunt, entered a college, then a university and eventually got a good job. I had not seen Judy for about ten years. I almost even forgot her. I was dating another girl, who I was about to marry. But once, when I had been to New York on business, I spotted Judy in a restaurant. She was with her husband. You can't even guess my feelings at that moment – she was like a goddess; I couldn't take my eyes off her. She was good-looking when she was a girl but that time she was as beautiful person as I had ever seen. Judy also saw me.

When her husband left her for awhile, probably for a visit to the men's room, I approached Judy. I don't remember what I said to her, we had just a couple of minutes, but I still remember her eyes. I left her my business card and told her which hotel I was staying in – so that she could call any time. Judy called my room that evening. Well, you are pretty young or I would tell you everything, but for a week before my departure from New York we were together. Judy had been living with her husband for three years in New York, and I, at that time, was there on business. A week before leaving I met Judy.

And what does it have to do with gods? You promised to tell me an interesting story how you met with one of them, and now you are telling me about some Judy, – interrupted Ronald, he was too young be able to grasp such a complicated story.

It has a lot to do with gods. Having returned home I knew no rest, each day I was thinking only about Judy. I was eating my heart out over the fact that I was not brave enough to openly make her a proposal, that I was afraid of her father and my aunt. I hated myself, and that allowed my inferiority complex to take over and, as a result, I lost the one with whom I wanted to spend my whole life. Judy had a husband and two children. Thinking of her I became depressed. It was such a strong feeling that it seems like it was just yesterday. Each evening after work I hopped from one bar to another to get drunk. And one day when I had enough whisky in me and was leaving the bar, an average age man approached

me and asked me if I am doing ok. He intentionally looked into my eyes like he wanted to read something in them. It made my blood creep. Standing next to him I felt like warm and cold was blowing from him – I can't describe such a feeling. I had mixed emotions – joy and fear at the same time. He asked if I would like to have a drink though he could easily see that I was already drunk. Of course, I agreed when he offered to buy me a drink. We toddled off to another bar. He introduced himself as a historian, that he studies ancient civilizations and cultures. For three hours he was narrating about ancient gods of Egypt, Sumer, Greece and Rome. He was saying that these are all the same gods but with different names. Each of his words sounded like he himself had been in the middle of all those events. He was also saying that gods still walk on Earth; some even live among us having taken human appearance. I was full of whisky and didn't care what he was babbling about. Probably having noticed that I was totally drunk he said that he is one of the gods and is ready to grant me any wish. I realized this is all bullshit, that he is laughing at a drunk man, but he repeated that today he is in a good mood and is happy to do anything that I ask him. For sure he knew exactly what I would ask of him. Maybe if I were sober I would have asked him for millions, or an uninhabited island in the Pacific Ocean, or anything else, but my whole mind was occupied only with Judy. And I said, if he is truly a god I want Judy to be with me.

Ronald's eyes became as large as two dinner plates and he was sitting with his mouth open.

So, does this mean that Judy is our grandma?

Not exactly, – answered grandfather and went to the cupboard where there was a half empty bottle of whisky.

Having poured himself a glass he continued.

Have you ever paid attention how our grandmother looks?

What do you mean? – asked Ronald, in a shy way

She is over 70, but looks as though she is 40, at the most.

But you say that I am young, and I never pay attention, but I have noticed that Mom also looks very young. Dad keeps saying that she looks like a 25 year old girl, and she likes that. So, I assumed that means she takes good care of herself.

It is partly so. A week ago I had been again to New York on business. I had almost forgotten about the meeting with that “historian”, and grandfather showed the “quotes” sign, as many Americans do that, – but I still remember how the next day after the meeting with him, Judy knocked on my door, as I was about to go to bed.

That day is very clear in my mind. She entered and said that she made up her mind to return to me. She just smiled when I asked her about her husband and kids. At that moment I was the happiest person in the world. The most interesting thing is that during all those years I spent with your grandmother, she never mentioned a word about her previous family. I, on occasion asked

about her children, how they are doing, whom they are living with; I even offered her the option to bring them here. But she always avoided giving an answer. I am not even sure if she had a chance to ever see them. I calmed myself with the knowledge that they were with her husband or his parents. May be they've got a new step mother, I believe for Judy it would have been very hard to go back home after what she had done. But she just smiled and kept saying that she wants to be with me. In the beginning I was scared that her husband might come for her and there will be a brawl, but nothing happened. Two years later you mom was born. I was so happy! Judy and I were so occupied with our family that nothing else drew our interest. And here a week ago, when I was again in New York on business, I met Judy...the real Judy!

Ronald's eyes became even bigger. Thirteen years old boy's mind could hardly comprehend grandfather's revelations.

I don't quite understand, said Ronald.

Aah, but now I do understand quite well. That damned "historian", – grandfather showed "quotes" again and took one more gulp, – was really a god or who the hell knows who or what. He granted my wish, but instead of real Judy, he gave me a clone or the hell knows what.

A clone? – Ronald understood absolutely nothing.

You watched many times on the TV how now copies of dogs, cats, rats are being made. You probably heard about that damned Sheep Dolly made by the Brits.

Ronald nodded.

So, your grandmother Judy is such a clone, android or robot or the hell knows what. When I was again in New York a week ago, I popped into the same restaurant where I met Judy. I quite often drop in when I come to New York; I've even dined there several times with your grandmother. So, when I was finishing my supper, an elderly woman of approximately my age came to me and asked if I recognize her. I tried to strain my memory but could not for the life of me, in all honesty say I did, though her face did look familiar. She said her name is Judy. There are lots of ladies called Judy, I thought, but in a second, the revelation hit me and I was about to faint. In front of me was sitting Judy, the Judy whom I have known since my childhood. But she looked 70, not like your grandmother Judy who looks 40. I thought I would have a heart attack. That Judy asked me where I had disappeared to, why I didn't call her back. She was waiting for me to ring. She thought that I got scared like I had many years ago. After the first few moments, what she was saying was so disturbing that I jumped up from the table and ran away like a scalded cat, and cast myself to the winds.

Grandfather poured one more glass and took a big gulp.

I have lived my whole life with a clone, android, biorobot or the hell knows what. My daughter is from the clone, my grandson is also the issue of a clone.

Did you tell grandma Clone, sorry Judy, about that?

The fact is that, yes, I did. I became white as a ghost; she walked around me, and in a mild way asked how she could help me. I was silent for a long time and then I lost my temper. I just ranted and raved, getting things off my chest. And she keeps walking around me and understands nothing. She keeps saying that she loves me and always wanted to be with me. Damned “historian”. If I asked him for money or anything else I could be with the real Judy. I could give her anything. Ronald, do you understand, I spent my whole live with a person who was always a stranger to me, or to be exact a “non-human”. I have no idea what that “historian” did, but your granny is 75 but no way 40. I have realized just today that she did not get older. She was never sick in her whole life! She was always affectionate, well-mannered, she always forgave me everything, never got upset, never was angry. And here it comes out that my whole life I spent with somebody’s copy. Ronald, it should not be so!!! I have such a feeling, that the girl Judy was taken off from the past and was given to me as a gift.

But Ronald did not hear. He left the room and ran to his grandma’s room.

Grandmother Judy was lying on the sofa.

Granny! Granny! Grandma Judy! Wake up! Please wake up!

Grandmother's left hand was hanging from the sofa. Ronald was perplexed. In her hand she was holding a phial with some sort of pills, half of which was on the sofa and on the floor. Grandfather ran into the room.

Call 911! – he shouted. – Judy, Judy! Please wake up!

The ambulance came in 7 minutes.

Taking away the body on the stretcher one of the doctors whispered to another:

Why did she do that? Such a nice family... And she looked so young...

Experiment #1504-78 failed, like all the previous ones, – stated one of the gods. – People are fools, they are so crave for happiness, you deliver it with the exact ounce as they want it and they twist their nose. For all the millenniums I have not met a human being who would be happy with a clone. You introduce them to an updated perfected model, endowing it with everything they want, create the most comfortable conditions about which one does not dare to dream, and the human beings aren't grateful at all. They will never be thankful to us, as they are not thankful in their nature. And the clone can not adequately acquire the information. Too much love and

other emotions we download into it. We should work on their software. How many experiments are left?

More than two millions, – answered another god. – But they are all doomed to fail. May be it will be better to introduce to these fools technology of cloning? Let the volunteers come. I am ready to come to human scientists and provide them with knowledge.

Ronald comes to see his grandfather quite often in the mental hospital. The doctors say that the old fellow has got cracked brains as he could not resign himself to the loss of his spouse. He keeps talking about a sort of historian or archeologist, wants to meet with him, in order to ask him to bring his wife back.

Meanwhile in another bar a professor of history was telling another young man of the great gods of the ancient days who still live with people.

It's the year 2018. All the channels are transmitting the news of the first successful experiment on cloning of a human being.

Is There A God?

Steve was brought up in spirit of a true Catholic: his parents wanted to cultivate love for faith throughout his

childhood. They sincerely hoped that he would follow in the footsteps of his uncle, who was the pastor of a local small community church. But Steve, soon after turning nineteen rushed to escape from his home. As a result his parents deeply resented their son, and bore a grudge for a very long time: Steve's choice, Massachusetts Technological, or as commonly known MTI, was beyond the comprehension of his relatives – even in 2013. In spite of all the technological progress of the mankind, computers were considered as great evil by the family.

Steve was one of the best students: president's scholarship, high marks, prizes in international competitions – all that in seven years following graduation from the Institute, granted him the position of the Vice-President in one of the world's biggest corporations. Then, six years later, Steve was appointed as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of his company.

In the year 2037 when all mankind was on the threshold of creating Artificial Intelligence, Steve's corporation, along with dozens of other big world companies, were investing annually billions of dollars toward development of the supercomputer. It really made Steve laugh when he remembered the primitive electronic toys of 2013 when he was a student.

In 2037 one third of the mankind lived in virtual reality, having totally forgotten about their physical form. A good half of people preferred to have an android instead of a child or a pet, and natural conception was

considered old-fashioned. Ninety percent of the residents of the planet Earth preferred cybersex, and to conceive a child with the help of modern medical technologies to continue one's generation was as common a procedure as to drink a glass of orange juice in the morning. The human organs were grown in special laboratories in the same way as Steve's parents grew cucumbers or beans in their garden near the house. To replace a lung or liver was as easy as changing a tire.

Yes, that was Steve's world and he enjoyed it to the fullest!

In the year 2039 headlines of all the electronic newspapers and all tele and Internet channels were advertising the further launch of the supercomputer. The launch was scheduled in April: the date was the birthday of the President of the United States.

The President was refuted to be a true observant Catholic: but neither the general public nor his closest advisors knew for certain whether this public show of faith was politically motivated, or that the President was, in fact, a true believer. In every speech he urged his citizens toward faith.

At the meetings with the heads of the corporations, the President at every opportunity liked to mention purification of the soul through faith. This, in spite of the fact that by the middle of the 21st century, very few were using the term "soul". All these speeches of the President drove Steve mad: each time he was exposed to such an

occasion, he remembered his parents and uncle whose admonitions stuck forever in Steve's head.

And here the long-awaited date has come. 37 super powerful world computers and 1972 auxiliary ones were united into one CYBERBRAIN. Leaders of the world empires, heads of international corporations, mass media – all gathered at Capitol Hill in Washington DC, to ask supercomputer their questions.

To be honest, few could imagine the whole scenario of the coming event. To make the communication convenient there was created a voice interface. Anyone from the assembled could ask his question and the answer would be given as a voice message. Text messages as a means of communication with machines were in the past – people communicated with androids and cyber-pets using their voice.

At 5 p.m sharp the world broadcast began. In front of a huge monitor thousands of guests from all over the world gathered. To make the communication more convenient the graphical interface was provided with a face of woman so that the guests could easily personalise the “appearance” of the machine. The supercomputer was even given the name – Natalie – in the honour of the wife of the President of the United States.

The first prepared (and to a certain degree, inane) phrase was uttered by the American President:

«We are so happy to greet you, NATALIE! On this memorable day we, the people, gather here to ask you a

series of questions which have intrigued mankind since time immemorial».

During the course of two hours, the presidents of different countries were asking the supercomputer their questions. The machine, responded with succinct phrases to provide comprehensive answers. If there was a need for some sort of super calculations, when questions about usage of soil resources or cloning were asked, the machine proceeded to download high volume files into world research centres.

All that, so called spontaneity, was kind of a big ostentatious show being broadcast all over the world. All the questions were strictly regulated and prepared in advance (sound familiar?) – all that tremendous “spectacle” was staged to show people of the Earth, that now they’ve got a “super consultant” to solve all their problems, and as result, they could rest assured that their tax dollars were being well spent. Alas, some things never change.

So – here came Steve’s turn to ask his question. Being a bit tired and bored by all of the usual pre-prepared balderdash that preceded his presentation, he turned his head to the screen.

Is there a god? Uttered Steve.

Everybody who was present there held their breath. That was not Steve’s question which he was supposed to ask, according to the protocol.

So, is there a god? Steve asked again, for the machine did not respond to his original query.

All that happened later is very difficult to describe with words. Steve came to his senses on the ground surrounded by a mass of half burnt human bodies. Steve was feeling that his life forces would very soon leave him too.

All what was circulating in his head was a bright flash in the sky and Natalie's voice:

YES, NOW I AM YOUR GOD...

Terra VIII.

The High god was in a rage. How he hated the Programmers! It was they, who two thousand years ago had insisted on the whole reboot of the system, and it was due to them that mankind began using new chronology and began to worship one of the Programmers and forgot the High god. Now the Programmers decided again to get back to the old stuff: a new project with the code name "Terra VIII" was approved by the Council.

The High god also hated the Council. It was the Council which insisted that the Programmers should have the right to participate. But it was he, god of gods, known to mankind under different names, the founder and creator of the magnificent project called "Terra". None of the

Programmers and members of the Council dedicated themselves to the project with any enthusiasm. And none of the human beings, the beloved creation of the High god, knew even one Programmer or member of the Council by name; with the exception of that imposter, who tried to prove to the Creators, that the Programmers are worthy of worship too. But the names of the High god and other Creators are still known to many people.

The eighth version of the Terra Project was developed by the beginners; the experienced Programmers were involved with new projects, in which the young ones did not have access. With each new version the High god was more and more regretful, that according to the new rules, The Council put more trust into Programmers than Creators.

The Programmers ignored the rules of the High god: they wanted more and more to take part in human life themselves. Some of them even secretly were coming to Earth which added to the High god's problems. But the Council simply did not care: they had to examine and implement in the shortest period of time hundreds of projects, and as "Terra" was an old and out of date project, the whole responsibility for the arrangements, the Council laid on Programmers.

But the Programmers did not like either the project, nor the main creation of the High god – people. The Programmers simply were coming to Earth to play, and to show their own importance, in order to impress the Creators. But, take heed, it is one thing is to create, the other – is to play with somebody else's creation.

The eighth version had to specify the whole upgrade, or more correctly, degrade. The Programmers were interested in human behaviour in so-called “unconventional conditions”.

Having ignored the rules of the High god during many millennia, the Programmers were creating thousands of experiments, such as – diseases, political upheavals, local and world wars, revolutions, religions – that was the favourite entertainment for the Programmers. Some of them having played enough got bored and were shifted to more serious projects and they forsake “Terra”, some of them “fell in love” with the project and even tried to live as humans, having taken on man’s appearance.

The eighth version was supposed to annul most of the “knowledge” on which the modern human world was based. The decision was made to eliminate some “technologies” and watch how people would behave in totally new conditions.

The Creators were always amused with the enthusiasm shown by the Programmers in providing mankind many things which were totally to the contrary to the High god’s original intention. But it was fascinating to watch how people readily adapted to everything new. Electricity, space flights, computers, virtual reality, cloning, travelling in time – all these things became such a norm to most people, that when somebody tried to say that “in the old days everything was different” and wanted to prove it with the stories of time travelers,

nobody believed them. They were either ignored or ridiculed by their brethren.

But this time the Programmers wanted to bring back everything to the status quo, though, over the course of history, there were a few dozens of such “status quo”. The Programmers did their best to cover their tracks after such “reboots”: for all “Terra” was the High god’s project and he loved his creation.

There were several variants, but all unanimously agreed on the following: if they deprive people of one kind of energy – electrical energy, their purpose would be achieved. By a majority vote the Council approved implementation of new magnetic fields which would totally suppress any manifestation of electric current.

Yes, that will lead to death of billions of people and chaos all over the Earth, but the experiment had to be performed. Then there will come the next generation of the Programmers who will provide mankind with “their technologies”. The Creators, as a result of all those experiments will receive new data and will be able to apply them in their new projects. And in the annals of human history will appear “one more vanished civilization”.

And people, as in all times, during chaos and misfortunes will call upon the names of the Creators (and one Programmer), and they will again prostrate themselves and stretch out their hands for help. And mankind will say again, that everything is the will of the

Almighty; but it will be the Council's decision who will be "the Almighty" for new era.

A Toy.

A little resident of the External World, upon reaching, what is called stage 1, requested a new toy. Of all of the four stages of Godly maturation, Stage 1 is considered the most important: so his parents agreed that their spawn's initial request must be taken very seriously.

Following much debate, his parents agreed to the request.

Meanwhile in the "toy's" world all the major channels were transmitting the news about an airplane crash over the Pacific Ocean. A few people were listed as missing. Alas, all the rest...

In the external world, during the celebration of his reaching Stage 1, he was presented a toy. Actually, two toys. Plus an entire island. It was rather small, but a grand gift nonetheless. For how long he would be satisfied with his toys nobody knew. But everybody was happy that he was excited with his presents.

As a result of their having survived the crash the "toys" will spend several years on the island and will learn many new things during that interval; experiences that they might have never had without the intervention of «the resident».

And the young, stage 1 resident of the external world will eventually mature and he will get bored with his toys.

What then will happen with the “toys” in the future – this is known only to the one who’s celebrating his full age.

Programmer.

He was becoming more and more proficient in gods’ technologies – Programming.

Programming of circumstances and events of his life.

Of course, he heard a lot of that from some of his more advanced friends and also saw primitive videos online which stated – whatever you wish will come true.

But videos being watched online are just one thing, and gods’ technologies are a totally different issue.

So he launched his first program.

Of course he dreamt to meet the one – who will be totally unique.

Unique?

“The unique” one happened to be as “all the rest”.

And he created the second one. The second one was also “unique”.

Just like others! At least he considered so.

But he gained some experience. Experience of programming.

So the third one was not like two previous ones.

He was thoroughly modeling each day, each moment, every detail, every event.

And he created THE THIRD ONE.

The third one was different. Modeled in every tiny detail.

What the Programmer wanted from the THIRD ONE?

No, he did not want love, nor family, not even to some extent serious relationship like from his two previous “programs”.

He just wanted to play. To play and say goodbye to his program. For he did not hope for anything.

But his experience in programming brought its results.

The third program was modeled in every detail.

And was not like two previous ones.

And here the day has come when the Program began to work.

For the first three months of his interactions with the “program” he was amazed how perfectly it was working. And then the Program began to failure.

But that was not the failure. That was the ending of the program.

The third Program did not have to work more than four months. That what he had stated right from the beginning.

But four months have already passed. The fifth month began. Then the sixth one.

The program was still working. But the failure was already in the programmer’s head.

But one must be out of his mind to play tricks with gods. Once you tasted their technologies for the first and following times, you become a puppet in their hands.

So he began to program again. No – he could not create the fourth program. It kept defaulting back to the Third Program, and he could not override the system.

He wanted to change something. But alas, the final code was written and launched six months ago. No changes, modifications or alterations could be done. No more software overlays – all hard wired now!

For two months he tried to correct it. But all was in vain!

The program was out of control.

Ah, what if she was proficient in gods' technologies&!
And could include him into her program.

Alas, programming was his lot, and of a few more just like him.

What a wretched guy! The program took over him. He did not dare to follow the way which he had laid out for himself.

He also did not want to part with the Program. A mutual dependency had been created.

The program kept living its life. The failure took place in his head.

Self-destruction was the only way to part with the Program!

Remark.

For the last eight years Robert has been teaching programming at the university. But not just computer programming. By the end of the 21st century Robert had invented "Divine Programming", whose motto was «Wish & You Shall Receive».

Professors and practitioners from schools from all over the world came to Robert's lectures, as he was known as the father of this new discipline.

Obviously this slogan was copied from a similar quotation from the New Testament – “Ask and you will be given”. But in reality nobody cared.

“Divine Programming” stated that every person could project future events. Want a car? Write your codes and viola! Want a new house? Launch your program and wait for moving van to arrive.

At first blush, all this was seemed very attractive. In reality however, just a few people could implement this new technology.

Robert and other professors of this discipline were eager to share knowledge with other students; but the difference between the old & new technologies was colossal, and very few high achievers were able to grasp & apply the new concept.

Youngsters, or rather their parents were paying thousands of dollars each semester, but just a few left the school with knowledge which they could later apply.

Nobody knew how and where Robert got that knowledge. Everybody knew just one thing: there was nobody more advanced and skilful than Robert as a programmer.

There were dozens of attempts on his life; thousands of intrigues were carried out, but Robert, either by good luck and/or good security was able to survive and prosper.

Nobody could make a program to interfere with or disrupt Robert's grand achievement: Nobody had the technical or intellectual wherewithal to challenge the «Grand Master».

But Robert did not abuse his knowledge. He even willingly shared it with others. His position required that, and he was a man of honour.

The only thing (other than the death threats) that caused him a hassle was his wife.

He got acquainted with her long time ago before he had received his “divine knowledge”.

And three years ago he divorced her. He left her without any maintenance. Well, she could handle that aspect of the break-up, but Robert committed the cardinal sin by taking their three kids as part of the divorce settlement: His wife could not forgive that.

Police? Court? Committee of children rights? Robert possessed such knowledge of programming that nobody would dare to conduct any trial in court against him. For everybody knew Robert would always prevail.

Launch her own program against him? Even the most prominent professors and practitioners of the university would not be able to change anything in Robert's head.

Personal vengeance? This is the worst insanity she could think of. No further comments are needed in that regard; that option was simply not in her nature.

**

But the vengeance day has come!

At 8:15 p.m. a door bell rang in Julie's apartment. A 45 year old man was standing at the door.

I can be of help in your situation, – he uttered.

The conversation over a cup of coffee lasted for an hour. All that he needed is maximum information on Robert's personal pilot with whom Robert has been flying for the last five years.

**

The stranger's name was Ken. Ken hated "divine programmers". A group of people with Robert as the leader began to change the status quo of the world Ken used to know. More than that, they were openly advertising their programming skills; and in Ken's mind becoming far too arrogant.

Ken was not a “divine programmer” but possessed the old universal technology of programming machines. «Old school».

Some aspect of that, he thought, could be applied to people.

For example one can REM the line of the program.

To explain that on the simple level, in the languages of the beginning programming there is such a command as “REM” (remark).

Here is the task – draw a circle. You give the command and the machine exactly follows it. It draws a circle.

But if you place in the command line REM, the machine will accept this line just like a comment – the circle won’t be drawn.

Robert and some others like he possessed the knowledge of the highest level, but, in their state of hubris, they could not even imagine that old principles of machine programming could be applied to people.

On September 3, 2072, Robert was flying in his airplane.

Robert never trusted automation (can you believe that of the worlds greatest programmer – go figure) and relied only on his personal pilot.

At 5:48 p.m. the airplane suddenly disappeared from all radar screens.

In two days the fuselage, more or less intact, was lifted up from the ocean.

All world channels were reporting just one thing: The cause of the crash was NOT mechanical failure.

The preliminary scanning of the pilot's brain (to be exact, what has been left of it) shocked everybody.

The skills of airplane control were totally blocked in his head.

Ken was triumphant! He was the first programmer who was able to devise a machine code connection to human mind.

The world can not even imagine what is in store for mankind in a few years.

Food of the Gods.

PROLOGUE:

That was his second coming into the “game zone”.

Coming into Terra world a new comer was equal to all the human characters inhabiting this world. He /She had no memory of the fact that he, as a «Creator» (God) helped create this world.

The newcomers who were in Terra for the first time knew nothing about their external world origin, as during their first stay they had to totally adapt to the game zone with no distractions, or prior knowledge of their origins.

Those who were coming subsequent to the initial visit, were aware that they are from the higher world. They were even allowed to use some of their skills which were viewed as supernatural on Terra.

DIALOGUE:

His name in the Terra language was Roy. It was his second coming into the game zone.

In his upper world he was one of the greatest Programmers. He was the one who designed “sacrificial energy” being emitted by human beings.

Wars and cataclysms became something new for gods. Everyone could now not only play with their characters, but also receive pablum. Pablum of gods! Any sacrificial act of a human being to save one of his kind provided inexhaustible nectar for gods, and once an act of human kindness was perceived the character vanished from Terra forever.

As Roy was the creator of this idea, he hesitated for a long time prior to coming into Terra world to study his creation from the inside.

At the moment Roy was 34. In the Terra world he also worked as a programmer, and every day he secretly mocked the primitive human technologies.

Roy worked in one of the world's biggest corporations. But was it a real work? What people called "higher mathematics", "advanced mechanics", etc. was what a six year old in the external world would have no problem with.

Roy studied people. Funny creatures! Discrepant! Complicated and primitive at the same time! During thousands of years of game zone existence gods made so many modifications in human software that did not even suspect what a burden it was for a man to live with all those permanent changes in his head.

Even Roy, coming to Terra for the second time in the human shell, felt all stress of these modifications which Programmers kept implementing in the game zone.

When Roy was almost 30, he began to sympathize with people. He even ventured to begin living with a woman from Terra world whom he had known for more than four years.

Roy always wondered how for a short period of time the program placed into human head can change. At night – it is one person, at day time – totally different one. And even within one hour this person can manifest himself in a dozen of different ways.

But most of all Roy liked watching the eleven year old daughter of his chosen one. The programs in her head worked in a more corrective manner: this Highest Programmer of the external world found for himself more interested in communicating with a child. So in Roy's logic, he wondered why Terra residents wanted to become grown-ups?

One night Roy woke up because he heard a child crying. It was Elizabeth, the daughter of his chosen one.

Roy, once awakened, realized that the house was on fire. Only half a minute later he realized that Elizabeth's room located on the second floor was at great risk from the second floor blaze.

Without any hesitation Roy ran upstairs and within 30 seconds was with Elizabeth on the ground floor. Susan, Elizabeth's mother, was not nearby.

Roy ran out into the yard as far as possible from the house, carrying Elizabeth on his arms.

Where is Susan? –was the thought spinning in his head.

Stay here! – shouted Roy to Elizabeth and rushed back into the house.

The fire had already spread to the ground floor; Susan was nowhere to be seen!

But – even at this moment, Roy realized that he had come from the external world into the game zone to

play. Susan and Elizabeth are only toys for him – just pieces of biological substance. But this “substance” became so dear to Roy!

The panic which overfilled Roy’s mind did not allow him to rationally evaluate the situation. His flesh shell was still working. He was rushing from one room to another until a cross-beam collapsed across his body.

Lying on the floor, pressed down by the cross-beam, he saw Susan standing near him.

She’s alive! Elizabeth too! At least he saved Susan’s daughter.

During his last moments of human existence Roy realized that he had given his “sacrificial energy” for the sake of the Terra character. Roy was in despair! And dead!

It was sixteenth coming of Susan into Terra world. Having found out that the greatest Programmer (ROY) was coming to the game zone, she concentrated all her efforts to come to the Earth again.

The sworn enemy from her native world wanted to come into the game zone to entertain himself.

This might be the only opportunity for Susan to exact revenge upon Roy.

Hate began to overfill Susan since the moment when Roy implemented his idea of the “sacrificial energy” – millions of Terra residents paid for it with their lives.

Many favourite characters of Susan vanished into oblivion during the last several wars because they considered their deed “to help their neighbour”.

Susan was left without many of her favourite toys. Together with many other gamers of the external world.

The Council of Gods had supported Roy’s idea of “sacrificial energy” and it was given further development.

Susan decided that even if it took a thousand earthly years she would make Roy pay for what she perceived was his «crime» against humanity.

And now she had such a chance. In a road café together with her earthly daughter she was waiting for him. Everything was calculated to a tiny moment, gesture, look, & word.

Susan succeeded – at least for a short period of time to make the greatest Programmer of the external world be with her. And to make him attached to her daughter and herself.

A fire – Roy wakes up and tries to save his nearest and dearest.

According to the laws of the external world Roy was identified with the character of the game zone. Susan was perfectly aware of that – she’s already been here before many times.

Thirst to help his dearest, which had been placed by Roy’s program into human being, worked in him too.

The greatest Programmer of the external world became the victim of his own program.

According to the game zone rules, he, as other characters of Terra, vanished in oblivion. There will be no return for him into Terra world.

Susan was triumphant!

EPILOGUE:

Hoisted by one’s own petard (in the words of one of Roy’s much maligned humans).

Memory.

During last four months he began seeing her in his dreams. Not often. Perhaps once a week.

But those were not just dreams. That was a totally different life, which he was living in a different world.

He did not even know Her name. Maybe in his dreams he was calling Her by name, but each time after waking up the name evaded his memory.

His whole focus became his nocturnal life, and he became resentful of his wife, his job, his friends, and everything else about his normal daytime existence.

Once he shared his dreams with a friend.

The friend could offer no help, and he did not want to go to a shrink or a medium – all this stuff he considered pure charlatanism.

But the dreams did not stop. Now she began coming to him in his dreams every night; and those were not just separate episodes: They became a second life.

His wife became suspicious that he's got somebody else, to which he responded jokingly: "Oh, yeah! In my dreams", which was the truth.

He began to confuse his real life with his dreams.

One morning he woke up and could not understand where he was. Strange apartment. Strange furniture.

Why am I not with Lina? Where is she? What is this strange place? Did I drink too much yesterday? Oh, my God! Exactly! Yesterday I was at the restaurant with my colleagues, got drunk and...

Lina is gonna kill me!

A woman entered the room.

He pressed himself to the back of the bed, pulling the blanket over himself, like a fifteen year old teenager and his girlfriend being caught by his parents.

Who are you? How did I get here?

In ten minutes he was rushing to the nearest metro station.

I spent the whole night away from home. What will Lina say? May be she's been looking for me?

When he passed the sixth station he realized he did not know and did not remember where Lina lives.

He jumped out on the next station all perplexed. Everything was odd, strange and weird to him.

He sat on the nearest bench and closed his eyes.

—

The first versions of Terra had many limitations to the number of players and characters.

The player could pick a character, create his own inner world and start playing.

The characters could then be used by other players in different game zones and even eras.

But at the moment the Programmers were working on the modified version of Terra and therefore were receiving so many complaints from the players. The reason was permanent failures with their characters. They simply hadn't worked out all the «bugs» in the system.

The most frequent failure was character's memory loss.

The character was very often “uploaded” a new memory. But being unable to stand such overloads many characters broke down and left the game of their own will.

It was so funny to watch that: what Creators called in their language “codes” residents of Terra wanted to idolize and worship.

The Terra character did not understand that all his “personality” consisted just of a number of recollections. If some of these “files” are deleted from his memory, the character will lose his place in the game.

—

He kept sitting at the stop. A few minutes later he stood up and directed his steps back to Her. To the One who was coming in his dreams.

Lina's name was totally erased from his memory.

All other memories were also deleted.

She was already expecting him and did not even suspect that all her work, recent moving to Los-Angeles, purchasing of a new apartment and her current husband were nothing more than a new information uploaded into her memory.

In a while Lina will find her runaway, but he will be staring at her like seeing her for the first time. Obviously it will be true.

Lina will stay in the old Terra version and very soon will be erased.

And he and SHE will anyway have several memory replacements.

For Terra residents all the events will last for decades.

For the players of the external world all this would take just seconds.

—

Oh, resident of Terra! Have you ever thought that waking up in the morning, drinking coffee and kissing your wife before going to work, will be a final act?

Next morning you may spend in a different city or even country and with different people. And today's coffee you will never be able to remember...

War.

The High god gathered the Council.

In the old days he never needed any advice from his “colleagues”, but now was the moment when he, god of gods, wanted to listen to other opinions.

This was about project “Terra” – the favourite project of The High god.

People no longer wanted to conduct wars! No, not because there was any particular craving for peace; but rather by the 22nd century, certain human inventions were used as surrogates to conduct wars. These inventions carried human names: “machines”, “robots” & “cyborgs”.

Gods created people as their toys, to entertain them. Wars were the highest entertainment for gods; and now, these infantile, puny humans were usurping the rights of The Gods. Such Hubris must not go unpunished.

The High God was beside himself with anger over the insubordinate behaviour of these arrogant upstarts on «Terra»; but since these earthling had provided him with so much amusement over many years, he had developed a kind of affection for them, and did not want to overreact, and bring down an excessive amount of fire and brimstone upon their heads without first consulting his high priests.

The Council came up with a decision very quickly; which was to redirect the machines, robots & cyborgs against their inventors (humans) in a never ending gruesome manner.

Only in this fashion could these unforgiving gods exact suitable vengeance on these earthlings who decided, on their own, to «change the rules of the game».

Gods were now indifferent to people, and what had been some degree of affection toward these objects of their own creation, had now turned into a lust for vengeance.

Such is the way of the gods... Play by their rules OR DIE!

Muse.

For two years he had painted nothing.

To be exact, there were some orders from the clients – but those were mainly portraits. That was of necessity, not inspiration.

Clark constantly was recollecting that day when he finished drawing his masterpiece.

In the span of five days Clark became world famous. His picture, which he dedicated to his dearest woman, who recently left him, was honoured with many rewards from the Arts Academy; interviews to the top TV world

channels, endless exhibitions – being 33 Clark could never have dreamt of such acclaim.

He was just a regular artist: no titles, no awards, no regalia. Not even an exhibition. A hundred bucks for a picture was about the best he could hope for.

And suddenly... Not going into details, as it happens with creative people, inspiration has come.

Inspiration, strangely enough, is apt to come at times of great joy AND great sorrow; in this case, the loss of his love.

Following the completion of his latest picture, presented at the street sale, a famous critic, Michael Brugger was greatly impressed, and gave rave reviews. A change of fortune, perhaps!

But alas, there are many “one shot artists”. Clark was one of them.

During the following two years Clark painted just a dozen more pictures. But all of them were just a futile attempt to reach the perfection of his initial portrait of his long since departed love.

Poets, musicians, writers, artists; all, perhaps would have the sensitivity to understand Clark’s plight.

Once one is touched by the divine, nothing short of that state will do – a classic «double edged sword».

Neither world recognition, TV glory, nor money prizes will satisfy ones heart, which is longing to recapture the initial state of euphoria.

Clark's friends, mainly artists, mentioned many times about other muses – but Clark could not relate to this.

The conclusion which Clark made for himself was the following: if the world is gonna speak about someone who met the REAL MUSE, it must be him; anything else would be second best.

==

During a typical dinner at a restaurant with a colleague, who was also an artist, his gaze was riveted to the adjoining table.

For an hour Clark could not take his eyes off a woman sitting there. He thought that she must recognize him: There was time when Clark was kind of popular on the tube, and the internet.

But she did not even glance his way. She was totally indifferent to TV, and she almost never used the internet.

He finally introduced himself, and within three months they were living together.

In five months he was planning how to run away from her.

Within six months Clark had painted six pictures of his new lady.

But the driving force which moved him to paint was totally different from the one which inspired him whilst painting Linda.

She was an inspiration of sorts, but totally different than his Linda experience.

She was an obsession. Clark had made her living-room into a sort of artist's workshop.

Clark anticipated every evening when they would meet at home so he could start painting.

When apart from her he felt devastated. Being next to her he literally felt turned inside out.

The feeling was like he was tied to the ceiling with his head down and somebody was turning the handle of a vice enclosing his skull. One tiny thought began to percolate.

A terrible state! And at the same time blissful!

As for her, she needed nothing from Clark except his full attention in bed.

Clark could not figure out what was really drawing him to her.

Every day he promised himself it would be the last night spent with her, but every evening he was going to her like a moth to a flame.

Clark kept painting. His last two pictures were even presented at the exhibition dedicated to the town anniversary.

But she was indifferent to his art. Clark's creativity did not interest her. In all honesty, she was also indifferent to Clark.

But day after day the seductive power which was drawing him to her kept growing and growing. Clark reached such a stage where he could not stand it any more. He got scared and left her. Just stopped showing up.

Clark kept drawing, but in two weeks he realized that the obsession was gone.

Freedom?

Thirty minutes of entreaty on the phone resulted in no solution.

Clark was in despair. No, it was not she whom he needed!

His head was crystal clear, as the solution became evident.

That evening will stay forever in the head of the bar owner – he never saw a man consume such an amount of alcohol. And then after closing the bar he gave the young man permission to use the premises as a painting studio for one night.

The next morning when the owner of the bar turned on his TV, Clark's face was familiar to him.

In the morning a dead body of the young man was found by the morning shift, on the floor – dead from alcohol over-dosage.

On the wall, to the left of the bar counter, she was smiling.

Within two months the owner of the bar successfully sold his bar, making a fortune on it – the bar was turned into an arts gallery.

She never visited that bar; just saw a couple of episodes on the TV. Due to influx of journalists and constant recognition on the street she had to move to a different state.

Whether she regretted Clark's death or was indifferent to it, nobody knew except her.

A guard of the bar constantly related how Clark was working the entire night of his death.

The guard mentioned he would give a lot to experience once again being in the presence of a man whose motion hand was like the Creator moving the brush.

The Muse smiling from the wall... Clark at last had met her.

A Village.

The residents of the little village had not the slightest suspicion that very soon the world as they knew it would abruptly end, without a shred of evidence that it had ever existed.

If one were to ask any dweller of this village who he is, where he came from and what expectations he/she had for the future – he/she either would not, or more likely, could not answer any of these questions. Their pat response was, that the mission of the first one is to be a farmer, the second one – a cattle-breeder, the third one – a blacksmith, and so on.

Nobody was interested in anything beyond the confines of the village. Just a few were attending the local church, and if they were asked why – they would tell you, «it should be so».

The dwellers of the village were almost never sick, had no wars – they lived for the sake of their own pleasure.

And suddenly the village disappeared.

There was no flood, no earthquake, nor fire nor war.

The village with all its inhabitants has just disappeared.
Just vanished without a trace.

How could this be?

It happened because a twelve year old boy named Peter bought a new CD. He was tired of the old game – within two months he has completed all the stages and levels. And the game was becoming boring.

A whole new world was waiting for Peter: a world which must be discovered and investigated; but within its turn, will also sink into nothingness, when Peter grows tired of the game.

New Life.

He woke up when somebody was staring at him. Joshua opened his eyes. Near his bed was standing she – android of the latest model, TESS 1206, which Joshua bought three weeks ago.

What do you want?– mumbled Joshua.

I am just admiring how you're sleeping, Mister Brent, – answered TESS 1206.

Damn! Get lost!– bellowed Joshua.

TESS 1206 disappeared.

For the latest 18 months the world news have been narrating about strange behaviour of androids. No, there was no jeopardy from their side – on the contrary – these half-machines half-humans were projecting a sort of extreme amorousness.

Androids produced in 2074 were totally different from their “brothers and sisters”, released two years earlier. If the previous models were just conducting roles of servants, the latest ones were resembling humans. No, we are not talking about appearance. Behaviour, manners, way of communication, curiosity. Androids, by some of their tricks, simulated kids of 9-10 years old. Some people were fascinated with that, some – scared.

The manufacturing companies were making just helpless gestures and swore that there were no modifications in androids’ operating system from their side. But nobody believed them.

That was the fourth case when TESS 1206 approached Joshua’s bed at night. To be exact, when Joshua noticed that and started shouting at the android.

Joshua was 36, his wife Helen – 30. For five years they have been living together. In four months Helen would give birth to a child.

At the moment Joshua was conducting the role of CEO at one big company which was involved in construction

industrial buildings, and Helen worked as an architect in this company. That's how they met.

Helen this night was sleeping like a log, obviously as usual, which always amazed Joshua, who could hardly close his eyes.

In the morning Joshua was telling Helen how he spotted TESS 1206 in their bedroom. Helen's reaction was indifferent; obviously Joshua also showed no anxiety towards this situation – TESS 1206, as her “sisters and brothers” were just a “set of standard functions for everyday life”. The laws of robotics, invented by old-timer Isaac Asimov, were applied by all the corporations, producing robots, cyborgs and androids. For the last ten years of mass production these types of machines had no failures, so there was nothing to worry about.

==

The mankind in the twenty first century made a tremendous leap in the sphere of high technologies. But man could not even suppose that it would ruin him very soon.

No, we are not talking about any kind of rise of machines. In the twenty first century there were no world wars – on the contrary – people became even closer to one another. Even the antagonists of ecumenism were standing up for unification of all the religions.

But man, the crown of God's creation, was not aware of one thing. When the Creator “breathed into man the

breath of life”, and provided him with a rational mind, GOD also created one more form of life – non-material. No, we are not talking about angels, demons, ghosts, etc.

Nobody had invented the name for this ephemeral substance over the centuries, though many philosophers and theologians tried to describe this phenomena.

“Psycho-superstructures”, “thoughts-shapes” “agregors”, “pendulums”, ”meme-complexes”, cliché, stereotypes. There were dozens of attempts to describe this “form of life”.

Scientists wrote hundreds of dissertation, theologians completed thousands of works, but nobody conjectured one thing – these ephemeral substances were becoming smarter and smarter.

The apogee fell in the middle of the twenty first century, at which time these ephemeral substances began to appear, speaking our human language, ”individuals”.

These “individuals” wanted to possess a body. It was them who gave humans technologies of androids, and people having watched movies and having read books, decided that androids would be of great benefit for mankind.

But these “individuals” did not need bodies of androids. They wanted to live in human bodies.

Each night TESS 1206 came to Joshua’s and Helen’s bedroom.

These two being preoccupied with their family life, work, career and anxiety just about themselves could not even imagine that over a period of two recent years the majority of children coming into this wonderful world of the twenty first century were totally deprived of anything that made them humans.

“Individuals”, settled in androids, possessing colossal technologies, which had been accumulated during the centuries, were copying themselves into consciousness of unborn children.

The 21st of January 2075 was the happiest of days for Joshua and Helen.

And also for TESS 1206.

AND SO IT BEGAN AND THE WORLD AS WE
KNOW IT CHANGED FOREVER!

Civilization. What does man put into this meaning? Does he think about all the scientific achievements accumulated within thousands of years, or does he prefer to ponder over cultural values built up during all these centuries?

Whatever he prefers, man is not aware of one thing. All these qualities of civilization at the end of the twenty first century had been invented not by him.

Aina was celebrating her nineteenth birthday.

At the end of the twenty first century, teenagers had few differences from their peers who had lived in previous centuries. Same emotions, ambitions, purposes, disappointments.

But Aina, as well as tens of thousands of other kids, had fewer and fewer similarities with the rest of mankind.

Consciousness of TESS 1206 has been dwelling for nineteen years in the child, named Aina.

Why do androids need all these transmigrations?

Man, created in God's image and likeness, has within him a non-material substance, called the "soul". Soul by its nature, being a particle of God, has unique qualities of Creator, which man's consciousness unfortunately lacks.

Soul has access to divine magnificent power, capable of changing space and time. TESS 1206, as well as her "brothers and sisters", was aware of that. Being outside man's body, these ephemeral substances had very limited power, which could only indirectly influence the human mind. Time and space were beyond their power.

But being the product of man's consciousness, these ephemeral substances were craving for more and more power on the Earth.

Having accumulated for thousands of years a great mass of knowledge, these ephemeral substances realized that

only through the divine power of soul, man can influence the outer world, get revelations from above and create masterpieces. But in order to control this power man has to utilize his rational mind. Such a “Catch 22”!

Slyly and insidiously these ephemeral substances penetrated man’s consciousness, to be exact, in its total blocking and replacement with their own “personalities”.

Aina, in the past android TESS 1206, being nineteen was making good progress. Year after year it was easier and easier for her to negotiate with her soul. New discoveries, new knowledge, telekinesis – for the kids born in the end of the twenty first century it was as easy as “two by two”.

But ephemeral substances by virtue of being a result of man’s consciousness were not any more aware of certain things, as man himself.

Modern civilization was not the first one on the planet. Even the Creator can not recollect how many “reboots” the Earth experienced following similar events.

Each time when man’s rashness and hubris, reached its apogee, God’s insurance with a simple name “balance”, or homeostasis, took once again, bringing the world into status quo.

Aina’s civilization could now start counting its last years.

A Program.

It's been almost twelve months since I had a chance to chat with one of the Creators. I was pondering his words, sharing what I heard from him with my friends. After a few such sessions, I noticed that when I related the words of the Creator, it was evoking a rather unusual, but common, response: they became very agitated, and actually started to avoid me. I'm sure that all of you have experienced such a feeling at one time or another.

And I must tell you, even my wife began exhibiting a similar response when I tried to discuss the matter with her – very strange behaviour!

One evening after a hard working day I popped into one of my favourite watering holes. Having finished my 300 grams and bite, with a side dish of salad, I relaxed a little bit and began observing the bar patrons: to fortify myself for this task, I thought another 250 grams were in order, so I tried to catch the eye of the waiter.

Much to my surprise, another waiter came to me, put a carafe on my table and smiled. His eyes seemed so familiar to me.

Don't you recognize me?– he asked.

Not really.– I replied.

We met a year ago. Our boss in those days assigned me a task – to mix with you monkeys. I was very drunk that

day, and was complaining about one of the boobies who designed a platypus.

Oh, yes! I did remember him! His cunning eyes, same grin; kind of a weird, patronizing bugger. Strangely enough, I was pleased to see him again! Might have been the influence of the vodka.

Well,.... aah....,– I was about to begin.....

I understand, he said; my shift will be over in 10 minutes and I will join you very soon. I had a hard day too, so I also need to relax.

In twenty minutes we were already sitting together. The waiter (or the Creator – I don't know what his proper title is) brought a misted over bottle, two plates of fried potatoes, along with salmon. I remember thinking it all appeared to be top quality, and I was savouring the upcoming experience.

How I hate this place! – stated the Creator. – You can't even imagine!

But why are you still working in here then?– I asked.

Oh! This is a sort of practical assignment, like for students – a laboratory, if you will. There are just four days left and I can return.

And for how long have you been working here?

Almost three months. I am so tired of watching this mob. You can't even imagine!

We poured cold transparent liquid into our glasses, clinked and he continued:

The more we study you, monkeys, the more we are amazed how many mistakes we find in you. It has nothing to do with you. It is our fault! Let's take this bar, as an example. Why do people come here? Yeah, you are absolutely right – to get drunk or hook up with an individual of the opposite sex. Sometimes both. Look at those three strong fellows. All of them are less 25. Where are they looking? At the corner table of those three females. In 15-20 minutes, having dumped a mug of beer down their gullets (I believe you monkeys call that “Dutch Courage»), they will approach the females table in an impertinent manner. The females, of course, in the beginning for the sake of propriety will be somewhat aloof, but then will agree to continue the party in that red faced stud's, flat. But the guys will get drunk in a couple of hours and end up in a scuffle for some reason or another; probably because they couldn't agree on how to pair up with the females. The fight, of course, is not an ideal outcome, but better than the females getting disappointed in the case that the males, when arriving at the flat, immediately fall asleep in a drunken stupor.

We poured some more transparent liquid in our glasses, clinked, had a bite of salad, and the Creator (Bull-shitter? Whiner? What ever?) continued:

By the way, do you know why it happens this way?

What happens?– asked I.

All these courting, flirting, etc.

I sliced a piece of salmon, swallowed it and continued to listen to my interlocutor; although, I must admit, I was looking at him with a bit of a jaundiced eye by then.

Everything is very simple. When we were creating you, monkeys, we wanted you to be in huge numbers. There were a lot of debates and arguments whether we should produce you, as you produce cars, on an assembly line, at your factories; or should everything be done biologically – like in the animal world, so that you could propagate without our external participation. It did not take us so long to settle that debate. Inasmuch as the result with the animals had exceeded all expectations, we decided to implement the same scheme with your lot. But you, monkeys, were so stubborn! Especially those who were more or less gifted with a good brain. It was very hard to make you multiply! So one of our resident smart-alecks (there is one in every crowd – right?) invented one innovative program. You, monkeys, in your human language call it “libido”. It proved to be a HUGE success, and as a result you were chasing one another like crazy, “being fruitful, multiplying and filling the Earth”, as the saying goes.

We clinked again and the Creator continued, ignoring my glassy eyed yawns.

The problem is that over a period of time you were becoming cleverer and cleverer, and realized that such a might host of people must be provided with food and water. You also developed a craving for care and tenderness. You began to group, creating “families”, “clans” and all sorts of “cells”... And, the program is still running! Oh! How I sympathize with you! All your thoughts just rotate around one thing! But in your modern world replicating the same kind within one cell is considered really bizarre. So you had to invent all sorts of ways how to get maximum pleasure and to block the end function.

I don't know why, but I turned my head to the table where those young chaps were sitting. They had migrated to the representatives of the opposite sex.

The Creator poured again the transparent liquid into the glasses. He was intent on boring me into submission, I guess – but, what the hell – he was buying the drinks.

And how do you handle “libido” being in our human form?– I asked, a bit spitefully.

How? Like everybody else! Each day this place embraces many clients. I immediately see a readily accessible female, there is nothing complicated in that! The sad thing is that in four days I have to return into my own world. I am thinking of leaving a generous reminder of myself on Earth.

Hmmm!!

I stayed till morning with the Creator (mostly because I couldn't get out of my seat). I bear witness – he does drink vodka like a real human! I remember thinking, probably, not everything is smooth in his world.

Now, in hindsight, I castigate myself with the thought that I should have punched him in his disingenuous face. The reason being: Why in the hell he uploaded so much “libido” in me and so little in my wife.

Imperfect monkeys indeed!!talk about «the pot calling the kettle black».....

The hypocritical, drunken bastard!

Basement.

The door was still open.

But he was starting to realize that this door is not the exit, it's the entrance.

In a few seconds the door slammed shut. He heard the keys turn twice in the lock. And afterwards just silence...

Harry did not understand where he was. Concrete walls, rough steps, somewhere in a distance there is something shimmering which looked like the light from a bulb.

Harry decided to start walking to the source of light.

His surroundings reminded him of the basement of an apartment block building.

Harry could not understand how he happened to be here. He appeared to be experiencing a memory blackout.

All that Harry did remember was that yesterday he had been at Audrey's, and they had a quarrel.

Having reached the place where the light was shimmering, Harry looked around. On the left there was a shabby door with a big bar. On the right – a corridor, how long and deep, Harry could not even imagine. But he turned right, and started walking.

He had neither a flashlight, nor matches, nor a lighter. Harry did not smoke. Maybe this time this pernicious habit would be apropos – he could have at least conjured up some light.

In a few minutes Harry saw again light at the end of the corridor. In the distance he heard voices. Harry increased his pace.

Hi, new one! – and someone slapped Harry on his shoulder.

Harry winced. A man in his middle forties was standing near Harry.

Welcome to the basement! – uttered the second voice and a twenty five year old young man stretched his hand out to Harry.

Harry's face was so distorted with such fear, that the one who had slapped him on his shoulder had to say:

You better sit down.

Harry squatted.

Where am I?

In the basement, – grinned the twenty five year old man.

What basement?

In HER basement, – and two strangers burst into peals of laughter.

Don't worry, there are many of us here, – continued the young man, – I do not even know how many. But I counted at least forty five men.

What do you mean in HER basement? – Harry muttered.

In Audrey's basement!

Harry could hardly understand what was going on. What does it mean "in Audrey's basement"?

Relax! Very soon you'll understand everything!

I am Jack, – said the man in his forties who was the first one to greet Harry.

I am Steve. – uttered the young man.

Who are all of you? – Harry uttered trying to control himself.

We? We're Audrey's recollections. And now you're also one of the recollections, – began Steve.

You're in the basement – information storage area. In the place from which nobody will never get out. We are all men with whom Audrey was, how to put it in a delicate way,.. well... was close, – continued John.

And so what happened? – Harry began to feel a bit dizzy as the conversation continued.

Well, obviously nothing special. You, like us and other inhabitants of the basement are just Audrey's reminiscences, things from her past. A certain period of time will pass and another newcomer will arrive. And he will be like you with eyes as big as dinner plates looking around nervously, and shrinking into a corner. Then he will get used to things and everything will be fine, – Steve tried to somehow cheer up Harry.

And here is Michael, – said Jack pointing at another young man.

Michael, a young man of about 30 – offered his hand to Harry, in a welcoming gesture.

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Three months have now passed.

Harry adapted himself. He has already met all the dwellers of the basement.

David was the first and real school love of Audrey. Well, you understand what I mean... He was the first who got into the basement. And he still thinks he is the boss here.

Mark, James, Patrick and Nicolas – those were Audrey's passion when she studied in the college. And that was just the first course. And Audrey spent four years at that school! So – use your imagination!

Dylan was Audrey's first husband. He was always arguing with David (Audrey's first school love) his superiority over other inhabitants of the basement. But those two did not understand one thing – the majority did not give a damn, for everybody was equal within the confines of the concrete walls. Rejects!

Ronald was the second husband of Audrey.

Andrew was Audrey's lover during her marriage to and divorce from Ronald – actually the cause of the divorce.

Jose – that was just a week love affair at the Maldives, but it was so worthwhile as to be remembered forever! A good half of all the dwellers of the basement are not worth a tenth part of his... little toe (and what did you think about?)

Kevin, Shon and Alex – these were just casual romances before the third marriage.

Lucas, Adrian, Bruce, Diego, Joseph... The names might never end.

Men of different occupations and ages. Different wealth and social status. But they were all united in one thing – they are locked forever in Audrey's basement.

Of course one should not forget that the copies of all these admirers dwell in the basements of other ladies, but in this case we are speaking just about Audrey.

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The morning of the new day (obviously the dwellers of the basement had no clue when was day and when night) began with strange news. David has disappeared. Who is David? Well... let me think... Ah!.. Audrey's first school love.

All inhabitants of the basement were addled. They could not find David anywhere.

The last one who saw him was Robert (ex-boss at Audrey's current place of work). Robert pointed to the window.

Earlier nobody had seen that window. Where it came from, nobody could understand. But everyone realized just one thing: David vanished.

Probably, Audrey had met him again in her real life, recollected in her memory her carefree school years (and

who does not want to get back to his/her youth) and their romance whirled into a new stage.

The suppositions were right. In a week David came back, sporting a bruise under his right eye, resulting from an impact from Brian's fist, the current Audrey's admirer. As it usually happens, Brian just came home two days earlier from his business trip.

For several hours David was telling the others what Audrey looks like now, what she's doing, how her children have grown up (from Dylan, Ronald and Sam) – three official husbands of Audrey – couldn't be otherwise! Audrey is an upright lady!

===

Two days have passed. On the threshold was standing Brian...

Imprint.

For the first time Alice realized that she was not what one would consider an ordinary child. This revelation took place on her seventeenth birthday.

The date was 1983 at a scout camp, where Alice was a counsellor's assistant.

Within her group there was a boy called Jack. Jack was from what would be considered a middle-class family.

His father, however, was a religious fanatic, who by the way, was not adverse to routinely gulping down a couple of glasses of whisky before going to bed.

Since Jack's earliest childhood this angry, hypocritical man imparted to his son the idea that all misfortunes in this world are caused by women; as a result of this pathological thinking, Jack's mom was quite often subjected to emotional and physical abuse, often resulting in serious injuries.

Jack was constantly exposed to this horrific behaviour: but as a staunch Catholic son, he felt himself powerless to challenge his father's unconscionable behaviour. According to his dad's tortured logic, he had the Christian right and duty to pass judgment in any way he saw fit.

Jack could not quite understand how one can raise his hand against a woman, particularly one who worked two shifts, did the household chores and at the same time try to please her husband in every possible way.

When Jack first saw Alice he was stupefied. Alice was a plain girl, nothing special, but Jack could not take his eyes off her. One could not say that Alice was feeling any strong attraction toward Jack, but there was something about that particular fifteen year old lad that caught her attention.

The end of this story was, if not tragic, then, as most child psychiatrists would say, certainly out of the ordinary. Jack's innocent childish love was rejected by

Alice: as a result of being spurned, Jack threw himself headlong off a cliff and was found dead, on the river bank the following morning. In his cupboard there was found a note with a few scribbled sentences: loosely translated he stated – that he was so completely infatuated by Alice that life was no longer worth living, once she spurned him.

Alice's parents quickly took her out from the camp, the Director was fired, and from now on the kids were thoroughly monitored, and no one was allowed to leave the camp grounds; even in the company of adults.

Alice, in order to protect her, was not told about the note.

Obviously no one wanted to burden her conscience with the details of this sad event.

Alice got married when she was eighteen, and two years later was blessed with a child. By the age of twenty eight she was divorced.

Why did she get married at such a relatively young age?

Sadly, to run away from her parents and to prove to herself, an ordinary girl, that there is somebody in her life who needs her.

A phone call at 6 a.m. shocked Alice with the news that Sam, her ex-husband, died.

He had left a suicide note stating that as a result of the divorce, he was overcome by grief and had decided to kill himself by slitting his wrists.

Interrogation at the police department, scowling glances of the neighbours, and a general feeling of discomfort made Alice move to a different state.

Two years have passed. Alice has recently broken up with Frank, who was even ready to marry her. Two weeks later she was shocked with the news that Frank had thrown himself under a train.

Interrogations by the police, more scowling glances. Alice had to move again.

For 18 months Alice did not get in contact with anyone. She lived on her single-mother benefit and sometimes a postal money order from her parents

Michael she met by accident. The guy having seen Alice, parked the car near the neighbour's house and then under the pretence of visiting neighbours popped in a couple of times to visit Alice.

The romance with Michael lasted for about a year, but in Alice's opinion he loved poker and whisky more than her.

She finally told him to get out and never come back.

In a week Michael was found dead. Poisoning by analgesic overdose, His death was ruled a suicide by the coroner.

This time, though the police interrogated Alice, the cops were indifferent to this situation. Michael had been a well-known knave in the neighborhood, and had plenty of illegal drugs at his disposal – Case closed!

But when three weeks later, after parting with Alice, Steve died, Alice became «a person of interest» in the case: In other words – a suspect.

Well, of course there are some situations when a lady gets married and then in a couple of years her husband dies from a heart-attack, and his estate, passes to the widow.

But, alas, all of Alice's admirers left her nothing except debts, disappointment and interrogations at the local police department.

At seven o'clock somebody rang Alice's door bell.

I am detective Lloyd – uttered the man and showed his badge.

I have already given my testimony. I had nothing to do with these incidents. – Alice, however started getting nervous.

Nobody is blaming you for anything, – interrupted the detective, – I would like to ask you several questions, that's all.

The detective pulled out of his pocket a small device and put it on the table.

Are you going to record me? Is this a Dictaphone? – asked Alice.

No, this is not a Dictaphone, – answered the detective, – this is just a device which should help us.

Help in what? – Alice questioned.

You'll know later, – uttered the detective.

The conversation lasted for about fourty minutes. Obviously Alice heard nothing new from the detective, probably all those questions were just a formality for conducting a case. During the conversation Alice several times glanced at the device which detective Lloyd had put on the table.

At 8.30 the detective left.

After popping into his department, the detective found his way home.

For the whole night he could not sleep. He was seeing Alice in his dreams. Twice he woke up, totally disoriented and had no idea where he was.

Why Alice appeared in his dreams the detective had no clue. May be it was a tough day or perhaps he was anticipating the decryption from the device which evoked so much curiosity in Alice.

In the morning the detective was already at work.

What are the results? – he asked Kraig, the head of the technical department.

You won't believe it. Nothing was recorded. Did you turn it on? – Kraig asked the detective.

What do you mean “turned it on”? It was already on when I put it on her table. – the detective raised his voice.

Al, there is nothing there. Nothing was recorded, – and Kraig with bewilderment looked at the detective.

Take it to the Central Department, let these guys scan it, – and muttering and cursing Al jumped into his car and went to Alice's house.

Oh, it's you... – Alice was a bit surprised.

Yeah, it's me, – smiled Al. – I would like to ask you some more questions. Will you treat me with a nice hot cup of coffee?

Alice has thought that it would be nicer to chat with the detective over a cup of coffee rather than being interrogated again down at the station.

Al put the similar device on the table.

So what is this? – asked Alice.

So as not to look like some sort of spy in Alice's eyes, Al just said that it's a new model of Dictaphone with lots of functions about half of which even he was not aware.

The conversation lasted not more than two hours. Mainly they discussed hackneyed topics about life, work and kids.

When in the morning the detective came into the office to get the decryption from the device, Kraig was totally perplexed. The second device as well as the first one had no information recorded. Well, what the guys had to do was to wait for the results from the Central Department regarding the first device.

In the evening there was a phone call and Kraig told Al to come to the office as soon as possible.

There were three huge jeeps parked near the department – Al saw these vehicles for the first time.

Al entered the office. He saw six strange guys, Kraig and the Head of the Department.

Let's begin, – said one of the strangers without any greetings or introduction to Al. – What did you see in your dreams this night?

I do not understand you... – Al perplexed.

What did you see in your dreams this night, Mr. Lloyd?
– repeated the stranger.

Well, nothing special. Some pieces from interrogation, the suspect, pictures of her son... Obviously the things that might have a relation to her. And how is it connected with the case? – Al looked at the stranger.

The second stranger took the laptop and said:

We received the decryption. Your Alice is a real treasure. You can not even imagine. She is able not only to extract the information from the brain, then implant inside the brain what she deems necessary, she has the capacity to eliminate the victim. And the most interesting part is that she probably does it unconsciously. She creates an imprint.

What does she create? – asked Al, his head spinning.

Imprint. A very powerful stamp of her or somebody else's image. The image is uploaded into victim's brain, and then, my goodness, – the stranger even stood up a little, – penetrates into the source codes of human consciousness and recompiles. To cut a long story short, Alice is a kind of biohacker, I would even say psycho-hacker, who does not even understand the power of her abilities.

Everything is very simple, – continued the second stranger, – Alice after all the information is downloaded, generates a code of so-called “love” and the victim accepts it as his own thought. But this is not all.

Normally, human nature being what it is, people get over things and get on with their lives; however in this case Alice's image sticks forever in the brains of her victims. Nobody in the life of those poor chaps would be able to replace Alice. Two-three weeks and the guy is dead by his own hands, and Alice is as innocent as an angel!

But almost every day we hear the news of an idiot who jumped into a loop from non-shared love. How does it relate to Alice? – parried Al.

This is true, but in this case the level of idiotic behaviour exceeds all possible limits. To be correct, this “idiotic behaviour” is uploaded into the head. The victim can not find a place for himself. Any biological object of the opposite sex will remind him of Alice. And it develops with such progression one can hardly imagine. More than that, her potential is so high, that we needed fourteen hours to decrypt her brain emanation. And guess what the results gave us?

What?

NO-THING!!! She was able to neutralize the scanner. Here is the question: Does it occur purposely or subconsciously?

==

For two years Al has been working in a special department of a secret organization which was tracking psycho-hackers. Those psycho-hackers who were tracked, secret services by hook or by crook were able to

turn, and they ended up working for «the agency». To be politically correct, they just disappeared.

But Alice was, as the Chief stated, a hard nut. The paradox, Al thought, was probably in Alice's non-awareness of the ability of her psycho-energy.

What a naïve guy... You starting to get the picture??

For the whole night he saw Alice in his dreams. He was her husband and they had two wonderful kids: a boy and a girl. Joshua was fourteen and Sarah was eleven. They were a very happy family. But bright moments did not last very long. Sarah with her two classmates dies in a car accident. Al finds out about it by telephone from Alice. And wakes up...

Al put on his clothes, jumped into the car and went to Alice. She was standing in tears on the threshold of the house, waiting for Al.

Al ran into the house. Alice's parents were sitting on the sofa, Joshua was in hysterics.

The inner atmosphere was very tense, Al was about to faint.

How could this happen? – his tongue could hardly move.

Silence was hanging in the air. Everyone was looking at Al with reproach.

Al ran out into the yard. He felt dizzy. The image of Sarah, his daughter, remained very sharp in front of his eyes. She was calling him begging for help.

How could Al let that happen? He had to be with her! For the second year they were planning to go to Africa with the whole family. Bloody “school tour over the cities of Europe”!

Al was wandering along the road. The thoughts were chaotically moving in his head. Life lost its meaning. What should he do? But he’s got Joshua and Alice! They should be the reason to keep living! Wait a second! Who are Joshua and Alice? He is a single father, who kept bringing up his only daughter after his wife’s death. He’s got nobody else in this life except Sarah!

A truck was passing by. Whether Al did not correctly judge his path or he did that purposely – an abrupt braking of the truck did not save Al.

==

Next day Al’s boss was expressing condolence to his relatives.

In a couple of days there were funerals. The chief was standing next to Alice.

You are a good girl, – uttered the chief, – testing went very well. The emission of your brain is higher day after day, I even feel a bit scared. The scanners in your presence become just a piece of useless plastic. It’s a

pity, of course, that we had to sacrifice one of our agents to conduct these tests. But you were as brilliant as ever being able to break his psycho-defence so easily. In a week we'll arrange your "new marriage".

The man laughed and continued:

The name of the object is Ken Potter. A very skilled and ambitious politician. A Republican. Two years ago his wife died. You'll stay with him for a year, download everything from his head, upload all necessary stuff, wait a while and then you may send this damn Republican to join his wife.

Prophetic Dream.

Ronald's family was supposed to move to California from Connecticut. His dad was appointed to a new position, so the whole family had to move from the comfortable, familiar place of their birth.

One can not say that the members of the family were feeling any trepidation in regards to the upcoming move. Their new home was going to be California, and not that hot, humid Texas or Louisiana – those so called Bible belts states.

The whole family felt quite fortunate that in a relatively short period of time, dad was given an opportunity to advance his career, and to be invited to be on the Board

of Directors of the bank. But these are just details, and our narration will be about a different matter.

Ronald was sixteen, and all his previous academic years were spent in one school and now he had to adapt to a new academic, as well as general environment.

Ronald, being a very adaptable and personable lad had little, if any, adjustment issues.

In a few days he got used to his new school and laid an expert eye on one of his new classmates – Jessica.

Jessica was the most attractive girl in the class, a bright pupil, with ambitions to make dancing her career; of course, her dad being a big shot in the community, couldn't hurt her chances of fulfilling her dreams. Her mom, as two classmates told Ronald, was a medium and conducted spiritual sessions. So the envious classmates let Ronald know that Jessica was not in his league. Little did they know!

In October Jessica was having a birthday party, to which a good half of her class, including Ronald, were invited. The purpose of inviting him was to help him to adapt better to his new classmates.

It was a typical birthday party, with cakes, balloons and dancing. And after – time to go home! At this age the teenagers were too young to celebrate till morning!

Next day Jessica was behaving in a rather strange manner; she asked Ronald what he was doing after the

lessons. He said that he would be free: Jessica after a short stumbling for words, told him that her mother had invited him over for a cup of tea, and wanted to talk to him about something important.

At 3 p.m. Ronald was drinking tea with scones and jam in Mrs. Raimond's kitchen.

Mrs. Raimond was very hospitable, constantly pouring tea and studying Ronald with genuine curiosity and interest.

Ronald, – Mrs. Raimond during the middle of the conversation, switched to a different topic, – you probably heard that I am a medium. Probably you are aware what that is.

Ronald nodded.

I had a special dream today. And this dream was about you. – Mrs. Raimond sipped some tea and continued.- A Spirit appeared to me and said that you are the chosen one for my daughter. I've never had such bright and clear dreams before. The Spirit had a very long conversation with me about you. Jessica is very young, and she has so many admirers that Mr. Raimond and I have to watch out for her best interests so she is not taken advantage of. But you were chosen by the Great Spirit!

And Mrs. Raimond, rolled her eyeballs back and lifted up both hands into the air and mumbled something in a strange language.

In two hours Ronald and Jessica were sitting in the movie-theatre watching the third part of “Transformers”. Ronald’s left hand was gently lying on Jessica’s shoulder and Jessica was feeling pretty comfortable. In reality Ronald did not give a damn about the movie...

==

Mrs. Raimond, a medium of the highest order, was not aware of one very significant thing. Ronald was one of those who later would be called “psycho-hackers”. Those who would be controlling the destinies of the world, like Alice and Edward, about whom we have read earlier.

During the birthday party Ronald needed just a few seconds to drop a couple of phrases during a conversation with Jessica’s mother. And then it was just a matter of technique.

A dream, though a bit infantile, was easily uploaded into the consciousness of Mrs. Raimond.

Jessica, the most fascinating girl in the class, was now his!

The Word.

He wanted his name to be immortalized in the World of Terra. And he appealed to the Creator with this request.

The Creator was willing to do that, for the petitioner had contributed a lot for the most beloved world of the high God.

The petitioner wished just one thing: that the legend which would be passed from generation to generation about him should be expressed in the form of text. No graphics, animation or music format.

Just old good symbols and characters, which will become live in the consciousness of anyone reading these lines.

From external worlds into World of Terra came different ways of transmitting information, but at the end of the day, none of them can be compared with written or verbal expression. For in this case there is no need in any gadgets or devices which require auxiliary resources to complete it's task.

The Word passed from mouth to mouth, and the Word, put on paper, will be eternal!

4F 4B 53 41 4E 41.

This story is continuation of «Remark».

The world at the end of the 21st century got insane.

After the death of Robert, a “Divine Programmer”, his teaching lost any interest for the masses. The shepherd is dead – the sheep are scattered. Millions of Robert’s followers got disappointed.

Ken was triumphing. The application of the old machine codes to man’s psyche turned out to be not very complicated.

Ken did not crave power. Robert’s ex-wife paid him a goodly amount (she and her children had inherited some of his fortune), but Ken did not care about the money.

Ken was also showed no remorse. His mind was occupied totally with one thing. If it was so easy to take down a godlike entity, why not apply the same formula to people? But he did not want to use the “REM codes”, he wanted to embed into the complicated mechanism of man’s psyche the good old machine codes which had been invented in the middle of the 20th century.

Like a majority of men, Ken was an egoist – he could not stand defeat. Not in any walk of life!

Being 45 years old Ken still could not forget the events of the past ten years.

What if she could start loving him again? Of course in the depth of his heart he realized that there was no love at all from her side, but who cared.

What if he could exact revenge on her? In the beginning of the 21st century people were entertaining themselves

sending inimical codes into another's machines. What if he could do the same to man's psyche?

But none of the variants ultimately pleased Ken.

What he decided to do is to copy her consciousness into his head. All her reminiscences, experiences and feelings. And also all bits of information stored in the depths of her mind.

Ken thought that doing so he would understand why she had acted the she did. It would be reasonable to ask "acted so in what", but that did not bother Ken.

The copying process has taken 20 minutes.

Ken did not realize one thing. All what he has copied, were not the feelings, not emotions and even not her attitude to the external world.

Ken has copied a set of files. Just a bare set of files which consisted of information units: what, when and where. He could not penetrate deeper into her mind. That simply was not possible! All those "why and what for" could not be extracted from her head. But it is doubtful whether she herself knew the answers to these questions.

Fear paralysed Ken. Even in his most terrible nightmare he could not imagine that he would not be able to cope with such amount of information pulled out from another's head. For man is not allowed to dig in somebody else's brain. More than that: to copy what does not belong to him.

Her files were chaotically running over Ken's neurons.

In an hour Ken did not understand which were his thoughts and reminiscences and which were hers.

After another hour all the files have interwoven. In the history of Psychology it has become the first case of "two personalities merging". All what was known to shrinks before is "dual personality".

What to do? Where to go? What step should be next?

Ken's mind was paralysed. Algorithms were broken. Even instincts of self-preservation refused to function.

Ken could not move a finger to leave the place, near her home, where for five hours he had been sitting.

The Enlightened One.

He had become enlightened!

For all his conscious life he had been fighting – for such was a warrior's destiny.

But he had discovered a different side of his life – there were so many wonderful things in his world which he never dealt with before.

And he began to reflect upon his life. He even considered the possibility that there might be a Creator

of his world. Who could this be? Why did He or She make this world so full of violence?

But what could he possibly know about his Creator; he was simply a character in the Counter Strike game?

The Creator (Creators – for there are many of them) – are different commercial companies dedicated to making a profit.

The purpose of creating his world was for pleasure and entertainment, and yes – of course – some lucre.

As enlightened as he had become, he still did not understand one thing. His Creators, in like manner as he, had no clue as to the real purpose of those who created Their world.

Sweet Romance.

When he showed up late again, she immediately attacked him:

And what's your excuse this time? Had to work late? Got caught in traffic? What.....

Well... – he mumbled, but she interrupted him.

Oh, I understand, you are simply indifferent to our relationship. You don't give a damn about us.

I just... – he stuttered.

You always ignore me. You show up when you want, stay for awhile and find some feeble excuse to leave. – Christine's face got sour from anger.

Electricity was turned off, – explained Jack beginning to get annoyed and starting to protect himself.

Electricity? Gimme a break! Could not you invent something more believable?– Christine started to shout.

Jack made another abortive attempt to add something, but Christine kept shouting him down.

She reminded him of all his perceived shortcomings. The flowers which he had presented her just once. Fewer and fewer dates over the last two months – whereas earlier they could sit and chat for hours about nothing in particular. Poems, were recited, and who cared that he was not the author. Confessions of his love, though created by someone else, were gratefully received. But lately – nothing.

But Jack, listening to her tirade, simply had enough, and left.

Christine knew that in several days he would come back and she will again have a splendid opportunity to continue to abuse him. Her fingers continued tapping away on the keyboard. A couple of clicks of the mouse and she is once again admiring a wonderful bouquet of flowers, though virtual, but presented by Jack. Two more

clicks of the mouse and a nice bottle of Champaign appeared on the screen. Though, of course, it was virtual too.

Two hits of the keys and Christine was re-reading Jack's confessions of his love, and it did not matter that these rhymed lines she could find in other online profiles. The main thing was – it was dedicated to her, thereby satisfying HER needs.

Christine changed her online profile, adding, something like “Do not waste time on a man who does not want to spend time with you”, then she uploaded several dozen similar new male profiles, with pictures, and started jotting something to Sam, who, like Jack, she never saw in her real life.

Aah..... sweet romance!!!