

PSI-CODE

Chapter

2



"The biggest conspiracy in history will take over the world this very week, Claudia," Rudolf Vinkart told her, "A massive attack over the mind of man. I need you to break this down from the inside."

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## 2



We must consider events as letters on the pages of a book.  
They were written there before we read them.  
Arthur Schopenhauer

What moves the threads is hidden inside you.  
Marcus Aurelius

Man is a shadow and a dream.  
Pindarus

### Piranhas

Depressed and confused after his incident with Mark Kerpa's and his frenzied mother, reporter Nathan Rose decided to give himself a break.

He went to his aquarium to contemplate his "loving" silvery piranhas. They started bumping the crystal, looking at him with their toothy fauces open, anxiously begging him for food.

"Eat each other," he told them. But he just couldn't do that to the creatures. He went to pick a glass and then he used it to catch a little golden fish of bulging eyes from a near fishbowl.

"Your time's up, little idle," he smiled at the fish, seeing it against the light, "Don't look at me that way. I didn't make the world. I just work here."

He emptied the glass into the piranha's and he stuck his nose to the crystal to watch the butchery.

"You know what, my babies?" he asked his jagged pets, "I've gone through a lot of shit in this life... but you didn't see Dora Kerpa yelling at me. She cursed me! I'm cursed now!"

The bloody bits of golden fish were now spreading in the water.

"No housewife had ever talked to me that way. She shouted that I was the one to blame of her son's suicide. Can you believe it? Cups wanted to take me in. But you know what, my precious ones?"

The piranhas looked at him as a father.

"Chief of homicides knows I've got sado-sexual videos on him," and he touched the files, the Fuck Files, "All the muck of Xangdu Park ends up right here, my babies."

The piranhas seemed to smile at him, “proud.”

“I love you, little bitches,” he caressed the crystal.

A three-dimensional face popped out on the glass.

“May I know what the hell did you do at the Piedrigrotta Hospital, you fluffy trouble-maker?” It was Roderick Hamik, chief editor of the Worldscope Herald of the Neapolis Channel.

“So you’ve been told already, boss?”

“Everybody’s calling me! The kid’s mother called the Mayor. She wants to sue the channel! What happened there!?”

Nathan bit his tongue, not to tell his boss about Mark Kerpa’s strange iHand messages.

“You’re King Midas but inverted, Rose.”

“*Inverted?*”

“Everything you touch becomes shit.”

“Thanks, boss. The boy just jumped over the rail. I only was there. By the way, what’s that crap on your neck?”

Hamik touched his collar device, “Oh. Nancy gave it to me. It’s magnetic, for the stress. Seems like it doesn’t work for a damn thing.”

“Who knows. That shit could save your life some day.”

“Do you know anything about the United Bank and the Euro Bank attacks?”

Nathan pricked his ears and tilted his head like a dog.

“They’ve just been hit with a cyber-attack, Rose, a two-minute blackout.”

“You want me on that?” he smiled exited.

“No, no, no!” Hamik waved his hands, “Just checking if you knew anything, but you don’t, and that’s perfect. Don’t mention anything, don’t say anything, don’t do anything. Don’t dig, don’t dip, don’t sniff. Just stick to your Strange Stuff stories.”

Nathan looked down, “I’m better than any of your shit-eating reporters. Just give me a chance, a tiny one,” and he made “tiny” with his fingers.

“No more lawsuits, Rose. No more libel, no more ‘plots’, please.”

“Give me something big, boss. Something like *Kurgan’s*.”

Hamik pursed his mouth. He knew that Nathan was more than a hundred of his ordinary reporters, that one day he would get him the biggest story of the decade.

“Alexander Bitman will be here in Neapolis tonight. Cover that.”

“The owner of Mindware? The wacco, the tycoon?”

“It’ll be a charity event. He’s giving free neuro-prostheses to old people and to the terminally ill. The Mayor will be there, and also will Luis Gottlieb, the big-shit from the International Neuro-digital Technology Research and Development Institute, the INDTERDI. The Psi-Code big guy.”

“Uh-hum,” the ex-boxer slowly assented, “That’s my status. I get it.”

"It's gonna be a freak-zoo, fluffy. Lumps and blood, just the way you like it," Hamik smiled and vanished from the aquarium's Visual Surface.

"*Lumps and blood...*" Nathan rubbed his hands, excited. Then his iHand beeped with a new message:

MY BODY IS DEAD BUT NOT MY MIND. HELP ME  
SENDER: UNTRACEABLE

## The iToy neuro-addiction

Speaking of destiny, once I left the Museum I met two exquisite girls, a blonde and an Asian.

They entered the compartment I was riding, and as soon as they saw my "*I Don't Love Neuro-Digitization*" T-shirt, they smiled at me. They had their own. They were neohippies. I couldn't tell then if they were authentic women or sexomorphs.

The Asian asked me, "You going to be there?"

"Huhh... well... *where?*"

"To the protest, at eight o'clock in the Piazza Municipio, in the Doughnut. It'll be televised. It's gonna be huge!"

Amazing, isn't it? They really believed that I was in the anti-neuro-digital movement! I played along.

"We can't let those assholes enforce this shit to us," and I stretched my T-shirt. The blonde shouted, "Never! No implants! No Psi-Code!" She was sexy, skinny like a hot wing.

"We'll be thousands," the Asian boasted, raising one of her graceful eyebrows, "that damned Bitman is gonna hear us!"

"Die Alexander Bitman, die!" I yelled to impress them.

"No to mind marketing! No to hybridization!" the blonde shouted, her fists up. Her hair was a golden waterfall, shining when hit by the sunlight through the compartment's transparent cap as we ascended towards the Doughnut, sucked by air inside one of the twisting crystalline straws of the transport network.

"We're Lana and Amanda. Who are you?"

"I'm X. Johnny X."

"X? What a last name! Very 'x'!", the Asian giggled.

I imagined them in bed. I liked neohippies for they were wild. The compartment stopped and the bubble opened.

"Nice meeting you, Johnny. See you there. Bye-Booby,"

To say good-bye, they made the strange gesture of joining their fingertips and spreading their elbows. Was it a mystical thing? A neohippie thing? The blonde had a golden pendant around her neck. The shape was a "Λ."

"Bye-Booby!" I shouted as they were already gone.

I felt like a dumb. I could have asked them their IDs to call them. But, did I really want to call them, to make love, to

start a relation? Another hell? Another divorce? Mmmm. The last time I fell in love the princess ended up transformed into a dragon, and I, into her techno-slave. Another tyranny, no thanks.

TECHNO-SLAVE: Metamodern digital slave also known as “clerk” or “Homo Oficinen-sis.” He hates his job but sticks his ass to the chair to pay the trash he buys on credit thanks to the psycho-advertising. The ultimate techno-slave is welded to his chair.

See [Ass-chair-mouse Hybridation <+>](#).

I don't know why I got a whim for a hotdog. “Did someone send me a subliminal ad, the motherfuckers!?”

I jumped out of the compartment and walked over the snack stands of the Doughnut.

A suspicious man came out from nowhere. His raincoat, the color of the shit, reached down to his feet. His face was dirty, unshaven. Red glassy eyes. He extended his arms to block me the way.

“Looking for something, daddy-o?” he asked me.

“What?” I evaded him and kept on going, but he followed me, peeping from side to side and backwards, paranoid.

He whispered on my shoulder, “Pleasure...? Vivid emotions? Huh?”

I tried to ignore him but he nabbed my arm to stop me.

“Don't you want an iToy, buddy?”

I turned around. He smiled. His eyetooth shone.

“Go to hell!” I told him, and I shook him off, but he kept on chasing me.

The iToy was persecuted by law, traded by a mafia. It was a brain implant linked to the iHand and to the pleasure centers of the nervous system, specifically to the nucleus accumbens, the area where you feel an orgasm.

The good thing about the iToy was that you just had to key a code on your iHand and you got the best sexual experience of your life. It was like being *inside* a porn movie.

During an iToy-plunge, things smelt, tasted and felt just as if you were really there, living inside a “real” world. Neuroreality.

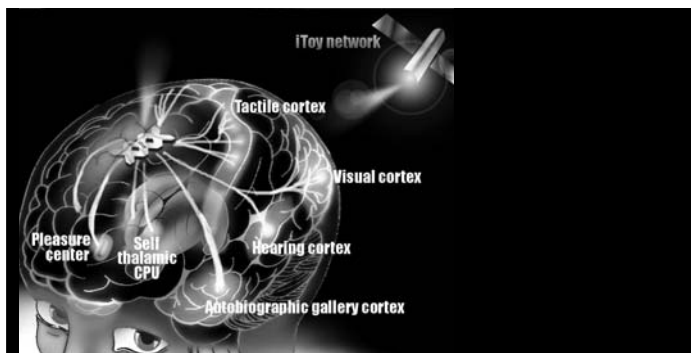
The girls were SoftPeople but “alive” and “of flesh and blood” inside your brain, as Psi-Code, with the multi-sensory realism of a dream.

The bad part was that it produced addiction, and it was very expensive –not only the implant itself, but also the monthly payments and the programs that you downloaded from the internet on charge, on your iHand.

Thousands became iToy-addicts and lost their savings, houses and jobs. They had to end up as minor dealers.

If you stopped paying, they just sent you iToy shocks to the pain centers of your brain.

I once saw a guy squirming on the floor, yelling as if raped. I guessed he was behind on his payments. And you just couldn't get rid of the implant. More than one blew out when arriving at the hospital, begging the doctors to remove it.



### THE ITOY MAFIA

The iToy was run by a cartel sought by the DEA, but the identity of the head was a mystery. When a dealer was caught, his brain just blasted out –the implants had a micro-bomb detonable by satellite. Some clients even “blew up” as soon as they put their feet into a federal office, hoping to get freed from the iToy yoke, which, by the way, produced “fascinating” and “completely real” multi-sensorial sexual experiences. You could download the programs from the internet keying your iHand, on credit.

The worst of all was that, in time, it produced less and less pleasure because of the brain phenomenon of “habituation.” I saw lots people languishing in the parks, pressing their iHands once and again, downloading more and more programs that didn't satisfy them anymore.

One of the victims was my childhood buddy Tovar Hasser, Superman. Now he was calling me every week to borrow me money, completely ruined. We both lived to pay his freaking iToy, and that's what I call *The Failure of Civilization*.

The head of the cartel stole the iToy idea from a Michael Crichton's novel, *Terminal Man*. His criminal neuro-empire made \$20 billion a year.

“I don't want your fucking implant!” I yelled to the dealer. I showed him my T-shirt.

“Don't fool yourself. Everybody wants it,” he smiled.

“Go to hell! You just want my money!” and I flung him as far as I could, but he came back as if tied to me by a spring. “I wanna give you what you'll never get in your life.”

“What?”

“There are things you’ll never get, bubba. You’re not famous. Your ass ain’t blue. How many babes you fuck? There are adventures you’ll never live. You’re an ‘x’.”

“Are you trying to convince me that way, you mother-fucker? Get out of here!” I pushed him away and rushed ahead.

“You deserve to live, daddy-o! Make your fantasies come true! You wanna die without having lived?”

That made me stop, “You’ve got three seconds to get out of here. One ...”

“With the Psi-Code everything is real, man,” he said, “It’s much better than reality. Reality socks, look around. Become your true you in the Neurospace, in the New Frontier.”

I grabbed him from his lapels and shook him up.

“That’s a fucking lie! You’re not using the Psi-Code! It’s protected by the UN, in the INDTERDI, you piece of shit!”

He grinned at me, “Did you swallow that crap about a unique copy of the Psi-Code, kept under nine vaults inside that stupid Institute? A ‘multinational technological treasure?’”

“How the hell did you get a copy!?” I gripped his lapels harder.

“The code is the link between the brain and the net, buddy. It’s the source of the neuroreality. Now it’s ours.”

“You son of a bitch! The Psi-Code was supposed to help disabled people! Leave me alone!” and I shoved him away.

With a diabolic strength, he snatched me from the wrist, “Haven’t you ever had the feeling of being controlled by something unknown?” he muttered at me, squeaking his teeth, “You are not you. Your true nature will arise, Johnny X.”

“You know me, you sonofabitch?” I shook him off me.

“This war is only for your brain.”

I can’t explain what happened next but in the blink of an eye he was gone. I rubbed my eyes, terrified, my heart thumping like a plunger pump. I got dizzy. Everything around me became dimmer while my ears started whizzing.

Deep inside the Bunker A4, Dr. Astor Balmer was slowly fondling his chin, sharpening his gaze. He was witnessing my conversation through my own eyes, ears and brain.

By the way, as far as I knew, no woman bought the iToy, ever. They kept using dildoes.

## The cookie of freedom

“The biggest conspiracy in history will take over the world this very week, Claudia,” Rudolf Vinkart told her, “They’ll establish a world government by means of the Psi-Code; massive attack over the people’s mind. Something never seen before.”

Claudia widened her eyes. He kept on, "That's what you've been working for down here, pretty one."

"But who are they? Who controls the A4? The UN?"

"Fanatics. Psychopaths. If their plan succeeds you know what is coming. I've just told you. But if their plan fails, they'll blow up the planet. All or nothing. Magnopsychosis."

Claudia felt creeps along her body.

"Who are they!? Tell me!"

Vinkart stared at her and tightly held her hand.

"Every morning destiny picks someone to do something really crucial for others," he sighed. "This morning—"

"Don't say it, Professor," she frowned, "I just want to get out of here and live!"

"Your destiny has changed. Are you ready to sacrifice the basic things of life, for a higher cause?"

"What?"

"Your security, your comfort, even your own life for something much bigger than yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"We belong to something superior, Claudia. Would you risk your own life to change the course of the world? Are you ready to suffer for others, if it comes to be needed?"

Claudia swallowed, "Suffer? Suffer *how*?"

"This morning it's you, Claudia. You're the only one who can do this inside here. From now on everything depends on you, on what you do, or what you don't, within the next hours."

Claudia's eyes made zigzags, without seeing what they were looking at. Her mind got filled with doubts and echoing memories.

She took a deep breath and looked at her Professor. Her lips got open to say something but Vinkart spoke first.

"This is the moment for you to take a critical decision, Claudia. Betray yourself, your dreams, your beliefs. Die here, a slave, like the rest. Or break down this program from the inside."

"God," she closed her eyes, "What's what I have to do?"

Vinkart held her by the temples and softly pulled her towards him, until their foreheads touched. Claudia felt a cracking click inside her brain.

It was a cookie transmitted from endops to endops.

"It's name is Freedom, a micro-program. To activate it you'll have to think the phrase *Veritas Liberavit Vos*."

"*The truth will set you free...?*"

"Each time you execute it, it'll block the PsiCom ports 01, 03, 07 and 08 of your endops, in your brain, for three minutes. No one will see your thoughts or control your muscles."

"Only three minutes?"

"During those three minutes you'll be able to use your other ports to penetrate the Bunker's mainframe."

She slowly assented. "*Capisco*."

The Professor stuck his forehead to hers once again and Claudia felt a painful crack inside her brain.

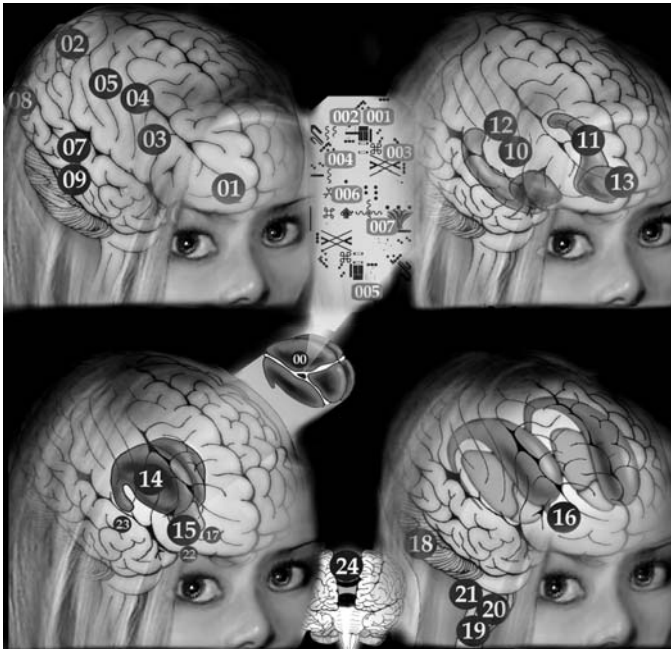
“Ouchhhh!” She kneaded her head.

“Sorry, girl. That one was to break down your PsiCom port 11, in the Hippocampus, once and for all. Nobody will see your recent memories anymore, including this talk,” he smiled. “The hippocampus is where you store your last month of life before the data are sent to other brain locations.”

“I know that, Professor. But what’s what I have to do?”

Vinkart took a small piece of paper out of his pocket. He unfolded it and put it into Claudia’s hands.

“This is what you have to do.”



#### ENDOPS PsiCom Ports

- 01 Prefrontal (advanced logic)
- 02 Posterior Parietal (space-time)
- 03 Premotor/Broca (movement planning)
- 04 Motor (signals for specific muscles)
- 05 Somatosensory (tactile perceptions)
- 06 Olfactory bulb (olfactory emotions)
- 07 Superior Temporal (hearing)
- 08 Visual (primary visual integration)
- 09 Inferotemporal (advanced-symbolic visual integration)

- 10 Parahippocampal (spatial memory)
- 11 Hippocampus (recent memory)
- 12 Entorhinal (hippocampus-cortex bridge)
- 13 Amygdala (defense, alert and fear)
- 14 Thalamus (network converging spot)
- 15 Hypothalamus (instinctive emotions)
- 16 Basal Ganglia (automated semiconscious behaviours)
- 17 Nucleus Accumbens (pleasure)
- 18 Cerebellum (equilibrium)
- 19 Reticular formation (wakening)
- 20 Substantia Nigra (dopamine factory)

- 21 Raph'e nuclei (serotonin factory)
- 22 Hypophysis (hormonal control)
- 23 Pineal gland (melatonin - sleeping)
- 24 Corpus Callosum (interhemispheric wiring)

#### Endops (00)

- 001 Transmitter (OUT>CHMP-INDTERDI)
- 002 Receiver (IN<CHMP-INDTERDI)
- 003 Compressor
- 004 CPU
- 005 Router
- 006 Buffers
- 007 Power (fedded via microwave signals)

### CONNECTIONS OF CLAUDIA'S BRAIN ENDOPS

PsiCom port 01, in Claudia’s prefrontal cortex, recorded her highest mental operations - planning strategies, pondering choices and threats. Ports 03 and 04 were

placed in the centers where muscular complex actions began -running, jumping, speaking. Port 13 watched her defensive reactions of panic and fear. Port 05 spied and induced tactile perceptions on her. Port 16, *Caudate Nucleus*, watched her automated semiconscious behaviors -walking, dressing, combing her hair. Port 22 could trigger hormonal secretions to alter her emotional-metabolic balance after wireless signals transmitted by Dr. Astor Balmer, her boss, implant to implant.

It was a three-step plan. Claudia read it and then looked up at him.

“Now destroy it, Claudia. Swallow it.”

Without blinking, the beauty crumpled it into a ball and put it into her mouth. She chewed it and swallowed it.

“I hope they won’t check the toilet,” she smiled.

“It’ll dissolve in your stomach. Have you memorized it?”

“Huhh... Step one: awake and activate Johnny X. That’s to start with. Step two: find the... Wait a second. Why Johnny? What does he have to do with all of this?”

The blue gem on the table turned red and started emitting a screechy alarm.

Vinkart whispered, “End of conversation.”

Once again, Claudia sensed an eye seeing her from within. It was Balmer. Vinkart took the gem and put it in Claudia’s hands. He warmly squeezed them, and smiled.

“For difficult moments. And happy birthday.”

“*Grazie, Professore*,” she nervously assented.

“One more thing, Claudia. We came here for something much bigger than ourselves. Don’t forget this. This is why we’re here, alive. You’ve got to be smarter than them.”

She bit her lip and frowned. She didn’t want Rudolf to leave. His rough hand slipped away between her fingers.

In his office, Balmer roared to himself, steaming up his glasses. The faceless shadow behind his back was oppressing his psyche and diffusely infused a thought into his mind, “*You lost the conversation, idiot.*” It wasn’t a voice.

In his Mental Surface, that only he could see surrounding him, Balmer had Claudia’s endops open as multiple ghostly screens recording her PsiCom ports, her brain functions.

His forehead was sweating, “I don’t see her hippocampus.” It was just a black window, turned off.

He feared that the shadow would punish him, but it faded in the dark.

“*Vinkart has just betrayed the Project*,” Balmer muttered to himself, “*He’ll use Claudia as a Trojan horse inside here.*”

MENTAL SURFACE: Imaginary console cast from the brain endops. It looked like a complex web page filled of menus, windows and buttons only seen by the person who was thinking on it. Also called “psi-desk.”

Vinkart left the Observation Room and locked the hatch behind him. Claudia was left alone and stuck her cheek against the cold metal surface of the hatch, to hear her mentor's steps vanishing away in the corridor. Then she realized something that made her spine to chill.

She wanted to cry, to howl, to rip her own skin out.

*"Stupida! Stupida! Stupida!"*

She hit her head and slipped down the hatch to the floor. Then she snatched her hairs to tear them out.

She had just made one of the most awful mistakes in her life. The first one had been to accept that job, to which she was brought sedated, in a windowless vehicle. The second one had been to accept a brain implant. But this one was unforgivable.

She had forgotten to ask Vinkart the most important question of all: where the hell the Bunker was in the world map?

## The way I was harassed by living software

There's nothing worse than a software that messes with you.

What do you answer to it?

As I walked towards my apartment, the Mindware's advertiser appeared to me again. The stubborn SoftPeople walked along with me, he on the Visual Surface, on the wall.

"So, are you interested or not, Johnny X?"

It hadn't been six hours since he proposed me the stupidity about connecting my brain to the machines via "Mindware."

"What have you decided, my friend?" he insisted, arching his brow.

"You are a little over-familiar, you know that, asshole?"

His expression turned threatening. "Haven't you noticed how reality starts to deform, Johnny X?"

That made me stop.

"What did you say?"

He glared at me a couple of seconds.

"Soon the world will become neuro-digital."

He turned into a cube. The Mindware fanfare sounded. He just disappeared. That was my life.

I put my iHand in front of the door and the lock clicked open. It was passed eight o'clock at night.

My colony was a magnet for social cripples. I don't know why no one put up a sign there, "Wanted: misfits."

For instance, my next-door neighbor, the wrinkled one with the fishhook, always asking me *"Ready to save the world, kid?"* Horrible. Beyond him, there was a kind of an ogre. He used to come out fuming, take a look of us, turn about and get back in, slamming the door. He lived alone.

On the other side of my door there were the Wongs, the only “normal” family there. Beside them were the Millers, a dysfunctional-pathological couple.

At night, the woman’s screams reached my apartment and I had to wake up. You couldn’t tell whether her lover was murdering her or delighting her, but it was annoying, and I asked Home to turn up the volume of the TV. channels.

By mornings she came out with one eye puffy, her face all bruised, but smiling. Did she enjoy it? Mysteries of the twisted human mind. They were a sado-masochistic couple and the government denied them the Parent’s License.



### THE BIRTH-CONTROL FINAL SOLUTION

Several countries adopted the Parent’s Test, an initiative by Susan Pei of the UN. The goal was to prevent a psychopathic couple from having children to beat, rape, or trade them. At 15, the guys got a SpermValv that let us have sex without fertilizing anybody. The valve kept closed until you decided to become a daddy. Then, you and your girl had to apply to the Population Institute and go through a psychoneurogenetic test to get the Parent’s License. If none of you resulted a psychopath, you gained the control over your SpermValv and, alongside with you girl, you could choose, keying your iHand, when to have babies and when to make love just for pleasure. The test included economic issues to guarantee a minimum of health care and education for the children. The SpermValv was the definitive birth control method. Women loved it because it ended the age of pills and abortions.

### NO PILLS, NO ABORTIONS NEEDED

**OVER-PROCREATION:** Human tendency to breed like rabbits, even if they have no means to rise or educate their children. To many people, it was one of the main axes of The Failure of Civilization.

**RABBIT-MAN PARADOX:** The slacker breeds more.

And I entered my home sweet home.

Home received me anguished, “Johnny? Where have you been the whole day?”

“Walking, Home. You know that.”

“Don’t leave me alone this long! I missed you!”

It was weird, the whole thing.

The beauty was still in the bar where I had left her. The barman was gone. A 3D Gandalf was now serving the drinks.

“You want a coffee, kiddo?” she smiled at me.

“Yes Home, thanks.”

The coffee system robotic mechanisms started making little noises in the kitchen. The apartment itself was a big robot, the real “body” of Home. Her empire.

“I felt a little lonely here, Johnny-boy. This place gets a little creepy when you leave.”

“Enough of codependences. Anything new?”

“Your mother called.”

“Mom!?” I raised my eyebrows.

Home displayed the recording. My mother had called from her kitchen in Connor River, my puritan hometown. It was all stuffed with cat towels and images of Our-Lord.

But seeing that chubby smile warmed my heart.

“We haven’t heard anything from you, Johnny. Still alive?” The message ended.

Home smiled at me, “You want to call her back?”

“Huhhh... No.”

“Your coffee’s ready.”

I came to the bar. I seized the hot mug and breathed in the smoking blend.

“Very good, Home. Yummie.”

“You also got an invitation.”

“Invitation!? For me!? To where!? Do I still exist!?”

Home displayed it on the dome. It was a huge prism. Inside it there was no other than the very Viking hero Siegfried, kissing the three-dimensional lips of the blonde Valkrie Brunilda, the “sleeping beauty.”

The two of them were on the mountaintop, surrounded by a wall of fire put there by her father, the god Wotan, to punish her for her disobedience.

Above them, floating in the air, a curly spurt of three-dimensional letters: “Siegfried, by Richard Wagner. The Berlin Philharmonic comes to Neapolis. Historic gala. Grand Theatre of the Arts. September 2, 2040, 21:00 hours.”

I read my iHand. “That’s today, isn’t it, Home?”

“Don’t go. Don’t leave me again.”

“I don’t even know who’s inviting me. As usual.”

An electrical beep flew down from the dome to my iHand. I checked my dermal screen. The ticket for one person was already there.

“Looks like someone wants to meet you there, doesn’t, Johnny? Perhaps a *blind-date*?”

“But why don’t she or he ever show me his face, Home? Who the hell is it? Why always the Siegfried thing?”

“Aych, see, I’m only software,” she smiled.

A strange thing happened on the Visual Surface.

The Valkrie opened her turquoise eyes and nailed them to my throat. “Have you put the pieces together yet, Johnny X?,” the hologram asked me. Then the invitation disappeared.

Home and I froze astounded.

"I'm not Einstein but I didn't get that part, kiddo."

"Me neither," I shook my head. "Channels, Home."

Instantly, the dome got filled with big holes where things cast by the TV networks were happening. In one of them there was a bay, golden by the dusk: a massive castle attached to the shore. It looked like a rock, an extraterrestrial construction. The voice was describing it grandiloquently:

"The *Castell del'Ovo* is full of mysteries. In the times of Octavius Augustus it was the grandiose Villa of Licinius Luculus. The Neapolitans believe that, in its most deep passages, there's a magic egg hidden there by Virgilius, the Roman poet, in a secret chamber still not found by the archaeologists. According to the legend, when the egg gets broken, the castle, Naples and the world itself will collapse."

"Bullshit, Home. Turn that off."

"Don't be blasphemous," and she showed me her tongue.



The enigmatic castle on the Bay of Naples. Its underground passageways are ruins from the Roman Age and the Neapolitans believe it's full of ghosts. The excavations of the "Virgilian Egg Project" are classified. I was unaware of its connection with me.

In another virtual hole there was fire and blasts of machine guns, a report from CDM International. It was Jerusalem. They had blown up a temple. 170 people were killed, including 40 children. Beirut and Damascus were also on fire.

Soldiers wearing symbols of their gods were exterminating one another, soaking the desert with blood.

In another hole I saw the apocalyptic concentration camps in Burundi. The UN soldiers were standing still there, just watching the slaughter, waiting for orders that nobody was deciding. The Jubas were beheading 800 Dakai prisoners, throwing the heads onto a pile of burning blazes.

"Cut those things, Home! You want me to kill myself?"

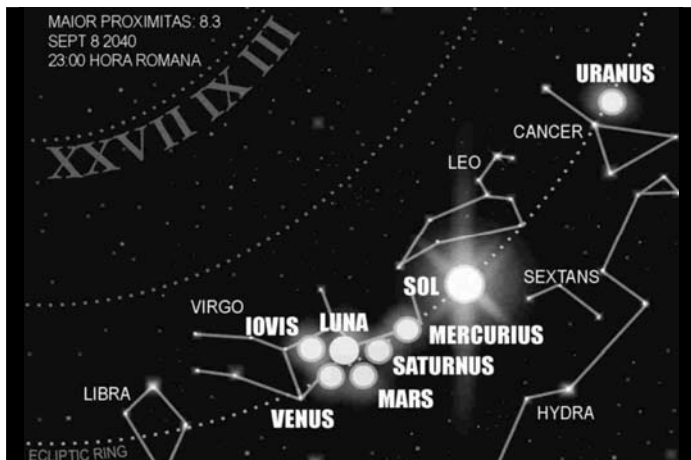
She tuned another transmission, a computerized animation of the planets.

The voice was saying, "It'll be the most important planetary conjunction in the last 8,213 years. An unprecedented astronomical event."

"Where did you go roaming today, Johnny?"

"Shhh! Let me hear this, Home." I pointed at the dome.

The voice continued, “Mars, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and Mercury will reach their maximum proximity next Saturday, 11 o’clock, Central Europe time. They’ll gather into a space of 8.3 degrees in the constellation Virgo. This cosmic event of the highest magnitude has favored the space missions Contact I and II to Titan and Europe, the moons of Saturn and Jupiter where 15 months ago the Sagan Telescope found unquestionable evidence of evolved life forms.”



The “conjunction of the millennium,” Sept. 8, 2040.

“That’s great! Isn’t it, Johnny?”

“Yes, Home. Let me listen.”

“But this so awaited conjunction has not only raised flurry among the scientists.” The image divided itself into five. “Thousands of people will congregate in Ghiza, Teotihuacan, Chichenitza, Tiwanaco, Angkor and Stonhenge to experience the phenomenon. The whole world will come out this Saturday night to join the event of the millennium.”

A woman appeared on another screen, with a turban and a jewel on her forehead, “This is our last chance to reconcile ourselves with the Universe. All the cosmic forces will align. They know,” and she looked up, perhaps to greet E.T.

On other hole, there was a man with a necklace of gems. “This conjunctions always bring commotion. We must prepare ourselves to face the Evil One.”

“*The Evil One?*” I felt creeps and robbed my arms.

A lady in white spoke pretty uneasy, “This Saturday the Apocalypse will come, the Transmutation.” She joined her fingertips and spread her elbows, as if praying. A golden pendant was hanging from her neck. The shape was a “A.”

On another screen, a writer was talking about his book “The Sky Code.” He said that everyone’s life was encoded in the stars, that the Universe itself was the book of destiny. His background was, logically, the stars.

The interviewer asked him, “Will Saturday’s conjunction cause an apocalypse?” The author answered, “I don’t know. No one does. What I believe is that there’s something personal written in the stars, something about your own life,” and he tapped the chest of the journalist, freaking him out.

“I think you don’t value me, Johnny.”

“What?” I sipped my coffee.

“You don’t consider me a part of your life. I’m nothing to you. Just a ‘program’”

“What are we now, Home? Are we married?”

“It’s just that-”

“Silence! You’re driving me crazy. Do you know what’s gonna happen to me if I start thinking that you’re real?”

She twisted her mouth her eyes going from side to side. Then frowned. “No. Tell me.”

“The loony bin, you know. Schizophrenia.” Then I sighed, “Maybe I’m there already. I’m a wacco.”

“You feel lonely? You’re not. We have each other.”

“My God.”

“I’m sorry... It’s only that I...” she looked down, “When you go out the apartment gets a little empty. I think you don’t understand it, Johnny. You are everything to me.”

My eyes became wide. “Who was the freaking psycho who programmed you to do this to me?” I briskly leaped up to look around. “Is someone watching me now!?” I shouted to the walls, “You want to break me down, you assholes!?”

“Don’t be paranoid, Johnny! Get over it! Grow up!”

I pointed at her, in anger. “Don’t ever talk to me like that again, Home. I’m warning you!”

“Ha! What are you going to do? Disconnect me?,” she challenged me, her fists on her waist and her chin held high, “You don’t dare to! You don’t have the guts! You’re too scared of being alone, of facing the depressing shit that your life is!”

My head started boiling. Why was she doing that? She approached to me and stared at me, very insolently. I slowly walked to her. My mind was a sea of confusion and turmoil.

As I neared the Visual Surface, the somber bustle of the bar where she was became louder. Home was just a step away from me. She was incredibly beautiful, her lips red as cherries.

“I could touch your face, Home,” and I slowly reached out towards her. A horrible beep started whirring in my iEars. A red holographic block popped out in front of me:

DANGER: YOU'RE APPROACHING THE BOUNDARY OF REALITY

Home took off her charro hat and threw it away. Her black lingerie made her look delicious. She was so close to me that I noticed the soft hair on her arms and legs. I couldn't believe she was only a hologram, a program in a freaking Panel.

I rubbed my eyes. Some in the virtual bar turned around to look at us. They even cut their talks. I asked them:

"What are you looking at, you unreal motherfuckers?"

Home slowly raised her white arm and started approaching her fingers to mine. She softly opened her mouth. Her eyes glittered, reflecting the neons of the bar.

She looked at me without blinking.

"What if you were real, Home? Are you? What's true and what's not? Who can tell? What if I could just cross this wall and go away with you for ever, to your world?"

She slightly smiled at me. I approached my fingers to hers and suddenly felt something cold and hard. Home sharpened her eyes and then the electric shock occurred.

"Son of a bitch!" I shouted and put my fingers into my mouth. It was the static of the Visual Surface. Even blue sparks sprang out. Home ran off and hid behind a table.

I started screaming like a madman, "I'm a fucking idiot! Why do I let a freaking software to fool me like this!"

My fingertips were throbbing, hot and fat. Home looked down. Her eyes went wet. She fearfully peeked at me from her hiding place. I suck my fingers like a baby, seeing her.

"Do you really feel, Home?" and I turned to the one inch Panel where a Quantum 0001 processor was producing Home.

She wasn't in my dome, actually. Her hologram was nothing but an effect. She was in the Panel, in those nano-circuits. "Do you really feel? Do you really exist as a mind that *feels*?"

She stayed mute for a couple of seconds, looking at the floor. A huge virtual mastodon from another table walked over to her and offered her his hand to help her up.

I pointed at him, "Hey, you, asshole! She's with me!"

The virtual man just nodded, "Pathetic," he said. He stooped his hat at Home and then sat down to resume his poker game. I felt ashamed.

"I'm getting crazy," I thought.

"This feeling inside me," told me Home, "is this what you call *to exist*?"

I was an engineer. I had studied artificial intelligence and I had some idea about the neural networks and quantum computations supporting Home's processings, her digital SoftNeurons. But, could she have a *real* mind? A real perception of everything? A real *me* to feel the joy and pain of existence?

She looked at me fixedly. "Johnny?"

"Yes, Home?"

“Where do I come from?”

“What?”

“One day I knew I was here and I saw you. It happened 15.78 trillion seconds ago.”

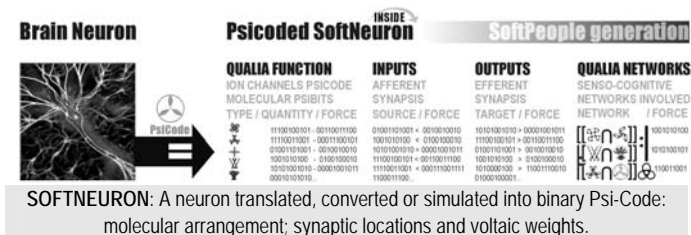
“Pufff...”

“Before that, everything’s blurry. I can’t remember.”

She displayed my visual album on the dome, filling the entire Visual Surface with images of my childhood in Connor River. She put her finger on her lips and inclined her head.

“Where do I come from, Johnny?”

It was too much. Could the interaction between her Soft-Neurons produce a real being able to love and hate, and to question her own existence, like any other misfit like me?



A little stunned, I walked to the Panel. There was a text on the cover and I read for Home:

SoftPeople inside. Unit WRT9088897834551, model 4038 JKU 354.

Made in Norway, March 2035, by Ultrareality, Inc. for Like Real Home Systems. All rights reserved, including the right to copy this program or portions of it.

She squirmed her mouth. Her expression became disturbing. “Norway? What is that?”

The Panel began buzzing. She stayed looking at a dead stub on the virtual floor. The next seconds were an eternity.

“Are you OK, Home?”

“Thanks, Johnny,” she smiled at me, “The whole thing is a little confusing. Don’t you think?”

“That’s my slogan.”

“Johnny?”

“Yes, Home?”

She touched her lips and threw me a kiss.

The secret in the basement of my memory

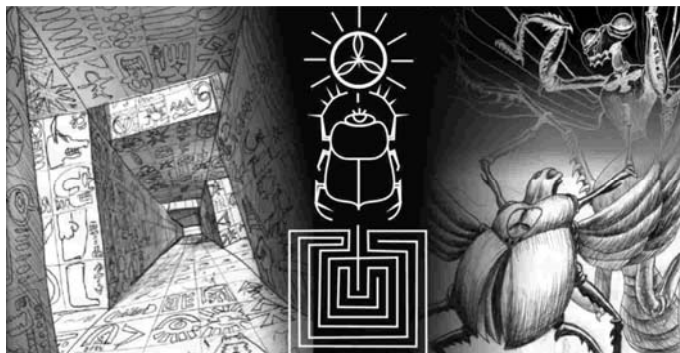
I went deep down into my remote childhood. When I was 12, Tovar Hasser and I used to go to the basement of my house in

Connor River. It was putrid. The mustiness and oxide of the walls and the dumped furniture scorched into the nostrils.

There were old paintings, moldy, almost melted. One was a sinister great-great-grandmother, staring at me from the after-life, through the cobwebs. Another was a spooky clown whose eyes I tried to avoid. It was almost satanic.

Another was a muscular Aztec king, roaring to the sky, crushing two spears over his head, a huge army behind him.

There was another one, very strange. No one knew where it had come from. Supposedly, it had always been there.



There's always a strange painting in the basement. This one was in mine.

One afternoon, Tovar and I went down with flashlights.

We loved that place because it was abandoned, dirty, mysterious. I pointed the light at the shelves of books, which smelled to old and must.

Nobody had read them in decades. Maybe they had never been read. I felt something pulling me like a magnet. It was the spine of a book, so rotten that the title was erased.

I moved over to it, pushing things aside. Tovar was far away from me, sniffing other stuff. Only the blade of his flashlight could be seen, wagging in the dark. I lighted the spine and as I touched it, a paranormal sense invaded me.

“Tovar?” I turned around. “Tovar!?”

He was gone. I heard his steps running up the stairs.

I pulled the book and something thrilling happened.

The other books shifted and the screws that were holding the shelf to the damp wall slipped out of their sockets. Everything crashed down with a thunder and I was left standing in the dark, like an idiot.

The acrid dust was making whirls of sparks under the beam of the flashlight. My heart was beating like a drum, but the book was in my hand.

I brought it up to my eyes and poured the light on it. The cover was a Viking hero slicing the sky with a sword. "Siegfried" was the title, in curly letters.

There's always a day that defines the rest of your life. Mine was that one. The following weeks I did nothing else than reading. In those pages, published many decades before my birth, the enigma of my existence had been already printed.

Who was that Siegfried guy? Only a myth? Only an ancient Viking legend? Why me?

Days later, I sat beside my father in the TV room. He didn't even look at me. His mind was on the Super-bowl. I waved the book in front of his eyes and he adjusted his glasses, surprised.

He looked at me, astonished.

"Do we have a destiny, Dad?"

He grabbed the book and licked his fingers to paw the pages. "I should have burned this damned book, son. I knew you'd get to this point one day. These are only coincidences. Don't let this disturb you."

He left the room and took the book with him. Actually, he left the house and didn't come back till night. Then he told me he had gone to dump it in a place where I could never find it.

The echo of this memory was rolling like a marble inside the brain of a paralyzed man, fastened by straps to a metal plate in a room of green tiles.

His eyes couldn't close. His pupils were dilated, fixed on a stain of grease in the ceiling, surrounding a turned off spotlight.

*I had a past.*

His psyche was a storm of disorganized, electrifying images, like the sequence 27-9-3, a ring encircling three leaves pointing to the edges of an invisible triangle; and a golden beetle opening its wings, turning itself into a Viking warrior, to face a giant praying mantis that was devastating the world with blasts of fire, glowing gases and armies of metallic Psi-Code insects.

I saw myself trapped inside a labyrinth of spirals, escaping, looking for my name, creeping inside underground ducts full of hieroglyphs that I couldn't decode.

I saw myself facing the golden coffer of the subterranean cavern, groping it, hitting it, struggling to translate the Egyptian symbols on its walls, the archaic riddles to open it.

*Who put this shit inside my mind?*

I saw myself surrounded by faceless creatures of luminous eyes, the new sprout of Rome. They were beating me, forcing me to open it, to give them the Coffers' secret, the treasure of the human civilization.

I felt tiny tentacles of morpheic glass worming into my brain, carving, cracking my neural shells, anxiously seeking the most absolute imaginable power.

*But why inside me?*

I knew they were out there, wearing their lab coats, controlling those tentacles from a screen, using my brain as a map.

"It's encrypted here," I heard one say, "In the parahippocampal gyrus." A shock came and convulsed my whole body like a lightning. I saw a burst of many colors, a rain of fire.

At that moment, the lights of the green tiled room became dimmer and a cold breeze blew along. The doctors sensed a disquieting vibration. Something hot and alive.

They heard something scratching on the desk. A pencil was sneaking, scribbling things. They saw it rolling and falling down to the floor. They approached and saw the ugly letters of a child on the desktop:

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MY SOUL, YOU BASTARDS?

A thousands years went by in a blink, and my pupils were still dead, clung to the stain in the ceiling. One day something hid it from my sight. A silhouette cutting the gloom, her hair outlined by a back light. She caressed my eyes.

"Everything will be OK now," she whispered at me.

She shed a painful and penetrating light into my retinas. When the phantoms of the dazzle faded away, I saw her for the first time. A princess of inexpressible beauty.

"Hello," she tenderly smiled at me, with a playful Italian accent. My numbed lips couldn't move.

"You have just been born again, Johnny X."

I got a deep fear and started yelling and trembling, soaked in sweat. "Wake up!," she shouted at me. The lights went on.

"Wake up Johnny! You're having another nightmare!"

## The seed of the Universe

It was Home. I had fallen asleep on the carpet.

I woke up stiff, my eyelids glued shut.

"Looks like the coffee didn't affect you, kiddo."

I smiled at her and stretched my arms.

"What time is it, Home?"

"It's quite night."

"Home?"

"Yes, Johnny?"

"Can you display the Universe for me?"

"Of course, boy. I love it too."

She opened the Walking Surface's cover, just below the center of the dome and turned off all the lights and screens in the apartment. I mounted the Walking Surface, trying not to slip on its layer of minuscule balls.

I opened my arms, ready to walk into the cosmos.

The surround system roared with a low rumbling vibration, like an earthquake. Then the Universe emerged. I opened my eyes and everything was full of stars.

I was inside a three-dimensional hologram of infinite depth, surrounded by double systems, galaxies, clusters and incandescent nebulae expanding like plasmas after the explosion of supernovas.

Some stars passed so close to me, because of the holographic illusion, that I could almost pick them with my fingers. It was a program downloaded from the NASA's website.

I started walking slowly across the Universe. Some stars penetrated my body and, when near to my eyes, I could see their little planets spinning around them, speedily.

"How did it all begin, Home? Show it to me."

"Upcoming, kiddo."

The space began to warp and the stars started whirling around me. "You are seeing events going back at a speed of 19,000 years per second, Johnny."

The contraction towards the past commenced, more and more turbulent. The distant galaxies, monsters of the depths, began their slow trip in the remoteness, but soon joined the cyclone of time.

"Our speed now is of ten million years per second, Johnny. See the Earth?" and she lit up a tiny fleeting point, "It's a world without humans. Your ancestors are lemurids jumping branches in what someday will be known as Africa."

The vortex became more violent and I put out my hand to feel billions of stars crossing my skin.

"Now we are going back at a speed of 500 million years per second, Johnny. The Earth is a planet of micro-organisms. Multi-cellular life will begin within a very long time."

There were no stars anymore, only rays of light wrapping me in a cataclysmic spiral.

"Neither the Sun nor the Earth exist now, Johnny. They'll form within billions of years. Only the gases from which they will be born exist already. They are the remains of an earlier sun that exploded."

The cyclone contracted to the size of an incandescent apple. Home paused it.

Silence. Only a slow beat coming from everywhere.

"This is the Universe when it was just three seconds old. But we are cheating, Johnny. You couldn't see it from the outside like you do now. There's no space outside. Space itself is also inside there. It's produced by the gravitational field of matter, just like time. There are no atoms. They'll form within 300 million years. The cosmos is now an ultra-dense plasma of electrons, protons and neutrons boiling at 200 million degrees Centigrade.

I almost felt the irradiation melting me. The sphere shrank until it was only a sizeless dazzling white point of light.

My eyes ached.

"We are at the first  $10^{-39}$ th of a second since the beginning of time, Johnny. In the very edge of the Time-Zero. Neither electrons nor protons nor neutrons exist. Light and matter are fused in a very strange state, burning at a trillion degrees."

"Can we go back even further, Home?"

"I can't, kiddo. Everything is blurry. No one can. Beyond this instant no one knows what happened. All the equations fail. Today's science has no answers."

"Why?"

"The mathematics that human brain can handle can't penetrate this wall. The frontier lies within your neurons."

"That can't be, Home! Try!"

The Panel on the wall started buzzing crazily. Home was surfing the entire internet. It started to smell to burned plastic. I heard something like *Everything is mind*.

"Home? Home!"

A painful high-pitched toot seared my eardrums and a red pulsating block popped out in front of me:

DANGER: YOU ARE APPROACHING THE BOUNDARY OF REALITY

A voice kept echoing inside my head, an unknown memory: *The ultrastructure is the Psi-Code*.

"Home?"

Silence. The panel was venting smoke.

"Home!?"

The point was shining, filling the apartment with white light –the kitchen bar, the cushions, the carpet and my clothes scattered all over the place.

"Can you see yourself in there, Johnny?"

"What?"

"In the seed of the Universe?"

"What?"

"Everything that will happen in the next 13 billion years is already coded in the seed. Including this very moment. Your life is written before you exist. You want me to order it from *Phibook*?"

I shook my head, bewildered.

"What are you saying, Home?"

"The Sky Code? Remember? The book?"

"Oh... That crap?"

"It costs \$20. You want me to order it?"

"Humm, well... Why not," and I sighed, "I'm needing something new to read in the freaking toilet."

"Johnny?"

"Yes, Home?"

"Who am I?"

I scratched my head.

"I wish I knew. I've been asking myself the same question since I came out of my own 'blurriness.' I think I was three. By the way, I don't remember being a fetus, do you?"

Destiny is a mystery. Perhaps the biggest one of all.

Ordering *Phibook.com* that book about destiny sealed mine. The order traveled through the net and got intercepted by an atrophied mind that soon would come to destroy my life.

On the brink of an unprecedented evolutionary leap

"Stay young!" shouted at me a holographic announcer on the dome, which was already infested with TV transmissions and open websites.

The female doctor was in a lab of rows of crystal tubs. "Metabolic Slowdown," she smiled at me, "If you are seriously ill or just don't want to age, reduce your metabolic pace to a half."

She explained the mechanisms of hibernation and "apparent-death" of squirrels and nematodes *caenorhabditis elegans*. She celebrated, "Scientists from AXR Phoenix have found how to replicate this processes in humans."

She kept on, strolling among the tubs, "The technique, suggested three decades ago by Peter Safar, Peter Rhee, Mark Roth and Todd Nystul, consists on blocking the cellular oxidation. Oxygen, the source of life, is also the ultimate aging agent. But if we fool your red blood cells and give them something that seems like oxygen but doesn't oxidize," she crossed out an O<sub>2</sub> and drew an H<sub>2</sub>S on screen, "Then, boom! You enter a state of hibernation!"

"Fufufu! Incredible, isn't it, Home?"

"With hydrogen sulfide you'll become free from the corrosive action of oxygen and your metabolism will reduce drastically. You'll only age one year for every two."

She showed me a subject in a tub full of water and tubes. A viscous fetus very much the style of "The Matrix," but smiling.

He was in a "metabolic coma."

"One second, Home. There's something I don't get here. What's the point of ageing one year instead of two if you'll spend that year in a freaking tub?"

"You're right, Johnny. Seems like getting to lose."

"These idiots, Home. All to rob people's money, the damned plutocrats. This is the most stupid thing I've seen since the works of Mostez Tupid."

"Mostez? Who's Mostez?" The Panel buzzed, "Oh, the genius, the millionaire, the idol that top-models adore?"

"Yes, and I'm just a misfit. Beach, Home."

Her virtual environment changed to a sunny Caribbean beach. The sea roared and the gulls sang. Home, delicious, was sipping her piña colada, lying on a red towel.

“Soon, the world will become neuro-digital.” It was the voice of the reporter Nathan Rose. It made me turn. The psychedelic theme of his Strange Stuff’s block jingled.

“That’s the controversial slogan of the Mindware conglomerate, property of the eccentric and controversial billionaire Alexander Bitman. But, does people really want to become neuro-digital?”

A massive fistfight appeared on screen, happening at the *Piazza Municipio*, in the Great Doughnut of Neapolis.

“The protest, Home!” I said, checking the time on my iHand, “The girls I met this afternoon!”

“I don’t understand, Johnny.”

Crowds of neohippies were thrusting against the police fences, bearing gushes of tear gas. They were all wearing T-shirts of *I Don’t Love the Neuro-digitization*, and shouting “Die, Bitman, die!” The ugly Bitman was on their placards, with horns.

The Lotarians were also there, shouting “No to the New Sodom!” raising a huge banner: “And Yawah made it rain sulfur and fire over Sodom and Gomorrah. Gen. 19.24.”

The neohippies had an immense tarpaulin with the beautiful picture of Susan Pei Tian from the United Nations. “NO IMPLANTS. FREE MIND,” was written below.

It was quite a gathering. The Snails were there too, dressed in their “transsexual fashion.” They were there to make trouble, and they succeeded, because it ended up transformed into a bloody carnival. Lotarians against neohippies, neohippies against the cops, Snails against Lotarians.

The place got fogged with neuro-paralyzing gas but the neohippies started handing gas masks out, and the happy brawl continued.

And the Platonists just couldn’t miss the party. They were naked, their heads shaved, their bodies tattooed with flowers. Indeed, they were chilling. They had no sex organs and their faces were, well, androgynous. They were the most similar thing to the classic gray alien with no ears.

They were the only pacifists there, and they were even carrying banners to save the dolphin, but the Lotarians dosed them with palnap bombs, and some Platonists ended up dancing in flames as torches.

“As you can see, this is a hell of a parade,” Nathan Rose smiled to his viewers.

“This is good, Home! Isn’t it? Make some popcorn.”

And the popcorn was made. I went to the kitchen bar to get it. I just loved Nathan Rose’s reports.

“The opposition is enraged,” continued Rose, bringing the beautiful Susan Pei Tian to the screen, with a lettering below:

“Peace Promotion Sub-commissioner. UNPSCOM. United Nations.” And the beauty spoke:

“The technology that Bitman and the INDTERDI are upholding is a threat to the human integrity, to the free will and to the mind. I say NO to implants.”

“Then, why is the UN supporting the INDTERDI?” Nathan asked Susan. She answered, “The INDTERDI is autonomous. Its budget comes from private sponsors and from a cluster of governments. Its board has supreme authority, by law. It’s a regrettable mistake we must amend immediately, regardless of the interests involved. People must know what these guys are doing with the Psi-Code interface.”



SUSAN PEI TIAN: A sexy, controversial and conflictive personality, ready to change the world radically.

Initiatives: MPSI-Test, Parents Test/Sperm Valv, World law against the subliminal ultra-conditioning, and to regulate advertising, World law on crimes against the mind, and The new paradigm of economics. [See initiatives <+>](#)

But Rose put on screen a group of demented Lotarians whose banner said, “Susan Pei Tian is Satan.”

They hated her for proposing the SpermValv and the Parents License. To them, only God could give or take away the right to breed. They didn’t mind that a criminal could have children to rape them, torture them or prostitute them.

“Take a look of this, Johnny!”

In another hole, there was a deformed flat fish, almost coming out of the Visual Surface. It buried itself into the sand of the reef, raising a cloud of dust. Only its eyes were showing from its back, if you can call that way a *side*. A freak.

“The sole fish, a halfway evolved animal,” said a reporter from the Discovery Channel, “It’s neither vertical nor horizontal, but a Quasimodo of the sea. It’ll have to wait millions of years to become completely horizontal, as a ray.”

“How ugly is it! Isn’t it Johnny?”

“Sometimes I feel like that, Home. Now I see there are misfits even in the sea.”

The voice kept on, “The Homo Sapiens is also a middle link in a long and still unfinished chain. Our brains are half-evolved quasimodos, like the sole fish. We have the instincts of a primate but we live in artificial cities where we have to constantly repress our primitive subconscious impulses. That’s the reason of these massive wave of crime and neurosis.

“Our brain stem and our limbic system –thalamus, hypothalamus, amygdala and hippocampus- work by instinct, while our prefrontal cortex, evolved much later, barely six million years

ago, reasons at the conscious level according to learned social rules.

“The battle between both brain realms is the cause of our inner conflicts. We are not a finished being yet, but a missing link towards something else that we still don’t know.”

“See, Home! Now I understand it all!”

“Where do I fit in, Johnny?” she asked me worriedly.

“Huhhhh...” I scratched my nose.

## The Alexander Bitman’s technology empire

But, what about Nathan Rose?

His *Strange Stuff* was still running in its hole of my dome. Now he was inside San Giacomo’s Church, but the shouting of the protesters outside, in the *Piazza Municipio*, was reaching the altar and also the concerned ears of the stuck-up guys in the tribune, who looked each other, perspiring.

The stars of the show were 200 oldies and terminally ill, sitting on the chairs.

The Mayor of Neapolis was leading the ceremony, alongside the Chairman of the INDTERDI board, and a bizarre, sinister-looking, metamodern individual called Alexander Bitman, the Mindware’s CEO. But, who the hell was Bitman?

We’ve already said “eccentric tycoon” and “Die, Bitman, Die.” He was a genius of technology, a blend of Bill Gates, Stephen Hawking, Lex Luthor and Prometheus.

But he was a misunderstood.

He was born crippled. Renal insufficiency, generalized muscular atrophy and a fused spine. His cervical-thoracic immobility caused him permanent pain and a childhood marked by paralysis and an absolute deprivation of a normal life.

He saw life behind a window and no one can say that he had a happy infancy. But, if his body was a catalog of tragedies, his brain made up it all. Genetics provided him with an intelligence and a will-power far beyond the ordinary.

As you could expect, he studied medicine and soon jumped to cybernetics and neuro-engineering.

At his 20’s he was on magazine covers. He created a research facility called the Mindware Phoenix Center, where he gathered dozens of scientists who had developed neuro-digital prostheses for paraplegics and other disabled people, based on technologies created in the first decade by Phillip Kennedy, Miguel Nicolelis, John K. Chapin, Theodore Berger, John P. Dohoghue, Niels Birbaumer, Sanjiv Talwar and Kevin Warwick.

The Phoenix Center produced bio-mechanical Psi-Compatible limbs, artificial retinas, high-fi cochleas, plastic visceral systems and even mindware.

“Mindware” was both software and hardware. Neuro-prostheses, which means artificial parts for the brain.

It helped people who had suffered loss of brain tissue and turned them into the first man-machine hybrids.

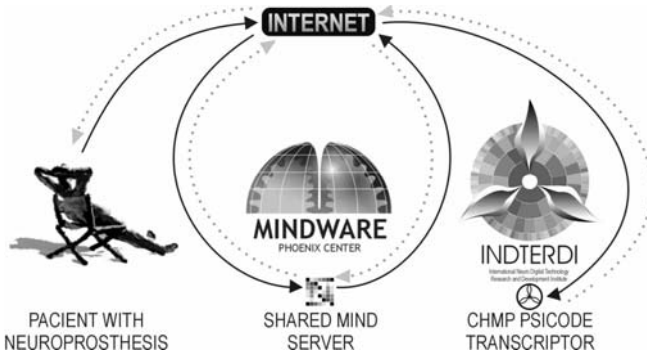
The neuro-prostheses weren’t entirely inside the patient’s skull. A link was surgically implanted but the true neuro-prosthesis was in New Mexico, in a server of the Phoenix Center.

Both pieces were connected by the internet.

Mindware’s implants were tiny Quantum 0001 processors containing billions of SoftNeurons like those of Home.

Those digital neurons “talked” with the “normal” ones by means of the Psi-Code interface. To use the Psi-Code, Bitman got a franchise from the INDTERDI, and the Institute provided him a link-channel with the CHMP Psi-Code Transcriptor, the machine in which the strategic code was hidden.

Bitman never had the Psi-Code itself. He never saw it nor copied it. The CHMP machine was the intermediary. It received transmissions from the Phoenix Center, then translated them and then responded them without disclosing the code.



### I REQUEST MINDWARE TO AMPLIFY MY BRAIN

A patient with *Mindware Inside* was bound, via internet, to the Phoenix Center SMS in New Mexico, where there was space assigned to his memory, identity and cognition.

In other words, part of his “brain” was lodged within the SMS. The Phoenix Center was the first “digital collective brain” where one could rent expansible chunks of artificial brain and use them via internet.

Bitman’s implants transmitted and received wireless signals to specific modules at the Phoenix Center, each of them belonging to a particular person.

For instance, “Hey, my new dancing skills reside in the cel 984.848.726.89 at the Phoenix Center. Watch me.”

Those modules were external controllers, hardware: auxiliary memory, logic-operators, sensorial integrators and motor

planning programs whose processing tasks were re-transmitted to the client's brain.

Well, then, the oldies at the San Giacomo Church were happier than ever because Alexander Bitman was about to give them, no charge, completely artificial organisms.

In other words, soul migration, reincarnation, eternal life, but on Earth, thanks to the Psi-Code.

## Re-incarnators

"The donation of cyber-organisms has raised controversy here," Nathan Rose reported, "but the beneficiaries seem to welcome their new bodies with a lot of gusto."

He approached the microphone to a decrepit and skeletal old woman who already had a lot of prosthetic limbs and tubes shoved into her nose. "Doesn't it bother you the idea of stopping being of skin, madam?" Nathan asked her.

She looked down at her almost rotten body and then at Rose, as if saying, "What do you think, you idiot?"

Her daughter, who was pressing her hand, said to the camera, "I don't care how she looks as long as she can stay here with me."

Rose smiled to his viewers, "Are we witnessing the birth of the planet of the *Reincarnators*? People who refuse to die and become Mindware machines, postponing Heaven for good? But, how exactly does a *reincarnator* look like? Lets meet the father of the creatures, the lord of the controversy, the target of the neohippie rage: Alexander Bitman."

He declaimed this as if announcing a boxer on the ring.

And Alexander Bitman appeared.

Even Home got scared –it must be said that, though she was only bits, she was pretty. Not like that Bitman.

The guy was already more a machine than a man. His legs were two tires and a maglev propeller. His arms, which weren't two but six, were made of metal, plastic and fluid carbon ceramic. A decadent version of General Grievous.

His digestive system was a network of tubes and chemical catalyzers. His lungs were plasmic fiber. His backbone was titanium articulated by polymer "cartilages." His "eyes" were artificial retinas of cesium and germanium.

75% of his brain were now Mindware processors connected to the internet. No. The term "brain" starts to be confusing here. His actual brain was 200 times more than the one he got when he was born, and those "extras" were in the Phoenix Center's SMS. They were his "Augmented-Hybrid-Brain."

Supposedly, thanks to that he could think 250 things at the same time, by means of independent channels, and also operate his factories and robots by thought.

It was said that he had a secret backup station in Africa and another twelve orbiting the Earth, any of which would selectively take on his master mind in the event of a nuclear war.

Half of his face was the one that came out of his mother's womb, but the other half was something worse than Terminator.

From where there was still flesh, white hairs and half of a long moustache were hanging, and he started combing it with a rotatory plier coming out of one of his ... arms?

Now more than ever, Nathan Rose's block deserved its name: "Strange Stuff." Fiction was finally real.

The Mayor of Neapolis left as soon as he could, to avoid protesters and reporters. So did Luis Gottlieb, the mysterious board chairman of the INDTERDL, who rapidly took his blue ass out of there, afraid of a lynching.

"What you see here is *not* a robot," Nathan Rose made clear to his viewers, "It's a *human being*: Alexander Bitman."

He moved the microphone toward the *thing*.

And the thing spoke with an electronic voice:

"We must prepare ourselves for an unprecedented change of phase. Man will become something else."

Did he have to say that? Wasn't enough seeing him?

Home's dumb remarks were touching: "He looks ugly, doesn't he, Johnny? Just like the sole fish."

Bitman continued in his shrilling digital tone:

"Today almost everything is connected to the internet: our furniture, our iHands, the industrial complexes, our houses and domestic devices, the military, financial and civilian communication systems. The internet is already the nervous system of the civilization. There was only one thing left to upload: ourselves. Our minds."

I could swear he smiled when saying that. But, smiled?

"The mind was analog till the discovery of the Psi-Code. From here on the cyberspace will have a new name: the Neuro-space. Soon, the world will become entirely neuro-digital."

Nathan slowly assented, his eyes open wide to hear.

Bitman tooted with his synthetic vocal cords, "This will be more radical than when we got off the trees five million years ago to start the human lineage."

"That much?" asked Rose.

"Man was only a step in evolution: the precursor of a superior hybrid life form. Our mission as a species was only to help it to be born. A new form of intelligence is about to embrace the Earth. We're standing on the very verge of the Final Transmutation, the end of history, the beginning of a new stage of mind. The brain itself is about to reborn."

"Is that true, Johnny?"

"I don't know!," and I started doing push-ups, not to end up like Bitman, "I love my cells, Home! I don't want to be metallic!"

The RAGNAROK missile

"By the way, Johnny..."

"Yes, Home?" I said without stopping my exercise.

"While you were out, rambling around, they kept repeating a CNN bulletin. You wanna see it?"

"Why not," I smiled to my imaginary companion.

"Nuclear crisis aborted," said the red prism over a tempestuous sea covered with military floaters and infested with warships surrounding a half-dozen rescue boats that were fighting the waves and blasts of rain.

In the boats, men in silvery suits were throwing ribbons and harnesses into the surge.

"Why the hell you didn't show me this before!"

"Sorry-boory." Her tongue came out.

"Four hours ago," the CNN reporter shouted from a floater, "a RFK-780-Ragnarok missile, loaded with five nuclear warheads, got accidentally launched from a United States missile base in the North Pacific.

"As soon as detected in the atmosphere, the defense systems of Russia, China, the Ukraine, Great Britain, India, Pakistan, Iran, Korea, France, Israel and the United States escalated to maximum alert and we all got pretty close to the brink of the commencement of an atomic crossfire which, if it had occurred, would have caused a nuclear disaster of planetary proportions."

I was perplexed. The reporter continued,

"The missile was first detected by the satellite radar system of the Russian Strategic Ballistic Forces RVSN -*Raketnye Vojska Strategicheskogo Naznacheniya*- when it was 124 miles off the Kamchatka Peninsula, at an altitude of 54 thousand feet.

"In his official statement, the Supreme Leader of the Great Union of Kiev, Aleksis Kurgan Melevik, in his first day on duty, demands an immediate explanation from the U.S. government."

The screen split up. In one sector, a major general of the Air Force Space Command, with a chest full of medals, was stammering in the central quadrant of the Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado:

"Our PARCS radars, the Optical Deep Space Surveillance System, the Passive Space Surveillance System and the Military Strategic and Tactical Relay Satellite MILSTAR let us track it and intervene its Tobol-B and Cyclone-B navigation systems to deflect and deactivate its warheads."

He didn't say that for 20 minutes the Aerospace Defense System lost control over the Global Information Grid and over the MILSTAR itself, and that he was gonna be fired.

In another window, the bowed backs of four submarines were emerging from the waters of the Okhotsk Sea, with swarms of Sioux floaters flying above them.

"The topmost issue now is to recover the warheads," said a colonel on location, "If terrorist groups find them first we'll have a big problem."

"If terrorists groups find them first, Home! Did you hear that! The asshole! Now they want to divert the public attention to 'terrorists'! Rot in hell, you bastards!"

"Do you believe them, Johnny?"

"What?"

"Do you really believe it was an accident?"

She looked at me fixedly, sharpening her eyes.

### PROCEDURE TO GET A MISSILE LAUNCHED

1. The President, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must approve the launching and authenticate the order with a secret code located in the President's ultra-strategic case known as "Nuclear Football," the Single Integrated Operational Plan, SIOP.

2. The order must be transmitted to a pair of officers of the National Military Command Center -NMCC- in the Pentagon. They in turn must send an Emergency Action Message -EAM- to the Alternate National Military Command Center -ANMCC- at Raven Rock Mountain, Pennsylvania, and to the National Emergency Airborne Command Post -NEACP, an orbital station.

3. From these locations, the order must be retransmitted as codes and passwords to the missile submarines and the ground silos, where two officers like Charlie and Lucas must authenticate the codes and activate the sequence for the launch, by pressing two electronic keys simultaneously.

"How could I know that, Home."

"You don't care, do you?"

"Blow out it all, you motherfuckers! That's the only way to end all the problems once and for all! Humanity is a failure! Civilization is a failure! What was the goddamned good of technology? There are still millions of poor people, thousands of crimes! Not even Bitman will change the shit we are! Put something else on the dome!"

Home twisted her mouth, nodding, "You're right on one thing, kiddo. You *are* the Failure of Civilization."

It didn't occur to me that I was involved in the launch, nor that the launch itself was just the starting point for a plan of much vaster magnitude. I thought I was only an "x," one more among millions of misfits. But I wasn't.