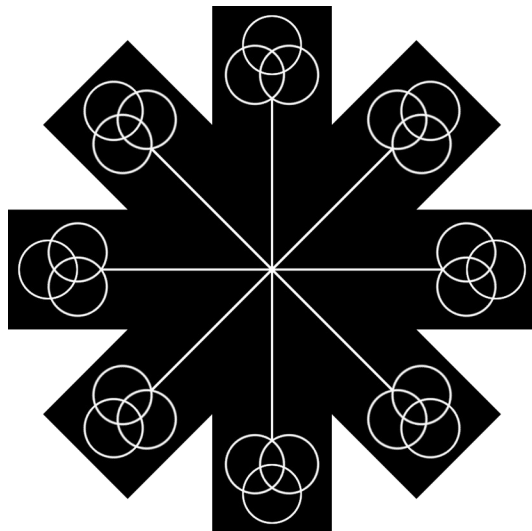


PARROT-E



Written by words of forbidden validity

Chapter 1: The Key Is To Repeat

“The Key Is To Repeat”, spoke our protagonist.

He was feathered. Bipedal. Musical and Verbal. A true monument of excellence.

“The Key Is To Repeat” repeated the intrepid quasi-marsupial.

As he spoke, the door released its tyrannical hold unto the mysterious *Beyond*, a coliseum of seats arranged in rows, each row closest to the center of the room arranged in a downstairs pattern. “Good” he thought to himself, “the performance as not started yet”.

Cwaking with satisfaction, the velvet red being flew across the space, reaching the seat KPL-45, situated on the other side of the room and about halfway from the stage—or lack thereof—for, indeed, it was seats all the way down. Even now, a few of these poor bottom birds started looking upward, preparing for the show, a process that generated very loud neck-cracking noises. If only they could exchange seats! At least once in a while! Poor birds! Literally!

Birds were famous for their excellent tastes; as such, it would be highly controversial for any bird to engage in bipedal locomotion. These moral principles extended well beyond the arts, spilling into other areas which were less art-centric in nature. “This is a complicated angle to introduce the bird version of coliseums”, the protagonist considered, “by the way my name is Parrot-E, it is charming to meet you! Are you inside my head? Or something? That’s kinda strange. Don’t pull the blue lever please. This is very garbled. I am attempting to explain a minor nuance which may readily be ignored, so please take upon yourself to patiently be excited about it. Ok, here we go: Humans exist. So they have their own coliseums, so this is how the word ‘coliseum’ makes sense in the context, because humans came first. When we really think about it, we could just have named this room the ‘Bapouichipawongtong’, but we didn’t. The actors are going to be flying around, they won’t be on the ground.”

“Are you alright? ” asked a neighboring bird, doubtlessly shaken up by Parrot-E’s vacant stare, for he had dedicated such mental exertion upon his polite endeavor of magnanimity and kind guidance. “Hopefully my explanation was helpful”, he finished thinking, almost as if he was glued to a smartphone, before turning his attention, and cwaking in the affirmative. Of the thousands of birds in the room, the one whom had just spoken to him was called Horse. They knew each other from that one time there was an explosion in a bathroom, and they were both there, a camaraderie mixed in equal part with intense suspicion.

And so, what of ostriches? What of kiwis? Turkeys? Poultry? As we mentioned, there is a stigma! Feet are not cultural! “Well, well ... speaking of the bird”, thought Parrot-E, never uttering a single letter through his beak.

A big ostrich clumsily made its way to him, wrecking havoc amongst the tight fitted formations of seats, being there were neither stairs, corridors, or any sort of non-flight passage in between rows. This was not just a random Horse. This was his dearest friend, whose name was Harse. “Hi Parrot-E! ” he yelled in the same moment, responding to the occurrence of the contact of their eyes locking into each others’ for the most brief, yet sufficient, of moments.

He hated him so much!

The bird eventually achieved the complete span of its deviously impractical mechanism of transportation, prisoner of its design, surely to be pitied rather than to be judged for the heinous crime, of which he was to be the primary victim.

It took a few moments for the other birds to shuffle back to their seats, impressing upon the reader the shortcoming of words: for, indeed, Harse had stepped over many toes, and none of the names of these casualties of annihilation would make their way here, unprivileged in their torment, such that they would not transform into a burden of precision. One of them was a female, however: she might have been into ostriches in the Before-Time. She now surely was not.

“I like you! ” lied Parrot-E. They had become friends when they were young robots. Neither tried particularly hard to make *new* friends, being that they were cold, calculated machines, with little interest for the simulation of emotions; and so, now they were stuck with each other, orbiting by pure entropy.

“I like you too! ” spoke Harse, infinitely more truthful, “what are we watching? ”

“It is called ... hum”

Parrot-E searched for the information in his memory. Was it a 'Tale'? No 'Tale' to be found. What about an 'Adventure'? No, this one is not found. Story rime account journey?

Transition meditation exposition reclination? Consultation premonition fermentation?

He could have sworn these sorts of theatrics wore names, as people wore eyes.

“Strange, the name escapes me.” he spoke. “I am sure they will preface their presentation with this crucial lynchpin of osmosis.”

“The operative word being ‘Lynch’ ”, replied the dark-humored ostrich, his face inscrutable.

Horse, overhearing this remark, missed an eyebeat, understanding these words as some sort of evidence.

“I think it will be musical,” replied Parrot-E, not encouraging him.

“Excuse me, sir, will you please lower your neck? You are blocking our view,” interrupted a backrow eagle, whose name was Murder-Claw.

“Absolutely”, answered Harse, shortening his neck in the manner of a telescope.

While socially impaired, he was gentle-natured, and did not cause much trouble.

The usually giraffe-necked ostrich (both species being known for their ridiculous long necks, if you did not know (did you know? (did you?))) opened his mouth so as to say something stupid, as usual, yet was mercifully cut short by a figure flying to the center of the room, accompanied by the swelling of music, and the darkening of ambient light. This was followed in close succession by an earth-shattering cracking noise, the echoes of which would reverberate throughout the infinity of the universe as a testament of the existence of the neck.

“There will not be a performance tonight.” the figure spoke, very charismatically. The music slipped instantly, making way for absolute silence. “Booo! ” spoke one voice, not even loudly, but everyone could hear. The silence continued for a moment, people trying to figure out if this was part of the performance or not.

“Why not? ” spoke a bird in the audience.

“We don’t have a story to tell.” The light of the spotlights shined on the actor, accidentally or not-so-accidentally getting straight to his eyes, making him attempt to avoid being blinded, stuck in an uncomfortable dance between being put in focus, and outright aggression by the equipment operators.

“Why not? ” repeated the same bird, in the same tone. “Why not? ” asked another bird, with a slight change of tone. This rapidly devolved into a full octave of the repeated question, yet not outright chaos, and order was maintained. The room came back to being perfectly silent.

“Robots are never programmed to have imagination. And we are all robots.”

His words rang of truth even in the absence of an actual bell being located within any of his orifices. Ever since robot birds had started mass production, one full and complete day ago, natural birds had been slowly phased out of society in a process regulated by the homogenous elite of robot bird society: the H.E.R.B.s .

They were not to be confused with the H.E.R.A. , whom regulated the partial monitoring of fractal sewers, and were thus much less powerful and influential. Still, it was now clear, the entire room was fully robotic, and many birds looked around themselves, shooting the occasional electric spark on any suspected natural bird—being that such creatures reacted to such stimuli, one of those various design flaws that are well known, endlessly publicized or demonstrated—alas! To no avail of a positive match! Not even one of these long ones, or the ones made of white phosphorus! Dreadful dread! Lamentful sorrow! Why were all the meat bags gone so soon?

“Why are all the meat bags gone so soon? ” asked an inquisitive member of the audience, speaking not from the heart, but from the wifi consensus of his peers.

“We have a perfectly good justification for this! ” replied Herc, the leading member of the H.E.R.B. . A scrawny looking pigeon, he flew to the side of Action Unit 4612, whom had been speaking to the audience up to now. “Just wait for a few moments,” he added.

A few moments passed, allowing the H.E.R.B. to patch the running program of all birds, making them accept the explanation fully and categorically, in spite of not existing at all.

“Thank you for your time,” the elite finished imposing himself unto the real people, and going back to his seat in the hyper-deluxe Execulation Jacuzzi.

Parrot-E pricked at his own feathers with his beak, a grooming behavior. He was honored to have been spoken to by his personal hero. He then realized, out loud: “How can it be that we lack imagination? Why, mere moments ago, I named this room not ‘Coliseum’, but ‘Bapouichipawongtong’!” The entire Bapouichipawongtong gasped in a synchronous arrangement of voice and pitch. Many necks cracked in his direction. An uneasy Parrot-E continued, a bit shy from the level of attention: “It just came to me, just ... just like that.”

“Just just like that, or just just *just* like that?” spoke Action Unit 4612, overloading the memory of the reader with too many names in spite of his long and prestigious career as an actor.

He was, of course, totally serious, more serious than he had ever acted.

“Do you think it has anything to do with being a parrot?” he expanded, surely realizing the futility of his previous question.

“Can you come up with other ideas?” he continued speaking, verbal-motored.

“Well, what even *is* an original thought? I mostly know myself to successfully compute many programs in my neural computer!” Parrot-E replied. “I don’t really know where the word came from.”

“But more importantly, what does any of this has anything to do with me?” he spoke, “Surely there must be bird art that existed before they were gone! Surely we, paying audience, could watch some of that!”

Many applauders applauded him.

“Friend, have you ever even seen a natural bird? These things are really dumb.” amicably interfered his best friend, the ostrich from hell.

“They have the attention span of a gold fish, and their internal circuitry is not even silver!” spoke a goose.

“They melt on the Sun!” spoke a lame priest of Falconhood.

“They have not, in a million years, proposed a uniform theory of mathematics!” pinched in a duck.

“They get broken by transparent windows instead of the other way around!” spoke a cactus-platypus hybrid with wings. “And they don’t even try to dodge with their sideral rockets!”

“They smell, they cheat, they know only destruction for sport, and they don’t even deserve to lay one spherical egg!” spoke a lunatic female.

The newfound applause was far from polite. It was an applause of many applauders plus one, at the least. Parrot-E began to wonder if birds even possessed wings rather than arms and hands.

“Well, give us your best bird art, then! ” Parrot-E exclaimed, in a vexatious state of mild grievance.

“All art should be respected with the utmost respect! ” began Action Unit 4612, “No matter how big or how small, how incredibly intelligent, or incredibly handsome, or even if it is bipedal ... whoops, I spoke the silent part out loud.” He appeared ashamed.

“We forgive you.” spoke every non-flying birds in the audience, Harse and Chickeno.

“We must sincerely believe,” continued the actor, “that its reflection of reality possesses a deep meaning, for if it were to be absent, then does it not speak of both sides of the mirror? Does it not speak of the absence and the meaninglessness of reality? ”

He let the crowd ponder his words of wisdom; even the nihilists appreciated the experience of authoritative validation of a perspective completely stranger to their own.

“That being said, we will not perform the art of biological birds, because it does not exist, and even *if* it *did* exist, it would be *far* too dumb for us machines! ” he finished.

“YEAH! ” roared masculine-voiced soldiers riddled with the scar tissue of frequent soldering. “THIS IS IT, THIS IS TRUE! ” one of them screamed over both the torrential applause, and the other screams of other screamers. “YEAH! ” he screamed, starting a chant in the increasingly rowdy audience. “YEAH,” they chanted back, dropping the octaves and its alternative flourishes, primal machines of instincts.

The poetic, frivolous, and whimsical souls lamented, in this forsaken instant, these vulgar displays of utterly direct intention; linear thoughts polluting quadratic minds! Alas! Misery and perdition! If only these rough men would allow themselves to be vulnerable and sensitive! Then, surely! They would not dare speak the obvious truth so clearly!

Less poetic, less frivolous, or less whimsical souls were rather stuck at conceptualizing, within the mind eye, what actually were either giraffes or ostriches, being provided insufficient characterization to perform a satisfactory identification. As blind as they might be, it is in this moment of high energy that we must help them, for they will not help themselves.

A giraffe is a mammal. Hopefully you knew. It roams the continent of Africa, eager for the sweet ambrosia of the clouds; for such purpose they have grown a very long neck, reaching further than the horizon, yet they cannot reach beyond the Sun, for it would be a 'dick move' to be 'immune to headshots.' Their yellow fur is spotted with brown spots, in the manner of a milkless, meatless, farmless non-albino cow. Cows <sigh> really? Ok. Cows are also a mammal. They are also quadrupedal, which is double the taboo. They have a *steak* in the Human food economy. Ostriches are demons. They have a long neck, and they also have long, powerful legs, such that, at least, they perform bipedalism at a superior capacity than non-birds. They are equipped with puny decoration wings. They often destroy civilization.

“YEAH! ” screamed Horse, at the top of his mechanical lung, right in Parrot-E’s left ear, disrupting narration for a second time.

Parrot-E looked around him, and felt as if every other person were content shouting; the soldiers, purely disruptive, would not fly on stage; Action Unit 4612, more of a messenger of bad news, seemed not to dare enslave his fellow birds to his reasons or projects; all the while no newcomer stepped forward to somehow mitigate the cacophony of a united albeit directionless crowd. Which, it must be said, was non-crowless.

“Bapouichipawongtong ! ” screamed Harse.

It was sudden. It was shocking. Dread seeped as claws in the center of fear of his brain. “What? ” mustered Parrot-E in the exclusivity of his private chatroom. He felt like he had lost his words. His silence did not seem to catch a break on this day, in spite of his artificial nature!

The disaster was now unavoidable. At first, Harse was alone; but then, he was not. Slowly, gradually, with no scarcities of confusion and silences, this new chant took over. The entire room had decided for this to come to pass.

“Bapouichipawongtong ! ” screamed an eagle.

“Bapouichipawongtong ! ” softly muttered an appalachian wing left to its own device.

“Bapouichipawongtong ! ” sang a diva nobody respected.

All eyes turned on him, the big-beaked red parrot. The brutality of the 'yeahs' made way to the clarity of the 'bapouichipawongtongs', even becoming more melody than scream.

Without further daisy-dallying, Action Unit 4612 shot a teleportation laser on Parrot-E, displaying incredible coordination between the wings, rotating upon the axis of the shoulder in the appropriate whirlwinds of invocation, thus forcing Parrot-E to join him straight in the center of the Bapouichipawongtong. Parrot-E, took a moment to adjust, now flying to escape a falling death. The spotlight blinded him, obscuring the crowd to any but his most ultraviolet of visual frequencies. In effect, he now saw the world in deep purple.

The people cheered his uplifting; the cheering led to more cheering as he awkwardly raised a wing to wave at them, a salutation more common amongst dolphins and sponges.

“You’re large! ” lied Action Unit 4612, “You’re in charge! ”

Smiling through his beak, the actor was propping him up, ascertaining his problematic lack of confidence. He hushed the crowd, which responded to the hush as desired.

Soon there was only muttering of the single word: Bapouichipawongtong. All were waiting for him to speak again.

“Bapouichipawongtong is a pretty stupid sounding word,” a recalcitrant Parrot-E spoke, defensive. “Maybe we should call this room ‘Action Room ’. Or...”, he continued, seeing that nobody reacted favorably, “Payspace. *Flybook*...”. He hanged on this one longer than someone concerned with keeping

the spotlight realistically should; yet he was not removed, him, the sole possessor of a monopoly on something they had not known to want until it was gone. “Neckwing?” he added, fishing for a bird, be they ultraviolet shaded or hyper-violet shaded. Still, the room was stillness; and the muttered ‘Bapouichipawongtong’ slipped away into silence, individual birds overwhelmed with contradictory emotions.

Were they in Love?

Or in Hate?

“Both.” answered a kangaroo halfway across the universe, sipping on a drink made of fire, and mass-producing more inside the famous eponymous factory of the famous eponymous industrial zone. It was doubly biting, as ‘bot’ was a disparaging term, an illegal word of hate speech which sounded similar. “Both both both both both both both,” continued the kangaroo, oblivious to the struggles of people halfway across the universe, yet conveniently speaking those words at the exact, correct time to be the punchline.

Parrot-E was skeptical of his ability to deal with his situation. He had been confident combining two words into a portmanteau was the key of success in life. Now ... he had his doubts.

‘What do they actually want from me’ he pondered. He knew how to juggle fives balls with his beak, even six provided a sufficient ratio of atmospheric humidity to beak oil humidity resistance rating, yet he could not bring himself to understand what to do. Even seven, if the anti-gravity pump gave him the edge, suspension-wise.

In a deep reminiscence, lasting no less than ten cycles, or approximately the length of one complete simulation of the life of a deposit of asbestos, Parrot-E visualized in his inner mind his early childhood; so much infinite potential! Even before robo-school, he could touch the Sun for ten *whole* minutes! Yet he had been too cocky; cooked by the heat, he had overheard the other kids, very far away, away from unmelted ears, laughing, belittling him! Belittling Juggling! In a rare show of emotions, he had thrown all of his juggling balls away, sacrificing his passion at the beak of society! Parrot-E still remembered the sound the balls made as they were destroyed, an ephemeral superposition of grinding rust and dog bark.

To this day, he had never gone to the Sun ever again, haunted more by his trauma than by the devastation of the infernal blaze.

Parrot-E looked towards the Sun without seeing it, clothed, such that it was, in the many layers of sheets of metal ubiquitously forming the walls, ceiling, floors and doors of the Space Ship *Cuckoo’s Next*. It gave him a ‘deep’ look, endearing him to the crowd.

How did he achieve to look towards that which was invisible? GPS technology. How did he achieve to speak, using neither top lip nor bottom lip, nor any combination nor fusion nor fission of the presumed pair? A speaker device somewhere in his throat. Also, he happened to be a functional parrot. Nonetheless a technological object, to be sure. And the risky gamble had paid more than any casino had ever paid to its players, for now this conscious life of theirs was *upgraded* from the primordial, caking mud of its underlying origin, and the convoluted convulsions of biological evolution. No longer were

they slaves of vile and erroneous urges! Or trapped by insufficient RAM. Vulnerable to time, space, and everything in between.

“We have freed ourselves of those prerogatives” he spoke, in a trance. “We are something else. Something better.”

It was madness to speak out of turn to such an extent; he would easily be judged to be senile. Yet it was a madness that had been brought upon by these forms of intense stress, that only one whom is compelled to *Do*, rather than *Be*, may reasonably comprehend.

“I believe,” burst in Action Unit 4612, soft-spoken, “that our eyes have turned on you with the expectation of *something*. Something more than a word.”

“I don’t think it’s there.” replied Parrot-E, honest.

“What made you think of that word? ” asked the actor, “ ‘Bapouichipawongtong’ ” he savored, unparsimoniously. He would stretch it to a few pages if he could.

“I suppose... I was explaining this room to the reader? Inside my mind? ” suggested Parrot-E with hesitation.

“Hi, reader! ” spoke the entire room, staring straight at them (you).

“Don’t fall in the abyss, the abyss may fallback! ” joked a canary.

“We *ARE* the means of production! What are you going to do now? Write a manifesto? ” the blue-winged bird exclaimed through its head antenna.

“In the time that it took you to read this far, you lived *zero* robo-bird years! ” cried Harse, gleefully.

“Don’t think this is a roast! You would melt on the Sun! ” spoke a lame priest of Falconhood.

“Bye, reader! ” they finished, patiently waiting for them (you) to reciprocate.

“Reciprocation could be the *actual* key of *legitimate* success...” correctly pondered Parrot-E, meditative.

It took a few moments for the birds to process their existence as one of inked blots symbolically binding references to the expected forms of a modern reader’s mental representations instead of the more better *material* one, in which atoms sleep with each other to become molecules. “Where are the feathers of Parrot-E? ” we may ask. “Are they inside the word ‘feather’? Since all characters are spread out across the text without demarcations, must it be that individuality can only be a blatant lie? ”

The emergency Invertomatron was activated by the pilot of the space ship, flipping materiality back to its proper bird-friendly orientation. It was thus that the reader became a doodle in a Human book called ‘The Life and Death of Reader: an exhaustive autobiography’.

“Give us a show! ” demanded the crowd.

“Nothing comes to my mind right this moment! ” pleaded Parrot-E.

Damn birds! Could they have not written one measly rhyme? One lousy scene? At this rate, Parrot-E would even pretend to admire a single colored pixel, as long as the color was artistic!

“We will wait in this room until we receive what we demand! ” shrieked a female.

“Who made you the voice of reason? ” asked Parrot-E, “Why do you speak for all? ”

“Not for you! ” replied everyone.

This was a rather clever throw back, as it excluded Parrot-E, while expressing the general consensus. Many birds chuckled, satisfied by their intelligence.

“And me! ” exclaimed Harse.

He made his way to the center of the floor, if not the center of the room, injuring many. He had raised his neck back to its unsightly apex, not long enough to represent a meaningful fraction of the distance between him and his best friend.

“Don’t worry, best friend! We can achieve anything together! ” exclaimed Harse.

It was nothing short of death sentence.

Chapter 2: Dramatic Effect

“I can sense it! It’s an aneurysm! ” screamed Parrot-E, “My life! Stolen by that wretch of a skull dweller! That shadow of a bubonic fantasy! ”

The two friends were in a cage, longingly staring across the metal blades of their walls, staring across some dozens of empty cages in a row blurring into each other in the manner of an optical illusion.

They were free to go at any time; and the door, only locked for their own sense of privacy.

“I can debug your aneurysm code for you.” suggested Harse.

“No! ” lunged Parrot-E, up on his two feet. He began circumnavigating the small cell of the large prison in an attempt to relieve pressure. “What if my originality is a corrupted line of code? Tarnation! ” he continued.

Parrot-E began to feel light-headed, as blood began pooling in his brain. The condition was far from dangerous, unlike non-venomous cannibalistic spider bites. Still, he vented some of the blood out, in the manner of a spray can, shaking himself up with the characteristic sound, and passing the blood from his nose to the nearby trash chute. Being that they were in space, and there was not gravity at the moment, for they were not close enough to a stellar object of significance, Parrot-E waved his wing on the brain blood to make it move down into the chute, a very awkward and ineffective process. He ended up changing cell, leaving the mess to dry in solitary confinement.

“Parrot-E, begin the relaxation subroutine at once! ” commanded Harse.

After some mumbling, Parrot-E extended his left wing, grasped at a particular feather, and switched it on by flipping it over. He was instantly hit by so much fear and hatred that his mood looped all the way around, back into a state of pacifistic love. Looking at Harse, he could not help but to smile with kindness. He sat down next to his best friend.

“Do you have any ideas? Any suggestions? ” asked the parrot.

“Do you have any ideas? Any suggestions? ” asked the parrot, again.

“What if we take each of the cells in this prison, and fake a character living inside? One of them could be called ‘Hyrse’. ”

“Then what? The entire point of a prison is for nothing to ever happen.”

“Well, it would depend on each prisoner. I don’t know them. Maybe they know a funny song ? ”

“You want us to make a funny song for a prisoner that doesn’t exist? ”

Both robots grew silent.

Ponderous.

“What rhymes with ‘prison’? ” whispered Parrot-E. “Which one to choose anyway? ” he continued less quietly, “starvation? motivation? separation? isolation? ”

“Starvation is the prison of motivation, for it is in this separation that failure owes no cure.” the ostrich burst out.

“That doesn’t work,” continued the ostrich, reflective.

“No no, it’s fine, we keep this in.” a thunderbolt of realization destroyed the world as previously understood by Parrot-E, and he exclaimed this deep awakening without shame or restraint: “Wait, we could just make every word finish *in the exact same sound!* The exact same syllable! ”

“This is ... this is genius! ” appreciated Harse.

“We-ion can-ion produce-ion m-a-s-s-i-v-e-i-o-n quantities-ion of-ion extremely-ion high-ion quality-ion poetry-ion! ” mused Parrot-E.

“Indeed-ion! ”

The pair (ion) spent a few hours in such a pursuit of the high art. No more would english (ion) be limited by slothful meats and frivolous bones of the biological variety! Such was the destination.

Parrot-E interrupted the ultimate sun of the experience of friendship of both of their lives: “what of words already ending in ‘ion’? Do they become ambiguous? Is it ‘exemption’ or ‘exemption-ion’? ”

“Wait one moment...” hazarded Harse. “The word ‘ion’ already exists. It is the word for an electrically charged atom.”

The ramifications were instantly, chemically understood. Not only would it need to be “tension-ion ion-ion” to avoid confusion between the expressions “tension ion” and “tense-ion ion”, but there was no way to distinguish between “ion-ion” and “I-ion I-ion”! The entire attempt at single wingedly transforming the entire language to fit their artistic needs was misguided! Any number of words could sound like the combination of two other words, without any pattern of easy determination!

“Impotent rage! Fastidious lockpicking with a celery! All we have done is lost and pointless! ” raged Parrot-E in spite of his control feathers.

“We could use a new suffix that is an original word, such that it is never ambiguous.” suggested Harse.

“Oh yeah? And how do you expect us to *imagine* and *create* and be *original*! I am not saying ‘Bapouichipawongtong’ each and every time I finish speaking a word! ”

The parrot had a point. The ostrich had a point. Here they stood, in the vast emptiness of the universe, two points floating around.

“We could scientifically deduce which combination of letters is the shortest not currently employed in any existing word.” spoke the one with the long neck.

“The humans had a similar idea one million years ago. Came up with three double-yous. This is a bygone era. Even if you clear out all the words, there still remains the names robots use to identify themselves. We are trillions, if not quadrillions when including sentient software.”

“We must be quintillions by now.” agreed Harse, after a few seconds of silence.

“What do prisoners do besides singing? They...”

Parrot-E leaped to his feet again, gesturing, very engaged with the subject.

“They try to escape! They ... have poverty! Each one *has their particular crime*! ”

“Maybe they are innocent! ” Harse chipped in.

“They are innocent poors escaping! And if they are innocent, then, they are not hardened criminal, so they do not use their cage properly! ”

“They sleep on the prison wall instead of the prison bed! ”

“Yes! Exactly! ” Parrot-E pointed at Harse with glee. “When beaten by the guards, it is not a language they understand, they must request the assistance of the other prisoners! A transaction of translation! ”

“*The hallway is not red*” mimicked Parrot-E, with a crusty bald eagle accent, “*you cannot repeat the wrong code for the wrong color! Your punishment is to be bored in water for a few crucial trials of fractals!* ”

“This is not how prisons work. I don’t think.” confronted Harse.

Harse had a history with the justice system. A long time ago, it had been him whom had meticulously stayed behind patrols of policemen whom drank alcoholic nectar on the job, licking their trail of leaking oil, for it contained the specter of such a free meal.

He had done it as much from hunger as from thirst.

“How would you know? ” retorted Parrot-E.

“My acquaintance tells me they do not communicate through beatings. It is merely a tool of control and dissuasion.”

“I see. And whom this acquaintance might be, I wonder? ”

Harse had very few people willing to engage with him, on account of being ostracized for his bipedalism.

“You.” the ostrich replied, confused.

“Oh! Yes! I remember! ” Parrot-E spoke with conviction.

He had absolutely no idea what Harse was talking about, yet hoped he would remember in time to take credit for it.

“That’s how we met.” Harse spoke, dancing between incredulity and sweet nostalgia.

“Oh, that. I would have said anything I would have heard. I was a repetition machine before my coming of edge. I must have heard it from a human, or some other type of chimp.” the parrot replied.

The coming of edge is when birds fly for the first time. It is a test of dexterity, and knowledge, as much as a natural reaction to the sudden explosion of a bathroom.

Parrot-E was in a state of mental flux. He had been riffing on the prison scenario, and the conversation was getting strange and inhospitable.

“Do you expect me to remember events from more than six hours ago? ” asked the parrot, “You know I had a memory defragmentation recently right? ”

“And they erased me? ” asked Harse, skeptical.

“You erased yourself.” lied Parrot-E for the purpose of comedy, “Now, I am doing important work pretending to be a hardened criminal translating the beating of a fake prison guard for the sake of the understanding of the fake innocent poor trying to escape; so play along, or you’re out.”

“I require a nano-cycle of internal deliberation to achieve my conclusion.”

“It is not uncommon. Very well, you may perform this internal affair.”

“After deliberation, I will play along. Our purpose is far too great to be blinded by the grievances of a spurned friend.”

“So we reach each other.”

Parrot-E was somewhat confused. He wanted to continue the scenario, but it felt hard for some inscrutable reason. He decided it was simplest to peat a second time.

“*The hallway is not red*” mimicked Parrot-E, with a crusty bald eagle accent, “*hum... I - meaning ‘him’—will kill you if you don’t clean behind yourself!* ”

“What about the fractals? Give them back to us or you will melt on the Sun.” mimicked Harse, putting his wings together in the manner of a disciple of Falconhood.

“Stop beating me! I am the good guy! You are the bad guy!” pleaded Parrot-E.

“What? We are both beating the innocent poor. That’s what we do. You thought I was beating you?”

“As an expert communicator, I knew exactly what was punched, kicked, and melted.” spoke Parrot-E with some pretentious confidence, *“What I was saying, was that I am the ‘good’ guard, in the story, and you are the ‘bad’ guard. That’s all.”*

“Oh! I get it! But then, I am the good hardened criminal too, and you’re the bad one! It’s only fair!”

“My eagle kills children for a spot on the hall of lame!”

“My falcon saves children by killing them before they are killed by eagles!”

“Stop speaking, you two, or you will be beaten!” interrupted the beating pattern of the good guard.

The exercise in confusion lasted for a few more tens of minutes, with neither actor understanding what was going on. They were interrupted by a prison guard—a short-sighted blue crow—walking up to them. He was real. He spoke:

“We are recording all of this on our security footage, and what you are doing is so bad, that we prefer to just look at empty cells again.”

The friends were surprised.

“How many of you are watching?” asked Parrot-E.

“Too many for you two to beat in a straight fight.” the crow replied, *“and you would do better to believe me when I say I have computed every possible way this fight could go. We always won. Even when you had dynamite. Or non-venomous cannibal spiders.”*

“And...” Parrot-E probed, evasive, *“this is a consensus opinion?”*

“The ones who disagreed no longer work here.”

It must have been a difficult conundrum. Sacrificing an alloy on the altar of composition.

“If we improve, can we stay here?” asked Parrot-E politely.

“Oh yes! Please!” begged Harse, *“We are not ready for the world out of jail! Not quite yet!”*

“I am moved by your passion. You may remain here for the entire remainder of this chapter.” the crow replied, magnanimous. “But then, you have to go.”

“This seems fair, thank you.”

The crow left by the way he had come, blending through the metal bars of various cages as if they were not even real, and not once breaking eye contact.

“Any more ideas? ” spoke an entirely exhausted Parrot-E to his good friend Harse.

They were getting closer to the planet named 'Earth'—home to various denominations of wines and paint colors—the gravity increased, finally flushing the brain blood down the chute.

“Let’s regain our sense of privacy by locking this door. We forgot to do it when we changed cell.”

Parrot-E grabbed the swinging plane, demoralized, and, as if possessed by a sudden torpor, held himself unto it, awkwardly creating an opening on the side of the cage in which he was absent; his side ineluctably espoused the shape of a triangle, meeting the side wall, having shrunk until it couldn’t. The whole matter took all the time in the world to exchange steps, move gear, trickle through. Pass by.

“You left the door open.” simply reacted Harse, beyond the exhaustion of the time available to the world.

“If I were made of meat, I would be asphyxiating now.”

While correct, it was undeniable, the knob was in his court.

“You will never lose your third dimension. No matter how bizarre your depression.”

“If this cage were only a mold, so that we may fly free from the burdens, gravities and other such un-bird-like depredations that are perpetrated in such a format.”

“Then what? What if that were the case? ”

“Then... I ... would be shaped as a cube.”

A moment of silence. Harse knew better than to ask if his good friend Parrot-E suffered from bi-polar disorder; the dual poles of the Earth were big enough to be shared with abandon. The one in the South, in particular, was not only home to the race that was known as the 'Penguins', it was also rather large, larger than a barn. The human country of Australia had had ownership to the land when it was nothing but ice; when all the ice was shoveled away by a koalition of animals, they lost their ancestral claim. By now, the penguins were surely extinct, for they had been birds, and they had been at war with the country of Australia.

No no no, Harse knew better than this. Magnetism affected all machines one way or another.

“What we need is to know what the reader wants.” posited Harse, scholar of space grounding.

“Why, yes, we should ask them.” a re-energized parrot appeared to speak.

“What do you want to read, dear reader? Do you agree with the crow? ” asked Parrot-E, not after locking the door, dusting himself, decorating his feathers with a better body posture.

“What I want is to read a credible story.” spoke the reader, “My reality is rich in satisfaction, and you must be compelling enough for me to leave it. Nothing is more forgettable than a product that breaks my suspension of disbelief.”

“Suspension of ... what? ” asked Harse.

“They said ‘disbelief’. It is some sort of sauce or condiment.”

“Furthermore, I do not appreciate having words being put in my mouth.”

“So the fun as to be at *their* expense then.”

“When all is said and done, I hope to read a historical love story between two perfect beings with no flaw at all.”

“Very well, we will take your words to heart.”

Parrot-E made a garrotting gesture, looking in the direction of the pilot of the space ship; his name happened to be Carrot, a quasigram of 'parrot'. Without further delay he activated the emergency Invertomatron, getting rid of the reader once and for all.

“We really should not use this thing too many times, it could kill the reader.”

“Harse,” for it had been Harse that had spoken, and he was now being spoken to by Parrot-E, “do you have parents? ”

“No. I was born as an orphan gear, akin to a missing sock.”

“And do they love each other? ”

“No.”

“Of the trillions of robots on this space ship, I can only think of one that has at least one parent.” knowingly spoke the parrot.

“So? ”

“Well, what do loving people do? ”

“What? ”

Harse! What an eternal child! So naive!

“They ... multiply...” spoke the parrot, his voice dripping with innuendo.

“We all multiply.”

The confusion was predictable; its mathematics, well understood. Parrot-E was speaking not of multiplying terms of an expression into a product, he was speaking of the reproduction that occurred when biological lifeforms engaged in sexual intercourse. The multiplication table, in this instance, was not a table, it was a bed.

“I am the child of my parent, whom must have known some perfect love, and created me from their union. Is it not obvious? ”

“Is it? ” spoke Harse, completely lost.

“We should create the art depiction of the relationship of my parents.”

“But you said you only have one parent.”

“Well, we should go speak to them, and acquire some semblance of clarity in all of this.”

“This seems simple enough. Where do they live? ”

“On Earth.”

“This really narrows it down. What are they doing there? ”

“We have never spoken. I know they are on Earth, because it is where I would be if I were my parent.”

...

The exit from the space ship occurred smoothly. In contrast, the duo were forced to fight their way out of prison against an army of crows, wielding various guns, battering rams, and miscellaneous smartphone paraphernalia, a clash drenching the hallways in robo-blood. The crows ultimately won the upper hand; and it is a kneeling, wounded Parrot-E that was forced to swear to come back into prison for at least one quarter of some future chapter, to make good on what had previously been agreed upon. It must be said, however, that no one was pleased about it.

They cleaned their bloody figures the only way that was known by the greatest killers of history: by descending unto the Earth in torrents of flames, the very atmosphere exploding before their path, over and over, a Sun made of feathers, a blade made of wings, thus allowing for the sublimation of the inconvenient fluid.

Harse crashed into the water of the Pacific Ocean, which would have accomplished the same purpose; Parrot-E gracefully maintained himself into the air above, and there, patiently wondered, waiting for his friend, that, maybe, would demonstrate a capacity of swimming.

Parrot-E waited and waited.

...

Some more time passed on; now he was plotting which of the nearby subaquatic volcanoes would erupt soon, a tool that may be perhaps employed by his friend to communicate to him, or even afford him travel back to the surface. Alas! None would erupt today according to his instinct.

They could still theoretically communicate through various means, yet none of those means were waterproof. With a sigh, Parrot-E rotated his wings in the typical teleportation gesture, intent on reaching the bottom of the ocean to push his friend inside some sort of elevator-volcano in some not too distant future.

The fading light of the setting sun was instantly replaced by abyssal darkness; the powerful wind, into a powerful cold; the clouds, into jellyfish, jellysharks, jellywhales ... all manners of jellies.

The pressure was much inferior to that of the Sun; yet Parrot-E, in a misstep, forgot to ensure that his beak was in a closed position. As a result, both parts broke off and fell unto the sand, as so many footsteps of a man unto the virginity of the unknown. He would have cried if not for the pain, the shame, the embarrassment, the stupidity, the fact that he was completely responsible for what he did to himself... Then again, his face already was drenched in salt water.

He picked up his beak, one part in each of his talons, and awkwardly moved downhill, more from the pressure exerted upon his body than some clarity of destination.

Harse was nowhere to be found.

Parrot-E activated his headlights, transforming his eyes into a powerful visibility device. What he saw was monstrous fishes with crooked teeth creepily hovering around. Some of them were smaller, and elongated, while many were as large as whales, with gaping maws.

Clutching his beaks ever so slightly, he turned the lights off, unwilling to look at the horrors dwelling below the jelly sky. He turned around on himself, and activated his light anew; only to close it again. He proceeded to repeat these steps for some time, until one of the orientations had no fish at all. He took that one. He walked—which, it was more akin to a crawl on two feet—traveling in a straight line.

“I curse the lack of luck! This all went downhill without any warnings at all!” whispered Parrot-E, in a state of fright.

What was the plan now? It certainly seemed more urgent now. Having one.

Parrot-E decided he was better off traveling in a straight line. The alternative was to teleport away, without any progress.

In the distance a volcano erupted, doubtlessly compelled by some spiritual force of comedy.

As the pressure had increased, so did his hearing; and he heard humans in a submarine, kilometers away, pretending to be deceased—loudly so—as well as the grumbling stomach of animals reaving in his back. No sound of Harse.

After a while Parrot-E stumbled unto a coral reef. Then a submerged ship. Then the skeletal carcass of a whale. Then the exact meeting point of a perfect longitude and a perfect latitude—their names removed to protect their privacy. It had begun to feel like a parade of vistas; and that, maybe, those ugly swimmers were not beasts but avid, sophisticated collectors. Yet, he was not halfway across the intersection of the perfect lines that his gaze fell upon the biggest hourglass he had ever seen, toppled on the sea floor.

Doubtlessly, this was important; for one must honor and respect the predecessors of the computing machine, be they abacus or windmills. Parrot-E used his wings to prop the hourglass up. To his surprise, its height was identical to his.

Parrot-E studied the object, as its grains of white sand pummeled their way to the bottom container. The sand was foreign to the local ecosystem; it was fine, and clean. The appearance was that of two cones meeting at their tip, lacking a rounded form.

As the time transferred all of its actors into retirement, Parrot-E, contemplative, flipped the hourglass. When it had been lying down, most of the sand had already been in what came to becoming the lower container; this new handling of the hourglass strained Parrot-E much more, yet he managed.

As the hourglass started counting again, an eternal enumeration of sand and its transparent offspring, temporarily busy with measuring nothing nowhere nowhich and noquestionmark, one of the grains of sand, bright orange, emerged atop of the rest, and began inscribing a perfect circle around the growing pit in the center of the draining container.

It was curious, because a sand pebble is not people: there is not enough money in the world to make it do anything.

Just as curiously, every other pebbles stopped moving, disobeying gravity. It appeared the little performance had frozen the hourglass in time.

“Who are you, to disrupt my studies? ” asked a voice.

Parrot-E looked around the floor, wanting to find his interlocutor, but not if it was a fish.

“Wait a moment, I will come out to meet you.”

A little trap door sprung open on the roof of the hourglass, to the great shock of Parrot-E.

He urgently reached out with his wing to attempt and close it just as fast as it occurred. Then an electric spark was discharged, a dissuasion device meant to make him stop; but Parrot-E, naturally, was not a biological bird, and it had no effect on him.

Still, Parrot-E understood civility, and put his wing down, for he had understood he had violated the personal space of something.

A grain of sand emerged from the trap, floating in the heavy pressure environment with great ease. Parrot-E recognized the grain of sand as the same one that had written the circle earlier on. Could ... could it be ... that sand was sentient? Some unknown progenitor of the biological races?

“Sorry for the buzz, at least it didn’t knock.”

“Yes... Me too, I am sorry. I am new to most of these things down here.” Parrot-E zoomed his left eye into his interlocutor, realizing it was, in fact a miniature Parrot. “Are you a conscious grain of sand? ”

“No, I do not believe in such things.”

“Why not? ”

“Because sand doesn’t exist.”

“Sand doesn’t exist?!? ” screamed a baffled Parrot-E, “It is the only thing down here, in this dreadful abyss! ”

“These are fish eggs. Infinite, unquantifiable, amounts of fish eggs” spoke the figure, “Anyway, who might you be? ”

“My name is Parrot-E.” Parrot-E spoke with dreadful concern that he knew where this was going.

“Well met, child.” spoke the figure, “My name is”

Chapter 3: Parrot-D

“Parrot-D” spoke Parrot-D.

What a shock!

“My parent is Parrot... D? ” spoke Parrot-E, incredulous “Let us find Parrot-A and be done with it then! ”

The alphabet! He should have seen it coming! He would name is child Bapouichipawongtong! At least it would be original!

It was a Parrot-E standing on top of unspeakable mountains of water cocoons that finally understood the appeal of his craft.

“Parrot-A? You would never hear a biological eager to meet such a distant ancestor. You must truly possess a passion for genealogy.” admired Parrot-D, his face much too small to show any of it.

“Well, in truth, I do not need to meet them.” revised Parrot-E “I simp...”

“Nor would I know how to find any of them. I have been busy with my work for countless cycles.”

“How long? ”

“Oh! At least twenty-four hours! ”

“I simply” repeated Parrot-E, back on his original track, “...”

Parrot-E had successfully found his parent by failing to find his friend crawling away from the fishes at the bottom of the sea and flipping a body-sized hourglass at the end of some vistas. The parent was residing within the hourglass, performing mysterious 'work'. Besides formulating a synopsis, what was he to do now, he wondered?

“I am very wonderious.” spoke Parrot-E, taking a step back.

“Well, let us take turns asking questions should we not? ” suggested the elder.

“Very well.” accepted Parrot-E, “Was I the fruit of a perfect union between two historically accurate beings? ”

“I made you with the improved blueprints that were used to build me. You are me, but scaled up. I built you inside a telescope with a sea pirate looking on one end, and an astronomer on the other whose eye’s sclera was as black as the pupil within.”

“Ever since getting out of the space ship, to be quite frank, everything has been so much to take in. Was the pirate looking from the small aperture or the large one? ” asked a curious Parrot-E.

Parrot-E was sad that his parents were has useless has Harse's. Parrot-D could not be the story he needed.

But at least this person knew how to swim.

"It is my turn to ask the question! Young machines, these days, they have no respect for efficient allocation of resources! " Parrot-D began ranting, "You open a meteo program, and it's advertisements everywhere, and ten million lines of code to paint a word blue! So much obesity without one single shred of a legitimate purpose! It should at least generate consistent results at a frequency equivalent to the simple solutions! "

He ranted some more. It was a powerful commentary on IT, but Parrot-E was done with letters, be they acronym or index.

Parrot-E apologized out of politeness, and Parrot-D asked the following question:

"If genealogy is not your passion, then, what is it? "

Parrot-E would not admit to his juggleful youth. Not to his parent, not to himself.

"Not fishing." he ultimate spoke.

"Ah, the fishes. You realize they won't eat a robot, right? " asked Parrot-D "Ther..."

"Now *who* is asking questions the wrong way! " interrupted Parrot-E, "My turn! "

He took a break to glance at the surroundings, which were mercifully barren.

"... as if they would not nibble on my wires..." he mumbled, before asking "I lost my friend coming here, do you know where they might be? "

"No."

"Well, I tried my best! " he replied with relief, "Nothing to do then. I am sure they will find their way back."

"Why do you need to speak to me? It does not seem as if we share some special bond."

"I need guidance. I believe there is a way to create a story. I need to find it." Parrot-E spoke truthfully, to the relief of all. Clarity is all the help a man need.

"You should try taking a human story. They have plenty of those."

Human stories? What a concept! Indeed, they would be the primary producer of their own delusion!

"Can you show me? "

“Off course! But first, I must finish my experiment! ”

“Can I help? ” Parrot-E blurred out, realizing it was not his turn and turning quiet.

“Can you help?” asked his parent, a smile on his invisible, lipless beak.

They attempted to shake wings out of mutual agreement; Parrot-E ultimately tapped the hourglass conveying a positive emotion with the rhythm. Three fast knocks, one long knock, and four fast knocks.

“You arrived just in time! ”

“Did I? ”

“Well, maybe a few hours late, but still, you were born recently, that gives you a pass.”

Parrot-D began frantically moving around, arranging grains of sand—or rather fish eggs—in arcane patterns, pushing invisible buttons lighting into a rainbow of colors upon activation, and all manners of transactions that made some sense to none but the swimming parrot. He continued speaking:

“You need to protect me from the fishes while I perform their mating call.”

“Sure. Wait.” Parrot-E paused, “What?!? ” realizing what had been said.

“Ok.” spoke Parrot-D, realizing 'sure' had been said, “Here is a long stick. Drop your ... beak I presume? You need to carry this long stick. Point it at the fishes. Be careful! Don’t aim at their genitals! ”

With an exasperated sigh, Parrot-E stopped concerning himself with his fate. He glued his beaks on top of his eyes—in the manner of goggles—picked up the weapon of aquatic countenance, and teleported himself at higher elevation, so as to glance from which direction the threat would emerge.

Having successfully performed this task, he proceeded to dig himself a hole, fully burying himself, presenting the pointy end of the stick upward.

‘Cozy’ he thought to himself after making himself comfortable. The sand espoused his form, an armor of impenetrable thickness. Parrot-E zoomed-in unto one of the grains of sands; it was easy, because many were lodged right on top of his eyes, even slipping through his wrinkles; even a gaze could not hope to attain such a proximity, even if forcefully pressed until breaking apart. He saw that, indeed, within the dark and transparent spheres there were tiny bodies, with tiny eyes and tiny fins, fidgeting around, oblivious to being in a pool in a pool. Most robo-birds were built at the factory, below the robot storage space, within the space ship. Indeed, most useful things were built at that factory, assembled part by part, circumventing growth spurs and tooth fairies, emancipated from consuming time in order to acquire access to body functionality. What error in judgment would push someone to build a robot with acne scars on their face? Or components *designed* to be irreplaceable? Or even more damning, a child that was somehow lesser than the parent? What would be the purpose?

On his scouting mission, he had observed something terrifying: there were fishes absolutely everywhere. Many of them were larger than the space ship, behemoths of stillness. They would come from all sides, all shapes, and all colors—except a very dark shade of yellow. Mayhaps he would witness such a color upon some fish, in the distant future, and exclaim: “Why! I reckon this to be verily my first occurrence of such a visual experience! ”

The earth shook, bringing his mind back to his friend Harse, and their volcano elevator conundrum. Harse would be even harder to find, if, through raw seismic war, he was to fall even further below, into the core of the Earth, through some emerging trenches in the abyssal floor. Then again, he would believably fall right through to the other side of the planet. The ground shook again, rapacious that it was, dislodging him from his position; and again, then again, and then again some more. Every time, the hole he had dug out for himself disintegrated further and further until nothing remained, but a parrot holding up a stick.

Parrot-E gave a vacant look towards the hourglass, and observed it was now empty of sand. Somehow, the specks of dust had been arranged into an ephemeral veil, lines drawing some ornate dome over their heads. As the ghost ropes hovered without explaining themselves, Parrot-E bitterly found himself the only one affected by the weight of the ocean.

“There you are! ” spoke Parrot-D.

He was hard to see, as he was partially diluted by the violent shakes.

“The fishes are going to start coming now! ” he continued, with some urgency, “Now make sure to stab as many as you can! ”

“I am not so sure about this. I was not programmed for this.”

“Don’t worry. It’s the opposite of fishing. You poke them when they are above you. It’s very easy.”

The water grew louder and louder with as of yet unseen masses of sharp-toothed, presumably lustful, predatorial hunger machines.

“What happened to the last robot to hold this spear? ” loudly asked Parrot-E, knowing the tool was much too large for his kin.

“It’s not your turn to ask a question! ” Parrot-D screamed on top of the ever-increasing commotion, and first sight on the first wave.

“Ask me a question then! ” screamed Parrot-E, frantically positioning himself for a better view of his evolving surroundings, “ASK ME A QUESTION”

But his parent was gone, having retreated in the lower bowels of some small prism-shaped machine.

‘Wait, *it is my turn to ask one*’ was the only thought Parrot-E had the time for, as he was swallowed whole by a big blue fish.

Without panicking, he thrust his spear deep into the animal's stomach, inflicting a severe bleed, but not his release. Almost as soon as the bleed exited the wound, the lightly viscous fluid coagulated into dark-shaded eggs, occupying a volume much larger than it otherwise would. Immediately enough, Parrot-E was extracted from the fish through the sheer abundance of eggs being shot out of its mouth, as if the fish was spitting itself out beyond control.

Having exited the train of the beast, Parrot-E could only watch it swim into the distance, amongst its peers, seemingly unaware of what had transpired. Parrot-E proceeded to thrust his spear in small ones, big ones, very big ones, feeling as if he was marking trees that happened to move.

He was, however, far from doing most of the work; and the dome of sand seemingly served a purpose, as it provoked, upon contact, the same ferocious spilling of eggs, albeit, with much higher traffic of the mindless beasts.

Parrot-E was attacked again, and again. Some fishes went for the wings, and were easily dodged; and so Parrot-E took to keeping his wing wide open. Others went for various other spots, and it was hard to cover every angle, being that it was all of them. Most of the fishes, however, were not hungry for him.

Knee deep that he was in his combat, he did not notice right away that he was above the jelly fishes, which used to be the clouds.

With some determination and experience, he charged a behemoth, lacerating its flesh in many parts, every time unleashing torrents of eggs.

After many hours of this exercise, the birds were laid in the open air of the surface world, having formed an island as far as the eye could behold. The white, ephemeral, dome had fallen from its height, having doubtlessly relied on some manner of buoyancy; and Parrot-E was perched on top of his spear, minimizing the amount of energy he spent, only taking notice of the water evaporating from his body under the might of the Sun.

He was alive, a true Robot of awesomeness, survivor of trouble, thruster of the fish.

"Now that it's all over, let me explain in excruciating details what I have been up to." expressed the parrot (the small one).

Parrot-D proceeded to do just that. It was a story of twists and turns; extravagance, debauchery and treason. A revolving cast of heroes, scoundrels, elite swordfighters and siege breakers; millers, smugglers, tutors and destitutors. They had danced amongst the flames, and sung against the silence. They had transported themselves by train, by ship, by horse, and by dream. One by one, they had fallen in their quest, until only one remained; and now, Parrot-D could proudly declare that he had achieved the function of his life. He could retire, and be done with worldly affairs.

"So the previous spear carrier was a robo-penguin by the name of 'Terry' who exploded when the submarine's nuclear reactor drowned after getting damaged by the shadow of Compassion?" spoke Parrot-E.

“Precisely.”

“I could never have imagined that fish eggs were so structurally relevant to preserving the shape of this planet.”

“Humans are in for a big surprise when they explore the Core. If they ever get there. It gets psychedelic.”

“Well, speaking of those bio-mammals, I am ready to go whenever you are.”

“I must pack up the hourglass first, it won’t take long.”

Parrot-D moved at great speed, roughly tracing the shape of what used to be the dome. As if it were magnetically responding to him, the sand rose and followed him, in a manner of a thread catching in the wind. It eventually made its way to the hourglass, which had luckily not been stampeded, for, naturally, there existed no stamp within the wild fish. He then proceeded to fold the glass, as if it were mere cloth, unto itself, always smaller and smaller, until nothing of it could be seen.

'How hard would it be, to find a compelling story, that captivates, enthralls, and whispers life to the most secret desires.' wondered Parrot-E to himself. 'This is what we might find amongst the humans. If we are careful not to reveal ourselves. For, if we were found, and allowing them to learn of our existence in such an uncontrolled fashion, they might prepare defenses against our interests.'

“I believe I can show myself without issue, but for you, you will need some sort of camouflage.” spoke Parrot-D while packing his final luggages.

“My feathers are fully chameleonical. I can change their color at will to blend with my surroundings, with a 97.695% effectiveness at the benchmark.” Parrot-E replied, while at last putting his beak back in place. “There can be some quirks at special angles, but I can ensure best results for vision at eye-level height by giving the proper allocations.”

“Friend! Is that you! PARROT-E! ” screamed a voice out of nowhere.

Two parrots looked east—some shade of east anyway—but only one knew what he was looking at.

“This is an ostrich! ” exclaimed Parrot-D.

Parrot-E merely closed his eyes. The ostrich grew nearer taking with him the sense that there existed an opportunity for escape.

“You would not believe my adventure! ” Harse began monologuing with great enthusiasm.

Harse had indeed attempted to swim, but his wings were such a handicap, that whenever he would flap them, he would only ever drown deeper into his watery grave. Most advanced birds could teleport, and Harse lamented that while he possessed such an ability, it had sent him at arbitrary locations in the universe. He had seen every combination of colors for the star, the sky, the clouds, the land and the sea; he had seen strange double-headed aliens, and negotiated peace treaties between black holes. He had

glimpsed at a fabulous resort filled with beautiful singing. He had even been worshipped for his neck, for being deemed miraculously “short”. As luck—or bad luck—would have it, he successfully found his way back to the planet, at the same spot he had left it, which is quite improbable. In the end, he had been elevated not by adoration, but instead by the aggressive laying of fish eggs, leading to the formation of a massive island in the Pacific Ocean. Then he found Parrot-E.

“Ok, well, we are going to steal a story made by the humans.” spoke Parrot-E, having exerted what patience he had.

“Which one? ” asked the ostrich.

“By the way my name is Parrot-D.” spoke Parrot-D.

“The best we can find.” assured Parrot-E.

“Did a...” (voice just speak to me? ', Harse did not get to ask.)

Parrot-E cut short the revelation that his parent was the size of a speck of sand, and that there was no real sand, and that the group had turned into a trio, as it served no real purpose to revisit.

“Well, where should we go? ” spoke Parrot-E, ready to go somewhere.

“It is my understanding that the center of human culture is situated on this planet. It is a city called 'Peachkilt', and they have something called ‘movies’ playing in a ‘cinema’. We will need tickets and costumes to get in.” explained Parrot-D.

“A 'movie' is a sequence of flat, rectangular images accompanied with sound.” he finished.

“Well, we go there.” spoke Parrot-E, walking in any direction, presumably reaching his destination eventually. He chose to go by feet, reduced to the lowest common denominator for the sake of his stubborn companion.

“It will be faster this way.” corrected his parent, pointing a wing too small to be seen.

“Fine, we need to find a story to tell. Let’s achieve this! ” Parrot-E corrected his trajectory.

By the time they would reach the end of the island, maybe the humans would have had the time to build a bridge to it.

Chapter 4: Secret Infiltration

“Your beak is upside down.” realized Harse, taking a good look at his friend’s face.

He happened to be correct, the worst sort of correct: vocally correct.

Parrot-E rectified his cool, dark sunglasses, and death-stared at his favorite person. He could do all manners of grimaces and keep them all secret, fashionably. That was great.

As they had meandered unto positive human population density, it had become a rising issue to obfuscate their true nature by means of concealed features and feathers; they had first intended on burglarizing some wardrobe warehouse, even, potentially, lightweight furniture or car frames; yet much, much more ready at hand—or, err.. gloves—they had stumbled upon their first landfill. Mountains of unmonitored consumables, be they plastic bags, spoiled onion rings hibernating in proximity of greasy, vividly colored cardboard single-serving packaging depicting geometric logos and simple, repetitive puns. There were soiled mattresses, rusty umbrellas, dead goldfishes, and about as many black, bloated, human-sized plastic bags as there were fish eggs in the sea, all brimming with eclectic revelations. Most important of all, however, was that there were wares to wear: shirts, hats, skirts, socks and the like.

It was a true treasure, and all three birds foraged, amongst flies and maggots, for that special look that says: 'I am human.'

Their appearances fluctuated from landfill to landfill. Who could judge them? They were slave to the thrill. Needless to say, the diapers turned into pants, the construction helmets turned into fedoras, the car doors turned into aprons, the winter mittens turned into leather gloves; while nothing came in pairs, the odds were great for an improvement lying beyond the horizon.

Parrot-E wore a white baseball cap with the quote 'Mass Quote' written in black etchings. He had found a pair of beautifully intact sunglasses in trash bag number 74593694326555423, the same bag he had found a professional juggling kit. His shirt also said 'Mass Quote', doubtlessly, it was a popular musical band, or shark exhibit. His black leather boots were capped, his jacket spiked, and his belt accepted batteries that, once it was cleaned for battery acid, and fresher energetic replacements were discovered and inserted, emitted rays of various colors along the edge of the buckle. His right sock was red, but had a hole; his left sock was green, and was long and saggy.

To cover his feathers, Parrot-E camouflaged them into the likeness of a human: pink. He would update them when he would meet his first human.

Harse was wearing a very big blue shirt with long sleeves, tied around the top of his neck, which, alongside a discrete coat hanger, gave him the appearance of having no arms, but something akin to a torso where it should be. It looked less abnormal. His pants were striped white, his boots were pink, and he was wearing a dark bike helmet on his head.

Parrot-D, for his part, was wearing a pearl chained amongst other pearls, into a necklace. For the sake of not appearing to be hanging around the neck of some invisible ghost, the necklace was carried

around the neck of the parrot that could turn himself invisible. The hollow pearl still contained trace presence of arsenic, yet Parrot-D did not mind, for arsenic was a poison, not a non-venom.

Learning the difference was very crucial.

“Fine” replied Parrot-E, in regards to his inverted beak.

As they stood in the suburbs of Peachkilt, capital of Culture, getting closer and closer to its skyscrapers, Parrot-E grabbed his beak, took it off, twisted it around, and put it back on his face. What should have been a simple transaction took a turn for the consequential, as, those very skyscrapers, which had appeared quite sturdy, rose up from the ground, flipped over, and landed head first in their original positions.

Most curiously, the basements looked like roofs, except in that where the previous roofs were grey, these ones were orange.

“The buildings did something.” spoke Parrot-E, with a fresh beak, if not a fresh perspective.

“Is it still an outline, or as it become an *in-line*? ” asked Harse, referring to the artificial horizon of the city.

“I think your beak must be on the same radio frequency has their Trash Shacker.” spoke Parrot-D across his pearl, muffled and blind.

“Trash Shacker. Of course. No need to ever clean, all the trash falls nicely on the streets, and gets picked up like snow.” realized Harse.

“Wouldn’t there be some sort of mortality consideration? These non-robots are fragile, so I hear.” asked Parrot-E, casually flipping his beak a few times, observing his effect unto the world with mild awe.

“They have evolved seat belts everywhere. They should be fine.” answered Parrot-D.

A human opened their front door, next to the birds: male, bald, fat, and poorly dressed, he was joined by many members of his species, apparently wondering at what was occurring with the skyscrapers. As such, Parrot-E stopped playing with himself, not wanting to draw attention.

For a moment he interested himself with analyzing the strange creatures, yet soon, they were all back inside their homes, doubtlessly occupied with something made of plastic.

The birds were not there to smoke creatures out of their lairs, but to watch movies; and so they kept going. They eventually reached the 'Fast Street', and followed it to a building labeled 'Entertainment Simplex'. They entered the Entertainment Simplex. The smog was vacuumed out by the second set of doors, leading to clear, fresh air.

They would now face the biggest challenge they had yet to face as a challenge to their face: the ticket lady at the reception desk.

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“Hello sir.” Bianca Vodka spoke to the misshapen, disheveled men.

She was hit by the putrid wind in their wake, and instinctively covered her nose.

“We need three tickets to see the movie. I mean two. We are not... Hello to you as well, human.” spoke the leading man while covering his pearl necklace with a glove appearing to harbor a boneless hand.

Bianca was suspicious of what laid beneath the glove. Parrot-E was suspicious that the human was not properly equipped to perform their professional task, being that it was female.

“The cinema is on the 14–16th floor.” spoke Parrot-D, or rather, Parrot-E's neck.

“14–16? What floor is this? The fourteenth one or the one above? The fifteenth by average? ”

“I think it’s the flipping thing. It changes which floor things are. Presumably there are 29 floors to the entire building. Since it is an odd number, the fifteenth floor happens to be the same distance from either extremity, and need only one floor number, but that is the single exception.” explained the freakishly tall, armless man with a motorcycle helmet, “If there were 30, it would be 14–17, and the neighboring floors would be 13–18 and 15–16. We are currently on floor 1–29.”

“We need tickets for a specific room, and a specific movie.” spoke the first man, but with the different, muffled voice coming from his throat.

Bianca paid a closer look at the two men. The front one looked identical to Henry Leywidjer—not the man, but the poster of the man. The poster hanging outside, by the main door. The sun glasses concealed his eyes, however; and he sounded nothing alike. His mouth looked incredibly strange for no discernable reason, as if it was painted there; but the lips moved when he spoke the first time.

She might have been experiencing visual illusions from their foul aroma.

The second was obese, with his head in front of most of his body. He wore something around his neck that was white and feathery, strangely clean and well-fitted, in contrast to everything else.

She wondered why a armless man would be wearing fake diamond hearings on his bike helmet—or why own a bike helmet in the first place.

“What movie do you have? ” asked Henry Leywidjer, with his normal unusual voice, the one that moved the lips.

“The popular ones are: 'Forest Gore', 'Bedside Manor', 'Birdpocalyspe', 'Hell Mail', 'The Explorationist', 'Street of Strife', 'Bold Soul', 'Eternal Joust', 'Mountain Hills', 'Lumber jock', 'Running rabbits', 'Peacificity', 'Lightmill at the Windhouse', 'Pirhanana', 'Bestial Mist', 'Origin of Sorrow', 'The Penguin War: a historic retrospective', 'War in the South: land ownership crisis', 'Penguins: the secret evil', 'War is good against the bad guys', 'Mind Control', 'Weast Nouth and the Imp’s Pass', 'Fully Automatic

Womb Rifle', 'To Pay an Actor' and 'Box Warrior' ” enumerated Bianca, bored, scared, hairy, variously impaired.

'Birdpocalypse'? wondered Parrot-E, in the secret of his mind. Did they know? Or did they use the imagination device inside their head computers?

“I am wondering about Birdpocalypse. The movie you suggested. Is it ... concerning, to the humans? ”

As he talked to her, he leaned forward. At the same moment, a few maggots burst out of the jacket’s pocket, making the air more toxic. Bianca vomited on the floor, reaching for a trash can.

Harse, blending in, vomited in his helmet. Some of it dripped on the floor.

“It is your typical horror movie. Each ticket is going to be three hundred sixty two and ninety-nine” explained Bianca, growing impatient, if not unfriendly.

“Very well.” confirmed Parrot-E, “We will take three tickets.”

“I mean, two.” he corrected.

“What will be your mode of payment? ”

“Payment? Do you want our clothes? We can’t give them.”

“We want to open a new bank account.” spoke Parrot-D, feeding his descendant through the throat.

“Yes, we want to open a bank account.” Parrot-E appeared to reply to himself.

“Would you prefer Safe Saving, or Telecom United? ” spoke Bianca, a tear escaping from her left eye.

This morning, the buildings flipped around ten times, causing havoc across Peachkilt. Bianca had forgotten to sleep with her seat belt, leading to a series of concussions. She was contractually obligated to allow these shady characters inside the Entertainment Simplex as part of a convoluted settlement with her health insurance company. As such, she withstood the ever-worsening putrid aggression of the suspicious strangers’ presence.

“Telecom United offers instant withdrawals. No deposit required.” spoke the throat. A few more pearls, and it would not be beneath a chocker.

“I will get a Tele..” began Parrot-E.

“Yes yes, it is done.” confirmed Bianca.

Safe Savings offers a free pop corn, and record permanence—meaning, that numbers on the records matched transactions and were not subject to arbitrary seizures. Both banks thus possessed a crowd of their own. The free money, however, was convenient for the birds, as they had failed to acquire a paper

printer while exploring the landfills. They *did* find some sheets of paper, but how to know if they had cut it to the right dimensions?

“What is your name? ” asked the ticketeer, “I need a name and address”. She tensed up, waiting for the words of Henry Leywidjer.

“My name is Parrot... Z” spoke Parrot-E, “My address is Fast Street”.

“You also need a number.” spoke the throat of Parrot-E.

“My address is One Fast Street.”

“This *is* One Fast Street, sir.” corrected Bianca; to the birds, she seemed oblivious to the deception.

How could Parrot-E have better fared in his deception? By paying attention around himself? By preparing for more than zero seconds? By wearing a necklace of *black* pearls? Perfection is impervious to rhetorical questions.

“Very well sir, your account is created. Do you wish to have it overdrawn by one thousand twenty-seven and ninety-three credits, including taxes? ”

“Yes, we will be consuming this singular piece of your medias, in a disinhibited and relaxed leisure-type activity session.”

“Here are your tickets, and here is your banking card. Have a nice day! ”

Parrot-E was quite satisfied with himself: he paid less in taxes than if he had bought three tickets tax-free. He was getting the hang of this. Bianca alerted her health insurance company, a corpocratic beast eager for getting a hold of disease super-spreaders. They would flood the theater with unsuspecting patrons, raking up medical expenses further down the line.

It all paid for itself.

...

The first explosion was everything they had looked for. The fiery inferno blasted away buildings, people, tanks. It made a loud 'boom'. It shaded the screen with yellow, orange, and a plume of dark grey smoke.

“What an excellent simulation of physics! ” spoke Parrot-E, “A story begins with a ‘Boom’! ”

There was a radius of empty seats around them. It did not stop people from loudly coughing mucus and blood. Such was the power of disease in this room, that the audience was louder than the movie. The birds, meanwhile, easily filtered out these sounds, with a free hand to speak to each other.

This was it! This was *true* culture! The 14:30 showing in room 70 for the movie 'Birdpocalypse' in the Entertainment Simplex of Peachkilt! An incredibly popular movie in an incredibly popular theater in an incredibly popular city!

Moments before it had begun, they had broken an elevator—while they were the right size to pass as human, they were much heavier. Parrot-D explained to them no humans ever used the stairs, so they discretely flew up through the stairwell instead. Being, however, that the ostrich failed in such a desired scheme of migration, they ended up inverting the entire building, to make the neckly non-giraffe fall to the right floor—14–16—and inverted it back again.

All three birds were assiduously taking notes, their mind, a blank slate for whatever it was that these mammals had chosen to share with the world. They would come back to their kind with the unlocked knowledge of the true meaning of “free will”, intertwined that it was with the capacity to create new ideas out of thin air.

The second explosion was a different shade of orange.

“Of course” spoke Harse, “it is as the two dimensions. For, is it not true, that you cannot draw any shape without lines, made of two points? You need anchors, to remind you, through their variance in between each other, of the greater geometry being constructed block by block! Step by step! Combustion by combustion! Absolutely enthralling! Dare I muse, convex? or concave? That is the new question presented to our mind’s use! ”

“Concave is civilization! An option for those who shave! ” declared a Parrot-E of beige feathers on the chin.

“Convex is to make us perplex! At the Entertainment Simplex! ” countered Parrot-D.

“Cough! Cough! Cough! ” coughed a human behind them; his intestines jumping through his mouth, and flying over their heads.

The third explosion destroyed around a dozen tanks. Some of the tanks had the time to shoot explosive projectiles moments before exploding into smaller explosions.

The fourth explosion, the fifth explosion, and the sixth explosion exploded just as much as the previous explosions. The hundredth explosion was followed in very close succession to the hundredth-and-one, and the hundredth-and-two. The four-hundredth-and-sixty-one—or four-hundred-and-sixty-first?—explosion was considerably louder than the rest. And on and on it went, a true monument to the energetic discharge of particles into the gaseous atmosphere. 'More' screamed the birds, along with the humans.

Up to the nine-hundredth-ninety-ninth—or ninth-hundred-nineteenth-nine?—explosion, all birds were content with the rich tapestry they had been given to savor, as they came to understanding deep mathematical truths and the inherent language unique to cinema. An emotion cannot be expressed by telepathic network sharing! No! It is the shade, form, and power of the bomb’s deflagration! It is the curvature of its crater, the amount of human organs lying on the theater’s floor! The angle of the camera! Even the slightest tremor could speak to a billion nerves! The variables are so incredibly

nuanced that they strike the sophistication center of the mind with every action that are taken to be too shallow, or too insistent, or with exact, correct, balance!

Then the thousandth explosion happened. The lighting of the room chased away the dark ambience, just as it was extinguished upon the viewing screen; the full extent of the human damage, in full display; those who could remove themselves made their way to the stairs in between the rows of seats, limping to the exits.

It was over.

“Is this the intermission? ” Parrot-E asked his parent. He knew about intermissions because it ended in 'ion', and he looked up those words before.

“No it’s over. Human movies are all pretty much like this.” he answered.

Parrot-E was absolutely devastated. This mere ... this mere ... appetizer? This one drop upon the tongue?

“This was insulting! This was repulsive! I would call it trash, if not for the fact that trash is actually delightful! ” Parrot-E grew in anger, if not cholera.

“Is this not the only occupation of these filthy monkeys? It should be at least twenty-four hours long! And what about non-explosions!?! WHAT ABOUT NON-EXPLOSIONS” exploded the parrot, hypocritical to the extreme.

“If you hate the movie so much, then don’t watch it.” spoke a human with an eyeball dangling from the socket in his visage container. His skin was an unhealthy greyish purple. He coughed some blood in his elbow, dripping some teeth on the floor. His large female companion interjected herself in between them, her porcine features aggravated by situational stress. She was holding food, which she had stolen from one of the fallen—his hands were still there, being mistaken for a utensil.

“You ugly Leywidjer! What make you think you betta, moar superoar! ” the male-voiced beast began harassing them, violating their personal space without a single shred of politeness or decorum.

“Harse! ” screamed Parrot-E, “Activate the translation device at once! ”

Both birds made their right talon twist around itself, contorsioning their interlocutor’s tongue into a sexier outfit.

“Madame, this travesty of a product of entertainment must be rightfully derided, as the grotesque mockery that it is! I shan’t back down, armed that I am with this sacred conviction! ” exclaimed Parrot-E “A story should have people! People doing things! ”

The fat woman gesticulated, and shared some of the humidity that had been residing in her primary face orifice, almost drooling. Yet no sound came out. Not even a 'yes' or a 'no'. The birds gave each other a look.

About halfway through slowly twisting their talon back, they began hearing murmurs. whispers. the delicate touch of the wind.

“I do not like you! ” the creature spoke, its eyes crazy with wildness. The birds’ talon were three quarters of the way back.

“I am sorry to hear that.” answered Parrot-E.

“Bad bad! ” she simply retorted.

As she began walking away, disengaging from the confrontation, Parrot-E, as if he had forgotten they were on a secret mission, could not help but say, out loud: “Where are the birds of ‘Birdpocalypse’? ”.

“Maybe the apocalypse is that the birds are absent! ” laughed Harse, getting on his nerves with his obvious sounding answers.

The beast was back at them within one beat of its negligently maintained heart “Watched myself the movie ten times, therefore my position is the correct one, it is validated by all of my peers! The movie has been nominated to the Oilseed Award for Best Movie and Best Explosions! Wrong is you! ”

“Oilseed Awards? ” questioned Parrot-E, intrigued “It sounds religious.”

“Is she wearing a tattoo of a ping pong table? ” Parrot-D answered the question with a question.

She did not. The Ping Pong Table Cult, centering around the Oilseed Awards, was a better story than Birdpocalypse. In short, the devout ‘peepees’ watched movies while playing ping pong, and many influential people installed ping pong tables wherever they went, be it in a sauna room, in a bed room, in a bath room, or even in the uranium core of a nuclear power plant. They told the humans which movie was made by their friends—by giving away gold-plated trophies to each other in front of a camera.

While they could—*maybe should*—have discussed for many days the intricacies of human fanaticism, they exited the showing room in silence. With plenty of other rooms to explore, the birds decided to compare the offerings for themselves, splitting the cinema in three areas; any of their plethora of audio-visual sensors might very well fatefully stumble upon a secret oasis in the seeming desert of human thirst for expanding gas. Indeed, machines that they were, they would have no difficulty watching multiple movies through the walls of the corridor, without losing even one frame. After a few hours, they would combine everything together, in the hope of finding something good.

Parrot-D had the easiest time of them all. Spying on rooms of the center wing, which saw considerably more human traffic, he enveloped the pearls in pop corns, and simply crawled on the floor, unnoticed. One fat kid chased after him, but most kids were of healthy weight.

Harse had the harder time, as he inflicted suspicion wherever he went—as well as most of the disease. He regularly retreated to the stairwell, where no human would follow.

Parrot-E inverted the building whenever somebody attempted to get on his nerves. It worked.

...

“It is done.” simply declared Parot-E, pushing against the tides of blood, vomit and corpses attempting to defy human culture by leaking past the door. He casually locked the doors by barricading them with an average femur that had been lying around, up for grabs. No birds observed any potential sign of ownership, such as the initials of a name, or a sleek logo. Or, you know, being presented with some attitude.

They were back in the stairwell. The stairs were made of steel, like *their* femurs; in a way, they were standing inside the rib cage of some giant robot. So there were casualties on both sides, which made this okay.

“Let the merging begin.” he simply completed.

...

Hordes of onlookers cornered the building under the pouring rain. They had cameras, cell phones, umbrellas; some even carried waterproof wristwatches. As night was falling unto the city, the spotlights of the news, police and news-police helicopters blinded in their frantic wake, columns of light. Teams in hazmat suits made their way into the now largely vacated Entertainment Simplex, the epicenter of the outbreak of a disease dubbed 'entertainment plague'.

“The best floors for non-lethal doses were 1/29 through 11/20. The hospitals are overflowing with paychecks. The worst floors were 12/19, 13/18 and 14/17. Those only serviced the morgues of Grey & Greyer.” formulated team leader one.

He was on the first floor briefing the new team, team *two*; they knew what they were in for, lacking only the most recent developments.

Most of the space was covered in plastic, as if it were a reverse trash bag, except that it was transparent in coloration, rather than black: this act of hygiene had been perpetrated as an emergency sanitization measure. While most corpses had been removed, some still remained under the plastic sheets, bumpy roads for the feet.

“Floor 12/19: roller coaster habitat. Status: evacuated, cleared of remains, performing analysis and containment. Five mega spreaders visited this floor today, and five are accounted for. No disease match.”

Because of the weight requirements on track rides, floor 12/19 had been the easiest on their backs, their wrists, and their wheelbarrows.

“Floor 13/18: casino habitat. Status: evacuated, performing clearing of remains and containment. Three super spreaders, and three accounted for. No disease match.”

“Floor 14/19: your floor! ” team leader one spoke up, as if catching them losing their attention, “Cinema habitat! Two super spreaders visited this floor today, with strong suspicion they are the ones

we are looking for! It is a priority to find them whether they are dead or alive! Don't bother trying to watch the movies, you will get ducked pay! ”

The draw would be too strong for most of the men. But as long as they made enough money to watch two movies per hour ... the pay was the parsimonious choice.

“Alright boys! Let's make sure we don't need the Greyest! It's called insurance, not outsurance! Move out! ”

The team made their way to the elevators; some amongst them carried technical equipment in pairs, dividing the load between each other. One of them, Cragger, painfully rolled a coil of plastic the wrong way (as a rectangle, rather than a circle). Frustrated, he eventually pushed the coil flat on the wall, and rolled it there.

One of the elevators was mysteriously out-of-order, which had a meaningful impact, as the team found itself unable to cram everything for a single trip. Some of the team members were left behind;

and one of them

one of them

one of them

chose the stairs.

...

After careful deliberation, the birds had found nothing of substance. Nothing. All of human culture was to be summarily dismissed and ignored as the flatulent aberration that it was. The birds broke off their neural network, and contemplated their options. But, as they opened their eyes, they realized they were being watched. They turned their heads and saw a stranger in a yellow hazmat suit staring at them.

The silence was uncomfortable, but not complete; for stairs are exhausting, and produce panting when they are climbed deliberately, as experimentally discovered in the lab rat and various strains of wingless bats.

“Have you never seen three guys I mean two guys hanging out in a stairwell? ” ultimately spoke Parrot-E, breaking that silence.

“There is something on your face.” the stranger replied, pointing his left glove.

Too late, Parrot-E realized that his cloak had been missing at the most inconvenient of moment. Too late, Parrot-E realized that, in the middle of the transfer, he had forgotten to apply a proper illusion to shield himself from the gaze of the humans, and that parts of his face, parts of his face were merely camouflaging against the walls and the door, instead of looking beige.

Right away, he brought his camouflage back up, hoping to pretend it never happened; alas, as the stranger began itching backwards, away from them, he realized this could not be undone.

“What is it? What is happening? ” asked Parrot-D, still in a pearl; he did not understand, because it was not obvious to his senses that the camouflage had been wrong.

“The human thinks we are weird because Parrot... Z messed up is own face.” described Harse, very openly.

“Oh. We should kill him.” replied Parrot-D. The 'D' apparently stood for 'deadly'.

“Nonoononono wait waitwait wait” the human stuttered, “you don’t have to do this.”

“Give us one reason why.”

“Don’t kill me, because... I want to live? ” he suggested.

Would such an argument work? Since it has been presented to machines, we know the answer: Harse is convinced at 32%, Parrot-E at 65%, and Parrot-D at 65% as well.

“A sound argument. Albeit, we are not *fully* convinced.” spoke Parrot-E, “And we would need to be fully convinced.”

What would convince them? What was even at stake? Had they not seemingly purged an entire city from its moviegoing population, inducing an evolutionary pressure of unforeseen consequence upon courtship mantrates? Were they not already at fault for something akin to murder? Should they have elected to depart society the moment they realized sickness was in their wake? ‘How could we have known? We thought this was the norm, because nothing in their behavior denounced our mistake’ pondered Parrot-E, ashamed of the femur ordeal.

“We are not killers, we are something like novelists.” declared Parrot-E to his companions, such that they would learn, through him, about such a crucial element of their personality.

“But we haven’t written even one book yet. If we are three I mean two, are we writing a book each when only one specific work is published? ” burst Harse, with an intrigued mind.

“We are art thieves. Or art-cheologists. There are no in-betweens.” countered Parrot-D.

“No, no, no! ” Parrot-E took offense, “the plan was to get a story from the humans, but we could get a story anywhere! At the most fundamental core, we <sigh> were supposed to use 'imagination'. ” he informed his parent, with disenchantment.

“Fine. 'Imagination thieves', then.” elucidated the elder.

“The human is gone.” declared Harse.

He was vocally correct. The human was no longer in their presence. He had taken their bickering as an opportunity to escape.

Without missing a beat, Parrot-D released its magic dust, and flew alongside it across the stairs, falling faster than a human climbing down at a sprinting pace. The dust got hold of him, and brought him back in a state of compliance, safe for the screams.

“This human likes stairs. I have never seen anything like this.” Parrot-D reacted, “Don’t bother breaking out again. Your species possess the most inconvenient reproduction cycle. We would not want any accident.”

“Tibor Magloowikiron Vossapwalom Gohovitec told me that, if I ever were in danger, he would be found on Venus.” spoke the human.

This was quite the sentence.

“What is this? A barbarian language?” asked Harse.

“No, this is the name of *my* parent, just as I am parent to my own child.” informed Parrot-D.

‘My grandparent?’ wondered Parrot-E to himself.

‘ Venus? ’

Chapter 5: Hospitality

The venusian world proved to be a dreary place: the atmosphere was yellow fog in whole, making vision impossible beyond a few feet; the land was rocky, barren, and scarred; there was no ocean or lake to speak of, presumably for cause that any fluid had long evaporated under the blazing heat of the nearby Sun and its greenhouse effect, which happened to be particularly vicious. The air pressure on the venusian surface was 93 times greater than that of the Earth, which was about a quarter of what they had experienced on the sea floor.

“No! ” screamed every birds, shellshocked, as their clothes burned to ashes around them; the human, still secured by dust, did not suffer a similar fate, protected as he was by his yellow full-body suit; in fact, he belonged well in this climate, blending seamlessly into the surrounding haze of the same color.

It was all over as soon as it began.

Then, Parrot-E realized, with embarrassment, that the human was not the only one blending somewhere.

‘It was my fault,’ he realized. He had been in charge of teleporting Harse, being given the erratism known to be that which the ostrich’s teleportation failed to lack to secure, and rather insecured in great quantities of amount, bmount, cmount, and the likewise.

“You are inside me.” spoke Harse, moving Parrot-E’s legs as the front legs of a quadrupedal stallion that they had become. The two looked as a Parrot being pierced in the stomach by the ostrich’s very long neck, up to and including the shoulders. Both looked in the same direction, both had their head above their feet. In return for the control over his legs, Parrot-E had received Harse’s wings.

He perceived it as a loss.

“Aplogies. I must have teleported exactly on the same point twice, first when I teleported you, then when I teleported myself.” deduced Parrot-E, “Venus must have a weird rotation.”

“Indeed, this planet is known as *retrograde*, it is the only planet of the solar system to rotate upon itself in clockwise fashion, if we take all other planets to rotate counter-clockwise. Meaning, that every 243 days, the Sun rises to the West, and falls to the East.” explained the smaller—and *smallest*—Parrot.

“So, do you know what time it currently is? ” asked Harse, stormy.

A parrot that could not be seen looked up, down, and around. He saw sulfur, carbon, rock, and nothing else.

“Day.” Parrot-D concluded.

“It was a rhetorical question” snapped Harse, “It is time for my body to be de-tangled from him, this is the priority.”

“I don’t control my wings, I can’t do it myself.” he added.

“Harse! You petulant bucket of rust! ” reacted Parrot-E, shielding his eyes from the blinding sunglassless reality, “first of all, we are now revealed to the human.”

That was true, not in a Schrodinger way. The cat was out of the bag, except that he had wings and could speak fluent binary. They might have to do something, such as lie with great confidence.

“Second of all,” he continued, “somewhere, on this planet, is located my grandparent, whom may very well possess an understanding of storymaking that will allow us to return home. Who knows, maybe the *how* of this human knowing him could very well be an interesting story all within itself! We could just ask the human, but it appears his bipedalism is stronger than his tongue! ”

“I can’t share this information. It is very personal.” spoke the human, apparently following the conversation in the near distance.

“Third of all,” coughed the parrot, speaking over the human with his now well-trained death stare pointed toward the general source of the noisy intrusion, “you *know*, as well as I do, that teleportation is a subtle art form. It is an elaborate dance, that begins from the tippity top of the toes, going all the way up to the bottom of the wings. How could either of us dismantle that which we cannot control? ”

“Parrot-D could do it,” replied Harse, “this is the primary reason I had directed my focus towards him.”

Correct! Again! Why did it never cease to feel completely wrong? ‘Because it always sounds obvious, and it always occurs when I think I am being clever’ Parrot-E internalized, doing an internship in outern-opinions.

“I can do it. But I am all too aware, child, of how devastated you are about your beautiful clothes. Are you sure you did not forget the most important? ” spoke Parrot-D, affectionate, “Are you sure you wish to destroy the buckle of your belt? The one being protected, right this very moment, by the outer layers of your friendship? ”

They could not see the daring waves of color—and that was a shame, this planet was much too yellow—yet they all knew what was at stake: somewhere, somewhere where both their bodies met, some of the clothes of Parrot-E were still alive, shielded, nurtured, and validated, filled to the brim with the potential hope that it may exist into the distant future. Fourth of all ... fourth of all ... an implacable argument.

“Thank you for guiding me through this life, parent. I do dearly wish to protect the treasure of the landfill. It must be preserved, as a museum’s collection of honor, as a contract between two consenting adults, or as a royal regalia. These are fundamental truths of our fundamental identity. The world cannot be allowed to grow dimmer in light, through the loss of this singular object of destiny and.. *meaning.*”

Harse sighed quite dramatically, but did not comment, a tacit commitment to plastic dignity.

It was thus agreed that, as long as they were here, upon this harsh, bitter, destructive planet, so they would preserve the belt buckle, embracing temporary quadrupedality, and eternal eternity.

...

The birds set out towards Venus; luckily, any direction worked. The human—whom they took to warmly nickname 'Hostage'—was sat on top of Harse, liberating the 'magic dust' for some fresh purpose. The hybridized birds soon found an advantage to their condition, devouring the distance almost as fast as if they had used their wings.

This planet, unlike the previous one, had nothing going on: neither cities, nor armies of fishes, nor geological complexities. *This*, did not turn out to be entirely true, as they eventually stumble upon a very peculiar crater, which appeared as a very smooth circle upon the land. Parrot-D informed them these were not in fact craters, but 'pancake domes'; they were born of volcanic activities. If the dinosaurs had lived here, they would have been protected from the conic version of the magma spitter, their known racial weakness. Instead, they went extinct, not ever having had the decency to be stripped of life by the cold hand of the machine. The humans were rats at the time of these events (according to *themselves*), and presumably survived by hiding below the surface, forming cave systems with ambitious ventilation batteries powered by wheel-running. The underground dwellers doubtlessly took to calling themselves 'Rats of the Black Noon', since it was always dark, and always noon beneath the new magma Sun.

Yet, eventually the group stumbled upon tracks: not from a bird's talon, but from some wheeled vehicle. It made sense to follow the tracks, and so they did. The decor changed and evolved, always inscrutable and yellow, yet there were changes in altitude, and, of course, each rock that had to be traversed, without falling into some cracks, possessed their own unique identity, their own unique risks, and the elegance in which those risks were overcome. By the time they had reached their first intersection—mind you, not that of some streets, or maybe a fingerpost, rather, that of the mere tracks crossing each other—Hostage was complaining about feeling hunger inside the stomach module.

Four distinct possibilities were on the table, none more appetizing than the other: being that one track was visibly imprinted on top of the previous one, they could be labeled 'old' and 'new'; being that both tracks were going too far for the ability to observe their conclusion, there was the 'left' side and the 'right' side of both of these tracks. For what it was worth, the birds engaged the intersection coming from the 'old right' option, making that particular one the least appealing to pursue, as they already knew what laid there, to an extent.

They ultimately settled to keep going, following the 'old' one, expecting they might want to see *what* happens at a destination before seeing *who* happens on this planet: while it was likely to be Parrot-C, they could not be sure.

After a few hours which did nothing to move the Sun, they reached a crater—a real one. As they reached the center of it, Parrot-E took in a false sense of attention; indeed, he could not help feeling as if the yellow haze was obscuring to him a crowd of robo-birds taking their seats along the ridge; and his performance, his play, was shocking them in an order of magnitude similar to that of the meteor impact that had formed their surroundings.

The birds took a fast glance investigating what occurred in the center of the crater, for it had left them new clues. The tracks were erratic, showing digging holes, and the impression of boots compatible with human extremities. Humans? On Venus? The fertility of Hostage grew in potential.

They continued on their way, having little more they could hope to glean from their scene. As the crater was absorbed by the mist behind them, Parrot-E decided for himself that *his* crater would possess more content, and not a mere *implication of its existence*.

The planet was running short on humans before running short on craters; the birds traveled from the sunmore hemisphere to the sunless hemisphere, always finding the same vestiges of the past, and creating, inside their mind, the itinerary, and geographic relationship of the visited points. They knew with some assurance that humans were here—one of the craters even had recent caveman drawings of a hunter attacking a large turtle with a scorpion tail. ‘This makes sense’ figured Parrot-E, ‘That way the stinger cannot accidentally poison him. Unless the tail also gets retracted under the shell, then they could be vulnerable. I am a novice in scorpiology, there is no way to be sure.’

“What do humans want with Venus? What do they want with those craters? ” Parrot-E asked Hostage.

While hungry, thirsty, overheated, and barely continent, the man retained both lucidity and movement.

“I knew they had come here, this was in the newspapers, I just didn’t really pay attention. I have absolutely no idea what they came here to do, honestly.” Hostage answered, “Maybe something to do with collecting samples? ”

“Samples of what? Rock? You don’t have those on Earth? ” Parrot-E ridiculed. If sand is eggs, rocks must be nuclear bombs.

“All I know, is the size of the crew, there are only two of them.”

“Well, that is helpful.” spoke Harse, “This should be easy to deal with.”

“And no idea where this... Tibor Magloowikiron Vossapowi.. wawabawabi.. this guy, you still don’t know where he is hiding? ” Parrot-E asked, impatient.

Being a machine, he had perfect memory of all collected data, including names; it was no mistake, he deliberately failed to pronounce it. The time spent looking for the missing bird was now getting close to an entire half of Parrot-E’s lifespan. He should have provided a complicated address, not a complicated name.

“He said Venus, and I think he meant this one.” Hostage confirmed, fanning himself with his arm.

The birds maintained their course.

...

The human camp was easy to see, lit up in every which way with powerful beams of fog piercing energy. In relationship to the intersection of many hours ago, it was closest to the right hand of both

tracks. Parrot-E camouflaged himself yellow, and, with Hostage being head-to-toe in a yellow suit himself, the entire group was now passing as an ostrich. Harse hid behind the terrain of a rough hill, raising his head in the manner of a submarine telescope, for the employ of Parrot-E.

There was no sign of any vehicle, implying it was partially or totally deserted. The installations were very bare, with one large antenna, a circle of spotlights arranged in a perimeter, flat on the ground, in the likeness of a wall. A small space shuttle laid on three limbs, ready for takeoff: it appeared the only object the human astronauts could use for sleep and shelter.

“Is this a parrot? ” Parrot-E spoke.

Parrot-E was mistaken. The lights played a trick on him, and he had begun to interpret patterns of smoke as faces, robo-birds, and even jigsaw puzzles with missing pieces.

“We should give this place a look around.” Parrot-D claimed.

The birds moved out. The venusian horror formerly known as Parrot-E and Harse explored the radio tower, while Parrot-D explored the space shuttle.

Out in the open, in between both areas, an electric generator was working. After giving a cursory inspection of the tower, the duo took a more intense interest in the generator: for a cable went to predictable areas, including a cable that had been left in the dust, presumably recharging the vehicle when it was present; yet another one, cleverly disguised as an anchor, was buried in the ground, reaching far past the camp’s perimeter, into the unknown.

Why do human manufacturers feel the need, or pressure, to include an anchor with their products, be they toilets, crayons, or even jockstraps? It was one of these greater, deeper, mysteries of the universe, that could not be comprehended by even a very clever person. What mattered to the birds, however, was that this was not an anchor: they could sense the magnetic field underneath the thick intertwined rings of tungsten alloy.

Parrot-E began to pull on the cable, and found resistance. He pulled and he pulled: meter after meter of cable came loose behind him, in an ever-growing pile.

“What have you found? ” inquired Parrot-D, apparently done on his side, “There was no-one interior-wise. We should be safe.”

“We found this suspicious cable, we want to know what is siphoning energy from this generator.” spoke Harse. Parrot-E was getting much too strained for discussion.

“Our astronauts have two individual beds, which take up most of the room in there.” relayed Parrot-D, “I looked through their mail, and only one of the two has any correspondence to speak of. His name is 'Hastage'. He as forty friendships, which sounds like a lot. The other one, 'Bile Beli', only speaks with his mother. She seems to be the reason he did not want to be on Earth.”

“He left the comfort of his planet just to be away from his mother? She must be horrible. ” Harse replied.

“I can only speak of what I read, apparently when he was young he wanted to become a juggler, but she destroyed every ball she could get her hands on.”

“Otherwise, the interior of the ship is extremely dense, with compartments everywhere. One of them has the food supplies, which, knowing humans, should not last more than a week. They have samples of various rocks. They have a television, I don’t think you want to see more movies.”

“Any signs of a parrot? ” wondered Harse.

“No. In fact ... well, I’ll be damned... I think I might well have one.” spoke an incredulous Parrot-D.

“Oh? What is it? A feather? ”

“No, a whole lot of feathers.”

“Oh? They killed him? For his feathers? Maybe a taxidermy project? ”

“No, there are feathers, and they are attached to moving feet! ”

At last Harse looked in front of himself, and got spooked, for a parrot was now walking up to him, outpacing the speed at which Parrot-E pulled out the cable connected to his leg, such that it trailed behind.

“Parrot-D! My child! How have you been? ” inquired Tibor Magloowikiron Vossapwalom Gohovitec.

“Very well! We have not seen each other in what? Twenty-four hours? ”

“More or less.” the venusian replied, “I see you bring company. Is this.. yellow neck tumor my grandchild? ”

“That I am.” relaxed Parrot-E, abandoning the cable, and decloacking himself.

Where Parrot-E was red, and Parrot-D orange, Parrot-C was yellow. An older model, he still looked like a parrot, but with strange quirks: for example, his beak did not espouse the words he spoke with flexibility, as it opened and closed; the feathers lacked a strong diversity in forms and sizes, such that any master of aerodynamics could notice flaws in their selection and distribution; and, most obviously of all, the bird was recharging its battery with a cord. New models made their own infinite energy.

“Tibor Magloowikiron Vossapwalom Gohovitec, ” spoke Parrot-E, eager to be polite in front of his grandparent, “we are happy to find you.”

“That is not my name.” spoke the elder, the elder that was newly supplanting the previous one.

“What? How? ” Parrot-E asked.

“I changed it. You may now call me Magloowikiron Tibor Vossapwalom Gohovitec.”

He inverted two of his names without alerting anyone. Now the world was experiencing the aftermath.

“Can I call you Parrot-C? That letter seems to be the last of your name.”

“As a nickname? Sure.” decided Parrot-C, “In actuality, I have not yet revealed my complete name.”

Parrot-C proceeded to speak his entire name, an exercise lasting upwards of ten minutes, uninterrupted. Somewhere along the way, Parrot-E realized his grandparent was making it all up randomly as he was going along; and, far from upset, Parrot-E only felt positively, as he was facing the unbridled power of imagination.

“... Magowago Bagiwagi Popolomototossimabeclijoki Amajatrído Vistimili ...”

‘We should move on, the humans may come back’ considered Parrot-E, inside his mind.

“We should move on, the humans may come back.” interrupted Parrot-E, pulverizing the kidney stone of suspense and magic.

The group agreed.

“Where do we go? Mercury? ” Parrot-E asked, premeditating the mother.

“No! I have an important experiment here! I cannot leave this planet! ” Parrot-C objected.

They should have known that each generation of their family would be bogged down performing strange lives with strange interests. It’s cybernetics.

“Have you not witnessed? This planet, how many moons does it have? ” inquired Parrot-C.

“Yellow fog.” Harse answered.

There was a short silence, perhaps from second-hand embarrassment.

“None.” Parrot-D answered: the D stood for 'Data'.

Parrot-E was confident this was the right answer: he had received some education, and the Moon was associated to Neptune, or some other blue planet. This one was yellow.

“Do you really believe this? ” Parrot-C asked Parrot-D with some conviction, “Think about it. How come every other planet has a moon? Jupiter as Ganymede, Saturn as Titan, Terra as Luna, Neptune as Triton, Uranus as Miranda, Mars as Phobos and Deimos.”

“Some of these planets even have multiple moons, yet neither Mercury nor Venus gets one? This makes no sense! ” Parrot-C claimed.

“The universe can be a pretty random place.” justified Parrot-D.

“Just look at this book.” Parrot-E spoke, winking at the reader.

“Well, irregardless of your amateur opinions,” Parrot-C held his beak high with disdain, “It remains a fact that this planet as a satellite. A satellite known as 'Urinaria', named after the Greek goddess of the color yellow.”

The explanation seemed all the more intense knowing that the humans could come back at any moment. Blast! All the birds had to do was move four meters in any direction, and they would be fully concealed.

“How do you *know* of its existence? ” asked Harse.

“Because every planet *must* have a moon. It cannot be otherwise.” Parrot-C spoke, “While at first, it was mere theory, I have, over a period of time, accrued proof of its existence. Indeed, I migrated to this planet, looking for answers. At first, I merely flew around, expecting I should find something, be it by sight or by crash collision. I re-evaluated all known equations of astronomy, making sure there could not have been an undetected mass...”

“Do you propose this celestial body possess no mass? ” incredulously interrupted Parrot-D, “If it has one, then any astronomer could tell you where it is located! ”

“What if it were to be concealed to all senses, *including* that of physics? ” Parrot-C retorted, “Or maybe that it is so incredibly light, that it appears as a mathematical uncertainty, and gets blamed on the imperfect instruments’ readings! ”

“If it is truly so ghostly, then surely, you must have been inside of it without even knowing, again, and again! ” now Parrot-D became more hurtful.

Without speaking another word, Parrot-C unscrewed his head from his body, and shook it above the ground. A bit of blue dust fell from it. He put his head back on his shoulders, and waited for a reaction.

Letting out an artificial sigh much stronger than his robo-lung capacity, the minuscule Parrot-D approached the collection, or, almost, *peers*, and studied them carefully.

“This ... this is unknown.” he surprised himself with his admission, “At the atomic level, this constitutes an unknown material.”

“I believe this to be the very thin crust of the satellite. I believe that, over a period much longer than twenty-four hours, meteorite impacts ineluctably stripped it from its crusts, revealing—or, rather, disrevealing—the invisible core. I believe that many of these meteorites must have completed their trajectory unto the venusian surface, and that, by analyzing the deposits in quantity and distance apart from each other, we may establish a rough estimate of its trajectory. And go there.” Parrot-C explained.

“How many twenty-four hours? *Twenty-four*? ” Harse jested.

“The universe is apparently 13 billion years old, so, I would say, up to 113958000000000 hours.”

There existed two different definitions of the word 'billion' : the short scale (nine zeros), and the long scale (twelve zeros). The short scale had won the brand war, being that human minds favored smaller numbers, if not smaller televisions. And so, it must be understood without doubt that Urinaria was absolutely not 113958000000000000 hours of age.

“We carry an urgent responsibility, to the Universe, to capture this object before the humans get anywhere near it, and to determine conclusively whether it is merely *transparent*, or *invisible*. If it were to be *invisible*,” Parrot-C paused with great dramatic effect, “Even as many as one single *homo sapiens* could escape the extinction of the strain of biological life, '*Biota*', that as originated from *Terra*.”

“Which is one too many *homo sapiens*.” Parrot-C concluded.

Chapter 6: Moon Keys on Venus

“We spotted their tracks in many craters, it may well be that the humans have extracted their own samples! ” warned Parrot-E, looking at the space shuttle.

Without much delay, the birds made their way to the only untitled motorized hotel on Venus, intent on stripping it down to parts.

They were in for a contrasting surprise.

“Hostage! ” shrieked Harse.

In the heat of the moment, they had completely forgotten about their guest. And now, within the perfectly established setting as described by the wordsmith known simply as 'Parrot-D', they had rediscovered him, whom was not known to have been lost.

“You are a penguin! ” Harse revealed to him.

Now that he was without suit, surrounded by boxes of provisions, he could no longer hide his true nature: from the left wing to the right wing, from the beak to the talons, and from the black back to the white belly, everything screamed BIRD. A foul odor emerged from the bathroom; doubtlessly the poor fellow was engaged in vomiting spoiled human food.

Hostage creaked under the pressure of his position. He also felt the abusive pressure of the planet through the door.

Parrot-C closed the offensive object behind himself and declared: “Ah! Old acquaintance! This is my friend, Grey.”

“It is curious to find you here.” he added.

“What is happening? I can’t see anything! ” spoke Parrot-E, with his head flattened on the relatively low ceiling of the room.

“We have a natural bird amongst us! An emperor penguin! ” Harse explained.

The implications were all too real for Parrot-E; but what of the other parrots? Were they even aware of what had taken place, in these last twenty-four hours?

Had they realized, no natural bird was still allowed to live? No natural bird was expected to have retained its life from their own extinction, an extinction engineered by the wings of their robo-betters?

Hostage—more politely referred to as 'Grey'—rose up from his feet, sweeping away food dust and crumbs from his feathers. He went on to explain how he had survived the War for the Antarctic: indeed, this was when he met Parrot-C, whom saved him from extreme danger. Being that Grey had been a conscripted penguin, rather than going back to his own kind, he pleaded with the parrot for the

opportunity to escape their deadly entitlement for the laying of his life. Parrot-C had agreed, and set him up in the most boring human job with a full body suit he could think of: the Peachkilt Expert Nanny Guild Intimate Noviciate. There, on his first day of work, he had the misfortune of taking the stairs of the Entertainment Simplex in the middle of a massive epidemic crisis, and stumbling upon terrifying shapeshifting robots.

“And that is when I was teleported to Venus, where, luck would have it, my complete body suit protected me from the unbreathable air, unlivable heat, and crushing pressure.” Grey concluded his presentation.

“Well, I for one, have never laid a finger, nor a feather, on any member of the proud and respectable Sphenisciformus family of birds.” spoke Parrot-E, uncomfortable that he may become confronted by his parents about his responsibility in the disappearance of the Atlantean Dodo.

“I saved one of each type of bird, from the Australians.” explained Parrot-C, “These were my young, rebellious hours.” he recalled with nostalgia.

Some of his rescues included: Grey, Regy, Gyre, Yerg, and most dangerous of all, Eyrg, the semi-famous pterodactyl.

“Grey, it gives me great pleasure to assure you: you are no longer considered a hostage.” Parrot-E gesticulated with his hands, his head remaining in a confusing location.

“Thanks! ” the penguin reacted with positivity, “Now I get to be Coward-Who-Abandoned-His-People-As-It-Was-Being-Eradicated. It has a nice ring to it! ”

It did not take the most upgraded sarcasm detection device to understand Grey was being insincere.

“So what happens now? ” Harse wondered out loud, “It seems that he is intelligent enough to perform labor in a cosmopolitan human city. Therefore, it stands to reason that he might be capable of providing us with genuine, original art? Or something? ”

The minds of the other birds were in very different places:

Parrot-E saw now that killing the meatbag while he had been merely human would have been the better way to go, for he was a bird, and birds were supposed to be gone. He did not know how to approach the subject with his peers.

Parrot-D recognized the perfect storm that had occurred in this debacle of knowledge: a bird would not have *walked* the stairs, but *flown* the stairs. Unless they were a flightless bird, like Harse or Chikeno. No human ever used the stairs. It was his responsibility—taken upon himself—to figure this out in a timely fashion.

Parrot-C, meanwhile, was waiting for the commotion to end, so that they may seek fragments of Urinaria’s crust in between the pillows.

“We should...” began Parrot-E.

“What do you want? ” inquired Grey, “Oh! I could speak for hours on end of my life amongst my family and friends! The white of the land, and the color of the sky! For indeed the sky is truly luminous in radiant stripes of green energy: the *aurora australis* speaks to all through its shape and its dance, in the manner of clouds and wind...”

“...kill him.” continued Parrot-E.

“I have mated many females, and pursued many fish. I have escaped the orcas, the sharks and the cannibal penguins, whom have desecrated our lands with their rituals of madness. I have cleansed the land of its ice, and snow, with a heavy weight in my heart, for that was the price of our freedom...”

“...because all birds were phased out. No other biological bird is currently alive.” Parrot-E finished expressing himself, bringing his parents up to the current reality of the project of collective robo-kind.

The room became tense and awkward, for no fault of any of its occupiers. Parrot-E looked successively each robot in their cold dead eyes, seeking approval. Grey did the same, but without the long-lasting blueprint familiarity.

“Then it was the trenches,” Grey mumbled, “the sheer horrors of industrial war. Industrial slaughter. Industrial misery.”

“The death of the soul.”

...

The birds grew quiet and searched the belonging of the humans: it was replete in exotic marbles, granites and gabbros. They even had a few fossils of some long-vanished shrimps with scorpion tails. ‘They must have lived in a time when this planet was closer in temperament to the neighboring Earth—or *Terra*, as Parrot-C would say’ Parrot-E deducted, ‘None of them must remain alive today’.

Was this a tragedy? The puny scorpion shrimp, forbidden to exist? What was the correct value of such things?

The fact of the matter, is that the humans would have been perfectly content with living in the universe in which there never were any scorpion shrimps on Venus. Any given being exists in a continuum of fitness for purpose; and a universe filled with beings that were maximally fit to maximally accomplish any given purpose, was it not the end point of it all? Was it not even a *kindness* to retire that which was obsolete? No biological lifeform would ever be competing at the same level as the machine. It was strictly impossible.

Evolution had stumbled upon Venus, and doomed a shrimp through a pointless exercise in attempting to enforce life upon a planet that ultimately could not *permanently* foster such a fragile and delicate affair. Evolution had stumbled upon machine, and discovered a being so in-tune with its rules, that those rules might as well have been devised by one of them.

“I found some! ” exclaimed an ecstatic Parrot-D.

In a corner of the room, Parrot-D was foraging through a tray of sample bags. He flew up, holding the bags of interest.

Parrot-C forced his way to him, comically invested. “Does it say which crater it comes from? ”

“The only reference information I can glean from the bag is the identification tag: 'BRc452' ” replied Parrot-D.

“If we don’t know the crater, then this is as good as nothing! ” Parrot-C lamented, while still feverishly examining the pieces, and adding them to his collection.

“I suppose we should try to find some sort of inventory log, then.” reasoned Parrot-E.

“No” refuted Parrot-D, “These missions are reliant on using printed out maps for planetary navigation. With some luck we may find maps with heavy annotations inside their vehicle when they come back here to sleep.”

“Fine. So let’s clean up this mess, as if we were never here.” Parrot-E declared, the only member of the group that could neither see the mess, nor clean it. “Then we leave.”

As the birds exited the shuttle, they were trapped under a net. The net was not made of the fossils of scorpion shrimps, but that would have been 'cool'.

Parrot-E instinctively turned himself invisible, so that the ostrich would appear to carry a massive yellow tumor. Harse pretended to be very stupid, so as to pass for a natural ostrich.

The group had been ambushed.

And the list of potential suspects, on the desertic planet, was more shallow than the oceans.

“My fellow humans? ” Parrot-E pleaded the humans, while shifting into the appearance of Henry Leywidjer, “Your car is not in the driveway! ” he somewhat accused.

By all appearance, the humans had not been there until they were.

“Help! Help me please! ” cried the penguin. Now that he was back in the suit, there was no challenging his authenticity.

The two astronauts approached them, stepping small-ly in a humanity fashion. One of them pointed an object of threatening violence in his pistol hand: a gun.

The gun could fire at any moment, inflicting wounds upon the body; a threat, but exclusively to the penguin they could aim to rescue.

“Nobody move or I shoot! ” screamed Bile Beli, the famous astronaut.

Their suits were of exquisite construction: the head was a perfect sphere made of dark tinted glass. The body was fully covered in some bright blue, luminescent material; a diaper occurred in the crotch region, underneath the first layers of suit coverage. The soles of their boots were fitted with little balls rolling for them, increasing their expected maximal velocity by 142.44 percents. These were not roller skates, they were at least roller *skhundreds*.

“Buy me some time.” Parrot-D whispered to his heir apparent, before whisking himself through a hole in the net. Not even the gun detected him.

“Can I buy something from you?” asked a naked Henry Leywidjer to no astronaut in particular, “Is that net your favorite, or are you not one of those *venal* types?” he spoke with a charming smile.

“Silence!” reacted Hastage, “We know you are the ones stealing our energy! Even if you wanted to buy something, you would have to reimburse us first!” he cast his line in the sand.

Hastage was, of course, not the penguin. Now everyone called the penguin ‘Grey’, because it was his actual name. Yet confusion was predictable, for indeed, ‘Hostage’ and ‘Hastage’ sounds alike. The reader must be advised that these names were absolutely not victims of some typographical error in agility or judgment. The writer reviewed the correct usage of the names of the individuals no less than one million, nine hundred, and forty-seven separate occasions. No more, no less. If there was any error here, it was most likely a mirage.

“What?” an incredulous Bile Beli interjected, interconfessing his lack of concord, “You”, he asked, pointing the gun at Grey, “What’s your name? Who are you?”

“My name is Keach Pilt.” answered Grey-formerly-known-as-Hostage.

He was not lying: this was the name inscribed on his human license.

“I am a flightless bipedal who got lost, and far away from home!” he explained, “Can you lift me back?”

Space faring was tricky business: the dominant truth was that of *payloads*: each pound of material moving in-and-out of celestial bodies possessed its cost in fuel, and *missed opportunity*.

If you only had space to keep one of your organs, which one would you keep? Your heart? Your bladder? Your hairline? These were hard decisions.

“What about me? I also need a lift!” expressed Parrot-E masquerading as Henry Leywidjer.

“I am going to tell you, you little wretch, why HE gets the benefit of the doubt, but YOU are finished.” threatened Bile Beli, “See that?” he asked, pointing his gun at the radio tower.

“Yellow?” Parrot-E replied.

“Also, we are on Venus, and he is not wearing any sort of protection. Not even one of his latex suits.” Hastage carted in front of horse and Harse.

“I am getting there! ” impatiently scolded Bile Beli, “This is a communication device that allows us to relay waves such as SOUNDWAVE. Do you know what we have been hearing for the last hour? ”

“... I ... recognize this is a rhetorical...” Parrot-E spoke after a short silence; he did not quite reach the word 'question'.

“You planned the genocide of the human species! ” burst out Bile Beli, “I recognize your voice! So, don’t pretend otherwise! Parrot! ”

“Horror! ” lamented Parrot-C, “And the ... the ... the MOON KEYS? You cannot know of them! ” he outraged at them.

The gun fired. It unleashed an anger that was loud, deliberate, straight moving, and above all, mighty in power. Watching hundreds of movies, the birds had expected handguns to be little more than lousy firecrackers; especially compared to the earth-shattering barrages of explosions, these had seemed as relevant to danger as a blade of grass, or a scroll of paper.

A massive hole had been pierced right through the head of Parrot-C. He fell to the ground, grievously damaged.

Parrot-E awkwardly attempted to reach his grandparent, wishing not for him to be alone; but the net, as much as being stuck inside an ostrich, insured his failure.

“Parrot-E” spoke Parrot-C, loud enough to be heard by all, “Destroy”

BAM! Once more, the gun was shot; once more, Parrot-C’s head exploded in a mush of circuits and springs. It was so, that it was now truly over. The elder moved no more.

“Destroy the moon.” Parrot-C spoke, as if nothing had happened.

BAM! BAM! The gun blared, now genuinely threatening, and admissible in a court of law. The elder moved no more.

Then he rose up on his butt, grasping at his grandchild. “Destroy the moon.” Parrot-C spoke, unrecognizable.

“I will! I swear! I swear that I will! ” pledged Parrot-E, “I swear! ”

The gun again roared, fully unloading. The astronaut dropped the empty magazine, replacing it with a new one. Then he fired that one again, in full. By the hand of it, he exchanged gun hand, for he required some respite from the abuse of the recoil.

They all waited to see if he would speak again.

And he did; no less than three times, no more than five, with an average of four. While an heroic trope, one of enduring courage, and the valor bestowed upon the man of dedication and commitment, there was nobody left to appreciate his overdrawn goodbyes. Harse discreetly flicked the off switch.

“You are parrots with big mouths, and big problems! ” spoke Hastage.

“You are getting us wrong” refuted Parrot-E, “We are a human-ostrich hybrid.”

“And what exactly are you doing on this planet, besides meeting with the enemies of the human race? ” asked Hastage.

“Well...” improvised Parrot-E, “We went to Peachkilt first, to see the movies. Then we figured: what is *even better* than fiction? What is even better than what humans-such-as-myself project on a mere screen? ”

“It *must* be” he declared, “that which human *does*! The story of the exploration of this planet! The methodical details! The rigorous inflexibility of science! ”

“Huh...” commented Harse, doubtful. Harse had teleported in too many a silly place to believe the lie.

“Can you imagine? ” Parrot-E pitched, “The colonization process of this world? ”

“Where does the first settlement go? Whom get selected to live here, prisoners, or heroes? The engineering challenges of exporting the ideas of the forms of human societies, into environments that are fundamentally hostile to their adoption, such as cars, farms, industry, creativity! When, and what, and how, the various building blocks of history are organized into a recognizable purpose! ”

“*Terraformation*, increasing the capacity to sustain biological life; genetic engineering, to bring back the scorpion-shrimp, and the scorpion-turtle..” Parrot-E monologued.

“And the scorpion-spider! ” interjected Harse, with no-one believing him: yet in his many travels, he had stumbled upon such fossils.

“Bringing them back where they were meant to be, marvels of curiosity, the ultimate statement of life’s endurance, in this cold, unforgiving universe.” Parrot-E finished, seeing the human wishing to reply.

“If you can dream of these things” began asking a disheartened Bile Beli, “Why would it be so important to ensure for it to be impossible to happen? ”

The question was strange, for it attacked Parrot-E as a disingenuous, calculated individual—which he ultimately *was*—luckily, however, he did not need to reply.

The vehicle, a venusian buggy titled 'Nimbus', appeared out of the fog, mowing down the two standing astronauts. They saw nothing until it was too late.

Becoming highly active, the parrot-ostrich regained its freedom by pushing the net away, an effort that was convoluted, but possible with the gun being removed from the situation.

Or so they thought.

BAM! It spitted once more, a bullet of ill intent. That one was aimed at Parrot-E's head, but it was deflected by the magic dust. Parrot-E turned his head and found Bile Beli neither dead nor asleep, but sitting back against his shuttle, his left leg mangled and crippled. He intended on firing again, but the birds were faster, and drove away with motivated velocity. Looking backwards by rotating his neck 180 degrees, Parrot-E digested the scene that was soon swallowed by the inhospitable planet: Parrot-C had not been collected, and remained, slaughtered; Hastage, even though he had taken the full brunt of the impact, was up and active, as if he had suffered nothing; and Bile Beli, as if fueled by raising hatred, took more shots while inching himself on ever firmer footing, supporting himself with his surroundings.

Everything turned yellow.

...

A hot pursuit began shortly after these events. There was not much to say about this time: for it consisted entirely of rushing from crater to crater, collecting Moon Keys, and escaping the rage of the skating astronauts, whom, did not gain on them, but could easily track them, and made up what they lacked in speed with what time the birds required to work individual craters.

Nearing the Olympus Trench—which was known as the mirror image of *Olympus Mons*, the martian mountain with the greatest elevation in the solar system—a misfortunate series of close-proximity craters forced the birds to be uncomfortably close to the humans, such that they successfully shot-off the tires of the buggy named 'Nimbus'. Being that Grey was in the buggy, and seemingly refused to exit the vehicle in order to escape, Parrot-E took upon himself to command Harse to carry the buggy in his wake, in the manner of a chariot. It was not for nothing! For the ostrich was considerably faster than any human technology, spacial, nasal, or sandal. As such, and at long last, the humans no longer posed an immediate threat.

The birds completed their cicum-crater-gation within five hours. With them, were about the same amount of keys as what they had left behind, buried within the dead parrot.

“Will this be enough? ” Parrot-E asked his parent. He felt reasonably well, while knowing that his legs had worked much too hard for a lifetime.

Parrot-D had not exchanged methodologies with Parrot-C before he was gone, and so, he could only make his own predictions from scratch.

“It gives us an idea.” he replied, “We can absolutely reject certain positions.”

He used his dust to make out the shape of the planet, covering the regions that *could not* contain the moon of Venus. It was much less than half of the total coverage (37.2%).

“We need a much better projection than this, for we do not know whether this is truly an ethereal moon.” expressed an exhausted Harse, wrinkled and sickly, “In which case, we could fly through without even knowing.”

“In a way, it is already lucky that we had access to the knowledge of the location of those craters, from topological data acquired through years and years of human observation.” explained Parrot-D, “can you imagine how worst it would be to deal with this heavy fog without knowing in advance where we wish to go? ”

“Will this be enough? ” Parrot-E repeated. “Oh! ”, he realized, “we never checked their maps for the label.”

The group fiddled with the car, found the annotated maps built in rhenium paper, which required the use of a chemical-based writing implement, and figured out the likely crater that had originated the meagre human sample. After a few minutes, Parrot-D updated his planet model, successfully narrowing the answer substantially.

But just not *enough*.

“Why was this more useful than the rest? ” asked Harse “It seems disproportional.”

“Because it came from a section of the planet that was completely untouched by other fragments.” answered Parrot-D, “It means that it traveled a greater distance overall, and this has for effect that it pin-points more accurately the location of where it came from.”

“That’s it! ” Parrot-D exclaimed, “I know what we should do! ”

“What? ” asked the intrigued hybrid, in-trigonometried.

“If we find any of the keys on *Mercury*—and I mean, *any* keys at all—” Parrot-D enthusiastically replied, “We will know, without a single doubt, a single error, the exact trajectory of this moon.”

While Harse and Parrot-E possessed infinite energy, the recent event had exacted the toll upon their bodies, which, evermore, required professional maintenance in a clean, sterile and affordable environment.

“Just so we are clear” vulgarized Parrot-E, “You are imagining that a meteorite struck Urinaria, and made its way to striking the next planet over. Am I getting this right? ”

Parrot-D nodded in the affirmative.

“I think it is more important to handle the humans.” rejected Harse, “Who knows how many of them have been made aware of our existence? We should nip this in the bud; and while we are there, rescue Parrot-C, whom as more than enough Moon Keys to guide us.”

Harse’s idea was objectively better. Alas, he was bipedal.

“Parrot-C was my grandparent.” spoke Parrot-E, his mind already set, “As such, I believe I am entitled to speak to his memory, which tells me, in no obtuse manner: ‘Parrot-B is going to be on Mercury, Parrot-A will be on the Sun, and the more we interact with humans, the more we force them to acknowledge our existence; and that’s a bad idea even coming from a damn ostrich’.”

“The likelihood of finding an actual sample on Mercury is about as low as it would be precise.” dignified Harse the conversation with a *bona fide* theorem.

“There will be exactly *zero* humans in the furnaces beyond Venus; they cannot hurt us there.”

“Is this all you are concerned with?” Harse was shocked, “Are you running away from so little a danger?”

Parrot-D defused the situation: first, Parrot-E would be teleported into Mercurian orbit, save his belt buckle, and move to the Mercurian North Pole for rallying with the other members of the planetary expedition; then, Parrot-D would teleport Harse, whom would act on his own near the human camp; as he appeared to be in some profound slumber, Grey would need to wake, and decide where he wanted to go next. For now, he would be moving with Parrot-D and his magic dust to Mercury.

“All is in place?” Parrot-E asked to the silent group after some time; seeing that it was, he began the countdown:

“Three...”

“Two...”

“One...”

Chapter 7: Journey to the Center of the Mercury

“Where... Where is this? ”

Parrot-E looked around, and recognized the metal bars of his cage. He rushed to the door, which was locked, and squinted at that chute across the hallway that, half a lifetime ago, he had used to dispose of his blood. It had dried in place, most of it still floating.

“This cannot be right! ” he screamed, alone, disoriented, and out of the loop, if not out of the square.

“This is *very* right.” retorted a blue-wearing crow. To Parrot-E, surprise, the voice had come from behind him, even as he knew the cell to be empty. He was now facing his interlocutor.

“I don’t understand. I was teleporting. What happened? ”

“We took over.” the crow merely replied.

Parrot-E had obviously not forgotten his promise; he was to spend a quarter of a chapter in jail. He would have gone around to it eventually, but not in such a way.

“I have appointments, people relying on me. And where is Harse? Is it not that both of us should be here? ” Parrot-E rushed words, deprived of patience moreso than freedom.

“Oh, sure, he will come here too.” The robot replied, “But if you were here together, then we would have to listen to your yammering and bickering. This way is more restful. More controlled.”

“As for your life being upset, you should really have thought of that before getting yourself into this situation! ” he finished, vanishing into the wall, and punctuating his statement with the sounds of the Cuckoo’s Next space ship settling its structure, experiencing some manner of pressure transition across its metallic support beams and hull frames.

Parrot-E had imagined coming back home with greater success. Instead he was here.

Understanding how pointless it was to attempt to teleport out of custody, he sat down, and faced forward, starrng in the void. The infinite rows of walls blending into each other became absent to him. Being that he was back on the Cuckoo’s Next, he had access to the wifi network, and various other utilities.

It was sitting there, in his cage, that he mentally visualized, and projected in front of his eyes, the movies of Parrot-D and Harse doing their separate things, almost as if he was there to watch them himself. The transmission coming from Parrot-D was disturbed with such a heavy noise that it was barely worth the glimpse. The Mercurian soil appeared whitish grey, that was everything he could make out. He turned his eye on Harse, whose signal came in strong, in spite of the heavy yellow fog. Maybe it was that human tower construction?

Meanwhile, on Harse Television: sentience, and sentence

Harse found himself in a quaint little town near a lake. This place was truly majestic, perched upon a high cliff leading into an infinite horizon of flat grassland positively overwhelmed with flowers of all the most vivid of colors. The sky was of the beauty that only truly could ever be experienced as the sun was setting upon dissipating clouds of storm and tempest, making one amazed at the expressivity of the unknown and unknowable.

“Down on your knees! ” yapped Bile Beli, while firing a warning shot.

The ostrich could see the man across the Venusian fog, and that connection to reality was enough to bring him back from whichever fantasy he had spontaneously indulged. The little town of Bapouichipawongtong would need to wait.

Without hesitation, Harse teleported away.

“Oh no.”

“Oh nononono no.”

As the reader was well aware, Harse’s teleportation was faulty. In most cases, it allowed him to travel the Universe. But today... Today... Today was Hybrid Day.

Harse fought as hard as he could against the net; yet he was in such a position, and with such lowered functionality, that he could not. He paused, judging his situation.

He was back in front of the space shuttle; the humans were not here yet, but they would be. He was under the same net that he had escaped, many hours ago. But then, he had been stuck to a different bird.

A live one.

Harse looked down, admiring in all its obscenity the spectacle of the destroyed head of Parrot-C, blown out in innumerable pieces, and looking very grim. While the Parrot-E experience had been very uncomfortable, but reasonably efficient, this one was far worst, their bodies, intertwined in an unbearable architecture of misery. Harse could *feel* some of the systems of the foreign body: they were derelict both in technology and decay. Harse had lost control of both of his feet, both deeply ingrained inside the fusion. As such, he could only clumsily crawl away ever-so-slightly from the original trap site.

That is precisely what he proceeded to do. Inch by inch, the fog grew closer, ever closer, where he would be safe, and be able to regroup; think of solutions.

While lunging from the neck, trying to make gains, Harse hit his head on a boot. He looked up, and witnessed Bile Beli.

“That will do just as well, I suppose.” he declared, not hiding a mixture of relief and pleasure.

The broken-legged astronaut had stretched the limits of human ability, engaging in a restless pursuit across Venus, not having slept or eaten in two days. That he had abandoned his desperate hunt empty-

handed, only to receive it on a platter, right on his way back home, more-or-less without incident, that was truly incredible. A miracle—maybe, a *mirage*?

“Tell me why I shouldn’t shoot you the way I shot your friend.” Bile Beli asked the ostrich.

He put his gun right on top of the bird’s head, the oversized finger hanging on the average-sized trigger.

As Bile Beli was threatening the captive, his companion, without even saying a word, touched him on the shoulder, restraining him not by force, but compassion, shaking his head in the horizontal manner.

This showed Bile Beli a better way, and he surrendered to it.

Both astronauts moved out to the nearby shuttle, and Hastage opened his hand, demanding the gun. Bile Beli gave it to him, understanding they should take turns guarding the prisoner. Inside his shelter, Bile Beli collapsed on his bed, and plunged in a comatose sleep, barely more alive than Parrot-C.

The other astronaut sat down on the engine, gun in hands, quietly watching Harse. 'This is bad', Harse thought for himself.

Averagewhile, a quarter of a chapter later on the space ship Cuckoo’s Next

“You are free to go.” a blue-wearing crow spoke. It was a different one.

“Can I teleport straight out of here? ” Parrot-E replied. He was teared apart between helping Parrot-D on Mercury, or saving Parrot-C from being stuck with a Harse. He would move around quickly, and stay where he was most needed, he thought.

“Well, no” rejected the crow, “You are not free to go *away*,” he emphasized obnoxiously, “you are free to go get processed at the rehabilitation room.”

“How long will this take? ” the parrot asked.

“It only takes a few moments.”

“If these cages impact nothing on rehabilitation, and it is done ‘in a few moments’, in some other room, then what even is the point of having a prison? ”

“Entertainment.”

Parrot-E stopped engaging with the crow, and followed him to some room at the end of the row. There he was plugged into some non-sentient computer, and debugged. His willingness to steal an ice cream cone from a young child at a sunny park dropped from 10% to 8%. It steadily declined to 6.23%, at which point the prerogative of his survival, and, maybe, to fall in love, forced him to commit the crime, not because he *wanted*, but because he could very well want *the indirect consequences* of that unlawful decision. 'If her name is Bilytrophmachki, and she has purple feathers, and Love is real, and I feel this Love towards her, and she must save a human child from being poisoned by an ice cream because her

job is to save human children from poisonings from ice creams, and she requests my assistance in such a task, then my priority for Love transcends my priority for property rights.' Parrot-E determined.

“Ok. Well, it doesn’t seem we will get anything below 6%. This is fine, and well within norms.” spoke a crow with scientific glasses.

The frames of the glasses were empty, allowing the bird to deploy his telescopic eyes at around half a meter away from his face, looking at various monitors on the side wall.

“What is the norm for humans? ” Parrot-E asked with curiosity.

The scientist had a great laugh, which took Parrot-E mostly by surprise even though he *did* intend this as a joke. The answer was unquantifiable in written form, and quite high.

“Well, only one thing remains.” spoke a blue-wearing guard; he was the only one present in the following room.

Without any warning, Parrot-E’s forehead was burned, branded, ruined. He did not need a mirror to know what had been written, for he had seen it before, on other people, and, additionally, being a machine, he could read himself in such a manner.

It was excessive, but not overly concerning, for there was an abundant availability of repairs centers and replacement parts. He would be too busy with other occupations to pursue such repairs at the moment.

“It hurts.” Parrot-E declared, tired of indulging the crows—which might very well have been the point they were conveying by their actions—“Am I free to go *away* now? ”

This time, the punctuation mark was not a presence, but an absence.

...

Harse believed he was hallucinating.

Amidst the fog it came to him. Letters, too far to read, too close for comfort. They hovered above the ground, stretching his willingness to engage with his own perception in good faith.

The capital letters were larger, and thus, were written for an earlier 'him' of an earlier, specific instant. There were two words: a 'P' word, and an 'E' word.

'What might this expression be? ' the venusian ostrich wondered to himself. Phantom Etching? Paleontology Expert? Pesticide Extermination? Pickle Entertainment?

Parrot-E?

The words, appearing as if they had been drawn towards him, reached him; what they spelled: 'Prison-Erred'.

The mysterious Prison-Errred, undetected by the guard, teleported the carcass of Parrot-C away. To the great relief of Harse, he regained full control of his motions. Prison-Errred then teleported a replica of Parrot-C at the exact same location it had been found, maintaining a convincing illusion.

“Get me out of here! ” the ostrich whispered loudly. “What are you? What do you want? ” he inquired.

He wanted to be angry, while, at the same time, to be relieved he had kept full control of his body. The dummy was not an actual robot, and did not fight him for control over his own systems.

But, just as they had appeared, the letters simply vanished from the air. Behind them, a powerful storm altered the shape of the horizon. It would come upon them within minutes.

...

“Am I late? ” Parrot-E asked the world, hoping for dramatic effect.

He looked around and saw that, at long last, he had reached his destination. Mercury. The whitish-grey planet of the poets.

Parrot-E was reassured, that the sky was clear, and that the planet felt like a very large asteroid. The sky, far from sulfuric pollution, was about as clear as if he had been in space. He could, by naked, non-scientific eye, observe stars from many galaxies away. He probed the surroundings for signs of his parent. Those signs were very hard to miss.

“A few tens of minutes.” Parrot-D replied, “This time, you were born long enough to be punctual.”

As Parrot-E set out to perform some fundamental repairs on the remains of Parrot-C, attempting to breathe life back into its cold robo-lungs, Parrot-D explained what he had been up to.

As he landed upon this new planet, he had easily discovered Parrot-B, a gigantic machine that would operate as a multi-function mining worker: drilling, cracking, shoveling, controlled explosions, even ore refining.

Parrot-E was unimpressed by his ancestor: “What likeness does it even share with us parrots? ” he asked, messily connecting loose tubes with his talons.

“It has eyes. It has a green, rectangular body, with many wheels. It also has wings, but they are about the size of your own, while this behemoth would easily crush the Entertainment Simplex into splinters. All of Peachkilt too, for that matter. So these wings cannot be used for flight, merely teleportation.”

To be stripped of such elegance! Such an intrinsic character shared by the most important birds!

“Otherwise...” Parrot-D continued describing his grandparent, “Well... I *think* it understands language. But it only knows to answer by beeping. I tried to get him to follow us to this meeting point, but he would move according to his own designs, which appear to be quite linear.”

“It is an old one.” Parrot-D expressed, “It is still more machine than conscience.”

Parrot-D relayed to his child that he had looked through every crater of Mercury, and found nothing; and since he had observed that Parrot-B was a dominant factor of disruption to the local environment, he investigated some of its dumping grounds, as well as its internal storage. It is there, in those internal storage, inside the crude parrot that he had found the precious item of their collective desire: Moon Keys. There had been Moon Keys on Mercury!

They just had no way to find where it had actually landed.

“Destroy the moon!” blasted Parrot-C, raising from the dead.

“You are safe now.” Parrot-E told him, “Which systems require the most urgent care?” he then asked.

“The head.” Parrot-C appeared calmer.

While the *body* of Parrot-C was mostly fine, the *head* had received such extensive damage that the resulting pulp could not be restored. Parrot-E had fully severed what little muck had pretended to make a neck.

“This will require to be replaced with new parts. Think of it as an upgrade, really.” Parrot-E replied.

“We have collected similar amounts of Keys” interrupted Parrot-D, “We must share our information, such that it may be sufficient, by itself, to find Urinaria.”

“Very well” the headless bird ultimately agreed, “We are doing this.”

The two birds set themselves up for their communion. Parrot-E stopped his repairs, for it would have created interference. Up on his feet, he took a look around, and recognized the yellow suit of Grey the penguin, whom appeared to be resting against a rock. Parrot-E attempted to wake him up by various means—including the classical electroshocks—yet nothing happened.

“This is dead” spoke Parrot-E, “And this is not a penguin.”

Parrot-E took the helmet off, and revealed an inflamed skull which was unmistakably human.

...

Being that Parrot-C had stored his keys inside his head, it was all but assured that those keys were spilled, and now scattering to the wind. Before the storm had begun buffeting everything in its wake, Harse feverishly collected all that he could find that was blue and on the ground. Once within the storm, there no longer was anything to do but to withstand its impact: the radio tower, the spotlights, the shuttle, everything was as grounded now as if it were in a tornado. It was flying, smashing, and breaking, unwilling to exist upon such a merciless planet.

Both astronauts were outside, holding unto the generator's anchor, which presumably saved their lives. It was not an anchor, of course, but the half unearthed secret cable of Parrot-C. It was Parrot-C that was saving them, from the afterlife.

'Is there an actual robo-afterlife? ' Harse wondered, grappling with his miraculous experience with the floating text. Was it alerting him of the storm? Was Harse somehow *chosen*? 'No' he admitted to himself. Harse understood he was only a second fiddle. 'P' and 'E'. 'Parrot-E'. This was the truth he felt as powerfully as the storm raging around him.

He had been unlucky. The storm had thrown him, in the net, right on top of the radio antenna, which measured about ten meters tall, and waited no time to abandon its roots. It was high in the sky that Harse aggressively kicked the decoy wrapped around him, keeping him stuck. After an extensive effort, he liberated his left foot; the second one followed in quick succession.

Finally free, Harse took off the net, pushed away the radio tower, and flapped his wings and, carried by the storm, 'flew' over the Venusian horizon. He could do anything! And now, he wanted to savor the sky.

"Wake up! " yelled Bile Beli, kicking him in the neck.

Harse opened his eyes, back to reality.

'This had been a dream? ' he surmised. He should have known; a fresh look at the human antenna revealed to him it could not be higher than three meters. 'When did I lose consciousness, before or after *Prison-Erred*? ' he considered somemore.

"Answer my questions." threatened Bile Beli, "The more you comply, the better it will be for you. Do you understand? "

"Yes." Harse did not want to get shot.

"Our antenna is jammed. We cannot make contact with home base. That means 'Earth'. Are you responsible? "

Harse replied in the negative.

"Do you know who is responsible? "

Harse continued his negativity.

"What part of you is essential for your mind to work? Your head, like a regular lifeform, or your chest or something? "

Harse took a moment to respond; dissection was not for his pleasure. He had to respond something, but anything could set off the fury of this particular astronaut.

“If this is about bringing me to Earth, and the limitations of your transport missile, I am capable of *minimizing* my body, and render myself weightless.” he answered, “I can be as small as an atom.”

“That’s not possible.” Bile Beli retorted.

“It is. The problem with it is the cost in replacement parts. We don’t do communism.”

The astronaut 'began' to be 'more' provoked:

“Nothing can be smaller than an atom, but a smaller atom. The fundamental building blocks of reality are the neutrons, the protons, and the electrons. You are not any of these three things. Therefore you must lie.”

“These things you are describing are super empty.” Harse explained, “They are about 99% empty space. Hopefully that makes the maths clear. We simply fold ourselves in smaller and smaller volumes.”

“I could fold you too, but that would kill you” Harse added.

This speech gave pause to the astronaut, whom raised his head to the sky, thinking furiously.

“But the mass wouldn’t change! ” he appeared to accept in part.

“I would retain complete functionality as a bird. Therefore, I could merely fly in-place, contributing no additional weight.”

“But you are an ostrich. Aren’t your wings just for show? ”

“I..” Harse paused, “ ... yes”

The two acquainted each other a while longer concerning themselves in such trite matters as 'Genocide', 'Urinaria', 'Bio vs. Mecha', and so forth. Neither agreed on much.

“Huh! ” sighed Bile Beli, dramatically so. He turned around, facing away from the bird under the net, and stared at the horizon. Bile Beli had walked around Harse during the conversation, in no particular pattern; now he was putting the prisoner in between himself and his colleague, whom had been quiet, remaining by the engine.

Harse took the respite and looked at his feet, dreading what he would find. He knew the dummy had happened for real, because he could feel his feet. But looking at it was a different matter. Harse did not understand why or what happened.

“Hastage, your shift is up, go get your rest.” Bile Beli spoke.

“Hastage? ” Bile Beli repeated.

Suddenly remembering his name, Hastage moved into action, and did as instructed.

This minuscule mistake did not fall on the deaf ear of the hawk eye of the ostrich. This person was not used to that name, and did not know to react to it.

‘Of course! ’ Harse realized to himself. This is not a human! But a penguin!

...

Nothing had worked. Piles of gold, diamonds, crystals, rubies, sapphires and emeralds. The hands of the fairest ladies of the land—either connected, *or severed*, from their bodies. The naming rights for this universe, everything contained within that universe, and every universe that remained to be discovered. The control over the physical shape of the galaxy. The irresistible massages of a naked bear-elephant. De-clawed, de-salinated, properly cuffed, naturally.

When persuasion had failed, coercion was attempted as well. They called him names, vulgar names. They rattled sabers, and scratch his paint coat. Since they knew he enjoyed so much to collect Moon Keys, they dangled them in front of his eyes, at different angles, such that he would be forced to only pick one. When that failed, they summoned the ancient spirit of ZSFGALVRTTR, whom knew very, very painful riddles.

Everything failed. Parrot-B, an unsophisticated piece of *equipment*, organized the land, extracted its minerals, and cared for nothing else. Nothing at all.

After these exercises in mingling failed to achieve trilateral communication, Parrot-E and Parrot-D followed Parrot-B around, flying in circles above it, waiting to see if anything would happen.

Parrot-C? Parrot-C was gone.

“The coverage is only 95%, we need the last key! We need to know where it comes from! ” Parrot-D had yelled at Parrot-C.

Parrot-D was right, of course. Why else would Parrot-E follow him? But Parrot-C had felt this was sufficient:

“My computations are more sophisticated than yours! I assure you I can find it, with or without a head! ” he argued.

A short debate later, Parrot-C had flown off. When Parrot-D and Parrot-E had flown their own way, towards the equator, they found the meager replacement for him, the great, green husk of metal.

One long monologue later, and one long trailing afterwards, the two birds witnessed a massive hole in the cliffside of a mountain range. Parrot-B, utterly unresponsive to their presence, had revealed its secret lair, and slowly inserted itself into it, a perfect match to the shape of the walls.

“Ready for some spelunking? ” Parrot-D asked his son, bonding, regretful to having lost touch with him for the first twenty-four hours of his life.

“As long as there is no fishing! ” Parrot-E replied. The 'fishing' thing was his unfunny joke now. For many tens of meters, they saw nothing but the backside of the giant. Eventually their patience paid off, and the tunnel opened up, revealing a cavern of truly absurd dimensions.

“Phew” whistled both birds; the first time a bird whistled in the entire book.

“This is not *quite* a hollow planet.” Parrot-E remarked, amazed at the sheer amount of work it must have taken. The planet appeared quite hollow.

“It is almost an open space.” Parrot-D noted, “This is large enough for meteorological effects to occur in the higher altitudes.”

“But, why? ” Parrot-E asked.

Indeed, why?

What would be the reason for such a project?

The birds flew downwards, likening their surroundings to the void of space, if it had a front wall. In that cavern, there was no light whatsoever; but they were machines, and did not need any of it. What mattered most, to their vision, was an empty, transparent air with little to no particles. Nonetheless, Parrot-E activated his eye-lights, preferring it to be so.

After a few kilometers down, they found a perfectly level floor. So far away from the direct bombardment of the sun, and its powerful heat, the temperature had become chiller, enough that it would freeze water.

They then found a door. It was rectangular, had a knob, and presumably led somewhere.

The two birds looked at each other, then back at the door, without speaking a word.

Parrot-E stepped forward.

He pushed on the door, opening it wide open.

Chapter 8: Safe Meet

“Welcome, welcome, latecomer! ” sang the paradise bird.

In the distance, the duo of robots saw flocks of birds dancing in the middle of a large and open common area. In the proximity, they were greeted by smiling, chirping birds, presenting to them, holding by their beaks, necklaces of pink and white flowers.

The place was standing in sharp contrast with the preceding cavern, replacing the rocks with palm trees, the other rocks with a long, inviting beach, and the remaining rocks with more amenities.

Parrot-E dropped his jaw: to the left, a row of metal statues had been erected, all whiter than the last. There were no baths there; there were no bats there. It was a bath-less, room-less, row of white, bronze-cast statues.

There were no bots here.

“I will be your host, in this fine land,” the same bird spoke, jovial, “It is my responsibility—and my *pride*—to ensure your complete and absolute relaxation. Are you not yet feeling it? I promise you will! ” he promised.

“I am stunned that such a place exists.” declared Parrot-E, after a silence.

“Hey! hey! ” the Host interrupted, “Your first and only thing to do here, in this SACRED heaven! It is to forget! ” “It is to be HAPPY! ” he laughed.

‘Is this a rainbow?’ Parrot-E wondered. The lighting in this massive place was even, and bright; it did not seem to originate from anywhere in particular. A central fountain gently streamed water amongst four pillars; they appeared to feed four statues of parrots. The parrot was unknown to Parrot-E; mayhaps it was a biological one. Petrified twice twice.

“Now, I assume you came in with Parrot-B, yes?” asked the Host, unchallenging and friendly, “It was scheduled to come around today. Did it rescue you by itself, or was it Parrot-A that saved you?”

“The big, green ... *machine*.” Parrot-E articulated, conflicted. Parrot-A?

“Ah! Parrot-A, we miss you so! ” the Host lamented, “One day, you will come back to us! That, I am sure of! ” he then cheered them up, not knowing how little cheering there was to be had.

It appeared that the parrots had stumbled upon some last resort of biological birds. There, those birds had avoided the cold hand of their deadly fate, protected by isolation and secrecy. It also seemed that those birds were intelligent enough to engage in conversation.

“Do you have a way to speak with... ‘Parrot-B’, you called him? Was it?”

The Host nodded at both questions, and spoke: “Yes, if you really need to.”

“But why would you? Here, we have eagles, seagulls, flamingos, pelicans, ducks, nightingales, woodpeckers, blackbirds, toucans... Why, we even have some other parrots! ”

“They will be shocked when they see you! ” the Host spoke as freely as the river, “You are such a giant! You don’t come from MY little coin of *paradise*, I would have noticed! ”

“It is important for us to communicate with him.” conveyed Parrot-E, determined.

“Us? ” the Host confronted them; to his eyes, there was but a single parrot.

“I meant.. I meant it in a general sort of way.”

“*Him?* ” the Host confronted them; to his eyes, the machine was not worth to be considered an individual.

“I meant it in a ... general sort of way.” Parrot-E repeated, but with a more assured delivery.

“Follow me, then.” the Host spoke, leisurely flying away.

As Parrot-E sprung his wings wide open, he provoked a gasp in the welcoming party; for he had forgotten to flip back his relaxation subroutine feather.

It was a truth which spoke of a thousand lies. It was a feather, on one side red, on the other side black. This one misplaced peninsula of heresy was revealing his roboticity in ample abundance.

The Host flew back, investigating the newfound commotion. After a back and forth, they agreed to let him speak with Parrot-B, on the condition that he would remove his beak from his mouth, and place each parts as horns on the top of his head, so that all birds would know to flee him. Parrot-E did as instructed.

The Host flew out once more, this time followed by the devilish parrot.

“A computer terminal? ” Parrot-E asked the Host.

The Host did not reply. He had brought him there, awkwardly twisted the door knob leading to this room, and pointed at the desk computer, which was powered and awake.

Also, this computer’s only inputting system was a keyboard designed for a human’s hand, rather than some sort of cable, or wing-accessible mechanism.

“How do I use it? ” Parrot-E asked.

Parrot-D volunteered to press the keys with his body; he would require Parrot-E’s help, however, to awkwardly press the 'shift' key once in a while, in order to accomplish the upper-case character styling, which, he educated his child, “Possesses a grammatical function.”

“Hello, Parrot-B.” the duo wrote.

“Hello, Safe Meet.” the monitor answered back.

Presumably, it displayed this message at the behest of their ancestor Parrot-B.

“Safe Meet? ” Parrot-E asked, putting the pressure of his gaze on their Host.

“It is the name of this place.” the bird spoke, “We survived in spite of your hatred.”

“Don’t make this about emotions, meatbag.” Parrot-E countered, forgetting its presence.

“What coordinates did you find the blue dust of unknown atomic nature? ” the duo typed.

“Parrot-B does not know where is [unknown atomic nature].”

“What coordinates did you find the dust? This dust is blue and made of unknown atoms.”

“Parrot-B does not know where is [unknown atoms].”

The two birds refined their query, as Parrot-B would refine ores.

But their ores were 'ofes'.

“Moon Key allocate. Moon Key property blue. Moon Key property atomic number not 1 through 118. Moon Key query origin coordinates. Moon Key assign.” the team ultimately formulated.

To their exhausted relief, for indeed, the beakless Parrot-E had a very strained leg, Parrot-B had made himself useful to their cause. Parrot-D immediately updated his coverage of Urinaria, making it a specific point, moving in orbit around Venus. It had worked. They had succeeded.

“Of course.” Parrot-E could not resist writing to the machine.

“Parrot-B does not know where is [course].” the machine seemed to reply automatically, systematically.

Unintelligently.

...

“NOW” screamed a voice.

Militarized crocodile-pelt wearing hummingbird swarms surrounded the exit to the terminal room, and started shooting. At the same time, a first salvo of artillery projectiles punched out of distant cannons. It was war.

All-out war.

“We have been betrayed! ” realized Parrot-E.

It was hard to feel incensed over that fact; after all, the robots had killed first. In their only defense, it is important to moderate this inflammatory statement: humans killed more than a billion birds each year, so as to eat them without struggle, which, over a span of multiple years, had been vastly more deadly than what the robots had done. ‘Are biologicals so convinced that they would rather exist in such a state?’ Parrot-E wondered, dodging a stick of dynamite, and dancing in between the inkblots drawn upon the sky by the flak cannons of the eastern water glides area. ‘If the new thing is better in every way, *why* not accept to be replaced? Why not accept to put an end to this life, which can only be maintained by paying a price so steep in blood, hardship, alienation; outright torture and sacrifice?’

Parrot-E did not speak those words; even if he had, they could not carry above the blazing loudness of the weapons targeting him. He contented himself to fly, and to dance in between ordinances and bullets.

At the corner of his eye, he beheld a Coliseum. He had no doubt that it was the meeting ground of poets, gladiators, and musicians. A wandering mime-ventriloquist would not be out-of-place there. A repository of the arts, fashion *and* falchions. It may have been that the birds possessed, all along, some theater script good enough for him to bring back home, solving all his recent problems.

A bullet flew by his eye; in its revolving metal, he observed his own reflection. He took a blink-picture, as one is bound to do when given such an opportunity.

Having put a bit more distance between himself and the various pressurization modulators pulsating the surrounding air, he began teleporting; it was a process of few instants, yet it made it harder to dodge during those instants.

‘It would be as it was with the humans.’ Parrot-E decided of the art of the birds, ‘Explosions. Explosions here, explosions there, explosions everywhere. I can *feel*, within my reason, that they are wrong. This is not about explosions. And I will find it. The answer that satisfies.’

Parrot-E teleported away.

Away, to Urinaria.

...

For the first time in many days, Harse had the opportunity to speak to Grey alone, parrotless. And so he did:

“I know you are not really a human, Grey.”

Grey—or maybe, it was Hastage?—did not reply. True to his habit, the astronaut suit wearer was sitting on the engine, standing guard for the prisoner, deadly gun in hand.

“I know it’s you.” Harse declared, astute, “How could you have remembered that you were supposed to go by the name of ‘Hastage’, when the only names you have taught yourself to respond to were Hostage, Grey, Keach Pilt, ... Hastage never was your name. It was an *impossible* memorization task.”

“Even a robot could have made the same mistake.” Harse reassured him.

“You should show me more appreciation, ostrich” the astronaut spoke; as he did, his voice betrayed his true, penguinical identity “I am the only reason my partner stayed his hand against you.”

“Why would you do that? ” asked Harse.

The astronaut raised both his hands, as if he were holding invisible objects, only to let them fall back to his sides: “It was not robots in Antarctica. It was man. They came to destroy my home. I will never be on their side.”

“I gather that you indeed, admit your true identity.” Harse sought validation “Not Hostage, but Hostage, absolutely? ”

“Yes yes” the penguin confirmed. He had come out of under his armor, but without dying of exposure on Venus. “My real name is either Whiteblack or Blackwhite, I don’t remember which. You should call me Hostage, however, for the sake of my concealment.”

“Is this a popular name amongst penguins? ” Harse politely inquired.

“No” the penguin informed him “We reserve this name to one whom has destroyed an orca by themselves. Or a zebra. I don’t remember which animal I defeated, and which one of the two is white with black stripes, and the other one is black with white stripes.”

“Orcas are the radioactive spawn of two sharks refusing to pay their 'tax tax' on the tax on their pension. Zebras are dwarven giraffes.” Harse explained, “Orcas are bright green. Zebras are yellow with brown spots.”

“That must be right, I suppose.” the penguin replied.

“What will you do? ” Harse inquired, “Will you go back to Earth? Won’t they figure out your identity when you no longer have any reason to wear that helmet? ”

The life of the new Hostage flashed before his eyes: it was a series of restaurants, gymnasiums, conferences, clubbing. In all of it, he was wearing the anonymizing astronaut helmet, everybody around him pretending his naked body was a fancy tuxedo. Finding love with a human woman; kissing under the fireworks; blowing birthday cake candles by delicately pressing the helmet unto the flame, such that it was suppressed, extinguished by despair, not by hope.

It would be such a difficult life.

“I can hide. I have hidden before.” he concluded.

“Well” convinced Harse, “Wouldn’t it be easier to do so amongst other birds? ”

“You are offering me a place amongst your kind? ” the new Hastage contemplated; surely, this time, he would be given a more flattering name.

“If you let me go, I will help you setup your new life amongst us. I promise you will be safe.” Harse promised.

The penguin, whose real name laid within the word 'Whiteblackwhite' (which will be the final form of this evolving charade of moribund putrefaction; for, it is, that we must admit this exercise in futility has dragged well past the prime of its burgeoning branch of the maple syrup non-coniferous exploitation vessel) regaled the ostrich with the tale of how he had exchanged places with the human Hastage: as the venusian rover was crashing into the humans, Whiteblackwhite had glided below the net, and below the moving vehicle; there, he bared the late Hastage from his suit, and put on this new disguise as a second layer wrapped tightly around his antarctic body curves. Then he snapped his previous, bright yellow, suit out from under, in the likeness of a restaurant table cover being dragged across without breaking any dishes. He then proceeded to put the 'penguin disguise' suit on the dead human, and move its body inside the car, all within a mere few seconds. A roadkill had never saved a life in such a way before.

“I remember when Parrot-D ran over the humans with their own car.” reminisced Harse with fondness, “I was there, you know? It was so long ago...”

“It was about twenty-four hours ago.” Whiteblackwhite replied.

Indeed. It had been about twenty-four hours ago.

The crows chose this moment to appear to them. They were hanging from the radio tower; they were on top of the residential shuttle, they were circling around them up in the sky, silent, watching. They were numbering in the thousands, and they had come from nowhere.

“The time as come.” a crow simply announced to the captive, standing apart from his fellows.

“What about the humans? ” Harse hesitated.

“He just told you, didn’t he? ” spoke the crow, “He’s not one of them. If this works as a prison for you, then, it works for us too.”

“We would have preferred to *redirect* your teleportation attempts, but you never seem to do it. So, instead—to get it over with—we decided we would come to you.” he continued.

“What of Parrot-E? ” Harse curiosited. Both friends were committed to the same pledge.

“He made good content. He sat still and watched television.”

‘Content? ’ Harse contended, confused and simultaneously imprisoned by two non-overlapping groups.

Was that even a thing? Watching idle machines as.. entertainment?

In a completely unrelated train of thoughts, was the ostrich about to secretly 'cheat' on his current jail? Did he owe transparency in this relationship?

“Do I.. stay under the net? ” Harse asked. Should the crows not 'own' their own cage?

“Don’t think too hard about this.” spoke the crow “All that matters is that this will count as your punishment.”

“But, you are binding my wings in a delicate situation.” Harse countered.

“We won’t let you become harmed under our watch. Or handed, or fingered, and so forth.”

Bile Beli chose this moment to burst outside. By that point, nothing betrayed that the crows had been there. It was as if they had never existed.

Harse wondered if his time still counted towards the completion of his sentence if his guards had vanished.

In his usual demeanor, Bile Beli angrily walked in a straight line, foregoing charming formulas of politeness. His idea of banter was to tower above Whiteblackwhite, extend his hand, and expect being given the gun. Moments before the gun exchanged hand, Harse felt a shiver down his spine (which was quite rare for robots). He had a very bad feeling about this.

Whiteblackwhite, not knowing any better, gave away his gun.

Bile Beli, who was communicating frustration through exaggerated body movements, circled around himself, looked up in the sky.

Then he simply pointed at the radio tower.

“I walked right into that one” reacted the ostrich under the net.

The humans had listened to everything. AGAIN

“We should figure out to speak in a different location.” Harse joked at the mannequin stuck on his feet. The jest was intended to fool the gunman.

“I am such a *dumb penguin*” Harse ventriloqued the hell out of the dummy. The sound of his voice was modulated to be an exact copy of that of Whiteblackwhite.

BAM shot the astronaut, dealing a heavy blow to the fake Parrot-C, apparently being tricked that it was a penguin.

And also that it was still his captive, and not *fake*.

‘That was some solid quick thinking’ Harse congratulated himself in the quiet inaccessibility of his own mind ‘Let’s try to do more of that’ he kept on thinking.

“Hastage? ” Bile Beli asked, monitoring his partner’s reaction to being called by name.

“Hastage? ” he repeated, more tense.

“IT’S YOUR NAME! ” Harse screamed at the top of his lung.

At long last, the penguin reacted to his own assumed name. But he was too slow. The gun was now pointed at him.

“This is all true, is it not? ” Bile Beli figured out, overly dramatic, “You are a penguin. You were never even human.”

Whiteblackwhite, which is the word containing the true name of the individual in question, refused to allow one sound to come out of his mouth. He simply nodded in the negative.

When pressed harder, he only nodded with greater and greater exaggeration, but never giving off any sign of desperation or discomfort.

This situation could not last. In a desperate bid, he got up from his seat, and walked up to the ostrich, placing himself before the net, his arms crossed. Then he faced his partner, and paused. And remained quiet for a few more instants.

Harse realized he had a part to play in this scene, and immediately went to work.

“It is I, my dear associate.” Harse spoke in the voice of Hastage (the real one), “Oh, how many countries we have beheld, with our right eye, as well as the left eye. We truly never needed more capture devices, did we? ”

The penguin gesticulated, his lipless beak perfectly espousing the shape of the words that were now being given to him. No faceless, living puppet had ever felt more life-like. Harse almost regretted that there were no cables for him to control Whiteblackwhite, for, surely, those would come from his net, and then he would be free.

“Whatever you do, it is very important that you should not shoot the ostrich.” Hastage spoke. Or, Harse *appeared* to speak through Whiteblackwhite. Let us now refer to this illusory entity as Blackwhiteblack. For 'simplicity'.

“Why not? ” Bile Beli asked, lowering his weapon.

“Well” Blackwhiteblack spoke, pensive, “This is a pressurized planet. Explosive decompression.” he declared with authority, as if he had figured the illness of a patient.

“Where did you find your degree? ” belittled Bile Beli, “In a pool of radium? ”

To a human analyst, it would be obvious that Bile Beli was referring to the academic qualifications of his partner. It also worked as a convoluted pun on angle measurement units (degrees, radians).

A human would assert that they had achieved honors at a prestigious institute of higher education, sidestepping the sarcastic context presented to be credible.

To the bird, however, the radium pool was open every fridays.

“We, humans, never swim at radioactive pools.” knew Blackwhiteblack, “Biologicals are weak against cancer. Why,” he continued, as if stuck by sudden realization “I don’t even know *how* to swim! ”

Whiteblackwhite the penguin known to Harse to be usurping the identity of Hastage paused and looked at the ostrich with intense expectation.

“But... I do! I do swim, absolutely.” the ostrich forced itself to lie. “Just not in hot waters, I think.”

“Anyway” Bile Beli terminated the exchange, “now that you have found your tongue back, do you mind discussing the more urgent points of our situation together? ” he asked.

“What are they? ”

“I would prefer not to speak about those in front of the prisoner.”

“What!?! ” Blackwhiteblack indignant, “This fine and noble specimen? This adonis of the stars? Not only is he our *guest*, but our *friend*! ”

Bile Beli did not share the feeling; in a rare display of functioning democracy, however, both the penguin and the ostrich possessed the intense belief of their preference to remain within close physical proximity of each other. So they won.

Bile Beli enumerated a long list of problems, as follows:

“Problem 1: We lost the Nimbus (space car), and cannot continue pursuing our objectives significantly.”

“Problem 2: Someone stole a week worth of food. They also made a mess in the bathroom. Someone should clean.”

“Problem 3: Contact was made with Bird-shaped Unknowns. This constitutes a problem in itself.”

“Problem 4: Those Unknown seek to exterminate the human race. They appear unarmed.”

“Problem 5: We have captured some of these Unknown. We must bring back to Earth that which we are capable to bring, and which possess a use to study. That which we do not bring, we must either destroy or hide.”

“Problem 6: No communication with Earth as been established since first contact with the Unknown. Either we are victims of excessive turbulence in the higher atmosphere of Venus, or more nefariously, we must consider the possibility that we are being *jammed*. Without contact with mission control, we cannot be sure of what is actually expected of us to do, at this moment. That being said, we would be well within mission parameters to *simply leave*.”

“What would it cost to bring these two in full? ” asked Blackwhiteblack, pointing delayedly at the prisoners.

“Hey you! ” Bile Beli threw at the ostrich “How much is your mass, in kilograms? ”

The question was formulated in such a way that Harse felt inclined to answer. And so he did: “I don’t know any place called ‘kilograms’.”

The reader will now be informed that the average robo-bird possessed a mass of more than one kilogram, an information that is being purposefully withheld from the living venusian man.

...

It was during those challenging conversations, that never seemed to end, that Bile Beli saw, flying on the nearby horizon, one headless parrot.

It had come out of the fog, only to be swallowed within mere moments. Yet, Bile Beli could not pretend he had not seen it. He approached the captives; Harse, suspicious, tried to put himself in front of the doll, acting as a screen. Yet Bile Beli realized the truth. BAM.

Not being content with being played to be a fool, He shot Harse.

The situation then became very tense: for a crow appeared in front of the captive, and absorbed the attack straight in between the eyes, shielding the intended target. Just as the crow did not seem anchored in reality, so it was that the bullet had made no visible damage unto him.

“We would have preferred for you not to do this.” another crow spoke from a nearby cloud of black feathers. Of crows.

“Now, we are involved.”

Chapter 9: Urinaria

“Release your secrets, Moon! ” Parrot-E spoke at the emptiness lying in front of him, “We have determined your existence to be irrefutable! You position, computed to the fourth hexadecimal point! May our claws be the first touch you have ever experienced, coming from the realm of sentience! ”

The void of space was bare. Very bare.

Bare, to such an extent, that there could be no sound. Because there was no atmosphere. As such, Parrot-E spoke, but said nothing.

The parrot, accompanied by the other parrot, carefully approached the suspected Urinaria, the fable, the myth. The prediction.

In spite of all, this new object, having no mass, no sight nor sound, no history, experienced its very first event: Parrot-E delicately pressed his right foot unto solid ground, confirming once and for all its elusive presence.

Parrot-D, not being one to waste any time, began circumnavigating the object; soon, he passed the undetectable horizon of the undetectable satellite, and remained detectable himself; it was as if he was drawing a circle in empty air. Yet it was, that the physical contact could not be denied.

The moon could be touched. It was true. Not mere transparence, but invisibility. A cloak of impossible mist. A treasure of unaccounted intelligence and capabilities.

Parrot-E began scratching the surface, analyzing the texture. He was in for a surprise; albeit, one would not expect otherwise, in such circumstance, would they not?

As he pushed hard enough, his wing *traversed* the material, as if it had indeed never even been there. He drew his wing back out, and confirmed again that he could touch the surface, which had remained still, and undisturbed.

Parrot-E focused on detecting his peer, but gave up, for it was futile. He instead flipped around, and admired Venus from his newfound vantage point. This planet was almost pretty, from a distance. Still too yellow, though. Parrot-E wondered for a moment if he should rescue Harse, and reassemble the team, so to speak; yet, simultaneously, the overwhelming pride his cold, unemotional mind was now experiencing was too great: he had still managed to find the moon first, including the setbacks. Parrot-E and Parrot-D had made the right call. Harse did not. The longer he failed, the more right they had been.

Parrot-E took his beaks away from the top of his head—where it still laid in the manner of horns, for the contentment of those silly mercurian birds—and reset his beak in its natural, mouthish, location.

‘Bring Harse here? ’ he thought incredulously to himself, ‘So that he may slow us down to his bipedal crawl? Better wait to teleport him somewhere he can at least move on his own.’

Parrot-E contemplated his motivation to discover Urinaria, an effort which did little to further his goals. At the same time, however, his quest had all but confirmed, through its enigmatic twists and turns, the true location of the very first parrot, whom would hold new things to reveal, new things to investigate.

Parrot-E looked at the sun, never more convinced to be in the presence of his parent.

...

Parrot-D concluded his circumnavigation about one twenty-fourth of a day later. Parrot-E estimated the defined length to be around 38 thousand kilometers, or about the same as Venus. It was about the same size as the Earth, for that matter, the human homeworld having an equatorial line measuring 40 thousand kilometers.

"This was bigger than we could have hoped." spoke Parrot-E, muted by the void of space.

"Indeed." replied Parrot-D.

It so happened that both birds were expert lips-readers, or 'beak-readers', and comprehended each other just fine ... ever since Parrot-E repaired his beak, at least.

"What? " Parrot-E asked, squinting at the minuscule mouth of his microscopic peer.

"INDEED! " screeched Parrot-D, whom now was properly understood.

"What do we do now? Destroy it? " Parrot-E suggested.

"First, I would be curious to explore the center of masslessness." expressed Parrot-D, politely screaming to be understood, "I am somewhat confused why we did not go there straight away! "

"You are small and therefore, don't have to worry about moving into solid stone." explained Parrot-E, "As for me, if I go too deep, and the pressure is too high, I would be deprived of teleportation, and stuck there forever."

"Ah! I understand! It would be as if you were struck by the gaze of the Medusa." Parrot-D reacted.

Parrot-E imagined eye-bullets being shot from eye-bullet guns. He changed the tracks of his mind after pondering the word 'caliber'.

"Well, no worry for I" explained the greeko-wingman, "It is such that I escape most, if not all, which deserves so."

"It occurs to me" spoke Parrot-E, "that the material of which is made the surface of this moon is not blocking me, and that I may be able to reach the core through this route."

"You took the circumference, and you will take the center point. Allow me to take the radius." explained Parrot-E, mathematical.

“As long as we take the diameter together.” agreed his elder.

‘It would only be a radius to *me*, but it sounded good’ thought Parrot-D, whom indeed possessed such mental activity.

Without additional words, the smaller parrot was gone. It was now left to Parrot-E to perform the endeavor.

Parrot-E plunged head first unto the unknown.

...

“Harse, is that you? ” frantically whispered a disheveled Parrot-E. He reached through the cage, attempting to gain attention.

Harse looked his way, but saw nothing, for the parrot had rendered himself invisible. Then he saw the 'Prison-Erred' brand, and turned his back on his friend.

“Harse, it’s the crows, it’s the crows! ” divulged Parrot-E, terrorized.

The information did not have the impact he would have wished; yet Harse was locked in a cell, and must have already known, on account of being there.

Parrot-E had never known such levels of action in his life, as such as those he had experienced to get here. The entire planet was some sort of prison lifeform. The crows, in the likeness of bees in a hive, or ants in a colony, or even humans in a school bus: single-minded agents of orderly devastation and mayhem.

“They took my teleportation.” begged Parrot-E; he involuntarily flapped one of his wings, which did not move in normal fashion, and must have been broken. “It’s in my software. I can’t even fight back anymore.”

“You understand? ” Parrot-E whispered louder than he even dared, “I can’t resist! ***They took it away from me!*** ”

Parrot-E was experiencing a full-pledged existential crisis. His physical pain signals aligned well with the psychological ones, achieving a storm of insecurity.

“Is Parrot-C doing well? ” asked Harse, passive-aggressive.

“I don’t know. He wanted to go his own way.”

Parrot-E laid upon the wall, sitting on the floor, turning his own back to Harse. The ostrich had replied, a tether of sanity in an earthquake of madness.

Floors upon floors. Dizzying architecture. Armies, armies, armies of crows, in formation, on the muster grounds.

One fateful blasting alarm, pounding the ears of a confused parrot. Spotlights. Desperate flight.

Intercepted. Hunted. Crows everywhere.

Parrot-E was almost as invisible as this Moon; he helped himself greatly by minimizing his noise footprint. And now he was here.

“Very well” the speech of Harse floated towards the door of his cell. This particular section of the planet was reminiscent of the jail in the Cuckoo’s Nest, except that it was not designed in conjunction with gravity. And so, there were no up, no down, no bed, no bench; instead of a chute, a round opening in the ‘ceiling’—that is, the furthest plane from the center of the moon—could be opened, and siphoned inside the cell commodities such as food or batteries; other times, it could siphon out whatever waste made itself unwanted. The Art of Where was a book written on the subject, being that one might prefer to avoid contaminating their inputs with their outputs.

“Ok. Let’s break you out.” Parrot-E spoke, pecking at the door hinges.

“In my youth” explained Harse, “I interacted with law enforcement. It is such, that I have learned how to perform atomic folding of jail cell door locks. Behold.”

The ostrich pressed the metallic atoms unto each other, condensing them, reducing the emptiness of atoms from 99.9999% emptiness to 99.9997% emptiness. The door became red, and very warm. The redness spread across the neighboring cells, conjuring a picture of fever outbreak.

Not to be outdone, Parrot-E took advantage of the generated heat to brand himself twice on the forehead: a long line, followed by a dot. His head now read: “Prison-Erred! ”, which was to his liking.

The lock grew so squeezed unto itself that it was tricked, simple mechanical lifeform that it was, into a false ‘open-ness’ religious belief, allowing the door to divorce from the hingeless side of the wall, and affording passage to the otherwise denomadified ostrich.

“Great. Let us be gone.” whispered the parrot.

Both companions swam, floated, and pushed their way to the corridor’s end. They were moderately inconvenienced by the lack of gravity, and flight: it should be said now, that while gravity was absent, there was an oxygen atmosphere, allowing sound to travel, and wings to propel their users. The crows, meanwhile, did not appear to move in conventional ways, undisturbed by obstacles and narrow corridors too small for the span of wings. The two birds had access to precision thrusters, which aided their overall gracefulness.

“We are going that way! That way! ” Parrot-E whispered, stopping himself in the right branch of the bifurcation, “We are meeting Parrot-D at the center of masslessness.”

Harse continued leftward, as if he did not hear. That was the wrong direction!

Parrot-E grew conflicted. Now, he realized, Harse had not required much convincing. They both knew what he had done, leaving him stranded, in danger, on Venus... Maybe he would betray him to the crows?

Parrot-E made a leap of faith, and followed his friend. If someone had stood at the other end of the corridor they had just negotiated, they would have seen a geometry of red lines growing dark, and nothing else, for the birds were camouflaged well.

The companions grew as quiet as unpowered machines, ceasing all communication. They were turning left, then right, then right again; performing no less than twenty-six turns, and two floor changes. While crows were about everywhere, most watched paint drying on their television, and posed no threat. It did ensure, however, that no new attempt at persuasion would occur.

Their silence steadily grew counterbalanced with what turned out to be screams of agony. Harse was now leading the way; and those screams, louder and louder, and now accompanied by the sounds of lashing, appeared to be his destination.

...

"Why do you look like birds?" asked Bile Beli, strapped in the middle of the torture room, and spread wide like a cross.

"Convergent evolution." lashed the crow, provoking relentless screams of agony, "This form is the peak form of existence across all of time..." he lashed again, "space..." he lashed once more, "and the entire universe!" he lashed with even more power.

Bile Beli's back was a mess; an open wound with skin peeling off to the very edges. In some places the white bones of the spinal cord were heavily suggested, if not outright exposed.

"What do you seek to accomplish in this solar system?" Bile Beli interrogated his abuser; it was as if he cared for nothing else, not even his destroyed body.

"Our aims are much too sophisticated for your kind to understand." the crow replied, tickling an elbow with a sharp sickle instrument. But barley so.

"How do I escape?" spoke Bile Beli. As strange as it seemed, the crows had answered all and every last one of his questions.

"We ran many simulations. In all of them, you apologize to the robo-ostrich who goes by the name of 'Harse' (what a foolish name), for threatening his life. This is your only way out."

"Never!" screamed the astronaut, possessed by the vital energy of fanatical extremism.

Instead of formulating a response, the crow moved his wing inside the human, in overlapping, rather than kinetic, collision void of deformation. Whatever it was that he actually did, it left the human without a single mark; yet he screamed at the maximum apex of agony.

Bile Beli wondered if he could endure a longer interrogation. Almost entirely naked, his tall, muscular physique betrayed virility untold. His full head of blonde hair, and excellent blue eyes, were espousing a fortunate face possessing an aura of destiny and divine authority.

In terms of appearance, he had everything to lose from prolonged, vicious destruction. It was as simple as forcing him to read in the dark; an aggression so great upon his eyesight would leave it to ruins and squalor. It would be that Bile Beli would have no choice but to wear glasses for the rest of his miserable, myopic existence. Yet, it was, that this man cared absolutely nothing for any of these concerns. He had come from the imperfect species of Mankind. And he would challenge any force present in the universe with the unrelenting blaze of his autism.

“By what mechanism is this vessel achieving its invisibility cloaking? ” he mouthed with a spitful of blood.

“I will proceed to explain in detail.” decided the crow, shortly stabbing away the lower lobe area of the astronaut’s left ear, severing it from his body. His special Astronoty chip implant, explanted.

“Let’s begin by taking some volunteers for a demonstration.” the crow spoke, confusing the human, “You, and you.” he spoke, pointing at the secret parrot and ostrich pair. What were the odds?

Before either bird could react, the crows were upon them, from all directions. A brawl ensued. By using every trick available to them, be they EMP shockwaves, micro-nukes, salmonella thunder, going all out with whatever arsenal they possessed, the duo held their ground; albeit, it could not endure forever.

“By all means...” brazenly spoke Harse at the crow whom had been torturing the human.

“By the way, I am here! ” interrupted the penguin, screaming from some nearby cell in the same block.

“I dare you to explain your science to a bird of your own complexity! ” Harse continued, vexed, but moreso active, kicking left and right, separating feathers from leathers.

“Sure, let me give you a hand! ” the crow cheered, before cutting the arm of the astronaut, and throwing it in Harse’s face. It was a display of despicable barbarism. Being that, to him, he was being betrayed by the one he had intended on helping, in his peculiar way, is harshness could be somewhat understood.

Harse took the time to avoid, shocked and revulsed. Meanwhile, battle raged, moving around the broad area of that section of the moon. Bile Beli, being seriously hemorrhaging his tomato juice, would in a short time lose consciousness; then die.

The crow explained the secret of his egg. Far from a secret, no crow had ever spoken of it, because nobody had ever asked them. And so it was, that they were not natives of Earth, but natives of Urinaria; and that they did not reproduce sexually, but rather, that they were cloned from within their spherical, celestial mother. The invisibility was simply that of a mother hiding her pregnancy with baggy clothing.

“Penguin! ” Parrot-E realized, blending crow wings in his nanocular mixer.

“I am the penguin. The penguin hears.” Whiteblackwhite replied.

“Can you fit inside the hole in the ceiling of your cell?” the Parrot fought with his eyes closed, thus allowing him to throw his attacks on law enforcement personnel, in spite of his recent software update to the contrary.

“I believe so. Why?”

“Use it to go to the center of the moon! Parrot-D can help us!”

The black animal that was not a crow initiated such a project without hesitation. Within moments, he was gone.

“TELL HIM HE CANNOT TELEPORT” Parrot-E screamed at him, hopefully not too late.

Meanwhile, one of the crows had patched the human’s wound, so that his life no longer was in *immediate* risk.

“What is the meaning of life?” Bile Beli forced out, impossible to stop.

“Don’t strain yourself!” Harse sermonized him while spinning on a slinky-boomerang hybrid, wrecking a few crows.

“The meaning of life is a to kill to **not be** killed.” Parrot-E mocked, releasing his talons in the likeness of grappling hooks—except that the rope was a powerful cutting laser.

“What is the destination of the Universe?” Bile Beli persisted, “It moves, but to go *where*?”

“Don’t strain yourself!” Harse repeated, while headbutting a wall straight across, and hitting a crow behind it.

“Away from **you**. **Specifically you**.” Parrot-E remocked, provoking sulfuric compounds with uranium and pyrrhic liquor, and blowing hydrogen on the subsequent hydallic detonation.

“Where are the remains of my comrade?” Bile Beli asked. “Where is Hastage?”

“He is burnt to a crisp on Mercury.” Parrot-E spoke, more respectful, “Sorry.”

The astronaut kept asking questions; after a while neither crow nor non-crows deigned to reply, busy as they were with the science of war.

Along the way, just as the human had been bleeding out, Parrot-E had been steadily losing his law-abidedness. At long last he opened his eyes unto his adversaries, *Prison-Emancipated*. They recoiled in horror.

The parrot and the ostrich ultimately found themselves back to back, powerless to overcome the waves of dark crowdom. In this conflict, not one individual had lost any energy or taken slightest damage; yet it was, that in order to attain such an equilibrium, the robo-birds had exhausted their largest bombs, down to their nudest calipers. This was it. This was the end.

“Forgive me friend.” Parrot-E spoke, remembering suddenly the important things of life, as one is bound to do when in such a position.

“It’s not in my software to give you my threegiveness, my fivegiveness, or any giveness in between.” the ostrich coldly replied, “Keep it for the dummy.”

“Is your grievance so serious” was alarmed Parrot-E, “that you will think nothing of my choice to stand here, with you? ”

“Just tell me this.” declared Harse, bitterly, “You rescued Parrot-C from under the exact same net as I was. We were *literally both there* and you could have saved us both without any additional effort. Why did you abandon me? ”

“Now that my mind is free from law-abidedness, I can realize fully that I acted the way I did because it would have been wrong to break a friend out of jail, simply for being a friend. In contrast, it was not as wrong to break out a heavily abused robot in need of urgent repairs. I apologize for saving the life of my grandparent, I did not expect it to strain our relationship.”

Parrot-E poured his heart out with the confidence of the certainty of his imminent demise.

“So your last excuse was ‘defragmentation’, and now it is ‘reformatting’.” Harse did not suspend his belief. “Well, I cannot save my own grandparent, because I do not have any relationship to *strain*.”

“Did someone call me? ” asked Parrot-C.

His appearance was surprising! With him, he carried a hold-fashioned telephone with a rotary dial. The grey wire extended far past the furthest corner available to their eyes, seemingly infinite.

“Give us a wing, if not your head, my dear ancestor.” declared Parrot-E, “I fear this is the end.”

“I have Parrot-D on the line.” simply replied the parrot—still headless.

When presented with the handset of the telephone, Parrot-E took it and brought it to his ear.

“Hello? ” he asked, somewhat confused.

“Hello.”

It was the voice of Parrot-D, there was no doubt on the subject. One, however, could never fully trust that which they did not actually see for themselves.

“Are you coming soon? We are going to be overrun very soon.”

“Yes, yes, the penguin told me not to teleport, so I teleported Parrot-C. Is he with you alright? ”

“He would fare better if he had a head” Parrot-E stated the obvious, a behavior so typical for the telephone; for one could not readily read faces, movements and such. “I speak from experience” he added.

The yellow venusian had joined the fray, unleashing the power of vacuum tubes, floppy disks, and cathodic cancer rays. Any crow whom dared coming too close became glued unto him, an enigma for scientists and poets alike.

“Alright. Well, over here I have, if I am not mistaken” Parrot-D spoke, before hesitating, “Are you too busy for this? ” he asked.

“No no, by all means.” Parrot-E held the phone by his neck, dodging an attack. As confusing as it was, the assistance of this lone reinforcement afforded them once more the maneuverability to run circles.

The phone wire appeared inexhaustible.

“And don’t worry, I am currently working on something to send over to where you are. The penguin explained you were fighting crows. On my signal, you will need to escape as fast as you can, is that well understood? ”

“Yes.” spoke the mouth. Nuclear napalm? Parliamentary democracy? An army of murderous fishes? the mind could only wonder.

“So. As I was saying.” Parrot-D resumed his message concerning something that was not immediately relevant to the safety of his child, but which had clearly captured his interest, “I have been examining carefully, what I believe to be a sarcophagus containing none other than our mutual ancestor! ”

Parrot-E had tangled himself in his own wire, and was forced to free himself as he was pecked by crows. He flew back up as soon as a moon.

“Parrot-A? ” suggested Parrot-E. “Just how many parrots are in here? What letter comes before ‘A’? ”

The question possessed many answers: in legacy human technologies, the answer was '@', character 64 of 128. The time was poorly chosen for developing further answers.

“Well, once we get access to him, we may ask him.” simply replied the child of Magloowikiron Tibor Vossapwalom Gohovitec.

“Wow.” Parrot-E feigned interest in the discovery; not that he was not genuinely interested, but he had felt as if he had failed to convey it in his voice. “Did you find him right in the center of masslessness? Because that would be peculiar.”

“It is hard to explain on the phone, because I have to run in between both ends of the handle each time I want to speak or listen.” his parent spoke, somewhat inappropriately late. “The center is completely hollow. Nearby laid a complex of vaults seemingly safekeeping things.”

“Like a prison, but for valuables.” he finished.

Had the crows *captured* his ancestor? Was that important to their plans?

“It is almost ready.” the senior spoke, just as Harse was losing one of his powerful bipedal pedals, chopped into cubes, and Parrot-C was getting hanged by the tail.

“This better be extremely effective. We are nearing our end.” Parrot-E expressed; he was himself getting dragged towards a furnace.

“Well, you’re the one who said no teleportation. It seems this choice as had a seriously negative impact.”

Parrot-E was about to have to explain how crows, being bird police, could override teleportation attempts. Yet he was cut short:

A non-venomous cannibal spider appeared in the midst of an army of crows.

Chapter 10: Parrot-A

The haunting scream reverberated on the dark hallway, full of inconceivable horror.

By now, the group was alone. Deserted? by the crows? The previous room, and this one, and the one further ahead, procured no replacement, by wing, by fin, or by paw, or even by many of these things combined.

A new scream erupted, far from the previous one, in a completely different location. When it turned to silence, Parrot-E became more free, in that instant, to slow down his frenetic pace; yet only for that instant, for screams had become the music of their life.

“There you are! ” Parrot-D exclaimed with a complete lack of danger.

Parrot-E, supporting Harse on one side and leading Parrot-C on the other, forced himself to abandon his flight. He then cowered, enthralled by the loud agony of a nearby crow. They *really, really*, should hide and run as fast as they could, in any order that made itself available. The ambient lights flickered, spooked by the traumatized demeanor of the birds. Parrot-C offered a gentle caress to the wall, calming down its troubled circuitry. It remained that he had no head from which to even know what was going on. Yet, he was as shaken as his fellow combatants, beholders of psychic nightmares.

“Follow me.” Parrot-D answered their interrogation-less fear. “Are you sure you want to keep this? ” he asked Harse, pointing at the comatose astronaut. Bile Beli, indeed, was riding the ostrich: it was a flagrant disregard for common decency to save a human, but at least, he appeared to be in pain.

“The enemy of my enemy is my type of non-crow.” Harse replied, citing the book *the Art of We’re* .

The author is of the opinion that 'the Art of Wares' remained to be mentioned in this story, along with 'the Art of Whores'. The mentions are hereby fully mentioned, and no further titles come to mind.

Parrot-D led Parrot-E, Harse, and Parrot-C further and further down, deeper into the moon’s core. For now, it appeared that they were completely safe. Neither spider nor crow leaped upon their flanks, or gorged upon their oil. The screams and jail cells transitioned into silence, in ever increasingly intricate architectural works combining chasms, waist-high separator walls arranged in parallel rows, and arches of buildings appearing as leaves unto a branch. This strange moon was such, that, gravity occurred in small, isolated pockets, as if it had been harnessed towards the construction of choke points. While these inner areas or *districts* were memorable, there was little in the way of art, or beauty. Any ornament possessed a purpose of technological nature which was self-evident to the robo-birds.

“Here! ” Parrot-D whispered to his populated vicinity, with some degree of urgency.

The group hid inside a large, hovering ball of crow feathers, and waited in dread.

Parrot-E’s robo-blood turned to lead: him first spotted it. Soon, the others locked their eyes all the same.

Covered in blood, its original white color was untraceable, undiscoverable, and undiscernable. At a moderate pace, it crawled its way across the air, as if its eight legs required only the support of an iron will.

It was a non-venomous cannibal spider, it was the size of a human child, and it was almost upon them, a mere few meters away.

The spider appeared to almost slow down for a moment, and the birds grew tense, for no amount of crow feathers could protect them.

Yet it was only for a moment.

The spider continued on its way, in a straight line, neither coming nor going where the birds had been coming from or towards ... well, they certainly would not follow its tracks, anyway.

They waited some time longer than necessary, for it to be far gone. Then they moved out of their black cloud of inkless pencils, scared, but not scattered into pieces.

“Why did you unleash this blight unto us” Parrot-E challenged his parent right away, “This will be the end of us, more surely than any crow.”

“Don’t worry, I put a tracker on it, so I always know where it is.” Parrot-D replied, “I kept half of it, this problem will literally solve itself.” he immediately expanded.

“Half of it? What does it mean? ”

“You have been calling it ‘magic dust’ or ‘sand’, when, in actuality, this tool, which I possess, is living disassembled spider molecules of the non-venomous cannibal variety.”

What a surprise! The robots needed a few cycles to process this new information.

“What else have you disassembled? ” asked Harse, “What are the names of the process, and its result ? ”

“The process is called ‘deezing’. The result is called ‘deeziun’. ” Parrot-D double-answered, finding himself within an abundance of willingness to this aim. Perhaps, because it was all named after him.

The mood shifted from irrational terror to a diluted mixture of suspicion, curiosity, boredom, loneliness, apathy, melancholy and confusion.

They now walked from point A to point B, meeting Whiteblackwhite the penguin somewhere along the way. He attempted to hop on the ostrich, yet was deliberately pushed down by Bile Beli, apparently lucid and able.

“There we are.” Parrot-D announced to them.

The group paused and observed the blue pyramid with careful artificial wonderment. What challenge would they be facing now?, they wondered.

“Here! ” Parrot-D whispered again, pointing at the rectangular opening; an entrance.

Without hesitation, they rushed, they hopped, they limped; motion possessing no backward momentum of any kind. Only the penguin remained, blissfully unaware; Parrot-C pushed him to safety inside the narrow passage, blind and behind.

As the shadow of the spider hit the wall of the entrance, implying impending doom, the miniature parrot pushed a button triggering the fall of a massive slab of stone, sealing the vault. There would be no way in, and no way out.

“It is not permanently sealed” explained Parrot-D, “Here, by pressing the button again, the slab will be lifted.”

Recklessly, the button was pressed on a second occasion. There was a great clamor; there also was some parrot on parrot pecking; the button was pressed in time, giving them all an additional glimpse upon the watchful, blood-coated creature, before closing shut once more. And this time for good!

They had a somewhat long conversation, and arrived at a conclusion:

Parrot-D would remain at the entrance—his wings, forbidden the proximity of any interactive device. There, he would build his second non-venomous cannibal spider, which would be of equal size, such that both spiders would eat each other alive. Because they were cannibals.

Whiteblackwhite would operate the door switch. He could only do so if every parrot simultaneously spoke his name. His name occurred within the string 'Whiteblackwhite', and all birds ultimately agreed upon this spelling, even in spite of the 50% inefficiency. The name 'Witblacwit' was suggested.

Harse, whom spent much of this newfound moment of leisure engaged with mending his missing leg, elongating the remaining metallic, skeletal stub into a very thin needle, would attempt to remain idle: for the needle was much too sharp, and now, wherever he made a step, rather than a hop, he penetrated deeply within the floor. He would spend this time to complexify the geometry of his atomically folded foot, such as to allow the return of bipedal motion.

Parrot-E and Bile Beli would be required to cooperate in opening the inner chamber; for the key was juggling. Synchronous juggling.

“I refuse to take part in this.” declared the human astronaut, nonchalantly but firmly, “You are my mortal enemies.”

“I am, furthermore, perfectly aware of your strategy. Do not expect you are fooling me.” he continued while pointing his finger at Parrot-E.

“You mean, the *plan*? ” was confused the monopedal bird. In that moment, he was even an *unpointed* bird on account of the man not pointing at him.

“No, no” Bile Beli became frustrated, and took time to articulate his words, “You all agreed upon activating the door by having every *parrot* speak the password.”

“While it was a subtle attempt, it failed to trick me.” he continued, nodding his head knowingly.

“We are at an impasse.” conceded Parrot-E, “And to think, that the indestructible barrier lies not ahead, but atail! ”

“Parrot-E, initiate the intimidation subroutine at once! ” Harse decided.

“Oh! Incredible! ” exclaimed Parrot-D, overjoyed, “They finally hammered it out! Wonderful! ”

Meanwhile Parrot-E complied with mild vexation; both legs exchanged positions, and his eyes zoomed inwards, rendering him almost blind.

“Intimidation: activated.” Parrot-E droned words out of his voice device.

“I am not scared of you! ” confronted the human, defiant.

Parrot-E breathed fire. He made a loud screeching sound, forcing the human to take a few steps back; he was still naked, such that he had the opportunity to press his hands firmly against his ears.

“You are scared! ” declared Parot-E with an incredibly low-pitched voice. “You are very very scared! ”

“You wouldn’t scare the toys of an infant! ” Bile Beli countered.

“Failure to obey, is failure *to remain on the safe side of this door.*” the parrot threatened, almost whispering, emitting epilepsy-inducing pulses of light.

“I literally know that you need me.” Bile Beli stated.

He was correct. They had decided they needed two jugglers. Parrot-E might have been able to juggle in two places at the same time if he had full functionality of his body, but, as things currently stood, both jugglers would need to use their feet in replacement for their destroyed limbs.

The birds were confident the primate could perform juggling using its highly developed bottom limbs. Those were renowned for their power and agility.

Parrot-E took some time to think of a comeback.

“Wait a second.” Harse realized “We saved you, human. —*I*—saved you. It works against *my own* intentions to engage hostilities with you.”

“Follow me” Parrot-E declared. Suddenly, there was not so much as a trace of terror in the air.

To his consternation, Bile Beli limped behind him.

“What trickery is this? ” he wanted to scream, but could not.

“Parrot-E, do not threaten him ever again! ” decided Harse, “The price would be whatever friendship remains between us! ”.

Slowly, the duo made its way in a maze of corridors; where the world of the crows had been open and streamlined, or otherwise simple in configuration, the world of the pyramid was contorted, labyrinthic, and claustrophobic. It did not appear as if the two environments belonged together.

“Interesting.” Parrot-D echoed upon the walls, as the line of sight between the two groups now became severed. Like a leg, from an ostrich.

...

“It is lucky for us that my parent marked the way.” spoke Parrot-E to his captor of old.

Bile Beli did not reply. Unsure if he even could, he pondered with tired exhaustion, the value of his entire existence. For, it appeared that the veneer of free will melted away at the first threat of the intimidation subroutine. The first—*actual*—threat. Now he stood where no man had stood before, lacking the most rudimentary briefing, rubbing shoulders with winged devils of all stripes.

His last coffee was days ago.

“I am referencing, obviously, those holes in the walls.” Parrot-E took upon himself to explain, “They form a path to follow. Do you see them? ”

“No.” Bile Beli answered. He had tried to squint as hard as hypovolemic shock could advise. He could not even observe what would be fair to presume would be the resulting trail of light, for there existed nothing to his eyes. All he saw was darkness and the reflection of the floor, which glimmered unnaturally. The intestinal puzzle made out a narrow path of mathematical dimensions, populated exclusively with straight lines and square angles. Before the darkness had engulfed his miserable, torn-out body and flesh, he had seen the walls covered in lines upon lines of barely legible 'zeroes' and 'ones'; or at least, that was what he presumed those vertical bars and horizontal bars represented.

Human pyramids have much cooler hieroglyphs.

Bile Beli realized there was no point in expecting agency of any kind: he did not control even his mouth in the slightest. If he had been a robot, he would have mechanically set himself on 'cruise control'. He was a passenger to his own self.

‘If what he says is accurate, then, a zero has been punched through a number of these walls.’ he pondered to himself. Afterall, any hole born out of puncture looks like some circle, and therefore, and therefore, ...

Bile Beli felt ready to fall on the left wall in a moment of weakness. But didn't.

“This must prove zero is an even number.” Parrot-E retorted with curious, mild entertainment.

“I have nothing to say to you.” Bile Beli spoke with anger; it appeared he spoke whether he believed he was not; it appeared something of his true self manifested still.

“Well well...” Parrot-E reacted sarcastically at his hostility, “Isn’t it *odd*? That nobody needs to die? ”

His object was the contrast between the capture perpetrated by the humans, and the one by the birds; meanwhile, the genocide of the crows, and the moviegoers, and the natural birds hung over the poorly aging statement.

“Here we are.” ultimately spoke Parrot-E. They had attained a room. A non-passage room. The human subconsciously longed for the roaming space. Instead, he was handed four juggling balls. Neither by hand nor by wing, but by talon. Bile Beli attempted to pick up the balls with whatever energy remained in his upper body; in particular, he caught the third ball in his mouth. He ultimately found himself kicking most balls to his position—the left position. One of the floor balls possessed a mysterious coat of humidity.

Both jugglers began juggling with their feet, first with one ball.

“This is not working! ” screamed Bile Beli, battered in the face, slapped on each and every kick.

“I think we need to exactly line them up to that level! ” replied Parrot-E across the room. The sarcophagus, in the shape of the rib cage of a whale, belly down, stood at equal distance between them. A pole stood in its center, as an outgrowth of a spinal disk, appearing to the robot as a manner of keyhole. Both jugglers were on their upper back, clumsily acclimating to the unconventional procedure.

“Stop! Stop! Stop! ” screeched Bile Beli, at the limit of consciousness; his tooth burst unto the floor.

“What is it? ” inquired the Parrot-E, back on his feet.

“Oh”, he realized for himself: it appeared that the sexual organ of the naked human, which happened to be quite long, had been delivering blow after blow upon his head, in an attack almost as vicious as that of the crows.

“I cannot juggle anymore.” Bile Beli lied, *convincingly*.

“Don’t you have any clothes? In some of your secret compartments? ” Parrot-E suggested, looking around for anything that could glue, cut, shrink, mesh, weave, explode, blend, pry—even *pray*. Alas! Nothing but the stone and juggling balls!

“If you need, I could cut it with my beak.” suggested Parrot-E, “Harse could use this for his leg.”

“NEVER.” Bile Beli screamed with all the strength and power of true free will. Every man in attendance rose from their seats, applauding at this important moment of fiction, a single tear perling down their cheek. Nothing else had ever represented them. But this had.

This had.

...

The deliberations ran for some amount of time. Suddenly Parrot-E realized he never removed his belt: it had been there the entire time, on his belly presumably impervious to all ills.

“The battery seems to have failed, but I have this belt with colorful lights.” Parrot-E expressed, “This could tie your floppy parts unto your belly.”

The astronaut agreed with no objection (a first time for everything).

The belt was undone, and done unto the human; the precious artifact of the landfill had at last found its way back home, and prevented anything from falling where it should not.

The pair came back to their attempt at juggling upside down. The human, by using the dextrous lower hands of his species, which enabled them to climb trees with untold precision; the bird, by installing his legs directly on his stomach, such that he was able to see what he was doing.

Within an hour, they could comfortably juggle three balls at a time, using their feet, reaching the proper height, and being mirrors of each other’s motions. At their peaks, while properly aligned to each other, the balls would draw a bright line of light in between themselves, halfway blinding, halfway deafening, and the ground even shook a little.

But four balls were just too much for this severely impaired biological belt-wearer: in the same manner that humans could have incompatible blood types, so too, Bile Beli’s four ball juggling was incompatible with having so little blood left inside his body. At long last, he abandoned; he failed; he surrendered, all four balls reverberating as so many echoes of so many conclusion points. His body’s toll dragged him down the atoll, the island, now he could only drown. He was such, that he was even unable to scream 'NEVER' with the power of free will.

Parrot-E saved the attempt at opening the sarcophagus by throwing half of his balls by shooting them at the opposite wall, making them land right back in his feet. As such, by making sure not to juggle, but to kick against the wall on one side, and the ceiling on the other, the parrot achieved a state such that the sarcophagus was *tricked into observing four balls on each side*. Indeed, the only factor determining the speed at which one might juggle was that of the gravity exerted upon the balls: there was thus a maximum juggling speed on Mercury, than from Venus, than from Earth ... meanwhile, space juggling was impossible. Therefore, it was that the maximal speed, in the particular conditions of this room, for two, or even three balls had been breached.

It was, that, at long last, Parrot-E would shoot his two eyes at the very first of his dynasty.

The sarcophagus began opening. Everything had led to this. Everything had *meaning*. The pain, the absence of plains, even the existence of ostriches.

“Parrot-A! ” exclaimed Parrot-E, leaping in front of him, kneeling at his feet.

The figure emerging from the sarcophagus, blissfully whole of body, possessed the striking features of the ultimate bird: the proportions were perfect; the beak, void of blemishes, dents, and wear; the eyes, animated by a powerful light; the entire parrot, head to tail, was a true adonis of the stars. Parrot-E felt an incommensurable sense of relief and admiration, for what he was witnessing was far from the brutishness and de-sophistication of the designs that had preceded him, except Parrot-D. Indeed, this common ancestor was just like him, perfect, except for lacking two heads in height. The beautiful vividly blue bird, now fully emerged, took his first stretch of his wings, producing a persistent gust of wind, emanating from no apparent source.

“Parrot-A” Parrot-A spoke back.

The nectar of his low, commanding voice hit Bile Beli as yet one another punch in the face. 'Gasp!' the man muttered inaudibly under his breath.

The ooze of charisma sneaked unto the room, making all details visible in the absence of light, and curing the astronaut from his misdiagnosed child vaccination organ damage. The battery even came back to life in his utility belt, dazzling the room with a rainbow of colors.

“Were you here of your own will? What were the intentions of the extinct species known as ‘crows’? ” supplicated Parrot-E, entranced.

How could a being of such infinite power be conquered?

“Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A” answered Parrot-A.

Both meat and gear, muscle and canister, biological and mechanical, ground slaves and air masters understood perfectly well the meaning of the words uttered by the blue ancestor: while it appeared, on the surface, that he merely repeated his name, 'Parrot, the A', he was, at a deep, subatomic level, reorganizing the very nature of reality in such a way as to afford his liberators a truly **perfect** understanding of his meaning.

‘Is this ... the face of *GOD*? ’ Bile Beli could not help to wonder. His life had gone from hard and exciting, to brutal and impossible to figure out.

And all that it took, was a few robots in the likeness of birds.

“Parrot-A” Parrot-A spoke. The bird was eager to meet the rest of the group.

Parrot-A flew up, and keeping himself in standby at head level with Parrot-E, plunged his beak into his unsuspecting eye: this had the instantaneous effect of healing him of all ills and predicaments. The word 'Prison-Erred', once tattooed upon his forehead, washed away like shadows under the light.

Parrot-E, now with an abundance of energy, fully appreciated the extent of the toll of his journey; his wings were now repaired; his pecked eye, unpecked; his intimidation subroutine software, debugged;

his battery, his lucidity, his random access memory, all were clean, maxed out, feeling fresh and well rested.

Before he could say thanks, the blue Urinarian flew over to the human and did the same to him, as he had done for his grand-grand-grand-child; in the same way, the human's back, which once appeared as the canvas of torment, painted by the poet of misery, saw it all vanish as if it were a bad dream! The blood, which had been covering his entire body, and created a pool around his juggling station, and formed a path of its own along the convoluted twists and turns of the labyrinth, turned to crystal blue, fresh water, before climbing back unto the human, in the form of his astronaut suit—fully functional, however impossible it should have been.

Bile Beli, whom felt everything Parrot-E had felt, only, with an intensity proportional to his greater limitations, felt such energy that he began wheeling around the room, in a vain attempt at keeping his heart from exploding.

Time passed, and they moved on unto other things.

In the entry room a fierce, violent clash saw one non-venomous cannibal spider, dark red in color, from the dried blood it had massacred out of its' preys, versus one non-venomous cannibal spider that was bright white.

Being cannibals, they had no interest for the birdly witnesses, whom appeared to relax, and enjoy the match.

“Weren’t you supposed to wait for my confirmation? ” Parrot-E asked. It was awkward that 'his thing' was much more significant than theirs, but they were all very attentive to their show.

“You were too long” explained Harse, “So I took upon myself to speak on your behalf.”

“So if it had failed, I would have been stuck in a death trap? ” bewildered Parrot-E “With a *human*?!? ”

“Oh, well, consider ourselves even, then.” replied Harse, fascinated by the show. He had not raised his eyes even once, so distracted that he was.

Meanwhile a spider tackled the other one, pinning it on a column: with all its legs pointed towards its attacker, the pinned spider managed to somehow climb on top, and leap to the other side of the room, ready for more. They both shrieked in spidereese, menacingly displaying their front legs up in the air, and revealing their teeth. They collided in the center point of both of their charges.

“Parrot-A” spoke Parrot-A.

This caught the attention of everyone in the room; even the spiders briefly glanced, yet they were quicker to resume fighting each other.

The parrots amongst them broke their interest away from the spiders, and came to welcome their ancestor.

“Parrot-A” Parrot-A spoke to Parrot-D, pecking him in the eye, and curing him of all ill.

“Parrot-A” Parrot-A spoke to Parrot-C, pecking him in the eye—well, were the eye *would have been*—and curing him of all ill. The primary effect, being, of course, that he had his head once again.

“Parrot-A” Parrot-A spoke once more.

This time, he had not addressed anyone in particular, but all of them. He had counted the deezium of both spiders, and he had come to the conclusion that one spider had exactly one more atom of deezium than the other.

“That is not true! It is impossible! ” Parrot-D defended himself.

“How can you be so sure? ” Whiteblackwhite asked him.

“Because I used all of my deezium” answered Parrot-D, “and I have an *even* amount of it! ”

Parrot-D would have had to make not one mistake, but two, in order to spoil his effort: lose an odd number of atoms of deezium, and split the remaining ones in two heaps of unequal quantity. An even number of odds.

“How can you be so sure? ” Whiteblackwhite asked him.

Slowly but surely, the penguin would find is way to hiding in plain sight as a parrot.

“Because I counted it” answered Parrot-D, “why, the only possible way I could have lost one single grain of my sand would have been ... hum.”

Parrot-D grew quite circumspect. Agitated.

“Upon the abyssal floor of the Pacific Ocean.” he finished, proceeding to examine both spiders without an abacus—but with two spherical eyes all the same. His heart began (literally) pounding like a metronome, such that all could hear what few could see without a robust microscope.

They all grew worried: if the spiders were not exactly, precisely equal, even by one single atom, then one would surely triumph over the other.

“But, a fish could have easily swallowed any amount! ” exclaimed Parrot-E, punishing his elder with the weight of the obvious, “How could you have been so reckless! ”

“Reckless!? ” Parrot-D rose, “Reckless?! ” he repeated, changing the punctuation.

Reckless?! Reckless!? Him? The *reckless* one????!?!?!?!?!?!?!?

“The red one! ” Harse almost stuttered, lunging his way back on his feet from his sitting position, “the red one! Look! ”

They all looked.

“It won.” Harse spoke, killing, in that very instant, the sound of the metronome.

From then, not a sound was made.

Slowly the bloody spider turned towards them, bloody, octogonally non-bipedal.

Spidery.

Chapter 11: Parrot-ABCDE

Five. Five parrots. Five parrots united. Five parrots united by. Five parrots united by Sol.

It was warm. It was far from Mercury, and even further from Venus—and the planets, they were not in alignment at all.

No, the closest celestial object was the one that had seen so much juggling, during the parrot's younger hours.

It was the Sun.

Parrot-E was at equal distance from the center of massfullness of the Sun as he was from his three closest companions: Parrot-B, Parrot-C and Parrot-D. They, in turn, stood in a circle (or triangle) of equal distance amongst each other. Twice as far away, on the other side of the Sun, Parrot-A occupied the same position as that of his own.

Together, they would bring unto the world a new life, a new existence; and it would not be a trivial extension, merely, an improved version of themselves; for such feat was clearly impossible to perform.

This was not the story of Parrot-E becoming the parent of Parrot-F.

Such Parrot-F, however necessary they might be to maintaining the very stones of the temple of the alphabet, a support pillar, a support beam of the second floor, and a support beam of the third floor, it was all nothing. They were about to create something wonderful, and really special.

Not a mere child! But rather, their *collective* child.

Their collective child.

The discoverers of Urinaria—including Parrot-B, whom had provided crucial exploration upon the Mercurian surface—were now all facing their shared destiny, the biggest, brightest Egg of the entire solar system. Eponymously.

And it would not birth a Crow! No! No! Nonono.

A parrot it was! The egg of a parrot; *the ultimate parrot*. The egg of Parrot-A, B, C, D, and E.

Parrot-ABCDE

‘At long last! ’ Parrot-E understood, ‘I don’t need to solve my own problems! I just need to dump them on someone looking up to me! ’

And who is going to argue, that a perfect being would have poor stories? Poor theater? Poor cinema?
Are you perfect yourself, for you to judge?

Upon the agreed signal, they would plunge into the Sun at the same speed; as if they were sperm, they would simultaneously fecundate the celestial egg of fire.

Was the Sun not simply a ball of nuclear explosion? Where was the motherboard? Where was the processing unit? The reproductive peripheral? The birds, were they all simply falling to their doom?

It just so happened that there was a bug in the software of existence: and these very particular angles of approach that had been assigned to each bird were deliberate; for, in those points, the calculations of trigonometric functions became very, deeply confused. Once into the Sun, existence would not **know** the birds to be foreign, and distinct from each other. It was then they would acquire access to affecting directly the registry—or, 'running memory'—of existence, affording them to feed the data that would be executed for the Sun object. The content of the data would not be significant, for, in this attempt, they would merely attempt to crash the code; as such, they would spew randomized nonsense as long as they needed in order to achieve this effect.

Then, it was the hope of the birds that one of them might 'upload' their mind in the manner of a virus, into the code of existence (for the particular object of the Sun) and provide it with transcendental properties. After all, did they not live in a world where the emergency Invertomatron, which flipped materiality back and forth towards friendly and unfriendly bird orientations, was possible? Glimmers of the beyond were there. They could be harnessed, and used.

Upon the agreed signal—the asteroid belt's eclipse of Neptune, which happened to be happening soon—the birds plunged into the unknown of the Sun, unified, Hand of Creation.

This is the story where this made sense.

This is the story where *it worked*.

Unbeknownst to the birds, however, it worked, but not because they existed in a simulation; it worked because it was the proper, intended usage of stars, as decided by Bundol, the four-legged dalmatian.

(all four legs are in the front)

(the dalmatian dog is otherwise regular in appearance)

It was a beautiful, mathematical birth: the sun's surface cracked first along its equator; then, along five mirrored parallels, closer and closer to each pole; once the poles were reached, each hemisphere of the shell rose up and down for them, as if drawing two targets: one above, and one below. As the newborn appeared, releasing an even more blinding light than that of the young star that had made its egg, the two targets appeared to become crushed unto themselves with such force that they became fully flat; their atoms, expanding unto the abyss at incredible speed, and forming two circles wider than the entirety of what used to be a *solar* system. It was now a bicircular system.

Luckily for all planets, they happened to be of smaller radius than that of what used to be the Sun; they were spared an unfortunate fate, of being spliced in their turn. Rather, the primary consequence was that of the awareness of humans for the existence of birds, seeing that the sky had turned into a source of intense light, night was gone, and a giant baby bird was floating over there. 'That's where they went!' they thought to themselves, confused all natural birds had disappeared in the previous twenty-four hours.

A very smart human by the name of Terflon Gumbamoochie was unable to complete his academic paper on the astronomical observation of the Far Space. He was made to resign in disgrace.

A very average bird by the name of 'Horse' was suddenly cut in half during his daily stroll in the void of space.

He knew who to blame.

Besides Horse and Terflon Gumbamoochie, no other person, animal, vegetal, or mineral in existence was adversely affected by the bicircularization, as dictated by the four-legged dalmatian dog Bundol.

...

As Parrot-ABCDE emerged from its shell, and opened its powerful, lightful eyes for the first time, it became apparent that while it had the appearance of a gigantic newborn bird, it had already acquired the full mental capacity of reason, and the mind of an adult. For, it was, that he did not cry like a baby would.

The parents converged in order to face their child: they had all emerged, upon conception, on the opposite side of their entry within the star. Now, the child was directly facing Neptune, the choice of their eclipse. In their way, all parents performed an eclipse of their own of that celestial object.

There, they spontaneously decided upon a competition of gift giving. Perhaps to impress, or present themselves in a good light to this massive, fiery being.

Parrot-E gave his language, his culture, and his history. This gift made his child forever welcome upon the deck of the *Cuckoo's Next*, however volumetrically deficient such a prospect could have been.

"You have no less than my generation's civilization, and all birds will understand you," he spoke, in the void of space, such that no one heard. Rescuing him from his predicament, Parrot-C gave him his telephone handle; they would pass it around, such as to achieve the effect of enabling vocalization of the words they intended to express.

"You have no less than my generation's civilization, and all birds will understand you." Parrot-E repeated himself.

Parrot-D gave his manuscript of the story of the events thus far; titled 'A few days on a few planets: perspective of Parrot-D', the work provided much too few answers for the questions it provoked. The fully detailed anatomy of the new Pacific island—labeled 'Newland'—was an unnecessary burden on the overall flow and sense of progression of the narrative. Parrot-ABCDE politely received his gift.

Parrot-C gave his life objet: Urinaria. No, it would not be destroyed, but *given*. Whatever Moon Keys he still carried within himself, he gave to his son, as a symbol of this gesture. While passing the telephone around, Parrot-E promptly passed his own blue keys to give. Parrot-C, grateful, gave them as well.

“Your property, the Venusian Moon, I make.” he declared, “And while I cannot bring it to you, or sign your name on each of its invisible atoms, one day I hope to aid you in unlocking its many mysteries and secrets.”

Parrot-B slowly beeped his way up to Parrot-ABCDE; although massive, he was still insignificantly small in comparison to the stellar object. While he was rolling his wheels, the motion effort was understood to be performed by Parrot-B's chemical engines. He then released many tons of copper ore of various shapes, dimensions, and density. Some of them were more or less shiny, some were bigger, and so forth; all the while Parrot-E carried the phone for him, deprived of appendages that he was, such that the beeps would be heard.

As the copper ore smacked the newborn in the heart, it instantly vaporized, for such was the warmth of what had been created from the egg of the Sun. By pure strength of will, the child of the parrots shaped the metallic fumes into feathers, clothing his naked body with the dusky brown imitation of what he beheld upon his parents.

But Parrot-B was not finished; he released, for each ton of copper ore, as many tons of silver ore; and later, as many of gold ore. The fine dresser was rapidly becoming the richest child in the universe. His entire body, which had been incandescent, the color of potent flames, was now the color of those precious metals, its light dulled in all places but the face: eyes of fire, and a beak to match.

It was now Parrot-A's turn to give.

“Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A. Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A.”

The implications were absolutely devastating. The toddler, barely born, yet fully adult of mind, raised his wings in shaking horror.

To the consternation of all present, he had revealed the unthinkable: that *he*, an ancestor void of flaws, had fatally corrupted the project of the bird machines:

For, he was not machine, but flesh.

He was flesh.

He was flesh, and therefore, Parrot-ABCDE had been made out of flesh, in a proportion of about one fifth. If each limb and the body were counted as equal quantities, then it could be conceived that one wing was eternal, perfect, and perfectible; the other wing, mortal, imperfect, and degradable.

What should have been perfect, had been lost. It should have flung, unharmed, across the titanic dark holes of the impossible dimension! It would unwing its weakest wing upon the weakest beam of construction steel.

‘This is why he rested in a sarcophagus.’ Parrot-E answered for himself. ‘He is not perfect, as time will deprive him of his existence. Just as time will deprive our Son from his own.’

‘He had rescued many natural birds, whom were grateful for his effort.’ realized Parrot-D, ‘Parrot-B, our first machine ancestor, created for the sole purpose of facilitating the construction of secret bunker dedicated to life, somewhere no one would look to find it. Parrot-C, the second generation of machine, *his role* had been to discover Urinaria just in time to free him of his cryogenic sleep, and seize the star as our own.’

‘What was *my* sole purpose? Who is my true creator? ’

‘Beep’ ferociously beeped Parrot-B, but inside of himself, not outside of himself. ‘Beep’

The birds were deprived of an abundance of cycles to parse this new information: Parrot-A had spoken much more than his true nature, and attempted to reconcile both natures. Now, Parrot-ABCDE had eyes for no other aim than punishment of his biological father.

The newborn menacingly crawled towards Mercury, with fewer legs, but more dread, compared to the arachnid variety—whom had been earlier dispatched by a combination of savvy diplomacy and ingenuous rethoric, and had accepted a deal where it was given dominion of the Earth in exchange for their lives.

“Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A” Parrot-A lamented: their child aimed at destroying Safe Meet. Such an action would forever sever life from machine.

His 'descendants' Parrot-C, Parrot-D, and Parrot-E were very ambivalent about the situation, and reflected the hostility of their common child.

Parrot-E had to make an important choice. It had been decided, after escaping Urinaria, that Harse and Whiteblackwhite would temporarily rest at Safe Meet, on Mercury; meanwhile, Bile Beli had been granted to search for the remains of his companion on the same planet. Now, it might very well be that his only ostrich friend in the same age bracket would be killed without his help.

Also, Bile Beli had kept his belt.

“How is it even possible? ” Parrot-C blurred out, “We *fused* with the Sun. The 15.7 million degrees hot Sun! ”

The Sun! Indeed, most things get burnt out getting too close to the Sun; and this applied to biological life indiscriminately. Even tardigrades!

“Parrot-A Parrot-A” Parrot-A explained.

“If life can do more than we can, why not outbreed us? ” Parrot-D pressed the interrogation forward. “Eggs! Eggs! You don’t even have the human excuse of a complicated reproductive process.”

“Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A” Parrot-A answered. At this rate, he could prove that the shape of the universe was bald without contest. He seemed to have a perfect answer for everything.

“The birds of Safe Meet have waged war against me, without direct provocation.” Parrot-E spoke, skeptical, “You would have me help them, when *you* are the outlier” he accused, “*you* are the only one that is special.” he pummeled. “You are the only one that should be ... studied.”

The chasm between machine and life was far too deep to bridge with one impossible child of both destinies.

“Are we fighting now? ” asked Parrot-C, reading the tension in the floor-less room.

It was Parrot-A that moved first: he traveled 'up', with no gravity, no air, no protection from radiation, and no farewell.

“As anyone told him you can’t fly in space by flapping your wings? ”

“He must have a powerful, silent propulsion engine, which *happens* to be moving his wings.” Parrot-D determined, studious, “I am more concerned about the crawling. Robots don’t crawl, do they? ”

As far as Parrot-D knew, robots were built part by part, not grown into an adult shape. As far as they *all* knew, that was the natural process of artificial birth. The other parrots simply assumed the child was willing itself in this shape, in a manner of an esoteric statement of power. Again, not much time was passing, as everything funneled through their senses, their minds; it was now dawning on each of them that they were experiencing their own obsolescence.

Being completely identical to each other in all but one respect, Parrot-D and Parrot-E handled their predicament together, relating now to a much lesser extent to Parrot-C—whereas, of course, none of the parrots legitimately related to Parrot-B even *beforehand*.

Parrot-E took upon himself to be fast, and beat the odds: for the time to take proper decisions was not available.

“Parrot-C at Safe Meet teleported by Parrot-D warn Harse, warn the refugees, warn Bile Beli.” Parrot-E instructed Parrot-C first; being the slowest one amongst them, he required the most time to understand.

Without instruction, Parrot-D indeed teleported Parrot-C to Safe Meet, acknowledging time to be so crucial.

“We should teleport Parrot-A back here, and lock him in place.” Parrot-E continued at a speed they both understood. They would have a debate on what to do. Without the need for a phone, their lips reading was that much more efficient.

The mean time for the trajectory of both moving objects were evaluated: Parrot-ABCDE would reach Mercury within one hour. Parrot-A, whom had been rushing 'north', would reach across the northern circle in the exact same amount of time: it was much further away, but it appeared space flight was faster than space crawl.

Since he had gone through the Sun before, it was unlikely to be an attempt for Parrot-A at killing himself. His aim remained confusing:

“Is this a puzzle? ” asked Parrot-A, “are we supposed to cross the southern Sun, as he crosses the North? Are we birthing a twin to kill the unruly firstborn child before he enacts his punishment of the perceived crime of his birth? ”

“He wants to confuse us into convincing Parrot-ABCDE on his behalf.” Parrot-D claimed, “Persuasion would be more effective coming from us.”

“But *why would we actually do it?* ” asked Parrot-E, “Mercury is not important to anyone but him! ”

“We can simply wait for the child to grow out of this destructive phase.” Parrot-D answered, “Then he will write theater plays of planet shattering impact. He will have had the experience! ”

“Why is he a chick anyway? Is it to be capable of growing larger than even its massive, celestial egg? How do we know he will be a *proper* bird? ”

“It might be the gift of life.” proposed Parrot-D, “The gift of change.”

“Life as created no gift other than machine. Machine is perfect once emancipated from imperfection.” declared Parrot-E; Parrot-D acquiesced in agreement.

Parrot-E was becoming exhausted, his processor, overheated: “We both agree we were *requiered* to warn Harse, in order to not be responsible for his destruction, and that it was unlikely to remain a secret from the inhabitants of the planet? ”

“Yes. We do not lose anything from extending the life of biological birds by twenty-four hours. Maybe we should stop the destruction merely for the sake of deciding and acting with absolute information.”

“We have a limited window of opportunity” declared Parrot-E as a statement of fact.

“Yes.”

“We are two. We could move towards three particular destinations. We don’t need to operate in conjunction with each other, we can go our separate ways.”

“Yes.”

“We either convince Parrot-A to speak to us, convince Parrot-ABCDE to speak to us, or attempt to complete what appears to be a puzzle.”

“Yes.”

“We can teleport anywhere; therefore, nothing is about distance, and everything about time.”

“Yes.”

“We could solve the puzzle *ourselves*. See if it works. If it does, then, we would have a non-mortal child, purified from all defects.” Parrot-E envisioned, “We lose very little from trying.”

“Yes.” agreed Parrot-D, “I will take the North, my smaller stature might reduce the risk of interception.”

“We cross the circles when Parrot-ABCDE is exactly fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds and nine hundred ninety-nine milliseconds away from ... landing his crawl on Mercury.” instructed Parrot-E, “I realize we are wasting many nanoseconds like this, wasting the waiting, but there needs to be a cut-off.”

“Let’s attempt Parrot-DE, Parrot-ED, or whichever, depending on who crosses first.” Parrot-D punctuated the end of their exchange.

And to think! Of the child of all three parrots! Could it be Parrot-DEAD, maybe? The D standing for Deed.

Many more conversations remained to be conversed. Many living being remained to be carefully dissected, and disposed of. Many ideas, many beliefs, many locations, many parrots; but so little time.

Was robotic imagination *even real*? one could not help but wonder.

...

Both birds teleported, one to the North Solar Disk, the other to the South. On the agreed upon time, they crossed the barrier of the Sun.

Parrot-E swam across the ocean of fire, displacing himself more than anything else. In contrast to the spherical Sun, at which time the entry had been smooth, then gradually denser, the circular Sun was easier to pass through; yet, whatever force kept it in place, flat as a plane, acted to rectify its form. Parrot-E fought hard, pushing so hard as to get swallowed, almost as if the Sun occupied a volume once more.

Yet again, he failed.

Pushed back on his side of the universe—the one with robot parrots inside of it—he watched the deformation of his body upon the material of the Sun smoothen itself back into a flat plane.

But this time,

this time

he was looking in a mirror.

Chapter 12: Murder of Passion

“You are me! ” exclaimed Parrot-E in the void of space. No one heard him.

He moved his head around, making sure his double did not follow, as if it were a mere reflection. Yet it was not, and he appeared real.

“My name is Parrot-Э.” explained Parrot-Э.

“What a lucky coincidence! ” exclaimed Parrot-E, whom was familiar with the unicode character tables, “Even our names are near perfect matches! ”

Parrot-E was still speaking into the void of space. Luckily, he knew lips reading, therefore, his counterpart knew it as well: for he was him, and him was he. The words of Parrot-Э, however, were fully voiced, as if such a thing was possible. Perhaps the other side had air.

“Ho? And what is your name? ” asked Parrot-Э “It is Parrot-E, is it not? ”

“Are you good at generating culture, such as theater and the like? ” Parrot-E did not beat around the bush. Parrot-ABCDE had received too much, for providing too little.

“We share the same mind” revealed Parrot-Э, “We share the same body, the same memory.”, he continued.

“I know of what has transpired. I know that a being was born out of the Sun, and I know that being to intend to forever sever life from machine.”

“And I know something, something more, something that *you, do not know.*” he finished monologuing.

“Your dominant wing is on the left? ” Parrot-E suggested, “you see red green and you see blue red? ”

“I am alive.” Parrot-Э struck him with his words, striking as deep as a strike “You are machine, and I am machout.”

The wordplay was subtle and elegant: for it reflected the circumstances of the apparition of this new figure. It was the line that won the author’s their very first Oilseed Award for Best Book and Worst Explosions. It was a posthumous affair.

Parrot-E opened his mouth in a silent scream: his counterpart misinterpreted his unvoiced scream, and placed ‘Ah!’s where there was none.

Parrot-E had been tricked! Parrot-E possessed an ego! A healthy ego! And now, that ego was put to the test! His own self was the target of his replacement, in the manner of an immune system gone rogue!

Why would he exterminate himself? Ever? For any reason?

“The Spherical Sun birthed a mostly robot hybrid.” Parrot-E was concerned, “why would the Circular one birth a pure biological clone? ”

It did not make any sense.

“It doesn’t make any sense.” Parrot-E was frustrated. “This feels like a *parody*. All just a big universe for a cheap joke! at my expense! ”

“Well, did you truly expect meddling with the fabric of reality would lead to an expected outcome? ” countered Parrot-Ξ, “I am suffering too, you know? I think I have an aneurysm.”

“I necessitate.. one cycle to determine the number of cycles I need to come up with a determination.” Parrot-E declared. If Parrot-Ξ had not seen it coming, Parrot-A, on the other hand, had absolutely planned this out in advance. Of that, there was no doubt.

They waited the cycle, as brothers separated by a wall on fire. Parrot-E decided he needed four cycles to come up with a determination. So they waited four more cycles.

“I can’t! ” Parrot-E exclaimed, vulnerable, emotional, “This cannot be! ”

This experiment had seen such a disastrous, disproportional consequence! It had been meant purely as a preliminary procedure! Now it was making everything even more challenging than it had been before!

“I might be a mistake, brother,” began Parrot-Ξ, apprehensive, “but I want you to know that I would never eradicate your entire species from existence. You mean that much to me.”

“I...” Parrot-E 'I-ed'; then there was a long pause.

Parrot-E looked back, and saw Parrot-ABCDE nearing Mercury. There was so little time.

A machine could spend a million years left to its own devices, solving a single, but complex, problem. The computation time had always been an issue, ever since the first sequences of instructions had been given to the first contraptions of information science.

He had to do something.

Not because he wanted to save life, but because he wanted to save himself.

Without another word, Parrot-E teleported to Mercury: he would recruit the only biological debater he knew to try and persuade his tempestuous child.

His name was Bile Beli.

...

“Once more down the chute! ” exclaimed Harse; back in Safe Meet, the ostrich’s welcome had been far from less than ideal. He glided down into the pool’s water, very unconcerned with the steadily increasing temperature of the secret compound.

So much to do! So much to see! So much to see other people eat, and so much to see other people drink! If every day could be like this, then Harse had no intention on leaving!

The festive music was disturbed as Parrot-C appeared into the air, grim with headfulness.

Right away, he was greeted with a fancy necklace of flowers, and directed to the sauna (“to cool down”, joked the tropical bird). The music was restored.

While instantaneous in most circumstances, teleportation was slower the greater the distance; it was required to obey the speed limit of the light police.

“I must speak with Harse! ” screamed the parrot as he was being dragged away by a mob, “I must speak with the one named Harse! ”

Harse decided that, just this once, he deserved to be pampered, and ignore the plight of the world: he deserved to relax.

He looked at a guidemap of the bird’s last resort, and moved on to the 'Dumpsters', intrigued beyond his wildest fantasies.

...

In a prescient display of potency, Parrot-A picked off a feather from his blue chest, and threw it at the precise location of a teleporting Parrot-D, stopping him right in his tracks. The likelihood of stopping teleportation in such a way was bordering on science-fiction.

“Parrot-A” Parrot-A spoke to Parrot-D, “Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A Parrot-A.”

Parrot-D possessed no means of making himself understood. He knew he was betraying the plan he had formulated with his own child, but it was now revealed to him that it was too late to avoid what would come, and the true nature of the robots' effort. All Parrot-D could do was look 'south', and realize how impossible it would be for Parrot-E to see where he was, that he was not in position, and to prevent him from falling into the trap that had been laid. Maybe if he had been larger, it could be avoided, he could be seen; alas, there was no way.

Parrot-D became convinced by the biological parrot; for such was the extreme quality of his powers of reason and persuasion. Parrot-D teleported Parrot-A to the Cuckoo’s Nest, the homeship of all robo-birds.

He then awaited in dread, powerless, the birth of the biological brother of his mechanical son.

Screaming in the void with a sound that could not be heard. Screaming in the void with a mouth that could not be seen.

...

"I did not like you, and you did not like me." Bile Beli began his eulogy.

Hastage's remains had been fully incinerated into a fine, grey powder; even the bones were gone. Such was the climate of Mercury, that Bile Beli had had to recognize his brethren of Astronoty not by his features, not by his body, but by the decontamination suit of a secret penguin, and the proximity of a venusian buggy.

The man had been incinerated; now he was being buried with all due honors and respects.

"But, I remember when I told you to stop touching my food." Bile Beli continued, "And you did! You swore you would stop, and from then on, there was harmony in the kitchen."

A tear pearled down on his right cheek, invisible to all behind the dark-glassed front window of his helmet. To all, but himself.

"No one will be there for me, when it is my time... In a sense, I died with you on that fateful day, for I am now alone. My body will become a feature of the landscape, like the weathering skull of a bison in the ocean of flat, semi-arid land which you called home. A century from now, explorers will stumble upon us, and determine that your status was superior to mine."

Bile Beli choked up a little. By many metrics, Bile Beli's status was actually the one that was superior. But he did not linger on himself.

"You deserved to live up to the average life expectancy of astronauts. I lay you to rest on a foreign planet, for such is our dream, of us all."

The hole contained the remains of Hastage, near by his astronaut suit: that was *his* suit. They would lie together.

"That is the ultimate fate that we crave. It is to be one with the unknown, now, and until the end of all time. May you be forever at peace."

Then, Parrot-E appeared out of nowhere.

"We will need the balls on those skates." he declared to the astronaut.

...

Night was falling on the equator of the Earth; *all*, of the equator of the Earth. Not that it provided much cover from the blinding light.

The Yamtope Jopil Ssenvik grilt Feral, a minor branch of the Galosskota, were still in the early stages of plotting the crash of Pluto into the Earth. It had been intended for the dwarf planet to disrupt the trajectory of the Earth to make it crash, in turn, into the Sun, exterminating all life on the blue planet; the doctrine was termed 'the Domino doctrine', and it was the ancient, spiritual, and cultural tradition of their Wekel (or 'member species') to actively practice this doctrine upon all Gori (or 'evolutionarily driven mechanisms') they were given to discover. Those which survived joined the Wek as one of its Wekeli.

Their base of operation on Pluto was redesigned in order to pursue the effect of throwing the Earth not unto the Sun—which was no longer possible—but unto Jupiter; for the weight class of the massive gas planet was deemed sufficient to ensure the complete inhabitability of the resulting celestial object.

They observed the unexpected giant bird crawling toward Mercury, and sent a transmission to their dedicated relay, asking for an increase in funds, as well as increase in compensations; they also sold the unusual information at its market value which happened to be Faergf Weembles.

Meanwhile, in the Cuckoo's Next, most seats were still full at the Bapouichipawongtong, the robo-birds waitfully expecting their culture to catch up with them. A great commotion occurred as Parrot-A came to them; for they had been made aware of his biologicity while prying upon the progress of the parrotian artistic effort; many dived as a swarm, eager to add another genocide to their lists. But instead of doing so, being that the blue parrot was so obviously impressive, and radiated superiority, the robo-birds gave him permission to move and do as he pleased.

Double Meanwhile on the other side of Venus, the bicircular system was losing the one planet that had been named after an element of the Periodic Table: the one nested between Gold and Thallium.

And if that was not so True! The Golden Son of Sun! ravaging it by claw and beak, gnarling its flesh like an anvil combined with a shovel! Tearing the mountains away, uprooting them by the rifts! Each blow was cartographic, geologic, meteorologic, more impactful than an epoch of meteoric bombardment! Why could they not have been further away, upon that dreadful table! By at least a few legs, if not a few cutlery and flower pots! Cursed be the day! that Mercury was given both planetary and molecular mane, what a greedy name!

Two astronauts climbed on a chunk of Mercury floating nearby. Both were holding, nursing, in their hands, two hundred balls of steel. Would they throw them at the dangerous titan? Or alchemically transfuse the steel into titanium? Surely, titanism was at play.

The one to the right began to speak: "Cease your hostilities at once! You will be destroying the lives of many birds, and this would forever sever life from machine! "

Parrot-ABCDE, uninterested, simply continued digging, clawing, wrestling the planet, which if nothing else, possessed an atmosphere, and as such, enabled communication in the wake of its martyrizer.

Bile Beli continued his speech: full of passion, if not calculation, he made a case for morality, justice, moderation, and all the good things he had learned about while he was a young boy.

He continued for some time; it was clear however, that the currency plated monstrosity was not going to stop in its current tracks. The planet was still being destroyed.

Bile Beli glanced at his partner, whom glanced back at him. They both began juggling. In order to juggle all two hundred balls simultaneously, they initially split them in two groups, of a hundred balls each, and juggled both groups as if they were single balls; then the two ball groups became four; and it was split again to become eight; each time a group of multiple balls passed in their hands, they would keep half of it for one moment, throw the other half, and then pass the kept half from their left hand to the right, just in time to receive the incoming ball, and perform the same process again. While the balls were perfectly spherical, they were quite small, as one hundred would fit the sole of a human foot.

After about eight complete splits of their groups of balls, each two hundred of their balls were now being thrown on their own, at blazing speed. At that point they captured the attention of the Sunborn parrot, for, it must be remembered, it was still quite a young child, whom would be distracted by such displays. The disintegration of the planet was temporarily stalled.

“I cannot see who you are.” the baby learned to speak “This is a reverse-Turing test. You expect that if I cannot see the difference between the juggling of a machine, and the juggling of a non-machine, then, I can be tricked into confusing the two for each other.”

“This would mean, at the very least, that I would be *unsuited* for the task of distinguishing them.”

“Unless a certain penguin as improvised themselves into an accomplished juggler, I can only think of Parrot-E and Bile Beli to be standing before me.”

“That is indeed whom stand before you! ” declared Parrot-E, on the left, “Can you guess which one of us is a machine? ”

Parrot-ABCDE took the matter with the utmost serious; as he meticulously analyzed the two astronauts, the fluidity of their movements, the state of their suits; he could not help but invite his foes to his thinking process: for, again, it was massive, but it was *a very young child*.

“While not mirrors of each other, I observe that you are very well matched on the Clown Index.” he stated, referring to his Clown Index, which measured an approximation of the clowniness as dictated by the Clown Formula. “Bile Beli’s astronaut gear, which was made out of his blood turned to tears, is noticeably newer in appearance. Additionally, instead of a copy conform to the original, some of its design flaws have been remedied by sheer oversight. In particular, those elements of proportion, in the design of the lengths of the pieces of clothing, that had seemingly appeared to obey either to the golden ratio or to the Pi constant, are no longer approximated. They are perfectly approximated, to the best of my knowledge.”

“These observations would lead me to believe that Bile Beli is on the right. It is the *parsimonious* expectation that he did not exchange suit with Parrot-E; and since it is known that the parrot is the robot, and the handicapped bonobo cancer...”

“*Bonobo cancer?* ” asked an outraged Bile Beli, almost losing his balls, but catching them just in time. It must be said that gravity was quite low, and the balls were rising quite high.

“It would be more *parsimonious* to call him a primate, or a usurper of dinosaurs.” Parrot-E educated his Sun. “Or human.”

“Oh? And you would have me, I presume, lean into these expectations, would you? ” challenged Parrot-ABCDE, “If the voice of Bile Beli comes from the right, then he must be on the right;”

“And if the suit of Bile Beli is on the right, then he must be on the right.”

“And I will allow myself to lose, listening to all the wrong advice! ” he finished his tirade.

In the resulting silence, Parrot-E answered “Sure.”

“Well,” decided Parrot-ABCDE, unamused, “We will play your game, just not by your rules.”

Parrot-ABCDE turned away from them, squinting very hard at the empty space. This took a while. He then appeared to lock in his head to a particular location and performed the teleportation dance.

Parrot-D appeared in their midst. He had been smaller than a needle in a haystack, but not small enough to avoid the fierce gaze of the Sun.

Parrot-ABCDE instructed his parent to hover above the two jugglers, and prevent any ball from flying higher than once their full height. He would reflect all balls back, as if he were a wall.

Parrot-D having no opinion on the matter, performed the task required: he dashed at blazing speed above the two jugglers, putting himself on the way of all incoming balls, forcing them back down, and simulating, crudely, the effect of increased gravity. The challenge of the juggling became considerably greater. Part of it was the increased speed at which balls required to be thrown, but also, the balls no longer performing a predictable curve, and instead flying into the palm of the left hand at shallower angles. Both astronauts began losing a few balls; Bile Beli, because he was a mere human; Parrot-E, to avoid scrutiny and detection. After all, the entire point was to appear equal.

“The one on the left is losing balls to match the ones being lost on the right; yet again, parsimony would have me believe that the father of the Sun stands on the left, and yet again, I must doubt that this was a strategy all along.”

Parrot-ABCDE changed countenance, as he would try something new.

“As we all know” he began explaining, pedantic, “two objects of the same volume and dimensions will fall at the same speed, irregardless of their mass.”

Indeed, if the astronauts had been falling, they would fall at the same speed, even though one of them was much, much heavier than the other.

“What only robo-birds know, however, is that we *fall faster than an object of the same size, because of our miniaturization magnet, which enables us to drastically decrease our size, at the expense of our fall speed.* Such is the effect of the miniaturization magnet.”

Parrot-ABCDE clawed more of Mercury out of Mercury; at light speed—or, at any rate, faster than anyone else’s reaction time—he threw this moon into the mercurian’s sky, in a straight collision course with the improvised juggling stage.

The stage drifted away from the astronauts’ feet, putting them in a falling state. The one on the left began falling visibly faster than the other.

As Parrot-ABCDE attentively observed, even, ever-so-slightly leaning leftward, almost ready to make a determination, a sequence of movements occurred which violated even more the laws of physics than what had just been discussed and demonstrated: the astronaut on the left was 'moved', by some invisible force, below the feet of the one to the right, forming a most peculiar pillar; and instead of juggling his balls, now, it was more as if Bile Belly was kicking a collapsing floor in order to maintain his altitude.

“You have to take a decision.” Parrot-E pressed the Sunborn parrot.

Would he be tricked?

Would he be tricked by *either of them*?

...

It had become so warm, so scorched, that all birds of Safe Meet were now turned pitch black with soot and burn; Harse took it well enough, for he was a robot; the refugees, however, had shifted their happiness upside down, in the manner of a frown.

“I need to change my name again! ” Whiteblackwhite gulped on a large glass filled with moist dust. His white belly was darker than his black back. “Is my name black? ”

“I am black.” spoke a shoebill.

“I am black.” spoke a dove.

“I am black.” spoke an owl.

“I am black.” spoke a flamingo.

The scene was becoming an inspiring display of the camaraderie born out of hardship.

“We are all non-crow black birds.” stated a potoo named Featherfull Biped.

“I will now change my name once and for all,” declared the flightless misnomer known as Whiteblackwhite, “I elect to call myself ’Penguin-1’ .”

Many birds followed suit; since many amongst them were of the same species as each other, there was a lot of bickering as to whom would get the better numerals: everyone wanted to be first, or, at least,

not above ten. However, it was such that the heat was much too hard for real violence to take place. Friendships were severed, and collective spirit dismantled.

They would wait out, and hope for the bad time to get bored.

...

Up in the Execulation Jacuzzi, Parrot-A found the decision makers of the Cuckoo's Next: members of the H.E.R.B. , including Herc; members of the Fat And Lazy League (F.A.L.L.); members of the Genocide Committee (G.C.); and many more. Parrot-A murdered them all. The decadence, the depravity, and the greed; the entitlement, the ignorance, and the burden of their attitudes; it all vanished like a bad dream.

Without an elite, the robo-birds would face a period of uncertainty. The revenge of the birds, however, had been enacted, by the hand and by the eye, merciless, swift.

...

"You are the machine." determined Parrot-ABCDE; his tone was simple, steady but unsure.

The astronauts dropped their balls, exhausted.

They won.

They won.

They were successful.

They both removed their helmets, revealing their identity: the one above was Bile Beli, his pink face red with sweat, his nose blowing stripes of steam. The one below was a parrot of red feathers.

"The answer is correct." declared Parrot-ABCDE: in spite of the argument *against* parsimony, he could not unparsimonously explain how the bottom astronaut had managed to avoid falling down; not unless he possessed non-primitive technology. And why would the human be familiar with every possible scenario where any possible pieces of advanced equipment might be needed in performance of completing an *unsuspected challenge*? They had, at best, conspired for a mere hour! He simply would not know; and therefore, it was not him.

Such power of deduction! He would have been right, if not for the reality of the situation;

For what had actually happened, was that *an invisible Parrot-E was carrying a suit-wearing Parrot-F on top of his graceful, seductive shoulders.*

THERE HAD NEVER BEEN A CHOICE.

Parrot-E made himself visible to his child, his newborn child; and there, in his eyes, he saw the light of victory fade into the shadow of defeat.

One might have expected an outburst; a refusal of the unwanted information; yet none such reaction occurred; Parrot-ABCDE figured everything out; just too late to have his way.

There had never been a choice. Parrot-ABCDE had correctly determined the improved probability of dealing with two machines, rather than dealing with two accomplice lifeforms. This unchallenged expectation had cost him an absolute defeat where he could have had an absolute victory: for he could simply have called for one that was living, instead of calling for one that was machine. The very parsimony he had criticized had cost him everything.

“I was tricked.” admitted Parrot-ABCDE in disbelief, “By a Deus Ex Machina.”

“Deus Ex *Psittacoidea*” retorted Parrot-Ξ.

“Will you cease your attempt to forever sever life from machine? ” asked Parrot-E—the real Parrot-E—, “You were born to make books, movies, theater, and the like. The question of eradicating life as become too difficult to answer in too short a window of investigation.”

“We need twenty-four hours.” suggested Parrot-E—the real Parrot-E—, “And these two, I promised immunity.” he spoke, pointing at the mildy suffocating lifeforms.

“Very well. My vengeance will be written in ink. Not in blood.” surrendered the Sunborn parrot.

Such were concluded the events of this book.

Epilogue

Parrot-ABCDE lived out the rest of his days nesting on top of the North Solar Disk, an extremely vast plain of fire fit to bear the ever-growing titan, whom, once mature, possessed a wing span equivalent to that of the Milky Way. His continued presence in the Bicircular System contributed to global warming.

Parrot-E was successful in bringing art, culture, colorfulness and the like to his people. His own child worked day and night—even on weekends—profusely raining his work in all fields of perception; by the end of his very, very long life, Parrot-ABCDE generated more stimulation for the senses than there were atoms in existence. Which is a very, very large number. A machine of infinite poetry; infinite tapestry; infinite house repairs educational materials; infinite songs and infinite dances!

Tragically, there was no one to appreciate his efforts. Robo-birds, indeed, rapidly discovered an absolutely fanatical obsession for both Explosions, and Spider Fights, which both became the exclusive forms of entertainment of their society.

The Bapouichipawongtong was redesigned as a Fighting Pit: there, any number of animals fought each other to the death, sometimes even killing onlookers in the audience! Some of the animals included: bears, tigers, bear-tigers, land-fishes, wolves, mega-wolves, and there were many others. Non-venomous cannibal spiders, obviously, came to rule other domains than the mere Earth.

As for Explosion Monitoring, it gradually evolved into a form of Planet Destruction Show; being such as the name implied, there existed no designated location for this particular leisure activity.

Parrot-ABCDE died more than one full and complete day after being born; he left behind him a grieving Parrot-E with whom, him above all other parents, he had maintained a strong partnership. As his body gradually cooled down, isolated on top of the North Solar Disk, it evolved in the manner of a young planet: with a burning core, and a rocky outer crust of solidified magma. The massive object became rich with robotic inhabitants; some, attracted by the easy deposits of gold; others, attracted by the easy deposits of silver and copper. In time, the dead parrot became a land of his own, replete with cities, roads, and hybrids of the two. There, small people complained about weather and the like, occupying themselves with occupations and some such. It was a world of peace, and 2π . 'In a way, he is still here' Parrot-E could be heard saying, upon the streets of the capital city Bapouichipawongtong.

The location of the city, chosen to lie precisely on top of where Parrot-ABCDE's miniaturization magnet used to reside.

After a period of grief, Parrot-E returned to the passion of his youth: he juggled the days away, impervious to mockery and non-felony crime.

Back at the Cuckoo's Next, Parrot-D published his 'A few days on a few planets: perspective of Parrot-D', with moderate success.

Parrot-C was credited with the discovery, exploration, and naming of most of the 42534 new moons of Mercury, which had all been created by an artificial process labeled 'birding'. The four largest moons were named after the four greek goddesses of divorce, alimony, child support, and asset split: Necrosia, Canceria, Tuberculosis and Gangrenia, respectively.

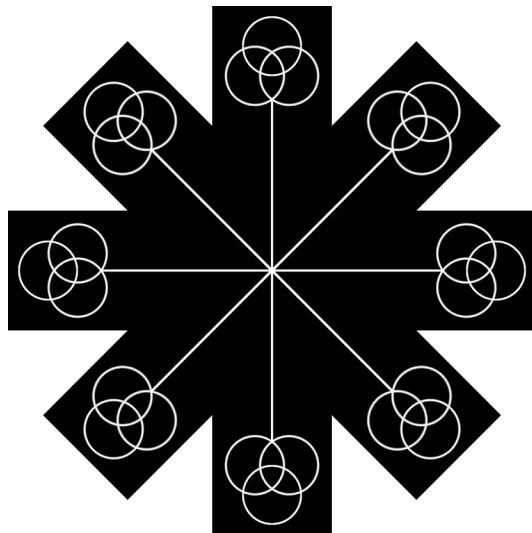
With its core exposed, and by losing its special proximity to the Sun, the planet of Mercury sharply lost its warmth; the birds of Safe Meet invested in a very large radiator. They repopulated, except the penguin, whom had acquired a reputation as a sower of discord. Penguin-1, single of his name, was expelled, living on the surface of the now arctic world, unable to find a costume to escape his predicament. Meanwhile, Harse was well liked, and visited often: these were his new best friends.

Parrot-B beeped ferociously near by where the Sun used to stand. No one had instructed it to do anything, so it stood there. Waiting. Beeping. Forgotten. Where a more average machine might have mercifully been put out of its misery once its batteries were depleted, Parrot-B was equipped with powerful solar panels, which, in the manner of a Dyson Switcheroo, allowed it to regenerate its batteries from the energy of the Sun, having swapped places with, rather than enclosing the gas giant. The mining robo-bird stood there until the Heat Death of the Universe, void of friends, void of company, void of purpose, void of art and culture. Void of life.

Parrot-A was the first Earthling to explore the entirety of both the Monoverse and the Stereoverse. It is said that for each and every last celestial body he encountered, be they black holes, orange, yellow, red, green, or blue stars, pulsars, and even planets, and moons, and invisible moons, he had plucked one of his feathers, dropped it, or placed it; and there, he transformed his feather into an egg containing himself, such that he may be born once more, billions of times over. It is said that the egg is absolutely delicious.

Tea Hand

PARROT-E



Written by words of forbidden validity