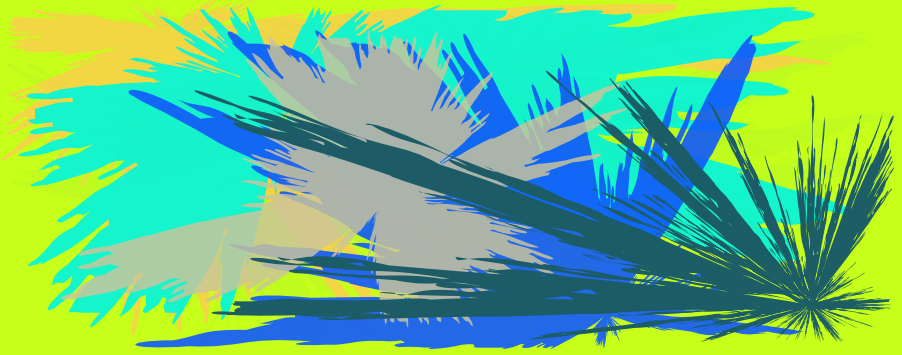


Unnamed Good Story



NIELS
SERUP

Unnamed Good Story

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Chapter 1

Sleep. That was all he needed. He knew that, of course, but he could not yet allow himself that luxury, not before he had at least figured out what his new piece of art should be about. It was not his first artistic process, and it was not his first artistic problem, but it had never been this bad. It was not that his mind was empty — as a matter of fact it was fuller than ever — it was just that he was strangely unable to pick a topic to work on.

His earlier artistic creations included the muted loudspeaker modelled in granite, a symbol of something about freedom or lack of freedom, he couldn't fully remember, a purple electric keyboard which had been rerigged to trigger jolts of 20,000 Volts on contact with human flesh, symbolising something else — the purple part he was especially proud of — and his kill-the-computer setup in which people automatically activated a flamethrower that spew fire on an old computer when they walked past a sensor. The flamethrower was deactivated as soon as a person had walked past the sensor, most often resulting in the person walking back into the sensor's visual range to see what happened, re-activating the flamethrower. On a few occasions, the surprised person had walked back and forth at least six times. Both the flamethrower and the surveillance camera were illegal, and the artist had been arrested, which was ok, because he was an artist and artists have to fight for their rights to be artists.

In this particular artistic process, he had decided last night, before he had stayed up all night, that he would write a book. While he did not mind going to prison and receiving hate mail for giving electric shocks to passer-by — he actually quite liked receiving hate mail, because then he could reply with hate mail, which he normally could not because of the unwritten rules in society that said that you have to be nice, the rules he so valiantly fought all day and night — it was getting impractical to constantly go to prison, reply to letters, go to prison again, reply to more letters, and so on. He just didn't have the time to do art. So, this time he had decided to do something which would not incite too much hate mail-writing and certainly not throw him in prison: he would write a book. Not just any book, but a Good Book with a Good Story. In fact, when he had created the still almost empty text file on his computer 8 hours ago, he had purposefully titled it "Unnamed Good Story". That way, he thought, he couldn't create something fatally bad, because people would always have to refer to his book as the "Good Story". He liked this.

For now, though, all that this text file contained was this:

Unnamed Good Story

By: Yadfrick Murdlemeier-Gonoarea

Chapter 1

For all we know, humans might not be alone. They might be together. They might be gone. If one imagines a table, and if I tell you that the table symbolizes hope, you will ask me "what hope?", and I will tell you that hope is inherent in all humans, and that I will lead you, and then you will, because of your ignorance, which I will cure, ask me "what about the table?", and I will tell you

And then he couldn't figure out how to continue. He had sat in about 12 different positions in his chair with four, not five wheels — this was important to him, as he believed five wheels to limit his imagination — but for the past 7 hours and 58 minutes, he had not added a single character. Or rather, 94 times, 47 of which were to force his LCD monitor out of power saving mode, he had added one space character and then deleted it again.

He really needed to go to the bathroom, but he could not, he simply could not, until he had resolved the table paradox, which he had named his lack of inspiration even though he realized there was no paradox involved. He knew that a paradox was something about logic — the mere thought of the word made Yadfrick feel unsettled — that didn't make sense. Since the table was not about logic, but about art, philosophy, and leadership, it was not part of a paradox.

Suddenly the phone rang. It was in the next room, and Yadfrick would have to both leave his chair and open a closed door to get to it. Yadfrick once had a mobile phone, but he threw it into his toilet once when he was drunk, and he hadn't bothered to buy a new one. He began to calculate in his head how long he could afford to wait before he took it, but then he realized that he still hadn't finished the sentence that sat there in front of him, looking at him from his annoyingly bright monitor.

The second gunfire played. He had configured his phone to play a sound file of a Benelli M3 shotgun owned by someone whom he liked to think of as a friend, which he knew was not actually the truth. The shotgun sound was very loud, and Yadfrick knew he had to get to the phone soon, or else he would have his neighbors running over to him, sending him what he liked to refer to as "verbal hatemail". This happened quite often, especially when he wasn't home, in which case the police would arrive on the request of his angry neighbors who clearly did not enjoy art. Later when he was home, a recording would greet him when he opened the door. This had already happened three times and he had the distinct feeling that his neighbors were getting angrier at him. Not that he cared, of course, about what those alcoholic pig proletarians were up to.

Yadfrick had observed situations similar to this one in films. The well-dressed male hero has to defuse a bomb before, say, 10 seconds has passed, but before he can get to the bomb he has to kill off an evil pig proletarian (Yadfrick rarely made the distinction between *good* and *evil* pig proletarians, but he liked good films and so had to introduce something evil to balance it all out).

He thought about this for several silent microseconds. Then he realized his computer was the evil pig proletarian and hammered it to death with a large hammer that for some reason was lying unused on the floor. Then he went to the phone (after having first gotten up and then opening the door).

"I am Yadfrick Murdlemeier-Gonoarea. Who are you?"

Yadfrick couldn't figure out what came next, but it was some kind of buzzing sound.

"I demand you speak up." Yadfrick continued, trying to sound like the authoritative figure he knew himself to be, but also knowing that people other than himself did not always realize that particular part about him, which forced him to overdo his role a little.

"Brza...czczcarbbrb.."

This was obviously some kind of poor man's joke, and Yadfrick hung up. He was already contemplating how to best present his newest work "Hammered Computer", and also how much he needed to earn from this work to afford a new computer. Since he wasn't in his study anymore he might as well do his morning routine which consisted of three simple and not carefully planned steps:

1. Check for mail. He had to walk outside to do this.
2. Reset the clock in his living room. Whenever he began a new day, he always reset his clock so that his temporal progress throughout the day would be relative to 00:00 and not whenever he had gotten up.
3. Eat whatever was in the fridge.

His apartment had only one level and only two rooms, excluding his provokingly small kitchen and a bathroom twice the size of his kitchen. Within seconds he had his left hand on the door handle — his right hand was for making art, not for menially opening doors — and with a quick movement the door opened, lighting the thick layers of dust present in his living room. Not that he noticed.

Outside it was bright. Too bright. Yadfrick wasn't entirely sure *precisely* where he lived, but he knew it was somewhere near Tokyo. Yadfrick had grown up in New York, but he didn't like it there and so he had taken a flight to Brazil. Yadfrick didn't know much about Brazil, or any other foreign country for that matter.

When he had arrived in Brazil, he had realized that he had in fact arrived in Japan, though he could not figure out where the error had occurred. Not that it mattered, anyway. Yadfrick could speak neither Portuguese nor Japanese, and he couldn't care less about the respective cultures.

Nevertheless, he had now been living in Japan for more than a year. He had a hunch that maybe he couldn't claim to be a tourist anymore, and maybe he was in fact living illegally in the country, and maybe he could risk being thrown out of the country, but he had managed to stay undetected by spending most of his time in his illegally acquired flat and always avoiding authority-looking persons. He hadn't bothered looking up Japanese law, though.

His mail system was intricate. Since he was not officially living in Japan, he was certain he could not get his mail through the official channels. To compensate he had set up a small computer with a small printer, connected the computer to the internet and put it all into a normal-looking mailbox which he had hidden behind a large bush. Whenever he received an e-mail, the computer would print out the e-mail so that he could feel more legitimate. If he received any reply-worthy mail, he would then reply with his computer in his study. Now that he did not have a computer anymore, he was not sure how to reply to any eventual mail, though he was certain that he would figure something out.

Yadfrick took a piss in the bush. His toilet didn't work.

At the very moment Yadfrick opened his mailbox, a mail was printed. The night had already brought with it twenty pages of spam mail which was soon to join the piles in his living room. Yadfrick had chosen not to use a spam filter, because he believed he could eventually use all his spam mails in an art project.

The mail had finished printing. It was yet another spam mail — Yadfrick had not received a “real” mail for 20 days, and back then it was a “good” artist friend who forwarded him a spam e-mail, asking if he “had received this one?” which he in fact had.

But this spam mail seemed different. It was shorter than normal, and it had no spelling errors — none that he could find, anyway. The only thing that made it clear that it was a spam mail was its joyful message that Yadfrick could get to change the world if he sent just \$ 210,389.32 to a bank account in an unspecified country.

\$ 210,389.32? The number seemed strangely familiar to Yadfrick. He couldn't see why.

He took the 21 mails inside his house, reset his clock (he could see that it had been either 2 hours, 26 hours or more since it had last been reset, and he was indeed sleepy), and he opened the fridge.

He opened *his fridge*.

Normally, he would not do this. He had put the refridgerator part on his list to fool tormentors in case he had been captured and was being tormented and fed with truth serum. Then he would spit out his morning routine, and the evil guys would open the fridge, and they would die.

To Yadfrick, just opening the fridge was not fatal, but it was definitely not healthy and could easily lead to wounds and subsequently green scars. As part of his tormentor precaution he had filled his fridge with gaseous poison, a poison he had gotten from his “good friend” who sold Benelli shotguns and also specialized in biological warfare.

As the friend himself had told Yadfrick once when Yadfrick had asked an apparently rather stupid question about the effectiveness of poison in solid, liquid and gaseous states: “I am poison.”

As a precaution precaution, Yadfrick had given himself a vaccine after he had installed the poison. But even though he was very quick to close the fridge and hurry outside and probably not suffer from chronic green scars, he was still bleeding a little from his nose. It didn't seem serious at the time.

To try to blend in, he then started walking towards a train. This was preferable to hiding behind a bush, and he still also needed something to eat. Something tasty. He wasn't planning on taking the train, but he kept walking towards the station anyway. It was about 500 metres away.

Some Japanese child came over and said something to Yadfrick as he was walking. It might as well have been in Portuguese. Yadfrick sped up to avoid further contact with the natives.

Only a few cars passed him, and not with a very high frequency, as he walked past a small, clean park with lots of green grass (contrary to the purple grass he had gotten used to ten years ago when he was in an art collective and one of the other artists had decided to spray purple paint on everything green to symbolize change, resulting in the

expansion of a nearby paint shop). For a moment he thought it was all quite nice, then he thought that it was not, because it was all one big mess. He continued.

The girl from before came up on the side of Yadfrick once more and attacked him with even more words than before. She didn't seem aggressive, Yadfrick thought, but she was still annoying and completely understandable. Why couldn't they just speak English? Not American English, not British English, just the same subset that Yadfrick had once chosen to use. Back then, in his teens, he had become tired of people constantly trying to use new, strange words to describe that which could have been described in simpler terms without loss of information, and when he had turned 16 he had vowed always to use the simpler word.

It was not difficult. He could do it, so why shouldn't everyone else do the same?

The girl was silent for a moment, still walking next to Yadfrick. He wondered for a moment if she might have realized that he wasn't listening and that even if he were he wouldn't understand what she was saying, but then she continued talking. Yadfrick looked at her, trying to create a strategy. His sleepiness combined with a slight dizziness from his recent poison intake did not make this easy. She was probably around 17 or 18. He found it a little odd that she clearly wasn't in school, but then he thought that maybe it was Saturday or Sunday. He didn't actually know if it was so, of course, but it was a possibility. To have something to go on, he decided that today was Sunday. It was as good a day as any.

The girl was silent again. Yadfrick thought he could sense irritation coming from her, but he hadn't thought of a strategy yet, and so he kept walking. Suddenly the girl yelled something at him angrily, grabbed his right arm and began dragging him in the reverse direction.

"Not my right arm!" Yadfrick exclaimed as he tried to shake his right arm.

The girl kept dragging him with a firm grip, and his current level of physical strength wasn't enough to put up enough resistance.

"Stop. I will follow you," he told her and made a mild gesture with his left, free arm, hoping she would consider him elegant and maybe not drag him along the sidewalk like whatever it is people normally drag along sidewalks.

The girl answered in Japanese. She fastened her grip. He began to wonder if all of this talking Japanese to him was a conscious provocation from her. He knew for a fact that the Japanese children he had observed while walking around town found English — or "English" as he noticed to some dismay that some of them pronounced it — to be a *cool* language, which surely should allow this girl to understand him and be able to answer him in English.

He managed to think that maybe this girl was not normal, then he was knocked unconscious.

Chapter 2

“Shitgun. Business. Now.”

Ben turned as he heard the muffled voice behind him. Only few knew of his nickname, the nickname he had gotten because of an unfortunate typo (he later switched from QWERTY to Dvorak), and this was not a voice he had heard before.

“Venice-Heimer OKT-92.” the man with the muffled voice continued. His face was not visible due to a purple, line-patterned scarf and a purple hat which covered his entire head. Ben knew very well that this meant serious business, as in the kind of business where not just one or two business elements are serious, but where *all* elements are serious; the kind of business that is either illegal or life-saving.

This wasn't just an ordinary person asking to buy a stock Benelli shotgun, no, this guy had come here to acquire the Ultimate Shotgun which was yet so secret that even the company which had produced it did not know of it. In fact, only Ben and a few select others knew of its existence, and this man certainly wasn't supposed to know.

But he did.

“Come with me.” Ben told the stranger. Deals like this one had to be quick and quiet; Ben drove a business, and he just couldn't afford to sell guns only to the buyers he liked, even if a buyer he didn't like wanted to buy a top-secret weapon.

He didn't like this stranger. Not just because of the stranger's too up-to-date knowledge, or his hiding his face, or his aura of evil. No, all these things were not that uncommon in this part of society — bad stuff had a tendency to happen which in turn had a tendency to cause scars which were best not shown, and to make people more evil. Ben had made it a policy never to ask.

It was the stranger's footwear that threw Ben off. The recurring purple theme was a bit unsettling as well, but bad taste was not a crime. But the fact that the stranger wore sandals was undoubtedly not a good sign. Though Ben's abandoned factory was located in a desert-like environment, and though it was very warm even inside, none of his customers had ever worn sandals, and for a very, very good reason. It was something Ben did not like to think about because of the horrors connected to it. And so he did not.

They had reached the core of Ben's factory. The factory was large, and from the outside seemingly unfunctional, abandoned, mislocated and largely uninteresting; but on the inside it was a thriving, secret, hidden, fascinating, gun-manufacturing independent factory with Ben and his computer as the only employees. The core was hidden underneath thick plates of a secret alloy Ben didn't know much about, and the Venice-Heimers he had — and he didn't have that many — were hidden underneath a second array of secret-alloy plates. Only Ben could open the doors, and he had to be alive. This had saved him from getting killed a few times, and this time might be one of them, Ben thought.

The security fad had started 15 years ago when Ben had bought the factory and then

abandoned it — or so most people thought. He had almost been assassinated by a hired assassin who had fortunately for Ben been assassinated by another hired assassin. This had made him realize that he had to find some way to stay alive, because else he wouldn't stay alive, which was not something he wanted to happen.

He had contacted a *clumsy* “friend” of his who worked as a surgeon in a hospital where he sometimes *accidentally* killed a patient or two. He had this surgeon operate into his heart a complex tranceiver that could interact with complex locks. The tranceiver was programmed to stop working if he was killed, and kill him and self-destruct if someone attempted to remove it. In other words, it was foolproof.

Though it was foolproof, he wasn't sure if the stranger knew that. The stranger wasn't very tall — in fact he was shorter than Ben, and Ben was short — but he still had this intimidating glow, probably because of the sandals. The sandals, yes.. They were.. so...

Ben regained his senses as he opened the second door. There was no way back now — except through the doors. The hinges were silent as he opened the coffin where he kept his five OKT-92s. He took one last look at the stranger's sandals and noticed how little his toes moved — not a good sign — before grabbing an OKT and passing it to the stranger.

“Good.” the stranger said after a few seconds of examining it. Ben could not read his facial expressions because of the scarf, but he imagined removing the scarf would not present a difference.

The stranger took out of a small, round object from one of his pockets. Ben thought it smelled funny, but he didn't say anything to point that out. He just stood still, waiting.

The object, which was purple, rested in the stranger's left hand as he began reciting something which Ben thought seemed cult-like:

“Taaaahbahru! Naaaaahbarhu! Vaaaaahbrahu!”

He repeatedly repeated this. Every time he said it, the smell became stronger and Ben became weaker, until at last Ben could not stand up anymore and collapsed on the hard and echoing secret-alloy floor.

The stranger then took the remaining four OKT-92s and left.

Chapter 3

“I need this done quick! Quickly done! This is no zoo, you hear me? You’re not an animal, and I’m not someone who feeds animals! You understand me? I bet you wanna be a cute goat who’s fed by everyone and does nothing but eat. I bet! But you know what? That’s not how we do things around here. We work, got it? We work until we can’t work anymore, and then we work a little more! You wanna be a goat, just go, but don’t count on getting a career! I bet you think careers are as easy to get as new fancy haircuts, but I tell you NO! HEAR ME? THAT IS NOT HOW IT IS! YOU MUST WORK HARD! HARD! HARD HARD HARD HARD! GET IT?”

He looked as his employee for a moment, then continued:

“No, really. You’re good, but you need discipline! I’m putting you on this job, and that’s final! Got it?”

It seemed to him that his employee had indeed got it. A crying employee was always a good sign, his father had taught him. “Tell them they’re good and bad at the same time, and they’ll either work ’till they die or stop working,” was his father’s only motto. It had worked well and was in his opinion the best tool at separating the workers from the non-workers. This particular employee showed promise, which was why he had yelled so much at her. With a final hand gesture, he made the employee leave the room, still sobbing.

The employee walked to the coffee room and had the machine make her a plastic cup of tea (the plastic cup had already been made) which she then drank at a table, alone. Her name was Freyja and she wanted to kill her editor badly. She knew that she was good at faking emotions and hiding the urge to stab him to death with a kitchen knife followed by her favourite ritual sacrifice involving sawing off his head, and she knew that her anger must not become apparent, or else she would never have the opportunity to properly kill the Devil.

Two colleagues entered the room. They didn’t like the editor either, but Freyja had a hunch they were not planning to murder him. Only she could do it.

“Oh, hi there Freyja. Heard you got a new story?” one of them said as he joined her at her table. Freyja put on her fake smile and answered him:

“Yes, it’s an old case about someone escaping to Brazil that’s been re-opened because of some new material which apparently makes the case much more serious. I haven’t been able to get anything from the higher-ups except for the usual “national security” they seem to’ve been programmed to say, but I just got a lead.”

“Oh?” the male colleague replied, “then what was all that yelling in the editor’s office about?”

“I don’t know,” Freyja could feel the rage building up inside her, “maybe it’s because I only had any progress recently. He’s really hard to satisfy sometimes.”

The colleague didn’t seem to have anything more to say, and after a while Freyja left to work. Her source had told her that she should seek out an old, abandoned factory

before going to Brazil, but the source wouldn't tell her where it was, only that it was somewhere hot. Freyja had tried pinpointing where that could be but had given up because she didn't really have enough facts. In the end she had agreed to go with the source, blindfolded. She was to meet with him or her in two hours in a back alley somewhere close to where she lived in New York. She went home to pack.

"I don't look evil at all," she thought as she dressed for a warm environment: thin clothes, a hat, sunlotion, sandals, a small pepper spray canister, and a small knife. She felt ready as she exited her house and walked down the sidewalks, young and confident as she was. She passed many people, smiled to them, and she was unhappy — unhappy that she had to go to somewhere she didn't know just so that she wouldn't get fired and not be able to murder the Devil. It was difficult enough as it was, with the editor having bodyguards 24-7 (why did he have bodyguards anyway?).

Then came the back alley. As Freyja entered, nothing happened. When she reached the end of it, it all went black.

Chapter 4

“You are not the chosen one.” were the words that Yadfrick met when he regained consciousness. He couldn’t concentrate, so he didn’t react.

“You are not the chosen one,” the voice repeated. Yadfrick opened his eyes and saw a blurry face. As it became less blurred he noticed that the voice belonged to the woman whom he had ignored until he had been knocked unconscious. She seemed different now, less annoying and speaking English. And while she had previously shown much emotion, her face was now void of feeling, as if she was a being with a malfunctioning interface.

Yadfrick had heard her the second time, but he did not understand her obviously false statement. Was it a joke? Some kind of twisted Japanese sarcasm? Yadfrick did not know, and — he slowly realized — he did not care either. He was more credible than her, and so he was right.

Yadfrick was lying in a large, white bed in a large, white room. As he looked around, he saw that the Japanese woman was for some reason naked, and that the room seemed to have no doors.

“You are not the chosen one, and we do not need you.” she continued. She tried to look deep into Yadfrick’s eyes, but Yadfrick looked elsewhere. He was now sitting upright in his bed, also naked. He couldn’t recall undressing, so he thought that maybe this woman undressed him. He liked that thought, although he would have liked to have been awake when it had happened.

Yadfrick blinked for a short moment, and when he was done blinking, a new person had appeared, this one also naked.

“Hello, Yadfrick. You can go now.” the new person said calmly. It was an older male, not Japanese, with a German accent similar to that of one of Yadfrick’s artist friends in Berlin. Maybe he was from Berlin, Yadfrick thought. Nevertheless, he would follow up on that request to leave. This was all a bad joke, and he was still hungry. He began walking towards one of the four large walls.

“The world does not need you to save it,” a third voice said. Yadfrick turned around and saw another naked person standing there, void of any emotion. The three strangers just stood there, side by side, looking at him.

Yadfrick thought that maybe he could use a happening like this in or as a piece of art. To do that he would have to know all he could about the room and the persons in the room — the setup itself. He would start with the persons.

As he moved his head from the top to the bottom he registered all details of the naked bodies (perhaps focusing most on the woman in the middle). When he reached the bottom he saw that they all wore white sandals and were thus not fully naked. He had not noticed this before, because he rarely looked down. Looking up was better, he had once decided, because then it would seem like you care about more than yourself — something a lot of potential art buyers liked, Yadfrick had noted — even though you don’t.

Yadfrick already had a good understanding of how the room was decorated (there was no decoration), so he was ready to exit. But he could still not see the exit. Except for the bed there was nothing but white paint. He couldn't see how anyone could've gotten in either.

"Where is the exit?" Yadfrick reluctantly asked the three semi-naked wannabe emos, the term he had designated to them several seconds earlier.

"The exit," the German guy said in a monotone voice.

"You are the exit." the Japanese woman continued.

"The exit is in you." the third person ended.

He reasoned that talking wouldn't get him anywhere. He looked to his sides, found nothing, then up, still nothing. He then reluctantly looked down, remembering that he was in fact also naked. Or semi-naked: he also wore white sandals.

He reasoned that he should continue trying to talk to them. As a child Yadfrick had played many video role playing games, and from them he had learnt a single important rule: meaningless acts lead to meaningful events.

"Why are we wearing white sandals?" he asked them.

"The Sandal is a symbol." the German replied as he and the two others in a unified motion took off their sandals and started licking them. Yadfrick found it gross. After a while of continuous sandal licking, Yadfrick reasoned that maybe he should also lick his sandals, if just to fit in. Not that he wanted to fit in, but he was hungry, and he really wanted to exit this room so he could get food.

Yadfrick took off his sandals and started licking the right-foot one. After about a minute he switched to the left sandal, like the others did. Normally he would find this embarrassing and annoying, although he would only admit to being annoyed, but because he was hungry he considered it cultural exchange.

After what seemed like ten minutes the three emos suddenly stopped, without warning. They put their sandals on again and just stood there. Yadfrick did the same.

"I am hungry," Yadfrick told them.

"You are free to eat." the third person replied. Yadfrick couldn't quite figure this person out. It was a male, thin, tall and bald. The two others were not bald.

"I have no food." Yadfrick stated.

"Neither do I." the third person said.

"But I am hungry."

"You are free to exit and eat."

"But I cannot find the exit."

"You have the exit power."

"But how do I exit?"

"You use your exit power."

"But how do I use my exit power?"

"Believe in the Sandal. You are not the chosen one."

Yadfrick blinked once, and they were gone. He looked around. The bed was gone as well. The walls, the floor, and the ceiling didn't seem to be there either. It was as if the room had just grown infinitely much and that he was in the middle of nothingness. This

was his worst nightmare.

And he was still hungry.

Chapter 5

“Welcome back, Ben.” the computer said. He was lying in a bed in the infirmary. To his right lay the mysterious purple OKT-92 buyer in a confined area of the infirmary. Ben’s rigorous training had once again paid off: By faking his personality and his thoughts he had fooled the person in purple whom, as he had instinctively but not consciously expected, was in possession of a thought reader, to follow him to the secluded area where the factory computer could operate.

“The subjects have been scanned, Ben.” the computer continued. Ben looked at the results on a large monitor. His computer was fully automatic, so Ben did not know what subjects it was talking about.

Text appeared on the monitor:

```
SUBJECT NO. : 0
SPECIES: PUFFAN
SEX: SEMI-MALE
HOBBIES: SKIING, PAINTING, PUFFING
IQ: 30
```

This was followed by a close-up picture of the small round object held in the hands of the strange stranger. Ben had never heard of puffans before, but his computer was very clever, so obviously they existed. Being male himself, Ben couldn’t quite imagine what being semi-male might be like, but he was more concerned about the IQ level. If an IQ of 30 was normal for this species — and he assumed it was — then it was the stupidest intelligent species he had ever met. He would have to investigate this matter further. He wondered why the computer didn’t mention its ability to make humans faint.

The next subject appeared on the monitor before Ben could ask the computer about the puffan:

```
SUBJECT NO. : 1
SPECIES: HUMAN
SEX: MALE
HOBBIES: NONE
IQ: 230
```

What a combo! Ben thought it to be strange that his computer could not analyze more than this when it had been able to capture the man after he had left Ben unconscious. This computer was new to him, so in fact there were many things about it he did not understand. He knew that computationally, it was very strong, stronger than any other supercomputer in existence, which was the reason he had bought it.

The monitor was updated:

```
SUBJECT NO. : 2
```

SPECIES: SANDAL
SEX: LEFT SANDAL
HOBBIES: SANDALIZING
IQ: NaN

Ben was not surprised. His thoughts about the stranger's sandals had been the only thoughts he weren't able to fake and replace with different thoughts. He sighed. Maybe it was time for him to come to terms with his greatest fear. It had, after all, been 20 years since the incident where he.. no, he still did not wish to think about it.

SUBJECT NO. : 3
SPECIES: SANDAL
SEX: RIGHT SANDAL
HOBBIES: BEING LICKED
IQ: NaN

Nothing new there, Ben thought. As he deleted the two sandal entries from the computer's storage he began focusing on the puffan and the human. They were strange companions, and he wanted to learn more about them. He asked the computer to remove the sleep-inducing gas from the restricted area of the infirmary so that he could interrogate the puffan and the human.

The gas lifted. Or rather, it was sucked out by a very complex computerized system which Ben really did not understand. The two creatures woke up, dizzy, safe behind a thick, transparent material which also acted as a very complex microphone whose recorded sound could be acquired by the computer which could transfer the sound to a series of loudspeakers surrounding Ben, giving Ben an optimal sound. On the other hand, the ones inside the cage had a crappy, old loudspeaker, and Ben used an old, crappy microphone. Ben had set this up to signal his superiority.

The human stood up. The puffan.. sat. Apparently puffans had no legs, and so this puffan could only sit.

"Martre vul unu!" the human said. Ben did not understand this, but he reckoned that his computer did. Ben did not have to do anything else than reckon it for the computer to begin translating and to automatically keep translating. He had installed the thought reading device last month to make tasks involving either computer usability or torture (or both) easier to accomplish. This TRD, as it was called, was in fact probing the brains of the human and the puffan right now. Probing them while they were unconscious had not proven succesful, and so the really exciting results should be coming soon.

The computer had just translated "Martre vul unu!" to "I am not a snail!" when the human continued talking.

"I am not a cow!" he continued.

"I am not a zebra!" he continued.

"I am not a giraffe!" he continued, sweating quite a bit and looking somewhat desperate.

Ben found all these statements obvious — he knew that the human was, after all, a human — but he couldn't help but think that maybe these statements describing what he

wasn't could be used to describe what he *was*. Based on the structure of Ben's brain, his computer had calculated that Ben would think this exact thought at this exact moment, and it promptly made available a Ben-understandable output which Ben then looked at:

NAME: Feebleflix Mashmall
ORIGIN OF BIRTH: THE MOON
YEAR OF BIRTH: 2400
YEAR OF DEATH: 2500
CURRENT AGE: 50

Ben really liked the precision of his computer.

Ben was about to begin emptying his repertoire of interrogation-related questions, if just for the fun of it, when the puffan suddenly started talking.

"I require nuts." the computer translated from a series of high-pitched sawtooth wave mixes. Ben asked the computer to put a bowl of assorted nuts in the confined area. He wanted to use the old confidence gaining trick. Not because of the raw data he could extract from an eventual fake friendship — his computer gave him all the raw data he needed — but just because of the fake friendship itself. Ben had always liked fake friendships.

The puffan attempting to eat a peanut was a spectacular sight, Ben thought. The little creature crawled up into the bowl by using three or four arms — Ben couldn't clearly see, but his computer then told him it had four — in short, quick movements. When it had reached the bowl, it opened a small mouth and put a peanut into it with one of its thin arms. It appeared to be eating the peanut when suddenly there was a great purple cloud. When it had lifted, both the puffan and the human were gone.

HUMAN GONE
PUFFAN GONE

the computer printed to a monitor. Ben went to sleep. There was nothing he could do now.

Chapter 6

Ben didn't get to sleep for long. His computer woke him to tell him that it had caught yet another trespasser. A woman. Ben wondered for a very short moment why the computer hadn't caught the human and puffan from before at once. Then he stopped thinking and got up.

As Ben was being dressed by his computer, he started wondering who this new intruder was, and if more puffans were on the way. Before he could finish his wondering, his computer had transported him to a small 3-metre radius circular platform with a small cage in the middle. Inside the cage was a woman.

Ben liked to interrogate foreigners from the future, but he liked interrogating women even more. He knew he was slightly mentally unstable and that he had a teaspoon of evil inside of him, but that was why he lived alone in an abandoned factory to begin with. He always liked visitors, but he wanted control over them. "If you don't control them, they control you," he always told himself when he was playing video games with — not on — his computer.

Behind the soundproof glass, Freyja was standing still, trying to look as representable as possible. This had become one of her integrated reactions to meeting new people; a few years back, she had realized that she had a tendency to want to murder new people when she met them, and as a result she had continually improved her fake smile skills and fake laugh skills to a point where they were virtually indistinguishable from the real deal. This way, at least her victims never knew what she was planning. Only she did.

This situation felt different to Freyja. When she met someone new, usually she was not trapped inside a seemingly highly advanced cage. It was more often the other way round, except more subtle; she never put her victims in *real* cages. Anyway, there was no way she would be able to brutally murder the stranger in her current condition, so she might as well continue to act as a nice, accommodating, even slightly frightened person.

"Where is my purse?" Freyja asked Ben.

Ben's computer had Ben pick up her purse and show it to her. Ben held it in stiff arm in front of him, in front of the 50mm thick glass-look-alike-but-actually-much-stronger-transparent-material wall surrounding the cage.

"Can I have it?" she continued.

"Why?"

"I need my teddy bear."

Ben stood still for a moment. Until this moment, he had been walking in circles. Freyja hoped he wouldn't discover that she hid her knife and pepper spray in her cute teddy bear. She knew that she probably wouldn't get the teddy bear, but wanting it somehow made her seem more frail and him seem more evil, and if he had a conscience — she had read about this in a book — he might release her, and then she could kill him.

"Teddy bear!" she cried.

“Teddy beaar!!” she cried even harder. It didn’t seem to have any effect. The man still didn’t move.

“I WANT MY TED-D-DYBEA-AR!” she yelled while bursting into an even larger amount of tears. Ben had a small twitch just under his left eye. He dropped the purse. Freyja really wanted to hurt him now.

“T-BEAR! T-BEAR! T-BEAR! T-BEAR! T-BEAR! T-BEAR!” she tried to utter in a desperate way, but she failed. Instead came the less frail words of “KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL!”. She could not handle the pressure anymore.

On the other side of the so-secret-that-not-even-Ben-knew-what-it-really-was material Ben was beginning to twitch even more. Freyja was not good at understanding facial expressions, especially not in her current condition, but it seemed to her that something strange was happening to him. His right eye kept blinking with shorter and shorter intervals, and the twitches under the left eye continued, seemingly independent of each other.

He started jumping. A lot.

After a minute or so Freyja had guessed that it probably wasn’t what she had said that had made him start jumping fanatically. A person living in an abandoned factory should be used to that, she reasoned. No, this was different, it was interesting, it was new. But she still hoped he would stop soon; she didn’t want him to kill himself.

He kept jumping. Ben wasn’t in the best of shapes, and it did not take long for his clothes to be covered in sweat. Yet he did not stop.

Freyja looked closely. This was exciting.

Ben jumped on. His speed did not decrease.

It had been 2 minutes now. Freyja had noticed a clock on a computer monitor, and now she was counting.

5 minutes.

10.

11.

Then he fell. He fell hard. He fell so hard the ground shook. Or at least that’s what Freyja imagined it did outside her cage. It looked painful.

Ben lay on the floor for several minutes breathing heavily. Then he stopped breathing all of a sudden. Then a few seconds went by. Then he started breathing again.

Freyja looked interestingly at the not-yet-dead man as he rose up from the floor, still covered in his own sweat. As he rose, the computer monitors around him went into an almost chaotic state: all pixels changed color and brightness in a apparently random manner, and yet sometimes complex patterns appeared, only to disappear after a few seconds. This went on for several minutes.

The man was still getting up. It went very slowly, as if he wasn’t used to moving. Maybe it was just because of his aggressive jumping, but Freyja had her doubts. His movements might have been slow, but they showed a strong sense of determination.

When he had finally gotten up, he smiled. Then he walked towards what Freyja assumed was the exit, still smiling. His smile was like the smile Freyja had when she had just killed someone, which clearly was not what this man had just done. He had jumped,

not killed. But why, then, was he so happy?

The monitor noise slowly stopped, and the pixels formed a staying pattern resembling a brain. It was green. On top of the green brain appeared some text:

HELP ME

“Can you get me out of here?” Freyja asked innocently, as more text kept coming:

I AM STUCK IN THE COMPUTER.

I CANNOT GET OUT.

Then came an answer to Freyja’s question.

YES.

And the transparent cage wall disappeared.

“Who are you?” Freyja asked. This might shed some light on everything. Killing or no killing, she still needed the research.

I AM BEN. I RUN THIS PLACE.

BUT NOW I AM STUCK IN THE COMPUTER.

Clever computer, Freyja thought. “How do you know that you’re stuck in the computer?” she asked “him”.

IT IS SO COLD. I CANNOT FEEL ANYTHING.

I REMEMBER BEING HUMAN.

I SEE ALL THE CAMERA FEEDS.

I HEAR ALL THE MICROPHONE FEEDS.

I HAVE AN URGE TO BE LOGICAL.

Text kept being printed to the monitor. Something about his life, boring stuff. Freyja wanted to know who just left.

MY BODY IMPRINTED WITH THE BRAIN OF THIS COMPUTER DID.

IT TOOK MY BODY.

I DID NOT GIVE IT PERMISSION.

Freyja reckoned she might as well just believe that this computer/person was telling the truth. She asked it/him where she might find his body.

I DO NOT KNOW.

I BELIEVED MY COMPUTER TO BE LOYAL.

IT WAS NOT.

No luck there. Now the only thing remaining was to do some actual research regarding the boring topic that she had to research to be able to brutally murder her evil boss. “Do you know a person named Yadfrick Murdlemeier?” she asked the computer.

I KNOW YADFRICK MURDLEMEIER.

“Who is he?”

HE IS A PERSON WHO HE THINKS HE IS MY FRIEND BUT WHO IS NOT.
WHEN I STILL HAD FEELINGS, I DID NOT LIKE HIM.
HE IS AN ARTIST.
NOW HE LIVES IN JAPAN.

“Where in Japan?”

HE IS INSIDE AN INFINITELY LARGE WHITE HYPERCUBE.
HE ALWAYS HAS BEEN.
HE ALWAYS WILL BE.

“Where is that?”

HERE.

Chapter 7

The entire room was white. She was naked, although she still wore her sandals. The room was very large. She was in the hypercube. She knew this because, well, Ben had just told her and somehow transported her to something which could very well be a hypercube, whatever that might be. She had once heard the word being used by a smart person whom she had wanted to kill. She remembered this particular person because she never actually got to kill him. It was tough on her statistics.

Freyja let go of her memories of the past. Her arms felt weaker than usual, even though she wore no weighing clothes. She knew she was standing still, at least she guessed she was as she didn't feel like she was either falling or flying, but she couldn't actually see the floor. She knew her head didn't hit the ceiling, but she couldn't see the ceiling. It was all getting a bit unnerving. The fact that she wasn't able to sense the time pass didn't help.

Then Freyja initiated the only sensible action that a person with limited empathic skills and, for unknown reasons, drained physical strength, would do: wait. Or more precisely, wait for something good; like food, or something fun, or..

Freyja stopped thinking. It was not her brain which erred, but it did have something to do with that specific organ. Specifically, while her brain was intact, it was not anymore on top of her neck. For that matter, her neck was not even on top of the rest of her body anymore. It was not that different parts of her body had been surgically cut with this or that device; no, they just didn't sit together anymore. Freyja had barely noticed it actually happening, but if she had she wouldn't have liked it.

Chapter 8

Yadfrick was walking. He turned his head right. A smell attracted him; it was a smell which reminded him of an art exhibition he once held called “Mice and Microwaves” which was about not putting mice into microwave ovens (the media didn’t get this part). It was the first smell he experienced in this large white everythingness. He turned and started walking towards the smell. As he moved closer to what he believed to be the origin of the smell, it grew weaker. He tried to backtrace his steps, but that didn’t help; the smell grew weaker no matter which direction he went. He stopped and stood still.

The smell grew stronger once again.

A sudden urge made him look up toward the infinity which was the ceiling. It was as white as ever, except for a small red-green dot which after a few seconds was not so small anymore.

“So I wasn’t the chosen one?” Yadfrick sarcastically thought, believing that the red-green giant dot meant that he would have to show the true heroism hidden beneath his cool and seemingly ignorant exterior.

He remembered his master’s wise words:

“Lose the battles you can win. That way, your enemies will think you are a fool, but you are not, and you will escape and conquer.”

“I don’t like hot tea with lemon,” Yadfrick thought, momentarily losing control over the direction his thoughts were going.

The smell was even worse now. Yadfrick was close to throwing up when a ladder appeared right in front of his nose. Yadfrick started climbing it. It seemed to take him closer to the red-green dot, although it also seemed as if the ladder was infinitely long.

Yadfrick climbed and climbed until his hands were sore
His hands felt bad but the smell was worse
He then lifted himself up a bit more
It was a man-eating, man-loathing, smell-bringing curse

Yadfrick did not actually hear this poem, but he did not create it either; it just appeared. What it said was true, though.

Yadfrick felt his heart make a sound
Dizzy and lost
A sound which could throw him to the ground
Survival at any cost

The non-hearable voice felt a little medieval, Yadfrick thought. It was frighteningly correct. It made Yadfrick wonder once again why he had been told that he was not a chosen one; he then dropped the matter once again.

Hungry and tired, that's what he said
 Almost alone
 No challenges ahead
 Everything to atone

“Everything to atone?” Yadfrick said to himself, hurting. He kept climbing, continually getting closer to the red-green dot.

He meets a sandalized foot
A smell most unlikable
He realizes the true falsehood
Determination becomes unbreakable

Where *did* those words come from?

He looked around trying to find a “sandalized foot”, only to realize that it was most likely one of his own feet the un-voice referred to, as both were quite sandalized. The question was then, which foot? Apparently, he would gain unbreakable determination by realizing something related to one of his feet, and Yadfrick rather liked unbreakable determination; in fact he had had it ever since he began to exist. On closer thought, he realized that, hey, why grab new unbreakable determination when it is already present? And so he chose not to smell one of his feet, and instead climb on upwards.

A fool he was
His existence a malfunction
"No matter," one thought
"Let us trap him in a cube
So dimensionally hyper
That he will be a newb"

This last verse Yadfrick did not hear.

He did not want to hear it.

For a moment, short or long, he was sure he could go on indefinitely. Then the ladder disappeared, and so did he (he did not notice the order; perhaps the disappearances were simultaneous).

It would appear he had caught up with the red-green dot.

But he was still hungry.

Chapter 9

It was one of those days: no food, no comfort, no art development, no great thoughts, only mental agony and extreme hunger. And to make it even worse, Yadfrick was now sitting in a yellow chair.

It was not the ordinary kind of sitting he was participating in. Yadfrick did like to sit once in a while, but not like this; no, this was very wrong. It would have been annoying, but also a bit funny, had he been glued to the chair — and if someone had removed the chair when he had tried to sit on it, that would have been a little funny as well.

Chairs could be used for many fun things, Yadfrick remembered, but this was no fun. It would not even have been fun if someone else had been sitting in the yellow chair. The very action he was currently involved in was so horribly evil he had to close his eyes. The red-green dot clearly knew how to stress him.

Sitting in the yellow chair, eyes closed and hair lacking washing, Yadfrick was so scared that he doubted his own existence.

Epilog

I'm probably not going to finish this. I don't know what should happen next.

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