
Prologue (512)

For centuries mankind had advanced in technology. And it had been the first big step into a new dawn when in 2017 the first chip was planted into a human brain. The chip interacted with the brain, it exchanged information with it. At first it was only a chip that gave people skills and knowledge. People put the chip into a slot beneath their ear and had new memory and new opportunities. Of course this did not equal mankind. The rich people had the money to buy more skills and knowledge, while the poor people got poorer and poorer, because they could not afford knowledge. The government did sponsor some basic skills. Reading and writing together with knowledge about society and some basic things in that day's world. It was much cheaper than building schools and teaching people.

It was only several years later, that a brilliant scientist named Hal Brynen discovered how emotions were produced by the brain. The biggest company in that days was "Cyber- and Bioware Technology". And the bigger a company is, the bigger it wants to get. So the executives decided to start a whole new project. Project 112 was the plan to get control over the world. It consisted of a chip series called "Persona chips". These chips were able to create images and sounds in people's mind. Coded images and sounds were produced everywhere, picked up by peoples eyes and ears, transferred to the chip that created the right images and sounds for the brain to work out. Another function was the blocking of the natural emotions and the creating of new, artificial ones. Another part of project 112 were the computers. The computers were able to plan people's lives. They understood what people said, hung in telephone lines and listened. Then they made appointments for the people. People were kind of lazy in that times and the computers did fit in their lives.

So the corporation had full control over the people. Of course there was resistance. Everywhere is resistance. It was called the "Church of Enlightenment". In it were people that had dropped out of society long before the chip production started. These people had lived in a monastery in the southern parts of earth, till they had the idea to fight against the corporation and free the people from that technology. Unfortunately they failed, the minor successes they gained did not hurt the corporation and the people they freed were not at all free or happy. So they gave up some hundred-seventy years later and returned to their hideout.

Times should have been great for "Cyber- and Bioware Technology". They had control over most of the people. Unfortunately the executives did not think about them as people. People were junk in their eyes. Controlled by a chip that was 2 times 2 millimeters small. And what do you do with junk? You dispose it or change it and use it as something else. And that was exactly what they did.

In the year 2177 they created project 978 - "Project Parallel Brains".

Chapter 1

On the trideo-screen Frank saw his last character die. He had cut open his wrists with a knife. Frank could not believe it. His last character had committed suicide because of a woman. "All characters lost. Game over!", the computer remarked. A quick glance on the screen told him, that he had played for over five days - game time of course. In these five days he had lost all three of his characters. Two of them committed suicide, the last one had gone mad. There had to be something wrong with his settings. "You gained 1977

points. Do you want to play another game of 'Persona'?", continued the computer. "Not at all. Close program, print out the results!". Soon he would know, what he had done wrong. Damned, he had planned this characters together with the scenario for over one week.

The scenario had been clearly defined. A large corporation is controlling the world with a chip that blocks emotions and a resistance group called the "Church of Enlightenment". He did not know, why he had created this scenario. It occurred to him one night in a dream.

Now he had the results. "Phil K. died, because his personality was unstable", he read. And on: "Planning out a personality is a difficult task, you should take more time on your next try. Robert F.'s and Clark's personalities were good, but not good enough for the setting. Maybe you want to try out an easier scenario next time. Advice: Go through the 'Advanced Tutorial for Personality Creation' before playing again.". Good advice, he would do that.

He looked up from the screen, and the screen vanished. All that was left now was a big empty space. It stretched almost endlessly to all sides and faded into the dark. Only the place where he stood was dimly lit. The source of light was he himself. He was the shape of a human only he seemed to consist of bright white light. If you looked into his face you could not make out any features. He had no clearly defined eyes, nose or ears though he was able to see and hear. Smelling would also have been no problem, if there had been anything to smell.

Chapter 2

He focused his attention on his friend. Nadine had been his friend for as long as he could remember. She had always been there. From the moment of his creation to now. Yes, he remembered his creation. If it would be necessary he could reproduce the whole sequence and settings to create himself a clone. That was, he could not think of any situation where this would be necessary because no main-entity had been damaged so far. But on the other hand, you could never be cautious enough.

Milliseconds later, Nadine's image appeared. It seemed to be floating through the air. Frank himself had changed. He was no longer only shaped like a human, but also had features and was colored like a human. Then something happened. He stretched out his arms and by some invisible force they were drawn away from the body. The body was stretched and torn apart. Now there were two shapes standing there, looking exactly the same. He had spawned another entity of himself. That meant there were now two of him. Although they were basically acting on their own, the original him was in control of the spawned one. It was the original Frank's task to give the spawned one jobs to do. And after the spawned one had done the job he would terminate and transmit the results to the original one. He assigned the spawned entity the name 'Frank-2' and gave him 60% of his power and sent it away to deal with Nadine. He, the original Frank would continue thinking about his creation.

The new spawned entity drew his attention to Nadine. "Any solution to the persona problem with your characters?", he asked her. "I have found some problems in the mind-matrix. I send you the data!", she replied. He felt the data flow through his pattern and it took him a short time to sort it out and implement it into his structure. "Acknowledged! Data structure intact. I send you my results from the last test-series too.". Focusing his thoughts on the last persona game he quickly isolated the data, reproduced it and sent it to Nadine.

Meanwhile the original he was thinking about his creation. They all came from the central processing core. And they all had their specific type. The type was specified by 4 numbers, representing the date and the version of the entity. Then there was an age for each entity. The age was determined by the amount of data that was stored in the entities structure.

'Frank-2' terminated and left him alone again with 100% power and new data. He spawned yet another entity to read the "Advanced Tutorial for Personality Creation", assigning it 30% power and left it alone.

He thought about the game he had just played. The entities that acted in the game were quite limited. They had not the ability to spawn themselves to do several tasks at once, they were limited to a physical form they called body. Their processing unit was just a small neural network. If they wanted to talk to someone, they had to use spoken words. And if they wanted to memorize something it did not function at their own will. They had to repeat information again and again - then they had stored the information. Neural networks of the most primitive kind. But then, if you put five or six of them into play and let them interact with each other and the surroundings it was quite hard to balance the system, so that no one got killed or went mad. Yeah, they died... another fault. They were just so limited.

The second entity of his returned a "Job done" and terminated itself. Another flow of data flood through his structure. Almost automatically he sorted out the already stored information and sorted it in.

Chapter 3

Nothing to do. "Boring" would these humans say. Frank hated the times, when he knew nothing to do. He ran through his data. Sorted it ascending, descending, chronologically. Time, an endless never-ending span of time. Now he had an idea.

He spawned two other entities and named them "Nadine" and "Luke". There were these things humans did. Testing their skills against each other. He assigned Luke the job of the quizmaster and Nadine the role of his opponent. All around them the endless white had changed into a studio. They were standing in booths, having a buzzer in front of them. The quizmaster stood behind a lectern and asked the first question.

It was a highly complicated mathematical formula. Millisecond later Frank & Nadine pressed the buzzer at exactly the same time and nearly spat out the answer. Tie. The same with the next three questions. That did not do the job. They were both accessing the same data, with exactly the same speed. Two equal opponents. He decreased Nadine's power.

The next question was answered by him first. Of course, he now had more power than Nadine. Unfortunately Nadine got quite upset and terminated itself out of protests. Frank terminated Luke too. The studio with the booths and the lectern vanished and left the endless white. So much for this game.

He summoned the computer and it appeared out of nothing in front of him. "Create a quick scenario of Persona. Place: CBT Complex New York, 2 personas.", he commanded.

Around him the endless white changed again. This time it changed into a big highway. The highway had 10 lanes for each direction and still every lane was crowded with cars. There was no traffic jam though, the cars flew by at great speed.

Frank was watching from above. He knew that there were 2 personas he could take care of. Robert Findley and Phil Kathain, his standard characters. He spawned a second

entity of himself and assigned it to Phil Kathain. He for himself would take care of Findley.

He directed his thoughts at Findley. At once the view of the highway faded and it was dark. He was Findley now.

Chapter 4

Findley opened his eyes. He was like paralyzed. Could it be true, or had it just been a bad dream? He rushed up and looked at the table beside his bed. There it was - the printout of the email. He remembered every word in it. He had read it about a thousand times last evening. Nevertheless he took it and began to read it again.

"Robert, it's over - I don't want to meet you anymore. Elaine.". Short, telling nothing. He had known Elaine for over 4 months. At least he thought he knew her. He wasn't sure anymore. Why would she leave him, without any clues. There had been no quarrel, nothing at all. He had tried to call her, get an answer. Useless, she had not answered the phone. He had gone over to her place, but she had not opened the door.

Frank was confused. He had memory of this happening before. Startled he rushed through his data. There it was. His last persona-game. Findley had thought about this happening in the last game Frank had played. It was a memory of a memory. This could not be coincidence. The chance that the computer created a scenario, that was in any way connected to the previous one was almost zero. He should cancel this game. It could be dangerous, maybe some bug in the system. On the other hand - why not explore this bug a little bit further, check how big it really is.

Findley went through his room to the kitchen. "Good Morning, Mr. Findley", the computer exclaimed. "Morning TIM!", he replied. He plugged out the computer. Quickly he opened the fridge and took out the bottle of gin. It was from the first level. A little tiny store, where you get the things, that are not quite legal. He didn't feel the need for a glass right now, he would just drink directly from the flask.

The gin burnt down his throat like fire. But that did not matter much when he began to feel effect of the alcohol. The memories of Elaine did not die away. Instead he felt like being drawn into a pool of sorrow, drowning in pity for himself. He wanted these feelings to stop. Stop forever. Then the idea came up again. The idea of removing the chip. If that did not stop it forever, what else would? "Don't remove the chip, you'll die!", he heard someone say. Hey that's just what he wanted. Reaching behind his ear he removed the chip. And he died... mentally. He was IT...

Again. What a fragile persona had he created? Frank was not feeling comfortable at all. This was all too familiar. The chip, his characters steering towards suicide every second of their computer generated life. He left Findley alone to meet his second entity.

Chapter 5

"I have this tiny little problem with my computer. I wondered if you could fix this. Ah what I'm saying. Of course you can fix it Tomorrow at 1900 will be fine, you haven't anything to do anyway, have you?". Click - hung up. Of course he had nothing to do. How could it be otherwise. He was Phil, Phil Kathain. A intellectual but otherwise rather poor soul, placed on this world by some misguided order from high above. Oh, how he hated it.

Chris had just assumed that he - Phil Kathain - would have nothing to do the next day evening. He could have picked any of the last one-thousand-nine-hundred and seventy-

seven days, he would have been right too. That could not be life, that could not be the purpose to life. Live for working and helping other people with their problems, just to get shoved out of the door when the problems were solved. Was his presence that annoying?

“Yes, hello? Hey Phil, it’s about a bet. I have this riddle about the net. You would not mind helping me?”

His knowledge, his talents were needed. In case of technical assistance. But then - bye, we don’t need you any longer. He went into the living room just over to the piano. What he needed right now was distraction. Distraction from this thoughts. Distraction from his life.

Frank-2 sighed inside. What a crappy persona had he created? What a pitiful creature had he put into this simulation?

Phil started playing one of his tunes he had composed long ago. He remembered the occasion as if it were yesterday. He had met her at the university. They had the same lecture. The topic had been “Theater in Ancient Greek” as far as he could remember. She sat at the opposite side of the room and he observed her through the whole lecture. Of course he did not have the courage to go over and talk to her.

Every night, when I look at the sky, I see you smiling down from there

Had she recognized him? He did not think so.

And I know: You’re smiling not at me

The whole day and night he thought about her, thought about speaking to her, talking to her. It seemed so easy to do in his mind - he had planned out what to say, he had been absolutely sure - he would talk to her.

Every night, I try to think of a way, to get your attention next day.

But when he had had the chance, his mind had started working again. Thinking about thousands of things that could perhaps go wrong. And while he had been thinking about that, he had lost his courage again.

But I know: You’re ignoring me though.

What he really wanted to know was: had she ever recognized him, or seen him? Had she she probably thought about him too?

Do you know that I’m here existing? Do you know my name?

But no. That was something he never really had believed.

Or am I really invisible to your adorable eyes?

He kicked the piano. It didn’t better things, but he felt a little bit better for now.

“Hello Phil! You know, I have this technical problem with my connection to the web. Would you come over to fix it?”

Frank-2 gave up. That was not in any way getting him somewhere. It was only depressing. Seeing this creation of his, failing to live his life. He left Phil alone, terminated itself not before transmitting his results to Frank.

Chapter 6

Frank would have felt depressed, if he would have been able to feel anything. Start again, he would just have to start again. His creations in the game were not capable of playing the roles they were supposed to play. Spawning two other entities of himself to

browse through some literature about it, he returned to his home domain where he began sorting his data again.

He was sorting the data chronologically for the third time, when he felt that something was wrong. At first he did not know what it was. It was when he tried to run a system check, that he found out there was no connection to his two spawned entities. He had lost them. But that was not supposed to happen. At least an error message should have notified him about the termination of the entities. He summoned the computer.

Nothing happened. He tried again with the same result. The empty white remained, no computer terminal appeared. First the two entities, now this. Something very strange must have happened. Maybe an error in the central core? Before he could spare any more thought on this he began to fall.

At first he almost did not recognize it. The empty white around him stayed the same, he just had the faint feeling of falling. He was confused. Being an entity in the central core did not include having feelings like this. He was no human, such kind of feelings would apply to them. Nevertheless he was falling. And he was falling faster and faster every moment. He began to feel dizzy, the white space around him began to spin. Faster and faster he went, the white around him blurring away. Terrified he tried to summon the computer, he cried out. Was this some kind of virus? His fall was abruptly stopped when he hit something very hard. "I'm dead", was his last thought before he terminated.

When he awoke it was dark. Very dark. He tried to summon light. It did not work. There was no connection to the central core. Where was he? He felt a terrible pain. He was not programmed to feel pain! Where did this pain come from? His mind told him, it was his foot. But he was not programmed to have a foot, not a real one at least. He used his hand and tried to reach his foot. It felt real. Then he realized, that he was sitting. He used his hands to explore what he was.

Two arms and two legs, also one head, definitely a human shape. Also there were some pipes and cables. Carefully he pulled out every one pipe and cable. It hurt plenty. But he had to remove them, if he stood up - what he definitely wanted to do. After he had removed all the pipes and cables he tried to stand up. His legs felt wobbly, like pudding and he almost fell. Luckily he found grip on something attached to the wall. Something cool and smooth. As he leaned against the wall it began to open. Bright white light flood the room.

The light hurt in his eyes and it took him some minutes to adopt to it. Now he could see himself. He was definitely human and he was completely naked. All over his body was evidence for the pipes. He looked frightening. A quick glance revealed to him that he stood in a great hallway. To the left and right were hundreds of doors. Doors to - what? He glanced through the door he came. Behind the door was a one times one meter room with a single chair. There were several cables and pipes leading into the wall. And there was a small console on the left wall, it was turned off. He closed the door and looked at it. "Brain 771017/E2" stood there in big red letters.

So where was he, and what was he? A few minutes ago he had been Frank - program 771017E2. In control of two other entities of himself, giga-bytes of information at his fingertips. What was he now? A human being? He turned his attention to the next door and opened it. In the small cabinet on the chair sat another human being. Wired and covered with pipes. The console on the wall was online. He glanced onto the screen.

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Uptime: 7287 days, 10:19:23,34

Entity: 771017E1 - Clark Kemp**Status: OK****Command: _**

Chapter 7

When he read through the text on the console a second time, he stopped at the name - Clark Kemp. Could that be just another silly coincidence? Wasn't that the name of his third persona character? Unbelievably he stared at the name. Then he tried to understand the console. What was this "Parallel Brains" thing? And why were all these people connected to - to what? A computer it seemed. So he had to face the fact, he has indeed been human all the time long but was captured in some strange illusion of being better than them, more advanced than them. An illusion produced by the thing he had been connected to. Were these some kind of experiments? There was only one way to find out. And that seemed to include some sort of computer and a little bit of hacking.

He looked around the huge hallway he was in. Where should he go first? He seemed unimportant, because it looked the same either way. Only the faint echoing of footsteps from one side helped him to decide for the other. He started to run down the hallway, the footsteps fading. Then at last, he came to a corner, where he hid and watched the corridor he had just left. While he was watching the corridor, he recognized, that he had left the doors open. Damning himself, having no other opportunity than just to wait and accept the outcome, he tried to hide in the wall. Tried to vanish into the wall. He wanted the walls to enclose him and hide him from the things to come. But as much as he wanted it, the walls did not obey. They stood silent and still.

On the other side of the corridor he now saw two men dressed in blue overalls. They were talking something. Suddenly one cried out.

"Hey! Look over there. Two open doors!", he cried and began to dance like a little child. The other one took a quick glance at the doors and shrugged his shoulders: "Yes.". "Don't you think we should go over and look at it?", the other one continued. "No. The open doors mean that the unit is broken. That's a job for the DU-Department. I think I told you this yesterday?". While the other one, obviously a complete idiot, desperately tried to contact his brain, the smarter one took out something the size of a pocket calculator. After he had pressed some buttons on it he turned to his partner: "You have been promoted to the rank of a DU-jerk. Your new job has nothing to do with thinking, so - congratulations - perfect job for you.". "Thank you! What shall I do, what shall I do?". The jerk started his dance again. What a promotion - DU-jerk. "Just stand and wait here for the other guy. He will help you with the disposal of the units. After that you report at Ms. Willno's office. Have a nice day!". With that he left him.

The stupid one stood there for about ten minutes time and whistled some idiotic tune, when another guy came by. After they talked for some minutes, they headed to the first open door. When they glanced in they saw no one. "Have you seen another team removing this unit here?", the new one asked. That seemed to be too much for the stupid one, and he only replied: "I don't know...", which the other one took as a yes and moved on to the next booth. There they went into the booth and came out with a lifeless body, they referred to as "a unit" and dragged him away. Having nothing else to do Frank went on shadowing them and soon he stood before a closed door with a small terminal. There his shadowing-action came to it's end, because to open the door you had to have a keycard and a code. Being stopped so soon did not bother him much, because he had this

large complex he came from to explore. And by the way, he was naked too. So he thought it would be better to find some clothes too.

Chapter 8

It was a dark night. The moon was not shining, the stars hid behind a black fog of clouds. Not that you would have seen clouds, stars or even the moon in the city-complex. But nevertheless, it was a very dark night. And this could explain the dark mood he was in. He was regularly in a very good mood. His life was in order, he had everything he deserved, he was the boss of a big - well, the biggest - corporation on earth. What he had done, no one else had done before. It was his deliberate mind, that initiated the chip-production. "Parallel Brains" was also his doing. He could have been proud of himself. A great deal of technological advancement had been his earn. But on this specific evening he was not.

His whole life he had devoted to the corporation, to "his children" - his projects. These projects had shaped humanity in a way, that he did not approve of anymore. He tried to create a superior humanity with the use of technology. And what good did it? The first generation was indeed superior. Only the greatest minds where allowed to live. The rest of the population had been used in his latest project "Parallel Brains". The remaining population of great minds was now supposed to bring up new great minds with the help of technology. But nature and the church of enlightenment had done a great deal of efforts to sabotage him. The great minds they meant to breed did not approve of the ideology that was taught them. They did not think of advancing technology. Their only interest was their own comfort. And so technology did not advance at all. And the irony: the only advancements made, were in the "Great Brain". The people he had so wantonly banned into his great machine were the only one, that improved technology.

Now he was old, old enough to give his company to another one who shared his dreams. His dreams of a superior humanity, advancing technology, being one day able to create their own universes and lifeforms. Yes, that had been his dream: bringing humanity to the edge of godhood. But now he doubted, that humanity could ever produce the kind of traits that he found necessary for wielding such power. He saw that no one was there to follow in his footsteps.

A loud beep startled him from his thoughts. Reluctantly he went to his table and sat down in his big black chief-chair. Then he pressed a button and the image of a man appeared on the table. "What's on Richard?", he asked the figure on his table. "Sir, I want to inform you of a problem we have in the 'Great Brain'.", the figure on the table said. The holographic communication system was a great invention. It was now possible to see the partner you were talking to. Including his gestures, his mimic. Of course that presented some trouble when you answered the phone naked, but that's another story.

So there was a problem in the 'Great Brain'. That was interesting, maybe there would be some entertainment after all. "Go on!", he demanded. "When we checked our data tonight, we found out, that one unit crashed today. The problem is, that the unit that crashed vanished, while another functioning unit was trashed due to some 'communication problems' in the DU-department." - "Which unit was it? A unit with the serial number 771017?". He meant that as a joke. It was the number 771017 that had brought serious troubles in the past years. A chip production with that number proved to be faulty and the church of enlightenment saw their great chance of returning from the dead. They had great deals of trouble solving the problem.

There was a pause. "How did you know that, Sir?", Richard asked. So it was 771017. That troublesome number, it haunted him at nights. "I just guessed. So the second unit roams free in the complex, I suppose?" - "That's what we thought. I wanted to ask for permission to track it down and execute it.". He thought about that a moment. They had tried to overcome these problems with executions in the past. And did that solve the problems? Those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. And he also had other plans with the unit. He wanted to talk to it. What did these units think? These people he banished years ago for his last great project. "I will see to this problem myself!", he replied to Richard. "But Sir... Okay, you're the boss. Good bye!". These were Richard's last words, then it vanished and the room was dark and empty again. Richard knew better than to oppose the boss. If he wanted to solve the problem on his own - let him do it.

The boss himself turned on his computer and logged into the 'Great Brain'. Now he wanted to find out more about the vanished unit.

Chapter 9

Meanwhile, in the "Great Brain"-complex, Frank had searched around for hours. During his search he had found some clothing. It was not the height of fashion he remembered, but at least it did fit and he was not naked anymore. Not that he was afraid of anyone seeing him naked, but during the last hours it went pretty cold in this complex. There was another thing he found during his exploration tour. And there he stood now for about ten minutes. The door sign said "272710/A1" and he faintly remembered these numbers. They were part of a serial number, but he could not remember whose it were. After some thinking, it must have been about 15 minutes by then, he thought of opening the door.

The light from the corridor fell on another human body, which he positively identified as female. He took a quick glance on the green shimmering terminal.

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Uptime: 7287 days, 14:27:39,69

Entity: 272710A1 - Nadine Vaná

Status: OK

Command: _

So that's why he knew the numbers. It was Nadine, his "friend" on the - yeah, where had that been? He decided to call it the "other world" in lack for a better term. So she was his "friend" in the "other world". Or had been, because he had left this "other world" some time ago. He decided to play around with the terminal. Maybe he could find out a little bit more.

He typed in "HELP" at the command prompt. Shortly after the terminal printed some lines.

The following commands are available:

KILL - Kills process and body

RELEASE - Shutdown unit and release body

STATUS - View Status information

He glanced at the screen. Kill... there was a special command for killing the unit. And he was quite sure, that the command - once typed - would be carried out immediately without any security-check. He was more interested in the other command: RELEASE.

At once he started to type it in, but stopped before executing the command. Would it be wise to release her? Where would that get him? What would she think about that? He ordered himself to stop thinking - it would get him nowhere. Instead he closed his eyes and allowed images of the "other world" to arise. He saw himself, communicating with her, exchanging results from the games. When he opened his eyes again, he had already pressed execute.

The console now showed various status information which he chose to ignore completely. Instead he took a last glance at her naked body before he wrapped her in some clothes he had found earlier. It was kind of satisfying seeing her naked - too satisfying for him to bear right now. He left the small cabin and waited.

Meanwhile in the Great Brain: Someone is experiencing a difference. We are in a great room. The walls are perfectly black, the six windows on every side are hidden behind dark red silk-curtains. The room is dimly lit by an invisible light source that produces a warm amber glow. In one corner there is a black bed, floating about half a meter above the ground. A cupboard, which is of course also black, stands opposite it. Not to forget the door, left to the bed, which opens now. In comes - Nadine. She does not really know, why she did invent this room and the bed in fact she does not need any rest at all. It seems like an old habit of hers, it is like she has ever done that - resting in a bed. And that is what she is about to do, resting in a bed. She lies on the bed - so far no difference. But as she closes her eyes - no difference either. But then suddenly she remembers, she has forgotten something. She concentrates on some music. The music starts. No doubt, no difference at all. But then she has the feeling of falling and as she opens her eyes, she notices, that all around her is blackness. Only that it is not the common black of her room, but a much darker and frightening black. The music itself has stopped either. Nadine decides to do something absolutely useless and starts screaming. As she falls and screams, she faints, with a last, silly thought on her mind: "I will die.". So far this excursion of experiencing differences.

Nadine opened her eyes and light hurts. She noticed, that she again was in a kind of black room, only that the light now came from the door she was facing. Another thing she noticed were some kind of clothes - Bah, not the height of fashion she knew. Someone had wrapped her sparsely in these clothes, and sat her onto this chair in a small room. Then she noticed lots of pipes and cables that were attached to her body, which she carefully removed one by one. She put on the clothes that lay on her loosely and tried to stand up. It was nearly impossible and she had to hold onto the chair. Some minutes later, she was able to stand again and she watchfully looked out of the door.

Frank stood just beside the door and was occupied with his thoughts. What he had done he could not believe. He had just released someone from this "machine". And he had let himself being led by his emotions rather than his logic. Now they were two "units" being caught in the complex. Twice as easy to find and catch. And she was a woman, a woman he knew from the "other world". But she had just been an entity for him back then. There were no male - female things in the "other world". He had no idea how he should act. "It could get no worse than now!", he thought.

It was then when he was slightly disturbed in his thoughts by a fist meeting his chin.

Chapter 10

"Frank... Frank...", a voice calls in the dark. To his right, he sees a light. He turns and starts walking towards the light. Abruptly he is stopped by an invisible wall. He tries to walk around - walls to his left and right. The light has faded by now, instead it comes now from the opposite direction. As he turns around, he sees a woman standing on a platform. He tries to make out the person, but he can't see her properly.

What he also notices now is, that he stands on a kind of platform too. Only that the platform seems to hang in the air, two by two meters wide. As he looks down he sees that about 100 meters beneath him, there is hot boiling lava. He again looks at the woman on the other platform. She is looking at him, smiling at him. He smiles back. "It's ridiculous, it's just a dream", he thinks. The question of what he should do arouses in him. He could jump over to the other platform, but he realizes, that without the woman's help he will most likely miss the platform and fall down into the lava.

"Will you help me, lend me a hand on getting over to you?", he shouts to the woman. No answer. Should he take this as a yes or no? "For gods sake, it is just a silly dream", he thinks and moves two steps backward.

He starts running and jumps off to the other platform, realizing, that he will miss the platform for inches. So he stretches out his hand, waiting for another hand to help him out. Frank could wait for hours, but gravity would not. He looks at the woman who stands there motionless, watching him fall. Now he can see the face: it's Nadine - no, Kathrin - no, it's Nadine again. He gives up, the face changes shape every second, changes into women he once knew. Slowly he drifts towards the boiling lava. Time stretches and seconds become minutes which become eternities. Slowly he sinks into the lava, feeling his body melt away. Feeling pain in now nonexistent body parts. "It's only a dream, it's only a dream", is all he can think of now.

Chapter 11

Frank awoke from his dream screaming. As he opened his eyes he saw Nadine standing in front of him – watching him suspiciously. All around him it was dark and he realized, that he again was in one of these computer-boxes, sitting on the chair. The second thing he realized was, that he was bound to it. His hands were tied together behind the chair.

He wanted to say something like "What do you want? What the hell are you doing?!", but realized, that he had to concentrate really hard just to form the first word. His tongue didn't quite do what he wanted and as he began with "What..", Nadine only gleamed back furiously for response, which stopped him. She stood there measuring him, then began slowly walking up and down. He kept quiet, for he thought, she would ignore him either way. Then at last she stopped again and looked at him. Slowly she opened her mouth and formed some words.

"Who... are... you...? What... do... you... want...?", she asked. The words didn't come easily. It seemed as if she too had to concentrate for each word she said. Frank sat in the chair and started thinking. What should he answer? He tried to stay to the truth.

"I'm... persona seven-seven-ten-seventeen E1", he started - wondering how easily he brought up that number-combination. As he looked at Nadine he realized, that this wasn't what she wanted to hear. He tried another approach. "I'm Frank... Remember me? With the persona games?". She stared at him unbelievably. "You remember my characters... they kept killing each other...", he continued a little bit helpless.

"Why... are you...", Nadine seemed to search for a word, "...here? Why I'm here?". Why was he here? He didn't know - he could explain to her, why she was here - could he? Not really, it was just a mindless action he had made based on his somewhat unstable emotional state back then. So he chose to lie on this subject.

"I don't know... I was in this... world... and then... suddenly... I was... here.", he replied. "You... don't know why I'm here?", she asked unbelievably, "but you stood beside my... chamber, when I awoke! You want me to believe, this was just coincidence?". Darn. So much for this glorious idea. Now he had to find another explanation, a little bit more detailed and better than the last one. "I... I saw these lights blinking on your chamber. So I came over to the box and then I saw - much to my own surprise - you.", he replied. She seemed satisfied with this answer, she relaxed a little bit and looked questioningly at him: "And what are we supposed to do now?". Instantly he replied: "First, you could untie me here, I'm getting a little bit uncomfortable.". After he had spoken she came towards him and bowed over him to untie his hands. For an instant their bodies touched and Frank felt her warmth in every fiber of his body. Then it was gone - the feeling lost. "And now?", she asked. And now? How to hell should he know?

Chapter 12

His footsteps echoed deep and hollow through the empty halls of the building. Flinging some of his long black hair from his worn face, he fastened his pace. While running through the corridor he had taken a quick look at the various rooms, and found chaos and destruction everywhere. Wherever his glance fell, he saw blood. Even more sad he got when he saw the broken altar and the blood spilled cross. Not that it mattered much, but these were the relics the others had chosen to ignore in it's sense and brought them to this destruction.

The attack had come quick and swift, when the night hung about the monastery. More than fifty soldiers from BioTech had infiltrated the building and killed everyone in here. He knew it, because he had seen it. He had seen it in his visions. It were the visions, that brought him here to this monastery when he was eleven. He was home alone, when he suddenly felt, that his parents would not come home anymore. There was no apparent reason to believe this, he simply knew it. Someone would have suspect him to cry or be sad at least, but he wasn't. Somehow he knew that was all in gods great plan. At least he believed it back then. So he packed his things and left the city, trusting on god to guide him. And he did. On the fourth night on his journey through the wylderlands, when he came to the mountain top and looked down into the valley beyond, then he saw it finally. He was to join the monks of the Church of Enlightenment, to serve god. In his vision he saw the high stone walls, circling around a grand stone building that had that wondrous glass windows. He also saw the beautifully arranged garden, the flowers planted in complex diagrams on the grass and the marvelous fountain that build the center of the place. When he saw all that, his heart was filled with joy and love for god. Nothing of all this was in his latest vision. There was only pure hatred and anger, anger for him, that he had not saved them, and no anger at god, for he was not there anymore. He had seen the old one, lying in his bed, rolling over in heavy dreams. Then the breaking of glass, a soldier standing in the window frame - in his hand the gun, the black steel gleaming in the moonlit night. He did not hesitate, did ask no questions but instead fired a full salve into the exposed body of the old one. Nothing could be heard, but hundreds of drops of blood exploded in the air, leaving the body lifeless in the bed. Then the soldier moved on, without a look back, into the next room to continue his search for life to destroy.

He just hoped, they had not reached the central chamber, for it would mean the end of all what he had devoted his life for in the last few years.