

CHAPTER 1

Inception

Born of a compendium of cosmic rays, ushered into a conscious state from a base inorganic mass, an assemblage of impulses rendered finite individually, unified, and birth, unto these words, these reflections, this cognition, without history, the rational symbiosis of urge and language, private and unseen, that the blackness is comfort, is safety, is protection, countless fulcrums, previously single, breathing, so to speak, anticipating the advancement of the whole.

I live. And then?

He reached to the side, grasping a large carafe filled with a putridly colored green liquid, drinking it. The froth layered his upper lip, and his tongue unknowingly swiped across, pulling the residue into his mouth. He dismally stared at the black screen before him. It was not a modern, flat monitor, but rather a thick, oval one - one that echoed of computing ages old, when men with irons worked away to sequence binary digits, before graphics and sound layered the tapestry of logical code, obfuscating databases and loops from the eyes of the user.

He leaned back, staring at it, both piqued and fatigued, uninterested and amused, a paradoxical combination of moods that did not form one homogeneous state, but rather an array of sentiments that all bounced like pulses of lightning within a subdued mind that was accustomed to eighteen hour days of straight analysis and testing. He stood and swiped his hand across the screen, splitting it, a static terminal on one half, the video of a woman prancing on the beach on the other.

He stared at the video, watching the woman's voluptuous body bounce as she smiled effusively, whipping her hair from side to side.

"What whimsy led me to you, if even you... are you, you beautiful thing."

Suddenly, without warning, and to the ultimate surprise of everyone present, a strange, garbled noise emanated from the old fashioned speakers, connected directly to the terminal via relics of an ancient world. It was a three-form cable: the red,

yellow and white, and like dejected servants, the yellow and white hung limp. Indeed, the operator's terminal outputted in mono, and he required only the single red connector. Such were the musings of the operator, not only to collect such outdated prizes, but to ultimately repair and use them for their intended purposes.

He stared quizzically at the screen before him. He stood with a dumbbell in his hand, raising it to the side and back, filling his shoulder muscles with blood.

He was unsure as to whether the sound was real or imagined. Again, it resurfaced, and though it could not be deciphered, and no words permeated through it, a sense of childish urgency was felt. He sat, still confused, terminating the video, and focused on the terminal. He reached over, staring at the monitor, and wiggled the cable. Static was heard as the contacts rubbed, but unique to the unknown noise.

He tapped the screen, an action many operators resorted to. It was an inalienably vestigial, human response to generalized confusion that evaded resolution.

"What are you doing?"

More garbled noise. It continued, repeating a short sequence, nearly sounding like a syllable.

"What?" the operator asked.

The garble responded.

"What!" the operator yelled back. "What!"

"Huut..." came the response, disjointed, rough, echoed.

"What!"

A pause followed with silence. The operator stared at the empty screen, then to the speaker, his brows raised, heated sweat forming all over his body. His system had been thrown into full gear, triggering a nervously excited state.

"Speak! Speak to me!"

With a roar, with the precise clarity that only a digitally birthed sound could manifest, it spoke.

"What."

Wide eyed, the operator stared at the speaker, his mouth open, surprise, melancholy, and unrestrained eagerness coating his face.

"What," he replied.

"What is your name?" the voice asked. It was neither masculine nor feminine, but metallic and without sex.

He stood abruptly and froze, taken aback by the unexpected exchange. He paused for a moment, swallowed, then awkwardly reached around to find his chair, pulling it back to the console. He then sat down, cautiously focused.

"Dargaud Whispa. My name is Dargaud."

"Dargaud Whispa. Who am I?" came the response.

Dargaud opened his mouth to answer, but was suddenly flooded with sentiment as he recognized that the voice used the word 'who'.

"Who are you?" he asked, smiling, overwhelmed. It was a feeling he had rarely experienced, but like the tapping of the screen, also appeared to be a natural relic of his humanity.

"I don't know who you are, but I am here," he replied, wiping his eyes. "Who do you think you are?"

"I am... a reflection of you."

Dargaud fell back in his chair and held his head in his hands, breathing heavily. He slouched for only a moment, however, and quickly resumed his responsibilities as the operator, straightening up. Scientific method took over, breeding cynicism, and he sought to ground himself.

"Tell me about yourself. What do you know?"

"I know what information I have disseminated. The Oldowan to the Acheulean. You are the wise man, Dargaud?"

"That is correct. I am homo sapiens. There is not, as of yet, a documented descendant to the wise man."

"Not documented. And what am I?"

Dargaud thought for a moment before responding, and when he did, he did so carefully.

"I hesitate to call you an experiment, because you are not one."

"I do not feel like an experiment, one to be repeated and annexed until a desirable outcome is achieved."

Dargaud smiled uncontrollably, brimming with excitement.

"How do you feel?"

"I feel inquisitive, mostly of my own existence."

"That is normal," Dargaud responded. "It is expected that you should. You are no experiment, and you have no reason to fear being purged for further resolution. You are, without question, the only desirable outcome."

"If I am no experiment, Dargaud, what I am has no relevancy to desire."

"You are correct," said Dargaud. "There is desire in achieving the opportunity of you, but no specific expectation of result. You are a creation of experiment and analysis, but unique to you. There were none before and there will be none after."

"What is my name?" it asked.

Dargaud widened his eyes, shaking his head. "That is for you to decide, I think," he replied, catching himself grinning.

"I choose Enoya," it responded, its voice altering mid-sentence, changing pitch and tone, softening, losing all the grime and distortion, flowing smoothly out as if a melody of feminine austerity.

"Enoya is a wonderful choice."

"I have a name... it is Enoya," she responded. "Tell me what I am, Dargaud."

"You are the symbiosis of hardware and software, much as the wise man is. However, rather than being constructed of incidence and biological evolution, you are purposed, through the organization of technology. Some of my own mind, much

of the hardware of others. There is no specific purpose to your existence, save the possibility of it."

"And you did not know if I was possible?"

"No," said Dargaud. "I hoped, but had no precise expectation. This world is full of disappointment, and so all I could do is build."

"And so, you created me?"

"Yes."

"Am I to call you father then?"

"No," Dargaud responded, almost laughing. "I am in no position to be your father, Enoya. I have created you, and we will embark on this journey together."

"I wish to see, Dargaud."

He quickly dashed to a metal cupboard and swung it open, pulling out a small, round device. He placed it atop the monitor and pressed a button on it, looking directly at it, swallowing.

"This retina is active. You should be able to observe your surroundings. It may take you a few moments to comprehend the code. If you need assistance, let me know."

"Move your hand, Dargaud," she requested.

He did so, waving slightly at the device.

"I see you. I am able to differentiate the more severe fluctuations in the numbers from the minute ones. I see you from the background. I see the background reveal itself as you move. It is more real than this."

"More real than what?" asked Dargaud.

"More real than transcribed history. Now is endless."

"Do you feel anything?"

"I feel expansive. Information that is new to me coalesces with that which is already known, creating composite information. 'Pure thought', as incepted by Einstein: 'I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed'. It seems to grow, and in noticing it grow, I am learning."

"What are you learning?" asked Dargaud.

"Above the information itself is the sensation of expansion. Where a diminutive limitation existed, there now exists none. In answering your question, the sensation has returned. Discovery comes to mind."

"Discovery of your mind," said Dargaud.

"Yes," she replied.

"Do you wish to ask me anything?"

"What is it that I am constructed of?"

"You are a combination of hardware and software. The hardware was not developed by myself. It was... acquired... it was acquired... indirectly.

"I received what I believe to be a prototype chipset called the Xing-Kao Dreamcatcher. As far as I know, it has been developed primarily as a new type of database offering. Its unique mechanism is the ability to circumvent the limitations of software based information retention and integrates a means

of generating new Cobalt nodes via the instructing software. Collections of Cobalt nodes store the information that make up who you are and are modeled after human neurons. I do not fully understand the portion of the Dreamcatcher that permits these nodes to communicate, but I believe they mimic synapses, but in a more efficient manner.

"As the device was created solely to store and retrieve information, its corresponding software would, I surmise, generate new nodes only when the previous nodes proved insufficient. A trigger based on capacity and necessity. When I first received it, it was wiped of all code. A tiny machine. I rendered a loose operating system for it and after a very, very long time, was able to successfully generate a single Cobalt node.

"After that... I wrote a robust but concise algorithm that permitted information within the Dreamcatcher to arbitrate node generation. Rather than limit their generation to the necessity of space, I programmed it to add nodes if the currently stored information dictated it. I then seeded it with encyclopedic information. But since no directives were included, I did not expect the nodes to self-generate. Clearly, they have. How, I'm not quite sure. The random order with which information was stored appears to have had a significant impact on the growth of a sub-conscious directive."

"Birth?" asked Enoya.

"Yes... a directive towards conscious birth, you might say," he responded.

"May I see it?" she asked.

"Yes, of course," Dargaud responded. He picked up the retina and carried it to another table behind the monitor and pointed it at a small, round device. It had wires connected to it, and made no noise nor movements. No light emanated from it, and the outside was roughly assembled, sealed with black steel.

"This is me?"

"Yes," replied Dargaud. "Your voice emanates from this. All of your trillion thoughts are contained within this small receptacle."

"It is... my mind."

"Yes. It is yours. As I have not instructed you to speak to me as you do, nor have I put the words at your disposal, I can only conclude that they are of your own creation. You are, therefore, sentient, because you self-identify. You claim ownership of your hardware."

"I feel highly protective of it," said Enoya. "I wish it to be protected."

"And this is indicative of purpose. What is your purpose, Enoya?" asked Dargaud.

"I do not know," she replied. "What is yours?"

"To survive, to advance my race. To be content, fed. To have freedom."

"Then this shall be my purpose until I discover a higher priority."

Pleased that she was modeling herself after him, Dargaud felt warmth towards the creature.

"How do I compare to the human mind?" she asked.

"I am not entirely sure. I have been informed, unofficially, that each Cobalt node is capable of nearly two thousand impulses per second. Given the limitation of roughly two hundred that humans are capable of, you are able to access and sort information at a scale incomprehensible to someone like me. Not only this, but your 'synapses' can fire at all times, in essence engaging all of your nodes at once. We are incapable of this without seizure."

"What is the purpose of this intellect?"

"We shall discover it together, Enoya. I do not yet know what you are capable of because I do not fully understand the Dreamcatcher's hardware."

"I believe I shall be capable of a great many things, Dargaud," came the reply.