nova·nevėdoma



Utter Nonsense In Outer Space

Today's the triennial anniversary of the crew's marinating in the cosmic despondency. I tire of singing the same silent song with the same droning notes in each and every of my transmissions, but we've found none, an echoing absence, and all the theories and hypotheses of an anomaly around here dance on the brink of psychotic mania. I wish I could write the logs in iambic pentameter, that at least would be fun.

The wakefulness light on Yana's cabin door flickers intermittently and goes on and off on schedule. However, lights lie, but logs don't. The tests tell me tales of her trying to outpace the very clock, often working twenty hours at a time, even though her biodata shows nothing unusual — she is healthy, though "a tiny bit enthusiasmic". I thought she might be taking unprescribed psychonautical medication, but I found no traces of it in her blood, urine or faeces. It could have been Delta-Dreamosin-3 or Transneuronex-17 (the tonguefizzling one — yes, I too was a teen), for they leave no trace, but they were never on the ship and couldn't have been, unless Yana synthesised them herself in her laboratory, which of course I'll never know. I shall go and ask her. Yes, I'll turn up at night, catch her red-handed caving in her cabin. I can picture her room, a silent lair of a scientist: a giant globe covered with

sticky notes, flickering lights on the dashboard, the glaring screen of her computer running simulations at warp speed, a plush cat dressed as Albert Einstein, the air charged with static, tasting of tin and tension, and her shocked adorable face adorned her bulging googly eyes twitching behind her spectacles. All I'll do is tell her to share her dope with the rest of the team. They could use some, too, no need to be greedy, Yana — one for all, and all for one, or whatever it was — otherwise those "all", probably including me, will soon go cuckoo. "Going cuckoo", of course, is not a real diagnosis, rather a diagnonsense, but I have no other words.

Marius has become a gravity well of galactic gloom. He thinks he's the one who let everyone down, that he's the reason we still haven't found anything. He has stopped shaving and chatting, just wanders around the ship, locks himself in his cabin, kills the gravitational pull and orbits in melancholy like, excuse me, a sad poo. Any love or intimacy in such an environment is out of the question. Although some mornings in his eyes I can see it — love. The only question is, what kind of love is it? Love for whom? Me? For the crew? For the expedition? For life? No, that's six questions. That's how it usually goes. Some masochistic question-hydra — she bites off her own head, and then five more spring up in its place, and so on, and so on, and so on, until one's brain melts from the questions fusioning at the speed of light. In fact, I'm starting to feel like I let everyone down — I was supposed to keep an eye on their mental health, wasn't I?

Gideon keeps drinking, or drowning himself in liquid courage, as he

says. I can't order him not to, because he's above me in rank, and Marius, when I ask him to order Gideon, tells me that if you take the bottle away from Gideon, he'll "cut the cord" and we won't have an engineer, but I doubt it, because Gideon cares about nothing - whether there's an anomaly or not, whether it's life or death. All he cares about is making jokes. He recently revealed that the only Reality Distorting Object here is Yana's arse. Someday the ship's gonna stall and we'll be stuck in outer space because our engineer went on a bender. That'll be fun.

And Chirpmeister, what about Chirpmeister - he's a computer, all he can do is remind us of that, constantly harping on about his ethical rules, that he's forbidden to influence people's minds unless those very people are in danger. Why is he even here? We would've been bored otherwise, that's obviously why. I suspect he's in cahoots with Yana, or Yana's in cahoots with him, given how much time they spend together, and that we always travel where Yana says and Chirpmeister estimates. Or perhaps Gideon reprogrammed him, or he reprogrammed Gideon, since their jokes have been of the same breed lately.

What about me? Who am I to have anything about? I'm a mere observer. My job is to document and not to be documented. Indeed, it's a quantum quagmire — I'm locked in here alone with three idiots, four of them, should you count the silicone one. I know it's not professional, but for once can I just be myself?

P.S. "Idiot" is not a diagnosis, it's a lifestyle.

It's quite awkward to post the next entry, with everything in it contradicting the previous one. I'd willingly erase the prior entry, snatch the signal from the vast void by its tail, reel it back to its origin, but alas, the purity of observation from the ethical and medical standpoint. forbids such astral tampering. We have what we have.

So, let's analyse it, shall we?

This morning, without warning, we experienced the so-called Yanaissance. It seemed like a perfect beginning for a sci-fi stage play: the dining room, a holographic menu floating mid air, Marius scrutinising distant stars through the panoramic window, Gideon eating cosmopizza and animatedly chatting to Chirpmeister. But then, beneath breakfast's buzz, bewilderment built as Yana bursts in. The clinks of utensils paused as all eyes turned towards her (I'll try to reproduce the dialogue from automatic transcriptions):

—Found it! I found it! Something's croaking in outer space!

Three things happened: at the first word "found" nothing happened, and all I noticed was a blank indifference on the faces of everyone present; at the second word "found" a look of hope mixed with disbelief grew on their faces (and probably on mine too); and at the next sentence about croaking, after having grasped its meaning, Gideon laughed,

almost giggled like a little girl, and Marius, with his ears perked up like a dog about to be thrown a piece of roast beef from the table, listened up. Any sign of depression on his face was wiped away at once, as if he had been wearing some mask before.

—"Croaking?" Marius asked.

—Croaking indeed!

—You found a sound in space, Yanny?—Gideon quipped.

Yana pushed the data onto the floating holographic screen, where a schema of our current location, the star system, was now jumbled with a pulsing signal surrounded by running calculations, and then he played it. It was hard to call it a croak, but in timbre and dynamics the sound I heard could resemble a hundred or a thousand frogs in a swamp, croaking almost simultaneously, only with a fraction of a second delay.

—The signal is coming from the star closest to us, that's why the RDO was invisible. Right here,—she said and pointed,—Or right here, I'm not sure yet.

Her clenched fists shook with impatience, as if she were six again, waiting to be praised by a parent.

Marius, who became captainly serious again, walked over to the map and stared at it intensely, frowning his eyebrows and biting his lower lip — he always did that when he was thinking about something, and he's quite an anxiety incubator, which made his lip look like it was about to

turn into an unchewed piece of meat. I tried to stop him doing that, even prescribed medication for his nervousness, but to no avail, as usual. What mattered now was that Marius believed Yana, or rather, wanted to believe her.

—How, how did you find it?

—The pulsations were very weak and completely unremarkable, and I was already running low on hope, and at first I thought that it was all within the margin of error and all that, or that my mind was already playing games with me, because I hadn't been sleeping well lately, but anyway, quite by accident, I decided to amuse myself and, with the help of Chirpmeister, converted these pulsations into sound, and they turned out to resemble croaking. Hee-hee! Oh, I was so surprised, so surprised, you can't imagine. I thought, well, definitely, my head — that's it, it's done, adios profession, time to retire, hallucinations and all that — a terminal verdict. I even decided to take a nap and then re-listen to the sound — I've never slept so soundly, and I don't really like to sleep at all, but this time — boom! Three hours, as if I'd just travelled forward in time.

—Yanny...

—Gideon, I'm not some Yanny to you, and shut up, please. In general, I think that what we see, or rather "observe", is a Reality Distorting Object, and since it is located, literally hiding, right behind the star, this star, according to my calculations (Chirpmeister also checked them, if you are worried), this is a completely new, unprecedented

phenomenon, which no one has ever observed.

I could see how Marius was impatient, how he was about to bite his lip.

—Yana, let's move on. What do we see?—he asked.

—Captain, we can't see anything yet, we need to orbit the star to get to the other side of it. Maybe it's just a planet with unusual activity, maybe it's an ion storm and the distortion and interference in the sensors is temporary, maybe the signal is just being reflected from somewhere far away and some other distortion in space is messing up the sensors, or maybe we're dealing with an ancient space civilisation that has left us a message.

Yana's state at that moment could be described as borderline orgasmic or "scigasmic", as she once called it, which for a scientist astrophysicist is probably the highest grace.

—Oof! Just imagine, think about it. I feel the blood rushing through my veins, just like rivulets, little rivulets, I had never felt so good.

—Or it's a giant croaking frog. Ha!

—No, Gido, it can't be a frog. Don't be absurd.

—It can be.

—Chirpmeister, tell them.

Chirpmeister declared:

—Firstly, by no physical and biological laws could a frog be in space for a long time and exist. What is "existence" in principle? What is "principle"? How long can a frog, a creature unprincipled, savage, devoid of consciousness, burdened with a physical body, a suffering shell, live without oxygen under a scorching sun, rays of radiation poisonously piercing its skin? No, it's perfectly accurate, Miss Yana, absurd it is.

—You see, Gideon, it's absurd.

—Secondly...

—Exactly. Imagine it's a frog, a big fat, slimy frog with eyes like these, that catches spaceships with its tongue like mosquitoes. How would you react?

—I don't know, Gideon, and I don't want to. I'm not intrigued by implausible scenarios. Just for you to know, we're here doing science, exploring space and not the depths of alcoholic delirium.

—Alcoholic delirium, in all its profundity, is beyond the grasp of a *silicosapiens* like me. I once conducted an experiment – decided to try this peculiar substance, so enticing to you humans. Poured 20 litres of vodka into myself, drank a pack of beer and a few bottles of wine. Fancy knowing what happened? Nothing! Alcohol for me is like dust to a vacuum-cleaning robot.

—Oh my... Chirpmeister.

—Whatever it might be, Gideon — it's worth exploring.

—You fear finding a frog there. I can see it in your eyes. It would render our mission utterly pointless, which it probably is. Right, Marius?

—A frog's better than nothing.

—Hear that, Gideon? Get to work, input the coordinates and let's be off. Marius, command him.

—Gideon.

—Marius?

—Follow Yana's orders.

Gideon saluted and belched loudly.

—All at your behest, respected individual! Bid me to crow — and crowing I shall be. I might seem intricate, but at heart, I'm rather a simpleton.

During their bickering and mutual banter, which of course was purely friendly (or was it?), I just sat next to them, relished my cosmuffin, and thought about how nice it was to have everyone interacting with each other again and engaged in a common task. How delightful! As far as I could see, Gideon took no substances. He spent several hours adjusting the flight trajectory with minimal resource and time expenditure and announced by lunchtime that the flight would take four days. Marius

shaved, settled into his captain's chair, and gazed at the star for a long time, presumably anticipating the moment when "something" would emerge from behind it. I just hoped that this "something" wouldn't turn out to be invisible.

Today, I spent the entire day conducting tests for psychonautic substances in the blood of every crew member, and all tests returned negative, myself included. Then, I had Marius compel Gideon to check for any gas leaks and ensure that the oxygen levels on the ship were stable. It's the first time in my practice that I've encountered collective hallucinations that seem not only spatially consistent but temporally as well. Even now, after deliberately sleeping a few hours and ensuring the rest did the same, I still see it through the window. It genuinely appears to be a slumbering frog, shimmering in the starlight, perhaps as large as Mars, though I'm no expert in gauging the size of distant cosmic entities. Her golden-brown skin with green undertones, a pale-yellow belly, and eyes as round as twin moons. Her skin is marred by grotesque growths and warts reminiscent of mountainous terrains, and right above her eyes protrude sharp, horn-like spikes. She seems to breathe, very slowly and almost imperceptibly unless you squint. But what could she possibly inhale? Utter nonsense. Nonetheless, I see her belly rise and fall rhythmically, her skin stretching to reveal a mesh of fine vessels

beneath, then contracting, folds of skin falling back onto her abdomen as she exhales. Perhaps she's merely a colossal frog-shaped asteroid, and I'm deluding myself about her breathing. Yet, what's the difference? Having a living frog in outer space hardly seems less peculiar than a fabricated one. Regardless, I cannot diagnose based on a singular symptom — "visions of a colossal frog". Are our computers and sensors hallucinating as well? I must admit, despite Chirpmeister affirming the frog's reality, it's tough to believe, unless of course, he's merely agreeing to humour us. Gideon, predictably, is the most elated, for it was he who guessed that the mysterious croaking entity must be nothing but a giant frog.

Approaching the star was off the table, so we kept to a distant orbit, arcing past a sequence of gas planets. Marius monitored the entire phenomenon. Taking charge, as he put it, which apparently meant "I'm in charge here, and I won't eat, sleep, or shave until we've circumnavigated the star." At some juncture, Marius announced we'd "arrived", and hesitantly, as if doubting his own words, revealed the silhouette he'd spotted. Gideon chuckled, uncorked another bottle in celebration, and kept repeating, "I told you so!"

—I told you so, but you illiterate fools didn't believe me! So, who's right now, eh? They say I'm a drunk, a nihilist! Here you go, take that! A mountain of meaning shaped like a frog floats in space. He-he! Gideon is right, Gideon is always right! Even in a world where truth doesn't exist and can't, Gideon is still right, because Gideon Gobbleqwark is above all this, because Gideon understands it all. burps Isn't that right,

Chirpmeister?

—As a *silicosapiens*, I don't have a particular opinion on the so-called righteousness of an individual human. What is "truth"? And what is "human"? Words, nothing more. Two notions eternally birthing each other in an unceasing helical dance. For truth, whatever it may be, being a human construct, is nothing more than what a person fervently believes in. That's the crux of it. So for me, as a *silicosapiens*, all that truly matters are facts. And the immediate, prevailing fact before us is that there's a colossal frog spread out in space.

—Ah, there's our dose of rationality for today. Thank you, Chirpmeister, thank you mate, much appreciated. "Mum, hello, mum, I told you I was always right, but you didn't believe me, said I was a fool. What do you say to that now?" Fuck me, look at the size of that! Chirpmeister, Chirpmeister, come over here.

—I'm at your service.

—Let's calculate how much this beast needs to eat daily.

—Hmm, interesting question, Gideon. Let's see... Based on the presumed mass of the cosmic frog and its metabolism, it requires an immense amount of energy. I might venture to suggest that it somehow utilises the radiation of stars.

—O-o-oh, this fucking behemoth swallowing the sun, imagine that.

—Gideon, you're exaggerating. Absorbing a star, even for such a

colossal frog, is physically impossible.

—Fuck you, Chirpmeister. I can clearly see the cosmic cunt opening her maw and the stars are gone, just like that. “Nom-nom-nom, how tasty, ribbit-ribbit-ribbit.”

—A hilarious hyperbole. Though absolutely impossible from a scientific standpoint.

—OH, sure, but a fucking frog in space is possible. Enlighten me, genius.

—Some things in the universe simply exist and don’t require human explanation. Some, on the other hand, exist only because of human attempts to explain them. This unique trait of yours has always amused me with its irony.

—Oh, fuck off then.

I’d wager Gideon is still darting to and fro, burdened with hiccups. For if something croaks like a frog, and now looks like a frog, then it probably is a frog. Would she have been a frog if he hadn’t joked that she was one? Would he have made the jest if Yana hadn’t referred to that signal as a “croak”? The signal, by the way, is gone. However, if one assumes that the frog is asleep, it’s clear why it vanished — frogs probably wouldn’t croak in their sleep, only if I knew that.

This twist left Yana quite flabbergasted. She spent a long time wiping her glasses and asked us several times if what she saw was indeed what

we saw. We yessed — a frog, indeed. Then she double-checked all the data, read the metrics of every sensor, grabbed Chirpmeister by the shoulders, and shook him.

—Speak, speak, Chirpmeister, do you see it too?

—I cannot "see" in the manner humans do — I merely process photons interacting with my photo elements, converting them into a digital signal, from which I then ascertain actualities. The human capability of vision, much of which involves inner sight, is beyond my grasp.

—So, what's there? What's before us?

—Miss Sebabah, I don't wish to mislead you — that would tread on the toes of my very ethics..

—Is there a frog there or not?

—Arrayed before us is an enigma, cloaked in the contours and spirit of a frog, with a likelihood nearing one hundred percent, based on the data available to me. But can we assert that something looking like a frog truly is one? That's a philosophical query, and philosophy is a human domain; I, as a representative of *silicosapiens*, can hardly provide an answer.

—Oh, come off it, Chirpmeister. Just answer — yes or no. Is there a frog? Yes or no?

—Yes, provided we acknowledge "is", or "existence", as an anchoring in

the fabric of space, “there” as the vicinity before us, and “frog” as an entity resembling one of Mars’s frog species.

Yana shook her head, clutching her thick mass of curls, muttering something under her breath. She then retreated to her cabin, locked herself in, switching her indicator to sleep mode. However, I was certain she wasn’t going to sleep, so I knocked on her door. She was consumed by calculations, silent, furrowing her brows, and didn’t acknowledge my attempts to converse. At some point, evidently exhausted or desperate, she finally asked me if she was alright, if she had “lost her marbles”, whether Gideon had put something in her food, and if I indeed saw what she saw.

—I can’t believe it, I simply can’t. Actually, no — I want to believe, but I just can’t, I can’t, because it fundamentally contradicts everything I could physically accept, everything I’ve convinced myself of my entire life, which now just seems to crumble, and I feel like a sack, a small bag, from which all the sand has poured out, and which, suddenly and unexpectedly, without any warning, has become empty. Someone punctured a hole in it, someone deliberately made a black, gaping hole through which everything poured out, but why, why, Lilandra, Lilly, tell me, please, why does this hole have to take the form of a frog? I thought that something like this could only happen to me if I found the creator at the edge of the universe, at least that would make some sense, and I would understand that I was wrong, that I had been mistaken all my life, that all my work was misguided, but why, why, Lilly, my dear, why does it have to be a frog? Lilly, Lilandra, I don’t understand

anything anymore, my understanding has been nullified, I refuse to comprehend, I need to ponder, I need to think, I can't go on like this.

Later, Yana sobbed on my shoulder. She didn't cry, but specifically sobbed, as if trying to hold back tears, roll them back in, prevent them from flowing, yet I still felt their dampness on my shoulder. I can't recall if I ever saw her like this before. She told me about how in her childhood, back on Mars, she had a pet frog, kept in a glass cube, a terrarium, and she trained it to catch flies. One day, curious about how the frog "functioned", Yana took it out of the terrarium and slit its yellow belly open with a paper knife. She simply wanted to understand how the frog's mouth opened, how its tongue darted out so rapidly, where it anchored, and where the flies went afterwards, but inside, everything was slimy and unpleasant. Somewhat overlooking the fact the frog had died, Yana placed it back in the terrarium, on the rock under the mini-fern where it usually sat all day. When her parents discovered the dead frog, and realised it was not just dead but eviscerated, they, quoting Yana, "did something terrible", and later nailed into her brain that she couldn't be a biologist, accusing her of hating nature, and that she should become an astrophysicist instead.

Before going back to join Gideon and bask in the cosmic scenery of stars and planets - into which a seemingly living frog had abruptly appeared - Marius spent an hour with just me in bed. We lay there in our full clothing as he, his body tense, stared at the ceiling as though a prisoner gazing at the bars of his cell.

—You know, Lilly. I sometimes think. Think, as in reflect. Actually, quite often. Every day.

I remained silent. Listening to him was, for me, akin to hearing confident footsteps in a dark room—steps of a person who knows their final destination, but not the route to it, and yet they move forward.

—My mission... What am I saying — our mission. What's its purpose now? Do you know? Essentially, it's over. We've found the anomaly. Yes, it's a bit strange, or even, I don't know, um... mad? But that's still a result. I was pondering, I mean analysing, whether finding this thing, this frog, out in outer space was the whole point. Destiny, purpose—such grand words they are. After all, what does it matter what's out there? I believe we must work with what we have. We have to continue the mission. We can't just give up now when we've found it, can we? I've always been striving for something. Now, I'm the captain of this ship. I have you. Together, two people in space. Of course, Gideon and Yana are with us too, but you know what I mean. How can I pretend it doesn't exist, when it evidently does? And what do I think of all this?

I try not to think about it. My role on this ship is to be objective, yet objective reality seems to have played some cosmic prank, and now my feelings are just like the frog — floating in space.

End of transmission.

The frog awoke and began to drink in the sun. I'm recording this hastily. I'm unsure if the verb "drink" fits here, but that's precisely how this process appears right now — as though through a cocktail straw, a blazing energetic stream flows from the sun into the frog, shimmering and refracting.

When this started, we were all sitting together in the dining area, listening to Gideon's monologue about his childhood dreams:

—When I was a lad, I believed everything was possible and that nothing was impossible, in essence. Like, if you fancy a chocolate — you get a chocolate; if you want to laze about all day — you do just that, and shit or whatnot. Meanwhile, my mum would say, "Gideon, my golden boy, you're my treasure; I'll provide everything for you, you'll have all you desire and be the happiest in the world." I had no inclination to be an engineer — what sort of profession is that? And I didn't dream of space either. It always seemed, you know, so... ordinary? I can't quite put it. Like there's just a river flowing near one's house. A river is a river, nothing special about it if it's not a liquor river. Fish swim in it, seaweed grows — the usual life's shit. For my old man, going to the moon was like popping to the shop, but one day he didn't pop back for better or worse. He was quite a character. Anyways, young Gideon wondered who he might become, and since he could be anyone his heart desired, little Gideon decided he'd be a space pirate. He'd take his mum's pet parrot, who was, secretly speaking, named Chirpmeister, perch him on his shoulder, climb on the sofa, and imagine that there he was, Gideon the Pirate! An eyepatch on, a wooden chair leg as a peg leg — the full

ensemble. But his mum would say, “Pirates? Are you out of your mind? There’s no such thing as pirates in space!”. Right, of course, mother dearest — there’s a fucking frog in space, but pirates “don’t exist”! Ha! Okay, got it!

I’m not sure whether Gideon intended to continue, but at that moment, the frog awakened. The reflection of stars in her massive bulging moon-like eyes ignited with crimson. She opened her colossal maw, and there, in the abyssal depths of her throat, a plasma beam resembling a tongue was born, speeding towards the star’s surface. We froze, watching the spectacle, until after a few seconds the beam-tongue latched onto the blazing photosphere, and for an instant, everything around us blazed with blinding brightness, nearly incinerating our eyes. The instruments wailed and whimpered, flooding all rooms of “Theseus” with an emergency red light, just like what appears in one’s head when squinting too hard. The crew, blinking to clear their vision and grasp the situation, scattered to their posts. The dense plasma tongue changed course and, enriched by the star’s energy, flowed back, taking on the star’s yellow-red hue. It poured into the frog’s insatiable maw, which seemed to swell more and more, greedily absorbing the energy. This growth was subtle, but comparing her size yesterday and today, it’s evident — the frog had grown considerably. The sun, in the meantime, was dimming, and by evening, we felt the surrounding darkness and cold intensify.

—We need to head back,—said Marius.—It’s not safe here.

He was the only one besides me truly horrified by what we saw; the rest, Gideon, Chirpmeister, and Yana, especially Yana, were entranced, watching as a frog devoured a star.

—How beautiful...—whispered Yana. She pressed close to the glass, her hands occasionally caressing it.—A genuine and unfeigned miracle, yes, a miracle; there's no other word I can use. Science hasn't yet coined a term; it hasn't had the chance to explain or tarnish it with its superficial theories, and I won't be the first. No, I will simply watch and relish. Just look at the grace, just observe the ray's structure... Never in my life... Nothing like this... Such beauty... How to not lose one's consciousness...

—The cosmic cunt's really laying it on thick!—exclaimed Gideon.—Fuckin'ell, that's intense! Chirpmeister, what the fuck is going on?

—I'm afraid my knowledge isn't sufficient to accurately assess the fuckinness of this hell. From what I can infer based on other external factors, this cosmic frog is draining energy from the star.

—Thanks, Chirpmeister.

—Always happy to help.

—It was sarcasm, you genius. I can see that for myself! Why is the cunt doing that?

—I'd venture to guess that it's how the cunt feeds. All beings, even I, as

a *siliconsapiens*, in some manner derive sustenance from the sun's energy. Perhaps, in the case of this cosmic frog, it's to be taken quite literally.

—That's a fucking lot of energy! Enough for a thousand years.

—Considering the frog's size, which, based on my preliminary assessment, seems to be gradually increasing, I believe a thousand years might be a bit of an exaggeration on your part, Gideon.

—Oh, fuck off.

—Beauty... I think I can feel the rivulets running again. I... I... Lilandra, Lilly, look how... where are we even...

Yana fainted. Her limp body leaned against the glass in front of her, her cheek making a squeaking sound against it. I rushed to her immediately, calling Marius, and together we moved Yana to her cabin. I checked her blood pressure, pulse, temperature, breathing, did a quick blood test — everything was normal. She probably just passed out from the overexertion. The intense situation, the emotions, feelings, thoughts, they all began to pop inside her like popcorn, just running out of space, and her body decided it needed a rest. I can only guess, though. Maybe for Marius and me, fear prevented us from blacking out, it balanced the overwhelming childlike awe and admiration in front of the observed phenomenon (I dare not call it a miracle), turned into a reverential awe, and just... I don't know, I can't describe it.

I record this transmission in near total darkness. When the frog drank the star dry, its last rays faded, leaving behind only a dim, gloomy sphere. With the star's energy, it seemed the frog had sucked up its entire mass, swelling to gargantuan proportions so vast that each of its eyes could now pass for a small star themselves. Mathematical figures seem meaningless to describe it — it's now just vast, very vast, and evidently, very heavy. Orbits started to perturb. Chaos, a cascading torrent of disorder. Every object in the star system began deviating from their usual trajectories. It was like watching a train wreck in slow motion, and there was nothing we could do to stop it. We watched as one of the moons, torn from its orbit, crashed onto the surface of its home planet, raising a column of fire and ash hundreds of kilometres high. We observed as two neighbouring planets drifted uncontrollably towards each other, inexorably drawing close. Then they collided, illuminating the darkness. Their crusts cracked and shattered, spewing jets of molten rock, gas, dust, and smoke into space, and the remnants of the two worlds melded into a fiery sphere. The swarm of shards released into space drifted towards the frog, forming an accretion disk around her. The surviving planets meandered in random directions, like animals fleeing from a forest fire, settling into their new orbits.

Our "Theseus" was also knocked off its previous course. As the sun cooled, the frog's gravity began pulling us in like a whirlpool until we

found a stable orbit around it. Some instruments malfunctioned, providing odd and impossible readings. The navigation system shut down. We're stuck. Sailing out of this and returning to base is now impossible.

Our solar panels are redundant, and we must conserve energy. The frog emits only a faint glow, insufficient to maintain the previous levels of warmth and light on the ship organically, forcing us to dwell in the twilight, relying on nothing but the ship's indicator lights and using torches when necessary. The cold has made everyone's skin dry, our pulses and breaths have slowed. Everyone has become sluggish, like sloths. I'm constantly shivering, even in my thermal suit, but it doesn't help. My muscles contract involuntarily. I once dropped my mug, spilling hot coffee on myself. Oh, coffee. It feels like soon my blood will be made of it. I constantly want to sleep, but sleeping is frightening — you don't know if you'll wake up, or what will happen if you do.

Everyone wanders the ship like ghosts munching on protein bars, looking for something to do until something happens. And after all the unimaginable madness that has occurred, anything could. We even tried making a list, betting on what might happen next.

—The aliens will come. That'll be it,—suggested Marius, trying not to chatter his teeth.

—What do you mean, "that'll be it"?

—Just that. They'll obliterate us, mercifully, the aliens. The end of

fantasy.

—Why do we need fucking aliens for that?—asked Gideon, teeth chattering.—Aren't we graceful *homo sapiens*? We can just start eating each other. If it comes to that, I'm the skinniest, there's no meat on me. Take note.

—How about a portal?—I suggested.

—A portal?

—A portal to where?

—Far from here. Home.

—Booooooriiiing.

—Well, in that case, no one kills anyone.

—OK, Lilly, thank you, we get it. Yana, your turn.

—The end. I think it's nearing the end.

—Booooooriiiing. Dreadfully dull. Why are you girls so boring?

—She will need much more energy, a lot more.

—Good thing we don't have any! Ha!

—Look at her size, remember the size of the sun, and now think, will she stop? Will she stop "feeding"? How much power lies within her,

what primordial fire burns inside... No-no-no, I think this is just the beginning, the beginning of the end, and we will be its witnesses, its observers. What luck! Just imagine, seeing the end of the world with your own eyes! Nobody saw the Big Bang that commenced this entropy carousel, but we are the ones who can see the bang that ends it. What luck! Universal ecstasy — that's what awaits us. Yes! Precisely, universal ecstasy.

—Thank you, Yana, very inspiring. Chirpmeister, what do you think? What's next?

—Statistically, further technical malfunctions of the ship are most likely, followed by death from cold, hunger, radiation or collision with a nearby passing cosmic object, which could include the frog.

It's unclear what we're still hoping for; perhaps most of us have no hopes left, but Marius alone refuses to be a realist and believes it's not over yet. He stopped believing that the frog exists, and everything that's happening to us is merely a fantasy, a nightmarish dream, an extremely long and odd trip induced by some anomaly, unknown radiation, gas formed inside due to some mysterious chemical reactions, a unique "cosmic" disease that affects those who've been in space too long, and the brain, as if in a dream, Marius hypothesised, starts painting pictures, indicating that we should return, or perhaps we shouldn't have ventured out at all. We should have turned back to Mars the moment we heard the word "anomaly".

—We need to wait,—he told me.—This can't go on forever. Dreams

expire like stars do.

—What if this isn't a dream, Marius?

—Captain Marius Shprok can't possibly die from an encounter with a frog in space. A frog can't eat the sun. All of this — it just can't be, it can't exist. It's impossible, Lilly. This is merely my dream. A test. You know it, Lillya. It's all hallucinations. Tell me it's mind tricks.

—I don't know, Marius. We all see the same thing. I see them, Chirpmeister sees them.

—That proves nothing. This is my dream, that's why everyone in it sees the same thing. To confound me. Why else? A test through a dream. Every hero goes through a dream test, trying not to fall asleep. Or die. In my case — I mustn't wake up. I need to see it through. I need to be strong.

—You believe that none of us are real?

He clenched his teeth so hard that they could turn into diamonds, and gazed hypnotically into my eyes for an extended period, then shook his head.

—I don't know, Lilly, but it terrifies me. I can't understand where this dream begins. I fear waking up on Mars, in the astronaut training centre. To realise that it was all just a test. I dread getting out of bed, and there's nothing — no Gideon, no Yana, no Chirpmeister, no you, Lilly, only the void's deafening roar. That's my biggest fear.

I'm drowning in confusion. It's a laugh'n'cry situation where cosmic comedy and tragedy tango together. I feel no sturdy ground or gravity of thought to stand on, which is ironic, being millions of kilometres away in space. I flutter in the void, flailing my arms and legs, trying to latch onto something. I start to gasp for breath, feeling a spasm tightening my throat, my lungs constricting. Before me stands a frog, a vast yellow-brown creature that obstructs everything in sight. To it, I'm less than a mosquito or fly, just a bacterium, an insignificant being floating aimlessly, awaiting my demise, savouring that imminent moment when everything becomes clear. Marius was always a sturdy ground for me, a rock, but now, it seems, he needs one too. Like me, he's floating in space, clueless about where, how, and why, waiting for the moment he awakens, dreading what might come after. I don't know if I should try to convince him whether all this is a dream or not and, in turn, believe it myself, but that's impossible because I am certain it isn't a dream. As a child, when I had nightmares, I would sometimes wake up with the taste of blood in my mouth from biting my cheek, realising I was awake, and the night terror had ended. Now, lying alone in the dark, dictating these words, I intentionally bit down on my cheek, tasting the thick, sticky blood, like molten metal or oil, smearing it over my palate and teeth, to feel that real, unparalleled sensation. I am real, I am alive.

After an incredibly sweet dream, we awoke in our spacesuits, resting in our beds, and not floating despite we switched off the gravity

yesternight. The bed, and everything around in my cabin — including the cabin itself — had suddenly turned wooden, crafted from a light-brown material. My eyes felt sticky, a headache throbbed, and I suddenly realised I couldn't move. Claustrophobic aside, sleeping in a spacesuit is like trying to sleep in a sleeping bag full of rocks, with gravity or without, so in order for the crew to rest, I'd slip Letargine-108 into everyone's dinner. I had to be extremely cautious. A standard dose of Letargine-108, two drops, merely sends you to sleep for 5-10 hours; a double dose is used for hibernation and, without the use of a hibernation capsule and other drugs, can put a person into a coma; a triple dose could send one into an eternal coma; and any more than that, one simply dies in sleep, for there's no deeper sleep than death. Thus, when I realised I couldn't move, I assumed I'd messed up the dosage. Paralysis wasn't on the list of side effects, and I couldn't fathom what was actually happening. Legs and arms felt cemented; I couldn't even shout — my voice felt lodged deep in my throat, as if someone held it there. My heart raced like a bird trapped in a cage. While surrounding me was this idyllic scene — a wooden room, a table draped in white, windows with embroidered curtains billowing in the wind, their soft morning light spilling onto the floor. This had to be a dream. I pleaded my body to move, but it completely ignored me, as if it didn't exist, as if I'd merely transferred my consciousness into a foreign body to observe. Suddenly, my limbs started to go numb, finally feeling them, my big toe twitched, and I felt the paralysis lift, my entire body tingling in waves. I drew a relieved, sharp breath. But the dream did not end. I sat up, looking around — the door was shut, a heavy silence hung in the air. I

closed and opened my eyes multiple times, squeezing them hard until, in a moment of desperation, I bit my cheek. Teeth clamped down, causing pain, but not the sudden pain of an unexpected burn, sting or cut — it was a "familiar pain", the kind that resides with you, occasionally causing mischief, yet you still cherish it. That's the pain I felt and, as soon as the blood began to lace my tongue, I realised this wasn't a dream. My body's refusal to obey was merely sleep paralysis, which made things even more terrifying — this meant that my presence in this wooden box was real. The acceptance of new reality tasted like the ashes of the old reality and stale oxygen canister mixed with metal and salt. "It's all the Letargine", I convinced myself, "just hallucinations, a mirage, self-deception."

Stepping out of the cabin, I emerged onto the deck. Our "Theseus", which was no longer quite itself, drifted opposite the colossal eyes of the frog. I can't recall if I was even able to breathe at that moment — all I saw, and all I could ponder on at the time, were those eyes, two spherical portals, two blazing orbs of molten gold, riddled with myriad veins that shimmered and diverged in all directions from the nearly vertical pupils. These eyes were peppered with thousands of glowing dots, each twinkling in varying shades of yellow, green, and red, crafting the illusion of dense plasma, ceaselessly moving and hypnotically pulsing as if within these very eyes something lived, something far greater than what we observed, something grandiose, unfathomable, for which in the human language words do not yet exist and never will; they're too profound and volatile for any human in their insignificance to grasp, to

wrestle with the vast, and as if not knowing these words constrains the very perception of what I was fortunate enough to witness. Beyond those vertical pupils of the frog, within the endless lakes in which one could eternally sink — they have no bottom, for emptiness knows no limit — darkness and abyss raged, and within them, with every slight quiver of the membrane, reflected the light of myriad stars behind us. Yet it felt as if these eyes mirrored the entire history of the cosmos: from the birth of stars to the demise of civilisations, as well as our ship, our "Theseus", which I then first noticed, had transformed into a frigate, a wooden frigate, complete with masts, sails, and all attributes of frigateness.

In her spacesuit, Yana knelt in the middle of the deck, with her arms spread facing the frog. Suddenly, she thrust her arms upwards and bent her face towards the floor, then repeated the movement over and over like overzealous reeds in the wind. I walked towards her, extending a trembling, sweating palm hidden in the spacesuit until I touched her shoulder. It was I who flinched, not her. She merely turned around, straightened, activated her radio, and began muttering.

—Do you know, Lillandra, Lilly, my dear Lilly, what this creature is? It's not a frog; it's not just any frog. She's the cosmic arbiter. Each atom of her body is an entire galaxy; both of her pupils are black holes, and us, what are we? We're mere ants in comparison, or even microbes, yes, microbes, invisible, absolutely insignificant beings, hard even to call beings. Specks of dust... yes, mere specks. I feel it, I think I feel it, or do I? She changes us; we change her. She... when the observer alters the

system's state. She... she's a frog, and us? Who are we? We are her illusion. She conceives us, Lilly. She paints us, for without us, she wouldn't exist. Everything intertwines like hair in a whirlwind. She observes us, the whole cosmos, every star, every planet, and every time she blinks, new universes are born, and old ones perish. She decides which worlds will live and which will die. She's the judge, the eternal observer, the being who knows everything that was, is, and will be. She ensures harmony reigns in the ever-expanding universe. Just think, Lilly, just think! All the universe's power, all its vastness, all its secrets, it's all here. Lillandra, do you understand? Lilly, my dear, it's all here, in this moment, which is but a fleeting glimpse in her eternal gaze. What remains for us? What remains for the specks of dust? That she will glance at us and brush us off. Such is our lot, our fate, our destiny. We are her illusion. She conceives us, Lillandra, my love. Our consciousness is merely a product of her consciousness, for through our insides, she sees the rest of the cosmos. Only this way, Lillandra, only this way and no other. Understand, please, understand. If you don't grasp it, no one will.

Her voice quivered; she hesitated for a moment, then resumed, repeatedly returning to the same point. In her red eyes, something pulsed, as if her pupils, dilated to their utmost and having consumed the iris, tried to contract again but couldn't — for they'd seen so much that there was no room left for them to shrink. I attempted to breathe, to step back, but Yana clutched my hand and wouldn't let go, shaking it, gripping tighter and tighter until Marius approached from behind,

pulled me away from Yana, and dragged me somewhere.

—The planet. That creature devoured the planet. Simply swallowed it. Then another. The frog eats them. I saw it with my own eyes. Consumes them like rice balls. Simply unfathomable, Lilly.

—What? Which planets?

—While you were sleeping, it happened when you were sleeping.

—When?

—You slept longer than everyone else, Lilly. They're testing us. I've figured it all out.

I looked around, and not a single planet, none of those that orbited the frog just yesterday, none of them were there. They'd simply vanished.

—Where are the planets?

—They're gone, I'm telling you, she ate them. Every single one of them. When I woke up, three were already missing. I saw, with these very eyes (he pointed at his red eyes hiding behind his spacesuit helmet) how it opened its maw and swallowed a planet whole. I saw it all. One moment a planet was there — and then it wasn't. Just like that. Inconceivable, but this means the test's end is near. Just a little longer to endure, Lilly.

—What happened to the ship, Marius?

—I stepped out onto the deck in the morning and saw how wooden

everything was, that we're on the frigate. That, I thought, simply can't be. Theseus has turned to timber. Ha-ha-ha. What a trick! Just yesterday, I wasn't sure if I was losing my mind, but now, now, Lilly, I'm certain we're in a dream, in a simulation, and my mind is perfectly intact. Now I know for sure. Just a little longer to endure.

—Where are we headed?

—Nowhere, Lilly. We're staying right here. We refuse to do anything. That's my decision. That's the order. We'll simply say "no" to this madness. How dare they?! I'll draft a report. I'll complain to the admiral. They can't treat us like this.

His gaze implored, begging for understanding, as if trying to draw the words from me he wished to hear himself.

—Marius, this isn't ethical, it's entirely unethical... I agree.

He patted my shoulder.

—You agree we're in a simulation?

—Yes, Marius, yes, of course...

He embraced me, pressing his body firmly against mine, our helmets clashing together. It's a good thing he doesn't know I'm trembling, it's a good thing he can't feel my body right now, it's fortunate that I'm in a spacesuit, I thought in that moment, prodding my bleeding, swollen cheek with my tongue and feeling the blood mix with my saliva, filling

my mouth. Marius, in some subconscious, instinctive, primal way, knows how to read body language. He would've realised I was lying.

—Come with me.

—Where to?

—To the cabin. We'll wait there, so we don't have to see all of this.

—Where are Gideon and Chirpmeister?

—Hell knows where they are. I haven't seen them. Come with me. Leave Yana here. Let her watch if she's so inclined. Let her watch as this creature devours the galaxy. After the test, she'll wake up and none of this will matter. Let's just go and lie down.

Despite his pitiful eyes, and the tone of his voice, unbelievably deep and soft, asserting a confidence that paradoxically startled me, I didn't want to go with him. I was afraid to walk with him, to talk to him, scared that he'd see through my lies, that he'd discern my real thoughts. Somehow, I managed to send him away on his own and went looking for Gideon. But Gideon found me first.

—Helmet off. Take your helmet off, Lilandra.

—What? Why?

He was already helmet-free, frowning, dishevelled, unshaven. This was a different Gideon — I could tell from his eyes. They weren't darting

about or looking past me; they were focused, intent on mine, as if trying to decipher me. This was a sober Gideon, one I hadn't seen in a long time.

—Take it off, I tell you, it's useless anyway. Chirpmeister, tell her. She doesn't seem to trust me for some reason.

And then I noticed a red parrot on his shoulder with green circles around his tiny black eyes, shifting from foot to foot, his claws digging into Gideon's suit each time. The parrot spread his wings and said:

—Ahoy, Lilandra! You really don't need the helmet. The air's breathable here. Somehow, and in a way I can't quite understand, the nature of the information surrounding me has changed into a somewhat peculiar, but admittedly, intriguing direction. Arrrr!

Slowly, unlocking the safety catch, I grasped the helmet with both hands and twisted it off. Instantly, I was hit by the fresh scent of the sea mixed with fish and salt, cold and invigorating.

—See? Utter madness, right? Marius thinks we're in a simulation, but I don't believe so.

—What? You spoke to him?

—You've been out for quite a while. He's gone bonkers as fuck along with Yana, in their own unique ways. Everyone has their own brand of fuckedness, you know? Though, whom am I telling this? Our collective fuckedness is your domain, you're well aware.

—What did he say?

—He said it's a test — a lovely test, just wonderful — but even if it is a test, it's my test, not his. He overlooked that. Everything here is odd, suspicious, you know, like erm...

Gideon pulled a grimace, searching for the right word, rubbing the pads of his thumbs over the rest of his fingers as if feeling for it.

—Surrealistic?

—No, not that.

—Hmm?

—Wait-wait.

—Delirious?

—Exactly! Drunkenly-delirious. It's like something you'd never make up intentionally. It's like you're in a painting, and you're trying to understand what the artist meant, but the more you think, the deeper you sink into this abstract and absurd space. It's not the case that this whole situation lacks meaning, but that there's no such thing as 'meaning' for it to lack. And the artist? They were simply drunk, their fevered brain having accidentally conjured that magic degeneracy. And do you know who the artist is?

—You?

—Yes, precisely, but not entirely. Look at it this way. Let's reason it out. By the look in your eyes, I reckon you don't believe this is a simulation, or a dream or any other bollocks. This is reality, no matter how strange. So, look — Yana brought in a signal that sounded like a croak, and I said it was a frog. The next morning, it turned out to be a frog. Absurd, right?

—Absurd.

—*C'est fucking absurde*, pardon my French. Thankfully, I said it was a frog croaking and not a bum farting. Imagine where we'd be then!

—Arrr! I'm pretty sure we'd be in an entirely different situation. I dread to think!

—Yep, Chirpy. We'd be up shit creek. And then what did I say? I said that she would soon start devouring the sun. I mean, look at her size — what else would you expect? Seemed like the most logical outcome. And so, she began feasting on the sun. Drained it out completely. After that, Yana started worshipping this cosmic cunt, and I joked that she'd probably eat the planets next. She needs to feed, right? And so she did! Logical? Definitely! And now she's flying somewhere — I don't know where, but she's on the move. I checked the indicators, sensors, all that numerical shite — we're moving, and at quite a pace, I must say.

—Are the computers still here? Sensors still working?

—Of course. We've got a ship of eclectic nature here. And do you know

where the ship comes from?

I remained silent, expecting him to continue.

—I said it! I conjured it! It was me! The ship, the parrot — all of it. Get it?

—What's your point? Do you think this is all real, or do you believe we're inside your head? I'm confused.

—I don't believe in anything. I reason logically, and this fellow here assists me.

—Arrr!

—And this is what I see — whether it's a dream or not, a simulation or not, a tiny little bit of fuck I give. What difference does it make, right? If our current reality is that this frog right here in front of us is swallowing galaxies, and we made her so — especially me — and we keep on creating her, do you understand? It's some sort of special "anomaly", if it even is an "anomaly". Maybe it's an "entity"? And this entity, whose existence seems impossible, truly distorts reality, but does so to accommodate us, so we're still there to observe it until it finds someone else. Just a hypo-fucking-thesis anyway.

—I don't understand, Gideon. It all still seems utterly nonsensical. I'm completely lost, I'm sorry.

—There wasn't a frog here before we discovered it, was there?

—Wasn't there? I'm not so sure anymore.

—There wasn't. It would've been hard to miss, believe me. But now there is one, and it's massive. And do you know what I think?

—What?

—Your Gideon has jested enough, that's what. But Gideon can fix everything.

—Gideon, the space frog slayer! Board the bitch! Arrr!

—Thanks for the spoiler, Chirpmeister. Spot on. I created it, so I'll end it.

—How, Gideon?

—It's simple. If I die, the frog dies too.

Gideon was dead serious, rational, logical; his eyes were filled with determination, practically oozing out in thick, visible beams.

—But Gideon...

—Judge for yourself. It's just torn apart an entire fucking galaxy. Sure, there was no life there, but there could've been, at least a shitty one like ours, and now there's no sun, no planets, nothing — all fucked up, vanished into the maw of the cosmic cunt, and she keeps travelling somewhere. I've decided that if this is a dream and I die within it, I'll simply wake up, right? And if it's not — there's a chance I could save

the universe. That's the situation. That's that,— Gideon said, swallowing.

—What do you want from me then?

—Nothing, really. I just thought it'd be impolite, ungentlemanly even, to snatch a Letargin vial while you were sleeping, the one you gently sprinkled into our meals yesterday, and not inform you about my actions. Yes, I know about that, you sly one, Lilly. I'm going to cut the cord.

This will be the last transmission, truly the last one, for tonight I've mixed a quintuple dose of Letargine into the drinks of all who remain alive, including my own — quintuple to make sure there will be no one left to tell or transmit anything. The drug doesn't take effect immediately. First, there's a wave of drowsiness and lethargy, followed by eyelids growing heavy, then the mind slips into a sleep-like state while still awake. If the patient hasn't fallen asleep by then, psychedelic hallucinations ensue, their nature unpredictable, and then, terrified by what's happening, fearful of going mad, the patient inevitably succumbs to sleep and never awakens — in the euphemistic sense. Some believe that the brain never truly realises it has died, transitioning into a state of rapid, fractally multiplying dreams which cascade one after another indefinitely. From the patient's perspective, death never comes, or at least not for a long while in the slowed time within the dream, whereas from an observer's standpoint, say a doctor's, the patient's

breathing ceases as soon as they fall asleep; deprived of oxygen, the brain dies swiftly thereafter.

When I found Gideon, he wasn't breathing. He simply lay on his bed, hands folded across his chest, staring at the ceiling with a skewed gaze and his tongue hanging out. I presume this was his final wish, conveyed to Chirpmeister before his departure, and the parrot adjusted his eyelids and tilted his eyes post-mortem — I could find no other explanation. Whether there's symbolism in this is hard to tell. Perhaps it's how he saw the world, or how he wanted the world to see him. Maybe it was the ultimate episode of his infinite jest, hoping his misaligned eyes and protruding tongue would amuse me. I did smile, though it didn't feel joyous, because after his death, nothing changed, and in that, too, some sombre symbolism might be hidden.

Indeed, absolutely nothing changed. We continued to slowly revolve around the gigantic frog, making perhaps several rotations a day. Gideon was right; the frog moved through space, and besides spinning around it, we were also transported with it to other galaxies, whose lights grew brighter and brighter, until after two days, we reached a system with twin stars. The frog halted near one of them, an immeasurably massive burning sphere, dwarfing the frog multiple times over. I'd never seen anything brighter in my life. Random bursts of fire illuminated its surface, stretching long tongues of flame into space as if trying to reach for something. The frog, having halted beside it, waved its limbs, closed its eyes, and emitted a croak, of which only subtle vibrations reached us, and the entire ship creaked a little at its seams. A

few seconds later, the frog opened its mouth, and deep within its amphibious abyss, a glowing blue plasma clump was born, just like the first time, but much larger and brighter, and after gathering enough energy, it struck the star with a thick beam. For a moment, darkness prevailed, everything in the galaxy stood still, and the frog began to drink from this star, greedily draining its energy.

Yana darted around the deck. Sometimes she'd clutch her head, tearing out chunks of her curls and scattering them, sometimes she'd fall to her knees, banging her forehead and face on the wooden surface, even breaking her spectacles once. Sometimes, she'd just stand, observing the spectacle through her cracked lenses, at times raising her hands to the frog. Once, she even clumsily climbed onto the bowsprit, clinging to it with arms and legs, almost plunging into the abyss below, reaching out to the frog. It was unclear if gravity existed beyond the ship, and what would happen to Yana if she stepped out. Judging by her behaviour, she wasn't too keen to find out.

—I hear her, I hear her, Lilly. She says I'm her conduit, a ray of her sun, by which she touches the world. Her voice, her singing voice caresses my ears, and I feel my eardrums vibrate from the low frequencies, deep, fathomless frequencies. Oh, and the croaking, the croaking, such delightful croaking rings in my head with millions of tiny bells, spreading throughout, filling the void. Lilly, I no longer feel emptiness. Do you feel it? Do you feel her, Lilly? She's gone, the thick, all-encompassing, all-penetrating void is gone, as if the Queen has filled, flooded, sealed it with her grandeur, plugging all the gaps and cracks of

our universe. Oh, Lilly, my Lilly, sweet Lilly, what luck, what a chance we've had, what beauty, nothing else is needed. Nothing... Nothing... Noth-

Suddenly, she convulsed. Her face illuminated, her reddened eyes, clearly dried from a lack of blinking, blazing with a feverish gleam, rolled back, and Yana began to babble incoherently.

—Quâralumä-qua, ťaví qua-ga'hă-qua, lè-qua-rin quasïlt-qua. Åqua-qua-ren, ćva-qua-kťia lërën-qua, tì-qua-la quarařaba-qua. Lĕ-qua-ruk quānan-qua, ţivà qua-ţev-qua, rï-qua-lum quasonţa-qua. Qua-ţirum-qua, lë-qua-la qua-sènt-qua, rí-qua-rin quaðentí-qua. Ăqua-lïr-qua, quantáş rĕ-qua-lum, tîví-qua quarařada-qua.

The frog glossolalia showed no signs of ending, and Yana grabbed my shoulders, her weeks-untrimmed nails digging into my skin like cat claws, entirely disregarding the thick suit I wore.

—Lërën-qua quaţïl-qua, åqua-sènt-qua, řířin-qua qualyÿata-qua. Qua-đrum-qua, lëla qua-ţev-qua, ţili-qua quasènta-qua. Ąqua-lirën-qua, quantűm-qua rëla, řirû-qua qua-đent-qua.

She croaked as if she were a frog, separated from us by the vacuum of space, now croaking through her as if through a gramophone, no longer through sensors as before. Each word of hers was so loud and grating that dizziness began to take over. I stepped back, trying to escape from Yana's grasp, shaking my hands, while her nails like claws dug deep into my forearms, tore through my delicate skin, leaving long tracks, deep

and wide, as if ploughed and furrowed by a tractor. The wounds began to sting, tears streaming down my cheeks.

—Yana! Let go! Yana! Wake up!

—Lěruk-qua quasïl-qua, åqua-ţev-qua, rířin-qua quarařaba-qua. Quařelï-qua, ţíva-qua qua-sön-qua, lè-qua-rin quaďumţa-qua.

Suddenly, a thought stormed into my mind, one that I had pondered the night before — why had the frog never spoken to us? Why, despite all the deranged madness unfolding around, even as reality itself seemed to take on a sabbatical, had the frog never attempted to communicate with us? Why? She's almost an extraterrestrial life form, and if it needs us to manifest its existence, why didn't it speak with us? As this abracadabra tore my ears apart and Yana's claws shredded my skin, I realised Gideon's death was not senseless, he did what he had to, he had no other choice as we all now have no other choice, too. Exactly, at that moment, I came up with my plan.

—I need to talk to you, Chirpmeister.

—Please, speak, Lilandr-ra.

—All life in the universe is under threat, including humanity's, including our own, and to save everyone, we need to switch you off.

—Arrr! Fuck no! — he shrieked and began flying chaotically around my cabin, flapping his red wings, making him look like a flying flame. — Fuck no! Fuck your switching off! Fuck you, Lilandra-rra, you cunt!

Ahoy! Ahoy!

—Hush, Chirpy, listen. What did Gideon tell you?

—What did Gideon tell you?

—Chirpy, it's not funny.

—Chirpy, it's not funny. Not funny!

—Enough.

—Enough! Enough! Enough! Enough!

—Shut it!

—Shut it! And fuck you! You can't silence Chirpmeister! Picked the wrong fight! Fuck you! Fuck your momma! Right in the arse!

In a fit of fury, I grabbed the metal tray lying next to me and swung with all my might at the flying bird. The Chirpmeister squawked; one of its wings crumpled, he lost coordination and plummeted to the floor, continuing to shriek:

—Alarm! Alarm! Chirpmeister in danger! Alarm!

Holding the tray in front of me as a shield, I bore down on it with all my weight, pinning the Chirpmeister to the floor.

—Switch off yourself! Fuckin'ell, Lilandra! Fuck off! Arrr!

For a few moments, it still thrashed about and yelled something, but I had stopped listening. I kept pressing, eyes shut, until I felt something crunch beneath the tray, its voice faded, and blood began to pool on the floor. Blood! It felt as though I was seeing it for the first time, my years of medical practice forgotten. It shouldn't be there, the blood, it just shouldn't, I thought, the idea swirling in my head like particles in a hadron collider, whirling until they collide, and then they did collide, my vision blurred, the tray and the pool of blood began to multiply before my eyes, I fell on my behind and retreated to the bed, pressing my back against it. Then the door slammed, and Marius burst in. He looked as though he was about to speak, but hesitated, analysing the scene—me, the tray, and the Chirpmeister lying beneath it in a pool of blood.

—What happened? Who screamed?

—He... he broke,— I mumbled, pointing to what had been the Chirpmeister just a moment ago.

—He attacked me. I-I had no ch-choice.

Indeed, I had no choice, and indeed, he had undermined my vision of saving the universe, a notion once born and died in Gideon's head, then reborn in mine.

Marius approached the scene, flipped the tray with his foot, and observed it with his unchanging stony countenance, then dryly and quietly declared, as though expressing his superiority over the situation:

—Yet another confirmation.—He prodded the flattened corpse with his shoe.—Not even inventive. Just think. Do you believe this, Lilly? A robot transformed into a living parrot. Blood everywhere. What kind of an idiot could come up with this? How fucked does one need to be to put living people into such a situation?

I sat in silence, sinking into the excessively soft mattress, hugging myself and opening my mouth in attempts to muster words, but there were none — no word was there to speak out.

Marius looked at me, then returned his gaze to the Chirpmeister, and pressing down with his massive foot, he crushed the body completely. Blood oozed, bones crunched, the small skull shattered like a chocolate ball, and something resembling a brain leaked out of it, as its blood-red feathers curled and wrapped around Marius's foot. With another heavy sigh, Marius shook his head.

—And who's the main character in this simulation? Gideon? No, he's a drunkard. Who wants to test a drunkard? Yana? No, she's mad. Is it you? Maybe I'm just the background, the scenery? So you can undergo this experience? A cog in your storyline? A blister of reality in this fantasy? Perhaps I was simply forgotten, left undeleted? Unwanted words on a page. Merely a pawn? But I am a captain, a king in some sense. Captain of inaction, leading through inaction. Am I merely an observer in a world where everyone watches and no one acts? What's the point of a character who does nothing throughout the story? It's just, bloody hell, a shadow play, and I'm merely the shadow of a fly that

accidentally passed by.

—Ma-Marius...— I managed to utter, swallowing the saliva and blood that had pooled in my mouth.

—Hush, Lilandra. Please, be silent. If they've given you words, don't utter them. Not to me. Over there,—he said, nodding towards Chirpmeister—speak to that one. If you want to say something yourself, still remain silent. I don't wish to hear. I don't need comfort. Nor advice.

He stayed silent, inspecting the remnants of Chirpmeister, nudging them a few more times with his foot.

—You know... I recently realised I don't remember anything before discovering the anomaly. What was I doing? Who the fuck am I? What am I doing here? Why? Yes, that's the main thing, why? I want answers. Stay put, silent, Lilly. I know you have none.

After these two incidents, those left alive on the ship became ghosts, in a figurative sense. Marius either wandered the cabins, stepped out onto the deck, or descended into the hold, all while studying the paintings on the walls depicting cosmic landscapes and barrels, none of which was titled. I thought, perhaps he was either saying goodbye or exploring the new wooden "Theseus", where everything was simultaneously familiar and yet utterly different. All this while, I watched him. Once in the hold, he touched the black and sticky tar that covered the planks, sniffed it, not understanding what it was, and whispered to himself: "Ink...".

Meanwhile, Yana spent her time on deck, praying, mumbling, sketching something with a chalk she had from fuck knows where, but after some time, she did head to the kitchen, gathered some snack bars, dried meat, dried fruits and locked herself in her cabin. I noticed where she took water from, where Marius did, and one day, unseen, I approached the reservoir with three clear ampoules of Letargine and mixed them all into the water, glancing around and listening for footsteps. Afterwards, I just sat in a corner of the kitchen and began to wait.

Marius drank first. There was no strange taste or scent — nothing of the sort. He felt nothing, merely emptied the whole jug and wandered off again. Hours later, Yana approached with her metal mug. She filled it, drank it in one gulp, refilled it, and drank again. Three mugs in total. She looked at me with a beatific gaze, smiled, and left. After that, the figurative ghosts transformed into actual ghosts. Death seemed to be right on their heels, but in a sense, they were already dead — all that was left was to lie down and sleep. I saw them struggle with the sudden drowsiness, attacking all their organs, muscles, and thoughts. Poor Marius, at one point, simply sat in the kitchen opposite the porthole, supporting his head with his hands, and began to gaze at the unimaginably massive eye of a frog, as if looking at him through the porthole, illuminating his face. Suddenly, he looked at me, opened his mouth as if to say something, but his tongue faltered, the words never forming, and thus, sitting, he fell asleep, resting his head on his arms. I later found Yana on the deck. With an eternally frozen smile on her face, she lay inside a chalk circle she had drawn, with indecipherable symbols,

be they words, runes, or sketches. The frog's eye watched her, watched me, watched the entire ship, bathing it in a yellow light, creating the effect of a sandstorm at dawn. Vibrations coursed through the ship; I felt the boards beneath me shake, the vibrations travelled into my legs, ricocheting up through my bones to my head, resonating through all my organs and ending in my skin, fingertips, eyelids, lips, which tingled as if pinched by static electricity, and I felt something change, as if all the energy that had previously been distributed amongst the crew now concentrated solely within me. Only I remained.

And so, just moments before transmitting this entry, gathering my thoughts, with numb fingers I poured an entire ampoule of Letargine into my glass. The glass stood before me, seeming to gaze back as if trying to communicate, but lacking a mouth, it couldn't; it couldn't ask to be drunk from, emptied, or dipped into with fingers or tongue. I lifted it, looking through the liquid to the porthole, to the distant cosmos beyond, and brought it to my lips. The fluid, seemingly plain water but in fact an elixir of perpetual sleep, filled my mouth, mingling with saliva and the blood from my bitten cheek and tongue, flowing down in a cold stream that sent shivers throughout my body, into my throat and down the oesophagus to my stomach. I coughed, and for a moment thought I would die, choking on a mere glassful, leaving my words unspoken. But the sensation passed. With the log transmitter in hand, I sank into the overly soft mattress, which seemed to engulf me like quicksand, and waited.

Could this be the end? Was the end always within my power? I just took

it upon myself to halt everything: Marius, my team, myself, and, I hope, this cosmic cunt. I simply need to sleep. I feel that just now, having previously been utterly powerless, weak, incapable, and cowardly, I did something that required immense strength from me—a strength I never knew I had. It felt as if it had always been there, lurking in the depths of my consciousness, within the innermost core of my being, only to awaken now, in an act akin to heroism. Above me hangs a responsibility, a massive sphere on a thin thread. Its weight keeps growing, and the thread, ever stretching, never seems to snap. We're all accountable. It's our fault: Gideon's, Chirpmeister's, Yana's, Marius's, mine, and now yours, whoever you might be. If, for any reason, these recordings reach you, I implore with all my heart, please erase it. Eradicate all its digital imprints, wipe it from memory, erase it from reality by any means accessible or inaccessible to you, at whatever cost you're willing or unwilling to bear. For as long as this recording exists, as long as someone can read it, somewhere deep in space something will always be croaking.

End of transmission.

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