

Password Incorrect

Nick Name

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About Name:

Memory capacity 997.2GB. Still running, despite signs of baldness on the main unit. An internet addict. The addiction is getting worse even after 17 main-frame reset procedures and daily restart exercises according to the B. Gates method. Has been looking for twelve years now for a disc on which he saved (at least he thought he did) his first blankish verse poem "Time to Log Out" about the existential journey through the dark, damp recesses of DOS. A fan of anti-community communities, humanoid frogs, hunting for lost trojans and on-line wine shops with cable delivery. Puts his socks on using two-step technology and in his free time - writes stories.

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Password Incorrect

Because this story will be painfully banal, it will be also painfully short.

Peter Maria Kędzierzyna of the Tschekan coat-of-arms bought himself the newest model of a 25th generation cell phone from Siemens-BenQ-Nokia-LG ABC 123, incorporating all achievements of the human race up to the time when Bill Gates became an honorary president of the United States.

Of Tschekan coat-of-arms, a manager in an important department of an important software company spent two whole weeks inputting all data relevant in his life. And not just phone and address data. He included all codes, PINs, passwords, e-mail addresses and the many ways they could be configured, parents' names, first and last names of distant relatives and degrees of relationship, important dates, blood type, date of birth, social security number, driver license and passport numbers, bank accounts, top ten of his favorite books, films, CDs, gourmet dishes, golf courses, works by modern painters, ancestral silver and European palaces, in rococo style. He also added the top ten of exotic countries and places he wanted to visit.

After two weeks, Peter of Tschekan realized that the cell phone was more valuable to him than a painting by de Bonnet-Majak – the number one artist on his list. He decided to protect the cell phone with an additional password, which was: *****.

Just in case, he set up a second password to secure files containing, what he called, "personally strategic data." He added both passwords into the cell phone, just in case.

One day, during a conversation with a certain lady, he accidentally scratched his beloved cell phone. Even though the scratch was tiny, it broke his heart and haunted him for two weeks. It drove Kędzierzyna of Tschekan to despair and to an after-therapy conclusion that he lived too intensely and needed to calm his frenzied mind. He was playing with the cell phone when by accident the top ten list of exotic places appeared.

"Nepal," of Tschekan read, and two days later was sitting on a plane to Katmandu.

He left the cell phone in a luggage locker at the airport, so the side wouldn't get scratched.

Three months later he was back, picked up the phone and couldn't remember the password, which was: *****.

Soon, people noticed a tourist with a backpack, wandering around the park and repeating over and over an assortment of five-letter words. The man didn't remember his name and wasn't able to explain where he lived.

Wishes Shovel Best

On Christmas Eve S?awek Przeko?niak received an SMS with these wishes: "Wishing yo good ping super new". He didn't know who sent him the surprisingly enigmatic message. And he doesn't know to this day. A pity, because thanks to that person he reached his current status and number 67 on the list of the wealthiest Poles.

Back then, during that beautiful, rusty white Christmas Eve night, Przeko?niak, who was rudely kicked out from a social network for utopian fanatics of extreme phobias (www.ilovefobia.pl) just a few days earlier, got an idea.

It was a quite good idea too, and the next SMS ("All at cart by unintentionally only honest lamb") convinced him it was the best idea of his life.

S?awek Przeko?niak, together with a friend from ilovefobia.pl – Czesiek Ci?g, decided to set up an on-line service, through which one could send SMS greetings to mobile phones. And the most important feature of the service was that texts of the wishes were not going to be predetermined and there would be no set list of pre-selected options. Messages would be created by a special software program from random words provided by a customer. Such a system would allow for truly unique greetings, and after all, nobody said they had to be comprehensible.

Czesiek took care of the development of the software, which for now they named "John of the Disc". Czesiek had suitable experience in the matter. While on the forum for (select as appropriate) phobics he designed an application, which created slogans for street protests. The application, even though it produced phrases completely illogical and nonsensical, became quite popular, and some of its most unique catchphrases you could have seen on TV – "Out With There Harm Out!" or "To Them Bag Away Now Now!"

Two future men of success got to work and the SMS greeting portal www.bestbestbest.pl went live just before Easter.

One of the site's first users and enthusiasts was Ramona K?stowicz from the popular girl band Fluffysteron. She didn't feel like writing her own greetings, so she logged in to bestbestbest.pl and filled out a short form. In the field "Words You Want To Use" she put "egg" and "merry", and in "Number of Additional Words" she wrote "3". Two days later she began to receive phone calls from friends and acquaintances with praise for her incredibly creative wishes. And there was plenty to praise:

"Merry goat's egg skull stink"

"Egg cattle merry wedged marvelous"

"Ammeter splashing merry Oligocene eggs"

"Incontinence merry before egg postmodernism"

Soon the service was hailed as "the most innovative internet achievement of the year" by the "Internet Sites Beginning With N" magazine. The exclusive triple click rate adjusted for median parallel traffic soon reached 34.98 and grew at an impressive pace. Czesiek created a special mode for Mother's Day, which turned out to be a mega-hit – the weekly magazine "Let Pass" included the "Mother's left sickly bingo" wishes in its "Quote of the Week" column. And that's how the uncontrollable popularity of the service began. Mobile phone operators noticed a significant fall in earnings due to a drop in profits from SMS fees. However, the always far-sighted S?awek offered them a revenue sharing option in return for partial investment and access to new technologies.

Czesiek designed two additional modes: Name Day and Birthday, and then after a job well done, concentrated his time and effort on viewing sites specializing in kinky naked everything. The end result of which was – S?awek got merely to number 67 on the list of the richest Poles. And only the fact that he fired Czesiek shortly after, in a rather machiavellian manner at that – by sending an SMS "You work here not easy kaput finito", allowed him to reach that 67th position at all. But this was thanks to only his and solely his sole and only hard work and merit. He wouldn't even publicly thank his wife if he got the "Inzabiz" Award for the Internet Site of the Year, an award on which he was still counting on and lobbied for.

To give luck a chance and to gain an even greater fame, Przeko?niak sent, posing as "Admirer", SMSs to editors of major, highly influential papers, known politicians, people in culture, show-business, science, healthy living gurus, authorities on potted plants, teachers of the self-defense dance qualadora, as well as semi-virtual tango, an acquaintance who was also a philosopher, and a lady from a shop selling imported cheese sticks.

Just as he expected, the reaction was spontaneous, euphoric and unequivocally positive. With just one exception. A politician connected with the home service of his parliamentary section's boss, with the mobile phone number 0-609-3459812, and known for his lack of sense of humor, did not take too well to a message from "Admirer" – "Wishes shovel best". The inquiry was turned over to the Inquiry Board and the Board of Inquiries.

Ten months went by. In his new pad, upstairs (here it meant the 9th floor), Przeko?niak was trying on a new, titanium-kevlar threaded, quasi-black, self-adjusting suit. That night he was scheduled to accept the Award for the Site of the Year in a competition sponsored by "Przekobiz" (he didn't have the patience to wait for "Inzabiz").

Number 67 on the list of the wealthiest Poles liked what he saw in the mirror. He practiced his smile and stride, checked if the paper with his acceptance speech was in his pocket, and smoothed down the mysterious tissue bulge on his belly. Thus pleased, he refilled his glass with the rest of the two-week ago opened Suwa?ki wine and glancing with admiration at his own imposing image, said:

"Cheers from afar throat through a bell".

Exactly at the same time, black limousines from the Special Security Agency arrived in front of his house.

A Man Called Desk

Christopher Warm had a sedentary job. On his keyboard he typed various letters and numbers, which would become computer programs. In his company he was known as Office Desk, because when he was working he always sat behind his well-used piece of conference table standing in a hard to notice corner in the software specialists' room. Christopher wasn't a wide person, and so his piece of conference table didn't have to be too big either, which also practically solved office space problems in the 0-1 Computer firm.

It was Warm's secret that the majority of his time outside of the company, he also spent behind a desk. On his keyboard he typed various letters and numbers, which would become computer programs for the 0-1 Computer Associates company.

While the Man Called Office Desk (MCOD, or simply Cod in an alternative version) was writing an intuitive program for the management of empty office desk space in software companies, a thing that nobody had ever expected to happen happened.

Warm became fused with the chair.

The staff at 0-1 Computer were disappointed, they had expected Cod to fuse with a desk. It would have been much more entertaining to watch, you could have laughed at him a little, and the nickname, given to him by the programmers' boss would have gotten a whole new meaning. And right now, there wasn't even much to talk about during cigarette breaks.

Warm did not hide the fact he would have preferred to fuse with a mouse, or a mouse pad. Right now, all he could do was to pretend he totally ignored the fact he was physically stuck to a chair. And he was doing just fine until it was time to go to his second shift at 1-0 Computer Associates, where he had been working on a program for the management of empty space in staff lockers in telecommunications companies.

What Christopher felt first was a major stress on his spine. A stress much greater than a weak body of a prime programmer (pri-pro in short) could withstand. When he stood up, it caused nasty comments from his next-desk neighbor, who called the whole company, or rather, whoever was still left there in the evening, into the room to watch Cod's exit.

Warm was completely used to such behavior and with his head raised high, as well as with certain effort, he left the office sideways, followed by his colleagues' jokes.

"'A Man called Chair'. Sounds much worse and I don't think it'll stick," Warm thought with certain satisfaction as he approached his car.

Only then did he realize how one chair could complicate his life. On one hand, he wouldn't have to ask for a place to sit anywhere anymore, because he always carried his own. That was particularly important at 0-1, where you always had to fight for a desk and a chair. But there was one small problem with 0-1, as well – how could you get there by car, especially when you're already late? This was just too much for Warm to grasp all at once, and he eventually resorted to hiring a moving van.

He quickly got used to other people looking at him with suspicion, or simply making fun of him. It wasn't that much different, or worse, from the experiences in his youth when his face was covered with acne. Slowly he learned to manage his mobility problem – he worked out a monthly rate with the moving company. The situation was much worse when it came to his love life. Julia, his girlfriend, was already unhappy that his computer programs were more important to him than a woman, and now she couldn't stand how the chair's presence in bed made them a threesome.

The third took too much space, was pressing into the mattress and creaked with every turn. She couldn't imagine making love to a guy stuck to a chair, and especially making love that would result in making a baby.

Evenings with the three of them became more and more annoying, for her, for him and for the chair, which manifested its displeasure by loosening the telescopic lever for height adjustment. It reminded Julie of unpleasantly kinky bestiality, and after a few days and a few arguments, one evening after an exchange of angry looks, she left.

"Don't worry. I'm sure I won't get stuck to it," Julia remarked about the suitcase she was carrying.

Warm decided to do something about it, to solve this issue just like he always had solved problems of the inorganic computer matter. He got one idea and immediately started to work on it. Since it had started so promising, he finished a six-pack of beer and threw himself onto the bed to calmly think up new ideas. However, he forgot about the backrest and while he was making close contact with the blanket something popped in his spine.

He lay down for two days but didn't improve.

"I can recommend physical therapy for your spine, but in your case, I don't specialize in it, maybe you should ask at the hospital in Shpoolki," an orthopedic specialist from the local health clinic said.

In Shpoolki, he talked with an orthopedic surgeon, a professor, supposedly the best in the country.

"Oh dear, of course something could be done, but I don't have the time right now. And besides, it sure looks comfortable, you must admit, right? I wouldn't do anything with it. Until it sticks, go out and enjoy life!" The professor said without even looking at the patient.

Eventually, Cod ended up with a private specialist of neutral medicine, who suggested him buttock tissue massage and antimaterialistic therapy, all preformed in his clinic, of course.

Warm rehabilitated himself for four months until one day, when he got up, he realized that his nemesis, like a scorn lover stayed in bed and even rolled over to the other side (or so it looked under the blankets).

He felt a pang of pity, and when he forgot he didn't have anything to sit on, he felt down and broke his arm.

He continued to recuperate for another month.

During his chair recovery period, his duties were transferred to the programmers' chief, the one who used to like to laugh at Cod. The chief had to work nights, because he wasn't as skilled as his slight colleague from the far corner of the programmers' room.

When Warm returned to work, everybody looked at him mysteriously. He went to his desk and saw his boss working on the computer. The boss

didn't even say hello. He didn't look well either, as if he hadn't left the place for quite a long time.

"What's up with him?" Warm asked in the coffee room.

"Ah, nothing. Got stuck to the desk," a receptionist quietly answered.

"It's gonna happen to all of us, Chris," his colleague from the programmers' room added, a computer mouse stuck to his hand.

Mini-Anti-Aggressor

Like many other inventors before him, professor Sławomir Suwak designed only the things he needed himself. He had several patents on his conscience already: an automatic cork opener for wine in the indicative state, a portable set of board games for solving personality problems, a wallet with a mini-device for the duplications of 100 złoty bills, and a piece of equipment “the day after” used to irretrievably eliminate from the time-space continuum days burdened with a hangover.

Now came the time for a mini-device preventing the development of symptoms of psycho-motor aggression.

The device was really simple. It weighed about a kilo and was the size of a bag of flour. It was to be worn on the right wrist. The fact it had to be the right wrist was very important. Otherwise, the invention didn't work properly, or even worse, it produced results opposite to its intended effect. Each day, its mini-containers had to be re-filled with substances promoting positive processes in the body leading to the return of good mood. There were three containers to re-fill, and the substances were not available on the local market and had to be imported using diplomatic channels from the USA. To operate the device, turning it on stand-by was enough. In that mode, it could be used continuously for one and a half hours. To recharge the batteries, you needed a charger, which was stored in a small suitcase. The device, when it was turned on, made a low murmur (or according to some - a loud growl) designed to keep the owner in a good mood.

Professor Suwak called his new baby “mini-anti-aggressor.”

The McPhilips corporation expressed its interest in the product early on, even when it was still at the drawing-board stage. The company partially financed the purchase of sub-assembly elements from its subsidiary specializing in the productions of components for technologically advanced products.

McPhilips also ordered the prototype of the device, which was to be formally presented for approval to the chief of its Europe, Africa and Israel division, who was known for being aggressive.

This was going to be a big day for Suwak. A Wednesday. The third Wednesday of the month. On days like that, at the end of the bio-weather cycle phi-alpha, the greatest number of people committed suicides and accidents of all kinds were at an all-time high. And it was exactly on such a day, as this carefully selected Wednesday (which blushed from this distinction), that the mini-anti-aggressor was going to make the biggest of impressions. Suwak was supposed to attend a press conference introducing this revolutionary invention and then meet with the McPhilips people to initial an agreement for the launch of the mini-anti-aggressor on the consumer market.

The press conference went just as the professor had dreamed it. At first, the journalists were somewhat irritated, but later, upon seeing Suwak's phenomenally good mood, started to change their minds. During cocktails, several journalists tested the device and showed sincere, unadulterated enthusiasm. One decided to write three different articles (four columns each) for a modest contribution to cover the costs of a cousin's son's trip abroad.

The meeting at McPhilips went much worse. The businessmen were irritated and annoyed, and nothing could be done to improve their mood.

“Why is it so big?” One very important man asked.

“Yes, why exactly is it so big? And besides, the boss of the region died of a heart attack, and his replacement is a quiet, phlegmatic introvert. He won't appreciate this,” another very important man added.

“Yes, the new one won't need it. And if you bring us a device the size of a SIM card, then we can seriously talk about it.”

“Yes, then we can talk seriously. Good luck.”

“Yes, good luck and good bye.”

The professor did not explode with fury, because a large amount of substances imported through diplomatic channels from the USA entered his blood stream from three mini-containers located on his right wrist.

Before going into his apartment, Suwak turned the device off, even though the battery still had enough power for seven minutes of continuous use. His wife greeted him cheerfully, but noticed that something was amiss. Suwak ate his dinner: the steak was too tough, and the pudding too runny. A new towel was hanging in the bathroom and a new bar of soap was sitting in the soap dish. On the newspaper rack, all the magazines were arranged chronologically with the most recent placed on top.

The professor was getting more and more angry. He ran to the closet.

“I got you now, you dumb shit,” he shouted infuriated pulling out a bundled pair of mismatched socks.

An argument of massive proportions, and not seen in the Suwaks home since the professor came back from the presentation of a portable set of board games for solving personality problems, took place.

In the morning, when his tired and still crying wife fell asleep in the locked bathroom, the exhausted professor sat down on the sofa, and said to himself:

“Now, that's better.”

Part-Time Evening Elementary School

In September, a new and widely advertised school opened its doors in the capital city – the Part-time Evening Elementary School. You could read in its beautifully printed brochure that the school was designed to help all those “children of wealthy parents, who are too busy to learn during the day due to the time spent on the difficult task of maintaining our country’s high ranking in the very competitive field of computer games.”

In other words: when a parent wanted to have some peace and quiet, he or she would leave the kid at home in front of the computer with a bag of chips. When the kid had enough, which normally happened in the evening, he would go to school for about two hours.

The creator of PEES and its first principal was Krzycho Jedynak, a former junior high PE teacher in Potylica, a computer games fan and the winner of, as we could read in the beautifully printed brochure, “a local Amiga gaming championship”. Understanding exactly the needs of his future students, he planned to open classes of the following profiles: platform PSP (one group), platform PC (three groups), platform GB (one) and platform Mac (cancelled due to a lack of interest).

The school received an astonishing number of applications (four for each spot), which meant that many kids spent their days playing computer games and that many parents wanted time for themselves. To be accepted, young candidates had to demonstrate their social and psychological maturity and computer instincts, evaluated according to a patented method developed by Mr. Jedynak. The parents, on the other hand, had to pass an exam in using a joystick and provide a proof of income of at least 7000 z?oty per month for a young family member.

During the registration process was so competitive, it ended in violence. A disappointed father of a child who didn’t get in, shouted that only VIP brats had been accepted, for which he got hit in the face by editor Furtok, in private – a father of a kid who got in to group B2/platform PC.

The school was fully prepared to cater to its very discriminating students. Each room was outfitted with a leather sofa and three fold-out beds for students exhausted after a full day of hard work. The rooms were also equipped with the newest four-processor multi-media computers – two per student, to teach him divided attention in a modern battle field simulation. The lessons were 25 minutes long, any longer and the kids wouldn’t be able to withstand the constant stress. During PE, the exercises were designed to practice joystick skills and stretch the spine. English lessons were considered to be the most important and were held every day to allow for quick mastery of games not yet translated into Polish.

In the group A1/PSP, together with the home-room teacher it was decided that each lesson will begin with a humming of the soundtrack theme from the newest version of the “Soldiers of Call of Duty in the Blitzkrieg Return to Castle Wolfenstein” game.

Because the students were increasingly exhibiting symptoms of exhaustion and ADHD, Mr. Jedynak decided to open, sponsored by the companies where the kid’s parents worked, a fully equipped medical facility, along with a resuscitation unit, a repeated psychiatric intervention unit, and a unit for the prevention of premature sexual development.

The principal, during the meeting with the parents, had painted grand visions for the future – in two years he planned to open four more schools in the city (one fully configured for gaming exclusively on Korean servers) and a school in every town where the computer user saturation level was above 23%.

In front of the entrance to the school, he planned a gigantic reconstruction of a battle field from level 3c of the cult game “Warriors of Battlefield 17” (map 4azurroknights.pk3). And instead of a football field, which wasn’t necessary for spine stretching exercises anyway, there was going to be a replica of Omaha Beach for fans of the paintball version of “Closer Combat 4 – Ultimate Expulsion”.

Unfortunately, after three years the school was closed due to a lack of interest. The principal didn’t consider the rapid development of multi-player type games, where the users play with each other on the internet, mostly in the evening.

And some insiders even claimed that kids at PEES had surfed adult websites during classes.

Happiness in a Four-pack

A leading world corporation in the field of extremely rapidly degradable products, Hipsi Co. decided to introduce onto the Polish market a new, revolutionary product – ingestible energizing happiness, under the brand name Happi. Expecting a huge marketing success, the company also made a decision to simultaneously release it in all possible variations: as an energy bar, diet chips, effervescent tablets and a carbonated beverage. This last variant, as the main representative product, was to be sold in a four-pack.

Happiness Happi appeared on store shelves accompanied by the largest in history advertising campaign starring numerous Polish and foreign celebrities. For the first time, the TV stations reached the state when commercials were shown 24 hours a day. When changing channels, it was impossible not to stumble upon, for example, a two-minute ad starring the actress Gabriela Staszewska, who was convincing the viewers that it wasn't nude film roles, but Happi beverages, that brought her real happiness.

It was a marketing hit. The Hipsi company riding on the wave of success decided to promote a couple of new versions: a magic tongue-coating powder and multi-flavor bullion cube. The general manager of Hipsi was immediately promoted to the position of the CEO for the regions of Central Europe and Afroasia.

After three months the sales fell rapidly – almost reaching zero in the month of M4+.

A series of consumer market studies was conducted. The main conclusion was: customers don't want to be happy. They are much more effectively motivated by misfortune.

The Hipsi company decided to develop a new product, with a working name O'Sorry'Mio.

At the same time, a small firm from Ko?atkowo began selling regionally boxes of chocolates called "That's Sad" in dark unsweetened chocolate, and "That's Sad" – economy pack. This was nothing else than unhappiness packaged as multi-flavor chocolates produced locally from natural domestic ingredients.

After two months, the unhappiness from Ko?atkowo caught interest of several major hypermarket chains and the chocolates began to be produced under license. Their popularity surpassed the wildest expectations of the company's owner from Ko?atkowo, who in a fit of happiness, threw himself off a bridge.

The sales grew even without any advertising.

Soon the "That's Sad" chocolates became the most popular birthday, name day and holiday gift in Poland.

Childult

Benedykt Ossolinsky, age 39, began to grow childish.

On the first day of his midlife crisis, he stood in front of the mirror examining his receding hairline and wrinkles on his face. In that very moment, while staring at his reflection he found in his eyes that mad look he had last seen thirty years ago in a photograph taken at a tethered flying model competition. The photo was taken by Henryk the servant, when his little charge decided he wanted a red biplane model Curtiss Consolidated Skyhawk Crusader 3A "Bingo Star".

This new look was also noticed by his co-workers, who for the most part, considered him to be an infantile spoiled brat. It fit with their idea of a boss.

And Benedykt was indeed the boss, even though he himself couldn't quite believe it. He was the head of a foundation for the self-promotion of the Ossolinsky family, well-known descendants of Polish-American aristocrats, engaged in business ventures there, and charity work here. The position was highly honorable and very prestigious.

Just as the employees didn't like Benedykt, in equal measure Benedykt didn't like his job. He considered it extremely stressful and felt it forced him to super-human sacrifices. Everything was arranged by the family as a penance for avoiding work. He had to go to the office at least three times a week for two full hours and entertain various smiling journalists, drink coffee with them and listen. He had to sign letters and open gifts from various companies hoping to win favors. And he had to play golf and attend social functions, movie premiers, shows and art exhibits. The family had only planned for three months of vacation time a year. Scandal! As a sign of protest he took to coming to the office wearing a t-shirt with the slogan "Attention, Baby!" on it.

All of these unfortunate circumstances resulted in Benedykt's addiction to drugs, alcohol and sex.

"Luckily, one can be an addict in style," he liked to repeat to himself as he inhaled another dose of funfetamine and washed it down with a Hot Benedictus cocktail.

To repeat after his father – Benedykt had everything and couldn't appreciate it. And truly, the father was right, his son had already experienced everything, tried everything, and was interested in less and less. Not like when he was a child, when he was just discovering the world, and the parents let him do and have whatever he wanted. Including the red Curtiss biplane.

And that was exactly what Benedykt realized when he saw that wild look from thirty years ago.

The next day he noticed his skin was smoother, even though he didn't apply his usual moisturizing cream the night before, because he was too preoccupied with getting addicted in a truly grand style.

"Listen, what happened to your wrinkle? You know, the one that kept me awake all night before the Charity Ball," Ewelina asked, she was Benedykt's new, eighteenth to date, fiancée and was crazy about looking good.

She was afraid that particular wrinkle on the face of her future husband will destroy the photo in the wedding announcement section of the newspaper, but fortunately, her parents arranged for photo-shopping at the editorial offices, so everything would turn out just fine.

"Not here and not coming back," Benedykt answered mischievously realizing that he was absolutely convinced it was true.

"Ah, my Benedictino," Ewelina the 18th fiancée said sweetly and looked at her man as if she fell in love with him all over again.

During the following days and weeks, Benedictino analyzed his look in the mirror and noticed more and more significant changes for the better. His hair returned to its college heyday, when he could use sugar paste to style himself a Mohawk, just like a certain punk band member, who always stood on the left and played on a brown guitar, which these days could be found in the basement of the Ossolinskys' residence.

Thanks to the glorious return of the college hair, Ewelina was replaced by Marzena, the 19th Fiancée, who was only 20 years old, but the age difference was hardly visible and was still getting smaller. The only problem with Marzena was that she was tall and Benedictino was becoming shorter, thinner and his body proportions continued to change. He began to look like a teenager, and the family forbade him to go to work.

After a while Marzena left him, because next to him she felt old and fat. Which was OK with him really, as the majority of his time now was spent on playing computer games suitable for children aged 12 and up. In addition, his parents had to purchase the entire stock of a model plane shop for him, so Benedictino bambino could spend hours gluing models together with the help of old Henryk, who wasn't really good at it at all – his hands were shaking too much. This became the subject of many pranks on the part of little Benny. Pranks, which drove the old servant to a nervous breakdown until the man decided to quit working for the Ossolinskys.

And little Benny went from model ships to model planes (but he didn't want a red Curtiss this time), and finally to Blaster Blocks and Galactic Wars. He also began to display interest in little girls. His parents, to avoid a scandal, locked baby Benny at the Noble Kozierobki estate, where he got to peep at his new nanny, Justyna, when she was in the shower.

His parents kept buying him smaller and smaller clothes and were happy – their own son fulfilled their great need for a grandson.

And Benny-bo at the age of 41 became the lovely adult baby just like in the photo taken at the flying model competition, and under the watchful eye of his parents, he was developing beautifully. He stopped riding his bike, stopped walking, stopped talking, and during auntie Helena's name day party, he said for the last time: "Mama."

After a while, he stopped crawling and sitting up. He became tiny, and his lovely skin was the envy of all ladies of documented aristocratic pedigree. Unfortunately, he also began to spit out his cream of wheat and throwing the spoon while being fed mashed celery, which should not happen to an adult man from a good family. This, as well as the fact that he peed during the night and had to wear disposable nappies, was a source of profound grief for his family.

"Ah, it's not so bad. Grandpa Thaddeus had the same condition, and that was back in the days of cloth diapers," Bennicito's father tried to cheer himself up.

After a while, during an event for the Polish diaspora in America, little Benidicticino-baby-boo began to latch onto his mother's breast, and that was simply appalling.

Maybe out of shame the infant began to curl up with his legs touching his chin. After a few weeks he fell out of even the smallest disposable diaper for newborns. A day after that, he disappeared, or rather ceased to be visible. He became an embryo. A little embryo of a grown man in the midst of his midlife crisis.

Micro-hockey

Out of boredom, two scientists from the New Contagious Diseases Research Centre devised themselves a new game. One day, as a result of the suspension of a research project dealing with a dynamically mutating vaccine following the pattern of the eyesocket flu bacillus, they had absolutely nothing to do until the end of the day, because the boss didn't order them to wash test-tubes.

They decided to play a game of hockey under the microscope. For a puck they used one of the millions of experimental bacillus, and one-arm pincettes, which as it happened also resembled hockey sticks, served as sticks.

The bacillus was not happy with it at all. It wanted to rest after an exhausting task involving vaccine discouragement, and these whitecoats here planned to put it to work yet again. And this time the work was much more labor-intensive and even more exhausting than before, but the condition and health of the tired bacillus not as good as in the times of youth, about two hours ago.

The scientists got excited. On a microscope slide they etched a hockey rink with laser, agreed on the rules, connected the microscope's camera to the big screen display and played until the morning. They had to change pucks several times, but that was fine, they had millions of them in stock.

The next day they didn't have anything to do either and they continued to play. They even invited other colleagues and the popularity of the game was so huge they could afford to play it in a championship system. Soon, the games were joined by the guys from the car-repair garage next door. They were tough opponents and even tougher fans – they took from the lab and carried away with them several flasks and some equipment, as it turned out - to set up their own game station in pit number 5.

That was when Player Number One and Player Number Two saw in the game an additional source of modest income. They began to sell microscopes, and secretly, as a freebie, were including with each purchase a set of several million pucks.

Thanks to the internet, where you could watch the footage of the first qualifying matches of the World Microhockey Federation, the game was gaining enormous following in an impressively short time. The Federation authorities decided on several, crucial for the game's rapid increase in popularity, decisions. The most important of which was the change in the shape of the puck from elongated to spherical, which allowed for a greater degree of control. After a long search, a new puck was proposed by the researchers from the university in Ghab-Akbad. It was an ideally spherical and unusually bouncy virus H4S19. Because this deadly virus dispersed through the easy-droplet-airborne method, special safety measures to prevent a massive epidemic had to be instituted, as well. The players, main and line referees, and the audience members in the first five rows had to wear surgical masks during the game, and each unsuitable or already used puck would be disposed in special bio-hazard waste containers commissioned by the Federation for specifically this purpose, and designed and produced by the Beoning company.

The choice of a new puck lead to an uncontrolled development of a "black league" – illegal games, where neither the players, nor the referees or the audience wore protective masks, and where the probability of infection in poorly-ventilated rooms varied between 0.75 and 0.79 to one.

On the internet, this "black hockey" was quickly named as the most extreme sport in history, and its popularity began to exceed that of standard "white hockey".

The Federation reacted fast. For the upcoming world championships in microhockey, a super-vaccine was to be developed, which would be administered to all participants and audience members. Twenty three leading institutes all over the world, including the New Contagious Diseases Research Centre were busy working on the vaccine's development. But FYI, the two famous scientists - creators of microhockey were not longer engaged in scientific research – they were simply too wealthy for that.

Voices of discontent were heard that the vaccine would lead to a dramatic fall in the popularity of the game. Hence the Federation members decided that the decision about the inoculation would belong to each participant individually, and each participant individually would be responsible for all resulting complications.

A great majority of people did take the shots, and the championships began in a truly great style – Jose Pelles from Brazil triumphed over Canadian Don Bronx. The games were held in massive hockey arenas, and fans sitting in the audience watched them on huge megatron screens, which single parts measuring 20 by 12 meters, made by the Beoning-Bell company were transported to the locations using stratospheric technology.

Until the second half, everything was going according to plan. During the game between Jose Pelles and Leonard Muktunowski a little incident took place involving Larry Dembovsky, a bio-hazard waste technician. Larry, while tossing a used puck into the container, yelled "Oh shit!" and fell down, lymphatic fluid began to flow out of his mouth, decationized blood gushed out of his ears, his eyeballs underwent rapid defragmentation, and thigh muscles began to reduce their volume at a visible to the naked eye speed.

"He wasn't vaccinated," an ER medic summed up, sneezed forcefully, and went back under the megatron to watch the second period, where in the midst of an excited crowd, he sneezed yet again and realized that something dripped accidentally from his mouth, not in the least his saliva.

An ethereal crowd of beautifully slight and delicate, measuring in nanometers, droplets was floating in the air. The droplets diffracted through them all twenty-seven hues of the rainbow, and this gorgeous spectacle would have inspired many a painter or a photoshop editor.

One of the more energetic droplets jumped through the right side of the nasal cavity and let the wind carry it all the way until the first row of the audience. At the very moment when Ms. Halinne Swider yelled out "yyyyyyyyeeeee!" the droplet lost its twentyseven hued tint and dived into the dark organic abyss of her mouth.

After nine minutes a voice was heard inside a capillary vessel:

"Excuse me, do we know each other?" The voice belonged to a red blood cell rather too busy with the taxes it owed the connective tissue.

"My predecessors were here. About seven months ago," the microbe said timidly, and began, this time boldly to hug the blood cell and pound on it, with what must have been its head.

"Ah yes, I remember. But nothing had happened. Hahaha! Oh, wait, what are you doing? What the hell are you doing here? Let me go!"

"You know, a lot had changed since then. We were playing all sorts of sports, and you were not, so shut up and stop twitching," the microbe's tone of voice changed, it was lower and more resounding.

And no surprise, the bugger was already inside.

Fetus Replacement IQ Booster

At the Institute for the Development of Organic Motherhood, a new method of an IQ “intervention boost” was discovered, which could be used already during the gestation period. IQ boosting was achieved through a fetal replacement process where the embryos from two carefully selected mothers were to be switched from one to another. Such a drastic change in the external conditions, (especially in different habits of substance use and abuse by the carriers) was expected to have a very stimulating effect on young organisms and lead to the development in the moment of their birth of a prime basis for an IQ level higher by 50%.

Despite strong opposition from organizations dedicated to the protection of developmental sanctity of unborn children, from groups devoted to the protection of family traditions, and from task forces committed to the preservation of racial purity, the new method (license purchased by the pharmaceutical giant Robots Healthcare) began to gain tremendous popularity, especially since it was introduced onto the market in conjunction with an attractive credit plan, offered by HSBBC. For the treatment and all follow up care, one could pay in easy month-and-half installments spread over 25 to 45 years.

The number of performed procedures grew at a never-before seen pace, and a trend for an IQ higher than 180 lasted several years.

Children of the “fetus replacement” generation were popping out like bunnies in the spring.

They obtained skills, knowledge, awards, academic titles and scientific degrees. With honor and distinction they represented our country in the international arena (especially in the field of fractal genetic engineering) and were the pride and joy of the whole society. Then the demand suddenly decreased, and it wasn't because of the actions of anti-fetus replacement organizations.

Parents realized there was no one left to take out the trash.

Kefir on a Very Bad Day

Waldemar Szary, a food technician at the OSM “Paziocha”, was having a very bad day – the kind of a very bad day, which normally comes after one of those very good days. A day, when nothing works, and when life kicks you in the ass harder than your friends at work. A day when you remember your innocent childhood and would like to return to those times, when there were no very bad days coming after very good days. A day, when you look in the mirror and realize that you’re not sure you know the person staring impudently back at you with blood-shot eyes. A day, when you’d seriously consider separating your mind from your body. Separating, at least until when the body stops causing you grief. In other words, Waldemar Szary had a massive hangover.

And when he had a hangover everything was always falling from his hands, which in his case could have serious repercussions. That’s why the chief food technician in the leading dairy cooperative in the country was reclining behind a giant mixing vat and desperately wanted to forget about the negative stimuli on his nerve cells caused by the 83 kilograms of his body.

“Szary to the manager!” The sore specialist for new flavor development heard as if through a heavy acoustic fog.

“Szary, you will make me a new product. Gotta be new and winning, not like those earlier super sweet yogurts, total crap. A French sourmilky delegation is arriving today, and I need to have something in an hour. Now get to work, time is running out. And it’s your time, not mine,” the production manager was half-shouting, which was typical of him during very bad days coming after very good days.

The last very good day for both of them was spent at Miss Elwira’s, the accountant, name day party. Every year she was throwing a party and everybody would always come, because if they didn’t, she’d forget to transfer salaries to their bank accounts. So both the manager and the technician got drunk on the same vodka, from the same bottle even, in each other’s arms, about which they didn’t want to be reminded.

“New product, new product in one hour... last time I had three,” Szary complained and with certain difficulty opened the ingredient storage cabinet. A week ago he received a shipment of new flavors from the French Colonies. A row of shining new cans tempted him with labels and optimism: fruit a la mango, exotic fruit with bacon, fruity mushroom, vegetable-carrot cellulose, natural flavor of home made yogurt, eccentric raspberry flavored orange and many others.

Time was running out and Szary slowly began to work, knowing that the last 45 minutes he had to spend on testing the new flavor, an activity which always ended up in the bathroom. He was convinced that the manager gave him this task today simply to make his life totally miserable after the shindig at Elwira’s. But what could he do? Into a small vat he poured with a shaking hand some fresh yogurt from two weeks ago. For his experiments, he used exclusively this yogurt, it didn’t provoke any unexpected gastric sensations like the natural ones, without those stabilizing E-numbers (E298, E301, E980). He poured some more, because he had spilled before, and now he spilled again, and then he had enough and went behind the mixing vat to recline for a while and forget about his 83 kilograms.

He was stirred to life by the drone of the secretary’s voice:

“Szary to the manager!”

The technician, wanting to escape into tomorrow, regained consciousness and jumped on his feet, which were not all that stable. He flung himself from the cabinet to the equipment table. He poured some kefir into himself, and then by mistake into the vat. He was shaking as he frantically opened cans with flavors, he knew he had two minutes, because then, the whole company would hear through the speakers:

“Szary on the carpet to the CEO!”

He added one flavor and mixed it in, and then another, but he spilled it. He didn’t check the label on the third one, but added it, too. From experience, he knew that the less defined the flavor, the better the manager liked it.

“Maybe it’s not such a bad idea with this kefir. The manager has a hangover, too,” he briefly thought when he was pouring in additional ingredients. He added more kefir and home-made kefir flavor, but not too much, because his hands were shaking, then he still had to mix it and add a few E-numbers. That went quick, he already had a tried and true mix of additives, preservatives, and stabilizers ready, which had always worked just fine.

“Szary on the carpet to the CEO!”

And the technician from the OSM “Paziocha” ran to the office, where the production manager was already waiting for him.

He took a deep breath:

“Kefir with a multi-fruit and multi-vegetable yogurt flavor,” he said with gloomy enthusiasm and leaned against the wall awaiting the “if looks could kill” firing squad.

“Gimme a spoon,” the CEO said, and like a true connoisseur began to sniff the mixture first. Then he tried it and asked the manager to do the same.

“So,” he said after a while, which in most cases meant it was OK.

“Yeah, you did good this time, Szary. This is good, right?” The manager half-whispered to the CEO, as he always did on his very bad days.

“So, yeah. I like. And the Frenchies will too. And when are they coming, those frat-eaters?”

“Oh yes, only the day after after after tomorrow, and maybe even after,” the manager replied and began to eat quickly to change the subject, “hmm... good, those multi-flavor ones.”

“Good. Now we gotta make some yogurt with a natural kefir flavor with pieces of fresh fruit, you know, those from that delivery from three years back, that’s been sitting all this time, because it was too sweet,” the CEO announced and Szary now knew for sure that the day would only be one of those very bad ones. As opposed to very, very, very bad.

Nose Number 32

Jolanta Moczydłowska, a former model in second-and-a-half rate fashion shows, unfulfilled MTV presenter and three times married of convenience fulfilled wife, didn't like her nose. Sometimes it was too small, and sometimes too big, and sometimes not in the right place. Everything depended on the time of day, mood, and the number of mirrors in her line of sight.

It was an early late morning. In a beautiful villa of her fourth husband, the sun was peeking cheerfully into Jolanta's bedroom, who whether she liked it or not, had to get up, because one, she didn't like to sleep with the sun shining on her face (could cause zits), and two, because she had a facial appointment (so there wouldn't be any zits). She took half an hour (which means an hour and a half) to get up, ate light breakfast and realized that today she wasn't going to like the shape of her left nostril.

"Another wasted day," the ex-model said to her reflection in a huge tv screen and switched the channel to a women's talk-show:

"A new revolutionary, plastic surgery method has been developed, allowing for performing surgeries on one particular body part practically an infinite number of times. What's more, the time between the procedures can be reduced to just three days, which for busy, modern women is certainly good news."

The program continued with an interview with Dr la Berg from Switzerland, who opened the first clinic in the world, where this new revolutionary method named after him was being performed. The method was based on applying onto the wound a synthetically generated alpine calf's fat tissue and covering the scar with multi-polymeric plasma, which facilitated the healing so rapidly it was noticeable to a naked eye.

Jolanta quickly dialed her husband's number:

"Love, would you like me to be your Cassandra Lubbock?"

The future Cassandra flew to the La Berg Clinique two days later, but came back after a week, because she also had some minor shopping to do.

"And... what do you think?"

"Oh, my Cassandra," the Fourth Husband said without paying attention. He was a respected lawyer defending discredited politicians, and as such he was very busy and didn't normally pay attention to small, insignificant things.

"Not Cassandra, but Damonna, that singer. I changed my mind, and you should notice, you spent 150 thousand dollars on it."

"Oh yes, that singer."

To improve her mood, Jolanta flew back to Switzerland for another surgery.

"And now?"

"Wonderful, beautiful! Just don't ask me, this beauty who has the most gorgeous nose on the planet, you know, that..." the Fourth Husband pretended he was trying to remember the name.

"The princess of Macaonaco!" Jolanta shouted, and for the next three days she felt as wonderful as the princess with the most beautiful nose in the world.

The wonderful feeling ended at a ladies' gathering at a fitness club, where all her friends talked about the prominent nose (a la Depardieu) of Pawelec's new wife, and Jolanta's dainty nose wasn't even noticed at all.

Again another flight to Switzerland. This time she was much better prepared. In foreign magazines she had read that snub prominent noses (but not as masculine anymore) would be in fashion this season, and that the wife of the president of Rumumbia ordered herself from the La Berg catalog, a nose listed as La Berg Shilouette 14.

"Awesome! You got a nose!" Her friends from Café Cuiudad admired her new acquisition, and Sylvia added: "I want one like that, too."

They went together, Sylvia to get the La Berg Shilouette 14, and Jolanta to keep her company.

"And, what do you think now?" She asked the Fourth Husband after coming back from the clinic. "It's a new model, La Berg Paco Rabanne."

"Exquisite, as always, but could you please do me a favor and slow down for a bit with those nose things, because a new Orshe model just came out."

This upset Jolanta enough to ask her Third Husband, who still loved her, to pay for a monthly stay at La Berg. And he did, and Jolanta changed noses every two days, because she couldn't make up her mind. And each time she sent photos to her friends to get their opinion. Many were giving their opinions, and there were so many opinions and suggestions that Jolanta got depressed. In the end, doctor La Berg told her himself that the nose number 32 was the best.

Somewhat recovered emotionally, she came back hoping that her four-week-long effort would be appreciated by someone. The Fourth Husband said nothing of course, until the beautifully shaped nose with a fantastic set of sculpted nostrils, fell off her face and landed on the floor.

"OK, problem solved," the husband announced, and then added, "if you want to sit in the Orshe for a while, here are the keys."

The Language of Worldwide Communication

Professor Jeremi Przyrobacki from Poland and Professor Philippe Delarousse from the Rousseau Institute met at the 1st International Professors Congress in Vodafos dedicated to the dialog about the role of professors in the modern institutionalized, disorganized, miniaturized and softy restituted world.

Przyrobacki ran into la Rousseau in the hall of the main conference center, constructed specially with the congress in mind. They both had felt that this could be the beginning of a long and fruitful international scientific collaboration. There was only one, small problem of a rather human nature – Przyrobacki didn't know Lotafrankish, von Mount didn't know Polish, and neither one could speak a word of English. But what do we have professors in this world for?

They decided, by using an improved and creatively embellished version of sign language, to create a whole new language altogether for the purpose of easy and comfortable communication in what they suspected would be an intensive and long-term exchange of scientific ideas. The decision was made and a few key words were created right there and then.

"Gyna bodokalunia!" The Polish professor said to the Lotafrankish professor when they were parting.

"Gyna bodokalunia, karnuk kilmadorni esdar!" The Lotafrankish man answered energetically. The Chinese delegates watching the whole scene deduced the exchange contained codes for the Future Reverse Combat Online game and began to clap their hands.

The professors went home feeling that history had been made.

Two months later they met again for a working session in the mountains of Clezmeron where they were supposed to develop the basis of grammar and word-formation. After the first two days, devoted to informal brain cell exercises, the results were better than good. During the creative process, which was moderated by la Rousseau according to the patented 4-192.5-3 method, the words most frequently used in any language, that is vulgarisms, were devised and listed here as "regrod", "hurcia", "larnogha" and "dygil". On the third day, the ambitions of both professors – their own, as well as patriotic and academic became apparent, as well as and their competition for the affections of a certain Polish-Lotafrankish speaking and very blond assistant at their disposal from the university in Laronne.

As a result, after a month-long session only the basics of grammar and the name of the language were decided upon. To honor its creators, it was to be called "Przyrolarouish". Word-forming, which caused the most battles between the two scientific talents, was to be calmly discussed during a three-month-long follow-up meeting on the Tralmar Sea coast sponsored by the leading mobile phone companies of both countries. Przyrobacki and la Rousseau agreed that this time the assistant should definitely be a brunette.

The next working session was a failure. The work progressed too slowly, and the dark-haired assistant additionally distracted their attention by her visibly non-existent bra. Both professors soon realized that creating a new language was not an easy task. And if the mobile phone companies wouldn't object, further work on the fundamentals of Przyrolarouish would take several, or more, years.

There were four more working sessions and frequent tele-conferences, during which, after long negotiations it was decided that the word-forming of the new language would in 37% follow Polish rules, and in 63% Lotafrankish.

Nine years later at a formal press conference, the professors announced their progress in creating a new language – the language of world-wide communication – and with that declaration their enthusiasm ran out.

Przyrobacki returned from the press conference late, totally absorbed by the fractal construction of a cellular anti-stem theory, with which he was infected by an accidentally met professor from the same institute. Granddaughter Theorysia ran over to greet her grandpa:

"Pyla jagudja, grandpa!"

"Pyla jaguduja! What, you're not in bed?"

"I can't remember how to say 'turn off the light' in Przyrolarouish."

"Oh honey, gramps hasn't come up with that yet."

Theorysia frowned, her brow puckering.

"Grandpa?"

"Aha, this is going to be one of those intelligent questions, right, sweetheart? I can feel it. Ask away my love but grandpa's not sure if he knows the answer."

"Tell me grandpa, why did you decide to make up this language? How did it happen?"

"Hahaha! That's my granddaughter! My inquiring mind!"

"So, tell me how?"

"Ah, nothing special, love. Grandpa didn't know where the toilets were. Now Theorysia, go to bed. My granddaughter, ha!"

An Inquisition-Style Massage

The greatest hit of the new health season turned out to be an innovative type of a relaxing massage, incorporating, of course to a lesser extent, certain methods of tortures used on religious heretics in medieval times. The creator of this unusually successful way of reducing stress was one Antoni Elkbellows, a man possessing a long and confirmed by genetic studies lineage, according to which he was a direct descendent of a respectable family of magnates from nearby Pi?a – the Oxbellows. The Oxbellows were known for their deep faith, which they changed frequently, because they were open to new things. During their time at the royal court, they had introduced the so-called preparatory tortures, which were to sensitize the prisoners suspected of heresy, to the relativity of questions about faith, asked during the torture sessions proper, which few of the prisoners had survived, in any case.

Using such a rich family experience, Dr Elkbellows developed a 42 minute Inquisition-style set (that was the time an average prisoner-heretic could survive), containing among other things: wrist stretching, hanging by the fingers, 78 degree elbow twisting, dislocation of the spine, intensive ribcage massage, whole-body stretching using the Oxbellows-Aerial table, centrifugal thigh bending, circular manipulation of the neck, deep massage of the pelvis, hammering of the extremities, pulling under the Oxbellows Up-Down table, buttock slapping, and the trademark Elkbellows massage – stoning of stress-tensed muscles.

In the first ever in Poland inquisitional massage spa located on Saint Street, this motto was hung outside: “Even if you have no stress in your life, you will still get rid of it.” This was a creative interpretation of a famous, and reflecting the spirit of those times, maxim of Bo?ydar Oxbellows, who had told each and every one of his prisoners “Even if you are not practicing heresy, you will still die for it.”

Soon, the spa experienced a flood of clients eager for new sensations. One of them was Simon Klepacki, the boss of a trendy new disco “Metrosexual Shelter” and several other nightclubs providing pleasures of the whole body, and who in the last few months experienced a mental burnout from trying to procure Lola Thigh – as a singer for the club and as a woman for himself.

Simon’s appointment was scheduled for 3:18PM. Of course he was late, but only by 3 minutes, for which he received a harsh reprimanding look from an elegant receptionist dressed up as Princess Zabobona. When he entered treatment room number 3, called the Chamber of Absolution, he saw the masseuse wearing a uniform designed to look like burlap rags.

“Please sit down and be quiet,” the masseuse, who Simon already named her Dobrava, said tersely. “You will now watch an instructional film to see just what kind of stress the people in medieval ages had to deal with.”

A set of stone doors in the wall slid to the side to reveal a screen on which various torture scenes began to appear. When the Chamber of Absolution filled with the cries of tortured heretics, Simon closed his eyes in fear, and Dobrava got to work.

First, through rapid wrist crushing she removed Simon’s stress caused by doubts about the honest intentions of the accountant at “Metrosexual Shelter”. That stress tried to fight to be noticed by hanging itself on the stone wall to the left of the torture table, but soon disappeared without a trace.

Using a deep ribcage massage, the alluring masseuse freed Simon’s body from the frustration caused by the inability to drive his motorcycle at the maximum speed listed on the speedometer, a failure which undermined his feelings of pride. With fast nearspine motions, accompanied by groans from the tv speakers and Simon’s vocal cords, she got out of him and threw by the wall the anxiety caused by the professional attractiveness of Lola Thigh. Lola Thigh sang and preformed nightly at a venue of Klepacki’s major competitor, also a Klepacki (don’t confuse these two, the fact that both had the same last name was purely coincidental, and besides, the other one had a different first name – Jacek). The stress caused by Lola Thigh – the singer, left Simon’s tired body permanently, but not without some effort on the part of the inquisitorial masseuse. Likewise with the sadness after the loss of the best girls from the Night Fusion club, who went to further their careers in Deutchechzland at a resort in Karlsbad Vary. Tiffany was really great, and maybe even loved him. Now, the stress connected with her was rambling by the wall trying to find a way to re-enter Simon, who was fighting with the images on the tv screen and his growing interest in Dobrava.

Dobrava very skillfully moved on to pulling under the table. Never before had Simon experienced something like this. He wanted to join the cries of the medieval people on tv who were getting their toes chopped off, but he valiantly held back. A pity, because he was supposed to show his pain. It would have been much easier for Dobrava to pull out of him the angst caused by his shrinking, for four years already, member. Simon, when he saw on the floor the tension caused by his phallus, couldn’t believe its huge size.

It was time for the most important part of the massage – the stoning. Stone after stone, with the greatest dedication the inquisitorial masseuse in the Chamber of Absolution on Saint Street, dragged out of Simon all dirty and lewd thought about Lola Thigh (name on the ID card – Janina Chubby). Soon the whole cell was filled with a stuffy erotically-physiological atmosphere, and a single, abstract frustration about L.T. was trying to fight for survival outside the body of its former carrier.

“Stoning was a form of death sentence for those who did not deserve a beheading,” the voiceover on the torture film said at the very moment when Dobrava began to stone the sternum, where a scandalously large number of sex scenes with L.T., which had never happened, gathered.

After the stoning, there was a brief break during which Simon realized that sex with L.T. was worthless to him now. He felt freed from all sin and stress, and the only thing on his mind was a quick physical romance with his so effective inquisitress, who after 39 minutes he could imagine now totally naked.

But even this newly forming stress was noticed by Dobrava, and through a circular twisting of the neck, cast out of Simon with a nearly super-human speed.

The timer hidden in a showpiece resembling a toe-breaking device went off.

The session came to a happy end, and the voice on tv concluded:

“No actors were harmed during the making of this film, only four stuntmen suffered accidents with various degrees of complications.”

Simon planned to visit his club after the session, to relax a little with a drink and a girl. Now he didn't feel like it at all.

He thought that he could visit, and for quite a long while, but somewhere totally different.

Puddle Skin Care

Dr Edward Perennial got his PhD degree in loyalistic algebra with considerable difficulty and considerable help from his brother, Dr. Perennial, who had gotten his PhD in loyalistic geometry two years earlier.

And how it often happens with the less street-smart savvy members of the academia, Dr Edward didn't stay long at the university, or to use a more street-smart expression closer to life and the street – was kicked to the curb.

And when he was walking for the last time through the main plaza of the Piast University, pondering deep thoughts about the injustice of treating people according to the Valesa scale of street-smarts, he stepped into a puddle. It had rained two weeks ago and the capacity of the university's drainage system was the same now as back in AD 1459.

So while standing in that vast, but not very deep puddle, Dr. Edward lost himself in his synaptic innards and didn't even notice the students who walked by and laughed sarcastically at their former teacher, that's how low his spirits had sunk. Neither did he notice a small dog, belonging emotionally and lawfully to an elegant female professor from the Department of Westernmostentatious European Polonisation, who sat reading a newspaper on a nearby bench.

The doggie deposited several droplets of precious liquid from his tiny, pure-breed bladder into the puddle.

"Perennial wants to take roots! Too late, you short-lived perennial!" A student yelled out from a window somewhere. But really, it wasn't a student at all, but the assistant lecturer Pisak in the department of loyalistic algebra, who was street-smart and savvy and took over Dr. Edward's office, because he liked the color of the chair (inscrutable red).

Doctor Edward didn't mind the assistant lecturer's unpleasant behavior so much, but he did mind the unpleasant behavior of the assistant professor – Ms. Czes?awa Ceracz.

"An annual perennial for sale! Good price!" was coming down from a window of the department, but what finally brought Doctor Edward back to reality was Ms. Ceracz's screechy laughter. Doctor Edward sincerely avoided her, and even more sincerely he wished she would trip up on the loyalistic-algebraic theory of Himko-Rybson.

Ms. Ceracz was less street-smart savvy than Pisak, but she knew how to use to her advantage the fact that he thought she liked him, which was not true, even though the woman wasn't good-looking, but then again, neither was Pisak.

The Ceracz-Pisak wave had been rolling through the department's vast interior for the past few months, and that resulted in a total abandonment of the professor by the very people who should have never turned their backs to display their well-worn pants, style Z.O Odra Wodzis?aw 1951, to the world. Unfortunately, the vice-dean, who also thought that Ms. Ceracz fancied him, was among those who started to avoid the professor and walk backwards. All that led to a confrontation regarding the Himko-Rybson theory, a confrontation that Doctor Edward did not survive, even though neither Himko, nor Rybson thought that Ms. Ceracz fancied them, because they were both long dead.

That way, a freshly fired doctor and a brother of world-renowned Dr. Perennial, landed in a puddle, an event which thrilled students sitting nearby, who promptly began to film it with their mobile phones with the intention of posting the footage on funnyvideofilmsfrompoland.com.

"I got it! It's gonna be a hit!" A young student, of psychology maybe, judging by his "I Want my Momma" t-shirt, yelled out.

An evil drill sergeant woke up in Edward. The last time the sergeant had woken up was in 1976, when his father was caught in-flagrante with a policewoman from the station in Gizajno, where they had lived at the time. The sergeant came and beat the living daylight out of the father, which prompted little Edward to run after the cop and kick him in the shins. An act of courage that the sergeant didn't even notice. This time it was different:

Edward was lonely, unemployed, standing in a puddle, into which peed the dog of a woman he fancied, filmed and ridiculed, wearing wet shoes from a hypermart. And now he received an SMS with what? "Buy something for Lola's zits." Doctor Edward, feeling his helplessness turning into the drill sergeant's revenge came up with an idea, which changed the direction of the skin care market all over the world.

"I will show yooooouuuuu!" Edward cried out deep inside his soul with a battle cry of a future victor, and his emotions manifested themselves physiologically through the dilation of his left pupil by 6% and a very quiet, nasal "oouuu".

Lola, Edward's daughter, was a pimply teenager deeply insecure about her face. Her father kept bringing her various medical treatments and nothing had ever worked. This time he gave his daughter a small medicine bottle filled with brownish liquid.

"Tonic with the extract of an urban puddle," he said and Lola ran to the bathroom to test the efficiency of the 137th acne treatment of her life.

"Thanks dad. I think it's worked," she said about a month later before going out to a club, and her father had a vague impression that there were more or less three zits less on his daughter's face.

He imagined Czes?awa Ceracz using this liquid and kept dreaming for good.

About three months later, Lola's friends began to regularly visit Doctor Edward begging for a sample of this miracle treatment, and he could barely keep up with the demand, especially since the summer was rather dry that year.

Half a year later, Edward's friend from kindergarten, who was now an expert in loyalty programs for a chain of pleasure-domes, showed up at the Perennials' house.

"You bring the know-how, I bring the marketing," Olek said, and it was the beginning of a long monologue, because he was street-smart and verbally savvy. And when he finished, he asked:

"OK? So do we have a deal?"

"OK," Edward answered, because he'd had enough.

Three months later, the company Perennial Cosmetics introduced at a chain of convenience kiosks a series of skin care products called "Puddle New Line". The products were voted number one in a prestigious contest run by the "Style and Fashion" magazine, and received an endorsement from Wanda Dolniak, a well-known singer, which resulted in the increase of the manufacturer suggested retail price by 320%. After a name change to "Puddle Skin Care" and a contract with a chain of make-up shops Zedhwora, the brand reached an exclusive status and overtook other skin care innovations – extract of quails' tonsils, essence of rutabaga and double C vitamin. The lady professor from the Department of Westernmostentatious European Polonisation began to use the products, but sadly Ms. Ceracz didn't have enough time, because she was treated like crap by Pisak, and stopped taking care of herself in order to make him feel sorry.

And then, when everything was just wonderful (except maybe for Lola's self-esteem, because her acne had returned), Olek showed up and said: "You say nothing, just listen," and began a monolog which lasted until 9AM the following morning. "You get it?" "Yeah," Edward answered, because he'd had enough.

And just like that Olek sold the company, the name and all rights to a big make-up corporation, and made a killing on the deal. He gave Edward what he felt like, in other words, not that much. The corporation changed the name of the product to Dr Perenni's Le Pudd Skin Care, and made an even bigger killing on it, especially in the US, where puddles are a thing of the past, because of very effective drainage systems.

And Doctor Edward Perennial? For about four and a half months he was more famous than his famous brother, but now was back up a shit creek without a paddle, pushed there by Olek who wanted more money, because he thought he had given Edward one zero too many (20 000 instead of 2 000). Lola ran away with her boyfriend to Ireland, and his wife was pissed and refused to make steamed dumplings.

And Doctor Perennial just stood there and when the evil drill sergeant woke up in him once again, he received an SMS.

Abnormales

"He is normally abnormal!" Clarisse (name on ID: Paul) said while biting into an unidentified piece of seafood hors d'oeuvre.

"Who's that?" Jonofi (name on ID: John) asked.

"That Robert. Can you believe that he's never in his life done amnesia?"

"No! The dude is really wack. How you know him?" Onardo (name on ID: Leon) wanted to know.

"Unfortunately we work together, he in stocks, me in funds. The dude admitted that he tried weed once back in school. And that's all."

"Who are you hanging out with, Clarisette?" Onardo groaned.

"My sympathy," Jonofi added and just for practice took a shot of amnesia from the cheese-and-drugs board.

And Kudupi (name on ID: Kudupi) just sat, smoked plimon and said nothing. He was like that – he wanted to have the big moment all for himself.

They ordered a round of Just Another Reason to Get Hard Drugs (whisky with ice). The evening at the Stop Deviation restaurant was promising to be a hot one.

"But you know what, this is nothing. Recently I met a guy at a party over at San Barenakedino's."

"Oh yeah? San Barenakedino? How's he?" Clarisse and Onardo both asked.

"Normal. Crashed his car, and is banging Lora in Drojeda. But not about him, only about this one sackless Jacek. Posing as a normales, too, that asstard."

"How?" Kudupi asked and everyone suddenly noticed.

"Yo Kud, wassup? You're talking?" Clarissesetto said.

"A momentary lack of brain power," Kudupi hissed quietly, took a shot of chrynine and washed it down with his drink, "So?"

"What so? So, this Jacek, he walks around and says he has only one woman."

"No!"

"You kiddin'"

"No, I tell ya, and then he says who that woman is..."

"I can't listen to this. Don't! Stop!" Onardo snorted, because he liked to snort from time to time.

"But you know!"

"We know, we know. Don't ruin the evening, Jonofi. Do they have kids already?" Kudupi asked a trick question.

"No, now I'm not playing! I wasn't supposed to say, and you, Kudu, now you said it for real, so I'm not playing. This wasn't supposed to be like this, why do you always have to bring everything back to a phallus, huh!"

"Either way, disgusting. How can these people have the balls to walk the streets? I dunno."

"Totally cuckoo," Kudupi began and they all knew he was about to drop the bomb.

"Just be careful with the detonation range, cuz I just had a stuffed snout with gorgonzola," Clarissesettissimo laughed. Everybody liked Kudupi's stories. They were always the randiest and broke every taboo.

"So, c'mon Kudu! You started, you finish!" Jonofi was getting impatient.

"The dude's name is Micha?, and he's a noob like I've never met before," Kudu slowly drawled his words with care and precision, like "cision" in the word "precision". The climax was inevitably coming soon, and the group at the table next to theirs was all ears, too, in the anticipation of a pathologically deviant story.

"?" Jonofi stared.

"??" Clarissesettesettisimoprime stared.

"?! " Onardo, supported by the fixated eyes from the table next to theirs, tried to force a quick answer.

"Do you know what time this doofus has breakfast?" Kudu began to build the suspense, aided by a gulp of tatamamina.

"At eight in the morning."

It took both tables almost three sessions of medium sized cheese-and-drugs boards to collect themselves after hearing this.

Finally, the orchestra of trained zoo employees managed to clear the atmosphere full of feelings of disgust caused the pathology of living in a big city.

All-in-One EveryToy

Right before Christmas a new toy appeared in stores.

It was a doll, or rather a robot doll with exchangeable parts, similar in concept to Kolego blocks, but bigger, more ergonomic and resembling realistic organs, which allowed for better chances of creative playtime. On its head, under the helmetphone and Busy Bee antennae, with an option for four antennas in the Blebletubby style, there was a blond mop of hair a la Dark Powder. The wings, fully extendable into two laser-plasmatic Chronicle series cannons, had changeable colorful modules, which offered possibilities for a game similar to MasterBlind, and a crate on the chain-mail jacket allowed for an intellectual challenge characteristic of the Kubic cube.

The modular construction offered practically unlimited possible combinations in creating a new character, and several suggested on the back of the box gave a taste of this incredible action-figure adventure: Rambie 3, Winnie the Poohman, Donald Potter, or Atomic Ostrich.

Its changeable boots (there were seven pairs in the set, with a possibility to buy 23 more) presented yet another arena to show off young creative talents. They provided for the abilities of either Ninja Hurdles, or Puss in Boots, or even an M1 Abrams tank. Additionally, thanks to the built-in mini-engines, the toy could negotiate obstacles – depending on the boots – either by crawling, jumping, walking sideways, pirouetting, or in the down-up fashion. The built-in internal organs allowed for the development of care-giving skills (activities: peeing, internal absorption, indigestion, stomach-ache). A 2 GB memory mini-chip was sufficient to teach the toy the basics of one of four languages, including sign language, and the reset button hidden in the left armpit afforded multiple opportunities at developing verbal communication with the toy. To make the play possibilities even more interesting and unpredictable, under the left wrist, there was a built-in operational panel with a choice of setting levels of aggression, bravery, childishness, obedience, intelligence and the need to spend time with a child diagnosed with ADHD.

Mr. Emil Czy? was just shopping with his son at the mall.

“Bartu?, look! EveryToy.”

“Eh, not for me.”

“Eh?”

Mr. Cypaste

Roman Fretard, known to himself as Gonzo, and to others as Tard wanted to make a career for himself quickly, nimbly and with all the effort comparable to a yawn.

He thought about ways to achieve this life goal for a long time, which means until he learned the basics of text editing, which happened at his first job at a firm trading in plastic bags landfill disposal permits.

One thing Gonzo would definitely disagree with was that Roman Fretard was a bit of a retard when it came to computers. His first official letter (a two sentence payment due notice) he had been writing with the help of a spontaneously gathered by him "Special Team" consisting of ucja and Maurycy for a whole week and a half. On the last day of this intellectual team effort, which was a Friday, twelve seconds after ?ucja copied the content of the notice from a letter she had written herself earlier, a simple message crept into Gonzo's. A message, which could be deciphered by a forward (yes, forward, not backward) zero-one code: copy-paste.

"Look here Tar... Gonzo, here you mark it and with this shortcut you 'copy', and here you go and 'paste' like this with this one," ?ucja said and was very proud of herself and her laptop.

"Yeah, except that your laptop got stuck again." From behind his desk Maurycy was wagging his finger, he was even lazier than Gonzo, but smarter than ?ucja.

"Not because of this cypaste, but because of this new system. It came installed with 'Multivista', a version for employees in firms trading in consumer waste storage permits called Ultimate during office hours. And now seems to me that everything gets screwy as soon as you turn it on, and sometimes even before."

"I believe you ?ucja. And when your notebook reboots, show me that cypaste one more time. I'm not into this Multivista stuff, because what is some dumpy system when compared to a beautiful hyperextension of the sun somewhere over Kuchara, when compared to the golden hue of onion fried with the kse-fi waves, when compared to the number of dividers for credit membranes in a wallet of a rich man, when compared to the magnificent smell of a briessante roll dunked in wholesome milk synthetically enriched with substances boosting the secretion of happiness hormones, that one from two years ago, not three," Gonzo said in a tone characteristic for a man who just discovered a solution to his life problem. He scratched himself behind the ear, which he liked to do in moments when his career receptors located under his left lung wanted him to know that everything was going fine. He winked knowingly to his own self in four years time. And then he yawned.

He yawned only in two circumstances: as a fad (rarely) and to erase the traces of his success-fueled self-contentment (more often – after he began to use in his professional life a certain two-step key combination.)

His first, crucial in his career cypaste he performed to fill out a document labeled Gonzobio.docxx. He copied the contents from a portal for career-minded people, from the profile of one Richard Ciemiecki, winner of the "manager of the minute" contest (second one in a row at 23:28, in the field of telecommunications.)

One thing that Gonzo would totally agree with was that Roman Fretard was definitely not a retard when it came to the impression he made on others (with maybe one "but" caused by too much attention to his hairstyle for the representative team of historical reconstructions groups).

"I see, Richard," the CEO of Sport Resort began during a job interview.

"Roman," Gonzo interrupted, "the computer made a mistake, you know, with Multivista, everything goes wrong."

"...Roman, that you have an enormous amount of experience in the field of telecommunications. Why would you want to work in our sports-hospitality oriented firm?"

"I see this question differently," Gonzo began, and because he didn't have anything in which to admire his hairstyle (CEO's laptop was non-shiny), he concentrated solely on making an impression and as the result, got the job.

He became a department chief with rather vague responsibilities, which was fine by him. However, he quickly realized that from time to time he needed to prepare a presentation, and unfortunately, as was the case with some of the most important issues, had to do it by himself. He limited himself to a skillful cypaste from the presentation of his predecessor, Maciek Janik, whom just in case, he criticized at every opportunity, which was easy, because the man's responsibilities had been clearly defined.

When Sport Resort won the contract for the construction of a new hotel center for 1200 people around the Olympic Sports Arena (built as a reserve for the future, to have it ready in time for the next championships), Gonzo began to push his weight around, because he felt more secure. And when he did five to seven cypastes, which resulted in two smaller contracts, he felt even more than secure.

The CEO was not too happy about it, and during a pay raise review, Gonzo admired his own reflection in his new metallic laptop instead of looking the boss straight in the eye (the other one was permanently connected to the security camera in production hall number 6).

In effect, Mr. Cypaste, as his department members began to call him, got a pink slip, but a day earlier he did a cypaste for the position of a vice-president of a company producing nanocomponents for electronic gadgets for left-handed people.

Vice-president Kenzo (Gonzo was good, but definitely too harsh, and this was not the image he was aiming for) quickly established himself at the new company by hiring Maurycy, who wrote for him all of the more important documents, and those less important, too, including shopping lists for subvacuum-modified jewelry. Kenzo also did cypastes, attended meetings, and gathered praise, and so it went through three more companies, until he became the head of the PanAsian region in an advanced ecoillogical technologies company.

When he winked to his own self from four years ago, he had reasons to be pleased, which he quickly masked with one slight yawn. This could have been a dream end of a success story of a modest guy calling himself Boss, if not for one, accidental cypaste, which was a side effect of a routine practice that had the right to become visible after four years of very intensive and marked with great accomplishments work from the bottom up.

Roman Fretard, instead of a list of new contractors in the last billing cycle, pasted into the report for the board of directors, a list of building and finishing materials for his house, purchased on the company's credit card.

Parachute No Limit

The director of an international airport was hanging from the ropes and checking their color in the sun, which graciously shone from between fiercely looking storm clouds. The ropes were suspended by carabiners from the hooks in the ceiling, which following the airport's motto ("sky is no limit") was located at the height exceeding the limits of innerspatial imagination of public use buildings. Thanks to that, the director's office, which wasn't small to begin with, according to the airport's second maxim ("space is no limit"), appeared to be a huge penthouse of at least 300 square meters. In reality, it was only 250 and the director, from the height accorded by the length of the parachute ropes, was lamenting about it:

"I told them to take over half of the cafeteria, but they wouldn't listen, and now, look at what I have to be cooped up with."

He was cooped up with two parachute guys, and two guys dealing with exclusive materials. And more precisely, they were copped up on a small, two-seater sofa. They'd been cooped up there for over two hours, because the director was known for his pedantic qualities and now with his every comment, he confirmed a rumor about him that was circulating at the airport.

The issue was indeed weighty and it weighed at least as much as the representative parachute. Even if this type of parachute hadn't existed before, now we were witnessing its birth and everything was depending on the color of those unfortunate ropes.

One kind of rope was too stiff, but the color was nice – Button-down Shirt Blue "Dark Day on Wall Street." Unfortunately, that kind could damage the impeccably chosen suit jacket fabric (yes, the director was wearing a suit jacket, because he wanted everything to match nicely). Other, softer types of rope were simply dream-made for the sort of managerial snob like this director of a paralyzed international airport. The ropes were made using the new revolutionary SkySafe technology, whatever that meant, but which had one major fault – their colors were fine for beginners parachuting from jump towers, and the director had already completed his first real jump. Well with a bodyguard really, but a bodyguard was just a bodyguard and didn't count, anyway.

"What are you giving me here: pink, bright green, bright orange, bright turquoise. Don't you have something for more serious guys like me?"

"Sir," he was interrupted by the voice of his secretary coming from the intercom, "Sir, the spokesmen for the striking workers informed that the departures terminal had been blocked."

"I'm in a meeting you tell them," the director replied kicking his legs slightly with frustration.

"OK gentlemen, I am getting annoyed by those ropes, and we still have the fabric for the canopy and the protective material to discuss. I brought you here to prepare the best ever under the sun representative parachute, if I'm going to have a photo session with it for "Aircraft Industry". The photographer is flying in on Friday and I want to have everything fixed and ready to roll by then. And it needs work too, you know, in case I have to jump out with this parachute from my lil' blue sports plane for real."

"I can suggest having the ropes made to order. Soft SkySafe in Button-down Shirt Blue."

"Just what I wanted to hear. Now the canopy. Can someone get me unhooked? How can I check the canopy if I'm hanging here. Gentlemen, more initiative, please. I didn't hire you, so you could sleep here on the sofa for twenty thousand."

Five men jumped up to get him unhooked. They put him on a ladder where he spent another two hours examining the canopy's fabric. This was not easy. Not this color, not that that "texture", not that intensity of light reflection.

"S... sir, the strikers have blocked the arrivals. In the main hall, about three thousand people are currently camping out, and violence is breaking out," the secretary stuttered, and her voice, coming from six speakers, was full of panic.

"I am busy. OK gentlemen, do you have other samples? Because what you've offered me so far, I must regretfully say is acceptable for a not-so-bright manager of a field airstrip in Asswhack. At my airport, we live by the motto "imagination is no limit." I'm expecting your suggestions, now."

"There are swatches of course, sir, but if you prefer to take care of the strikers, we can wait, no problem. As I understand, this might be a more pressing matter than the canopy."

"You think?" There was a moment of deep thought on the seventh step of the titanium ladder.

"Sir, excuse me," the terrified, quadrophonic voice of the secretary could be heard again.

"Yes, talk to me!" The manager yelled back.

"Sir, Mr. van Hookjes is here. He says he brought the proposal for professional parachute helmets with an air-bag system."

"Ah, yes, tell him to come in, of course. Gentlemen, do something. I can't stand here on this ladder all day long. I have helmets to look at."

Coma Longer Than Expected

It was on a Wednesday evening, during the seventh episode of “The Murderers from a Residential Cell”, when a handsome man from the early-reanimation unit fell into a coma, that is, he couldn’t be woken up after the surgery using the usual methods, and a couple of unusual ones, as well. Nurse Janina wanted to call his family but a cell phone in the patient’s locker was turned off and nobody knew the code. The patient slept sweetly, and no one could have suspected that it wasn’t a normal sleep full of wet dreams, but a dangerous coma, which would last longer than expected.

“The patient surely maybe will wake up...” Dr Kaliszewski began to say during the morning rounds three days later, “...in about three days to three years.”

Everyone sighed emphatically sharing the pain.

The head of the ward looked at a young doctor and told him sternly:

“Watch him, so he won’t go into shock when he wakes up.”

“But will he really wake up?” A patient from the bed by the window asked aggressively in a tone of voice full of purposeful grudge towards the health system, because for three months it hasn’t been able to cure him from a simple case of la Boiusset’s flu.

The handsome patient, the whole ward knew his name was Mieczysław, slept like a baby, longer and longer, and as everyone knew time worked to his disadvantage. The people felt sorry for the man. They talked about him when they were at home and on call. Such odd times, that the one who slept, had it the worst. They thought about how he would react when he returned to the world of the awake.

“He may not survive,” said the Patient by the Window, who knew The Sleeper a little, because he had been sharing the room with him for the already mentioned three months. “His life wasn’t going too well. His girlfriend had dumped him, he got fired, his bank card was cancelled and he was evicted. And now they here put him in a coma.”

“Who?” asked the normally silent Patient on the Specialized Life Support System.

The Sleeper woke up during one of the following episodes of “The Murderers”.

“The Murderers?” He asked with a sweetly sleepy voice for which all the women at the New Diseases Hospital would gladly have given an ovum.

Nurse Janina came running first. With the heart pounding in her chest, and a big smile on her face, she put another self-sticking IV in Mieczysław’s arm. She didn’t have the courage to look him straight in the eye.

“Nurse, you seem to have gotten younger since yesterday?” No Longer Sleeping remarked.

“Ah yes, I had a little plastic surgery on my forehead, so it would wrinkle to the left, such is a trend this season, I can’t help it.”

“But it looks great on you. And all this since yesterday?” Mieczysław was honestly surprised. He looked around and noticed that the patients in other beds wouldn’t look him in the eye, either.

“And also an intracheek scar correction, but that’s just purely cosmetic,” Janina added, wanting to talk about herself for as long as possible, or rather, to not talk about That.

“?ukasz,” Mieczysław said towards the window, “is there something I should know?”

“I know nothing, I’m only here with the flu, I don’t know, others can answer, I’m just lying here nicely and watching TV right now,” the Patient by the Window barked under his nose.

“And what’s the date today?” No Longer Sleeping asked suspiciously.

The situation was saved by the young doctor – Kaliszewski. He entered the room happy as a lark, which normally accompanied him when he was happy as one. Now the lark was somewhat tense and you could feel it in the air.

“Hello Mieczysław? And how are we feeling today? Good, I suppose, because sleep’s the best medicine, as the old saying goes, and who cares that it’s banned. Ha! And happy as a lark, I see!”

“And how am I supposed to feel? Good is right. And thank you for your kind words. But... excuse me, if I may make a comment, but I thought you were a dark haired guy, and not a baldie.”

“What can I say, time does that to people. Unfortunately, I’m a victim of a panenergetic diet.”

“I haven’t heard.”

“A totally new thing. And so it happens that I am one of those, coming once in a hundred years, who suffers from side effects. But I’m glad it’s not finger dwarfism, like it happened to one of my doctor friends. But Mieczysław, there is one thing I’d like to talk to you about.”

“I see that you’d like, and I think I know what this is going to be about. I slept longer than I should have.”

Nurse Janina began to silently weep and an invisible tear ran down her corrected intracheek, and a nurse’s aid walking down the corridor with a diffusion vacuum bedpan froze in her steps.

“Something like that,” replied bald Dr Kaliszewski.

No Longer Sleeping took out his cell phone and entered the code.

“Not going to work. The numbers changed to a seventeen-digit code and two phone companies had merged, and everyone’s got new PINs with four symbols, of which two must be letters from “g” to “r” entered in an AZ-Max mode.”

“Aha,” Mieczysław said quietly and the nurse’s aid would have let herself be transferred to an avian disease ward in return for being able to wipe away all the sorrow she saw in No Longer Sleeping’s eyes. “And did anyone asked for me, sent mail, left a contact number?”

“This we unfortunately don’t know. A while ago we changed the internet-phone PBX system to comply with WebTel 4.0.5, because, you know, no sane person would stay with the ancient Web 3.0.”

“Aha,” Mieczysław said quietly, and Janina squeezed his hand, and then stroked it gently without realizing what she was doing, simply because she needed to connect with this poor man.

“I also need to tell you about the mandatory change of ID documents, which you were not able to do before the deadline. It was done to unify both the real and virtual identity, so you could pay taxes either here or there. I’m afraid you will have to pay the administrative penalties. Your cards probably don’t work either, because the size of the reader has changed. And if you had a car, you don’t have a car, because now the fuel comes from the power of the energy circle,” bald Klimaszewski was gaining speed.

“Ah, what the heck, let me finish with it. There are no wheat rolls anymore, because they’re banned, and that newspaper which you still have on your side table, is no longer published, and all other paper ones are gone too. Now it’s only news on screen. And the world of coffee came to an end,

because now there is coffee-flavored liquid-like synflex. And the DVD format is gone, too. Only VDV now, and I won't be able to watch my beloved 'Long Time Ago on Earth' anymore."

Klimaszewski began to cry and other patients, too, and when the head of the ward came and realized what had happened, he just waved his hand with dwarfed fingers.

"So, I woke up in a different world, is that what you want to suggest?" Mieczysław said. Nurse Janina sobbed now openly and from the hallway came the sound of loud and uncontrollable crying of the aide's and several other nurses.

At that moment, a male voice on the TV interrupted:

"You've just watched the twenty seventh episode of The Murderers from a Residential Cell."

"Twenty weeks?" Mieczysław couldn't believe it, and his brown eyes got so big the room went half-dark.

"Two," the Patient on the Specialized Life Support System answered.

"They show them ten at a time," Łukasz added full of sorrow.

Mieczysław took Janina's hand and looked her warmly in the eyes, so warmly that quasi-liquid synflex wanted to become real coffee.

"Then we'll start all over again," he said and the room got a little bit brighter.

Snoboholic

It was the second day of the Exotic Poultry Producers Association meeting held at the palace in ?ci?gno. As always, all important issues were moved to the back burner on Friday before noon, that is half an hour after the start of the debate. Sales comparisons were replaced with alcohol, and market reports – with snacks.

“For a glass of boraquasco, slightly warmed with the left hand index and ring fingers, zezola fruit makes a perfect accompaniment,” Cezary Pytlasi?ski said while drinking vodka and snacking on a herring, and everybody listened with great interest. This suave, handsome man with jet-black curly hair and a slight contraction of the left eyelid (frequency between four and seven ticks a minute) was for the poultry producers a personification of good manners and a source of knowledge about high-class life style.

“Mr. Pytlasi?ski, and don't you have, you know, by chance just a drop of that borax for a heiress from podunk Zapolandia?”

“Hahaha, for you, my dear Emilia, for the next meeting I'm ready to order a whole, lined in brocade box of the best drinks from all over the world.” Czarek replied, and the heiress from Zapolandia melted under the table with delight. “And that would include boraquasco. Bo-ra-qua-sco. Let's repeat!”

“Bo-ra-qua-sco!” They all chanted enthusiastically, and a few guys even developed a tick of the left eyelid.

Only Herman Klita didn't repeat like the others, and was, as always, very skeptical, which in turn made Czarek chronically depressed.

“And you Herman, don't you like alcoholic drinks of the world?”

“Compranocitelopatrone. What year would you recommend?”

Compranocitelopatrone was a dark red wine produced from grapes grown on the southern slopes of the Citello mountain on a small Spanish island of Zicomprano de Ryua. Its production, according to a closely guarded method, had been done for three hundred years by the Arterian monks whose abbey was located at the top of the mountain. Each year only several hundred, hand-numbered bottles were made, and the wine was prized for its full bouquet best appreciated during siesta on the southern coast of Pilates when served with roosmoose meat and the Adriatic variety of wandering escalope; the year considered to be the best by the experts was 1989, rested in barrels made of wood from an old shed out back (marked “RQ”).

“'89,” Czarek answered, but not to Herman, but to himself, and not then, but now, when he was pouring over a register of all-wines on the internet. Back then, his jaw had tensed, and the male half of the poultry producers association had stopped developing an eyelid tick.

In moments of defeat, Cezary Pytlasi?ski knew how to recover. He belonged to men, who stubbornly pursued a goal, and could dedicate themselves to the quest wholly, regardless of the obstacles. That's how it was that time, too:

“I will show him who knows his wines! Who knows everything!” Cezary kept repeating to himself and got to work, “I have three months.”

Three months later, during the next poultry convention, Cezary Pytlasi?ski showed off a new model of a DVDB player with a built-in home theatre system and a portable game room, yet fitting into a side pocket of one of the loose combat pants with big side pockets on a rack.

“For three thousand dollars. Duty free in Singapore,” Czarek boasted, and everybody stared in awe, and even Herman was impressed.

“And you went to Singapore?” A skeptic asked.

“Yep. For a golf tournament and to do a bit of shopping. You know, the wife wanted to finally buy something at Fanfany's.”

Women's left eyelids ticked almost instinctively, and Herman kept silent until the end of the convention.

It must be said, that unlike other snobs, Czarek didn't exaggerate too much in his stories. In Singapore, it was really duty free, but it wasn't he who bought it, but his brother, a Blizzair flight attendant, and his wife really did go shopping at Fanfany's, but in Prague.

Positively motivated by his last triumph, Czarek got vigorously to work, totally not paying any attention to what his employees were doing with the poultry. He worked mainly on urban sports, which he wanted to make the main focus of his appearance at the next convention. But he didn't neglect other issues either:

Diets for men in their prime

Contacts with people in show business

Evolution of golf on the Old Continent, with a special consideration of mountainous Chorvenia

White wines and fresh water farm raised fish

Wind-fly-fishing sports

Extramarital affairs

Therapists who charged by the minute through Escape

Other topics from the list.

Yet another convention. Czarek was welcomed enthusiastically, even though the poultry brotherhood was paying a lot of sudden attention to the newcomers – a strong group of young and talented managers from an egzemo-exotic chicken farm in Fodder Band nearby Podunkowice.

“This is a club for Russian golf. You hit with it not a ball, but a specially designed grenade. During the impact, the detonating fuse is activated and a load of plastic paint-filled balls is dispersed over an area of roughly 3 meters in diameter. The color of the paint varies depending on what is considered the most tacky in any given war-golf season. The player who doesn't come back to the bar covered in tacky paint wins.

Everybody was impressed, and one man's eyelid even ticked a little, because he didn't realize that the speaker of this witty comments wasn't Czarek, but one of the Fodder Brothers (a term coined later by triumphant Pytlasi?ski).

Czarek had to fight for attention:

“And have you tried kite-golf?”

“Kite golf?” The Fodder Brothers were surprised, along with half the audience, which was intoxicated with exotic drinks that Friday.

Kite-golf – a new exclusive type of golf, considered an extreme sport where a player hits the ball while hand-gliding. In an amateur version, the glider can be equipped with an enriched bio-fuel powered motor. The player who in a ration of 3,25 to 1 counts more holes without touching the ground wins.

“In Skoptland I came in seventh, but ahead of even Peter King himself. You know, the champion kite-golfer from San Prego. And I met Christina Paqualerra during the tournament there. You know, the singer. She was rather hot, I admit, especially from the bird's eye view.

“But she's with that actor, that...” One of the Fodder Brothers butted in.

“Actor, no actor, who cares, it can all change so quickly, especially when someone leads life as active as Chrissy or I,” Czarek shared

conspiratorially, and Ms. Zyta from Klimalaszki, interrupting her enjoyment of a long-slim cigarette, cried out:

“Oh, Czarek, but will happen to us?”

The women were laughing and Czarek said:

“You, my dear ladies, I shall never forget. You are the nicest and most beautiful poultry maidens I know.”

“The most beautiful you will meet during the next convention. Aldonka, Miss Poland. She bought out W?adeczek’s farm, when he went back to cabbage and rapeseed,” Jareczek from Czysznów said, washing down a bite of dried sea horse with a gulp of whiskey.

Three months of hard work. Czarek knew that the Fodder Brothers would not be much of a competition now, but he wanted to be well prepared for the meeting with Miss Aldonka. A good photoshopping session would take his graphic editor at least two whole weeks.

“And look here at this photo. Here I’m standing with Borys Dylina”

“The one from the “Sergeant” tv series?” Elwira from Na??cz cried out and Czarek noticed from the corner of his eye that Miss Aldonka was also impressed. She was really beautiful, but not enough to become Miss.

“Yes, the one and only. He came to me for an Italian neck-tie styling workshop, along with a few other young actors, also handsome, but less famous.”

“And what about Leszek Pie?ko? Was he there?” Miss Aldonka asked shyly.

“Leszek, Leszek... maybe... that guy...”

“That bald, fat 60 year old,” Miss Aldonka replied spitefully and Czarek turned invisibly red, because he couldn’t show he was boiling on the inside.

“But I don’t know if you know that Borys recommended a therapist to me, you know, in case I have heart problems.”

“But Czarek, you are married!” Halinka from Góra said while sipping mamernet’99.

“My wife has an equally modern approach to marriage as I do. Lately she’s been seeing this oil magnate, Kluk. I admit, a very nice and clean guy. But coming back to the topic, here’s something interesting. This therapist gives counseling via Escape, because you know, I don’t have the time to do it in person,” here Czarek paused waiting for a question which would suit him.

The question was asked by Miss Aldonka, who apparently had a problem with Czarek’s popularity among the poultry farmers and wanted to discredit him:

“You live that far from the city?”

“Miss Aldonka, that’s not nice,” Rysia said with disgust while wrapping around her the tail of a Syberian camphora.

“Yes, in a way it is far, especially that the city is Los Bangeles,” Czarek paused again, so the delighted reactions could sound appropriately delightful, which indeed happened. “But I have a superfast connection, and there are no problems during our calls. You know, I have the AC-MAX wireless connection system.”

Miss Aldonka was still doubtful and Czarek doubled his efforts:

“You know, these are those brain core stimulating pills for creative thinking in the 3-7-3 team work mode.”

“I was at a party at the vice-president’s private resort. And I must say, this was something, something... And Wiesio, the vice-premier, what a funny guy that Wiesio, we could invite him here to meet our sweet and intelligent ladies.”

“A portable device for the production of 17 of the most popular enzymes. Today I’m picking pheromones, especially for Miss Aldonka.”

“The new standard in civilized countries is the 3+1 family unit, you know. Two women and one man, or two men and one woman, and one, only one child, which the adults take care of in a three-shift system. But I’m a traditionalist, you know, wife and I are looking for a nice and attractive lady. Maybe we will try Helga from Himilshaven...”

And this is, my dear ladies and gentlemen, a world class expert, Mr. Gilmand de Borek, a world-class psychic who can select two most suitable for each other persons based on their ergo waves. Gilmek charges 900 euro per session, but for my lovely poultry ladies he will do it for free, world-class. So, which one of you ladies wants to go first. Miss Aldonka?”

Czarek’s efforts were admirable and their results visible. The members of the Exotic Poultry Producers Association drank excellent unusual alcoholic drinks, played exclusive unusual games, met famous unusual people, and had unusual rarely seen personal preferences. But Czarek still hadn’t reached his main goal “to impress Miss Aldonka, and then we’ll see.” He was determined to succeed and determined to prepare even better for the next convention.

“This time it will work, this time she’ll be mine. I have something so huge that they’ll all be speechless, and especially my Miss Aldonka,” Czarek thought, exhausted but pleased with himself.

“Ah, welcome mehsye Czarek,” Rysia from the W?gorek Palace said, “You know, I met that Borys the actor, he was very nice and I even liked his play that he did for us at the palace. And that wine, pepperlot was nice too, a bit sour aftertaste at the second tasting, but generally everyone was happy.”

“Excellent! And where’s everyone? Not waiting for me?” Czarek said suspiciously.

“Ah no, you know. Because this new guy had arrived. Very nice and everybody likes him, even very much, and especially Wojtek, you know, the one who married three times and has three mistresses.”

“What?”

“You’ll see for yourself.”

The new guy was named Mr. Nowak and was sitting next to Miss Aldonka. He was drinking domestic beer and snacking on salted peanuts.

“Yes, I have a wife and two sons. I work two shifts to pay the bills. Do you have blood sausage? I got hungry during the trip. And in those Super Cheap Railways they don’t have a restaurant car anymore.”

“Really?” Miss Aldonka said sweetly.

“And do you know how to play hot pot, because I brought the equipment, and it had cost me nine thousand euro,” Czarek’s ironic voice could be heard.

Hot pot – a social game for two to six people, requiring special equipment costing three to five thousand euro – consisting of a chase in special resembling frying pans vehicles powered by the human masticatory muscles. The person, who escapes the greatest number of times without allowing the vehicle to overheat, wins.

“Oh no, I came here to learn,” Nowak said and smoothed down his hair.

Czarek noticed that several guys were drinking domestic beer, and in a grand motion pulled out a bottle of Palisander Liquor, but nobody paid any attention, because Nowak kept talking:

“And layers I keep in a special hut, so they won’t be stressed, because otherwise I will loose one egg per day.”

“Wow, one?” Szymek said smoothing down his hairsprayed Mohawk.

"And speaking of eggs, have you ever tried a flemiostrich egg? Very tasty!" Czarek was shouting, but without effect. And then he heard the saving tone of his cell phone "fooor myyy Czarek frooommm Christina Paqualerra."

Miss Aldonka finally noticed:

"Could you please take your phone call elsewhere?" She asked and Czarek only had the time to shout into his phone:

"Ah yes, hello Mr. Vice-premier! Wiesio, what's up?" It made an impression only on Wojtek, who had serious money problems.

"Boss, this is not Mr. Vice-premier, but Chojnacki from accounting. I'm calling to tell you that the repo guys are here."

Mr. Czarek Pytlasi?ski experienced an almost invisible tick of the right eyelid.

An Impulse Purchase

Balbina Wachowiakowa was doing shopping with her husband and son at the veryhypermarket. Their cart was already half-filled, and they only just reached the food section.

"Mom! Mom! Look! Cubicar! Cubicar!" Rafik shouted while looking at a meter-long model of a Formula Zero car with all kinds of bells and whistles, whose three-volume user's manual fitted nicely into a small 20-liter trunk in the rear of the bolide.

"No Rafcio, we can't afford it, we still need to buy enough laundry detergent to last us three months, because at our local hypermarket it costs 25 groszy more per package."

"Mother is right," father said matter-of-factly.

"OK," Rafik changed tone from childish to adult, "I take the white-green one and we're out of here."

"Rafik. No! We have other things to buy!"

"Mother is right," father said and suddenly turned with the cart into an aisle with home improvement equipment.

"Balbi, look. Ecological multi-drillo-screwdriver!" Felicjan, the father, said suddenly when he saw a promotional kit with a set of "three lifetimes guarantee" drill bits.

"No, Felik."

"But I must tighten that screw in the cupboard. You know, that in the upper right corner, in our second storage room."

"Felik. End of discussion. We have expenses. Don't you remember? Today we're going to auntie Basia's birthday party."

"I remember, but..."

"Mother is right," Rafik interrupted matter-of-factly.

When they got to register number 221 with their fork-lift cart with a trailer, three hours and 59 minutes had passed since they first entered through the gate of hall number 3.

"Not bad. Only three hours today," father said matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, because mom spent the whole hour picking out a gift for aunt Basia."

"Not aunt, but auntie," mother said.

She picked out, in the end, a totally useless 300-piece dinner set. The aunt had already two of them, and she lived alone, after her third husband and seventh live-in boyfriend had left her.

"Is that all?" The cashier asked after scanning all the items, and before Balbina could answer, began to recite from memory:

"And maybe I could interest you in a five-passenger car in an ecological matt color, with seven cushions, four-climate zone AC, engine ready for the installation of an organic propulsion drive, and with twenty additional options in a standard version."

"Only twenty," disappointed Rafik asked.

"Thank you, we can't afford it," father said matter-of-factly.

"And the trunk? Is it big?" Balbina asked.

"Err, maybe..." the cashier answered and continued with her memorized speech:

"We're offering a convenient purchase option in installments of 20 z?oty a month, or every other month. The available colors are: Bahama spruce, Roman birch doublemat, grassy glamour with the upholstery in either mountain moss, or exotic beach."

"And the trunk? Big?" Mother asked again to keep up appearances.

"Err... I don't know."

"OK, we'll take. You see, we've bought quite a lot today. Grassy glamour, exotic beach, monthly payments."

"Great, here are the keys and the registration. Insurance in the dashboard compartment. The car is parked in the back on the left. The license plates will activate five minutes after the engine is turned on. Happy driving."

"Thank you," Balbina answered and a moment later added:

"Oh yes, I'd like a lighter, please."

The cashier wrinkled her nose and began to query her computerized register system.

"Lighter, lighter... Unfortunately, we do not carry this product."

UI Fas Spe Rea Course

Blanka and Edmundo inhaled books by the truckload and even that was not enough. So they participated in an ultra-fast speed-reading course based on the Hi- Re method.

After three days of intensive training they completed the course with honors.

As a special prize, they received the longest novel published in the last three years, which had as much as 24 pages – “In Search of a Lost Parenthesis” by the R-syndicate writing quartet.

Blanka read ultra-fast:

“Bro po giv flo . By ass ass fuc kwa dop – No, . , con is a pro rod ban trans rap bit Ove! ... — ? If kle bio hon Ja where ha ye whe grog or . . R kli rot e ter. ,”

Edmund read ultra-fast:

“.Ass - ;fuc gav fas no I will fu fuc fu her he wen fa, ha! Ha! Thes pon – fu co soo sa by fro. Sle in sla Eas the my you pen. One con ex bla . No!!! Wha?”

Blanka said:

“I have to say, this is an incredible book. It keeps you in suspense, the characters are so vivid, dialogs – precise, and the narration – first class.”

Edmund said:

“I totally agree. This must be probably the most fascinating book of this summer, and not even probably. Totally.”

The Robotic Intelligence Test

Anna was afraid like never before. Another employee evaluation day was coming up. The most important part of it was a test of a robotic intelligence RQ, determining the level of robotization of a human mind regarding reliability in performing standard tasks, speed of work performed, error ratio, length of work performed without the need to restart, and the number of tasks performed simultaneously. In the last test Anna barely managed to stay within the limit, but right now she had problems with her father in law who's been luring her husband into alcohol, and with her husband who's been luring the father in law into drugs.

"Don't worry Anna, it'll be alright. Lately they fired only twenty, and they supposedly lowered the RQ bottom line, otherwise they'd be no one left," Rajmund tried to cheer her up.

She did a dry run. Scored 145. Five points short.

"I'm scared," Anna said quietly.

"You'll see, you'll come back in a few minutes and it will all be over," Rajmund was telling her in a confident voice.

"Easy for you to say. You scored 190, and besides, you're not as old as I am."

"Don't be so negative. Twenty three years is... not that old," confidence left Rajmund's voice. She was right, most individual telemarketers were below twenty. And supposedly each year reduced the RQ by five or ten points.

Four infinite minutes went by.

Anna came out and breathed a sigh of relief mixed with a resolution to once and for all get done with marihuash-flavored alcohol.

"So? Did it go OK?" Rajmundo looked happy, because Daria sitting next to him had exactly the opposite intentions.

"I think so..." Anna barely began to answer when she was called to the verification office.

"I'm sorry to say that you have not reached the lower limit."

"How come? I wrote about 160 individual SMSs of 20 characters each in one minute?"

"That's correct. 166 exactly. With no mistakes, at that. But since last week the RQ standard has been set at 170. It was posted there outside... I'm sorry. Your pink slip is waiting at the reception. Thank you. Next!"

Soup a Priori

A certain unemployed mathematician from Afroasia worked out the Ligadul's Law, based on which, and after considering a maximum number of variation, one could calculate the so-called near future (counted in days, or at the very most in weeks, from the date of calculation).

A certain unemployed inventor from O?miogród created the Futurobot – a device, which applied the Ligadul's Law to the person in its closest vicinity.

"Listen! It worked!" Martyna chirped into the phone. "You know, I turned it on, entered all the data, and it said that Robi would come home drunk and start throwing the furniture out the window, so I hadn't even bothered to clean."

"So..." Bo?ena asked half-bored, because Robi, Martyna's second husband didn't interest her in the least bit. The wrong Robi.

"So, he came home, started screaming, and the place was like after a tornado. And I can tell you, my dear, it made me feel better. Would have been a different thing, if I had been cleaning all day, you know. This Futurobot is super. I can sell you one, cuz I got me several, for friends, you know."

At first Bo?ena didn't want one, and then she did. Right after she watched on the Kitchen Annex TV channel a repeat of the "Robi's Appetizers" show.

Robi Appetizer. The country loved him. So sensitive and so sweet at the same time. Handsome. Appetizing. Just like a spring onion. It was a matter of honor for all self-respecting housewives and house husbands to prepare a Robi's recipe for Friday night dinner or Saturday lunch. For Bo?ena, too. And she almost always succeeded. Except for the turkeyducky soup. It seemed so simple, but her soup wasn't as clear as Robi's, and besides that, it was inedible.

She bought a Futurobot and already after turning it on, she knew it was a good purchase. When she entered the target data (soup) and references (Robi Appetizer) the device spoke to her in that beloved voice of the Polish cuisine's most famous:

"So, let's get cooking, and chin up, everything will be great."

The cooking went fabulously and she felt great. Like never before. And it went fast, too. In comparison to the seven hours of inputting the data, the two hours spent stirring over a small flame went by in the blink of an eye. It had to turn out great – Franek invited his friends from the embassy over for dinner and they wanted to try something truly Polish.

After two hours, the Futurobot breathed a sigh of relief and said tenderly:

"My dear, time to taste it!"

She tasted and almost vomited. Again, inedible, or even worse. She didn't understand how that could have happened, because according to the development of the situation, the robot adjusted and introduced new ingredients, for example, she had to add another carrot and take out two grains of allspice.

"How did this happen?" Bo?ena asked reproachfully.

The robot was silent.

"C'mon, tell me what happened with you."

Nothing.

"I trusted you, and now nothing? How could you?"

Nothing.

"Not even 'I'm sorry'?"

Instead of "I'm sorry" the Futurobot printed out the following message:

Soup a priori failure confirmed

Analysis:

Too much direct sunlight – 1%

Meat too soft – 7%

Water too hard – 9%

Other factors – 83%

An Orbital Flight With a Small Surprise

George Pearinsky was disappointed. They stuck him into this thing resembling a caftan, not a flight suit, and he couldn't even take a photo of himself, but maybe it was better without one anyway, because in this vomit-green inflatable quilted shit, he looked like a huge pear, even though he weighed only 125.5 kilograms.

"And what is this?" He asked the captain pointing with his eyes at the screen, where wrapped in a thick layer of brownish gases, an outline of Earth could be seen.

"What?" The captain was evidently caught off guard. He seemed to be fully engrossed in a computer game illegally loaded as an additional application for the passenger orbital ferry autopilot system and needed a while to come back to reality.

"This! Is this what I paid 200 000 amereuro for?"

"Ahh, that," the captain finally came to and smiled with a "not this again" smile to his co-pilot, Denise, or maybe Dennis. "You know, most of our customers are a bit... surprised with this view. It's all because of those stratospheric gases. They should finally prohibit their emission." The passenger grew slightly irritated with this remark and Denise, or maybe Dennis, added:

"We realize it looks better in photographs, and if you prefer, I can offer you a beautifully published album."

"What?"

"An album of the most beautiful photos of Earth taken from the height of several meters above ground, and put together by the best photographers and over-realistic painters in the world."

George Pearinsky, the first European of Polish decent in space, took the brochure ("album" was just too much of an overstatement) and barked under his nose "I didn't pay 200 000 to look at pictures." But he had to admit that seen from that distance, Mother Earth looked particularly bad. Greyish and ugly. Too ugly even when considering the steeply discounted promotional price of the flight.

"Remember to return it after the trip, they will be counted," Denise, or maybe Dennis, warned him.

The commercial passenger number 0289/Mr. Pearinsky leafed through a couple of pages, compared the photos with the view outside and fell asleep. He always slept during flights, and he flew quite much, because he made a fortune as a trader of rights for the emission of stratospheric gases (he had connections in the appropriate European commission), and so he was needed in every geographical latitude.

"Calling the so-called Houston! We have this one problem, we have this one problem!" The captain was shouting in the direction of Pearinsky, which unavoidably meant the latter one woke up from a dream in which he was floating in space, signing lucrative contracts for the emission of carbon dioxide.

"So-called Houston! This one problem," Denise, or maybe Dennis, was repeating.

"What's this?" Pearinsky wanted to know with every cell of his wrapped-in-quilted-shit being.

"A Slovakian spy satellite on collision course. A Slovakian satellite on collision course," the captain shouted, and both members of the crew faked quite well pressing the emergency buttons.

"Slovakian?"

"Yes, a post-NATO model. Decommissioned after everything became available on Bobble Earth," the captain answered and added in Denise's direction, "switching to manual controls. A three-degree course adjustment to the left. Starting descent."

"And where's this satellite that's colliding with us?" The passenger wanted to know.

"Ah, nothing, it's just passed us, you can't see it now, but I can show you the camera footage," Denise, or maybe Dennis answered and switched on the monitor.

"But the date here, that's from two weeks ago?" The trader in stratospheric emissions got upset.

"Ah, yes, actually, two weeks ago we had a very similar situation," the captain alertly added and quickly changed the subject, "What's important now is that you get ready for about 2 minutes in the state of weightlessness, and not some Slovakian satellite from two weeks ago. Are you ready for this magnificent experience experienced so far by only..." the captain consulted his notes, "two hundred eighty eight commercial passengers?"

"I guess so. What do I need to do?"

"Just feel light."

Pearinsky felt light for about 30 seconds and then he felt heavy and wanted to vomit. The bag was already ready and Denise handed it to the passenger quickly enough for the contents to land weightlessly inside the bag, and not outside.

When the carbon dioxide emissions trader looked at the full barf bag, he couldn't help but comment:

"So yeah, I paid 200 grand to look at pictures and my own puke. Unforgettable memories, I'd say."

"Such surprises happen to quite a few of our passengers, but with this satellite you had some extra luck, not every flight is so exciting," the captain remarked reassuringly.

"OK, we're going back to Earth now. I need to be home before eight, my wife has a yoga class tonight."



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