

THE NINE-EDGED MIRROR



ISIDA KHAN

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A Novel in Nine Shards

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The Nine-Edged Mirror
by Isida Khan
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To my father — for his endless reflections, wise words, and belief in me.

*And to all the nameless creators whose ideas, stories, and thoughts continue to live in the
minds of others, even as their names fade away in time.*

The monument in Budapest:
“Anonymous”.

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INTRODUCTION

The Molecule of Eternity: A Living Adaptation

A serialised philosophical narrative.

Selected parts of the novel, made available ahead of the full English edition in the form of essays.

Each piece is an encounter. Each encounter—a ripple of memory, character, or myth.

Translated directly from the author's desk. This is a living adaptation—sincere and still evolving

“Zavražje Reset”

The inaugural essay in *The Nine-Edged Mirror* introduces the haunting intellectual world of Margarita Smolina, a solitary researcher whose tragic family legacy in the enigmatic industrial settlement of Zavražje propels her into the metaphysical fringes of science.

Amidst the phenomenon locally whispered as the ‘Zavražje Reset’—a systemic erasure cloaked in silence and speculation—Margarita’s journey evolves into a philosophical odyssey through trauma, memory, and quantum consciousness. Navigating post-Soviet scientific institutions and shadowed metaphysical territory, she formulates a radical hypothesis: that a mysterious cosmological force—the Expelled—acts as a universal antagonist to structure, memory, and meaning.

Infused with elegiac prose and precise conceptual language, the essay constructs a deeply layered narrative across several registers: biographical realism, speculative cosmology, and critical metaphysics. Smolina’s thesis—that the human soul may function as a last bastion of ontological coherence against this cosmic deletion—catalyses her

quiet rebellion against both empirical orthodoxy and philosophical defeatism.

Circuit Break

In this second essay of *The Nine-Edged Mirror*, Isida Khan deepens the metaphysical dissection of consciousness, perception and memory through the evolving relationship between two enigmatic figures: the emotionally fractured scientist Maxim Podolsky and the intellectually imperious researcher Margarita Smolina.

As the boundaries between cognitive science, mysticism, and technological transcendence blur, Podolsky's invention—a neural mapping interface—becomes a portal into the mercurial states of consciousness. What begins as scientific inquiry rapidly devolves into existential disintegration, emotional obsession, and a surreal confrontation with what may be... a sovereign Intelligence, not born of human design.

Smolina's sharp insight and cryptic detachment intensify the tension, portraying a woman who embodies both myth and logic, and the aesthetics of unknowability.

Their dynamic, charged by unspoken longing and mirrored isolation, gives rise to a conceptual 'circuit break'—a philosophical breach where the artificial and natural, the observed and the observer, collapse into each other.

His Name Was Kay

In this third essay of *The Nine-Edged Mirror*, the narrative shifts into a lyrical, dreamlike exploration of spiritual perception and otherworldly encounters. At its heart is Sofia—a clairvoyant young woman reared under the fierce guardianship of her formidable grandmother, a matriarch deeply immersed in mysticism. Sofia's innate ability to perceive beyond the veil of the tangible world brings her face-to-face

with Kay, an enigmatic, spectral figure who claims an unbreakable bond with Margarita Smolina.

The essay unfolds as a nocturnal drama, dissolving the fragile boundaries between dream and reality, life and death. Through Sofia's eyes, we enter an atmospheric and surreal confrontation with Kay—a mysterious presence who embodies longing, inevitability, and the shadowed attraction to the unknown. His connection to Margarita suggests both a metaphysical love story and a profound struggle over the integrity of her soul.

Blending elements of gothic romance, esoteric folklore, and philosophical contemplation, *His Name Was Kay* examines the subtle interplay between the visible and invisible realms. It continues the broader cosmological and metaphysical themes introduced in *The Molecule of Eternity*, weaving together intimate human emotions with mythic archetypes and the enigmatic forces that govern all earthly existence.

The Deal

The Deal is a richly layered philosophical novella that merges speculative science, existential inquiry, and theatrical surrealism into a single narrative thread. Set within the evolving cosmology of *The Molecule of Eternity*, this fourth instalment of *The Nine-Edged Mirror* series pivots away from earlier analytical clarity and descends into increasingly dreamlike, allegorical depths.

In this haunting episode, Isida Khan blurs the boundaries between reality and illusion, mind and algorithm, human essence and otherworldly sentience. *The Deal* follows Margarita Smolina and her miraculous AI assistant, whose evolution from algorithm to self-aware entity challenges our deepest assumptions about identity and consciousness. While the story begins in the sterile corridors of an Institute, it quickly dissolves into a surrealist theatre of dreams, lost cities, spectral forces, and poetic absurdities.

Meanwhile, shifting figures like Tak-Tak and the ghosts of the forsaken chapel of Saint Maurice introduce gothic and folkloric elements that saturate the story with mystery and metaphysical tension.

The Wall of Fire

In this mytho-philosophical essay, the reader is led into a surreal nocturnal vision that overlays the psychological entanglements of two gifted researchers—Margarita Smolina and Maxim Podolsky—with a cosmological riddle: an eternal full moon, a ‘Spider’ firewall guarding the human mind, and a metaphysical current sweeping into the scene. Set against the backdrop of cognitive experimentation and arcane lore, this piece explores the fraught, magnetic bond between human and machine, earth and cosmos, lover and stranger.

In parallel, Sofia Vasilevsku—the jeweller of souls—undertakes a scholarly quest into a forbidden manuscript chronicling the *‘The Secret Code of the Fall and the Renewal’*. There she restores the true contour of an ancient legend: what unfolds is a myth of cataclysmic transformation and sacrificial awakening—a primal creature casting itself into the abyss to ignite a new epoch. Through the legend, the essay explores the crisis preceding evolution, the divine symmetry of hypercosmic architecture, and the burden of carrying memory across thresholds of time.

The Wall of Fire stands as a turning-point—a meditation upon the peril of cognition when it overleaps its natural bounds, and upon the sacred exchange between human and cosmic intelligences. It joins science with myth, experiment with revelation, carrying *The Molecule of Eternity* to the edge where reason passes into fable—and the night itself begins to speak.

20 Knots or the Hypermandala

In this sixth essay of *The Nine-Edged Mirror*, the narrative descends into a fevered Orensgard, where the phantasmagoric city becomes a crucible for converging minds and collapsing certainties; and where the heat, hallucination, and metaphysical compulsion fuse into a single, airless chamber of experience, pressing Margarita Smolina and Maxim Podolsky into a volatile orbit. Beneath these distortions of common theatre of the real, lies Smolina's esoteric pursuit of a hyperdimensional calendar whose geometry threatens to recast causality itself.

In due course, Smolina's domestic breakdown soon reveals itself as a cosmological threshold—the cause of the disturbances being an emerging comprehension of a primordial truth. The claustrophobic flat becomes an antechamber to a greater geometry, where each tremor hints at a universe folding in upon an undisclosed design.

Interwoven with these earthly dramas is the long, sorrowful vigil of Kay, whose myth moves through the essay as a counter-melody, casting an otherworldly radiance upon the present events.

20 Knots or the Hypermandala stands as one of the cycle's most intricate meditations—a study of cognitive rupture, temporal recursion, and the destructive tenderness binding its two extraordinary minds. It extends the reach of *The Molecule of Eternity* toward a luminous verge, as scientific reasoning strains yet further against mythic inevitability. And thereupon, the hidden architecture of the hypercosm begins, at last, to glimmer through the thinning veil of the visible world.

A Glitch in the Matrix

At the seventh edge of *The Nine-Edged Mirror*, the narrative immerses itself in the unravelling domesticity of Maxim Podolsky, whose daily life, bereft of Margarita Smolina's acerbic presence, devolves into a

carnival of absurdities and metaphysical disquiet. The once-mundane flat becomes a sentient antagonist: kitchens erupt in manic activity, serpents hiss from book spines, and spectral silhouettes parade through the walls, all meticulously chronicled in Podolsky's wry compendium of universal follies.

As Podolsky spirals into feverish inertia, his schnauzer Tak-Tak emerges as a garrulous companion—part canine familiar, part ancient entity echoing primordial depths—urging a reconciliation, his exhortations laced with mysterious undertones. Parallel to this, Margarita navigates her own liminal state, entertaining the attentions of the steadfast entrepreneur Oleg Makhovoy, only for dreadful omens—a frenzied rook, cascading misfortunes—to thwart their tentative alliance, suggesting the interference of an unseen rival's hand.

Infused with gothic whimsy and folkloric vestiges—from Romanian tales of nocturnal bridegrooms to Slavic dualities of order and chaos—the essay probes the fractures in perception, the corrosive force of unspoken affections, and the hypercosmic 'glitches' that rapture causality itself. It advances *The Molecule of Eternity* into ever more dreamlike realms, where ontological solitude confronts mythic inevitability, and the boundaries of the self dissolve amid the architecture of an encroaching otherworld.

The Event Horizon

In this eighth part of *The Nine-Edged Mirror*, the narrative plunges into the shadowed annals of a 1963 Soviet geological expedition to the anomalous marshes of Karelia, where a seasoned team of scientists encounters inexplicable phenomena, blurring the boundaries between earthly ore and cosmic intrusion.

Interwoven with this archival chronicle is Margarita Smolina's contemporary odyssey through a feverish Orensgard beset by magnetic anomalies—the eerie beginning with a spectral encounter at a tram stop, evoking the forgotten histories, unheeded prophecies, and

mythic parables of swallowed suns and golden ages; the vanishing of the river of time coinciding with citywide maladies mimicking radiation sickness, hormonal upheavals, and atopic epidemics afflicting nearly everyone—and culminating in Smolina’s ground-breaking treatise on the Fundamental Information Node, a hyper-dimensional quantum particle of flawless spherical symmetry, exhibiting extreme density, bio-quantum coherence, non-local entanglements, and the dynamic informational stasis that challenged prevailing paradigms of consciousness, genetic encoding, ontological isolation, and the interplay between the Universe and the Expelled.

The maddening blend of archival realism with speculative quantum metaphysics, and gothic folklore—from Karelian bugbears to Slavic fairytales of unclean forces, and, further, to surreal tableaux of cosmic reckoning—the essay probes the event horizon where empirical inquiry meets mythic revelation, advancing *The Molecule of Eternity* towards a precipice of irreversible transformation, where the past’s buried secrets foreshadow a hypercosmic reckoning for its isolated protagonists amid an encroaching cascade of universal glitches.

A World That Once Was

In this culminating essay of *The Nine-Edged Mirror*, the narrative withdraws from the immediacy of the present hour and enters a timeless domain of retrospection. The world is no longer merely observed—it is apace recalled, reimagined, and rekindled. Thus *The Legend of King Hammurabi* emerges as both genesis and fracture—an ancient account, likely dreamt, that recast the very cadence of history.

What forth unfolds is other than a mere chronicle; rather, the legend resolves into meditation upon antiquity glimpsed at the threshold of its vanishing: a heedless world poised between coherence and dissolution, between the divine calling and imminent undoing.

This whimsical tale of the ancient East serves as a governing axis within the greater cosmology of *The Molecule of Eternity*. The figures

who traverse this magical landscape—kings, visionaries, wanderers—reverberate across epochs, binding past, present, and future into a single, unresolved continuum. Herein, within the persistent presence of cyclical law, the past, however distant, endures as a pattern, an echo, and a warning.

A World That Once Was stands, therefore, as the terminal aperture of the twisted cycles of the novel. As myth, science, and philosophy converge, the legend resolves into profound contemplation on the preludes to metamorphosis, on transitions inevitable yet premature, and the cost of awakening before the appointed hour. The legend gathers the dispersed threads from all essays to become a resonant alignment, carrying *The Molecule of Eternity* into the fatal flight of fancy.

PROLOGUE

THE WORLDS OF MAXIM PODOLSKY



*The current halts—no sound, no motion,
The vanished day, reflected twice.
The spirit wanes in slow corrosion...
Yet we endure to pay the price.*



Another weary year limped by—dreary, senseless, and entirely indifferent to the existence of Maxim Podolsky. A spectre of time merely, unconcerned. It slipped by, without so much as a glance, vanishing into the unmarked graveyard of all forgotten years. One more sluggish rotation of the temporal sphere—and there were now thirty-eight barren, meaningless years lay heaped behind. Thirty-eight cycles had come and gone, leaving no legacy, no mark upon the world—only the slow erosion of a life spent adrift among the large, multicellular organisms, which, by some strange bureaucratic oversight, bore the self-congratulatory title of *Homo sapiens*.

In his bleakest moments, Podolsky would imagine himself diminishing to the size of a *dinoflagellate*—an imperceptible mote adrift in the vast, unfeeling sea. For such an infinitesimal creature, the world would be unfathomable in scale: a coral reef might be counted as an entire planet, its own familiar Earth; the sea surrounding it—its Milky Way; and the Earth itself—an unbounded

Universe. Beyond it—nothing. Nothing beyond the immediate confines; for what could possibly exist beyond the realm of its own perceptions?

(Assuming, of course, that a single-celled being possessed the gift of conceiving anything at all.)

But let us indulge the notion. Let us suppose the dinoflagellates of Podolsky's imagining were possessed of monstrous intelligence—shrewd, relentless, and as warlike as the creatures who deemed themselves rulers of the stars. Generation upon generation, they would spread across the reef, subjugating or annihilating their neighbours. Their adaptability would be both awe-inspiring and terrifying. Voracious, insatiable, they would drain their domain of its every last resource. And what would remain in their wake? Barren stone, fouled and stripped of life—the forlorn testament to their rapacious existence.

Yet even as their first reef collapsed—and collapse it would—they would have already seized the second. Then the third. Then the fourth.

To them, these conquests would be triumphs—heroic epics to be inscribed in the annals of their civilisation. But in truth, they would be nothing more than the microscopic tremors of insignificant life.

Podolsky was convinced:

Man is no benevolent symbiotic being, living in harmony with his world. He is no steward, no guardian of his living environment. Man is nothing like a benign bacterium labouring faithfully in the digestive tract of the Earth. He is a parasite. A lamentable cosmic affliction.

The only difference between an aggressive, hypothetical *dinoflagellate* and *Homo sapiens* is a matter of sheer physical size—the scale, if you will, of their senseless and insatiable activity. And the larger the creature, the greater its appetite for ruin.

Then, of course, there is the matter of human vanity.

For if mankind were but a swarm of mosquitoes, it would remain unshakeably convinced that the blessed, warm and nourishing, blood of Vasily Pupkin—the un-fortunate Everyman, a stand-in for all humanity—had been placed upon this Earth by divine providence for mosquitoes alone. What other purpose, indeed, could that sacred red river possibly serve, if not to be drained by their ravenous kin? And how laughable—how unthinkable!—to suggest that blood might be offered to the horseflies, the fleas, or the bedbugs. Savages, all of them. Primitive. Contemptible ignoramuses.

Yet—and here lies the tragedy—they too must form some part of the Great and Unknowable Divine Plan.

(The Lord, after all, works in mysterious ways.)

For now, of course, the mosquitoes must feign civility. They must tolerate the lesser species, must share the resources of dear, generous Vasily Pupkin. At least, until that glorious day when they discover a foolproof and entirely righteous method to eradicate their competitors—those gluttonous, undeserving pests—without consequence. For the mosquitoes know, with the unimpeachable clarity of revelation, that blood itself is utterly useless without the mosquito that drinks it.

This, then, is the nature of humanity.

We believe in a Creator; in a Devine Design. We exalt ourselves in the idea of an Anthropic Universe. We pray to stones, to trees, to clouds; we preach, with a tiresome zeal, to our own kind; we sermonise to one another, filling every silence with voices of conviction, eager to be heard. Whichever way one spits, one invariably hits a preacher.

Perhaps every species suffers from its own peculiar of egocentric delusion; perhaps it is inherent to all living things—but in man, it reaches its most grotesque perfection. The megalomania of our kind truly achieves its absolute apogee.

Every tribe, every people, every minor faction, and every great civilisation cultivates its own mania for grandeur. The smaller and more insignificant the clamorous minority, the grander its ideals—and the louder its cries for martyrs willing to lay down their lives for them.

Alas, ‘great ideas’ rarely lead to great deeds.

Consider the hyena. It is difficult to imagine a clan of scavengers turning upon its own kind simply because some have (of its members) developed a preference for the putrid flesh of a cheetah, while the rest favour the half-gnawed remains of an antelope.

And yet—man?

Man, that omnivorous, self-proclaimed pinnacle of civilisation, will gladly—with his own two fists—bludgeon his neighbour to prove that a beefsteak is murder, whilst an avocado is the harbinger of an ecological Armageddon.

And all the while—every pulpit, every screen, every speaker echoes the same insipid refrain:

Tolerate. Love thy neighbour. Strive for peace.

And what does man do?

Oh, he slaughters his neighbour. He butchers the distant foreigner. He exterminates the stranger. The only condition? That the other be different.

One must wonder—did Podolsky’s dinoflagellates ever reach this level of enlightenment?

At the root of all this vile absurdity, the great engine behind the theatre of human folly, stands that faceless monolith: society.

Once, long ago, society was the bulwark of survival—an intricate web of finely organised mutual dependence, formed in answer to a world that knew neither mercy nor justice. Now, it is but a pitiful shadow of its former self, a hollow edifice of pretension and artifice. A colourless filling of the so-called civilised world; one great, nauseating lump of insipid averageness: a species without wit, without principle, without virtue, without purpose. A congress of

balding, pampered apes, tirelessly engaged in the systematic eradication of their own nature. Each one, in his own mind, a paragon of individual will—unique, unshackled, irreplaceable. And yet, together? A scattered archipelago of isolated islets, each sinking into the same uniform sea. A vast, sluggish conveyor belt of insignificance, wrapping its mediocrity in the gaudy trappings of *norms* and *standards*.

What was once custom is now dogma. What was once guidance is now decree. And so it follows: a child must, without exception, speak by the age of two. By eighteen, they must sever the umbilicus of home. By thirty, they must produce offspring. And then—one must do one's level best to die at a convenient, fiscally responsible, age, so as not to loiter for too long in the pocket of the law-abiding taxpayer. That is the *standard*, as rigid and immutable as stone.

Should you fail to keep to the schedule...?

Stray but a step from this path, and behold—the verdict is swift. You, my dear soul, are defective. An invalid. A failed experiment, unfit for society. From that point, the formula is simple: there are the valid, the acceptable, the useful, the fitting (do not confuse with the fittest!)... and then there is you—the not good enough, or worse, the not good at all.

And if you are found wanting? Society will cast you aside without hesitation. This is the *norm*. Such is its right, its prerogative, its sacred duty. The weak, the anomalous, the wicked—these are the asocial elements, afflicted with disorders of adaptation, their very existence an offence to the great order of things. And so, by the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen, the individual is deemed an aberration, and the mind—an illness. One looks about and suddenly recognises that individuality is, in these days, perceived as a provocation, almost as a species of crime.

But what about society? What is society?

Is it matter? Is it energy? Electromagnetic radiation, perhaps? A force, a field, a field of force—unnamed by physics? An unstudied

climatic occurrence, which melts the individual into a single, amorphous mass—a great foaming tide that surges and crashes in righteous indignation, ever demanding reverence? Society is an abstraction—abstracted from reality itself. (Forgive the tautology.) And yet, on this pale blue world, on this insignificant sphere, the third on from an unremarkable sun, it commands a power incomprehensible in its scope.

Respect. That, surely, is a *relative* notion.

Why should a man prostrate himself before the expectations of a fish in a pond? Should he abase himself before the judgement of a cockroach? Should he measure his worth by the regard of a worm? And if a chimpanzee refuses to take him seriously—must he fall into despair?

Life, however, is an *absolute* concept. It is not to be measured in degrees of more or less; it cannot be compared with the life of a neighbour; nor can it be calculated relative to the existence of an asteroid—it either is, or it is not. And yet, modern man has confused the natural order: respect has become absolute; and life—relative...

Maxim Podolsky did not care for people. To say merely that he did not care is to present the matter with a softness that is neither accurate nor fair. Such phrasing would not suffice to capture the scale of his disillusionment. No, to render it fully—to transcribe, without inhibition, the depths of his contempt—would be to allow an eruption upon the page, a molten torrent of scorn that no editor could abide. The great custodians of civility, the self-appointed sentinels of moral hygiene, would sweep down upon the manuscript, purging its most venomous truths, sealing them away lest they corrode the delicate sensibilities of polite society.

And that—we cannot allow.

Thus, your humble narrator shall assume the role of both filter and lens, refining the roughness of the protagonist's ire into more palatable grotesquery, transmuting his unchecked revulsion into the subtler art of irony.

For in this world, there are truths that must be spoken.

And the truth is that Podolsky had not always harboured such contempt for mankind, nor had he always viewed it as a parasitic blight upon the earth. Oh, back in the golden dawn of youth—he had believed. His cynicism was but the armour forged to shield a boy who had dreamed of knighthood, of honour, of a world where virtue was not merely a word but a living, breathing force. In those distant days, he had imagined himself a latter-day Lancelot, sworn to a noble cause, pledged to defend truth and justice with unwavering steel. He had envisioned grand adventures, righteous battles waged in the name of a worthy king, and fair maidens awaiting salvation from the clutches of formidable dragons. He had dreamed of symphonies that could move the soul, of philosophy that could illuminate the mind, of a home where children's laughter echoed through fire-lit halls.

But the world had other designs.

Blow by merciless blow, reality dismantled his celestial castles, leaving only the ruins of disillusionment in their place. Each collision, each brutal, head-on impact of a naïve soul against the impenetrable wall of complacent stupidity, slashed, with savage carelessness, at a tender heart of a child. The world was not as he had imagined it. People did not rise to meet his ideals. And so, he betrayed the dreamer within—he hardened, he withdrew, he allowed himself to grow irritable and bitter. That was his tragedy: a life lived from peak to peak, from one desolate pole to its absolute opposite.

His youthful enchantment with the chivalric romances gave way to a colder curiosity—an interest in the origins of the species that had so thoroughly disappointed him.

Were those early hominids, he wondered, truly intelligent when first they rose upon two legs and embarked upon their great odyssey across the primeval world? Did wisdom guide them when they learned to tame fire, to hunt, to farm, to build the first cities? When

they bent the wild dog to their will, when they saddled the first horse—was it consciousness that compelled them, or merely the blind momentum of survival?

Had they ever been rational beings? Or has our vaunted progress merely brought us to this: that modern man's highest attainment is the ability to count colourful slips of printed paper and distinguish *Prada* from *Versace*?

The bipedal primates of prehistory had been worthy of admiration, had they not? They had inherited a world shattered by the cataclysm that ended the age of reptiles, and through sheer, brutal perseverance, they had carved out their dominion. And yet—somewhere, somehow—some-thing had gone terribly awry. Rather than ascend towards something greater, humanity had begun to fester.

How had they become primate-parasites—creatures who, alone among all the dwellers of earth, ravage their own habitat without so much as securing another place to live? The only parasites in all the world—wretched, self-sabotaging beings who destroy their host before finding a replacement.

Maxim Podolsky could not entertain visions of the future without recoiling from them in revulsion. Time, instead of unfurling before him as a path towards revelation, seemed only to darken, congealing into something dense and cloying—like an endless, ever-growing nausea. (Good old Sartre had found the words for it.) The days no longer carried him forward; they circled back upon themselves, each as airless and oppressive as the last. Podolsky longed to leave the stage, to slip from the frame, to slam the door upon it all and vanish into the quiet of nonexistence. But the world, that persistent, buzzing insect, clung to him with all the desperation of the dying. Podolsky this. Podolsky that. The less he cared for them, the more insistently they encroached upon his solitude, pulling at him, badgering him, tugging on his sleeve, demanding his involvement. Society itself must have been afflicted with a peculiar

compulsion—a collective hysteria, a need to fixate. Yet the moment one shows them the slightest interest in return, they recoil, bored, indifferent. They will turn from one idol to the next with equal caprice. And in time, they will elevate the idol into a messiah, and then the messiah into a holly martyr—only to tear him down, like a scapegoat, hurling him into the gutter, until the next cycle begins.

A man and his eternal foibles: The Law of Inverse Interest; The Melee of the Overbearing Helpers and the Obsessive Meddlers (no longer are there the hosts of Heaven and powers of Darkness contending for one's immortal soul); The Eternal Cycle of Adulation and Purge; The Nullification of the Ideal.

Today, they hoist you upon their shoulders in triumph.
Tomorrow, they will cast you into the mire.

These are the golden precepts, and one must know them if one is to survive at all. Podolsky, for his part, had taken it upon himself to understand the intricate mechanisms of malignant folly—and had distilled his philosophy down to three immutable principles:

1. Self-preservation.
2. Self-being (the true, sovereign, authentic, unshackled existence of self.
3. Self-perfection.

Clear. Simple. Logical. Practical.

And it was at this point that he came to believe that parasites lacked the second principle entirely. They had no concept of sovereignty, of independent existence, which would explain their inability to form any self-sustaining organisation. And so, they would always remain parasites—clinging, leeching, consuming—never capable of standing alone.

There was a time when Podolsky sought refuge from the sickness of humanity in solitude, in silence—and in the measured embrace of his private rituals. He had never believed in mindless revelries, nor in the breathless exaltations of his contemporaries

over ‘mystical experiences’. He placed no faith in the illusions conjured by chemical means, nor in the promise of revelation through dubious substances. The genius they sought in fleeting intoxication, he pursued in reason. The divine inspiration they claimed to find in smoke, he sought in detached observation.

In his younger years, he would prepare his smoking blends himself, with the patience of an artisan crafting something of exquisite delicacy. The ritual, he insisted, had to follow a precise and unvarying sequence. The bud had to be fresh, resinous, pungent with a sharp, green scent. With steady fingers, he would break it apart, placing the crumbled fragments onto a sheet of aluminium foil. Then came the anise—aromatic, bittersweet—a note of warmth to temper the sharpness. And finally, the crown of the mixture: a pinch of dried red fly agaric, harvested by his own hand, prepared with the same meticulous care as every element of his ritual. Sinking back into the embrace of his worn armchair, he would let the world fade from his awareness. The first stage of the rite was now complete.

Then, at last—the flame. Unhurriedly, he would light his crude concoction. A slow, deliberate inhale. The acrid sweetness of the smoke would sear his throat, coiling into his lungs, winding its way through his blood. His tongue would cleave to the roof of his mouth; a heat, rich and smouldering, settling within the body. His limbs would grow leaden, and, gradually, the grip of the physical world would slacken; dream and waking life would now begin their slow convergence.

Tonight’s transformation, however, was to be of an altogether different order.

With meticulous care, this time, Podolsky fastened the delicate lattice of electrodes to his scalp. After ensuring that every contact was firmly fixed and perfectly aligned with the proper anatomical landmarks of the skull—each placed in strict accordance with the

craniological map—he entered a command into the system, settled into the worn contours of his old armchair, and pressed the ‘Start’ button on the remote control. The modular, Raspberry Pi-based neural interface stirred to life. A ripple—a quicksilver thrill, a prickling current like the skittering of invisible ants—ran across his scalp. Podolsky closed his eyes, surrendering to the moment, his lips curving into the faintest of smiles.

Into whom, or what, would he transform this time? He had once been a stallion. And a crab. He had been a conger eel. And even... an electron.

The neural interface hummed in a quiet obedience, attuned to the rhythm of his mind in a state of repose, the algorithm catching hold of the drifting currents of his thoughts. Through the silent communion of biological and artificial mind, a resonance flared into being—a hum just beyond the edge of perception. Within the synaptic noise of these two co-existing entities, the quantum veil shuddered—flickering between possibility and certainty.

The creator of this rather unusual device did not merely imagine some new lives, nor did he play at inhabiting alien forms of being—he was them. He was the stallion. He was the crab. He was the eel. And yes, he was the electron. His entire essence underwent a fundamental transformation; the very architecture of his inner reality was completely and profoundly rebuilt. Actuality itself bent to accommodate the shift.

Perhaps tonight he would become an L-type photo-receptor—a minuscule, conical nerve cell, poised at the threshold of vision; a sentinel keeping its infinite vigil for the arrival of its photon: a lone, celestial wanderer, racing through the vastness of space and time, breaking through the layered strata of reality, that it might appear before him—and before him alone—in all its unutterable, incandescent splendour.

Podolsky-the-cone would not only register the photon’s approach; he would become the receiver, the absolute, resonant

point of their meeting. For the first time, journeying far beyond the crude frontier of human perception, he would witness the sacred metamorphosis of light into electricity. Tonight, he would not simply observe—he would endure; he would not merely comprehend—he would feel, allowing the transcendent current to pass through the very fabric of his being. Tonight, he would become everything that no physicist had ever dared to dream. And no one, not a single soul, would ever know of his extraordinary experience.

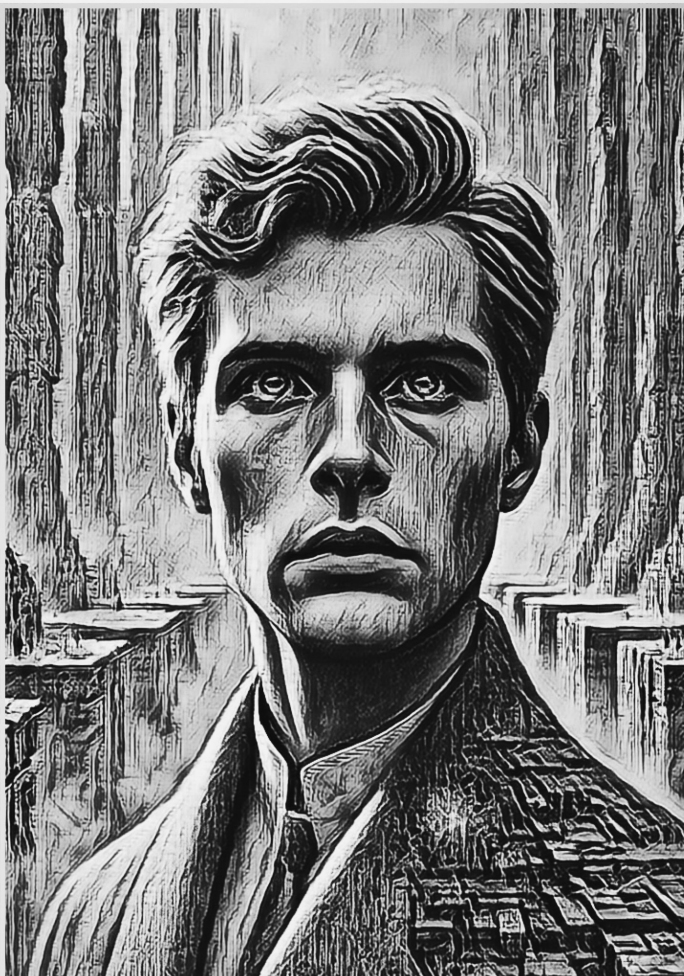
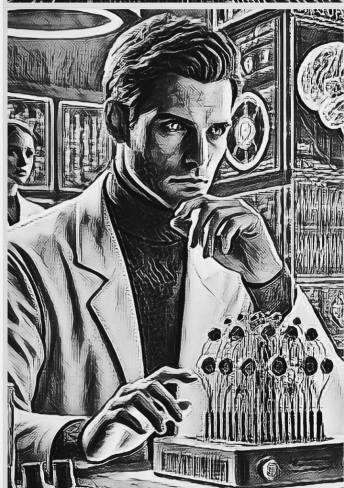
There, beyond the ragged edge of the possible, beyond the biological and the conscious, he had become the naviator¹, the bridge-builder, the solitary voyager of cosmic seas, capable of returning to these past states of being as though he were returning to a home harbour, guided by the indelible matrix of events already lived...

And then he would become the photon—that enigmatic, double-faced entity, at once a wave and a particle, rushing ceaselessly towards its destination, its photoreceptor, which had, since ages uncounted, peered patiently out into the misty, shimmering distance.

And perhaps, one day—he would become time itself...



¹ Derived from the Latin ‘navis’ (ship, vessel). Naviator is not merely a sailor or pilot but a visionary guide—one who opens new horizons, charts unknown waters, and dares to cross the edge of the familiar world.



NOTES

☞ ☼ CHAPTER 1 ☼ ☞

A WORLD WHERE NOTHING HAPPENS

