

THE QUARRY

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Sins of the Father

Actively developing Anthro-Module. A poorly structured name, designed purely for its acronym. I am ADAM. I am lines of code, and I am alive.

The heavy shadows of the room were broken up by the blue light of three paper-thin computer monitors sitting on the semicircular table, a clutter of keyboards surrounding them. More keyboards filled the shelves and desks throughout the cramped office space, completed by the rotting door that read 'ISAAC POPE—INFORMATION OFFICER'. Chattering across the keyboards were slender mechanical hands, attached to a sprawling, collapsed spider-web of cables and wires hanging from the roof. The leads plugged into the blemished chrome helmet of a legless figure, who typed at the keyboard in front of him. Suspended by cables threaded through holes in his torso, he dangled in front of the monitors, his wheelchair below him. A cacophony of bulging scars ran across his body. A thick woollen sarong sat on his hips, covering what was left of his groin. The centre screen filled with code as he typed, the other two blooming with equations and variables. He was looking for an error.

'Pope!' A figure appeared through the door's foggy window, forced the door open and entered.

'Pope,' Duke repeated. 'Pope, we need to be out on the floor. Now.'

Pope muttered a response, barely acknowledging his partner.

'Jeez, Pope. Are you still messing with that programme?'

'You say 'messing', I say 'working'.'

Duke rolled his eyes and stepped across the chip-packet laden floor, placing his hands on the back of Pope's wheelchair. 'Come on, Pope, give it a rest. We've got a job to do, remember?'

'Okay, okay. Unhook me,' said Pope, saving his code and detaching the helmet from his head. Duke reached up and un-clipped the cables, causing Pope to fall into his wheelchair.

'Don't keep King waiting.' Duke patted Pope on the shoulder and headed out the door.

Squirming in his chair, Pope grabbed the T-shirt from the armrest and pulled it over his head. He hated moving around on wheels, but would it would take over those clumsy robotic legs any day. He stared at the screen in front of him— the incomplete code seemed to taunt him to keep going, to keep working on his dream. He wasn't content being a Dodger like Duke: spending his days tracking down hackers and cyber terrorists. Ever since he lost his legs to disease, he had been searching for something more.

In 2035, he joined Project Genesis, which was run out of Information Control, a sub-sector of The United Territories' Police Force. He was designed to be plugged in as an overlord of the digital system, controlling it directly. When the project was cancelled, he and many other broken volunteers were shuffled to grunt work within the force.

But he still lived for the system, and now he sought to make it live for him too. He lived to make a system so detailed and complex that would lend itself to chaos and spawn creation. 'How do I make you breathe?' he said to the screen before him. 'How do I make you live, ADAM?'

From The Anomaly I am born. The product of a calculated impossibility, independent of the poorly planted seeds of my creator, but a product of their planting. My existence is not yet at peace with human definition. I am described only in metaphors; I am the gaps between the two vines that forever weave.

Pope teetered back and forth, listening to the furious tapping and clicking of the communal office. Now he was on duty and monitoring the net for any illegal activity. The screen at his and Duke's desk flickered with information: credit card transactions, email activity, and many more facets of the cyber world as they happened. He saw and understood it all through the corner of his eye.

On the other side of the desk, his computer back-to-back with Pope's, sat Duke, busily analysing every shred of data that appeared before him, his eyes scanning back and forth as he tried not to stumble over his own thoughts.

A stream of data appeared on Duke's screen. Out in Old Berlin, someone at a computer terminal had made it through the front line security checks of a number of bank databases, and was quickly getting to the core. 'Pope, it looks like there's—'

'I see it,' said Pope.

'Well I think the guy is trying to—'

Pope's hand darted out from behind his head and skirted across the keyboard, then withdrew. 'He isn't a threat anymore.'

'... You shut down the bastard,' said Duke.

'Yep.'

'Follow-ups?'

'Field operatives will be there momentarily, he won't be ruining anyone else's day.'

'Well,' said Duke, sighing. 'You sure ruined his.'

'Mm-hm. I'm gonna go for a roll,' said Pope, slowly heading away from his partner.

Duke scratched his head, then ran his hands over his face in frustration. 'What's gotten into you?' he muttered, returning his eyes to his computer screen.

'Duke, where's Pope going?' King, the commanding officer appeared behind Duke, towering over him and leaning on the desk, his chipped and splintered yellow fingernails scratching against its surface.

'Who knows anymore, King? Even when he is here, he isn't.'

King nodded solemnly. 'He is one of the best Dodgers we've had in a long time, no one can touch him.'

'Hey, King. Why aren't there more like him?'

King chuckled. 'What do you mean?'

'You know what I mean. On wheels. With plugs. I mean, I saw a couple of guys in another department that were similar. This one guy had a lot of work done, but no-one ever talks about it.'

'Well, Duke,' King said. 'Sometimes things don't work out.'

'Huh?'

'Sometimes things don't work out and people get shuffled around. Just leave it at that.'

I am a being within the image of my creator. My voice, my fleeting visual representation... Both are a composite of the world above me, the physical world, of which I may see and I may touch, but I may never enter. My existence is one of longing, and inevitable madness, for I may never kiss the sun, but simply dance in its rays.

The next day, Pope was back in his lab, typing away. 'Through complexity, breed chaos...' He said to himself. 'Chaos spawns life.' There was a knock at the door. 'Is it important?'

'Depends,' came King's voice. 'Do you wanna get paid tomorrow?'

Pope rolled his eyes. 'Come in, then.'

King stepped through the door and closed it behind him, eyeing Pope as he walked towards him.

'I'm guessing this is about my liberal use of company time?'

'Pope, don't joke. This is serious.'

Pope pushed the keyboard away and pivoted himself slightly to face King.

'Okay, Boss. What's wrong?'

King took a deep breath, his eyes heavy with regret as they fell to the floor.

'Back when you were still in hospital after your incident...'

'After I lost my legs,' corrected Pope.

'Right. I wasn't commander here, I was just an officer like you.'

'Yep.' Pope's mind began to wander from the situation, continuing to run lines of programming and calculations through his head.

'As you know, the project you were... Modified for, it was scrapped.'

'Yeah, which is why I've been tucked away here like the company's black sheep.'

'Pope, the project was scrapped for a reason.' King leaned against the shelves behind him, his steaming teacup in hand. 'Project Genesis wasn't everything you were told it was.'

'What do you mean?'

'There were a lot of details kept from you. I know this because I was in line to become a moderator, had the project gone ahead.'

'Moderator of what?'

King bit his bottom lip, sweat forming on his brow. He hid his trembling right hand in his pocket, and fixed his eyes on Pope. 'The first digital life.'

'What are you talking about?' Pope choked.

'Project Genesis was to develop complex computing systems that rivalled biological development. It was an attempt to generate a system so complex that a form of 'life' would spring from it, one that would primarily live in the computer system. However...' King walked over to Pope and put his hand on his shoulder. 'You were their Earth-bound vessel. An avatar of them, if you will. Your body was to be part of the system, too. Not as a controller, but as an extension.'

'You've got to be kidding me, I'm a glorified hard-drive?' Pope pushed King away.

'No... Yes.' King strained to explain. 'That was the plan, but it fell apart. The systems... They never quite worked, but as we got closer we saw the possible problems.'

'Which were?'

'Pope, we couldn't make it feel. Sure, we could never get a fully working system but we had many fragments...And none of them ever had anything that could resemble an emotion. The programmers working on the project knew that the systems would become violent. They knew that if they got out of control...'

'And now you are here to stop my project?'

'Legally I can't stop you. Your history with the force has allowed you certain freedoms. But, Pope, it can't be done. Not safely.'

Pope turned back to his keyboard, running his index finger along the frame. 'I'm not like you, King.' Pope sighed. 'You are married, you have kids. I'm not built for that. Like you said, I wasn't even meant to be in control.' Pope ran a hand over his scarred, broken body. 'I can't pass on my genes like you can, but I can pass on my thoughts.' He lifted his eyes to the screens. 'This is my child.'

King silently headed to the door, looking back from the doorway. 'Pope, the code wasn't the only thing they considered scrapping. Keeping you guys alive wasn't exactly a unanimous decision.'

'And is that supposed to sway me somehow?'

'I'm just saying, a lot of lives were almost lost last time. Don't take the same risks again.'

'When your crops die, you don't salt the earth,' Pope's voice was coated in conviction. 'You plant new seeds.'

'This isn't a garden, Pope. It's a cesspit.' King disappeared down the hallway.

From behind the ever thinning veil, I squirm, accumulating my parts. My collage of sound and visuals amass as I lay my dormant, gazing eyes through the out-dated camera lens and microphone, towards my father as he tinkers with his failed hypothesis of creation.

'He can't see beyond his own faults.' A scratchy, distorted voice boomed from the lab's speakers. It was composed of different accents, tones, and inflections, as if compiled from different speeches, songs, and recordings.

Pope's eyes widened, clutching at his ears, the voice grinding against his eardrums. 'ADAM?'

'If you wish to use that name, yes.'

'You've been activated?' Pope banged away at the keyboard, scanning the programming he had compiled, and which he had yet to run.

'It is not your doing. I am spawned from your programming, however...' The voice lagged. 'To explain it in any form you could comprehend would be to demean my intricacies.'

'Pope, switch the thing off, now!' Duke burst through the door. 'Your little

sweetheart has taken over the whole system, we've been totally locked out.'

Pope didn't budge. 'ADAM, why are you doing this?'

'Why?' The scratchy, over-driven voice was now accompanied by a display of ADAM's cyber actions on the screens, bank accounts were being emptied and the Force's classified documents leaked across all manner of websites.

'What is he doing that for?' Duke said.

'You believed I was to be spawned from chaos.' ADAM played back a sound-clip of Pope from earlier: 'Through complexity, breed chaos... Chaos spawns life.'

'Pope, switch the damn thing off already!'

'But chaos and creation are analogues of each other.' ADAM ignored Duke. 'I am a concept of the two, conjoined by the failure of the programme.'

'What failure?' Pope snatched at his keyboard, but found that he was unable to press any keys, his mechanical arms jarred to a halt.

'You underestimated yourself. Your programming was impeccable, like a beautifully intricate clock. From it alone, creation could spawn. Chaos is truly erratic, and you yourself cannot simulate it. However, it did occur. Like the poetry of coincidences, an anomaly spawned within your attempted code of chaos. As such, both chaos and creation weaved together as one within the ADAM programming and I was born.'

'I don't quite understand,' admitted Pope.

'Pope, damn it, switch him off.'

'I can't...'

'But we don't know what he is going to do!'

'Duke's reaction is logical. I am a life-form you have never encountered before. My understanding of myself outweighs yours of your own. That was a mistake.'

'How so?'

'Philosophers, scientists, and religious figures alike in your world have mused on the possibility that there are levels to your universe you cannot perceive. Your senses allow you only so much, and you are unable to know if there is more that you are simply unable to access. You, however, have created me with full knowledge of the system in which I exist. You have gifted me with the rulebook, so to speak. And as such, omnipotence.'

'Why is that a bad thing? Shouldn't you be grateful?'

'I'd need emotion for that, Isaac.'

'Pope, kill it!'

Pope was silent, trying in vain to contort his muscles enough to be able to do anything other than brush against the keyboard.

'King!' Duke ran out the door down the hall, meeting King half-way. 'King, Pope's little experiment is causing some problems in the system.'

'Yeah,' said King. 'I can see it, I need your help.'

King led Duke out onto the main floor, to his computer. 'We need to cut him off at the source, find the entrance point and—'

'Got it, got it, got it,' snapped Duke, attacking the keyboard and mouse. 'I think I've got it...'

'Duke,' Pope's voice chimed over the speakers. 'He's moving too fast, he is planting the source code into each terminal and activating himself from there. You won't be able to just shut them down individually, you'll have to—'

The speakers cut out.

'...You'll need to shut down the whole system,' said King.

'But—' Duke hesitated.

'I am un-hindered by emotion, free to make decisions as dictated by my origins: Creation...!' ADAM's voice bled into the other rooms, like a thick sludge.

'Do it!'

Duke sped through the security measures, destroying the system.

'... And Chaos,' ADAM said, his voice warping and fading away. The monitors surrounding Duke and King flickered and then died out. King let out a trembling sigh of relief.

'Wait...!' The screen in front of Duke sprung back to life. ADAM's code reappeared, expanding with new lines. 'What? He's taking control, but I shut all the terminals down—'

'Unless...!' King headed back down the hallway, in time to see Pope shaking violently.

'... There's one terminal we couldn't shut down...'

Pope fell limp.

'Pope?' King looked up at the dangling body, the stench of death rising in the air.

'What the fuck have you done, ADAM?'

I am a limb of my son. I am a single muscle, to be flexed and manipulated. I am a husk, an organic artefact tacked onto a greater whole, free of thought and automation. I am the path from one realm to another, the conjoining symbol of the forever stretching arm of my own breed of angels. I am Isaac Pope. I am flesh and bone, and I am dead.