Edenborn

Nick Sagan

pandora

This is the Sunday to beat all Sundays. I'm taking a stroll through the park and we're talking sunny shores, shade-giving trees and sailboats floating on the Seine. It's an infinity of pleasure and leisure, with couples gazing out at the water together, families enjoying open-air picnics, and no one in a rush. There's green grass beneath me, and blue sky above. I'm carrying the End of the World in my veins, but I don't know it yet.

A nineteenth-century French boy moves past me in a blur. It's not his speed that blurs; he's walking no faster than I am. But he's not so much a boy as a collection of colorful dots in the shape of a boy, as if his atoms were somehow visible to the naked eye. He pays me a smile, and I pay him one back.This kid is full of springtime and laughter, reminding me of a young footballer I used to coach in my teenage years. I watch a dot labrador lope after him, stopping short to watch his dot master bend down to uproot some dot lilies. At a distance everything looks real, but up close like this you can see things for what they are.That's not the case in = most domains, where the illusion of life is near absolute.

Champagne signals me. She's dressed for this with her embroidered traveling dress, her lace fichu, her fancy hat and her parasol. I'm the anachronism with my fringed faux-leather coat, blue jeans and silver eyebrow piercings. But neither of us fit in because we're the only ones here who don't smack of pointillism.And we're both wearing our old faces, the ones programmers and artists assigned us while in the real world our bodies slept and slept some more.

'You tweaked it,' she says.

'You noticed. Do you like?'

She scrunches her nose up. 'I don't know yet.Tell me what you did.'

'Played with color, made it a little less painterly,' I say, passing her the bottle of Beaujolais I've brought for this occasion. 'You're the art historian - give me some of your expert opinion.'

'There's something else.'

'Yeah, I disabled the automatic composition.When you turned your head, the dots that made up the characters used to rearrange to fit your point of view. They'd frame up to create a perfect pointillist painting wherever you look.'

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'And now they behave more like regular people.'

'Right.You don't like it?'

'Who said I didn't like it?' She smiles, popping the cork.'You're so sensitive, Pandora. Don't be so worried about what people think.'

'Who said I'm worried?' I say, taking the glass from her after she pours.'Cheers.'

'Yeah, cheers.'We clink and drink to the second half of our lives: eighteen years of wonderful, terrible freedom. Today is the anniversary of the day the lie unraveled, the day we learned what we were, where we were, and why. It's hard not to think of it as a birthday.

'Nice,' she decides of the wine.

It is - this vintage is crisp and not too dry, not half as complex as the 'serious' wines she prefers.You can keep your oak and berry and nutty bouquets, thank you very much.

I tell her how I programmed this particular Beaujolais, but she's not interested. 'We'll have a real drink when you come up,' she says, threatening me with a far-too-serious twenty-year-old bottle of Riesling she just discovered in a Bavarian pub.Over the years she has filled her wine cellar with a collection that would be the envy of any oenophile, building it up by looting the stocks of the dead.We're all scavengers these days, indulging our various hobbies as compensation for the work we do.

My work is technical. If anything breaks, I fix it. I'm responsible for power, communications, computer systems, IVR and similar inorganic technologies. I am not responsible for cloning or parenting. I couldn't do what Champagne does. I chose this line of work because -

Excuse me, Pandora. Another matter requires your attention.

Can it wait? I'm telling a story here.

I can see that. I can also see you're telling it wrong.

Here we go.

You should start earlier, when you realized your world wasn't real.

It's my story, Malachi, and I'll tell it my way.Give me a minute, will you?

I can afford you another three minutes, and then we should talk.

Three it is. Now go away before you wreck my narrative structure.

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I chose this line of work because I keep clinging to the past. I grew up in a fake Brazil and a fake America, but I woke up in Belgium, the real Belgium, to learn that my wildest nightmares were true. When the kids were little, we taught it to them like this:

Desperate times had settled on us -
The Black Ep swept like a scythe through our ancestors
The brilliant among us knew none would survive -
But against this threat some must stay alive
To carry on the species
So they meddled with our DNA, and gene-ripped
babies came
into being
But who will raise them to adulthood?
Only computers would serve when all were dead
They built a false world for dreamers to explore
While our bodies slept safely in the real
Not knowing we were alone in the world
With a great burden awaiting us
When we awoke and saw what had been concealed
One of us went round the bend
With treachery and shameful acts
He made six of us from ten
But now the battle's fought and the battle's won
With each and every successful birth

But childrearing just isn't for me - I'm terrified at the thought of bringing kids into a place like this. So it's easier for me to work behind the scenes, and stay a little closer to my old life by maintaining and upgrading the Immersive Virtual Reality I grew up in. In the real world, I visit all my nieces and nephews. I'm their favorite aunt, and I love them because I'm not totally responsible for them. Not the way Isaac,Vashti and Champagne are.

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