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Sincerely,

Viacheslav Lazurin



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

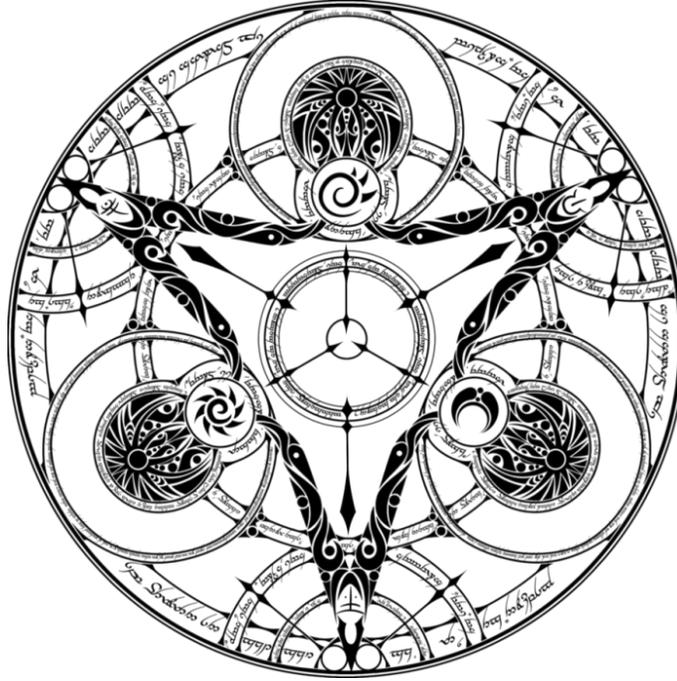
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KEEP YOUR VOICES LOW

by Viacheslav Lazurin



Welcome to our museum! Please seat yourself there and let me connect you to this thing. We call it mind-expanding machine. Visually, it resembles an ancient phonograph, doesn't it? Assuming you know what a phonograph is. Assuming such things still exist in your constellation. If not, there is one example in the next room within the same dimension. You may check it out later. Not the real one, of course, just a reflection in a controlled time curve.

Sorry? Yes, you can touch it, but we need to find a protective glove that fits the size and the shape of your...limb. Otherwise, it will undergo an inverted time flow and...anyway, the device I am tuning for you now is much more exciting!

It is the miracle of our museum. A gift of a forgotten civilization. Please do not move, I need to plug in more wires. It is pure luck that your brains have a standard set of inputs. We do not guarantee the quality of transmission if the client has modern fashionable modifications.

Oops, I forgot to start with the safety rules! Please pay special attention now. First, whatever you may hear, do not try to respond or interact with it in any way. For the sake of your mental health, consider it just a recording. Actually, it will be nothing but a recording, randomly downloaded from another plane of existence. Second, whatever you may hear, do not try to unplug yourself. If the session is unexpectedly interrupted it may cause severe damage to your brains. However, there is nothing to be afraid of. Have you ever feared your grandma when she was telling you a tale? This is the same. Assuming you have ever had a grandma.

Well, I think, we are ready. Now relax. You are going to hear a frequency vibrating far beyond what we tend to think is the world around us. It can be anything. The whispering of dying stars. The ringing of a frozen nebula. Some of us believe this machine serves a purpose. That it lets you hear what you need to in order to fulfill your destiny. It can even be a message from your ancestors in the previous aeon. There is one who claims he heard a long debate between dragons and sirens, imprisoned in a black hole. Another says he now knows what space medusas gossip about.

The Universe remembers everything. Anything that has ever emitted a sound. Anything that has ever vibrated. It has left a trace throughout all dimensions. Now listen. Listen to what it tells you....

Crackle. Noise. Unclear interference.

“Do you hear us?”

Silence. The thundering dissonances.

“Do you hear us?”

“*Holy Virgin! Where am I?*”

“Try to concentrate. That will make the signal clear.”

A hissing pause. One second.... Two....

“*Am I dead? I don't see.. I don't feel anything!*”

“This is not the logical end of your existence.”

“*Are you angels?*”

“We...Pszzt...do...do not...Tschhh”

“*I beg you, tell me! Are you angels?*”

“Tschhh.... No.”

“*Well...I knew where my sins would finally lead me....*”

“Do you identify yourself as a so-called Michelangelo Buonarroti? An attempt to analyze the most repetitive frequency, projected by your consciousness, resulted in this illogical sound pattern.”

“*I am Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni!*”

“Is this your personal identifier, or is this the general name of your species?”

“*What? I barely understand! Your voice is so bizarre. So monotone. Hard to say whether you are sir or madam. And your Latin is very peculiar. I can assume imps are genderless, but I can't believe they do not speak Latin well!*”

Another pause. For more than a minute full of low unspecified sounds. And then....

“We do not find most of your words logical. As we are trying to enhance our transmitter, be aware it is supposed to exchange our thoughts as long as they are logical. We request you to remain logical and coherent in spite of your limited abilities.”

“You summoned my soul after death.... Is that right?”

“We need 19 seconds to provide a logical and sufficient response.”

The silence lasts precisely 19 seconds.

“Your essence is now located in the core of your world. This is the common order. After death, everything comes back to the center of the planet. All spirits smolder there to keep the universal energy balanced and to keep the planet moving. We are talking to you using a specific beam, directed through all the layers of the planet down to the core.”

Muted crunch. Sounds like ice being broken.

“We did not get your response due to a temporary malfunction. We request you to repeat.”

“I have always suspected the world is run by an inferno.”

“We are unable to interpret your message logically.”

“For God’s sake, who are you?”

“17 seconds required to provide a logical response.”

Again, the pause does not exceed the mentioned duration.

“We are investigators. We learn the past by analyzing memories of spirits kept inside dead worlds. We try to understand the cause that led to their extinction in order to...”

“Kept...inside...dead worlds? Jesus, what do you mean?”

The din that follows resembles many, many voices whispering in confusion.

“As an intelligent being, you must be aware everything dies. The surface of your planet is now empty. We are trying to understand how you remain so emotionally engaged without being exposed to chemical impulses of your no-longer-existing body. We find it illogical.”

The last word echoes with stress very distinctive from the previous monotony.

“We request you to answer our questions in order to reveal the past of your planet.”

No reply. No background noise.

“Are you there? Confirm you still hear us.... We request you to answer...we request you to answer...we request you to answer....”

This phrase repeats dozens of times with the same tone, rhythm, and time span in between.

“I am...here...put forth your questions, demons.”

“Having analyzed all the detected fossils and some blurred images from your mind, we now have a set of assumptions that we want you to either confirm or deny. When alive, would you define yourself as a brain with a dynamic structure, protected in a bone box at the top of a walking spine?”

“Well...that sounds simplified but accurate.”

“The main purpose of your brain substance was to analyze data, gathered through 21 sensory systems, and to react to the environment in order to survive and replicate.”

“What do you mean, ‘21 sensory systems’? There have always only been 5! I used to see, smell, hear, taste, and touch!”

“We expected such a remark from your side. Judging from the collected information, your species has gone extinct with many sensory channels still

remaining locked and inaccessible. Due to limited data, the only response to the environment was mostly either fight or flight.”

The hush takes over. This time they are patient in waiting for a trembling voice to reply.

“The last two options you mentioned...you just described the entire history of humankind.”

“However, there were cases when some individuals experienced weak signals from the locked brain circuitries, which resulted in creating unique artifacts containing hidden messages. These artifacts were mostly ideas and images projected onto flat surfaces, three-dimensional things with no application, or even sounds arranged in a specific order. Have you ever witnessed such cases?”

Something resembles a deep breath. A deep breath of no-longer-existing lungs.

“I have witnessed nothing but the will of God. The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection.”

“Your statement is beyond what we consider as logical.”

“You speak too much about your damn logic!”

“This is the only weapon we have against the entropy of the Universe.”

Something pulsates in the background. Like the beats of a no-longer-existing heart.

“Is this what you came with? The weapon?”

“We have a strong suspicion your planet has been destroyed by the high degree of entropy your civilization produced, but could not handle. We request you to answer more questions.”

“Please...I have no secrets.”

“Do you agree that technological progress was moving much faster than the brain was evolving and, as a result, the instinctive program of each

individual was not up to date to deal properly with an environment that kept changing?”

“I am not sure if I understand you, but...I feel like you are talking about a soul. Yes, it has always been lost in reality. Like an innocent child left in complete darkness. Many people killed it to cease its weeping.”

“Whenever the environment did not match a desired image, was there a common tendency to alter the perception of it?”

“This is so true. Everyone would look in the own mirror and wipe away the reflections that did not please them.”

“Do we understand correctly that your kind was divided into two subspecies, supposed to connect on a level of bodies but unable to merge on the level of minds?”

He thinks. They wait. Unknown ghosts whisper in the background repeating something like a spell. Or like a curse. Until the answer rises.

“Each of us was born alone. Each of us died alone. Those moments of temporary union only deepened that loneliness. Yes, we complemented each other. But everyone had their own way.”

“We request you to clarify. Is your response affirmative or negative?”

“I fear no one can tell this except for God.”

“Your replies describe a very disorganized system. Illogical.”

There is a specific emphasis in the last word similar to a verdict. At once, all background noise dies, as though an invisible wire has been cut. The silence does not last long. Something cracks it like glass. Something drills its way through solid darkness ringing like an insane chromatic scale. It goes upwards and downwards in a sine wave. Faster. Higher. Turns into a solid roar...

“Guys...I can see you now...in the sky...”

Strikes resembling heavy steps dominate all other sounds.

“Have we not disconnected? Why do we hear him?”

“Please stop what you are doing.... It hurts...hurts...”

“Ignore the sound phenomenon. Prepare the next bomb.”

Then the thunder of a broken bell makes the seconds shake.

“So dear is the sleep to me,

Still more than being made of stone.

My shelter is my shadow here below.”

Then the cry of all forgotten souls merges into a desperate shout.

“In blind happiness am I alone.

Don’t wake me, beg you.

Keep your voices low.”

Then the vibration of the universe—rearranging itself—reaches frequencies beyond perception.

“Go, David. Go on, my boy.”

“We request your explanation. We are experiencing anomalies beyond understanding.”

“And what are you concerned about?”

“There is movement on the planet’s surface. A giant walking object. Non-organic.”

“Well, this is...what did you call it previously? The three-dimensional thing with no application. The creation of my own.”

“It is launching stones against our ship!”

“He is very good at it.”

“Your responses are illogical. Your planet has been targeted for termination due to the large amount of entropy remaining in the core. The spirits in there must not be reborn in any form.”

“I knew it. I felt it. It was like something cold and sharp went through my mind. You are evil. Insane.”

“We request you to explain the gravity anomalies. We cannot leave the orbit nor dodge the stones!”

“You see, once, this boy defeated the one much stronger than he. This world is run by an order you cannot understand through mere logic. Meanwhile, I must be grateful to you. You set me free. You told me something I should have understood in my mortal body, but I was so ignorant. We were so ignorant. Now I am aware of my God-given power. “

“We request you to....”

“Goodbye.”

Multiple explosions. Alarms. The grinding of metal being smashed.

“David with the sling, me with the bow. Michelangelo.”

Heavy steps. They echo over all the madness.

“Broken are the high column and the green Laurel.”

Crackle. Noise. Unclear interference.

Our museum is about to close. Just a minute, I will unplug the last wire. How do you feel? Excited, right? Yes, everyone feels like that after a session with this machine. No, I am afraid you can't come here tomorrow. We will be closed for maintenance. I suggest you visit another museum on the second moon known as Sistine Chapel. That place is old-fashioned. Classic, if you will. You need some water? Here you go. You're welcome. Where was I...yes, the old-fashioned museum! There are pictures, sculptures—some of them move and talk by the way—and there are those things...what are they called...with black symbols projected onto white pieces of...never mind. Ancient stuff, to put it simply.

Please do not be afraid of the fact that the museum is run by a ghost. Don't worry, he is a great guy! Sometimes, he helps us by shifting asteroids or managing eclipses. He likes to create gravity anomalies. We don't know how he does it, but he does it.

Follow me; the exit is this way. Everything you will see there has been created by this old man. He is an artist. He is a sculptor. He also writes poetry, can you imagine? If you ask him, he can tell you a lot about his past. He used to be an intelligent mammal from some planet with a forgotten name. If you are lucky, he will explain to you why he called his moon Sistine Chapel and what it means.

The museum is guarded by a giant statue he loves very much. This thing has a sling—assuming you know what a sling is—and literally can throw meteorites. No kidding! By the way, the old man says anyone who guesses the name of it will be given a gift beyond price. Nobody has succeeded so far. You have only one attempt. Will you try?

He is also very spiritual and religious. Be careful lest you offend him. When talking to him, never use the term “logic.”

He does not like it.

THE END