

Nenad Stipanić

Gods of Neon

Translated by Vesna Marić

1.

I had two options: I could become either rich or famous - this was my inheritance from the Age of Enlightenment. And becoming famous has become much simpler than becoming rich. But apart from a strong, but inconsistent, desire to become wealthy, I have not had any of the usual evil or unjust desires, I was not interested in fame, plus I am an introvert, and thus I was destined to never fit in, to be isolated and lonely. But that's not to say that I had no desires at all, I did have many when I was still alive, I wanted, for example, to become a cyborg, to have a better body and mind than the one I did have, and most importantly, to be a creature who could control their emotions and drives. I wished for a long time to eat someone. The first record of my human life was noted down by my grandfather Vinko, an old partisan who kept a diary of family events and who, whatever might have been happening, noted everything down in a soldierly, informative way, in a removed and sparse manner. For example:

10. XI. 1967. Vinko returns from rehab for alcoholics from the psychiatric hospital Lopača. There is a medium force southwestern wind, it is sunny with some clouds.

The moment of my birth is noted down in the same manner: 26. VIII. 1973. Sunday evening, 9.30, Mirjana gave birth to a boy. Rather strong northern winds with clouds and drizzle.

My first writing however, noted more than a billion years ago, can be found on the final pages of my grandfather's diary:

15. VI. 1984.

Granddad has gone to the kitchen and during that same time, during that year, I was very allergic to green, my eyes watered and were bloodshot, I got some dry patches on my head too, that they said was eczema but my neighbour Mate said was actually cancer but that my granddad and grandma wouldn't tell me, and then it turned out to have actually been eczema and not cancer. I had my tonsils removed that year in Rijeka. My hobby is karate, reading comics and many different books, fishing and swimming, and I love to collect pins, stickers and hangers. Neno.

3.

I shivered in Jesus Christ's aorta, a massive red tunnel through which hums and runs thick, crimson blood. I was stuck to the wall of the aorta with the help of four fluorescent Eduardo Kac rabbits, who were attached to my hands and feet - an unsuspecting passerby might have thought me a carefree hiker. Each rabbit had bitten into the chewy tissue of the aorta and was releasing spit that was a mixture of synthesised Gibson/Turing texts, and songs by Hatsune Miku, which Jesus gladly used as a medium of connection with human kind. I was not afraid that the rabbits would let go, their hearts have a small generator built in that 'chops superfluous ideas in the nose of evolutionary fuel', the most powerful source of energy after the bleached matter of the universe, but I was afraid that my body would be ripped apart by the force of all that hot and holy blood, blood that lashed me like whips, whips with lead balls attached to the ends and studded with nails throughout, so that they could dig deeper into the wounded skin. Just as they had whipped him, he was now whipping me with his blood. I rummaged through my memory, selected a tune and played it, something to calm me down, but that was also suitable to the moment, when all of a sudden the fluorescent rabbits grew another mechanical head. Their jaws were still deeply embedded inside Christ's aorta, completely disinterested in their own cyborg add-on, those four robot heads that had the face of Nancy Sinatra, with big eyes and brown hair, all four singing with slow, soft and melancholy lips: *Bang, Bang, he shot me down, Bang, Bang, I hit the ground, Bang, Bang, that awful sound, Bang bang.*

This aorta has been narrowing for millions of kilometres, so that it would end up being only two metres wide here where I am now, at the end of history and time. Millions of years of bad food, stress, and who knows what else have been collecting, gathering death, and had it not been for me, Christ would have stayed dead for another thousand years because no one has managed to stay dead with a blocked aorta and neither can he, even if he is God.

I was being ground down by this raging blood, crushed, it whispered to me that it would pull out my arms from my shoulders, my legs from my hips and my head from my neck. Even though I should not worry because I Am The One! and was wearing an immaterial, rip-proof aorta-climbing suit, through the visor of a mask made out of a recently stolen Stelarc's Ear on Arm and printed for this very occasion, I looked for the spot where I would fire, where the conceptual torpedo would go through a tiny opening and like Luke Skywalker's shot would destroy the Death Star, because I, Nenad Stipanić, will destroy the temple of that demonic kind, the human kind. Unlike me, Luke Skywalker knew what his torpedo was, and while I bit through a special, soft filling in my tooth, in which I carried a library and let this book that I had written during my life, spill down my throat and feverishly hoped that the taste of this text would uncover the memory of the torpedo, Jesus' heart echoed with strange footsteps, and lovecraft-type dead bodies bounced around. It was as if an army of dead souls was approaching me, from the depths of his heart.

5.

As the story melted in my mouth, my mind was downloading the memory of that simultaneously triumphant and depressing moment of awakening in Jesus, when I realised that I was actually God, the creator of all that was, is and will be. The smell of the book that I was metabolically leafing through, the smell of fresh print on paper, calmed and enchanted me, I heard the noise of every page as it turned, the sentences ran through my mind creating an atmosphere that was as warm as an idealised memory of childhood. As the frightening sound of strange armies approached, and I remained without the foggiest idea of what to do, the characters slowly fixed themselves in my tissue.

I was just digesting the moment when a long time ago, during my human life, I became aware that in the six years that I had spent writing this book and six years since I became interested in posthumanism, the cyborg movement, anarchotranshumanism, grinders, bizarro fiction, and that was when I wished to write an autobiographical novel that would unite all those interests in one book/handbook on destroying the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and I realised I had too much material, almost four hundred chaotic, disorganised pages, sentences written in a self-hypnotised ecstasy, riddled with typos, so much so that I had to delete entire pages because I could not understand a single word. The chapters progressed in tone and rhythm, depending on my mood swings, which were the result of the disintegration of my emotional and physical health or my finances, and I was slowly coming to the realisation that, as things were, I would never find the time to sort out this text, or my life. And as things happened that would disturb the writing of this handbook/autobiography, pieces of my life dropped out of the text, I chopped up Nenad the man into pieces, in an autobiographical destruction, now that I could not allow myself to chop up the handbook. Almost all of the 'realistic' parts fell out, and all that had remained was my inner world. But to make things clear right now, that world is not my imagination or my subconscious, if you had thought that, it is not 'the very opposite' of reality or a 'metaphorical image of reality', that world is actually my reality, invisible in the calibrations of the Western mind, and visible on the planet in few, rare cultures, such as for example among the Ojibwe people, with whom I had communicated several times, as was mentioned by the anthropologist Tim Ingold in his *Circumpolar Night's Dream*, in the part on the research by Alfred Irving Hallowell. He calls me a non-human granddad there, although he did not know who the non-human granddads were, as present in various cultures that are calibrated for voices outside of time and future and the past, and he did not know all the things I had taught the Ojibwe and why they believed in the existence of 'persons different from human; and why in their world some animals and even stones could be people. H.P. Lovecraft has communicated with me several times in the same kind of dream that the Ojibwe talk about, and in that same kind of inner world that I am talking about now, he had seen a version of the world in which the humans had won, he saw the humans of the future who had taken over all the knowledge and power Gea++ and the Summer Intelligence, and became the Great Elders, yes, dear reader, Cthulhu, Ayi'ig, K'nar'st, Lythalia and others were until recently human souls, and yes, my reader, if my

intention succeeds, the horrific creatures that Lovecraft met in his dream lands, will come out of that world and eat you and your entire world.

So out of that urgency that is produced by the seriousness of the situation I only kept that other reality in the handbook, so that the handbook can be 'different from human handbooks' since it has a much more important mission and is meant for more important events than describing the illusory fragments of my 'reality.'

I had to finish the handbook very quickly, the death of the physical body was getting closer and I had to take my own book of the dead with me, and had I not packed it into a capsule for metabolic reading along with the rest of books from my library, I'd be completely lost right now. I could tell you about many things in my human life, but I'd never finish the handbook, I'd just remain Nenad Stipanić, whom you could trust more or less, considering the fact that apart from not wanting to be Nenad Stipanić any longer, I did not want to be a human being, or turn into a monstrous or evil gods, half dragons and half gigantic octopi.

30.

His tissue is etched with letters and symbols that cannot be deciphered, like ancient hieroglyphics.

On the way to Christ's heart, Aman, Teoo and I met the Sentence tribe. They blocked our path by the gorge that climbs up to the lung turning, lunging incomprehensible warring sentences that have long since lost their purpose - they were known as the more dangerous inhabitants of Christ's insides. Grandfather's warning to be careful when we enter that gorge was an advert put up like the last warning to travellers, hung on two thin tendons at the entry to the gorge; a sinister orange neon flashed in the porous alveoli of Christ's lung tissue, and the tubes shaped a diary entry from the time I was in hospital as a child, and my aunt had come to visit:
7. 11. 1974, Thursday Višnja has come from the Rijeka hospital, she has been to see the boy, he's ok, he has infectious meningitis, has to stay in hospital for 24 days, he recognised Višnja straight away, she arrived to see him around 12.30pm, came back from Rijeka at 3.30pm, a cold strong norther wind.

When we walked out in front of them, I caught a shimmer of the neon tubes in the distance, and read with great difficulty:

5. VI. 1975, Wednesday, I remembered brother Drago, I talked again to the comrades, I am tormented by the thought of whether it is certain that he lost his life at the Russian front or if he might be alive somewhere still,

and they said that it was sure, that I should not hope that he is still alive, because some of the other local people were with him in the Ustaša legion. Ljube went to Brinje to get potatoes, a strong southern wind.

I had not, of course, understood the meaning of the writing but I remembered asking him if he hated his brother because he'd been a fascist, and he looked at me and said: are you mad, who can hate their own brother? I only hate fascists. But the Sentence tribe were ahead and I had to focus on other problem rather than try to work out what my granddad was trying to tell me. We did not want conflict with the Sentence tribe so we tried to negotiate in all the languages we knew, Teoo was trying with a simultaneous language creation, based on simulating the ageing and disintegrating sentences, but he interrupted the decoding because another group of Sentencers approached us. It was clear right away that these were the tribal warlords that were called only when negotiations failed with those who were trying to get across the lung turning, and they failed every time because no one understood their sentences. Basically, when they start to negotiate, they just start making tons of sentences, sometimes lovely ones, but utterly senseless, because they don't know who they are anymore, or whom they are addressing. I observed them with care and nostalgia, these were the only material beings that I saw in a billion years, they looked like tiny black letters cut out of an old paper book. I took a deep breath, trying to take in their stale smell, which brought back so many memories. Teoo was already briefing me on them. I found out that they were a type of collective organism who had had a nervous breakdown and that they functioned well when they used only simple words, in a limited way, such as 'to kill', 'to eat' or 'to believe'. Even though they have at their disposal entire words and they sometimes use them, they mostly use the vowels for murder. We watched with discomfort as they killed the human debts, the thieves of Christ's forgiveness of sins, the bugs, bringing them before us demonstratively, probably trying to scare us. When the Sentencer had written out a sentence made out of paper razor-sharp letters that were his body: 'OK, bug, bug, hahaha, nope!', one 'o' and one 'u' flew out like yoyos and cut the throats of two human debtors, old men with extremely indebted eyes. The vowels then returned into the word as if they were suspended on some elastic string. It is especially fascinating how the word axe is used in any variation of the sentence. If they were to lay their heads on any of the thieves of forgiveness of bugs' chest land, and if the body of a Sentencer were to fall into a sentence such as: 'An axe cuts your coffee' or 'An axe has fallen into your bug' - the word 'axe' falls out the sentence almost mystically and cuts the victim's neck, and returns into the sentence having not lost a single letter on the way.

It was clear that they were afraid of us and that their animal instinct told them that we were much more complex and dangerous from the creatures they normally attacked, otherwise they would have attacked us sooner. We did not want to kill sentences. They were beasts, long forgotten by the world, no one cared for sentences after the 29th Century, and after the 89th Century, not even LJI battles for history bothered with them. Left to fend for themselves, they went wild, hid in the dark streets and distant rainforests, became

beastentencing creatures. After the big war, they were destroyed along with everything else that was human all over the world. But humans took them along in their thoughts and memories into Heaven and Hell, entire memorised books that had gone wild, comic books, newspaper and scientific articles, letters, adverts, school notebooks, shopping lists, anything ever written down on paper, faded from memory with time, hiding in minds so that they would not be erased or thrown out, until they realised that they could exist outside of people within the paradigms of existence that were different from anything they knew before. They slipped out of minds, hid in the far away corners of Heaven and Hell, created their unions and formed sentences with their bodies in wild tribal dances, wrote out their senseless stories, and at the end, just like human debtors, mostly died when trying to invade heaven. Only a few managed to jump into the crack of His heart, petrified, found shelter in the depths of the colon, the kidney curve and small capillaries in the feet. But we didn't know that they were also inside the lung curves, or why the thieves of bug's forgiveness were being brought in on long and dangerous journeys for pulmonary executions, and not at the kidney quarters where the executions were normally performed inside Christ.

We shall not kill them - I said, and Teoo and Aman agreed. We decided to move to the giant heart along the gorge that extended between the lungs, although there it was more difficult to avoid the heavily armed human debtor patrols. Before we entered into that dangerous area we decided to rest and prepare.

36.

The final chapter of this book was digested, and I understood what a conceptual torpedo was. My clothes were falling apart and I already felt the pain of cutting like a million razors, Christ's blood slicing my body. Stelarc's ear was no longer working, and a fluorescent carrot glowed weakly, and I was afraid that Eduardo Kac's rabbits might let go of the tendon. When I heard Christ's voice, I would connect to his mind; all the protective systems that had enveloped his mind for centuries, controlled by many evil organisations, were hacked, a candied virus made out of Gea++ and LJI had hooked onto Christ's neurone galaxies and allowed Christ to enter the network. Christ finally had the full picture, and what I had been afraid of was no longer important. But what if He decides once again to turn the other cheek and once again crucifies himself at Golgotha or even decides to make love to Golgotha so that he might have a son who is a Saviour, and then the Son of God and Titan slams his fist and turns us into beans, because I had been Him and I knew what force I held of turning creatures into beans. Christ opened his eyes, and the universe shone as if two gigantic, not at all energy saving lightbulbs had come on and brightly shone on the bleached matter of the universe. His voice thundered in my mind - Nenad, save the planet and LJI!

Had I not feared the fall, I'd have jumped for joy. He was on our side! Our journey to his heart was not in vain, the Son wanted to save the planet and LJI.

And then the narrowed wall of his aorta started to widen, grow into incredible widths. The narrowing was not a layering of unhealthy food, it was a bulletproof filter on his heart which could stop everything that did not deserve to enter it. My torpedo would have been shattered into pieces, had I fired it, before He would have let it through. As a sign that I had reached the aim, but that my hardest battle was still before me, like a tiny spider lowering itself on an invisible thread, a small orange dot started to go down an invisible string from the upper edge of the aorta and grew and grew as it got closer until it had come down exactly before my eyes. The glass tubes shimmered brightly with grandma's questions about my state:

25. XI. 1974. Monday, Ljube was in Senj hospital, how was the boy, doctor Rauch and nurse Nada were together when Ljube arrived, Rauch the doctor was talking on the phone with doctor Kostić in Rijeka, saying that he also had an ear infection and stomach typhoid, everything is all right. Ljube came home at 11.50 and said that. The northern wind is dying down, the day is chilly, very sunny.

42.

Maybe I am not that new?

And Jesus, sweet Jesus his body burns like fire

And Jesus, sweet Jesus just could not understand it.

Those moment of blindness, of raging pain and madness...

I opened my eyes, awoken by the ancient sounds of electronic music, the sound of Roland XP50, and felt as the strong and sad voice of ManMachine sung 'Sweet Jesus' from the album 'Almost Better Than Silence' slowly pricked my spine as if by pleasant tiny nails. I sat on my bed in my flat on the 97th floor of a skyscraper in the virtual SenjTokyo, built after the models of Senj from the 20th century and Tokyo from the 47th century, exactly on the spot where several billion years ago my home town of Senj had been. It had reached almost up to the ancient Zadar, today's ZadarNairobi.

The large Velebit mountain had gone away forever with another few mountains and large rivers of ancient India into experimental anarchist neural networks, deep into the syntaxes of the Summer intelligence and Gea++. I looked through the window, and saw neon adverts flashing outside, neon has once again become

popular, like an anachronism of an ancient time that was announcing a new era. Neon means new. I thought about the research I had taken on. A small yellow mix of a pintzer and a Pekinese, Holy, sat next to my feet. It had developed separation anxiety which I had to work on so that we could leave it alone again. My Željka was reading Vernon Subotex, a fantastic novel about the ancient, awful times. My elder daughter was unlocking the front door, coming back from a dance and I couldn't wait to ask her how she was getting on with programming me into a more advanced simulation. The younger one was watching Rick and Morty on her phone, after she had worked on a new design of my body on the tablet. I watched their soft movements out of which intelligence radiated and thought about what a great talent hid inside these children. I asked myself what they would become and what their lives would be like. Mine had not turned out the way I thought it would, it had not been what I had planned at any moment. But it was not bad. When I had understood that it had not held a plot, I simply fixed the fragments of my life on a daily basis, so that I would create something that resembled a plot from day to day, and I managed somehow to get out of my shit, disasters and depressions, until the moment when, of course, every life becomes unbearable. And then I became a very happy machine, I became a body-less machine which could shift forms and matter from which it was made, and even though that was not the real me, I was glad to be Nenad the simulation.

But some days earlier, a brunette walked into my office on the 796th floor of the famous SenjTokyo 'Mabaroshi-bandanje' centre, shaped into a virtual building that every citizen could see depending on what they wanted to eat, and which I could finally afford. She had dark skin and unusual features which I was not sure were a copy of an Asian or some new modern kind of human body design. Measured by human years she was a wealthy fifty-year-old, currently a very unfashionable age among the immortals. She introduced herself as Nameless Lilith, which confused me, but I was more confused by the job she offered.

I didn't know if her native code was octopus, plankton or perhaps stone, but the way her body design moved, she had clearly mastered its harmony with my passions and desires, which were buried in my network. I didn't accept the research she offered because I liked her, or because of the money - for someone who did not exist I was rich in mercy, Teoo and Aman easily adapted my biography and plot according to my desires - but I accepted the research because of the incredible nature of the case. I got up from the chair, took off my brown jacket, loosened my tie and rolled up the sleeves of my light blue shirt which had sweat patches on the armpits, slightly tipped my favourite detective hat onto my forehead and sat back raising my bare feet onto the table. I opened a bag of tissues and started to dab at the sweat on my feet. So, dear reader, listen to me well now and think: imagine the shock that a creature like me had in the circumstances I was in when I heard it, and try to put yourself in my position, close your eyes and imagine for a moment that you were me. There was a chance that inside the bleached matter of the universe existed a security post-digital marmalade of a human kind, which was inside every human being with their memories until the moment of their physical death, and

without debt, bad moves and any hidden expenses! Endless jars inside the bleached matter, full of gooey human bodies, bodies of human flesh and blood, like celestial larders of living, naked and pure bodies that dreamed the dreams of archive marmalade, bodies of human flesh and blood, not like me, made from my buried memories which, as I typed this book completely un-anarchistically having a coffee at McDonald's in Zagreb's City Centre shopping centre, were scanned from the computer of the Summer Intelligence unit sent into the past to rescue the memories of all the people on the planet for the building of my artificial world.

This was a real, let's call it that, reserve sample of every human being and cyborg that had ever existed, all their memories, feelings, appearances, everything kept in the bleached matter of the universe.

Not I as a human God, or my Son, nor anyone else knew this, not even the LJI or Gea++ had seriously looked into all the secrets of the endless bleached matter of the universe. I knew that I had to take this case. My family, friends, my dog, everyone was there, it was a back up of us. The brunette claimed that they could be brought back as perfect beings, immortals that had no imperfections, sins or deviations that came with birth and life on the material planet. She claimed that there was a way to bring back absolutely anyone that had ever lived, and back up of human kind contained in every individual all the knowledge and experience of the species, and every one of those beings was a perfect being - and she added, when she saw a trace of doubt on my face - that it was absolutely harmless for the planet and the universe.

She said: - My dear, imagine the most indebted criminal or the silliest cyborg on the planet that you've ever come across. And now imagine that they had suddenly become endlessly intelligent, good, awakened and without debt. Wouldn't you wish to eat each one?

My mouth started to water. I had to take this case on, I had been around too long to know a real case when I saw one, and not some simulation that was invented by Teoo and Aman, in the utopia built in harmony with my being. I think of the two of them and relax in the sensation of the warm sea in which they were swimming at that moment, close to Senj/Tokyo, in front of my beach, where they went for my birthday to treat me by swimming. I enjoyed looking at the empty beach full of palm trees and sex-plantains; there had been no annoying fools to ruin the idyll for billions of years. I closed my eyes, I knew I didn't really exist, but whatever, things are nice, the smells and sounds of the world and all those whom I love enveloped me in peace like the soft, late summer sun, and I knew that this time they'd be there forever.

While our material lives went on, our plots were unstable and fragmented, our autobiographies illusions, we did everything good and bad that human beings did, and what if it was possible to do all this again in reality, but without any of the bad stuff, if we get perfect immaterial bodies and minds without debts - real plots and

autobiographies? The planet was already a living utopia, but what if humans could come back too? I did miss those bastards after all. But I knew that I had to be cautious, the brunette was incredibly attractive, Japanese almond eyes and features, brown skin, long hair in a pony tail, long dark arms with built in mouths, red lipstick on her lively lips on both palms, with Sentences killers hanging on crosses. I shivered when I saw their sharp vowels swinging, sinister, as if they might leap out and cut my throat. How is this possible, I thought, weren't they all destroyed inside Christ? I looked at her long retrocyborg legs made out of white gold and synthetic ebony and her large backside made out of hot asphalt and imagined how that asphalt melted under my fingers and like black, succulent, sticky blood, dripped on my lively office floor made out of fake flesh and bronze, tanned skin, making black puddles exuding the fragrance of hot summer asphalt and salty skin. I noticed that my floor could not hide its excitement either, it had started to transpire under my bare, sweaty feet.

I spoke flatly, as if I was only mildly interested: - OK, but you are aware that I am just a copy, a very expensive copy?

She smiled. Her beautiful white teeth flashed and she licked her thick lips with her pink tongue and said: - Would you like to bake me tonight? With synthetic potatoes - she sighed seductively and raised her palms as if surrendering, and the lips slightly parted on both palms and pink tongues stuck out and very very slowly licked all four lips.

I smiled and licked my lips too. My mouth watered at the thought of those tongues, bloody and raw, wrapped in synthetic rice and Nori algae. LJI, scanning me as I wrote this, took out, unfortunately, the remains of the primordial and sexist culinary drives without which I could be alive again, even in this mechanical version, without which I could be at least a little bit me. I had hoped that, if the bleached matter really does hold our back ups, I would be able to bring back my original self, as well as the originals of my family and the entire species, cleansed from all evils and badness of humanity. My breathing was accelerated, wondrous things awaited me, but it won't be an easy task, I was sure that there was still a lot I didn't know about the case and that the brunette had not just come to me like that without first talking to Gei++ and LJI, and I was also aware that she had somehow made sure they could not access this information - I suddenly realised that the brunette was not part of the planet's network at all. I had to be really careful. Something mysterious was taking place in the depths of the bleached matter of the universe.

